

**ORIENTING MUSLIMS: MAPPING GLOBAL SPHERES
OF AFFILIATION AND AFFINITY
IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIAN FICTION**

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Abstract

This thesis asks how four South Asian Muslim novelists have responded to the challenge of writing about Islamic faith ties in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York's World Trade Centre and the ensuing "war on terror". This is a period when Muslim writers and commentators have come under increasing pressure to "explain" Islamic affiliations and affinities, and – as Pnina Werbner (2002: 1) has put it – to 'disclose where ... the centres of their subjective universe lie'.

Focussing on the international novels of Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Salman Rushdie, and Kamila Shamsie, this thesis explores the hypothesis that they can be read as part of a post-9/11 attempt to revise modern "knowledge" of the Islamic world, using globally-disseminated literature to reframe Muslims' potential to connect with others, whether Muslims who subscribe to other versions of Islam, or non-Muslims. It considers how the "world literature" these authors create and shape maps spheres of Islamic affiliation and affinity, questioning where their subjects turn in seeking a sense of connection or identification, and why. It provides a detailed examination of the inter-cultural and intra-cultural affiliations and affinities the characters pursue in these texts, asking what aesthetic, historical, political and spiritual identifications or commitments could influence such connective attempts. It also analyses popular discourses and critical discussions surrounding the novels, offering a critical examination of the explanations offered by their authors in their non-fiction writing and commentary for privileging, problematising or prohibiting one (Islamic) affiliation or affinity instead of another, and scrutinising how the writers are appropriated as authentic and hence authoritative spokespeople by dominant political and cultural forces. Finally, it explores how, as authors of

Indian and Pakistani origin, Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie negotiate their identities and the tensions of being seen to act as Muslim spokespeople in (conscious) relation to the complex international and geopolitical context in which they write.

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Chapter 1. Writing, Islam and Faith in Anglophone South Asian Fiction after 9/11

Introduction

In the introduction to the revised edition of *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, first published in 1981, Edward Said (1997: xii) expressed increased concern that 'malicious generalisations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West'. He went on to describe his disturbance on being asked, presumably because of Middle Eastern



Untitled
Sajid Khan (2012)
[Figure 1]

– and mistaken Muslim – identity, to provide the media with an insider's insight into the bomb attack in Oklahoma City in April 1995:

I must have received twenty-five phonecalls ... The entirely facetious connection between Arabs, Muslims, and terrorism was never more forcefully made evident to me; the sense of guilty involvement which, despite myself, I was made to feel struck me (xiv).¹

¹ The perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombings was in fact Timothy McVeigh, an American Gulf War veteran and agnostic, whose protest was anti-government.

These late twentieth-century observations point to a totalising trend in Anglo-American discussions of Islam, and highlight its potentially unsettling impact on those actual and assumed Muslim writers who might be called upon to comment in the western public sphere. They provide a means of entry into this study, which asks how four South Asian Muslim authors have responded to the challenge of writing about Islamic faith ties in the aftermath of the attacks on New York of 11 September 2001, which replaced the Oklahoma City bombings as the most destructive on US soil to date.

This thesis explores the hypothesis that the international novels of Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Salman Rushdie and Kamila Shamsie can be read as part of a post-9/11 attempt to revise modern “knowledge” of the Islamic world, using globally-disseminated literature to reframe Muslims’ potential to connect with others, whether Muslims who subscribe to other versions of Islam, or non-Muslims. It considers how the “world literature” they create and shape maps spheres of Islamic affiliation and affinity, questioning where their subjects turn in seeking a sense of connection or identification, and why. It provides a detailed examination of the inter-cultural and intra-cultural affiliations and affinities the characters pursue in these texts, asking what aesthetic, historical, political and spiritual identifications or commitments could influence such connective attempts. It also analyses popular discourses and critical discussions surrounding these texts, offering a critical examination of the explanations offered by the authors in their non-fiction writing and commentary for privileging, problematising or prohibiting one (Islamic) affiliation or affinity instead of another, and scrutinising how the writers are appropriated as authentic and hence authoritative spokespeople by dominant political and cultural forces. Finally, it explores how, as authors of Indian and Pakistani origin, Aslam,

Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie negotiate their identities and the tensions of being seen to act as Muslim spokespeople in (conscious) relation to the complex international and geopolitical context in which they write.

For the purposes of this study, I use 'affiliation' to describe more active and selective of the modes of Islamic connection which may be traced in the novels. According to the *OED Online* (2013a, 'affiliate, v.') the would-be 'affiliate', an adoptive son, seeks to attach himself to an institution, organisation, political group, or society, expressing in his choice a desire to belong. In Edward Said's (1983: 18-19) conception, this may constitute what he describes as a 'turn' from a lost or outmoded natural familial 'filiation' to a critically created and 'compensatory' cultural and societal system of 'affiliation'. Further, it may demonstrate an individual's desire to become an 'agent' or 'bearer' of a particular notion of 'civilisation' or 'culture' (Gilroy 2004: 65).

The term 'affinity', in contrast, variously defined in the *OED* (2013b, 'affinity, n.') 'by position' as a 'relationship of kinship generally between individuals or races', and 'by inclination' as a 'voluntary social ... companionship [or] alliance' and 'psychical or spiritual attraction', may point to a more natural, unplanned or even involuntary sense of being drawn to a particular community grouping, geographical area or imaginative realm. Nederveen Pieterse (2007: 186-8) uses the term to describe the 'multiple circuits of [cultural] identification and integration' within which migrant communities participate in a global multicultural context. However, the term need not be confined solely to this usage. 'Affinitive' may also refer, for example, to the kind of feelings ignited between Muslims of radically different social, educational and doctrinal backgrounds when engaging in Islamic rituals or contemplating a common heritage or culture in their South and Central Asian homelands.

In drawing attention to different ways in which contemporary Muslim connections are established and experienced, the South Asian literature I examine begins to take leave of the colourful, hybrid, and darkly comic multicultural visions offered in the popular postcolonial writing of the 1980s and 1990s. This was a period bookended in the UK by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), which perhaps did more to juxtapose the religious and secular than to explore their interrelationship. Yet the twenty-first century fictions I consider remain in dialogue with these novels, with works of world literature like Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), and such colonial antecedents as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), and Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955).

After 9/11: Muslims in the Frame

The "terror" attacks of 9/11 and, later, 7/7, brought a militant "jihadist" Islam sharply into world view. Racing to decode the 'message' of 11 September 2001, commentators and critics in the British press such as Martin Amis (2008: 3) interpreted the launching in Afghanistan of this 'Intercontinental Ballistic Missile' as an alien culture's wake-up call to the innocent, unassuming West.² As Amis put it, 'America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated' (3). Social anthropologist Pnina Werbner (2002: 1) would later observe that it seemed to parties on both sides of the proposed ideological divide 'that the clash of

² This quotation is taken from 'The Second Plane', an article first published in *The Guardian* on 18 September 2001 and subsequently collected in *The Second Plane* (2008).

civilizations predicted by Huntington ... between Islam and the West had finally materialised’.

The language used to narrate the violent historical events of 9/11 and defend the invasion of Muslim nation states in the weeks and months following the collapse of New York’s twin towers, both reflects and sustains this assumption. The ‘rhetoric of “evil”’ deployed by George W Bush in his State of the Union Address in January 2002 (Kellner 2002: 344), and the ‘moral’ pronouncements of British Prime Minister Tony Blair in anticipation of the renewed war with Afghanistan (Gilroy 2004: 67-8), are typical. For, as Werbner (2002: 2) went on to note, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, it seemed the civilisational ‘ “clash” – or its denial – had become the jargon of politicians and the media’: an evolving ‘newspeak’ (Hobsbawm 2007: 163) of ‘ideological shortcuts’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2007: 179) that could potentially be manipulated in the interests of revised geopolitical agendas, and ultimately therefore in support of the ensuing “war on terror”. Since that time, this discourse has continued to penetrate discussions of globalisation and culture in America and in Europe (179), tending to separate individuals of different faiths into opposing categories of “us” and “them”; position Muslims and Arabs as pre-modern or, as Salaita (2008) puts it, ‘uncultured’ in relation to the West; and perhaps even, as Bayoumi (2008: 4-5) proposes, to ‘degrade the language’ to such an extent that it ‘structure[s] the thinking [of American citizens] about the Muslims living among [them]’.

The articles, interviews, commentary and notices published by writers such as Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens and Salman Rushdie in the international English-language press since 2001, have attempted in various ways to furnish western readers with a deeper understanding of Islam and Islamism and to

justify the compromising of (Muslims') civil liberties in a language that perpetuates the notion of a clash of values.³ Responding to the World Trade Centre attacks, Rushdie (2002: 393, 396) saw fit to pass judgement on the cultural attitudes and behaviour adopted by the Muslim society from which the "Islamist" is thought to hail (for example, its attitude to scientific enquiry, women's rights or religious dress), and endeavoured to advise 'Islam' on reforming its principles in relation to modernity. In 'Terror and Boredom: The Dependent Mind', Amis (2008: 62) has also sought to provide "insights" into the 'unrighteous' mentality of the (imaginary) Islamist suicide bomber and, by reinforcing the idea of 9/11 as a point of rupture, a-historically to exonerate Anglo-American powers from any responsibility for creating the hostile climate in which World Trade Centre attacks occurred. 'Far from wanting or trying to exterminate it', he writes, 'the West had no views whatever about Islam per se before September 11' (63).⁴ Meanwhile, Hitchens (2007: n. p.) endeavoured to convince readers of the legitimacy of their invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan in defence of an ongoing war on Islamic terror.

In making their arguments, these intellectuals have typically pitched the reason, modernity and secularity for which they claim to stand against the evils

³ While Amis, Hitchens and Rushdie's opinions on aspects of American foreign and British domestic policy in the years following the 9/11 attacks are by no means homogeneous, their attitudes to (radical) Islam, which may be described as neo-liberal, neoconservative and atheistic in tendency, are largely in sympathy. Rushdie's (2002) book of essays and columns, referred to here, is dedicated to Christopher Hitchens, who championed his cause following the 1989 fatwa.

⁴ This article was first published in *The Observer* in September 2006, five years after the 9/11 attacks.

of an irrational, encroaching religious extremism, and promoted freedom of expression over what they consider to be a suspect cultural relativism. This was the case, for example, with the 'manifesto' against the rise of a 'new global [Islamic] totalitarianism threat' akin to Nazism, signed by twelve public figures including Rushdie, the controversial Dutch politician and writer Ayyan Hirsi Ali, and the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, and originally published by the French political weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in March 2006 (H. Ali *et al.*, cited in *BBC News* 2006). Prompted by expressions of Muslim dissent over the handling of sensitive issues such as the publication in a Danish newspaper of derisive cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, its authors attempted to use a liberal, secular and democratic rhetoric to distance themselves from accusations of 'Islamophobia' while fostering a fearless and 'critical' discourse on 'Islam' (*BBC News* 2006). Unfortunately, the anti-fundamentalist press statement that resulted sounded more like anti-Islamic 'moral posturing' (Nederveen Pieterse 2007: 190-1) than a precursor to reasoned discussion on equal terms.

The slew of fictional narratives produced by either Western or Westernised writers, both in North America (DeLillo 2007, Safran Foer 2005, Updike 2006) and in the UK (Amis 2008, Faulks 2009, McEwan 2005, and Rushdie 2005c) in the wake of 9/11 have juxtaposed such similar values and principles when describing imaginary terrorist threats or suspect Muslim subjects. Their attempts to grapple with what the critic Robert Eaglestone (2010: 361) has termed 'the melange of anxiety and anger that make up the West's fuzzy understanding of the current multiple and interlinked crises', have therefore tended to reinforce the binary oppositions between Islam and the West, rather than seeking to understand why they occur. In Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2007), for example, the

novel's rational, secular neurosurgeon protagonist, Henry Perowne, perturbed by a burning plane bound for Heathrow, seen as symbolic of a looming 'attack' not just on London but 'our whole way of life' (35), muses about what might happen to his 'innocuous' musician son under a radical regime characterised by 'hatred' and 'the purity of nihilism' (33). His grim conclusion, that 'in the ideal Islamic state, under strict Shari'a law, there'll be room for surgeons. [But that] Blues guitarists will be found other employment' (33), rearticulates the underlying notion of a clash of values, pitching in fiction the innocent and expressive individual against an intolerant, absolute, unknown Other.

Critical commentators across disciplines and cultures have begun to expose how such a totalising rhetoric can demonise and demean the Muslim subjects it attempts – and fails – to represent. Analysing in *The Uncultured Wars* instances of anti-Arab racism amongst American intellectuals, both liberal and conservative, from Christopher Hitchens to Michael Moore, the cultural critic Steven Salaita has highlighted how, in these very public and political representations of an unerringly 'strange and violent Islam' (2008: 152), Islamic peoples have come to 'exist ... as characters, never narrators': always spoken for, but rarely permitted the space or the power to speak for themselves (165-6). So, through the essays of Rushdie (2002: 395), we may learn that the Islam of 'a vast number of "believing" Muslim men' stands for 'a loathing of modern society ... riddled as it is with music, godlessness and sex'. Meanwhile, in fictionalised accounts, we may enter the stream-of-consciousness of the radicalised Muslim youth as he surveys with distaste the alluring bodies of bare-bellied teenage girls, 'weak Christians and non-observant Jews' (Updike 2006: 3); or "understand" the misanthropic motivations and beliefs of the 9/11

attackers, absent from the scene, through the collective litanies of their numbed New York victims:

‘It’s sheer panic. They attack out of panic.’

‘This much, yes, it may be true. Because they think the world is a disease. This world, this society, ours. A disease that’s spreading,’ he said.

‘There are no goals they can hope to achieve ... Kill the innocent, only that.’
(DeLillo 2007: 46).

Considered in a context of heightened security, increasingly authoritarian anti-terror legislation and rising Islamophobia both in the US and the UK, this tendency of (mostly) white, Western “men of letters” to act as pundits, passing judgements on “Islamists” – and therefore Muslims and Islam – even as they attempt to speak for them, has become both a cause for concern, and a catalyst for calls to respond. If not exactly tolerated then at least ignored, trivialised and un(der)-addressed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the comments of Amis and others have, since then, drawn direct, critical responses from their literary peers.⁵ Respondents such as Ronan Bennett (2007), Terry Eagleton (2007a), Kamila Shamsie (2007b), and Daniel Soar (2007) have made interventions by various means: letters to national newspapers, scholarly essays, blog comment,

⁵ The most controversial of Amis’s comments has been the assertion he made in an interview with journalist Ginny Dougary of the *Times* that ‘the Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order’ (Amis, quoted in Dougary 2006: n. p.). Measures suggested to ensure this suffering included travel restrictions, and the strip-searching of people who look Pakistani or Middle-Eastern, deportation, the curtailment of other freedoms – what Amis described in short as ‘discriminatory stuff’ intended to ‘hurt ... the whole community’, which Terry Eagleton (2007a: xi) later described as a regime of ‘calculated harassment of a whole population’ aimed at ‘humiliating and insulting certain kinds of men and women at random’.

book chapters, and reviews. Whatever their chosen means, all have emphasised that the greatest task – greater than the task of revealing racisms, hypocrisies, defective logic, and so forth – is to challenge the authority of these ‘leading luminar[ies]’ (Eagleton 2007a: x) and ‘self-styled expert[s]’ (Bennett 2007: n. p.) to propose their often limited and uninformed opinions on highly complex and emotive subjects without censure.

Ronan Bennett explained in 2007 that to do so is not to launch an attack on freedom of speech, far from it. ‘As a novelist’, he suggested in his comment piece for *The Guardian*, ‘Amis is free to do whatever he wants with his characters’, even if his ‘flamboyant [anti-Islamic] clichés’ prove ‘poor substitutes for understanding, reason and real knowledge’ of contemporary Muslim experiences (Bennett 2007: n. p.). However, what is not acceptable, he suggests, is for the ‘odious’ public endorsements of anti-Muslim prejudice and expressions of racist sentiment published by leading literary and cultural figures to be allowed to continue to pass without comment. Years after 9/11, Bennett urges, critics and authors English and Indian alike must ‘start writing’ to express their inability to remain silent in the face of such an ‘outrage’. The novelist Kamila Shamsie (2007b: n. p.), replying to his comment, offers the following statement. Echoing Bennett’s arguments, she summarises the factors that convinced her, Pakistani and a Muslim, to take up the challenge to break her strategic silence and ‘write a heated response’:

The failure to express outrage cannot easily be distinguished from a lack of outrage... I agree with Ronan Bennett that those who didn’t stand up to condemn Martin Amis bear responsibility for their silence ... because ... he is still recognised as one of Britain’s most significant writers, and has the moral authority which comes with that recognition. ... I don’t advocate any form of

censorship. ... But in worlds without censorship, the way to respond to odious views which are given space in the press is to, well, respond! (2007b).

The post-9/11 period has certainly seen a growth of Muslim interventions in contemporary debates about Islamic peoples, not only via the media channels of news articles and comment, but the more enduring literary modes of memoir and fiction (part perhaps of a new wave, particularly post-7/7, of Pakistani-English writing within South Asian fiction); and a concomitant rise in the analysis of strategies for representing Muslims by academics and practitioners. While – as the sources quoted above indicate – British-affiliated writers, politicians, journalists and intellectuals contributed to (and were conscious of) the hostile discourse surrounding Muslims from an earlier point, it was perhaps the tube bombs detonated in London on 7 July 2005 that truly brought the sense of ‘culture shock’ home to the UK, when its citizens found their country’s capital assaulted not by foreign fanatics but British-born ‘attackers’ who ‘grew up as British lads’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2007: 179).

Werbner (2002: 1) has described British Pakistani Muslims pre-9/11 as ‘a vocal minority ... never afraid to speak their minds even if their opinions ... were out of line with British popular sentiments’. However, she argues that things changed in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks, when this section of the population – best positioned ‘to feel tangibly the potential rage and terror of the West’, and therefore to highlight the negative effect it was having on ordinary Muslims – enacted a tragic ‘self-silencing’ (1). Yet the ‘culture shock’ described by Nederveen Pieterse seems to have had the reverse effect (2007: 179). Many British-born and British-based South Asian Muslim writers, including Tariq Ali, Yasmin Hai, Ed Hussain, Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, Sarfraz Manzoor, and Ziauddin Sardar, have described the London bombings as a

‘watershed moment’ (Ali 2005: 1): a point after which it became impossible not to respond – whatever their reservations about doing so. In his memoir *Greetings from Bury Park*, which concludes with his mixed reflections on the call to spokespersonship in the wake of 7/7, the journalist and broadcaster Sarfraz Manzoor (2008) explains that:

As someone who was also from Luton and who shared the same religion and nationality as these alienated and angry men, it sometimes felt ... as if I was expected to speak for the bombers and in some way explain why they had bombed the tube. But ... my reaction was one of anger, confusion and betrayal. What they felt and what they preached was not in my name (Manzoor 2008: 265).

Manzoor’s book, with its expressions of bewilderment over the events of July 7, functions as an eloquent response to public demands for ‘Muslim’ self-justification, and as a way of addressing a personal need to explain why the bombings were ‘not in [his] name’ – or indeed the names of many (British) South Asian Muslims (265).

In her annual survey of Pakistani English Literature produced in 2005 Muneeza Shamsie (2006: 161) noted, perhaps unsurprisingly, that ‘in the wake of 9/11, 7/7, and the Afghan and Iraq wars a number of Pakistani writers chose to explore the relationship between Muslims and the west, whether’ – like Manzoor – ‘they examined the experience of the Pakistani diaspora or excavated episodes from Muslim and European history’, as her daughter, Kamila Shamsie, would go on to do. Standing perhaps at a greater geographical remove from Pakistani fiction (and writing with the benefit of an additional three years’ hindsight), the Indian author and critic Amit Chaudhuri (2009: n. p.) has hesitated directly to link the recent burgeoning of Pakistani

fiction in English to the rapid changes in the geopolitical landscape over the 'last seven or eight years', seeing the emergence of 'a handful of Anglophone writers' as 'in no obvious way connected' to the destruction of 'a great symbol of American capitalism ... by two aeroplanes'. Yet he has heralded writers like Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie (whose recent novels *do* in fact connect with these events, in direct as well as oblique ways) as 'a 21st-century phenomenon, appearing at a time when the new supposed fundamentals of this century – free-market dominance, the end of history, the clash of civilisations – suddenly seem frayed and ephemeral'. As a result, he sees them as 'interestingly poised: implicated in both the unfolding and the unravelling of our age'. Chaudhuri's attempts to marshal, to contextualise, and to analyse these "new" Pakistani fictional framings in English, in addition to a growing critical discourse surrounding Muslim representation in wider spheres, open up ground for a multidimensional consideration of how contemporary South Asian Muslim writers may contribute to this "unravelling".

Global Orientations in South Asian Muslim Fiction

It is my argument that Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie orient themselves towards the "global" in their internationally-disseminated novels, both in terms of their geopolitical subject matter and selection of settings which are of symbolic and strategic significance to world powers; and in terms of the intra- and inter-cultural Muslim affinities and affiliations that they map within these zones of conflict and contact. They do this at a time when ordinary experiences of multicultural contact have been rendered suspect, and there is a desire (at least in western spheres) for writers and academics to attempt to expose where in the world Muslim loyalties lie. This is also a moment when alternative, perhaps

more positive, ways of understanding both international faith connections (such as Islamic cosmopolitanism) and our responsibility to others as planet-sharing humans, could usefully be revived and revised.

In *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy (2004: viii, 65) highlights how, in the ‘states of permanent emergency’ created out of the “war on terror”, ‘ordinary experiences of contact, co-operation, and conflict’ between people of different races and ethnicities have come to be viewed with scepticism. For Gilroy, these experiences are symptomatic of multiculture’s ‘conviviality’ – of its capacity to facilitate ‘processes of cohabitation and interaction’ in social life, both in national (British) and global (cosmopolitan) contexts (xi-xii). ‘The cosmopolitan desire to presume the equal worth of alien cultures and ... proliferat[e] encounters with otherness’, which he goes on to defend in the second half of his study, can also be identified in the fictions I examine in my thesis (65). As Gilroy proceeds to suggest, in the current climate of suspicion toward non-western others, the idea of initiating close contact between different ethnic (and religious) groups may be censured as inappropriate, ‘misguided or out of date’ (65). At the same time, as he also notes, the potentially unifying discourses of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘human rights’, which might be rallied in support of such exchanges, have become ‘tainted’; today they are used by dominant powers to ‘justify intervention’ into the sovereignty of peoples who appear less ‘civilized’ (65-6, 70). Yet Gilroy is determined to pursue his aim of ‘explor[ing] ways in which the ordinary cosmopolitanism so characteristic of postcolonial life might be sustained and even elevated’ (80).

In spirit with Gilroy, I contend that the selected novels attempt to explore a range of Muslim experiences of ordinary cosmopolitan ‘contact, co-operation, and conflict’, both within South and Central Asian Islamic contexts and beyond

them (viii). Doing so, Aslam, Hamid, Shamsie and (to an extent) Rushdie hint at an 'ability to live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful or violent' (xi), even as they investigate tensions and intolerances. It is my argument that, in dramatising aspects of Subcontinental Muslim connectivity, the chosen novelists eschew a simplistic revival of the colourful, celebratory visions offered by a "saris, samosas, and steel bands" brand of commercial multicultural fiction produced by postcolonial writers in English. They also avoid reproducing cosmopolitan perspectives which may be easily aligned with totalising worldviews.

Critics like Graham Huggan have highlighted how such "exotic" literary products have been prized in late-twentieth century western multicultural contexts for their convenient 'levelling out of different histories, and [their] aestheticised celebration of diversity that disguises the lack of sociohistorical change' (2001: 117). Others, most notably Timothy Brennan (1997: 36-7), have taken postcolonial or "third-world" writers to task for exploiting their 'transcultural' ('nonexilic, world-travelling') statuses in order to present an 'appropriate cosmopolitan view' (appropriate, that is, to western audiences), which seems to betray the ideas about the assumption of equal worth which Gilroy would uphold. According to Brennan, the features of this 'new' cosmopolitanism 'form a geopolitical aesthetic' which foregrounds the 'roving' and 'fundamentally estranged' "third-world" individual's experiences of transcultural 'hybridity', and 'mute[s] antagonistic political objectives' (36-8). Its literary purveyors are attentive instead to 'the requisites of metropolitan assumptions' about 'disparate cultural identities'; they may, Brennan concedes,

be 'critical of the West', but their 'sympathies' coalesce with prevailing Euro-American perspectives and attitudes (36-9).⁶

Yet the twenty-first century novels by diasporic and transnational South Asian writers which I examine in this thesis collectively offer no such comfortable or compatible "cosmopolitan" visions of global multiculturalism to the western reader/consumer. In different ways, each confronts and exposes the historical, religious and cultural differences, actual and perceived, which threaten to divide Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in complex geopolitical contexts – in rural Afghanistan and suburban Karachi, for example, but also New York and other western metropolises. They demonstrate the diversity of South Asian Muslim affiliations and affinities and the richness of Islamic culture's intellectual and aesthetic inheritances, which may be used to forge links between disparate communities. But they remain conscious of how these connections and perspectives can be manipulated and limited by political and cultural authorities – global and local, western and Islamic – and this awareness, to varying extents, shapes the form and content of their fictions.

⁶ Huggan (2001: 26) summarises Brennan's use of the term 'cosmopolitan' in relation to 'successful postcolonial writers/thinkers' such as V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie as 'meaning not so much that they are, or present themselves as, socially mobile and multiply affiliated as that they respond to and creatively rework metropolitan demands for cultural otherness in their work'. He goes on to observe that:

Cosmopolitanism, in this sense [proposed by Brennan], creates a conflicted politics of value through which writers are simultaneously rewarded for their democratic worldview and for their emplacement within set hierarchies of metropolitan cultural taste ... Brennan admits [that] such writers do not *have* to respond in certain ways ... However, the chances are that at some point they will be encouraged to do so, and that they may be rewarded – sometimes handsomely – for their ability to conform to 'geopolitical-aesthetic' rules. (27).

The novels I examine feature a wide variety of Muslim protagonists, from indigenous peoples, to migrants and refugees, to diasporic settlers, moneyed expatriates and privileged world travellers. These characters find and follow feelings which may resemble Gilroy's (2004: 80) 'cosmopolitan solidarity' across actual and virtual borders; they offer a 'translocal commitment' to Muslims and non-Muslims 'slightly different' from themselves with whom they share a common humanity (88-89).

In 'Cosmopolitanism Contested', Gilroy seeks to bracket the ordinary cosmopolitanism he advocates from those western hegemonic models, ascendant in the era of the "war on terror", which run counter to what he considers to be 'the noble idea of world citizenship' (69). He suggests that 'today, the point of view that makes the improvement of a resentful and unappreciative [poorer and less developed parts of the] world by imperial powers into a matter of morals can call itself cosmopolitanism' (69). For Gilroy, this corrupted notion of cosmopolitanism, which he describes as 'armored', is tantamount to 'ethical imperialism' (66, 69). Its advocates seek to bring together 'willing nation states' inspired not by a desire to explore 'how human beings might communicate or act in concert across racial, ethnic, or civilizational divisions', but rather 'oriented by the goal of enforcing a desiderata of peace, privatization, and market mechanisms on a global scale' (69-70). In place of these 'state-centred' versions, imposed from above, Gilroy proposes a kind of 'cosmopolitan commitment' or 'attachment' which he terms "vulgar" or "demotic". This non-elite, decentred, anti-racist and humanist cosmopolitanism is to be 'articulat[ed] ... upward from below' by 'would-be world citizens' (74-5, 79). Gilroy's "demotic" cosmopolitans:

Find ... civic and ethical value in the process of exposure to otherness ... [and] glor[y] ... in the ordinary virtues and ironies – listening, looking, discretion, friendship – that can be cultivated when mundane encounters with difference becoming rewarding. ... [They may also] consider how to cultivate the capacity to act morally and justly not just in the face of otherness ... but in response to the xenophobia and violence that threaten to engulf, purify, or erase it. (75)

I suggest that my authors' characters are drawn to connect with bodies and groups on grounds which resemble but also differ slightly from those envisaged by Gilroy. His focus when developing his ideas about 'cosmopolitan solidarity' is on the largely white, western intellectuals and travellers with what he terms 'rights-bearing bodies' (89). These individuals are empowered to extend gestures of 'translocal commitment' to those 'rights-less' people in parts of the world which are subject to neo-imperial 'brutality and arbitrary power', whom they might 'shield' or 'protect' (89). The fictions I consider do include characters – for example elite Pakistani expatriates, well-connected Japanese refugees, and European Muslim converts – who might indeed qualify as more 'rights-bearing' than either their illegal Afghan immigrant or ghettoised diasporic compatriots. Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), and Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), among others, also feature protagonists of nominal Islamic affiliation who can be seen to go to considerable measures to avoid 'being forcibly attached by patriotism and nationalism to cultural and political formations that' in their opinion, and Gilroy's terms, 'are wrong, unjust, evil, or misguided and therefore unrepresentative' (75). Yet, crucially, these novels also dramatise the experiences of 'rights-less' (or considerably less privileged) Asian Muslim subaltern characters, whose lived

experiences of “demotic” cosmopolitanism are at times less edifying, and differently nuanced.

In *Ethnicities and Global Multiculture*, Nederveen Pieterse (2007: 155) looks beyond western cosmopolitan legacies to other, ‘non-western cosmopolitanisms’, such as a multivalent ‘Islamic cosmopolitanism’, which may shape the Muslim world’s ‘self-perception’, and present a means of ‘bridging’ societies, globally. He defines cosmopolitanism ‘broadly, as perspectives and sensibilities that stress human bonds and interconnectedness across cultural and political boundaries’, and identifies these ideas as common to ‘Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and so forth’ (155). Although he seems to feel that the term has been sufficiently ‘revisited’ and reclaimed in ‘recent times’ so as to justify its use, Nederveen Pieterse nevertheless suggests that ‘we may prefer global solidarity’, given cosmopolitanism’s accrual of ‘elite and urban overtones’ (156). It seems to echo Gilroy’s (2004) ‘cosmopolitan solidarity’, both lexically, and in its recognition of human beings’ ‘essential similarity’ and (global) communicability (89, 4).

But whereas Gilroy’s ideas are inspired by a ‘postmodern planetary consciousness’ derived from an ‘unabashed humanism that ... is ... licensed by a critique of racial hierarchy and the inhuman life forms it creates’ in global, multicultural contexts (83, xii), Nederveen Pieterse (2007: 160) seeks, quoting Osman Bakar, to underline the scriptural foundation for ideas of Islamic cosmopolitanism, and to make a case for it being ‘a major part of Islamic self-awareness’. Historically:

In the Koran ... the new faith [Islam] and its followers are described as ‘*ummatan wasatan*, meaning the middle nation’: ‘Thus have we made you a middle nation that you might be witness over the whole human family or the

world community (2:143).’ As a religion and a culture, Islam is and seeks to be ‘a bridge between East and West’: ‘in Islam, civilization-consciousness is deeply rooted in such Quranic ideas as common human ancestry, common humanity, universal goodness of the human being, universality of divine favours to the human race, the wisdom of ethnic and cultural pluralism ... Islam is very much interested in the idea of a *universal civilisation*.’ (160).⁷

Certainly, ‘cosmopolitan’ readings of Islamic scripture, and aspects of its heterodox spiritual traditions and aesthetic heritage which endorse and express ideas of tolerance and openness to others, inform and facilitate the fictive affinitive connections I consider in my study. But, as Nederveen Pieterse also notes, ‘Islam ... [can] make ... different contributions to cosmopolitanism’; Islamic cosmopolitanism can manifest itself in different ways, ‘geopolitical, geo-economic, and cultural’ (157). In its current militant, political and expansionist manifestations, it could also be seen as an aggressive contemporary ‘cosmopolitanism’ which operates in parallel to ‘neo-liberalism and belligerent American hegemony’, and yet is invariably set ‘beyond the pale of [Western] modernity and globalization’ (156). Yet, as Nederveen Pieterse goes on to observe, ‘contemporary Islam is both co-dependent with western modernity and deeply wired to the career of global capitalism and neoliberalism *and* an

⁷ Nederveen Pieterse (2007: 160) also goes on to observe that:

This is one of the reasons why Huntington’s thesis of a clash of civilizations is so fundamentally misplaced, as well as alien to Muslim thinkers. The deep tradition of tolerance in Islam is scripted in the Koran. Emerging *after* Judaism and Christianity as other Abrahamic traditions, Islam acknowledges their legacies, a gesture that has not generally been reciprocated.

alternative cosmopolitanism that is interspersed with other cultures’ – in other words, Islamic cosmopolitan has diverse, and divergent profiles (166).⁸

Likewise, the ‘global’ affiliations and affinities that Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie map are not only convivial or humanely cosmopolitan. They are also awkward and conflicting, and make for uncomfortable reading at times, while their origins and significance are sometimes hard to pinpoint or define. Literature produced by South Asian Muslim authors today reflects both the complicated nature of contemporary global Muslim experiences of connection, and the concerns held about them by the (largely western) world for which they write.

The inter-cultural and intra-cultural connections charted by my writers in their fictions “orient” the reader’s gaze toward a range of spaces of South Asian Muslim affiliation and affinity: aesthetic, cultural, historical, political and spiritual.

⁸ In their historical and anthropological study *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* Benjamin D. Hopkins and Magnus Marsden (2011: 137-8) offer a fascinating examination of contemporary ‘Muslim cosmopolitanisms’ constituted on ‘the peripheries of South and Central Asia’, which differ significantly from the models apparently prescribed by a ‘militant’ ‘global Islam’ which is often assumed to have replaced or erased them. Hopkins and Marsden argue that, to the contrary, ‘transregional forms of Muslim identity’ in these liminal spaces ‘encompass people who enact their identities in relation to a wide range of ethnic and linguistic markers, as well as to varying forms of doctrinal tradition’. Furthermore, ‘such identity formations do not merely extend spatially across different nation states; they also involve the forging of connections between ... Muslims who have experienced the differential effects of ... imperialism’ (137). These ‘connections between Muslims’ may, in Hopkins and Marsden’s account, ‘illuminate the nature of Muslim thought and self-understanding in these [frontier] settings and beyond’ (138-9).

These are located not just within, but beyond and between the independent states of India and Pakistan which much of the Subcontinent's postcolonial Anglophone writing has attempted to map. In applying the theories of Benedict Anderson (2006) to the work of Amitav Ghosh, Anshuman Mondal emphasises how modern nation states are simultaneously 'imaginary' and 'real' (Mondal 2007: 88). They are 'mental construct[s]' which exist within an often disparate (and widely dispersed) community's 'psychic' realms (88). But they are also geographically and temporally anchored. Likewise, the spaces of South Asian Muslim affiliation and affinity my writers depict correspond to specific regions of our Earth, which might be surrounded by borders. They relate to sites of particular historical and strategic significance in which Islamic cultures have flourished, and Muslims found a "Dar al Islam" – a physical and spiritual home.

The fictions I examine are set in diverse locations such as America, England, Japan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, not all of them hospitable to the followers of Islam. They take place in time periods which include the reign of the Mughals, but also encompass the ceding of British imperial power in India, Partition, the Cold War and the contemporary moment of today's "war on terror". For their protagonists, close encounters with cultural others which occur within these places may result in the surprising discovery of unsought spiritual or aesthetic affinities, to a sense of universalism, and a shared humanity. The act of seeking spaces of contemporary 'Muslim' affiliation, meanwhile, may lead to imaginary realms of seeming spiritual or historical belonging (such as a sacred, mirage-like "Arabia"), but also to physical conflict zones (the training camp on the Af-Pak border), where cultivated allegiances terminate in disjunction and alienation, even violence and death.

Writing of postcolonial British Pakistani Muslims, Werbner (2002: 3-4) reflects that if 'diasporas are transnational communities of co-responsibility', then in order to understand their divergent responses to the attacks of September 11, and destabilise the now commonplace 'clash of civilizations' thesis, 'we need to disclose where their identifications, the centres of their subjective universe, lie'. In the post-9/11 context, authors who attempt to map in English, and by means of a mainstream, literary fiction, the widely dispersed spaces with which diasporic and transnational South Asian Muslims identify, might be understood to contribute to such an act of public disclosure. However, these internationally-focused novels do more than present ripostes to popular western conceptions of a monolithic Islamic identity, which cast global Muslims as a people torn between a culture of western modernity and the un-culture of barbarism; potential, if not actual, affiliates to a global umma with 'bloody borders' (Huntington 1992: 13). Rather, they offer subtle attempts to revise both Western imperialist and political Islamist maps of the Muslim world which would attempt to identify a single 'centre' or focus for Islamic subjectivity and identity. The diverse cultural, spiritual and political affiliations and spontaneous, imaginative affinities which Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie explore in the process illuminate the co-responsibilities with which contemporary Muslim individuals and communities contend and coexist. They reconfigure Muslim being and belonging in today's global world as complex, challenging, and always multi-dimensional.

I have already hinted at how the works examined in this thesis might collectively be viewed, and at the role that the events of September 11 have played in their making. Considering "9/11" as a watershed moment, it could be argued that they contribute to a pan-Islamic attempt to respond in some

measure and in English to the reductive and polarising perceptions of Muslims and Islam produced after the attacks on the World Trade Centre, and in the hostile climate of the ensuing “war on terror”. Given the national origins and affiliations of their authors, these recent novels – like those of other less celebrated writers, including Mohammed Hanif, Usma Aslam Khan and Moni Mohsin – might also be identified as part of ‘new wave’ of politically-engaged, and highly marketable, Anglophone Pakistani fiction (Shah 2009: n. p.; K. Shamsie 2007a: n. p.). Composed in the wake not just of 9/11, but the US-led assault on Afghanistan, the 7/7 London bombings, and the Mumbai attacks of 2008, this spokesman-like writing may – perhaps problematically – provide Western readers with fresh perspectives on Islamic states and organisations of extreme concern to America, Britain and their allies.

Widening the lens, the selected writers’ literary fictions must also be seen as the transnational, diasporic and cosmopolitan descendents of a South Asian Muslim cultural tradition indebted to twentieth-century authors published in Urdu and English, from Ahmed Ali and Saadat Hasan Manto to Qurratulain Hyder, Anita Desai and Agha Shahid Ali, and expressive of an aesthetics, history and politics which remains distinct from – though it is influenced by – that represented in Arab Muslim and White, Western narrative traditions. Finally, they might be considered as works of “world literature”, written from a perspective informed by their authors’ South Asian and Islamic heritages, and engaging, in English, with global themes.

In seeking to define ‘world literature’ David Damrosch (2003: 9) observes that western understandings have tended to shift between ‘three general conceptions’: world literature ‘as an established body of *classics*; as an evolving canon of *masterpieces*; or as multiple *windows on the world*’ (Damrosch’s

italics). 'These three conceptions', he argues 'are not mutually exclusive, though sometimes people of decided taste champion one over another and even attempt to portray their favoured mode as the one true definition of literature' (9). He concludes his essay with a reassertion of his opening point (that 'a crucial feature of world literature is that it resolves always into a *variety* of worlds'), stating that: 'works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture ... Every single work of world literature is the locus of negotiation between two different cultures' (9, 14).

The works of Anglophone fiction written by the authors I will analyse which have recently been published by houses such as Faber and Faber, Bloomsbury, Penguin and Vintage, and internationally disseminated, are poised in just such a way. They 'open' – or appear to open – 'windows' for largely foreign (Anglo-American) audiences 'into ... varied times and places' (10) connected with Muslim South Asia at a moment when Islamic cultural, religious and political struggles in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have captured the interest of western readers. Hence they run the risk Damrosch identifies in relation to 'newly visible' world-literary 'texts' which are drawn from cultures in which the West may have an 'interest' (10). They expose themselves to the possibility of being mis-translated: made to 'fit comfortably with [stereotypical] American images' (of radical Islamism, for example) or – because of the cultural colour that they offer – 'sucked up in the Disneyfication of the globe' (10).

However, when I describe the world literature Aslam et al. create and shape as "globally-oriented", I am seeking not only to make reference to the fact that it draws readers' attention to diverse spheres of Islamic affiliation and affinity which may provide insights into 'other' (Muslim) worlds. I also hope to draw

attention to the “global” critical consciousness that these Indian and Pakistani writers bring to bear when creating such texts, which may pre-empt, resist or even prevent what Damrosch (2003: 13-14) describes as the ‘refract[ion]’ or ‘assimilat[ion]’ of the images they present when they enter (mostly Anglo-American) “world” markets.⁹ In this I align myself with critics of world literature such as Peter Morey (2012). He suggests that theorists such as Gayatri Spivak have perhaps been too quick to dismiss the term “global” when discussing contemporary literary and social ‘mode[s] of ethical critical engagement with inequalities of power’ (21). As Morey explains, Spivak prefers ‘planetary’ because she believes ‘it allows Otherness to flourish while eschewing mastery and enshrines respect for difference’, whereas “world” and “globe” ‘have become contaminated by their association with globalisation and a particular hegemony’ (21).¹⁰ Yet, as he proceeds to observe, “global” may in fact have its own particular utility when it comes to describing a kind of literary engagement (world literature) that testifies to the ‘negotiated nature of lived experience’ in an unbalanced and unequal world:

⁹ In ‘What is World Literature’ Damrosch asserts that ‘works by non-Western authors or by provincial or subordinate Western writers are always particularly liable to be assimilated to the immediate interests and agendas of those who edit, translate and interpret them’ (2003: 14).

¹⁰ Morey is referring to Spivak’s (2003) use of ‘planetary’ and ‘planetary’ in *Death of a Discipline*, in which she ‘propose[s] the planet to overwrite the globe’ (72). Gilroy too (2004: xii), prefers “planetary” over “global”, suggesting that although both ‘point to some of the varieties of social phenomena – [they] resonate quite differently. The planetary suggests both contingency and movement. It specifies a smaller scale than the global, which transmits all the triumphalism and complacency of ever-expanding imperial universals.’

'Global' in my usage, suggests that the [novels produced by writers such as Aslam, Shamsie and Hamid] describe subjects and situations which are the result of the logic of globalisation, at the same time thereby criticising, exposing and awakening in the [predominantly western, Anglophone] reader a new awareness of the costs of that process (49).

This study reads the novels of transnational South Asian Muslim writers as discrete textual entities, shaped by local, regional specificities, yet 'enmeshed ... in the world' (Said 1983: 35) and hence "global" in terms of their orientation and the political, historical and material contexts of their production. In doing so, it surveys the range of identities and connections their authors map for globally-implicated South Asian Muslim subjects, and attempts to understand the contribution their writing makes to an emerging category of "world" literature in the third millennium.

Points of Reference

Discussions of my writers' recent fictions could potentially be framed in a number of ways, depending on the theoretical paradigm selected to interpret or decode them. The following discussion provides an overview of the critical methodologies which inspired and inform this study, the relevance of which is then explored in greater detail in the textual analyses offered in the thesis's individual chapters.

Underpinning the critique presented in this thesis are the observations made in, and questions raised by, postcolonial works from the late 1970s onwards which are concerned with colonial modes of imagining, reading and representing the "Other", and with the capacity of literature written in English by writers from a decolonising world to reconfigure them. These include Edward Said's (1978) much-discussed initial critique of the Occidental exoticising of

Eastern subjects in *Orientalism*, and his later examination of how the Western media stereotypes Muslims in *Covering Islam* (1997). His earlier work is pertinent to this enquiry for its having emphasised the potentially ‘socially constitutive role of Orientalist (or Eurocentric) discourse’ in creating a ‘fantasmatic’ Orient and Oriental subject which it identifies as ‘real’ (Lazarus 2004: 10). It is also useful for its assertion that there ‘*are* cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and [that] their lives, histories, and customs have a *brute* reality *obviously* greater than anything that could be said about them in the West’ (Said 1978: 5, my italics). These ideas, in addition to those posited in the later *Covering Islam*, remain relevant today because of the continued production in Western/ised discourses of a fictional non-Western and Muslim “Other”, with whose “reality” the novels examined in this study all appear to engage.

Also important to this thesis are Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) considerations of Western epistemological bias, how the discourses of imperial and patriarchal hegemonies function both to construct and to silence marginal subjects, and the (im)possibility of subaltern self-representation in her essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak’s commitment to identifying subaltern agency – in potentially ‘displacing gesture[s]’ or ‘unemphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting[s] of ... social text[s]’ – even while acknowledging the ‘circumscribed’ nature of her task, in particular informs its spirit (308). My study is, additionally, influenced by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s (2002) pioneering study, *The Empire Writes Back*, which was first published in 1989. Their exploration of the capacity of post-colonial literature in English, and writing from Indian cultures in particular, to resist, reconstitute and replace dominant imperial narratives, is especially relevant to the themes explored in my thesis. Anderson’s (2006)

discussion of the 'global' spread of anti-imperial, post-colonial national communities, which he characterises as 'imagined', is also useful to me. As mentioned above, it informs the understanding offered here of the nature and scope of the spaces of affiliation and affinity mapped by the post- or neo-colonial authors' fictions. Yet, in my analysis, I seek to extend the ideas Anderson develops in relation to twentieth-century "national" communities to a consideration of contemporary international/transnational communities constituted on less fixed grounds, such as those of faith.

Amin Malak's (2004) brief yet significant study, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, draws on the legacy of these academic theories, but identifies the need for a 'religion-orientated paradigm' (152) for reading literature inspired by Islamic civilization and culture which can operate through and beyond categorical 'posts' (14). Usefully, it adapts postcolonial paradigms such as those developed by Ashcroft et al (2002), to argue that by using the once "appropriated" language of colonial English, Muslim authors can today create literary 'site[s] of encounter for cultures and peoples on equal terms', thus 'demystifying' and 'de-alienating' Muslims and Islam, oft-maligned post-9/11 (Malak 2004: 5, 11). Malak's book is also the product of an active search for what, echoing Said and Spivak, he describes as the alternative voices of a marginalised and/or silenced 'Other' for whom 'Islam retains an identity-shaping valence' (3). It provides a helpful point of reference for a definition and appraisal of the "Muslim" aspects of post- or neocolonial South Asian Anglophone writing, its spokesman-like elements in particular.

Malak (17) adopts a pan-Islamic approach in his book, arguing against a tendency in postcolonial theory to date to 'subsume ... religion under the category of nation', which may result in the discussion of faith only as part, for

example, of a project of anti-colonial Islamic nationalism, and not as a powerful means of articulating alternative or resistant perspectives in its own right. He surveys texts produced in the last century by Muslim writers from the Indian subcontinent alongside novels and memoirs written in English by North African and Middle Eastern authors. In doing so, he draws attention to common 'Islamic' features central to the construction of meaning in such works, for example their adoption of Qur'anic scripture as an inter-text. However, the Baghdad-educated scholar tends to allow Arab paradigms to dominate his discussions of the factors which shape Muslim-English discourse world-wide. This, in addition to the appropriateness of his emphasis on a particular understanding of Islamic culture, aesthetics and heritage as an inspiring force for these fictions, is something which I will rebalance in this thesis.

Malak, who sees Islamic terrorism as antithetical to the tolerant, life-affirming message of his Islam, places today's 'inquisitorial, condemnatory' (155) Islamic voices beyond the pale of Muslim literary tradition, foregrounding instead writing expressive of individual experiences of contemporary Muslim being and belonging which neither reinforce nor resemble the clichés promoted by 'fanatics and ideologues' (12) on either side of the imagined East/West divide. Post-9/11, his negation of dissenting Islamic voices and claim that 'progressive' Muslim-English narratives might stimulate cross-civilizational encounters typified by 'debate not denigration, cooperation not clash, harmony not hegemony' (152), could be dismissed by critics of contemporary expressions of

multicultural and cosmopolitan connection as blinkered and naive; out of step with current times.¹¹

They might also be revealed as exclusive and limited when read in the light of works such as the political scientist Mahmood Mamdani's (2004) study, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Islamic Terror*, which provides a longer international background to the category-constructing 'Culture Talk' used by academics and politicians from Bernard Lewis to George Bush to discuss and interpret political Islam. For, as Mamdani (15-18) makes plain, the distinction drawn between 'good' Muslims ('modern', 'peaceful' citizens), and 'bad' Muslims ('premodern', 'inclined to terror'), the result of judging individuals of faith according to their political affiliations and not their

¹¹ For me, Malak's critique appears too interested in promoting a positive, civilised, co-operative face of contemporary Islam, although that dimension is of course important – and it is one that I myself may seem to privilege in my consideration of Rushdie, Hamid, Aslam and Shamsie. But my chosen authors also attempt, in their very different ways, and to varying degrees of success, to map (or pointedly not map, thereby leaving the reader with an awareness of its potential importance and presence) 'the world of the Islamist' (Eagleton 2010: 366), in order to try and understand it. Perhaps this is because Islamic fundamentalism can no longer be conceived of as 'inconsequential' – to borrow Aslam's (2011a: 139) term – after 9/11. Whether or not that is the case, these writers recognise a need to account for both – or many – sides of the story: to see, for example, how jihadi ideologues may be engaged in "civilized" discourse (as in Aslam); or to consider the legitimacy of Islamic voices which may seem as extreme or delusional, and question the progressiveness of those who criticise them (as in Shamsie). This is a vital element of this contemporary South Asian Muslim fiction: it is easier to promote and celebrate the (often aesthetic) positives, than to provide a nuanced, global consideration of (what may be perceived as) the negative faces of Islam.

cultural or religious identities, is a false one: 'there are no readily available "good" Muslims split off from "bad" Muslims, which would allow for the embrace of the former and the casting off of the latter' – as Malak might have us do. Yet despite the limitations that might lay it open to attack, Malak's work presents a significant initial attempt to theorise how literary fiction may meet the 'challenge of including Islamic subjectivities and cultural epistemologies into a world of equal differences' (Majid 2000: vii) at a time when the discourse surrounding those differences is dominated by forces far from equal. It is for this reason that it remains important to my study.

