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Narrating Pakistan Transnationally: Identity, Politics and Terrorism in Anglophone Pakistani Literature after “9/11”

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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*In loving memory of my father, Rafat Karim, who no longer lives to see the fulfillment
of our shared dream*

What's going on out in the world?"
"The last fire has almost burnt out." Kim pointed in the direction of the looming
emptiness outside before coming to sit down on the sofa.
"That's not the world, it's just the neighbourhood," Hiroko said sharply.

—Kamila Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*



I feel obligated to point out, though, that I have always been a sucker for ideas I find
aesthetically pleasing. The cosmic sweep of the thing - an interstellar kula chain -
affirming the differences and at the same time emphasizing the similarities of all the
intelligent races in the galaxy - tying them together, building common traditions...
The notion strikes me as kind of fine.

— Roger Zelazny, *Doorways in the Sand*

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Declaration

This work has not previously been submitted for any other degree and is not being concurrently submitted for candidature in any degree.

Signed: _____ (Candidate)

Date: 20 December 2013

Published Work

Extracts from Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 were published in "The Treatment of '9/11' in Contemporary Anglophone Pakistani Literature: A Case for Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman." *ESharp* 17 (2011): 84-104 and "The Hideous Beauty of Bird-Shaped Burns –Transnational Allegory and Feminist Rhetoric in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*." *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* 3.1 (2011): 53-68.

Abbreviations Used

TRF	<i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i>
WIB	Women in Black
WAB	Women against Fundamentalism
TTP	Tehreek-Taliban-Pakistan
AHA	American Historical Association
IDP	Internally Displaced People
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
ASI	Asia Society Interview

Abstract

Anglophone Pakistani literature has thrived in the country since its inception in 1947, but the past decade has witnessed a momentous development of this corpus and its readership, receiving formal recognition in *Granta 112: Pakistan* in 2010. Literary criticism on the subject, which was relatively limited when I started my research on Pakistani English writing in 2009, has since grown but there remains considerable scope for further study. My thesis focuses on the major works of four Pakistani writers, namely Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2008), Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009).

Using 9/11 as a marker, my thesis purports that Anglophone Pakistani writing counterbalances "post-9/11" discourse in American and British fiction which has tended not only to privilege the 9/11 moment as unique, but also assumed essentialist notions of victimhood, violence and identity in its representations. This literature, when it concerns itself with countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, focuses primarily on their perceived cultural peculiarities, frequently equating them with extremism, violence and female oppression, and thereby reinforcing the dominant non-fictional rhetoric of the international media. As part of this discussion, my study critiques not only Islamophobia but also refutes the erroneous use recent acts terrorism as a justification for rising Islamophobia. My thesis underscores recent Anglophone fiction's attempts at destabilising the "single story" about Islam and Pakistan.

This study examines the contribution of contemporary Anglophone Pakistani writers in providing alternative representational tropes on the subject of Pakistani identity and selfhood, thereby transforming and revitalising the conventional imagining of the country to the international readership. However, I argue that the work of Anglophone Pakistani literature does not stop here. I show that this reimagining of Pakistan operates within the framework of "transnationalism" and aspires to imagine a political state of "togetherness in difference". Transnationalism is here conceived as attitudinal, covering human collaborations that link people across national boundaries. It is advanced as a progressive and productive alternative to the assumed cultural, political and economic dominations coded into globalization, which is critiqued for its subtexts of cultural and economic domination. Writing from positions of cultural and spatial uncertainty, these writers *simultaneously* "host" a rigorous interrogation of fundamentalism, violence and oppression in Pakistan but also strive to facilitate a more "hospitable" understanding of Pakistan internationally. Treading the perfidious fault-line between the binaries of home and abroad, native and foreign and extremist and moderate, these writers address two major issues: one, they intervene by exploding the alleged myths of multiculturalism in the so-called "West"; in characterizing this alternative scenario they effectively question the rise of "Islamophobia" and the ill-informed stereotyping of Muslims around the globe, especially after 9/11. Secondly, I argue that the literary resistance offered by these writers constitute a "zone of contact" between the global north and global south. Replacing the discourse of "us and them", their fictions advocate the phenomenon of what Ien Ang has called "complicated entanglement". This entanglement envisages a range of transnational narratives—feminist, political, economic and cultural. As

border individuals who embody a complex fusion of cultural experiences themselves, these writers are appositely positioned not only to explore the contradictions of human experiences, but also imagine the possibilities of their resolution.

Introduction

Every place should be able to claim universality equally whether it is Berlin, New York or Lahore

—Mohsin Hamid

Literature after 9/11

Rethinking the representation of violence and identity after 9/11 in the fiction written about it, Richard Gray suggests that “[we] are still, perhaps, waiting for a fictional measure of the new world order” (“Open Doors” 133). In a similarly sceptical tone, Lawrence Wright expresses his concern that the “world has changed ... and our culture has changed but I haven’t yet seen the book or the movie or the song that captures the people we are now and helps us to redefine who we are in this new post-9/11 world”. Of course, Gray and Wright’s dissatisfaction with the literature of 9/11 stems from two different and conflicting sources. Whereas Gray regrets what he sees as fiction’s inability to represent global terror in its historical and territorial contexts, Wright echoes the more familiar rhetoric of 9/11 as a unique and apocalyptic event.

Recent years have seen any number of fictional representations of 9/11 which attempt at decoding the traumatic events on this date. On the one hand, these representations have included memorializations of an idealized pre-9/11 world, commemorations of the victims and heroes of 9/11 and even some attempts at exploring the psychology of terrorist figure in order to eventually reach some form of catharsis. On the other hand for some writers the events of 9/11 were, at least initially, too complex to address solely through artistic means. In an interview with Tishani Doshi, Martin Amis says: “I think every writer on earth was considering a change of

occupation on September 12 because what you had to say seemed so dwarfed by events”. V.S Naipaul goes to the extent of declaring that the “novel’s time is over” and that to “sit and weave a little narrative” was a response entirely disproportionate to the tragedy itself (Donadio). In her poem “The Dead of September” Toni Morrison writes, “I have nothing to say”. Suheir Hammad finds that “there have been no words, “no poetry in the ashes south of Canal Street” since the tragedy of 9/11 (qtd. in Rothberg 153). Even the terminology employed to address 9/11— “[t]he thing,’ ‘the event,’ ‘9/11,’ ‘September 11:’”—signifies a certain failure or “verbal impotence” in capturing the impact of the attacks. (Gray, *After the Fall* 2)

Gray has usefully recorded that 9/11 was the first major external attack faced by mainland America since war with Great Britain in 1812. Global conflicts and civil strife have been witnessed frequently since then, but “there had been nothing from outside that struck at the heart of the nation” (4). Given this, the preliminary effects of the 9/11 attacks among the American public were outrage, confusion and implacableness, in addition to, as Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton suggest, “the belief that having struck once, terror will do so again, at the same place, like lightning” (*Terror and the Postcolonial* 1). The visual image of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre became one of the defining images of the past decade, its live footage lending it a mythical, film-like quality.¹ The monstrosity of the spectacle, witnessed in real time by a global television audience, led many people to instantly declare 9/11 a major rupture, accompanied by an anxiety that nothing would be the

¹ Gray suggests that the live footage of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre contributed towards exacerbating the American response to it. He writes, “[t]here have been other crucial events that have been rapidly broadcast throughout the world, including, in the recent American context, the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. The difference here, however, is threefold: witness at the actual moment of crisis, the failure of ritual and the mixing of the strange and the familiar” (*After the Fall*, 6).

same again. Of course it is worth bearing in mind that the U.S. media deliberately and repeatedly stressed the jargon of “invasion”, adding to the sense that the “homeland was no longer secure and, to that extent, no longer home” (*After the Fall* 5).²

But of course, 9/11 had been in the offing a long time before the actual attacks. As Pankaj Mishra remarks, “the collision between the paradise of domestic security and the hell of global insecurity had happened long before it horrifyingly manifested itself on 9/11” (*The Guardian*). The problematic and dangerous nature of the American exceptionalist rhetoric of 9/11 is relevant to, and explored, in every chapter of the thesis. Once the immediate fear of invasion died down, and America entered a stage of mourning, it was only natural that writers of fiction were called upon to document this tragedy, and to create some kind of framework within which a collective catharsis may be attempted. By 20 September 2001, Dinitia Smith had already published an article in the *New York Times*—“Novelists Reassess Their Subject Matter”. Smith offered a broad, though understandably hasty, collation of responses from American writers about their roles after 9/11. Echoing the anxieties of Amis and Naipaul’s, Smith observed that “In the hours after the terrorist attacks last week, many American novelists, whether engaged in themes far removed from the horrific events or not, asked themselves if what they do had turned irrelevant”.

The position of literature at such a time is worth examining. Why should fiction presume to offer ways for readers to understand and recuperate from their

² In *The Irony of American History* (2008) Reinhold Niebuhr writes: “[m]eanwhile we are drawn into an historic situation in which the paradise of our domestic security is suspended in a hell of global insecurity; and the conviction of the perfect compatibility of virtue and prosperity which we have inherited from both our Calvinist and our Jeffersonian ancestors is challenged by the cruel facts of history”. While Niebuhr is at least to some extent aware of the historical shortcomings of American politics, in particular the hypocrisies involved in its claims to “struggle” against “tyranny”, the sense of intrusion into a local “paradise” is not uncommon in the media reaction to 9/11 (1-11).

experiences and losses where the media coverage and analysis seemed insufficient? Catherine Morley usefully asks,

Why was it that writers were called upon to explain or offer insights into the events? In what way would they be able to offer accounts any more illuminating than one's own experience of 9/11? And how could the writer offer any more than what was offered by the endless reportage and documentaries of the day? (295)

The perception about the role of fiction in negotiating the territory between real and unreal, grief and anger, and empathy and revenge is crucial to any understanding to its relation to the 9/11 moment. Its part in illuminating and deconstructing the events of 9/11 can now, more than a decade later, be contextualized within two major fictional trends. One trend has focused on the psychic and personal response of individuals to trauma; in this process, the internal responses to the tragedy are explored via images, fragments, sounds and flashbacks. In the other trend, based on a more panoramic view, trauma is seen as collective against a backdrop of a long historical duration. Karen Alkalay-Gut refers to the latter as “a stable ground from which to view the events that is both fully engaged in the raw emotionality of the moment and distanced from it sufficiently to enable aesthetic contemplation” (259).³

Notwithstanding several novelists' initial reluctance about approaching 9/11 through a fiction, as previously mentioned, we have seen a significant production of literature related to 9/11 particularly in North America and Western Europe. In keeping with Lawrence's assessment of post-9/11 being a distinctive era, this literary

³ In “The poetry of September 11: The Testimonial imperative” Alkalay-Gut writes that “almost every literary journal on the Web called for submissions to special issues devoted to September 11” in a “spirit of domestic inclusion” (257-79).

corpus tends to primarily explore the first category described above, which privileges individual consciousness at the preliminary stages of trauma.⁴ Whereas a case can be made for this exercise, it poses a danger of being too restrictive. The sense that “[i]nnocence is shattered, paradise is lost, thanks to a bewildering moment, a descent into darkness, the impact of crisis” risks creating reductive binaries between before and after, victim and terrorist, us and them and consequently, good and evil (*After the Fall* 3). I argue that such fiction is largely grounded in Euro-American discourse of hegemony and proves insufficient in representing terrorism and violence in their proper transnational and trans-historical dimensions. Moreover, individual and domestic narratives about 9/11 have tended to depict terrorism as a stark contrast before and after 9/11 by obsessively revisiting the damaged skyline of New York. As Aaron DeRosa suggests, “[a] simple glance at the plethora of 9/11 dust jackets depicting unblemished blue skies and/ or the absent presence in the New York skyline demonstrates the point. The rhetoric of loss and violation are so deeply enmeshed in discussions of 9/11 that it is difficult to gain critical perspective” (607).

We also find that in many 9/11 novels terrorism is imagined and represented within the confines of domestic and individualised contexts, so much so that “a kind of imaginative paralysis tends to set in” when it comes to writing the “enemy” (*After the Fall* 135). While there have been a few attempts at depicting 9/11 from alternative

⁴ Again, Gray suggests that “[t]here is a recurrent tendency in American writing” to approach major events in American history as apocalyptic, citing examples of the writings of Washington Irving, Mark Twain and Henry James. In *The Third Reich*, Michael Burleigh quotes from a letter written by Henry James to Edward Waldo Emerson on 4 August 1914: “It has all come as by the leap of some awful monster out of his lair—he is upon us, he is upon all of us here, before we have had time to turn around. It fills me with anguish and dismay and makes me ask myself if this then is what I have grown old for, if this is what all the ostensibly or comparatively serene, all the supposedly bettering past, of our century, has meant and led up to” (27).

perspectives and positions, these seem to be restricted and forced exercises, with writers as skilled as Don De Lillo and John Updike struggling to offer substantial psychological or emotional accounts of the terrorist as anything more than the cultural/civilizational “other”. The responses by Euro-American mainstream media to 9/11 (and of course “7/7”), which uncritically privileges a Euro-American centric version of events, can be seen to be ironically echoed rather than contradicted in the fiction that has emerged from this part of the world. There have been approximately 164 Anglophone novels to date that have addressed 9/11, but how many of these writings offer counterpoints to the Euro-American centric media representation of 9/11? Is there an emerging fiction that challenges this hierarchal view of the world while deconstructing the singularity and uniqueness of 9/11? Likewise, where in literature are the undetermined positions of diasporic peoples—often straddling more than one notion of “home”—being explored in the context of terrorism? Are they included or excluded from the notion of an “America” that has fallen victim to terrorist activities?

The problem with inviting these “global” responses to 9/11 lies in the contradictions and challenges inherent in the very term “globalization”. While the various implications of the term have been widely debated, in my study I take globalization to be the extension of Euro-American political, economic, cultural and social modes around the world, making the term also synonymous with Euro-American ideology. This indeed is also the sense in which I understand the current usage of the phenomenon termed “modernity”. Any effective attempts at countering such imperialist forms of globalization would entail along with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s proposal of “provincializing Europe”, a reimagining of globalization from the margins

as well as from border positions.⁵ Hence, for this thesis I prefer to employ the term transnationalism in opposition to “global” or “globalization”. Let me briefly explain why. In the world of time-space compression in which we find ourselves, and where multiple identities are being continuously negotiated, transnationalism can be used a critical framework to understand individual and group experiences across nations and cultures. Whereas “[t]ransnationalism can also make it difficult for migrants ever to feel completely ‘at home’ in any one place, which in turn can provoke identity crises and lead to an ongoing sense of being unsettled”, it is the liberating, productive, enabling and creative aspects of transnationalism that I ultimately invoke in my study (Tupai14). I analyze the ways in which transnationalism is used in Anglophone Pakistani fiction to unravel the contemporary world as defined by Arjun Appadurai—“a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models”. This fiction explores global interactions within the constructs of “cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization”, straddling both phenomena in its attempts to redress the issues of representation in fiction written in and about the contemporary world (295-6).⁶

⁵ In his ground-breaking book *Provincializing Europe* (2007) Chakrabarty explains the problematic nature of “political modernity” which instinctively invokes “the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise” hence making it “impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe” (4, emphasis in original).

⁶ Appadurai constructs a set of five anthropological landscapes, within which to consider the complexities of the new global cultural economy. These include “ethnoscapes”, “mediascapes”, “technoscapes”, “financescapes” and “ideoscapes” and are seen to be constantly at play. Appadurai suggests that these landscapes are a basic yet effective framework for substituting the previously inadequate models of “push and pull” (migration theory), “surpluses and deficits” or “consumers and producers” (296).

Bearing in mind this conception of transnationalism and assuming that we acknowledge that much of Euro-American fiction both over-represents the apocalyptic nature of 9/11 and under-represents its complex impact on the rest of the world, it stands to reason that a more complex fictional conception of the contemporary world should be desired. What this situation offers to novelists is the chance, maybe even the obligation, to insert themselves into the space between conflicting and “conflicting interests and practices and then dramatize the contradictions that conflict engenders” (*After the Fall* 147). Such writing would need to not only traverse the vast swathes of historical time, but also productively conflate the notions of “insider” and “outsider”, and familiar and unfamiliar. This span of time and space within narratives, sanctioning imaginative free-play, could then engender the basis of a more veracious understanding of contemporary terrorism in fiction.

While Gray and Rothberg express the lack and consequent necessity for a “radical reaccentuation” of the current forms of fiction addressing 9/11, I more optimistically propose that such a body of fiction has been called to life by the emerging Anglophone literature by writers of Pakistani origin. While this literature, along with its Euro-American counterparts is often categorized as “post-9/11 fiction”, it is “post” in a very different sense to the latter. My understanding of Anglophone Pakistani novels as “post 9/11” is based on the definition of “post” as against the distinctive singularity of 9/11 rather than being published after 9/11 or dealing exclusively with its aftermath.⁷ Rothberg’s wish-list for “what we need from 9/11”

⁷ Pei-chen Liao uses the term “post” in a similar way in her recent book *“Post”-9/11 South Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror* (2012), where she argues against the “uniqueness” of the date, and the complications that arise from positioning 9/11 as such (1).

novels”, I argue, has been the preoccupation of emerging Anglophone Pakistani fiction for some ten years now:

What we need from 9/11 novels are cognitive maps that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others. Such an imagination will necessarily be double and will be forced to balance two countervailing demands: to provincialize the claims of “the first universal nation” and to mark its asymmetrical power to influence world events. (158)

Of course while the decentring of the US in the reader’s consciousness can be seen as a process akin to Euro-American fictional privileging of a “westernized” response to 9/11 (replacing bias with prejudice), I argue that Anglophone Pakistani fiction is interested in more than just replacing one hegemonic model with another. Via its focus on transnationalism, it attempts to offer alternative models and weave together dichotomous narratives. It disturbs the prevalent balance of power in the literary canon about terrorism and identity, but in a complex and nuanced manner.

However, before any detailed analysis of this body of fiction, it would be useful to contextualize its relationship to the contemporary non-Pakistani Anglophone 9/11 literature. Here I briefly examine three of the more prominent novels published after 9/11 in North America. Given the scale and scope of this thesis any lengthy analysis of Euro-American fictional responses to 9/11 will not be possible. But this has been discussed in-depth elsewhere.⁸ The critical reception of this selection of texts

⁸ See Mohan G. Ramanan’s “The West and its Other: Literary Responses to 9/11” (2010) in which he argues that many writers of American fiction about 9/11 “fall into the contemporary trap laid by the Huntington thesis and [exploit] the clichés of our times” (129)

has ranged from luke-warm to severe. In a recent book, Pei-Chen Liao iterates a similar sentiment:

On the surface, the mainstream media and literary representations of 9/11 seem to oppose each other. While the former reaches out for the global and the political, the latter withdraws to the local and the personal. Yet a closer look at the imperialist notion of the US in the media's representation and the individual, domestic, urban, and at most transatlantic experiences of trauma in the 9/11 fiction reveals that hidden behind both extremes is, to quote Martin in Delillo's *Falling Man*, "the narcissistic heart of the West". (19)

Critics such as Muhammad Safeer Awan, though he focuses mainly on media representations, have been particularly biting, suggesting that the

... vilification of the Muslim community and their faith has been relentless among certain segments of the media and almost all political parties since 9/11. Most of the politicians, media commentators and authors have been very focused in their campaign of demonizing Islam as a faith and Muslims as a community. (525)

Awan adds that the "American media as well as academia, for the most part, failed to promote responsible patriotism" after 9/11 (526), thereby suggesting a contentuity and (un)conscious complicity between fiction and non-fiction.

It appears that in the view of both these critics, an adequately complex representation of global terrorism has been beyond the scope of the majority of American and European fictional responses to 9/11. My response to Liao's line of questioning—"Is 9/11 a major world event?" is the same as hers: "It is and is not"

(11). The inability (or possibly unwillingness) of many novelists to explore 9/11 in its historical and geographical contexts, and their related insistence on defining it through its “Americanness”, has proven to be drastically limiting. Additionally, despite the claim of British and American novelists regarding the dawning of a new post-9/11 fictional age, their writing has been largely littered with all the hoariest of narratorial and topological clichés. These issues of formulaic fiction, misrepresentation and stereotyping that are offered by the Euro-American 9/11 fictional corpus, has indeed led many to question whether it is at all possible to write about 9/11 with any kind of artistic or socio-political integrity.

It appears there was an inevitability about Don DeLillo’s fictional response to 9/11, which came in 2007 in the form of *Falling Man*. His previous novels, *Mao II*, *Underworld* and *White Noise* all contain a foreshadowing of the war on terror. Toby Litt’s review of *Falling Man* in *The Guardian* begins thus:

Falling Man is Don DeLillo's 9/11 novel. Readers have been expecting it. With his understanding that it is terrorists, not artists, who now speak most directly to the collective unconscious, DeLillo - of all artists - came closest to prefiguring, if not predicting, the attacks on Washington and New York. And so, even as news of those attacks was received, DeLillo's was the name that came to mind - just as JG Ballard's did when the manner of Princess Diana's death became known.

Falling Man tells the story of Keith Nuedeceker, who works as a lawyer in the north tower of the World Trade Centre, and the intense fragments of his life, personal relations and encounters after this date. DeLillo’s attempts to delve into the psychology of the Al Qaeda hijackers, led by Mohamed Atta, were found to be

narrow and forced by many of the early reviewers. In *The Washington Post* Jonathan Yardley writes that “this novel never pulls the reader in, never engages the reader with the minds, hearts and lives of its characters, never manages to be what readers most want from fiction: a *story* with which they can connect”.

While DeLillo’s delineation of the relationship between his protagonist, Keith Neudecker, and his estranged wife Lianne is both reflective and exhaustive, his attempts at entering the psyche of Hammad—one of the hijackers—are clearly less successful. As Litt observes, “DeLillo’s 9/11 terrorists read like a weak echo of earlier DeLillo gangs—most notably, of the Moonies of *Mao II* who sit in their van, intensifying their all-excluding faith”. DeLillo’s narrative, when articulated through Hammad’s consciousness, is particularly stilted, sounding strained and repetitive:

This entire life, this world of lawns to water and hardware stacked on endless shelves, was total, forever, illusion. In the camp on the windy plain they were shaped into men. They fired weapons and set off explosives. They received instruction in the highest jihad, which is to make blood flow, their blood and that of others. (33)

Hammad is shown, during the process of being drawn to Islam, as holding America responsible for his social and economic frustrations. Islam offers him a means to “struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans” (DeLillo 80). Hammad’s one-dimensional and clearly unsophisticated understanding of Islam (and indeed American politics) finds no contradiction in the narrative; there is no character, vocalized from an Islamic position, to counter the deceptiveness of Hammad’s conception of Islam. In fact it is

reinforced by the image of the terrorists who can be heard “chant[ing] prayer, voices in chorus in praise of God ... *Allah-uu Allah-uu Allah-uu*” (38).

DeLillo’s inability to represent Hammad’s psyche and cogitations in a meaningful or eloquent way stands in ironic juxtaposition to the novel’s claim that “[t]hese three years past that day in September, all life had become public” (182). In reality, all life in DeLillo’s novel appears to have become dangerously private, “assimilating the unfamiliar with familiar structures” signifying that the “crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated” (*After the Fall* 134). This also proves distracting to formulating an empathetic understanding of trauma itself, echoing instead the familiar rhetoric of the dominant sources of media. It is a process of what Sonia Baello-Allue has called “acting out” as opposed to “working through” (70).⁹

Deborah Eisenberg’s *Twilight of the Superheroes* (2006) has been called one of the first major fictional responses to 9/11. Her set of interconnected short stories approach the tragedy from a range of perspectives, with her characters representing a cross-section of age, gender, and profession. There is also in Eisenberg’s writing, it has to be acknowledged, an understanding of America as a shifting, nuanced and liminal place. However, when it comes to exploring the psychological impact and trauma of 9/11 on the individuals in her stories, the domestic and highly personal effects of terror are privileged. Not only is 9/11 assessed within domestic realms of American society, it is also (like much of “post-9/11” fiction) perceived as a break after which a psychological and emotional collapse of private lives and relationships

⁹ Baello-Allue explains that:

Acting out is the tendency to relive the past through flashbacks, nightmares, compulsively repeated words and images. It is a compulsive repetition of re-enactment of trauma. Working through is the process by which the person tried to gain critical distance from the trauma, becomes able to distinguish between past, present and future and assume responsibility. (70)

ensues. In a review Stephanie Carpenter writes that “[t]he fragility of contemporary American domesticity is a theme that runs through the collection. The families in this piece are broken apart by mental illness, dementia, sexual awakenings, violence and differences in ideology” (154). The sudden and horrifying transformation of the cityscape of New York is a continuous feature of the short stories, many of the scenes being set in the terrace of the high-rise apartment building in close proximity to the twin towers shared by Nathaniel and his roommates. However New York’s magnificence prior to 9/11 is conveyed in idyllic terms as Nathaniel imagines the Empire State to be a “brilliant violent hologram”, contemplates the “vast, twinkling prairies of Brooklyn” and admires the “Statue of Liberty holding her torch aloft” (7). Isenberg writes: “[s]tars glimmered nearby: towers and spires, glowing emerald, topaz, ruby, sapphire, soared below [...] Everything was spangled and dancing; the little boats glittered” (7). 9/11 is hence problematically situated as the trigger point for the breakdowns—mental, physical, emotional—that ensue from this point onwards.¹⁰

Not only is 9/11 shown to instigate the disintegration of American public and private lives, it is also suggested through Nathaniel that the significance of previous events is no longer granted validity. The anxiety and thrill experienced by Nathaniel and the American nation at large at the turn of the twentieth century (specifically in

¹⁰ Similar problems regarding an over-emphasis on domesticizing an international crisis are encountered in Ken Kelfus’s *A Disorder peculiar to a Country* (2006). Here, while the protagonist Joyce appears to react in a similar way to the news of the attacks on the World Trade Centre—an instinctive smile, accompanied by shame and guilt—the reasoning behind her reaction is entirely different. Joyce’s response to the news is described in sexual terms—she “felt something erupt inside her, something warm, very much like, yes it was, a pang of pleasure, so intense it was nearly like the appeasement of hunger. It was giddiness, an elation” (3). This unexpected reaction to the tragedy can however, upon further investigation, only be attributed to Joyce’s subconscious relief at her husband’s death in the attacks. Such a reasoning proves now only somewhat anticlimactic, but also restricts the exploration of 9/11 to a strictly private and domestic space.

the context of fears of the Y2K computer bug) are professed null and void. This makes Nathaniel both passive and depressed: “When it comes down to it, it always turns out that no one is in charge of the things that really matter” (4).

Eisenberg’s inclusion of Delphine in the stories, which could prove extremely helpful in conflating the increasingly pronounced “them” and “us” positions in America, appears to be little more than a token contribution. Delphine is described as a half Armenian and half Chilean immigrant, whose “English had been acquired at a boarding school in Kent for dull-witted rich girls and castaways, like herself, from everywhere” (31). She appears to be a member of a global cosmopolitan elite who is American by default—a position warranting in-depth exploration. However, the dialogue assigned to Delphine while significant is limited in frequency and depth:

Oh, yes, here it’s not like stuffy old Europe, where everything is stifled by tradition and trauma. Here you’re able to speak freely, within reason, of course, and isn’t it wonderful that you all happen to say exactly what they want you to say? Do you know how many people you are killing over there? No, how would you? Good, just keep your eyes closed, panic, don’t ask any questions and you can speak freely about whatever you like. And if you have any suspicious looking neighbours, be sure to tell the police. You had everything here, everything, and you threw it all away in one second. (31)

Eisenberg’s attempt at parodying American exceptionalism via a representative of the global elite is significant but takes the form of an occasional outburst rather than a sustained counter-voice in the narrative. Delphine, while present in the name of inclusivity, struggles to remain anything more than an outspoken outsider in the stories. Her frustrations, grievances and resentment with the “war on terror” are not

psychologically explored, as is the case with her American counterparts, but instead merely articulated.

John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), unlike *Twilight of the Superheroes*, employs a Muslim jihadi as its chief protagonist—Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy—who upon completion of his high school education in America decides to devote the rest of his life to the service of Islam, finding God “is closer than the vein in his neck” (152). Updike's endeavour to enter the mind of an eighteen-year old Arab Muslim is, as some critics consider, doomed from the start. Ramanan suggests that “Updike is quite unable to evoke the puritanism of Ahmad and his efforts are comic in the extreme and border on caricature” (129). And Ahmad's portrayal, perhaps with good reason, all too often lapses into caricature, with his attitude towards the “devils” around him seeming particularly simplistic: “I look around me,” he says, “and I see slaves—slaves to drugs, slaves to fads, slaves to television, slaves to sports heroes that don't know they exist, slaves to the unholy, meaningless opinions of others” (73). Moreover, Ahmad's fundamentalist religiosity is often depicted in hackneyed terms; he warns his class-mate Joryleen Grant, “You have a good heart, Joryleen, but you're heading straight for Hell, the lazy way you think” (73). He worries about the girls around him, “Someday they will be mothers. Someday soon, the little whores” (17). *Terrorist* does not manage to conjure a profound sense of reality; each of the main characters is from a different racial and/or religious group and could almost be referred to as the Young Arab, the Old Jew etc. As Gray suggests, fulfilling the requirements of “an iconic figure in American literature”, Ahmad remains “an outsider, not merely to those around him but also to the reader. We never get further

than Ahmad's resistance to a world he never made and his consequent, confused search for a way of hitting back at that world (136).¹¹

In light of Rothberg's recommendation that the post "9-11" novelists should range widely across time and space it is interesting that the writing of at least two major Anglophone Pakistani "post-9/11" novels began significantly before the event itself. Mohsin Hamid explains about the writing of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007):

I began the novel in the summer of 2000, shortly after "Moth Smoke" was published, and a full year before the events of 9/11. I had spent much of the previous decade living in America, and I wanted to explore in fiction my own growing desire to leave. It was confusing territory for me, because I loved—and still love—so much about America, and yet was still uncertain about staying on. Similarly, I loved Pakistan and yet felt unsettled about returning there. Also, I was working as a management consultant and as a novelist, so I was professionally torn. Those fissures, cracks in my tribal identity and cracks in my romantic identity—romantic in the sense that "what do you want to be when you grow up" is a passionate question—gave birth to the first draft of the novel, an utterly minimalist account of a Pakistani valuation expert who decides to return to Pakistan despite loving New York.

Hamid's attempt to explore the "cracks" in his own fractured identity through his novel, I suggest, contributes towards addressing the "cracks in [America's]

¹¹ Gray further posits a link between Updike's portrayal of Ahmad and Richard Wright's "Bigger Thomas" and Ralph Ellison's "invisible man". Whereas these characterizations have stood the test of time as iconic figures, Gray argues that over-simplified representations such as these also "suggest the limits to Updike's testimony" ("Open Doors" 136).

necessarily incomplete hegemony”, perceptible in the American 9/11 novel (Rothberg 158). My thesis proposes that the “political and aesthetic project” that Rothberg anticipates in the form of a novel—and which he claims “has not yet been written” is—has been successfully undertaken by at least four major writers of Anglophone Pakistani fiction. The rest of this thesis is devoted to establishing how their novels have traversed the spans of time and transnational space—both literally and figuratively—to engage in a productive fictionalization of the contemporary age of war and terror.

Writing Terror/Transcribing Trauma

Nations, like individuals, sustain trauma, mourn and recover. And like individuals, they survive by making sense of what has befallen them, by constructing a narrative of loss and redemption.

—Thomas Laqueur

On 20 September 2001 George W. Bush addressed the world, and speaking on behalf of the American nation, declared, “[o]ur grief has turned to anger”. According to a certain kind of “Americanism”, the combination of trauma and vengefulness has come to define the first decade of the twenty-first century. Trauma has become what Alexander Dunst convincingly calls an “organizing metaphor” for “America’s post-9/11 ‘injury culture’” (1). The collective victimhood experienced in America after 9/11 quickly paved the way to the anger that Bush refers to; this grief and anger were exclusivist in nature, exposing the “limitations of a national framework for trauma” (Dunst 1).

While it is clear why a “unifying narrative” was deemed important by politicians in making sense of the range of responses to 9/11, what I, along with a number of journalists, critics and creative writers, find of more concern is exactly how inclusive and broad this “unifying narrative” could be. While Morley optimistically suggests that American novels writing 9/11 “weave the multitudinous stories of victims, survivors, witnesses and perpetrators into some kind of coherent discourse that speaks to a subjective sense and experience of the moment”, I have been suggesting that this was seldom the case with British and American Anglophone fiction. I find that the unfolding of collective trauma is at best partial owing American fiction’s eschewing of a meaningful representation of “others” in its exploration of 9/11. I echo Pankaj Mishra’s concern in his 2007 article that:

There are no simple oppositions in these books between “Muslims” and the “west”. They simply assume that for many Muslims the west is inseparable from their deepest sense of their selves, and that most people from societies that western imperialism cracked open long ago cannot afford to see the west as an alien and dangerous “other”; it is implicated in their private as well as public conflicts.

In her recent book *Trauma Culture* (2005) Ann Kaplan discusses the impact of trauma on individuals and groups, emphasizing the pressing need to “share” and “translate” the effect of this trauma (1). Though Kaplan acknowledges that the difficulty in bringing a permanent closure to trauma, she explains that a certain catharsis can be achieved from “translating” it via the medium of art and fiction—by “finding ways to make meaning of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as to oneself” (19). Kaplan highlights the fact that the same traumatic event will be ingested and mourned differently by different individuals: “[h]ow one reacts to a

traumatic event depends on one's individual psychic history, on memories inevitably mixed with fantasies of prior catastrophes, and on the particular cultural and political context within which a catastrophe takes place, especially how it is managed by institutional forces (1). By extension, what is also significant is the effect of trauma on individuals who are not immediately or directly affected by traumatic events such as 9/11, but who suffer indirectly by it. This secondary form of trauma can be experienced by those who are physically removed from the site of trauma, such as those not present in New York on 9/11, and the continuous on-screen relays of the moment of devastation. Additionally of course, trauma begets memories of previous traumatic experiences. Kaplan's personal encounter with 9/11, which she experienced in New York, served to resurrect the nightmarish memories of the Second World War: "[my] childhood sense of extreme vulnerability returned, as if our very New York apartment building might not continue to stand" (3). As an event, for many individuals 9/11 led to the collapse of the tangible barriers of time and space and reality and memory, hence producing a "new subjectivity" (4). The resulting breakdown in what Kaplan calls individual "psychic identity", unleashed a string of responses which find a resonance in fictional character portrayals and which will be analysed in much greater depth in later chapters.

9/11 also triggered a problematic kind of patriotic surge. While it can be argued that there was something positive in this togetherness, this was at the expense of constructing an "otherness". The American reaction to the trauma of 9/11 was itself facilitating a different kind of forgetting— what might be described as a refusal to comprehensively recognize the suffering of others. The investment in victimization as political identity then always depends on these short-circuits: the divorce of one's

injured self from the other; the severance of a violent event from its historical context (3).

It is a difficult matter to pass judgement on the morality or rationality of this racial and religious “othering” given the traumatic state of mind in which the general American citizens found themselves after 9/11. Patriotic gestures included the new presence of the American flag in a number of locations, the public speeches extolling the nation’s unflinching courage; mourners filling the streets with banners, candles, photographs and other symbolic gestures; the image of the twin towers gained unprecedented popularity and the site of their devastation became “a space full of horror but also heroism” (Kaplan 12). But while the American media played and manipulated this national unity as the world watched: “this proved to be a fiction—a construction of a consensus in a Eurocentric and largely masculine form” (13).

Ulrich Baer’s edited collection, *110 Stories: New York Writes after September 11* (2002), among many other accounts, affirmed a desperate need for the cultural and emotional rebuilding of America after the trauma. What I want to suggest is that this process of finding meaning through language post-trauma, with the possibility of redemption or catharsis is not confined to a particular group of people. Who will tell the stories of individuals or groups that have become tainted by association (no matter how subtle or intangible) with the alleged perpetrators of 9/11? I am talking here about the increasing burden of identity tags worn by the populations of Pakistan, India and the Middle East, and Muslims and non-religious migrants from these regions in America and Europe. Specifically, I am also interested in the impact this has had on Muslim women and the imagining of Muslim women in these regions. The increasing presence of Islamophobia (resulting in 482 hate crimes against Muslims in America 2002 alone) suggests that media framing is not only influential but often toxic—

“more so, in some ways, than education—so opinion-makers should carefully weigh the social consequences of their representations” (Christopher Smith 1-2).¹² Where are the attempts to address their trauma? There is an equally pressing need for this alternative narrative to be told and indeed to be heard.

Whereas Kaplan captures the tensions in the expression of trauma in America in the days immediately after 9/11, even her declarations, privileging 9/11 as unique, are problematic. Kaplan argues, unsatisfactorily I believe, against the attempts to historicise 9/11:

But the United States was attacked. This was a separate event – in the here and now of 9/11 – that needed to be dealt with in its specificity. Linking these attacks to the past actions of the United States was to collapse incommensurable levels of happenings and thought ... As leftists and political peoples, I asked, can’t we also live in the present and relate to present emotions? (15)

It is clear that 9/11 has to be understood both as a specific event and as a part of the general political history of the contemporary world. As a tragedy it has its own unique features that should not be diluted or missed in the process of making academic comparisons, but it should also be seen as a part of transnational acts of terrorism. Contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction shows that “catastrophic events (like

¹² For further reading on the American mainstream media’s portrayal of Muslims after 9/11 see Christopher Smith’s “Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Media Framing during the 9/11 Decade” (2013) where he suggests a revocation of the initial positive light in which Muslims were shown after 9/11. He argues that a “gradual increase in animosity thereafter was due to a shift away from this framing, especially by right-leaning talking heads. In 2006 the framing of right-leaning media shifted again, toward nativism” (abstract).

9/11) remind us of the urgency for a focus on transnational conflict with a view to developing understanding among people” (23).

In their timely book, *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton suggest that the “critical vocation of postcolonial studies during and beyond the ‘war on terror’” is to dispute a sweeping counter-terrorist ideology. Boehmer finds that the “anti-imperial, decolonizing agenda of postcolonial studies has become ever more pressing” in the current climate, in order to prevent the perceived acts of Islamic terrorism, in the words of Edward Said, “[c]ommunism as public enemy number one” and to disrupt the oversimplified notion that ‘we’ (the West) are never terrorists and that “Muslims, Arabs and Communists are”.¹³ Boehmer is interested, like Said, in the ways in which the discourse about terrorism is deployed by nations like America and Britain to censure the violent responses to imperialism, thereby incorrectly severing the cause from its result. (11) In other words, while the consequences of 9/11 are scrutinized the underlying causes behind such acts are consistently, and criminally, ignored. Gayatri Spivak calls this “metalepsis”, where the terrorism, which is actually an “effect” of colonial power and oppression, is instead presented as a “cause”. (11) Another implication of this privileging of effect over cause has been the attempt to what Spivak effectively calls “museumizing” terrorist attacks. “At the soft end of this” she claims, “is the marketing of a sentimentalized 9/11 that is altogether offensive.” In her “Speech on Terror”, Spivak offers an example of the rampant commodification of terror after 9/11:

Behind an adjacent tarpaulin-cloaked fence topped with barbed wire [at Ground Zero] . . . splinters from the soaring television antenna that marked the

¹³ The legitimization of Israeli state political violence as “counter-terrorism” against Palestinian terrorism has been a prolonged manifestation of the dangers of erecting over-simplified binaries.

highest point in New York City—1,732 feet into the sky— sit on their sides, right next to the punctured, debris-choked remains of Fritz Koenig’s great spherical bronze sculpture, the former center-piece to the trade center’s ground-level plaza, interpreted as a symbol of world peace through trade. And nestled against the Koenig globe is . . . a charred and pitted lump of fused concrete, melted steel, carbonized furniture and less recognizable elements, a meteorite- like mass that no human force could have forged, but which was in fact created by the fiery demise of the towers. (“Terror: A Speech after 9/11” 85)

Confronted with what is largely perceived as inadequate writings of trauma, Boehmer usefully detects two main schools of thought about present-day postcolonial theory, critical practice and literature: one which uncritically represents globalization as a process of hybridization and promotes the notion of the allegedly “borderless global economy” which transcends the national divides of the past; the other kind which maintains an anticolonial agenda, offering resistance to neo-imperial ideology which it sees as a product of globalization itself. In this sense, Boehmer suggests, the latter should perhaps more aptly be seen as acts of terrorism than of globalization. The first kind of postcolonial writing would include examples of magic realist novels while the latter, on the other hand, could be to produce the kind of documentary realism that is commonly associated with “nation narration” (143). They both share a belief, however, in a colonial past that continues to shape the present. The sentiments of resistance that are expressed through the second kind of writing, often lie dormant until they erupt in response to a “variety of economic, political, social and religious” reasons that have in the past included genocide in Rwanda, diamond trading in Africa, Israeli politics in Palestine in an attempt at “decentring the centre” (144).

Where in amidst the possibilities of hybridization and resistance can contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction be positioned? Is it geared towards the representation of the borderless global economy that Boehmer defines or is more closely aligned with what Rushdie declared to be the chief aim of postcolonial writers—that of “writing back” from a subaltern position? I argue that the complex and demanding task of interrogating, revising and rewriting contemporary notions of globalization and modernity in which contemporary Anglophone writers take part resists any such straightforward categorization. “Writing back” is only a part of their literary process rather than the defining characteristic. The novels I analyse in this thesis present an idea of the global where every local and regional enunciation has importance and a role. Whereas mainstream notions of globalization are not rejected, they run parallel to other possibilities of what is conventionally deemed “global”. Hence my research suggests that the writers I look at straddle both these tasks; while they resist the ideology of the war on terror, they also transcend narrow national or cultural differences to offer a vision of a singular, if unequal and uneven world. Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid are also regular contributors to British media outlets such as *The Guardian*, which they use as an additional platform for expressing their views on art, politics and history.¹⁴ In times of heightened sensitivity in Pakistan, they are called upon to express their views to an international audience. The fact that most of them have not had any formal education, training or experience in politics seems to matter little as their cultural authority is derived from their fiction. In this

¹⁴ According to *journalisted.com*, a website providing statistical information about journalists in the UK, Kamila Shamsie has published 61 articles (mainly in *The Guardian*) since July 2007. Her recent articles have covered a swathe of concerns about Pakistan, ranging from the complexities of the 2013 national elections, to the extermination of Shia Muslims in Baluchistan and the difficulties of extricating terrorism from the country. The political concerns in her fiction are hence regularly reinforced in her non-fiction writing in international newspapers.

sense, we might conclude that Pakistani Anglophone writing has a great and grave responsibility on its shoulders: it not only helps to make sense of the present, but also models ways of understanding the future of the global “war on terror”.

The transformation of terrorism and trauma into prose narratives is the predominant concern of my chosen writers. I argue that where British and American narratives of trauma after 9/11 have quickly been canonized, other responses to 9/11 and particularly its impact on diasporic Muslims have not been able to attain similar positions of cultural authority. The ethics and aesthetics of trauma literature have been under scrutiny particularly since its surge after World War 2 and the Holocaust. It has been frequently asked whether (and how effectually) tragedies involving irreparable human damage and the massive loss of lives can be adequately conveyed and represented via literature. Examining the ways in which novels might be able to convey trauma beyond the “level of events”, ingesting its far-reaching psychological effects on individuals and groups means that literature is “often as much about the cause of trauma as the after-effects” (Thomsen 116). My research addresses these concerns via the novels of my chosen writers, paving the way to understanding “trauma” “terrorism” and “violence” as fluid, nuanced and situated. Multiple perspectives are introduced, and the discourse on 9/11 is productively widened on a transnational and collective level.

Contemporary Pakistan in the Euro-American Imaginary

Pakistan produces people of extraordinary bravery. But no nation should ever require its citizens to be that brave.

—Nadeem Aslam

Whereas I hesitate to use 9/11 as an exceptional moment in contemporary global events, it appears that “Pakistan” has never been more widely discussed in Europe and America. In a recent interview on the Bill Maher Show, Richard Clarke—the former American National Coordinator for Security—described Pakistan as a nation of “pathological liars”. Amidst applause and encouragement from his audience, Clarke went on to declare that the “only worse ally you could have [to Afghanistan] is Pakistan” (2011). During the interview, Clarke had little choice but to acknowledge the strategic reasons for America’s continued political alliance with Pakistan. But according to him, the human, environmental, infrastructural and economic damage in Pakistan and Afghanistan were just consequences of the 9/11 attacks. At this point, it is worth briefly examining the toll that “9/11/” “war on terror” have taken so far on Pakistan. According to the 2010 Economic Survey of Pakistan, the war has

...cost the country more than 35,000 citizens, 3,500 security personnel, destruction of infrastructure, internal migration of millions of people from parts of north-western Pakistan, erosion of investment climate, nose-diving of production, growing unemployment and has above all brought economic activity to a virtual standstill in many parts of the country.

In addition to this, America has launched hundreds of drone attacks in Northwest Pakistan over the past decade with the declared aim of eliminating terrorism from the region. These attacks are yet another example of the combination of ignorance and duplicity that has marked U.S. foreign policy in Pakistan and the Middle East. A study conducted by Stanford and New York Universities in 2012 estimates that these attacks have resulted in “49 civilian deaths for every one known terrorist killed”,

making it a total of between 2,562 and 3,325 people in Pakistan, including 176 children (Danielle Gram). Gram further explains,

Fear of drone attacks have kept Pakistanis from participating in daily activities like attending school and engaging in commerce, further calling into question the long-term consequences of drone strikes on the stability of the region. Mental health professionals fear that children traumatized by their presence may grow up with long-term ramifications of psychological trauma.

However, Clarke seems to have no shortage of supporters in the continued justification for America's actions in Pakistan. In "Pakistan and Terror: The Eye of the Storm" Bruce Riedel writes,

Pakistan is the most dangerous country in the world today. All of the nightmares of the twenty-first century come together in Pakistan: nuclear proliferation, drug smuggling, military dictatorship and above all, international terrorism. Pakistan almost uniquely is both a major victim of terrorism and a major sponsor of terrorism. It has been the scene of horrific acts of violence [...] For the next American president, there is no issue or country more difficult to get right, which means developing a policy that will move Pakistan away from being a hot-house of terror. (32)

Riedel's demonizing of Pakistan worryingly echoes the frequent and clichéd admonishment of the country regularly receives in British and American outlets such as Fox News and MSNBC. What is particularly problematic is Riedel's contention that the dangers posed by Pakistan are, "above all", territorial and historical which by extension sees the 9/11 moment as unique and in turn justifies an indefinite war against Muslims. Several years ago, when asked about his concern about the future

ramifications of American training and support of Islamic fundamentalists during the Soviet-Afghan war, Zbigniew Brzezinski (the then National Security Advisor for America) responded: “What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?” Brzezinski’s words of more than five decades ago—which also comprise Aslam’s epitaph to *The Wasted Vigil*—still resonate in the language of his political counterparts in America, who continue to privilege their own agendas and perspectives over the tragic loss of American and non-American lives in the “war on terror”. As Noam Chomsky provocatively suggests, the irony of America’s support of radical Islamists as favourites in their war against the Soviets is of course unmistakable—“[t]he West is quite ecumenical in its choice of enemies. The criteria are subordination and service to power, not religion” (21). American and European involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan is couched in the language of “crusades”, “humanitarian intervention”, “intelligent bombs” and more recently in the context of drone attacks the somewhat misleading term, “collateral damage” (Chomsky 14). The “war on terror” itself is of course a deliberately vague formulation of words. As Chomsky suggests via Michael Stohl: “We must recognize that by convention—and it must be emphasized only by convention—great power use and the threat of the use of force is normally described as coercive diplomacy and not as a form of terrorism” (16).¹⁵

In North America and Europe, even outside political circles, a perpetual hysteria seems to denote Pakistan and the economic and security problems it poses in

¹⁵ ¹⁵ Interestingly, Chomsky also invites attention to the notion of US religious fundamentalism, not a terminology that we encounter often in recent times, and which he clarifies is based more in popular culture than in the state: “The U.S., in fact, is one of the most extreme religious fundamentalist cultures in the world” (21).

conjunction with its alleged state sponsorship of terror. This violent imagining of Pakistan has indubitably intensified after the Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was found and later killed by US forces near the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.¹⁶ If Bin Laden's capture offered relief, it also resulted in the escalation in the stereotyping of Pakistan as the violent "other" of the "civilized" world. Bin Laden's killing was scrutinized by a number of "experts", many of whom had never visited Pakistan, or for that matter South Asia. Amitava Kumar appositely asks, "How much did they really know about the country, much less about the city where Bin Laden had been discovered? Did they speak any of the languages spoken by Pakistan's 180 million people? Had any of them engaged in any sustained study of the place or its people?" (17).

