

IN LOVE AND WAR: THE POLITICS OF ROMANCE IN FOUR 21ST-CENTURY
PAKISTANI NOVELS

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Abstract

Writers of fiction have long since relied on love, romance, and desire to drive the plots of their work, yet some postcolonial authors use romance and interpersonal relationships to illustrate the larger political and social forces that affect their relatively marginalized experiences in a global context. To illustrate this literary strategy, I have chosen to discuss four novels written in the twenty-first century by Pakistani authors: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan, *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam, and *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie. With the geographical origin of these writers as a common starting place from which to compare and contrast their perspectives on global politics, their understandings of gender, and their perceptions of how the public and the private constitute and intersect each other, I will use postcolonial theory to dissect the treatment of romance in their respective novels.

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Introduction

Writers of fiction have long since relied on love, romance, and desire to drive the plots of their work, yet some postcolonial authors use romance and interpersonal relationships to illustrate the larger political and social forces that affect their relatively marginalized experiences in a global context. To illustrate this literary strategy, I have chosen to discuss four novels written in the twenty-first century by Pakistani authors: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan, *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam, and *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie. With the geographical origin of these writers as a common starting place from which to compare and contrast their perspectives on global politics, their understandings of gender, and their perceptions of how the public and the private constitute and intersect each other, I will use postcolonial theory to dissect the treatment of romance in their respective novels.

My own entrance into Pakistani literature was somewhat of a meandering one. I first encountered postcolonial literature in an undergraduate course taken after my undergraduate degree and found myself most engaged with novels from the Indian subcontinent, fascinated by the political concerns and the multiple layers of oppression faced by many of the characters that were so foreign to my middle-class Canadian upbringing. Perhaps at first it was an experience with the exotic that drew me in, the introduction to new and alien lands and cultures, but as I continued my studies, I was most interested in how the voices within the novels felt about such subjects as global politics and Western imperialism and where my own nation fit in terms of worldwide schematics. I was captivated by the potential of fiction to create understanding and transcend borders in a way that news reports and political pundits had failed to. As I had

grown up mainly unconcerned with oppression in my own life, sparing only a few cursory thoughts for the World Vision “less-fortunates” oceans away, it was the injustices based on gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and geography that held my attention and motivated me to explore further study in postcolonial theory, feminist theory, globalization, and political theory. In my resulting reading of South Asian fiction, I also found that the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the resulting War of/on Terror increasingly served as focal point within the fiction that followed these events, and perhaps even elicited a greater number of politically oriented texts originating from within the region most affected.¹

Though these events have inarguably affected the relationships and actions of nearly every state in the world, perspectives on the reasons for them and opinions on what the reactions to them should have been and should be in the future, have varied as much as the number of these states and the individuals within them. These perspectives and opinions have unavoidably been influenced by the information presented by the available media and constructed by personal and cultural experience and therefore tend to be geographically and rhetorically similar. Consequently, the region of Central/South Asia was of particular interest to me since it is located at the site of what became global military activity, though, as I came to learn, foreign activity and involvement was by no means a new phenomenon in the area, but was more accurately the intensified repetition of a pattern of imperialism and exploitation. In essence, I was interested in the voices of

¹ The term “War of/on Terror” comes from the Zillah Eisenstein’s *Against Empire*, in which she points out the hypocrisy of the United States government in “appropriat[ing] ‘democracy’ for its own global agenda, and displac[ing] ‘terrorism’ to others elsewhere, though, through violence, war, globalization, and the neglect of the social welfare of its own citizens, it produces more terror than any of its declared enemies (11).

a region that so many other voices were speaking and writing about, yet whose viewpoints were largely ignored in my own culture. All of this, as well as an appreciation for the literary style of several currently writing Pakistani authors resulted in a geographical theme in this thesis.

Four Pakistani Novels

In order to discuss differences in terms of style and subject matter between writers, the country of their birth and their tendency toward politically oriented fiction are the only commonalities amongst the authors I have chosen to examine. Though there are common motifs running through all of the texts I have selected, I have chosen instead to compare and contrast different themes in each of them, while using the trope of love and romance in the plots as the unifying idea through which other themes are explored. The first text I will look at is perhaps the simplest and also the most problematic of the group. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, though short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2007 and winning several other awards, is alarmingly one-dimensional in its treatment of gender and global politics. Its plot centers on the first-person recollection of Changez, a Pakistani national who attended an American Ivy-League university and was working for a prestigious business evaluation firm in New York when the attacks of 9/11 suddenly changed the American political climate as well as the attitude of Americans toward his Pakistani roots and Islamic identity. Changez relays his experience to an American stranger he meets in Lahore, recounting his shifting allegiance from business and money to the country of his birth, ultimately returning to Pakistan in disgust over the American reaction to 9/11 and the consequences of that reaction to himself and his

country. He provides the additional story of his romance with an American girl named Erica, using it as an allegory of the relationship of the United States with countries such as Pakistan, as well as to warn of the danger of the nostalgic American emotional response to the attacks, a response that Hamid believes will result in isolation and ruin for the US. In Hamid's work, I will discuss how he uses Changez and Erica's relationship to reinforce his anti-American text as well as the problems with his portrayal of this relationship, particularly in the character of Erica. Additionally, I will highlight the interpersonal and international complexities that Hamid does not attend to, pointing out the layers of oppression that he chooses to ignore.

In contrast to Hamid's work, *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan gives particular attention to gender as a site of oppression and the myriad locations at which there are imbalances of power and agency in the lives of both of her protagonists, Dia and Daanish. Short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2003, Khan's novel undertakes the same themes of imperialism and violence as the other texts, though it is the only novel written pre-9/11. She also uses romance as the driving force in her plot line, but focuses specifically on themes of love and transgression as well as how individual relationships illustrate hierarchies of power at a larger scale and thence how the political shapes the private. Khan also illustrates how the "frontier" is constructed and used as a space of permissiveness where socially dictated confines can be ignored and connections formed between individuals that normally could not have existed. To demonstrate these themes, Khan's plot revolves around both Daanish, a student returned from a New England university to Pakistan for his father's funeral, and Dia, daughter of a deceased father and his distant wife, Riffat, owner and executor of a silk factory who

both enjoys and has granted her daughter liberties uncommon for Pakistani women. Dia and Daanish form a romantic and sexual relationship over the course of the novel, though forbidden by both of their mothers, and through this relationship as well as additional sub-plots, Khan establishes that for both individuals and nations, the decisions of the past directly determine the possibilities and limitations of the present and the future.

Like Khan, Nadeem Aslam in *The Wasted Vigil* also uses the romantic relationships in the novel to serve as reflection of the relationships between states and as proof that the past cannot be extricated from the present, but is a product of the previous judgment and actions of previous individuals and nations. Introducing the theme of literary self-reflexion, Aslam's plot revolves around the setting of a library within a house in contemporary Afghanistan and Aslam uses the image of books to illustrate the connection between literature, art, beauty, education, and peace and the combined power of these elements to act as the antithesis to war, violence, ignorance, fanaticism, and injustice. The house mentioned belongs to English-born Marcus, who moved to Afghanistan and declared permanent residency there after marrying Katrina, a liberal Afghani doctor who was executed before the commencement of the novel for her refusal to adhere to the version of Islam enforced by the Taliban. Marcus' house is the site of intersection for four other lives: David, a former American spy and lover of Marcus' deceased daughter; Lara, a Russian woman in search of her brother who went missing during his military service in Soviet Afghanistan; Casa, a young zealot, molded since youth to hate America and sacrifice whatever necessary to fight against them; and James Palantine, a similarly narrow-minded American, deployed to Afghanistan as part of the Special Forces. In weaving together these seemingly dissimilar lives, Aslam is able to

depict a microcosm of global relations, demonstrating the offences and misunderstandings, both historical and contemporaneous, that result in friction and conflict, as well as possible models for healing past wounds and present quarrels. While Aslam develops the relationship between David and Lara within the timeline of the novel and uses it to highlight the challenges of moving past former affronts, geographical distance, and political ideals, he uses Marcus' recounting of his marriage to Qatrina to epitomize the ideal relationship between countries and cultures, establishing peace amidst an environment of violence and extremism.

Spanning five centuries, Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, shortlisted for the 2009 Orange Prize, rests on violent clashes of global significance: the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945, the partition of India and the formation of Pakistan in 1947, and the consequences of 9/11 in Afghanistan and America in 2001-2002. Like Aslam's ideal relationship between Marcus and Qatrina, Shamsie presents an ideal global citizen: Hiroko Tanaka is the only consistent character within the text, her life spanning the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki, the partition of India, the fledgling years of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the chaos of New York City at the crumbling of the World Trade Center. Primarily through the development of her romance with and marriage to young Indian law student Sajjad Ashraf, as well as in her relationship with British/German colonials James and Elizabeth Burton, Hiroko serves as a site of cultural encounter and embodies the solution to oppression and power imbalances based on gender, religion, ethnicity, race, language, and nationality. Through Hiroko's travels within the novel, Shamsie is also able to visit some of the events of the past that explain the present global condition.