I have already made reference to Graham Huggan's (2001) critique of writers, critics and institutions invested in the process of 'turn[ing] the literatures/cultures of the "non-Western" world into saleable exotic objects' (10). It would not be fair to describe either the wide range of twentieth-century Muslim-English literature analysed by Malak, or Malak's book itself, as works engaged in such a venture. Nevertheless, when discussing fictional depictions of incidences of both inter-faith harmony and cross-cultural tension, this thesis, following Huggan, remains alert to the commercial and political contexts in which the novels it examines are produced, and how these may shape and contain them. For, their transnational and diasporic authors could engage in the deliberate suppression of expressions of disharmony with contemporary Western, neo-liberal ways of thinking about certain Muslim Others, thus ensuring their tastes are aligned with those of Anglo-American markets. In this sense their literature may resemble that of twentieth-century "cosmopolitan" postcolonial writers whom Brennan (1997: 36-41) has (disparagingly) described as "politico-exotic". Brennan sees such novelists 'as modelling themselves "on nostalgia for 'democracy' as a vision of pluralist inclusion"; as playing

intermediary roles as 'outside' cultural commentators within the metropolis; [and] as rejecting or at least ironising the liberation movements of the decolonisation era' (Brennan, summarised in Huggan 2001: 11-12). So, too, my novelists may mute Muslim voices of dissent, and demonise or trivialise Islamic acts of resistance to neo-imperial (western) hegemonies, in order to secure their entry into the "global" public sphere. Furthermore, those of them who seek to question western cultural values and assumptions by staging 'repoliticised' visions of Muslim South Asia to curious western eyes may nevertheless end up reinforcing exoticist myths of identity (ix). Depictions intended, in Huggan's terms, to 'unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power', may, ironically, gain a kind of cachet for their capacity to thrill or disturb the reader, the result being that their more critical dimensions are misread or overlooked (ix-x). Huggan's acute analysis in *The Postcolonial Exotic* of the 'complicity between local oppositional discourses and the late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained' is of great relevance to my study (vii). But he also seeks 'to defend ... and to honour' in his book the work of writers whose work is 'bound up' in this global literary industry (xv-xvi). His observations about the strategies "marginal", postcolonial authors may deploy to resist and rewrite reductive narratives of otherness are central to my questioning of how South Asian Muslim writers manipulate motifs of mainstream multicultural and cosmopolitan fiction. As I will proceed to argue, their novels perhaps satisfy neo-Orientalist demands for Muslim 'exotica' to an extent, but also function to subvert the stereotypes which would feed Occidental assumptions and appetites.

Nederveen Pieterse's (2007) *Ethnicities and Global Multiculture* reconsiders concepts of cosmopolitanism, also termed 'global solidarity', 'transnational

rapport' or 'globalization in the affirmative' (156), in the context of global multiculturalism and in relation to Islamic world history and contemporary religious extremism. It highlights the importance in early modernity, and in the colonial era, of Islam's role as an 'intercontinental middleman' or 'bridging civilization' dependent on the 'creative cohabitation' of peoples, centred in the Arab world but reaching far beyond it into Africa, Asia and Europe (155, 157, 160). It also underlines the Qur'anic traditions of tolerance, humanism, and respect for other religions upon which the spread of Islamic world culture was based (160-1). In the process, it questions the effect that historical and cultural memories, or the consciousness of the earlier flowering of a 'Muslim cosmopolis' and knowledge of its loss, may have had on diverse Islamic self-perceptions in the present day (157-60). It also probes the relationship of a twenty-first century Islamic umma both to Western neoliberal and global capitalist 'cosmopolitanism', and to an 'alternative cosmopolitanism ... interspersed with many cultures' which may coexist with Western models or, in a quest to dominate the world with one tongue and culture, reject them altogether (7, 166-7).¹² Nederveen Pieterse's book therefore functions in various ways to inform and extend the understanding offered in this thesis of the nature and scope of the range of global spheres of historic and contemporary Muslim affiliation and affinity, and manifestations of a sometimes problematic Islamic 'cosmopolitanism', with which the characters in the South Asian texts may identify.

Following his discussion of Islamic culture's 'cosmopolitan character' Nederveen Pieterse suggests that, in an era when 'multiculturalism has gone

¹² However, Nederveen Pieterse describes this contemporary expression of Islamic globalization as 'not cosmopolitanism but hegemony' (2007: 7).

global and identification has become flexible', multiculturalism entails engagement with the world, including its conflicts (7-8). In addressing a contemporary South Asian Muslim-English literature so "flexible" in its identifications that it sits uncomfortably under any one label, my thesis looks through and beyond temporal, national, regional and faith-based paradigms to developing theories of "world" literature, which might bring these texts into focus. According to Franco Moretti's (2000) 'Conjectures on World Literature', modern novels produced in and by cultures like those of India, situated at the margins of an unequal yet unitary 'planetary system', are ever the result of a creative compromise between 'local materials' and 'western formal influence', always transformative of the host form (54-8, 67). Scholars such as Moretti, who place great emphasis on Western European narratives as a shaping force for world fiction, seem inclined to celebrate cultural hybridity and to revive postcolonial notions of a subaltern struggle to make "foreign" forms and languages "speak" (58). These ideas, as discussed above, may seem outdated or naive when considered in relation to post-9/11 South Asian fiction. Yet Moretti's observations about the capacity of an unequal world literary system to produce works which are acts of compromise but also variation and transformation, resonate with the comments made by other critics and practitioners in relation to contemporary South Asian writing and international markets.

Sarah Brouillette (2007b) and Kamila Shamsie (2009d) highlight the impact of the domination Moretti describes in practical, material terms, and offer first-hand insights into the difficulties encountered and compromises made by transnational Anglophone authors when writing fiction for a largely White, Western majority community far removed from the parts of the world they might

depict. Looking critically at Anglo-American publishing's popular adoption and promotion of what she loosely terms 'minority' writing as 'World', 'International' or 'Global' fiction, Shamsie (2009d: 110) highlights the need to interrogate the hierarchies obscured by such terms, which are less inclusive than they might seem, and which, when uncritically applied, may ensure the perpetuation of the inequalities on which neo-imperial literary economies are based.¹³ Such insights function as a caveat, and inform my search in this study for a better or more qualified means to describe the globally-oriented literature which such South Asian Muslim writers continue to develop and create, despite their reservations about how it is categorised.

Emerging Visions

What remains absent from the account of relevant studies offered above is a work that deals specifically with the indentitarian aspects of "world" literature produced in English by contemporary South Asian Muslim writers, particularly over the course last decade and in dialogical relation to 9/11.¹⁴ Tariq Rahman's

¹³ Shamsie (2009d: 110-111) understands 'minority writing' to be work produced by migrant writers, for example in the UK, whose voices remain under-represented, which must appeal to 'majority' readerships if it is to sell or receive crucial attention.

¹⁴ Malak's work excavates through its analysis of Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) the Subcontinental and anti-colonial roots of an Anglophone fiction 'committed [to] but never uncritical' of India's Muslim civilization (Malak 2004: 27). It also explores to some of this literature's feminist, diasporic, and postmodern postcolonial permutations through discussions of novels by authors including Attia Hosain (1961), Salman Rushdie (1988), and Adib Khan (1994). However, while he does not dismiss local and regional inflections, Malak does not pursue them. Rather, as noted above, he tends to listen out for a moderate twentieth-

study, *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), was the first to focus on writing produced by authors who originate from a South Asian Muslim state. But the “history” Rahman offers does not necessarily foreground Muslim perspectives or more contemporary, local political interventions. Indeed Rahman, in evaluating Pakistani-English writing, distinguishes between ‘literary’ (cultural and aesthetic) and ‘non-literary’ (‘Islamic, nationalistic, traditionalist’ and political) criteria, privileging the former over the latter (11, and see 1-12). He argues that this literature, which spans the period from India’s Partition to the death of General Zia, offers few sophisticated responses to politics or to history (224, 232). In his opinion, it seems to lack the capacities of Pakistani vernacular fiction which may, as Aamer Hussein testifies, stage ‘events ... in the blinding glare of historical awareness (ethnic and religious warfare, migration, resettlement) and social realism’ (2005: 9). Given the current proliferation of Anglophone Pakistani texts which seem anything but apolitical or unaffected by recent events, Rahman’s otherwise interesting commentary on trends in Pakistani-English writing seems strikingly out of date just two decades after his book’s publication.

Much discussion has occurred about the extent to which Pakistani-English fiction has turned toward the “political” in the post-9/11 period. Authors have experienced a call for cultural insights, an expectation that that they will be able to supply ‘the stories behind the news’ (Hussein, Mohsin and Sethi 2010). Editors such as Muneeza Shamsie (2008: 21) have drawn attention in

century ‘Muslim voice’ (88) he can associate with a ‘good’, global ‘*Dar al Islam*’ (89), and to leave unconsidered the extent to which this voice may speak with, within and without the critical discourses used to define Islam and Muslims at the start of the twenty-first century.

bibliographical essays and new literary anthologies to works by Anglophone Pakistani writers which, in 'touch[ing] on ideas of religion, identity and otherness', offer timely responses to geopolitical events. These themes of course surface in her earlier short story collections (1997, 2001), and in regional and diasporic contexts, not just global ones. Yet Shamsie's introduction to the 2008 selection, *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women*, firmly situates the short fictions she anthologises in the context of:

The last decade, [in which] Pakistan has been strongly affected by political events in neighboring Muslim lands, including the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the politicization of religion, exacerbated by Western rhetoric of Crusades, and the clash of civilizations (21).

Significantly, she claims these diverse stories, anthologised under a 'Pakistani' national umbrella, are 'part of a new world literature in English that gives voice to experiences beyond the traditional canons of Anglo-American literature' (24-5). Yet her introduction is – by necessity – too brief to provide room to substantiate this claim, or to outline a paradigm that might be applied to novel-length works; the proof remains locked within in the concise female fictions – including Kamila Shamsie's 'Surface of Glass', and Humera Afridi's 'The Price of Hubris', set in New York post-9/11 – which are contained in the anthology. Cara Cilano's (2013) new study *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State* is dedicated to a consideration of how Pakistani novels in English 'imaginatively probe the past, convey the present, and project a future in terms that facilitate a sense of collective belonging'; but its emphasis is in on 'the idea, nation' and 'state' of Pakistan, including the notion of Pakistan as an 'Islamic' nation, 'as a 'foundation' for that sentiment (preliminary pages). The final section, 'Failed state, nation in crisis', focuses on post-9/11 fictions by

Aslam, Hamid, Shamsie and H. M. Naqvi which, in Cilano's words, 'counter [a] dominant tendency to absent and abstract' the (Muslim) "enemy" in America's "war on terror", using the 'trope of migrancy' (193).

Scholarly maps are certainly being revised to cover this "new" literature, but they remain patchy, mostly works in progress. Review essays and journal articles have addressed individual works produced by Central and South Asian writers including Aslam, Hanif, Khaled Hosseini, and Rushdie, noting trends in contemporary writing about Islam, Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular, and raising questions about the form, substance and ethical dimensions of modern prose narratives which reflect an other (Muslim) culture (Jefferess 2009, King 2009). Claire Chambers (2012) has attempted to explore what affect their Muslim heritage has had on the writing of Tariq Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Aamer Hussein, Zahid Hussain, Hanif Kureshi, and Kamila Shamsie, whom she interviewed along with other writers of Egyptian, Jordanian, Sudanese, and Syrian origin. Meanwhile critics interested in the progress of the Anglo-American novel have discussed the pre- and post-9/11 works of writers such as Rushdie in the same breath as those of other established White male authors of the "new atheist" persuasion (Eaglestone 2010, Spencer 2010a). Robert Spencer's (2010a) conference paper, 'Literature vs. Fundamentalism: Politics and Morality in Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*', for example, drew comparisons between Amis's *The Second Plane* (2008), Philip Roth's *Everyman* (2006) and *The Plot Against America* (2005), and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), as it attempted to establish criteria for a 'good' (deconstructive, dialogical, explanatory, empathetic, anti-fundamentalist and a-theistic) literature in the wake of the "war on terror". Such critical work provides a rich and often provocative range of theories, criteria and canons-in-formation against which

my discussions of the range and scope of a new world fiction reflective of 'Muslim modernities', but distinctly South Asian in inflection, may be presented.

Authors, Texts and Terminology

How, then, to explain the choice of authors and texts examined in this study, and the terms used to describe them? I have limited my enquiry to the internationally-focussed novels produced after September 2001 by four writers, Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie, in order to allow for an in-depth analysis of both the individual texts and the contexts of their production. The texts have been selected on the basis of their post-9/11 publication date, multi-national or "global" scope, and provision of what Damrosch (2003: 9) might describe as 'multiple windows' onto the 'worlds', in this case, of Muslim-majority states, societies or subjects, and engagement with issues of current (Western) concern about "Islamic" identity, particularly in contemporary conflict zones. The authors have been chosen on the basis of their South Asian and Muslim origins, and in order to reflect the styles, themes and wide-ranging perspectives offered by writers of different generations, genders, geographical locations, and public and private profiles.

Born in India and Pakistan, resident at times in and between Manchester, London, New York, Karachi and Lahore, these writers have at times been described as Anglo-American and British Muslim, in addition to South Asian, Indian or Pakistani. Rushdie, who was born in Bombay immediately prior to Partition, and lived for a time after graduating in Pakistan, was educated in Rugby and Cambridge, and has lived most of his adult life abroad in London and New York. Aslam, born in Gujranwala, Punjab, in the late nineteen-sixties, came to the UK with his parents as a teenager, settled in West Yorkshire,

studied at Manchester, and now lives in London. Hamid, a Lahori by birth, and Shamsie, a Karachiite, both children of the nineteen-seventies, left Pakistan to study in the US, and have since divided their time between New York, London and the cities of their birth.

The authors' affiliations to different national cultural dispositions – Indian, British, Pakistani, and American – have a significant bearing on their work. They influence, for example, the critical perspectives the writers offer in their novels on the place of religious, communitarian and secular identities within the postcolonial nation state; the value systems upheld by “home”-based and diasporic societies; conceptions of regional and world history; notions of belonging; attitudes of patriotism; ideas of civil responsibility, and so forth. Yet, without negating the significance of nationally-specific factors, I treat Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie as equally situated within a South Asian cultural formation and, for the purposes at hand at least, seek to emphasise this dimension.

For, the ‘idea of the nation’ may, as Jurgen Habermas (2001: 64-5) has stressed, ‘help the members of a state construct a ... form of collective identity beyond the inherited loyalties to village, family, ... or clan’, an identity which is instead secured in ‘presumed commonalities of descent, language, and history’ strong enough to ensure citizens’ ‘willingness to stand up for’ (and hence perhaps, literarily represent) ‘one another’. But, as he goes on to point out, in an ‘increasingly ... interconnected world’, the ‘decisions made by states’ rarely ‘harmonize with the interests of the persons and areas affected in the state’s social and territorial surroundings’, whose relationship to that “territory” may precede the nation’s constitution, and whose rapidly expanding contacts are also intercultural and multiethnic (70, 75).

In this context, other regional 'constellations', made up of people(s) similarly united by a 'mutual understanding, intersubjectively shared norms, and collective values', but with 'common historical horizon[s]' which extend beyond those of the nation state, may therefore provide an alternative basis for a shared sense of civic solidarity and (political) culture (75, 82, 102-3). Habermas's ideas about the importance of other (postnational) constellations to individuals' self-understanding and identity seem especially relevant to the constituents of a modern South Asia whose histories, heritages and hybrid identifications long predate the crude partitioning of the subcontinent into Indian and Pakistani nations, and whose future may hinge, as historians like Rajmohan Gandhi (2014) argue, on the recognition and rehabilitation of the common ties that exist between them.

It is my contention that each of these South Asian Anglophone authors, whose perspectives are also international in scope, has either intensified their focus on the Indian subcontinent, its troubled borderlands and diverse Muslim peoples, in the wake of 9/11, or could be considered to have returned their literary attentions to the region following that moment. While Rushdie's *Fury* (2001), for example, narrowed the focus to contemporary New York and the world of a largely insular, Americanised cosmopolitan protagonist, his first post-9/11 novel, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), expands out into global spheres, its action split between cities such as Los Angeles, London, Strasbourg and Delhi, but centring on the contested valley of Kashmir, and the fatal fallout from ruptured relationships originally forged in this Subcontinental conflict zone. His later work, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), confirms in very different fashion this renewed focus on South Asia, looking back to an earlier period not of politicised religious conflict but Islamic cosmopolitanism, to the flourishing

court of the Grand Mughal, Akbar, scenes at which are juxtaposed with the decadent Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Hamid's first book, *Moth Smoke* (2000), is set in Pakistan, its action confined to Lahore in the stifling summer of 1998, a season overshadowed by nuclear tests. It offers "windows" onto a corrupt outside world, but these are increasingly obscured by the fug of its lethargic protagonist's heroin haze. Hamid's second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), uses an encounter in present-day Lahore between the eponymous "fundamentalist" and an anonymous American interlocutor as a framing device. Like *Shalimar*, it is intercontinental in its (retrospective) narrative sweep. In this confessional narrative the recently repatriated Pakistani Muslim antagonist proffers vivid insights into his experiences of living, loving and working in the West, and eloquently articulates how his critical, global political consciousness was awakened in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Both Aslam and Shamsie have previously set their narratives in Pakistan and amongst the Pakistani diaspora. Their novels, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009), each of which features a cast of characters who come from disparate parts of the globe, and Afghanistan and Pakistan as a substantial geographical setting, seem to consolidate a shift in their post-9/11 fiction toward a direct engagement with questions of Islamic faith, politics and identity arising in contemporary zones of international conflict located increasingly close to 'home'.

When, therefore, I refer to the four mobile writers of multiple national, institutional and cultural affiliations and their work as "South Asian" in this study, I am seeking to draw attention to the ways in which their fiction reflects the impact of recent geopolitical events on parts of South Asia and South Asian

Muslim subjects, and to explore the complex relationship their representations of these may bear to the authors' ethnic identities. Abdulrazak Gurnah (2007: 3) suggests in relation to Rushdie that whatever this author's desires to the contrary, he can never quite succeed in his aim, expressed in the novel *Shame* (1983), 'to write "the East" out of him and found new origins'. This study considers what happens when 'Eastern' (South Asian, Muslim) identities are suddenly re-politicised, and explores the effect this may have on the production and reception of the world literary text.

In *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton (1996: 7) notes that 'in much that is classified as literature, the truth value and practical relevance of what is said is considered important to the overall effect'. Yet "value" is a transitive term', as he goes on to observe, 'it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes' (10). It is my argument that, in the decade of the "war on terror", pressure has been placed upon transnational and diasporic writers of South Asian (and particularly Pakistani) Muslim origin to 'disclose' to western readers 'where their identifications, the centres of their subjective universe lie' (Werbner 2002: 3), either directly or through their characters. In this period distinctions between fact and fiction, and between autobiographical and novelistic formats, have become blurred, such has been the 'fascination' on the part of the media and government with identifying "voices from within" Muslim communities' (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 15) that may illuminate the workings of "the Muslim mind" for the general public (Davids 2009: 178). As Mondal (2012: 38) observes, in this anxious moment, 'subjective experience is taken to validate the [literary] text's representation of a social phenomenon ([such as] Islamism)' in the rush to "understand" its attraction, and the writer's

'representation of what he calls [Islam] ... is taken to be 'true' because he speaks of it from 'first-hand' experience'. Curious and concerned readers have staked faith in these writers and their texts and taken them to be authoritative not only because of the ways in which they are marketed (as instructive and insightful accounts by "native" informants), but also because of the ways that their authors present themselves (as spokespeople) and construct their narratives formally so as to produce a reality effect.¹⁵

The transnational South Asian Muslim authors whose works I examine remain conscious of the ways in which – on account of their heritage, craft and status – they may be assumed to be "implicated" (or may strategically implicate themselves) in the complex cultural and (geo)political contexts about which they write. Yet, as their non-fiction commentary clearly demonstrates, each feels a strong obligation to use his or her position to somehow "set the record straight" for western readers when it comes to Muslim-related matters in general, and South Asian Islam in particular.¹⁶ In this thesis, I draw on assertions made in

¹⁵ Aslam's (2008) *The Wasted Vigil*, for example, is praised in the novel's front papers as:

Arguably the best novel available on the current situation in the Middle East. The jihadists, the warlords, the crusading Americans – all are given voice in calm, relentless, shatteringly beautiful prose that reveals the essential wrongness of the current conflict from every angle. There's no whitewash or caricature here, just authentic writing that delivers the world – and a range of extraordinary characters. Highly recommended.

Library Journal (starred review).

¹⁶ As I will go on to discuss in the ensuing chapters, each individual author must be understood to negotiate his or her position as a potential "spokesperson", or broker between Subcontinental Islam and the West, differently. For example, in

interviews, essays and other paratexts to suggest that this commitment informs the perspectives of affiliation and affinity which are offered in their fiction.¹⁷ The novels which Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie have produced in the years since 9/11 have ranged in form from (satirical) thrillers, to dramatic monologues,

a lecture for Yale University, Rushdie sought to bring his family connections to a 'transgressive' (and irreverent) Pakistani writer and personal experience of living under the fatwa to bear as he raised concerns about the 'cultural closing in' which he believed had spread 'outside the Western world' and 'across the Arab world' since the 9/11 attacks (2002: 432-434, 442). He concluded by aligning himself with 'the guardians of the modern [western] world ..., the custodians of freedom and the occupants of the privileged lands of plenty' as he pleaded for his adoptive America to offer a 'civilized' response to this 'barbaric' (Islamic) act (442). By contrast, Kamila Shamsie (2007b), has used *The Guardian's* Books Blog to indicate her reluctance publically to express her 'disgust' at the illiberal, anti-Islamic views expounded by Rushdie's close contemporary Martin Amis *precisely because* of her '(Pakistani and Muslim)' affiliations. Yet while she asserts that she prefers not to rise to such 'awful opinions', thereby refusing to 'enter a world in which Muslims are considered supporters of terrorism until and unless they explicitly state otherwise', Shamsie concludes that she has no choice because 'the failure to express outrage cannot be easily distinguished from a lack of outrage'. Hence she enters the debate as a self-defined 'Muslim foreigner' reluctant either to defend herself or 'acquiesce' with the silence cultivated by the 'UK literary world' of which she is a part, as she searches for a literary means to censure 'one of Britain's most significant writers' 'limited' perspectives of Islam.

¹⁷ As I do so I remain aware that while the authors' 'subjective experience' may be 'taken to validate [fictional] representations of [Islam] ... there is also an "objective" dimension to [their] texts which ... [requires] critical examination' (Mondal 2012: 38). In other words, I understand the subjective experiences dramatised in the novels to be shaped not simply by their writers' "inside" knowledge of Muslim South Asia, but – crucially – by these global authors' personal attitudes and political agendas.

cross-continental romances and polyphonic historical sagas. Although their plotlines are facilitated by some improbable coincidences, and their prose is ornamented at times with poetic allusions, dreams and flights of fancy, each novel is grounded in social, cultural and political realities, whether contemporary or historical. Each takes place in an actually existing location, at a precise point (or points) in time, and centres on complex (Muslim) characters whose lives are punctuated by real events. These include the creation of Pakistan, the Soviet- and American-led invasions of Afghanistan, the collapse of the World Trade Towers, and true cases of “honour” crimes in British Muslim communities. All of these “factual” elements encourage the reader to accept the perspectives the fictions present as “true” – or plausible as re-imaginings of what might well have passed in these particular contexts.

These novels are also quite specifically constructed and framed so as to create reality effects. Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), for example, compresses in excess of fifty years of Kashmiri history and features a caricatured and demonic “Islamist” as its central antagonist. But its drama is pinned to specific dates of significance to the region, and peppered with “authentic” Kashmiri, Urdu and Arabic vocabulary and allusions to religious and cultural traditions; meanwhile, the novel itself is fronted by a dedication to the novelist’s Kashmiri grandparents, which hints at the genealogical credentials he brings to his highly authored account. Hamid’s monological novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) contains no such legend. But it is introduced by a narrator whose voice is deliberately crafted so as to resemble precisely the tone adopted by a certain type of foreign-educated Pakistani; it encourages the listener/interlocutor to respond to this peculiarly polite and provocative Muslim

protagonist *as if he were real*.¹⁸ Aslam ushers in his Afghanistan-set epic *The Wasted Vigil* (2008: front pages) first with a reflection from President Carter's National Security Advisor on the role of the Taliban in shaping world history, which functions as an epigraph, and, secondly, with an excerpt from a fifteenth-century Afghan poet. At the book's close, a disclaimer underlines its incorporation of 'real event[s]' (Aslam 2008: 435). Thus Aslam seems to invite the world reader to interpret his lyrical, and psychological fiction as history rewritten: as a sensitive, perceptive comment on the current situation in Central Asia, backed both by a personal connection to the region, and by intensive secondary research. Shamsie, too, inserts lists of works consulted and offered for further reading into her meticulously researched global fictions (2002b: acknowledgements, 2009c: further reading).¹⁹ These perhaps encourage the reader to interpret her novels not as definitive, "authoritative" revisions, but rather as decentred interventions into the wider geopolitical discourses with which they engage: as subaltern insights into the impacts that colonialism and the post-colonial fallout, neo-imperialism and globalisation have had on migrant (South) Asian, Muslim citizens.

The South Asian Muslim identities and positions vis-a-vis Islam which these texts articulate are informed by nationally-specific factors, such as the particular

¹⁸ This accent both mimics that deployed by a particular class of Pakistani *and* 'resonates with many Western preconceptions about Islam, or about people from the Muslim world', Hamid (2008b: 46) has said – prejudices he wishes to use his fiction to expose.

¹⁹ See, for example, Shamsie's discussion of her 'obsessive' scrutiny of Google Earth 'to help [her] visualise places [she] was writing about but had never visited' (2009a: n. p.).

version of secularism adopted by Jawaharlal Nehru as a state ideology in post-Independence India, which was linked to revised a historiography of 'India as a "composite culture" ' and the 'ideal of a syncretic, tolerant civilization' (Srivastava 2008: 23). This 'secularity', according to Achin Vanaik (1990: 148), 'has been described as an admixture of Western concepts ... and certain aspects of Indian tradition', but differs from British and European models in that it 'does not favour the development of a progressively non-religious state'; hence it may be seen as 'non-communal or non-sectarian rather than secular, that is, non-religious' in character. Writing on the relationship between secularism and the postcolonial Indian novel, critics like Neelam Srivastava (2008: 23) point out that 'the multicultural thrust of Nehru's nationalism provides the ideological matrix from which ... Rushdie's otherwise divergent secular narratives of the nation are constructed'. While the author might personally favour the relegation of religion to the private sphere, he nevertheless endeavours in his novels to entertain 'secularism, myth and belief' as worldviews which are 'equally valid' – as do others of the writers considered here, Aslam in particular (25). Also writing in relation to the work of Rushdie, Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2009: 145) notes the author's dependence on the idea of "*kashmiriyat*" when attempting to imagine a solution for the disputed Valley of Kashmir. In doing so she highlights the importance of another dimension of South Asian Muslim identity that informs the Islamic positions the selected writers propose in their novels: the ascetic and pantheistic tradition of "Sufism". Kabir observes that in 'liberal Indian discourse' – as in some of the novels I examine – a secular, syncretic version of Sufism is privileged 'that seeks to eject all that is troubling about Islam to the national imaginary', with the result either that the religion's 'significations of a threatening otherness' are (too)

simplistically 'defused' or, 'more productively', that 'spirituality' is 'reinsert[ed] ... into the praxis of the everyday' (20-1). And yet, as Katherine Pratt Ewing (1997: 11, 14) emphasises in her study of Sufi religious meanings and practices, 'when we look at the histories Pakistani Sufis claim for themselves, we see them constructed out of a complex set of resistances and identifications with others', a version of which 'modernist' intellectuals may reconstruct as they attempt both to 'reconstitute [their South Asian Muslim] roots' and – simultaneously – to articulate their objections 'to the fixity of [Islamic] tradition'. Such appropriations are also apparent in the novels considered in this thesis as the writers attempt to articulate a range of more nuanced 'Islamic' positions.

In identifying Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie as "Muslim", I take my cue from Malak (2004). He uses this term in preference to "Islamic" to refer to the writers and the narratives examined in his study in order to emphasise their cultural rather than their theological rootedness in the civilization of Islam (5). As he explains,

Muslim ... denotes the *person* who espouses the religion of Islam or is shaped by its cultural impact, irrespective of being secular, agnostic, or practicing believer. The term *Islamic* ... denotes thoughts, rituals, activities and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam or directly associated with its theological traditions. I ... avoid the adjective *Islamic* in relevance to the currently literary context of this book and settle for the simple adjective *Muslim*. The latter choice allows for the *specificity* of the individual writer's conception, vision, and rendition of the culture of Islam (5-6).

Muslim narratives suggests the works produced by the person who believes firmly in the faith of Islam; and/or, via an inclusivist extension, by the person who voluntarily and knowingly refers to herself, for whatever motives, as a 'Muslim' when given a selection of identitarian choices; and/or, by yet another

generous extension, by the *person* who is rooted formatively and emotionally in the culture and civilization of Islam (7).

It is by the last proposed 'extension' that Malak feels able to defend the inclusion in his study of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the infamous fiction of a self-declaredly 'secularist' author of Indian Muslim origin (Rushdie 2002: 176). This is a book which, despite its author's (Rushdie 1991: 394) declared rejection of religious and cultural 'absolutism', may as a result of its irreverent perspectives on the Prophet and Islam, function to reinforce stereotypes and thus to facilitate the transformation of what Malak (2004: 110) terms the 'literary product' into a hot-property commercial 'item' attractive to 'anti-Muslim consumers'. The same accusation, though to a lesser degree, might be lodged at some of the works explored in the later sections of my thesis. Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) in particular is a novel which the *New York Times* critic Akash Kapur (2005: n. p.) considers to be 'infused with an anger that is occasionally overdone, yielding passages that read like an assault on the religion from which all the characters' unhappiness seems to originate'.

Yet while Malak seems anxious to justify the incorporation of the narratives of controversial (secular, critical, and at times anti-Islamic) culturally and ethnically 'Muslim' writers such as Rushdie in his book, I see the consideration of the fictions of such ambivalent authors as important to my thesis. Indeed, their critical, dissenting voices seem a crucial component of any study which seeks to explore a range of literary depictions of Muslims after 9/11. As I will argue, Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie's recent fictions and related non-fiction texts demonstrate very different attempts to contest in literature what Robert Spencer (2010a) might term official 'fundamentalist', in the sense of

unquestioned, dogmatic, essentialist, or undemocratic, narratives in relation to Islam.

Some of these may, if read in isolation, prove insensitive or unpalatable to certain readers (although Spencer would suggest that the best of them stage dialogues in themselves). Yet, considered together, all may contribute to a vital literary and hence discursive project of (re)orientating South Asian Muslims in texts published in the West in the wake of the war on terror. In describing this project as “vital”, I perhaps reveal my own predilection (shared – as demonstrated above – by many scholars in my field of postcolonial and world literature) for writing which, individually and/or collectively, functions to unsettle and challenge simplistic, stereotypical perspectives of “Other” cultures and identities. My particular interest in examining how (far) the works of world literature produced by South Asian Muslim authors in the last decade may intervene in contemporary debates to complicate conceptions about intra- and inter-cultural Islamic identities has, inevitably, been shaped by a combination of personal and professional experiences. Before proceeding with my quite decisive readings, it would seem appropriate briefly to delineate these here.

Martin Amis (2008: 3-4) has described the attacks on New York’s World Trade Centre of 11 September 2001 as ingeniously staged: designed to exploit the fact that they would be globally mediated, send shock-waves of fear and terror around the world. He states:

No visionary cinematic genius could hope to recreate the majestic abjection of that double surrender [of the twin towers], with the scale of the buildings conferring its own slow motion. [Its architect, Osama bin Laden] well understood that an edifice so demonstrably comprised of concrete and steel would also become an unforgettable metaphor. This moment was the apotheosis of the postmodern era – the era of images and perceptions (4-5).

For Amis, ‘the message’ of 9/11 was clear: ‘America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated’ (3). The age of ‘innocence’ was over, he claimed, ended by ‘suicide killers’ who ‘belong in a different psychic category’, and for whose absolute affiliation to a death-defying faith “we” (Americanophiles?) have ‘no equivalent’ (3, 7). Aged 21 and at bowling alley with a Maldivian Muslim friend I had met while studying English literature at Oxford University, I experienced these events differently. Unacquainted with New York (where he – by contrast – had recently completed an internship with the United Nations), I failed to connect images of two endlessly collapsing towers which appeared on the score monitoring screens with any external reality; I associated them instead with the graphics that appear when a player achieves a strike. It was a few months later, on visiting my friend in his home in the (then) quiet capital of Male, that I began to appreciate how the shock of the attacks had been registered, not in metropolitan centres, but in smaller corners of the world. Here ordinary (South Asian, Muslim) grandmothers with little power to influence global media worried terribly about how both they and their more mobile relatives would be perceived in increasingly Islamophobic (western) parts of the globe.

In 2007, my reading of popular Anglophone world novels led me back to postgraduate study, and to the critical and contextual analysis of such international literary texts. I found myself particularly drawn by contemporary fiction by South Asian (predominantly Pakistani) writers in English which seemed to articulate these experiences of global misperception, and to offer “alternative”, Muslim perspectives on recent events. My reading of a selection of these – including Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Kamila Shamsie (on whose fictions I wrote my MA

dissertation, *Local Concerns and Global Compromises*) – were strongly influenced by the seminars of the *Framing Muslims* international research network, which were running in 2007-9. In this period the overwhelming (and depressing) sense – daily reinforced by shifts in government policy, and coverage in the press – was that minds were closing to the positive dimensions of multicultural societies in general, and to the diversity of global Islamic identities in particular. For me, the network's explorations of how Muslims are depicted (and depict themselves) in contemporary cultural discourses, of the structures that govern these representations, and how they may be circumvented, seemed to offer crucial new tools for thinking about the windows which open onto our (shared) world when we read such globally-oriented texts.

Globally-Oriented Texts as Discrete Textual Entities

In the chapters which follow this introduction, I explore the hypothesis that there has been a shift towards a more politically-engaged form of English-language fiction amongst South Asian Muslim (and predominantly Pakistani) writers in the years since 9/11, in part in response to media and market pressures – to a demand for explanatory stories and authentic spokespeople – but also a result of the individual authors' desire to rewrite this 'East' which they cannot, in the contemporary climate, simply write out of them.

Rushdie comes from an older generation of Indian English writers praised and criticised for their 'cosmopolitan', 'migrant', 'postcolonial', and 'Third World' perspectives (Huggan 2001: 85). He is perhaps better known 'as a tongue-in-cheek chronicler of modern India [and] facetious gadfly to Islamic orthodoxies' (86), than a subtle or sympathetic commentator on "home" events. In the next chapter I suggest that he has responded to the pressure for a third-millennium

fiction which responds to recent events – or, as he puts it, ‘to find a way of writing after 11 September 2001’ (Rushdie 2002: 436) – by re-focussing his attention on Islam in its South Asian contexts. I examine, in conjunction with the statements he makes in his essay collection *Step Across This Line* (2002), the two ostensibly very different novels he has produced since then, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), which both seek to provide reasons for contemporary Islamic terror and excavate earlier histories of cosmopolitan Muslim civilization on the Indian subcontinent. Yet, as noted above, while Rushdie’s name has become ‘entwined with the literary representation of Islam’ (Malak 2004:91) since the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), I stress that he remains a problematic “Muslim” spokesperson with regard to contemporary Islam.

I argue that his post-9/11 fictions tend to fall back on fairly simplistic domestic explanations for individual engagements with political Islam; caricature as fanatics and fakes the anonymous, ‘iron mullahs’ whose origins and motivations they might otherwise seek to deconstruct; cling on to nostalgic and perhaps unrealistic notions of a tolerant, pan-Indian spirituality, prior to its corruption by foreign forces; and fail to give due credence to experiences and acts of faith (Rushdie 2005c: 116-17, 2008a: 390). Borrowing from Eaglestone’s (2010: 367) discussion of *Shalimar*, they suggest an ‘inability’ or ‘refusal to engage with the otherness of the terrorists and their ideas’, using instead ‘an array of techniques to recapture this within a pre-established framework of understanding’. They thus provide a contrast with the more acute, uncomfortable and local perspectives offered by an inventive younger generation of transnational Pakistani writers including Hamid and Shamsie (who, unlike Rushdie, were raised in the shadow of General Zia and his programme of Islamization) on the

attitudes, affiliations and affinities of contemporary South Asian Muslims in relation to Islam.²⁰ Rushdie's recent fictions also seem, despite their attention to detail, to lack in their secular scepticism the intricate insights into Islamic history and culture – in particular its aesthetic and spiritual appeal – which are offered by Aslam in *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), and (perhaps more comprehensively) his later novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), and also by Shamsie in *Burnt Shadows* (2009).

In the third chapter, I go on to consider how in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) Hamid stages a singular, studied and provocative act of “writing back” to Western fictions of Muslim affiliation and identity after 9/11. This is a book whose distinctive monological style and urbane tone sets it apart from the other often polyphonic “world” fictions which form the basis of this study; it resembles more closely the real-life confessional memoirs of former Islamists like Ed Husain (2007). Yet as Changez, its “native” Pakistani protagonist, takes command – controlling the gaze of his American interlocutor, choosing which windows to open onto his expatriate experiences as a market fundamentalist and “home” life as a *desi*-returned – he limits the “authentic” insights on offer and provides explanations of Lahori life which function to unsettle the foreign reader, even as they would appear intended to reassure him. At a time of heightened interest in stories told from the ‘*inside*’ (Husain 2007, Preface), Hamid proffers a Pakistani Muslim Other's seemingly instructive tale of a young

²⁰ According to Shah (2009: n. p.), Mohsin Hamid has said that, for members of ‘Pakistan's small English-speaking elite’ like himself, ‘coming of age under the oppressive dictatorship of General Zia was a “dramatic wrenching change” that created a fertile ground for writers’.

life lived in corporate America's dark domains, one with obvious parallels to his own, whose authority – ironically, tantalisingly – remains impossible to verify.

Hamid's slippery monologue plays directly with the western interlocutor and reader. Its Pakistani narrator second-guesses the foreign listener's responses to the "native" life he puts on view, and presents an "official" (but not necessarily trustworthy) interpretation in its stead – one which may serve further to obscure the face of the 'reluctant fundamentalist' whose true identity the tourist seeks. By contrast, Shamsie and Aslam's third-person narratives describe rather than dramatically create moments of inter-personal tension, uncertainty and unease, as seen from multiple individual perspectives. As a result they present a variety of alternative frameworks for understanding terror, faith and 'other' ways of seeing the world in the wake of the "war on terror", rather than narrating their inability to address these issues.

Chapter Four considers *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), the first two post-9/11 works produced by the British-based author, Nadeem Aslam. His globalising fictions turn in this period from depicting the tensions which exist amongst a "close-knit" Pakistani community in a multicultural English town, to sketching the bonds (almost) forged by international strangers when their lives collide in a war-torn Afghan village. The chapter asks how far they present alternative conceptions of Muslim affiliation and affinity in zones of inter-faith contact and conflict. In doing so, it acknowledges the partial and still-circumscribed nature of the Muslim modernities this diasporic South Asian writer places on display. It suggests that Aslam nostalgically promotes a secular, aesthetic, Sufistic Islam, now seen as crumbling and moth-eaten, or hidden from view, while – like Rushdie –

surveying other cultural manifestations and theological interpretations of Islamic faith with suspicion.

Further, it argues that despite Aslam's commitment to portraying the 'historical dimension, ... psychology ... and the complexity of the social and cultural situation' (King 2009: 474) responsible for producing the conditions where peoples appear to clash, his fiction tends to reinforce the idea that ultimately the followers of a fundamental and political Islam and those who inhabit or adhere to the liberal, democratic principles of the West, are ultimately irreconcilable. One might suggest that whereas in Hamid's apparently confessional narrative, the chameleon-like Changez confounds the novel's title by eluding definite classification, Aslam's characters collapse back into the essentialising categories of Mamdani's (2004: 17-8) 'Culture Talk', even as the writer attempts to use an increasingly broad range of perspectives to unpick them. I go on to suggest that Aslam's post-9/11 fiction fails to rise to a greater challenge of using contemporary world literature formally and thematically to question the individual's responsibility – as a character, and as reader – to comprehend the emotional and spiritual needs, and confront the geopolitical conditions, that may result in a turn toward a radical Islam, and the apparent "clash" which he bemoans.

The fifth and final chapter examines the work of Kamila Shamsie, focusing predominantly on the novels *Kartography* (2002), *Broken Verses* (2005), and *Burnt Shadows* (2009). It asks how she "writes back" in these fictions to the pronouncements of a White, Western, male establishment in the wake of 9/11, to the ambiguous legacies of Rushdie, and to those diasporic South Asian writers such as Aslam, who have followed him. In doing so, it notes certain resemblances in terms of trope and treatment: Shamsie's novels and short

fiction include figures like Hamid's Changez: moody Pakistani males out of love with a securitized and suspicious West; they feature sensual scenes akin to those of Aslam, where Muslim characters explore their humanity through communing with a range of Islamic and "pagan" religious artefacts; and they entertain with witty, mocking passages in which Rushdie-esque mullahs are synecdochically reduced to "beards". However, I contend that Shamsie, aware of the commercial potency of such symbols and tropes – the old frisson of the postcolonial exotic and erotic, with the added thrill of 'bombs and mullahs' (Shamsie 2007a: n. p.) – consciously deploys these and other colourful, multicultural and romantic elements as a device to engage the reader in her always more complex fiction. As a result, she avoids duplicating Hamid's deft but elliptical and monologic affront on Western conceptions of Islamic identity, Aslam's melancholic retreat into a pan-religious aesthetic, or Rushdie's (2002: 436) trivialisation of religious leaders otherwise 'unimaginable' to him.

By mapping a diverse range of global 'Muslim' experiences of cross-cultural alienation and interconnection from multiple Western, non-Western, and feminine perspectives this chapter argues that Shamsie complicates the reader's understanding of contemporary South and Central Asian Muslim identities as enacted within the social and political parameters of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and America. She uses this fiction of colliding worlds to stage moments of intercultural encounter in which the protagonist and 'reader' is urged to interrogate the power-relationships that underpin her potentially dangerous assumptions about Islamic identity, "frame" her interpretations of suspect behaviour, and dictate her hostile response. The actor in this conflict zone must take responsibility both for her own and for her country's role in creating and maintaining the Islamic figure of fear. For, in Shamsie's networked

fiction, the (South Asian, Islamic) “terrorist” is neither a super-powered, otherworldly intruder like Rushdie’s ruthless Shalimar, motivated by a personal vendetta; nor is he a privileged, postcolonial fictional cipher, able to baffle his reader with a barrage of words. Rather, he is an ordinary, often mistaken, and marginal figure, caught up in global politics as he struggles to find a way (to be at) “home”.

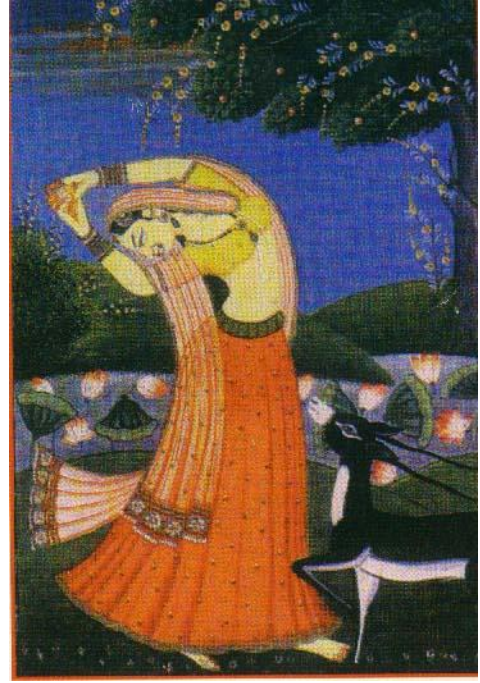
Ultimately I argue that the novels I examine may be read as attempts to respond in writing to the fears, preconceptions and curiosities about Islamic identities which have dominated western discourses over the course of the post-9/11 decade. But these globally-oriented texts must be understood as discrete entities. They are produced by South Asian authors with disparate attitudes to “Islam”, which have been shaped in particular regional, transnational and diasporic contexts. And these writers have widely diverging appreciations of the bearing that the faith has (had) on contemporary and historic Muslim identities. Some strive more simply to reveal where the centres of their suspect South Asian, Muslim characters’ subjective universes may lie: to “map” their identifications forensically, so that they might be “known” by the reader and categorized, thus perhaps reinforcing more limited and prejudicial (western) perspectives. Others approach the act of disclosure more subtly, indicating (ironically) the impossibility of pinpointing a particular space of Islamic affiliation or affinity which may govern their protagonists’ hearts and minds. However, I propose that it is those authors who use their novels less to expand understandings about Muslims’ intra- and inter-cultural connectivity than to turn the tables, questioning the ethics of exposing ordinary Muslims’ personal identifications to public scrutiny, who present the most radical, literary challenge to world readers. For these global fictions contain within them a critique of the

dominant political and cultural forces which require nominally Muslim subjects' Islamic affiliations and affinities to be disclosed. They prompt their audiences to reconsider their own prejudicial orientations, and how these shape the stories they demand and hear about South Asian Islam.

Chapter 2. Enchanted Realms, Sceptical Perspectives – Salman Rushdie's Post-9/11 Fiction

Introduction

This chapter explores the Islamic affiliations and affinities mapped by Rushdie's two post-9/11 novels: the transnational thriller *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), and the continent-connecting historical romance *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008). It asks to what extent they offer a discursive, imaginative or empathetic South Asian Muslim perspective on geopolitical events. These two ostensibly very different works of



A Miniature
M. K. Dhiman (n.d.)
[Figure 2]

fiction endeavour to provide an international audience with reasons for contemporary Islamic 'terror', and to excavate for this readership earlier histories of cosmopolitan Muslim civilization in India. They feature a range of idiosyncratic affinities felt by Muslim protagonists for individuals from Islamic and other religious backgrounds, which are dramatised in scenes both of harmonious multicultural co-existence and robust inter-faith debate. In this sense, they continue in part to reflect the 'mosaic of diverse cultural identifications' (Nasta 2002: 147) experienced by Rushdie as a privileged, cosmopolitan intellectual, and cultivated by the hybrid and migrant characters featured in many of his more diasporic fictions.

Yet it is my argument, as this chapter will demonstrate, that the specifically Islamic networks or ‘affiliations’ which Shalimar and The Enchantress also describe are, by contrast, considerably more limited. In these third millennium novels the pursuit of more orthodox or “fundamental” Muslim connection invariably results not in a healthy, heterogeneous and ‘anti-essentialist’ realisation of a multicultural self (Nasta 2002: 149), but an aggressive and monomaniacal erasure of any preceding allegiance or identity which might obscure an Islamist’s nihilistic understanding of “truth”.

Rushdie Today: Writer and Pundit

Salman Rushdie is today an established if controversial figure within English literary circles. In the course of a career that almost spans four decades he has won fame and notoriety both on and off the page, not only for his many novels – most notably *Midnight’s Children* (1981), which in 2008 was awarded the ‘Best of the Booker’, and the inflammatory *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which incurred the Valentine’s day fatwa in 1989 – but his political and cultural punditry, colourful personal life, and seeming institutionalisation. Whether volunteered or invited, the opinions Rushdie has aired and the actions he has undertaken in the glare of an increasingly global public spotlight have never failed to cause a stir, particularly when they have related to “Muslim” matters. His (2005b: 19) criticism of Tony Blair’s knighting of the Muslim Council of Britain’s Secretary General as ‘the acceptable face of “moderate” ... Islam’, ridicule of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s “inane” suggestions about the incorporation of Sharia into UK law (Rushdie 2008b: n. p.), and acceptance of a Birthday Honour in a move perhaps ‘calculated to goad Muslims’ (Hoyle 2007: 3), provide examples.

Over the course of the last decade Rushdie has perhaps modified the stance he initially took in support of the Bush and Blair governments' responses to the World Trade Centre attacks and their subsequent 'War on Terror' (Gurnah 2007: 7), evident in essays like 'February 2002: Anti-Americanism', published in the *New York Times* and anthologised in *Step Across This Line* (Rushdie 2002: 398-400). However, a brief sample of his latest newspaper interviews and comment would serve to confirm Robert Spencer's (2010b: 260-1) opinion that the savage censure Rushdie has provided of a fundamentalist Islam in such pieces remains unmatched by his critique of Western universalism and hegemony.

When asked, for example, by *The Guardian's* Susannah Rustin to offer his opinion on the French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols which was passed in 2004, popularly discussed as a ban on headscarves, Rushdie refused to 'defend the veil' in the interest of championing women's rights (Rushdie 2010b: n. p.). Apparently still seeking to promote a vision of female 'freedom' largely based around the loose notion that this equates to the uncensored wearing of 'short skirts' (2002: 393), he took the opportunity to accuse 'women in the west who use [the veil] as a badge of identity' of acting in 'false consciousness' (2010b). His negation of the possibility that such politically-conscious females may be something more than misguided says more about the limits of Rushdie's secular liberal imagination than it does about their ignorance or disingenuousness.