These recent stereotypical representations of Pakistan and Islam are of course not a new phenomenon. But why are academics and other specialists in Europe and North America so reluctant to counter the media representations of Islam and Pakistan, and to expose the hypocrisy and fallacy of the "war on terror"? I will take the liberty to speculatively suggest a few reasons for their (on the most part) resistance in doing so. Firstly, there was the sense that mainstream media reportage had so overwhelmingly monopolized the provision of news and analyses that any scholarly additions or contradictions were perhaps perceived as futile or marginal. Secondly, of course, there is the fear factor, ranging from fear of personal safety to that of being tainted by reputation within academic circles. Finally (and most disturbingly) is their complicity—as in the case of Riedel—suggesting assent and approval of mass Islamophobia and stereotyping. This phenomenon has been noted by critics such as Ahmed who observes the resistance on the part of poststructuralist and

postmodern scholarship to speak “beyond the academy”: “[r]eading the daily press, speaking with my family and friends, I felt stymied. There was a queer distancing between history and event, between time and narrative, in the daily conversations. Muslims were perpetually under attack. America was seemingly new at this imperialism business” (21).

It is in fiction we find that this silence is broken. New generation Anglophone writing by writers of Pakistan heritage has begun to offer a series of responses to the problematic image of Pakistan in the globe. My thesis views these novelists as key players in the re-creation and restoration of the global imagining of Pakistan. Their fiction acknowledges that Pakistan remains exceedingly troubled today, but also that it has survived in the face of the threats posed by a number of historical catastrophes of which 9/11 is but one. Pakistan is, in the words of Anatol Lieven, “a hard country” (*Hard Country* 18).

Writing “Woman” Transnationally:

In her *Introduction* to the inaugural volume of fiction by Pakistani writers—*A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English* (1997)—Muneeza Shamsie explains that “Pakistani women who employ English as a creative language live between the East and the West, literally or figuratively, and have had to struggle to be heard. They write from the extreme edges of both English and Pakistani literatures” (1). While the past decade has seen a relative surge in Anglophone fiction by Pakistani women writers, historically women have been underrepresented on the English-language literary scene in Pakistan. In her brief overview, Muneeza Shamsie describes Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah who published *The Young Wife and Other Stories* in 1958 as the “only woman writing English fiction of note during that era”

and whose stories “revolved around social pressures in the daily lives of women” (*Dragonfly* 10). Hamidullah was not only a fiction writer but also a prolific journalist whose political views proved so inflammatory that she was asked to confine her writing to “women’s issues”. She later fought and won a legal case over the banning of a women’s magazine, which she later used as a platform for her political expression. After her pioneering work, *The Crow Eaters* (1978) by Bapsi Sidhwa was one of the first novels by a resident Pakistani (irrespective of gender) to gain international acclaim. Sidhwa went on to publish *The Bride* (1982), *Cracking India* (1991) and *An American Brat* (1993) all of which made significant attempts at bringing women’s issues from south Asia to a wider global audience. After Sidhwa, writers like Kamila Shamsie, Faryal Ali Gauhar, Uzma Aslam Khan and Sara Suleri have emerged as popular “global” novelists of Pakistani origin. To this list of transnational feminist writers of Pakistani origin, I add Nadeem Aslam, Daniyal Mueenuddin and Mohsin Hamid whose fiction I argue is acutely aware of the over-determining of the categories of Muslim women and Pakistani women through religious, racial, political, social and economic frameworks.

The argument advanced is that the four Anglophone Pakistani writers discussed in the following chapters address the crisis in the approach to transnational feminism—that of it being largely hegemonic and ethnocentric. That of it telling what Chimamanda Adichie has so befittingly called “a single story”. The single story has meant and continues to mean that entire nations have been defined by their poverty, making it “impossible ... to see them as anything but poor ... their poverty being [their] single story” (YouTube 2009). In “African ‘Authenticity’ and the Biafran Experience” (2008) Adichie more fully explores the rampant stereotyping of Black Africans, which she argues have emerged out of a combination of curiosity and

contempt. In the narratives Adichie has in mind, “Africans don’t matter, not even in narratives ostensibly about Africa”, so much so that it is suggested that even anti-imperial narratives emerging from Europe failed to offer “humanized” portrayals of Africans (44). This single story (effectively addressed in Adichie’s novel *Half a Yellow Sun* 2007) is also the concern of Shamsie, Hamid, Aslam and Mueenuddin, who destabilize the “default position” that views countries like Pakistan, and in particular women from Pakistan under a generic canopy of catastrophe.

Their narratives explore the dangers and limitations of employing the terms “Pakistani” and “Muslim” interchangeably. This assumed association between nationality and religion has further narrowed a category that is already grossly inadequate. The characteristics associated with both these labels—Pakistani and Muslim—have invited an unhelpful moral crusade from centres in the global north, within both academic and non-academic environments. The stories of honour killings, forced marriage, physical abuse, disfigurement, oppression and the withholding of basic rights all cumulatively add up to this posturing which is vigorously challenged by anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughod in her recent book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* (2013). The image of the veil, carrying intertwined religious and political connotations, has been a major factor in determining the perception of women in Pakistan, the Arab world and within Muslim communities globally. About the uncritical bestowing of identities Chandra Mohanty has noted that “the veiled women, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, and so on... exist in universal, ahistorical splendor, setting in motion a colonialist discourse that exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing” power relations between the global north and south (*Feminism Without Borders* 41). Moreover, in her study *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*, Katherine Bullock

has not only refuted the perceived oppressiveness of the veil but advocated it as a stand against a consumerist culture which can liberate women from the constraining myths of beauty and body image.

The over-determining of Pakistani women, Muslim or otherwise, which hinders transnational feminism, can be traced to at least two significant sources. The first emanates from the deeply ingrained notion that feminism as theory and practice is predominantly “western” domain. Rashmi Varma states in this context that the “rights, freedom, self, individuality, subjectivity” of women are all professed as the products of “western history”, in which automatically “the sense of a feminist self is dependent on another woman”. The cruder version of this is encountered in the form of aggressive stereotyping in the European and North American media, which routinely represents the women as by definition oppressed, victimized and disenfranchised. Additionally visual representations of women from South Asia, Africa and Latin America, often used out of context, can have misleading effects. Gloria Munoz Ramirez uses the example of the banner image of Zapatista rebels to make this point. The image, far from projecting the “fixed” figure of the silenced “other”, is a photograph of Zapatista women flooding the streets on International Women’s Day in 1966. Ramire describes them “wearing face masks and multicoloured dresses, many carrying children on their backs or in their arms, with signs and slogans, cries, songs and dances” (139). When misinterpreted, these same women who epitomize transnational feminism are hence rendered either as victims of oppression or as sexualized and fetishized “others”.

I concur with Varma when she notes that one of the biggest difficulties with the discourse on transnationalism is to invalidate the entrenched notion that feminism is, historically, socially and politically a “Western” prerogative g”). So whereas in

many cases the objectification of “third world women” is paved with good intentions, the final result of this hegemonic feminism is that of a widening and dangerous bifurcation. In a similar vein, Chandra Mohanty writes, “[t]hus, feminist scholarly practices (whether reading, writing, critical or textual) are inscribed in relations of power—relations which they counter, resist, or even perhaps implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship” (334). Representations such as these tend to override the social, cultural and economic heterogeneities of women from the global south. This imperialistic production of a single story, Mohanty suggests, is particularly worrisome as it “nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse” (334-335).¹⁷

The second kind of stereotyping of women from the global south often results from an analogous stereotyping of religious practices themselves. Islam, which over-determines the image of Pakistani women, is generally understood in Europe and America as automatically denying women agency or rights. This misinterpretation of Islam is no doubt triggered by a small selection of its malpractitioners, who oppress women in the name of protection. Farhat Haq writes in this context that “[f]or most Islamic fundamentalists the Muslim women have become that symbolic space on which the battle with the “corrupt” and “infidel” West must be fought and the sanctity and honor of Islam must be protected” (199). The Pakistani novelist Uzma Aslam Khan adds about this double oppression: “this ongoing battle involves [the Muslim

¹⁷ In her essay “Melodramatic Postures and Constructions” (2003) Nirmal Puwar is concerned with the ways in which the “subjectivities” of certain western feminists and intellectuals is related to the “subjecthood” they assign to the “Other”. Puwar contends that academic “fantasies and anxieties” are created on the text/body of the subaltern female. She talks about how the “hybrid metropolitan” figure of the British-South Asian woman elicits a melodramatic posturing by “western” feminists who at once pity and celebrate them.

woman's] sexuality, marriage, mobility, work, dress – so much about which is heard, rarely from herself. Local religious zealots control her in the name of Islam; the West controls her in the name of freedom” (*World Pulse*). As a result, what we are faced with is a vast body of thought, scholarship, literature, film and journalism that has proved unsuccessful in acknowledging and adequately representing the complexity and heterogeneity of women's lives in Pakistan. In order to work towards a transnational feminist narrative, feminism needs to be regarded as an “epistemology”—“an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society” (Miriam Cook viii) Cook adds that in this way “feminism is not bound to one culture. It is no more Arab than it is American, no more Mediterranean than it is North European” (ix).

I argue below that women are both reimagining themselves and being reimagined in contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction. My chosen writers negotiate the spaces between local and global while cutting across traditional gendered identities to pave the way to a discourse that aims to weave a transnational narrative of feminism. In the process of acknowledging and representing the transnationalism of Pakistani women, my chosen writers pay attention to the everyday lives of women in Pakistan in their varied social and economic environments. Women from lower income backgrounds are positioned as active social agents as opposed to passive participants; they exist both within the specificities of their own cultures and the expansiveness of the world. Shamsie's more light-hearted comment that “women have hormones the world over!” (Helen Brown) will explain why in her own words her “novels give [readers] a very different idea of [Pakistan]. But, as Cook suggests, this attempt at transnationalism does not exclude the possibility of allegiances to groups or communities: “As members of a world community, [women] can think

transnationally while retaining deep connections with a specific place, whether it be of birth, of choice or of compulsion” (xxii).

Transnational feminist writers of Anglophone Pakistani fiction—who are not necessarily only women—are read in this study as strongly political. Their fictions, even when they are about home do not endorse an oppressive domesticity by merely representing things as they always have been. The leaving of “home” is not automatically offered as a solution to their problems either. The narratives place private homes in the public and political context of homelands—and in turn place homelands in the larger context of the world—in order to reveal complicated, empowering linkages between them as they unsettle received notions of modernity, civilization and globalization.¹⁸

The Writers and their Works

The writers I study in this thesis are Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam and Daniyal Mueenuddin. They are selected on the basis of their shared themes and concerns, and powerfully sustain my understanding of the transnational scope of contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction. As part of my methodology in each of the chapters, I have devoted the first major section to the critical theories, social and political contexts, biographical details and historical background that I have deemed important in effectively undertaking a close textual analysis of the novels. In this

¹⁸ In *Transnational Women's Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008) Susan Strehle hypothesizes from a conjoining feminist and postcolonial perspective that home, far from being a private arena, “reflects and resembles nation: not a retreat from the public and political, home expresses the same ideological pressures that contend within the nation” (1).

section I briefly outline the arguments made in each chapter and offer relevant biographical details about the novelists.

Chapter 1 focuses on the writing of Kamila Shamsie, who was born in Karachi in 1973 at a time when Pakistan was recovering from war against India and remained gripped by internal political tensions from within. While Shamsie spent many years living and working between London, New York and Karachi, the city of her birth has proved to be a major influence on her fiction. She writes prolific and passionate fiction and non-fiction about Karachi, particularly in her first three novels:

I, too, find myself wanting to make claims about its resilience. It isn't that "the city of lights" is unchanged or undamaged by its suffering, but it is undimmed. Arrive there from any other city in Pakistan and the energy of the place will strike you with an almost physical force (sometimes it's a literal physical force, depending on where you are and what you're doing). The energy isn't just about a quickness of pace, but ferocity of intent. "What are you doing with your life?" Karachi asks, and millions rise up to provide an answer, aware that every month thousands more are migrating to the city—dreaming their dreams, claiming their claims to its lifeblood. It's as wondrous as it is terrifying. (*Newsweek Magazine*)

Shamsie was born into a literary family with women writers like her great aunt Attia Hosain (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* 1961), her grandmother Jahanara Habibullah (*Remembrance of Days Past* 2001) and her mother Muneeza Shamsie who is a prominent literary critic and journalist in Pakistan. Carrying on the tradition set by the women writers in her family many decades ago, feminism remains central to Shamsie's writing as well. Her fictional women —Aliya, Mariam, Raheen, Aasmani,

Samina and Hiroko—are all involved in a struggle for freedom, be it personal or political, individual or collective. The struggles experienced by Shamsie’s women are exacerbated by the patriarchal and feudal environments within which they are embedded, these structures are not limited to Pakistan. *Broken Verses* (2005) which is set during Zia-ul-Haq’s “Islamization” of Pakistan explores the story of Samina, a political activist through whom the novel “contains unequivocal rejection of Zia’s hegemonic version of Islam, stridently anti-women Hudood Ordinance and brutal suppression of the freedom of speech” (Chambers 209). There is a marked attempt in the novel at separating Islamic fundamentalism and from the more progressive manifestations of the religion, as aesthetically expressed through Sufism and poetry. In *Broken Verses*, Samina encourages her daughter Asmani to translate the Quran along feminist lines, with “versions free from patriarchal interpretations” (5). This of course has been a significant concern for several other Anglophone Pakistani writers, including Nadeem Aslam who frequently employs Quranic verses as art form and visual imagery in his writing.

Shamsie’s attachment to Karachi is also partly explained by the prominence of women in its public life:

You’ll often hear Karachiwallas say there’s nowhere else in Pakistan they can happily live. I’ve heard it said more frequently by its women than its men. Karachi is hardly free of patriarchy, but its women are more visible, and more often to be seen in positions of authority, than elsewhere in the country. In February, when the city’s most powerful, and controversial, political party, the MQM, called for a women’s rally, the numbers that gathered were so vast (estimates vary from several hundred thousand to 1 million) that the BBC declared it the largest congregation of women ever organized in the world. In

a city where votes are divided primarily along ethnic lines, it was heartening to imagine we were witnessing a new kind of campaigning—one that placed gender in the political arena and gave teeth to the phrase “women’s vote.”
(*Newsweek*)

Her portrayals of Karachi are affectionate, vivid and complex, painting a picture of a vibrant and lively city without romanticizing it. Her global experiences have given her a different perspective on her home environment, and this underpins her fiction—she often explores cross-cultural relationships and cultural identity, particularly the burden of cultural history and family expectations.

Chapter 1 explores Shamsie’s most recent book *Burnt Shadows* as a transnational narrative that is set across the divisions of time and space, spanning over half a century and three continents. The disparate backgrounds of its protagonists, who belong to different and seemingly incompatible worlds, is a theme that reflects the author’s own existence between various worlds. The novel’s chief protagonist is a Japanese woman, Hiroko, who survives the atomic bombing in Nagasaki but is left permanently scarred by it—certainly psychologically but also physically in the form of two beautiful and perversely compelling bird shapes that are burnt onto her skin from a silk kimono she was wearing at the time of the explosions. Hiroko leaves Japan after the atomic attack, experiences the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, followed by the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1970s and finally the aftermath of 9/11 and the “war on terror”. All of these epochal moments are carefully intertwined in Shamsie’s narrative via Hiroko’s person. Not only does the immensity of Shamsie’s narrative canvas enable the transcendence of the particularism of contemporary terrorism, it also envisages the basis on which, perhaps perversely, the phenomenon of terrorism, capitalism and colonialism unite people. If Shamsie offers a progressive

vision of Islam, she derides its fundamentalist components; if she deplores American encroachment into Afghanistan and Pakistan, the novel is alive to the trauma inflicted by the 9/11 attacks on American citizens. In traversing these vast divides of history and geography, Shamsie imagines an alternative form of identification, rooted in the notion of collective belonging. This reading transforms Nagasaki, Delhi, Kabul and Karachi into transnational spaces at the centre of world historical events. Within the transnational framework that the novel erects, I examine its dislodging of feminism as a Euro-American entitlement, and make the case for Hiroko as a striking model for transnational feminism.

In Chapter 2 I address the work of the Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid, who was born in Lahore in 1971 and has chosen to return there, after spending many years living in America and England. Hamid's educational experience is similar to Shamsie in that he too obtained privileged schooling and studied Law at a prestigious American university. His subsequent experience of working in the American corporate sector effects his writing profoundly, as he explained during my interview with him in London (2013):

Finance, work and business are very important in my novels. How do people make a living, the intensity of it—it is the law of the jungle. Empathy becomes instrumentalized in business and is used only functionally. After an education that teaches the importance of collective human values, suddenly you find that these values are undesirable.

The tensions identified here by Hamid between a fundamentally discordant experience of education and professional life is evident in all three of his novels—

Moth Smoke (2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013).

Hamid's first novel *Moth Smoke*, delves into the growing culture of drugs, sex, crime and corruption amongst the elite residents of Lahore. This novel is a testament to Hamid's emotional commitment to Lahore (similar to Shamsie's relationship with Karachi), seen in his representation of it as "an unevenly developed, international urban centre, which constantly interconnects with its Punjabi rural hinterland" (Chambers 176). His second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, considers the life of a young Pakistani man living in New York (Changez is possibly Muslim, though certainly not religious) after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In a short story called "Focus on the Fundamentals" on which the novel is based, Hamid explains Changez's disillusionment with the America:

When I arrived at Princeton, I looked around me at the Gothic buildings—
younger, I later learned, than many of the mosques of Lahore, but made
through ingenious stonemasonry to look older—and thought, this is a dream
come true. The university inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in
which I was the star and everything was possible. Looking back now, I see the
power of that system, pragmatic and effective, like so much else in America.
We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only
by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations
until the best and the brightest of us had been identified. In return, we were
expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining.

And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first.
(*Paris Review*)¹⁹

As previously mentioned, the composition of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was well advanced when 9/11 happened. The narrative explores Changez's life in America, along with the complexities of his professional and personal relationships both before and after 9/11 and retrospectively considers the unfolding of individual and collective relationships against this historical context. Teasing out the sensibilities of the 9/11 victims as well as those criminalized as a consequence of it, the novel problematizes the binary between the two. Chapter 2 offers a close textual analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* bearing in mind precisely this historicization of contemporary global terrorism and conflict. Reading the novel as a constructive and imperative destabilization of existing essentialist notions of identity, I argue that neither Changez nor his silent American interlocutor can be assigned uncritical identities as a victim or aggressor. The use of the second personal "you", used to great effect in all three of Hamid's novels, invests an inextricable link between form and content in his writing. As Hamid has said in an interview with Chambers:

In my novel, there is an attempt to fundamentally implicate the reader. So if you view the world as fundamentally [sic] a world where there is a war between civilizations, then the novel is a thriller. If you don't, it is equally a random encounter between two separate guys who go their separate ways. So if it's a thriller or not depends on the preconceptions we bring to it as readers.
(178)

¹⁹ This short story, first published independently in *The Paris Review* (Fall, 2006), was later incorporated into *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Hamid's setting, like Shamsie's is transnational. The impact of 9/11 is extended from New York and Washington and displaced onto a wider world—Chile, Manila and Lahore are some of the sites from where the novel explores conflict and identity. I suggest that the tension between American non-Muslim citizens and even well-assimilated diasporic Muslims long pre-date the 9/11 moment, which serves more as a trigger-point than “ground zero”. Critics of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* have largely read it as a story of Changez's alienation from and resentment against the U.S., while at the same time acknowledging the more complex allegorical possibilities of Hamid's writing. My reading of the novel adopts a different stance on this matter, insofar as it proposes instead that Changez's feelings for the U.S. transcend the post-9/11 animosity that is more or less expected of him. Instead, Changez remains inseparably connected to America, even after his departure from the country. This association, if anything, is strengthened as a consequence of his disappointments. This paradox, enabled by the novel's transnational imagining, can be traced to Changez's dual consciousness, one that concurrently allows him to experience the events of 9/11 as an “insider” as well an “outsider”, as an American and as a Pakistani. The resulting feelings of confusion, conflictedness and crisis of identity are all viewed affirmatively—and as presenting favourable possibilities—in my reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Chapter 3 focuses on the writing of Nadeem Aslam—a novelist who was born in the northern Pakistani city of Gujranwala in 1966 and moved to Huddersfield in England at the age of fourteen. As with the other writers being discussed here, Aslam's identity as a writer is difficult to determine; Chambers writes that “given his late arrival in the UK, he is neither a ‘diasporic Pakistani writer’ nor a Pakistani writer, but is situated in an in-between position, complicating conceptual boundaries

between East and West” (134). Aslam’s uncertain territorial affinities are echoed in the shifting of his professional life. Like his contemporaries Hamid and Mueenuddin, Aslam took up writing fiction as an alternative career to the one he initially determined. He abandoned a science degree at Manchester University in order to pursue his writing ambitions and made his fictional debut with *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993). The novel was an unapologetic attack on Zia ul Haq’s Islamization of Pakistan during the 1970 and 1980s and the social and political damage caused by this process. His second novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) explores the lives of immigrant communities in the north of England that are engulfed within the discourses of fundamentalism, racism and secularism, juggling the status of marginality with the possibilities of transnational existence.²⁰ However Chapter 4 focuses on *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). Mohammad Hanif (author of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* 2009) writes about *The Wasted Vigil* that

There are episodes in the book so intense, so gruesome, that you have to close it and breathe before you can start again. Similarly, there are poetic images so stunning that you pause and read again to savour the sheer beauty of the language. This will be read as a novel about Afghanistan, but it should be read as a book about love. Nadeem Aslam has said that his father advised him to "always write about love". In this third novel he has shown absolute commitment to that advice. (*The Independent*)

Hanif’s review gestures to the fundamental paradox of beauty and violence in Aslam’s writing, which is conveyed both thematically and stylistically. Reviewing the novel for *The Guardian*, James Buchan furthers the sense of conflictedness in Aslam’s views on Islam and his homeland: “Born in Pakistan 40 years ago to a

secular-minded family, he ... views Islam and his homeland with feelings so complicated they must be an agony to him.” Buchan’s suggestion that Aslam uses his fiction to “work out his feelings” in the setting of modern-day Afghanistan—the “graveyard of a great and distinctive antique culture”—seems to me appropriate. This setting of the novel, prompted by a need to explore terrorism, identity and feminism within literature in a less synchronic way, privileges a more expansive investigation of the transnational dimension of contemporary terrorism. Aslam’s attempts at dislocating the “war on terror” allows some respite, or what Eoin Flannery has usefully called “breathing space” (Internationalizing) within which the lives of his characters can be considered more within diverse and composite contexts of their situations. This departure from the dominant media and literary responses to 9/11 is also complemented by Aslam’s authorial horror and indignation against the Taliban’s religious extremism. His views on the subject are evocatively distilled in the recurring image of the surviving head of a Buddha statue, which acts as a leitmotif in the narrative, is Aslam’s response to the destruction of ancient Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan Valley in 2001.²¹ Aslam has further commented on this incident, “although I may not have been able to stop you [the Taliban] in real life, in my mind and in my book you won’t succeed in destroying this Buddha” (Chambers 139).

My reading of *The Wasted Vigil* tries to detect the possibilities of hope and restoration generated by Aslam, in part from the poetic excesses of his narrative that seemingly contrast the often-grotesque subject matter. I show that *The Wasted Vigil* is saturated with images of decay—stale perfume, musk, moths and blood leading up to the horrifying concluding image of a Buddha’s head hanging precariously from a

helicopter far above the Hindu Kush.²² But I argue the juxtaposition of lyrical beauty and terror acts as an appropriate medium for the novel's exploration of terrorism's transnational historical dimensions and de-centering of U.S.-centric perspectives.

Chapter 4 undertakes a joint investigation of Daniyal Mueenuddin's of short stories—*In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009) and Hamid's most recent novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) (henceforth *In Other Rooms* and *Rising Asia*). Like his contemporaries, Mueenuddin's life experiences have been geographically and culturally varied. He was born in Lahore in 1963 but grew up between Pakistan and America, attending Dartmouth College and Yale Law School. After practicing Law for a number of years in New York, he recently returned to Pakistan to run his father's farm. Mueenuddin's experiences of rural life in Punjab have heavily influenced his stories that revolve around the life, family, friends and servants of the Punjabi landowner K.K. Harouni. The stories are interlinked via major characters from particular stories often playing minor but influential roles in others, and the story cycle in its totality creates a network of connections between the urban and rural, the local and the global. *In Other Rooms* tries to articulate in fiction what Ranajit Guha in another context calls "the small voice of history",²³ departing from the epic expansiveness that Shamsie, Hamid and Aslam's writing offers. International terrorism is only alluded to on occasion and violence is represented mainly within domestic contexts. However, I argue that the small voices that Mueenuddin's stories

²² The Alfred A Knopf edition of *The Wasted Vigil* very effectively uses the image of the Buddha's head on its front cover.

²³ Guha's essay, first the text of a lecture in Hyderabad in 1993 and later published in *Subaltern Studies* in 1994, engages in a critique of the dominant social, political and cultural frameworks available to assess history, which exclude any substantial articulations by the oppressed—or the "small voices". Guha attempts to create a platform where these voices may be heard more effectively, hence not only illuminating their concealed histories but attempting a kind of recuperation from decades of suppression.

articulate form a collage of the heterogeneous “whole” of Pakistan, enabling an effective (and perhaps only) way of depicting a country so nuanced and differentiated.

Offering several fruitful comparisons to Mueenuddin’s stories, Hamid’s *Rising Asia* is set in an unnamed South Asian city that is likely to be Lahore, but could equally be Mumbai, Johannesburg or other iconic cities of the global south: “enormous, home to more people than half the countries in the world, to whom every few weeks is added a population equivalent to that of a small, sandy-beached, tropical island republic” (82). While my reading focuses on Hamid’s capability to challenge the ways in which Pakistan is projected and interpreted, the chapter is committed to explore the novel’s transnationalism. Hamid’s characters are unnamed and identified by generic terms—“the pretty girl” and “the politician”, while his protagonist is “You”. I suggest that use of the second personal pronoun, the disposal of first-personal identification and the ironic employment of the “self-help” format all contribute towards establishing the validity of the universal claims made by the novel. The chapter asks why Hamid’s “You” represents millions of other people in the world, drawing individuals together under the canopy of capitalism, and is a timely and necessary intervention in current debates about transnationalism.

The publication of *In Other Rooms* and *Rising Asia* have each been followed by a sense of relief that Pakistani writers had decided to depart from the “9/11 novel”. On reflection this sense of relief is both defective and misleading, not least because I explore in some detail the flaws in the usage of the term “9/11 novel” to classify the work of my chosen writers. But if the relief of reviewers and readers is based on the absence of expansive violence, terrorism and war in Mueenuddin and Hamid’s fiction then this assumption too is premature. Chapter 5 explores Mueenuddin and Hamid’s depiction of Pakistan as a multifaceted, complex and heterogeneous space that is

grossly misrepresented and misunderstood. This heterogeneity is explored under the rubrics of corruption, violence, gender and class. Once this notion “difference” is plotted, I show that these narratives are acutely conscious of the problems that arise from a forced separation between “us” and “them” or between “global” and “local”. One of the most damaging long-term results of 9/11 and the “war on terror” has been the negative imagining of countries like Pakistan. In the media’s attempts at exposing the warring factions, civil crimes and religious extremism that are (admittedly) prevalent in many parts of the country, it is tempting to forget that there is more to Pakistan than this. Nor, I argue via this fiction, is the country as removed from its “civilizational others” as it is imagined.

Chapter 1

Imagining a Connection: Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.

—Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Nationalities, ethnicities, tribal, and religious filiations imply geographical and political definitions of some kind, and yet, partly because of our nomad nature and partly due to the fluctuations of history, our geography is less grounded in a physical than in a phantom landscape. Home is always an imaginary place.

—Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words*

1.1 Introduction

In order to read *Burnt Shadows* (2009) as a transnational novel, I would like to devote a brief discussion to the parameters of my usage of this concept. As suggested before, I take transnationalism as attitudinal; a phenomenon grounded on human collaborations and consistencies that link people across and beyond the artificial constructs of national boundaries. I emphatically concur in this regard with the phenomenon that Peter Hitchcock has usefully termed “the long space” within which Postcolonial fiction might challenge and reconfigure the ways in which history, geography and culture are articulated. Predominantly I propose that *Burnt Shadows* both problematizes and counter-narrates the notion that the origins of terrorism, violence and ideological extremism are confined to specific national borders. It looks

beyond the present moment, using an extensive and exhaustive mode of engagement that refuses to see identity, culture and terrorism as historically settled. Equally, it advocates that the governance procedures in place to understand and counter terrorism, particularly in the global north, need to be constantly interrogated and evaluated. In its attempt to interrogate the normative relationship between terrorism and the “nation” in favour of a broader transnational framework *Burnt Shadows* provides a much richer and more nuanced perspective into the “multidirectional and transcultural process[s]” through which world politics has tended to operate. (Srilata Ravi 216). The novel operates by linking cities across the world and facilitates a consideration of the complex histories they have shared. It determines that the historical correlations between these seemingly discordant spaces have continued to intensify in their contemporary forms.

Shamsie’s narrative scope, both territorially and in terms of perspective variation, echoes Arif Dirlik’s assertion that “[m]odernity may no longer be approached as a dialogue internal to Europe or Euro-America, but is a world-wide discourse in which many participate, producing different formulations of the modern as lived and envisaged within their local social environments” (17). Scholars such as Dirlik (alongside Dipesh Chakrabarty and Arjun Appadurai) not only examine the conspicuous gaps in existing notions of globalization and global metropolises, but also interrogate the framework within which these understandings are formulated. This then leads to the deduction that universalism appropriated in Euro-American centres is little more than a specific particularism—a notion that Shamsie attempts to redress in *Burnt Shadows*.²⁴ Sara Lennox writes,

²⁴ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar critiques Appadurai’s “alternative modernities” for its inability to escape or break with the phenomenon of “modernity” itself (*Alternative Modernities* 2001). But it is important to steer clear of the distinction between what

Within the frameworks elaborated by classical Western social theorists like Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, modernity itself has been taken to be a condition that characterizes contemporary Western societies, though to which non-Western societies may aspire and will eventually—willingly or unwillingly—succumb. However, scholars critical of Eurocentrism have shown that the diffusion of capitalism throughout the globe (i.e. the phenomenon now known as globalization) has produced heterogeneous, not homogeneous, political, social, and cultural effects, bringing other parts of the world into being that are just as modern as the West, but differently so. (2005)

These different formulations of lived experience, told imaginatively and from a number of positions and acknowledging a spectrum of cultural and religious sentiments, form the basis of the transnationalism discussed here. In the case of Shamsie, as I later elaborate, this transnationalism is not restricted to the narrative but is also the mode of her own lived experience, across linguistic, cultural, intellectual and territorial registers. In a collection of personal essays Natasha Garrett has described transnationalism as a positive state of impermanence or what she calls a “contemporary mode of migration” (4); this sense of movement and agility between time and space is encountered in Shamsie’s narrative style too.

There are two major forms of identification that need to be addressed here: Muslim and Pakistani. One need briefly glimpse the history of the Indian subcontinent to grasp that identity and belonging have been notoriously problematic concepts in this territory. Any imagining of nationalism based around identity has thus been apportioned little more than a mythical status by critics such as Ayesha Jalal who

Gaonkar calls “the good and the bad” forms of modernity that would be the inevitable result of constructing an anti-European or anti-America modernity. The process would be an exercise in futility and would prove, eventually, counter-productive (1).

astutely observes that “[d]espite a well-orchestrated official nationalism, Pakistan ever since its creation has been searching for moorings somewhere in the twilight zone between myth and history” (Past 9). Contemporary Pakistan is a space of multiple and competing identities, which continue to be coaxed under the larger banding of Islam. In her debut non-fictional work, *Offence: The Muslim Case* (2009), Shamsie questions the generalized approach towards a so-called “Islamic world”. To Shamsie, “Islamic” is a false and flawed concept within which she finds that “people aren’t discussing politics, but a mythical ‘Muslim world’. They discuss what is written in the Quran, as if there’s one interpretation of what it means” (Chambers 217). If anything, Shamsie privileges identification through nation rather than religion. Whereas Shamsie’s privileging of the nation in her non-fiction may at first appear to contradict the transnationalism of *Burnt Shadows*, the two are in fact closely connected. Shamsie explores the uniqueness and individuality of nations—and is particularly equipped to do so as she moves regularly between countries. But for her national peculiarities do not translate into a “clash of civilizations”. In her attempt to explode this myth Shamsie explains, “Manichaeism reporting exists on both sides, but it’s not an equivalent situation because of the cultural power that America wields”. She disavows the “Islam vs. the West” thesis on the basis of Pakistan’s on-going battle between extremists and moderates, in favour of the “Extremists vs. Everyone else” debate (Chambers 221).²⁵ This forms the basis of the novel’s transnationalism, whereby characters, settings, perspectives and ideologies are representative of both

²⁵ Shamsie also invites attention to the global growth of “Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist groups [that] have been getting stronger in the last two decades”. She suggests that the apparent failure of “leftwing secular ideologies” in the 1970s may have led to the formation of “dogmatic religious positions” around the world (Chambers 220). In observations such as these, Shamsie is highlighting not just the global permeation of religious fundamentalism but also the irony of associating it with particular religions or nations.

difference and sameness. As a transnational novel *Burnt Shadows* generates characters and situations that help to understand and represent historical conditions in a nuanced and analytical light. Not only does it necessitate a consideration of the social and political realities of its various territorial settings, but by drawing continuous parallels between these settings, it also suggests that these realities have a unifying global resonance. Marked by movement, Shamsie's narrative espouses the imagining of alternative forms of existence and identification.

As part of this process the reader takes Shamsie's lead in positioning herself varying in the course of the novel and hence develops a degree empathy with each of these positions. The characters, in the first instance, are individuals in their own rights—plausible fictional characters that critics such as Henry James have described as being the key ingredients of a successful novel. They provide a certain “intensity of illusion”:

What he [James] requires of a novel is that the “feel of life” of the fictional characters should be created, the feel of the choices open to them; a moral evaluation, if it is to be genuine and valid, can emerge only from the possibility of *their* world, *their* personality, *their* mode of experience. These objectives can only be achieved if the reader can get “within the skin” of the characters, can see and understand in their terms, from their perspective, without of course sacrificing his own objective position. (Pascal qtd in Hale 93-94)

However, Shamsie's characters go beyond the provision of this intensity of illusion; while their personal lives are intricately mapped in the narrative, they are also players in a transnational and political field, representing a wide spectrum of positions (gendered, racial, religious and national) from around the globe. The novel

thus acquires allegorical proportions, facilitating and inviting access to it at multiple levels. Hiroko Tanaka, the chief protagonist, is a trained translator of languages and her profession becomes something of a metaphor for the collective belonging that Shamsie's text purports. The literary merits of her novel as a story, explored in the course of this reading, are extended through the political contribution it makes to the contemporary debates about "global terror". Shamsie has made this intervention at a moment when Pakistan as a sovereign territory and Muslims as a religious community are in a particularly precarious position. With Pakistan and Islam becoming increasingly synonymous with each other and with acts of extremity and fundamentalism, Shamsie has reclaimed the space as heterogeneous, fluid and transnational. This, fortunately, does not involve any doctrinaire instructions in world history. Instead, putting her own transnational experiences to good use, Shamsie makes a case for transnationalism by using two approaches simultaneously. First, she acknowledges the bases on which the stereotyping of Muslims and Pakistanis is carried out. Next, she neutralizes it. In other words, whereas her ultimate intention is to counter it, she does not outright reject or undermine this stereotyping. Being "westernized" in several ways herself, and living between England, America and Pakistan allows her this privileged insider's perspective. This "doubleness of belonging and not belonging", sometimes categorized as an enabling "homelessness", empowers Shamsie with the ability to ask questions as an insider and an outsider simultaneously (Ambreen Hai 381).²⁶ As a transnational intellectual involved in the

²⁶ In "Border Work Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*" Ambreen Hai reflects on the impact of this world women's writing that is produced in border spaces, carrying the influences of myriad cultural, regional, religious and linguistic factors. Like Sidhwa, Shamsie would also be aptly categorised as a "border worker", who writes from shifting perspectives, moving between the familiar and unfamiliar and blurring the distinctions between the two (382).

process of what Ambreen Hai calls “border work”, Shamsie’s endeavour is aptly defined as undertaken by one “who both belongs and unbelongs, who can offer crucial perspectival shifts, can have liberatory potential, because it can undo hierarchical categories of opposition, offering useful critique and reconceptualization of either side of an opposition—be it cultural, political or intellectual” (Hai 381).

Shamsie’s dual vision is used in *Burnt Shadows* partly with a view to rescuing and restoring the image of secular and tolerant citizens of Islamic countries around the globe today, and accordingly we find in the novel a subversive attempt at “negotiating the contradictions of cultural heterogeneity, modernity, nationalism, or diasporic identity” (Hai 382). The transnational setting of the novel aids this agenda by allowing a certain spatial fluidity, accompanied by shifting national, religious and cultural standpoints. This fluidity defines the structure of the novel both horizontally, in terms of its vast geographical span, but also vertically in terms of its historical contexts. Shamsie historicizes often and extensively, beckoning political history over the duration of the second half of the twentieth century in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of terrorism in the contemporary world. In doing so she effectively refutes the language of “Ground Zero” in which the historical exceptionalism of 9/11 is implied.²⁷ The narrative involves an attempt to demonstrate how historical instances of violence and terror have been misrepresented for political and ideological motives by the hegemonic powers of America and Europe, and subsequently endeavours to let these shadows reappear. The ways in which the narrative invokes these demons of the past suggest that their purpose is not to present

²⁷ In an interview Shamsie reinforces her distancing from the 9/11 moment: “Nadeem Aslam was the first person I told I was writing about Nagasaki, and he said ‘Oh, will this be your 9/11 book?’ I remember being annoyed and wondering why this necessitated writing about 9/11: I had no idea until very late that the book would examine that event” (Chambers 216).

a dogmatic analysis of right or wrong, but to show conflict as a human condition, plaguing everyone at one time or another. This recalling of a dark past is also achieved in Shamsie's short story "Our Dead Your Dead" (2011), when the narrator Ayla breaks down the pattern of terrorism as she sees it: "America had 9/11; England had 7/7; India had 26/11; Pakistan has 24/7". The tone of acceptance in the story betrays an acerbic edge, which does not characterize the narrative in *Burnt Shadows*: "[t]hey were all to-the-marrow *Karachiwallas*, steeped in a bitter "survivor humour" which had been refined through decades of violence. The men who strapped bombs to their chests in the name of God were just the newest form of attackers, not even the deadliest."

1.2 The "Nation" in Transnational

Shamsie explains in an interview with Chambers,

In 2001, people began talking about Afghanistan and Pakistan, often making misinformed claims, because many didn't know the area. I at least know a little more, and am very interested in politics. In the early 2000s there weren't many Pakistanis whom journalists knew and could ring. Now and then they asked me to write something, so I fell into journalism. (216)

Whereas Shamsie's words here were in response to a question about her role as a journalist and cultural commentator, her fictional writing too has been inseparable from her politics. This section of the chapter focuses chiefly on transnationalism in *Burnt Shadows*—by anchoring it, in the first instance, in the work of Fredric Jameson. I go on to present a discussion surrounding the criticisms following Jameson's essay, and attempt to assay these conflicting positions through Shamsie's writing. Jameson's assertions about postcolonial authors, as I discuss here, hold true for Shamsie insofar

that she does not eschew the concept of the nation-state despite the transnational scope of her novel. Transnationalism becomes a particularly charged term in Jameson's analyses, especially in his influential and controversial essay, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) which makes a distinction between literatures emanating from "first" and "third" worlds. Famously, in this essay he argues towards establishing that "[a]ll third world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories" (69). Jameson hypothesises that the fundamental difference between "first" and "third" world literature lies in their differing registrations of the divide between public (political) and private (poetic) lives. Whereas European and American literatures from the "first world" make this divide intelligible and distinct, Jameson believes that third world texts are by and large "national allegories", which may use "western machinery" (the novel, for instance, or the English language) but are quite antithetical to them in every other way. He suggests that while a "third world" text makes the politics of even the most private of episodes evident, the "first world" novel views the notion of politics in fiction as a "pistol shot in the middle of a concert".²⁸ In "third world" societies, then, psychology or what Jameson calls "libidinal investment" is read and understood mainly in national political and social terms. Among "third world" intellectuals, Jameson suggests that there appears to be a compulsive "return to the national situation", with the idea of the "country" and "us" gaining precedence and privilege above all else (65). The claim rests on the assumption that while "first world" literary intellectuals do not demonstrate significant attention to the "nation" and its citizens, "a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world" (65).

Here it is worth briefly evaluating the basis on which Jameson distinguishes between the “first” and “third” world texts. In “third world” texts it is suggested that plot and characterization are both employed to illuminate the larger historical formation of the present. In the case of Pakistan, which shares a rich and multifarious history with its political adversary and neighbour, India, the historicizing of national identities and their formation is a vital and complex process. Pakistan’s history is bound to overlap with India’s history and Pakistani Anglophone literature is critically aware of the nationalistic tensions that result from this historical intersection. Jameson explains in the context of “first world” literature that the “view from the top is epistemologically crippling, and reduces its subjects to the illusions of a host of fragmented subjectivities” unable to grasp their “social totality”. “All of this” he goes on to contend, “is denied to third world culture, which must be situational and materialist despite itself” (85). Jameson argues that this primarily is the reason for all third world literature being allegorical—“where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectively itself” (86). I contend, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, that *Burnt Shadows* exemplifies the value of individual experience in relation to the “experience of collectivity”, particularly national collectivity. It imbibes political, national and historical concerns within its narrative and speaks representatively from more than one position. It does so with a sense of urgency. In addition to Jameson’s focus, I would like to suggest that the issues of border crossing, migration, transgression, political intervention, and the dismantling of global stereotypes are also of increasingly vital aspects of her narrative.

Naturally, Jameson’s proposal has met with a plethora of critical counter debates over the years. Among the several heated responses that the theory has

invoked, Aijaz Ahmad's criticism has been particularly influential. Ahmad takes his fellow critic's attempt at creating a categorical distinction between the "first", "second" and "third" worlds as an act of ideological betrayal and discrimination. He refutes the idea of the "cognitive aesthetics" of third world literature on the basis that such a generalization overlooks a deep and complex "multiplicity" of literatures (Ahmad 3).²⁹

Ahmad was born in India, is a Pakistani citizen and regularly writes poetry in his mother tongue, Urdu. It is not difficult to see why Jameson's claim about "all" third literature is offensive and unacceptable to him. His opposition to Jameson is grounded on linguistic and cultural specificities alongside a profound disagreement about the validity of "first", "second" and "third" world categories. Whilst entirely supportive of Jameson's condemnation of the neglect of some excellent pieces of fiction from Africa, Asia and Latin America, Ahmad nonetheless refuses to accept the term "third world" as having any "theoretical status whatsoever" (4). According to him, issues of "periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles" are too vast and complex to be combined under such a reductive heading (4). Additionally, of course, the "third world" literature in English made available in metropolitan countries is by no means representative of the literary corpus in the nations that comprise this part of the world—it is only a small fraction of it. Ahmad questions Jameson's hypothesis, in view of the latter's evident lack of exposure to the wealth of non-English language literature, notwithstanding Jameson's examples from Chinese literature. There is also the additional concern on Ahmad's part that most first world intellectuals have never "bothered" with an Asian language,

²⁹ Ahmad goes as far as to claim "that the man whom I had for so long, so affectionately...taken as a comrade was, in his own opinion, my civilizational Other." He adds, "It was not a good feeling" (4).

and that translations are very rarely found to travel from “East to West”. Ahmad despairs that a handful of writers from the “third” world are hence disproportionately representative of a vast section of the world, “of a race, a continent, a civilization, even the ‘third world’”. About the *New York Times*’ description of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* as a continent “finding its voice”, Ahmad bitterly observes, “[it is] as if one has no voice if one does not speak in English” (5).

What is important to this debate is Ahmad’s critique of Jameson’s division of the world into three categories. Though Jameson is careful to qualify that his dissection is only for “descriptive” purposes, Ahmad professes that “description is never ideologically or cognitively neutral” (6). He refers to the set of descriptions stamped upon the “third world” by colonial powers and the manner in which “our” bodies, traditions, cultures and politics were described. He mainly remains concerned with the classificatory purpose of descriptive language, which defines the “first” and “second” world by framing them in terms of their “production systems” but the “third” world by that of its experience of imperialism. This taxonomy, Ahmad believes, “divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it” (7). Ahmad’s criticism about collapsing *all* third world literature in one generic category is, I grant, valid. Indeed the literature of Pakistan alone, given the sheer number of languages that comprise it, is too vast and varied for it to be reduced to generalisations. Furthermore there is the argument that reading “third world” literature as always representative of national politics “constricts the text within its history of subjection, forcing it to exist only inasmuch as it is defined by this imperial existence” (Nadine Chan 42). Chan further condemns such an approach by calling it a

“homogenizing and brutally handicapping prescription which traps the colonized within a cycle of subordination” (42).³⁰

This debate is intensified because, in my opinion, it obscures some serious limitations in both Jameson and Ahmad’s readings. To read a text “a-nationally”, as it were, may prevent us developing a proper political, historical and aesthetic perspective required by it. On the other hand, to position it as exclusively allegorical of a nation is, as Chan suggests, overly restrictive as to its scale. More significantly in the context of my study, neither critic’s framework seems to offer the flexibility required to analyse new generation Pakistani fiction in English. However, the theoretical debate between Jameson and Ahmad offers a crucial opening to consider the role and work of diasporic writers such as Shamsie, who continue to write about and be associated both culturally and professionally with their lands of birth and hence occupy a particularly problematic position relationship to oppositions being presented here. The issue of self-representation and identity, which once necessitated literary “postcoloniality” or “Third-Worldism”, mainly owing to the “impulse to critique Eurocentric norms”, is no longer a sufficient map for the kinds of representation sought by writers like Shamsie. Does national representation have “continued relevance in an age where categorically rooted subject identities have been effectively deconstructed”? (Chan 41). My response to that is a tentative “yes”. *Burnt Shadows* does not negate the notion of national representation but rather offers a pluralized version of it, mediating between national space and class divisions. In the Jameson-Ahmad debates we are not offered the prospect of a third possibility—of

³⁰ Chan examines what she calls the “troubled space of cinema and nation” in the context of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). Like Shamsie, she considers the “ethical importance of continuing to read transnational cinema through nationalist frameworks, while also realizing the limitations of doing so when considering newer transnational productions” (37-38).

writing fiction from multiple (transnational) positions. The responsibilities and expectations associated with a writer in this position of “inbetweenness” are manifold; not only would they, according to the Jamesonian categorization, then conform to the highly personalized and private writing styles of the “West”, but also carry a certain national representational burden by mark of their association with the so called “third world”. Anglophone literature by writers of the so-called “third” world, (who are not necessarily only resident in their original homelands any longer) inhabits a unique space—providing its writers with a “contact zone” that is intermediary between the national and the global—a space that might be called “transnational”.³¹ This contact zone or “interstitial space” is crucial in the initiation of new strategies of belonging and identity formation. It facilitates collaboration and contestation; agreement and dissent (Boehmer 22). Boehmer refers to it as a site of “potentially productive inbetweenness” between the “first” and “third” worlds (21). Neither Jameson nor Ahmad explicitly takes into consideration, in any kind of significant detail, the particularly ambiguous space occupied by migrant writers. Are they speakers and legislators for the so-called “third” world or do they fall into the category of “first world” writers whose fiction is invested exclusively with a privatized libidinal quality? What I suggest here is that by the very complexity of their positioning, such a writer is equipped with the tools to fulfil both these roles—of public and private—at once. Ellen Berry cites and espouses this creative productivity:

The resistance to closure, the insistence on permanent openness, partiality.

And provisionality so evident in many contemporary cultural and political

³¹ “Contact zone” is a usefully coined term by Mary Louise Pratt in her essay “Arts of the Contact Zone” (1991). The term refers to the space where “transculturation” happens, involving the meeting and interacting of people across cultures in asymmetrical ways. This of course empowers people within the contact zone with greater knowledge of the unfamiliar and the perspective to accommodate it.

projects might be seen as part of this commitment to opening multiple paths to the future so as not to foreclose it in advance ... Such an investigation has even been called one of the most urgent ethical projects that cultural workers can undertake in our altered world. (123-124)

I argue that these writers from the global south profess the urgency of the projects Berry has in mind, both within and outside a fictional context. Shamsie, for example not only addressed the most significant pressing global concerns in which South Asia is implicated, but in Pakistan she is very much regarded as a public intellectual and often accorded an ambassadorial status.³²

Boehmer, like Shamsie, is invested in a similar creative “contact zone of cultural and political exchange” where nationalisms lie not just within nations, but find their stimuli outside it—among other postcolonial nations with similar histories, experiencing analogous liberation struggles. This inextricable and productive linkage is reinforced by what Boehmer insightfully calls “like-minded colonial nationalist ‘pilgrims’” who do not quite fall into the category of the colonial rulers or the colonized masses—though having more in common intellectually and culturally with the former—form a group quite unique to themselves. Impelled by the desire to at once embrace the globe and the nation, they “reach beyond cultural and geopolitical boundaries to discover ways of constituting a resistant selfhood” (Empire 20).