Politics and Literature

Though the subject will be visited later in the context of the novels, the connection between politics and literature is a foundational concept in postcolonial studies, proposed by Edward Said in his 1978 work, *Orientalism*. Certainly supported by the Pakistani novels studied in this thesis, Said writes that literature is inseparable from social context, noting that it is also instrumental in forming discourse, which, in the Foucauldian sense is the conjoining of power and knowledge and involves “[t]hose who have power hav[ing] control of what is known and the way it is known” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 63). Thus literature is a powerful tool in reproducing representation as reality. Furthermore, Said notes that both literature and reality constitute each other and therefore must be considered together. He writes that “[t]oo often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me, and certainly my study of *Orientalism* has convinced me...that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together” (*Orientalism* 27). Said later writes in *Culture and Imperialism* that literature and the resultant discourse has been and is currently an influential determinant in the formation of both alliances and rivalries over territory and dominion and that global conflict also has metaphysical dimension. He states: “Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (7). Contained in Said’s words is the affirmation that geographical context needs to be studied alongside literature, as it is in this thesis, and also that if literature and representation is powerful in

the hands of the colonizer, there is also the potential for narratives of resistance against colonization and imperialism. He continues: “[t]he post-imperial writer of the Third World therefore bear their past within them—as scars of humiliating wounds, . . . as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a post-colonial future . . . in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist” (*Culture and Imperialism* 212). Each of the texts analyzed in this thesis surely could be considered “part of a general movement of resistance,” the political heritage of the writers compelling a reclamation of hegemonic territory, denaturalizing the lasting domination of colonial power.

The history of Pakistan and the texts it produces provide a particularly rich postcolonial context as there was not simply one great influx and exodus of colonizers (though the area was part of British India), but the location has been subject to layers of imperialism and encroachment by the United States and the Taliban among others forces, resulting in not a unified resistance and rebuilding narrative by “formerly silent native[s],” but more often in multidimensional texts, addressing multiple offenders against national and individual self-determination. In addition to serving as agents of resistance, postcolonial texts serve to restructure positions of power, placing local experience and concerns at the centre and “pushing the colonial world to the margins of experience” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back* 12). Moreover, in areas of political upheaval and conflict, fiction often performs a crucial role in overcoming censorship and state-sponsored bias in the media. Kamila Shamsie, in an article in *The Guardian*, writes that for those authors who grew up in such environments, “one of the most compelling urges in [their] fiction is to tell those stories that have been

suppressed” (“More Honest Than the Facts” 30). Furthermore, she continues that fiction, in fact, has the potential to convey more truth than non-fiction because of its ability to articulate emotional experience and connect with readers on a personal level. She writes:

Fiction writers go where news reporters and historians dare not tread: into characters’ heads, into the dreams they lose at the moment of waking, into the memories forgotten, the fears never articulated even to themselves. We do all this, even while making stuff up or distorting and embellishing “what really happened” for the sake of a dramatic arc; and, in so doing, we claim our ability to convey emotional truths, more revelatory about a time and place than any series of facts. (30)

Consequently, because fiction is often used as a site of resistance and the repositioning of power, as well as because of fiction’s capability to make linkages across geographical and cultural divides and transmit one individual’s truth and perspective to another, I will consider in this thesis both the political paradigms of the authors as well as their individual and collective origins and experiences while unpacking the images, implications, and allusions of their texts.

The Context of Pakistan

Thus, as the cultural origins of the writers are of vital importance, the history of the state of Pakistan plays into each of their narratives, figuring into their own lived experiences as well as the composition and actions of their characters who are from a geographically similar area. The state of Pakistan provides a historically unique and contemporarily relevant context for literature, as it has long been a highly contested area for colonizers and has featured in much of the geopolitical turmoil of the past fifty years.²

² The following summary of the history of the region that is now Pakistan is based on an amalgam of sources: *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* by Husain Haqqani; *Pakistan: In the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan* by Mary Anne Weaver; *India* by

Before its formal existence as a country, the area that is now Pakistan was a site of hyper cultural exchange as a multitude of conquerors and migrating groups including Persians, Greeks, Arabs, and Turks settled there and their populations diffused amongst the groups already living in the region. Additionally, the Silk Road, a route of economic and cultural exchange between East and West, ran through the Indus valley within modern Pakistan's borders, thereby increasing the frequency and volume of the flow of ideas between peoples.

Because the region was rich in the spices that were in extreme demand in Europe, the Portuguese, Dutch, and British trading companies and governments battled over the control of the Indian subcontinent and its surrounding waters, with the British ultimately gaining a lucrative monopoly over its resources in the early 18th century. British colonial policy also gained control over and through strictly segregated Indian social structure, a rigid class organization designed to maintain control through layered oppressions in which the British remained at the top reinforcing and adjusting these social hierarchies to serve their own purposes. Due to this oppression, resistance to British rule intensified in the early twentieth century, and because of a combination of civil disobedience and peaceful protest spearheaded by Mohandas Gandhi, the colonial government finally retreated in 1947, leaving India as an independent nation. In contrast to the peaceful means by which the people of India gained their independence from colonial rule, the Indian subcontinent was violently carved up along religious and ethnic lines to create two separate nations: the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of India, resulting in

Stanley Wolpert; *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier* by Imtiaz Gul; and *Descent into Chaos: The US and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* by Ahmed Rashid.

the death of citizens ranging from several hundred thousand to one million in number and the displacement of approximately twelve million. Even after millions of Hindus and Sikhs who lived within the borders of the newly formed state of Pakistan migrated to India and a reciprocal migration of Muslims to Pakistan took place, the country faced further violence in 1971 when East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh due to a militant uprising of the Bengali minority within the state.

Because its borders were drawn specifically to encircle religious uniformity, the history of the state of Pakistan must include discussion of the history of Islam and the conflation of the history of a region with the history of a religion. As Kamila Shamsie asserts in another of her works, *Offence: The Muslim Case*, “[b]ecause the nation chooses the history of Muslims within the subcontinent over the history of territorial Pakistan, it creates a particular notion of identity as wrapped up with religion in a manner quite distinct from notions of identity in, for example, Indonesia, the nation with the world’s largest Muslim population” (16-17). Consequently, in addition to writing in response to territorial conquest and the ebb and flow of imperial rule, postcolonial Pakistani writers are forced to confront an additional binary that has been constructed and reinforced by both history and design: Islam versus Christendom, though “Christendom” is often distinguished by other categorizations such as “the West,” “America,” or “Britain.” Shamsie continues that this dichotomy, conjuring images of the invasion of the Crusades, the exploitation of the Silk Road, and the tyranny of the British East India Company, has been deliberately nurtured since the creation of the state of Pakistan in order to weld provincial divides with a mutual threat and a unity of purpose. Additionally, Shamsie continues that provincialism was not the only reason for adopting Islam as the totalizing

national myth, but “Islamic ideology was trotted out as a politically expedient tool” because “the border dispute with India was also crucial” (*Offence: The Muslim Case* 34). Furthermore, the binary created by a nationally universal religion pitted against menacing infidels masked the differences in orthodoxy, doctrine, and practice among Muslims themselves, producing the illusion of a monolithic Islam that seemed more conducive to a peaceful state than did the collection of many fractured sects.

Despite predication of the nation of Pakistan upon a common religion and no further formal colonization or civil war following the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, the state of Pakistan continued to be a participant in geopolitical conflict while still suffering national violence in the forms of political assassinations and militant religious fundamentalism.³ The United States used the nation of Pakistan as a major ally in the Soviet-Afghan dimension of the Cold War in the 1980s and again in the first Gulf War when Pakistan aligned itself with the United Nations-backed contingent deployed against Iraqi troops in Kuwait. Despite its history of loyalty, Pakistan was sanctioned by the US due to nuclear activities and estranged from the benefits of a healthy economic American relationship; however, following 9/11, the state of Pakistan was forced back into coalition with the US by the threats of economic downturn and the loss of foreign aid money. In resuming a strong allegiance to the United States, the Pakistani government was

³ There is great suspicion surrounding the death of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq who, after ruling Pakistan for eleven years following a military coup, died on August 17, 1988 in a mysterious plane crash. He was a dictator who imposed strict Islamic rule on the state and nurtured radical fundamentalism, giving historians many reasons to question the circumstances and accidental nature of his death. Additionally, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated on December 27, 2007, shortly after her return to Pakistan after eight years of exile. Upon her immediate return in October of that year, 140 people were killed by two different suicide bombers’ attempts on her life. She had promised to fight against religiously based violence and radicalism, thereby inducing retaliation by extremists (Z. Hussain xiv).

compelled to discontinue its support of the Muslim Taliban, focus its efforts on weeding Islamic militant groups out from within its own borders, and go to war against the peoples of Afghanistan, some of which had strong familial ties to their own population.⁴ Taken as a whole, the history of the country's relationship with the US provides support to the statement of Andrew J. Bacevich, that Pakistan is "a nation that the United States has been happy to use without ever bothering to understand" (Haqqani i). These themes of manipulation and misunderstanding embedded in the history of the state generally figure prominently into the texts produced by Pakistani novelists, while the characters themselves often reproduce similar relationships with each other.