In the same interview, speaking in relation to the controversial and much-misreported proposals to build a Muslim Community Centre in lower Manhattan two blocks away from the Ground Zero site, Rushdie made the following comment: 'I'm not a big fan of mosques, I'm not a great fan of mullahs... [But] of

course people should have a place to be able to observe their religion'. This statement seems more conciliatory. Yet its author's primary interest seems not to endorse the centre's (Muslim) users' right to express their faith affiliations freely, but to ensure that the entire site can 'go back just to being part of New York', with Muslims departing quietly to pursue their faith-related activities in a space nominally approved and sanctioned by Western liberals, but barely visible to American eyes. It is consistent with his view that religion should be confined to the private sphere.

Rushdie's interview with Rustin was ostensibly convened to discuss *Luka and the Fire of Life* (Rushdie 2010a), the author and father's new 'novel for teenagers', a book which she proposes it is 'hard not to see... as a rebranding exercise... a deliberate step... towards something lighter, slighter and much more personal' than its ambitious, topical precedents (Rustin 2010: n. p.). His latest story collection may appear apolitical, but it seems inevitable with a writer like Rushdie that the conversation which takes place around it will be easily sidetracked onto more controversial and political matters.

Decades after Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced his death sentence, then, it certainly seems that Rushdie remains committed to cultivating the role of 'a political figure and very public writer' in relation to Islam (Rushdie 2002: 432). Indeed his interest in exploring Islam on the Subcontinent seems freshly renewed, both in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York, and of the communal violence sparked by perceived acts of Islamic terror in South Asia in the months that followed them (401). He may criticise western and, specifically, American news media for narrowing the parameters of what it is permissible to say, particularly post-9/11 (Rushdie 2005a: n. p.). Yet the author repeatedly adopts the mantle of pundit. Rushdie uses the "global" opportunities afforded by

his international status to emphasise the Indian Muslim aspect of his identity as he seeks to legitimise his claim to speak with authority about how minority Islamic communities should behave in relation to other faiths and cultures.

In his essay 'November 2001: Not about Islam?' Rushdie (2002: 394) focuses on the primitive spectre of hoards of Muslim men amassed on the 'Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, answering some mullah's call to jihad', in order to emphasise the (to him, clear) connection between 'terror' and a 'belief' in Islam. Later in the same essay he reminds the reader of the critical perspectives he offered of Pakistani Muslims' self-exonerating anti-Americanism in his 1983 novel *Shame*. In 'Not about Islam', Rushdie (2002: 396) goes on to state, 'I wanted then to ask a question which is no less important now: suppose we say ... that we are to blame for our own failings?' The expatriate author's use of the collective pronoun "we" points to the kinship he would claim to possess with the Muslims of South Asia. This is an affinity Rushdie foregrounds even as he seeks from a westernised perspective to censor the attitudes of the people who hail from what he describes, in his contemporaneous 'Lectures on Human Values', as the subcontinent's 'blinkered monoculture' (430).

It should be noted that critics such as Spencer (2010b: 262) have recently seen fit to draw a distinction between Rushdie's 'literary' and 'political output', arguing that his early and controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* offers, by contrast, 'an attack on [a] kind of Islam, not Islam per se'. Spencer cites Rushdie's interest in 'heterodox Islamic traditions' such as Sufism and the emphasis he places in the novel on 'doubt, discussion, criticism and interpretation' as evidence of its author's commitment to portraying an alternative and more humane Islam in opposition to aggressive Islamisms (262).

Rushdie's two post-9/11 novels redirect the reader's attentions toward Muslims in "native" South Asian (as opposed to migrant, diasporic) contexts, and would certainly seem to bear witness to a subtle but arguably significant shift not only in critical but in literary-fictional focus. This is a shift back in time and geographical location to the civilized, multi-faith, and majority-Muslim societies of pre-Partition and Mughal India, recalled and recreated from the figures of Rushdie's childhood memory and remnants of historical nostalgia. Yet it is one whose visions are ever overshadowed by Rushdie's (2002: 430-1) impressions of a closely-related but 'utterly alien' Pakistan, which he visited as a reluctant adolescent, and by this country's barbaric Central Asian Islamic and Middle Eastern Muslim brothers.

Rushdie's tendency to satirise rather than to attempt realistically to represent religious 'fundamentalisms', particularly of an Islamic persuasion, can of course be traced to earlier works such as *Shame* (1983) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). These energetic, entertaining fictions feature apparently devout Muslim characters – a dangerously obsessive local Maulana driven wild by his shoe-string necklace of shame (Rushdie 1983: 43); a saintly, seer-like, silver-haired girl on her deadly mission to Mecca (1988: 473-6) – many of whom may best be described as deluded and disorientated in their respective relationships to the divine. However, it is their controversial "Muslim" creator's continuance and consolidation of these types in the globally distributed fictions he has produced since the launch of the "war on terror" – and hence in relation to a discourse dominated by popular misconceptions about an Islamic "axis of evil", clash of civilisations and meltdown of metropolitan multiculturalism – which is of greatest relevance to this thesis.

Some literary critics and theorists have dismissed Rushdie in recent years for his lack of political engagement, pointing to his failure as a 'migrant' writer to continue to 'rebuke' or 'challenge' the fundamental (and unequal) values of a western society which, since the fatwa, has provided him with shelter (Eagleton 2007b: n. p.). In Terry Eagleton's opinion, Rushdie is 'a man who moved from being a remorseless satirist of the west [in Thatcher's 1980s] to cheering on its criminal adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan' in the age of Bush and Blair; one whose literary output no longer retains the radical perspectives of 'the left'. While not overlooking the limitations of Rushdie's recent punditry, other critics have sought rather to refocus attention on the dissenting and sceptical perspectives provided in his earlier novels, such as *The Satanic Verses*, which exposes both the apparent bigotry of the "character" of Muhammad, and the inequality of Britain under 'Mrs. Torture' (Rushdie 1988: 266). They argue that what might be termed the anti-fundamentalist or "a-theistic" position adopted by the novelist in relation to any voice of authority, political, cultural or religious, remains particularly vital at a time when the survival of our world is threatened not only by the proponents of global jihad but also global capitalism (Spencer 2010b).

Bradley and Tate (2010), however, in their study of *The New Atheist Novel*, suggest that Rushdie's most recent fictions, like those of other British men of letters, including Amis, Ian McEwan and Philip Pullman, 'too often end up bearing witness to the sheer poverty of our public discourse on religion' (111). In their opinion, these writers are more likely to 'dramatize ... a return to some pre-rational religious dogmatism' or 'fetishiz[e] ... liberal enlightenment values' than 'attempt to move beyond the Manichean clash of religious and secular fundamentalisms epitomised by 9/11 ... offering more complex and variegated

pictures of the multi-faith world beyond' (109). Yet *The New Atheist Novel's* authors also emphasise the important role the novel has to play in the current climate in providing a means by which readers can sensitively and seriously engage with alternative and undogmatic modes of 'religiously-inflected seeing and being' (109). The creators of such 'post-atheist' literary texts, they argue, must write despite personal doubt 'as if [they] believed in the possibility of religious experience as something irreducible to the standard categories available to science and method' (85).

The Post-9/11 Fictions:

Shalimar the Clown

Shalimar the Clown (2005), which appeared in the UK less than two months after the 7/7 bombings, was Rushdie's first work of fiction since his pre-9/11 *Fury* (2001). The earlier novel, set in New York, imagined America at the decadent height of a hubristic 'golden age', troubled by a malaise linked to a growing consciousness of the less privileged and exploited world's oncoming wrath or 'fury' (Rushdie 2001: 114). Like *Fury*, *Shalimar's* narrative spans continents – namely the Indian subcontinent, Europe, and North America – but a single geographical space is located at its story's heart. In this case the space is a South Asian one: the disputed Muslim-majority state of Kashmir, which Rushdie has described as being of particular interest:

Because I am more than half Kashmiri myself, because I have loved the place all my life, and because I have spent most of that life listening to successive Indian and Pakistani governments ... mouthing the self-serving hypocrisies of power while ordinary Kashmiris suffered (2002: 305).

It provides both the idyllic setting for the novel's interfaith romance, and – when love fails – the site of Shalimar's terroristic turn.

Shalimar compresses and selectively embellishes over fifty years of political Kashmiri history, from the moments immediately prior to the cessation of British rule and Partition of India to the ongoing conflicts of the twentieth century, focusing on the incursion of communalism into the idealised space of the predominantly Muslim Valley of Kashmir. When the sub-continent was partitioned and granted independence in August 1947, the feudal Hindu ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, was undecided as to whether to join Congress-led India or the newly established Muslim nation of Pakistan. He eventually signed a treaty of accession with India following the invasion, in October, of Pakistani tribesmen from the North-West Frontier. War broke out between the two nations, and was ended by a ceasefire initiated in 1949 and overseen by the United Nations Security Council, which also adopted a resolution that a plebiscite should be held once hostilities had ceased to decide the question of the state's accession. But troops were not evacuated, and Kashmir was partitioned for practical purposes between Pakistan, which administered "Azad" (Free) Jammu and Kashmir and the Northern Areas, and India, which controlled the state of Jammu and Kashmir, including the 'prized valley' (Schofield 2000: xi). War broke out again in 1965, but the 1949 ceasefire line (renamed the "Line of Control" in 1972) 'remained the de facto border' (xi). By 1989, a protest movement against the Indian administration among the valley's Muslim population had gathered momentum. This was, according to Victoria Schofield, 'both an armed struggle and a political rejection of their continuing allegiance to the Indian Union' (xiii). But, as she also notes, it 'lack[ed an] obvious unanimity of objective', and was resisted by other

inhabitants of the state, such as the Ladhaki Buddhists, Kargil's Shia Muslims, and the Hindus and Sikhs of Jammu, while the Pakistani government 'was only too happy to support the movement "morally and diplomatically"', and 'unofficially ... to assist in reviving the spirit of the 1947 "jihad"' among the "Islamist" insurgents, hoping that it might thus 'achieve militarily what it had failed to gain through negotiation' (xiv). The conflict continues in the twenty-first century and, following the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's involvement in fostering terrorism in the region has come increasingly under the international spotlight.

At the level of global politics, Rushdie may be understood to use his multiply-located "world" novel to explore the ties that connect and bind the oppositional and archetypal figures of the powerful, covetous American and the embittered Kashmiri jihadi. Yet the link traced between their different worlds in Rushdie's ostensible 'fiction of intrigue' (a fiction born of imperial contexts which, according to Siddiqi (2008: 1), 'foregrounds a threat to the [western hegemonic] social and political order') appears on examination more personal and cultural than religious and political, based as it is on human bonds of love, sex and "honour".

Shalimar's drama revolves around the fallout from a love affair that flares in the early nineteen-sixties between two Kashmiri teenagers who are born in 1947, at the dawn of Partition. Raised in the idyllic multifaith community of Pachigam, the tight-rope walker Noman ("Shalimar"), son of the village *sarpanch*, falls for a dancer named Boonyi, the pandit's green-eyed daughter. Their romance unfortunately flares at a time when sectarian differences in the disputed valley are becoming increasingly exaggerated, and communal violence is escalating. But when their sexual liaison is exposed, the villagers decide -

despite some consternation - to support the Hindu-Muslim match in the spirit of “*Kashmiriyat*”, or of national, social and cultural solidarity.²¹

Tensions increase in 1965 with the appearance of a foreign ‘iron mullah’, Bulbul Fakh, in the neighbouring town of Shirmal; the local people shelter the firebrand preacher and build him a mosque. He denounces the pluralist Pachigam as an enemy to the “true faith”. But things only truly fall apart with the arrival of the Alsatian Resistance hero turned US Ambassador Max Ophuls, drawn to the ‘issue’ of Kashmir by a sense of a common cause. He seduces (or is seduced by) Boonyi, installs her in Delhi, then abandons her – first to gluttony and narcotics, then, when the scandal of their affair breaks, to the clutches of his envious wife. She abducts the resulting child, ‘Kashmira’, and raises her in America as ‘India’. Bent on revenge, Shalimar retraining as an Islamic terrorist; Boonyi, broken, returns home to wait for death.

The Kashmiri tale central to Rushdie’s continent-spanning novel unfolds largely in extended flashback, framed by the story of Max’s assassination in Los Angeles in 1991. Max, now America’s chief of counter-terrorism, is knifed to death in the book’s opening pages by his Kashmiri driver ‘Shalimar’ in a

²¹ *Kashmiriyat* was always a fictional notion. As Victoria Schofield (2000: xii-xiii) points out in her Preface to *Kashmir in Conflict*:

[As] Sir Owen Dixon, UN Representative for India and Pakistan, noted in 1950, the difficulty of resolving the future of the state [of Jammu and Kashmir] was compounded by the fact that it was ‘not really a unit geographically, demographically, or economically’ but ‘an agglomeration of territories brought under the political power of One Maharaja.’ ... What [he] noticed from the outset was that with peoples of such diverse origins nominally united under one political authority, whatever the outcome of a unitary plebiscite, there was bound to be disappointment from amongst the minority ... As the Indian writer, Sumantra Bose, has recognised, the challenge was always to find a middle ground between ‘communal compartmentalism and the chimera of non-existent oneness.’

seeming act of Islamic terror. After this, the narrative leaps back to paradisiacal, pre-Partition Kashmir to tell the story of Boonyi and Noman's births and fatal love. It goes on to encompass Nazi-occupied Strasbourg, Islamist training camps in Pakistan, and the California of the migrant elite. It ends there, in America, with India/Kashmira's Manichean struggle to defeat Shalimar, her vengeful stepfather.

The instances of Muslim or Islamic connection featured in this complex narrative are largely split between feelings of a broadly spiritual and cultural affinity on the one hand, and more radical religious and political affiliations on the other. The affinitive connections seem largely to be local and benign – a sympathy felt for a popular Sufi saint long revered in Kashmir or favourite figure from Mughal literature, for instance. The affiliations, however, appear more dangerous in persuasion; they are typified by the commitments of the delinquent, deranged or politically enraged to an 'un-Kashmiri and un-Indian' hard-line Islam (Rushdie 2005c: 122).²²

²² This seems in tune with the novelist's broadly binary reading of Islam in Kashmir expressed in June 1999 (Rushdie 2002: 305-7). In this column, written at the time of the Kargil crisis, he described 'mullahs and radical Islamists, who characterise the struggle to "liberate" (that is, to seize) Kashmir as a holy war' as an external, Pakistani force, whereas:

Ironically, Kashmiri Islam has always been of the mild Sufistic variety, in which local *pirs*, or holy men, are revered as saints. This open-hearted, tolerant Islam is anathema to the firebrands of Pakistan (306).

Historians like Victoria Schofield (2000: xiii-xv) might agree – in more complex terms – 'That what began as a more secular movement in the valley [of Kashmir] for greater political liberty became one with "Islamist" overtones arose directly from the changes occurring within Pakistani society and influences from Afghanistan'; and that, lamentably, 'In the crossfire of multiple objectives

The first of these senses of connection – affinity – is perhaps exemplified by the spontaneous flood of feelings of what we could term “psychical or spiritual attraction” experienced by Shalimar’s father Abdullah on entering the Mughal pleasure gardens where his acting troupe is to perform the ‘traditional *Ram Leela*’ and ‘*Budshah*, the tale of a Muslim sultan’, in service of Kashmir’s maharaja (71). Abdullah’s emotions are intensified partly as a result of a pre-existing sense of kinship with the gardens’ founder, the Mughal emperor Jehangir, whom the Muslim headman deems superior to Kashmir’s current Hindu ruler; and partly as a result of his substantial imaginative and auto-suggestive abilities as a professional actor-manager (78-9). For the dreamy and nostalgic Abdullah, the draw of the garden is predominantly aesthetic and secular. He is entranced by the ‘water music’ that plays from its ‘liquid terraces’, and hypnotised by the “horticulturalist monarch[’s]’ ‘love-song’ to the earth (78).

Such feelings of affinity may lead the gentle, moderate village headman wistfully to fantasise about deposing Hari Singh and reinstating Jehangir’s glorious past:

remain the lives, and sadly often violent deaths of men, women and children who have been caught up in a deadly war of words and weapons, which seems unending’. Yet she, and other scholars of the region’s conflict (for example Mridu Rai (2011: 277), who points to how Kashmiri Muslims have ‘defied assimilation within an Islamist rhetoric that fails to recognise their regional specificities’; or Peer (2010a), who points to the attraction to his contemporaries of the Salafi fundamentalist-reformist movement, discussed below), would illuminate the greater diversity of Kashmiri political and moral positions in relation to “Islamism”, which the fiction writer, in his satirical reconstruction of post-second world war history, strategically omits or obfuscates.

The present maharaja was no Mughal emperor, but Abdullah's imagination could easily change that ... [he] closed his eyes and conjured up the long-dead creator of this wonderland ... he felt himself being transformed into that dead king ... the Encompasser of the Earth, and [he felt] the languorous sensuality of power (78).

But for Rushdie's comic character, the impulse toward or desire to embody an Islamic potentate remains benign: Rushdie gives the reader no reason to anticipate that Abdullah's indolent day-dream of becoming Jehangir will translate into any insurgent action. Yet the author hints that his protagonist's nostalgic, aesthetic connection may nevertheless pose a threat, not to global civilisations or international relations, but to local civilian ones, at a time when Kashmiris – made nervous by rumours that 'looting, raping' armies of *kabailis* (Pashtun tribesmen) have crossed into Kashmir from the new-made Pakistan – are beginning to wonder: 'maybe we are too different after all' (85, 87). The negative implications of Abdullah's dreamy pursuit of his affinitive aspirations is registered in Rushdie's narrative by the *sarpanch*'s level-headed wife, Firdaus, who interrupts her husband's delusional ventriloquising of the Mughal emperor in his philosophical death-throes to return Abdullah to the demands of the narrative present:

She grabbed her husband roughly ... she shouted, deliberately making her words as harsh as possible. 'This garden has a big effect on small men. They start believing they are giants ... If you want to prepare to play a king ... think about Zain-ul-abidin in the first play. Think about Lord Ram in the second.' (79)

Firdaus may simply wish her husband to refocus on the task in hand – the night's coming performance. But her words also seem to betray a fear that Abdullah's fixation on this Muslim aspect of their syncretic Kashmiri heritage

may contribute to tensions within the region's multifaith community, for which their acting troupe has always striven to provide a balanced portrayal of Muslim and Hindus alike. In the fractious post-Partition climate *Shalimar* describes, symptoms of sentimental experiences of religio-cultural affinity must be suppressed in order to lessen risk of causing cultural offence.

Other benign-seeming Muslim connections charted by *Shalimar* include a spiritual affinity or feeling of 'fondness' on the part of the residents of Pachigam for a range of historic Sufi saints or *pirs* and living seers, ranging from the fourteenth-century saint Hazrat Bulbul Shah, fabled for introducing Islam to Kashmir and for unfreezing the waters of the Jhelum, to Khwaja Abdul Hakim, a 'doctor and Sufistic philosopher', who ministers in the twentieth to the bodily and spiritual needs of Pachigam and Shirmal's diverse populations (82). The doctor momentarily appears in the narrative to preside over the lovers' nativity in the Shalimar gardens. He fails to find a medical remedy from amongst his impressively heterogeneous skills-set, which encompasses the practices of west and east, to save Boonyi's mother; she dies in childbirth. Yet the learned doctor is nevertheless able to offer the grieving Pyarelal Kaul some philosophical consolation, drawn from the teachings of Sufi mysticism but equally accessible in the religiously 'blurred' Kashmiri context, to the Hindu *pandit* (83). The *khwaja's* gentle dialogue with Pyarelal on the bitterness of his beloved wife's untimely departure: 'the question of death ... proposes itself, does it not, panditji, every day ... [But] you have a beautiful daughter ... The question of death is also the question of life, panditji' – lulls both parties into a sentimental sense of accord, like the 'Sufi hymns' which, harmoniously alternating with the 'Hindu *bhajans*', soothe the jangling nerves of the guests at Shalimar and Boonyi's carefully orchestrated multifaith wedding (83-4, 113). He

is a figure of 'sectarian ambiguity' whose practices may present 'a compendium of everything of which Islamic puritans most disapprove' (Dalrymple 2009: 114-15); yet the *khwaja* also appears to represent, in Rushdie's idyllic vision of pre-conflict Kashmir, 'everything that was best about the valley ... its tolerance, its merging of faiths', which made a nonsense of 'austere monotheism' (Rushdie 2005c: 83).

The Sufistic sensibilities dramatised in *Shalimar* seem to resemble those of the author's Kashmiri grandfather, also a doctor. Rushdie dedicates the novel to him, and remembers the old man with respect and affection. In an interview he gave to Johann Hari soon after the book was published, Rushdie (2006: n. p.) is reported to have described his ancestor as simultaneously devout, rational and enlightened; a 'model of tolerance' happy to engage in conversation, even disputation, when faced with his teasing grandson's religious doubt. Hari (2006: n. p.) emphasises the distinction drawn by Rushdie between this elder man's 'mild, mystical', Kashmiri Islam, akin in Rushdie's opinion to that practiced today by India's pluralist and "secular-minded" Muslims, and the 'austere' brand of fundamental Arab Islam introduced to the valley in the 1960s. In Hari's crude terms, 'Salman's grandfather stands for him as an alternate Islam, a radically different way of being Muslim to the Khomeinist and Bin Ladenite head-choppers'. Rushdie depicts "Islamic" affinities largely peaceable in character in *Shalimar's* opening stages.²³ But it is the stricter affiliations of precisely such

²³ The Sufistic affiliations also seem conveniently to be frozen in time – part of a bygone era. There is no space in Rushdie's darkly comic tale of terror for a realistic portrayal of those politically committed Kashmiris whose retention of a link to religious tradition may lend gravitas to their leadership of resistance movements. The journalist Basharat Peer (2010b: 81) describes, for example,

radically 'other' Muslims – Islamist insurgents and fundamentalist fanatics – that he strains to represent as his novel turns from Kashmiri romance to global jihadist thriller.

In the narrative, the residents of Pachigam retain their 'fond' attitude toward – or affinity for – the centuries-old saints and scholars associated with Sufi mysticism even as the foreign-leaning Islamic preachers who enter the valley threaten to usurp or drive them into extinction (Rushdie 2005c: 115, 87). Rushdie portrays the inquisitive native Kashmiri community's openness toward such Sufistic figures as harmless in itself. Yet his novel illustrates the potential of such instinctive and intense emotions – like Abdullah's fixation on the Mughal aesthete Jehangir – to lead the villagers into more sinister realms, particularly if exploited. The 'iron mullah' whom, it is rumoured, was 'miraculously born' of abandoned Indian 'war metals', and who poses on arrival as the reincarnation of the saint Bulbul Shah, ostensibly stays in Shirmal at its populace's behest: 'many ears' are curious to hear his message, we are told (115-16). When articulated in his harsh, alien tones, the familiar *azaan* or summons to prayer is

in the article 'Kashmir's Forever War' how the head of the separatist Hurriyat Conference coalition, Omar Farooq, 'deftly mixed his roles as modern politician and the head cleric in Kashmir's Sufi tradition, leading his followers in a sing-song voice humming Kashmiri and Persian devotional songs and then moving effortlessly to the question of Kashmiri politics' as he commemorated the death of his cleric father, who was assassinated in 1990. Peer goes on to mention both Farooq's shouting of crowd-pleasing slogans ('Kashmir is for Kashmiris! ... We will decide our destiny'), which win him the support of 'excited young' Srinagaris; and the politician's sustained attempts to engage with Indian and Pakistani governments regarding a peaceful settlement and the demilitarisation of the region, 'often at a high personal price' (81).

transformed into a 'call to arms', a means of drawing the variously enthralled, obedient and opportunistic Kashmiris into pan-Islamic insurgent networks (123). It is to the Maulana's sectarian cause of 'resistance and revenge', preached from his pulpit, that Shalimar and several of the valley's dissatisfied youths subsequently become affiliates (115).²⁴

In his unyielding, metallic quality, the iron mullah resembles other militant religious "fanatics" portrayed in Rushdie's earlier fiction, such as the hard-line Hindu nationalist Sammy Hazaré, also known as the 'Tin-man', who appears in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (Rushdie 1995: 301). However, Sammy, a Christian Maharashtrian convert, is to some extent humanised. We learn, for example, that he joins Fielding's fundamentalist 'crew' for 'regionalist rather than religious reasons', yet that the somewhat unhinged individual has become 'half-man, half-can', less as a result of a radical political commitment and more on account of his obsession with bomb-making (311-12).

²⁴ Interestingly, such Islamist types as *Shalimar's* iron mullah closely resemble the 'rather forbidding old men ... glassy-eyed with righteous indignation' who Anshuman Mondal (2008) remembers as being responsible for the burning in Bradford in 1989 of copies of *The Satanic Verses*. For the youthful Mondal, they represented 'the archetypal Other – exotically attired, speaking broken English in thick "foreign" accents and fanatically propagating the rhetoric of the mullahs in Tehran' (1). Mondal argues that these fantastic figures, often mistakenly associated with an older generation of Muslim immigrants whose Islamic attachments clash with the duties of multicultural citizenship, have lingered too long in the popular consciousness as stereotypes of a more fundamental Islam. Meanwhile, the increased 'religiosity' or 'turn to Islam' of the angry young men joined the crowds that day has, until very recently, been under-researched and little represented or understood (2).

Rushdie (2005c) uses the scrap-metal legend in his critical Kashmiri narrative to emphasise a causal link between aggressive Indian military intervention in the region and the rise of this radical new brand of Islamic preacher which is its direct legacy, born out of and fostered in opposition to it. The foreignness of Fakh's ideology and bearing are repeatedly emphasised: the occupying Indian army Colonel, Hammirdev Kachhwaha, for example, scornful of the 'miracle' theory, suspects him to be 'a pro-Pak communalist' (120). This patriotic Hindu deems the infiltrating Muslim outsider a hypocrite 'who dare[s] preach about [Indian] enemies within the state' when, having sown the seeds of communal discord, he is in fact the 'incarnation of that foe' (120). Yet the motivation and affiliation of the much-mocked but impassive mullah, silent in relation to his past and place of religious instruction, remain unknown, and the faceless Fakh an all the more disquieting figure as a result (117).

Later it is confirmed that the Maulana takes his religious cue and culture from hard-line 'Islamist-jihadists', whose ideological commitment to an aggressive and austere form of the faith is motivated by the religiously-rooted but political 'desire to crush the infidel' (262, 264-5). His 'seductive tongue' gains potency from emotive allusions to the 'immorality' and 'evil' of godless, idolatrous '*kafirs*' (125). This belligerent, moralistic, and ideological discourse clashes with the tolerant language deployed by Hindu and Muslim Kashmiri villagers, yet resonates with that we might popularly associate with an absolute, Saudi Arabian and Wahhabi-inflected Islam, and with its global jihadist proponents (116, 120, 122, 125, and 264).

The youthful affiliates turned Islamic militants featured in *Shalimar* include, in addition to Shalimar: Anees Noman, his depressive brother; the delinquent Gegroo boys; and Abdulrajak, the diminutive 'Filipino revolutionary' who

attempts to befriend Shalimar at a training camp (269). All are associated with Fakh's fearsome new interpretation of the faith, yet differ slightly in their affiliative motivations. Anees, who is abducted one night by the local liberation front commander and 'asked if he would like to learn to make bombs', is portrayed as a morbid and melancholic character; he assents because he finds the promise that at least this way 'life was likely to be short' cheering (106). The Gegroo boys are more maliciously self-seeking, while the seemingly polite and orderly Abdulrajak 'shine[s] with some sort of crazy internal light', fuelled by a peculiar religio-political fervour which borders on insanity (268).

Rushdie's lack of patience with 'superstitious madmen' (Hari 2006) of an Islamic fundamentalist kind seems particularly evident where the Far Eastern Muslim is concerned. The more rational arguments Abdulrajak might articulate for joining radical Saudi- and Pakistani-funded organisations for national liberation are undermined by his broken Hindi. His dialogue amounts only to unenlightening expressions of allegiance and action, such as 'Man of God inspire. Man of war do' (Rushdie 2005c: 269). The "factual" information the omniscient narrator supplies to contextualise Abdulrajak's impassioned speech offer only a textbook-style explanation for the impoverished and persecuted Filipino's route to radicalisation:

The luminous little man ... had accepted U.S. arms and backing but loathed the United States because American soldiers had historically backed the settlement of Catholics ... against the wishes of the local Muslims. The Christians controlled the economy and the Muslims were kept poor. (269)

Hence, where Rushdie's Filipino Islamic revolutionary is permitted to speak it is in stumbling syllables and for comic, if chilling, effect. The character cannot himself convey in any sophisticated fashion what sparks his fanatical zeal, nor

what personal and political circumstances drive him to make the absolute commitment to kill a hated American and so link his 'story' to Shalimar's (269).

Abdulrajak and the iron mullah's commitments to a partial, pro-Muslim God may be understood both as somewhat insanely devout, and as politically strategic. But the "Islamic" opinions and alignments of the bored and bullish brothers Gegroo, 'a trio of disaffected layabout[s] ... looking for trouble' are more simply cynical and self-serving (126). The boys' "turn" to Fakh in 1965 is precipitated purely by their anticipation of a father's rightful wrath over their rape of his daughter; the hell-fire preacher's exclusively male mosque (we are informed that 'no provision had been made for ladies') is the only Shirmali space which will grant them asylum (119). Similarly, their attempt, on return to Shirmal in 1988, to impose the 'Islamic decencies' promoted by their 'holy' employer, the fictional 'Lashkar-e-Pak', is attributable to no higher cause than their desire to avenge themselves on the father of the girl they defiled and the compatriots whose principles they violated in the process (126-9, 286-7).

Rushdie's (2002: 395) characterisation of the misogynistic Gegroos seems partly consistent with his assertion in his *New York Times* column 'November 2001: Not about Islam?' that:

For a vast number of "believing" Muslim men, "Islam" stands, in a jumbled, half-examined way ... for a cluster of customs, opinions and prejudices that include [amongst other things] ... the sequestration or near-sequestration of "their" women, the sermons delivered by their mullah of choice, [and] a loathing of modern society in general, riddled as it is with music, godlessness and sex.

Yet it is also inconsistent. In the essay quoted above, Rushdie firmly links the majority of Muslim men's apparently illiberal and anti-modern behaviour to a

muddle-headed commitment to some superstitious ‘mulch of “belief”’ promoted and exploited by the political proponents of an Islamist ideology (395). But in *Shalimar*, the Gegroo boys, thuggish although not stupid, are seen cleverly to exploit the insurgent movement for their own venal ends. The young men’s aggressive and stereotypically “Islamist” behaviour – torching the village’s television tent, terrifying its unveiled women – thus interpreted, is therefore *not* so much “about Islam” (Rushdie 2005c: 285-7). Rather, it seems to be more about the dangerous egotism of three young swaggering, self-styled cowboys, and their need publicly to demonstrate that no man can insult them and escape censure, thus perhaps adhering to a bloody code of ‘honour’ which, though popularly associated with Muslim culture is not, as Tillion (2007, back cover) has demonstrated, an ‘aberration specific to Islam’.

Like the Gegroos, Rushdie’s ‘terrorist’ central protagonist, Shalimar, burns with a desire to avenge his ‘honour’, which drives him toward political Islam (Rushdie 2005c: 258). Turned comic-book fashion toward the dark side by Boonyi’s betrayal, this suddenly sinister clown affiliates to the Kashmiri liberation front, and thence to the ‘worldwide Islamist-jihadist’ movement, in order to exploit the *umma*’s military education programme, arsenal, and global networks for his own sadistic gain (264). As he informs a leader of the local militia, ‘ “I need to learn a new trade ... For now ... I’ll kill anyone you want to ... but ... one of these days I want the American ambassador at my mercy” ’ (252). Realigning himself with the separatists, the former beneficiary of Kashmiri pluralism now describes Muslim Pakistan, whose weapons fuel the insurgency, as an ally; he talks of national ‘freedom’ gained through trust in a ‘common God’, ‘faith’ and ‘a higher allegiance’ (259). As an affiliate to the cause of global jihad, he submits his body to the rigours of training at the Pakistani Inter-

Services Intelligence-backed FC-22 camp (264-8). Under the tutelage of the iron mullah, Shalimar surrenders his mind for re-programming with an international religio-martial 'ideology', for which the only 'permitted' text-books are 'training manuals' and 'the Holy Qur'an' (265). Yet despite his protestations to the contrary, Shalimar remains driven, fundamentally, not by a desire to 'turn' – in his brother's words – into 'some kind of fire-eater for God', but by a jealous husband's urge to destroy the man who stole his love (259). In this sense his commitment differs from that of the devout, fanatical Islamists characterised by Rushdie both in this fiction and elsewhere, to waging 'holy' war against Western and Jewish 'infidels' or even 'fellow Islamists', for solely sacred or political ends (Rushdie 2002: 395).

Rushdie's (2005c) portrayal of his eponymous protagonist's ultimately disingenuous affiliation is not lacking in some complexity. The absolutist Shalimar, turned from love to hate, is certainly attracted by radical Islam for its own sake. In the training camp, he half listens to the preacher's uncompromising lessons about 'God's work' and 'truth', the latter of which is presented to new recruits as a replacement parent, sibling or life-partner:

Everything they thought they knew about the nature of reality ... was wrong, the iron mullah said. That was the first thing for the true warrior to understand. – Yes, *Shalimar the clown thought, everything I thought ... was a mistake ...* In the world of truth ... there was no room for weakness, argument, or half-measures. ... Only the truth can be your father now, but through the truth you will be the fathers of history. – *Only the truth can be my father...* – Only the truth can be your wife. (265-6).

Shalimar willingly accepts the iron mullah's liturgy as a substitute for the other, earlier, Kashmiri lore about the nature of man, good and evil, laid open to him in youth by his Hindu *pandit* father-in-law (91-2). He hopes that by subscribing to

the mullah's more exacting dictates he may sever his ties to the painful, shameful past and yet, at the same time, that his cultivation of a hard-line Islamic affiliation may provide a means to fulfil a violent pre-existing need for vengeance. So when Shalimar rises and tears off his 'garments', crying: 'I cleanse myself of everything except the struggle [to expel 'the infidel']! ... Take me or kill me now!' he does so with a cheating heart and double tongue (267-8). He may 'almost believe ... [in] his own performance ... that he was no longer what he was and could indeed leave the past behind', but Rushdie's sceptical clown remains conscious of his inability to commit himself disinterestedly to this new cause, given his overriding urge to pursue a personal vendetta (268).

Despite such attempts to furnish them with greater texture, Rushdie's representations of the connections and motivations of Kashmir's fictional Islamists are crude in comparison, say, to those pertaining to the strict Muslim reformists and Islamic insurgents described in *Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer's (2010a) first-hand account of the Kashmiri conflict. For example, Peer ascribes the attractiveness of a stricter form of Islam introduced in the late 1980s to educated individuals from amongst his village's lower middle classes not to locals' awe and curiosity about 'blood-and-thunder preachers' (Rushdie 2005c: 115), but rather to their interest in its focus on social reform:

They [the Salafist group] revolted against the way Islam had been practised over centuries in Kashmir ... They wanted to shear the local traditions ... saving the peasants from the mumbo-jumbo and exploitation of the priestly class – the *moulvis* [Muslim scholars] and *pirs* [holy men], the Muslim Brahmins (Peer 2010a: 167).

In Peer's account, the young men who join the anti-Indian liberation movements do so partly out of boyish envy for the glamorous insurgent's

Pakistan-gifted Kalashnikov, 'green military uniform and ... [the] badge on the chest that said: JKLF!', and partly because they find themselves caught in the relentless tide of 'death, fear and anger' which was sweeping with the escalating conflict through the valley of Kashmir, but not for the venal reasons Rushdie attributes to the bad-boy villains of his piece (23-4). As 'wild ... men, fanatics, [and] aliens' (Rushdie 2005c: 130), *Shalimar's* fundamentalist affiliates ultimately reinforce rather than expand the range of the now familiar type of the mad, 'bad', dangerous Muslim (Mamdani 2004). In his 1995 novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie characterised Hindu nationalists as being driven by 'engines stranger' and fed by 'darker', more personal 'fuel' than that of '*the nation, the god*' (Rushdie 1995: 312). In the hands of the same author, the post-9/11 "world" fiction becomes largely a vehicle for stripping the cold-blooded "Islamic" assassin-antagonist not only of any real religious and ideological motivation, but of any political one, too.

Further, it becomes a means instead of dressing the wronged, embittered, Muslim subject's anti-American behaviour in the primitive garb of misogynistic "honour" (Rushdie 2005c: 258). The result is the deflection of responsibility for contemporary acts of religious extremism and, in this instance, "Islamic" terror, onto the aggrieved and aggressive Muslim male whose rage may be concurrent with a turbulent era, but whose propensity to evil seems inherently his own. Responsibility is perhaps also partly deflected onto the patriarchal culture from which *Shalimar* hails, which permits the pursuit of his bid for vengeance.

In his essay on contemporary fiction and terror Robert Eaglestone (2010: 366-7) suggests that *Shalimar* lacks a 'sense of the world of the Islamist', and points to an inability on the part of the novelist to 'get to grips' with 'the Islamist "truth" ' to which individuals such as *Shalimar* are ostensibly converted. Indeed,

the 'sulfurous' Maulana's railing disquisition against the materialist enemy and his self-interested values, which immediately precedes Shalimar's dramatic 'revision' of his 'screwed up' 'worldview' and supposed avowal of hard-line Islamist principles, is comprised predominantly of nihilist platitudes (Rushdie 2005c: 264-5). Bulbul Fakh asserts:

The infidel holds that the picture of the world he draws is a picture we must all recognize. We say that his picture means nothing to us ... The infidel speaks of universal truth. We know that the universe is an illusion and that truth lies beyond ... The infidel believes the world is his. But we shall ... cast him into darkness and live in Paradise and rejoice as he plunges into the fire (267).

Shalimar 'scream[s] in assent': 'without the struggle I am nothing!' Yet what the Mullah's "struggle" is – save a bloody-minded rejection of Western capitalist attitudes and values, expressed in the most generic of terms – remains, like the preacher's identity, almost entirely obscure (268). The complexities not only of this particular type of radical and political Muslim affiliation ("Islamism"), about which the West continues to be anxious, but also of other more profound experiences of spiritual connection seem to be relegated in Rushdie's elliptic if not reductive world fiction to a space firmly 'outside [the author's] world-view' (Eaglestone 2010: 367), equating, in that novelist's own terms, to the realms of 'spiritual fakery and mumbo-jumbo charlatanism' (Rushdie 2005c: 48).

Despite the fact that it discriminates to some extent between different forms, expressions and uses of the faith – Sufi v Salafi, religious v secular, private v political – *Shalimar* is a work that could arguably be considered part of a wave of "new atheist" fiction, in which 'Islam [and Islamic extremism in particular] comes to embody the irrationality, immorality and violence of religion in general'

(Bradley and Tate 2010: 5). It is interesting, then, that several of the novel's characters, Hindu and Muslim, can be seen to attempt in different ways to disconnect themselves altogether from the shifting influences of what could be termed the God-like 'shadow planets' of (religious) ideology, tradition and superstition (Rushdie 2005c: 48). Such heavenly bodies, diabolical and divine, are exemplified in *Shalimar* by the Hindu 'dragon planets' Rahu, the 'exaggerator' and 'intensifier', and Ketu, the 'suppressor' of human instincts (48). These spiritual entities, like other addictive secular gods (such as stimulants and narcotics), 'grab' and govern man's understanding of his own morality, freedom and ability to think and act for himself, whether for good or for ill (46). Rushdie's suspicion of them is well-documented, both in his previous fiction and prose.²⁵ In *Shalimar* his Kashmiri characters, from the obese and opium-addicted Boonyi to the disaffected "Islamist" Shalimar, variously try to break with these simultaneously seductive and dangerous influences in order to regain control of their own destinies and, ultimately, realise their desires – the woman for her husband's earthly love; the man for vengeance on his unfaithful wife.

For Shalimar, the process of 'let[ting] go' in order to achieve self-determination entails the severance of the two contradictory vows which he

²⁵ In Part One of 'Step Across this Line', one of his 'Lectures on Human Values' Rushdie emphasises the importance of ideas contained in the Sufi Muslim poet Fariduddin Attar's story *The Conference of the Birds* (Rushdie 2002: 407-9). Here the creatures expand the possibilities of what they can be by transgressing the limits prescribed by others, eventually becoming their own gods. Rushdie sees this as a vital step toward 'advanced civilisation', founded on 'several individualisms ... merged into a collectivity' (409).

makes to Ketu and Rahu: to let his adulterous wife live; and to annihilate her and her lover (226, 237). He must rescind the first in order to realise the second, but disassociate himself entirely from both if he is to forge on the basis of self-abnegation the new Islamist ties which will grant him access to the fundamentalist networks he exploits then betrays (267-8, 271). In the end the selfish Shalimar jettisons the “holy” cause for a secular satisfaction more sublime – a husband’s bloody, brutal revenge for his wife’s infidelity, dressed in the guise of jihadi terrorism. It is this individual motivation, not his lawyer’s captivating “sorcerer’s” or “Manchurian” defence’ (that Shalimar’s ‘free will was subverted by mind-control techniques’; that he was ‘programmed to kill’ at Hamas-style ‘brainwashing centres’), which the Los Angeles court that sentences him recognises (383-4). The realisation of individual desires, and hence the achievement of selfhood, seems in Rushdie’s sceptical fiction to preclude the possibility of a pure or total commitment to any external governing authority. Bradley and Tate (2010: 99) have referred to Rushdie as perhaps ‘the most intensely theological of contemporary British novelists’. The theme of ‘the quarrel [with and] over God’: of the individual’s desire to cut his ties with – or “disaffiliate” from – a supernatural being and organised religion; and the impact of their demise, disestablishment, or death on society, is something that Rushdie continues to pursue alongside more aesthetic and ‘enchanted’ experiences of South Asian spiritual affinity in his later novel, *The Enchantress* (Rushdie 2008a: 440).

The Enchantress of Florence

Set at the time of the sixteenth-century Mughal Emperor Akbar, Rushdie’s next book, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), is focused in part on the Grand

Mughal's cosmopolitan court, and in part on the Florence of Niccolò Machiavelli and the Medici. It incorporates characters whose fortunes carry them across continents, dramatises their foreign encounters, and invites the reader to draw comparisons between India and Italy's two rich and contemporaneous cultures, but largely keeps the European and South Asian civilizations which it depicts distinct. Rushdie uses in *The Enchantress* the bare bones of what might popularly be considered "world" fiction – transnational protagonists, "exotic" locations, and a plot that features inter-cultural exchange – to create a historical fantasy rooted in India and its Mughal heritage.

In this sense, Rushdie's second novel of the third millennium differs from those of his younger contemporaries Aslam, Hamid and Shamsie. Though they remain interested in the earlier and often hybrid histories of Muslim countries, these authors have consistently chosen more modern Islamic peoples, cultures and conflicts as the subjects for their recent fiction, particularly those of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century Pakistan and Afghanistan. Their post-9/11 novels therefore present a more obvious and direct creative challenge to contemporary media (mis)representations of South Asian Muslims. Yet it seems important to note that *The Enchantress*, Rushdie's post-7/7 novel, appeared at a time of heightened anxiety in Britain over multiculturalism's apparent failure, rising religious intolerance and perceived 'ethnic segregation' (Phillips 2005: n. p.). It explored in the midst of such misgivings the cosmopolitan nature of an earlier Islamic civilization or "middle nation" (Nederveen Pieterse 2007:160), which might be upheld as a model of pluralism and openness.

In turning back to this time, Rushdie perhaps took up in *The Enchantress* the threads he loosened in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). In this novel the eponymous Indian protagonist, part-descendent of a Moorish Sultan, laments

the communal riots that tear through Bombay in the early 1990s after Hindu militants destroy the Babri Masjid, and sets his sights on the lost paradise of Al-Andalus. This medieval Muslim homeland is epitomised in the novel by the mirage-like image of Granada's intricate Alhambra, a fourteenth-century feat of Islamic architecture constructed on European soil and today preserved by UNESCO as a "World Heritage Site" (Rushdie 1995: 433). The secular, unaffiliated and yet unforgettably 'Moorish' narrator, a man 'full of theses, [with] never a church door to nail them to' (3), lauds this space as a 'masterpiece' of cultural complexity and harmonious integration;

Palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom..., monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing ... [and] testament to ... our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for dropping the boundaries of the self (433).

This rose-tinted vision of an earlier, 'golden' civilisation and a wistful desire to reawaken its 'sleepers' haunts Rushdie's late twentieth-century narrative, its concluding pages in particular (227, 433). But while his ever-elaborate and magical fiction conjures up in colourful detail an ornate Andalusian façade, it ultimately leaves its Moorish protagonist and readers alike lingering on the threshold of the Alhambra's 'noble courts' (433). Over a decade later, in *The Enchantress*, Rushdie invites us to enter and explore these Islamic palaces' rich interiors and culture, not in a modern European or South Asian setting but in an historic 'Hindustani' one (433).

At the time of *The Enchantress*'s publication, critics characterised its creator as a 'walking political symbol, peculiarly liberated by his new book', a novel which they deemed to be 'resolutely not of this world' (Muir 2008: 6). While ancestral ties linked the modern, hybrid Indian protagonist of Rushdie's 1995

novel to the era of Arab-Islamic dominance in Iberia, inviting readers to compare this earlier time of apparent religious pluralism and tolerance with the extremism and intolerance of the present day, Rushdie's 2008 work is set entirely in the past. As a result this post-9/11 fiction – like Tariq Ali's *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005), which was written at the time of the Iraq war, and redirects our attention to an era of Arab presence, co-habitation and cross-cultural exchange in medieval Europe – can perhaps be expected to provide only an indirect corrective to, or comment on, simplistic Muslim stereotypes by means of a lesson in cultural history.²⁶ Yet Rushdie's focus on the Mughal court and emperor brought to life by *The Enchantress* indicates a 'willingness' on the part of its author not just to acknowledge but also to 'think through' the 'more humane elements' of Islamic traditions which Spencer (2010b: 261) in his reconsideration of *The Satanic Verses* describes as necessary to a twenty-first century literary project of undermining Huntington's 1992 'clash of civilizations' thesis. It also demonstrates a desire to engage to some extent with the 'darkness' (Rushdie 1995: 303) and confusion with which times of 'cultural admixture' have today been associated.

Rushdie observes in his essay on the *Baburnama*, published in *Step Across This Line*, that the events which followed 11 September 2001 have had an impact on the way in which we "read" and re-present the historical Muslims

²⁶ In her review of the novel Kamila Shamsie (2005b: n. p.) states that Ali, 'prompted ... by ... a comment [made] during the Gulf war that Muslims have no culture', deliberately set out to counter this claim in this fourth installment of his *Islam Quintet* by depicting instead 'times when learning and culture were synonymous with Islam – and appreciated as such by the most enlightened Christians'.

described in such texts; 'who', he asks, 'then, was Babur – scholar or barbarian, nature-loving poet or terror-inspiring warlord?' (2002: 191). He highlights the fact that, depending on one's political persuasion, it is equally as possible to stress the destructive and iconoclastic aspects of Grand Mughal regimes as their 'polytheistic inclusiveness' (191). *The Enchantress* was written not only at a moment of multicultural misgivings, but also at a time when Rushdie's contemporaries amongst the British literary and "New Atheist" elite were at pains to question the intolerance of an apparently illiberal and yet 'mainstream' Islam (McEwan 2007: n. p.). This was a moment when, conversely, scholars of Indian and Pakistani Muslim origin like the historian Ayesha Jalal (2008) were at pains to offer more complex historical perspectives on the fluctuation of religious discourse within South Asian Islam, including the relationship of the religion's 'outer husk' to Muslims' 'inner faith' (K. Shamsie 2008: n. p.). Rushdie's choice of the debating chambers of Akbar's doubtful cosmopolitan court as a setting for *The Enchantress* cannot be considered apolitical if considered within this compositional context.²⁷

The Enchantress opens in late sixteenth-century India with a European traveller's approach to the Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri. He wishes to tell its founder Akbar a tale that connects a Florentine adventurer called Argalia to the Emperor's great-great-aunt, Qara Kōz, a princess long forgotten by his family. Meanwhile Akbar, increasingly dissatisfied with orthodox religion and his inherited Islamic faith, has constructed a 'Tent of New Worship' for theological

²⁷ Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (2005: xiii) suggests in a work which Rushdie cites as a source in *The Enchantress*'s concluding bibliography, that 'the contemporary relevance [of this Indian Muslim emperor's cultivation] of the dialogic tradition and of the acceptance of heterodoxy is hard to exaggerate'.

debate, where 'the adoration of the divine was re-imagined as an intellectual wrestling match in which no holds were barred' (Rushdie 2008a: 97). The European, who calls himself the 'Mogor dell' Amore', is judged a fraud and placed on trial by Akbar's advisors (81). Yet Akbar is intrigued by the younger man's outlandish but well-reasoned arguments and claim to be the Emperor's uncle. He permits the stranger, who now says his name is Niccolo Vespucci, to entertain him Scheherazade-like with the story that reveals their genealogical connection, and so authenticates the Mogor's Mughal heritage.