Though Boehmer’s discussion makes political leaders and intellectuals such as Jinnah, Gandhi and Platjee its focal point, I would like to suggest that a similar case

³² An important example of Shamsie’s journalism is her article in *The Guardian* published on 23 March 2012: “Kamila Shamsie on Pakistan, America and the Pitfalls of Plotting” in which she swivels the historical moments between America and Pakistan that have become common markers of terrorism. She alters the commencement of this relationship from the 1980s to 1958 when America provided Pakistan with one hundred F-86 planes in exchange for the usage of Peshawar as a listening post.

could be made for the contemporary group of migrant Pakistani writers of English language fiction. Not unlike Boehmer's group of colonized elites who inhabit an exclusive space owing to their middle-class status, educational background, global experience, fluency in European languages and intellectual leanings, this group of writers too find "themselves to be more at home in the colonizer's culture than in their indigenous environment" but are simultaneously marked by their anticolonial activity and solidarity. Boehmer further explains: "anti-colonial intelligentsias, poised between the cultural traditions of home on the one hand and of their education on the other, occupied a site of potentially productive inbetweenness where they might observe other resistance histories and political approaches in order to work out how themselves to proceed" (21). It is this state of productive inbetweenness that fuels Shamsie's fiction, which not only subverts conventional notions of nationalism, colonialism, feminism and terrorism, but also contains a "psychic healing" power by blurring the distinctions between foreign and familiar (Emily Hicks xxiii-xxxi). In the words of Trinh Minh-ha,

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside [and] she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. [...] Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in she is like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. (74-75)

I offer a reading of *Burnt Shadows* that marks the novel as an aesthetic and political tour-de-force; a work that proposes alternative approaches both to understanding "globalization" and the normative understanding of nationalism as a nation-specific phenomenon. Shamsie explores "globalization" from an

unconventional, altered territorial bearing that moves away from London, Paris or New York to Tokyo, Kabul, Delhi, Istanbul and Karachi. Equally, she is interested in the nationalist sentiments and practices that connect these otherwise distinct and separate nations, proposing nationalism as a global phenomenon in the process.

Before turning to the novel itself, I will briefly explore Shamsie's own metamorphosis from a Karachi-centred writer to novelist who chooses to set her most recent novel in the "globe". In an article in *The Guardian* about her relationship with the city of her birth and also her most powerful literary muse, Shamsie allows us to momentarily glimpse the tension in her mind about "home" and "away": "[b]ut wherever I lived, Karachi was the place I knew best and the place about which I wrote. I knew its subtexts, its geography, its manifestations of snobbery and patriarchy, its passions, its seasonal fruits and their different varieties. I knew the sound of the sunset". While her first three novels are all based mainly in Karachi, *Burnt Shadows* begins in Japan and ends somewhere between Afghanistan and New York. This departure mirrors Shamsie's professed need to leave the city with which she feels so "intimately acquainted" in order to widen her fictional canvas. She explains that "this geographical widening of [her] imagination was one of the most important factors in [her] decision to move to London three years ago—[she] was eager to alter [her] relationship to Karachi from part-time resident to visitor". But far from rendering her "unmoored from [her] subject matter", this territorial distancing from her homeland has, if anything, reinforced her relationship with Karachi. In response to the often heavy criticism launched against the notion of diasporic writers or citizens representing "homelands", Shamsie argues that this distancing from her country and the revisiting of it from abroad had enabled her to re-envision Pakistan in a manner never before possible—"I discovered a previously unknown pleasure: how

to make a distant place feel intimate.” In order to be intimately acquainted with a place, or to be able to “reach out of thousands of windows in the city, rub the air between [her] fingers and feel texture,” Shamsie suggests that a writer need not commit her physical presence to a particular country (*The Guardian*). It is the ability to step out of “home” and view from a more nuanced perspective that gives Shamsie the power to assess and reflect on her nation. That she chooses, and is able, to work and write in metropolitan cities such as New York and London and that her linguistic mode is always English has little to do with impeding this representational process. Her claim is helpful in understanding the specific charge of her fiction.

1.3 Transnational Terrorism:

Burnt Shadows explores the entrenched role played by both the acts of terror and the “war on terror” in the shaping of nationalistic affiliations and identities. Shamsie suggests that terrorism, enacted by forces ranging from the state to individual fanatics—imperial Japan’s enforcement of militant terror to cataclysmic American intervention against it, or 9/11 and the American led “war on terror”—are more pervasive across time and space than commonly accepted. She is interested, like Aslam and Hamid, in the manifestations and guises under which the phenomenon of fanaticism and “fundamentalism” masquerade.

The first allusion to terror in the novel is a contemporary one. Unshackled and stripped of his clothes and his dignity, Raza Konrad Ashraf finds himself in a cold cell awaiting an orange jumpsuit. He has joined the band of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. As his life flashes before him and the future appears unremittingly dark, he is compelled to ask himself: “How did it come to this?” The novel suggests that Raza’s

question is not rhetorical but rather demands a detailed and in-depth response. His confusion arises not only from the chain of events in his personal life, but also from a much larger political configuration which refuses to accord historical uniqueness to 9/11. In Shamsie's story 9/11 is an integral part of modernity itself and a part of world history. The juxtaposition of New York 2001 with Nagasaki 1945 constitutes a form of resistance against the 9/11 presentism by continually invoking the past as indispensable to an understanding of the present. Shamsie endorses Lynn Hunt's concern that on the American Historical Association's (AHA) website that "[p]resentism, at its worst, encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation. Interpreting the past in terms of present concerns usually leads us to find ourselves morally superior" (AHA). Hunt's difficulty with the study of contemporary history (of both formal and informal kinds) mainly lies in the sense of "temporal superiority" that can result from privileging the present over the past.³³ Shamsie's historical exegesis does not add up to any crude formulations such as the legitimization of 9/11—but there are clear attempts at reiterating terrorism as a modern and transnational—as opposed to archaic "Islamic"—phenomenon.

In keeping with the novel's thematic concerns is its narrative scope, encompassing vast reaches of historical space and time and navigating rapidly between them. Structurally, too, *Burnt Shadows* recognizes the "virtues of

³³ Hunt, President of the American Historical Association (AHA), suggests that presentism in America is a desirable state of being owing to the moral conveniences it offers: "We more easily accept the existence and tolerate the moral ambiguities of eunuchs and harems, for example, than of witches. Because they found a place in a non-Western society, eunuchs and harems seem strange to us but they do not reflect badly on our own past. Witches, in contrast, seem to challenge the very basis of modern historical understanding and have therefore provoked immense controversy as well as many fine historical studies". It is also worth noting that Hunt's column on the AHA website was written well over a year before 9/11. Her concerns about the "modern Western historical consciousness" hence predate the exacerbation in presentism witnessed across America after these attacks.

maintaining a fruitful tension between present concerns and respect for the past” (Hunt). From Guantanamo Bay the setting moves briskly back in time to the crisp and “perfect blueness of the sky” (5) in Nagasaki on the morning of 9 August 1945. Shamsie constructs a particular perspective of war and the magnitude of its destruction through a carefully individualised lens. War has “fractured” Japan’s beauty, in largely the same way that it has done more recently in Iraq or Afghanistan. Linking these spaces and the devastation wrecked on them is the novel’s chief protagonist, Hiroko Tanaka, novel—a young Japanese woman who is a native of Nagasaki. Her experience of the catastrophic effects of war in Nagasaki see the place of her birth transform into a “functional” and stifling place, one where even the innocent love between her and her German fiancé Konrad—burdened as they are with specific histories—becomes of necessity discreet and dangerous. Shamsie uses graphic and discomfiting detail in her descriptions of the atomic bomb, making it all the more effective by the use of banal language by school boys in Nagasaki, who have heard varied rumours about the “New Bomb” and speak of it animatedly as though describing an action film: “[t]hose who were close, it stripped to the bone so they were just skeletons. The ones further away, it peeled off their skin, like grapes. And now that they have this New Bomb the Americans won’t stop until we are all skeletons or grapes” (15).

The evocative passage that precedes the moment of the explosion provides a particularly powerful prelude to the horror that follows. Stylistically, contrasts such as these serve as an effective metaphor to capture the coexistence war and peace and love and death that Shamsie’s remains preoccupied with in the novel. The passage describes Hiroko’s newly discovered sexuality in the wake of Konrad’s marriage proposal to her just minutes before his death:

Hiroko steps out onto the veranda. Her body from neck down a silk column, white with three black cranes swooping across her back. She looks out towards the mountains and everything is more beautiful to her than it was early this morning. Nagasaki is more beautiful to her than ever before. She turns her head and sees the spires of Urakami Cathedral, which Konrad is looking up at when he notices a gap open between the clouds. Sunlight streams through, pushing the clouds apart even further.

Hiroko.

And then the world goes white. (23)

In Shamsie's novel, this moment marks not only the beginning of an unprecedented trauma for Nagasaki, but underscores a new human destructive dimension. For the remainder of her life, the narrative alludes to Hiroko's inability to recover from the experience, emotionally or physically. It is intimated that Hiroko's first child was aborted owing to the possibility of severe mutation caused by radiation. Later on, her son Raza's girlfriend in Karachi is brutal in her explanation about why she could never marry him: "Nagasaki. The bomb. No one will give their daughter to you in marriage unless they're desperate, Raza. You could be deformed. ... I've seen the pictures. Of babies born in Nagasaki after the bomb" (189). The cumulative effect of this delineation of the consequences of terror in wartime Japan, grotesquely manifested even decades later, is felt at a number of key points in the narrative—the violent partition of India, the Soviet-Afghan War, New York on 9/11, Afghanistan during the "war on terror" all become sites of political turbulence and bloodshed. The myth of justified "state terror" is hence exploded to reveal its politically and economically motivated reality and is shown to be to be as, if not more, destructive than individual/group acts of terroristic violence.

This notion of transnational terrorism leads to the formation of unexpected connections and friendships in the novel, such as that between Abdullah—(first a young jihadi in Pakistan, later an immigrant in America)—and Hiroko at a library in post-9/11 New York, as the two of them nostalgically pour over a glossy double-paged picture of pre-war Kandahar. This seemingly dichotomous mixing is however anchored in a deep-rooted solidarity when the losses of both individuals are considered. Abdullah runs his “palm across the photograph [of Kandahar], as though he could feel the texture of the ripening pomegranates pushing up against his skin.” This tactile experience provokes a latent bitterness: “[f]irst they cut down the trees. Then they put landmines everywhere. Now ... cluster bombs” (311). His reaction to the defacement of his homeland echoes Hiroko’s experience more than five decades ago. Like blue skies of Nagasaki, the sky in Kandahar too is described as “impossibly blue”. Abdullah speaks nostalgically: “The light in Afghanistan. Like nowhere else.” It is structurally significant of course that their nostalgic outpourings—epitomized in the clear blue skies of pre-war Nagasaki and Kandahar—take place in New York which is days away from experiencing the damage to its own “impossibly blue” skyline. The unspecified though intrinsic transnational bond that develops between Hiroko and Abdullah means that Hiroko touches the photograph of Kandahar “as reverently as Abdullah had”, empathetic and reminded of “how strong a grip childhood had on her ageing mind.” (311). The narrative deliberately seems to keep conversations between them brief—a gesture perhaps towards the unsayable truths of their past lives:

When they came to the end of the book Abdullah closed it and said “That’s where I want to live.”

“Afghanistan?”

“Afghanistan then.” (311)

Of course Shamsie’s imagery of the devastation in Nagasaki deliberately ricochet in the ghastly scenarios witnessed after the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Centre. “Only melted rosaries remained,” Hiroko describes, “of the people inside the Cathedral” (76). She continues to paint the scene of disaster: “[t]he next morning I went to the Valley; it was what the priest at the Urakami had spoken of when he taught me from the Bible—the Valley of Death. But there was no sign of any God there, no scent of mangoes...days—no, weeks—after the bomb and everything still smelt of burning” (77). Shamsie’s vivid delineation of the impact of terrorism fits in perfectly with the more recent literary accounts of 9/11. What is seemingly incongruous is that her focus is on Nagasaki instead of New York. This is the narrative’s attempt not only to undercut the selective representation of historical violence, but also gestures to the biases and prejudices encountered in dominant representations of political terrorism. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum, for example, features amongst its other displays a large steel beam cross, marking not just the national but also the religious hegemony in way 9/11 has been mourned. The American Atheist Society’s prosecuting of the museum on the grounds of perpetuating religious “othering” is based on the reasoning that the shrine “does not represent Jews, Muslims, Mormons or atheists, and they all had deaths on 9/11” (CBS News).

I propose that Shamsie’s narrative goes a step beyond the collective solidarity that she posits amongst the victims of terrorism when she sanctions a degree of compassion for those routinely derogated and dehumanized as “terrorists”. Her writing probes the lives of the Mujahideen—not at length but when it does, intimately

so—offering the reader a sense of their “human” dimensions.³⁴ The narrative is observant particularly of the sense of kinship that underscores and fuels the missions of the Mujahideen. Abdullah's zeal and impassioned hatred for the Soviets earlier in the novel is evident from his desire to “drive out the last Soviet” from Afghanistan (198). But Shamsie grasps at the finer details of Abdullah's life in her analysis—the truck he drives, for instance, which is identifiable by a picture of a dead Soviet soldier on its rear adds a visual dimension to his feelings. To Abdullah and many other youngsters like him, the sentiment captured in this (to us deplorable) illustration is a source of enormous pride. But Shamsie is able to capture more than just the darkly destructive aspect of this mentality. She articulates the delicate balance of Afghan camaraderie, hospitality and warmth and their spirit of revenge against those who they believe have wronged them. Raza's presence in the Pashtun inhabited districts of Karachi, while first resisted by Abdullah is soon after welcomed. After his initial reluctance to accept Raza as a friend, Abdullah embraces him as a “brother” by virtue of their alleged common enemy, the Soviets, and will henceforth willingly lay down his life for his “brother's” safety. This desire to protect Abdullah characterizes Mujahideen thoughts and actions more generally, working as they do within closely-knit and interconnected communities. There is a sincerity at work here, which refuses to allow the reader to form undiluted reservations about Abdullah. His conversations with Raza, even when highlighting the assumptions about masculinity and violence in the construction of anti-Soviet nationalism, carry a certain lightness of touch.

³⁴ For further reading about Mujahideen, particularly during the Soviet-Afghan war see *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (1995) by Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau. The book offers in-depth insights into the tactics and psychology of Afghan warriors during the war, and as Shamsie attempts in her fiction, “humanizes” them.

The novel's punctuated visits to the Mujahideen training camps enable a rare perspective to take shape. It imagines the processes involved in becoming what is known as a *jihadist*—a formulaic and all-too perspicuous phenomenon in dominant global discourse. Shamsie's narrative is able to accommodate a psychological perspective on Raza's perverse fascination with the training camps. There are pangs of guilt and betrayal on his part for having escaped the suffering and hardship of the refugee camps for a brief period of time; there is a palpable sense of self-hatred at being seduced by Karachi's "lights and its promise". He explains "I was forgetting why there is no option for me except to join the Mujahideen. The boys growing up in the camps, they won't forget. They'll look around and know, if this is the better option that must mean our homeland now is the doorway to hell. And we must restore it to Paradise" (216). Shamsie's use of the jargon of heaven and hell is of course intentional; while considered distasteful and dangerous by the international media, here it is employed to indicate the sincere emotions and firmness of the beliefs of men like Abdullah who commit their lives to the cause of *jihad*. Shamsie's fiction is characteristically informative—an indication of the elaborate research that she undertakes for each of her novels. But by documenting information it assumes to be unfamiliar to its readership, the novel also serves as a way to develop a sympathetic relationship with the Mujahideen both in Pakistan and abroad. For instance, during their journey through the sweltering plateaus of Northern Pakistan, Abdullah's brother hands both the boys their *pattusis*—rough pieces of cloth which are to serve them as blankets, camouflages, blindfolds for enemies and most importantly Abdullah explains "[i]f you are killed in battle you'll be buried in your bloodied *pattusi*—the Mujahideen don't need their bodies washed and purified before burial. We are already guaranteed heaven" (226). Much like the young jihadist Casa from *The Wasted Vigil*,

Abdullah's thoughts and actions are shown to be the result of a lifetime's indoctrination of Islamic extremism. Casa and Abdullah have known no other education of principles other than the dogmatic version of Islam with which they have been proselytized. Both Aslam and Shamsie are thus conscious of the futility and injustice of admonishing *jihadist* beliefs without tracking their sources.

I hasten to clarify that this partially sympathetic portrayal of the Mujahideen does not validate Carolyn See's review in *The Washington Post* in which she refers to *Burnt Shadows* as a "three generational tale of while oppression". Rather, Shamsie's text purports that the violence of Muslim suicide bombers, while abhorrent, is not unparalleled or unprecedented in historical terms. Like Aslam, Shamsie also offers an unambiguous criticism of the Taliban's treacherous fundamentalism the "black turbaned men who banned everything of joy, blasted ancient prophets out of mountain faces" and "knew exactly what a woman's place in the world was" (261). Even moderate Muslims like Sajjad can develop a perturbingly violent mind-set, which Shamsie depicts in his animosity for his neighbouring country when war between Pakistan and India is in the offing: "[t]he instant the war starts before the bastards have time to take out our launchers, we much launch our missiles. Our biggest missiles. Right into the mouth of their government in Dilli. Cause such havoc they turn around and run, and never ever think about looking us in the eye again" (260).

In addition to nuancing the tropes within which violence is viewed, Shamsie also problematizes the Mujahideen's nationalist animosity against the Soviets. The complications here arise because of the pan-nationalism of Islam. The concept of the Muslim *Ummah* functions on the very notion that geographical boundaries are arbitrary and meaningless, possibly even a stumbling block in the alignment of the

Muslim brotherhood.³⁵ Of course, conservative Muslims frequently view nationalism as a European curse. An interesting example of this can be taken from the “Mission Islam” website that offers a full-bodied section on “Nationalism: An Erroneous Concept”. The article invokes verses from the Quran to establish Islam’s disapproval of nationalistic divisions amongst its followers:

O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam. And hold fast together all of you to the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favours on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brothers; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided. (Qur'an 3: 102-103 qtd on *Mission Islam*)

In historical terms, however, it would be naïve to deny that Islam is associated with nations and boundaries. 9/11 if anything, has further deepened this link, by positing associations between national affiliations and religious extremism. Abdullah’s religiosity combined with his nationalistic sentiments offer a vital link between nationalism and religion, the latter fuelling the former. Whereas it is his love for a destroyed nation that lends him empathy from Hiroko, it is his religious zeal that alienates him from someone like Kim, who is representative of the “average American” sensibility, if indeed such a generalization can be permitted.

The long road trip undertaken by Abdullah and Kim epitomizes the tensions in their association. It is worth noting that stylistically too, Shamsie choses to set this

³⁵ See Imam Zaid Shakir’s “Islam and the Question of Nationalism” where nationalism is viewed as “an exclusivist, chauvinistic attachment to a particular group, and the sacrificing of universal human concerns on the altar of particular national interests, are strongly rejected by Islam” (*New Islamic Directions* website).

conversation in the context of travel, transition and movement. The journey from America to Canada takes place upon Hiroko's insistence that Abdullah, living illegally in America, be transported to safety after 9/11. The conversation that ensues between showcases the colossal misunderstandings and misperceptions that dictate their views and opinions of each other. Kim's mistreatment of Abdullah in this case, is yet another example of terrorism's many different manifestations. Shamsie highlights via Kim the dangers, sometimes irrevocable, of a nationalism based on an idealized and static view of the nation. She says in an interview with Chambers, "I didn't want to add to the debate about why Muslims become terrorists, but to examine what happens to peaceful Muslims when they live in a world where many people view them as potential terrorists" (225). The tension between Abdullah and Kim is important, particularly so because, as Shamsie insists, Kim is "largely a wonderful person", which renders her behaviour more problematic (225). The scene captures Abdullah's distinct discomfort about sharing a small physical space with an American woman while Kim is convinced of his culpability as a terrorist. She eventually feels compelled to hand him over to the FBI once the border has been crossed. Prior to that however, their discussion on the subject of Islam reveals a certain unexpected connection between the two. The conversation is sparked by Kim's incendiary question:

"Have you read the Quran?"

"Of course I have."

"Have you read it in any language you understand?"

"I understand Islam", he said, tensing.

“I’ll take that to mean a no. I’ve read it—in English. Believe me, the Quran says nothing of the sort. And frankly, what kind of heaven is heaven if you can find shortcuts into it? Seven generations?”

“Please do not speak to me this way.”

“Tell me one thing. One thing. If an Afghan dies in the act of killing infidels in his country does he go straight to heaven?”

“If the people he kills come as invaders or occupiers, yes. He is shaheed. Martyr.”

“He is a murderer. And your heaven is an abomination.” (346)

As Kim later releases Abdullah into freedom, and as he walks into a restaurant filled with parents and children, Kim experiences a sharp sense of panic—“what had she done?” The narrative captures this moment of baseless panic and barefaced cultural bigotry, which in this case leads to drastic consequences when Kim decides to report him to the police.

This episode, I believe, is significant for a number of reasons. For one thing, it encapsulates the intensely problematic relationship between people who hold fundamentalist ideas about religions, cultures and nations. In a world that is constantly projected as globalized, this episode gestures at the continued and in many cases exacerbated presence of particular differences that appear dangerously irreconcilable. Secondly, it highlights the role of Kim in the novel as a highly educated, trained professional engineer, but whose education contains some fundamental, not to say, *fundamentalist* lacunae. In portraying Kim, Shamsie expresses a social and political anxiety—that someone with as much cultural capital as Kim is also *necessarily* a bigot as a result of her education. Thus, the analysis of her situation and her resulting prejudices have been determined by the presentist

“Ground Zero” moment and has no room for any wider historical perspective. In this sense she becomes representative of the “average” American.

Hiroko’s experience of terrorism stands in contrast to Kim’s oversimplified justification for her action against Abdullah. Furthermore, it serves to bring into effect an epiphany in Hiroko, whose understanding of world history attains a heightened sense of clarity the moment in which she grasps the limits of the American zeitgeist:

In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead? Acceptable, that’s what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he’s guilty, maybe not. Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understood for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb. (362)

But Shamsie’s representational strategy is complex and the reader is invited to access the raw sense of helplessness mixed with a wounded national pride and seething anger that gripped the America in its immediate reaction to 9/11, and thereby understand the character of Kim. As briefly discussed in the Introduction, in *Trauma Culture* Kaplan reflects on her own psychological and physiological response to 9/11, during which time she was present in New York. In her case the terror experienced on this date served to resurrect the nightmarish memories of World War II; she explains, “[m]y childhood sense of extreme vulnerability returned, as if our very New York apartment building might not continue to stand” (3). As an event, for many individuals 9/11 led to collapse of the tangible barriers of time and space, reality and memory, hence producing a “new subjectivity” (4). The resulting breakdown in what Kaplan calls individual “psychic identity”, unleashes a string of responses including the powerful anxiety and paranoia experienced by Kim as well and her state of manic fear at

hearing the news of a suicide bomber attempting to detonate a bomb placed in his shoe on a flight to Miami. At Hiroko and Isle's lack of concern, she cries out in frustration, "It was a plane...Another suicide attack on a plane" (264). She is wholly unable to rationalise their apathy at the possibility of America being wounded in a similar manner again. "I hate this...I hate that it felt familiar, trying to get hold of him (her father). Those hours I couldn't get through to you on 9/11" (265). Kim later contemplates the power of terrorism and the manner in which it has impacted the world: "[e]arthquakes and floods were one thing—but to start having to calculate the effects of a bomb or an aeroplane, that was something else entirely. What size of plane? What weight of a bomb? If a man walked into a lobby with dynamite strapped to his chest? If chemical gas was released into the ventilation system?" Kim views the world as a structural engineer, driven to the point of obsession with "fixing" what she feels is structurally wrong. Her desire to explain Islam to Abdullah connects her to her colonial predecessors in the novel, James for instance, who had attempted to mould Sajjad in his own image. These connections are part of the narrative's patterning and create a sense of perspective from the point of view of the implied reader, which is always outside the comprehension of the characters.

As part of her interest in international terrorism, Shamsie has shown a sustained preoccupation with the politics of Pakistan under the leadership of the country's military leader and president, Zia-ul-Haq. This moment is privileged in Shamsie's other novels such as *Broken Verses* and *Kartography* as well, serving as a pivotal point around which Pakistan's political history is played out. This was a particularly crucial time for the development of Pakistan's political relations with America, and for its ideological positioning on the map of the world. Zia ascended to power over a country that had only recently emerged from the throes of civil war (the

war in 1971 which led to the partition of Pakistan into East and West)—bloodied, truncated and drained of resources and morale. He made enormous investments in Pakistan’s nuclear programme, in the overcoming of the Baloch insurgency and the endorsement of the Pakistan Muslim League, the ruling political party in the country today. His tenure is best remembered most for its emphasis on the Islamization of Pakistan’s state apparatus and for his foreign policy, in particular his support of the Mujahideen during the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.³⁶

Burnt Shadows visits this moment in history and employs the character of Harry Burton to express the notion of “internationalism powered by capitalism” in America’s war against the Soviets. Harry contemplates the irony involved in the “idea of Pakistan, India and Israel working together in America’s war” and in the image of “different worlds moving from their separate spheres into a new kind of geometry” (204). These thoughts satisfy and distress him simultaneously and there are hints throughout the novel that Harry’s loyalties, though expressly American, are not indifferent to Pakistan’s plight. Through Harry’s perspective, Shamsie visualizes a hypothetical map of the world in the late 1970s—it is a map in which “countries appear as mere outlines, waiting to be shaded in with stripes of red, white and blue as they were drawn into the strictly territorial battle of the Afghans versus the Soviets in which no one else claimed a part” (203). A war that had started out as a “three-way affair”, with Egypt providing arms made by the Soviets, America fuelling the finance and Pakistan offering training bases, had rapidly transformed a local conflict into an international war—“[a]rms from Egypt. China and - soon Israel. Recruits from all over the Muslim world. Training camps in Scotland!” (203). In particular, Shamsie,

³⁶ For further reading on Zia-ul-Haq’s entrenched and destructive role in Pakistan’s Islamization see Tariq Ali’s *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (2009).

through Harry, dwells on the vital role played by America in the establishment of the Afghan Mujahideen forces, who after rigorous training became indispensable in America's war effort, eventually removing the Soviets from Afghanistan. The novel invokes the irony of this self-motivated political maneuver on the part of America, and juxtaposes it to the American-led "war on terror" decades later. Agonized by his hypocrisy of such a war, Harry examines the "dried riverbeds and barren gullies" of Afghanistan and exclaims, "We make a desolation and call it peace". This allusion to Tacitus's account of Agricola is of course significant not least because of the imperial parallel it suggests between the Roman and American empires. Harry continues to his colleague, Steve, "I never thought we'd be back here. Violent revolution in Saudi Arabia, that was my forecast. Being here ... there's no smugness. Just failure" (278-280).

What is interesting here is that though Steve and Harry share a common nationality and are professionally united by their intelligence mission in Pakistan and the Middle East, their ideologies are set distinctly apart. Harry has affection for Pakistan and the ability to trust Pakistanis that Steve can never empathize with. He is also able to critically perceive the irony in Steve's narrow mindedness, evident in Islamophobic claims such as,

You're an idiot to hire all these Third Country Nationals. Economically, sure, I see the sense. But stop recruiting them from Pakistan and Bangladesh. You're acting like this is a territorial war and they're neutral parties. Go with guys from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines. Indians are okay, so long as they are not Muslim. (280-281)

It is intriguing that Harry resists a verbal response to this statement, but this is put down to his utter physical exhaustion that he is prevented from "reminding Steve that

fifteen years ago he loved to joke that the difference between Vietnam and Afghanistan was ‘there we just had GI—here we have jee-had’” (280-281). Harry’s unuttered admonishment of his colleague, while crudely formulated, appositely sums the historical and political moments of poetic justice that Shamsie’s narrative negotiates.

1.4 Problematic notions of “home”

At the core of *Burnt Shadows* lie certain recurring juxtapositions: home and abroad, weak and powerful, past and present, national and transnational. While exploring these binaries, the novel is interested in the process of linking them together in order to better appreciate the relationship between them. This problematization of positions—be they national, religious or cultural—is performed chiefly via the point-of-view of Hiroko, and it is both with her and through her that readers of *Burnt Shadows* explore the range of time and space covered in the narrative. The narrative depicts a horror-filled world where the earth was “more functional as a vegetable patch than a flower garden, just as factories were more functional than schools and boys were more functional as weapons than as humans” (7). John Whittier Treat suggests in his book *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (1994), that

Japanese present at the bombing of Hiroshima or Nagasaki and who subsequently wrote of their experience, commonly preface their accounts with a historical qualification. Each tells us, as if that place both permits and curbs the words to follow, where he was on the morning of 6 or 9, 1945. (ix)

In Hiroko’s story it is on the morning of 9 August when in a matter of mere seconds, Nagasaki is nothing more than a “diamond cutting open the earth, falling

through to hell” (27). The grotesque devastation of Nagasaki, from Hiroko’s perspective, is if anything exacerbated by her survival of it, especially as it takes the life of her fiancé, Konrad. This scene of devastation is a crucial moment in the novel, largely because it presents a recurring relationship between militant nationalism, devastation and cruelty—evils that the world continues to witness in its many faces. It is both specific and ubiquitous. Via Hiroko, Shamsie keeps the consciousness about the destructive nationalism at the forefront of the novel—not just in the form of the “blut and boden” nationalism of Europe and America, but also that of imperial Japan. Additionally, these nationalisms are described as forms of predominantly masculine violence, which in the novel leave their indelible marks on Hiroko, in the form of the hideously compelling bird-shaped burns on her back. This violation to Hiroko’s body analogously recalls the terrible and distressing stories about the Japanese “comfort women” during World War 11—women coercively turned into prostitutes and heinously exploited by soldiers in the war—which were uncovered decades later.³⁷ These burnt shadows of a masculine, imperial and nationalist war leave her bereft of all physical sensation on her back. This enforced numbness, both literal and figurative, is important to bear in mind while following Hiroko through the rest her life experiences. Moreover, it marks her first and permanent departure from “home”.

Through Hiroko and her shifting experiences of “home”, Shamsie models a nationalist consciousness offering an alternative to its militaristic and masculine manifestations that Hiroko has witnessed. Hiroko’s relationship with nationalism and

³⁷ For further reading on the experiences of Japan’s “comfort women” refer to *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (1994) by George Hicks. Hicks writes, “The overall numbers will probably never be known, even if Japanese authorities were to reveal all available official documents, for the women did not even rate a category of their own in army manifests” (17).

her imagining of patriotism are summed in her own words when she declares herself to be most “at home in the idea of foreignness” (141).

Shamsie complicates the phenomenon of “homesickness” in the novel. The novel’s realism dictates that Hiroko’s occasional acknowledgement of “homesickness” for Nagasaki is diluted by the sense of alienation that comes with re-imagining herself there. In her memory, it is a place that no one around her can visualise, experience or empathise with. Though at some point in the future she intends to take her husband, Sajjad, and her son Raza to Nagasaki, she is not obsessed by the idea of return, possibly because contemporary Nagasaki would be as alien to her as it would be to them. Nor does she seem too concerned by the realization that she would “always be a foreigner in Pakistan”, irrespective of the number of years spent in the country or the strength of her bond with “real” Pakistanis. It appears that her experiences in life have taught her, in her own words, the meaninglessness of “belonging to anything as contradictorily insubstantial and damaging as a nation” (204). The bonds of friendship and kinship she forms during the course of her life in the narrative all transcend nationally “imagined communities”, which make it possible “for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (5-7). Hiroko’s “imagined community”—to borrow the term from Benedict Anderson—is both expansive and extensive, rendering her able to both acclimatize to places and empathize with people more readily. It is this transnational spirit that aligns her with individuals such as Sajjad, Elizabeth and Abdullah, all of whom have experienced and understood the loss of homelands and the acceptance of alternative homes. In all of their cases it is the “national” sense of belonging to places—Japan, India and Germany—that contributes to the formation of the kind of transnationalism Shamsie has in mind.

Burnt Shadows disturbs the relationship between native and foreign in each of its many locales. This narrative technique comes into play particularly effectively in the way that Hiroko first embraces New York, and in return feels embraced by it. There is hence little element of irony in the fact that the first entry to be made in Hiroko's American address book is that of "Omar from Gujranwala", a small town in Pakistan. Her "love affair with New York", as she characteristically puts it, begins when this Pakistani-American cab driver expansively greets her with, "Welcome to *my* country!" (288) (emphasis added). Hiroko's positioning in yet another alien space, facing the challenge of establishing herself in a new "home" is a long process of constructing and deconstructing allegiances. New York wins her approval mainly because of its ability to resound with a wide and eclectic mix of tongues; she finds the possibility of "Urdu, English, Japanese, German, all in the space of a few minutes" to be an electrifying one. Overwhelmed with this unfamiliar offering of globalization, she marvels at the "miracle of it!" (288) Like "Mary Poppins' handbag", Hiroko begins to believe that New York is never too small for anything. The 9/11 attacks—invoking the nightmares of Nagasaki—strengthen her feelings of empathy towards America. Far from feeling avenged, she finds herself "caught up in a feeling of solidarity quite unfamiliar, utterly overwhelming" (295). But America's subsequent response to this moment also triggers Hiroko's experience of the country as a narrow and shrunken place, rendering her optimistic vision of America's global dream and its ostensibly 'horizontal' nature, short-lived. Over the course of the latter half of the novel Shamsie shatters this illusion by depicting the process of Hiroko's disillusionment with America, exposing the limits of New York's purported cosmopolitanism. By doing this, Shamsie further lays out the groundwork for her own exploration of transnationalism.

The territorial expanses that Shamsie draws out serve as a crucial foil to the cultural narrowness of New York that Hiroko experiences. This constriction can be sensed in a visual and tangible sense through Shamsie's detailed descriptions of the metropolis. Hiroko is astonished and saddened by the territorial compactness of the island and the psychological narrowness of its inhabitants, and wonders: "How could a place so filled with immigrants take the idea of patriotism so seriously?" A contrast to this self-importance is offered through a dialogue between Kim and Hiroko about Nagasaki:

[b]ut you see, then I'd read the history books. Truman, Churchill, Stalin, the Emperor. My stories seemed so small, so tiny a fragment in the big picture. Even Nagasaki—seventy-five thousand dead; it's just a fraction of the seventy-two million who died in the war. A tiny fraction. Just over .001 per cent. Why all this fuss about .001 percent?. (293)

Shamsie's authorial intervention borders dangerously close to didactic here, Hiroko's mathematical undermining of the Nagasaki devastation no doubt geared towards the decentring of the 9/11 moment. It does however accentuate Shamsie's reconfiguration of patriotism in what Salman Rushdie has called "the fiercest combat zones of the age" (*Burnt Shadows*, book flap).

1.5 Hiroko as Transnational Feminist

Borderlands [...] may feed growth and exploration or [...] conceal a minefield.

—Margaret Higonnet, *Borderwork*

Shamsie's fiction has consistently prioritized the portrayal of powerful female protagonists. No doubt this follows appositely from the generations of powerful women, many of them published writers, from within her family. In *Broken Verses*

(2005) for example, Aasmani and her radical, domineering mother (also a political activist in Zia-ul-Haq's regime in Pakistan) are memorable for their personal and political aspirations and their attempts at destabilizing a complacent status quo. There is a haunting quality to their zealous and unflinching pursuits of political reform, and their splendid disregard for the social and cultural expectations heaped upon them by a patriarchal society. The impact of their characterization is heightened and enriched when juxtaposed against their more fallible male counterparts. Here I focus on the ways in which *Burnt Shadows*' re-imagines womanhood from transnational and trans-historical perspectives.

For Shamsie, women from countries such as Pakistan are faced with a state of double oppression. She explains, "Pakistan contains some of the most radical feminists in the world, because reacting to misogyny as hideous as that which can be found there creates a powerful opposite trajectory" (Chambers 221). However, she also concedes that many women in Pakistan who would be considered staunch feminists are exceedingly sceptical about what is widely known as "western feminism". The term itself is of course problematic chiefly on account of its racial and racist assumptions, taken as it often is to connote "white" middle-class feminists in Europe and America. The commonly held association between "western feminists" and Imperial rule intensifies any resentment or cynicism that may already exist. Shamsie attempts to explore the reasons behind the scepticism of Pakistani women regarding her counterparts in Europe and America: "[o]ver and over, women (primarily white and living in the West) refer to those who have it worse off, or relatedly, say that they are living in the best possibly place and time to be a woman. Is that Sisterhood or Imperialism or both? (*Guernica* 2013)

For many years feminist critics such as Spivak have expressed anxiety about the potentially counterproductive (and dangerous) role of middle class European feminists who deny (either consciously or unconsciously) speech and agency to what she terms as the “subaltern”. Who does such a Euro-American feminist speak on behalf of and how does she circumvent the vast representational burden that she is faced with? Spivak famously asks,

Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of “woman” seems most problematic in this context ... The assumption or construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. (93)

Mohanty also problematizes the notion of being perceived and defined by “western eyes”:

I no longer lie simply under the gaze of western eyes. I also live inside it and negotiate it every day. I make my home in Ithaca, New York, but always as from Mumbai, India. My cross-race and cross-class work takes me to interconnected places and communities around the world—to a struggle contextualised by women of colour and of the Third World. So the borders here are not really fixed. Our minds must be as ready to move as capital is, to trace its path and to imagine alternative destinations. (530)

More recently, adding to the work of Spivak and Mohanty, the Egyptian feminist scholar Nawal El Saadawi has expressed a concern about the attempts made at “modernizing” women in the global south. She writes, “some Arab and Islamic countries have been the theatre of such modernization processes at the hands of

national governments and rulers largely controlled by Western interests. The result has been nothing more than a form of pseudo development” (ii). The impact of such modernization is bound to be limited to the privileged few while the majority decline into further destitution. El Saadawi focuses on the gap between the rich and the poor both in a local and global sense. Like her counterparts, this focus then extends into a desire to create solidarity and to arrive at a common ground, a more encompassing and wholesome feminism if you like. El Saadawi is unreservedly critical of “progressive feminist movements” that have “intervened on behalf of Iranian women, not realising that sometimes the form and even the content of their intervention was being used to discredit the Iranian people’s struggle against American intervention” (v).

Even more recently in a publication aimed at providing a transnational platform to feminism—and hence attempting to address the dangers of Euro-American appropriation of the movement—one of the contributors (Siri Hustvedt) writes: “[as] a white, educated, American woman from a middle-class family, I have not suffered the horrors of overt, brutal misogyny. I was never subjected to genital mutilation or sold to a man as his wife or sex slave” (*Fifty Shades of Feminism*). Hustvedt’s words, while pointing out the difference in perspectives between women in different classes and cultural-social contexts worryingly reflects the growing essentialism found with regards feminist thought, even today. The political counterpart to this is seen when “the language of feminism is ... appropriated to fight wars” (Holmes). Cherie Blair and Laura Bush have both spoken publically and often about the need to “liberate” and “save” Afghan women from oppression—by implication justifying (if not advocating) the continued military presence of America and Britain in countries such as Afghanistan, and previously Iraq.

During an interview with Rachel Holmes, a co-editor of *Fifty Shades of Feminism*, Shamsie expresses a particular anxiety about the parochial manifestations of feminism encountered today. Shamsie and Holmes do not bring themselves to agree on the expiry date of what they refer to as “bossy western feminism”. While for Holmes “what we’re hearing in what’s left of bossy western feminism is the wagging tail of a dead dog (a bitch, in this case)”, Shamsie is less convinced that “imperative” feminism has given way to “inquisitorial” endeavours. This parochialism that Shamsie speaks of is present in *Burnt Shadows*, from wartime Japan to pre-partition India and later in contemporary America.

Shamsie’s approach to unpacking the state of double oppression begins with her very choice of protagonist and, is in the first instance, to transnationalise it. It stands to reason then that her protagonist is neither Pakistani nor middle-class Euro-American, but of Japanese origin. I suggest that Hiroko is one of the most powerful female characterizations in the recent trajectory of Anglophone Pakistani fiction and is portrayed as a model of transnationalist feminism. The gendered violence, physical and psychological, to which Hiroko is subjected, originates from multiple sources, adopts many guises and is experienced in diverse locations including Nagasaki, Tokyo, Delhi, Karachi and eventually New York. Shamsie’s expression of feminism via Hiroko hence problematizes conventional notions and expectations linked with global feminist debate. In the character of Hiroko, I argue that Shamsie has addressed the concerns she shares with postcolonial feminist critics such as Spivak, Mohanty, Fatima Merssini, Miriam Cooke and Nawal El Saadawi by foregrounding a transnational feminism that alters its geographical axis in the course of the narrative. It hence becomes, above all, a human condition.

Shamsie's narration of gendered violence, both emotional and physical, begins with depictions of Hiroko in imperial Japan. After Japan, Shamsie moves on to consider the position of women in colonial India, where women were consciously denied any voice or agency and where British "wives" belonged, as Shamsie demonstrates, in the carefully fabricated world of the Delhi garden parties. The setting moves next to post-independence Pakistan, where Hiroko is once more categorized and denied agency on account of her appearance, origins and gender. Her exposures to the nuclear radiations in imperial Japan make her both unconsciously fascinating and instantly repellent. Finally, as the novel moves westward and Hiroko with it, Shamsie takes a perverse pleasure in exploding the feminism of the "global north". As a finishing touch, the narrative closes in on the moment Hiroko lands in America, where she is promptly offered assurances of safety from male immigration officers who are shown to be painfully ignorant of the political irony of the following statement: "It's OK—You'll be safe here" (287).

I will focus briefly on the ways in which Hiroko disrupts the unequal—sometimes unquestioned, often unacknowledged—balances of gender power in Nagasaki, Delhi, Karachi and eventually New York. One of Hiroko's earliest introductions is that of being the daughter of a "traitor"—a Japanese politician who pays for his life to fight with his life against the conservative nationalist ideologies he opposes. Hiroko is however disposed to endanger her own life to protect his, which is under threat owing to his resistance of a particular brand of Japanese patriotism, one that, for instance sends young children on kamikaze missions. Furthermore, in circumstances where even a cursory association with a white European could be potentially life threatening in Nagasaki, Hiroko risks a romantic relationship with a German man, which is itself complicated by the historical axis alliance. She is forced

to keep her relationship with Konrad concealed from the fanatical and misogynistic military presence around her. Konrad, who abandons the feelings of nationalism towards “his once beloved country [that] he long ago gave up trying to fight for or against” is regarded suspiciously in Japan after Germany’s surrender in 1945. His status in Nagasaki thus shifts from “that of an ally into some more ambiguous state which requires the military police to watch him closely...” (*Burnt Shadows* 18). Of course the concealment of their relationship is based as much on the fear of militant nationalism as it is on imperial Japan’s cultural constructions of gender.³⁸ While traditions and morals are cherished and valued by her—she will not, for instance, consider sexual liaisons with her lover before marriage—she is rendered conspicuous by virtue of her psychological strength. After the bomb, which also brings about the tragic death of her lover and her father, Hiroko makes the decision to pursue Konrad’s past by exploring his past and travels to India by herself. This migratory experience is an almost unimaginable accomplishment in its historical context and also marks the beginning of Hiroko’s transnational journey. It is worth noting here that while politically and economically these two nations had discovered several commonalities—their new beginnings after World War II and Indian independence being an obvious point—Indians and Japanese continued to perceive each other as distant and distinctly different.³⁹

³⁸ For further reading see Vera Mackie’s chapter “Embodied Subjects: Feminism in Imperial Japan” in *Japanese Women Emerging from Subservience, 1868-1945* (2005: 95-118) in which she considers the tensions of identity (cultural, political and gendered) experienced by Japanese women from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Mackie explores the influence of imperial state politics on the lives of women, personally and professionally.

³⁹ For further reading on historical relations between Japan and India refer to P.G. Rajamohan’s “Changing Paradigm of Indo-Pakistan Relations: Opportunities and Challenges”.

From Nagasaki Hiroko moves to Delhi, a city gripped by anticolonial sentiments and poised for freedom from the Raj, followed by Partition. Here, after meeting Sajjad, an Indian-Muslim friend who later becomes her husband, Hiroko is seen to embrace India wholeheartedly—culturally, linguistically and emotionally. The effortless fluidity with which Hiroko seems to assimilate into an unacquainted environment is illustrated in stark contrast to the members of the Burton household, her hosts in India, led by the patriarchal figure, James Burton. In this predominantly masculinist society of colonial India, where women were consciously denied any voice or agency in colonial or anti-colonial discourse, (existing, as Shamsie demonstrates, in the world of the Delhi garden parties) Hiroko makes a significant intervention.

The narrative wastes little time in establishing the discontinuity that defines James and Hiroko's interactions. James' instinctive shock at confronting Hiroko is an important statement about his gendered perception of women together with his limited understanding and tolerance of racial difference. Shamsie portrays it as a particularly unsavoury combination. So it is not surprising that Hiroko's detailing of her travels from Tokyo to Bombay, and then further to Delhi, is found by James to be more than just surprising—it is also deemed unacceptable. His reaction is one of horror, followed by disbelief—"What alone?" But Hiroko, equipped with an intimidating practicality only responds, "Yes. Why? Can't women travel alone in India?" (46) Both Elizabeth and James find themselves struggling, (Elizabeth to a lesser extent) with this unexpected flouting of their stereotypical expectations of a "demure Japanese" woman, who in their imagination is brought up exclusively on restrictive codes of tradition and domesticity. By this logic, it is ironic that it is James who denies agency to his wife, speaking in terms of "allowing" and "not allowing"

Elizabeth to do certain things. Any attempts to do the same with Hiroko are instantly rebuffed; described, in what is a most evocative metaphor, as one who would “squeeze the sun in her fist if she ever got the chance; yes, and tilt her head back to swallow its liquid light” (46).

The Burton household microcosmically replicates the patriarchal structure of British Empire itself in which the role assigned to Elizabeth, though not overtly violent or oppressive, is a distinctly passive one—“Elizabeth picked up her cup of tea from the windowsill and felt as though she posed herself for a portrait, *The Colonial Wife Looks upon her Garden*” (35). Of course the voice and perspective infused in this sentence underscores Elizabeth’s acute consciousness of her own disempowered role, hence rendering the title of “colonial wife” ironic. The link between James’ patriarchy and imperialist nationalism is developed in his encounter with, and understanding of Hiroko. He finds himself “oddly perturbed by this woman who he couldn’t place. Indians, Germans, the English, even Americans...he knew how to look at people and understand the contexts from which they sprang. But this Japanese woman in trousers. What on earth was she all about? (46) The confusion and frustration he feels at encountering this woman who exists and functions outside his realm of experience or understanding is significant in confirming his status as a patriarchal colonial figure. Unlike Hiroko, he struggles to accept the unfamiliar and is possessed with a fierce need to transform her—to make her more familiar, and hence more accessible and natural to him. Shamsie deploys Sajjad to interrogate James’s tenacious and gendered “Englishness”:

Why have the English remained so English? Throughout India’s history conquerors have come from elsewhere, and all of them – Turk, Arab, Hun, Mongol, Persian—become Indian. If—when this Pakistan happens, those

Muslims who leave Delhi and Lucknow and Hyderabad to there, they will be leaving their homes ... But when the English leave, they'll be going home.

(82)

James's uneasy relationship with India and thinly veiled chauvinism do not fit in with Shamsie or Hiroko's transcultural sense of identity and belonging. Whereas Hiroko's love for Japan is not dependent on a fixed territorial relationship with the nation, James' allegiances to England incapacitate him to form or sustain relations outside the paradigm of a certain kind of "Englishness". Hiroko's physical movement away from Japan renders her mode of "belonging" fluid; James has also moved a considerable distance from his homeland, but returns, to the best of our knowledge, unaltered by this migration.

The tragic loss of homeland unites Elizabeth—who is half German and was forced to leave Berlin in her childhood—and Hiroko, and paradoxically empowers them. Hiroko's position as a woman is related to her transnationalism, evident not only in her ability to transcend space, time, history and tragedy, but also through her influence on Elizabeth, who belongs, ironically, to an ostensibly more liberal and materially advanced world than Hiroko. There is an inversion here of the notion of feminist thought radiating out of the global north in order to influence women in the global south. Because of this solidarity between them, Elizabeth insists on Hiroko remaining in the Burton household, a move that in the first instance is unthinkable for James, who has felt disturbed by her unprecedented visit. For Elizabeth however, Hiroko's entrance into the household is an empowering development, as it initiates the possibility of reclaiming her own agency, both as an individual and as a woman marked most obviously by the courage to think of a life outside her marriage. Her rebellions, which in the past were nothing more than imaginative excursions—"my

imagined rebellions get more pathetic by the day” she earlier claims—take on a more tangible form as she begins to question her reasons for keeping her relations with James alive. She is reacquainted with her “wants”, something she has not given thought to in several years:

Want. She remembered that dimly. Somewhere. *Want.* At what point had her life become an accumulation of things she didn’t want? She didn’t want Henry to be away. She didn’t want to be married to a man she no longer knew how to talk to....she didn’t want to make James unhappy through her inability to become the woman he had thought she would turn into, given time and instruction. (100)

These realizations, activated in Elizabeth by proximity to Hiroko’s clarity of mind and determination, also have a bearing on her conceptualization of national belonging. There are suggestions that Elizabeth’s passive acceptance of her wifely role in India was also related to the suppression of her German identity—“she didn’t want to keep hidden the fact that at times during the war—and especially when Berlin was firebombed—she had felt entirely German” (100). This last revelation is particularly significant, aligning Elizabeth’s sense of national belonging to Hiroko’s transnational version of it. Berlin and Nagasaki are linked here through the experience of destruction from air. Among many others, one of the reasons for the tensions between Elizabeth and Sajjad is precisely this sense of a lost homeland that Elizabeth experiences: “Elizabeth wanted to catch Sajjad by the collar and shake him. *I was made to leave Berlin when I was a little younger than him—I know the pain of it. What do you know about leaving, you whose family has lived in Delhi for centuries?*” (83) (emphasis in original).