Due to the writers of the texts studied in my thesis sharing a common geographical origin, I feel it necessary to mention an additional key component. In grouping any collection of individuals along lines of geography, gender, socioeconomics, or any other classification, there is always the risk of essentialism: the assumption that groups or cultures can be reduced to a common or single experience and can be defined by their commonalities. With homogenization comes the dangers of stereotypes and the falsehood that persons can be understood based on their ethnic group, country of origin, class, and so on. Within any of the groups mentioned, as well as all others that could be mentioned, there is generally as great of a range of experience within that group as there would be when compared to a different group. Hence, the organization of writers, texts, or individuals into categories based on any similarity is precarious and bears the hazard of reducing a variety of experience into a simple singularity.

⁴ Ethnic Pashtuns are a majority within Afghanistan and comprise a relatively large proportion of Pakistani demographics, particularly in the region bordering Afghanistan.

Though the writers I have selected do share a common nation of birth, I will attempt to avoid this problematic essentialism by contrasting the experiences they portray as well as how and to what ends they depict individuals. Furthermore, since according to Said, the geopolitical context from which an author writes must be considered in order to accurately understand the wider implications of his or her text, such geographical categorization is useful when making efforts to understand all the social and cultural influences that postcolonial analysis rests upon.

The Use of English by Pakistani Writers

The collision of cultures within the geographical area of Pakistan is paralleled by a similar exchange of languages and forms of representation. Like many postcolonial writers, the authors discussed in this thesis were compelled to make a deliberate choice as to which language they would use to produce their texts. Because the writers were born in Pakistan and spent at least most of their childhood there, but were also educated in their later years somewhere in the West, they were each forced to choose between writing in a language associated with the place of their birth, most likely Urdu, or in English. Within the framework of postcolonial theory, this decision can never be devoid of political significance, as each of the options in language better serve a particular political agenda.

Within the context of the state of Pakistan, English is obviously the language of the colonizers, a “feature of imperial oppression” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back* 7). British India is perhaps the archetypal example of how English “bec[a]me the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power [was] perpetuated

and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ bec[a]me established” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back* 7). Because it is impossible to dissociate the language of English from its power as a past and present language of colonialism and privilege, postcolonial writers risk reinforcing its power to subjugate and dominate as well as affirming the power of the societies that commonly claim it as their own, such as the United States, Britain, and Canada. The alternative is not without its own challenges and limitations, however. Though using a medium of communication that may be viewed as empowering to postcolonial self-identity, works written in less widely known languages are readable only by a smaller number of people and, therefore, publishers are less eager to distribute and translate them. Thus writers of political fiction may be hesitant to use the local language when it will place restrictions on the breadth of their texts’ reception. The authors of the texts analyzed in this thesis may have taken these tradeoffs into account in deciding to write in English and may have adopted the strategy put forth by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin:

[b]y appropriating the imperial language, its discursive forms and its modes of representation, post-colonial societies are able, as things stand, to intervene more readily in the dominant discourse, to interpolate their own cultural realities, or use that dominant language to describe those realities to a wide audience of readers. (16)

Additionally, the appropriation of English grants the power of self-representation to its writers, allowing them to depict themselves and their own cultural groups in the language of what has come to be the globally privileged. Regarding the importance of such self-creation, Fatema Mernissi, in *Scheherazade Goes West*, writes: “If the West has the power to control time by manipulating images...then who are we if we do not control our images? Who am I—and who makes my image?” (111). Whether a strategy in

language choice was calculated or not, it is clear that the authors examined in this thesis use the English language to broadcast the injustices of particular geographically determined experiences to a larger global audience and are, predominantly, using English to resist against the very societies that are linked to its use.

Just as the authors straddle languages, their lives comprise interstitial cultural experiences. As previously mentioned, they were born in Pakistan and educated elsewhere; also, they currently divide their residency among locations in Pakistan, the United States, and Great Britain. Pakistani literary critic and anthologist, Muneeza Shamsie, states that Pakistani writers “who employ English as a creative language live between the East and the West, literally or figuratively, and have had to struggle to be heard. They write from the extreme edges of both English and Pakistani literatures” (1). Though, arguably, all postcolonial authors could be categorized as inhabiting the space between cultures (simply because their own is a fusion of past and present and colonized and colonizers), the writers discussed in this thesis are especially poignant examples of liminality and hybridity. As Homi Bhabha discusses these terms in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, liminality and hybridity refer to the occupation of a transcultural site of exchange that results in constant cultural reproduction (5). For Bhabha, liminality involves a position outside of easy categorization, between groups, and consequently, and is often also a place of hybridity where these groups meet and fuse in a new cultural production. Notably, Bhabha considers this space to be ideal for creation, writing that “[t]he borderline work of culture...creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause of aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that

innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (10). This act of innovation and interruption is seen in the following texts as conventional Western forms of fiction are appropriated to write both past and present from a unique and resistant point of view.

Feminism and Colonial Practice

All of the novels analyzed in this thesis are concerned with the politics and dynamics of power, but the consideration of such is incomplete without taking into account the various levels where these dynamics can play out. The primary concern of postcolonialism is that of power—who has it, why, and at what expense to those who do not. However, postcolonial theory mainly addresses power asymmetries based on ethnicity and nationality and resulting from past and present colonization and imperialism, ignoring other sites and sources of oppression. Similarly, feminism also centers on power and subordination, but centers primarily on gender rather than race and location. However, since both premises are based on the unevenness of distributions of power, a fruitful strategy is to intersect postcolonial theory with feminist writing when discussing the characterization of women in the novels, noting how the experiences of imperialism and patriarchy often mirror each other and how the confluence of the two results in a “double colonization” (see Holst Peterson). Likewise, class must also be attended to in order to consider how sites of oppression interlock with and exponentiate each other, resulting in different bodies encountering varying levels of subjugation.

Critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Suleri have also noted how feminism without postcolonial attention results in the false identification of women across global boundaries and the homogenization of gendered experience. Such

theoretical practice ends in useless coalitions founded upon essentializing principles; that is, that the domination of patriarchy trumps all other forms of subjugation and therefore, the experience of a woman is the same everywhere, regardless of geography, race, or class. As Mohanty writes: “the assumption that all women, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis...is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women,” thus conflating the experience of a white woman of privilege with that of a poor woman of color in the Third World, as well as problematically constructing all women as powerless for the same generalized reasons (22-23).

Just as postcolonialism deals with the discrepancies of power across race and nationality, the consideration of gender is necessary to understand the differentials that mark relationships between sexes. Though gender is an integral identity marker to consider when a study of power or oppression is undertaken, it holds particular significance to the topic of this thesis that centers on romance and the insight and nuance it provides to postcolonial relationships. Although desire in a traditionally colonial sense is presented within the novels, love is also discussed in more familiar romantic terms and is used to illustrate the bridging of ideological gaps and the overcoming of difference. Thus a discussion of both colonial and romantic tropes of love is necessary.

Under past and current colonization, women’s bodies have figured prominently into imperial campaigns, as sites of conquest, the forbidden, and dangerous foreign desire. Anne McClintock, in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, discusses sex to be a function of the imperial system in that invaders rape the female local population in order to seal their domination over the colonized

group (17). While wider-scale conflicts occur, women's bodies become microcosms of the same sexual violence, the victory centered by the resulting shame of the male population whose female relatives are raped (Eisenstein *Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy* 27).

Beyond the violent action of rape perpetuated by the invading army, Robert Young explores the function of sex between races as representative of the desire for the forbidden, of the transgression of proscribed social boundaries.⁵ In *Colonial Desire*, he writes that, though "colonialism was a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration, and above all, of power...it was also a machine of fantasy, and of desire" with a lust for expansion and replication (Young 98). Consequently, women's bodies also served as the site at which the desire for the exotic and the desire to expand into the foreign played out at the scale of the individual, while sexual encounters with the local female population provide a method for the imperial culture to literally replicate and therefore reinforce itself.

Despite the sexual liaisons between colonizer and colonized, imperial populations remained greatly concerned with miscegenation, the sexual union of different races, as well as the precise categorization of the offspring resulting from these relationships. Ann Laura Stoler writes that "the micromanagement of sexual arrangements and affective attachments was so critical to the making of colonial categories and deemed so important to the distinctions between ruler and ruled" (Stoler 10). The heritage of such concern is, in some circumstances, modern boundaries between races, lust for the exotic, as well as

⁵ Though "race" is a problematic and constructed mode of classification of human beings, I will continue to use it to denote traditional colonial classifications of visible ethnicity, geographical location, skin color, etc.

the use of skin color to heighten social standing, all of which can be found in the novels considered in this thesis. Stoler adds that these sexual relationships, as well as the constructed boundaries forbidding them, are not simply the dark side of conquest, but the “charged site of its tensions,” demonstrating sex to be a useful location at which to study a larger colonial context (10).