The novel moves between Akbar's struggles to remain interested in 'questions of kingship' (such as who should succeed him: his legitimate, fundamentalist son, or the free-thinking Italian) as he broods over the 'question of Man', the enchantments of 'Woman', and the Mogor's captivating ancestral tale (177). This starts in Renaissance Italy, traverses Central Asia, and concludes in the Americas. It charts Argalia's enforced conversion to Islam in the services of the Ottoman Sultan, encounter in Herat with Qara Köz, and their escape to Florence where her magic bewitches locals.

The Mogor asserts that after Argalia's death, the adventurer's cousin, Ago Vespucci, sailed for "India" with Qara and her maid-servant, but disembarked in the New World; here the princess gave birth to a yellow-haired child, whom the stranger claims to be. Yet Akbar's royal mind cannot quite encompass such a tall tale of stopped time, commingling races and new worlds. Vespucci, rejected, vanishes from the city and Fatehpur Sikri mysteriously self-destructs, forcing Akbar's migration. The Emperor 'solves' the riddle of the Mogor's ancestry for himself: Vespucci is not the child of the enchantress, Qara, but the son of her mirror-like maidservant. Thus ends the deception of "nephew" and "uncle",

although the world-weary Akbar remains conscious of the provisional nature of any (dis)enchantment.

The Enchantress, like its predecessor *Shalimar*, revisits in a historic Hindustani setting some of the mystic and philosophical aspects of Islamic traditions which Rushdie touches upon in his earlier fictions. One might infer therefore that its author is – and the more sympathetic of his creations are – still ‘sentimentally devoted to a gentler [and indigenised, Indian] Islam’ (Brennan, quoted in Spencer 2010b: 262). Yet by the start of Rushdie’s latest novel the potency of this Islam, at least for characters such as Akbar, is beginning to fade or to be diluted by other “enchantments”. *The Enchantress* is an altogether more philosophical and fantastical fiction than *Shalimar*. Rushdie seems more interested in pursuing in it a project he began in *The Satanic Verses* of making the novel a means to establish and maintain the ‘contestability of [all] doctrines and practices that trace themselves to some sort of unchallengeable origin’ (Spencer 2010b: 254). Akbar’s multicultural and multiply “enchanted” Mughal city provides an ideal context for this. In the India of *The Enchantress*, where worlds, faiths and thought-systems collide, “Muslim” affiliations and affinities, and indeed all feelings of religious connection, are contextualised by those of other believers. They are also rendered problematic as a result of a wider theological debate – that which Rushdie’s (2008a: 440) Akbar terms the ‘quarrel over God’.

We are briefly informed at the novel’s outset that Akbar, seeking some strong, heroic being to be his ‘hammer and [his] anvil ... beauty and ... truth’, his infallible prop and support, ‘had trusted the mystic Chishti whose tomb stood in the courtyard of the Friday Mosque, but Chishti was dead’ (72-3). Having swiftly spelt the death sentence of the unfortunate Sufi mystic, the playful writer then

trivialises Akbar's feelings of affinity for him. Rushdie hastens to inform us that the questing emperor simultaneously 'trusted dogs, music, poetry ... and a wife he had created out of nothing', as well as 'beauty, painting, and the wisdom of his forbears': secular deities and seeming surrogates for the sterner Gods one might associate with more orderly, orthodox and monotheistic expressions of religious faith (73).

Looking to Muslim connections which are more historical and aesthetic than spiritual, *The Enchantress* maps in greater detail the Mughal and Hindustani emperor's ancestral linkage via his grandfather Babur and 'Iron' forbears Timur-e-Lang and Chinggis Qan, with whose 'murderous' associations he would prefer to break, to the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of Central and North-East Asian dynasties (42). Akbar draws solace from the peaceful teachings of his childhood tutor, a Persian Mir, and finds a great affinity, for example, with the heroes of Persian epic such as the legendry Hamza, the widely-travelled uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet it is the artistry of the Indian masters who paint such figures into teeming life and, with them, 'Mughal Hindustan' and the soul of its emperor, that most captivates him (148).²⁸

It is apparent here that while he will acknowledge in his fiction the weight of the Baburian legacy on the sensitive Akbar's psyche, Rushdie is keen to emphasise Akbar's feelings of difference from these overbearing forebears. He stresses the emperor's sense of having an 'other' and more potent South Asian

²⁸The role of Indo-Persian culture in shaping South Asian Muslim identities, specifically – and fascinatingly – the influence of Persian epic on the contemporary Pakistani and Afghan 'cultural unconscious' (including that of a 'jihadi milieu'), is something that the academic Suroosh Irfani (2010: 37) explores in detail in his recent article, '*Shahnamah* – The Other Story'.

Muslim identity, and hence of being '*Hindustani*' (41-2) – unlike his Timurid ancestor who, as Rushdie (2002: 193) has noted elsewhere, found India lacking in 'charm'. Despite his own not insubstantial tyrannies, the aggression Babur's cultivated Mughal grandson associates with the marauding hordes of his '*Mongol*' ancestors is altogether too harsh for him (Rushdie 2008a: 42).

In addition to mapping the emperor-protagonist's Central Asian and Islamic inheritance, *The Enchantress* makes frequent reference to his attraction to the artistic, philosophical, and imperial practices of other faiths and cultures; of 'people ... not his', and yet for whom he feels a powerful 'sense of kinship' (176). For Rushdie's god-like Grand Mughal, himself a great 'Enchanter', has a prodigious appetite for bewitchments sourced from outside the perhaps comforting but limited circles of his family's Islamic faith and culture, whether in the beguiling form of exotic women, or fresh intoxicating thoughts (53, 102). His interest in these is emphasised in the narrative by his enthusiasm for creating new architectural spaces such as Fatehpur Sikri in which 'religion, region, rank and tribe' can collide (53). Within these are situated new forums like the 'Tent of the New Worship', where expansive metaphysical discussions may take place (97).

Examples of the non-Muslim art and ideas that capture Akbar's imagination range from the inspirational songs of the Hindu composer Tansen and imaginary heavens of the rival Rana of Cooch Naheen, to the apocryphal tales of the enigmatic European stranger and 'megalomaniac fantasies' of his charming authoritarian contemporary Elizabeth I (43-4, 53, 92). Here faith is perhaps best understood as the willingness to permit oneself to believe or trust in the potential reality (or realisability) of a delightful deception or a powerful dream. Its artefacts and instruments are talismans or wishing bones: props in a

fantastic act of self-delusion. This works in reverse, too: the Scots pirate Lord Hauksbank, who briefly features as Argalia's dupe, carries with him a collection of "objects of virtue" to keep his traveller's soul anchored (17, 19). These include an illuminated miniature copy of the Holy Qur'an which the superstitious Scottish 'milord' stores alongside other treasures – a pagan goddess's silk handkerchief, a locket containing the image of England's faerie queen – each of which commands equal reverence (19-20).

Rushdie's exploration of the attraction of the enlightened if somewhat susceptible Akbar toward eclectic, alternative, and mind-opening 'enchantments' drawn from 'the guardians of the unseen realms ... palmists, astrologers, soothsayers, mystics and assorted divines' (403) seems largely light-hearted and expansive. Yet his treatment of what Kamila Shamsie (2007a: n. p.) might describe as the 'landmine' connections – the radical Islamic beliefs felt and affiliations forged by the novel's less eclectic or privileged cosmopolitan characters, of lurid fascination to western world readers today – is, by contrast, more darkly cynical and reductive.

The Enchantress offers miniature sketches of child soldiers, troubled sons, and 'holy' men, all variously deployed in a clash of empires, and obviously intended as negative reflections on contemporary Islamist affiliations (Rushdie 2008a: 226). It covers, for example, the alignment – troubling for Akbar – of his son, Prince Salim (who would later become the Emperor Jehangir), with 'puritanical' types such as the religious thinker Badauni (98-101); and the forced conversion of children to Islam in the training camps of the Ottoman Sultan (225-6). The 'surly' Salim's "turn" toward Islam is not a maturing adolescent's considered assertion of a reclaimed Muslim identity, but a predictable and easily manipulable act of teenage rebellion (98). To the foreign, Florentine observer,

Akbar's bored, 'petulant', extreme son is a pawn in the hands of a humourless and austere religious thinker, and a potentially 'dangerous' weapon to be deployed in the power games of court; to his guilty and nervous father, he is a weak 'puppet' confused by the multiple spiritual and secular influences, puritan and profane, to which he has been exposed, and which he mimics (101). While Akbar warms to the visiting Argalia or 'Mogor dell' Amore' (indeed, he even considers adopting him), he becomes distant from his 'diehard' son, the mass of whose contradictions he – assuming a lack of affinity, or common comprehension – makes little effort to unravel (101).

The depiction provided later in the novel by Argalia's brainwashed 'memory palace' of the indoctrination of abducted children at the Ottoman 'prison camp[s]' in the Balkan city of Usküb likewise emphasises the lack of agency of the Christian initiates captured from the wide-ranging geographical region encompassed by the Caucuses (225). Forced to forget their filial loyalties and to convert to Islam by a wizard-like dervish of the Bektashi Sufi order, and trained as a fighting force, these alpha boys, crack recruits, newly dressed and named, are transformed into terrifying 'instruments of the Sultan's will' (225). Rushdie describes this disabling and de-forming process as the placing not only of the enslaved child's physical being, but of his entire 'soul ... under new management' (226). In this instance, the 'angry' children are unwilling affiliates; their parrot-like mimicry of Arabic doctrines, unlike that of the perhaps equally ignorant but more empowered Prince Salim, is 'frightened' and resentful (226). Yet the result is perhaps the same: the forging of new kin-like bonds amongst those committed to a common political or imperial cause, which replace the natural ties of blood, and curtail individual freedoms (230). In *The Enchantress*, the face of fundamental Islamic affiliation seems as sullen, closed and joyless

as the wine-flushed visage of the Grand Mughal, sceptical entertainer of multiple enchantments, is open and cheerful.

It would appear important to note here that Akbar is profoundly disturbed and depressed by the behaviour of other strict adherents to religious faith, such as the observant Brahmin girls, who would rather sacrifice their lives than compromise their Hindu beliefs and practices by serving a Muslim king. He remains inclined to interpret their drastic actions as ones of aggression: “these girls died because they preferred division to unity, their gods to ours, and hatred to love” (247). Earlier in the narrative, the Mughal emperor, adopting the majestic plural, informs his Italian visitor Argalia that despite his ‘affection’ for the ‘supernatural entities’ of polytheistic religions, ‘Yet we must be what we are. The million gods are not our gods; the austere religion of our father will always be ours, just as the carpenter’s creed is yours’ (175-6).²⁹ Rushdie’s magical fiction explores through the eyes of the resolvedly Muslim and yet resolutely sceptical Akbar the wonders and terrors of an imaginative ‘world beyond religion’ situated outside the bounds prescribed by the ‘comforting circularity’ of inherited faith (53, 103).

Given the pressing need for a countering of the lack of complexity and nuance offered by contemporary representations of the claims of religious authorities, Rushdie’s interest in depicting an alternative kind of enchantment is

²⁹ Akbar’s commitment to Islam is substantiated by historical accounts. Amartya Sen (2005: 289), for example notes that:

When [Akbar] died in 1605, the Islamic theologian Abdul Haq concluded with some satisfaction that, despite his “innovations”, Akbar had remained a good Muslim. This was indeed so, but Akbar would also have added that his religious beliefs came from his own reason and choice, not from “blind faith”, or from “the marshy land of tradition”.

of course desirable. Yet, in giving an almost superior weight to non-spiritual forms of enchantment, he conveniently sidesteps a serious examination of incidences of feelings of affiliation and affinity experienced from *within* the ever-porous boundaries of any particular religious faith, and specifically Islam. This, and his failure in *Shalimar* and *The Enchantress* to represent more than what might be described as the familiar faces of a more extreme, devout or fundamental Islamic faith, is what, I will go on to argue, sets these fictions apart from the novels produced after 9/11 by a younger generation of Pakistani Muslim writers, Aslam and Shamsie in particular.

Areas Left Unmapped

This thesis contends that, in an apparently secular age, world literary works by authors of Muslim backgrounds may describe deep-felt spiritual connections and attachments which have popularly been trivialised as superstitious or irrational, yet which remain central to their characters' sense of selfhood. Further, it suggests that by expressing in their fiction 'Islamic subjectivities and cultural epistemologies' which the reader may incorporate into his or her understanding of a 'world of equal differences' (Majid 2000: vii), they may contribute to a process of 'demystifying and de-alienating Islam and Muslims' (Malak 2004: 11). This is something that remains of central importance in the context of the present day, when the word 'Islam' and the mention of Muslims continues, in Shamsie's words, 'to exert a magnetic field ... pulling in a host of words of which the most thickly clustered is "Terror" and, hard on its heels... Offence' (K.Shamsie 2009e: 1).

Rushdie attempts to explore not only a variety of types of Islam, but also a variety of types of faith in *Shalimar* and *The Enchantress*, Yet the result is not

only that Muslim stereotypes such as those propagated by writers like Martin Amis are reinforced, but also that those more complex, nebulous (and potentially controversial) spiritual convictions, political commitments and historical-cultural connections which may underlie contemporary South Asian (and Pakistani as opposed to Indian) experiences of affinity or affiliation for Islam are largely left unmapped. The next chapter explores how his younger contemporary Mohsin Hamid seeks to redress this imbalance in a fiction which features a Pakistani Muslim protagonist whom its author deems is anything but 'stereotypically Muslim' (Hamid 2008b: 46).

Chapter 3. 'A Devilishly Difficult Ball to Play' – Mohsin

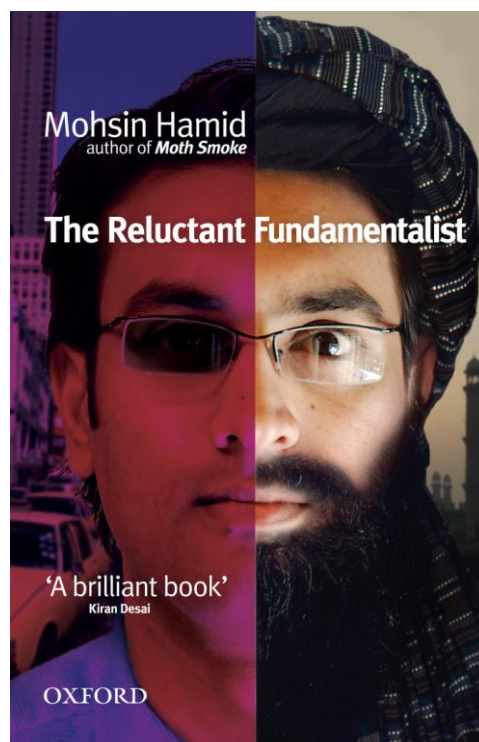
Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Introduction

The transnational Pakistani novelist Mohsin Hamid (2013a: 15) recently observed that his fiction 'has what might be called a realistic narrative – there is no magic, no aliens – but the frame ... it uses isn't realism. It is something else: ... play'. He went on to explain his reasons for staging his noirish post-9/11 thriller, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), as a game:

My project was ... to try to show ... how feelings already present inside a reader – fear, anger, suspicion, loyalty – could colour a narrative ... I wanted the novel to be a kind of mirror, to let readers see how they are reading, and, therefore, how they are living and how they are deciding their politics.

This subtle, opaque, and equivocal portrayal of a young Pakistani man's flirtations with "fundamentalism" offers many leading hints but no verifiable clues as to his "real" Islamist proclivities. Yet it forces its expectant Anglophone readers to sit in judgement over its Muslim narrator's supposed "confession",



The Reluctant Fundamentalist
Oxford University Press,
Pakistan (2010)
[Figure 3]

making them players in a literary game of misrecognition (and re-cognition), the rules of which Hamid dictates.

This chapter examines in detail the ambiguous personal affiliations and peregrinations of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* author, and the dubious and ultimately unknowable affiliations of its playful protagonist, Changez. It asks how Hamid's novel has been de-coded, both as a result of assumptions about the autobiographical contents of this fictional confession and of the prejudicial and psychological misreadings that it invites and partly engenders. Lastly, it considers his later formal experiments, which continue to encourage the participation and play with the expectations of their co-creating readers. At its best Hamid's ludic fiction reflects and refracts stereotypical images of a Pakistani Muslim nation still framed by fears about Islamist affiliations in the English-speaking world. This final section asks whether his post-*Fundamentalist* short fictions present new, productive developments, or simply dead ends.

Hamid's Ambiguous Personal Affiliations

The cosmopolitan Hamid is a Princeton graduate who has worked in New York and London as a management consultant. He was born in Lahore, raised partly in California, and resident for nearly a decade in the UK. However, he has subsequently – and publicly – elected to return to live in his home city in Pakistan's Punjab. Hamid's fiction is rooted in Pakistan, and provides windows onto national and transnational subjects whose trajectories seem aptly topical in an early twenty-first century context. In *Moth Smoke* (2000) an unemployed Lahori banker becomes addicted to narcotics while his country teeters on the brink of nuclear war; in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) a jaded Pakistani expat, Lahore-returned, seems poised to deliver to his American listener a

contemporary tale of a turn to terror. In this novel, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and is an international bestseller, Hamid stages a singular, studied and provocative act of “writing back” to western fictions of Muslim affiliation and identity after 9/11. The book’s distinctive monological style and urbane tone set it apart from the other often polyphonic “world” fictions (for example those of Aslam and Shamsie) which form the basis of this thesis. In terms of genre, as a supposed confessional narrative, it perhaps resembles more closely the real-life confessional memoirs of former Islamists like Ed Husain (2007). Both *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* have drawn international attention, and provided Hamid with a reputation as a subtle master of chilling, urbane thrillers, and vivid portraitist of young, contemporary Pakistani life. However, Hamid is best known for the latter novel, in which the apparently eponymous Pakistani Muslim protagonist reflects on the period of his youth he spent in America before the scales fell from his eyes. That this novel has received the lion’s share of the attention is perhaps unsurprising given the prevailing climate of fear and suspicion that has surrounded Pakistani and Muslim matters. However, as I will go on to argue, the novel, and its reception, is by no means unproblematic.

When it comes to his own faith, Hamid has described himself as a ‘secular, liberal, progressive man’ for whom ‘Islam’ forms a significant but by no means sole ‘component’ of his identity (Hamid 2003c: n. p.). He acknowledges that its importance to him has increased and his sympathy for fellow Muslims grown since the attacks of 11 September 2001. But he rejects the ‘simplistic and dangerous notion’ that Muslims of diverse backgrounds, including himself, can be ‘disassociated from their ethnic, cultural, political and personal characteristics and meaningfully grouped together for any positive purpose’,

whether that be “anti-terror” interrogations or global jihad (2003c). Instead, he is keen to assert the ‘diversity’ of his beliefs and tastes, political and cultural. In doing so he seeks to delink them from the adjective “Muslim”, and simultaneously to emphasise their similarity to those of ‘millions of my fellow large-city dwellers around the world’. He asserts:

I believe in democracy ... I believe that religion should influence laws only through universal ballots, not through the will of a clerical elite ... There is nothing particularly Muslim about these beliefs ... I see nothing particularly Muslim or non-Muslim in my personal tastes. I like many types of music, ranging from the blues to qawwali. I like the novels of the Japanese Haruki Murakami and the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz. I like cricket. I like dogs. I like to dance. I love sushi. ... Surely, shared values and shared tastes ... are components of identity that cannot and should not be brushed aside (2003c).

Hamid crafts this studiously neutral public profile in a period in which measures such as racial profiling; the disproportionate stopping and searching of Asian youths; the surveillance and disruption of Muslim communities; and “good character” citizenship tests, have been justified as expedient for indentifying potential suspects in the “war on terror” (Brown 2010: 173-5). As Morey and Yaqin (2011: 106-111) note, when a connection is assumed to exist – as it has been after the attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 – between culture and political activity, and religion ‘elevated’ as the key component of cultural identity, the hitherto private matters of faith and culture become issues of public concern. The need visibly to demonstrate allegiance to a government-sanctioned set of “good” (British) social, moral, political and economic values and version of ‘good [Muslim] faith’ is urgent (Brown 2010: 181; Morey and Yaqin 2011: 111). The irony in Hamid’s case is that even as he attempts to distance himself from this ‘good Muslim’ discourse, giving a flavour of his eclectic, global, and not-

specifically Islamic mix of tastes, he in fact arguably inscribes himself within it as the kind of:

‘Normal Muslim’ [for whom] religious beliefs and observance come into the equation but [who], in the end, ... is ... willing ... to orient [themselves] in relation to a presumed consensus around individualism and the market ... [And for whom] religion has not trumped material aspiration and, as securitizing discourse so often insists, turned them into fanatical separatists or jihadists (Brown 2010: 180).

As Morey and Yaqin (2011: 111) point out, for the Muslim citizen and subject in the West, there is ‘always an element of self-stereotyping involved in answering the call to authenticity’.³⁰

Geographically, Hamid prefers to say that he lives “between” the city of his birth, Lahore, and other metropolitan centres, including London and New York (<http://www.mohsinhamid.com/about.html>, n.d.) In doing so he draws attention to his international mobility and, again, to the breadth of his cosmopolitan connections and sympathies. He lays claim to being a citizen of the world (‘a

³⁰ This is a pressure registered in a recent fiction by the character of Mo Khan, the American and nominally Muslim protagonist in Amy Waldman’s novel *The Submission* (2011), whose plan for a garden wins the competition to design a memorial at Ground Zero. Frustrated when it seems his success will be denied, he resolves to flirt with the fears of the American populace, refusing to promote the “normal” (non-threatening) Muslim self-image that would mollify and reassure them:

He would not ... reassure anyone that he was ‘moderate’ or ‘safe’ or Sufi, whatever adjective would allow Americans to sleep without worrying he had placed a bomb under their pillow. It was exactly because they had nothing to worry about from him that he wanted to let them worry. (78)

Mo’s rebellious thought perfectly encapsulates the dilemma of the Muslim-as-“problem” after 9/11, forced to articulate his “good Muslim” credentials or, remaining silent, be assumed to belong to the dark side.

law abiding, productive inhabitant of whatever city I currently choose to call my home'), disinclined to discriminate between faiths. Thus Hamid reserves the right not just to state an aesthetic preference for an aspect of non-Muslim culture, but to extend political support to the populations of majority-Muslim regions like Kashmir and Palestine as they struggle for statehood (2003c). Yet Hamid (2000b: n. p.) is also strongly committed to remaining resident at least for part of the time in his native Pakistan and to preserving his "Pakistani" identity, despite the fact that doing so may at times have threatened to inhibit his freedom to roam. And, interestingly, the Pakistan to which he cleaves is one relieved of its global Islamic role, no 'beacon to the world's Muslims' or 'sword-arm' to an aggressive *umma*, but a collapsed state kept on 'life-support by international lenders' and in desperate need of the means to stand alone (Hamid 2000a: n. p.).

In his self-positioning the Pakistan-born writer therefore differs considerably from more senior diasporic and "atheistic" authors of South Asian origin, such as Salman Rushdie (whose work I discuss in Chapter 2) and Hanif Kureishi. Despite selective claims and incumbent requirements that they speak as Subcontinental authorities, these authors have remained physically and politically located on what they would want to perceive as the side of cultural openness, liberality and reason when it comes to Pakistan and Islam (see, for example, Rushdie 2002: 430-1, Kureishi 2004: 203-206, and Suroor 2011).

Hamid's fiction has been discussed and anthologised in journal and magazine special issues like *Beyond Geography: Literature, Politics and Violence in Pakistan* (M. Shamsie 2011) and *Granta 112: Pakistan* (Granta 2010). Such publications have sought to showcase Pakistan's diversity and dynamism as expressed through its literature. They have grouped Hamid's

writing alongside that of other Pakistani English-language novelists of Muslim background such as Nadeem Aslam, Mohammed Hanif, Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie. The common denominator when it comes to these authors is the fact that they were mostly born and raised in Pakistan during the 1970s and 1980s, studied for degrees at American and British universities in the late-1990s and early 2000s, and remained resident abroad for significant periods in their early careers. Though differing significantly in treatment, scope and focus, their novels and non-fiction testify to their consciousness of having been affected personally, politically and professionally by their experiences. These include having grown up in times overshadowed by Zia's Islamization, the Afghan-Soviet War, localised ethnic conflict and nuclear standoffs with India, and having come into maturity at the time of the 9/11 attacks (see, for example, Hamid 2006: n. p.).

Such "new" Pakistani authors demonstrate a 'hunger', in Aslam Khan's (2010: n. p.) words, to understand their place amidst their home country's 'chaotic layers', give voice to what they see, and perhaps shape how they are seen. They remain acutely aware of the apparent expectations of foreign markets when it comes to literature about Pakistan. They are conscious that they possess the dubious privilege of being local 'custodians' and 'beneficiaries' of a global 'brand' whose commercial success depends on its replication either of 'paisley designs' and 'bridal wear', or of 'bombs/minarets' and 'burkhas', misappropriated metonyms for Islamic terror (Hamid et al. 2010: n. p.). Yet they retain a conviction that none of these things should be placed 'out of bounds' to them as writers, either as a result of censorship or self-censorship: neither the 'mosquito nets', 'the extended families', the sexually abusive mullahs, or the Guantanamo detainees (Aslam 2010b: n. p.).

In 'Where to Begin', Aslam (2010b) identifies the task of the contemporary Pakistani-English author as being to flesh the 'tourist clichés' with 'human warmth, longing and complexity' and, conversely, to accentuate characters' universality by stripping away the specifics of their lives and making them stand alone as bare humans. Jamil Ahmad, a former Pakistani civil servant and "new" but older addition to the group, whose work is also included in the *Granta 112* anthology, implies in his fiction that Pakistani writers and journalists should continue to prioritise local causes, lives and deaths, 'expos[ing] the wrong being done outside their front door' before seeking other, wider human dignities to expound and protect (Ahmad 2011: 34). Although differently inflected, the requirements these authors outline are essentially similar. They gesture towards a contemporary Pakistani English writing aesthetic in appeal, and ethical and political in scope, which speaks out where others remain silent. Encompassing Islamic geographies and affiliations which continue to engender international concern, this literature is global in reach. But it introduces locally-nuanced perspectives of the geopolitical spaces it describes, thereby unsettling western ways of seeing and exposing the legitimacy, humanity, and ambiguous quotidian reality of South Asian Muslim ones.

Hamid seems almost to write to these requirements, as this passage from an article published in the *New York Times Magazine* on 30 September 2001 illustrates:

My family waits, like many... watching battle plans being discussed on television, ex-guerrillas being interviewed about the Afghan terrain, radical figures threatening bloodshed if Pakistan helps America. Meanwhile the long summer has come to an end in Islamabad. The city is green and bougainvilleas are blooming. Fresh pomegranates are arriving from nearby

orchards, along with grapes and apples. The fruit, which rarely makes the news, still makes people smile ('Lives: The Countdown', Hamid 2001a: n. p.).

In this paragraph Hamid subtly reconfigures our impressions of Pakistan and its people. He juxtaposes the exotic fruits the western reader might anticipate consuming in a Central Asian country (pomegranates) with those more familiar in European climes (grapes, apples). He demonstrates that there are more than two sides to every story, balancing Afghan radicals who oppose Pakistani co-operation with the Americans with former rebels prepared to assist them. He situates his on-looking family, potential voyeurs and victims, caught somewhere in between. Lastly, he restores the capital city of an Islamic country so often described in terms of decline in its national - and, in this context, rejuvenating - green; he paints the faces of its citizens not with grim visages of despair, but with quiet smiles which might offer a modest sign of hope. The resulting impression is of a diverse nation, where ordinary people are affected by the pull of different tides, but retain an ability to swim against them.

The post-9/11 context has intensified the requirement for the kind of Pakistani writing which can command the English-speaking world's attention without pandering to what it wants to hear; which strives not only to demystify and reify its orientalist images, but to make it recognise the impact of its neo-imperialistic attitudes and policies on the theatres of the east. Hamid's consciousness of this is acute, as his article 'The Usual Ally' demonstrates. It was published in *TIME Magazine* on 1 October 2001, when Pakistan was about to be dragged into the front line of the escalating war on terror, and in it he draws attention to America's convenient blindness to the humanity of peoples it does not know:

In America, the murky, unknown places of the world are blank screens: stories of evil can be projected on them with as little difficulty as stories of good... Americans must consider the consequences of projecting a war film onto what is not a blank screen at all (2001b: n. p.).

Hamid repeatedly seeks in his writing to populate the screen he describes with diverse images of ordinary Muslim lives which are neither wholly bad nor wholly good, forcing western readers to recognise the potentially devastating impact of belligerent acts of erasure.

Perhaps out of a desire to demonstrate his allegiance to an alternative vision of Pakistan at a time when the country remained under threat, Hamid in 2008 joined his contemporary Mohammed Hanif in rather publicly announcing his relocation to Pakistan after several years spent abroad (although in practice and as noted above, Hamid continues to spend significant amounts of time away from Lahore). Like Hanif (2008) he made his case for the move in a comment piece in *The Guardian*, stating that despite the fact that he had ‘thrived’ in the UK, his ‘heart remained stubbornly Pakistani’ and, furthermore,

I never believed in the role Pakistan plays as a villain on news shows. The Pakistan I knew was the out-of-character Pakistan... without its makeup and plastic fangs... These are troubled times... But there is reason to be hopeful... When it comes to where we think Pakistan is heading, we are voting with our feet (Hamid 2009a: n. p.).

Their articles differ in tone – Hanif’s tends toward cynicism; Hamid’s seems more optimistic – but what both writers have in common is a confidence that they may at least discover a ‘new [social] texture’ on their respective returns to Karachi and Lahore (Hanif 2008: n. p.).

These authors’ relocations to twenty-first century Pakistan should therefore not simply be seen as the wistful attempts of expatriate writers to realise an

outdated myth of return, although they are in part driven by emotional yearnings – Hanif (2008) longs for Karachi's sea breezes, while Hamid (2009a) still feels Lahore's powerful 'grip'. Rather, they are pragmatic and ethical ventures: as disillusioned British residents they seek to escape deteriorating race relations and rising living costs; as committed returnees they feel a 'duty' to show solidarity with their compatriots, to be present at and bear witness to the birth of 'a more equitable and tolerant Pakistan' (Hamid 2009a; Hanif 2008).

Hamid (2006: n. p.) in particular has made repeated reference to the fact that his relationship with New York – once his 'most passionate' metropolitan 'affair' – has changed in recent years. His articles in British and American magazines and broadsheets, document in some detail the negative impact of the events of 11 September on him, and on his compatriots' New York-based lives, leading to feelings of fear, anxiety, even paranoia, and precipitating their departure (Hamid 2001a, 2003a, 2006). They indicate his frustration with the way in which the Pakistani and Muslim components of his 'transcontinental mongrel' identity have been aggressively thrust upon him – and subsequently held against him – in the persecutory post-9/11 climate of the West, and in particular the U.S. (2003b: n. p., 2003c).

Frequently figured in amorous terms, New York becomes 'the girl I will always lust for but who left me exhausted' (2003b). The jilted articles Hamid published in the years immediately following the World Trade Centre attacks, are impassioned, informative and yet also plaintive, frustrated and at times patronising in tone. They reflect his disappointment as a civilised, compassionate, secular Muslim with his experience of 'democracy' in Bush's U.S., his total disinclination to embrace Bin Laden, and his desire to re-educate his woefully ignorant listeners about the reality of contemporary Islamic

perspectives vis-a-vis the West (2003a, 2003c).³¹ In their tone and style, the author's non-fiction articles appear consonant with some of the positions put forward by Changez, the protagonist of his 2007 novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). This book has been interpreted in some quarters as a novelistic attempt to offer an authentic window onto a terrorist mindset, and has provoked some interesting autobiographical and pathological readings of its author and subject as a result.

***Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Contemporary Readings**

Hamid's debut novel *Moth Smoke* (2000c) was well reviewed when it first was published in 2000 and has reportedly achieved a kind of 'cult status' in India and Pakistan (Elliott 2011: 9) Yet in comparison to the international bestseller that succeeded it, this early novel has attracted relatively little academic or popular attention in Anglo-American or "world" literary circuits at least, perhaps, until now.³² Set in late-1990s Lahore, *Moth Smoke* presents from a range of

³¹ His approach is utterly unlike that of the protesting 'Islamic Rage Boy' figure, Shakeel Ahmad Bhat, whose unkempt, ranting visage has been fetishized as an icon of 'pathological anti-Western fanaticism' while the potentially rational and political portent of his words has passed without comment (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 27). Nor does it resemble that adopted by the reasonable-sounding Muslim "refusenik" (94) whom Morey and Yaqin also describe. This figure, critical of the supposed 'complicity of a mindless, monolithic [and – one might add – barbaric and backward] Muslim community that has been cowed by rampant Saudi-inspired extremism' has come to stand for the (often reformed) "good" Muslim type in the contemporary western press (94-5).

³² There are some examples of scholarly interest, but the treatment of the novel in these is rather brief. Paul Jay considers *Moth Smoke* as a transnational and post-postcolonial text in a chapter of *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in*

narrative perspectives a complex portrait of Daru, a young male middle-class protagonist. Daru loses his banking job, falls out with his privileged and America-returned best friend Ozi, and descends into a life of drugs and crime in a Pakistan beset with crisis: in the throes of economic meltdown, financially reliant on narcotics, and locked in a potentially nuclear conflict with India. Like Mueenuddin's more recent collection of short fiction *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009) and perhaps Hanif's darkly comic *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), this early work gives a powerful sense of the difficulties its central characters face in the course of their daily lives as a result of social inequalities and systemic corruption which may be the legacies of a feudal and colonial past, but are articulated in new forms by their twenty-first century inheritors.

Moth Smoke encompasses narrative strands and themes which may chime with the concerns international audiences have had in relation to nuclear-armed Pakistan and the conflicting loyalties of its increasingly transnational Muslim subjects after 9/11. But these were less visible to publishers and readers prior to the World Trade Centre attacks. When reviewing *Moth Smoke* for the *Los Angeles Times*, Jonathan Levi (2000: n. p.) observed that its New York-based author had 'created a hip page-turner about the mysterious country that both created the sophisticated Benazir Bhutto and hanged her father'. But it was not until May 2011 that Rachel Aspden suggested in her re-reading that the novel also 'provides the context for [a] clash of cultures' in its 'portrait of a country violently divided against itself' (Aspden 2011: n. p.). That clash, between the

Literary Studies (2010); meanwhile Cara Cilano discusses what it may reveal about mental strategies for dealing with the traumatic events of 1971 in *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction* (2011). Neither writer deals with *Moth Smoke* exclusively.

corrupt and complacent foreign-educated and advantageously connected rich, and their increasingly impoverished and resentful Pakistan-remaining brothers, is partly figured in the characters of the expatriate Ozi, and his sinking peer, Daru.

Hamid (2000c: 11, 74) “frames” the upwardly-mobile and moneyed Ozi as the Pajero-driving, Black Label drinking, Switzerland-visiting, New York-returned son of a ‘frequently investigated but as yet unincarcerated Federal Secretary’ who specialises ‘it’s said, in overpaying foreign companies for equipment and pocketing their kickbacks’. His embittered and rapidly socially descending boyhood companion Daru, is a parentless PhD drop-out (he studied microcredit at Punjab University before he switched to banking in the hope of earning a living), whom Ozi’s father advises to downscale his ambitions from ‘large multinational’ to local car-dealer when his firm gives him the sack (75). If Ozi attempts, in Hamid’s ironic, “ethnographic” fiction, to realise in Pakistan ‘*The utopian vision of Over There or Amreeka*’ which ‘*promises escape from the almost unbearable drudgery of the tribe’s struggle to subsist*’, then Daru tries for his part to reveal that the facade of living the American dream is one maintained with little enthusiasm by a bored and compromised transnational Lahori elite (79). Yet, despite his disillusionment with it, Hamid’s ‘brilliant’ and aspirant middle-class protagonist covets the privileges and cultivates the company of the ‘crowd’ he holds in contempt, even seeks to re-establish a long-lost ‘bond of boyhood trust and affection’ with Ozi (36, 79, 89). That is, until he becomes this society’s scapegoat. For Daru’s trial for the hit-and-run murder of a child which Ozi “inconveniently” commits ultimately provides the frame for Hamid’s inconclusive narrative. Through the characters of Daru and Ozi, then, *Moth Smoke* perpetuates a discomfiting divide between the dispensable, locally-

situated middle-class Pakistani subject (who *is* nevertheless culpable, if not for this, then for other disquieting crimes visited on its lesser citizens) and his elite, cosmopolitan, cousin, figured as an 'overgrown child ... who gets away with everything' (96, 244).

Hamid's first novel also presents an experiment in form, whereby the role-playing reader is required to stand in judgement over the protagonist, to become his defender or detractor, to determine his guilt or "innocence", thus adopting a position Hamid would go on to critique in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As he explained in an interview:

Moth Smoke is about this young guy, ... who is being tried for a crime [killing a child] ... A number of people tell their stories to you ... The idea was to encourage the reader to form an opinion about what's going on, to make a judgement on the central character, what he's being tried for, who he is. In a way my second novel tries to do the same thing (Hamid 2008b: 45).

The second time, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the form almost replays as farce. Gone are the multiple conflicting portraits through which we must diligently search for the truth about the shadow of the man who stands in the dock, however tempted we may be to place our 'faith in [his] promises' or believe his 'fantasy [of] being framed' (Hamid 2000c: 235). In their place we have a dramatic monologue which Hamid (2008b: 45) has described as a 'one-man-play', performed by the erudite, Anglophone Pakistani, Changez, to a silent American listener. There is no firm accusation, no second witness, nor any concrete evidence that can tie the protagonist to a tangible offence. There are, however, plenty of references to the fact that he keeps 'intimidating' company and puts the listener 'ill at ease' (2007b: 123). As with Daru's story, Changez's narrative will remain incomplete if some conclusion about what kind of man he

is, and what he is capable of, cannot be supplied. But the difference here, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is that when this judgement is made it will be indicative not of the reader's having weighed the evidence with an open and impartial mind. Rather, it will point to his or her residual 'preconceptions and prejudices and fears' about this clever Pakistani protagonist and the thoughts he articulates in his polite, familiar and 'vaguely menacing' British-sounding voice (Hamid 2008b: 46).

Moth Smoke was reissued by Penguin in April 2011 (Hamid 2000d). It may have attracted greater interest at that time as a result of the status its author had accrued since 2000 as a commentator on Pakistani affairs, spokesman for the perspectives of the region's people, and a "pin-up boy" for Pakistani-English literature' (Elliott 2011: 9). However, although its title may have become more familiar to readers of literary fiction in the second decade of the third millennium, it does not necessarily seem to follow that the complex affinities and affiliations which it maps are more than superficially "known".

Hamid's appearance alongside the political scientists Francis Fukuyama and Anatol Lieven, and Bangladeshi novelist Tahmima Anam, on BBC Radio 4's topical discussion programme *Start the Week* (2011) hosted by Andrew Marr shortly after the killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, seems a case in point.³³ Hamid's task was ostensibly to explore for listeners 'what it means to be middle class in Pakistan'. Marr (*Start the Week*, 2011) supposed the recently republished *Moth Smoke* might be deemed to describe 'from the inside' the

³³ Hamid has also appeared on other "flagship" British news and current affairs programmes as BBC 2's *Newsnight* (Quirkstir 2008), where he was called upon to offer a response to the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008.

world mapped by Lieven in his historical survey, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (2011).³⁴ The conversation touched on themes that included the lack of provision made by the Pakistani state for ordinary citizens, and the support provided by non-governmental social structures in its stead. However, these were not discussed in relation to *Moth Smoke*'s specific narrative content or characters. Instead, Hamid cited in the course of the programme examples of instances in which such networks had been activated which would be familiar to listeners with a more general interest in news and current affairs, such as the 2010 floods in Punjab and Sindh. He offered a single, largely positive reading of the social structures which came to the aid of Pakistanis who were severely affected in this time of crisis. This differed considerably from the ambivalent and multi-perspectival portraits he presented to readers in *Moth Smoke*.

During the course of the programme, Hamid succeeded in modifying some of Marr's more simplistic descriptions of the Pakistani social structures discussed with formulations of his own. For example, the broadcaster's clannish 'family' and 'kinship groups', concerned to close ranks and protect their members, became in Hamid's reformulation sophisticated and 'powerful patronage networks' providing a 'safety net' for those in need (*Start the Week* 2011). But in the main, the interviewer set the agenda, selecting the topics, and choosing the controversial terms of debate which might spark and frame ensuing

³⁴ In this book, Lieven (2011: 4) introduces his main protagonist, Pakistan, as "Janus-faced" ... divided, disorganised, economically backward, corrupt, violent, unjust, often savagely oppressive towards the poor men and women, and home to extremely dangerous forms of extremism and terrorism – "and yet it moves", and is in many ways surprisingly tough and resilient as a state and a society.'

conversations.³⁵ Following the discussion of the popular response to the floods, he swiftly steered the conversation onto other, pre-ordained topics deemed of relevance to a consideration of the modern Pakistani state. These were, primarily, 'Pakistani paranoia' (a term proffered by Marr in the guise of agent provocateur) about the Indian "enemy" across the border, and questions of Islamic identity, centred around choices of dress, drink, drugs and language (*Start the Week* 2011).

Start the Week is a *cultural* discussion programme, yet this edition, ironically, provided little space for a consideration of how Hamid's *literary* portrayals might extend the parameters of current debate around aspects of quotidian Pakistani culture often configured as problematic in the West. An examination of Hamid's depiction of the poverty of career prospects available to home-grown graduates disinclined to toe the line of Pakistan's ever-evolving elites might, for example, encourage the reader to revise his understanding of the extent to which this apparently close-knit and nepotistic culture actually supports its members. The more complex positions and less absolute attitudes to which *Moth Smoke* in particular strives to give life remained if not exactly overlooked then certainly underexplored as a result of a need to contain them within a fairly narrow journalistic agenda which privileges sound-bites and simple images even as it expresses a desire to get beyond them.

Distinctive in its tone and style, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is perhaps the best known and most unsettling literary intervention into the discourse around

³⁵ See Morey and Yaqin's (2011) chapter in *Framing Muslims* on 'Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Media: *Normalization and Difference*' (44-78) for a more extensive discussion of how the mainstream media sets the agenda when it comes to the discussion of 'Muslim issues'.

South Asian Islamic extremism to have been produced after the attacks of 9/11. It has been shortlisted for several prizes including the 2007 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and the 2008 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia Region), and in 2008 it won the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature. The novel has proved arresting to readers on account both of its seeming promise to deliver some sensational-sounding content and of its slippery narrative form.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist presents in the shape of a dramatic monologue the story of the high-flying Pakistani executive Changez's love affair with New York and disenchantment with the 'fundamentalist' capitalism of the West. The novel opens at a cafe in the Old Anarkali district of his native Lahore several years after the 9/11 attacks, where he appears to be entertaining a silent American visitor with the story of his turn away from America. Changez talks of his Princeton education and of how he came first to acquire and then to part with his prestigious job as a financial analyst, his ambiguous 'love' Erica, and adoptive city of New York; he describes the circumstances surrounding his relocation to Lahore, where he becomes a university lecturer (Hamid 2007b: 18). The protagonist details in particular his unexpectedly joyful reaction to the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the sense of solidarity he felt with the beleaguered Afghan tribesmen whom America targeted in their bloody wake, and his reluctance to serve as a 'janissary' to a modern-day empire that privileged 'maximum productivity' and 'maximum return' over any humane agenda (41, 132, 173).

In the latter part of the novel, as the Old Anarkali market empties and shadows fall on the heart of Old Lahore, Changez makes reference to what he did to 'stop' the inhumanity of his formerly beloved America, grown dangerously defensive in the years since the 9/11 attacks (190). However, the actions he

has taken in this regard remain, crucially, in doubt. The Pakistani protagonist's concluding commentary as he escorts the American back to his gated hotel reflects both the increasingly uncomfortable state of Changez's 'guest', and his host's anxiety to reassure this man that, despite playing 'Kurtz' to his 'Marlow', he in fact poses no threat (208). The outcome of this dubious Pakistani-American encounter, like the extent and nature of Changez's "reluctant fundamentalism", remains unclear: at the end of the novel the Pakistani tour-guide, lecturer and 'potential terrorist' offers a handshake to his American confessor and receives a glimpse of something metal beneath his jacket in its stead (209). Hamid's reader is left to draw his own conclusions as to which of the characters is the victim and which the assassin here; whether the reasons for their meeting could perhaps have been benign; and who exactly must be misled or misread in order for this work of fiction to find foundation.

Fictional in content and confessional in tone, Hamid's artful dramatic monologue mimics in ostensible subject and style such "factual" Muslim memoirs as Husain's (2007) *The Islamists*, which critics have praised for opening their eyes to the realities of Islamic fundamentalism.³⁶ Yet, unlike Husain's '“refusenik”' recantation (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 94), Hamid's playful novel maps "fundamentalist" affiliations entertained by its secular Muslim subject which might surprise the reader, and in cleverly elusive fashion refuses to speak of others which may be deemed more (stereo-) typical.

Encoded in Changez's narrative is a warning that any literal interpretation of his apparent confession – and, by extension, Hamid's fictional text – as an

³⁶ See, for example the strap line from *The Times* on *The Islamists*'s front cover, which describes the memoir as 'a complete eye-opener' (Husain 2007).

insightful and authentic act of post-9/11 Muslim spokesmanship could serve to 'implicate' the reader and interpreter at least as much as its narrator and author (Hamid 2007b: 80).³⁷ Any nod of assent, either when Changez ventures to suggest that the American may not be 'entirely *surprised*' to hear him admit to some initial sense of pleasure at the World Trade Centre's destruction, or when he hazards a guess that his guest may have felt comparable 'joy' when the US launched retributive attacks on the Muslim world, will ensnare the "world" reader (84, 86). It will appear to confirm their prejudice and pre-existing hostility. It seems crucial that attention be paid to this propensity to politically determined suppositions at a time when there is a tendency amongst western commentators and even governments to assume that highly authored individual accounts of encounters with Islamic extremism can provide 'illuminating' and 'instructive' insights into young male Muslim minds which may contribute to their 'decod[ing]' (Mondal 2012: 37; Morey 2011: 138-9).

Ironically, many readers of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* seem to have fallen into the same trap as that set by Changez for his fictive interlocutor. They have found in his autobiographical account the confession they are perhaps 'set ... up' to seek about his sinister embracement of Islamist terror, and overlooked his other Muslim affiliations and non-religious connections (Morey 2011: 138). When reflecting on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* reception in the months following its publication in March 2007, Hamid has remarked on his readers' tendency to conflate the novel's cosmopolitan protagonist with the character's

³⁷ Changez observes that a 'confession' can 'implicate ... its audience', depending on their response: 'Reject it and you slight the confessor; accept it and you admit your own guilt' (Hamid 2007b: 80).

creator (Hamid, 2007c: n. p.). On occasion aspects of Changez's behaviour – typically, his confession that he '*smiled*' when he saw the Twin Towers collapse – have led to emotional exchanges with Hamid's readers (Hamid 2007b: 83). While Hamid has said that he 'wouldn't call the[se] confrontations', he acknowledges that people were 'angry or upset' and required him to provide 'an explanation' for his character's seemingly callous reactions to an act of international terror which had a devastating impact on America (2007c). The author and his protagonist's biographies are not dissimilar: both are young articulate Pakistani men born in Lahore, educated at Princeton and employed in corporate New York; both have fallen in and out of love with that city and subsequently emigrated from America. Crucially, both may also be thought to fit the 'well-educated, upwardly and geographically mobile, migrant constituency' which Bart Moore-Gilbert observes is 'consonant with the profiles of the real-life 9/11 attackers' (2012: 193). What is interesting with regard to the reader responses is the assumption that perhaps because of these correlations they have a shared point of view to communicate, and that this is "real" or "representative": that Hamid, via Changez, gives voice to the thoughts of certain type of Islamic 'fundamentalist' which he at least partially supports.

In the years since *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s publication, critics have begun to pay attention to this oblique novel's capacity both to engender and to undermine such straightforward readerly assumptions. John Mullan (2011: n. p.), for example, has observed a tendency amongst *The Guardian*'s Book Club audience to take the novel's contents literally, assuming an autobiographical overlap between the Princeton-educated author and his erudite creation, and interpreting his seemingly prescient fiction as a 'thesis' with the potential to illuminate 'attitudes and beliefs that might shape political events'. Other,

postcolonial critics, such as Morey (2011: 139) have gone on to analyse how Hamid's intimate account, while 'subtly parodying successful quasi-autobiographical texts', forces its reader into a new and unsettling relation with its fictional "fundamentalist" narrator, making it impossible to link his 'political awakening' to the 'default positions attributed to Islamic radicals'.³⁸

Likewise, Bart Moore-Gilbert points to the fact that it is difficult to trace "Islamic fundamentalism" as habitually conceived in western public discourse' at all in Hamid's slippery novel, and notes that Changez's predominantly cultural "Muslim" affiliations and affinities are sparsely represented. But Moore-Gilbert (2012: 194-5) would use the text to identify 'loc[i] of opposition to (American-led) globalization', and is keen to emphasise that Changez's resistance is 'linked to the long tradition of leftist pursuit of social and political justice' and in sympathy with a 'rainbow coalition' of anti-imperial antagonists. While he acknowledges that to emphasise the secular, leftist aspects of Changez's supposed "fundamentalism" is to 'risk re-presenting resistance ... in terms which can be more or less comfortably "recognised" by the 'liberal metropolitan reader'', Moore-Gilbert focuses mainly on analysing information which may help us discern 'whether Changez is, indeed, a "fundamentalist" and, if so, of what kind':

³⁸ Interestingly, the 'political events' certain Book Club readers thought the novel foreshadowed were not solely the stereotypical turns to the "dark side" of militant Islam and acts of "jihadist" terror one might expect the western reader to anticipate (Mullan 2011). They also included the violent reciprocations of individuals who might resemble Changez's shadowy, paranoid interlocutor. Mullan notes, for example, that one reader observed:

'There is a lot of prescience in this book,' ... referring to the 'incident in Lahore' (the arrest of an American CIA agent who shot two men who had threatened him in the street). 'It could have come straight out of the pages of the novel.'

sociopathic, rational, or morally conflicted (195-7). Reading the lack of resolution offered in relation to Changez's "fundamentalist" affiliation as testament to the fact that it may not be possible adequately to represent or recognise 'in the current climate of vexed relations between the West and certain Muslim formations', his essay leaves unexplored the alternative explanations for the novel's intriguing ellipses which this chapter seeks to foreground (197).