Home and nations are dynamic concepts in *Burnt Shadows* and the novel is interested in what life is like for the same people living in multiple locales, exploring the significance of topographic barriers that are arbitrary yet infinitely significant. The process of dispatiation in the case of Hiroko initiates a thoroughly invigorating metamorphosis, which without unmooring her from her “roots” enables her to develop a transnational identity:

Do you see those flowers on the hillside Ilse? I want to know their names in Japanese. I want to hear Japanese...I want to look like the people around me...I want the doors to slide open instead of swinging open. I want all those things that never meant anything, that still wouldn't mean anything if I hadn't lost them. You see, I know that. I know that but it doesn't stop me from wanting them. (100)

Towards the end of her life, having lived through “Hitler, Stalin, the Cold War, the British Empire, segregation, apartheid” and most importantly the atomic bomb, Hiroko knows that the world would survive even this most recent horror of terrorism, 9/11. In the twilight of her life, however, she cannot help but question the fundamental inhumanity of the acts of terror and violence she has witnessed—directly and indirectly. Helplessly she declares, “I just want the world to stop being such a terrible place” (292). The Indian born feminist writer and poet, Meena Alexander, when addressing her position as a marginalised individual from the perspectives of both gender and nationality wrote: “[t]hat's all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing . . . Writing in search of a homeland” (qtd. in *Theorising Asian America* 139) In this chapter I hope to have established the character of Hiroko as a woman who having experienced multiple migrations is not “cracked” by them, and who despite being

uprooted several times in her life, remains consistently and ‘connected to places, people and ideologies. Hiroko, I suggest, presents an alternative to “homeland” in the traditional sense of the term; she is heroic and wise not despite the multiple homelands she inhabits but because of them.

Chapter 2

“A Fellowship of Wounds”: War & Peace in Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*

Set atop a dusty plain between two ridgelines, the orchards ... once yielded pomegranates as large as softballs, luring visitors from across southern Afghanistan during the harvest season. After they gorged on the juicy magenta fruit, most headed home. Others grew so intoxicated by the prospect of farming the fertile soil that they transplanted their lives. [...] By the fall of 2006, the city looked like old death. The pomegranate fields had been booby-trapped with makeshift mines. Homes and shops had been blown to rubble. Bullet holes pocked the few walls left standing.

—Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*

2.1 Plurality and Aestheticization

Any analyses involving contemporary historical or cultural processes remain, of necessity, contingent and incomplete. Thus, my reading of Nadeem Aslam’s novel *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) always threatens to be outstripped by the daily geo-political convulsions of the so-called “Af-Pak” strategy formulated by the U.S. and its allies since 2001. The world news headlines on 9 October 2012 provide a case in point: Malala Yousafzai, a fourteen year old girl from Northern Pakistan was shot and wounded by members of the Taliban (known in Pakistan as *Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan* or the TTP). By the end of the year, Malala remained in a British hospital, where she had been evacuated, in critical condition. She currently resides in England, and at sixteen, is already a pioneer for the rights of female education all over the world. The attack, which the TTP threatened to repeat via their spokesperson, was a case of

targeted shooting against a thriving campaign for Afghan women's right to education.

As her diary recalls:

Sometimes I imagine I'm going along and the Taliban stop me. I take my sandal and hit them on the face and say what you're doing is wrong. Education is our right, don't take it from us. There is this quality in me – I'm ready for all situations. So even if (God let this not happen) they kill me, I'll first say to them, what you're doing is wrong. (qtd. in Shamsie 2012)

Malala's story was, in a manner of speaking, already foretold in Aslam's novel, published four years before these events.⁴⁰ Not unlike Malala, Aslam's female characters voice their condemnation of the Taliban and other Islamic fundamentalists, but significantly, also confront American power in Afghanistan, thereby underlining a disturbing line of continuity between the two. Following the Malala incident, world media has, understandably, been flooded with unrestrained condemnation of the Taliban and though the "blowback" thesis is now a received wisdom in journalism, this acknowledgement of American and European culpability in sponsoring terrorism seems to do little to counteract the popular cultural and geopolitical image of radical Islam.⁴¹

Alongside condemnation for the Taliban's shooting of Malala, another wave of sentiment, in the form of a vote of confidence for America, appears amongst

⁴⁰ At the time this chapter has been written, Malala's condition has improved vastly and she attends full time school in Birmingham, England. She continues to be a source of interest to the global media and has published a book—*I am Malala* (2013) in which she tells the stories of the difficulties experienced by children in fundamentalist Northern Pakistan in attaining basic education.

⁴¹ For further reading on the "blowback theory" see Ruth Frankenburg's article "Cracks in the Façade: Whiteness and the Construction of 9/11" (2005). Frankenburg examines the traumatic events of 9/11 in the context of the "history of whiteness", studying how that history has impacted the ways in which 9/11 is constructed and remembered, and how these differ from the remembrance of previous acts of terrorism around the world.

sections of people in Pakistan. This is neatly summarised in a street poster that declares: “Drones kill so Malala can live” (Image 2).

How does Taliban’s extremism sit in relation to America’s Af-Pak strategy? Are the two really as different from each other as they may at first glance appear? Is the denunciation of one directly proportionate to the celebration of the other or are these forces equally culpable in the on-going devastation of Afghanistan and the neighbouring areas in Pakistan? This, in part, is the ground fascinatingly navigated by Aslam’s novel and which this chapter aims to explore in some detail. Alongside, it will raise questions about the ethics of Aslam’s representation and aestheticization of violence, terrorism and carnage witnessed in Afghanistan and Pakistan over the decades. I show that Aslam’s lyrical and sentimental intervention in global discourse about Islamic terror presents terrorism as a form of cultural and aesthetic vandalism, particularly in relation to the people and landscape of Afghanistan. Aslam’s writing, both here and in previous novels such as *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and his short story “Leila in the Wilderness” (*Granta* 2010) is heavily influenced by an array of allied artistic forms. These range from the inspirational influences of Pakistani miniaturist Abdur Rahman Chughtai, the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), Persian miniature art (which forms the stylistic basis of *Maps for Lost Lovers*) and *Qawali* Sufi music. I frequently refer to Aslam’s use of imagery and metaphor in forming an understanding of his conception of human beings and human interaction. Claire Chambers notes that “Aslam characteristically finds a Yeatsian ‘terrible beauty’” in his exploration of violence; even the ugliest moments he describes are redeemed, at least partially, by some beautiful factor (138). In *The Wasted Vigil* such beauty emanates from a range of interconnected imagery: the lingering scent of the

old perfume factory in Marcus's house, the ceiling nailed with treasured books, and the head of the ancient statue of the Buddha.

Before embarking on a close reading of *The Wasted Vigil*, a brief discussion of Afghanistan's political history and its links with the Taliban and terrorism (real and perceived) will help to establish the context. With the possible exception of Indo-China and Congo, no other region in the modern world has experienced an era of conflict as explosive and prolonged as Afghanistan. A nation of invaluable geostrategic importance, connecting the Middle East to Central and South Asia, Afghanistan has been in a continuous state of war since the 1970s—witnessing the Soviet invasion, the Mujahideen civil war, and more recently the 2001 American-led “war on terror” to oust the Taliban regime. As such, Afghanistan has been the target of rampant negative stereotyping in the Anglo-American popular consciousness, one that automatically and instinctively associates the country with terrorism, religious fundamentalism and suppression of individual rights—especially those of women. Indeed, this devastation of Afghanistan over a generational life span is not new. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Afghanistan became a victim of the so-called “Great Game” played out between the imperial powers of Britain and Russia, in which the two countries captured Afghan territory, uprooted settled populations and violently intervened with the matters of the state. These two dominant European powers, relentless in their pursuit of global supremacy, initiated the process of Afghanistan's political, geographical and economic devastation that is going on today. It was in 1919, after three wars and numerous alterations to its territorial map, that Afghanistan eventually gained full autonomy over its domestic and foreign affairs. Half a century or so later, Afghanistan once again became an important pawn in the affairs of the Cold War, this time between the world's new superpowers, Soviet

Union and America. Aslam's delineation of Soviet and American involvement in Afghanistan will be examined closely in this chapter, and connections will be posited among the acts of terror witnessed previously as well as in the present of the country's bloodied history (Chandrasekaran).

If there is one subject that springs to the minds of most people in Europe and America on the subject of Afghanistan today, it is likely to be that of the Taliban.⁴² Socially and politically powerful, and with a not insignificant following, the Taliban are entrenched in the country in ways that have made it problematic for both local and international forces to extricate their influence. For the purpose of this study it is worth establishing, yet again, that the "problem" of Afghanistan has never been one that implicated just one country; it was and continues to be a matter of transnational proportions, involving several nations and conflicting ideologies. The terrorist attacks launched against America in September 2001 reinstated Afghanistan as one of the world's most dangerous countries in the perception of Euro-American states, along with several other Muslim countries such as Iraq, Libya and Pakistan. As a result, diasporic Muslims all over Europe and America have felt the impact of this overwhelming suspicion and resentment in one way or another, directly or indirectly.⁴³ On the basis of the Taliban's globally threatening position, the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan have been aggressively justified by Euro-American governments, as have the lethal drone attacks that are being regularly carried out by

⁴² In "Rebels of the Frontier: origins, organization and recruitment of the Pakistani Taliban" Shehzad H. Qazi offers a detailed dissection of the politics of the Taliban in Pakistan, considering the role played by them both domestically and internationally. Shehzad refuses to see the Taliban as a monolithic group, describing the factions and contradictions within them, and lamenting the lack of genuine insight in previous studies of the Taliban (*Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2011)

⁴³ According to a survey carried out by the global Thomson Reuters Foundations Afghanistan was ranked number one for being the most dangerous country in the world for women. It was followed closely by Congo, Pakistan, India and Somalia (2011).

the CIA in north-western Pakistan.⁴⁴ To a large extent, the motives for the American-led “war on terror” were left unquestioned by the masses (at least until very recently when there has been an increased awareness of the “blowback thesis”) and within academic circles. As Judith Butler points out, “positions that are considered ‘relativistic’ or ‘post-’ of any kind are considered either complicit with terrorism or as constituting a ‘weak link’ in the fight against it” (2). Aslam’s writing (along with Shamsie and Hamid’s) responds to the appeal that “it is surely time to allow an intellectual field to redevelop in which more responsible distinctions might be heard, histories might be recounted in their complexity, and accountability might be understood apart from the claims of vengeance” (Butler 3).

To probe the connections posited between Afghanistan, the Taliban and terrorism it is a useful exercise to examine the implications of terms such as “terror”, “terrorism” and “terrorist” in further detail, and attempt to establish exactly who is defined by these terms and when. The contemporary world, as Elleke Boehmer and several other postcolonial critics aver, poses an international situation of conflict and terror, and the so-called “war on terror” continues to exemplify grim irony by employing its own version of state terrorism to combat it.⁴⁵ Interested primarily in the triangular relationship of postcolonialism, globalization and terrorism, Boehmer poses some difficult and timely questions about the pervasiveness of terrorism. An approach such as Boehmer’s eschews the hackneyed and formulaic understanding of terror as

⁴⁴ The headlines of today’s news on BBC report American claims to bring drone attacks on Pakistan to an end “very, very soon”. The BBC however adds that “correspondents say his (John Kerry’s) comments are intended to ease anti-American resentment in strategically important Pakistan”, gesturing towards the lack of sincerity in the American pledge to its “useful” pawn (1 August 2013).

⁴⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter Shamsie, too, exposes the irony of employing terror to combat terrorism, and laments the repercussions of Japanese military fascism when countered by American state terrorism via Hiroko in *Burnt Shadows*.

the “dark reversal of the global” and suggests that terrorism emerging from previously colonized regions is overwhelmingly in response to the state terrorism of the colonizing powers. It is worth returning briefly here to Boehmer and Morton’s two versions of postcolonialism discussed previously—the first involves the forging of a collective community, and transcends difference in favour of sameness. In this version postcolonialism would be used synonymously with transnationalism and “cross border exchange.” The other approach offers postcolonialism as a subversive field geared towards resistance involving struggle and subversion. This distinction becomes more challenging and interesting when Boehmer and Morton argue, “[f]rom this perspective, unnervingly to some, postcolonialism aligns more closely with some of the theories and significations of ‘terror’ (as in anti-colonial violence, for example) than it does with globalisation” (143). I suggest that fictional narratives such as Aslam’s straddle both the positions that Boehmer and Morton hypothesize. *The Wasted Vigil* aspires to a collective human existence, but the progression towards this unified whole involves keeping watch on the revival of “belated empire” with its centres of power in America and Europe, and the willingness to “sabotage, subvert and baulk them if necessary, and also to explore alternative yet co-existent locations and lineages of meaning and survival” (144). I propose that one way of constructing alternative paradigms is via fiction such as Aslam’s.

Within this context of the correlation between terrorism and narrative, Muhammad Hanif’s observation of *The Wasted Vigil* is pertinent⁴⁶:

⁴⁶ Mohammed Hanif’s own fiction is distinctly political in theme and content, and forms a significant part of Anglophone Pakistani literature’s interest in the nation’s politics in the 1970s. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), a humorous and biting critique of Zia’s Islamist regime, challenges the received notions of American and Pakistani governmental relations over the war in Afghanistan.

The Wasted Vigil spans 30 years of what the media used to call the “Afghan conflict”, which has now transformed into the front line of the West's war on terror. Occasionally it harks back to missing GIs in Vietnam, the early days of Soviet space programme and, more ambitiously, the spread of Buddhism in Afghanistan. But the core is made up of intersecting lives destroyed by the on-going Afghan war.

The significant term here is “intersecting”, suggesting both the transnational scale of the on-going Afghan war and elongation of time and space as a result of it. Through its literary consideration and depiction of the proxy American-Soviet war in Afghanistan—followed a few decades later by the American led “war on terror” there, Aslam’s novel constructs a chronology of terrorism in which American culpability in both the devising and continued sponsoring of terrorism is made apparent. Recounting thirty years of Afghanistan’s violent history, *The Wasted Vigil* is able to offer nuanced and humanized representations that historical and political accounts cannot. Chambers describes Aslam’s writing as the “paradoxical blend of despair and joyous optimism, irony and stream of consciousness” combining “aestheticism, gender, religion, Urdu, sexuality, violence and poetry” (141). The novel’s scope enhances this revisionist approach towards contemporary understandings of terrorism and attempts to explore the global situation of terrorism from a number of different standpoints. It does not restrict itself to a mere fictionalized political response to America but rather creates through fiction a more or less equitable distribution of voice and agency to characters that represent transnational loci, their locations determining their multiple points of view.

The transnational scope of this novel is made further complex when considered in light of Aslam’s own identity as a writer who was born and lived for

fourteen years in Pakistan before migrating to Britain, and who continues through his work to express a complex understanding of events in the country of his birth and its neighbouring nations. His dual positioning, outside Pakistan yet equipped with an insider's perspective and the merging of identities that accompanies such a migrant position, serves as a relevant context to the ways in which Afghanistan is represented in the novel. In Aslam's own words:

Afghanistan—a crossroads of history—seemed an appropriate place to discuss the meeting of Islamic and Western culture, the 'civilising missions' and the 'bringing of democracy,' Napoleon arriving at Alexandria and proclaiming that the teachings of the Koran dovetailed with the principles of revolutionary France. (*Random House*)

Not having visited Afghanistan prior to the researching of *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam's interest in the region originates from his connection to Pakistan:⁴⁷ "[w]hen in the 1980s, the USA and Saudi Arabia began funding and arming the Afghan Mujahideen, my family and friends in Pakistan were among the people who warned about the dangers of giving billions of dollars' worth of weapons to Islamic fundamentalists (*Book Browse*).” Significantly, this complexity of Aslam's sense of belonging manifests itself during his visit to Afghanistan. He confesses to an empathy with Kipling's Kim—strategically concealing either his British or Pakistani identity and moving between his two nationalities:

In some places I had to tell them I was a Pakistani because Pakistanis were liked there, and to be British would have been dangerous. In others I had to

⁴⁷ In an interview Aslam explains that his interest in writing about religious fundamentalism and honour killings (a major subject in *Maps for Lost Lovers*) originated much before these themes became popular topics globally: “with *The Wasted Vigil*, it appears that I decided to write about current events in Afghanistan but the story is actually as old as *Maps for Lost Lovers*” (Chambers 155).

confess to being British because Pakistanis were loathed. A large bomb went off in Kabul while I was there and the city, suspecting Pakistani involvement, became filled with anti-Pakistan sentiments. (*Book Browse*)

This movement between national identity and also between time and space is at the core of Aslam's writing; the circumlocution becomes a stylistic necessity, subverting the homogenizing stereotype about the Taliban and the West. In addition to this, the novel also challenges the conventional understanding of a term that is vital to this study—globalization. One of the challenges offered in the novel which is set, barring a few brief interludes in America, almost exclusively in Afghanistan and Pakistan is to establish that the statuses of “modern” and “globalized” are as much a preserve of the global south. In contrast to several recent narratives that have explored the impact of 9/11 on Muslims settled in Euro-American metropolises, *The Wasted Vigil* locates its story in largely uncharted locations, thereby also challenging the narrative priority of these metropolises. So it is not in London, New York, or Madrid that Aslam's characters experience the full force of terrorism but in the centres of Kabul, Jalalabad and Peshawar. Moreover, the “foreigners” in the novel are largely from the western world, including England, America and Russia, and the narrative engages in an intricate exploration of their relationships to Afghanistan. I would like to emphasize that while serving as an alternative narrative to neo-imperial 9/11 fiction, *The Wasted Vigil* is also firmly grounded in the ideas of transnationalism. In an interview Aslam beckons history to reinforce the sense of a collective struggle:

My understanding of Islam, from a non-believer's perspective, is that Mohammed was trying to build a state. A state needs an army, taxes, and so forth: essentially, he was a politician. What happened on 9/11 to the West was just a widescreen version of what has been happening in the Muslim world

since day one. [...] I was born into this struggle, one that until recently the wider world was ignorant to. (Chambers 147)

By bringing the world into Afghanistan the novel initiates an important process of teasing and widening the scope within which the trauma of 9/11 has been traditionally represented. It attempts at what I call “de-alienizing” a nation that has suffered severely from propaganda, political misjudgement and cultural/religious stereotyping, escalated no doubt by the terrorist acts of September 2001 and July 2005.

In this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which Aslam “unites” Afghanistan with the rest of the world and posits causal relationships between the acts of terror witnessed in the contemporary world with those experienced decades, and even centuries ago. In other words, it is Aslam’s contention that the violent intrusion into Kabul by foreigners is analogous to New York’s defilement on September 11 2001. As Aslam describes in an interview, “[t]he predicted horror was unleashed onto the people of Afghanistan soon enough, but it took decades for it to reach the wider world—on September 11, 2001 the consequences became apparent to everyone” (Random House). I offer a reading of the novel, along the lines of Boehmer and Jenkins, which suggests that the “war on terror” has become an ideal post-Cold War tool by enabling European and American states to continue the neo-imperial dispensation by waging a “war without end”. Aslam uses his narrative to make poignant and ironic comments on the war on terror, never underestimating the power given to the global north *through* terrorism and suggesting in the words of Boehmer that “the unlocalised phrase ‘War on Terror’ is a hostage to its own imperialising fortunes, in so far as it implies that terror is everywhere, and hence it must constitute the primary mode of sovereignty of the counter-terroristic state itself” (*Postcolonial Writing and Terror*: 5). Additionally, I investigate the polyvocality of Aslam’s story,

asking what bearings each character's rendition of global events via personal experience and interpretation can have on representation of the events themselves. The chapter will also consider in some detail Aslam's representation of Afghan women and their relationship to the patriarchal society within which they function. I will argue that the novel offers an alternative discourse to the gendered stereotypes of Muslim women by depicting powerful and memorable women, who become both the agents and victims of the forces of religious nationalism and capitalist globalization in relation to Afghanistan. Again, this representation undermines the formulaic portrayal of Afghan women encountered in ethnocentric Euro-American discourse, and imagines a transnational feminist narrative within which to destabilize it. Finally, the chapter will invoke the title of the novel in order to ask the all-important question—has it been “a wasted vigil”? Does Aslam's version of Afghanistan, and indeed of the world within Afghanistan, allow for the possibility of transformation? Are there ways of reading *The Wasted Vigil* as a liberationist novel of transnational significance or does it in fact reaffirm a fatalist view of future of Afghanistan that is always already read as a wasted space? *The Wasted Vigil*, despite being framed by the global image of terror, torture, war and loss, is finally a testament to human endurance and recovery. While the colossal compromises and human sacrifices depicted in the novel may appear irreconcilable in the immediate future, Aslam makes a plausible attempt at reconfiguring the relationship between coloniser and colonised, east and west, global and local. Better still, he questions the very binarism of these terms. By fictionally recounting historical suffering alongside the poignancy of personal attempts at transcending such experience, Aslam's “[w]riting posits futurity in relation to the futureless (that is, terror, necropolitics). It does so precisely because it reminds us of colonial ‘pasts’, of the ‘regeneration of colonialism through other

means', and hence of the need to remain vigilant about and to survive such regeneration" (Frankenburg and Mani 322 - 34).

2.2 'Worlding' Afghanistan

As David stands at the height of Jalalabad's city centre, he pronounces, "We have a view of all sides from here, like the Pentagon in Washington, DC. "And the wooden O of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre".

—Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*

In a television interview Nadeem Aslam remarked about *The Wasted Vigil*, "The cast in the novel is international because I am not an Afghan. I am a foreigner. I wanted to explore from the view point of foreigners, [bring] the world into Afghanistan". The imagining of Afghanistan as a meeting point for the novel's international community is one that is echoed through the course of *The Wasted Vigil*. As one of the lead characters, Marcus, examines a *diwan* (anthology) of poetry he suggests that "everyone who comes here [Afghanistan] should be given one so that no matter where they are in the world they can recognise each other. Kin. A fellowship of wounds". Marcus's house, anthropomorphically depicted, serves to unite the seemingly disconnected cast of *The Wasted Vigil*, and is in keeping with Aslam's own transnational position as a writer.

Like Shamsie's transnational cast in *Burnt Shadows*, Aslam's characters belong to different nations, cultures, ideologies and religious positions and despite the distinctly different nature of their pursuits their fascination and commitment to Afghanistan unite them. The solidarities and commonalities between such a diverse set of individuals are of paramount importance to Aslam, who has written elsewhere that "the way we experience grief, sorrow, love, rage, is the same; the rest is cultural

difference and the political situation into which we are dropped” (*The Independent*).⁴⁸ *The Wasted Vigil* offers a narrativization of his interest in exploring connectivity and dichotomy of the human condition: “[s]o either I’m everything or nothing, and I don’t really see a contradiction there. My alphabet doesn’t only have 26 letters, but also the 32 of the Urdu alphabet, so I have a total of 58 letters at my disposal” (Chambers 156).

I offer below a brief overview of *The Wasted Vigil*’s diverse cast: the novel opens by focussing on two characters—Lara is a young Russian woman visiting Afghanistan in search of her brother Benedickt, a Soviet soldier who defected from the war in the 1980s and who, as we later learn, had been brutally killed by his Afghan enemies. The other is Marcus Caldwell, English by origin but settled in Afghanistan for decades and connected to the country through family history and his marriage to his Afghan wife, Qatrina. Both Marcus and Qatrina are doctors and philanthropists who aim to build a healthier, freer and more educated Afghanistan. Marcus is wholly absorbed into Afghanistan and is at no point nostalgic about England. Despite losing both his wife and daughter, Zameen, to the Taliban’s fanaticism, Marcus still views Euro-American *realpolitik* as culpable for the destruction of Afghanistan. Furthermore, Marcus provides refuge to several endangered individuals in his house, including Casa—a *jihadi* who eventually, and ironically, turns out to be his keenly sought grandson. Marcus simultaneously represents both the horror and danger of living in Afghanistan and the optimism and prospects of restoration in this part of the world.

⁴⁸ Aslam’s most recent novel, *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013) is set during the “war on terror”, and explores the unfolding of days after 9/11 from the perspective of two “culturally” dichotomous individuals who are bonded on grounds of humanity, at least initially. Aslam’s attempt to elide cultural difference in the novel is aided, as in *The Wasted Vigil*, by the polyvocality of his narration and enables him to keep exploring intersecting themes.

David Town is a former American CIA agent involved in anti-Soviet operations and a genuine lover of the societies and cultures of Pakistan and Afghanistan. David's anti-communist sentiments are initially unrelenting, being grounded in the loss of his brother Jonathan to the Soviet army. His attachment to Afghanistan deepens through the course of time spent in the country and through his devotion to Marcus's daughter Zameen. After her death, this emotion is transformed into a desire to protect Marcus. Over the course of the novel David's assessment of American political strategies alter drastically, to a point that he becomes a protector of the Afghans and even, to some extent, of the Taliban. David's relationship with Casa is an element which serves to enable Aslam's transnationalism in the novel—by opening up dialogue and a relationship between a representative of the American government and a member of the Taliban, Aslam signals an optimism that underlies the possibility and urgency of cross-cultural communication. The narrative detours into David's conflict with a former friend James Palentine, an American Special Forces officer who is determined to do his national and international duty in Afghanistan by torturing Afghans in the hope of extracting vital information. In the latter half of the novel we are introduced to Dunia, a young and politically astute Afghan schoolteacher seeking refuge from her Taliban enemies, and who becomes arguably the most powerful and hauntingly memorable character in the story.

Marcus's house in Afghanistan has a symbolic function in the novel, serving as a concrete mooring for Aslam's narrative. Not unlike Afghanistan, the house embodies an unusual and compelling concoction of beauty, darkness and grotesqueness—infused with endless reminders of the grandeur and exquisiteness it once possessed. It is a physical testimony to human loss that has scarred the nation for decades, but continues, remarkably, to be able to accommodate a disparate collection

of endangered individuals who are connected to Afghanistan through birth, death or love. Lara begins her exploration of the house as “somewhere very far away a muezzin had begun the call to the prayers of dawn, defined by Islam as the moment when a black thread can just be distinguished from a white one without artificial light” (10). This evocative image metaphorically captures the innumerable subtleties and intricacies of life shrouded within Marcus’s house and Afghanistan. It is a peculiar house, not least because its immense ceilings are studded with countless numbers of books, of all manner and shapes, nailed to the ceilings as “original thought” we are informed, “was heresy to the Taliban and they would have burned the books.” The intermittent rumble of the B52 aircrafts cause the books to shake loose and “rain” down in the house. The rooms are a tangible manifestation of Islamic aesthetics—each room representing one of the five human senses including mesmerizing murals such as that of “Subha in a dancerly gesture [presenting] her eye to a rogue in the forest” (11). The room representing the sense of hearing contains a fascinating paradox in the words “Allah created through the spoken word” inscribed alongside images of singers, musicians, instruments and song birds celebrating the spoken word, all of which are strictly discouraged in the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic *Sharia*. The room dedicated to the sense of touch depicts yet another compelling image of the Prophet Muhammad with his hand submerged in a jar of water, the explanation being that “he would not shake hands with women, so in order to make a pact he would put his hand in a vessel containing water and withdraw it, and then the woman would put her hand into the water” (11). While this deliberate, and ostensibly heretical, artistic suffusion of the religious with the worldly may be directed towards foregrounding an Islamic aesthetic, what is also made abundantly

clear is the sheer cognitive inability of the Taliban to envisage such a possibility.⁴⁹ On the one hand, Aslam seeks to demonstrate the sophisticated intellectual and cultural tradition of Islam; on the other hand, he is careful never to neglect an altogether darker set of possibilities that can also be derived from it in the form of the fundamentalist fanaticism of the Taliban. Both the Taliban and the Islamic liberal aesthetic captures the contradictory compulsions of modernity and Aslam reproduces the barbarism-progress duality within his depiction of Islam. He describes the scenario to Chambers in an interview:

In Lahore on a Thursday night you can go to the tomb of Sufi saint Shah Jamal and hear the former *tonga-wallah*, Pappu Sain, playing the drum. It is two o'clock in the morning, pitch black, and you see brilliant points of light as people smoke marijuana. All the while the Taliban are over the horizon [...] if there is a theme in my writing it is that I am standing on the side of the prism in which I can see the light that isn't white. (153)⁵⁰

This spectrum of contradictory possibilities is regularly featured in Aslam's fiction. When Katrina's ninety nine paintings fall into the hands of Taliban soldiers, they do "not know how to deal with the pictures—each one bore the name of Allah's names in Arabic calligraphy, the Compassionate One, the Immortal One—but the words were

⁴⁹ For further reading on Islam and portraiture refer to Thomas W. Arnold's *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture* which undertakes a study of diverging theological perspectives on pictorial representations in Islam. In a similar attempt, Gordon Raynor published an article in *The Telegraph* entitled "Why Muslims regard images of Mohammed as blasphemous" and quotes a particular *Hadith* (Islamic saying) as warning that "all the painters who make pictures would be in the fire of Hell".

⁵⁰ The physical proximity of Lahore's famous Badshahi mosque to its equally well-known prostitute district, Heera Mandi, has been a continuous source of fascination for artists and writers. Lahore is depicted, both by Aslam and Mohsin Hamid in *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as alive to the possibility of these harmonious and fascinating dichotomies.

surrounded by images not only of flowers and vines but of other living things” (205). The impact of these images is a devastating one; it affects them, moving them to fury in a way that Marcus and Katrina’s books and cassettes have not been able to do, owing to their imaginative failure to read their content. The complex artistry of the paintings defies easy categorization, encouraging instead a complex integration of religion and art that is captured visually on the front cover of the audio edition of *The Wasted Vigil* [Image 3]. Aslam’s recurrent focus on the conflict between art and religious extremism is no doubt borne out of his personal experience of such a dichotomy. Not only does he describe his maternal family as austere and conservative, there are references to a fanatical uncle who would “break [his] toys and beat [his] mother” in the name of religious training (Chambers, 154).

Marcus’s home is an important version of Aslam’s own conception of habitation. He explains in an interview: “[a] writer really has no place, ultimately. The most alive you are is when you are working or thinking about your work. Whichever place gives me the opportunity to be in that state is home. At the moment it's England. At the moment it's here. As a writer, the only nationality I have is at my desk” (*The Independent*). The sense of integration, entanglement and even confusion that result from such a position is viewed in a positive light in the narrative. At the same time, *The Wasted Vigil* is acutely conscious of the relationship between identity and ideology and the layers of divisions formed by this relationship—manifested in American capitalism, Soviet communism, anti-Americanism, militant Islamic religiosity. Against these conflicts, the novel models a sense of evolving and transformative identity—one that claims to be neither separate nor distinct to others, but transcend ideological binaries. It is this process of recognition and introspection,

replacing militant identities with a more complex subjectivity that gives the novel its transnational scope.

2.3 Transnational Terrorism

The entire world it seemed had fought in this country, had made mistakes in this country, but mistakes had consequences and he didn't know who to blame for those consequences. Afghanistan itself, Russia, the United States, Britain, Arabia, Pakistan?

—Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*

In the words of Walter Benjamin, “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight” (*Illuminations* 257). Indeed it takes only a cursory glance at modern history to apprehend the role played by terrorism during the historical periods of colonization and empire; these took many forms including the forcible extraction of cheap labour, slavery, illegitimate acquisition of territory, the denial of basic human rights and the flouting of justice—acts which in other words impinge on what is conventionally regarded as a “civil society”.⁵¹ Why then, it becomes worth asking, is it assumed that retaliation to these acts of political, moral and social injustice would not acquire the form of terrorism? Elleke Boehmer goes to the extent of suggesting that terror has often been

⁵¹ See Mustapha Maraouchi's “Introduction: Colonialism, Islamism, Terrorism” (2003) in which problematizes the traditional delieniation of the historical conflict between “East and West, the avant la latre and the avant-garde, tradition and modernity, Islam, or a version of it, and Capitalism, one transitional movement confronts another” Marouchi's resists the American and European political disengagement with history that came into play after 9/11, but existed much before that. He puts it bluntly: “our vacation from history is over and done with” (6).

an effective form of resistance to imperialism both in its previous and “modern state” (*Terror*).

Aslam’s novel presses the need for a re-visitation to history and to the violence and suppression that were and continue to be exerted by the so-called “civilised” “first world” nation-states today, especially in the context of their ever-widening material and ideological “spheres of interest”. *Maps for lost Lovers* suggests, “ordinary people, in this case principally first and second-generation British Asian Muslims, live with *quotidian* forms of terror” (Moore 3). *The Wasted Vigil* questions the dominant rhetoric of 9/11 which “in its sloshy metonymy, returns us to the individuous distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as ‘Islam’ itself)” (Butler, *Precious Life* 2). Postcolonial Studies, it has been more recently suggested, has skirted around, to the point of neglect, the study of “contemporary imperialism, and the traditional colonial and terroristic forms it takes” (Boehmer, *Terror* 7). I am interested in examining the ways in which Aslam leads the reader to revisit some of these historical realities to disturb the “anachronistic division between “East” and ‘West’” (*Precious* 2) on the issue of terrorism.

Pankaj Mishra has stated in a particularly hard-hitting article that “Western governments have coerced and bribed the Pakistani military into extensive wars against their own citizens; tens of thousands of Pakistanis have now died (the greatest toll yet of the “war on terror”), and innumerable numbers have been displaced, in the backlash to the doomed western effort to exterminate a proper noun” (*The Guardian*) This attempted extermination of terror has a long history. To facilitate this discussion, I will briefly outline America’s first moments of entanglement with Pakistan, now more than sixty years ago. After its independence in August 1947, America was one of the first nations to form diplomatic ties with Pakistan. In the early 1950s, when

Pakistan was under the leadership of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, President Truman sought the establishment of a CIA operation base in the country. As Pakistani leaders continued to visit America to seek further financial aid, armed American presence in Pakistan became stronger. A military base was set up in Rawalpindi and Peshawar Air Station was leased to facilitate American surveillance against the Soviet Union. The interest in Pakistan as a strategic geographical location was of course compounded by American suspicion of Nehru's socialist India—and its alliance with the Soviet Union.⁵²

Although over the next few decades the political relations between America and Pakistan remained variable and erratic, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 America's approach towards Pakistan became much more stable. Political alliance with Pakistan at this juncture aimed at mobilizing Muslims in the “great jihad” against Communism. Pakistan's military dictator at the time, General Zia ul Haq, whose regime rested on the twin pillars of religious extremism and a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic *Sharia* laws, provided America with wholehearted support in the war against a common enemy, Soviet communism. *The Wasted Vigil* offers biting condemnation of Pakistan for its support of the radicalised groups of religious fundamentalists as a result during the Cold War.

This history is found embedded in the thoughts of Lara, a Russian visitor visiting Afghanistan in order to learn the fate of her brother Benedick, who fought for the Russian army in the war. As Lara observes the moon from Marcus's house “great

⁵² *In Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism, and Resistance to Modernity* (2011) Riaz Mohammed Khan sheds light on the historical ambiguity in Pakistan's foreign policy (and public discourse) with regards America and the Taliban. Being a former foreign secretary in Pakistan, Khan is able to analyze the situation both in America and Afghanistan; the study finds little prospect of economic and intellectual growth in Pakistan unless the country's ongoing contradictory stance on foreign politics and internal affairs is resolved.

in size and brightness both” (32), she thinks about the “Space Race” fought in the 1950s between the United States and the Soviet Union. Acerbically she contemplates, “[y]es...who wouldn’t cower beneath a nuclear-armed Soviet moon, a nuclear-armed American moon?” Lara then goes on to compare the spectacle of the 2001 New York attacks to the Cold War space race: “[i]t never happened but she wonders if the terrorists didn’t come close to something like that in 2001, an enormous spectacle seen by the entire world, planting awe and shock in every heart” (32). Lara’s private musings provide some of the brief and fleeting references to 9/11 in the novel, suggesting perhaps that Aslam deliberately wishes to steer clear from privileging this particular moment of terrorism over others. Lara diminishes the importance of nations and nationalism in her dialogue with David, while confessing to him her painful guilt at having married the Russian army official, Stephan whose ideology and allegiance to the government were in stark contrast to her own. When David attempts to reassure her—“[y]our country made you feel guilty [...] They put so much unreasonable pressure on you, so many unreasonable demands”, Lara resists. She deliberates, “I wonder how much of it is to do with my country. Maybe it’s who I am” (262-3).

This decentring of the nation and the associated contextualization of contemporary terrorism showing a productive relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and American neo-imperialism, is a regular feature of Aslam’s narrative. The episode of a suicide bombing at a local school in Jalalabad, targeting predominantly the school’s visiting American owner—“[t]o kill an American would send out a big message” (52)—is followed by a public declaration by the terrorists: “A passionate servant of Allah has carried out a glorious act in Jalalabad...we have hundreds more young men like him, lovers of Muhammad, peace be upon him, who are willing and eager to give their lives in this jihad against the infidels” (64). The

novel goes beyond signalling conventional horror at such events; through David's consideration of suicide bombing in Afghanistan Aslam reminds us of its modern and imported lineage there. He offers an alternative way to understand suicide bombing by a literary historicization of the term. Initiated principally by American frustrations at failed attempts at destroying the Salang Tunnel to the North of Kabul—a vital supply route for the Soviets in the 1980s—suicide bombing was offered by the Americans as the only viable tactic.

In his fiction Aslam highlights certain historical facts that are usually camouflaged by anti-Islamic propaganda. He invokes, for instance, the wrath of the Islamic fighters at America's severe condemnation of their recent attack on the American School, in light of the fact that the American president had "shaken hands" with the men who blew up a passenger plane carrying Afghan school children "bound for indoctrination in the Soviet Union" (92). David's complete silence here carries immense significance when followed by Lara's horrified reaction to this news, "Is that true?" Moreover, the episode of the killing of the innocent Afghan children, mentioned however parenthetically in the narrative, evokes the same reaction in the reader as it does in Lara—it demands immediate and undivided attention. Nothing mentioned before or after this carries consequence in the moment this information is revealed. It is the eloquent silence of David—his guilty conscience—that provokes a poignant readerly experience here. Stylistically, it is Aslam's ability to use free indirect discourse, which enables access to "somebody else's mind" without even having to specifically link the thought with the character, that marks the novel's most distinctive difference from a non-fictional account. This polyvocality is both complex and eventually liberating.

Aslam's artistic representation of history has the advantage over journalistic reportage of portraying the process of David's psychological and ideological transformation. As David reflects on the events of the past that once seemed bizarre and inexplicable, he begins to apprehend the role performed by the U.S. more clearly, recognizing that "the explanation for some events existed in another realm, a parallel world that had its own considerations and laws" (106). One of the more prominent examples of such an event in the novel is the siege of the American Embassy in Islamabad, which was carried out by militant Muslim university students and lasted for five hours before any signs of intervention by Pakistani troops. This delayed response to the assistance sought by the Americans "who had feared for their lives in the vault for five hours", however, mysteriously results in a telephone call made by President Carter to General Zia thanking him for his assistance. At the time David

...watched Pakistan's ambassador in Washington accept the gratitude of the United States and claim that the Pakistani Army troops had reacted 'promptly, with dispatch', he had little idea of the larger things at stake, didn't know why the United States could not afford to dwell on the issue. Khomeini's revolution has meant the loss of important listening posts in Iran that had been trained on the Soviet Union. General Zia had accepted a CIA proposal to locate new facilities on Pakistani soil. (90)

It is with hindsight that David perceives the hypocrisy involved in America's extravagant flattery of their political pawn General Zia. In the novel, this delayed understanding meant that David has, unwittingly, the blood of Zameen on his hands. Through this intensely personal look at history, Aslam exposes the a-historicity or anti-historicity in the formulation of contemporary understandings of terrorism. While in the post-Bush and post-Blair eras this acknowledgement of the mendacity of

American foreign policy is more pronounced, the rhetoric of the war on terror has by no means abated.

Aslam juxtaposes the portrayal of militant jihadi training in Pakistan with insights into American support for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. During his training we find Casa exploring the laboratories of the camp “stocked with labelled drums of various acids, acetones, cellulose, wood composite and aluminium powder” and practising destruction by crumbling a boulder with US-made “Semtex”.⁵³ The intended result of depicting Casa as trapped in the “Islam vs. West” stereotype, is in Aslam’s words, to not “necessarily want readers to sympathise with Casa, as many readers have told me that they do, but ... better to understand where these people come from, and how they arrive at the point they have. This is not to encourage forgiveness, but is rather about preventing such radicalization in the future” (Chambers 143). Aslam’s position here is precarious; Casa’s venom and his desire to destroy Americans are not sentiments that Aslam wishes to sympathise with. Yet, in an interview, he does refer to Casa as “my jihadist”, wanting to portray him as both human and humane:

Here is what my jihadist thinks at one point in *The Wasted Vigil*: “Does no one remember what happened on board flight United 93? A group of Americans—civilized people, not barbarians—discovered that their lives, their country, their land, their cities, their traditions, their customs, their religion, their families, their fellow-countrymen, their past, their present, their future, were under attack, and they decided to risk their lives – and eventually gave up their

⁵³ The novel provides a bit of factual information about Semtex, a potent explosive used commonly for demolition and military actions. Aslam further informs that the Americans made every energetic effort to reclaim it from Afghanistan, after having lavishly supplied it in the war against the Soviets.

lives – to prevent the other side from succeeding. He could be wrong but to him that seems a lot like what the Muslim martyrdom bombers think they are doing. (Random House)

The thing to note is that Casa's frustration surfaces from American political hypocrisy that presents the acts on board the United 93 as heroic, but condemns Muslim martyrs; he is disinclined to acknowledge any difference in their motives. The element of authorial intrusion at this conjecture, while not loud, is unmistakably clear; all that is said about Casa at this point is that "he is not wrong" (212). As Aslam claims elsewhere, "the suicide bombers are just bullets, are just knives. My rage is aimed at the terrorist leaders, the people who lead the confused rudderless young men astray" (Random House).

Along with this, Aslam also seeks to shatter the myth of Afghanistan and Pakistan as being inherently and historically violent regions of the world. In the novel, again, this is achieved through David's perspectives on Peshawar, a city he has grown to love and appreciate over the time he has spent there—"the City of Flowers. The City of Grain." David laments the transformation of Peshawar into a "city filled with conjecture", where underlying motives and sinister agendas prevented the existence of trust and friendship. Searching the maze of Afghan training camps for Zameen and her son Bihzad after their mysterious disappearance, David is appalled by scenes of starvation and wretchedness around him and forced to concede, "he had helped create all this" (155). Historically, located on a major trading network linked to the Silk Road, Peshawar was now a route for the United States to supply arms into Afghanistan. So glutted had the city become with American weapons that we are told "dentists filled cavities with shotgun pellets in Peshawar" (152). This emphasis on the transformation of the place is directed at exposing and exploding the myth that cities

like Peshawar bred “natural” guerrillas and warriors and that for reasons rarely speculated upon, Afghans were ingenious ‘with all things mechanical’.⁵⁴ The exposure of this particular fable appears to be particularly charged with rage:

Of course the Afghan ingenuity with all things mechanical is a myth, encouraged by the United States and the West during the war against the Soviets. Most of the rebels were peasants who had little or no military expertise. They came from villages in distant pathless mountains and, contrary to historical romances, were not natural guerrillas or warriors. They needed training in weapons and technology, they who were still afraid of eclipses and thought communication satellites circling the night skies were in fact stars being moved from here to there by Allah. (295)

The narrative does not stop with its suggestions of Afghans being “nurtured” into terrorism:

Afghanistan was known as the Graveyard of Empires, yes, but these and other appellations of ferocity were thought up by British historians attempting to explain the end of the First Anglo-Afghan War of the nineteenth century, the most notorious defeat in British history. During the 1980s male Western journalists enthusiastically revived and embraced their martial stereotypes, to the satisfaction of agencies like the CIA. (295)

Aslam’s historical exegesis verges on non-fictional here; there is none of the lyricism of style experienced elsewhere in the novel, but rather a matter-of-fact, explicatory tone. He presents a picture of transnational terrorism, and delinks the phenomenon from being the sole preserve of this or that nation-state or agents of the global south.

⁵⁴ Today Peshawar has impressive facilities for education (including the provision of education for women) but continues to grapple with extremist violence from its Taliban factions with recent years seeing regular religious attacks, civilian killing and destruction of infrastructure.

This clearly correlates to the America's military strategies such as regular drone attacks since 2004 in the north-western regions of Pakistan that has continuously killed civilians. Recent American state terrorism has included targeted assassinations, use of illegal cluster bombs, chemical and biological weapons, and surveillance and torture to pursue its political interests, and it is this relationship between state and non-state terrorism that Aslam pursues in his fiction.

But it is important to consider the perspectives contained in the above passages: who is implicating Euro-American governments in Afghanistan's unravelling here? David's political coming of age, as it were, slowly begins to align him with Aslam, their voices merging into free and indirect speech, with little need for the author to attempt any distinction between the two. Based on Aslam's interviews, it is difficult to ascertain his personal alignment with any of the characters he creates. He describes to Chambers the experience of being variously labelled as pro-Taliban, pro-Soviet Union and pro-American after the publication of *The Wasted Vigil*. He defends these allegations thus: "[a] novel is a democracy, and as a novelist I have to work hard at making the reader understand every character" (142). While this said intention of making "everybody human" is evident in Aslam's writing, there are indications of a particular empathy with David. For one thing, David is the only character in the novel that substantially evolves and—if a "tragic hero" could be identified from *The Wasted Vigil* it would be him, complete with *hubris* and his eventually preserved dignity. His metamorphosis is gradual and more complete than Changez's in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, who in the final analysis, is left feeling profoundly confused over the question of his identity and politics. The change in David's ideology is accompanied by alterations in his personal relationships and private life, and Aslam maps this transition from "human" to "humane" through the

course of the narrative. Additionally, David's thoughts about American involvement in Afghanistan resonate with Aslam's own non-fictional statements. For example, about the fracturing of the global political field Aslam claims, "[t]he West has obviously to some degree added to these tensions" (Chambers 147). This implication, while briefly glossed in the interview bears weight not least because of Aslam's epigraphic reference to Zbigniew Brzezinski's unconsidered response to American sponsorship of terrorism in Afghanistan: "What is more important to the history of the world—the Taliban or the [...] end of the Cold War?" These words form the starting point of *The Wasted Vigil*, which subsequently unfolds to expose the irony and imprudence of Brzezinski's words.

As with other elements, the relationship between state and non-state terrorism is fleshed out in the novel through the accounts of personal encounters between David Christopher Palentine (James' father), against the backdrop of the Islamist attack on New York. As they discuss the fate of Zameen (who has been captured and tortured by the CIA), a large bomb explodes just a block away from the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. It is a prologue to 9/11. The narrative conjures up scenes of emergency now familiar from the subsequent historical media coverage of 9/11—as ambulances, police cars, fire engines and humans blend into a din of "sirens, cries and shouts" (200). David's brief reaction speaks volumes: "*They are here.*" His tone is one of the "shocked recognition of inevitability" reminding him of the Quranic verse "[w]herever you may be, death shall overtake you, though you may put yourself in lofty towers" (169). In an interview elsewhere Aslam expands the point: "I lived a stone's throw from the White House when I taught in Washington, DC earlier this year, and I couldn't help thinking how certain decisions made in that place in the 1980s became fists as they travelled to Pakistan, fists and hammers that broke my

journalist friends' bodies" (Random House). His physical proximity to the centre of American power is starkly juxtaposed to his ideological distance from it. *The Wasted Vigil* takes into account aggressive American nationalism forged in the wake of 9/11, resulting in the war on terror and expressed in the sentiments expressed by the US secretary of defence's benediction of the US troops embarking for Afghanistan, having been "commissioned by history" (30). Aslam meditates on the irony of such sentiments through David's sceptical questioning of what "they, the Americans, really [knew] about such parts of the world, of the layer upon layer of savagery that made them up." (155)

Aslam strengthens this perspective with other voices such as Casa's, however crudely expressed—"[t]wo of their buildings fell down and they think they know about the world's darkness, about how unsafe a place it is capable of being!" (318) In such a context, Robert Young has recently offered some analyses of the relationship of the Europe and America with transnational terrorism by comparing it to the long and tragic experiences of countries such as Afghanistan. Young offers a critical reminder of the relatively minor Euro-American experience of terrorism compared to that of the postcolonial world, where it has been of an endemic and structural kind. He writes that the "war on terror is often projected as if it were Americans and Europeans who are the main victims of terror." Reiterating this, Young suggests, that there are "in fact different forms of terror that operate very differently elsewhere" (323). In light of this, Casa's refusal to treat 9/11 as exceptional becomes less an example of postcolonial resentment and more of a historically accurate observation.