Important in a historical sense, as well as in modern events, sex and gender is used as a justification for war and imperialism as women are seen to need liberation from their “barbaric” male oppressors. Named by Gayatri Spivak as “white men saving brown women from brown men,” this paradigm has been specially adopted in the current wars in the Middle East and Central Asia (93). Regardless of the practical validity of this rationalization, when using it, the region is increasingly Orientalized (Said’s term signifying the construction of the East as exotic, peculiar, inferior), Islam is further demonized, and ethnic women constructed as powerless. Eisenstein notes that this attitude victimizes Muslim women and also ignores both their potential for and practice of vibrant resistance (*Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* 153).

Love as a Literary Trope

Each of the novels plays upon these colonial themes of desire and rescue in the relationships that drive the plot lines, but also are further nuanced by additional dimensions of representation when the romances are used for the purposes of illustrating hierarchies within societal groups based on gender and class, ideal examples of coalition building, and also, and especially, the interplay of geopolitical forces. In writing

specifically about Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, an Arab/Egyptian novel rooted in both love and politics, but spanning the locations of Egypt and the United States as well as reaching across the entirety of the twentieth century, Emily Davis notes:

it works against the political failings of both the colonial romance and the postcolonial national romance even as she appropriates some of the key tropes of both subgenres...[The] yoking of romance to politics allows for an exploration of transnational political coalitions for which neither masculinist nationalist rhetoric nor colonial fantasy has provided the space. (par. 3)

Though, as she notes that the “engagement with the romance genre [has] not always been acknowledged by critics, erasing much of the political force,” the romances in these postcolonial novels serve to be widely appealing to audiences while still transmitting a political agenda through their symbolic and allegorical nature (par. 4). Davis argues that the reason Soueif's novel was denied the Booker prize was due to the critical disregard of the power that postcolonial stories of love and romance have to act as allegorical texts, demonstrating the bridging of cross-cultural divides as in the case of the marriage of Anna, a young British widow, and Sharif, an Egyptian nationalist within the Soueif's text.

The romances within the novels discussed in this thesis similarly merge instances of colonialism and postcolonial agendas with traditional Western romantic themes. In more traditionally canonized examples of literature than the ones studied in this thesis, stories of love have provided the vehicle through which writers could comment on the conditions of their times, highlight social concerns, or caution against particular behaviors. Jane Austen uses *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate the disadvantages of women who are not born to social privilege; Jay Gatsby's desire for Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* allows F. Scott Fitzgerald to caution against desiring that which is always beyond

reach, in both materialism and love. One of the most common themes found in literature is that of forbidden love, D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* serving as a prime example. Consequently, if there are taboos within literature, there must also be a code of acceptable behavior that is transgressed; in the case of Lawrence's text, that behavior is the forming of relationships across socioeconomic classes. Since love is often linked to the adherence to or transgression of a particular code, characters are punished for crossing lines of ethnicity or class as dictated by society, demonstrating the restrictions enforced by both global and local culture and the risks and consequences associated with breaking them. Furthermore, John Bayley notes that stories of love and desire are often told didactically, to serve as social and individual commentary where direct address would not be well received (34). The novels discussed in this thesis support Bayley's theory; they use romance to teach what the author believes to be the proper way to form relationships across difference, to demonstrate the restrictions of geopolitical hierarchies, and to illustrate the deficiencies in current divisions between classes and ethnicities.

Moreover, the relationships in the texts are often canonical in nature in that they repeat and intersect with each other, the problems of the past repeating themselves in the present, reflecting the recurring nature of war and conflict, as well as history in general. Similarly, the options and constraints of individuals in relationships in the present are frequently dictated by the choices of those in the past, demonstrating how previous interactions between nations and cultural groups shape and direct the possibilities of the future.

Ultimately, though the authors use love to fuel and develop their stories, it is not the nature of love itself that most concerns them; neither is it upon romance that they

focus their commentary. Rather they use these relationships to write postcolonial narratives of resistance against power imbalances, whether they be based on location, ethnicity, gender, or class. Some of the authors use insight into relationships to give formerly exoticized female characters a voice and resist Orientalist views such as that of Flaubert's of an Egyptian courtesan. According to Said, "she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her" (*Orientalism* 6). In contrast, Khan, Aslam, and Shamsie all give women as well as ethnic characters a voice to describe their perspectives on their own relationships, and thereby granting them power in a larger context. Generally, what matters most to these writers is the geopolitical context and how this context shrinks and expands, as well as how the dissonance and dynamics between cultural and civil groups and the alliances and manipulations of global struggle are distilled into individual experience.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

It is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be.

-Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Mohsin Hamid has called *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “a tragic love story” (qtd. in Perlez). “At its core,” he continues, “this is a story of someone who is in love with America, in love with an American woman, who finds he has to leave.” Hamid is rather direct in his symbolism, his alter ego character of Changez ensuring that a connection is made between the character of his love interest, Erica, and the United States as well as his relationship with Erica and the relationship of the United States with other nations and their citizens who try to integrate into American society.⁶ Though at times problematic, Hamid’s symbolic novel provides unique dimension to global events.

Hamid’s own life experience brings an interesting perspective to his text, as he creates his main character, Changez, with much the same background as himself. Born and reared in Lahore, Pakistan, Hamid moved to the United States to attend Princeton and Harvard, worked as management consultant in New York and London and eventually returned to Pakistan, disaffected with American attitudes and racism that followed the attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 (“Mohsin Hamid Homepage”). Similarly,

⁶ For the purposes of this section, the terms “America,” “American,” “the United States,” “US,” etc will be the conflation of elements of the state, the nation, society, and culture. Though each of these terms bring very different implications, they are generally considered a single essence within the novel, thus I will merge them in my analysis as well.

Changez moves from Pakistan to the US to attend Princeton University, excelling scholastically and also in his proceeding business endeavors as a management consultant for the prestigious firm Underwood Samson. The novel is composed of his retelling of this particular period—his rise within the company, his disenchantment, and his departure back to Pakistan.

The story itself takes a unique form, a monologue where Changez speaks directly to “you,” an unnamed and unidentified American who is silent for nearly the entirety of the novel. This format is integral to Hamid’s point, the marginalized story of the Pakistani is recentered, and the American is voiceless, for as the author noted in an interview with Deborah Solomon, “in the world of [...] the American media, it’s almost always the other way around”; representatives of the Islamic world ‘mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves’” (qtd. in Scanlan). Additionally, the one-sided perspective of the novel allows the ending to be completely ambivalent; as the point of view in the novel is so biased in presenting only Changez’s voice, we can never quite trust him fully; neither can we trust the American that he is speaking to. At the conclusion of the novel when several possible endings are alluded to, the reader is left to draw her own conclusion as to whether the American is a CIA assassin, Changez a radical Islamist, or the characters are both as innocent and agenda-less as they profess to be. As Hamid writes concerning the conclusion of the novel: “The novel is just a conversation between two men. If you believe one is a terrorist, or one is a CIA agent, or one harms the other, that is something determined by you, the reader. I created shadows in which a reader could explore their own biases” (“Mohsin Hamid on *the Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Re Solomon Interview”).

Furthermore, because Changez's voice in the novel is always speaking to "you," it makes the novel very conversational and didactic, the reader forced to listen to and identify with Changez's story and listen to the criticism in his dialogue.

The moralizing effect of the first-person point of view within the novel is enhanced by the symbolism Hamid uses to construct his love allegory. The consulting firm, Underwood Samson, shares the same initials of the nation it represents and the name of "Erica" is the last five letters of "America," making them symbols of the United States that are explored very divergently, though sharing the same tale of love and then loss. In the beginning of his story, Changez is "in love" with the utilitarianism and meritocracy of Underwood Samson and the American business world. In succeeding in the "efficiency" of an American university and then a prestigious American business, Changez subscribes to the national "melting pot" myth, "suspect[ing] [his] Pakistaniness [to be] invisible, cloaked by [his] suit, by [his] expense account, and—most of all—by [his] companions" (71). He also loves the story of American self re-creation, the possibilities of the American dream embodied by his boss, Jim, whose property in the Hamptons reminds Changez of *The Great Gatsby*. With the reference to Jay Gatsby, however, the suspicion is reinforced that Jim's efforts toward reinvention from his poverty-stricken beginnings is only the chasing of an illusion that one can transcend their past.