Mullan and Morey have perhaps placed greater emphasis on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* ludic qualities. Mullan (2011), for example, framed his survey of audience responses which point to a shared conviction of the reality of the 'attitudes and beliefs' described in the text, with his own critical observations. These foreground the novel's fictive elements – the provocative ambiguity of the narrative first-person; Changez's chameleon-like capacity to change "fundamentally" when scrutinised in different lights – and would seem to dissuade the sophisticated reader from taking any single interpretation of Changez's fundamentalist associations as read.

Morey (2011: 140-1) has also drawn attention to the ways in which this symbolic and allegorical novel's 'constant attention to fiction-making' not only makes a mockery of any attempt to fix the allegiances – Islamic or otherwise – of its deterritorialized and unreliable narrator, but disorients the reader with alarming effect. Morey's argument is that by 'making the text a site of struggle for ... different versions' of events or experiential truths, Hamid forces readers to detach themselves from habitual, culturally-conditioned modes of perception. Thus freed, they may see into the 'spaces' the writer constructs for being and believing 'between [the] conflicting interests and positions' typically associated with East and West (138). The implication is that 'deterritorialized literature' can

make us realise the constructedness of the essentialising shorthand used to describe (Muslim) protagonists in the wake of the “war on terror” (138). Such writing may perhaps therefore force its readers to confront their responsibilities as players in a potentially deadly game of framing others’ identities, as Hamid (2013a: 15) – retrospectively – has hinted that he hopes it might. Literary tricks and effects – such as Hamid’s recruitment of the shifty Changez in place of a “trustworthy” narrator, and his clever fashioning of a faux confessional narrative – are essential to the process of laying bare the artificiality of the text and the character positions which Hamid invites us to construct and de-construct.³⁹ Hamid (2011a, n. p.) has remarked that as a child he was captivated by the role-playing *Choose Your Own Adventure* series of puzzle books, and as a maturing writer has come to ‘wonder if the power of the novel... [is] rooted in the enormous degree of co-creation it requires on the part of its audience’. He is intrigued by the notion that it is incumbent on the reader who listens in to the ‘half-conversation’ of a dramatic monologue to ‘supply its missing context’. Perhaps coerced, certainly invited, to engage in an act of co-writing, the reader creates – in Hamid’s words – a version of the book which reflects his or her ‘individual inclinations and world views’ as much (if not more) than those of its characters.

His tone may seem disinterested here, his motivations benign, but in a post-7/7 world where, as Tony Blair declared, ‘the rules of the game have changed’ (quoted in Wintour, 2005: n. p.) and it appears to be open season with regard to

³⁹ Within the body of the novel, Changez draws attention to his capacity to use language creatively to gain the trust and respect of his American colleagues in phrases such as like: ‘I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could’ (Hamid 2007b: 46).

the treatment of Muslim subjects, Hamid creates a novel which ‘plays’ a mischievous even malicious ‘kind of game’ with the western reader - one which that reader can never win (Hamid 2009b: 225). Brazenly foregrounding the likelihood that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is in fact a ‘confession that implicates its audience’ (Hamid 2007b: 80), the author asks the reader to meet the challenge of ‘responding to [the Pakistani protagonist’s] manipulation’ (2009b: 225). But he must do so in a ‘vacuum’, devoid of any external referent, forming a character judgement of the protagonist – either as a ‘random chap’ or a ‘terrorist’ – based on his instincts (225). The reader has no way of knowing if he gets it right: Hamid cuts the ending short, and Changez’s ‘true’ nature – if indeed this can be thought to exist – is never disclosed. Furthermore, any “fundamentalist” identity the protagonist may propose is undermined by the fact that he may be misleading the American who listens to his one-sided conversation. As he repeatedly reminds his audience: ‘there is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you’ (Hamid, 2007b: 172-3). The monster, martyr, mimic- or middle-man apparently embodied by Hamid’s “Changez”, but given flesh by the apostrophised western interlocutor and reader, will – in this sceptical reading of the text – only ever ‘implicate ... its audience’, reflecting the kind of transnational Pakistani Muslim they anticipate seeing or want to see (80).

Hamid uses his central protagonist to complicate the idea of South Asian Muslim affiliation by avoiding a commitment to any identities available to him. The “fundamentalist” of his novel’s title remains unrepresented; like an empty signifier, Changez floats free. His are *potential* rather than *actual* affiliations; it is not possible to determine whether Changez is responsible for an act of Islamic terror, or to what extent he subscribes to a radical Islamist’s agenda. Hamid

simply opens up the possibility of his being an affiliate of a jihadist's global umma; it is the reader who decides to what extent he indeed subscribes.

Changez as Psychological Case Study

I am going to insist that this [*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*] is fiction and whatever learned members of the audience determine about the psychosis of the characters involved, they have nothing to do with me (Hamid 2009b: 225).

Hamid attempts to emphasise his novel's fictive qualities. But his intimate portrait of a Pakistani Muslim subject remains susceptible to being interpreted as an incomplete and literal confession of a fundamentalist turn, rather an intentional and highly literary cipher, in a period when commentators have suggested that testimonial accounts of Islamic radicalisation should be 'prescribed like medicine' (Wakefield 2007: n. p.).⁴⁰

This is a problem perhaps compounded by the contemporaneousness of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* publication with books which purported to offer authentic insights into the world as seen from a radical Muslim perspective. Examples include *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left*, a memoir by Ed Husain (2007), and *Terrorist*, a

⁴⁰ Mondal (2012: 37) draws attention to this quotation from *The Daily Telegraph*, which is reprinted in the endpapers of *The Islamist* (Husain 2007), in his critical article 'Bad Faith: The Construction of Muslim Extremism in Ed Husain's *The Islamist*'. In it, Mondal observes that Husain's memoir has been circulated as recommended reading in the corridors of Whitehall, and has informed government thinking and policy with regard to tackling Islamic extremism, 'due in large part to the conviction that general lessons for our times could be drawn from this personal account of one young man's experience of certain radical "Islamist" movements' (37).

thriller by John Updike (2006). Both of these – like Hamid’s novel – were published by Penguin.⁴¹ In the former Husain, a reformed British Muslim extremist who now works as an “expert” on international threats from Islamist radicalisation and terror, claims he will take the reader on a journey behind the scenes of ‘today’s Islam’ as he saw it from first-hand (Husain 2007, ‘Preface’). Husain endeavours to answer the kind of questions he imagines non-Muslim American and British readers have harboured since the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks.

But what Husain purports to “know” about the impulses and emotions that inform a young Muslim’s turn toward violent extremism, fiction writers place in doubt. Hamid’s novel leaves the details of what Changez may or may not know about the operations of a terrorist cell unclear, and the question of how far he either fabricates or withholds an insider’s perspective on radicalisation unanswered. Yet at a time when ‘the possibility that [an] extraordinary personal story ... can help to answer ... pressing questions about the ... Muslim community’ (Bunting 2007: n. p.) has been central to its appeal, Hamid’s ambiguous account of Changez’s fundamentalist affiliations seems to have piqued audiences’ curiosity rather than acted as a deterrent. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* remains susceptible to some equally intriguing diagnostic readings.

One such reading is offered by the psychoanalyst M. Fakhry Davids in his 2009 essay ‘The Impact of Islamophobia’ (2009), which had its first outing at a conference on psychoanalysis, fascism and fundamentalism in November 2008. His aim in the paper is to explore ‘what light... psychoanalysis [can] shed on

⁴¹ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was first published by Hamish Hamilton and then by Penguin in 2007.

what goes on in the mind when the Muslim is vilified as the enemy of the public good', a racist trend which he argues has intensified in the period following the attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 (178). Specifically, he seeks to understand the role Islamophobia has played in making a 'radically anti-Western Islam' attractive to Muslim adolescents in the West at a time when, in his view, fundamentalism has been 'inscribed' as Islam's 'problematic heart' (178, 191). He takes as case studies three young male Muslims attracted by fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and examines their struggles to integrate the Muslim aspects of their identity with those of their western selves. The first is "Ahmed", a British Muslim of Pakistani background who attended Davids' psychoanalytic practice in late 2001 or early 2002 presenting anxiety about his former militant connections; the second the ex-Islamist Ed Husain – or at least his authorial persona as portrayed in his intimate memoir; and the third a fictive creation, the seemingly eponymous protagonist of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Following Frantz Fanon's theories about 'violent resistance' (189), Davids reads as 'normal' the trajectories traced by the now apparently reformed and re-integrated Ahmed and Husain. They gravitate away from the Afghan training camps and tutelage of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, which attracted them in their rebellious adolescence, and toward modified and less militant forms of Islam, community roles, and university courses by the time of their early twenties. Yet Davids seems profoundly disturbed by Changez's "case". For Changez's behaviour fails to fit this developmental pattern: in Davids' reading, he first appears to suppress his Pakistani Muslim identity in order to pursue a career as a management consultant in New York, then actively embraces Islamic fundamentalism on relocation to Lahore (188-9). The language and tone the psychoanalyst uses to describe this seemingly total transferral of allegiance is

one of deep concern. Davids describes Changez's severance of his New York ties as destructive rather than liberating, and reads his shift toward a more political consciousness as a 'descent', not as a progression. He considers the metropolitan Pakistani's crisis of confidence in American capitalism to have ushered in a 'catastrophic breakdown of the personality' from which the protagonist seems unlikely to recover (189). Meanwhile, Changez's story is haunted by 'the prospect of the violent return of the repressed', meaning – in this instance – the Muslim Pakistani subject's dangerously "fundamental" Islamic side.

In Davids's opinion, the two British Muslims, "Ahmed" and Husain, benefitted from having been raised in a society 'that tolerated a fundamentalist voice within' (189). This gave them scope, he argues, to play out their 'fundamentalist' fantasies – to look into what he terms Islam's 'problematic heart', realise its fissures, and find a way of remaining Muslim in the West (191). He fears that Changez, whom he observes was not so fortunate as to be born into such a liberal society, has adopted a 'narrower interpretation' of Islam which, unexorcised and unintegrated, will 'constitute a danger' not only to the young man's individual psyche but to non-Muslim peoples as a whole (181, 189).⁴²

The problem with Davids's deployment of Hamid's novel as a tool for analysing the situation and psychological condition of actually existing Muslims living in contemporary western societies is that it relies on the unstated assumption that the author, presumably because of his cultural and religious background,

⁴² Davids' presumption appears to be that contemporary America and Pakistan as portrayed in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provide no place for a young Muslim to work through identitarian issues, although what evidence the novel provides for this remains unspecified.

creates in the fictional Changez a text-book example of a real-life 'problem' (p. 188). Davids does not challenge Hamid's credentials as a commentator on Muslim issues, or question the author's capacity to speak with any genuine empathy or authority about the militant radicalisation of a single expatriate Pakistani Muslim youth (let alone all such individuals). Nor does he enquire into the extent to which the novel's protagonist may be intended to be representative of a particular (stereo-) type. And although Davids acknowledges that the details of what exactly Changez's 'reluctant fundamentalism' entails remain 'unclear', and concedes that 'we assume' (rather than *know*) the nature of the mindset into which Changez enters, the psychoanalyst leaves unconsidered the author's reason for omitting them (189).

In short, Davids fails to ask the kinds of questions which philosopher Gregory Currie (2011: 14-15), who is interested in the interplay between psychology and literature, has suggested should be raised by readers who value creative writing for the insights it appears to offer into the workings of the mind – into 'moral thinking and acting', for example, or the causes of human behaviour. Currie lists these questions as follows:

Is the practice of fiction one we can reasonably expect to give us the insight we hope for? Are serious fiction writers well equipped to give us that insight? ... [And] is what I'm supposed to be learning consistent with or supported by the best science? (14).

The philosopher maintains that such a reader should remain conscious that a literary work is 'an exercise in pretence', and that the beliefs and perspectives its creator presents as reliable may not correspond with any external reality they have experienced or taken time to research (15). Currie also reminds us of the

fallibility of our perceptions when it comes to interpreting human behaviour, whether as creative writers or as readers.

Ultimately, Davids's assessment of Changez may reveal more about what the professional psychoanalyst wants to read or believes he is reading about an expatriate Pakistani Muslim's response to Islamophobia in the post-9/11 West than it does the mentality of Hamid's fictional and ambiguously 'fundamentalist' subject. Noting trends and diagnosing psychosocial problems based on literal readings of contemporary novels by transnational Muslim writers in English would therefore seem at best a hazardous business.

Dead Ends? Hamid's Recent Short Fiction

'The (Former) General in His Labyrinth' (2008d), 'A Beheading' (2010), and 'Terminator: Attack of the Drone' (2011d), three works of short fiction which Hamid has produced since *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, suggest a continuing desire on the part of the author to engage with presumed reader expectations for an international "brand" of contemporary Pakistani (Muslim) writing by means of experiments in literary form. These tales' bold titles, like that of Hamid's second novel, seem to promise to deliver characters and narrative content in accordance with "world" requirements – in these instances portraits of decadent despots, deadly bombardments and gruesome scenarios that may 'scare the shit' out of readers (Hamid et al. 2010: n. p.).

'The (Former) General in His Labyrinth' is a work of digital fiction which makes the reader an active participant in a story-making game. 'A Beheading' is a fragment of dramatic monologue which appears to 'function' like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 'as a thriller which mirrors the pre-existing thrill in the audience and reader' (Hamid 2009b: 226). Both are designed to entertain. But

despite their postmodern reflexivity and game-playing, these shorter works lack the in-built framing devices which are crucial to the ironic process of using fiction first to place and then de-face the apparent trademark characteristics and affiliations of the bearers of the Pakistani brand.

Hamid wrote his interactive story, 'The (Former) General in His Labyrinth' (2008d), for Penguin's digital fiction project, which was produced in collaboration with alternative reality game designers Six to Start, and ran for six weeks in March and April 2008 (*We Tell Stories*, 2008). Interactive readers are ascribed the task of navigating the courses of action available to the failing president and '(Former) General' of a country with nuclear capacity. They adopt the guise of the General himself, who is surely a fictive echo of the now former, and then current President, General Pervez Musharraf. At the click of an arrow we may choose to occupy ourselves with some important business, entering ornate marble hallways to proceed to meetings or enter our TV studio to record a political speech. Alternatively, noting that we have a long night ahead of us, we may prefer to sit back and be entertained by our private secretary, Shaan Azad, who maintains there are 'always at least two ways to tell a story'. While the story's game-like format provides us as readers with the apparent freedom to choose the direction we wish the story to take, in reality our options are limited: we must select from a prescribed set of quickly exhausted options and then either abandon the hope of concluding the narrative, or retrace our steps back to the start. Caught in the limited loops available in the rather lacklustre and lethargic (Former) General's labyrinth, we have ample opportunity to reflect on his and "our" current choices, but no capacity independent of him to generate alternative actions or initiate any change.

If we read the story allegorically, it offers more than an ironic comment on Pakistan's contemporary political situation, led by an increasingly isolated president who, by mid-2008, had 'outlasted his welcome' (Ali 2008: 255), been electorally defeated, and was under threat of impeachment. It playfully provides the interactive worldwide player with an opportunity actively to embody the shuffling figure of the (Former) General Musharraf, to eavesdrop on his thoughts and – by exhausting a circumscribed set of options – to realise both his inability and his disinclination to act to alter the status quo. The General is 'unable' in Hamid's (2008c: n. p.) critical words, 'to accept the logical conclusion of the project he had begun: his own departure'. At a stretch it might be argued that the story's format encourages a degree of empathy on the part of the interactive "reader" with the plight of Pakistan's beleaguered leader, some of whose initiatives Hamid once respected; or that it even functions to implicate the role-player by making him temporarily responsible for Musharraf's (in)decisions. Yet Hamid uses the second person narrative mode when addressing the General/gamer ('you.....'), thus encouraging a more objective attitude on the part of his global, Anglophone audiences toward the autocratic Pakistani persona he invites them to adopt. And he limits the range of pre-programmed actions available to those of a dictatorial stereotype. As a result, 'The (Former) General' simply presents an amusing diversion, a wry and comic insight into the imagined dilemmas of a slightly exotic and ineffective modern autocrat.

'A Beheading' (Hamid 2010), published in *Granta* 112, but written prior to Hamid's return to Lahore, is a fragment of a dramatic, monological account, this time in horror-story mode, of a writer's nightmarish abduction by shadowy intruders. It speaks to the rational but also 'pernicious' fears to which Hamid

gives voice in his commentary about the vulnerability of Pakistan-based writers, artists and other individuals who are critical of the country's powerful political, judicial, military and religious authorities (Hamid 2011c: n. p., Haque 2011: n. p.). Hamid claims in his newspaper essay 'Silencing Pakistan' that 'A Beheading', in which the anticipated 'blood-bath' (2009b: 227) is delayed but not denied, was fashioned out of a desire on his part to investigate his feelings of fear and intimidation – 'doom' and 'terror' – about being an outspoken Pakistani writer prior to his relocation to Lahore (2011c). The implication in his essay is that perhaps, by publicly confronting his demons, he will encourage his free-thinking compatriots to follow suit and exercise their own, speaking out about their state of 'insecurity', rather than letting it force them into self-censorship or silence.

The point of the story is that it 'mirrors' not just an assumed 'pre-existing thrill in the audience and reader', but also the author himself (Hamid 2009b: 226). Yet the fictional (and formal) experiment which is the outcome of Hamid's having permitted his imagination temporarily to fall prey to 'a fear that gives rise to self-censorship' (Hamid 2011c), does not stand as a complex creative expression of the author's paranoid psychic state. Rather, devoid of this literary context, it appears in an edition like *Granta 112* as a 'horror' story which plays to exactly the kind of misperceptions about what is "typical" in Pakistan which Hamid has criticised the global media for amplifying in his commentary and – in fictions like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* – endeavoured to undermine (Hamid, quoted in Haque 2011).

'A Beheading' may perhaps be a necessary by-product of what the transnational Pakistani writer has described as the 'divided man's conversation with himself' (Hamid 2007a). One suspects, however, that like 'The (Former)

General' it does more to indulge nightmarish fantasies about a Pakistan governed by inept autocrats and infiltrated by terrifying Islamic militants, than to develop Hamid's earlier stated project of 'reintroduc[ing] complexity into a world that, for reasons of space and economy, is desperately trying to minimize it' (Hamid 2008a: 118-19).

'Terminator: Attack of the Drone' (2011d), the dystopian fiction Hamid wrote for *The Guardian Review Book of Short Stories*, is perhaps his most interesting attempt to use creative writing to "reintroduce complexity" to international depictions of Pakistan since *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The story is set in what initially seems to be a burnt-out, post-apocalyptic landscape, a science fiction or fantasy space almost devoid of animal and human life. Against this backdrop, a plucky young boy, one of a handful of human survivors of a continuing onslaught from a mechanical race, narrates the story of a night he spends 'huntin'" his nemesis in a strange and drawling accent (2011d: n. p.). A few clues are gradually introduced which may convey a sense of a real cultural, geographical and historical context. We learn that the narrator's friend is called 'Omar' and another boy, 'Yousuf', has vanished. The region they live in is prone to earthquakes, abandoned Kalashnikovs are easy pickings, hidden caves provide a safe space, and firing at unmanned aerial vehicles is a deadly kind of game.

Using form to alienate and disorient the reader, Hamid makes him to fall back on his knowledge of prior texts and inter-texts. These may include dystopian visions of broken worlds conveyed in fractured prose, disturbing works of science fiction (filmic and literary) where alien and artificially intelligent life threatens to colonise and ultimately eradicate humanity, even perhaps frontier narratives or western films. Reading the juvenile narrator's experience of

multiple US drone attacks through these pre-existing fictional lenses, perhaps we can begin to realise the magnitude of their impact on his vision of everyday life: how they shape and warp his impressions of reality; and how he understands and counters the threat these enemies pose. Experiments in form such as these, which attempt to use unexpected aspects of genre fiction to make the reader reconfigure reality and read it in different modes, undoubtedly serve a purpose at a time when it is all too easy to fall back on clichéd and stereotypical ways of reading, particularly in relation to young, male Muslim subjects. But while they encourage small shifts in viewpoint, perhaps tricking the participating reader into seeing contemporary Pakistani “horror” stories through “other” eyes, they lack the ‘devilish’ and ‘difficult’ ludic edge which distinguishes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007b: 80). Ultimately, Hamid’s surreal, nightmarish forays in short and virtual fictions fail to build in any substantial way on the very real challenge that his disconcerting post-9/11 novel presents to its highly implicated, co-creating Anglo-American audiences and their prejudicial perspectives. They may suggest new directions but lead, literally and metaphorically, to dead ends.

Conclusion

The Reluctant Fundamentalist vigorously exposes the constructedness of the confessional Muslim narrative as presented to a hypothetical western reader who is disoriented in oriental lands. It encourages him to adopt a sceptical position not only vis-a-vis the Pakistani Muslim suspect he encounters in his midst, but also with regard to the “suspect” aspect of his Islamic identity. In doing so, it leaves unmapped those components of contemporary radical Muslim affiliations, spiritual and political, which the secular, western world finds

most troubling. Hamid's arch fictive account of his Pakistani protagonist's American encounter and his subsequent comments about how Changez's "adventures" may be replayed by the always creative reader combine to undermine any novelistic attempt to "frame" or to "speak for" "authentic" South Asian Muslim subjects. One suspects this is as much the result of the author's discomfort with the role of 'representative' Pakistani Muslim writer as his desire to push the bounds of contemporary fiction (Hamid 2011b). In this he contrasts with his contemporary, Nadeem Aslam (2010b), who, as we will see, uses his literary output to illuminate precisely those 'area[s] of darkness' in the lives of his Pakistani and Afghan Muslim protagonists which Hamid's novel would render obscure, and unfailingly frames the insights he presents as "real".

Chapter 4. Re-culturing Islam in Nadeem Aslam's Mausoleum

Fiction – *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Wasted*

Vigil

*Lord, cried out the idols, Don't let
us be broken;
Only we can convert the infidel
tonight.*

(Agha Shahid Ali 1997: 21)

Introduction

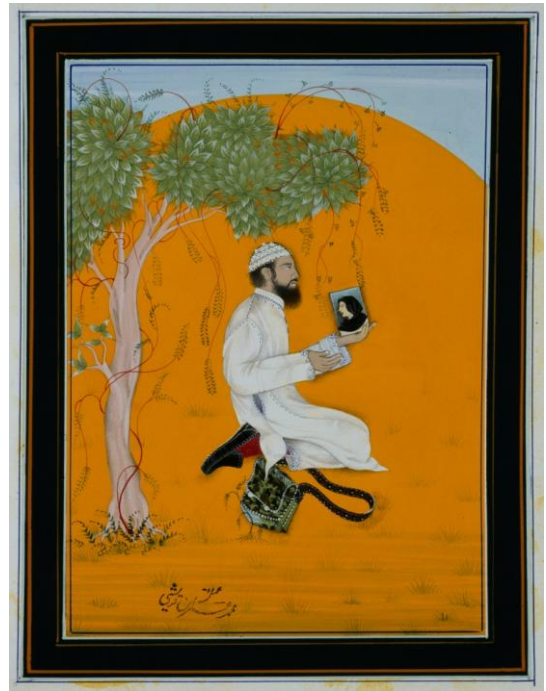
In Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), set in twenty-first century Afghanistan, an English doctor who has converted to Islam attempts to salve the wounds of a young Islamist.

Aslam makes us party to the elder character's thoughts as he exits the

disused perfume factory where the boy, Casa, has been sheltering; Marcus muses:

The world is apricot light and blue shadows. In sura 27, Solomon laughs on hearing the conversation of two ants – a rare example of humour in the Koran – and there is a third-century Buddhist version of that tale with two butterflies instead of ants. It's no point sharing with the boy the delightful essential idea that tales can travel, or that two sets of people oceans apart can dream up similar sacred myths. (231).

And yet throughout Aslam's narrative Marcus, a man with a seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge of western science, world literature, art, and



Moderate Enlightenment (5)
Imran Qureshi (2006)
[Figure 4]

cosmopolitan Muslim history, tries to do just this: to expose Casa to alternative aspects of Islam's written, oral and visual culture which may transform his understanding of the 'tales' told by the Qur'an, and help him trace his own features in fragments of Afghanistan's multifaith heritage. But, as in the passage above, the Englishman also strategically withholds certain narratives, deeming them too delicate or dangerous to discuss with the volatile Islamist.

Focusing on the two novels Aslam produced in the first decade of the new millennium, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), this chapter examines how the British Pakistani author's ecumenical fictions make manifest the pre-Islamic Buddhist, Persian and Sufi mystic and aesthetic heritages of South and Central Asian Islam. It contends that his post-9/11 novels recast those regions' resident and diasporic Muslim peoples – child soldiers, perfume-makers and migrant housewives alike – as both susceptible to influences which present an alternative to an austere scripturalist Islam, and deeply, sensually human. Significantly, it argues that his novels stage moments where Muslim characters of different doctrinal and sectarian backgrounds are provided with a fleeting chance to identify commonalities of perspective through a mutual contemplation of this art. And it notes that the moments of affinity they dramatise seem impossible to sustain.

In writing these fictions Aslam appears to be absorbed in a precarious ethical, humanitarian and artistic venture which may be described as "re-culturing" Islam.⁴³ It could be argued that *Maps* and *Vigil*, which are replete with

⁴³ As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Steven Salaita (2008: 1-2) argues in *The Uncultured Wars* that Muslims have been relegated to the realm of the 'uncultured' in Western imagination, construed not only as

images of burqas ‘studded with fireflies’ (2008: 227), Mughal miniatures, and bejewelled calligraphic texts, simply pander to Orientalist tastes. But their author seems less interested in inviting occidental readers’ delectation or ‘doing PR’ (Aslam 2011a: 140) for some palatably “moderate” version of the faith, than in repopulating contemporary imaginations with unorthodox stories of Islam for the sake of rehabilitating and restoring its ordinary South Asian Muslim adherents’ own (self-) image. This seems particularly important at a time when that faith has been steadily “un-cultured” both by the barbarising discourses of the West, as Steven Salaita (2008: 1-2) notes, and by the brutal actions of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.

Anthropologist Shaila Bhatti (2010) acknowledges in ‘What can Museums do for Pakistan?’ the educative power of artefacts which point to a heterodox South Asian Muslim cultural history and the significance of the buildings which house them. She also remains attuned to the irony of the fact that such diverse aesthetic objects are exhibited in institutions where they are abstracted from their origins and hard for the majority of people to access. Conscious of museum spaces’ ‘cultural value and positioning’ in Pakistan’s ‘current socio-political climate’, Bhatti is interested in investigating ‘the contributions that they make to its society and towards constituting a sense of identity, history and

‘unrefined’, barbarous, premodern, and ‘complicit ... with terrorism’. This Arab-American scholar himself would reject the label ‘cultured’ because he associates it with ‘white liberals’ and neoconservatives whose ‘platitudes about tolerance, diversity and coexistence ... engender sanctimony’, and because their ‘refined conversations [have] overtaken the world, delegating people into intellectual categories, demarcating civilizational essences, [and] prioritizing rights of expression’ (167-8).

heritage of the nation for its citizens and global travellers' (27). She seeks to highlight their capacity to project an image of this Muslim nation as something other than a 'terrorist civilization' – a place where a 'marble Hanuman' or a Gandhara Buddha may perhaps also find a home (28, 31).⁴⁴

The two novels by Nadeem Aslam which are examined in this chapter, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), seem to aspire to museum status. They preserve and conserve within their pages both "muse"-inspired and secular arts, and also present spaces of scientific, historic and cultural interest where deep understandings of individual Muslim connections to one another and to the wider world may be nurtured and sustained. Yet those characters who would distribute their cultural knowledge more widely among the Pakistani and Afghan communities which Aslam depicts are invariably thwarted. As a

⁴⁴ Interestingly, and perhaps controversially, Bhatti concludes her article with the following statement:

Maybe it is time to expose this Pakistani culture in an effort to subvert and rescue the deteriorating image of Pakistan, and export their knowledge widely so that images of antiquities such as the renowned fasting Buddha ... become the future associations with the nation and its people (2010: 32).

This prospect may seem unlikely, given the Muslim country's prevailing cultural climate; indeed, Bhatti acknowledges that she may appear to 'chase for a utopian fantasy' in searching for a way to revive 'the increasingly forgotten vision for the nation that embraces an unbiased inclusive history and diversity' at an early stage in her piece (30). But she also stresses that what she is striving toward is less ambitious and hence perhaps more realistic than that: 'the recognition of possible alternatives that are not hampered by official national ideology or blinkered by conservative imagination' (30), Aslam seems to be in sympathy with Bhatti's sentiment and (as I will go on to discuss) to explore through his fiction – *The Wasted Vigil* in particular – what he considers to be the achievability of this goal.

result, his “museum” fictions fall short of this implicit aim. I argue that they may better be characterised as “mausoleum” fictions: stately literary edifices in which the artefacts treasured by (largely European or western-educated) curators of heterodox Islamic tradition are carefully interred, moribund symbols of an earlier time of tolerance for whose resurrection Aslam keeps “vigil”, yet retains little hope.

‘All the Colours?’ Aslam’s Islamic Spectrum and Commitment to Realism

Aslam was born in the Punjab town of Gujranwala in 1966, raised in Huddersfield from the age of 14, and educated at Manchester University. This diasporic writer describes himself as ‘not [having] lived a very cosmopolitan life’ because his foreign travel was limited prior to his becoming an established writer (2006: 67). He continues to cultivate a more retiring and ascetic profile than the transnational Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie (see, for example Rees 2004: n. p.; Malik 2013: n. p.). Yet, as the “unbelieving” son of a Marxist filmmaker and poet, and of a mother whose background was orthodox Sunni, Aslam is nevertheless keen to portray the family from which he hails as so diversely comprised that it contains a world of ideas in miniature. Made up of ‘communists and rightwingers, religious nuts and atheists’, it displays ‘all the colours’ which Aslam (2011a: 151) believes the writer needs to convey ‘the very different ways [of being] Muslim’ – something he attempts to do in different ways in his first two “9/11” novels, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008).

Aslam’s intense and richly detailed fiction is deeply embedded in a modern, cultured and anarchic globe which encompasses and frames the Pakistani, British and Muslim worlds that Aslam, on account of his heritage,

feels he most intimately knows. It is influenced by Urdu before American, European or other “world” literature; inflected with memories of being raised in Zia’s “Islamized” Pakistan and coming of age in Thatcher’s Britain; and shaped by British Asian politics. It gains urgency after 9/11 as a result of an internalised obligation to raise “moderate” concerns about the situation of globally-implicated Muslims in “multicultural” middle England or in a benighted Afghanistan which the Taliban has drastically “un-cultured”.

Aslam’s youthful encounters with the beliefs and practices of orthodox adherents to a ‘strict unsmiling’ faith seem not just to have given him insight into the different hues of Muslimness that may populate his fictive spectrum (2006: 66). They have also heavily shaded his impressions of a certain kind of Islam and Islamic character type. Particular memories, actual and inherited, resurface in various guises in Aslam’s fiction and non-fiction, such as the essay ‘God and Me’, which was published in an edition of *Granta* magazine devoted to exploring through literature ‘the varieties of religious belief and their personal, social and political effects’ (*Granta* 2006: back cover). The author’s highly personal contribution is punctuated by recollections of clerics beating the terrified boys who attended his Qur’an class when they forgot the incomprehensible words of Arabic which they were meant to learn by rote. His oppressively religious uncle looms large. Aslam recalls the austere man smashing his “idolatrous” toys and threatening to thrash his mother for listening to devotional music – a pre-Talibani figure of Islamist menace as seen through the adult author’s eyes. The ‘loud chanting of the Qur’an’ in alien Arabic also made a strong impression (Aslam 2006: 67). Aslam recalls it occurring not only at designated prayer times but, with increasing frequency, throughout the day on Pakistani radio and television as Zia’s Islamization policy took hold: an intimidating soundtrack to

the steady imposition of Saudi-style “Islamic” values’ of which public executions were one traumatic result (67).

Aslam’s recollections in *God’s Own Countries* also indicate that it was in these early years that he developed a contradictory love for the aesthetic aspect but not necessarily the religious content of South Asian Islamic culture – in the case of the Qur’anic calligraphy, he loves the lettering, but not the letter of God’s word⁴⁵. In ‘God and Me’ Aslam describes his near fetishization of illuminated copies of the Qur’an, with their intricate geometric designs, ‘sinuous calligraphy’ and floral motifs, and absolute refusal to put them to their devotional use (67). Confused by this seemingly paradoxical sense of Islamicate affinity, Aslam has more recently sought to understand how a faith founded on ‘words of love’, ‘kindness’ and ‘longing’ has acquired ‘brutal’ Wahabi overtones (68). For, although he is an unbeliever, Aslam is attracted by religion’s ‘moral’ foregrounding of ‘love’ and ‘filial obligation’ for ‘strangers’ (Aslam 2010b: n. p., 2011a: 145).⁴⁶ Further, he is interested in making works of art which bring

⁴⁵ Bruce Lawrence (2012: 21) uses world historian Marshall Hodgson’s term ‘Islamicate’ (and the related ‘Persianate’) to describe ‘aesthetic or literary elements’ that are the result of an ‘elision’ of religion and (secular) culture and of the sharing of Islamic and non-Islamic traditions in a Muslim Cosmopolitan context.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, the model to which Aslam returns when discussing morality and his aesthetic ethos is Christian:

With Christ came the idea of the ‘brotherhood of man’: I am good towards you because you are my sister/brother. ... Buddhism and Hinduism ... preach compassion, but ... without this same sense of strangers’ relationships involving filial obligation (2011a: 145);

A work of art can be a powerful instrument against injustice ... Think of a crucifixion scene ... by Giotto. A man is being tortured ... He is dying and this dying is being witnessed not by strangers but *by ... his friends!* They are at

spectators, as witnesses, into shocking proximity with the suffering humanity they place centre-stage, engendering compassion (and, perhaps, a sense of elation that verges on the sublime).⁴⁷ Aslam's fiction, then, should be understood as profoundly shaped by an enduring personal need to mine the 'workings of [an individual] consciousness' seared by and infused with intense experiences of exposure to Islamic 'religious' practice and to South Asian aesthetic culture. His hope is that undertaking this literary-exploratory act will help him better comprehend his 'place in the wider world', and – by extension – that of the others his work portrays: Muslim, non-Muslim, human (2010b). As a result Aslam's growing opus may offer subtle and complex, although at times misunderstood, interventions into Western neoconservative and militant Islamist

the bottom of the cross, their own agony as visible as his ... *And all of this is being watched by us* (2010b).

Christ is a powerful icon; however, Islamic tradition seems notably absent here. Examples of Islam-inspired (or Qur'an-enshrined) tolerance and compassion are not entirely lacking in Aslam's fictions, however. In the short story 'Punnu's Jihad', for instance, a Yemeni man eases the Pakistani's religious guilt with an adapted saying from the Hadith. 'There is a kind of tree whose leaves do not fall ... in that it is like an ideal Muslim', he tells the anxious Punnu, 'But Allah understands if we don't succeed in being perfect in this imperfect world' (2011b: 77).

⁴⁷ In my opinion, Aslam presents the suffering human as something more than that. His bound, bleeding and brutalised figures – Leila, Punnu, and Qatrina – appear almost as instant icons of martyrdom. Their pain, beautified and intricately described, stirs the reader, creating a feeling of awful excitement (or 'terrible beauty', in Claire Chambers' (2011: 136) terms), which I would describe as a sense of the "sublime"; the disturbing affect of this has been noted by critics (for example Adam Mars-Jones 2008: n.p.)

diktats about what beliefs “good” or “bad” global Muslims must accept, the networks with which they connect, and their presumed psychology.

Aslam’s delicately delineated global novels, set most recently in international conflict zones in Afghanistan and Pakistan, present world readers with a poetic realism through which the pull of metaphysical connections or porous experiences of existence may be expressed, and aesthetic and empathetic sensibilities cultivated. His quiet, mimetic craftsmanship is altogether different from the satirical skill of the quick-witted Rushdie or the hyper-real artifice of Hamid. Aslam’s concern about the exploitative and corruptive potential of organised and orthodox religion and his profound belief in the enduring power of art may appear in keeping with that of Rushdie (2002: 59). But the similarly unbelieving younger author’s attitude to individual spiritual experience is considerably more yielding.

Where Hamid’s fiction presents smoked-glass surfaces, Aslam’s novels might be described as “mirror-written”. They are crafted with the intention that the western world reader will see his own visage reflecting back from the character portraits the author produces, recognise in the face of a fictive Muslim other his own ‘basic human concerns’, and bear “witness” to his story (Aslam 2010b). This seemingly transparent yet highly personal approach to ‘honest’ realist representation, which Aslam outlines in the essay ‘Where to Begin’, proceeds on the basis of a Romantic assumption that ‘if something is true of [him], then there is every likelihood that it is true of billions of others’. It takes as read that the British-based writer’s preoccupations – ‘love’, ‘loneliness’, ‘grief?’ – which also pervade the consciousnesses of his Pakistani, Afghan, American and European characters, and provide grounds for empathetic connections to be established between author, subject and reader, are actually ‘common’ to all

(2010b).⁴⁸ But it leaves unquestioned the epistemologies that may inform just who or what is made the focus of Aslam's 'human concern', or is permitted to prevail as more or less human(e) in his fiction.⁴⁹

All authors will of course write from a particular, situated position, and – like Aslam – universalise certain claims which may be used to bolster a particular (geopolitical) worldview.⁵⁰ Yet the pictures the Pakistan-born writer presents in his increasingly geopolitical fictions, from his small-town, Punjab-set debut *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), to the anonymous Afghan wastelands of the

⁴⁸Aslam's concept of "mirror-written" fiction relies on an assumption of the universality of human sentiments and passions and a faith in the visionary eye of the author-poet that resembles that of Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 'A Defense of Poetry', the Romantic writer states:

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth ...; the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds ...; [it] is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature (Shelley 1977: 485).

⁴⁹ Tony Vaux notes in *The Selfish Altruist* that in a 'new global era', which may 'show Western power seizing hold of humanitarian principles and distorting them', those who attempt to stand for the human must continually strive for 'impartiality', interrogating the 'interests [that lie] behind any expression of "concern" or humanity', 'carefully defin[ing their] relationship with those who claim ... [their] values', and ensuring 'concern for the "person in need" ... include[s] all who are in need, not just those we happen to favour' (2001: 17; 42).

⁵⁰ Aslam's tendency to foreground certain characters' human "universality" may – as Kadir (2004: 7) warns – be 'a function of the universalising impulse in the cultural optic of those [privileged bodies] doing the worlding' in 'world literature'. It could betray Aslam's desire to 'circumscribe the world [and its people] into manageable global boundaries' in order to bolster a particular civilizational view (Kadir 2006: 73).

short fiction 'Punnu's Jihad' (2011b), are never of a straightforward clash between 'good', western(ised) local cultures and 'evil' Islamic ones, or a simplistically inverted variant on that theme. Although painstaking in his portrayal of South Asian Islam's artistic heritage, Aslam, who would distance himself from ideas of 'nationalism' and 'ideology' (2011a: 150), seems uninterested in performing a triumphal act of "writing back" to western notions of a benighted Islam or oriental decadence. Rather, he appears ethically committed to bringing his readers, disconnected from their habitual identifications and thus deterritorialized, into a new sense- and emotion-led understanding of the feelings of affinity his Muslim characters may experience within and across perceived bounds of faith and culture, and the extent to which the affiliative bonds they make and break may be compatible with these.

Maps for Lost Lovers presents a rich, ecumenical tapestry of the largely aesthetic South Asian Muslim affinities which disparate diasporic Pakistanis may elect to pursue. It also points to the often cruel curbs that a misguided older generation may impose on them in name of "honour" or loyalty to the "true" faith and culture of their long-distant homelands. Aslam's (2004a: 111) second novel draws attention to the damage one 'dangerous' but domestically limited anti-heroine, the housewife Kaukab, inflicts on her family as a result of her orthodox religious beliefs. In 'turn[ing]' his mind 'towards the warlord' in his third novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, which unfolds in Afghanistan, Aslam (2008: Daulat Shah epigraph) seems equally if not more preoccupied with re-educating the Muslim world he believes Islamic scripturalists have "un-cultured", as with expanding the perceptions of the largely white, western audiences who are his most likely readers. He appears in this global novel to be trying to find an aesthetic means by which an enlightened, 'translocal[ly] committed' (Gilroy,

2004: 89) “we” – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – may not only “talk to [Islamist] terrorists” but ‘win over’ Islamic cultures’ potential ‘murderer[s] with an embrace’ (Aslam 2008: 422).

Aslam (2011a: 140) asserts that ‘a novel is a democracy’; the ‘novelist [must] work hard at making ... everybody human’ and understandable to his readers - and hence at representing all parties equally – however much this may dissatisfy dominant ‘ideologues’. Here he parts company with the likes of the iconoclastic Rushdie and Rushdie’s contemporary, Martin Amis, for whom the novel is an entry into a more universalised western world-view. Amis (2008: 11-20), reeling from the attacks of 9/11, seizes the novel as the last outpost for a secularly “enlightened” literati who may “legislate for mankind” (16). He seeks to defend its ‘intransigently... individual’ form against incursions from Islam’s ‘desolate’, irrational and dangerously dogmatic ‘lonely crowd’ (16, 19-20).⁵¹ Rushdie, too, uses the novel not only to pull down all ‘doctrines and practices into the realm of history where they can be questioned, criticized, contrasted ... even refuted or overhauled’ – as Spencer (2010b: 253) notes, but to expose them and their adherents to ridicule so as to discredit them utterly.

Despite their liberal, anti-ideological triumphalism, both ageing *enfants terribles* unfailingly champion the unbeliever over the man of faith, self-inspiration over divine, and individual over collective experiences. Aslam differs fundamentally in that he believes that no one human’s fervently held perspective can be dismissed as ‘incomprehensible, nor inconsequential’

⁵¹ Amis appears unable to entertain Rumi’s notion, to which Ziauddin Sardar recently redrew attention, of ‘Islam as love and all Muslims as “a community of spirit”: “join it, and feel the delight of walking in the noisy streets, and being the noise”, [Rumi] wrote’ (2012: 4).

(2011a: 139), however far-fetched or unpalatable. Not, that is, if a novel is to function as 'a powerful instrument against injustice', as Aslam (2010b) believes it must, accurately representing the world and legislating for common understanding as a safeguard against the alienation and radicalisation of disenfranchised elements.

Yet the "truth" of Aslam's fictional representations of Islamic figures of terror, from jihadist militants to immigrant housewives, remains slightly compromised. He is convinced that as a 'moderate Muslim' deeply affected by the World Trade Centre attacks he must use literature publicly to condemn both Bin Laden's acts of international terror and the 'small scale September 11s' which occur in Muslim communities each day (2004b: n. p.). While they point to austere Muslim characters' capacity to feel affinity for heterodox traditions which may shake the foundations of their absolute faith in an exacting Allah, Aslam's fictional depictions of "fundamentalists" seem foreclosed, as if their psychological affiliations to a "fire-and-brimstone" interpretation of Islam and its divinely dictated scripture will always prove unbreakable. It is the iron grip of ideological and scriptural Islam which Aslam foregrounds most consistently in his post-9/11 novels, although he also points to dangerous zeal of his British Asian and American atheist characters, who never question the compatibility of their anti-Islamic stance with their self-appointed role as '*watchmen on the walls of world freedom*' (Aslam 2008: 277). In the end, its affiliates collapse back into the 'bad' Muslim category of Mamdani's (2004: 17-18) 'Culture Talk', or die trying to escape. Aslam's world fiction is weighted subtly but significantly in favour of educated, open-minded, socially responsible and slightly privileged "good" (Muslim) characters, from European converts and westernised Afghans to secular lovers. These individuals are cognoscent of a heterodox (and

unscripted) Islam and able to let sensual, aesthetic, spiritual affinities shape their understanding of faith and inform the paths they take. Caught in a contemporary era of religious extremism and violence where the desire to preserve and cultivate alternative Islamic culture and use it as a bridge to extend their humanity is dangerously out of place, they cut courageous, semi-tragic figures, prepared to risk their lives for the sake of rehabilitating Muslim societies.⁵²

Ultimately Aslam's third-millennium novels function as mausoleum fiction. They attempt at every possible instance to recall and commemorate the hybrid and unorthodox traditions of Muslim lands. These function as mementos of a model of moderate Islamic enlightenment, which foregrounds Islam's originary and historic emphasis on the values of self-knowledge, tolerance, compassion,

⁵² Their compassionate, self-sacrificial commitment to rehabilitating a small part of the Muslim world seems in keeping with that of the ordinary, heroic citizen-protagonists in the poems of the revolutionary left-wing Punjabi poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), to whom Aslam dedicates *Maps*, and whose work has been strikingly redeployed by artists and politicians who would resist religious oppression in contemporary Pakistan. The following lines from his poem about the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg as enemies of state, *Ham Jo Taarik Rahon Mein Maray Gaiy* ("We Who Were Murdered In The Darkest Lanes"), for example, were recently quoted in Pakistan's House of Parliament by Aasia Nasir, a Christian member of the National Assembly, in protest at the murder of cabinet member Shahbaz Bhatti, who spoke in favour of a Christian women sentenced to death under blasphemy laws:

Why complain? Holding up our sorrows as banners,
new lovers will emerge
from the lanes where we were killed
and embark, in caravans, on those highways of desire...
it's because of them that we went out to make the world our own
we who were murdered in the darkest lanes.
(Faiz, translated by Waqar Ahmad in Nasir 2012: 249)

humanity and justice as a possible focal point for rehabilitation and reform.⁵³ But Aslam's fictions also suggest that these traditions, and associated art and artefacts must now, for the sake of preservation, be extracted from their South and Central Asian roots and interred, archived, or safely concealed from view. Islam is revealed as replete with alternative affinitive dimensions – and in this sense “re-cultured” – in Aslam, but only as a museum piece which only a literate and largely western minority can access.

⁵³ In ‘A Plea for Enlightened Moderation’, published in *The Washington Post*, General Pervez Musharraf (2004: n. p.) proposed a two-pronged strategy to tackle Islamic militancy and the West's mistrust of the Muslim world. It was based on an Islamic commitment to ‘shun militancy and extremism and focus on advancement through ‘individual achievement’ and ‘socioeconomic emancipation’, and a Western undertaking to ‘seek to resolve all political disputes with justice’ and ‘aid in the socioeconomic betterment of the deprived Muslim world’. In describing ‘the Muslim part of Enlightened Moderation’, Musharraf emphasised, as does Aslam, the importance of individual ‘introspection’ as a means to social maturation. He also stressed the need to remember and resurrect Islam's ‘glorious past ... as the flag bearer of a just, lawful, tolerant and value-oriented society [which] had faith in human exaltation through knowledge and enlightenment’. The then president of Pakistan, however, seemed to invest greater hope in the achievability of a ‘renaissance’ among his ‘brother Muslims’ than his artistic counterpart has since displayed in his fiction.

Aslam's Post-9/11 Fiction:

Maps: Prescribed Affiliations, Elective Affinities and the Solace of

“Sufism”

I won't move to Pakistan. What would my life be then? My children in England, me in Pakistan, my soul in Arabia, and my heart – (Aslam 2004a: 146)

These impassioned words, uttered in a tumult of hurt, frustration, love, guilt and grief by Kaukab, the immigrant Pakistani housewife in Aslam's second novel *Maps*, provided the inspiration for this thesis's examination of how South Asian Muslim experiences of affiliation and affinity are mapped in contemporary fiction. Plaintive, impassioned, halting, elliptic, they point to the complexity of a single orthodox, exilic protagonist's transnational Islamic ties, and the emotional and intellectual strain their simultaneous tenure places on her consciousness. Earlier in *Maps*, Kaukab tries to calm herself with the image of the world-sculpted Adam, his 'head ... made from the soil of the East, his breast ... Mecca, his feet from the West' (31). But this speech frames as unlikely the possibility of her being able to feel at home in such a body, or to orient herself in any one direction where her moral "soul" and human "heart" can be at rest. It strikes a mournful keynote common to the experiences of "global" Muslim being and belonging charted in Aslam's novels.