Young examines the reality of life for the global majority where terror is an everyday experience. His focus is on Sri Lanka, but his insights can easily be extended to contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the past two decades or so the

bulk of fiction emerging from Sri Lanka, including Ambalavaner Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, has centred overwhelmingly on this experience of terrorism in the country, thus indexing the difference between "terror effects" in the west and the "incomparable more traumatic experiences of the civil war in Sri Lanka" (323). Indeed, the situation in Afghanistan where violence, oppression and terrorism have been a way of life for decades is uncannily similar.

While Casa's anti-Americanism is shown to be historical, it is not seen as the normative reflex in the novel. Here, Dunia, a remarkable Afghan woman who is both educated and opinionated and who seeks refuge from the persecution of the Taliban in Marcus's home, becomes crucial. Aslam's own perspective is perhaps most clearly projected through Dunia—simultaneously exposing America's involvement in Afghanistan as well as rejecting all affiliations with radical Islam. This position is effectively captured through Dunia's conversation with the two American spies who visit Marcus's home immediately after she has offered one of her five daily prayers:

"I am a little tired of having to prove who I am. Didn't I tell you who I was when I was on my way here yesterday?"

"We are not your enemy."

"We are here to help your country. We came to get rid of the Taliban for you..."

"Please stop [...] The Taliban regime had been in place for years and no one was particularly bothered about getting rid of it. You are not here because you wanted to destroy the Taliban for us, you are here because you wanted retribution for what happened to you in 2001. I am glad they are gone but let's not confuse facts."

"You can't expect a country to function like a charity."

“Then why pretend it is?”

“I am sorry. That was uncalled for.”

“No, I am glad it got said. At last we are on the same page—without illusions.” (374-5)

The implied authorial perspective at this point is merged with Dunia’s and serves to ironically distance other sensibilities such as James Palentine’s when he (along the lines of Kim in *Burnt Shadows*) debates the merits of torture and innocence—“[n]o one in the world is innocent but these Muslims say they are[...] So until everyone admits they are capable of cruelty—and not define their cruelty as just—there will be problems” (249). This ironic distance then proclaims the hollowness of the “war on terror”, that claims to rescue Afghanistan from political and religious suppression of the Taliban. It also draws attention to James’ own paranoid misreading of Islam: “[w]e have a new kind of enemy David. They are allowed to read the Quran at Guantanamo Bay, as their religious and human right. But have you read it? They don’t need jihadi literature—they’ve got the Quran. Almost every other page is a call to arms, a call to slaughter us infidels” (247). This irrational fear and inability to read, fits Young’s diagnosis of the problem of interpreting terrorism as terror, which presents the former as “self-generating, uncontrollable, proliferating. Totally random. Terror messes up and violates the smooth transition between causes and effects” (307). Further, *The Wasted Vigil* echoes Young’s hypothesis that terrorist tactics have been similar across space and time. Young parallels the bombing in 1883 by Irish Fenians of the London underground between Charing Cross and Westminster stations to the Islamist ‘7/7’ bombings (308). Likewise, the responses to terrorism have traditionally expressed through a fear of “immigration or the foreign” (322). This

Euro-American anxiety associated with immigrants and “foreigners” is carefully juxtaposed in the narrative against the havoc wrecked by “foreigners” in Afghanistan.

2.4. Aslam as Feminist

Relatively recently, I have discovered the existence of a feminist group called “Women in Black” or WIB. Completely covered in black clothing from head to toe, WIB groups of women can be found in several parts of the world, silently but firmly mourning the female victims of institutionalised violence, war, human rights abuse and oppression under male-dominated politics. Vera Mackie, in her work on transnational feminism, describes the overwhelming visual impact of her witnessing of such a vigil in Japan, held by hundreds of women of different nationalities. These vigils are now increasingly common in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, in the wake of the war on terror launched in 2001. As the UK WIB group claim—they are “a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence”. In much the same spirit is the women’s transnational group called “Women against Fundamentalism” (WAF), which principally works towards to challenging the growth of fundamentalism in all religions. Condemning fundamentalism, and negating its link with any one particular religion, WAF say that the “control of women’s minds and bodies is at the heart of the fundamentalist agenda”. Thirdly and finally, the Women’s Action Forum (also WAF) in Pakistan was formed in Karachi in 1981 and serves as a non-hierarchical organization that supports women’s rights across the boundaries of belief, political affiliation, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Geographically, the impact of WAF has been exceptionally wide, its voices emerging from across the

globe and addressing the issues of violence, fundamentalism, state control and sexual/reproductive rights to name but a few.

While researching for *The Wasted Vigil*, particularly in the context of its representation of Afghan women, I became interested in the psychology and ideological convictions behind such transnational women's solidarity movements. WIB are not only committed to non-violent protests. Their actions symbolise a refusal to accept the "logic of war" and the consequences of that war on women. They work from the hypothesis that "male violence against women in domestic life and in war are related. Women experience a continuum of gendered violence, generated and sustained in masculine cultures" (WIB website). Their organisations transcend ethnic and national backgrounds, collaborating across these and many other differences in the interests of international justice and peace. In their own words, "[w]e work for a world where difference does not mean inequality, oppression or exclusion."⁵⁵

I invoke WIB and both the WAFs in my study precisely because they exemplify a version of transnational feminism. Mackie observes that "[b]y staging a vigil as 'women in black' these women were performing a visual affirmation of their links with women's groups around the world, staking a claim to the use of public space and providing a visual affirmation of their place in what might be called a 'transnational imaginary'". Indeed as America and its allies joined forces to wage their "war on terror", people from countries such as Britain, Japan and Australia were

⁵⁵ Elsewhere Mackie has condemned the "obsessive attention paid to the covering and uncovering of women's faces in accounts of the recent history of Afghanistan specifically, and more generally in accounts of the lives of women under Islamic regimes" ("Faces of Feminism" 1). As an example she has noted the recent publication of the story of a young Afghan woman's life under the Taliban regime by a European feminist. The front and back covers of the book depict the Afghan woman as shrouded under layers of the veil, and are entitled "My Forbidden Face". Mackie problematically points out the metonymic use of the veil for the nation of Afghanistan.

summoned to “imagine a connection with women in another country”, predominantly with the women of Afghanistan. In fact, as suggested in Chapter 1, the symbolic figure of the veiled, oppressed and abused Afghan woman was yet another tool employed in Europe and America to justify the mobilising of further troops into Afghanistan. Those involved were being encouraged by the media and politicians to view themselves as the saviours and liberators of these women and though there was an attempt at connecting the consciousness of the “western” woman with that of the woman in the *burqa*, clearly this was not quite the transnational unity WIB had in mind. Instead, this version of transnational female solidarity continued to endorse the hierarchies that prevented the establishment of any mutual solidarity. To this, Lindsey Moore adds (in the context of *Maps for Lost Lovers*) that “[r]epeated tropes are, among other things, relentlessly gendered, as is illustrated by the entanglement of imperialist and feminist discourses in media coverage of Afghan women’s rights” (1).

I have previously discussed Postcolonial Studies’ powerful critiquing of the allegedly self-defeating attempts by some—though by no means all—western feminists and women activists of America and Europe to create this idea of a “global sisterhood” or of “international feminism”, because they do so necessarily from a vantage point of disparate political and economic power and privilege. Feminist scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Rashmi Varma and A. E. Kaplan have been wary of a homogenous international women’s movement as they tend to objectify the figure of the “third world” woman while assigning historical agency to an equally fetishized imagining of “first world” women.⁵⁶ Mohanty suggests that “... images such as the veiled women ... the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, and so on... exist in universal, ahistorical splendor, setting in motion a colonialist discourse

⁵⁶ In the Introduction and Chapter 1 I offer a detailed analysis of the tensions between transnational and what is problematically termed “western feminism”.

that exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing First/Third World connections” (*Feminism Without Borders* 41) The “us” and “them” divide, far from dissolving is deepened with an overpowering realisation of the cultural, social, national and economic differences that exist between these two abstractions. She makes solidarity the political and ethical goal of feminism.

This stereotype of the helpless Afghan woman has also been a staple of contemporary popular literature (Image 4). Asne Seirstad’s best-selling *The Book Seller of Kabul*—an account of the family life of a local Kabul bookseller, Shah Muhammad Rai—exposes his allegedly objectionable treatment of the women and girls in his household. Rai’s response to this has been one of indignation, formalised in litigation in court against the writer, in which he was eventually victorious. In *Women for Afghan Women: Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future* (2002) Sima Wali addresses the urgency of challenging stereotypes concerning Afghan women:

The failure of the West to influence events in Afghanistan cannot be attributed only to the growth of extremist Islam and tribalism. Rather, it is a direct result of long-standing inability of Western institutions to adjust to the realities of what needs to be done and to listen to the voices of the vast majority of Afghans, who are capable of ushering in democratic change and are willing to do so. (*Foreword* 2)

While she accepts the “global awareness created by western feminists” about the state of women in Afghanistan today, she insists that the issues challenging Afghan women need to “go beyond an overemphasized discussion of the veil and women's oppression at the hands of Afghan men”. In one of the articles in the collection Eleanor Smeal points out that “[t]he women's movement [in America and Europe] must take itself more seriously and develop a gender perspective on global affairs” (33). Post-9/11,

images of Muslim women have been used for another purpose as well—to reinforce fundamentalist policies by religious extremists, as a means of regulating society along socially and politically conservative lines. The patriarchal religious and political establishments in countries like Afghanistan view women as integral to the regulation of society—they must be “controlled, tamed, and dominated” under the ironic pretext of protecting the honour and maintaining the status of women. Faegheh Shirazi argues, “in such contexts, for a more orthodox reinterpretation of Islamic values, women's bodies have become the testing ground for new political policies. These values are then intertwined with regional traditions and fed to the populace as the way to salvation” (3).

In this section I consider Aslam’s intervention amidst this twofold distortion and misrepresentation of the Afghan woman. In the novel patriarchal oppression is manifested in two predominant ways: first, in the form of extremist Taliban governance in Afghanistan, where women are subjugated under the pretext of religion and protection; second, American imperialism, which is seen to equally exploit women in the name of liberation. Aslam’s women become sites for the infliction of these crimes and for resisting the sources from which they emanate. Confronted by this double subordination, their lives are ultimately scarred by their rebellions, this tragic framing both constraining and releasing their agencies at various junctions in the novel. Here I read three of Aslam’s female characters as transnational individuals—this transnationalism is signalled even in the literal meanings of their names: Qatrina (purity), Zameen (land) and Dunia (universe).

Through Qatrina, Aslam constructs a fierce condemnation of the practice of fundamentalist Islam. In a society that regards religion as the only legitimate code of life, Qatrina not only chooses a non-Muslim Englishman (Marcus) as her husband, but

favours a non-religious marriage ceremony. She is “indifferent” it is noted, “to the idea of supreme beings and their holy messengers” (33). This serves as a secular feminist perspective in *The Wasted Vigil*. When she runs out of options, Qatrina eventually does consent to a religious ceremony, but stipulates that the marriage service be performed by a woman: “We have to help change things. Nowhere does the Koran state that only men may conduct the wedding” (33). This idiosyncratic radicalism is compounded by her clear and unequivocal desire not to have “any mention of God” at her funeral—a wish that results in the vandalism of her grave by those opposed to her. The impact of Qatrina’s unwillingness to accept Islamic fundamentalism results in a legacy of loathing whereby the neighbourhood children contemplate pastimes such as “[o]r shall we go and throw stones at the grave of Qatrina?” (82).

While there is evidence in the narrative to suggest that Qatrina (like Aslam) is a non-believer, it is worth noting that she does in fact turn to the Quran to provide evidence for the presence of a Muslim priestess at her wedding. In what resonates with the chief philosophy of the WAF, it is ultimately the fanatical misinterpretation and practice of Islam that Qatrina remonstrates against, principally its oppressive exclusion of women. Qatrina’s frustration with fundamentalism and tribalism and their negative impact on the women of Afghanistan may appear to a certain extent to echo global media reports on the subject, but the two should not be conflated. Her position is that of an insider—her rebellion is from within—stemming, as Marcus explains, from both empathy and experience: “[s]he worked with the patients for longer hours than I did. Travelled to remoter areas than I ever contemplated whenever she heard about an outbreak or epidemic. But she would at times feel utterly hopeless at the state of her country’s people” (96). The act of tearing the sapling of an apricot

plant apart after dealing with the eight pregnancies of a critically unwell woman expresses her frustration with the ignorance and obstinacy of her “religious” society—the latest pregnancy has taken place despite her “warnings and pleadings” to the woman’s husband who has taken no heed of the potentially fatal consequences of this impregnation. While Qatrina is articulated in the narrative to nullify a set of misconceptions about Afghan women in ethnocentric feminist discourse, she also plays a role in shattering misconceptions about America in Afghanistan. So much so that she enters a rigorous interaction with the local mosque to appeal against their ban of birth control, which is feared as the “West’s attempt at reducing the number of Muslims in the world” (81). Aslam’s sympathetic portrayal of Qatrina—in that she resists religious fundamentalism and appeals to rationalism—have, unsurprisingly, landed him in trouble with certain audiences to the extent that there have been accusations that the “CIA and MI5 had directed” the novel’s agendas (Chambers 142). Aslam dramatizes Qatrina’s anti-fundamentalism at key moments in the narrative. This includes her suggestion to Marcus: “I sometimes wonder if one shouldn’t let people hear a sentence like ‘I do not believe in the existence of Allah.’ They’ll be stunned but will go away and think about it.” To this she adds, “[t]hey might have heard about such people but to have it come from a person with a skin, with a mouth and eyes, a person who is standing at the same level as them—that has a different impact altogether” (195). Although the chief offense caused to fundamentalists from such statements would be owing to their blatantly heretical nature, there is an implication Qatrina’s gendered status would exacerbate its impact. Hence, art becomes one of the ways in which Qatrina challenges the extremists, whereby she converts religious symbols to their material counterparts.

Aslam's Afghanistan affords no easy utopic spaces. Qatrina rebels against Islamic fundamentalism, but it is a mutiny that leads her to a ghastly death at the hands of her enemies—a punishment carried out publicly as a sign of warning to any further women contemplating defiance or “heresy”. Her death is preceded by a state of intense psychological and physical degradation encapsulated in an episode that haunts her for the remainder of her life. It is an episode worth dwelling on briefly, as it magnifies Qatrina's conflict with patriarchal fundamentalist ideologies of the Taliban. The ferocity in her engagement with the Taliban soldiers, when she is asked to sever Marcus's right hand as a punishment for theft, is significant:

They now held a gun to her head—“Do it!”—so that Marcus had to plead with her to go ahead, knowing they would kill her without thought. He picked up the scalpel and pushed it into her hands, tried to close her fingers around it. But she kept saying no, enraging them with her defiance, shaming them in front of the crowd. She lifted her *burqa* and looked into the eyes of the boy in front of her. The crowd suddenly silent.

‘Go ahead and kill me. I am not going to do it.’

She stood to full height. (243-4)

She is compelled, finally, to amputate Marcus's hand when they threaten to kill him instead of her. Aslam shows that after performing the amputation Qatrina “entered a different geography of the mind altogether. She would not speak, or couldn't, kept her face to the walls, to the shadows. In any room she rushed towards corners” (207). But an additional consequence of Qatrina's deteriorated mental state is her overwhelming desire to protect the symbols of art and education from the hands of the Taliban, and it is for this reason that when Marcus returns to the house after spending a week in a hospital in Kabul, he finds their library of books nails securely to the ceiling. These

among other assertions of her selfhood show that despite Qatrina's unwillingness to engage further with the Taliban, she has in no way been silenced or defeated. Even in the inhumane death she suffers, she shows not a single sign of submission. After being subjected to the ordeal of stoning, she is left to die in a dilapidated mud and brick cell. When approached by a cleric from the local mosque to "beg Allah's forgiveness for a lifetime of sin", Qatrina "raised her burqa and pursed her swollen lips and spat out"—a final mark of her rebellion (267).

While Qatrina thus devotes much of her life to questioning the militant fundamentalism of the Taliban regime, her daughter takes this struggle a step forward. Zameen's persecution is even more extensive than Qatrina's, delivered by Soviet, Afghan and American fundamentalisms of various kinds. First, Soviet soldiers, who raid Marcus's house, capture her: "Your daughter is sympathetic to the insurgency. Her name is on the list we have been given by an insider" (16). The "insider", who we later find is a Muslim cleric, provides her name as a participant in a recent anti-communist massacre in retaliation to what he deems the irreverence of her family to the Taliban regime. Assisted by a Soviet defector Benedickt, Zameen eventually settles with her son in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. Her body, an important space for the writing of a transnational feminist narrative, integrates the oppression of women by Islamic fundamentalists, Soviet communists and American expansionists (she is later made captive by American forces in the region, led by James Palentine). Zameen's response to David's concern ("Are you alright?") is met with hostility that has resulted from these multiple sources of oppression—"I have to be, don't I? We have to be, don't we? Just as long as you Americans and Soviets can play your games over there—nothing else matters" (150).

I suggest that Zameen presents an alternative form of identification to the diffident Afghan woman in the normative Anglo-American discourse. She is depicted in transnational terms—as someone “who knew the Lake District, knew Edinburgh and London nearly as well as she knew Mazar-i-Sharif and the Buddhas of Bamiyan” (200). This sentimental description of Zameen by Marcus to Lara, and their subsequent exchange about Zameen’s love for the Yorkshire Moors and its “woods full of bluebells” which place in the midst of war-torn Afghanistan posits an innate connection between spaces and lived experiences. Living in a house provided by a Western aid agency, Zameen becomes a humanitarian agent herself, encouraging local women from refugee camps to enter her house and embroider and sew in secret. The risks involved in this act make it even more treacherous, given that under the Taliban regime work and education are strictly denied to women, “so much so that a woman in possession of a silk thread is branded a wanton.” (142) But despite this “[h]er fiercest loyalty” we are told, “had been to these women” (150) who fundamentalists would leave with no alternative but to beg on the street if she did not facilitate this secret means of livelihood. Aslam posits an element of solidarity between Zameen and the women who come to embroider in secrecy in her house on the basis of their courage on one hand, and their shared oppression on the other. But even their sources of oppression have a transnational component; while Zameen becomes an agent of a “Western” aid agency, it is another representative of the “West”, David, who misinterprets her actions as that of a Soviet spy. Benedickt, who aids her escape from Soviet detention camps, violates her body by raping her repeatedly. The refusal of Taliban warlords to provide her newborn son with healthcare without the provision of sufficient funds leaves Zameen no option but to practice prostitution for a short span of time. In support and solidarity with Zameen’s

sorrow, her neighbour explains to David later on, “[s]he had to do it for about three months. There was no alternative, you must understand. After she gave up she was sometimes accosted by her former...clients” (151).

Dunia, the third of Aslam’s female protagonists, is presented as his most obvious transnational figure—there is nothing about her that specifically positions her in a particular geographical space. Aligned with neither American conservatism nor with Islamic fundamentalism, she represents the educated intellectual of Afghanistan and brings the novel’s feminism into the present day. Like Aslam, her home could be anywhere. Her ideological positioning leads her to question and challenge the extremes of both Islamic and American fanaticism, and thereby facilitating Aslam’s own intentional blurring of the boundary between the two. She does however succeed in opening up lines of communication between the representatives of both these standings, drawing out one and silencing the other. The narrative movements in the novel underline this position, which I will briefly discuss here.

The first episode involves her brief verbal exchange with Casa in the premises of Marcus’s house—where they have both sought refuge. Hitherto, Dunia has remained silent in his presence, her only contact with him being the exchange of a prayer mat five times a day. But when Dunia and Casa finally begin to talk, their dialogue becomes significant on various levels. To begin with, it subverts any notions about the sexual passivity of Afghan women:

Touching her eye she brings away a teardrop that has grains of kohl dissolved in it. She is as amazed as he seems to be when her hand advances towards his face and the dissolved kohl is rubbed into his right cheek.

“What are you doing?” he asks in a hollow voice.

“To keep off the bad eye.” Rendering a perfect thing a little less perfect, to stop the djinn from coveting it.

“I ... wish I didn’t feel alone all the time,” he says at last. (269)

The significance of this episode lies partly in Dunia’s success in drawing Casa out of the depths of his quiet anger against the Americans and his profound sense of loneliness. In doing so, of course Aslam also reiterates his sympathetic characterization of Casa. Dunia’s relationship with Islam is never marked by Casa’s “fear of Allah’s retribution”; sharing little more than the prayer mat they pass between them (270). She challenges Casa’s oppressive Islamic identity through her sexual and emotional awareness. Dunia’s “shot of furious energy” to Casa’s reproach—“Aren’t you ashamed of going about the way you do? [...] A Muslim woman should always keep her face covered” results in the two never speaking again in the novel. Aslam silences Casa, letting Dunia have the last word—“Who told you that?” and reiterating that “He has no answer” (320).

In the second episode, Dunia enters into a dialogue with James Palentine and his team at Marcus’s house. Dunia’s sense of pride is piqued by the suspicion on the part of the American officers regarding her identity and right to be in Marcus’s house that repeat the sense of fear and alienation she has already experienced at the hands of the Afghans and Taliban. She eventually refuses to any longer tolerate such offensive interrogation: “I am a little tired of having to prove who I am.” James Palentine’s attempts at justifying American presence in Afghanistan by way of an apology to Dunia —“We are here to help your country. We came to get rid of the Taliban for you”— but he is not allowed to finish his sentence. Dunia’s next words conflate Palentine and Casa—“You are as bad as he is”—thus asserting her right not to be

categorised in the broad divisions of “liberal” or “extremist”, cancelling out the normative notions of “civilised”, “savage”, “terrorist” and “terrorised” (374).

Qatrina, Zameen and Dunia, along with the other minor female characters portrayed in Aslam’s narrative become the spokespeople for a transnational feminist narrative that seeks to both recognize differences and borders across generations of time and space but also look into the possibilities of their transcendence. Their socio-economic and political challenges, their powerful confrontation of these challenges and their eventual tragic framings lead me to summarise their innate and inextricable linking in the words of Anna Akhmatova, who Lara quotes in the novel: “[a]s if I was drinking my own tears from a stranger’s cupped hands” (92).

2.5 A Wasted Vigil?

Robert Eaglestone appositely asks, “[h]ow have leading contemporary Anglophone writers to date reflected on the ‘War on Terror’?” by looking at four novels as case studies—Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005), Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2006) and Martin Amis’s short story “The Last Days of Muhammad Atta” (2006). He suggests that all of these novels engage variously with the resentment against Europe and America for their “fuzzy” and inadequate understanding on contemporary terror-related politics around the world. Eaglestone professes that all of these novels fail to address the claims they make about understanding terrorism and exploding the moral and political logic of the “war on terror”. He concedes the possibility that this failure can be attributed to the limitations of the genre of the novel itself. This concession however, appears to be only a secondary one, and is not presented in any significant detail in the essay.

Eaglestone’s contentions against these novels, despite affirming some of their intellectual and literary merits, ranges from their lack of provision of plausible alternative paradigms and their inability to portray realistic characters and probe their beliefs (if they are fundamentalist it is important to know what they are fundamentalist about) to their refusal to “engage with the otherness of terrorists and their ideas” (366-7). The problem, as discussed in detail in the Introduction, seems to be that while the novels all portray the world and its people as ever changing, they do not address how or more importantly, why, these changes take place. There is in the “current crisis, a very different set of discourses that demand engagement” and that the Anglo-American academic and cultural paradigm do not provide a sufficiently large platform to accommodate alternative discourses, leave alone to subvert the

existing stereotypes. They attempt to “rephrase terror in distinctly Western terms—blaming it on evil, illness or on universal desires” (368). Eaglestone goes as far as to suggest that the “West” is yet to fully comprehend what the crisis of terror really is about and that to understand this would be the first step towards defeating terrorism. To keep defining and redefining terror from a western perspective, he argues, is a kind of self-defeating “blindness, of a sort well known to postcolonial theory” (369).

While I agree with many of the points on which Eagleton takes issue regarding the recent “westernized” depictions of terror, I have proposed here that *The Wasted Vigil* offers a departure from this tradition; I argue that its ability to transcend the normative approaches to terror lies in its ability to access the phenomenon of terror from multiple, nuanced perspectives. I have explored ways in which Aslam is himself equipped to tell this multi-dimensional narrative, based on his own experience as an immigrant in Britain after spending his childhood and youth in Pakistan and of the diverging, often contradictory facets of his upbringing. Aslam explains about his childhood, “[i]n my own extended family when staying with my father’s relatives, people were painting, singing, the radio was on, and there were beautiful photos on the wall. My mother’s side of the family was far more austere; [...] Although I found my mother’s side difficult it helped me understand a range of people” (Chambers 146). So while in the novel we are exposed to the fundamentalist psychology of someone like James Palentine who believes that in torturing thousands of Afghans (most of them innocent) he is “still doing what [he] can for his country and the world”, there are also genuine attempts at deciphering the psychology underlining Casa’s acts as a terrorist—his motivations, his jihadi training and his anti-American sentiments. Resentful on many accounts against the Americans he struggles predominantly with understanding their scorn and disdain for him. This personalized

resentment is then universalized in Casa's logic: "[e]very Muslim should be told what his fate would be if his sword hand fails. This is his country, but the sense of entitlement he detects their eyes brings home to him the full extent of the peril and challenge faced by Islam" (211).

It is in its nuanced appraisal of the notions of identity, nation, terror and religion that the novel ultimately offers promise; by acknowledging the validity of conflicting convictions and by interrogating and challenging the discourse on "right and wrong" and "moral and immoral", "terrorist and terrorised", it models some kind of transnational reconciliation. The novel is constantly alive to the idea of life and migration as heterogeneous experiences steeped in horror and beauty, tragedy and comedy. Of course Aslam has first-hand experience of this, remarking, "[p]ersonally I think cultures should intermingle, but we mustn't romanticize the immigrant's often cruel journey" (Chambers 146). These reconciliations are enormously aided by Aslam's stylistic blending of beauty and violence in the narrative. His stylistic artistry finds its inspiration, to some extent, in the work of miniature artist Abdur Rehman Chughtai, who Aslam has professed a particular debt to: "Chughtai showed me that art can be composed by people like me. This statement indicates how difficult it can be to live in another culture. It is easy to idealize cultural migration ... it can be a positive experience [...] however ... migration [can be] terribly traumatic". (Chambers 146)

I wish to conclude this chapter on *The Wasted Vigil* with a brief reference to Michael Ondaatje's fourth novel, *Anil's Ghost* (2000). The setting in the novel is Sri Lanka, enveloped by the forces of destruction and corruption, and while the civil war rapidly loses count of its victims, neither the representatives of local nor their international counterparts are able to recognise or define the roots of the crises.

Remarking on the horrific atrocities and state-sponsored terrorism over two decades, the character of Gamini in *Anil's Ghost* says, "Everyone's scared Anil. It's a national disease" (53). Countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan too can be justifiably included in an ever-expanding set of "diseased" nations. As nations of the global north have historically had a role to play in the proliferation of this disease, and continue to do so today, it would be fair to include them in such a list too. *The Wasted Vigil* explores the terrifying presence of this moral and political disease in Afghanistan but is constantly aware of the transnational proportions of the malady of terrorism. It works its way towards establishing that Afghanistan is not "alien" or isolated by token of the moral urgency of its situation—the problem is global, and Afghanistan is but one node of modern, international terror. Young proposes that in novels such *Anil's Ghost* there can be found a palpable and concerted effort at presenting that the effects of terror can be resisted—and that in fact to live a human life they have to be transcended. The novel "critiques the assumption that people in the West know how to respond to such terrorism, in particular the assumption that international human rights discourse is the best way to help those who are living through it" (324). In this analysis, a "rights"-based activism can only be a product of geographical and cultural distance. However, many characters in *Anil's Ghost* and indeed *The Wasted Vigil* respond to terror by "locking down into a state in which emotion itself is abandoned" (324). They retreat into themselves and sometimes they emerge creatively and imaginatively from this retreat; it is a process of detachment, rebuilding, reconstructing and becoming "[s]ome people let their ghosts die, some don't" (53). Ondaatje offers the possibility of ordinary and average individuals who initiate a process by which the "cascading demons of terror are contained and instead of disparaging the terrorists, constantly belittling their motives and living in a state of

hysterical fear, they inhabit a space of ‘androgyny and non-violence’, almost sedate and other worldly (Young 326). *The Wasted Vigil* portrays a space in which humans coexist with bombs, a world in which many people begin to develop a kind of immunity to suffering. Marcus is an excellent example of what Ondaatje suggests in *Anil’s Ghost*; he represents future hope despite all that he has lost to war. The very last sentence of the novel bears testimony to this hope, suggesting that Marcus, despite all that has been lost and destroyed around him is still hopeful of a meeting with his grandson—“He enters the building and asks if someone would be kind enough to take him to the city centre in a while. He is meeting someone there who could be Zameen’s son” (369). *The Wasted Vigil* enables a resonance of voices—no matter how seemingly disparate—which in turn collectively establish the universal foundation of terror by token of which we always have been, and remain, intricately interconnected. This interconnectivity of human society is what, as Aslam artistically shows, makes survival both possible and beautiful. The Buddha’s head remains intact at the end of *The Wasted Vigil*, a final mark of the coexistence of destruction and endurance.

Chapter 3

Deconstructing 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”

—W.B. Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk*

3.1. Introduction

The release of Mira Nair's film adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (henceforth *TRF*) in 2013 closely followed the terrorist bombings during the Boston Marathon. The findings that attributed the Boston attacks to an alleged Islamic militant group (reportedly as a response to the continuing war in Afghanistan) later led to criticism against the “untimely” release of the film. Lauri Neff's media coverage of the story, entitled “No reluctance to release ‘Fundamentalist’ film”, expressed the American public's discomfort at this alleged insensitivity on the part of the production team, and the team's response: “[i]nstead of being concerned about the release of ‘The Reluctant Fundamentalist’ so soon after last week's Boston Marathon bombings, the cast says the film presents an opportunity for understanding” (Breitbart). Christian Toto's reportage of the same story expressed

a similar public reaction: “You'd think the cast of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* would be concerned that their film is coming on the heels of yet another terrorist attack carried out by extremist Muslims” (Breitbart)

While the agitation against the timing of Nair's film adaptation of *TRF* appears in itself erroneous, it is the barrage of furious public responses to the articles that warrant greater attention. The comments, which rapidly transformed into frenzied debates about Islam, terrorism and America, were chiefly directed towards films such as *TRF*, holding them guilty of endorsing Islamic extremism and the manslaughter of innocent civilians in countries like America. Upon reading these comments it occurs to me that *TRF*, as a novel and a film, is being widely interpreted as a literary counterpart of terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists. The responses generally equate Islam with fundamentalism and deride the religion:

“Oh, great, let's just pretend that Muslim jihadis don't terrorize!”

“This should be a flop and deservedly so.”

“You are mistaken. I do not fear Islam, I loathe it.”

“Please provide us with book, chapter and verse from the New Testament where it is written that Christians must kill or oppress those who don't ‘subscribe to their ideology’.” (Breitbart)

While *TRF* has been avidly consumed in the global north, many American and European readers, it would appear, are not willing to accommodate a narrative about 9/11 related by a Pakistani-American. Nair and her cast have tenaciously promoted the film as an endeavour at alleviating such anti-Islamic sentiments, reiterating that “[w]e are riddled with Islamophobia, we are riddled with xenophobia in many, many

ways” and adding that *TRF* provided “a bridge between two worlds that [we] know and [we] love and desperately need to understand each other” The timing of the film’s release, from this perspective, only helps to reinforce what Nair declares to be its main aim. She refers to the Boston Marathon blasts as “another reminder [of] how the suffering that is global, that you see every day in other places in the world, has now become local” (Breitbart).

My reading of *TRF* proposes that Hamid alters the axis on which much of the contemporary discourse on terrorism takes place in literature and the media. Like Shamsie, he offers a context within which to analyse (without condoning) the recent trajectory of terrorist attacks on America and Europe. Whereas the attacks on 9/11, 7/7 and 11-M are often cited as epochal moments responsible for the reverberations felt by the structures of contemporary Euro-American multicultural society *TRF* makes a concerted effort at flouting such presentist claims. The novel along with Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* and Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013) disturb the notion of a causal relationship between 9/11 and the rupture of the so-called multicultural consensus in North America and Europe. The challenge to this particular perspective remains at the heart of *TRF*, which is at pains to demonstrate the fragility of multiculturalism many decades before the September 2001 attacks.

It is the positioning of 9/11 as both unprecedented and apocalyptic that justified popular manifestations of Islamophobia in Europe and America. The events of 9/11 have influenced the growing pace of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim crimes of hatred but it is grossly mistaken (and dangerous) to view Islamophobia as “consequential” based on the glib notion that “stop the terrorism and Islamophobia will stop also” (14). It is suggested that “the term Islamophobia most likely evolved

out of the grass roots situation being faced by Muslims in the London borough of Brent in the early 1980s” (16). Abdullah Faliq writes that “[f]ar from it being an abstract intellectual exercise, Islamophobia or anti-Muslimism is a reality today” and its proliferation has led to racist attacks and activities at many different levels of society. Liz Fekete has spoken about a “new MaCarthyism”, only today the “Islam scare” is replacing the “red scare” (New Macarthyism 64-70).. But of course critics like Nathan Lean have taken the debate a step beyond destabilising cause and effect of Islamophobia in *The Islamic Industry – How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* and argues that like anti-Semitism or xenophobia of any kind, Islamophobia too has a long and complex history. Its visibility now is seen by Lean as little more than a “resonance” resulting from the cumulative effect of Muslim migration to the global north in the late twentieth century, “the Iranian Revolution, hijackings, hostage taking, and other attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon” (x).

On and after the tenth anniversary of 9/11, European and American governments have continued to grapple with the perceived challenges of immigration, while Muslims residing in the global north have felt increasingly threatened in both public and private spaces. These feelings, exacerbated by a “crisis-oriented and headline driven” environment (Lean X) have resulted in widespread feelings of fear, alienation and injustice throughout these societies. Groups in Florida revealed plans to burn copies of the Quran on the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attack at the Dove World Outreach Centre church in Gainesville. In 2011 Flintshire Muslim Cultural Society’s announcement to open a mosque in North Wales resulted in a serious arson attack on the premises intended for its construction. In the same year the American CIA agent, Raymond Davis, shot two young Pakistani men who allegedly attempted to rob him in Lahore and a vehicle despatched to protect Davis ran over another

innocent pedestrian. In 2008 French Muslim graves were found desecrated near Arras with a pig's head hanging from a headstone. For many in Europe and America, the targeting of Muslim citizens has become a natural response to the elimination of Islamic terrorism.⁵⁷ In 2011 the British Conservative Party MP, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi addressed her concerns about the “rising tide of anti-religious bigotry” in Britain, suggesting that it has become socially acceptable to express prejudiced views against diasporic Muslims, paving the way to a “sloppy kind of religious illiteracy” about Islam. Anti-Muslim sentiments had passed what she called the “dinner-table test” (Speech 201).⁵⁸

Interested in the intersection of literature, politics and history, it is in this political climate of mounting fear and anxiety regarding Muslims both within and outside European and America, that I present my reading of Hamid's novel. *TRF*

⁵⁷ For further reading see Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg's *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (2007) which considers both the formal and casual means by which Islam and Muslims have been demonized in Western Europe and North America, and the misconceptions that pervade the minds of many people with regards Muslims. It examines the associations made with Islam and the Middle East, Muslim men and terrorism and Muslim women and suppression, in order to assess how ingrained these links have become in an Anglo-American imaginary.

⁵⁸ This speech was closely followed by British Prime Minister David Cameron's address at the Munich Security Conference in Germany in February 2011. Cameron's address suggested that “state multiculturalism has failed”, and asserted that any “genuinely” liberal country “believes in certain values and actively promotes them”. These values included the tenets of “Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Democracy. The rule of law. Equal rights, regardless of race, sex or sexuality”. Cameron insisted that all citizens of the United Kingdom needed to believe that “This is what defines us as a society. To belong here is to believe these things.” The “doctrine of state multiculturalism”, on the other hand, Cameron outlines, was based on the premise that different cultures lead to different modes of living, and that as a result British society has failed to cultivate a sense of homogenous belonging—“We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values.” Cameron advocated, like Tony Blair and Gordon Brown before him, a strengthening of a common “national identity”, and hoped that a received ideology of Britishness would dramatically resuscitate a fractured and feeble society. His speech with varied degrees of approval, but had a disappointed and hostile reception by the British Muslim community. (Speech 2011)

offers us a Pakistani autodiegetic narrator, Changez, who upon his return from America delivers a monologue to a wholly silent American listener—a visitor in Lahore—with the professed purpose of explaining his own appearance, behaviour and relationship with America and Pakistan. The American auditor, assigned no lines of his own in the narrative, communicates to the reader via Changez’s paraphrasing of his comments, questions and descriptions of his body language. This device, at one level, allocates complete control of voice and agency to Changez the narrator. In other words, in the novel, America has “the right to remain silent” while an alternative version of events of 9/11 is presented to us. I will argue here that by making his autodiegetic narrator deliberately unreliable, Hamid has not only created a productive distance between authorial and narratorial perspectives but also made the relationship between America and the Pakistan more nuanced than a simple case of postcolonial resentment. In a similar vein, Janet Wilson suggests that “[t]he withholding of any voice from Changez’s companion and the ventriloquizing of his presence through answers to his questions seemingly “others” the American, so reversing the dichotomised western/subaltern relationship” (*Essays on Fundamentalism*, forthcoming). During this process Changez conveys his own anxiety with regards to the American (there are implications he may be armed), as well as the American’s paranoia regarding Pakistan, making it difficult for the reader to develop uncomplicated sympathies. The use of second person narration, implicating the reader as a participant, allows for a range of interpretations of the novel to coexist. This is of course is precisely the authorial intent:

In my novel, there is also an attempt to fundamentally implicate the reader. So if you view the world as fundamentally as [sic] a world where there is a war between civilizations, then the novel is a thriller. If you don’t, it is equally a

random encounter between two separate guys who go their separate ways. So if it's a thriller or not depends on the preconceptions we bring to it as a reader. (Qtd. in Chambers 2011:178)

TRF's significance as a contemporary novel has mainly been attributed to its role in combating the stereotypes held against Muslims after 9/11 and challenging the prejudices against Islam and Pakistan in contemporary America. As such, its reviewers have concluded that the novel attempts to challenge what Edward Said has called the efforts "[t]o demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the grounds that it is 'enraged' at modernity is to turn Muslims into objects of a therapeutic, punitive attention" (*Covering Islam* 1997: XXXV -XXXVI). The aim of this chapter is partly to endorse this reading of the novel as a critique of Islamophobic discourse in contemporary Euro-American societies. However, my reading of *TRF* ascribes as much significance to the use of the term "reluctant" as it does to "fundamentalist". Changez's transition from a "lover of America" to a "reluctant fundamentalist" is neither abrupt nor uncomplicated; it is a complex and conflicted process, which originates considerably *before* the tragedy of 9/11 and does not necessarily culminate with his return to Pakistan. This process is further problematized by two important details—one, the novel's navigation of Changez's altered relationship with America is always seen through his class affiliation and second, Changez is never, even after his radicalisation towards the end of the novel, shown to be particularly "Islamic". Islam in Hamid's novel is much more a "cultural identifier" than a "religious dogma" (Harleen Singh 25).

Changez experiences a profound sense of exclusion and displacement both in Pakistan and in America before and after 9/11. Prior to 9/11, as I demonstrate here, this displacement occurs on a subconscious level and is registered by Changez only

retrospectively. In order to formulate an understanding of this experience, the first section of this chapter investigates the shifting meaning of multiculturalism in Europe and America, highlighting its fragility both before and after 9/11. The second section introduces the notion of “double consciousness”; drawing from the works of W.E.B. Dubois and Paul Gilroy, it suggests that Hamid’s protagonist inhabits a fractured mental and physical space of double consciousness—first in his capacity as a student at an American Ivy League institution, and then as an employee at a powerful and exclusive investment analyst company, Underwood Samson. Considering both the limiting and the liberating possibilities of this double consciousness, the chapter moves on to ask on behalf of Changez, and borrowing from W.B. Dubois, the question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” My reading suggests that 9/11, rather than being an inaugurating moment, serves to *add* a sense of urgency to an already urgent crisis. Changez’s retrospective and incensed enquiry into America’s politics and intervention in world affairs, particularly in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan is examined here, alongside an exploration of the reasons that lead to the formation of this perspective. Like the other writers I have examined in this thesis, Hamid’s writing is a robust and determined attempt at historicising the tragedy of 9/11 and seeks to shatter the prevailing political myth of “Ground Zero”. Like Singh, I suggest, “modernity in [Hamid’s novel] is unsettled by a historicity that questions the constitutive elements of crisis” (25).

My reading of the novel reveals that Changez’s disillusionment with (and sense of alienation in) America after 9/11 disclose a loss of faith in his “American dream” which had hitherto served as a way out of his declining wealth and class status in Pakistan. Running alongside his alienation in America is his sense of alienation in Pakistan, where he feels unable to form attachments or empathy and which eventually

transforms into a desperate need to form affiliations with those people in Pakistan who far from being able to partake in the “American dream”, are palpably harmed by it. Discussing this double bind in light of Partha Chatterjee’s essay “Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love” (1998), I make a case for Changez’s inability, despite his political reservations, to give up his love and connection with America. Changez’s alienation from America does not lead to an intransigent Islamic fundamentalist identity. To the contrary, I suggest, that in the final analysis the novel offers the vision of a more fluid transnational identity that questions and challenges the limitations exerted by geographical boundaries and territorial nationalisms.

Terrorism, as reiterated by Hamid’s narrative and the other novels discussed in this study, is also a transnational phenomenon that needs to be understood in the context of its long historical duration, as opposed to instances of unique or singular violence. Changez eventually becomes the vocalizer of the reality that 9/11 is but one marker of violence in the world—a fact that American and European fiction after 9/11 seems to ignore in favour of or of monumentalizing the 9/11 moment. Equally, through Changez, Hamid affirms that notwithstanding its current signification, the term “fundamentalism” (and the associated term “fundamentalists”) has universal currency. In so doing, Hamid engenders alternative understandings of fundamentalism as part of his greater interest in interpreting the tragedy of 9/11 from a pluralized perspective.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ In “Fundamentalist Islam at Large—The Drive for Power” (1996) Martin Kramer considers that “[t]he Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English now defines fundamentalism as the ‘strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, especially Islam.’ However problematic this formula, it does acknowledge that fundamentalism in Islam is today the most visible and influential of all fundamentalisms”.

3.2. Multiculturalism: A Misnomer?

Echoing the exasperations of postcolonial thought more generally, Hamid says, “[i]t seems bizarre to me [...] The French are so French, the Germans so German, and everything is about narrow nationalism, as opposed to reaching out for a common humanity” (Chambers 187). The effect of what Hamid calls “narrow nationalism” is sadly unmitigated by Anglo-American efforts at claiming otherwise—“popular western perception tends to view the conflicts generated by 9/11 as a similarly benevolent endeavour (to colonialism)—chivalric crusades to rescue women chafing under the burden of the veil, or politically idealistic measures to bring democracy to pre-modern, dictatorial regimes” (Singh 25). The recent banning of the *burqa* by the French government in April 2011, alongside the caveat of a \$30000 fine against the male enforcement of the Islamic female garment on women is clearly couched in the language of secular universalism, allegedly aimed at protecting the dignity and liberty of Muslim women in the country. Contrary to the professed intentions of the French government, however, the ban seems to have had an adverse effect on Muslim women’s rights in France. *The Guardian’s* coverage of the predicament of Hind Ahmas, a Parisian Muslim woman was headlined “France’s burqa ban: women are effectively under ‘house arrest’” and quoted Ahmas’s views on the situation:

My quality of life has seriously deteriorated since the ban. In my head, I have to prepare for war every time I step outside, prepare to come up against people who want to put a bullet in my head. The politicians claimed they were liberating us; what they've done is to exclude us from the social sphere. Before this law, I never asked myself whether I'd be able to make it to a cafe or collect documents from a town hall. One politician in favour of the ban said

niqabs were “walking prisons”. Well, that's exactly where we've been stuck by this law. (*The Guardian*)

The impact of the *burqa* ban presents not just the limits of French state secularism and nationalism but also leads once again to the question of the gradual demise of “multiculturalism” in Europe and America.⁶⁰

While political commentators and writers have increasingly expressed anxieties about the pressures exerted on it by 9/11 and 7/7, multiculturalism has of course been under threat long before this date. The fragmentations and divisions that are witnessed in the contemporary world are, despite what fictional and non-fictional writing in America and Britain may tell us, neither unique nor new.⁶¹ The anthropologist Sindre Bangstad suggests that European multiculturalism “has a particularly dark history regarding its treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, and with that follows a burden of moral responsibility. It is a burden that must be shouldered even in the bleak and challenging times we are living in at present” (*Immanent Frame*). Chrysavgi Papagianni reinforces this view: “despite the undeniable progress that multiculturalists have made in both Europe and America in our days events like ‘9/11’—or at least the manipulation of them by conservative politics—undermine multicultural efforts for coexistence and foster instead assimilation and monoculturalism” (2).

⁶⁰ In *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2012) Leila Ahmed traces the history of the Muslim veil, advocating that it is increasingly being worn as a symbol of strength—she cites the examples of American Muslim women wearing the veil in support of their Palestinian counterparts—and not as much out of compulsion. Like Hina Ahmas, Ahmed also presents a case for the veil as an emancipatory as opposed to oppressive choice.

⁶¹ In “Open Doors, Closed Minds” (2008) Richard Gray debunks the notion of 9/11 leaving a “yawning and possibly unbridgeable gap between before and after”. This notion is, according to Gray, both misleading and an important defining feature of much of the fiction that has emerged from Europe and North America after 9/11.

Visible assertions of monoculturalism and national identification were, admittedly, seen to escalate in the aftermath of 9/11. Critics such as Qiong Li and Marylinn B Brewer have posited differences in these responses of national identification by grouping them into patriotic (positive, inclusive) and nationalistic (negative, exclusionary) categories. Their extensive survey of American citizens after 9/11 highlights the shallowness of the idea of cultural diversity, which is often seen by their interviewees as the opposite of patriotism. They conclude: “patriotism and nationalistic American identity combined are related to less tolerance to cultural diversity, negative attitudes towards minority groups and restricted criteria for identification as a ‘true’ American” (736). Hamid’s protagonist witnesses the rapidity with which attitudes towards him in the U.S. alter, both socially and professionally, in the wake of the attacks. This manifestation of hatred, both verbal and physical, appears to be the result of a powerful latent anger. And indeed the same can be said of Changez’s own resentment towards American political and social life, which had been accumulating much prior to 9/11, albeit largely unnoticed by him. What Li and Brewer call patriotism palpably and visibly gives way to a nationalism that works to exclude him after this moment. Anna Hartnell explains that 9/11, as a deeply ambivalent sign of transnationalism and globalization, has re-framed older debates about American multiculturalism—which have in the past tended to construe the nation’s cultural conflicts as a civil war rather than one that takes place within a wider global milieu (336). Hamid, having himself experienced the liminality of his protagonist, can play an empathetic role here. Post 9/11 xenophobia, which was based on religious and racial “othering”, proves particularly problematic to Changez who is determined to love America.

After 9/11 Changez, and thousands of others like him, faced the challenge of forcefully reassessing their own efforts at assimilation in America, called upon to overcompensate, as it were, for the acts of the Muslim terrorists with whom they happened to share a religion. This process worked in reverse to the palpable and definitive process of the alienation of Muslims at various levels of social and political life in America. The urgent and somewhat defensive attempt at reiterating “Americanness” is reflected in Changez, who like many other Pakistani-Americans struggles with his image and perception after 9/11. As a novelist and a journalist representative of Pakistan and the Muslim community, Hamid also experiences the tensions and pressures of this process of re-identification. After attending an event in Germany during a recent book tour, where he was repeatedly confronted by the jargon of “we Europeans” and “you Muslims,” Hamid writes, “[e]ventually I was so exasperated that I pulled my British passport out of my pocket and started waving it over my head. “While it’s true the UK hasn’t yet joined the Eurozone,” I said, “I hope we can all agree that that country is in fact in Europe” (*The Guardian*)⁶²

Under these circumstances, diasporic Muslims feel the need to constantly and continually negotiate their identities, inhabiting a space that is often gripped with fear of them and hostility *against* them. The 9/11 attacks, a “dramatic tipping point” served to justify the “disparate treatment of Muslims in the media, in society, and by government” (Moore 119). This freedom of hatred, as it were, licensed not least by President George Bush – “‘they’ (Muslims) hate us for our freedoms”—led to a

⁶² Hamid’s main contention in this article is that “Islam is not a monolith”. He explains that as he travelled he was “struck by the large numbers of interviewers and audience members at Q&A’s who spoke of Islam as a monolithic thing, as if Islam referred to a self-contained and clearly defined world, a sort of Microsoft Windows, obviously different from, and considerably incompatible with, the Apple OS X-like operating system of ‘the west’” (*The Guardian*).

dramatically increased “visibility” of Islam in books, media, the internet, on the streets and inside homes (Moore 120). Moore further suggests, “the exceptionalism of the Muslim American experience illustrates the desirability, and perhaps the inevitability, of rethinking what it means to speak of pluralism in America” (130).