Notwithstanding his love for the possibilities that America professes and his desire for full inclusion into society and fellowship, he also resents the power that it holds over him, finding strange joy in the attacks of 9/11 that cripple the nation that is the object of his somewhat unrequited love. Though he is somewhat confused as his

comfortable lifestyle is enabled by a “lucrative American salary” that is the “product of an American university,” he is delighted at the humbling of the powerful nation (73). As he watche[s] as “one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapse[s],” he “smile[s]” and his “initial reaction [is] to be remarkably pleased” with “the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (72-73). Though Changez is initially satisfied by the equalization in his relationship with America caused by the 9/11 attacks, the “crumbling of the world around [him]” mirrors “the impending destruction of [his] personal American dream,” the tide of racism and manipulative geopolitics shaking the foundation that he has built his American aspirations upon.

Despite Changez’s progress in the company and his aptitude for his occupation, the love story goes awry when he realizes his contribution to American global manipulation and financial extortion in reinforcing the “fundamentals” of the US economic paradigm, that of efficiency and economic self-interest without regard to the cost to others. After months of intense introspection following 9/11, Changez finally concludes of his coworker:

I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe...I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present. In other words, my blinders were coming off, and I was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision. (145)

Following this realization, Changez essentially abandons his job at Underwood Samson and returns to Pakistan, becoming an activist university professor. It is this tenuous relationship of Changez and the American economic identity that is the focus of the title of the novel. The obvious irony of the title “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” lies in the

expectation of Islamic terrorism and the unexpected application by Changez of the term “fundamentals” only to the dangerous reign of numbers and profits in American society. While Erica’s father, with a “typically *American* undercurrent of condescension” tells Changez, “You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism,” Changez himself only defines the “fundamentals” as the ruling principles of Underwood Samsom: “systematic pragmatism,” “maximum return,” “professionalism,” and “efficiency” (55, 37). Furthermore, Changez’s “reluctance” comes from the sense of unease we get first from his contributions to the “task of shaping the future with little regard for the past,” and then his shift to possible “Islamic fundamentalism” at the end of the novel in the way we normally regard it, brooding, suspicious, bearded, and dangerous, rejected and retaliating.

This romance with the possibilities of America is completely dissolved when Changez realizes the contribution of American economic “fundamentals” not only to the detriment of individuals, but to nations. He reflects:

...I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. Moreover I knew from my experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was only right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision. (156)

Thus, following what he views as America’s betrayal in refusing to support Pakistan against India as well as the racism he faces after 9/11, Changez abandons one set of “fundamentals” for another, bearing the mixed emotions of a spurned lover, hurt both by the philosophy underpinning the American myth and also its refusal to fully incorporate

him.

Similar to American, regardless of his dedication to her, Erica never fully allows Changez into her life, her longing for past circumstances immobilizing her from looking to the possibilities of the future. Erica both reflects and complicates Changez's relationship with America, demonstrating yet again the inefficacy of his efforts to fully penetrate (both literally and figuratively) Erica's defenses and American society. The facet of the United States that Erica embodies is what Changez calls "a powerful *nostalgia*, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return" (113). She yearns for Chris, a deceased former lover, the way Hamid sees America to be fixated on the illusion of past glory and simplicity, a self-destructive "nostalgia" that Hamid frequently explores in the novel. Both of these scenarios reflect the causes and implications that Denis Walder explores in his definition of nostalgia as:

the strange mix of individual and social desires that prompts the search for past experiences...and which seems to become prominent at certain critical stages of human history – such as the rise of industrialization...or, nearer our own times, the rise in migration and exile accompanying the end of empire and the disasters of the twentieth century,...represent[ing] the present as a place marked by a trail of survivors searching for their roots, for a home, in the ruins of history. (935)

Hamid criticizes both Erica and the entity she represents in their turning to the past rather than the future when faced with crises of identity and trauma.

It is a particular view of the past that captivates both Erica and the US, an obsession with geographical implications that venerates immortality and simplicity. Erica describes Chris as "a good-looking boy with...an *Old World* appeal," demonstrating Hamid's opinion of an American fixation on its European roots and the chimerical view of its society as being built solely of European materials and "Western" ideals, with no space in the story for immigrant and "Oriental" contributions. In contrast

to her constant devotion to Chris, Erica's relationship with Changez is subject to ebb and flow and fickle emotion. Whether or not her version of the past is accurate, it is her belief in its desirability that is destructive and keeps her from forging new bonds.

Changez reports: "I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love; it was, after all, a religion that would not accept me as a convert. But I knew that she believed in it, and I felt small for being able to offer her nothing of comparable splendor instead"

(114). For Erica, her love for Chris represents "a time before his cancer made her aware of impermanence and mortality," reflecting what Hamid views as the post-9/11 American wish to return to a time before America had been wounded, its fragility revealed to both itself and the rest of the world. Changez relays the similarity to Erica's of what he views as the American sentiment following 9/11:

...it seemed to me that America, too was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was truck by its determination to look *back*....What your fellow countrymen longed for was unclear to me—a time of unquestioned dominance? of safety? of moral certainty? I did not know....I felt treacherous for wondering whether that era was fictitious, and whether...it contained a part written for someone like me. (114-115)

In the focuses of both Erica and America, Changez doubts the permission of his presence and participation based on his ethnicity as well as his association with relationships of the future rather than the past.

In light of the definite parallels Hamid draws between the preoccupied wistfulness of both Erica and American society, the sexual experience of Changez and Erica is particularly enlightening. In their first attempt toward sexual intimacy, Erica is very inviting to Changez, but is, in the end, only "acceding" and "not aroused," making

Changez's effort unsuccessful. In their final attempt several weeks later and after Erica has retreated further into despair and ceased contact with Changez, he attempts to both alleviate her suffering and satisfy his own lust for her. To ensure her desire for him, Changez directs Erica to pretend that he is Chris while they make love, thus forsaking his own identity in order to gratify his desire and ambition. His narration of the experience interprets both his sexual liaison with Erica as well as the dissolution of his romance with the "fundamentals" of Underwood Samson: "I felt as once both *satiated* and *ashamed*. My satiation was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance..." (106). He later continues that he was willing to forsake his own identity because it was so fragile; in a classic tributary of postcoloniality, Changez is uncertain where he belongs and to whom he owes allegiance. When he realizes that he has been living as "a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to [his] and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that [his] own country faced the threat of war," he definitively sides with Pakistan, abandoning his affair with Underwood Samson (152).

His romance with Erica is more complicated, however, for though he also compromises his identity in order to gain her favor, he never gives up seeking her love and trying to ensure her welfare. Even when he returns to Pakistan and she has apparently committed suicide, Changez still forgoes other relationships and hopes for her return. Contrastingly, though the novel is about two love affairs, each of which causes him to abandon his identity, Changez renounces one lover (Underwood Samson and its fundamentals) and sympathizes with another (Erica). These variant reactions illustrate

Hamid's own complicated relationship with American attitudes and policy as well where he places blame for the 9/11 attacks and the geopolitical implications of the War of/on Terror. For Hamid, Underwood Samson represents the expansionist policies of the United States and their valuing of efficiency and the accumulation of wealth above all else, without consideration to consequence or history at an individual or political level. Just as the employees of Underwood Samson determine the monetary values of individuals and enforce budget reductions without regard to personal implications, but are not subjected to such measures themselves, so does Hamid condemn the America that has the highest military activity in history, yet "has not fought a war on its own soil in living memory," neither feels loyalty to Pakistan who has sided with the United States through multiple conflicts when it is threatened by India (127). Underwood Samson also represents for Changez and Hamid the way of thinking that permits the "mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty-first century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen" (99). In essence, Underwood Samson symbolizes American exceptionalism, while Erica recalls an entirely different kind of ill.

In contrast to Underwood Samson, Hamid constructs Erica as deserving of compassion and sympathy, ignorant of her own weakness and how it affects others, as well as an example of how the forming of new relationships would ease the pain of the past. The figure of Erica as a woman and therefore archetypally passive and submissive brings further dimension to Hamid's interpretation of the United States. Though the United States is typically portrayed in recent postcolonial fiction as aggressive and militant, the character of Erica presents the possibility of some level of innocence in the actions of the US as Hamid uses gender stereotypes to configure Erica and the entity that

she represents as gentle and flawed instead of violent and goal-oriented. This portrayal can be seen as problematic or accurate, depending on one's own political and theoretical convictions; some would take great issue with US depicted as anything but aggressive and manipulative, while others could argue the intricacies of gender roles and representations themselves. Regardless, Hamid, speaking literally in a male voice for the entirety of the novel, uses the character of Erica not to explore the intersections of oppression on gender or to compare at length the power differential between her and Changez based on both race and gender, but uses Erica to demonstrate a complicated interpretation of the conflation of the nation, state, and culture of the United States. Rather than straightforwardly and predictably villainizing America, Hamid attributes some of the dangerous foolishness of its reaction to 9/11 to its simple and solitary grief, its nostalgia for its own imagined past engulfing the ability to connect with others and act empathetically. In turn, however, Hamid names this isolationism as contributing to the deliberate violence of the War of/on Terror, while implicating Erica in her own demise. The caution that Changez directs to America applies both to the nation and the individual:

As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums....Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own. (168)

In this sense, Hamid attributes Erica's downfall to the looking to an illusory secure past instead of the possibilities of the future, equating her dangerous solitude to an American attitude that forgoes allegiances in favor of reconstructing a fictional past where none were necessary.