Maps is set in the late 1990s in a northern English town known to its immigrant population as 'Dasht-e-Tanhaii'; that is the 'Wilderness of Solitude' or 'Desert of Loneliness', in Aslam's (2004: 29) bleak translation. The novel tells the story of what transpires in Dasht-e-Tanhaii's close-knit Pakistani community the year after the unmarried lovers Jugnu and Chanda disappear. It begins with

Chanda's brothers' arrest in winter on suspicion of their killing; spans the spring and summer in which her parents employ a couple of illegal immigrants to give false alibis; and ends with their sons' conviction in autumn for a crime of 'wicked[ness]', not 'honour' (348). Events unfold mainly from the perspective of Shamas, Jugnu's brother, an aging, unbelieving Communist exile, amateur poet and Community Relations Council director. In trying to retrace the lovers' last steps he trespasses on the affairs of others. These include a Hindu boy mad with grief for his battered Muslim girlfriend, and an attractive divorcee, Suraya, who seeks a route to reunion with her alcoholic husband and beloved son via a sham marriage to Shamas. Meanwhile the anxieties of his austere and orthodox Muslim wife Kaukab weigh heavily on the narrative. She struggles to exonerate herself from blame for the lovers' vanishing and re-establish relations with her children: the artist Charag; dutiful, abused Mah-Jabin; and atheist Ujala. Kaukab fails in this, as does Shamas in his affair with Suraya. After a fractious family dinner overshadowed by the murder verdict and a series of devastating revelations about the damage Kaukab's "Islamic" beliefs have done to her family, she attempts suicide. The novel ends with a report of Shamas's unexplained death at 'Scandal Point', the site of his trysts, and with the figure of the boy immigrant. Touched by this news, he prepares himself 'to go out into the world again' and face with his fellow humans the 'calamity' he knows will ensue (369).

The acts of terror Aslam describes in *Maps* mirror those which he understands Islamic fundamentalists inflict daily not on American "infidels" in foreign lands, but on Muslim families and communities "at home", whose ordinary, lived experiences of Islam are not recognised as legitimate by their Islamist censors. Aslam (2011a: 141) describes his novel as 'the literary

equivalent of a Persian miniature'. It demonstrates on a detailed, domestic, diasporic level the dangers of displaced and disenfranchised migrant Muslim characters cleaving "fundamentally" to an extreme (western) atheistic or (Saudi Arabian) Islamic ideology and an imagined homeland. It contrasts severe pathways carved by atavistic affiliates with those traced by more "moderate", "modern", mobile Muslims who remain open to Sufi mystic interpretations of South Asian Islam and its heterodox Persian and Hindu aesthetic culture while seeking to loosen their ties to stricter religious and cultural traditions. But *Maps* also suggests that positions along an Islamic spectrum – atheist, enlightened moderate, extremist – are never entirely fixed. There is scope in his novel for all subjects to be moved by aspects of the faith-based cultures which they would censor or outlaw: for rigid positions to soften, even if, eventually, tense vigils are resumed at either post. *Maps* also touches on the transformative and healing effects of encounters with unorthodox counter-culture on Dasht-e-Tanhaii's "multicultural" community as a whole. Like Shamas's Hiranman-inspired 'artist' these may 'tell ... us what we should aim for, ... reveal the ideal to us, telling us what's truly worth living for, and dying for, in life' (Aslam 2004a: 168).

Aslam casts the housewife Kaukab as a devout, superstitious South Asian advocate of orthodox Saudi Wahabi Islam and hence a domestic demon. She believes in djinns, considers 'stoning' a punishment of 'divine origin', and deems the dead lovers 'dirty unclean sinners' (322-3). A conservative cleric's daughter 'born and bred in a mosque' and 'trapped within the cage of permitted thinking', Kaukab is described by her daughter Mah-Jabin as 'the most dangerous animal she'll ever have to confront' (56; 110-11). Kaukab struggles hazardously in *Maps* to reconcile her conservative beliefs and emotions as a dutiful, god-fearing and largely housebound wife and mother in a seemingly godless

England where her husband and beloved children have established new roots. But, as Amina Yaqin (2012: 113) notes, 'the book shows that "state multiculturalism" is a meaningless notion for ... a rootless underclass who cling to an unforgiving mode of belonging in an alien environment'. Kaukab's ability to "integrate" into mainstream British society is not on trial here. What Aslam's novel instead puts to the test is her capacity to relax her ties of faith sufficiently in order to enter into a more compassionate, "forgiving" way of being with her own migrant Pakistani family: to entertain and even perhaps accommodate the secular, atheistic and cultural Muslim ideas and identities they express beneath the roof of their shared northern English home.

Kaukab remains loyal to a sepia-tinted vision of a paternal Pakistan as 'a country of the pious and the devout ... where boundaries are respected' which she knows is not strictly true (Aslam 2004a: 63). She deflects, for example, a wealthy Islamabadi's criticism of Dasht-e-Tanhaii's little Pakistan as home to 'sister-murdering, mosque-going, ... veil-wearing inbred imbeciles' (312). She turns for guidance to 'holy' diasporic upholders of "Islamic" values, like the 'cleric-ji' who gives her sacred '*salt*' (libido-quelling bromide) to make adolescent Ujala 'obedient' (304). She directs prayers to Mecca in Arabia's 'sacred land', at whose gate she knocks in dreams; and entrusts her 'soul' to an omniscient, admonitory Allah, who is her sole confidant (99, 145, and 291). Kaukab's deep familial love, capacity for guilt, aesthetic sensibility and powerful imagination make her an understandable if not sympathetic constituent of

Aslam's (2011a: 140) novelistic 'democracy'.⁵⁴ When the estranged Ujala knocks at her door she 'wants to take his face in her hands, to kiss him'; she is mortified when she discovers the harm she has inadvertently inflicted on her family, lamenting: 'I can't seem to move without bruising anyone, but I don't mean to cause pain' (2004a: 293, 326). And, musing on how her merciful Allah can have had the lovers killed, she experiences flashes of doubt (332).

Tragically, only Aslam's readers are privy to the silent, internal vacillations which humanise Kaukab. Meanwhile, the fundamentalist tenets to which she publicly clings appear as 'moral[ly] 'cripple[d]' to her judges, filial and legal, as Jugnu and Chanda's "sinful" union is to her (113). These censors cannot comprehend how Kaukab's 'code of honour and shame' can operate concurrently with love (348); she cannot permit sympathy for the lovers to erode her conception of morality (147). Shamsie (2004: n. p.) observes that *Maps* presents readers with the real face of 'the devoted mother behind the headlines' about "honour" crimes. But, tellingly, when that mother envisages 'her image ... in the mirror' she anticipates an encounter with a son-poisoning monster (Aslam 2004a: 308).

⁵⁴ In her review of the novel, Kamila Shamsie (2004: n. p.) described Kaukab as a character who, 'in the hands of a lesser novelist, [could] have become a monster', but instead:

She is transformed into a woman entirely human, entirely heartbreaking ... she is the voice of condemnation raised against all transgressions from orthodoxy and also the voice telling us: "Islam said that in order not to be unworthy of being, only one thing was required: love."

Thus Shamsie anticipated Aslam's criteria for a compassionate but uncompromisingly realist fiction, as set out in 'Where to Begin' and his interview with Chambers (Aslam 2010b; 2011a: 140).

The less developed Ujala, an extreme atheist, provides a rebellious Muslim refusenik foil to his immigrant mother's fanatical faith and his father's guarded scepticism, countering Kaukab's emotional, exculpatory self-representations with cold, unflattering images. Ujala recasts the religion his mother says gives 'dignity to millions' as irrational and inhumane: 'derang[ing]' of the 'ignorant', impossible to disaffiliate from, and unforgivably implicated in 'barbaric' practices like punitive 'amputation' (322-323). He exposes the long-term negative impacts of his mother's faith-inspired attempts to control her children, about which Mah-Jabin stays silent. Ujala will not let his family 'relegate' fundamentalist Muslim housewives like Kaukab to what Aslam (2011a: 140) has elsewhere described as 'an inconsequential category' because they are not 'involved in things considered of consequence' (such as acts of global, anti-Western terror).⁵⁵ But, rather than 'invite ... contrasting readings', Aslam's fictional British Asian youth reinforces interpretations of his mother and her principles of "shame" and "honour" as problems specific to a monolithic Islam. This native-informant's 'superior value judgements' paint the migrant Muslim woman's 'domestic life [as] alien, organized according to creeds spawned thousands of miles away', and reconfirm an 'unbridgeable divide between Islam and the West' as a quotidian reality (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 77).

⁵⁵ Despite Aslam's seeming commitment to 'referenc[ing] ... every headline-grabber' (Brace 2004: n. p.) when exploring the 'issue' of "honour" crimes in diasporic South Asian Muslim households, his novel implies no link between such domestic tragedies and political, religious extremism. The lovers' murders are not 'colored with the lens of a nationalist antiterror rhetoric' (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 75), as is usually the case, but instead are re-presented as a focus for Dasht-e-Tanhaii's multifaith residents' 'humanitarian concerns'.

Yet in striving to make Ujala 'human' and show the 'very ordinary "face" behind [his] words', Aslam perhaps draws the sting from his tail (Aslam 2010b). We catch a glimpse of the character's humanity in a telling "mirror" moment when he peers into a polished spoon at the family dinner table. He has kept a firm hold on this object while trying to trap his mother into revealing her most intolerant views. Now, gazing into it, Ujala sees not a coherent image of his defiant visage, but 'a distorted portrait' reflecting back (2004a: 323). Ujala's twisted features loom large in this instance, but so do his memories of the congenial naturalist Jugnu, the embittered young man's curious, irreverent boyhood mentor. Momentarily, Aslam dilutes Ujala's supposedly principled aversion for Islam with the hint of the partiality of personal grief, and allows a softer, subtler mode of challenging orthodoxy to be illuminated.

Not surprisingly for a novel dedicated to the activist poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *Maps*' most sympathetic and humane character is a sixty-something socialist non-believer who, despite his perturbation regarding certain traditional Pakistani Muslim practices and beliefs, remains enamoured of aspects of a cultural Islam. Understanding 'that the universe is without saviours' and convinced a 'more just way of organising the world has to be found', Shamas serves Dasht-e-Tanhaii's practical and political needs as the Director of its Community Relations Council (15; 20; 324). But as a poet and romantic whose 'imagination insists that all aspects of life be at its disposal', he embellishes impressions of its 'Desert' with eclectic 'appropriation[s]' from 'supernatural' imagery (82). Most significantly, he tries to bring spiritual 'solace' to himself and the neighbourhood's lonely Hindu, Sikh and Muslim settlers by reconnecting them with a resistant, questing Sufi political aesthetic which prizes the pursuit of selfhood, humanity and love (9).

Aslam's belief in the vital importance of cultivating self-knowledge as a

means to understanding our place in the world, and to rediscovering the holy grail of 'love' for oneself and one's fellow humans, must explain the relative credence the author gives to broadly Sufistic cultural and aesthetic practices, philosophies and pathways, even as he stresses his consciousness of Sufism's 'corruptions' (2011a: 151).⁵⁶ *Maps* exposes, for example, the deviant practices of those holy men who may claim kinship with the "soft" Muslim saints the novel's lovers venerate, but now serve other, more venal masters. They persuade strict Muslim parents to let them beat 'malevolent' *djinn*s from their daughter, who loved a Hindu boy; shred the love-poem that 'garland[s]' her grave; and condemn both as 'minions of Satan' (2004a: 185, 194).⁵⁷ But such men are depicted as aberrations who have long betrayed the truth-seeking Sufis who tread 'internal path[s] of love of God and people' (Frembgen 2012: 13-14).

As this perhaps demonstrates, a degree of caution should be applied when referring to the "Sufi" dimensions of Aslam's worldview and works. First, as

⁵⁶Aslam's (2010b) enthusiasm for a faith that foregrounds the cultivation of a love for what is human which may emulate the love expressed by the divine is evident in 'Where to Begin':

I love thinking about religion and how it attempts to put something other than money and sex at the centre of human discourse – it puts love there. As Borges said: 'I give thanks ... for love, which lets us see others as God sees them.'

⁵⁷ Similarly, Aslam's novella *Leila in the Wilderness* exposes the corruption of 'holy personages' at a desert shrine when, at the heroine's mother-in-law's behest, they administer mind and soul-cleansing treatments to 'help' the sonless Leila conceive a male child; nail her to a bed; and provide crude implements to sever the magical wings of hope and longing that sprout spontaneously from her back (2010a: 41-5)

Zahra Sabri (2012: 12, ellipses and italics author's own) warns, to tack this newly trendy adjective onto 'familiar' elements of heterodox South Asian Muslim tradition – '*buzurg ... mūsīqī ... shā'irī* (elder ... music ... poetry)' – which resurface in contemporary Pakistani culture and loom large in Aslam's fiction, may be to risk obscuring subtler meanings. Second, when heterodox culture is ushered into the "Sūfi" 'mainstream', the blanket of a 'universal concept' is pulled not only over its diverse and divergent features, as Sabri also notes, but its apparent advocates, too – including the atheistic Rushdie and unbelieving Aslam.⁵⁸ Yet Aslam's relationship to Sufism is in fact more serious, subtle and substantial than Rushdie's, based less on rose-tinted memories and more on an acute personal affinity for its intoxicating, moth-to-the-flame aesthetic and profound, humane conception of how it may answer to material and existential needs.

As caretaker of the lakeside bookshop the *Safeena*, Shamas has private access to a non-domestic space which becomes a lifeboat for him and for the divorced Suraya in their grief. Here, over twentieth-century Urdu literature from

⁵⁸ Since writing 'A Sufi Saint' Sabri (2013a: n. p.) has sought to emphasise in private correspondence with me that (in her opinion) the championing of Sufism as a "heterodox" opponent to an "orthodox" Islam is itself based on a misapplication of the term "orthodox" to Islam;

The truth, in [her] view, and in the view of some leading non-Western and Western scholars of Islam, is that it is difficult to distinguish within Islam any such thing as 'orthodox' Islam (especially given the lack of an organised Church or priests, at least among the majority Sunni sect) to which 'heterodox', 'Sufi' Islam can be presented in attractive juxtaposition.

Secondly, she has stressed that 'in fact if "Sufism" (which [is] a relatively new, Western term; the term we [Pakistani Muslims] have traditionally tended to use being "*tasawwuf*") is interpreted as the mystical dimension of Islam, then it actually becomes mainstream Islam, rather than a deviant variant.'

Pakistan's leftist Progressive Writers' Movement, they forge a friendship more intimate than their restrictive community would publicly allow between a husbandless woman and a married man, but which addresses the 'universal' needs Aslam (2010b) identifies as 'basic human concerns'. He cites the following as examples of 'universal' concerns: '*What is love? What is this loneliness? What can I do with my grief? I made a mistake I don't know how to correct*'. When Suraya recalls a recital by the exiled socialist Wamaq Saleem, a fictional character Aslam modelled on his poet-father who told him to 'write about love', Shamas feels to meet her 'is to meet oneself': to find a kindred soul (Aslam 2004a: dedication, 155). When, in turn, Shamas cites Syed Aabid Ali Aabid's protesting verses: '*I did warn: the prison out there has been expanding slowly, and now its walls have almost reached your own garden*', his 'melancholy voice singe[s] her heart' (211, emphasis Aslam's). Shamas cites these verses in answer to his doubts about whether he did enough 'to condemn the pernicious excesses' of Jugnu and Chanda's killers (211). His transparent compassion also touches the scheming Suraya morally, shaming her in her chicanery. Both characters seem to experience in the novel a feeling akin to the mysterious ache of "selfhood" or "*khud*". This is an emotion which the Sufi-influenced philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal described as a metaphysical element that drives individuals to free themselves from earthly limits and aspire to loftier goals, the ultimate being affinity with God reached via a recognition of God within: of the divine spark that animates the human (Mir 2006: 30-1). In Aslam's realist fiction secular trysts informed by this philosophy lead to "mirror" moments in which the face of a lover reflects on the other's humanity.

Maps goes beyond simply charting its central protagonist's personal affinities. It also sanctions through Shamas' indirect, internal dialogue the sense of

catharsis, solace and spirit of defiance which he imagines devotional music can instil. In particular, he imagines it filling the hearts of a chorus of minor female characters, repressed by a conservative and patriarchal mainstream and searching for reprieve. In the novel's most lyrical set-piece, the Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan comes to Dasht-e-Tanhaii to give a concert at the home of some descendents of his patron saint. Shamas functions as a partial, peripheral interpreter of women listeners' 'visible' 'agony', in accordance with Aslam's (2010b) model of witnessing. Locked in the marquee's intimate space, he sees a young woman married to a cousin whose children suffer from genetic defects; she is 'moved to tears' by Nusrat's portrayal of the expiry of Sassi, who dies with her head pressed to a crescent-shaped sign of hope. The weeping girl is, Shamas thinks, 'no doubt, asking the soul of the ... poet-saint – whose verses are being sung ... – to tell Allah to lessen her burden' while 'women hold her, striving to console' in a collective outpouring of grief (Aslam 2004: 189). Shamas spies Chanda's parents by a moth-encircled lantern as Nursat sings the passion of the analogous Heer, poisoned by her brothers, family and the mosque's holy men for abandoning an arranged marriage and pursuing union with her beloved. Such empathetic reflections lead to an ethnographically-intoned endorsement of Sufism's history of artistic dissent and the sacrificial struggle of its 'pure-hearted' (Iqbal in Mir 2007: 168) followers to realise their right to self-determination and unmediated union with the divine:

The poet-saints of Islam express[ed] their loathing of power and injustice ... [and] – because they advocated a direct communion with Allah, bypassing the mosques – were denounced by the orthodox clerics ... Even today the Sufis are referred to as 'the opposition party of Islam'. And always ... the vulnerability of women ... was used by the poet-saints to portray the intolerance and oppression of their times: in their verses the women rebel

and try bravely to ... make a new world. And, in every ... story they fail. But by striving they become part of the universal story of human hope (Aslam 2004a: 191-2).

It is precisely this brief, 'brave' Sufistic lifecycle of unsuccessful striving toward an affirmative light and yet falling victim to the strictures of a Pakistani Muslim community which cannot cut its atavistic ties, and bequeathing to the next generation a legacy of morbid hope, that shapes the narrative arcs *Maps* continues to describe until its closing frame (192). Yet Aslam's characterization of Shamas as a lonely, romantic fantasist, blind to his lover's pretences and neglectful of his family, slightly undermines the credibility of the escapist, cathartic reading the novel's structure proposes. The idealised lovers Shamas would nurture appear as the pale icons of a marginalised Sufi mindset (or, at least, of the Sufi mindset given prominence by Shamas). These characters are too 'curious ... about ways of *living*' – or 'mak[ing] a new world' where they can be one with their beloved – to survive Dasht-e-Tanhaii's arid climate of orthodoxy and superstition (192, 280). Instead, they expend brief, shadowy half-lives almost exclusively in Shamas' mind: they appear in myth, memory, daydream, poetry and as ghostly metaphysical presences. These lovers' 'innocent', world-shunning bids for sublime self-realisation may pattern future utopias, but the reality – as the unbelieving Shamas 'knows' – is that 'the dead will not be resurrected' and the living are 'trapped [on Earth] with each other ... and there is no release' (20, 280, 288). Not unless, that is, they can collectively 'confront' their complicity in "honour" crimes, ask 'penetrating' questions about their failures, and 'face' each other in the truth's unflattering light (288).

A brief appearance at the family home by the 'Young British Artist' Charag, taught by Jugnu 'to break ... the bonds and ties [of] manipulative groups',

indicates how a second generation of cultural Muslim disaffiliates from orthodoxy, educated and domiciled beyond Dasht-e-Tanhaii, may bear the burden of engendering self-reflection among the migrant communities who raised them (321). Charag has been inspired in adolescence by the bright shades and exquisite shapes of South Asian fabrics to 'look at Matisse more carefully' (310). In adulthood, he retains a delight in delicate Islamic aesthetics: reviews describe a '*rhapsody in restrained form and colour*'; Kaukab admires 'immaculate butterflies' (320). Yet he also brings to his artwork a consciousness enhanced by (European) critical theory that prevents him from 'paint[ing] with handcuffs on' (321). He places taboo personal content – a portrait of himself uncircumcised – in intricate Islamicate frames, creating metaphorical art that questions 'act[s] of violence done ... in the name of a religious or social system' (320). Struck by a lakeside encounter with Suraya, who propositions him then asks if he can 'paint' her shame, Charag is also increasingly aware that he must honour his commitment to try cautiously to 'incorporate' her complex history, and those of myriad immigrant 'others', into his artwork, examining and exploring their sorrows, if not celebrating them as Shamas might (133; 318-319).

Aslam describes as 'special and arresting' his first experiences of visiting galleries 'where the people on the walls staring back at me were the colour of my own skin' – thereby, confronting him with their "human concerns" (2011a: 143). In the end, Kaukab rejects Charag's art, unable to see its 'merit' and deaf to his reasoning: the '*Uncut Self-Portrait*' is a 'wicked' affront to Islam, his concern to record non-relatives' struggles unnecessary (2004a: 318-21). But by briefly opening up space for Charag to sketch his vision for an interrogatory, Islam-inflected art - controversial yet sensitively framed, beautiful but not

romanticised - Aslam points to its “real” potential to reflect ambivalent experiences of contemporary diasporic South Asian Muslim affiliation and affinity. These are experiences which Kaukab or Ujala would dismiss as unrepresentative, and Shamas eulogise.

Maps for Lost Lovers charts a movement toward a responsible, realist fiction which is porous and lyrical. It presents readers with a ‘forensic, pseudo-documentary analysis’ (Yaqin 2012:101) of immigrant Pakistani Muslims’ polyvalent relationships to inherited, imposed and elective doctrinal beliefs, religious and cultural practices. It attempts to bridge this anthropological divide and soften searing critical perspectives by encouraging readers to see as subjective reality characters’ psychological experiences of supernatural enchantment. It also uses lyrical passages to develop deeper emotional understanding of how ideals encapsulated in Islamicate South Asian aesthetics may enhance their impressions of the world and aspirations for a future within it. And, even as it valorizes them, it reveals the inadequacy of romantic “Sufi” counter-narratives to account for a sustainable way of “moderate” Muslim life in a domestic climate of Islamic extremism.

The Wasted Vigil: Re-Culturing Islam – Salvaging Art

And the poet in his solitude
turned towards the warlord in a corner of his mind
and gradually came to look upon him
and held a converse with him.

DAULAT SHAH OF HERAT, *Tazkirat-ush-Shuara*, 1487
(Aslam 2008: epigraph)

The Wasted Vigil remains in poetic realist mode but shifts away from isolated migrant worlds-in-miniature and toward native Afghan Muslims deeply

implicated in “global” landscapes and narratives of culture-clash. It explores how the recognition and re-cultivation of Afghanistan’s spiritual and aesthetic connections to Persianate and Gandhara culture may bring emotional release and spiritual solace to isolated Muslim communities ruled by Americans, warlords, and Taliban, where freedom of (religious) expression remains severely restricted. It suggests this culture, strategically deployed, could salve the traumatised and corrupted psyches of civilians and militants caught in the crossfire of international forces on the thresholds of their Afghan homes and hence – perhaps – ensure the survival of a dangerously ‘thread[ed]’ ‘world’ (432).

Chambers (2011: 137) describes *The Wasted Vigil* as Aslam’s fictional ‘refutation of the Taliban’s destruction’ of Afghanistan. He informed her that he wanted to tell ‘the Taliban, “although I may not be able to stop you in real life, in my mind and my book you won’t succeed in destroying th[e] Buddha”’ whose ruined visage is a powerful presiding presence in the novel, nor – presumably – the Central Asian syncretism it signifies (137). *Vigil* is an eloquent, erudite and not unproblematic attempt to use this culture to “answer back” to those who perpetrate such apparently nihilistic acts in Islam’s name.

The story unfolds at a lakeside house near the small town of Usha, occupied by Russians in the anti-Soviet war, ruled by the Taliban after the communist collapse and civil conflict, and presided over in the narrative present – circa 2004 – by an unholy alliance of US intelligence and Afghan warlords. It is home to Marcus, an elderly English doctor and Muslim convert whose connection to Afghanistan long predates the Taliban’s advent. The ceilings are studded with impaled books; its walls are covered with mud-smeared paintings; and a perfume factory concealing a partially buried Buddha head is housed in its

grounds.⁵⁹ Marcus' memories of his Afghan wife Qatrina, also a doctor, and of his daughter Zameen, both of whom were abducted and executed during the Soviet and Taliban regimes, also haunt this lonely space. Despite his losses, Marcus remains, keeping vigil for his grandson, Bihzad, whom he believes survived Zameen. Characters of radically different worldviews converge here seeking sanctuary, aid and answers: Lara, a Russian Christian art historian trying to trace her brother, a Soviet soldier; David, a CIA agent and Zameen's lover, desperate to discover who caused her death twenty years before; Casa, a young Afghan trained in jihadi camps and injured on a covert operation; and Dunia, a schoolteacher contemporary. They make 'links out of separations', or a 'kinship of wounds' while power struggles rage between rival Taliban- and American-backed warlords (Aslam 2008: 87; 430). But the spell breaks when Dunia is kidnapped, Casa returns to the conviction that Allah wants him to have no ties, David dies trying to prevent his suicide, and Lara leaves the world-weary Marcus to find ways to memorialise the graveless dead.

As in Rushdie's *Shalimar*, *Vigil's* protagonists' affiliations and affinities are largely divided between aggressive, strategic and to some extent devout political and ideological affiliations and "softer" tendencies to be drawn by spiritual and aesthetic affinities, the pursuit of which has both local import and international implications. In *Vigil* more than *Maps* Aslam figures aspects of Islam itself (rather than distorted elements of Pakistani Muslim tradition) as

⁵⁹ Marcus' treasure-filled home appears to the reader as a miniature '*Ajaib Ghar* (house of wonders)'. In Shaila Bhatti's (2010: 30) terms, such a building 'may ... appear as a problematic sign of nineteenth-century [or colonialist, Orientalist] display narrative', but also suggest a 'panoply of exhibits [which] is ideal in thinking about revisionism of [Afghan] history and culture'.

having belligerent, anti-scientific, anti-cultural historical associations and connections. He does this in bold, memorable statements that “frame” ensuing digressions. The sound of the *salat-ul-fajr* in Jalalabad, for example, prompts the worldly David’s “realisation” that ‘the first two words of the call to the Muslim prayer are also the Muslim battle cry’ (47). The disturbing impact of this is undiminished when the American is lulled asleep by the muezzin’s soporific entreaty: ‘*Come to worship ... Come to happiness*’ (47). The implication for the wary westerner in post-2002 Afghanistan is that Islam’s resonant invitation to religious comfort – and, by extension, submissive faith – cannot be trusted because it may also summon the faithful masses to sleepwalk back to war.

Such statements seem to paint Islam as war-mongering and inherently barbaric, but Aslam asserts that they are expressive of his polyphonic novel’s non-Muslim American and Russian characters’ opinions, rather than his worldview (2011a: 141). (However, it is harder to discern who is speaking in this even more introspective, elliptic, consciousness-flooded fiction than it is in *Maps*, where Ujala’s anti-Islamic taunts are contained mostly in belligerent dialogue directly attributable to him). Nevertheless to create fiction in the third millennium which gives sonorous if not unchecked voice to European and Afghan Muslim protagonists’ ‘love’ for the Sufistic ‘pictures, ... practices and habits’ and Buddhist inheritances of their Central Asian homelands, is to pit oneself firmly against those ultra-orthodox Muslims who would outlaw and destroy them (2008: 319-21).

As a liberal humanitarian, culturally Muslim artist, Aslam is specifically opposed to the radically conservative, socially restrictive, anti-cultural strains of “fundamentalist” Islam traceable to ultra-orthodox Sunni theologians like the Mongol-era Ibn Taimiyaa. The ethnographer Jurgen Wasim Frembgen (2012:

39), would – like Aslam – uphold the ‘feeling of a common bond and closeness’ or ‘*communitas*’ which Sufi aesthetic traditions may inspire. He blames the ‘anti-Sufi’ Ibn Taimiyaa for ‘sharply distinguish[ing] normative Islam’ from its daily expression in mystical forms – ecstatic music, erotic poetry – so as ‘to marginalize popular, living Islam as heathen’ (40).⁶⁰ *Vigil* is densely packed with fictional scenes – the riddling of the smiling Buddha relic with bullets; the stoning of the burqa-shrouded Qatrina – which echo real-life incidences of Taliban-inflicted terror targeting icons and practitioners of traditional, expressive, “un-Islamic” arts, from the staged detonation the of Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001, to the showcase murder of Swat Valley singer Shabana in 2009.⁶¹ In spirit with Frembgen, Aslam (2008: 262) would figure as heroes and martyrs individuals who ‘rebel’ by non-violent, educative and cultural means ‘against the Taliban’s insistence that the wings be torn off [Afghan] children’. But in *Vigil* he toes a fine line between the projection and representation of anti-Islamic positions as he struggles to complicate readings

⁶⁰ Frembgen is chief curator of the Oriental Department at Munich’s Museum of Ethnology, and a teacher of Anthropology and Islamic Studies. An enthusiastic exponent of Sufi mysticism, his emotional accounts of journeys in Pakistan (‘the land of the Sufis’) read ‘more like a kind of travel fairytale’ than conventional ethnography, as Simone Falk notes (dust jacket, Frembgen 2012: n. p.). They should be treated as partial, somewhat Orientalised reflections.

⁶¹ In January 2009, as Frembgen (2012: 41) notes, Shabana’s body, ‘riddled with bullets, [and covered] with banknotes and CDs ... [was] exhibited on the main square of the town of Mingora as a deterrent to “immoral shows”’. For Frembgen, it provided a poignant illustration of how ‘the militant Sunni Taliban poison and destroy their own Pashtun culture ... which, along with a cult of masculinity, also cultivates a romantic spirit and appreciation of beauty’ (41).

that would reduce the conflict in Afghanistan to a simple clash of Eastern and Western cultures.

The militant, political, ultra-conservative Islamic affiliates Aslam brings to life in *Vigil* are partly offset – as in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* – by American anti-communist, pro-capitalist, neo-conservative ideological extremists. They function as theoretical counter-balances to ‘media representations’ of Islamic fundamentalists, emphasising Aslam’s ‘deep ... suspicious[ness] of the idea of “empire”’ irrespective of ideology, and seeming to pre-empt criticisms that he places Islamic expansionism beyond the pale but does ‘PR for US imperialisms’ (2011a: 140; 145). As near mirror-opposites, Aslam’s (2008: 414) militant Americans are indeed *almost* as zealous, robotic and – despite their claims to the moral high ground – as to blame for the brutalisation and destruction of Afghanistan and its people as their Islamist counterparts.

But *Vigil*’s articulate American former agents and stealth operatives, affiliated professionally to the CIA, are not (quite) equivalent. They include the middle-aged David Town, “turned” against ‘the Reds’ – and so toward becoming an employee of the anti-communist Agency – by his brother’s death in Vietnam, but made ‘fundamentally inconsolable’ (and irreconcilable) as a result of Zameen’s CIA-orchestrated killing some years later (153, 201). They also include James Palantine, the fresh-faced and increasingly fanatical son of David’s former friend and recruiter. The 9/11 attacks may have convinced James that the holders of extreme Islamic beliefs ‘ha[d] to be stopped’, but his family’s commitment to continuing the “business” of the CIA – to defending, the ‘sane’ US against the ‘crazy ... rest of the world’ – long predates that “watershed” moment (328-9).

Both these characters are painted – or are permitted to paint themselves in Aslam’s multi-focal fiction – in slightly more sophisticated, intelligent and defensible lights, than *Vigil*’s Islamist jihadi types. David asserts he became a ‘believer’, as a ‘result of study and contemplation. Not ... a personal wound’; although he may be guilty of misinterpreting it, he is widely read in Islamic history and culture and fluent in Pashto (153). James justifies his ‘vigilant’ treatment of ‘sleeper’ terror suspects like Casa on the grounds that in the wider scheme of things it could prevent the Taliban replicating ‘what they did to the Buddhas of Bamiyan’ on US soil – detonating the carved visages on Mount Rushmore (380-1). Sins of omission and commission destabilise the positions these characters adopt. At the time of the Soviet War, David raises no objection to the CIA’s cynical staging to Western journalists’ eyes of a Russian bombing raid on a refugee camp for Afghan exiles in Peshawar, an atrocity the Americans had the intelligence to prevent. Instead, he justifies this human rights violation on the ideological grounds that: ‘the civilised world would see this and condemn Soviet brutality, [and] Moscow [would be] made to rethink its policies’ (and that the young Afghan Communist who rivalled him for Zameen’s love would, in the process, be eliminated) (173). In the twenty-first century context of America’s war against the Afghan Taliban, Aslam’s descriptions of James’s actions, too, prove distinctly uncomfortable reading. This is the case, for example when he is seen casually supervising the young Islamist militant Casa’s blinding with a blowtorch, an act he undertakes on the following “reasonable” pretext:

I did what needed to be done ... These people have been trained in how to survive interrogation techniques. For some of them true jihad starts at capture. So we have to be extreme, go beyond their trained endurance. I am

just searching for our country's enemies ... It's nothing personal against this man. (411).

Both David and Casa are prepared to go (or allow others to go) to unacceptable lengths to defend a cause or principle that their extreme measures actually undermine. The 'refined' diction and 'decepti[ve] ... objectivity' they deploy when dealing with the constituents of a supposedly 'savage and innately violent' corner of the Muslim world betray an 'epistemological overconfidence' akin to that Salaita (2008: 167-8) identifies among America's 'hypocritical' and 'sanctimonious' white liberals and neoconservatives. Aslam's flawed patriots classify as "cultured" in Salaita's value-loaded conception of that word, and their presence in the novel contributes both in obvious and more insidious ways to its radical Islamic subjects' barbarisation or "un-cultur[ing]".

The two young jihadi militants featured in *Vigil* are the assertive and rigidly Islamist Casa and his junior, Bihzad, a less confident and more religiously porous character. Aslam describes their militant activities, like those of their American "others", in sufficient detail to ensure that no doubt is sown about the roles they take in perpetrating atrocities. Together they are responsible for visiting terrifying physical and psychological attacks on the civilians of Usha: Bihzad bombs the town's American-funded school; Casa distributes an intimidating and admonitory *shabnama* ('Night Letter') to the remainder of its residents (Aslam 2008: 72-4, 166-7). However, while these characters' guilt is not in question, their willingness to participate, and the extent to which they do so freely, remains uncertain. Casa and Bihzad's barely existent civilian pre-histories, pathways to radicalisation and modes of indoctrination are revealed in snatches of repressed memory, Qur'anic citation, madrassa-cum-training-camp

anecdotes, and Taliban commanders' opinions. These pervade their consciousnesses and are reported in cool, "factual" tones:

Cyanide can be extracted from apricots, Casa knows. He had distilled it at a jihad training camp, injected it into the bodies of creatures. The memory comes to him as he walks past a flowering tree at the edge of a street in Jalalabad city centre, the flowers still not finished emptying themselves of scent this late in the afternoon (121);

Because no true Muslim should shrink from killing in cold blood, his jihad training had included slitting the throats of sheep and horses while reciting the verse from the holy Koran which gives permission to massacre prisoners of war (123).

Essentially, like Rushdie's (2008: 225) child soldiers, abducted by the Ottoman Empire 'to be changed into instruments of the Sultan's will', Aslam's (2008: 222) young Afghan jihadis resemble the stereotypes of brutalised orphan "recruits" *Vigil* itself cynically proposes. They appear as third-millennium products of what Robin Yassin-Kassab (2008: n. p.) terms the 'perverse marriage of the worst of the Deobandi and Wahhabi theological traditions', which licensed the Taliban's 'boy commanders' to 'declare ... year zero' on syncretic Afghan culture. And they are easily drawn into 'the mechanism of [an] Islamic world' which functions – according to Aslam (2008: 82) – 'with [military] precision'.

Bihzad, the younger, is presented as a "war victim", an innocent and unwitting martyr (222). 'Happy' to 'suffer for Islam' and Allah, and genuinely contrite that he experiences 'worldly ... wants' (he longs to 'go to England ... make something of his life. Even find love'), he only realises in a pre-death epiphany that 'his heart is clamped in someone's fist': his life is not his own (63-4, 66, and 69). Conversely, Casa, who guides Bihzad blindfold to his suicidal

bombing mission, seems a “natural” affiliate: hardened, knowing, self-sufficient, a ‘veteran’ in youth (137, 221). He feels affinity for a God who inspires terror and sanctions slaughter: frequently we hear him intone “martial” Qur’anic passages in the first person (122-3). He delights in ‘creat[ing] alarm among non-believers’, prides himself on his military prowess, and in pre-pubescence sought battle and ‘martyrdom’ (122, 137). A dedicated affiliate, Casa has also ‘studied’ his trade, attending Friday prayers, reading weapons manuals, learning passport forgery and acquiring English from Western news coverage of terror attacks (214).

But Casa’s grasp of English is poor – parroting rote-learned phrases and ‘deciphering’ at best – while his knowledge of US and Afghan history is inaccurate and poorly sourced; even Bihzad discerns that the ‘fêted warrior’ the older boy reveres reads incorrectly from the Qur’an (64, 222). In the polyphonic *Vigil*, the foundations of Talibani Islamic world “knowledge” are easily rocked, particularly by cosmopolitan Westerners like Marcus and David (229, 278). The confidence Aslam’s “warrior” affiliates retain in the authenticity of their Islamist personae falters along with this epistemology. As a result stereotypes of ‘war criminal’ and ‘war victim’ are destabilised, allowing “other” civilian Islamic identities to be warily explored (222).

The primary alternative *Vigil* proposes to austere Talibani Islamic pathways antipathetic to the ‘heresy’ of ‘original thought’, are the intellectual and empathetic connections to Afghanistan’s Persianate and Buddhist aesthetic traditions cultivated by sensitive European converts and secular, Western-

educated Afghan women like Marcus and Qatrina (11).⁶² They appear as social and artistic ‘innovators’, educators and holistic healers in a modern, Central Asian era when ‘innovator’ has become a ‘dirty’ word (265). ‘Indifferent to the idea of supreme beings’, these characters recognise the need to understand belief and be literate in its language and culture if they are to converse with believers and – ultimately – ‘change’ limited conceptions of Islamic identity which harshly restrict the lives of ordinary Afghans. This is a position Aslam’s writing repeatedly endorses (39).

The novel’s Afghan Muslim man and woman of science once took an active decision ‘to teach themselves about history and religions, about paintings and

⁶² The attraction of Sufi religious traditions such as saint-worship, dependent on a more visceral draw, features in *Vigil* and – as in *Maps* – is made specific to an Afghan Muslim female underclass. But its depiction is more cursory, and seems touched with a greater geopolitical sadness here. Aslam (2008: 173) reminds us, via the aid-working Zameen, that the long-buried Muslim saint to whose grave the women of refugee-flooded Peshawar travel to address their complaints is ‘often the only person in this life they could question without impunity and accuse of neglect’. Such comments reflect the unbelieving and socially conscious author’s personal disquiet when contemplating Muslims’ dependence for support on godly intercession and desire for reunion with divine, particularly if they are living in impoverished communities and war-torn lands open to exploitation. Aslam (2010b) has described himself as ‘deeply moved’ and ‘at times shaken to the last cell in [his] body’ by the sight of ‘the destitute and helpless’ flocking to kiss the ‘walls and floors’ of Pakistani mosques). But they also indicate his enduring consciousness that places like the saint’s mausoleum, seen by the Islamist Casa as ‘contrary to the pure form of Islam [which] had to be destroyed’, also function as present-day sanctuaries for an Islam that permits dissent and doubt (2008: 334). The cathartic effect of communing rituals remains in *Vigil*, but it is largely by means of aesthetic encounters that Sufism’s subversive spirit is kept alive in the novel.

music', aware that their medical training left them ill-equipped to understand the workings of the (imaginative) world in which they practiced (356). This fact is introduced late, as if to underscore its importance as Casa's crisis of Islamic identity intensifies. But the couple are established from *Vigil's* opening page as collectors and 'readers' of 'the best fiction and poetry' and caretakers of indigenous Afghan art (356). Significantly, the artefacts they treasure include, in the subterranean seclusion of the perfume factory and subsequent annexe of the Kabul Museum, the decapitated head of a Gandhara Buddha sculpture in smiling, meditative pose. This talismanic icon is said to have bled gold tears when the Taliban tried to destroy it, leaving them afraid and confused. Marcus and Qatrina's strategic, cultural affiliations predate the Taliban's idol-smashing and book-burning campaigns, and secretly endure in spite of such intimidation. Again, they point to a very real need – in censorious historical contexts – for space to be carved for a 'genuine' art which 'bring[s] human warmth and longing and complexity to what is two-dimensional in other, lesser hands' (Aslam 2010b).⁶³

Edward Said (1993: xiii) observes in *Culture and Imperialism* that for Matthew Arnold, the Victorian cultural critic and author of *Culture and Anarchy*, 'culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element', which 'palliates, if it does not altogether neutralise, the ravages of a ... brutalising ... existence'. "Culture" appears to be valued for similar reasons by Aslam's intellectuals in the very different context of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century

⁶³ This is in keeping with contemporary cultural discourses within Pakistan about the importance of reclaiming of an Indo-Persian Islamic culture underpinning Pakistan's South Asian Muslim identity as a counter to the Islam of the Taliban (e.g. Irfani 2010).

Afghanistan. Its palliative dimension is particularly visible in *Vigil* after the advent of the Taliban, who subject Marcus and Katrina to violent repression (separation, amputation, execution) because their commitment to curating, creating and disseminating Islamicate 'culture' which 'add[s] colour to Adam's story' threatens to undermine the monotone "Islam" on which the fundamentalists' regime depends (256).

Surveying Marcus' lakeside house in the first decade of the new millennium, when the Taliban's grip on Usha has weakened, the grieving art historian Lara is solaced by the 'kinship of wounds' she finds among the bullet-marked Persianate murals and works of world literature riven with nails, which continue to survive in its rooms (430). Lara notes the tender care Marcus has taken to collect and clean shards of plaster depicting lovers strafed by Talibani gunfire. She uses them therapeutically to construct a 'kind of afterlife ... for [the] obliterated'; to create 'a young man and woman made from the ruins of dozens in this interior' (30). Significantly, these artefacts' curator, Marcus, is transformed in Lara's mind's eye into 'the Sufi'; his treasure house a metonym for 'the ruin of golden Islam, a destroyed *markaz* perhaps and a Zone of Peace' (415-6, 430).⁶⁴ The Russian woman's orientalist perspectives of her Muslim convert host and his adoptive Afghan home are personal and subjective. Yet Aslam's narrative repeatedly encourages us to view Marcus in a not dissimilar light: as an Orientalised wise man and harbinger of a "cultured" domestic

⁶⁴ The paintings, intended, for courtship, celebrate the five senses in vibrant scenes of animate and inanimate life centred on Islamic customs such as the Ramadan fast. Drawing the guest to the topmost room dedicated to 'love, the ultimate human wonder', they may also inspire her to reach for divine love (Aslam 2008: 12-13).

domain, where fragile rapprochements may be forged between his war-damaged guests.

In fact Aslam's novel suggests that the outlawed culture which Marcus and Qatrina attempt tenderly to conserve may do more than mitigate suffering. It can perhaps stay the hand of those who would inflict it, challenge the grounds on which they do so, and provide individuals with a means not only of memorialising but of moving beyond it, using the best of what is salvageable from the past to establish new foundations for society. Marcus remains convinced, for example, that neither the Egyptian hijacker-pilot Muhammad Atta, nor his Al-Qaeda terrorist colleagues can have been 'educated men in the real sense' of being literate in the humanities and open to 'nuances' of belief (357). The implication is that if they were they could never have perpetrated such attacks. Qatrina's creative solution to the "problem" of their apparent antipathy to "culture" is to combine elements Islamic literalists outlaw as profane within sacred, scriptural frames. In doing so, she presents viewers with iconographic conundrums that challenge pitiless conceptions of Allah and celebrate in his name all living creatures on heaven and earth (as in the *ayat ul kursī*):

The Taliban did not know how to deal with the pictures – each bore one of Allah's names in Arabic calligraphy, the Compassionate One [etc.] – but the words were surrounded by ... animals, insects and humans. They wanted to tear out these details but couldn't because the ... curves of the name took up the entire rectangle (242).

Qatrina's more cautious convert husband, in his acquired Islamic wisdom, prefers to emulate the chivalrous Saladin, countering 'iron' beliefs with 'delicately sharp' scriptural "correctives" (231). When confronted, for example,

with Casa's antipathy to the Buddha head, Marcus attempts to "explain" that the Qur'an appears not to condemn all forms of sculpted image: 'the Koran itself says the race of djinns belonging to Solomon ... decorated his cave with statues' (229).

However, as Said (1993: xiii) warns, cultural attitudes can be divisive when they become 'a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that', and are used to 'differentiate ... "us" from "them"'. In Aslam's novel, the cultural views Qatrina and Marcus articulate by means of provocative artistic statements and slightly patronising literary-historical talk threaten to alienate and antagonise those whose imaginations, not tempers, they seek to reach. Qatrina is publicly stoned to death for insisting on an unorthodox wedding she hopes will change attitudes to women; Marcus' seeming exposure of Casa's ignorance about Islam in guided tours of the Gandhara Buddha "idol" and Sufistic wall-paintings, later induces in his pupil feelings of revulsion and thoughts of 'annihilation' (Aslam 2008: 255). Both husband and wife place their faith in a high Islamic culture which palliates the grief of already-sensitised European characters while dangerously unsettling their ignorant, volatile, Islamist Others. This seems ironic, given that Aslam appears to have written *The Wasted Vigil* with the notion of conversing with the Taliban in mind.

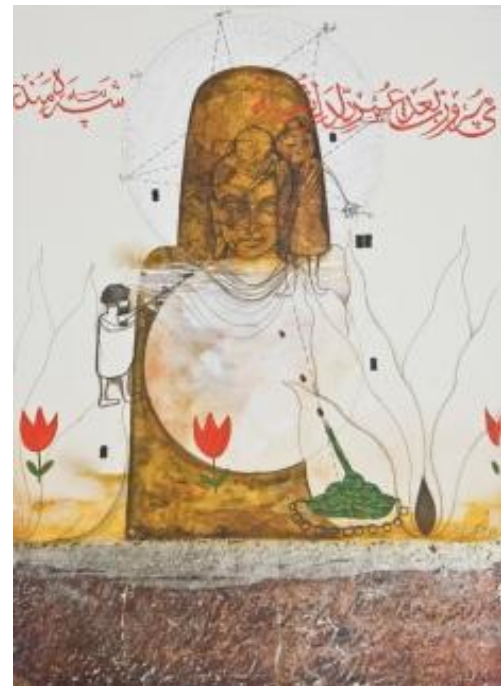
Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000) linked the symbolic reconstruction of a damaged Buddha statue to the rediscovering of humanity after genocide. Like that novel, *Vigil*, with its foregrounding of the fallen Bamiyan Buddhas, continues to point to Aslam's conviction in the resistant and potentially transformative capacity of art at a time when Islam is popularly seen as the enemy of all such recourse to the aesthetic. Yet in framing potent icons of intra- and interfaith tolerance and affinity in Afghan lands as always under threat, his

novel functions as a “mausoleum” for them vis-a-vis the onlooking West. It reconfirms depressing assertions about the present predominance of barbaric and iconoclastic ‘Islamic’ mindsets, even as it reveals the past and muted presence of thinkers and makers who might challenge them.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of contemporary Pakistani and Afghan art, but Haema Sivanesan’s ‘Bamiyan Notes’ (2011) also seems relevant to a discussion of how artists may intervene in the destruction of symbolic artefacts in order to produce artworks which retain traces of that violence, but integrate them into new, hopeful images with a healing effect. Sivanesan describes a joint project undertaken in 2008 by Canadian multimedia artist Jayce Salloum and Pakistani miniaturist Khadim Ali, to survey the central Afghan landscapes and its contexts. The resulting collaborative installation focussed on the case of the Bamiyan valley which housed the Taliban-detonated Buddhas and which is home to minority Shia Hazara: a place which seemed to ‘locate ... the fault-lines, ideological divides and inequalities, that underline the current conflict’ (54). Sivanesan emphasises that the valley’s ruined Buddhas simultaneously ‘conserve a violent and traumatic history’ of the Taliban’s attempted erasure of the syncretic identity of the Hazara who claim kinship with their Gandhara creators; signify ‘an originary sense of connection to a place’; and bear witness to ‘Hazara people’s role in Afghanistan’s history’ (55). She observes that ‘the [Hazara] ambition to reconstruct the Buddhas from their ruins suggests a process of recuperation – ... of remaking or rehabilitating history and identity – to restore a symbolic order, ... dignity and a sense of belonging’ (55).