It is this historically and politically charged realm of perceived European and American multiculturalism that Hamid explores. As we witness Changez’s “falling out” with the American corporate machinery, and the “impending destruction of [his] personal American dream” (106), one of Hamid’s chief concern is to reveal the long duration of regressive American nationalism beyond the 9/11 moment. In the latter half of the novel, Changez is struck by the epiphanic realization of the existence of American imperialist nationalism for the entirety of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Moreover, some of the most significant moments of this realization occur when Changez is outside America—Hamid’s way of suggesting that America needs to be decentered in any effective imagining of the world after 9/11. This decentring must be both geographical and historical, as the novel invites, like many of its contemporaries, a much broader historical perspective.

3.3. Changez’s “Double Consciousness”: How does it feel to be a problem?

More than a hundred years ago, W.E.B. Dubois appositely and contentiously declared that the fundamental question occupying the minds of Americans regarding the African settlers in their country is, “How does it feel to be a problem?” (*Souls of Black Folk* 1) It is a question, Dubois suggested, that stemmed from a combination of “curiosity and compassion”, and often remained either unasked or disguised in more socially accepted articulations (1). Essentially, Dubois was teasing out the

complexities of difference and the notion of a “double consciousness” or “twoness” that emerges as a condition of displacement and discrimination. He argued, demonstrating through his personal experience of racism from a very young age, that his own double consciousness urged him to excel in his foreign surroundings, and establish his identity thus—“[t]he sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads” (2). The intensity of his compulsion to excel was accompanied in his case with the realisation that some of the prizes that were more rightfully “theirs” than his had to be “wrest[ed]” from them, in some way or other—“by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head, —some way” (2). Dubois suggested that the “negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a ‘veil’ and equipped with a ‘second sight’—a double consciousness—with which to apprehend his surroundings, always seeing ‘one’s self through the eyes of others” (3). For Dubois, this double consciousness carried heroic proportions: “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (3).

Much later, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy picks up on Dubois’ formulation by considering the “specific forms of double consciousness” required by an individual or collective group who inhabit two identities, European and black, for instance (1). “Standing between two great cultural assemblages” (1), such an individual or group according to Gilroy, is encumbered with the mammoth undertaking of simultaneously negotiating a sense of continuity and separateness between the two cultural formations. He focuses on “the special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once”, questioning vigorously the existing “ethnic absolutism” of Cultural Studies

(3). Gilroy, who speaks as an “opponent of national history” and the “cultural insiderism” that accompanies it, warns about the transformation of nationalism into ethnic absolutism, which he defines as

A reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable. (“Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism” 115)

As a metaphor that underpins his study, Gilroy offers the haunting image of ships in passage, caught in a continuous movement. They refuse to be anchored permanently, and are an effective visualisation of Gilroy’s desire to be recognized as “being both Black and British in addition to everything else that I am” (117). The analogy contributes towards the development of Gilroy’s broader hermeneutic which proposes that “cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (*Black Atlantic* 15). Occupying this threshold space, an individual’s sense of home no longer carries the kind of supposed “settled feel” associated with someone who inhabits (mentally or territorially) only one nation at one time, but such fluidity eradicates the error of perceiving life and human existence through relatively constrained and bounded categories such as the nation. It is a subjective and complicated position that demands an “inversion” of the conventional relationship between the binaries of margin and centre. Simultaneously, it calls for what Gilroy fittingly terms “reconstructive intellectual labour” (45), which also facilitates the asking of crucial metaphysical questions such as “Who am I” and “When am I most myself?” (70)

What Dubois and Gilroy show about slavery and the Black Atlantic can now be related to Islamophobia and the figure of the contemporary Muslim. This imagining and interrogation of the “self” is signalled even on the very opening page of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Changez, Hamid’s protagonist, proclaims, “I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language” (1), simultaneously affirming the plausibility of this combination and the complications necessarily attached to it. Changez offers considerable unsolicited reassurance to the smartly dressed American he has come across in Lahore’s famous *Anarkali Bazaar*⁶³, protesting excessively and frequently his enduring love and affection for America despite his supposedly “anti-American” appearance—“Excuse me Sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened of my beard. I am a lover of America” (1). These four concise sentences spoken by Changez to his American listener succinctly summarise the thrust of one of the novel’s fundamental questions—that is, to what extent is his professed love for America congruous and compatible with his recent, albeit reluctant embrace of fundamentalism?

The power of this opening can only be sustained in the novel through, as I have suggested before, a revision of the normative cultural meaning of 9/11. In order to analyse Changez’s psychological, social and physical metamorphosis into a “reluctant fundamentalist”, the novel has to go beyond the rigidly fetishized 9/11 moment. Changez’s position in America prior to 9/11 is complex even before he is physically present in the country. Having been born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, Changez makes a decision to leave Pakistan with his family’s approval in order to

⁶³ Hamid uses the metropolis of Lahore as a setting in much of his writing, often exploring the changes in people and life styles that emerge when the thresholds of the old and new parts of the city are crossed. Hamid’s first novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000) “represents Lahore as an unevenly developed, international urban centre, which constantly interconnects with its Punjabi rural hinterland” (Chambers 176).

acquire a “foreign” education at Princeton Law School. Though his first reaction to this experience is one of unmistakable awe and admiration both for the institution and the country, it is one that becomes increasingly complicated as he continues his process of assimilation. The awe is reminiscent of what Partha Chatterjee describes as the wonder and veneration experienced by the first Indian visitors to England for this nation’s knowledge, skill, discipline and technological advances:

When I arrived at Princeton, I looked around me at the Gothic buildings—
younger, I later learned, than many of the mosques of Lahore, but made
through ingenious stonemasonry to look older—and thought, this is a dream
come true. The university inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in
which I was the star and everything was possible. Looking back now, I see
the power of that system, pragmatic and effective, like so much else in
America. We international students were sourced from around the globe,
sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly
customized evaluations until the best and the brightest of us had been
identified. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your
society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to
do so. I certainly was, at least at first. (Hamid 178)

Changez’s monologue consistently revisits the dilemma created by his sense of belonging in two spaces simultaneously. His veneration for Princeton, his initial thankfulness for being associated with it and his exulted prayer of thanks after being recruited by the financial firm, Underwood Samsun, all stem from a desire to reclaim in America a class position that his family is losing in Pakistan. Changez is particularly sensitive about this loss:

I am not poor; far from it: my great grandfather, for example was a barrister with the means to endow a school for the Muslims of the Punjab. Like him, my grandfather and father both attended university in England. Our family home sits on an acre of land in the middle of Gulberg, one of the most expensive districts of this city. We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener – which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth. (11)

However, had this been the sole determinant of Changez's Pakistani background, the entire matter of his identity and the complications attached to it would have been distinctly less problematical. While Changez takes pains to establish the social credentials of his family, he is also reluctantly compelled to confess to his listener that "we are not rich" (11). He explains, "[s]o we retain our Punjab Club membership. We continue to be invited to the functions and parties of the city's elite. And we look with a mixture of disdain and envy upon the rising class of entrepreneurs—owners of businesses legal and illegal—who power through the streets in their BMW SUVs" (11). Drawing a distinction between wealth and status, he argues that "status, as in any traditional, class conscious society, declines more slowly than wealth", comparing his situation to that of "the old European aristocracy of the nineteenth century, confronted by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie" (11). This discrepant relationship between respectable appearance and reality of wealth is frequently explored in Anglophone Pakistani fiction. And it is this same sense of the decay of class privilege and the desire to reclaim it leads to Changez's migration to an American Ivy League university.

His aspirations intricately woven with his sense of pride, Changez embraces two seemingly contradictory codes during his time at Princeton—"pretend all is well

or work hard to restore things to what they were” (12). Conducting himself in the manner of what he calls a “young prince”, he discreetly procures three campus jobs in locations unlikely to be frequented by his circle of friends and acquaintances, and prepares for his classes at night. Changez’s efforts to painstakingly maintain the façade of wealth and comfort reveal that even the financial aid package that enables him to study is more a source of shame than pride to him. This yearning to blend in with his peers is also the cause of considerable tension in the Underwood Samson interview room when Jim, his potential employer, enquires: “Do your friends here know that your family couldn’t afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship?” Changez’s responses to such a line of questioning are always brusque: “Excuse me, Jim, but is there a point to all this? (9). Jim’s question clearly touches a sensitive nerve. This defensiveness and irritability with regard to his class position in Pakistan pervades Changez’s American life, sometimes palpably and at other occasions more subtly, much before the occurrence of 9/11. 9/11 itself shatters any illusions he has nourished of salvaging his family’s declining wealth and class position back in Pakistan, depriving him in addition of even the veneer of respectability which his family continued, at the very least, to enjoy back home.

Changez’s holiday in Greece with a group of fellow students from Princeton is built into the narrative to offer crucial insights into the tensions that underlie his class-consciousness. The group comprises almost exclusively of members of the University’s prestigious eating club, “Ivy”—young men and women from affluent families with no insight or empathy of any kind into Changez’s financial struggle to sustain his own education. These are the American “aristocrats”, representative of the “old money”, who have maintained their stranglehold on American society in a way that Changez’s family are now failing to do in Pakistan. Here Changez’s identity,

compounded by his simultaneous affiliation and alienation from the group, is primarily as Erica's "exotic acquaintance" in the group.

The contradictions in his mind is a compelling one—he both wishes to retain his privileged access to this exclusive group of Princeton graduates but at the same time privately condemns their thoughtless indulgences. On the one hand he is overwhelmed by the opportunity to experience luxuries he had never before known, giving in to "the pleasures of being among this wealthy young fellowship" (23); on the other he confesses that there were "details which annoyed" him—"the ease with which they parted with money, for example, thinking nothing of the occasional—but not altogether infrequent—meal costing perhaps fifty dollars a head" (23). Changez's sensibilities are also piqued by the "self-righteousness" of his companions when it came to dealing with those to whom they had paid money for a service—waiters, for instance—irrespective of the difference in ages between them. Their complete lack of regard for people significantly older than them leads him to consider "by what quirk of human history my companions—many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they—were in a position to conduct themselves in a world as though they were its ruling class" (24). The fact that they *are* in fact the members of a global ruling class points further to his complicated feelings of envy and superiority towards them. Furthermore, Changez's class-consciousness is entwined with his sexuality. In addition to the boorish behaviour of his American peers, what further alienates him from them is his sexual reserve and awkwardness, depicted in his heightened sensitivity to the female body despite his regular sexual encounters with women in America. As he reflects about his first glimpse of Erica's breasts, he realizes he remains "acutely aware of visible female skin" (36). Changez's awkwardness here is symptomatic of a more complex internal struggle; on the one

hand his sexual under-confidence generates feelings of shame and frustration; on the other there is the equally powerful desire to disassociate himself from what he perceives to be social boorishness.

His double consciousness also manifests itself at other significant moments in the novel, particularly when he first ingests the magnificent view of Manhattan from the sophisticated interiors of the Underwood Samson office—“nothing had prepared me for the drama, the *power* of the view from their lobby.” The influence of this first exposure to the American corporate world is enough to make him conclude that “on that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm’s impressive offices made me *proud*” (38). However, this appreciation for his new professional environment and for New York more generally, is drenched in feelings of awe and wonderment, reinforcing the fact that this “was another world from Pakistan” (38). The glaring disparities between the two worlds, distilled in the visual image of New York’s skyline from his new office, serve only to shame him further. Again, it is history that is invoked to appease, albeit superficially, this sense of smallness: “four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians” (38). Changez’s aggressive desire to achieve and excel, stemming from this very financial and technological disparity between these two worlds, suggests perhaps that his sense of shame translates into a kind of defiant determination to prove his worth, *despite* his origins. This sense of professional determination and personal resolve seep through the tonal excitement of his monologue—“I worked hard—harder, I suspect, than any of the others: subsisting only on a few hours of

sleep a night—and I approached every class with utter concentration” (46).⁶⁴ While his tenacity impresses his seniors at work, what singles him out from the others is his “natural politeness and sense of formality”, which as he speculates, may have been a “barrier” in his relationship with his peers at university but proves to be extremely valuable in a professional setting: “whatever the reason, I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could” (48). His politeness, a mark of respect for social hierarchy—a stereotypically traditional Pakistani virtue—turns out to be a valued corporate skill. The crucial point here is that despite any illusions or allusions to the contrary, Changez, whether on grounds of his professional tenacity or the exoticness of his origins, always stands out from the clone-like uniformity of the newly employed team at Underwood Samson who “shorn of hair and dressed in battle fatigues, we would have been virtually indistinguishable” (43). What he thought to be his conservative social manners have an economic value in the professional environment of corporate America. Of course, Hamid’s play with the military metaphor here gestures to the larger political aspects at stake in the firm’s corporate values, which I later discuss in more detail.

Interestingly, it is Jim—Changez’s employer at Underwood Samson—and not Changez who first detects the economic potential of Changez’s “doubleness”, when he detects a “bit of the warrior” in him. As part of his literary strategy, Hamid’s presents Jim as both an empathetic character and a foil. However Jim, accurately in this case, recognizes the spirit of struggle with a sense of shame in Changez, advising him, “[d]on’t be ashamed of that. Nurture it” (50). Jim’s intervention here is borne

⁶⁴ The strive for the acquisition of wealth, and the ruthless entrepreneurial toil involved in becoming “rich” are central themes in Hamid’s novel, as I later demonstrate in relation to *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* as well. *Moth Smoke* explores the dangers of an obsession with wealth, where the protagonist’s (Daru) pursuit of drugs, sex and money is poetically conveyed via the image of a moth and a burning flame.

seemingly out of a sense of empathy for Changez's "foreignness" in America; in other words "it comes from feeling out of place" (48). Class and race are conflated once again, as Jim explains to Changez that he too "grew up on the other side", hence underlining the similarities between his own poverty and Changez's racial and ethnic marginalization. The "irony of paying a hundred bucks for a bottle of fermented grape juice" is not unknown to Jim. However, Changez's sense of self-respect and the defensiveness harnessed to it, resist Jim's offer of empathy—"The confession that implicates its audience is—as we say in cricket—a devilishly difficult ball to play" (80). He does not wish to accept any affiliation with his employer's sense of unbelonging and an underprivileged past. Though he acknowledges the existence of certain similarities between them, he is determined to clarify the differences between their respective "other sides"—"I did not grow up in poverty. But I did grow up with a poor boy's sense of *longing*, in my case not for what my family had never had, but for what we had had and lost" (81). While Jim's attempted affiliation offends Changez's sense of class privilege, the only concession he makes is when linking America with Pakistan on the basis of their historical experiences of European colonization: "like Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country continue to be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine" (47).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Mueenuddin's protagonist in "Our Lady of Paris", Sohail, is also a Pakistani who moves to America to attain university education. The depictions of Sohail and Changez are, however, markedly different, owing mainly to the differences in the financial status of their families in Pakistan. As the son of an affluent businessman from an elite family, Sohail is never marked by his work ethic, professional determination or tenacity. His desire to find employment in America appears half hearted, and in the opinion of his mother, unnecessary. The decline in the wealth of Changez's family thus powers his ambition, success and eventual disenchantment with the system.

The complexity of Changez's double consciousness is made palpable in more mundane scenarios such as his very first dinner at Erica's parents' home. His first dilemma, with regards to his appearance is finally resolved when he decides to take "advantage of the ethnic exception clause that is written into every code of etiquette" and wears a white embroidered *kurta* over a pair of jeans. On the subway, in what he pointedly describes as the "cosmopolitan" nature of New York, he seems to blend in seamlessly. But his meeting with Erica's parents throws up further clash of social codes around the religious prohibition of alcohol consumption for Muslims. While Changez asserts his "Pakistaniness" often in the novel, when Erica's father hesitates to offer him alcohol he is keen to assure him that he not only drinks but that contrary to Western impressions, many Pakistanis do the same. But however quick he is to disassociate himself with the image of the common Pakistani who doesn't touch alcohol, his patriotism is immediately piqued when Erica's father offers broad and sweeping generalizations about the state of Pakistani politics and economics; he is a carefully chosen part of his representational strategy and echoes a set of clichéd sentiments about Pakistan—"Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people, don't get me wrong. I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism" (63). There are two things to note about the comment made somewhat casually by Erica's father—first, his obliviousness to the irony of America's culpability in the figurative raping of Pakistan and second Changez's anger at this "typically American undercurrent of condescension." He is plagued by the perceived superiority of what Chatterjee calls "a concept of the West" and his simultaneous disapproval of American politics (1335). As Erica notices, "You're touchy about where you come from" (64), an observation

that foreshadows Changez's later disillusionment with America. What we see here then is that Changez is straddling a range of contradictory ideological and identity positions, which includes his own disassociation from "ordinary" Pakistanis, "fundamentalism" and various kinds of religious restrictions but also a sense of discomfort in his affiliation with American elites.⁶⁶

But let us pause here to ask—does Changez's "double consciousness" present itself as a complicated and painful state of mind, or does Hamid offer the possibility of a positive double bind in his protagonist? Exploring the psychological understandings of double consciousness, Dickson D. Bruce Jr. writes,

Even as the Romantic idea, with its echoes of Sturm and Drang, highlighted the difficulty of resolution in the war between incompatible souls, so too the psychological literature stressed its difficulty. All the accounts of double consciousness reported its sufferers' great anguish, their real unhappiness upon becoming aware of their condition, their desire to possess a single individual self". (306)

Indeed, in the case of Changez there are several examples in the novel that signpost the discontentment, confusion and embarrassment that result from his dual sense of belonging. Dubois's solution to this agonizing and limiting condition was the merging of the double self "into a better and truer self" (4). Whereas Dubois has received criticism for an allegedly unsophisticated solution to a painful crisis from scholars

⁶⁶ Rafia, the mother of Sohail in Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms*, alludes to a similar double bind when expressing her concerns about her son's future in America, in her view rendering him "not American and not with any place in Pakistan" (149). Sohail, like Changez, eventually makes the decision to return to Pakistan. Unlike Changez, however, he is able to benefit enormously from both the wealth and social status that his father has accumulated back home. Their motivations, both for moving to America and returning to Pakistan contradict one another; while Changez's migration was largely motivated by the desire to reclaim his family's declining wealth in Pakistan, Sohail's return to Pakistan is encouraged by the prospect of returning to the embrace his family's wealth and class position.

such as Bruce Jr. and Ernest Allen Jr. (who critiques Dubois's use and interpretation of the term "double consciousness"), I argue that such a resolution resonates with Hamid's attempts to unravel his protagonist's dilemma. The narrative of the migrant—be it Changez or indeed Hamid—speaks neither from essentialist Pakistani or Islamic point of view. Nor does it participate in Euro-American centric "othering" to distance itself from the "other", in this case itself. It offers instead what Roger Bromley has usefully termed an "intense dialogicity: which fuses these two positions (Narratives 122). The stages of Changez's trajectory of American life—from defensiveness, to confusion, to despair, disillusionment and abandonment—are in the final analysis reconciled, if not resolved. I expand on this discussion further on in the chapter.⁶⁷

3.4. Changez's 9/11

Changez's first palpable crisis of identity takes place when he is in Manila on an official assignment. This is interesting because of the geo-political dimensions of this encounter—he is in neither America nor Pakistan at this moment, but a representative of American corporate power in the Philippines, one of the first "informal" US colonies. The distance from his two "homes" is described as being both unprecedented and disorienting for Changez. The crisis is sparked when contrary to his expectations of finding a city similar to Lahore or Karachi, he discovers a highly developed and technologically advanced metropolitan with a "glittering skyline and walled enclaves for the ultra-rich" (74). This unconscious comparison with his less developed Pakistani cities contributes significantly to his unusual behaviour—"I

attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an *American*” (74). He describes his forceful desire to be perceived as a member of the “officer class of global business” (74); wanting to ensure he is treated by the Filipinos with the same sense of respect his colleagues were more effortlessly entitled to. Despite his inward sense of shame at maintaining this façade of “Americanness”, he displays no explicit sign of this to anyone, answering “New York” to any questions about his origins. It is then left very much to the reader to judge Changez’s sincerity when he asserts, “in any case, there was much for me to be proud of: my genuine aptitude for our work, for example, and the glowing reviews my performance received from my peers” (74). It would appear that Changez is not convinced of the sufficiency of his professional virtues to ensure the respect that his American colleagues command. It is here that the importance of 9/11 as a plot device becomes pronounced, because just as Changez’s attempts at Americanizing himself become more noticeable, he is confronted with the calamity of terrorism.

How does Changez, the self-proclaimed “New-Yorker”, react to the breaking news on his television screen in his hotel room in Manila? He explains to his American listener: “[b]ut as I continued to watch I realized it was not fiction but news. I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Centre collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (83). This moment in Hamid’s novel is also unprecedented as it offers a counterpoint to the constant and continuous construction of “otherness” in American fiction and non-fiction after 9/11, which includes the figure of the Islamic jihadi, presented as violent, illiterate and extremist. Changez is, to the contrary, highly qualified and professionally valuable component of the American corporate world. And yet, he smiles at this image of terror and suffering.

Hamid is able to achieve here via fiction the nuances and depth of understanding that so often go amiss in factual reporting. *As an action, Changez's smile, which has for some readers become emblematic of his "fundamentalism", is of course intended to be theatrical and even deplorable.* Chiefly, however, the smile is revealing. This is not a reaction of undiluted pleasure: as Changez explains to the American, the insensitivity of his response was a source of immense confusion to him: "I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed? I did not know, *then*" (84). Retrospectively Changez is able to establish that his pleasure was derived solely from the symbolic power of the act—the realization that "someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (83) (emphasis added). Changez has, instantly and instinctively, privileged the 9/11 moment as an act of justice; he is confused and unsettled by this conclusion, and is simultaneously desperate to partake of the anguish and horror experienced by his American companions. The knowledge of Erica's safety is hence a source of temporary relief to him—"this allowed me to share in the anxiety of my colleagues and ignore for a time my initial sense of pleasure" (85).

The monologue acquires a certain tonal tension and uneasiness as Changez flies back to New York "uncomfortable in [his] own face", "aware of being under suspicion". He admits, "I felt guilty" (85). This sense of guilt and agitation stems from two major sources: one, from his identity as a Pakistani Muslim that instantly affiliates him (in the eyes of the U.S. government as well as himself) with the terrorists and second, from the memory of his inhumane reaction to the catastrophe. The objective process of his alienation is inaugurated at New York's airport immigration service where he is separated from his colleagues who join the queue for

American citizens, while he joins the one for “foreigners” (85), which will no doubt resonate with many migrants’ experiences of international airports after 9/11, myself included. After a long interrogation by American immigration, whose staff included as Changez pointedly observes, a female officer with English significantly inferior to his, he is finally permitted into the city to find his companions had collected their luggage and left—“As a consequence, I rode to Manhattan that evening very much alone” (86). Here of course, Dubois’s notion of “this particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” painfully presents itself (3). How does Changez respond to this double bind of exterior and interior perception? His initial response to this crisis is one of denial; he is not yet prepared for or perhaps even interested in any sort of personal or ideological confrontation with what he understands to be “America”. He has interpreted his pleasurable reaction to 9/11 merely as a momentary deviance. Despite the immediate sense of alienation that Changez experiences upon returning to America, there is still a kind of naïve complacency in his belief that his “Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card” were enough to his identity as an American. As part of this endeavour to cement his sense of belonging, he becomes Erica’s “official escort” in New York’s high society, continuing to convince himself that he was intended for this exclusive life, attributing his fortune to his impeccable breeding and superior education. Retrospectively Changez determines a kind of “symmetry” to his position at the time: “I felt I was entering in New York the very same social class that my family was falling out of in Lahore” (97).

As Hamid decodes these complicated affiliations we realize that it is in part Changez’s failure to assimilate to the American ruling classes that turns him into a “reluctant fundamentalist”. Once the initial embarrassment at airport immigration

control dies out, Changez attempts to integrate within the circles of American privilege. In particular, the act of accompanying Erica to social fundraisers for the victims of 9/11 helps to relieve residual guilt for his initial reaction to the tragedy (97). The irony of these social movements becomes clearer to him in retrospect, accompanied by a sense of naiveté at being “presumptuous enough to think that this was how my life was *meant* to be, that it had in some way been inevitable that I should end up rubbing shoulders with the truly wealthy in such exalted settings” (97). At the time, although he thinks that the recent stories of discrimination against Muslims in the American business world might have an element of truth behind them, he is unwilling to risk his position at Underwood Samson and makes every possible effort not to reveal his escalating concern with his Muslim identity. Jim’s friendly attempts at drawing him out are in vain, and result only in Changez’s increased concern about the “apparent transparency” of his thoughts and feelings. His determination to remain a part of the American corporate world overrides any desire to publicly voice his anti-American sentiments—“I knew that our firm, like much of our industry, had seen a sharp downturn in activity levels following the September attacks, and Wainwright had shared with me a rumour that cutbacks were on their way” (137). This insight proposes 9/11 as a part of the much deeper cataclysm of the banking crash and deep recession that quickly followed the terrorist attacks. Even then Changez speaks of America and Underwood Samson with a sense of commitment and belonging—the references to “our firm” and “our industry” indicating as yet an extent of concord with the country and especially, the classes who rule it.

This attempt at re-assimilation, borne out of Changez’s sense of mounting insecurity after 9/11, is however destined to be short-lived. It is a question of days and

weeks before Changez finds himself mentally and physically incapable of continuing to believe in the “firmness of foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York” (106). His reassertion of assimilation is met with obstacles both from outside forces in America, but also from his own psychological upheaval following his visit to Pakistan. Changez’s understanding of the historical transformation of the “American century” is a slow, complex process that often manifests unexpectedly through incidents that affect his personal life. For instance, the news of being ranked number one among his colleagues for a second consecutive time, and the prorated bonus that allows him not just to pay off his student loans but also make a considerable saving, is not received by him with as much jubilation as he had expected. Instead, the prospect of a sub-continental war with India becomes a matter of intensifying concern for him and instills in him a desire to visit Pakistan, despite his parents’ warnings to remain in America for safety.

Changez’s first visit to Pakistan is of crucial importance, not only because of its structurally central positioning in the narrative, happening very soon after 9/11—but also owing to his rapidly intensifying identification with a new image of Pakistan. Whereas previously the country had been viewed by him as decaying and degrading, he now sees as vulnerable and warranting both protection and representation. As he explains to his American listener, a re-visitation of “home” after a prolonged period of time requires a “different way of *observing*” (140)—“I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing” (140). One of the first manifestations of this American gaze appears in the feelings of shame and sadness at the dilapidated conditions of his family home where he “was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls

[...] *This* was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness” (141). Changez’s initial reaction of disappointment and embarrassment, playing into the stereotypes that the narrative strives to dismantle, give way to a graver introspection, whereby he considers: “I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country’s elite” (141). It is a realization that leads to intense self-loathing, wherein Changez is disgusted even by his own reflection in the mirror and the “unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed” (141). The use of the language of “possession” here associates America with a kind of dreadful and overpowering occult power—a curse from which he needs to be exorcised. Changez’s family home and its physical design and décor become a primary site on which this crisis of his rebirth as a Pakistani plays itself out—the sense of despair and degeneration, followed by self-chastisement at his own blindness, and finally, pride—“It was far from impoverished, indeed it was rich with history [...] I was disturbed by what this implied about myself: that I was a man lacking in substance and hence easily influenced by even a short sojourn in the company of others” (142).⁶⁸

It must be noted that Hamid’s mapping of his protagonist’s metamorphosis is intentionally non-linear. From failed attempts at assimilation in America, the narrative explores the elements of Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” phenomenon that Changez seems to be experiencing. Airports carry a continued significance in the

⁶⁸ H.M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy* (2009), a story told from a Pakistani perspective in post-9/11 New York ,attempts to unravel a similar psychological trauma in the lives of its Pakistani-American protagonists, Chuck, AC and Jimbo during the escalation of Islamophobic hate crimes in America. Naqvi’s delineation of events and emptions however is both more abrupt and more straightforward than Hamid’s. The radical transformations in people, relationships and associations after 9/11 appear to propagate rather than counter the historicity of the crisis that Hamid is concerned with.

process of identification, becoming something of a metaphor; this means that even before Changez enters mainland Lahore, the minor act of embracing his older brother at the airport evokes in him an instinctive sense of this “clash of civilizations”. Changez’s retrospective monologue takes on the proportions of a bildungsroman where his transition from innocence to experience and back to innocence is projected.

⁶⁹ This is of course a grossly oversimplified version of events, but bear with me while I explain why they need to be viewed as such. At the airport he feels “almost childlike twenty two”—as opposed to the state of “permanent middle-age” associated with a man “who lives alone and wears a suit in a city not of his birth” (142). Despite his family’s desire to learn details of his life in New York, Changez senses a kind of unsuitability of speaking of “that world” in Pakistan, as it “would be odd to sing in a mosque” (143). At this stage of the narrative, Changez has not considered any kind of amalgamation of his American and Pakistani life. This all too simple bifurcation however misses the fact that he has himself become the space on which these two discordant worlds play themselves out. Until, that is, he sees the possibility of any kind of resolution between them. Changez’s homecoming is thus reminiscent of the African-American abolitionist and journalist Martin Delany’s 1859 Official Report of the *Niger Valley Exploring Party*, a poignant account quoted by Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*: “The first sight and impressions of Africa are always inspiring, producing the most pleasant emotions. These pleasing sensations ... are succeeded ... [by] a feeling of regret that you left your native country for a strange one; an almost frantic desire to see friends and nativity ... when an entire recovery takes place, the love of the country is most ardent and abiding” (qtd. in Gilroy, 24). The parallel between

⁶⁹ See my article “The Treatment of ‘9/11’ in Contemporary Anglophone Pakistani Literature: A Case for Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman.” (*ESharp* 17 2011: 84-104)

Africa and Pakistan does not end here for it is worth bearing in mind that in different ways both spaces have served as producers of slave labour, enhancing Euro-American global power at the expense and detriment of their own. It is very much in this sense that Changez refers to the American “empire” as being “traditional” in its approach.⁷⁰

3.5. Historicizing “Ground Zero”

In response to a question regarding the place of politics in Anglophone Pakistani fiction Hamid comments, “I don’t believe an apolitical position exists; pretending not to have a political position is itself a political position. Writing about the Victorian noble house without writing about plantation workers is a political position. I have felt no pressure from outside to make my books political” (Gohar K Khan). The historicization of the 9/11 moment is as important to Hamid’s writing as it is to Shamsie and Aslam’s fiction. Changez, Hiroko and Dunia all undertake the challenge of contextualizing the present in the past—with varied and complex results. Their historicization however shares a simultaneous admiration for the *culture* of the “West” and a discontentment with its *politics* over the decades. Before embarking on a discussion about Hamid’s historicization of the 9/11 moment via Changez, let me refer back briefly to Partha Chatterjee’s essay on the problematical relationship between South Asia and Europe. Chatterjee explores the problematic idea of the simultaneous love and fear experienced by a “modern Indian for modern Europe”, tracing the relationship back to Vasco da Gama’s arrival in Calicut in 1498 in search

⁷⁰ For further reading see Bruce Fien’s *The American Empire After the Fall* (2010) maps the trajectory of American politics to suggest that the initial manifesto’s of American politics which regarded “[p]reemptive wars...as precursors to executive tyranny” has degenerated into “an arrogant, swaggering Empire featuring hundreds of military bases abroad with defense commitments to foreigners” (abstract). This degeneration, Fien suggests has been accelerated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

of profits and converts (1334). Unwilling to imagine or concede a straightforward “dreamland of universal consumption in the millennium of globalization” Chatterjee finds the dynamics of this relationship between Europe and India over this extensive period both morally and politically complicated (1331). While the early Portuguese invaders were content to rule by instilling fear, terror and violence against what they regarded religious deviance, the British Raj, he argues, wanted not just to be feared but also loved. What is interesting here, and what Hamid appears to echo in *TRF* is the suggestion that the “civilized trade and modern education”—the tenets on which more recent colonization prided itself—failed to obliterate the “terror and violence of early Portuguese expeditions” (1331). Examples of this terrorism exerted by European and American states continue to be found in all forms and scales, large and small, around the globe today in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Northern Pakistan. Amongst those who collaborated with the British desire to be loved, Chatterjee enumerates Indian ruling classes (merchants, nobles, princes) as well as the nascent literati and intelligentsia, and which in present times would include individuals such as Changez. Chatterjee proposes that this “love” is borne out of a fascination and admiration of the “concept of the West”: “This is a parody—a pathetic parody—of the chauvinism of the great powers designed to make our elites feel good about themselves, but one whose price, as always will be borne by the poor and the powerless in our society” Moreover, Chatterjee contends,

One major transition that took place in the middle of the 20th century, alongside the collapse of Europe’s colonial empires, was the decisive shift in world dominance from Europe to the US ... we have only to remember the televised spectacle of the Gulf war to perceive the concentrated terror that can

be unleashed by those who regard themselves as policemen of the world.
(1335)

Though it is the 9/11 moment that initiates the process of Changez's questioning of the history of the relationship between Pakistan and America, Hamid's writing seems to insist on a "lateral mapping outside American power or on a consideration of the ways in which local experience is linked to global structures of dominance" (Singh 28). Hence, and I am inclined to agree with Singh's analysis that "Changez is disenchanted and sullen upon his return to Pakistan, but his eventual decline into radicalism is prompted not by 9/11 but by the tensions between India and Pakistan" (28). In Changez's understanding (albeit somewhat simplistic), American failure to support Pakistan in a potential war against India causes resentment when viewed in light of the "assistance" (I use the term advisedly) Pakistan offered to the Americans in Afghanistan against the Soviets. He attempts to convey to his listener the magnitude of antipathy and fear experienced by Pakistanis resident only miles away from over a million American, Indian and European troops threatening "full scale invasion" (145). He describes that he

[F]elt powerless; I was angry at our weakness, at our vulnerability to intimidation of this sort from our—admittedly much larger—neighbour to the east. Yes, we had nuclear weapons, and yes, our soldiers would not back down, but we were being threatened nonetheless, and there was nothing I could do about it but lie in my bed, unable to sleep. (128)

Changez's anxiety for Pakistan also emanates from the impending prospect of his return to America and the treachery he has begun to associate with this act of leaving—"What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances?"—compounded by the realization, "And what was I abandoning them for?" (145). On

his flight back to New York he is struck by the irony in the number of young students and professionals, flying back to America after their holidays: “children and the elderly were meant to be sent away from impending battles, but it was the fittest and the brightest who were leaving, those who in the past would have been expected to remain. I was filled with contempt for myself...” (146).

While Changez recognizes this betrayal, initially at least, this leads to little more than a delay in his return to the U.S. But at a later stage in the novel his affiliation with Underwood Samson is called into question during an official visit to Chile, which contributes to the novel’s historicization of 9/11. Of course, Chile is a carefully chosen site for this development, since it had been at the receiving end of the US-backed coup against the socialist government of Salvador Allende and the subsequent instilling of the dictator Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1973. This was Chile’s 9/11, arranged by the United States in order to prevent another Cuba on the American continent. Naomi Klein, among other commentators, cites Chile as one of the many countries where what she terms “disaster capitalism” took root by taking advantage of a people gripped by political and military shock and terror. What Milton Friedman called an “extreme capitalist makeover” manifested itself there in the form of mass privatization, tax-cuts and free trade (7). Klein suggests that the “shock doctrine” was in place long before 9/11 and her examples range from Pinochet’s coup in Chile in 1973 to the orchestration of the Falklands War in 1982 and the Asian financial crisis in 1997 to the auctioning of beaches in South East Asia after the tragic tsunami disaster in 2004. In the Chilean context Senator Frank Church is quoted as having said in 1976,

Like Caesar peering into the colonies from distant Rome, Nixon said the choice of government by the Chileans was unacceptable to the president of the

United States. The attitude in the White House seemed to be, ‘If in the wake of Vietnam I can no longer send in the Marines, then I will send in the CIA’” (qtd. in Moyers)⁷¹

It is with this American involvement in mind that the Chilean publisher Juan Bautista poses a question to Changez: “Does it trouble you to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?” (170). Changez, via Bautista, sees himself as a “modern-day janissary”, who “ferocious and utterly loyal [...] had fought to erase their own civilizations” (172). It is a question that results in Changez’s reflection on his status as a “servant of the American empire” (173) and a foot-soldier in its “project of domination” over countries like Pakistan (177). This episode marks an important moment in a series of epiphanies experienced by Changez after 9/11, offering clarity of vision and blurring the divide between “the capitalist hierarchies of American power” and “radicalized Islam”, hence aligning the “fundamentalist with the capitalist” (Singh 27). After this point Changez becomes openly indignant of “the manner in which America conducted itself in the world” and her “constant interference in the affairs of others [...] Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan; in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role” (177). Even more significant is his belated realization that “finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power”, a “project of dominion” in which he has played a role. Realizing that he could no longer “facilitate” (177) this “dominion”, he now also knows that his “days of focusing on the fundamentals were over” (175). This alteration of his gaze now enables him to view America as a state and society in

⁷¹ Under the government of President Nixon, America expressed its aggressive disapproval of Allende’s socialist regime by using two approaches, namely Track 1 and Track 2. Track comprised non-CIA measures which were geared towards encouraging a massive coup against the Allende government. Track 2 was an overseas CIA operation managed by Kissinger which supported Chilean military officers in contributing to a coup.

two ways: one, with the “analytical eyes” of an individual who has experienced both Princeton and Underwood Samson (Changez does not belittle these experiences) but also, as he informs his American listener, from the “unconstrained” perspective of someone who refuses to be circumscribed by his professional status, and “free therefore to consider also the whole of your society”, being “struck by how traditional your empire appeared” (178).

Whereas the use of the term “empire” here is intentioned to challenge the claims of American exceptionalism and underline its affiliation to the European imperial and colonial project, it is the term “traditional” that requires further unpacking. American imperialism is more than a century and half old by the time Changez speaks. But to Changez, hitherto, there was a kind of novelty associated with this form of imperialism. Hamid’s own disenchantment seems to be presented via Changez here, given his “affinity with Utopian American ideals”, as compared to Europe, which in his own words “as a whole still feels tribal” (Chambers 187). The realization of America’s tribalism or traditionalism is hence a painful one for both Hamid and his protagonist. The revelation of the American empire’s long history brings forth a bitter tone in Changez’s narrative, evident in his deliberate and sardonic replication of the clichéd master/servant language he associates with imperialism:

Armed sentries manned at the check post at which I sought entry; being of suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permission to abide legally and forced therefore to work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer. (178)

Changez’s disillusionment with America has often been read as conclusive; Singh

talks about “rigidity of Changez’s perspective” and his “decline into radicalization” (27-28). This reading, I believe, renders *TRF* more uncomplicated than it is. Changez’s disillusionment with the American dream and his resentment for American politics in relation to Pakistan are complicated by his inability to make a neat or undiluted transition from a “lover of America” to a “fundamentalist”. As Chatterjee explains in relation to the Indian fascination with “the Europe of Shakespeare and the steam engine, of the French revolution and quantum mechanics” (1335), Changez’s cultural dream continues to lure him: “Would I not miss this city of possibility, with its magical vibrancy and sense of achievement?” More significantly perhaps, he asks himself simultaneously, “Where else could I ... hope to attain such an impressive income?” (179) Moreover he continues to remain concerned with the awkwardness his rebellion would cause Jim, bringing him in conflict with his own particular indebtedness Changez feels towards him. His sense of duty to Erica, and his desire to retain a connection with her also continues to haunt him. This turmoil in Changez prompts Hartnell’s argument that

Hamid's Pakistani migrant protagonist is not simply alienated but also simultaneously drawn to the isolationist and exceptionalist currents of the American national narrative. This ... is the paradoxical premise that conditions *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* resistance to the racism and national triumphalism that fuelled the Bush administration's “war on terror”. (336)

Changez is both estranged from and drawn to America. *TRF* offers no clear divide between Changez’s admiration for America and the disaffection he later develops for it. He constantly challenges his previous identities and sense of belonging but at no point in the narrative does he arrive at a settled identity. Even at a

fairly advanced stage of his metamorphosis Changez's remains engulfed in a state of existential confusion that is effectively captured on his last day of employment at Underwood Samson. Unable to represent the firm any longer, Changez engineers his dismissal. It is a matter on which, despite Jim's appeal, he is unwilling to bend. At the same time it worth noting that it is not a decision that is entirely clear to him, once again pointing to the "reluctance" of his gradual desertion of America. He describes this state of mind to the American listener: "No—please understand me—that I was convinced that I had made a mistake; no, I was merely unconvinced that I had *not* made a mistake. I was, in other words, confused" (181). The apparent nonchalance with which he leaves the office building, escorted on either side by a pair of security guards, in fact conceals his frustration and confusion. But his distinctive camaraderie with Jim offers some hopes of redemption:

"You really screwed us, kid," he said. "I know," I replied. "I am sorry." "I'm not a big believer of compassion in the work place," he went on. "I didn't think twice when it came to firing you. In fact, I wish I'd done it a month ago and saved us the headache you gave us down in Valparaiso. But," he paused, "I'll tell you this. I like you, Changez. I can see you're going through a crisis. If you ever need to get something off your chest and want someone to talk to, call and I'll buy you a beer." My throat constricted; I could not reply. I nodded slowly, a gesture not unlike a bow. (181)

Not only is Jim's compassion unexpected, especially in view of his own earlier description of the world of American finance—"the economy is an animal"—it also counteracts the combination of indifference and "evident unease" of his other colleagues as he departs (181). It is worth re-examining Jim's affiliation with Changez at this point; Jim represents what Changez wants to be, the member of a

threatened or marginalized class who learns the rules of the corporate world and becomes a “cosmopolitan elite”. This desire, thwarted, in part explains his continuing and confusing affiliation with Jim and the American corporate world. Moreover, it makes Changez’s final departure from America a more difficult one: “I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequence; I lacked a stable core. I was not certain of where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither [...] my own identity was so fragile” (168).

Confessions such as this are also acknowledgements of a permanent connection as Changez begins to question his view of clashing civilizations. No clearly demarcated lines of thought or action are offered here. In fact the inherently complicated nature of Changez’s “clash of civilizations” rebuts Hartnell’s assertion that “Mohsin Hamid who, as a Pakistani writer who has lived in both New York and London, shares with his central protagonist the *burden* of representing the racial, religious and national difference that formed the focus of post-9/11 xenophobia” (336) (emphasis added). Hartnell’s association between Hamid and his protagonist over this positioning is problematic. While Changez is clearly unsettled by the various cultural, political and national directions in which he feels pulled, Hamid, in his own words is very content with his hybridized position:

The main difference between Changez and me is that I am very comfortable being a mongrelized or hybridized person, whereas Changez is always trying to fit. Part of me does want to pick a position but that is a very small part of me. If I turned that minority position within me to a majority position I suppose I could be Changez. (Khan).

At the same time however, Hamid establishes categorically that there is nothing simplistic about Changez’s embrace of “fundamentalism” or his return to Pakistan.

While Changez may not be as comfortable as Hamid about embracing a hybrid position, he is never at ease choosing one identity either. It is here that he locates the possibility of hope—of the existence of a kind of transnationalism that allows him, a declared opponent of the American State, and to love an idea of America, as well as his devotion to an American woman despite her continued rejection of him. He is torn between his class and emotional affiliation. Changez’s state of “double consciousness”, I argue, though overtly a source of confusion and vulnerability, in the final analysis could be a liberatory and emancipatory apparatus. The visual imagery of his state of mind during his final few days in New York echo this productive turmoil I refer to:

I was an incoherent and emotional madman, flying off into rages and sinking into depressions [...] sometimes I would find myself walking the streets, flaunting my beard as a provocation, craving conflict with anyone [...] Affronts were everywhere; the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history – not just from the government but from the media and supposedly critical journalists as well – provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger. (190)

This condition of rage and frenzy, compounded by an almost hysterical desire for confrontation are symptomatic not so much of a newly acquired hatred for America or Americans, but of an intense and grievous disappointment at his own sense of belonging. Changez at no point speaks in terms of abandoning America. His efforts are rather directed towards curbing its excesses— “Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own” (190). Whereas this parodying of the Bush/Blair jargon during the “war on terror” seeps through, I suggest there are elements of sincerity here.

Hamid's self-described "love story" about America, interrogates American nationalism and "triumphalism" that pervades America in the aftermath of 9/11. Like Hiroko, Changez too is struck by the American return to a self-absorbed and xenophobic nationalism: "you retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away" (190). From an exclusively personal perspective, this nationalism has been at the expense of his inclusion into America. In an interview elsewhere Hamid observes: "[t]he traditional immigrant novel is about coming to America [...] I wanted to do the 21st century polarity when the magnet switches and pushes them away. At its core, this is a story of someone who is in love with America, in love with an American woman, who finds he has to leave. It's a tragic love story" (qtd. in Perlez). In congruity with this suggested genre analysis, Changez too sees his relationship with America as a tragic romance:

There is in such situations a moment usually a moment of passion during which the unthinkable is said: this is followed by a sense of euphoria at finally being liberated; the world seems fresh, as if seen for the first time; then comes the inevitable period of doubt, the desperate and doomed backpedalling of regret; and only later, once emotions have receded, is one able to view with equanimity the journey through which one has passed. (179)

One of the ways in which Changez experiences the difficulty of severance with America is through his relationship with Erica. This relationship is complex from the very beginning—she never quite recovers from the psychological breakdown caused by the death of her former lover, Chris. However, Changez's "aborted attempt

to make love to Erica is the corollary of what is clearly an aborted love affair with America itself". As they lie shoulder to shoulder, united but not quite, Changez observes to himself, "She did not respond; she did not resist" (Hartnell 342). It is her impenetrability, both literal and metaphorical, that serves to deepen "the growing wound this inflicted on [his] pride" (*TRF* 89). By extension, this impenetrability is paralleled in America's rejection of him. Noting this parallel, it would appear that "while Erica is initially quite charmed by her idea of Changez's family life in Pakistan, her interest in him is merely transitory, fleeting", gesturing towards American reluctance to empathize with the rest of the world (Hartnell 342). Towards the end of the narrative Changez recognizes Erica "had chosen not to be part of my story; her own had proven too compelling" (*TRF* 167).

In the face of his unrequited love, and despite it, Changez continues to subscribe to the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* in order to keep abreast with the lives of those he has left behind but always with particular attention to the remote possibility of re-discovering Erica. He continues to send her emails until finally her account becomes inactive and eventually resorts to posting her a letter every year, which is invariably returned to him. He subsists on a self-delusional relationship, with a woman who is almost certainly deceased, and is able to find comfort only in imagining a life that includes her:

Often, for example, I would rise at dawn without having slept an instant. During the preceding hours, Erica and I would have lived an entire day together [...] Such journeys have convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. (195-197)

This unwillingness and inability to “reconstitute” himself autonomously results not just from his relationship with Erica, but with America at large. These identities, once mongrelized, cannot be reverted to as separate selves. Hamid proposes the permanence of the affective bond between Pakistan and America. Changez’s relationship with America is altered but not terminated by 9/11 and the events that ensue in its wake. As Changez explains, in a tone that fuses relief with resignation, “Something of us is now outside and something of the outside is now within us”. While he is “not opposed to the building of walls” to shield himself from danger, implicit in his suggestion is a kind of determined fluidity that refuses to ground itself too firmly in exclusionary notions of nation or culture (197).

It is interesting to then connect this sentiment with Changez’s very first words spoken to his American auditor, which now acquire a more genuine and earnest quality: “Excuse me Sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened of my beard. *I am a lover of America*” (1) (emphasis added). This seemingly fractured position, expressed in his “fundamentalist” appearance and the simultaneous declaration of his love for America are indicative of two things: one, the frustration and confusion that emanate from his thwarted desire (for America and for Erica) and second, of the associated notion that his appearance is not antithetical to his “Americanness”. Changez’s optimism, so often neglected by readers in favour of his animosity with post 9/11 America, is poignantly encapsulated in the following lines: “September had always seemed to me a month of beginnings, a *spring* of sorts – possibly because it marks the commencement of the academic year” (187).

Do we believe Changez? Indeed to search for a definitive answer to this question would detract significantly from the depth and complexity of Hamid’s story. This inherent destabilization and uncertainty—a sense of negative capability—which

have meant that Changez vacillates frenziedly between being angered and placatory, sardonic and wistful, hospitable and hostile eventually sustains the novel's transnationalism. Changez's ambiguity is paralleled in the narrative's stylistic features—as the evening draws to a close, the streets of the famous bazaar become gloomy and deserted. Shadowy figures lurk about and an air of suspense fills the pages of Hamid's novel. Are either Changez or the stranger armed? How harmless is that “glint of metal” that is detected in the stranger's jacket? Who, if anyone, will be harmed? As with any successful thriller, the possibilities are endless.