A further intricacy of Hamid's interpretation of the reaction of America to 9/11 is where he places blame for the aftermath as well as the attacks themselves, and also how he deals with the homogenization of experience. Jones and Smith assert that the novel is too simplistic in its explanation of the causes of 9/11, that is that "the West deserves the home grown threat for its failure to address terror's root cause, namely the liberal state's rejection of the non-Western 'other,'" and that this perspective "ultimately undermines the foundations of political association properly understood" (944). Still others would find the suggestion of any American innocence preposterous, attributing all of the discontent and militarism of jihadists to the involvement of the US in foreign politics and the exclusion of the individual or national "other" from full fellowship in American society.

A further risk of Hamid's portrayal is his predictable use of ethnicity and gender to convey his interpretation of global events. There is the implication of a typical experience in the character of Changez; Hamid uses him to narrate one experience, but in his portrayal lurks the danger of essentialization and the possible assumption that he represents a unified "Pakistani voice." Because the novel is quite short and the character of Changez rather undeveloped, Animah Kosai describes him as "a mere stereotype," luring Western readers into "find[ing] [his] superficial motivations fascinating" and concluding, "Oh, so that's how a Muslim Pakistani living in America feels." She continues, "To a Malaysian who sees many other Muslim worldviews, it rankles." Her further critique could apply to both Changez and Erica: "Mohsin delights in symbols and grand ideas but is unable to humanise them. His characters are mere stereotypes that stand for a particular attribute, and we can't feel them breathe...[we] are never given full

understanding of [their] motivations.” Hamid seems to be trying to balance his symbolic message with literary merit, but ultimately comes up a little lacking in both areas as they necessarily comprise each other.

Despite the weaknesses in his fiction, Hamid produces a unique spin on the causes and effects of 9/11, providing layers of interpretation that may be absent in other fictional works about this particular topic. His use of love and its disillusionments and dissolutions as an allegory for the experience of outside individuals and nations with what Hamid believes to be the values and behaviors of the United States and the resulting exceptionalism and isolationism of these values demonstrates Hamid’s personal understanding of the reasons for the events of 9/11, the underlying motivations for the US’s response, and the possible consequences if such attitudes continue.

Trespassing

Who we are and how we end up depends entirely on geography [sic].

-Uzma Aslam Khan, Trespassing

Though the novel was published in 2003, Khan completed *Trespassing* in 2001, several months before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Consequently, her work is problematic in conforming to the category of post-9/11 Pakistani fiction, but Aslam herself affirms the applicability of the text to those events as well as the aftermath of them. “[S]o much of this book is about history coming back to haunt you,” she states in an interview with Nicola Smyth, who reports that the novel is so pertinent to the events of September 2001 that it “leaves [Khan] unsettled by her own unwitting prescience.” Within the context of foreign involvement in Afghanistan as well as in the first Gulf War, Khan uses romances to illustrate how the choices and intertwinings of the past dictate circumstances of the present and the possibilities and limitations of the future, a concept directly applicable to the milieu that created 9/11 and the War of/on Terror. She particularly addresses the theme stated as the novel’s title: trespassing—the trespassing of socioeconomic boundaries, national borders, ethnic division, and familial dictates and how these transgressions elicit tragic results. Additionally, Khan investigates the politics of gender within Pakistani society, illustrating the restrictions placed on the agency of most females and the consequences of transgressing these restrictions, while depicting and giving voice to female characters that are resistant, developed, and multidimensional so as to avoid casting them as a weak, victimized female stereotype. Furthermore, in adopting multiple voices within the novel,

Khan shows that history is composed of multiple individual histories, not one media-disseminated authority.

Similar to Mohsin Hamid, Khan is the product of experiences across borders and her own history is integrated into the experiences of her characters. She grew up in Pakistan and then London, was educated in the United States and then moved to Morocco for several years before returning to Pakistan, thus adding personal insight to the experience of Daanish at an American university and also of Dia, a young woman in Karachi. Khan relates to the limitations that gender in Pakistan in the 1980s enforced, saying, “[I] was quite an angry teenager. I was the Dia generation and I did feel very strongly that I could not live the kind of open life I felt I should be having” (Smyth). Similarly, like Daanish, she attended college in the United States during the first Gulf War, recalling, “There was this absolute silence which was really eerie and left me very shaken and also very determined to find out more. It was a turning point for me politically and in many other ways” (Smyth). Consequently, her novel has an overtly political tone, condemning the geopolitics of the past as well as the defects in contemporaneous Pakistani society.

Because of the political nature of the novel, Khan pays careful attention to voice, both her own and that of her characters. The voice she uses for her fiction writes in English and Khan notes, reflecting, the political implications of her choice. Though she writes that “as long as you write in English, ... acts of resistance go unnoticed in Pakistan” because English is seen to be an “elitist” language, the use of which “creates a fence between [the writer] and the rest of the country,” she writes in English instead of her “mother tongue Urdu or father tongue Punjabi” to oppose the existence of such fences

and the “attempt at stipulating a single identity to Pakistan” (“Fiction and War: Looking for Pakistan's Looking-Glass - Part 2”). Khan continues:

I write to live better, but I do it with a tool I'm meant to be ashamed of. The tool is English....This is not a choice, but an acceptance. And it is not an apology. I was educated in English, including in my own country. Yet, if I have inherited a legacy of militarisation, nuclearisation, ‘Islamic’ laws, and war, I have also inherited an explosive attitude to the English language. As a storyteller, I imagine my country in a tongue that is hated. And coveted. (“Fiction and War: Looking for Pakistan's Looking-Glass - Part 2”)

Thus, while accepting the controversiality of writing from Pakistan in English, she also resists the rejection of it based on its consideration as a solely colonial tongue, noting its ability to break down the partitions within Pakistan itself that rest on divisions amongst Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Bengali, Pashto, and other regional dialects.

Though she writes in a Western language, Khan is careful not to contribute to orientalist views of Pakistan with exoticized views of Pakistani society or predictable and clichéd characters, but anchors her work in the familiar stories of family life, love, loss, and youth, telling these stories with multiple voices. In doing so, she does not, however, seek to act as an “interpreter” of Pakistani life for outsiders, stating that “writers who fit this description” are no different from the “white colonial writers [who] played the part in previous centuries. This is the New Orientalism,” she continues, “It has a ‘West saves the East’ undercurrent, and there are always passages about ‘native’ tribes and customs so that it reads more like an anthropology study than a novel” (A. Hussain). To avoid this “New Orientalism,” Khan focuses on realistic plot lines and realistic characters, while each of the characters is allowed to provide his/her own perspective on the events of the novel as the chapters vary in voice and time.

This multiplicity in temporality and point of view is used intentionally by Khan to support her own assertion that Pakistan is “a place where linear time does not exist” and history cannot be presented as a singular story, but is composed of the experiences of individuals ("Fiction and War: Looking for Pakistan's Looking-Glass - Part 1"). She uses this tactic in portraying the relationships within the novel to illustrate the array of backgrounds and perceptions that influence the decisions and dynamics of the romances, in turn, reflecting the rejection of a unified national myth and identity. Khan writes: “What bears stressing is that there is not one Pakistani history but many” ("Fiction and War: Looking for Pakistan's Looking-Glass - Part 2"). Since the history of the state of Pakistan was formulated in a specific way in order to serve a political purpose, Khan seeks to resist this mandate by writing the plot with voices spanning gender, time, age, and class, each including what they perceive to be important or pivotal. Especially when discussing the failure of the media to accurately report the damage done by the United States military to the states of the Middle East in the first Gulf War as well as when switching between five different characters to relate the personal histories of the novel, Khan seeks to “tell [what] the textbooks won’t.” She continues: “Our official history may be Arabized, but our unofficial histories run in the millions. As Susan Sontag wrote, ‘All memory is individual, unreproducible it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened...’” ("Fiction and War: Looking for Pakistan's Looking-Glass - Part 2").

While resisting both the notion of an official history as well as exotic description and orientalist stereotypes, Khan is particularly concerned with the portrayal of female

characters. Unlike Mohsin Hamid's one-dimensional depiction of Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Khan creates both conservative and liberal women that are multi-faceted and complex, allowing her to explore a woman's view of love and also the possible varieties of her experience within postcolonialism and patriarchy. Khan relays in an interview, "I'm so tired of reading books written by Asian diaspora authors who depict Asian women in Asia as passive, pathetic creatures. Inevitably, their books begin with a woman in the kitchen chopping onions or having a baby or both at the same time" (A. Hussain). In writing particularly the character of Riffat, who demands equality with men in activism and occupation, Khan provides an alternative to the domestic victim often portrayed in orientalist texts, though she cautions that Pakistani society may not respond favorably to such transgressions and affronts to its dictates. This conflict reflects Khan's own experience of striving to be a political novelist "in a country where to walk her own streets is a trespass" and where she, as a female in Pakistan, would "have grown up learning that to preserve her honor, her family's, and her country's, is the priority" (Khan "Pakistan: Woman and Fiction Today" 3). Just as Khan created herself as an individual resistant to the pigeonholing of her society, so she creates female characters that defy both their own local and global stereotypes and resist the passivity and victimization that is expected of the intersection of their gender, religion, and location.