Full reconstruction may be impossible, even undesirable, however (see, for example, Clark 2011: n. p.). Ali’s paintings, like Aslam’s novel, attempt it in partial and miniature form, and give a similar sense of the Persianate paintings and decapitated Buddha’s enduring vulnerability. In *Untitled 2007* [Figure 5], Ali replenishes an emptied niche, depicted in warm, golden-brown tones, with a meditating Buddha spirit. Serene of face, spherical in body, the Buddha seems at once indestructible and dangerously oblivious to the tiny, colourless Taliban

What makes the picture Aslam paints of *Vigil*'s Talibani Muslim characters more complex is the fact that impulses of affinity inspired by the natural world and an apparently "un-Islamic" cultural aesthetic continually threaten to override the most absolute of Islamist affiliations. They not only throw the minds of resolute recruits into confusion, but – temporarily, at least – bring about minor shifts in perspective,



Untitled
Khadim Ali (2007)
[Figure 5]

particularly when they arise organically, in contexts free from Western intervention. (Interestingly Casa assumes all foreigners are aid or charity workers, 'cogs in a machinery of kindness' and 'non-believers'; he would exploit their 'compassionate impulses', but hold their ideas in contempt (Aslam 2008: 213)). Despite Casa's hardened state, for example, he is not immune to nature

fighter who, having penetrated its sandstone shell is poised to blow its brains out. Images of resilience are juxtaposed with those of continuing threat, resulting – as in *Vigil* – in ambiguous scenes in which (pre-) Islamic cultural connections are preserved but this heritage's future is painted as uncertain and the hope of its unprotected survival could appear naive. Yet where Ali's painting appears primarily to restate a cultural problem and – in shrinking the Talibani soldier and making the meditating Buddha loom large – invests a quiet faith in the prevalence of his peaceful mentality, Aslam's English-language fiction places the emphasis on the importance of outside bodies' physical salvaging of the artefacts that, almost talismanically, seem to encapsulate such powers.

or to culture's charms. Aslam allows us to glimpse the possibility of him being swayed to 'tentativeness', even tenderness and 'trying not to smile' as a result of finding a bird's nest nestled in a stone sculpture's ear (195). This, we are informed, is 'a discovery so enthralling that [Casa] had wished to share it with another human, the momentary fascination of it making him act out of [what he subsequently convinces himself is] his true [puritanical] character' (213-4).⁶⁶ He is similarly affected by the experience of unmediated contact with the "magic" Buddha head by which Lara finds him sleeping in the perfume factory (164). The initial thought of proximity to this 'idol' – like the thought of proximity to the Russian woman, a potential temptress to his Taliban-trained eyes – is a cause of 'distress' (218). But the smiling Buddha becomes in the course of the narrative a listener to whom Casa tries to confide the written 'truth' of his stirring humanity – until, that is, his pen's failure to write persuades the petulant and superstitious youth that 'Allah doesn't want him to' (377-8).

Shamsie (2009e: 76) recently lamented the fact that 'there is too small a space for those-who-oppose-attacks-on-Islam and also oppose-violence-in-the-name-of-Islam' to be heard, both in Pakistan and the West. It is interesting therefore that in Aslam's novel it is Casa's encounter with his contemporary

⁶⁶For this incident, Aslam (2006: 68) surely takes inspiration from the childhood memory of his ultra-orthodox uncle's encounter with a toy bird in which the man momentarily seemed to recognise 'the possibility of beauty within something he loathed'. The fictional resurfacing of this again emphasises the mature author's need conscientiously to bear witness to the spark of humanity he believes must exist in the mind of the most entrenched Islamist, to remind readers – as the well-meaning disaffiliate David reminds the Islamophobic James – that even the most apparently diabolic is 'the child of a human, which means he has a choice and he can change' (Aslam 2008: 413).

Dunia over a shared prayer-mat at Marcus' house that perhaps has the most profound impact on his psyche. For, she seems to fit Shamsie's description of the kind of practicing Muslim to whom both "the West" and its Islamist "other" should give ground. Casa and Dunia's five daily 'trysts' over the *janamaz*, offer a potential opportunity for the two differently devout Afghans to assert and counter radically opposed Islamic views, for example, about whether 'the source of prayer [should be] delight', as it is for the gentle, Sufistic Dunia, or 'fear of Allah's retribution', as it is for her Wahabi opposite (Aslam 2008: 319, 321). But they also provide a window of time in which two isolated souls can explore the humanity that may connect them, as Dunia attempts to do when she rubs kohl into Casa's cheek after seeing his praying body in danger of being engulfed by flame, leaving the boy confused (316, 318).

Although he ultimately and aggressively rejects her offering of a smudge of imperfection 'to keep off the bad eye' as the 'practice ... of infidels and star-worshippers', Casa is touched momentarily by the girl he must periodically meet because 'they bow towards the same God' (319, 321). Meanwhile her own connection to Allah is strengthened in the struggle to field his 'thorn-like' comments, 'hold his eye', and maintain her firmly humane and life-affirming point of view (319, 321).⁶⁷ In Aslam's introspective novel, then, the shared site of prayer provides a rare metaphysical space. Here, hostilities suspended, Afghan Muslims, male and female, with radically different understandings of their faith, may – seeing in one another's prostrations a mirror-image of

⁶⁷ In this Dunia resembles the 'pure-hearted Sūfis' Iqbal describes as 'seekers after God and possessors of the truth', 'who see ... God in the light of [their] own *khudī*' (Mir 2007: 168).

themselves – pause to consider what connects them, rather than what divides, and how they may unite to forge for the future ‘a more wholesome and humane representation of [them]selves’ (Zahid in Irfani 2008: 18).

However, despite Aslam’s “democratic” intentions, his fiction proposes a contemporary cultural hierarchy, placing the enlightened European characters with their compassionate minds and ‘rights-bearing bodies’ (Gilroy 2004: 89) at the top as the custodians of the apparent best remnants of Afghan and Pakistani heritage.⁶⁸ In the end in *The Wasted Vigil*, he invites our gaze to linger not on the subtleties of faith that divide and could unite the would-be Afghan lovers, but ‘The heroes of East and West slaughtering each other in the dust of Afghanistan’ like ‘sides in Homer’s war’, while the Buddha’s chained visage is airlifted to a museum space secured by the British Army (Aslam 2008: 426, 429-33). The channels Aslam opens up for communication between two different types of people, those sympathetic to a heterodox personal, spiritual and aesthetic Islam, and those who cling unquestioningly and superstitiously to a brutal and absolute ideology or faith, eventually collapse when they become too close, or explode in a shared embrace. As in *Maps*, the more open, humane

⁶⁸ Paul Gilroy (2004: 89) states that ‘where the lives of natives, prisoners and enemies are abject and vulnerable, they must be shielded by others, endowed with those more prestigious, rights-bearing bodies that can inhibit the brutal exercise of colonial governance’. I borrow from him when I describe characters like Qatrina, Marcus and David because they seem to resemble those cosmopolitan ‘others’ Gilroy identifies as empowered to extend ‘translocal solidarity’ – in this case – as a counter to the Taliban’s brand of Islamist imperialism; they place themselves in the line of fire, literally and metaphorically, when they try to shelter and save ordinary Afghans like Dunia and Casa from rape, murder and jihadi suicide.

and flexibly affiliative characters who survive are left lingering on the periphery. From this vantage point they bear agonised witness for readers to the mutual pains suffered and inflicted by warring factions irrespective of faith or ideology, as Aslam (2010b) believes they should.⁶⁹ But they also intervene to bury the symbolic remains of a time of greater religious tolerance deep in the Afghan sands or the dusty corner of a foreign archive: fragments shored against a culture's ruin which they are too terrified to risk restoring to its indigenous inheritors. In Aslam's "mausoleum" fiction we return, ironically, to a state of cultural impasse.

To adopt the terms of Agha Shahid Ali (1997: 21), quoted at the start of this chapter, affective 'idols' and articulate, empathetic Muslim girls, conveniently vanished and hidden from view, will never 'convert' the alienated and demonised Talibani 'infidel' to a more humane Islamic vision of the world, whatever his affinitive impulses. It is not the novelist's job to attempt this. Indeed, for Aslam or any other writer to do so could be to risk reducing a nuanced intervention to a highly dubious fictional re-run of the civilizing mission, with "good" cultured and "bad" barbarous Muslim stereotypes cast in the major roles (see Salaita 2008: 137-9). But Aslam (2010b; 2011a: 140-1) places stress in his framing interviews and epigraphs on the importance of turning imaginatively and discursively toward Taliban and warlord, making all characters 'human', and using art as an 'instrument against injustice' or a

⁶⁹ Aslam (2010b) wrote in 'Where to Begin':

I ask myself if this is what a novel or a story can be – that the reader is locked in a space with the victim and the perpetrator and those who love the victim. Imagine if we were there at Abu Ghraib, in those terrible rooms and hallways, and imagine if the parents of the men being abused were there too, watching. But then it's not 'watching'. It's 'witnessing'.

means to 'prevent ... radicalization'. Given this emphasis, one might have expected Aslam to have afforded militant Islamists greater scope for development as *humans* in the sensitive and perceptive *Vigil*.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Aslam perhaps attempts this in the alienated and apocalyptic 'Punnu's Jihad', published *Granta* in on the anniversary of 9/11 (2011b). Aslam exposes in this poetic, realist, but less polyphonic short fiction the workings of a sensitive, compassionate Pakistani orphan's consciousness as he undergoes a process of re-categorisation (but not religious radicalisation) in Afghanistan in October 2001. Joining the Afghan fight against a punitive West as an aspirant medical auxiliary, Punnu is forced into soldiery by a Talibani mullah, sold to the Americans as an Islamist terror suspect by a collaborating warlord, and recast as a candidate for extraordinary rendition. Aslam sketches Punnu's experiences almost exclusively from inside out. He creates an internal, Islam-inflected dialogue which demonstrates Punnu's political perspicuity, spiritual and philosophical depth of thought, delight and wonder at nature and culture, righteous anger at global inequalities, and enduring Sufistic desire to persevere in a greater jihad, wrestling with darkness toward perfection in Allah's 'imperfect world' (77). We witness his vivid dream of the battlefield, for example:

They lay all around ... slain, slaughtered, stinking, cleansed at last of the burden of being ... and he stood above their corpses, puffing out wide flowers of breath into the Afghanistani air, a dawn light so pure ... For an instant he wanted Allah to appear and explain it all to him, not just watch from His high distance through unappalled eyes. Punnu hadn't known he could summon such deep feelings ... he was enraged at the peace that reigned at that very moment on other parts of the planet, and in grief he cursed the lives that were continuing uninterrupted elsewhere (67).

But unlike Casa and Bihzad, his militant jihadi antecedents, the self-possessed Punnu goes on to harm no-one or thing in the name of any cause. He causes injury to a warlord's lackey and dreams of denuding a prayer book of leaves for self-protection only. He feels guilt even for imagining ill-doing and offers aid to those who will betray him, incapable of deserting fellow Muslims or negating their 'dreams of justice on earth', until his 'hands and feet are fastened with zip-locks and he is carried outside' to the US helicopter, his capacity for planetary

Conclusions: Archived Hopes

Discussing postcolonial writers after September 11 in her essay, 'Migrating from Terror', Margaret Scanlan (2010: 267) suggests that:

While they are much too subtle and ironic to assume the mantle of our unacknowledged legislators, they transform that fault-line [between the binaries of – for example – Islam and the secular West] into a living, breathing space in which the human consequences of rigid and lethal polarities become visible.

Her essay takes a broader sweep than this thesis – Scanlan discusses the work of Libyan exile Hisham Matar and Indian writer Kiran Desai in addition to Mohsin Hamid. Yet I would argue that her statement, particularly the second part (about transforming the fault-lines into a 'living breathing space') more fittingly applies to the intricate landscapes and interiors painted by Aslam than the rather stifled theatres of confrontation constructed by Hamid.

In Aslam's fiction we, the "world" reader, are invited to kneel at the 'bottom of the cross', to use an image from 'Where to Begin': to bear terrible, tragic, global witness to the human toll taken as a result of a seemingly eternal clash, if not of warring faiths then of Western and Eastern imperialist regimes, in which each side is significantly wounded, each significantly to blame (Aslam 2010b).

interaction crudely suspended (78-79). Before Punnu closes his eyes at the story's end in a martyrish gesture of surrender to geopolitical forces beyond his control, the mis-taken, disempowered Muslim suspect 'casts a spell on the world, telling it to last until he awakens' (79). Ten years after 9/11, Aslam invites the reader to imagine what story Punnu would tell if he were released from imposed bonds and assumed affiliations and free to pursue a humane, affinitive *jihad-al-akbar* of his own.

Yet, while he encourages a recognition of the mutuality of “global” wounds, Aslam re-replaces the emphasis on the need for ultra-orthodox Muslims to change. He depicts the perception of violent ‘offence’ to Islam and attacks against ‘anti-hardliners’ as ‘primarily an intra-Muslim affair and only secondarily concerned with the non-Muslim world’ (Shamsie 2009e: 3-4, 6).⁷¹

From our safe and privileged “global” distance, then, we are invited to extend imaginary compassion – albeit to discrepant degrees – to Pakistani and Afghan perpetrators of Islam-inspired violence, and to their victims and families. We are asked to consider how greater access to the secular, expressive, and faith-inflected arts – particularly indigenous (South and Central Asian) ones – can put beleaguered Muslims back in touch with diverse images of humanity, thus providing solace, extending awareness of heterodox inheritances, and expanding understandings of ‘kin’ and ‘fellowship’ (Aslam 2008: 10). And we are encouraged to imagine that, by remaining open to the possibility that connections can be forged through an affinitive recognition of a mirror-like oneness, the most “enlightened” and self-sacrificing of Aslam’s characters may lay the foundations for an “moderate”, ethical *modus vivendi*: for a means of “holding converse” with and countering the radically opposing worldviews of warlords and Islamists (Aslam 2010b, 2008: epigraph).

As I have argued, however, this ‘converse’ is in fact constantly frustrated in Aslam’s mausoleum fiction: Marcus and Dunia’s attempts to refine or “re-culture” Casa using Sufi practices and Buddhist artefacts are wasted on the

⁷¹ Shamsie defines ‘anti-hardliners’ as: ‘a varied group that includes moderate Muslims, secularist Muslims, non-Muslims etc.: in short, those who, for varying reasons, oppose the ascendancy of the hardliners ... who call for [punitive] violence in the name of religion’ (2009: 6).

ultimately unmovable Islamist subject; the heterodox traditions they treasure are subsequently erased or withdrawn. In the novels of Kamila Shamsie, to which I now turn, it is the conduct of the “cultured” western and western-educated characters – by contrast – which comes under greatest scrutiny. In the next chapter this thesis proceeds to consider how her fictions challenge the very basis on which corrective or combative conversations with Islamic “others” are sustained, and question the ethics of judging ordinary Muslim “strangers” based on assumptions about their religious affiliations and attitudes.

Chapter 5. Stranger Intimacies: Global Un-knowing and the Suspension of Judgement in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography, Broken Verses* and *Burnt Shadows*

Prologue: 'Do Not Feel Safe. The Poet Remembers'

If something terrible is happening in the world, I want to know about it ... I will see what the problem is. I will see who the villain is. And I will bring him to trial by writing the book ...: 'Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.'⁷² (Aslam 2012)

What is one Afghan? ... Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? (Shamsie 2009c: 362)

Nadeem Aslam's striking comments, made on the publication of his third novel, in January 2012, underscore the author's belief that, acting on the



No Fear
Saud Baloch (2011)
[Figure 6]

⁷² Aslam made this statement in a public discussion of his then forthcoming novel *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). The story returns to Afghanistan and to Pakistan at the time of 9/11 to consider how that geopolitical 'hinge moment' (Aslam 2012) exacerbated pre-existing tensions. The quotation is from 'You Who Wronged', Czesław Miłosz's poem on the death of the dissident poet Osip Mandelstam, written in 1950. It concludes:

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.
You can kill one, but another is born.
The words are written down, the deed, the date.
And you'd have done better with a winter dawn,
A rope and a branch bowed beneath your weight. (Miłosz 2001: 103)

courage of his moral convictions and clarity of insight, he must use his fiction to unmask the “warlord” or terrorist and cast him cowering into his cell. This antagonist is envisaged not as a potential partner who may be held in ‘converse’ – as the epigraph to *The Wasted Vigil* (2008: n. p.) may imply – but as a subject fit for global interrogation, exposure and, finally, “poetic” indictment at the novel’s triumphal close.

If Aslam sets out to show his readers what he knows of the world, why it is as it is and who is to blame, his female contemporary Kamila Shamsie repeatedly questions how we know what we see when we look at it, and whether it is morally defensible to bring our circumscribed comprehension and values to bear to condemn those others with whom we share the planet. Her 2009 novel, *Burnt Shadows*, opens with a man shackled, interned, and anticipating receipt of ‘an orange jumpsuit’ (Shamsie 2009c: 1). But there is no sense of vindication here, nor is the reader given any means by which to “know” how to interpret the scene that Shamsie’s ‘Prologue’ frames. We are confronted only with the consequences of condemnation: subjugation, confusion, and dehumanisation; and with the answerless question: ‘*How did it come to this?*’ (1, author’s italics).

It is my contention that Shamsie crafts in her (geo)political novels, from *Kartography* (2002) to *Burnt Shadows* (2009), a decentred, Muslim, female fiction of global un-knowing, suspended judgements and intimacy with strangers. She attempts – in a phrase borrowed from *Broken Verses*’ uncertain heroine Aasmaani – to use it to ‘move ... the debate’ around the performance and policing of global, Islamic identities at a time of “war on terror” ‘to ... that accountable space’ of open, uncensored, public discussion (Shamsie 2005a: 288). And in doing so she creates contemporary global narratives which refuse to resolve into any simple, mobilizable epistemology of the world.

Introduction

This chapter proceeds to argue that Shamsie's novels make readers party to intense experiences of intra- and inter-cultural alienation and connection, seen through analytical and self-critical elite transnational Pakistani and, later, Asian and American eyes. Her narrative outcomes are increasingly contingent on her female protagonists' realisation that positions of isolation and introspection are both unsustainable and unethical in an interconnected globe: they must interest themselves as a matter of urgency in the worlds that exist beyond their windows.

The Author, Kamila Shamsie

Raised in Karachi, educated in America, and now resident in London, Kamila Shamsie is a transnational and increasingly activist Pakistani writer and commentator who for many years has lived between these radically different cosmopolitan spheres. She comes from an affluent Muslim emigrant family with a strong commitment to literature and a tradition of producing articulate – and resistant – women writers, whose biographies stretch back over several generations to pre-Partition Lucknow.⁷³

The acceptance of Shamsie's novels by Bloomsbury marks the realisation of a childhood 'great dream – publication by a house at the centre of English literature' (Shamsie 2009b: n. p.). Her literary fictions are increasingly ambitious. But they remain grounded – as her mother has been at pains to point out – by an inherited, predominantly matrilineal appreciation of how “the written

⁷³ For a full discussion of these relatives' movements and legacies, see M. Shamsie (2009 and 2012).

word mattered so deeply” in Subcontinental colonial contexts, and continues to matter in post-colonial Pakistan’s uneasy, gendered, national and neo-colonial environments (K. Shamsie in M. Shamsie 2012: 176). Shamsie has undeniably been impressed by the ability of the post-Independence ‘Indo-Anglian’ fiction championed by Salman Rushdie (1997: x) to ‘bedazzle ... the literary world’ with its ‘uniquely ... hybrid South Asian sound’ (M. Shamsie 2009: 141). Yet her writing is shaped by a desire to better its depictions of Pakistan (K. Shamsie 2010: n. p.), and to augment her colonial and postcolonial antecedents’ attempts to ‘capture the essence of Urdu literature and its culture’ in English-language novels (M. Shamsie 2009: 141). Shamsie studied creative writing with the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali in Clifton, New York, and in Massachusetts. Her awareness both of the potency of ‘words’ and of how ‘silence’ may provide room for ‘pause’ and reason to ‘search between’ them for alternatives, was sharpened under his tutelage (2002a: 23, 25-6).⁷⁴ Her novels indicate a similar commitment to cultivating a political aesthetic.

Shamsie’s fiction establishes, without what Brennan (1997: 39) terms ‘a flattening out of influences’, affinitive connections with European, North American, South Asian and other “world” writers and artists. These include

⁷⁴ Shamsie (2002: 26) vividly recalls in ‘Agha Shahid Ali, Teacher’ being set the task of creating a poem using only the words which were contained in an Amnesty International article. She describes it as ‘a lesson in working with the language of journalism to create moments of lyricism’, and ‘a demand that we search between words like “torture” and “deprived” to find “touch” and “skin”’, which ‘had the effect of making every word we used seem like a sought after thing’ (26). This questioning sensibility seems fundamental to her novelistic reworking of often over-determined and dehumanised or desensitised images, particularly in *Burnt Shadows*, with an illustration from which this chapter began.

Joseph Conrad, Italo Calvino, Rainer Maria Rilke, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sadequain and Michael Ondaatje, in addition to Agha Shahid Ali.⁷⁵ Their works, which Shamsie more often critically interweaves as intertexts than reverentially invokes as paratexts, represent alternative philosophical and aesthetic approaches which have expanded the author's conception of the world and of how it may be perceived and represented in literature.

Shamsie's biography has followed a similar tripodal trajectory to that of her compatriot Mohsin Hamid. She came of age in a period of Pakistani history overshadowed first by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nuclear programme and, subsequently, by General Zia's Islamization scheme and his regime's complicity in the arming of Afghan mujahideen in the war against the Soviets. Her decentered perspective on Pakistani and world politics has perhaps most profoundly shaped by this experience, after which, she states, it seems

⁷⁵ Brennan (1997: 39) criticises "Third World" cosmopolitan writers who have 'found recognition first in English' on account of their juxtaposition of 'alien cultural elements' because he assumes their intention is 'not to show (like E. M. Foster in *A Passage to India*) a cultural dissonance, mutual incomprehensibility, but rather unity and complementarity' which, for Brennan, is too simplistic. This, he argues is 'not a matter of individual style' but 'borrowed from the meetings and mixings of distinct national and ethnic styles on American streets' (39). However, Brennan identifies as different literature such as that written first in Arabic and Urdu which he suggests draws on a culture whose 'sense of history, ... source materials, ... literary allusions, and assumptions' are 'not a part of the common knowledge of Western readers', and whose 'aesthetic strategies are therefore too independent to be pedagogical' (43). Shamsie's Islam- and Urdu-inflected English-language fiction would seem both to fall into the latter category, and to demonstrate the complementarity and disparity of other world literature.

impossible to see 9/11 as an event which occurred in a vacuum, ‘the Ground Zero of history’ (Shamsie, 2011a: 158). Instead, as her commentary and fiction show, Shamsie views this and other geopolitical phenomena – which may be attributed to a “clash of civilizations” or used to justify “terror wars” – through the prisms of different national, regional, individual and group histories (K. Shamsie 2012: n. p.). She seeks to draw attention not only to longstanding abuses on several sides, but to insidious inequalities in ‘cultural power’ that persist between countries like Pakistan and America when it comes to their global communication (2011b: 218).

When questioned about her political and religious perspectives, the author has described herself as a ‘secular feminist’, with the caveat that ‘the Islam [she] grew up among didn’t make distinctions between the sacred and the secular’ and that the ‘intermingling of traditions makes it hard to separate religion and culture’ (2011b: 219, 223). Shamsie has also stressed that she ‘dislike[s] people making generalisations about the “Islamic world”’, and that attitudes to feminism and its contemporary manifestations in twenty-first century Pakistan are anything but homogenous (214, 219).⁷⁶ Her relationship to national and international writing and realpolitik, as to Islam and to feminism – whether

⁷⁶ Ruvani Ranasinha (2012: 209-10) has argued persuasively that Shamsie’s fiction ‘enacts the fault-lines within contemporary discourses of feminism and the need for an alternative framework to conceive Pakistani women beyond the totalising conceptual categories of both “Islam” and “feminism”’. She describes it as being ‘animated by the theoretical insights of “Third World” feminist and postcolonial feminist scholarship’; and she observes that it ‘attempts to gesture towards a range of progressive gender possibilities framed within a discourse of human rights that transcends discourses of cultural imperialism’ (211-12).

western or “Third World” – should therefore be understood as refractory and reflexive.

Knowing: Shamsie’s Take on the Exotic and its Expectations

The “world” literature Shamsie is committed to creating in *Kartography* (2002), *Broken Verses* (2005) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009), the three novels she has produced in the aftermath of the “war on terror”, might better be termed “global”.⁷⁷ It is written with a highly contemporary consciousness of its potential for misinterpretation, excerpption and fetishization in a material world where supposedly authentic, informative, and indigenously-produced (Islamic) culture has become a powerful commodity, whether for those who would champion or those who would vilify it and the epistemologies it may be claimed to reproduce. And it is shaped by a concomitant awareness of its capacity to engage a “world” of readers with alternative, transnationally-informed and locally-inflected perspectives of “subaltern” Muslim affiliations and affinities that can engender ordinary cosmopolitan re-cognition, compassion and respect, as well as often-problematic geopolitical anxiety.

Shamsie’s pre-2001 novels, *In the City by the Sea* (1998), a magical fable of political oppression, and *Salt and Saffron* (2000), a post-Partition tale of interclass romance, earned their author the ambiguous accolade of ‘our new

⁷⁷ I avoid describing this as “post-9/11” fiction. Shamsie (2011b: 222) has firmly stated that ‘9/11 wasn’t the turning point’ for a shift in the way she views the world. Rather:

It was the war on terror ... America’s invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. That’s when the war on terror came to Pakistan. In 2002, Pakistan’s religious parties became serious players in the government for the first time, and at that moment I thought the world had changed.

multi-culti Nancy Mitford; a global girl who does love in both hot and cold climates' (Trapido, in Shamsie 2000: back cover). The entertainment value of a tongue-in-cheek 'multi-culti' exotica and erotica (that is, of affairs of the heart either thwarted by, or permitted to pass beyond, internal and international borders, often explicitly referenced) was an important theme in these early fictions (Shamsie 2000: 1-2). Thick descriptions of mouth-watering South Asian cuisine, a source of comfort and cause of desire for its consumers, rounded off with comical hybridisations of canonical English literary texts ('such stuffed chillies as dreams are made on'), were also staple fare (Shamsie 1998: 62). In these sharp-witted stories of upper-class cosmopolitan Pakistani life, Shamsie has presented attitudes to everything, from the desirability of 'racy *desi*' men who come from 'the not-us' part of town, to the ethics of indulging in the pursuit of 'élitist Third Worlder' narratives, and the creation of saleable 'political art' (2000: 28, 31, 182; 1998: 18). But the intimate, "insider" perspectives she has offered have been nothing if not acute, critical and ironising.

Like other Anglophone writers who appear to have risen with the current wave of interest in Pakistani writing, Shamsie has been and remains quite alert to the potential commerciality of her work. She is also aware that – by dint of her Subcontinental Muslim genealogy and transnational biography – she may be expected to deliver variations on a theme of Huggan's (2001) 'postcolonial exotic', enhanced in 'Af-Pak' settings – as Hamid et al (2010: n. p.) wryly surmise – not by 'paisley designs' but 'bombs/minarets/menacing men in shalwar kameezes' and 'burkhas'. Post-2001, Shamsie continues to blend anticipated cosmopolitan "Pakistani" and newly interesting "Islamic" tropes and themes into romantic and Asia-centring historical English language fictions.

These offer complex, local, cosmopolitical responses to questions of “global” concern.

The two novels Shamsie produced in the early years of the third millennium, *Kartography* (2002) and *Broken Verses* (2005), are both largely Karachi-based and narrated from the first-person perspectives of two upper-class, educated and urbane, but also peculiarly insular, young Pakistani women. *Kartography* follows the struggles of the schoolgirl and (later) college student Raheen in a contemporary Karachi rent by “communitarian” violence. We watch as Raheen begins reluctantly to trace the features of a pre-1971 map of ‘Pakistan split ..., but undivided’, seen on a spinning, ‘out of date’ globe, in the faces of her closet friends and family, with anguishing results (Shamsie 2002b: 1). *Broken Verses* (2005a) is narrated by the brittle, bereaved Aasmaani. It describes a grown-up daughter’s desperate attempts to “investigate” the known circumstances of her feminist mother’s disappearance and the death of her dissident step-father ‘The Poet’ in the late-1980s, about which she would remain in elaborate denial. Both novels unfold through romantic plot-lines: the pursuit of Aasmaani’s quest rides on her relationship with her questionably-motivated new boyfriend Ed; Raheen’s intimacy with her childhood soul-mate and would-be lover, Karim, relies on her recognition of his otherness and the limits of what he perceives as her elite cartographies.

Although ponderous in theme, these novels appear more overtly “multi-culti” in content, lighter and cruder in their characters’ flippant-seeming exhibition and integration of South Asian ‘exotica or erotica’ (Yadav in Reddy 2002: n. p.), than the Ondaatje-esque *Burnt Shadows* (2009). The latter continent-crossing saga of a middle-class, mixed race Asian family’s enforced peregrinations is overshadowed by the images of a Japanese woman charred by American

atomic bombs and a Pakistani man shackled as a suspect in the on-going “war on terror”. It may be considered to offer more geopolitically “exotic” perspectives than its youthful antecedents.

Graham Huggan’s (2001: vii, xi) *The Postcolonial Exotic* sets out to examine ‘the varying degrees of complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which [they] circulate and are contained’, drawing attention to the commodification of postcolonial texts and the exploitation of a lucrative trade in ‘Oriental(ist)’ exotica by multicultural or “Third World” authors like Rushdie. In Huggan’s reading of postcolonial literary production, and Indian-English literature in particular, its privileged cosmopolitan writers spectacularise the local for the enrichment of the consuming global; they ironise the exoticising imperial and post-imperial gaze, but risk sacrificing cultural specificity and political force along the way (80-81).

Importantly, Huggan’s work highlights the ‘dilemma’ faced by those who attempt to ‘account for cultural difference without at the same time mystifying it’ or ‘promote the cultural margins without ministering to the needs of the mainstream’ (31). And it identifies the ways in which writers operating within a discourse of the exotic may manipulate its tropes in order to some extent to critique them. He demonstrates how they use ‘unsettling techniques’ – the ‘counter-ethnographic’ depiction of metropolitan South Asia; the foregrounding of sanitising, romanticising, de-politicising and ‘spectacularising’ processes by which these are reified into aesthetic objects; the transformation or negation of the tourist’s gaze; and the interrogation of ‘celebrity glamour’ and national representativeness – to ‘resist’ and ‘rewrite ... social text[s] of continuing imperial dominance’ (x, ix, xi, xv). Huggan describes ‘Indo-Anglian’ novels thus ‘designed as much to challenge as to profit from consumer needs’, as

‘strategically exotic’, yet not unproblematically so (x-xi). As he cautions, the ‘ironic self-consciousness’ their authors deploy in dealing with “exotic” materials ‘might also be seen as precisely the commodity form – the symbolic capital – on which the[y] have made their reputations as reader-friendly, and also wryly sophisticated ... novelists’ (xi).

All Shamsie’s post-2001 novels feature content which seems deliberately designed to pique and problematise the shifting interests of the international ‘alterity industry’ Huggan (vii) identifies, which thrives – in the words of one of her archest characters – on ‘Exporting Exotica to the West’ (Shamsie, 2002b: 240). All bear analysis as “strategically exotic” texts in his sense. In *Kartography* secular western feminist myths about veiled women’s lack of agency turn back most obviously on the East Coast educated Raheen, who balks as she watches her beautiful, womanly best friend Sonia cover her hair and tug at her sleeves prior to meeting Zia, their childhood companion, at Sonia’s family home. Raheen attempts to intervene in what she presumes is Sonia’s submission to conservative male oppression:

‘Is it your father?’ I asked. ‘Is he making you do the hijab bit?’

‘Raheen!’ Zia’s voice quavered. ‘She does have a mind of her own.’

‘Thanks, Zia. Raheen, stop asking bakwaasi questions. We have a lot to talk about that’s more interesting than my wardrobe.’ (Shamsie 2002b: 151-2).

Sonia dismisses Raheen’s concerns, taking command of the conversation and making plain that such narrow thinking interrupts the more complacent course of their deep-running friendship. She also scoffs at the ‘foreign-returned’ Zia’s attempt politely to “respect” her seeming “difference” and articulate the social and moral values that may underpin her choice of modest dress, despite his lack of personal affinity with them: “customs of proper behaviour” ... which

rubbish-wallah sold you that line, Zia? I know you don't see the point in any of it' (153, 155). Both the transnational characters' attempts to interpret Sonia's sartorial shift as the result of patriarchal pressures or cultural conformity rebound on them; Sonia's negations make them seem less mature and more ignorant of the realities of what matters to Muslim women who remain in their home country (148). In Shamsie's countering fiction, the potentially repressive causes of South Asian "Muslim" female behaviours which trouble a "liberal" West are enquired into but left hanging. Meanwhile the object of western-influenced "concern" gains subjectivity as she refuses to acknowledge a problem – Sonia meets Raheen's initial 'What's going on?' with the answer 'We are Muslim women', and no further elaboration. She retains the right to 'disagree about religion' (148) and, in her frank refusal either to concede or argue – and thereby participate in a "politico-exotic" 'conversion of politics ... into a source of aesthetic play' (Huggan 2001: 12, 81) – Sonia wins a degree of bland and un-exotic, if apparently apolitical, autonomy.⁷⁸

Elsewhere in the novel, Shamsie uses the same privileged metropolitan characters' ironic splicing of western pop culture with the late-1980s Karachi

⁷⁸ Brennan's criticisms of the formulaic "Third World" cosmopolitan fiction he later termed 'politico-exotic' (in Huggan 2001: 11-12) include the view that 'to be political has become a selling point' for its authors, who 'join an impassioned political sarcasm ... with ironic detachment, employing humor with a cosmic, celebratory pessimism' (Brennan 1997: 41). It may be possible to lodge this claim against writers like Mohammad Hanif in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) but not Shamsie: she may deploy irony, irreverence, and sarcasm, but her fiction is anything but morbidly "celebratory" in its portrayal of concerns about contemporary local and global political trends and formations, from which her characters can never remain "detached".

setting to highlight how the city's elite, bilingual residents may "spectacularise" or repackage it as alluring and enticing for a curious, foreign market. On a night-time cruise in a borrowed Mercedes, with Status Quo's 'In the Army Now' blaring loud, Zia and Raheen sing at the top of their voices, drowning out the pop stars and rendering inaudible any residential street sounds with the darkly comic hybrid lyrics: 'Bijli [electricity] fails in the dead of night / Won't help to call "I need a light" / You're in Karachi now' (85). This scene and music are cut abruptly when a gunman attempts to apprehend the couple by embedding a volley of bullets deep into the body of the car, nearly penetrating Raheen's skin. When the shooting ceases, the words '*They cannot protect you from this... And what else?*' surface and repeat in her ineptly processing mind (87, 89).

The teenagers' frivolous transformation of their native city into a depoliticised adventure playground for the thrill-seeking rich is portrayed less as an act of naivety than one of wilful blindness. Shamsie marks it as implausible, unsustainable and irresponsible in a metropolis where 'affluence and lack [sit] cheek by jowl', and residents regularly confront 'factional', 'ethnic', 'sectarian', and seemingly 'random violence', which may in fact be orchestrated 'by someone who want[s] Karachi terrorised' (2000: 196, 2002b: 259). *Kartography's* youthful protagonists' search for entertainment and sensation in their 'always dual' (331) metropolis is undermined and replaced in Shamsie's fiction, but not with the kind of knowing, sardonic, 'politico-exotic' initiation into postcolonial Pakistan's failings which Brennan (in Huggan 2001: 12) might expect. Instead, it instates a considered and contextualised critique of its cosmopolitan elite. In particular, it targets their conscious negation of the complex affiliations and affinities of those less privileged "strangers" who populate the city in which they would feel at home, and suggests they must

deepen their understanding of these, and acknowledge how their lives interconnect.

The touristic gaze, much problematised from internal and expatriate perspectives in *Kartography*, is engaged and first comically, then chillingly inverted in *Burnt Shadows*' post- and neo-imperial contexts. This is the case, for example, when the Delhi-departed Muhajir Sajjad takes Harry, his American (and unbeknownst to him, CIA-operative) friend, on a tour of Karachi's opulent 'bazaar of seafood' (Shamsie 2009c: 159). More than the diversity of its fish, or the Pakistani ethnic and faith nations that crowd into the market's melting pot to hawk their catch, Harry's host seeks to showcase his city's most "authentic" natives to his foreign guest:

Sajjad ... caught hold of a fisherboy and directed Harry's attention to him ... 'But these are the original inhabitants of Karachi. The Makranis. They're descended from African slaves. See?' He pointed to the boy's hair and features in a way that made the American deeply uncomfortable but clearly didn't bother the boy in the least (160).

Sajjad's point is to draw attention to Karachi's untiring history of absorbing the world's fluctuating tides of enforced migrants – enslaved Africans, displaced Afghans, ousted Indian Muslims fleeing the horrors of Partition – including himself. If Harry is to "see" this he must set aside his amused and patronising racial, tribal and religious presumptions. These include the view that Sajjad has reverted to type, transforming – like 'every Pakistani' – into a chancing 'tour guide at the sight of a foreigner', or capitulated to an easy patriotism, conveniently forgetful of his Dilli disdain for what he once perceived as a culturally inferior location (160). Shamsie's novel seems to hint that Harry should also consider his own culpability in relation to Sajjad's displacement and

self-consciously futile, exilic nostalgia, which are woven carefully into the novel's polyphonic fabric by the omniscient narrator. When asked how he feels about the circumstances that led to his reluctant Karachiite incarnation, Sajjad tells the American: 'now I say this is my life, and I must live it', and attributes this attitude to an apparently neutral yet loaded 'Pakistani resignation' (161). This, he asserts, amounts to 'a completely different thing' from the submissive 'Muslim fatalism' Harry would map onto him (162). Sajjad's carefully chosen words certainly invite further investigation in the light of the provincial and geo-political context of this section of the novel. That is, the situation of near ethnic civil war in Sindh, exacerbated by an influx of weapons bound for and refugees fleeing from the US-backed anti-Soviet war and facilitated by "Kalashnikov" culture, which the civilian protagonist neither courted nor condoned (Lieven 2012: 303, 315).

The role that the western media plays in creating celebrities out of photogenic activists and resistant artists of "exotic" origin are most knowingly described and challenged in the novel *Broken Verses*, which itself is set in 2002, at the start of Pakistan's cable TV boom (Shamsie 2005a: 4). In the earlier stages of the novel Aasmaani wryly explains how her British-educated mother Samina rose to sudden fame as "Pakistan's Gypsy Feminist" in the inequitable political climate of the 1970s (87). A foreign film crew caught the activist's fiery, "ethnic" 'beauty' and 'new minted' zeal for justice on camera and a laudatory magazine article was circulated globally:

The Canadian film team must have scarcely been able to believe their luck that day – everything about her cried out 'I'm ready for my close up!' She was wearing a plain white kurta, a thick karra on her wrist ... and had her hair tied

back with a scarf. And she could speak with passion and intelligence and flashing grey-green eyes (87).

Later, when Aasmaani listens to the audio from a 1986 debate in which Samina went head-to-head with a hard-line Maulana, Shamsie reminds us how the female Activist's assumed Anglophone affiliations may be held against her by Pakistani Muslims who wish to present them as a threat to an exclusionary, patriarchal, global order. Attempting to uphold, for example, the "Qur'anic" requirement for female head-coverings, the Maulana seeks patronisingly to designate Samina as ignorant outsider, ill-versed in '*our* Holy Book', thus bolstering his own Islamic authenticity and authority (284). He says: "the devil can cite the scriptures to his own purposes". I could mention verses from *our* own tradition ... but I suspect the Shakespeare of the West might carry more weight with *you*" (284-5, my italics).

More interesting than Shamsie's "knowing" depiction of the dubious benefits of western press intervention is her portrayal of the way that *Broken Verses*' celebrity figures – 'feminist icon', trail-blazing actress, political Poet-aesthete – whose fame was cemented by local press and artistic intelligentsia, are scrutinised by a young, media-savvy generation out of love with politics (32, 87-8). Typified by the cynical, elite, disaffected Aasmaani, these inheritors are forced in Shamsie's narrative to 'rethink' and 'try to understand' how the attractive, resistant, internationally-recognised icons they worshipped in childhood relate to the composite, contradictory Pakistani selves on whom the spotlight seldom falls, yet with whom they share a home (332). Her younger

characters are also made to reconsider what the implications of such understandings may be for narratives of “representative” national character.⁷⁹

What sets Shamsie’s “global” fictions apart is the fact that their frames of reference are not limited to those which seem to be prescribed by Huggan’s “postcolonial exotic” parameters. They encompass but extend beyond a sense of address to the West’s imperial interest in spectacles of South Asian exoticism, shifting the focus to contemporary anxieties about Islamic difference or otherness both at home and abroad. Arguably, they are more interested in matters of internal domestic concern and their relation to neo-imperialist or ‘unipolar’ (Gilroy 2004: 65) geopolitics than the legacies of colonialism. They struggle self-consciously to circumvent a simple replication of elitist perspectives and to contend with multiple marginal, migrant, and dominant viewpoints. The attitudes and positions they present are not easily assimilated; they rarely make for comfortable reading.

Reactions to “exotic” content staged in *Kartography* and *Broken Verses*’ pages become a means of enquiring into how Pakistan’s more privileged classes “read” and interpret the social fabric of their Subcontinental Muslim homeland from positions of distance and proximity which simultaneously limit and enhance their perspectives. *Burnt Shadows* goes on to explore the detrimental effect expectations of an Islamic “exotic” cultural otherness can have on the relationships of intra- and inter-cultural strangers between whom

⁷⁹ Significantly, Aasmaani begins to believe that ‘character is just an invention’, a fiction which ‘allows us to go through the world with ... ease’ but obscures ‘what we can’t begin to consider ...: that there is no consistent “I”, only a somewhat consistent outward form that houses a vast set of possibilities’, held together by a (self-) imposed ‘narrative of character’ (142-3).

'differential relations of power' exist, both in twentieth century Asian, and in contemporary North American contexts (Huggan 2001: ix-x). Considered together, these global fictions offer a substantial critique of the roles privileged transnationals can play as 'gatekeepers [of] authentic access' to scenes of South Asian Muslim otherness.⁸⁰

Questioning: Shamsie's Complex Affiliations

In considering the rise of the Indian English novel, Gopal has asked: 'What does it mean that *the world reads and believes that it comprehends* "India" through Rushdie [(English)] ... rather than ... Qurratalain Hyder (Urdu)?' (2009: 2, my italics). Shamsie herself is a writer who is indebted to world literature in English for its insights; indeed she claims to have 'discovered' the world – or at least, its metropolises – through reading 'Anglophone novels set Elsewhere' (2010: n. p.). But she is also extremely aware that if the reading (western) "world" interprets and believes that it comprehends "Islamic" Pakistan and Pakistanis as they are authorised for global consumption by South Asian Anglophone writers with agendas more in tune with market demands, then its understanding will only ever be partial.⁸¹ Her knowing treatment of "exotic" content reveals that she

⁸⁰ Considering 'the problem of access to the cultural other by the touring classes', which Shamsie seems to raise and challenge thorough the casts of her fiction, Sarah Brouillette asks the following questions:

Who [presumes to be able to] access ... the [South Asian, Muslim] cultural other, which forms of access are legitimate, and who may judge? ... How do postcolonial 'writers/thinkers' [and crucially all empowered "global" citizens] establish themselves as gatekeepers to any presumed authentic access, or, alternatively disavow the very requirement that they take on such roles? (2007a: 25).

⁸¹ Shamsie notes in particular the inauthenticity of Rushdie's depictions, to which her fictions may provide correctives: 'The only time I recall reading about

cannot see 'tiptoeing away' from the 'landmines' she acknowledges 'exist around the particular stories from Pakistan that most interest the world', or from the finding ways to write about them, as a 'legitimate course of action' (Shamsie 2007a: n. p.). She cannot abnegate responsibility in a third-millennium republic of letters whose leaders' at times 'odious' coverage of Islam requires serious rebalancing (2007b: n. p.).

Instead, she deals with the twin problems of positionality and representation by producing increasingly geopolitical world fictions which "respond" from situated, self-critical perspectives. They answer back to the totalising visions of an irrational, absolute and 'unreformed Islam' (Mishra 2012: n. p.) offered in 9/11's wake by a mostly white, western, male establishment with whom the Indo-Anglian Rushdie can be bracketed. And they are also written in questioning relation to the more ambiguous literary interventions of her immediate Pakistani associates Aslam and Hamid, whose slippery and elegiac novels depict Islam more subtly – as complex and multiply affiliated – but also perhaps operate insidiously to reconfirm stereotypes of young Muslim men as tragically un-cultured or dangerously unreadable.⁸²

Karachi in novels was in Salman Rushdie's early works ... But [his] vibrant, dynamic Bombay felt far more Karachi-like to me than his versions of Karachi' (2010: n. p.).

⁸² Shamsie has indicated, for example, her annoyance at Aslam's assumption that a new Nagasaki-based novel must be her "9/11 book", and that her knowledge and experience of Pakistani Muslims' 'religious feelings' as a Karachi-raised expatriate is very different from his British one (2011b: 214-5). While praising Aslam and Hamid's sustained engagement with 'issues' of extremism, she has sought to distance her writing from both their 9/11-centring

The novels Shamsie has produced in an era of “war on terror” are inscribed with globally-anticipated tropes of a stereotypically “fundamental” Islam and Islamic identity, and endeavour to map related affinitive and affiliative trajectories in South and Central Asian lands. Hence certain resemblances can be traced between them and the post-9/11 novels of the other three writers discussed in earlier chapters. Shamsie (2005a: 59-60) figures as ‘the beards’ the groups of religious conservatives who gain political ground in the North West Frontier Province in *Broken Verses*’ contemporary narrative strand, and threaten to curb women’s rights, citing compliance with “the guidelines of Islam” as their justification. Her synecdochic shorthand might contribute to the mystification of religious fundamentalists who dedicate themselves to wielding the Holy Qur’an as a tool for discipline and punishment, transforming them into faceless, menacing, but ultimately mockable Islamist bogeymen.

The early morning call to prayer intrudes upon her critical and resistant metropolitan protagonists. The compelling vision of a beached mermaid with which *Broken Verses* begins – and which proves central to the reader’s understanding of Aasmaani’s hauntedness – breaks with her recollection of how, on moving into a new Karachi apartment, she had chosen the child’s nursery over the master bedroom. She has settled there in hope of finding shelter from the barrage of aural assaults that would come from an uncomfortably proximate mosque. ‘My sister had warned me, [it] broadcast fiery sermons just before the dawn azaan’, Aasmaani informs us, “‘If you sleep there, you’ll wake up angry every morning”, Rabia had said’ (2). Statement made, she

novels, stressing that she is ‘always interested in Pakistan’s alternative narratives, rather than the stories of the military and extremists’ (225).

steps abruptly, naked, from her bed and the chapter shifts from a lyric to a brittle, sarcastic, prosaic tone. It is as if – with the brute, quotidian intrusion of Pakistan’s harsh “religious” realities – our largely secular heroine’s hope of retaining space to fathom what thwarts the progress of her intellectual and emotional life is shattered.

In *Broken Verses*, too, Aasmaani’s surly and disillusioned lover, “Ed” (aka Mir Adnan Akbar Khan), bemoans his post-9/11 unemployment and exile from his adoptive New York. Ed turns bitter when recalling what happened in the aftermath of the Twin Towers’ collapse: ‘I was laid off because I’m Muslim’, he angrily asserts, after expressing his nostalgic love for the life he led in America, and for the feeling he relished of being ‘a New Yorker’ until ‘that September day’ when the World Trade Centre collapsed (45-6). A ‘caveman’ volatility seems temporarily to consume this haughty and highly educated Pakistani thirty-something, turning him suddenly ‘from light to dark, from joker to knave’; Aasmaani reinterprets it seconds later as a kind of controlled aggression: Ed is a man who ‘only play[s] with masks’ (46-7).

It may be possible to cite the inclusion of such seeming trademarks of the Pakistani ‘horror brand’ (Hamid et al 2010: n. p.), excerpted from their novelistic contexts, as evidence of how Shamsie’s world fiction perpetuates western (feminist) myths even as it attempts to complicate them. Yet any marginally more comprehensive analysis of *Kartography’s*, *Broken Verses*’ and *Burnt Shadows*’ complex contents would make this critique hard to sustain. For the plots of Shamsie’s third millennium novels revolve around the repeated puzzling of supposedly enlightened Anglo-European and Asian “readers” of Subcontinental Muslim society and culture. Not only do Shamsie’s fictions anticipate and ‘interrupt’ – to borrow Derrida’s (in Cherif 2008: 66) term – limited

and habitual epistemologies which are conspicuously mapped onto the bodies of South Asian Islamic characters. *Burnt Shadows*' intertextual allusion to and reworking of E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India* through Sajjad's tentative seduction in colonial Delhi of his British employers' Japanese visitor is a notable instance (2009c: 92-112). They also endeavour to replace descriptions of Islamic affiliations and affinities which position Muslims as alien and other with depictions of ordinary Islamic connections which are grounded in local domestic and political realities.⁸³ The "dis/sociative" quality of Shamsie's fiction perhaps distinguishes it from that of the other authors examined in this thesis, whose fiction either presents readers with pre-judged "bad Muslim" ciphers; sets out from a position of "knowledge" to bring Islamic villains to trial in its pages; or playfully renders judgement of the central Pakistani pro/antagonist impossible by obscuring his features with smoke and mirrors.⁸⁴

⁸³ In conversation with Mustapha Cherif, Derrida asserts that: 'To relate to the other, as other, is ... to respect the interruption ... [E]ven if one recognises this insurmountable dissociation in ... between us, to live together is to be able to recognise the dissociation and interruption' (Derrida in Cherif 2008: 66).