In her essay “Migrating from Terror: the Postcolonial Novel after September 11”, Margaret Scanlan writes about the challenge faced by postcolonial novelists addressing contemporary terrorism:

As postcolonial writers, they find themselves [experiencing] the binaries of terrorist discourse, between, say, native and alien, or between Islam and the secular West. And while they are much too subtle and ironic to assume the mantle of our unacknowledged legislators, they transform that fault-line into a living, breathing space in which the human consequences of rigid and lethal polarities become visible. (267)

In the aftermath of 9/11 it has become clear that the impact of terrorist catastrophes can be exacerbated by the inflammatory works of journalists, film-makers and indeed novelists. As Scanlan further suggests, though several novelists “are at pains to suggest that the Islamic terrorist is a human being with whom we may have some sympathy, none of these writers creates a context large enough to include ordinary Muslims, people with differing political and religious perspectives” (267). “Where”, Scanlan appositely asks, “is the Charles Dickens or the Upton Sinclair of terrorist fiction?” (266). In such a context, Mohsin Hamid's novel does two things: it endorses

the possibility of an alternative literary language of terror by charting the alienation of a young, privileged, Pakistani professional in America through a narrative that is “doubly conscious” and simultaneously explores the transnational potential of ‘9/11’. In the first case, by undertaking what Edward Said called the “voyage in” Hamid challenges the stereotype of America as a “haven for the oppressed” (Scanlan 267), powered by secularism, rationalism and utopic possibilities. By exploring the transnational implications of terrorism, and by grounding it historically, Hamid has advanced the possibility of a fascinating set of connections between America and Pakistan that is premised on a properly historicized understanding of the modern condition. Hamid shares Chatterjee’s anxieties about the oversimplification of the relationship between the global north and global south and he echoes the complexity of the “love” felt by the latter for the former and both men that “Vasco da Gama must never appear on our shores again” (1336). Their paths eventually diverge: Hamid does not share Chatterjee’s hesitation about the coexistence of love for America and a disregard for its politics. To him these positions, represented via Changez, are not mutually exclusive. The use of fear, domination and terror by the terrorists on 9/11 is as repugnant as that witnessed over the 500 years of colonial rule, deconstructing any simplistic analysis of the juxtaposition of victim and terrorist, moral and immoral, good and evil. This deconstruction is both timely and imperative.

Chapter 4

Imagining “Difference”: Daniyal Mueenuddin and Mohsin Hamid

Everybody nowadays seems to take a view on Pakistan. Very few know what they are talking about.

—Edward Luce

4.1 Negotiating “Global” and “Local”

Ien Ang suggests that “[o]ne of the most urgent predicaments of our time can be described in deceptively simple terms: how are we to live together in this new century—this century that has begun so sadly, so violently?” At the risk of labouring the point, we might rephrase this question as—what is the possibility of transcending particularist identities and schisms in order to find a way of living “together in difference” (2003:2)? This final chapter of my thesis purports that the fiction of Daniyal Mueenuddin and Mohsin Hamid attempts to imagine the state of “together in difference” by acknowledging “difference” and the preservation of difference as a mandatory requirement towards the imagining of transnationalism. Both writers propose that it is only when difference is recognized in depth and detail—and this involves the deactivation of “otherness”—that any notions of cohabitation can be adequately addressed.

To this end I consider two recent works of Anglophone Pakistani fiction: Mueenuddin's collection of short stories, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* and Hamid's most recent novel *How to get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.⁷² These works, both set against local or regional background but telling global stories—Mueenuddin's sets most of his in rural and provincial Pakistan and Hamid in anonymous cities that can easily be identified as Karachi, Lahore or Mumbai—establish a significant set of connections that this chapter sets out to explore. While transnationalism continues to remain central to both works, we find here a departure (stylistically as well as in terms of location) from the other examples of Pakistani fiction in English considered so far in this thesis. Both Hamid and Mueenuddin make a shift from the more geographically expansive novels and offer instead a more microscopic view of Pakistan. The literary renditions of Pakistan as being in what Owen Bennett-Jones called the “eye of the storm” after 9/11 are here replaced by a representation of the country in its everyday dimension.⁷³ To a large extent, as my reading shows, both writers depict Pakistan as a complex and heterogeneous social space, which needs to be understood outside the amplifications of both orientalist fiction and non-fiction. Moreover, breaking from the tradition of much of 9/11 American fiction which suggests a sense of paralysis in America after the attacks, Mueenuddin and Hamid present Pakistan as a dynamic and persevering society. In what may at first appear a paradox, both writers also represent Pakistan as a thoroughly globalized space, which is not as “backward” or “primitive” as its media portraiture suggests.

⁷² Henceforth I will refer to these texts as *In Other Rooms* and *Rising Asia*.

⁷³ In *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (2009) Owen Bennett Jones offers analyses of the country which are similar to Anatol Lieven's assertions in *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (2011). Bennett-Jones suggests that while military dictatorship, Islamic extremism, civil violence and ethnic rivalries continue to permeate through the country, these problems are less dangerous than they are portrayed to be in the global media. Far more threatening, Bennett-Jones and Lieven argue, are the environmental dangers that Pakistan faces such as severe water shortages and global warming.

The discourse on Pakistan, particularly in the media, appears to be wedged in a figurative time warp, offering coverage on religious fundamentalism, civil violence, economic collapse, extensive poverty and oppression. It is hardly surprising then, that journalists such as Asad Rashid have called Pakistani Anglophone fiction “a place of refuge”—an energizing interruption from the representational tropes that have come to define the country. Lest this fictional “place of refuge” be mistaken to elude the gritty realities of life in Pakistan, Daniyal Mueenuddin has explicitly clarified: “[w]e are not lying in a bath of warm water and reflecting upon our sort of quirky, funny families. There’s an edginess to our writing, I believe, which is distinctive” (NPR). This edginess becomes integral to the representation of Pakistan as a vital, vibrant and diverse place, but also demanding analyses and reflection.

In their simultaneous consideration of homogeneity and heterogeneity, thereby facilitating a literary “contact zone”⁷⁴, both writers also regard their writing as conscious process of “self-help” and healing. While in Hamid’s case this is manifested in the format of his novel (written as a self-help manual), which claims (albeit playfully) to “help two selves, one of them yours, the other mine” (*Rising Asia* 201), Mueenuddin too acknowledges the pedagogic and therapeutic element in his writing: “[t]hese stories are written from that place in between, written to help both me and my reader bridge the gap” (W.W. Norton Interview).

Hamid and Mueenuddin are both appositely positioned to undertake their complex depictions of Pakistan, and to situate it within a transnational framework. Mueenuddin half-seriously refers to Hamid and himself as IDP’s (Internally Displaced People) whose relationship with Pakistan is complicated by the sense of being “of it and not of it”. In this definition, a complicated sense of nostalgia comes

⁷⁴ For more on “contact zone” see Chapter 1, pg. 71.

into play as these writers yearn for Pakistan not only when physically removed from it but also when present there. In a joint interview they speak of their increasing inability to “grasp Pakistan” or to even fully “recognize” it (Asia Society Interview). The ambiguity here should be viewed not so much as a constraining factor for their fiction, but as an enriching and liberating one. In this chapter I explain why.

It is worth pausing here to contextualize Hamid and Mueenuddin’s writing within their own historical and biographical contexts that bear several important similarities to with each other.⁷⁵ Mueenuddin’s representation of the relationship between rural and urban Pakistan, of course, is informed by the writer’s own move from the American corporate world to his father’s farm in Punjab. Known to the international readership as a “Pakistani-American” novelist, Mueenuddin was born in Los Angeles, to a Pakistani father and American mother. While his early childhood was spent in Pakistan when he was exposed to rural life in Southern Punjab, he spent the greater part of youth and adult life in America. His education includes degrees from Dartmouth College and Yale Law School, which led to his employment as a corporate lawyer in New York. Mueenuddin’s reaction to his legal career was one of disillusionment. This disillusionment however, also led to the realization of an opportunity and echoes Hamid’s shift from a legal career to a novelist:

Sitting in my office on the forty-second floor of a black skyscraper in Manhattan, looking out over the East river, I gradually developed confidence in the stories I had lived through during those years on the farm. I realized that I was in a unique position to write these stories for a Western audience—stories about the farm and the old feudal ways, the dissolving feudal order and the new way coming, the sleek businessmen from the cities. I resigned from

⁷⁵ In the Introduction I offer a more detailed discussion on the personal, educational and professional backgrounds of the two writers.

the law firm, returned to Pakistan, and began writing the stories that make up *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. (Bookbrowse Interview)

In abandoning his legal career in favour of writing fiction and managing his father's large estate in Southern Punjab, Mueenuddin claims to have found the main inspiration for his fiction: "in the course of running this business I've met all sorts of characters, have come to know an isolated, intense, feudal world—the feudal aspect of it being important, because the feudal life is one of profoundly ramified connections" (*The Elegant Variation* Interview 2009). This experience of transition between various life-worlds is embedded into Mueenuddin's fiction.

Mueenuddin does differentiate between "the texture of lives in each culture"—American and Pakistani—which he has experienced. However, one does not get the sense that he is particularly rooted in either of these settings. This unsettledness is in turn encapsulated in his non-fictional rendering of his experiences:

So many people are connected to each other in so many complex ways. No one dies alone and are found eaten by their Chihuahua. That doesn't happen in Pakistan. When I go to Pakistan, at first it's lovely, I love the bath of connections, but six months or so later, I am overwhelmed and just want to be left alone. Whereas here (America), people really spend their lives connected in that same way to three or four people. They live their lives in these little boxes that occasionally rub against each other. (*Beyond the Margins*)

Mueenuddin offers the following explanation for his choice to live in Pakistan: "livelihood ... fascination with the landscape and people, desire to explore this aspect of my identity—and stories, characters, predicaments." He has described, "[l]ife here in the Pakistan's bushiest boonies is red of tooth and claw, more colorful and intense than any other place I've been" (*The Elegant Variation*).

As discussed before, Hamid's evolution as a writer is strikingly similar to Mueenuddin's. His life, lived between England, America and Pakistan enables him to make specific connections between places and he talks about these resonances in an interview: "Lahore is a big river city like the various American cities that have to do with the Mississippi. Blues territory, in other words. The blues is pitched with the emotions and resonance and feeling of a lot of Punjabi folk music, which is what I grew up with" (*The New York Times*). This deliberate complication of the prevailing stereotypes of a "global city" is at the heart of contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction, but Hamid takes this process a step further by using Lahore as a prototype for this urban formation:

For so long we have talked about "the city" and we've used cities like New York or London as our template for our universal conversation about cities, and I was thinking, "Well, maybe Lahore actually is quite typical of cities around the world now. Maybe I can use Lahore as a template for this global city." And that's what I've tried to do (Terry Gross)

With this alternative view of the global city, Hamid's fiction explores the interrelationship between finance, social class and growth. Finance and economics are dominant concerns in *Rising Asia* which dissects society into "almost 12 different socio-economic levels: from 'dirt-poor' to 'village boy' to 'quite poor city dweller'... to 'middle class entrepreneur'...to 'well of guy'" (Wajahat Ali). Hamid's ability to, in his own words, "chart Pakistani society up in terms of ... socio-economic categories" enables him to "capture a bigger canvas of what a society looks like" (Ali). Of course part of the aim of *Rising Asia* (and Hamid's other fiction) is to counter the "negativity and cynicism when talking about Pakistan". Hope, redemption and love are thus constant elements of his novel, as they are in Mueenuddin's stories. Hamid

acknowledges the desire to “inject” these elements “into the world”, “without being overly constrained about the notion of there being a ‘West’ and an ‘East’” (Ali).

While Hamid’s earlier novels, and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in particular, have received an increasing amount of attention by critics and researchers, it is too early yet to tell how much will be written about *Rising Asia*. Commentary on *In Other Rooms* appears conspicuous by its absence, perhaps because it does not “neatly” fit into what is regarded as new Pakistani 9/11 fiction in English. As scholarly work on the texts I examine in this chapter is virtually non-existent, I have relied to a large extent on book reviews and interviews to determine a sense of the initial reception of this writing. In his review of *In Other Rooms* for *The Washington Post*, Michael Dirda declared it to be the “first widely read book by a Pakistani writer”. While obviously contentious, Dirda’s claim is worth examining here. In his view, Mueenuddin’s stories allowed their readers to inquire into “what life is like for both the rich and the desperately poor in Mueenuddin’s country”, resulting in what he calls a “miniaturized Pakistani ‘human comedy’”. For Dirda, Anglophone Pakistani fiction before Mueenuddin’s did make some attempts to portray the lives of “the desperately poor”, but without positioning them at the centre of the narrative. In his opinion, Mueenuddin’s fiction confirmed the pressing need for meaningful engagement with the dispossessed in Pakistan. However it would be singularly misleading to assume that Mueenuddin’s writing marks an unprecedented moment in Pakistani literature as such, since it deploys many of the formal and thematic concerns of other writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa and Moni Mohsin. Claire Chambers writes in particular about the representation of servants in subcontinental fiction (of course this is by no means to suggest that servants exhaust the category of the poor or dispossessed that Dirda talks about):

South Asian writing more broadly shows a related interest in domestic servants. From Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ayah* to Arundhati Roy's *Velutha*, or Rana in Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence*, servants and their families are far more prominent in subcontinental fiction than they have been in the West since the demise of Jeeves and Wooster. (*Dawn*)

Indeed, literature in Urdu offers several such examples as well, Saadat Hasan Manto being an important and influential one.⁷⁶ Mueenuddin himself professes a debt of inspiration to Manto:

For me, Saadat Hasan Manto is important as a writer because you see with stories like this there is nothing prettied up about his writing. One of the things that I object to about most of the people who write about Pakistan is "the scent of mangoes and jasmine school of writing". I think that does a disservice to the country and plays into the stereotypes that most Westerners have about Pakistan, and he certainly doesn't do that. (*Fivebooks*)

If Mueenuddin's stories are important, it is not so much because of the uniqueness of their subjects, but because they see these local and regional concerns as global ones.⁷⁷ Additionally, they offer representations of Pakistan's underprivileged class not only in the settings of the wealthy homes in which they are employed as servants, but also in their own "home" settings. His stories are as much about inequality as they are about the everyday lives of this large swathe of Pakistani society.

⁷⁶ Saadat Hasan Manto's fiction in Urdu is marked by scathing representations of the atrocities witnessed around him during the partition of the Indian sub-continent and he became both renowned and persecuted for depicting the graphic truths of social and political violence in this decade. In particular, *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) satirically explores the violent relationship between India and Pakistan via inmates in a Lahore asylum. An English translation is available online at www.sacw.net (1998).

⁷⁷ *In Other Rooms* has been a *New York Times* bestseller and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

While Kamila Shamsie and Nadeem Aslam and Uzma Aslam Khan have offered expansive literary representations of Pakistan's political, cultural and historical co-ordinates on the global map and of the transnational links between Pakistan and the world, Mueenuddin offers more of a microscopic view of sections of Pakistani society that are not usually conceived as a part of this transnational Pakistan.⁷⁸ In doing so his interlinked short stories deconstruct some of the most egregious stereotypes about the country and its people. The stories deliberately shift the reader's attention away from international conflict, terrorism, crime and violence with which the country is often read as synonymous. In an interview, Mueenuddin has suggested that, "[t]he point is, that while great atrocities are committed, and the world stares, most Pakistanis go on with their wolfish or doggy lives—terrorism is only a small part of our daily experience. Life is job and family and little things" (2009).

Most of the reviewers of the collection, it seems, have endorsed Mueenuddin's strategy. Jacob Silverman has observed: "[i]f Daniyal Mueenuddin is better at telling the stories of the desperate, the poor, and the failing, it is in part because there is a richness and vitality to Pakistan's disorder that the author manages to harness without fetishizing. And for a book with obvious social concerns, these are the tales that need to be told". Dalia Sofer reiterates a similar sentiment in *The New York Times*, highlighting in particular the forensic accuracy with which Mueenuddin portrays Pakistan: "Corruption too is ubiquitous here [...] For a country whose name means 'land of purity', Pakistan is startlingly blemished." At the same time, Sofer notes that "Mueenuddin's talent lets us perceive not just its machinations but also its beauty ... a

⁷⁸ Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2003) has been appositely compared to Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, specifically in the context of its spanning of three continents and its complex interlinking of families and cultures. Like Shamsie, Khan's interest in the Soviet-Afghan war is central to her writing; *Trespassing* is set in the aftermath of the war.

charpoy laid out in the shade of a mammoth banyan tree, the smoke of a hookah on a spring afternoon, ‘eucalyptus trees planted by some briefly energetic government’”.

It would appear from these reviews that *In Other Rooms* successfully undertakes the considerable task of representing an internally differentiated Pakistan to the world, while steering clear of the pitfalls of the (frequently) orientalist stereotyping that often characterizes such efforts. In light of these observations, I begin my discussion by briefly considering some of the stylistic elements of Mueenuddin’s fiction, which I suggest reinforce the subject matter of the writing. Mueenuddin has spoken of the influence of classic Russian writers, including Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekov and Ivan Turgenev, on his own fiction. In one interview, he has spoken of his identification with Tolstoy’s character Levin from *Anna Karenina*: “I’m living his life, it’s very conscious” (*The Stranded Gentry*). It is worth noting of course the deliberate parallel Mueenuddin draws between the general social conditions of late-nineteenth and early- twentieth century Russia and contemporary Pakistan, including economic unrest, explosive social inequality, civil discontent and political instability. *In Other Rooms* presents a literary mimesis of life in Pakistan, attempting to portray along the lines of Balzac and Tolstoy, a complete and comprehensive social reality.⁷⁹ This totality or cohesiveness in Mueenuddin’s narrative is achieved by the thematic and structural threads that connect the stories to each other, enabling the reader to gain a sense of Mueenuddin’s fictional world as a whole. As Ian Reid writes, “[t]o group separate stories together cohesively, two sorts of constructive method may be used: internal linking and external framing” (*The*

⁷⁹ See *Studies in Balzac. 11. Critical Analysis of Realism* where E. Preston Dargon employs Balzac’s fiction to devise a working definition of literary Realism: “It is the art of representing actuality, viewed largely from the material standpoint, in a way to produce as closely as possible the impression of truth” (35). Dargon subsequently develops a substantiated list of properties associated with realist fiction, which includes the subheadings of exposition, plot composition, description, detail and style—the contents of these sub headings finds many resonances in Mueenuddin’s fiction.

Short Story 46). Frank Moorehouse's prefatory note to his first collection of interconnected stories seems to be appropriate for Mueenuddin's work as well:

These are interlinked stories and, although the narrative is discontinuous and there is no single plot, the environment and characters are continuous. In some ways, the people in the stories are a tribe...which does not always recognize itself as a tribe [...] The shared environment is both internal (anxieties, pleasures and confusions) and external (the houses, streets, hotels and experiences). (qtd. in Ian Reid 47)

In Other Rooms comprises eight short stories, many of which were previously published, centred on the household of one K.K. Harouni—a semi-feudal landlord who is also an enterprising industrialist. The stories are set between Harouni's mansion in the city of Lahore and his vast farm in rural Dunyapur, shifting fairly rapidly between rural and urban spaces and they move abroad in just one instance, "Our Lady of Paris". The reader enters K.K. Harouni's life in its final years, sometimes through direct narrative contact with him and at other points via members of his family, estate managers, servants, friends and relations. The various locations afford the reader a mobile perspective from which to explore Harouni's "empire". With perspectival shifts from grimy servant quarters and impoverished villages to the vast and ostentatious drawing rooms that echo the lives of the country's ruling classes, *In Other Rooms* explores the connections between Pakistan's rural and urban lives and "the characters, settings, leitmotifs, deepen their significance as they recur with variations in one story after another", thus also developing a "sense of community" (Reid 47).

Raymond Williams has written about the novel's task of the "exploration of community" ranging his evidence over the span of a century from Charles Dickens to

D.H. Lawrence—“[w]hat community is, what it has been, what it might be; how community relates to individuals and relationships; how men and woman, directly engaged, see within or beyond them, for but more often against them, the shape of a society” (*The Realist Novel* 234). *In Other Rooms* affirms the short story’s capacity for doing this as well. Like Hamid, Mueenuddin’s consideration of both rural and urban Pakistan in their transformative states (which in itself are vast categories comprising layers of distinctions) becomes a necessity. Mueenuddin’s interest in telling the small stories that speak of the heterogeneity of Pakistan, which he then weaves into his macro-narrative on a much larger canvas, makes the short story a most suitable mode for him. Such a canvas allows for the foreshadowing implied in one story to be reen countered at a later stage in a different story, with an altered emphasis. The stories’ inextricable link with each other is reflective of the inseparability of local narratives in creating a global chronicle.

Rising Asia departs from Hamid’s earlier expansive literary appraisal of 9/11 in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to a socio-economic satire in what David Eggers has called the “messiest, most chaotic ring of global economy”, a description that also appears on the book jacket of the collection (Hamish Hamilton). *Rising Asia* is written in a “self-help” format with the explicit intention of demonstrating “how to get filthy rich” (*Rising Asia* 4). At the centre of the novel is its protagonist—“You”—an unnamed individual whose life the novel maps from birth, through boyhood, adulthood and eventually to his death. It is established very quickly that “You” is born into the impoverished and unsanitary conditions of rural life of a poor country, which is as likely to be India and Bangladesh as it is to be Pakistan. This anonymity is of course entirely intentional though the novel offers considerable hints that the country is in fact Pakistan. Covering a huge social cross-sections, *Rising Asia* attempts to

counter the dominant “growth narrative” associated with global market capitalism by addressing the “loss narrative” which is much less frequently addressed (Khan Interview). So while the novel ironically asserts the intention of teaching the reader how to accumulate wealth and fame in rising Asia, it is always more concerned with both the individual sorrow and collective loss of human values and happiness that Hamid sees as an inevitable by-product of global capitalism. Hamid’s exploration of a transforming metropolis can be aptly compared to Dickens’ *Great Expectations* in which

A full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correlatively with the uprooting and dehumanization of men, women, and children by the millions—a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a “thing” or an engine capable of being used for profit. This was the century of progress. (Dorothy Van Ghent 246)

Like Dickens, Hamid views the global financial growth as abrogating the essence of human feelings and relationships, slowly but punctiliously desensitizing individuals. The machinery of capitalism hence becomes a perversely unifying transnational force. The sense of loss associated with progress is often encountered in Hamid and Mueenuddin’s fiction when migration takes place. Reproducing the networking through which various parts of the globe have become connected—the movement of people from South Asia to Euro-American cities for example—Hamid charts the movements between the rural and urban zones of his unnamed city—“quivering in the torso of rising Asia” (82).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Hamid’s depiction of his unnamed city bears several resonances of Karachi or Lahore: “Your city is enormous, home to more people than half the countries in the world, to whom every few weeks is added a population equivalent to that of a small...island”. Further on, “Your bus barrels along in the shadow of these monuments, dusty new arteries feeding this city” (82).

As part of my analysis I am interested in the extent to which Mueenuddin and Hamid's "realistic" portrayals of Pakistan deviate from or conform to sociological, anthropological and autobiographical depictions of the country. In what ways, if any, do Mueenuddin's stories and Hamid's novel echo or alter the non-fictional representation of Pakistan, since the latter claims to operate with an unmediated access to the "real"? In order to construct parallels and posit variances between these competing notions of the "real", during the course of the chapter I will intermittently refer to some recent influential recent publications on the Pakistan including *Pakistan: a Hard Country* (2011) by Anatol Lieven and Tariq Ali's *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (2007).⁸¹

Lieven's *Pakistan: A Hard Country* is the record of a journalistic journey through Pakistan, offering a testament to Pakistan's resilience in the face of a multitude of odds. Tariq Ali's third book about Pakistan, *The Duel*, is an exploration of its economic and political exploitation orchestrated by its international "allies". While these texts share a certain set of contemporary assumptions about Pakistani society, they also dissent from the normative Euro-American view of the country. Additionally, both writers acknowledge that rural and city spaces of Pakistan bear marks of each other and are closely interconnected, if heavily differentiated and heterogeneous. Like Mueenuddin and Hamid, Lieven and Ali are simultaneously insiders and outsiders, having lived for extended periods of time in Pakistan their permanent homes are outside the country. For Lieven, an interest in the history and politics of Pakistan and extensive research on its four provinces results from his work in Pakistan as a journalist for *The Times*. Ali's analyses of Pakistan, while rich and informative in terms of research, is also of interest to me because of the repeated

⁸¹ I will henceforth refer to these texts as *A Hard County* and *The Duel*.

banning of his books in Pakistan and his admonishment at the hands of the country's military leaders, including Zia ul Haq. His persuasive and unequivocal condemnation of both American intrusion and fundamentalism Islam as contributing factors to the plight of Pakistan places him in a precarious position in Pakistan. Contextualizing the fiction within the anthropological and political research conducted for this chapter, I look at Mueenuddin and Hamid's works under three major thematic rubrics: "corruption"; "gender" and "inequality".

4.2 A Corrupt & Violent Nation:

"You know quality matters. Especially for fakes."

—Mohsin Hamid, *Rising Asia*

Today, on the morning of 14 January 2013, it is impossible for me to make any kind of contact with my family in Karachi, Pakistan. National mobile networks have been disabled, with a view to preventing terrorist attacks on *Shia* Muslim groups during the month of *Moharram*.⁸² Whilst all major retailers remain closed and routes to the airport are cordoned off, several small business owners continue selling goods from discreet back entrances. With evening approaching several restaurants will risk doing business and weddings, celebrations, funerals and processions will all be carried out as planned. This, for Pakistan, is everyday reality. Lieven quotes Galileo in his epitaph for Pakistan— "and yet it moves". This movement is not merely a weak sign of life, but Lieven argues that Pakistan is a "hard country", lavishly equipped with both resilience and the ability to recover in order to survive. Bennett-Jones also

⁸² The persecution of *Shia* Muslims has been an on-going process in Pakistan but escalated drastically towards the end of 2012. On 10 January 2013 over one hundred *Shia* Muslims were killed and over 200 injured in a sectarian attack in Quetta.

maintains that despite the challenges they are confronted with, most Pakistanis remain “moderate, modern, tolerant and stable” in pursuit of a theocracy.⁸³

On the other hand, the international media’s fear mongering and often dehumanizing delineation of the country would clearly have us believe that Pakistan is on the brink of collapse. Mishra rightly warns that this “shoddiness has far-reaching consequences in the real world”, citing in particular “the disastrous stigmatization of ‘AfPak’ [which] has shrunk a large and complex country to its border with Afghanistan, presently a site of almost weekly massacres by the CIA’s drones” (*The Guardian*). Both traditional and “new” media have all amounted to an unchallenged perception of Pakistan as a country fraught with corruption at every conceivable level of society. In 2009, General David Petraeus, the Commander of American forces in the Pakistan region, declared that Pakistan was two weeks away from being overthrown by the Taliban (*The Telegraph*).

In their fictional representations of Pakistan, Mueenuddin and Hamid negotiate and traverse the ground between these diverging views of Pakistan—a “hard country” and a “failed nation”—endeavouring to interrupt this international narrative. Both writers concern themselves with the complex relationship between right and wrong, ethical and unethical and legal and illegal in Pakistan. Their analyses of these relationships offer counterpoints to the received impressions of an inherently corrupt and violent country, not so much with a view to denying the deep-seated problems extant there but to resist an oversimplified understanding of them. In a country that is

⁸³ Bennet-Jones summarises Pakistan’s problems since its inception thus: Owen Bennett-Jones also refers to Pakistan’s toughness:

The country has been under military rule for nearly half its existence. It has had three wars with India and has lost around half of its territory. Its economy has never flourished. Nearly half its vast population is illiterate and 20 per cent is undernourished. The country’s largest city, Karachi, has witnessed thousands of politically motivated murders. Religious extremists have been given free reign. Pakistan’s proximity to Afghanistan, Iran, India and China; its political volatility; and its need for huge foreign loans; have ensured that the country has always been the subject of considerable international concern. (*Eye of the Storm* xii)

clearly struggling with corruption, how is this corruption practised on a daily basis? Is it so deeply entrenched into the minds and attitudes of people that it appears normal as opposed to peculiar? Can it at all be explained outside the scope of rhetoric of law and order? Is it specific to Pakistan or is it a global phenomenon? These are some of the questions this section aims to address through the chosen texts. Moreover, we should also emphasise that Hamid and Mueenuddin's narration of Pakistan sees it as a "hard" but not a "harsh" country—it is also a loving place, reflected in its art, literature and music over the decades. Hamid expresses a nostalgic attachment towards Pakistan, encapsulating the contradictory nature of the country when he said, "the degree of sweetness that comes from this...forbidding place is magnificent" (Asia Society).

Corruption, be it in the form of minor theft or a major assassination, appears to be endemic in Pakistan.⁸⁴ It is *a* way of life, as Mueenuddin and Hamid's fiction depicts, but not the *only* way of life. Mueenuddin's effective and evocative representation of this reality stems from his ability to simultaneously normalize and contextualise it. Quite unlike his non-fictional accounts, Mueenuddin's fictional voice is never shocked by the country or alarmed by its many shortcomings; there is something deadpan about his rendition of events which significantly enhances impact the stories have on the reader. The first story of the collection, "Nawabdin Electrician", narrates an episode in the life of a local village electrician who "flourished on a signature capability, a technique for cheating the electric company by

⁸⁴ Fatima Bhutto's memoir *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2010) also attempts to expose the pitfalls of Pakistan's legal system and like Lieven, suggests that the country's problems are exacerbated by its political classes. The memoir deems Benazir Bhutto and her husband, Asif Zardari, guilty of the assassination of Fatima Bhutto's own father, Murtaza Bhutto, in Karachi in 1996. The roads leading to Mideast Hospital, where the bodies of Murtaza and his comrades were anonymously "deposited" by the police, were cordoned off on the day of the killing, and Bhutto alleges that the hospital was not equipped to deal with the kind of injuries suffered by Murtaza. The involvement of the police is particularly telling here, "the street outside our house was hosed clean; all the blood and glass was washed away [...] some fifteen minutes later, the police had removed all the evidence" (403).

slowing down the revolutions of electric metres, so cunningly done that his customers could specify to the hundred-rupee note the desired monthly savings” (1). The language here carries a sense of achievement—Nawabdin flourishes on the basis of his ability to trick technology and “this trick guaranteed his employment”. Far from disdain, the narrative voice is pitched between irony and sympathy for Nawabdin, whose “discovery eclipsed the philosopher’s stone”, and who thus maintains a vital infrastructural connection between the cities of Multan and Lahore and their surrounding villages (1). He does this, primarily to provide the comforts of city life for his employer K.K. Harouni during his infrequent visits to the farm: “by his superhuman efforts he almost managed to maintain K.K. Harouni in the same mechanical cocoon, cooled and bathed and lighted and fed, that the landowner enjoyed in Lahore” (3). This perverse sense of reliability about Nawabdin, both personally and professionally, should have a disorienting impact, but does not.

The open admiration for the durability and inventiveness of Nawabdin finds an echo in Hamid’s description of the nature of his protagonist’s employment. The process of his selling of “expired goods at scrap prices” by removing and altering expiration dates on the products is described with a large degree of appreciation:

This is not as simple as it sounds, there being a number of tricks to removing ink unnoticeably and requiring great attention to detail in the printing process [...] You are simply increasing the efficiency of the market, ensuring goods that would otherwise be wasted find buyers at reduced price points. You have never heard of anyone dying as a result. (*Rising Asia* 92)

Hamid and Mueenuddin’s affection for their characters is echoed in Tariq Ali’s justification for his continued interest in Pakistan as a country:

However much I despise the callousness, corruption, and narcissism of a degenerate ruling elite, I have never allowed that to define my attitude toward the country. I have always harboured a deep respect and affection for the common people whose instincts and intelligence, despite high levels of illiteracy, consistently display a much sounder appreciation of what the country requires than those who have lorded it over them since 1947. (X111)

Like corruption and violence, the phenomenon of “justice” is also nuanced by its social and political situatedness in Mueenuddin’s stories. “About a Burning Girl” delves into the personal and professional life of a judge at the Lahore high court. This is the only story from the collection that is narrated in first person, a technique employed to give the story a distinctly confessional quality, blending guilt with practicality. The narrator’s introduction of himself is his disclaimer, nonchalantly and easily made: “I am a Sessions judge in the Lahore High Court. I will tell you at the start, so that you understand my position regarding these events, that despite my profession I don’t believe in justice, am no longer consumed by a desire to be what in law school we called ‘a sword of the Lord’” (86). There are two things worth recording in the above lines—one is the use of “no longer consumed” as opposed to “not consumed” to describe the judge’s engagement with Law. The loss of zeal replaced by a hardened indifference seems to be the *modus operandi* for many of Mueenuddin characters, resulting from setbacks, frustrations and a sense of failed idealism.⁸⁵ Second, the allusion to the Biblical “sword of the Lord” terminology, received in the subcontinent through the imposition of Anglo-Saxon law suggests dissatisfaction with the “Britishness” of Pakistani law. Lieven makes a crucial

⁸⁵ Lieven suggests that the Anglo-Saxon legal system that Pakistan inherited and retained is often as unsatisfying to the general public as it is to its practitioners. He quotes, “Yes, they say, the law has hanged my brother’s killer, but now who is to support my dead brother’s family (who, by the way, have ruined themselves bribing the legal system to get the killer punished)?”

intervention here when he asserts that “[a]ll over the former colonial world modern legal systems have been undermined by the fact that they were imposed from outside, have never been fully accepted by the mass of the population, and often clash with the population’s traditional codes” (86).

The unsettling elements of the judge’s admissions of transgression emanate from the anomalous mixing of honesty with deceit, lending the judge a certain verisimilitude despite his malpractice. As in the case of Nawabdin the electrician, the judge arrives at the point quickly, wasting no time in revealing the gaps in his professional ethics. He offers a perversely logical argument clinched by the contrasting image of an imagined career of honesty and integrity: “I would still be a lawyer without briefs, roaming the courts looking for clients, or clamouring at the bar and grovelling at the feet of judges” (86). His interpretation of professional ethics are echoed the words of a retired Pakistani judge, quoted in Lieven’s book:

It doesn’t do for a judge to be too hard with the lawyers. We all know each other and there is a sort of family feeling in the legal profession. And a judge who makes himself really unpopular with the lawyers will find his promotion blocked by rumours and whispers, or may even be accused of corruption, rightly or wrongly. So many judges take the live-and-let-live attitude when they ought to be pulling up a lot of lawyers up very hard indeed. (108-9)

This notion of the unofficial legitimizing of illegality in Pakistan’s complex judicial system is epitomized in the characterization of Mian Sarkar, a canny and furtive accountant who not only deploys the aphorism that “[i]n Pakistan all things can be arranged” but also infuses a degree of narrative excitement and unexpectedness in such a notion (99). The reader in turn remains in awe of the efficiency and efficacy with which Mian Sarkar disentangles the judge’s cook,

Khadim, from accusations of murdering his sister-in-law —“Madam most particularly desires to retain the services of the young man. I had money in hand. It happened that the Deputy Superintendent of Police and I became well acquainted...” (99). And later, “I also happened to strike up a second acquaintance. A respected doctor from Abbotabad” who is also willing to be bribed to confirm a medical falsehood. Mian Sarkar’s talent for corruption brings something admirably pithy and exciting (I use the word cautiously) to Pakistan’s complex everyday life: “When he leaves the office in the evening, exactly at five, he doesn’t turn a corner or get into a cab or bus, he simply dematerialises.” His portraiture suggests that he serves as a link across class categories whereby “[e]verything about the private lives of the judges, and of the staff, down to the lowest sweeper, is to him incidental knowledge” (94). Mueenuddin’s reconfiguration of Pakistan’s entrenched corruption does not amount to his tolerance of fraud and venality in the system. Rather, it is an attempt to humanize the workings of this system and facilitate an access to it other than through the “roll call of infirmities” (Mishra) found in statistical data and media reportage.

Hamid’s narrative purports to map and locate the quest for wealth through his protagonist, who is constantly embroiled in a “sticky web of red tape” (141). His ability to invoke both empathy and pathos in the reader is intriguing in light of the fact that the entire success of his business is based on sales fraud: “[p]ermits denied, inspections failed, meters inappropriately read, audits initiated, all these scams and hassles you have over the years surmounted by greasing junior and mid-level palms” (141). Hamid’s affection for his protagonist is unquestionable. However disconcerting the underhanded business of bottling and labelling counterfeit mineral water, his character retains an endearing quality. This affective narration is clearly linked, as in the case of Nawabdin, to the protagonist’s skill and wholehearted devotion to his

work, albeit illegal. While the severe financial pressures to which the company eventually succumbs leads some employers to consider skipping an important production process (boiling), “You” finds this particular line of fraud unthinkable: “[n]o. We don’t boil, we don’t sell. You know quality matters, especially for fakes” (101).

Mueenuddin’s representations range from Nawabdin’s individual experience to the venality that underscores the country’s judicial system. Hamid’s novel takes the representation of a corrupt institution further, consistently offering parallels between “rising Asia” and elsewhere in the world by suggesting that “[b]ecoming filthy rich requires a certain degree of unsqueamishness, whether in rising Asia or elsewhere” (120). Analysing the economics of corruption in Pakistan, a local journalist Lal Khan has presented a similar argument against viewing corruption as a “Pakistani” phenomenon – “corruption is not the cause of the crisis of the prevalent socio economic system but it is a symptom of the diseased capitalism that needs and breeds this curse. It is the inevitable by-product of the misery, dearth and the deprivation...” (“In Defence of Marxism”). Hamid’s representation of Pakistan’s military headquarters clearly incriminates Euro-American governments; he addresses the “world’s national security apparatuses” alongside intimating the “single-minded dedication or curatorial ferocity” of “those at the apex of organizations entrusted with national security” (160) and hence offering important parallels with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist’s* concern with the damaging role of American national security presence in its “colonies”:

These artists of war are active even when their societies are officially at peace, quests for power being unrelenting, and in the absence of open hostilities they can be found either hunting for ever-present enemies within or otherwise ...

spoils these days often cloaked in purchasing contracts and share-price movements. (161)

Hamid's representation of corruption, like Mueenuddin's, is unflinching. However, it deviates from the latter in tone by frequently verging on the acerbic. This sarcasm is encapsulated both in Hamid's use of pithy and forceful sub-heading—"Befriend a Bureaucrat" for example—and his implied criticism of global market capitalism in statements such as these:

No, harnessing the state's might for personal gain is a much more sensible approach. Two related categories of actor have long understood this. Bureaucrats, who wear state uniforms while secretly backing their private interests. And bankers, who wear private uniforms while secretly being backed by the state. You will need the help of both. But in rising Asia, where bureaucrats lead, bankers tend to follow, and so it is on befriending the right bureaucrat that your continued success critically depends. (140)

We also find here striking parallels between Mueenuddin and Hamid's representation of Pakistan and the non-fictional accounts of Lieven and Ali. Mueenuddin creates a plausible world in all its complexity, but unlike non-fictional accounts, which by their very nature are unable to enter the minds of individuals, Mueenuddin's narratives offer complex and intricate insights into the psyches of "ordinary" characters. His depiction of Pakistan, while exposing a grim reality, is based on his own notion that what "an artist is not allowed to do is to despair" and the conviction that "I don't think unremitting negativity works" (Jabberwock). This attitude is at the root of Lieven's admiration for the ability of Pakistan to work while confronted by innumerable challenges: "[t]here have been times during the writing of this book when it seemed that would have to be entitled 'Requiem for a Country'. At the time of writing, the

pressures on Pakistan from without and within are unprecedented even in its troubled history. Yet such despair would be premature” (3).

4.3 No “Single Story”

Neither Hamid nor Mueenuddin’s fiction sets out to construct “alternative Pakistani woman” or “alternative feminism”. The argument advanced here is that in both these texts, the very concept of a stock “Pakistani woman” is dislodged. In fact their depiction of a heterogeneous and uneven range of female characters is contingent on the refusal of such a category. The assumed formulae between elite women=powerful women and dispossessed women=weak women is hence shown by Mueenuddin to be fundamentally unsound. This counteracting adds up not only to a resurrection of Pakistani women from the associations of passivity, reticence and oppression but also a productive removal from the totalizing conception of gender with regards to Pakistan. Scholars have now for some time been wary of women in South Asia and the Middle East being represented as “single homogenous group” in political and social discourse. Sultan Barakat and Gareth Wardell prompt (in the context of Afghan women) that

[i]n reality, there are significant differences between urban/rural, educated/uneducated, rich/poor and between different tribal/ethnic groups. It is no more valid to make sweeping, unqualified generalizations about Afghan woman than it is to speak of Afghan men as constituting a single group. Second, it is important to understand the traditional division between public and private worlds within Afghan life. (910)

But in disputing this homogeneity, the intention of this fiction is not to offer an alternative, though equally ethnocentric, discourse. The women I discuss here are all inextricably connected by victory and loss, and envy and empathy, within complex sites determined by considerations of class privileges, geographical locations and political affiliations. This process is no doubt aided by an uncoupling of Pakistani female identity and Islam. The women encountered in *In Other Rooms* (and *Rising Asia*) are not particularly religious, making their portrayals invigorating when compared to many representations of Pakistani women encountered globally. The feminist critic Bushra Rahman worries that the propensity to represent Pakistani women within the framework of fundamentalist Islam (particularly during Zia's regime and also increasingly after 9/11) "renders the uncritical consumers of American corporate media unaided in discerning fact from fiction" (106).⁸⁶

I first examine gender narratives in the context of *In Other Rooms*. The women I focus on—Salima, Zainab, Husna and Lily—are plotted at distinctively unique levels of Pakistan's uneven social and economic map. Mueenuddin investigates and presents their lives within their specific situatedness, but simultaneously showcases a complicated inevitable connection between them. The basis for this solidarity is often, as I will show, their melancholia.

⁸⁶ On a different but related note, Sultan Barakat and Gareth Wardell ask why discrimination against Afghan and Pakistani women "passed generally without comment when perpetrated by anti-Soviet Mujahidin allies in a cold war context" (909). Carol Stabile and Deepa Kumar express a similar distrust of American government's deliberate conflation of the fight against terrorism and the fight against the oppression of women. They argue: "Yet this focus on women's liberation ...we argue, was little more than a cynical ploy – it served as a one of the pillars on which elites sought to sell the war to the US public. As the 'War on Terror' continues, and as the Bush administration turns its rapacious eye on other 'rogue' nations, the use of women, children and their 'human rights' as justification for US aggression needs to be interrogated and challenged".

In Other Rooms, Daniyal Mueenuddin employs a popular traditional Punjabi proverb, which translates into—“Three things for which we kill: women, land and gold”. This crude formulation, positioning women as possession alongside land and gold and suggesting the extent to which the Punjabi male may go in order to protect “his woman”, stands in ironic contrast to the women Mueenuddin sets out to represent. Lieven’s research, on the other hand, endorses the popularity of this belief particularly in his observation that “indeed, most crimes committed in the defence of *izzat* [honour] are collective crimes [...] this is not seen as immoral, or even in a deeper sense illegal” (89). Attending briefly to the related concept of *ghairat* (meaning modesty and used in the context of women) it is interesting to note that Lieven unquestioningly assumes a certain “way of living one’s life; just as a woman is expected to ‘do *ghairat*’ in her dress, mode of behaviour and above all, of course, sexual conduct” (89).⁸⁷ Preceded by the qualifier, “of course”, this suggests that women’s sexual discretion and modesty are taken for granted. Mueenuddin’s women, however, flout such portrayals and expectations of female behaviour. In particular, Mueenuddin’s literary account contradicts Lieven’s journalistic perspective of rural women. Moreover, Lieven assumes the automatic and successful enforcement of honour codes: “when it comes to issues of sexual behaviour and family ‘honour’, a majority of cases are in fact settled at this level—all too often by the death of the woman concerned at the hands of her own family” (92). Mueenuddin’s women,

⁸⁷ Deploying a popular Middle Eastern and Pakistani saying— “I against my brother, I and my brother against our cousins, and our family against our *biradari* and our *biradari* against other *biradari*”—Lieven posits that the notion of kinship forms the social crux of Pakistan, cutting across affiliations of religion, nation or ethnicity, often taking precedence over larger political and social causes. *Izzat* translated into honour and *ghairat* translated into modesty are fundamental aspects of the functioning of kinships. (12).

however, resist this foregone conclusion, either by physically moving to the relative safety of the cities, or by the strategic deployment of their sexual powers.

Zainab, the female protagonist in “Provide, Provide” initially appears to play to the conventional expectations of an ethnocentric Euro-American readership regarding disempowered women in the global south. Mueenuddin, true to his style, sets up a deliberately misleading image of Zainab, only to later take it apart. Upon entering his house, the land manager Jaglani “saw a woman crouched over the hearth in the courtyard lit by a single bare bulb, cooking *parathas* in clarified butter. She looked back at him and then covered her face, turning her face away” (55). Her body language, actions and attire all correspond with the image of the “heavily veiled, secluded women, whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children and the other females in the harem or immediate kinship circle” that Rahman suggests have become integral to the stock representation of Pakistani women in the international media (106). It is also clear from the nature of her employment that she is Jaglani’s social inferior, the married sister of his chauffeur, Mustafa. What follows, however, is a more complex depiction of Zainab as a powerful and assertive woman, her actions limited but not erased by her poverty. Her agency is registered through Jaglani’s point of view:

She had a hard, pale face, angular, with high cheekbones, almost beautiful, but too forceful, reminding him of a woman who had been caught years ago on the banks of the Indus, a cattle thief. No woman had ever before been known to lift cattle, and people came from miles around to see her, sitting defiantly on a charpoy in the *dera*, waiting to be turned over to the police. (55)

As Zainab becomes Jaglani’s mistress, the notions of *izzat* and *ghairat* are problematized in the story. Zainab’s reputation amongst the villagers, as the mistress

of a powerful man, remains (at least superficially) unsullied in public. But upon her refusal at accompanying him every night of the week, the following conversation ensues between Zainab and Jaglani:

“Why do you care?” he asked. “Are you afraid the other villagers will find out?”

She laughed humourlessly. “The villagers! They knew the first night. They leave me alone because they are afraid of you. It’s nice, it’s a proof of just how much they do fear you. If you dropped me they would call me a whore out loud as I walked down the street.”

“Then why not spend the nights?”

“Then I would be your whore. At least now we still pretend”. (59)

This notion of pretence and of maintaining a semblance of *izzat* is crucial; but equally crucial is the fact that Zainab’s sincerity is not pretence, but a genuinely held belief. She vocalizes an aggressive desire to preserve her *izzat*: “You buy me things and then later you’ll think you bought me. I was never for sale” (58). She leaves Jaglani’s money untouched, displaying both of pride and a sense of frustration with a social system that fails her, leaving her with no sense of entitlement. Whereas it is clear that Zainab wants security, recognition, children and status, Jaglani’s sudden death drives home to her the realization that “I’ll get nothing”(72). She loses her adopted daughter, Saba, who legally belongs to Jaglani’s family, and is left with no prospect of any material benefit from his will despite her official status as his second wife. Just before his death Jaglani’s patriarchal introspection lays bare the logic of Zainab’s marginalization:

He reproached himself for taking his eldest son’s daughter and giving her to Zainab, transplanting the little girl onto such different stock. Secretly, and

most bitterly, he blamed himself for having been so weak as to love a woman who had never loved him. He made an idol of her, lavished himself upon her sexual body, gave himself to a woman who never gave back, except in the most practical terms. She blotted the cleanliness of his life trajectory, which he had always before believed in. (75)

Zainab's precarious hold over Jaglani is partly based on her sexual relations with him, but also on her emotional rejection of him. While she eventually agrees to become his second wife, her refusal to be emotionally "enslaved" by him is evident in her brutal honesty to him: "[y]ou know, I thought I didn't have children with Aslam because he couldn't. But it's me." She almost began to cry, but then she stopped herself. Her face became hard. 'I only married you because of that.'" (68) Her deliberate constraining of emotions embodies an attempt at preserving her tenuous power and pride. The story exposes the oppressive basis for Jaglani's romance, as Zainab's hopes for a child and subsequent social security remain unsatisfied.