While examining just two of the several romances of the novel, it is important to understand the characters that comprise these relationships and how the politics of their romances are dictated by their identities. Though explained near the end of the novel, the romance between Riffat and Shafqat takes place first chronologically speaking. Riffat is the widowed independent proprietor of a silk factory near Karachi and Khan's example

of a woman resistant to both colonialism and patriarchy. She is capable and proud, with “fans but no friends,” but sensitive to those even further subjugated by socioeconomic class (192). Approximately twenty-five years previous to the time when the novel commences, Riffat had been in a relationship with Shafqat, an aspiring Pakistani doctor, during their time at university in London. Though Shafqat professes to be liberal in his views and acts outside the male-dominated conventions of Pakistani society in nearly treating her as an equal, their relationship crumbles when he insists on gendered activism, maintaining that should he be the one engaged in the political arena, “he wouldn’t be the one to stay home with the children or attend to her phone calls or arrange her meetings. Never. That was her job. His was to fight for freedom” (405). Shafqat, thus, represents the double standard of activism: that though resisting oppression at a postcolonial level, an individual may still reinforce subjugation based on gender or socioeconomic class. Riffat recalls that though Shafqat had “traveled and ruminated more than anyone she knew,”

[h]e was waiting, like everyone else, for a meteor to shatter the walls. Like so many political liberals of the time, he turned out privately orthodox. As if a thin membrane snagged his beliefs each time he stepped inside his home and he could do nothing but surrender because change was only in God’s hands. That was the principle he’d despised but the one his life had followed. (408-409)

Accordingly, though Shafqat, and later his son, Daanish, are devoted to protesting the mistreatment of nations by those other states with more geopolitical power, they sustain hierarchies based on gender within their own romantic relationships.

Riffat’s daughter, Dia, is a young woman unique among females of her demographic in Karachi based upon her freedom and opportunity for self-determination. She is the heiress to her mother’s silk factory and is fascinated by the cultivation of silk,

the husbandry of the silkworms, and the manufacturing of the cloth, but not particularly interested in her classes at the women's college where she is enrolled. Though in her younger years, Dia's mother had been very ambitious and attentive in her studies and rejecting of societal expectations, she does not demand this activism from Dia; rather, she leaves her to determine her own path, only stipulating that she follow her own desires rather than conforming to cultural demands or bowing to the convenience of following social conventions. In fact, Dia relays that "[t]he best thing about her mother was that she never tried to make Dia more like herself" (193). Though Dia does not demonstrate the same resistance as her mother or adopts her strong political opinions, she does disagree with and protest her best friend's efforts toward securing an advantageous marriage for herself, concluding that she will not reinforce the pattern of marrying for status, security, or wealth, but will only marry out of love. In the nuances of Dia's character, Khan creates an individual that defies a monolithic radical feminism, but in her liminal existence Dia demonstrates what Khan holds as the greatest value: self-determination, though the plot itself establishes that this is sometimes impossible under current societal conditions, despite the efforts of multiple individuals.

The story of Dia's romance is the intertwining of her life with Daanish, a Pakistani student returned from college in New England for the sole purpose of attending the funeral of his father, Shafqat. While in America, Daanish becomes the object of exotic desire, experiencing the politics of colonialism on a personal level in his relationships with two American women. The first simply uses Daanish to enhance her own image "because he ma[kes] her look ethnic," while a sexual experience with the second, like Changez's attempt at intercourse with Erica, illustrates his inability to

gracefully “penetrate” American society both literally and figuratively (22). However, upon his return home and through his subsequent relationship with Dia, Daanish exercises over Dia a power similar to that of the American women over him, though it is based on gender rather than nationality, thus demonstrating the multiple layers through which power asymmetries can be played out.

Previous to her relationship with Daanish, Dia pledges to maintain her independence and to avoid the obsession with men that has marked many of the women around her:

It was the knowledge that so many women fell into just this trap: arguing, or just plain fretting about men. On the other hand, there was an unspoken agreement between men: Women was not a topic worth mentioning, unless she aroused them sexually. But Man was a topic women devoured from every angle. Dia was certain this was the most obvious yet neglected reason for their disparate positions in society: time. Women spent it on men; men spent it on men. (92)

Though initially well-intentioned, Dia falls into this same cycle of reproducing the hierarchies between men and women and throughout the course of her romance with Daanish, she becomes increasingly infatuated with him while he regards her more and more as an afterthought. Just as her mother, Riffat, has forsaken her own principles in marrying a man she does not love but who brings her stability after her relationship with Shafqat has dissolved, Dia disregards her former idealistic attitudes and succumbs to the social constraints that she had previously scorned.

Regardless of the politics within Daanish and Dia’s deteriorating romance, the climax of the novel comes when the reader’s increasing suspicions that they are siblings are confirmed. As Dia is the product of an adulterous affair between Riffat and Shafqat, her mother has forbidden her to see Daanish, but does not tell her the reason. In following her desire and her principles of being only with the one she loves, regardless of

consequences, Dia has continued a relationship with Daanish in secret, the couple retreating to the unsurveilled space outside the city for their sexual liaisons. However, their romance is doomed, despite Dia's best efforts toward transgressing the codes of behavior dictated to her and her resistance against the notion that "a woman's reputation [is] the currency that measured her worth" (280). Khan plays with the ideas of fatalism and determinism and considers if self-determination is truly possible in a society where conventions and hierarchies are so entrenched. Like Amal in Adhaf Soueif's *Map of Love*, Khan's female characters in particular "oscillate between optimism and despair, agency and helplessness, angered activism and resigned fatalism. In a corrupt political system, marked by nepotism, cronyism, and cruelty, the concerned individual feels diminished and ineffectual" (Malak 142).

Similarly, though Riffat is determined to have a romance of egalitarianism and is largely successful in this attempt, her relationship with Shafqat cannot survive their return to Pakistan. Despite their transgressions and resistance against the dictates of Pakistani propriety through involvement in a sexual relationship while they were in London, Shafqat tells Riffat: "You can't transport something that exists here to another place" (404). On the failing of that relationship, Riffat reflects: "It should never have ended this way. Two young people who'd fallen in love in another land ought to have returned to their own to cement that love. Love knows no boundaries. No geographic man-made perimeters" (392). Though Riffat struggles to determine the course of her life and bend it to the values she espouses, her choices to break up with Shafqat, marry Mansoor, and have a brief affair with Shafqat again, result in the death of Mansoor when he learns of the affair. Not only this, but also the illegitimate parentage of her daughter,

determines that a long-term relationship between Dia and Daanish is impossible. For both Riffat and her daughter, whose life is complicated by love for her half-brother, efforts to transgress against the implicit decrees of Pakistani society result in tragedies, demonstrating an individual's inability to create change at a societal or even personal level, since the forces acting against their geographical location and gender are simply too strong.

While Riffat and Dia suffer the tyranny of patriarchy and destiny, Daanish understands determinism at a colonial level, his political ideals unable to survive in a location marked by corruption, the lack of access to resources, and exploitative violence carried out by more powerful states. While in America Daanish spends much of his time researching the realities of the first Gulf War, the failure of the US media to accurately report them, the unilateralism of the United States government, and the complicity of the state of Pakistan in American actions. He espouses strong political conclusions during his time in America, vowing to become a reporter-activist like his paternal grandfather; however, his father warns: "Do you want to throw away the opportunity to educate yourself in the West by returning to the poverty of my roots? You will fight Americans, only to find you also have to fight your own people. This is not what your grandfather languished in jail for" (25). Though the possibility of protesting domination appeals to Daanish, he faces the same obstacles that obstruct Dia and Riffat's attempts at self-fulfillment, that being whether change on an individual or societal level is truly possible under the rigid structures of oppression in Pakistan. Illustrating this dilemma, one of Daanish's American love interests counsels, "You know, you dream too much. You've got to take hold of your life, grab it by the neck, and let it know who's boss. They

haven't learned that in Mexico," to which he replies, "Sometimes...you're faced with obstacles that are bigger than you. When there's no electricity and you can't turn on the water pump, and it's a hundred and ten degrees, what choice have you but to sit and let the sweat pour off?" (32). That is the central theme that Khan attaches to her stories of love and trespass—that sometimes conditions are impervious to resistance and trespassing only results in futility and tragedy.