⁸⁴ In describing Shamsie's novels as "*dis/sociative*", I mean to point to their conscious incorporation of – and hence *sociation* with – myths of "Islamic" Pakistan which may be considered of interest to "world" readers, and which have variously been given fictional life by her South Asian (male) literary associates. Simultaneously, I seek to give weight to her attempts to distance, withdraw, separate – or *dissociate* – her depictions from the insights offered by these supposed representatives, and to adopt (at times radically) alternative interpretative slants, which render redundant the binary epistemologies of contemporary and historic Islamic customs and practices widely available in the West. This still dialogical strategy is altogether different from the perhaps similar-sounding one of '*disengagement* from your country [America] by mine'

In their fictions, Muslim Pakistan's largely undifferentiated ethnic and "sectarian" communities are depicted as patriarchal, hostile, and violent (or as passive recipients of that violence), with orthodox Muslims of Sunni affiliation usually cast – as in Aslam's *Maps* or Rushdie's *Enchantress* – in the role of would-be perpetrators of anti-Sufi and anti-Shia persecution. Yet where Aslam may fail, as Rehana Ahmed (2012: 7) rightly notes, to create 'space for the idea of South Asian Muslim culture as a force of community coherence, strength and resistance in the face of racism and other types of inequality', I would argue that Shamsie begins to make room in her novels for 'a cultural communitarianism that is not oppressive'. In *Kartography* she presents us, courtesy of the novel's heroine, Raheen, with an altogether different vision of how, in contemporary Karachi, the religious practices of the Shia Islamic sect are permitted to continue. In doing so she revises understandings of the capacity of diverse and apparently divided Muslim communities for a kind of productive cohabitation which simultaneously negates yet is contingent on the existence of established boundaries (in this case of gender and religious denomination).

Kartography draws to a close in 1995, when security forces mounted an indiscriminate crackdown on the protestatory, self-defensive and militant Muttahida Quami Movement (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1996: n. p.). In the same period Raheen's personal life spirals out of control, her closest relationships thwarted by the discovery of her Muhajir father's historic expression of racist contempt for her boyfriend's mother's 'Bengali blood line' as tensions escalated in West Pakistan with the advent of the Bangladesh War of

advocated by Hamid's (2007b: 203, my italics) ambiguous and fictional Changez.

Independence (Shamsie 2002b: 232). Yet it is at this time of regional turmoil that the cosseted, Karachiphile narrator interrupts her private nightmares of being caught in the city's crossfire in order to write her estranged lover a letter that tells of its 'lunar street[s]' (330, 337).

Raheen informs Karim that during the sacred month of Muhurram (in which Shiites mourn the slaying at the battle of Karbala of Imam Hussein ibn Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson), an alley opens through the interconnecting hallways of a line of houses which reaches to the rear entrance of the Imam Baragh mosque. Readers familiar with Karachi's geography will know that Imam Baragh is located in the ethnically mixed area of Orangi Town. Raheen explains that the alley permits purdah-observing Shia women – aided by neighbouring families – to walk from their homes to their place of worship free of strangers' intrusive gazes (330-1). Its lifespan is brief, for the street obeys lunar time: it lasts only the course of a month and as long as the moon shines. But, nevertheless, it exists – evidence, for her, of the city's difficult and not easily resolvable dualities (331-2).

At this point in the novel the expatriate Karim, who left Karachi for London and Boston in his early teens following his parents' separation, has become obsessively headline-conscious; he daily scours the online English-language editions of *Dawn* and *Newsline* for death statistics and updates on factional issues (132-3, 147). Monitoring his native city from a globally mediated distance, Raheen's exilic boyfriend sees it as a fearful 'abstraction', one from which – in Raheen's opinion – he remains estranged because he 'lack[s] the heart to make it a reality' (297). Raheen's elegiac epistle to Karim may be seen as an attempt on the part of the story-loving narrator to do just this: to use less told and less sensational narratives of ordinary Karachi lives sustained amongst

its diverse streets to make an alienated former intimate 'hear' the cross-rhythms of its 'heartbeat', and hence draw him home (181). Shamsie's fiction suggests, through its heroine, that elite Pakistani ex-pats and locals alike must contemplate their internationally infamous "Third World" city with neither terror nor romanticism, but with an 'unblinking, unsentimental compassion', if they are to find ways to live within it (332). And, they must remain attentive to the 'truth' of its Muslim population's daily pursuit of concomitantly serendipitous and conflicting sectarian religious and ethnic lives which can neither be easily censored or condoned, if they are honestly and ethically to attempt to re-present the character of this Pakistani metropolis to an expectant globe (332).⁸⁵

Where scriptural Islam and the language of Arabic have generally been presented as instruments of patriarchal oppression, and their affiliates as antipathetic to art, *Broken Verses*' discussion of Aasmaani's potential creation of a poetic, English-language translation of the Qur'an pre-empts and interrupts both these readings. Attending an interview for a media job soon after her somewhat rude awakening, the bored protagonist finds herself attracted by a line of Arabic painted on the unfortunately-titled 'Save the Date' or 'STD' television studio's wall (2005a: 3). It is the refrain which threads itself thirty-one times through the verses of the Surah al-Rahman or Chapter of "The All-

⁸⁵ Brouillette (2007a: 18) hints that 'closeness, community, intimacy and solidarity' have been weighted with too much 'authority' by postcolonial critics like Huggan, for whom 'access to what's "real" can require the valuing of [such] forms of identification with "what is morally superior to rationality and distance in social relationships"' (18). Shamsie's account of intersectorian cohabitation in contemporary Karachi seems to eschew this criticism, opening as it does a window onto a scene of intimacy which arises only as a result of 'rationality' and respect for social 'distance', a window which quickly closes.

Merciful”, which begins with Allah’s gift of speech to man, and ends with the gardens of Paradise. It reads, in Aasmaani’s rendering: ‘Which of your Lord’s blessings would you deny?’, and – as she eruditely informs us – has been cherished by calligraphers ‘for its variedness and balance’ (5). For the ‘instantly old’ and suddenly outmoded thirty-one year old heroine it offers a temporary anchor to something older and – by implication – wiser and more substantial either than her latest flippant and studiously apolitical ‘media incarnation’, or the studio’s aspirant bright young things, whose intimidating commitment to ‘progressive thought’ appears to shine through their eyes (4, 10).

It seems significant that it is the eloquence *not* of the bejewelled calligraphy which so delights Aslam (2006: 67, 2011b: 77) and his characters, but of the phrasing and lexis of the single line of Arabic text, which might repulse or confuse them, that triggers in Shamsie’s Aasmaani a wistful and affectionate memory of the conversation that took place between her mother and The Poet, her avuncular ‘Omi’ (Shamsie 2005a: 5, 166). Samina suggests that her precocious, idealistic and still-idolising daughter should make a career of translation, learning Arabic so as to rework the Qur’an politically ‘into both English and Urdu, in versions free from patriarchal interpretations’ (5). The Poet requests that his young protégé consider the Surah al-Rahman aesthetically ‘especially for me’, and vie to ‘top’ his ‘beautiful’ transpositions of its most lucid and ponderous verses with new renderings of her own (5). The Qur’an is positioned as a result not as an inherently tyrannical and patriarchal text of “unarguable absolutes”, as it is for Rushdie (in Mishra 2012: n. p.), a book of pre-scripted censures which some greater Islamic (male) authority may impose. Rather, it appears as a complex and challenging literary work, comprised of dark and light materials – apocalyptic visions of the split sky ‘redden[ing] like a

rose or stained leather', the granting of 'articulate speech', promises of 'virginal hours' (Shamsie 2005a: 5) – and open to re-interpretation. In Shamsie the sacred text is transformed into a 'realm of polyphony, doubt and argument', which Mishra (2012: n. p.) notes Rushdie has sought to reserve as the stamping ground of the secular novel.

In *Broken Verses* the Qur'an remains an awe-inspiring book, but also one which Shamsie implies the Prophet's progressive, female, Muslim inheritors must nevertheless struggle to make their own – if, that is, they are convinced that dialogical strategies of resistance and recuperation are preferable in contemporary Pakistan to the self-preservatory ones of silence, inaction, or (dis-)contented 'repose' (Shamsie 2005a: 137-9). Yet it is important to note that although she is personally attuned to language's 'aesthetic – its music', and passionately committed to her chosen profession, Shamsie is too conscious of the limited reach of literary fiction in a 'largely illiterate country' to fetishize (novel) writing as a 'politically crucial art', or a means to present perfect models of Pakistani feminist resistance (2002a: 24, 2011b: 225). Hence perhaps it takes the entirety of *Broken Verses* for her sceptical and reluctant third-millennium protagonist to conclude that it *may* in fact be viable to use newly independent private TV channels to continue her upper-class mother's still meaningful project of 'mov[ing] battles towards abstract space' and 'forc[ing] tyranny to defend itself in language' in order to expose it to debate, and so weaken its hold (2005a: 336). And it is the living, spoken word, as expressed through contemporary and populist media – documentaries, drama, poetry, song – in which *Broken Verses*' strong-minded female characters invest greatest hope. That is, hope not of individually dictating action or winning 'ultimate victory' (as they might in Aslam), but of collectively 'remind[ing] the

nation] of all the components of its character', creating a matrix within which Pakistan's Muslim, female citizens may attempt to forge resistant pathways of their own (2005a: 335).

Shamsie's treatment in *Burnt Shadows* of the often over-determined and politicised act of *namaaz* and its emotional effect on young affiliates to anti-Soviet jihad is also instructive when considering the dis/sociated position her fiction adopts in comparison, say, to Aslam's *Vigil*, and how it replaces more polarised perspectives of Muslim prayer rituals with similarly situated but alternatively dual and political ones. In *Burnt Shadows* the two excitable teenage protagonists Raza and Abdullah pray in an austere mountain setting which seems to make them more susceptible to a powerful overflow of feelings of religious awe and wonder. Shamsie informs us that, as 'the setting sun dulled all the sharp edges of the world ... Raza saw the beauty in the moment and it was with a true sense of reverence ... that he laid his pattusi [blanket] on the ground and stepped onto it' to pray, catching Abdullah's eye and nodding in a shared recognition of common 'emotions' as he did so (Shamsie 2009c: 229).

Yet the context is important to establish before proceeding with such a reading. The scene takes place the early 1980s at a makeshift 'prayer space' overshadowed by a gun tree beside a 'cluster of tents' on a borderland plateau not far from the frontier city of Peshawar (226, 229). The middle-class, polyglot Karachi schoolboy Raza, masquerading as an orphaned ethnic Hazara, has accompanied his newfound refugee friend Abdullah here, having convinced the hesitating Afghan Pashtun to join the mujahideen. Raza, who has planned to deliver Abdullah to the camp and mysteriously 'vanish' back to the safety of his aunt's house in Peshawar, is by this stage a highly reluctant participant in his own 'grand adventure', panicking, afraid and conscious of his foolishness (213,

226). Abdullah, by contrast, appears to have regained confidence in his mature, long-standing commitment to drive the occupying Soviets out of the 'hell' that has become his homeland and, for future generations, 'restore it to Paradise', as he rejoins his Pashtun brothers on Afghanistan's threshold (216).

Raza is woken by an older, 'green-eyed' man at the camp and told (but not forced) to join the other men beside the tree; performing the namaaz appears an important step to proving his masculinity and kinship with the 'first Muslims, in the deserts of Arabia' (228-9). Both boys are born Muslims, and we are told that Raza has memorised the Arabic words of prayer whose 'literal translation' he still does not know, while Abdullah is likely to view the region's 'ancient rock carvings' as 'the work of infidels' (212, 330). But neither Raza nor Abdullah's horizons have been set by the teachings of an ultra-conservative madrassa. Each has attended a school at which he appears to have excelled – at least, that is, until his education was disrupted by international and internal conflicts; Abdullah retains a reverence for books and desire to learn English, Raza an interest in teaching and a gift for languages (197-200).

Neither character's naturally pious participation in this seemingly spontaneous and unfettered Islamic act of worship can be interpreted as disinterested when his place in the novel's geopolitical "big picture" is understood. Yet *Burnt Shadows*' portrayal of the spiritual and fraternal stirrings of these 'still so unformed', praying youths, caught in the 'confusion of still-forming nation[s]' and described from Raza's wide-eyed point of view, is genuine (182). We have no reason to question that Raza believed he 'felt the words of prayer enter his mouth from a place of pure faith', found a sense of shy affinity with his Afghan friend as they mutually contemplated their entry to a state of martyrdom, or discovered 'meaning in every muttered syllable of Arabic'

he embraced for his own purposes (230). Nevertheless, when considered in the context in which he experiences them – as a spectator at the scene of his Afghan “brother’s” potential self-sacrifice, and as a petitioner for deliverance on purely selfish grounds (*‘Lord, Allah, let me escape this place’*) – Raza’s feelings of closeness both to Abdullah and to God appear morally compromised (230, author’s italics). As in her Karachi-based novels, Shamsie provides ‘no simple answers’ (2002b: 331) nor easy paths to inter/national judgement of the Muslim characters she creates and critiques as she shifts the terms of world literary engagement away from stereotypical visions of ‘thugs’ and ‘angels’ (Hamid 2007b: 204), and toward the sensitive depiction of ordinary, globe-tethered citizens.

Un-knowing: Shamsie’s Global, Decentring Perspectives

Kartography’s description of the lunar streets is prefaced with a quotation from the Italian novelist Italo Calvino. The citation appears, given the tell-tale parenthetical intervention, and Raheen’s earlier reference to writing a paper based on Calvino’s (1972) *Invisible Cities*, to have been selected by the protagonist to accompany her love-letter to Karim. But it may also act, by proxy, as an epigraph for Shamsie’s novel, and indeed her global fiction as a whole. It reads:

There are two ways to escape suffering [the inferno where we live every day]. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space. (Calvino in Shamsie 2002b: 330, author’s square brackets and italics).

On a scale first local then global, Shamsie's decentred, (South) Asian female protagonists both '*seek and learn to recognize who and what ... are not inferno*', and make room for them. These women: Raheen, Aasmaani, and especially Hiroko, function as cautious, self-conscious agents for the demystification, differentiation and humanisation of Islam and ordinary Muslim Others who have been made 'acceptable' targets for demonization, even decimation, in geopolitical climates inflamed by the "war on terror" (2009c: 362).

Migrating beyond the 'limited circles' of 'intima[cy] with ... intimates' which *Kartography* sought to trouble, and into the states of global "un-knowingness" and 'intima[cy] with strangers' described by the more diasporic *Burnt Shadows*, these Asian heroines lay bare the historical politics and prejudices that give rise to subjugation (2002b: 331-2). They point to the precariousness of basing a "knowledge" of others on paranoid, self-centred "readings" of their supposed performance to type, and to the perils of placing apparently insignificant people in the 'little corner' of our worlds' 'big picture' (2009c: 362). And, having way-marked these hazards, they proceed to extend an unconditional commitment to the diverse individuals they encounter. This may resemble the 'translocal solidarity' described by Gilroy (2004: 88-9) in *After Empire*. However, in developing that concept the sociologist seems to place the emphasis on the charitable 'alleviation of suffering' conferred by western cosmopolitans with 'rights-bearing bodies' on peoples in post-imperial regions (such as Palestinians in the Gaza strip) who are less mobile and less privileged (89). Shamsie's non-western, transnational female protagonists, with their subaltern bodies and distrust of hierarchies, eschew this; they instead invest in the 'open communication', which Gilroy also envisages, functioning not as patrons or martyrs in relation to global others, but as equal, common citizens (89).

It is Hiroko Tanaka, *Burnt Shadows*' perspicacious East Asian protagonist, who provides the most sustained focalising point for a humane and critical consideration of who or what is "not inferno" in Shamsie's "war on terror" fictions. Hiroko is a migrant character with a strong sense of the cosmopolitan 'morality' described by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006: xiii); she is acutely conscious that 'each person [she] know[s] about and can affect is someone to whom [she] has responsibilities.'⁸⁶ Hiroko's near innate 'disdain ... of official attitudes towards foreigners' puts her at odds, in Shamsie's words, with the "us versus them" mentality of her native Japan's 'xenophobic [wartime] society' – and, indeed, with all societies which condone the inimical treatment of strangers (Shamsie 2011a: 158). Despite her transnational affinities and the easy camaraderie she establishes with other peoples in countries which are far from her homeland, she remains firmly uninterested in 'belonging to anything as contradictory and damaging as a nation', whether Pakistan, America, or a global *ummat al-Islamiyah* (2009c: 204).⁸⁷ In short, Shamsie's most arresting heroine cultivates a position that is not only decentred but also scrupulously unaffiliated

⁸⁶ Appiah (2006: xiii) acknowledges in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* the negative connotations that the term 'cosmopolitanism' has acquired ('celebrations of the "cosmopolitan" can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial'). Yet he has 'settled on' it because it encompasses two 'intertwin[ing]' strands: first, 'the idea that we have obligations to others'; second, that 'we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives' (xv).

⁸⁷ Her approach to exchanges with global others may, in this regard, resemble the 'partial cosmopolitanism' which Appiah (2006: xvi-xvii) proceeds to advocate: Hiroko 'sides neither with nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality.'

as she attempts to engage with planetary others whose nominal regional, cultural or religious allegiances make them vulnerable to xenophobic attacks.

When we first encounter Hiroko as a conscripted munitions worker in wartime Nagasaki, her capacity to combine rectitude and anarchy with a hint of Raheen's 'unsentimental compassion' is already apparent (2002b: 332). In a period when western cosmopolitans and indigenous artists have been branded 'traitors', factories deemed 'more functional than schools and boys ... more functional as weapons than as humans', she has been dismissed from her job as a German teacher for remaining loyal to her 'iconoclastic' father (2009c: 7, 13). A dissident artist, Matsui Tanaka dared to challenge his neighbours' ostentatious memorialisation of a "heroic" schoolboy's Kamikaze attack. Hiroko has also fallen in love with the 'fugitive' Berliner, Konrad Weiss, who has abandoned 'a once-beloved country he long ago gave up on trying to fight for or against' and sought solace in tales of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Nagasaki's cosmopolitan world, about which he plans to write (12, 18).

This young woman's status as a perhaps elective but hardly privileged migrant is also conferred early in *Burnt Shadows*' narrative. Following the death of her father and fiancé on 9 August 1945, when America exploded its second atomic bomb "Fat Man" over Nagasaki, the city's medical facilities are 'overrun' (Shamsie 2009c: 61). Suffering from radiation poisoning – she is severely burned on her back – Hiroko has little choice but to accept a friend's offer to admit her to a Tokyo hospital for treatment. When life there as a translator for the Americans becomes unbearable, she feels compelled to seek 'departure' (48). She treads a path alone to pre-Partition Delhi, where Konrad's married half-sister Elizabeth (formerly "Ilse" Weiss) and her English husband James Burton live. Hiroko travels not in a bid to claim some widow's due, but in hope of

help securing work and a future as something more than the 'explosion-affected person' the western world would reduce her to being: more than a Japanese 'hibakusha' (49).

In India, and for the rest of her long life, Shamsie's resilient and resolute subaltern heroine vehemently refuses to allow herself to be defined by the physical and mental scars of the nuclear holocaust – by the 'story of the bomb' (222-3). Her subsequent peregrinations take her to the newly carved Muslim Pakistan as the convert wife of James' legal assistant, to late-1990s New York after India performed its Operation Shakti tests. Yet throughout them she will not forget the irreparable damage done as a result of President Truman's decision that it was 'acceptable' to 'expend' thousands of supposedly threatening Japanese lives in order to 'save' American ones (62, 362). Hiroko's enduring disquiet about the ease with which such international acts of inhumanity are justified in western circles makes her reticent to assume complete knowledge of the proclivities of those South and Central Asian Muslims with whom she comes to share a home. However, it must be stressed that the non-judgmental compassion toward Muslims which Shamsie's global fiction uses Hiroko to enact is ultimately disinterested: driven first by moral principle, although underpinned by traumatic personal loss and sensitivity to Islamic nuance gained through marriage and international migration.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Derrida states that for a relationship to be established between oneself and a respected, interruptive other, a 'leap' of faith must be made in the 'darkness that is the lack of knowledge', even as we seek to 'accumulate the most knowledge and critical awareness possible', for 'the difference between an opening up and a closure depends ... on the *responsibility taken in the midst of risk*' (in Cherif 2008: 60, 75).

Hiroko functions most powerfully as an agent for the demystification, differentiation and humanisation of ordinary, peaceful South Asian Muslims in *Burnt Shadows*' final section, which is takes its title – 'The Speed Necessary to Replace Loss' – from *The English Patient* (1992), Ondaatje's equally epic post-war novel of converging international lives (Shamsie 2009c: 245, 365).⁸⁹ This concluding, contemporary part of Shamsie's novel takes place in a post-9/11 New York whose patriotic populace's attitude to immigrants has 'shifted' and 'shrunk' in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks (289). In the metropolis' suddenly self-defensive and suspicious climate, Afghans and 'Arab'-looking men of military age are reduced to potential Islamist combatants (326-7). Even the most benign invocations of Allah now meet with a frosty reception in a city-space where allusions to the Prophet Mohammad's sympathetic sentiments once were socially acceptable (289). Yet it is at this time that Hiroko,

⁸⁹ The Sri Lankan-born Canadian author's novel closes where Shamsie's has begun: with the dropping by America of its atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Burnt Shadows* seems haunted both by Ondaatje's (1992: 284-5) Indian British Army sapper Kip's initial 'shock and horror', and by his deep contained anger, as he realises what this means: the betrayal of the 'fragile white island that with customs and manners and books ... somehow converted the rest of the world' (283). Shamsie's novel also seems governed by Kip's sense of restraint, even contempt, on contemplating all those who – convinced of their moral superiority and in control of history – would 'bomb ... the brown races of the world', make them feel 'this tremor of Western wisdom' (284, 286). For although he rages: 'All those speeches of civilization from kings and queens and presidents ... such voices of abstract order. Smell it. Listen to the radio and smell the celebration in it. In my country, when a father breaks justice in two, you kill the father' (285, author's ellipsis), Kip cannot execute the English patient; his choice is rather to give the 'slip' to his hypocritical world.

who since 1998 has tacitly accepted the Manhattan penthouse refuge and openly embraced the companionship offered by her old friend Ilse Weiss, recalls with joy the conversations she had with the city's migrant South Asian taxi-driving population prior to the Twin Towers' collapse, and tries to sustain these precious relationships into an uncertain future (263).

On arriving in New York, desperate to know whether Pakistan has responded 'in kind' to India's recent nuclear tests, Hiroko takes a risk, blurting out in Urdu to a possibly Indian or Pakistani yellow cab driver, 'Has Pakistan tested yet?' (287). Immediately thereafter the affable 'Omar from Gujranwala', a new-minted American citizen, draws the elder woman under his wing, responding first "in kind" by answering her anxious question in Urdu, then 'switch[ing] to English to say, "Welcome to my country, aunty"' (288). Omar's genial remark, which makes a mockery of the idea of discrete identities or exclusive claims to belonging, 'mark[s] the start of her love affair with New York' (288). It is an affection which the 'uncivic' aspects of the city's response to 9/11 may jeopardise but not ultimately extinguish, so long as people of a similarly hospitable spirit – Hiroko included – remain within it (289).

In the conversation that follows the East Asian woman and South Asian man's initial, 'flirtatious' showcasing of their acquired Pakistani and American affiliations, Omar plunges into serious talk, telling Hiroko about the 'Major cab strike' against the introduction of new regulations with which he is involved (288). This politically active Punjabi migrant's animated tone feels familiar to Hiroko; it reminds her of 'her former students in 1988 when boys who had once

sat at the back of the class were out on the [Karachi] streets, waving the flags of their political party and singing songs of victory' (288).⁹⁰

Yet it is important to note that in this brief encounter Omar appears as a man whose sentiments may seem knowable to Shamsie's decentred Asian protagonist, and yet who wishes – in order that they might be better understood – for his national and political affiliations to be “un-known”. When Hiroko begins to enquire into the number of taxi drivers who are Indian and the number who are Pakistani, apparently treating the two as separate entities, he makes a request:

No, no, please ... Don't ask how it's possible that we can strike together when our countries are in the middle of planning for the Day of Judgement. It's what all the journalists ask. Aunty, we are taxi drivers, and we're protesting unjust new rules. Why should we let those governments who long ago let us down stop us from successfully doing that? (288)

Practical solidarity in the face of the restrictions imposed by authorities is what Omar wishes to place on display here.

Seating herself always in a respectfully distant but receptive position, 'behind the passenger-side seat[s]' of the New York taxi cabs she orders, Hiroko continues to listen to their drivers' stories and not to question but to 'talk ... to them about their lives' (309). Shamsie's narrative emphasises that it is thus, through discourse and not through confrontation, that Hiroko's comprehension grows of the many personal as well as political matters that preoccupy 'this

⁹⁰ In Pakistan, 1988 was the year when General Zia was killed in a plane crash and Benazir Bhutto's centre-left, democratic socialist Pakistan People's Party swept to power, making Bhutto Pakistan's first woman Prime Minister.

varied group of migrant workers' (309).⁹¹ The reader's awareness of the diversity of a particular (Pakistani) quotient of New York migrants and of the kaleidoscopic nature of their human concerns is thereby expanded. So too is this community's continuing need to insist that group outsiders accept on trust what they claim to be the truth about their attitudes and motives. Even as it widens the parameters of what – filtered through the Hiroko's consciousness – the global reader may "know" about Subcontinental others, Shamsie fiction uses the cosmopolitan protagonist's experiences to inculcate an understanding that we may learn more about such subalterns by being prepared to not to question, but to listen, and to let personal presumptions and societal preconceptions go.

When it comes to Hiroko's encounter in New York Public Library's 'cavernous [presumably Rose Main] reading room' with Abdullah, the Afghan man who at

⁹¹ Appiah (2006: xv) emphasises that being 'cosmopolitan' entails not only 'tak[ing] seriously ... the value of human life' and 'particular human lives', but also 'taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance'. He goes on to state that:

Cosmopolitanism shouldn't be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of co-existence: conversation in its older [obsolete/archaic] meaning, of living together, association (xviii-xix).

Hiroko's "un-exalted" cosmopolitan approach is a kind of 'habit ... of co-existence' that embraces this principle of 'taking an interest' and of 'conversation' (xv, xviii-xix). But in Shamsie better relations (and understandings) are established – as we have seen, and will go on to see – not just through passive cohabitation, but through active investment in "conversation" in the more current sense of that word: through the reciprocal 'interchange of thoughts and words; familiar discourse or talk' (*OED Online* 2013c), which may lead to a deeper appreciation of and respect for others' principles and motivations.

the age of fourteen encouraged her son Raza to join him in training for the anti-Soviet mujahideen, this “un-knowing” approach is everywhere in evidence (309). Now, in 2002, following a knock on the door from the FBI, the terrified Afghan, who has been working for nine years in New York illegally as a cab driver, is on the run, and Hiroko has agreed – at Raza’s proxy behest – to smuggle him into Canada, from where he can be transported to Afghanistan.

In the reading room, she tentatively approaches a ‘broad-shouldered, dark-haired ... straight-backed’ figure whose ‘fingers rest ... very lightly on the page of a book’, ‘not knowing’ whether he bears the identifying mark of the Afghan man she is meant to meet or, if he does, ‘what kind of man she w[ill] find’ (309, 313). When his eyes meet hers and he slides away to another table, perhaps for privacy, perhaps because he at first cannot see Raza’s face in her Japanese features, and an old man with arched eyebrows “explains”: ‘Afghan. They don’t like women’ (“their” attitudes to books remain unmentioned!), prompting Hiroko to extend her hand to rest on Abdullah’s arm, a determined gesture that demonstrates her ‘refusal to accept that analysis’, her preparedness to keep an open mind (310).

As Hiroko listens, asking only short, unassuming, echoing questions that barely interrupt his narrative flow, Abdullah quietly explains that, having stayed with the Afghan guerrillas until the final remaining Soviet troops were withdrawn in 1989, but never seen the hoped-for peace, he has come to the US out of economic expediency. In 1993 he accepted his brothers’ decision that he was most likely to survive the journey across; the prospect of their youngest brother earning ‘a real living’ in America was deemed a better option for his family, despite the risks, than his remaining in Karachi as a truck-driving refugee (313). Now, faced with the prospect of his enforced return, Abdullah attempts to make

the best of it, telling Hiroko that after a nine-year absence in which his child was born: 'I'll see my son, my wife. The light of Afghanistan. It's not so bad?' (314).

Shamsie paints a nuanced picture, through Hiroko's unflinching, compassionate, maternal gaze, not of 'the boy who drew [her son] into a life of violence but only [of] a man' – dutiful, sensitive, 'uncertain' about his future – who 'understood lost homelands and the impossibility of return', yet fought for and will journey back to them (313). This is a man who – understandably, given his circumstances – may glance with guarded 'suspicion' at the Japanese woman who seats herself beside him in the exposed public space of the American library, but whose eyes express a longing to have that sentiment 'overturned' (310). One who will also, after the briefest acquaintance, 'reverently' share his bibliographic finds – photographs of Afghan couples in scenes of vibrant, peacetime life, long destroyed by cluster bombs – or unthinkingly lift a veering drunk from his new-made companion's path, placing him gently out of the way of harm (311, 313). Like the intimate strangers Raheen encounters in *Kartography's* city of 'no simple answers', and the estranged parental figures whom *Broken Verses'* Aasmaani seeks better to know, *Burnt Shadows'* former mujahid ultimately appears as a peaceful man with a difficult past and future who seems to struggle with all 'human soul[s]' for the 'luxury' of finding 'humanity in repose' (Shamsie 2002b: 331, 2005a: 139).

Neither Abdullah nor Omar's faith affiliations surface in their conversations with Hiroko, a woman whose first allusion to Islam has been to confirm with her future husband, Sajjad, that 'the spider is beloved of Muslims' (Shamsie 2009c: 59). What religious sympathies they have remain implicit; they are something

the secular Japanese-Pakistani convert finds no reason to challenge.⁹² Shamsie has assented to Harleen Singh's idea that *Burnt Shadows* is '*positioned precisely against ... a narrowing of topic*' (Singh in Shamsie 2011a: 158) in "war on terror" novels to the events of 9/11 and to the question of 'why Muslims become terrorists' (Shamsie 2011b: 223). Instead she uses Hiroko to unsettle the assumed right of western non-Muslims to second-guess the quality of the beliefs held by 'peaceful Muslims' whom they view as 'potential terrorists' (223). And, by bringing this self-righteous attitude into historical and political perspective, Shamsie points to its negative impact on contemporary, globally-interconnected individuals and communities. In this way, she partly demystifies the process whereby peaceful people are turned to violence, but eschews a direct engagement with Islam and Muslims themselves (or their values and beliefs) as a "problem".

The most forceful instance of this unsettling of western perspectives comes at *Burnt Shadows*' climax, when the novel has shifted gear from cross-continental romance to international thriller. Ilse's patriotic American granddaughter Kim has insisted – despite her 'unshakeable faith in a world that allowed all protests ... to take place within a legal framework' – on driving Abdullah over the Canadian border on Hiroko's behalf, knowing that the old lady's Pakistani passport and non-western features are unlikely to smooth her

⁹² Shamsie informs us that Hiroko 'felt about those who believed in religion' as 'about people who believed in the morality of their nations': 'it was baffling, it seemed to deny all reason, and yet she would never be the one to attempt to wrestle the comfort of an illusory order away from someone else' (2009c: 329) or allow it to limit her understanding of their capacity for humanity. At least, that is while they remain peaceful, and do no harm.

dealings with the immigration officials (2009c: 329). Kim is a woman whose sentimental, ex-CIA father Harry once believed could 'alone be counted on to engage the world without doing any harm' (174). Yet, since 9/11, she has begun visibly to 'stiffen' at the sight of 'a dark-haired man doing something with his shoes' in a Manhattan Park and, since Harry's death in Afghanistan where he was working as a private military contractor, to question whether 'one Afghan man' can be trusted not to 'send [her] world crumbling' or – in an echo of her father's words – to 'do no harm' (276, 326).

Committed to keeping her promise, but deeply 'uneasy' about aiding the deliverance of an illegal Muslim migrant reported to have fallen foul of federal authorities, Kim is increasingly discomfited by her and Abdullah's stilted attempts at conversation on the drive from New York to Montreal, which seem only to confirm her assumptions about his attitudes to 9/11 and Islamic affiliations. When Abdullah tries, 'choosing his words carefully', to describe the only other journey he has made beyond the metropolis prior to this departing trip – to a Massachusetts mosque with other Central Asian, North African and Eurasian Muslims at the time of Ramadan – he initially arouses Kim's amusement by describing the group's confused response to American road signs (341-2). But Abdullah soon stumbles onto thornier ground with a comment that Kim construes as an allusion to his Muslim companions' pre-9/11 comprehension of American vulnerability: of the country's unpreparedness for the un-signalled World Trade Centre attacks. With this the 'pang' of 'liberal guilt' Kim had thought she felt for a man who could not 'take for granted [the] ability to enter and exit nations at will' quickly abates (340).

Kim's tension only increases with the Afghan's truncated description of his friends' encounter with a shed truck-load of stuffed toys on their night-drive

home. She is convinced that Abdullah curtails the story of his return trip in order to circumvent a confession that the group of idol-hating Muslims 'cut right through ... the pink bunny rabbits' scattered over highway, appalled by a 'grotesque' and absurd image of Islamic barbarity and intolerance which is of her own conjuring (343). The reader is made party to the fact that, at Abdullah's request, the men had driven close enough to the fallen cargo to take in 'armloads of rabbits and bears' as they passed, delighting in 'fur softer than anything the men had touched in years', and at the idea of being able to present them as gifts to their children (343). But he is wary of mentioning this, lest his sharp American patron consider him a thief; and she, lost in fantasy, shows no inclination to invite her own disillusionment.

Most detrimental to their attempts at dialogue and, ultimately, Abdullah's chance of freedom, is Kim's refusal to 'feel uncomfortable' when the Afghan thoughtfully observes that America should seek – perhaps through proximity – a better understanding of the 'disease' (war) which it liberally spreads in foreign lands, and determination instead to interrogate and discredit as 'mad' the 'system of belief' that may inform his decentred perspectives (344, 346). Even Abdullah's endorsement of Kim's assertion that Hiroko is 'an amazing woman', which she makes in a supposed 'last' bid to 'establish common ground', proves unsatisfactory (345). He assents by alluding to the fact that Hiroko has secured her son and husband a place in heaven because she converted to Islam. 'Even martyrs who die in jihad can't do so much for their family', he concludes, 'It's written in the Quran' (346). But she, deaf to the Afghan's suggestion that it seems 'wrong' for the same 'honour' not be extended to the convert, is interested only in channelling her misplaced feminist outrage at his supposed reduction of Hiroko to 'a launch pad for her husband and son's journey to ...

paradise' into an acerbic attempt to enlighten him as to the erroneousness of his understandings of Islam:

'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 no. I've read it – in English. Believe me, the Quran says nothing of the sort. And frankly, what kind of a heaven is heaven if you can find shortcuts into it?'

... 'Please do not speak this way.'

'Tell me one thing ...' Unexpectedly, such a rage within her ... 'If an Afghan dies in the act of killing infidels in his own 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.'

'We should not speak any more.' (346-7)

It is almost as if, in this decentred global fiction, the roles of *Vigil's* Casa and Marcus are reversed: here thoughts of 'annihilation' crowd Kim's mind, while Abdullah patiently tries to point to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic belief and culture (Aslam 2008: 255). Yet the reality remains in *Burnt Shadows* that it is the incensed, Islamophobic US citizen who wields greatest power. Whatever the rights or wrongs of her Muslim interlocutor's perspectives, no space can exist for an inoffensive and expansive dialogue about the Islam he understands differently when the "knowing" American claims the moral high ground and remains on the defensive. The confused Kim's inability to listen or give credence to the "other", less easily digestible, "side" of Abdullah's story of Islamic affinity and affiliation – to his reverence for those who accept his God, his trust that 'Allah protect' all those who have helped him, and his desire to

resist oppression – not only puts an end to dialogue (Shamsie 2009c: 353). It also leads, when Kim reports Abdullah to the authorities, to the arrest of another Central Asian Muslim who ‘did nothing wrong’, Hiroko’s son Raza, who is presumably thereafter detained at Guantanamo; to the marginalisation of this man’s concerns; and to the impoverishment of his betrayer’s humanity (363). It is Hiroko’s bold attempt to spell this out to Kim in the penultimate pages of the novel, rather than mock or mourn the tragedy of an Islamic East and secular West’s ultimate irreconcilability, that makes plain the difference of the perspectives Shamsie offers in her “war on terror” fiction.

Re-entering the narrative after Raza’s arrest, Hiroko takes issue with Kim’s claims that her ‘training’ in dealing with suspected threats should exonerate her ‘suspicion of Muslims’, and hence her betrayal of Abdullah’s trust; that her recent bereavement might make a paranoid, self-saving attitude to the world outside her window comprehensible (293, 360-1). In censoring her friend’s attitude to strangers (‘I think you’re too scared and angry to be allowed to make a judgement’, ‘You condemn a man based on five minutes of conversation’, ‘You don’t even know you’re lost’), Hiroko makes historic links to similar such moments, from the familial to the geopolitical, in which humanity is abandoned (361). She reminds Kim of her grandmother Ilse’s ill treatment in Delhi in 1947 of Sajjad: in an echo of *A Passage to India*, ‘for all of two minutes [the colonial wife] thought [her husband’s Indian assistant] was a rapist’ when she saw him touching the scars on her Japanese guest’s back (361). Finally, Hiroko makes more shocking links between Kim’s ‘crime’ of privileging of her own life and freedoms over those of the Muslim Abdullah, and international atrocities – the internment of the Jews under the Nazis, the nuking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the post-9/11 targeting of Afghans – which were permitted to pass because

more powerful nations saw them as necessary to the preservation of European or 'American lives' (62, 361-2). To Shamsie's migrant Asian protagonist's mind, there is no choice to be made when it comes to judging the potential threat posed by another's ties of nation or faith. For her the risk of losing touch with humanity and becoming part of 'the inferno' is too great: she must seek to know that part which is 'not', and let it live (2002b: 330).

Conclusion: Rendering Forgiveness Redundant

Perhaps most significantly, Shamsie's "war on terror" fictions dare to imagine through their decentred female Muslim characters that different people may – as humans – find ways to connect and cohabit without needing either to deny or to justify the religious and cultural affiliations and affinities which international entities may seek to render suspect. The position she adopts is not unproblematic. It requires that her predominantly western world readers distance themselves sufficiently from complex and compromised Islamic characters to be able to situate their actions in inter/national contexts of conflict, or recognise their capacity – in the midst of "the inferno" – to extend an 'unexpected embrace' when a relative stranger is in need (2009c: 322). These flawed figures include Raheen's Muhajir father Zafar, a man perhaps too proud of his link as an emigrant to the 'Muslims of Mecca' to 'be absorbed' into the potential melting pot of Karachi, despite his disquiet at rising ethnic violence (Shamsie 2002b: 224). They also include Abdullah's brother Ismail, a farmer who welcomes the stability brought by the Taliban regime, but refuses to entertain external 'concern' about its impact on his daughters (2009c: 320).

'No simple answers' are forthcoming in Shamsie's novels when it comes to appraising the bearings that very different manifestations of South and Central

Asian Islam have on the actions of her Muslim characters. This is not because the “true” nature of their affiliative alignments and affinitive emotions are obscured, as in Hamid, but rather because they are necessarily portrayed as diverse and multiple – always unpredictably, usually surprisingly, and often reassuringly so. From *Kartography* to *Burnt Shadows*, Shamsie’s decentred heroines work their way towards an understanding that: ‘We have to every day live with the truth and every day find a way towards unblinking, unsentimental compassion that renders forgiveness irrelevant’ (2002b: 332). Reading the world through their eyes, Shamsie’s global fictions start to set an agenda for an alternative, critical, Asian- and Islam-inflected geopolitical consciousness which encompasses but does not rush to judge the perspectives of those characters who continue to be consigned to ‘the little corner of the big picture’, as it is configured by the West (Shamsie 2009c: 362).

Chapter 6. Conclusion: Orientations toward a Coherent Narrative?

This thesis has explored how four South Asian Muslim writers have responded to demands for ‘coherent’ accounts of Islamic faiths in the first decade of the third millennium, and situated the dominant discourses of the West-led “war on terror” as central to their internationally-marked English language fiction. It has argued that their globally-oriented novels operate in different ways not simply to reveal, but also strategically to



Hope 1
Jamil Baloch (2009)
[Figure 7]

occlude, complicate, and re-culture the wide-ranging (Islamic) affiliations and affinities which animate their Muslim characters. Some of the individual works examined may ultimately reconfirm the western stereotypes they attempt to rewrite. Others circumvent them entirely, hinting at but refusing to reveal fully the religious proclivities of their protagonists. Still others strive to deconstruct stereotypes and de-centre western perspectives and priorities, daring to envisage a world where, as humans, Muslims may cohabit with others convivially, needing neither to apologise for nor to disclose the religious attachments which global hegemonies may seek to render suspect. Considered collectively, they demonstrate an attempt to revise modern “knowledge” of the

Islamic world, countering rigid interpretations with narratives centred in a range of South and Central Asian locations, and periods of cosmopolitan (Islamic) civilization, which bring the more flexible and open dimensions of Muslim culture and societies to life.

This thesis acknowledges the partiality of the portraits which the selected authors offer as they attempt to reframe their Muslim subjects' potential to connect with diverse intra- and inter-cultural others. It notes a tendency to privilege relationships formed on the basis of a shared affinity for aesthetic culture, "Sufistic" philosophy, or "universal" humanitarian principles, rather than a mutual interrogation of political differences or potentially divisive doctrinal issues. My study recognises that some novels, such as those by the diasporic writers Aslam and Rushdie, continue to indulge "exotic" appetites, or reinforce Eurocentric ways of seeing. It also points to how certain highly resistant texts like Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* remain susceptible to appropriation by dominant political and cultural forces. Yet, as I have argued, such fictions may be interpreted as "authentic" exposés of radical Islamist mindsets less as a result of their authors' "authoritative" provision of inside perspectives, and more because of their readers' compulsion to mine them for pathological insights. For this thesis also highlights the selected writers' use of certain formal strategies, which demonstrate their capacity to negotiate the tensions of being seen to act as Muslim spokespeople, as it analyses how far their geopolitically engaged and embedded texts intervene in hegemonic discourses around ("suspect") Islamic identities. It indicates how Hamid stages, for example, a young Muslim man's "confession" which implicates its foreign audiences; and how Shamsie constructs a historical narrative which de-centres predominant western readings of "world" history and uses Islamic characters to challenge the ethics of judging

planetary “others”. It suggests that these writers are particularly effective in circumventing dominant narratives: they confound the world reader’s search for “insight”; bring into view alternative perspectives of Asian Muslim experiences of affiliation and affinity; and undermine assumptions about how (devout) Islamic identifications limit Muslims’ capacity to converse with the rest of world.

Ultimately, I maintain that the works of world literature which Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie have produced in the wake of 9/11 *do* attempt to re-orient western readers’ perspectives. They invite audiences to redirect their attention onto diverse spheres of global connection (beyond moderate Sufistic and fanatical Islamist ones), and to reconsider how far their Muslim characters’ sense of self is informed by proximity to these spaces. In so doing, each one also re-focusses its international readership’s attention on the matters of geopolitical concern which its author deems most urgent. These include the threat posed not only to the western world but to heterodox South and Central Muslim multiculturalism by absolutist Islamist affiliates, and the negative impact that the policing of Islamic identities has had on multiply affiliated Muslim subjects/suspects. They also encompass the need to find a way of holding converse with and about Islamic peoples, founded on an ‘unsentimental compassion which renders forgiveness redundant’, and a vital suspension of judgement (Shamsie 2002: 332). On reflection, “Orienting” is perhaps a suitably ambiguous term. It hints at the potential reactivation of perspectives complicit with the (neo-) imperialistic agendas of a global literary marketplace, but also points to a re-centring of (South) Asian visions, which re-align global Muslim identities with multiple spheres. As such it may be aptly posed as a means to describe the complex ways in which the novels of Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie and Shamsie are implicated in the (fictional) unravelling of the Islamic affiliations and

affinities, which have engendered such consternation and curiosity in the “war on terror” decade.

In the later stages of my doctoral research (January to March 2012), I undertook a Junior Residency at the Research and Publications Centre of the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan. On arrival, I was immediately struck by the artworks I encountered there, several of which are included as illustrations in this thesis.⁹³ As I have explained at greater length elsewhere, these arresting paintings and sculptures appeared to intervene directly with the contemporary global narratives about a “suspect” (Pakistani) Muslim identity which had preoccupied me when formulating the hypothesis for my thesis.⁹⁴ But, as I soon learned, the artworks I saw were by no means framed in sole relation to the West’s “war on terror”; in fact it transpired that their creators’ primary intentions appeared to be to contribute to, or comment on, debates taking place *within* Pakistan, both regionally and nationally. These included discussions around the challenges posed to the country’s normative and traditional Muslim culture by the increased influence of more puritanical, prohibitive and punitive Wahabi and Deobandi interpretations of Islam, but also encompassed other religious, political, social and personal matters of central importance to the young artists’ lives.

My discussions with students and established artists at the NCA, and subsequently with resident and transnational Anglophone Pakistani writers at the 2012 Karachi Literature Festival, forced me to realise afresh that to view

⁹³ See Figures 4, 5 and 6.

⁹⁴ See the research paper which I produced during my Residency, ‘Reframing “Violence”, Transforming Impressions: Images in Contemporary Pakistani Visual Art and English-language Fiction’ (Clements 2012).

their creative outputs exclusively through a “global” lens – as geopolitically-attuned works intended to play into, disrupt or complicate the (supposedly) homogenous perspectives of “the West” – was to neglect their other, and often more urgent, localised import. I became attuned to the need constantly to rethink my assumptions – or re-set my compass – if I were to gain my bearings in relation to these artists’ local “Islamic” affinities and affiliations, linguistic style and idiom, and regional (as opposed to transnational) orientations. Such realignment was a prerequisite to a more subtle understanding of how far their faith connections, geographical situations and working language shaped the perspectives they sought to communicate through their fine art and English-language fiction, both nationally and internationally.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ These artists’ working languages might include Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Baloch, Kashmiri and Sindhi, in addition to English. Prior to my arrival in Pakistan the novels, paintings and sculptures which had, until this point, been most accessible to me were those that deployed a vocabulary of globally-recognisable “Islamic” icons and had been internationally exhibited – like Rashid Rana’s *Veil Series* (2004) – or published in English over the course of the last decade by Anglo-American presses, their covers often adorned with similar images. During my stay in Lahore and Karachi it became apparent that it was desirable not just to endeavour to remain open to the regional resonances of such transnational cultural texts. I also needed to look beyond them to the (still multicultural and cosmopolitan) fictions and artworks being produced, disseminated and discussed *inside* Pakistan’s borders; for these might operate further to provincialize and historicise western concerns about shifting Islamic identities, and centre indigenous ones. A fully differentiated account of how more locally-inflected contemporary Pakistani literature engages with the idea of South Asian Islam in “Islamic Pakistan” (and with related feelings of affiliation and affinity) would – ideally – encompass novels published not just in English, but also in Urdu and the other regional languages, such as *Sifar Se Aik Tak*

While *Orienting Muslims* attempts to take account of the locally-inflected and de-centred depictions of South and Central Asian Islamic connections offered in particular by Shamsie, it proposes and goes on to demonstrate the centrality of the discourses of the “war on terror” to the visions such transnational Anglophone authors present in their contemporary, “global” narratives. Damrosch (2003: 9, 14) reminds us that works of world literature ‘resolve ... always into a variety of worlds’; they ‘change ... in nature when [they] move from a national sphere into a new worldly context’, but are ‘always as much about the host culture’s values and needs as [they are] about a work’s source culture’. Contemporary criticism needs to revisit how far the Anglophone authors of Pakistan’s “globally-oriented” world literature and their politically-engaged and locally-situated counterparts prioritise intervention in regional debates on Islam over responding to western anxieties, and ask what South Asian Muslim networks are made visible as a result of this re-centring process. A reappraisal of how their affiliative and affinitive dimensions are mapped in regionally-inflected and disseminated (but still globally interpretable) English-language fiction and visual artworks seems particularly pertinent at a time when Muslims of different progressive, orthodox, and sectarian backgrounds continue to be

(2009) by Mirza Athar Baig, which reviewers have praised for coming closer to contemporary concerns and interests. My enquiries are currently limited as a result of my monolingualism to literature written or translated into English. It seems particularly important, therefore, to note with Zahra Sabri (2013: n. p.), that the establishment of a ‘firm market’ for Pakistani English fiction abroad may have allowed ‘for more diverse types of local [Anglophone] writers to be published, noticed, and also promoted’ at home; and that its authors could hail from an ‘emerging’ ‘class ... for whom speaking English is not necessarily a function of a profound Westernisation of culture and lifestyle’.

positioned in the international press as perpetually irreconcilable. *Orienting Muslims* argues that the discourses of the “war on terror” have had a profound influence on the intractable Islamic perspectives produced by transnational South Asian Muslim authors who remain conscious of the complex geopolitical contexts in which they write. Studies which seek to shift the focus away from “global” novels, and toward more local accounts of affiliation and affinity written from “the little corner of the big picture”, might profitably keep in mind the framing narratives this thesis has identified, and the strategies its authors have deployed to differentiate, deconstruct and de-centre dominant discourses. Considered together, the regionally- and globally-directed fictions produced by South Asian authors of Muslim background can provide a fuller and more nuanced perspective on contemporary experience, thereby offering striking contributions to the ambiguous contemporary project of “unfolding” Islam to an expectant world.

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