Mueenuddin's complex representation of Zainab is paralleled elsewhere in his collection. The short story, "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders", begins with a simple declaration, "Husna needed a job" (101). To the male servants in K.K. Harouni's household, Husna becomes an object of discrimination not only because of her gender but because of the indeterminacy of her status—"somewhere between maidservant and companion" to K.K.'s estranged wife, Begum Harouni. On her arrival, she is admitted to the secretarial office as opposed to the living room. The living room marks of the generations of wealth accrued by the Harouni family, displayed in photographs of, "hunters wearing shooting caps posed with strings of birds or piles of game, several woman in saris, their hair piled high in the style of the fifties, one in riding breeches [...] To the side stood a youthful Harouni in a receiving line shaking

the hand of Jawaharlal Nehru” (101). But even the servants of this house instantly determine Husna’s identity and deem her unworthy of this fine setting. In sharp contrast we find the pathetic shabbiness of Husna’s family home—its dusty steps, windowless rooms, vulgarly painted bright walls and television covered with embroidered cloth, this last pathetic image of an effort at respectability. Husna’s right to access the home and company of K.K. is based not on present but her past: “[i]n this world some families rise and some fall ... And now I have come to you for help. I’m poor and I need a job. Even Begum Harouni agrees that I should have a profession. My father can give me nothing, he’s weak and has lost his connections. Everyone says I should marry but I won’t” (102). Her reasons for rejecting marriage, while not explicitly explored in the narrative, are probably based on the unlikelihood of marriage improving her financial and social position in any significant way. Like Zainab, albeit with a different personal history, Husna’s ambitions have economic roots. These ambitions also however express an almost hysterical longing to “re-join that world” of prestige experienced by her grandparents. We find that her imagination is regularly swarmed with images of affluence and opulence as she visualizes herself in “cool rooms where ice and alcohol glowed on the table [...] gliding through foreign airports, at ease in the European cities that she read about” (108). Husna has to use her erotic capital to try and achieve what her old landed family has failed to do, that is, to find a place among the “new wealthy”. Her palpable lack of ease in the fine surroundings and refined setting of K.K’s living room becomes cringingly evident in her interaction with his friend Riffat Begum: “Husna followed the conversation face to face, the skin around her mouth taut as if frozen. Abruptly she stood up, catching a foot on the tea trolley, rattling the cups and saucers” (104). The awkwardness of her spoken English corresponds to the embarrassing clumsiness of her body.

K.K. Harouni's sexual relations with Husna, while a source of hope for the latter, are profoundly shameful to him. Not unlike Jaglani, he regrets that "[s]he blotted the cleanliness of his life trajectory"—a fact he would not contemplate disclosing to his family or other social equals (75). This dichotomy between public image and private life continues to dictate the functioning of Pakistani society, and Husna's treatment in the household once she moves in to stay illustrates this, particularly after K.K.'s death. One of the first consequences of K.K.'s death is the rapidity with which Husna must vacate the room and return to the annexe. In addition to this instant and visible decline in status, she is aggressively reminded of her own position by K.K.'s three daughters who demand her immediate departure from the house: "They tell us you have a number of trunks in your room. We will not ask what you have in them. You may take those with you. But nothing else" (120).

Salima, arguably the most destitute of Mueenuddin's female characters was "born in the Jhulan clan, blackmailers and bootleggers, Muslim refugees from the country northwest from Delhi" (17). With a heroine addict for a father and a prostitute for a mother, Saleema herself became the "plaything of a small landowner's son" at the age of fourteen (17). Various representatives of class in the Harouni home, where she is made to live, carry out Salima's sexual exploitation. The landowner's son "plucks" her from her village but discards her soon after; thereafter she begins to cater to the sexual whims and desires of the men in the grimy servant quarters she shares with them. The cook "lording it over the kitchen" bribes her with fine foods in return for sexual favours but once his sexual interest diminishes Saleema is banned from the kitchen altogether. We are told that "he would sweeten up and try to fuck her now and then, out of cruelty as much as anything else, to show he could..." (19). Whereas she is clearly used by the men in the servant quarters, for sex, verbal abuse, crude jokes

about her body, Salima sees their interest as protection. Sex becomes a means to ensure at least a degree of financial security, come as it might at the expense of her lost dignity. But the system in which she finds herself operating—sex in return for food, sex in return for small monetary incentives, and sex in return for comforting words—ultimately leads her to dwell on questions of her identity and agency. But even this questioning is registered through the eyes of others. This is evidenced in Saleema's contemplation as she rides in the back of the employer's luxury car, "I suppose people looking in must wonder who I am" (25). She seeks permission to open her passenger seat window, "not so much because she wanted to, as to register her presence" (25). This need to assert her selfhood is reinforced in her impassioned defence to Rafik, in which she not only implicates her estranged husband for her plight but also attempts, out of desperation, to establish her self through her roots: "I know what you all think [...] You think I'm a slut, you think I poison my husband. Because of him I'm alone, and you all do with me as you like. I'm trying to live here too, you know. I'm not a fool. I come from somewhere" (23).

In contrast to Zainab, Husna and Saleema is their much wealthier counterpart, Lily. After a devastating car accident in London, Lily returns to attempt to regain control of her life in Islamabad. Few readers outside Pakistan might anticipate Lily's life there: "Lily had been to parties all week, month, endlessly drinking, rarely having dinner [...] For this evening, themed as 'Night of the Tsunami', her friend Mino's servants had brought in truckloads of sand to make an artificial beach beside his newly built weekend home" (156). There are suggestions that Lily is caught between her own independence, which she frequently makes reference to, and the lack thereof. Mueenuddin's description of her reflects this paradox:

Not yet thirty, she was unusually pretty, her hands and feet and small upturned nose—her high cheekbones, her lips—sharply defined and yet giving the impression of softness, as if she had been trimmed out of soft brown velvet with fine scissors ... the whole effect being that of a fastidious cat, tail wrapped around herself in repose, independent (157)

Lily is shown as struggling to both sustain her link with the “westernized” Punjab’s elite and attempting to acquire some kind of distance from this class. Her most significant attempt made at achieving his distance—aimed at absolving and cleansing herself from what she sees as a decadent lifestyle—is her marriage to a wealthy farmer, Murad. But Lily’s transition from elite urban Punjabi life—“drifting from party to party, flying out of Isloo, as they called it, to Karachi, to Lahore”—to her husband’s farm in Jalpana is necessarily problematic. Her claim that “I want to be at the farm. I’m going to be like an old fashioned Punjabi wife, weighing out the flour and sugar every morning and counting the eggs” (186) reflects her distance both from the traditional figure of the Punjabi woman that she (albeit half seriously) wishes to emulate, but also from much more empowered figure of an affluent and educated member of the Pakistani elite. Her infidelity to her husband only months after their marriage, compounded with her urgent need to leave the stifling rural setting outlines a certain impossibility of a transition between these two spaces. In fact marriage is analogously compared to the “act of drowning” in which she “would be left to hear the blame, to injure him, blindly or by neglect, becoming one of those thin sharp women from the cities who can hold their liquor but are desiccated by it, who are well dressed without taking pleasure in it, living much in London, bored...” (209). Lily’s insights into this possible future—to her a terrifying prospect—also serves to distance her from the caricature she draws out.

Mueenuddin offers no clearly defined indications of the future for Zainab, Husna and Lily in his writing. Their stories are wrapped up briskly, in his characteristically distilled and compressed conclusions. Humiliatingly turned away by K.K Harouni's daughters after his death, Husna's departure from the house is swift—"[t]he next day two men loaded the trunks onto a horse-drawn cart and carried them away to the Old City" (129). Rejected by Jaglani at his deathbed, Zainab too is escorted by his servants "through the gates of the compound and out into the busy street" (82). Lily's future is speculated through the outcome of her marriage: "[a]mong the possible futures, Lily now recognized the likely one, the one she must avoid" (209). In the days after K.K. Harouni's death Salima and her newborn child are rendered unemployed and she takes to begging on the street for their sustenance. Hers is the only story that offers a sense of finality in the form of her untimely death. In view of these endings, and despite them, I suggest that Mueenuddin's women while represented in melancholic terms preserve strong elements of hope. There is nothing melodramatic or defeatist about their representation, no indications of any of the women floundering in confusion or self-pity. Husna and Zainab's departure after the deaths of their employers—I hesitate to say lovers—is both quick and intimates the possibility of rapid recuperation. The predominant sense of their departure is that of movement. They will look for another means of survival. Lily, while contemplating the future of her loveless marriage is perfectly aware that this is the option "that she must avoid". Even Salima, whose life ends tragically, makes a conscious decision to beg so she can avoid the route of prostitution, no longer willing to make herself sexually permissible. Whereas Mueenuddin's female characters leave their own unique footprints in the narratives and do not lend themselves to any easy

categorisation, their indeterminate (possibly promising) futures offer yet another basis for their solidarity.

Hamid's narrative disturbs the phenomenon that Mohanty has dubbed "discursive feminism" (*Feminism* 2003). Like Mueenuddin, Hamid steers clear of narrating a "single story" of womanhood in *Rising Asia*. The three women characters represented in *the* novel are all linked to "You" in a significant capacity and are vocalized through his opinions, negotiations and relationships with them. While retaining their own unique social distinctiveness in Hamid's anonymous city, they simultaneously lend themselves to be subsumed within a collective transnational feminist narrative. I suggest that these three women, all of whom experience life as struggle, and in some cases tragedy, invite empathy and identification from a transnational feminist readership. Their struggles take place within their situatedness of their settings, some of which are particular to specific regions and cultures—such as kinship, enforced marriage, and educational deprivation and others that are universally applicable such as patriarchy, capitalism and migration. Hamid's female characters all function within an oppressive society; the difference lies in the degrees of oppression and the individual assertion of selfhood on the part of the women who experience it. What I want to explore here are the ways in which the protagonist's mother, sister and beloved negotiate this oppression, thereby dislodging the notion of "third world" women as silenced and lacking agency.

On the infrequent occasions when Hamid deploys the more hackneyed images of women in villages "bearing clay pots on their heads for water and carrying clothes and soap for cleaning", the description is always anchored in practicality, depicting the everyday functionality of the village. Nor is the space of domestic and household work in any way undermined in the narrative. The protagonist's mother, a matriarchal

figure in the family, is in fact depicted as someone with “solitary” responsibility (8). Even within the traditional rural patriarchy of her village, she is portrayed as resilient, assertive and dominant: “[y]our mother is regarded in the compound as vain and arrogant and headstrong, and these accusations have bite, for they are all true” (9). Hamid reinforces the mother’s mental and physical strength by occasionally depicting her through the eyes of the other women in the village:

The other women of the compound would be frightened of your mother were it not for the reassuring existence of the men. In an all-female society your mother would likely rise to be a queen, a bloody staff in her hand and crushed skulls beneath her feet. Here the best she has managed is for the most part to be spared provocation. Even this, cut off as she is from her own village, is no small victory. (10)

While this description of the mother is couched in the language of fear and violence, a certain sense of admiration is palpable in such descriptions. Her “victory”, as suggested earlier, though curtailed within her social and economic situatedness, needs to be assessed as such. It should also be noted that it is the mother who becomes the agent for movement and progress as through the combination of her ambition, foresight and persistence she manages to orchestrate her family’s move from the country to the city. This futuristic desire to defeat poverty in turn initiates the journey that embarks her son on the path to becoming “rich in rising Asia”. The mother’s lifelong struggles are tragically crystallised in the incurable metastatic disease that plagues her towards the end of her life. The extremity of her suffering, described in graphic and discomfiting detail in the novel, brings about a “transformation in her appearance and personality” but does not erase her sense of selfhood. More than her fear of death however, the mother is devastated “by the failure of her imagination to

conceive of a proud way to end” her life (70). This sense of shame is no doubt heightened by her family’s inability to afford any kind of effective medical treatment for her disease, reducing her, in her eyes to a financial and physical liability. Her anguished pride hence becomes the single most painful bane of her existence in her final days. Her funeral where “rose petals are thrown, incense lit, entreaties to the divine offered” becomes yet another transnational site, not lodged in any particular cultural context. Hamid’s charting of the mother’s “progression from solid heartiness to ethereal fragility” and his exploration of the range of psychological and emotional upheavals experiences involved, appeal to a collective sense of solidarity.

“You’s” sister asserts her sense of selfhood almost instantly, firstly by mocking the possibility of being “frightened” at the prospect of her imminent marriage at a very young age to a much older man—“[h]e should be frightened of me”, she claims. Her claim is however preceded by a forced laugh, giving reason to doubt her assuredness. When “You” probes her further about her ostensible lack of fear at the marriage and a return to the village, she posits a distinction between them— “[t]hat’s why you’re still a boy and I’m a woman” (25). This bifurcation between girlhood and womanhood suggests that “You’s” sister is in a state of mental preparedness for her future in the patriarchal system in which she operates. The sister appears to view her sacrifices—of education (as she is denied schooling) and of her enforced marriage—as part of the performance of womanhood. Her premature passage to womanhood is captured in a poignant moment in the narrative, when she becomes an invaluable source of comfort to “You” after a traumatic migration from village to city. In this moment she “does something that “You” associates with women of girth and substance, not with slender slips of girls like [his] sister” (26). She sings. The mellow and powerful intonations of her song have a chant like effect

on “You”; the song is oddly enchanting and the movement of his sister’s “body swell and diminish like a harmonium” render her a mystical and powerful quality. My point is that while the cultural constraints of forced marriage, the withholding of basic educational rights and the socio-economic deprivation of female characters like the sister position her very differently to her counterparts in the global north, Hamid has taken the trouble to showcase her mental and emotional processes which prevent her from being reduced to a mere “other”.

Hamid’s chief female protagonist, known in the novel only as the “pretty girl”, contravenes any expectations of passive beauty that her deliberately satirical title may invoke. Even as a teenager she is depicted as ambitious, perceptive and equipped with a meticulous plan for the fame and wealth that she has marked herself for. These goals, which appear far-fetched and irrational in the context of her impecunious social and economic background (her only family being her unemployed and misogynistic father and a severely ailing mother) include aspirations to an independent home in the city, a flourishing career in the modelling industry, urban luxuries and contingency plans for any unexpected difficulties. Her passage to wealth, borne out of her resolve to “escape from her family” and the humiliating deprivation of her neighbourhood are represented tragically, rendering her emotionally hardened and seemingly indifferent to love of any kind. Treated as a sexual object, both in the realms of poverty and wealth, the “pretty girl” operates in a society that is contingent upon her sexual accessibility. Hamid traces this process of violation, made complicated owing to her agreeability. This agreeability is of course, not entirely optional:

Initially these were kisses and the permission to fondle her body. Then oral sex was required. This was followed by anal sex, which she believed, much to his surprise and delight, would allow her to preserve her virginity. But as the

months passed, she came to doubt this logic, and eventually she permitted vaginal sex as well. (51)

I suggest here that the “pretty girl’s” characterization is anchored in a transnationalist framework, making it virtually impossible to apply any kind of national, religious or cultural stereotypes to her. Situated in a ruthlessly capitalist schema, she is presented as a tragic figure battling the conditions of poverty to orchestrate a life change. Her loneliness through this journey paradoxically adds to her universality. Firstly, the society in which she must “bridge a significant cultural and class divide to enter even the lower realms of the world of fashion” structurally excludes her (51). Not only is her success in breaking down this structure contingent on her sexual availability, this act gradually depletes any notions of her self-respect. She admits to “You” that “I am not the sort of girl men should marry”. Her financial success hence comes at the expense of her chances of finding a husband, placing her, like many other female characters I have explored in a problematic double mind. The men who exploit her for sexual pleasure have no interest in marrying her by token of her defilement.

Hamid’s feminist representation of the “pretty girl” does not preclude a set of victories and the possibility of hope. While the “pretty girl” epitomizes the causal relationship between success and sexual exploitation in her professional life, in a personal capacity she is shown far from submissive. This is encountered on two occasions in her narrative where she assumes a distinctly dominant role in her sexual encounters with “You”. Moreover, the narrative offers glimpses into her genuine happiness when in the company of “You” who “render[s] her life in the neighbourhood she hates more bearable” (51). Moreover, while there is an apparent denial of any deep-seated feelings of affection towards the protagonist by the “pretty girl”, “she knows there is something. She is happy during her conversations with you,

happier than at other times [...] You are a door to an existence she does not desire, but even if the room beyond is repugnant, that door has won a portion of her affection” (52). The economic and social paradigms of capitalist “rising Asia” are shown to resist accommodating a narrative of love, but *Rising Asia* is ultimately a testament to the triumph of love.

Once the totalizing myth about Pakistani women is destabilized in the stories, the emphasis on a heterogeneous conception of Pakistani womanhood facilitates the weaving of a transnational feminist narrative that all the writers discussed here contribute to. I suggest that such a transnational narrative need not undercut the distinctive social and cultural identifications of women across the world. As Yuval-Davis has neatly stated, “people who identify themselves as belonging to the same collectivity or social category [but] can actually be positioned very differently in relation to a whole range of social locations (e.g. class, gender, ability, sexuality, stage in the life cycle, etc.) (2004:17). The representation of these various “social locations”, especially those projecting the perpetuations of gendered violence, is hardly new and can be regularly encountered in anthropological, filmic, and journalistic texts. But often, these representations of female victims do not allow for a realization of their individual agencies. Hamid and Mueenuddin hence take the necessary corrective steps in their fiction. Mueenuddin has said elsewhere that

Repression doesn’t necessarily make repressed persons weak. As the adage says, what doesn’t break you builds you. Some of the strongest women I have met are Pakistani. Because the structures of power are organized against them, they have to learn to use all kinds of clever and indirect means to exercise power. (Escelera)

4.4 “This Most Unequal City”

And I shall sell you sell you sell you
Of course, my dear, and you’ll sell me.

—Elizabeth Bishop

Both *In Other Rooms* and *Rising Asia* are teeming with a sense of growth. This seems to be a bizarre reflection to make about narratives that undertake an exhaustive consideration of a country like Pakistan, which has staggeringly low figures of economic development. Yet, in both texts there exists an overwhelming yearning toward social and financial upward mobility within what Hamid evocatively calls a “steam furnace of ambition” (37). Hamid and Mueenuddin capture this heady sense of growth and individuals’ aspirations for economic betterment, but present it alongside the narratives of loss that they seem to suggest are inextricably linked to the process of growth. Hamid writes, “[i]n this novel I was building a superstructure that is the market narrative, but, side by side, exploring the shadow it casts on the story of love and loss” (*Economic Times* 2013). Thus Hamid is not exaggerating when in *Rising Asia* he declares, parodying the hackneyed style of self-help writing, that “the pursuit of love and the pursuit of wealth have much in common. Both have the potential to inspire, motivate, uplift and kill”. In an attempt to depict happiness and love as inversely proportionate to economic growth, the former is described as the factor that “dampens the fire ... robbing of essential propulsion an already fraught up-river journey to the heart of financial success” (37). In this section I focus on Hamid and Mueenuddin’s delineation of the social and political unevenness of the landscape of

Pakistan, its restless and shifting environment and its complex interconnectedness—which cumulatively counteract any attempts at oversimplifying it.

The social configuration of *In other Rooms* is reflected in the structure of the K.K. Harouni's home, called "Gulfihsan", the "name by which Lahore knew the great house" (50). Inhabited by people across an array of social and economic standings—from feudal lords to small businessmen and servants to impoverished relatives—the house becomes a metaphor for their inextricable interconnectedness. In turn, it can also be treated as a microcosm for the way in which Pakistan itself functions. Mueenuddin's stories, like K.K.'s house, are mapped on an extensive canvas and attempt to, in the style of Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine* (1830), capture the "complete picture". His professed attempt at recording the "high and low, rich and poor, corrupt and incorrupt" are fulfilled through his deployment of a range of multiple and competing perspectives in the stories, and also by the deliberate narratorial distancing from the characters. This distance affords the narrative the ability to access many psychological states, without necessarily aligning with any. The lives of his characters, as I will demonstrate in this section, are complicated on account of their shifting and conflicting class positions. The human struggles and suffering explored in the stories predominantly arise from an attempt to both acquire wealth and improve social standing, or indeed a desperate effort to retain the two.

Pakistan is here depicted in the stories to be in state of flux. While there are no traumatic ruptures in the social fabric, the narrative explores the transience of class positions and therefore indicates class mobility. The definition of ruling elites in Pakistan has evolved over the decades since the British's Raj's privileging of the landed feudal class. Formerly, political power and wealth was bestowed almost exclusively upon a select number of notable land-owing families. Mueenuddin's

stories trace the decline of these once omnipotent representatives of the feudal class—which was likely to include previous generations of his own family. Ayesha Siddiqua writes about these changes that,

[p]opularly, the term “elite” invokes the image of the landed-feudal group, which was originally part of the ruling elite in 1947. However, over the years this began to change with the state’s civil and military bureaucracy getting integrated into the elite and also using state resources to create other elite groups such as business and industry. (*Express Tribune*)

Mueenuddin’s representation of this loss of wealth and status experienced by the feudal class is marked by distinct pathos. K.K. Harouni’s resentment against the emergent industrialists and entrepreneurs “blazing into view” in Pakistan appears to stem from a mixture of condescension and envy. He feels “forced to endure”, for instance, conversations about luxurious cars with those whom he views as social upstarts – “a “Rolls-Royce coupe recently imported by one of the Waraiches, a family no one had heard of just five years before” (50).

There are two elements at play here, wealth and reputation. It appears that while K.K. Harouni may grudgingly become accustomed to the transference of wealth—he even dabbles with investing in industrial ventures—the loss of social status is unbearable to him. The inability to preserve feudal power eventually leads to exasperated attempts on K.K. Harouni’s part at “selling tract if urban land and pouring more and more cash into factories, buying machinery from Germany, hiring engineers, holding meetings with bankers” (50). While his decline is accelerated by the fraudulent methods of his land manager Jaglani, ironically it is also Jaglani who assumes the responsibility of shielding his employer from psychological side effects of these losses. Mueenuddin writes, “[t]hey spoke for a few minutes of about a

murder recently committed by one of the tenants, a matter of a girl. Jaglani knew to do this, in order to paper over the embarrassment his master must feel at having to sell land held by his family for three generations” (51).

The interconnectedness of the various social classes and their mobility, however, also means that there are people who aspire to displace Jaglani. The household chauffeur, Mustafa, falls into precisely this category. But irrespective of his motives, he remains as dutiful and reverent towards Jaglani, as the latter is of K.K. Harouni—“[s]eeing Jaglani coming, he flicked away his cigarette, and went around to open the door [...] Mustafa had earned Jaglani’s confidence by his discretion and by his excellent qualities as a courtier” (52). This reverence, while undoubtedly little more than a show, is also an inherent condition of Pakistani bureaucracy. Both Jaglani and Mustafa, irrespective of their intentions, find social irreverence to their employers unthinkable. It is this movement across the class spectrum accompanied by the continuity of certain social gestures that is a constant feature of Mueenuddin’s Pakistan.

The movement and restlessness within which Mueenuddin depicts the feudal class and the bourgeois industrialists also marks his representation of the more “Westernized” Pakistani elites. K.K. Harouni’s children and grandchildren have experienced life outside Pakistan and (like Mueenuddin) have obtained their education in the America and Europe. While their experience of both worlds intensifies the sense of indeterminacy with which they are seen, this can also be attributed to their social dislocation in Pakistan. Murad, whose life closely resembles Mueenuddin’s own, also experiences the tensions of not being able to settle anywhere with any kind of permanence. He is a Princeton graduate who returns to Pakistan to run his ancestral farm and thrives on his determination to innovate and revitalize the

local rural economy. However, Murad's move from America to Pakistan, and subsequently from the cities of Lahore and Islamabad to his village in Jalpana, reflects an unsettling fluidity. His intention of remaining on the farm continuously for three months is instantly tested upon receiving the invitation to an opulent party in Islamabad. He feels liberated at the prospect of visiting the city—"I love that moment, coming past the United Bakery, the jewelers, past Old Book Corner, the streets full of diplomats' cars, the farm and its problems far far away" (174). But at the same time, we hear of his instinctive contentment in his life at the farm where he recognizes "how happy (he) felt, how alive, looking up at the sky" (173). This state of in-betweenness, emerging from the tensions between his rural and urban life, both inducing fascination and frustration simultaneously, resonates with Mueenuddin's location between America and Pakistan. In his own words: "half-Pakistani and half-American, I have spent equal amounts of time in each country, and so, knowing both cultures well and belonging to both, I equally belong to neither, look at both with an outsider's eye (Interview 2009).

Mueenuddin offers more nuances by shifting the location to the privileged districts of Paris in "Our Lady of Paris". This is yet another dimension of wealthy Pakistan, albeit experienced outside the national space. Unlike the stories preceding it, the protagonists found here all share a background of privileged education and social sophistication. Like Hamid's delineation of the relationship between Changez and Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we find here an exotic attraction between Pakistan (represented by a man) and America (represented by a woman). However, the configuration offered by Mueenuddin is different. What we have in "Our Lady of Paris" is the carefully constructed awkwardness that exists between Helen, Sohail's American girlfriend, and his parents, Rafia and Amjad. It offers an interesting reversal

to the relation encountered between Changez and Erica's family in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where Changez, despite all efforts to be subsumed into American life, is never quite at ease in the presence of Erica's wealthy parents. In Mueenuddin's story, the narrative gestures regularly to Helen's considerably less impressive social and financial status, the difference in wealth being the most obvious difference here. Helen's description of Sohail's relationship with her own mother is significant: "He and my mother get along well, even though— she's a secretary in a little Connecticut town, and she has a house with cats and a garden. He liked that. At first I thought he was pretending, but he wasn't" (136). Sohail's own mother, on the other hand, is depicted as an exceedingly refined and well preserved "drawing-room" figure, who "knew everyone of a certain social class in Karachi, went to dinners and to the polo and to all the fashionable weddings, flew often to Lahore and Islamabad, and summered in London" (130). The expensive jewelry worn by Helen in Paris has been lavishly gifted to her by either Sohail or his mother and Mueenuddin writes that her "cheeks burned at the thought that she was spending his money. She had hardly any of her own for this trip, no savings; at school she lived on nothing, always had a job, even after she met Sohail" (152).

This seems to be an attempt at reversing the existing notion of the material successes and sense of plenty typically associated with America in stark contrast to the visual images of loss and poverty that have become allied with Pakistan. The narrative signals the irony of Sohail's parents introducing Helen to her first experience of ballet in Paris's splendid opera house, where the contrast between the two women becomes most visible. The difference in their status is confirmed by the images of opulence and grandeur including her "midnight blue sari of shot silk, a long heavily worked pashmina shawl, and earrings made from cabochon emeralds, green

drops large as grapes” (143). Rafia’s observations on Helen rub this snobbery in: “I was watching you—I could see it all reflected in your face, the freshness of your impressions. I’m so glad you liked it” (144). Rafia has claimed this space to exercise her power over the younger woman—both as a member of the elite class and as Sohail’s mother. But Helen’s reaction to a hitherto unexplored world is not uncomplicated; while “everything in this world seemed to her finer, more defined, more weighted”, it also “seemed false to her, the people shuffling down the staircase [...] the wood mouldings painted gold, the massive and elaborate chandeliers” (145). Mueenuddin sustains the stylistic parallels of his stories—Helen’s discomfort in this setting is reminiscent of Husna’s in K.K. Harouni’s lavish drawing room and both women lack the experience that is necessary for the enjoyment and appreciation of wealth and finery.

The perception of America by the Pakistani ruling classes is significant here. Rafia compliments Helen for being “the right kind of American, the Americans who went to the moon [...] the Americans of Hawthorne and Lowell—the Puritans and the prairie” (147). This is interesting on more than one level. For one, it reveals the kind of American Rafia wants to believe in, the ambitious American with an exceptional work ethic, who doesn’t “assume” material success before achieving it. This of course is in ironic contrast to the opulence experienced by her own family, and effectively summed in the words of her husband, “I was born into a comfortably well off family. All my life I’ve been lucky, my business succeeded, I’ve had no tragedies, my wife and I are happy, we have a wonderful son” (138). Secondly, it is difficult to ignore the exoticism in Rafia’s words, reflecting a detached and skewed vision of American country life with which she associates Helen and of which she has no desire to partake. This imaginary American life, having reached her through the works of

Hawthorne and Lowell, provided a counter image of America after 9/11. Her worry for Sohail's position in contemporary America lies in her realization of his emasculating in-betweenness—"not American and not with any place in Pakistan"—worsened, she believes by pressures exerted by 9/11 on the identity and reputation of Pakistani men. (149) Rafia's scepticism is based on her concern with protecting what she sees as her son's identity:

I see these boys come through Karachi on two-week vacations – the boys who settled in America – and they always have this odd tamed look, a bit sheepish – they more or less apologise daily. Sohail's background will always be a factor ... He is proud of who he is, but they would knock a bit of that out of him. (149)

In such statements, Rafia could well be drawing out a portrait of Hamid's protagonist Changez. On the other hand, Rafia's concerns for Helen's happiness in Pakistan expose a canny understanding of the truth about her life: "You would hate Pakistan. You're not built for it, you're too straight and you don't put enough value on decorative, superficial things – and that's the only way to get by there" (148-9).

Hamid's representation of wealth in *Rising Asia* offers a marked contrast to Mueenuddin's delineation of the Pakistani upper classes, the former being much more invested in the process of the acquisition of prosperity. In both narratives the path to wealth is paved with psychological turmoil, sorrow and in some cases tragedy. The end result in both however, offers glimpses of hope and revival. The two chief protagonists in *Rising Asia* demonstrate none of the ease and sophistication of Mueenuddin's elite characters, despite their acquisitions of considerable wealth. Part of the reason is their uneasiness about their own affluence. Midway through *Rising Asia* is a scene where the protagonist and the "pretty girl" both find themselves in a

Karachi-like “city by the sea”, containing “a crush of people more diverse than you see at home, their languages more varied, their skin and lips and hair testifying to wider geographic swaths of evolution [...] binding rising Asia to Africa, Oceania, and beyond” (151-152). The scene offers a stark visual contrast to the previous meetings between the protagonist and the “pretty girl”. Here the protagonist is a changed man from what the “pretty girl” has known him to be in the past—a local DVD delivery boy, a struggling business aide, as someone who carried a “whiff of home”. Now, “a limousine whisks you to your hotel, in a prestigious neighbourhood [...] High in your room, you gaze out at the sea, mesmerizing to you, a man from the far-off plains [...] You nibble on tiny chocolates and an assortment of exotic berries... and think, This must be success” (152). At the same time, a comparable visual description is offered of the “pretty girl”: “She is sitting beside her lap pool, in the shade of a tree, wearing a fawn swimsuit and retro dark glasses while sipping sugar-free cordial through a bendable straw” (152). Both these depictions gesture at a somewhat forced and uncomfortable embodiment of wealth, the exotic berries and sugar-free cordial seeming both unnatural and perhaps even incongruent to both individuals.

This apparently successful passage of the two characters into the elite class, however, is much more complicated than what Hamid has frequently called a growth-narrative. To the contrary, it is the narrative of loss suffered by his two protagonists that Hamid is interested in. While the movement from rural to urban life, followed by material success has in part fulfilled the aims of both these individuals, they continue to be depicted with pathos and fragility. The protagonist, towards the end of his life, having lost the vast majority of his fortune to his absconding brother-in-law, is described as having done “remarkably well”—befitting to irony of the novel’s title. The pathos of his loss is registered: “At the two-star hotel that is your residence, you

have negotiated a long-term, month by month room rental for less than half the standard rate” (202). But there is also a distinct sense that the protagonists do not equate wealth with happiness:

What you do sense, what is unmistakable, is a rising tide of frustration and anger and violence, born partly of the greater familiarity the poor today have with the rich [...] At times watching the stares that follow a luxury SUV as it muscles its way down a narrow road, you are merely relieved to have been already separated from your fortune (206).

It is logical then that the “pretty girl” is only able to form a meaningful and loving relationship with the protagonist after the loss of his wealth.

Mueenuddin and Hamid’s narratives contravene the possibility of forming any clichéd notions about Pakistan. Their stories offer a resounding reminder that a country with the demographic structure of Pakistan (with a population of over 187 million people) cannot reasonably be understood by employing a set of obdurate stereotypes. Pakistan has amassed notoriety for being “divided, disorganised, economically backward, corrupt, violent, unjust, often savagely oppressive towards the poor and women, and home to extremely dangerous forms of extremism and terrorism” (Lieven). But this discourse, when carried out without proper contextualization has proved to be a dehumanizing one. The fiction examined in this chapter attempts to offset the debasing discourse within which Pakistan has too long discussed. Concurrently, neither writer sees Pakistan as removed from the “world” narrative, attempting rather to “finesse cultural differences into the human part of the story” (*Beyond the Margins*). They “[tell] it like it is, with all the violence, madness and political turmoil that it involves” (*Beyond*), but retain a conviction in the country’s ability to survive—and also, in many cases, thrive.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's article in *The Washington Post* in 2007 was entitled, "Why Do They Hate Us?" The ambiguity of title (which echoes the familiar jargon of early post-9/11 sentiments in the American media) chiefly pertains to the subject positions of "they" and "us". Hamid begins by recounting his own state of mind at the prospect of staying in Dallas:

Recently, I found myself in Dallas, a place I'd never been before. As a Muslim writer, I felt about going there pretty much the way an American writer might have felt about heading to the tribal areas of Pakistan: nervous, with the distinct suspicion that the locals carried guns and weren't too fond of folks who look like me.

However, the rest of the article is not an extension on these fears. The question—"why do they hate us?"—is in fact posed to Hamid by a local resident at a Dallas bookstore.

The stranger's question, Hamid describes, "stopped [him] cold". The crux of my thesis lies in investigating Hamid's instinctive reluctance (and perhaps inability) not only to address the question but also to interpret it in the first place. Retrospectively, Hamid explains that his chief difficulty with the question was not its unexpectedness but the confusion he experienced in conclusively determining whether he represented "us" or "they". He explains in the article that "part of me identifies with 'they' and part with 'us'", briefly glossing the experiences of his childhood and youth in America from which nostalgia is not absent. Hamid, like Shamsie, Mueenuddin and Aslam, remains inextricably aligned to America and Europe for both personal and professional reasons. However, Hamid's ambivalence regarding his identity position is augmented by the realization that "growing up in

Pakistan in the 1980s let me see firsthand the devastating effects that the best of U.S. intentions can have”. History thus becomes inseparable from the writing I examine here—the long duration of Britain’s colonization of the Indian subcontinent, the many decades of American political and military intervention in Pakistan, reaching its peak during the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), the American-led war on terror after 9/11 and the ongoing American drone attacks on northern Pakistan seriously confound the relationship that these writers have with America.

My interrogation of their novels has suggested that their liminal positioning—their state of “in-betweenness” coupled with their historical consciousness—enables Hamid, Aslam, Shamsie and Mueenuddin not only to critique globalization as a code for Euro-American supremacy, but also leads them to, as Spivak provocatively suggests, “overwrite the globe” (72). In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin debate the appropriation of “the dominant language”, its transformation and subsequent use “to reveal a cultural reality to a world audience” (189). The novels I examine here go beyond the appropriation of the English language. The dissolution of cultural, ethnic and geographical boundaries and their reconfiguration is privileged above all else, allowing the “larger picture” to take shape. This emphasis on transnationalism takes the notion of the “empire writing back” at least a step further, inviting a reimagining of the world through a productive obfuscation of “us” and “them”.

I have argued that contemporary Pakistani fiction in English is transnational in scope even when its focus is on urban and rural Pakistan. The universal and the local remain in balance and inextricably connected. The narratives remain cognizant of Pakistan’s on-going tribulations with politics, fundamentalism and corruption. *In Other Rooms* and *Rising Asia* are particularly invested in depicting Pakistan as ridden

with corruption and grinding poverty but are equally aware of the universality of these experiences. While they scrutinize the consequences (both private and public) of the rampant upsurge of capitalism in Pakistan, there is an attempt at viewing this process transnationally both within the “rising Asia” phenomenon and within the broader context of the rest of the world. Pakistan, as a result, is deterritorialized.

This process frequently involves the deconstruction and dismantling of negative stereotypes about Pakistan. The narratives are intolerant (and sometimes contemptuous) of pigeonholes and caricatures that have pervaded the international media for many years and attempt to counter them. The imagining of women in categories such as “Pakistani woman” or “Afghan woman”—veiled, oppressed and contained—are shown to be grossly inadequate for the understanding of gender relations. It is not just the limitation but also the very existence of reductive categories that is questioned and flouted; what is presented instead is a varied and differentiated range of representations, which have transnational reverberations. A moment in *Burnt Shadows* encapsulates this when in New York during 9/11, Hiroko’s mind wanders to the train station at Nagasaki and its “walls plastered with signs asking for news of missing people”; she is drawn to the conclusion that “[i]n moments such as these it seemed entirely wrong to feel oneself living in a different history to the people of this city” (274). The translation of lived experiences, over time and history, thus becomes fundamental to emerging Anglophone Pakistani fiction.

Using a transnational rather than global approach, I have suggested that the emerging body of Anglophone Pakistani literature is based on the productive ambivalence experienced by Hamid when asked, “why do they hate us?” It has made possible the notion that “tales can travel, or that two sets of people oceans apart can dream up similar sacred myths” (Aslam 231). Alive to reality as it unfolds in the

present, the literature I explore is highly topical but also carries a heightened awareness of what Hayden White has called “the historical process itself” (97). Through the narratives I have considered, I have suggested that the set of writers I consider are not interested in rescinding European or American literary modes of analyzing the world—such as the privileging of 9/11—but rather in altering the axes on which stories are told and understood, within and outside the fictional world. Their bilingual consciousness facilitates such a venture, but also to a large extent, necessitates it. Chakrabarty has posited in *Provincializing Europe* that “European history is no longer seen as embodying anything like a ‘universal human history’”. No major Western thinker, for instance, has publicly shared Francis Fukuyama’s ‘vulgarized Hegelian historicism’ that saw in the fall of the Berlin wall a common end for the history of all human beings”. My chosen novels are at pains to suggest that dates such as 9/11 are speciously chosen to mark the commencement of a new historical moment by much of contemporary British and American fiction in response about terrorism. To highlight the problematic nature of the exclusive privileging of the 9/11 moment, I have offered examples from a selection of Euro-American novels and articles about 9/11 and highlighted the awkward elements of xenophobic grieving which “effectively [sidestep] any attempt to imagine those who fall outside that literary and political citizenship” (Singh 23). Anglophone Pakistani fiction moves away from any such notions of presentism and offers two major points of departure: it invokes history and delves into public life. Whereas Euro-American fiction (as well as films and art) have tended to exemplify the consequences of terrorism in chiefly private and domestic realms, Anglophone Pakistani fiction has endeavoured to collapse the barriers between private and public life. A brief conversation in *Burnt*

Shadows between Hiroko and Kim in New York, just a few days after 9/11, captures this sense of “post colonial exasperation” (Singh 23):

“What’s going on out in the world?”

“The last fire has almost burnt out.” Kim pointed in the direction of the looming emptiness outside before coming to sit down on the sofa.

“That’s not the world, it’s just the neighbourhood,” Hiroko said sharply. (250)

Hiroko’s words carry insinuations of the American privileging of terrorism as a domestic crisis and of thus reducing worldly experiences into American ones. By contrast, critics such as Boehmer have suggested that “in the globalized world terror is a force that has been *incorporated every where*” (145; emphasis in original). Anglophone Pakistani literature makes a significant intervention here to suggest that conflicts and contradictions have defined the international space through history. In fact, despite being rattled by the effects of the war on terror on its terrain, Mueenuddin and Hamid have shown life to proceed at a heady and unstoppable pace in Pakistan. Terrorism is seen not to have the same paralytic effect in these accounts as it does in American and British fiction, which as Singh suggests “may treat 9/11 or 7/7 as the cataclysmic end of civilization and modernity” (25).

As part of the countering of the diminished understanding of terrorism, violence and identity in the Euro-American imaginary, my chosen novels have offset the imagining of women from countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan by inverting the normative structures within which women have traditionally been viewed. Not only have these novels proposed reconfigurations of the representation of Pakistani women in the international media, they have also taken issue with the intervention of middle-class European and American feminists on the matter. The former has been addressed for its rather more blatant typecasting, the latter for the

limitations of its understanding of its feminist counterpart in the postcolonial world. Furthermore, this literature has confronted the dogmatic anti-feminism of fundamentalist impenetrations of Islam, which forcibly enforces the silencing and domestication of women in Pakistan. In my thesis I discuss the ways in which both Euro-American and Islamic fundamentalist politics grossly underrepresent the heterogeneity of women in Pakistan by narrating them through a “single story”. The harmful effects of this are compounded by the fact that this politics uses the figure of the female to justify and augment its practice.⁸⁸ Hence future work in the field of Anglophone Pakistani literature would warrant much greater attention to the work of other women writers from the region including Sara Suleri, Uzma Aslam Khan (*Trespassing* [2003] in particular), Bushra Rehman and Faryal Ali Gauhar.⁸⁹ While Muneeza Shamsie’s English language anthology of short stories by Pakistani women was published in America in 2008 and Shahla Haeri published six intense and invigorating interviews of professional Pakistani women entitled *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* in 2002, there is a great deal of critical work to be done on the subject of the literary reconstruction of womanhood and transnational female identity in Anglophone Pakistani fiction.

When I began work on this project in 2009 there were very few critical works on emerging Anglophone Pakistani fiction. What was available was restricted to a handful of publications in academic journals, very few books and materials that emerged from conference panels exploring South Asian literature. For this reason, my

⁸⁸ See Sara Suleri’s “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (250-5).

⁸⁹ In “Is the Woman in Pakistani Fiction a Survivor or a Victim? – A Discussion of the Nature of Womanhood in Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing*” Kezia Poole writes that “[r]ather than deliver yet more ‘silent, submissive protagonists’ for Western consumption, Khan’s women are victims, survivors, and everything in between, conflicted by the universal implications of past and future, place, space, class and family” (academia.edu).

initial secondary research for the thesis was restricted to what was available in newspapers, magazines, book reviews and author interviews. Over the period of four years, this field has seen a significant rise in interest with 2013 being a particularly prolific year for the publication of scholarly work on this body of literature. Pakistani literature in English and the body of critical writing are on the brink of something immensely exciting. The surge of interest in exploring the Anglophone Pakistani literature, which became abundantly clear as the bibliography for my project rapidly expanded, is bound to intensify. The strong notes of optimism in this fiction frequently surprise the expanding readership. While Pakistan has been viewed synonymously with violence, poverty, corruption, oppression and fundamentalism for many decades now, my research has shown that its fiction ultimately sustains its faith in Pakistan and (at the risk of sounding mawkish) the world—and is indisposed to separate the two. Hamid's protagonist helps me to effectually, and optimistically, conclude this thesis:

It is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us. (*TRF* 197)

Illustrations

Image 1: The Buddha's head



THE
WASTED VIGIL

A NOVEL

NADEEM ASLAM

Image 2: “Drones kill so Malala can live”



Image 3: Audiobook cover of *The Wasted Vigil*

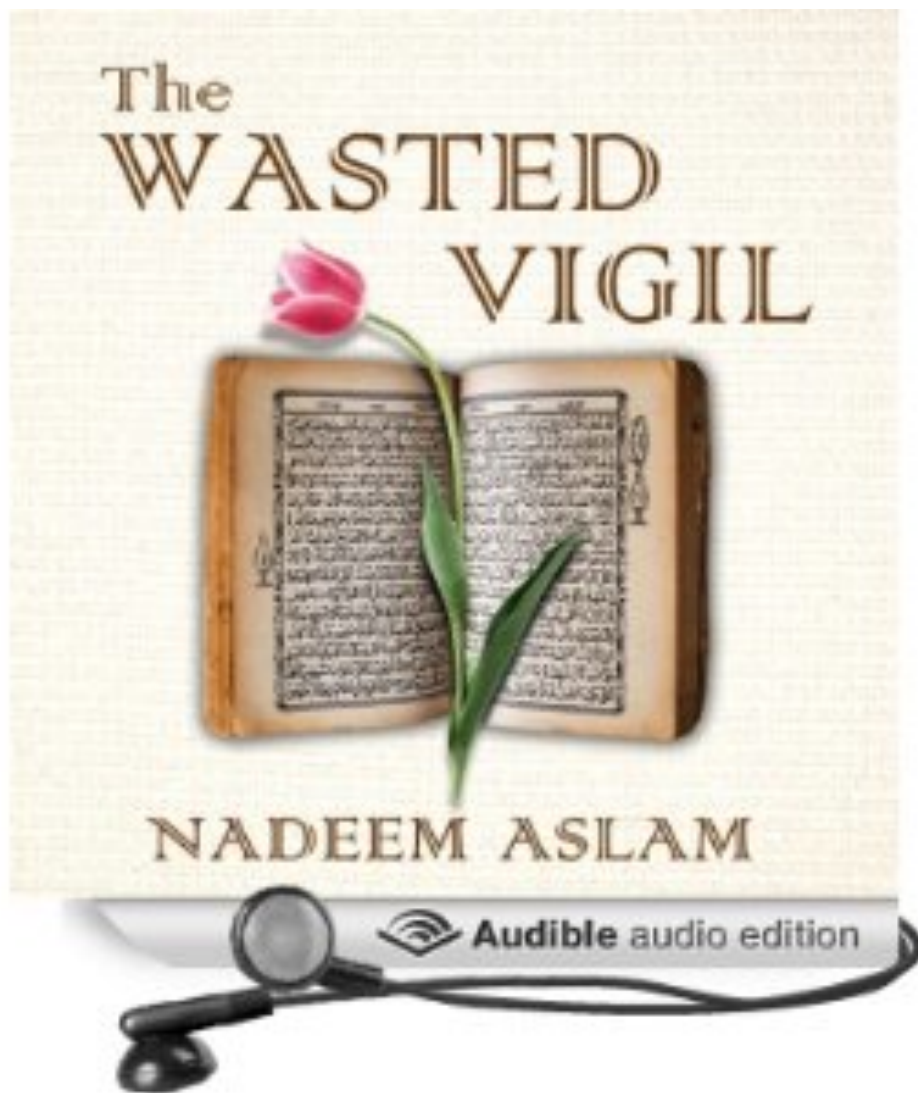
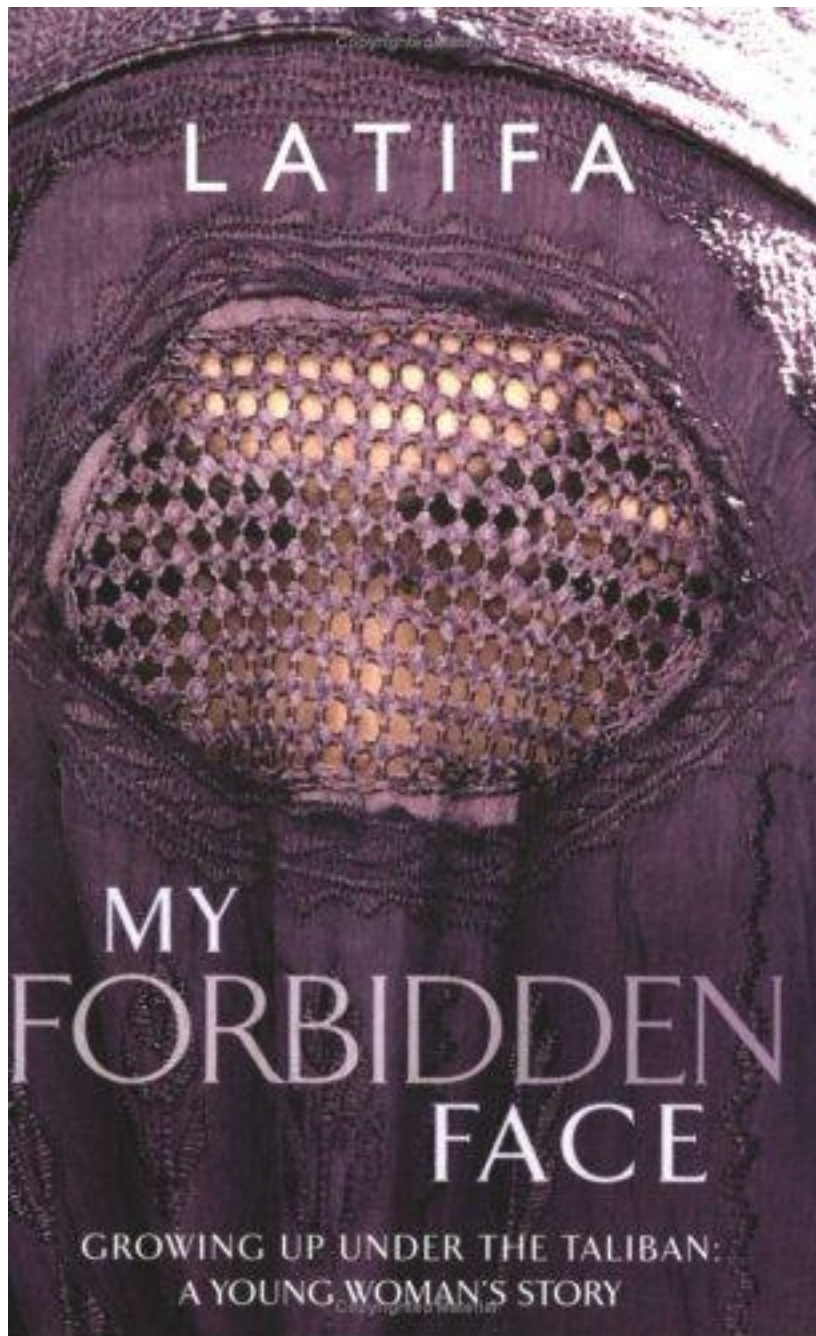


Image 4: “My Forbidden Face”



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