Because Khan is so overtly political in her novel, with Daanish's time in America seeming to serve only as a platform from which to declare her criticism of the United States, her themes of resistance, fatalism, and the actions of the past affecting present realities can be extended to a global context. Just as the reader wonders if there is really any purpose to the characters' acts of resistance, considering the magnitude of discursive power they are opposing, Khan poses the question as to whether a rather marginalized nation such as Pakistan is able to counter the will of more powerful states. After reading about the increased defense spending of the United States government, Daanish considers: "While poor countries are punished for defending themselves, the strongest military power in the world comes up with excuses to keep building its weaponry....The biggest problem is that we require aid at all. Beggars, that's what we are. We can either join the bullies or stay beggars. Those are our two choices" (262). Throughout the novel, Daanish constantly voices Khan's concern as to whether there is any potential in resistance, though she constantly affirms that there is nobility in it.

Khan most poignantly examines this dilemma of resistance in the conclusion of the novel, when it is revealed that Dia and Daanish are half-siblings and therefore all their endeavors at resistance against familial dictates of spousal choice, societal expectations

of sexual propriety, as well as their efforts toward transcending marriages of convenience in favor of love-driven romance, have been thwarted by the final moral law against incest. Thus, the destiny of their relationship is doomed by the decisions and transgressions of their parents in the past. Though the circumstances are no fault of their own, Dia and Daanish are punished for their own unknowing trespasses, a dilemma that allows the novel to question whether resistance is possible when there are so many forces beyond the control of the individual and even outside of current temporalities. After Riffat learns of Shafqat's marriage to another, she concedes to allow her mother to choose a groom for her, later "warn[ing] Dia of the pernicious fatalism the nation was increasingly trapped in" (409-410). She continues: "It was a deadly cycle. Dia had to understand that in her own small but tenacious way she could break it" (410). The irony of her efforts lies in the fact that Dia's later efforts to resist fatalism in love and choose her own partner, destine her to tragedy because of others' actions in the past, just as the citizens of Pakistan are hampered by the former actions of political leaders, both foreign and domestic, leaving few avenues, despite acts of resistance, to navigate a "happy ending." Thus, Khan weaves the plots of mother and daughter together in her own fatalistic fashion, situating the novel within the context of a culture rooted in oppressions of gender and class, strictly governed by convention and expectation, and subject to the caprice of more powerful states, to parallel one of the warning signs she describes in the novel: "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED" (373).

In conclusion, Khan weaves together multiple stories told by several different voices to create a version of history that parallels her framework of how history should be accurately represented as the interlocution of many individuals rather than an official

version of the transpiration of events from a singular perspective. In creating her text in this manner, Khan is able to pay particular attention to female voices and how manifold layers of oppression interlock to create their particular circumstances. Contrary to Hamid's novel in which he produces an essentialist protagonist, assumed to speak for his nationality, Khan strives to construct characters that are familiar enough to readers to eschew orientalist views, yet locationally-specific enough to provide insight into Khan's own experience and political platform. Ultimately, though she is politically active in her text, Khan resists drawing conclusions as to the potential efficacy of such activism and its associated transgressions of borders and conventions, as well as its struggle against myriad forms of oppression. What she does note, however, is that there are generally consequences either to the present or future for such trespasses.

The Wasted Vigil

There are millions of marks of love on the earth, runes and cuneiforms on the water, on the very air. It is the wisdom of a thousand Solomans. The communal script of belonging. The First Text. In a place where not many can read or write, each person's memory is a fragile repository of song and ceremonies, tales and history, and if he vanishes without passing it on, it's like the wing of a library burning down.

-Nadeem Aslam, The Wasted Vigil

Nadeem Aslam was born in Gujranwala, Pakistan in 1966 and lived there until 1980 when General Zia's rule caused Aslam's poet/communist father to flee to Britain, where he has lived since leaving Pakistan. His liminal experience gives him a unique insight, but also objectivity into his discussion of the geopolitics that have created the conditions of war and upheaval in post-9/11 Afghanistan, conditions which he elaborates upon in his novel. In engaging in such a charged context, Aslam neither claims a moral authority nor political innocence in his writing, an attitude that is very apparent in his text. In an interview with Random House, Aslam asserts that "[w]riters have always got into trouble with people who think they know the answer....there's no message in my books. My writing is my way of exploring my own life and the workings of my own consciousness" ("Interview with Nadeem Aslam"). As Khan does in *Trespassing*, Aslam meanders through multiple consciousnesses and uses several voices to illustrate different perspectives within the novel, ranging from that of an Islamic extremist to that of a former CIA operative. Like Khan, Aslam uses these voices to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of history, particularly the history of conflict.

As Aslam's story is set in contemporary Afghanistan, its central theme is, predictably, a political one, and he is, like Khan, concerned with how the present hinges upon the decisions of the past. Though the novel is rich with history and factual detail, none of it seems contrived, but adds to the vibrancy and resonance of the text, which is primarily concerned with the emotional truth of the experiences of individuals, their lives reflecting a larger geopolitical context. Aslam is careful to "tell the reader how all that information is connected to a flesh and blood human being," thereby distilling a sweeping history of colonialism, oppression, and terror to a relatable personal level and assuming the task of explaining how the actions of armies and empires impact the life of the individual ("Where to Begin").

Though Aslam does not profess to hold any special wisdom that he imparts through his writing, neither does he claim his novels to be politically innocent. Instead, he acknowledges a link for himself between activism and literature, considering his work charged with transformative power. He relates:

I always say that I vote every time I write a sentence. Politics for me is about feeling a certain responsibility towards the world I live in. From my viewpoint, all writing is political—even nonpolitical writing is political. Coming from Pakistan, and belonging to the Islamic world, I can't not be aware of how politics affects our daily lives, how it is not just dry legislations and law and statements. It's visceral. I lived a stone's throw from the White House when I taught in Washington, DC earlier this year, and I couldn't help thinking how certain decisions made in that place in the 1980s became fists as they traveled to Pakistan, fists and hammers that broke my journalist friends' bodies. None of this means that my work is composed of slogans. I am first and foremost a novelist. I am happiest when I write something that satisfies me aesthetically but which also repays some of the debt I feel I owe to the world. ("Interview with Nadeem Aslam")

Aslam feels it his responsibility to assist in the "witnessing" rather than simply the "watching" of injustice and oppression. In doing so, he feels "that a work of art can be a

powerful instrument against injustice. A necessary source of courage” (“Interview with Nadeem Aslam”). As Aslam writes with a particular humanitarian-driven political agenda in mind, and in doing so only claims allegiance to “ordinary Pakistanis” and “ordinary Muslims” but stresses that those who can be described by such categories also have a responsibility to oppose more radical views. He explains: “Most ordinary Muslims say, ‘We just want to get on with our lives. Don’t identify us with the fundamentalists.’ But it’s a luxury. We moderate Muslims have to stand up” (qtd. in Brace). Though he is politically minded like the authors that have been discussed previously, Aslam carries his resistance further by not only examining the instances and consequences of imperialism in his novel, but also the effects and tyranny of Islamic fundamentalism and its correspondingly destructive nature. In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam explores the long history of invasion in the region that is now Afghanistan and how the proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union created the conditions that bred Muslim radical groups such as the Taliban and warring tribal factions. However, he does not hold those Islamist groups to be innocent, clarifying:

America is the sole superpower and as such it must be kept an eye on. But Islam is a great religion which means it, too, is open to abuse." He adds: "Osama bin Laden and his ilk say they are distressed by the sad situation of Muslims everywhere in the world. Well, Bin Laden lived in Afghanistan, one of the poorest Muslim countries. How many hospitals did he build? How many schools and colleges, roads and networks of railways? He is a billionaire and could have done that easily. Instead he built terrorist camps. (Brace)

Therefore, Aslam does not place the blame for the violence and upheaval in Central Asia upon any one party, but through the various perspectives he adopts in the novel, examines how decisions of the past combine to form the conditions of the present and how the actions and paths of individuals and groups interweave themselves to craft mutual

destinies and fates, common themes found in postcolonial Pakistani fiction. For Aslam, however, this theme takes a personal turn. “[B]oring, empty words on white paper [directions from the White House] is literally the stuff of pain and meat and membrane when it arrives on the other side of the world and is capable of spilling blood. America supported Zia. Zia took my uncle to prison and tortured him. How did that process happen?” (qtd in Sethi). Each of the characters in the novel goes through a similar examination of history and its tangential effects, inquiry as to the forces that have formed their lives and circumstances.

The novel centres on five unrelated and dissimilar individuals and the intersection of their variant ideologies in a house in Afghanistan. Aslam states that he “wanted to write about how friends become family” and certainly the characters are intensely bonded as they mutually experience danger and loss, some while navigating the intricacies of desire and romance. He insists that this is a universal theme, the building of understandings across “cultural difference and the political situation[s] into which we are dropped” (qtd. in Sethi).

Within the novel’s initial pages, Aslam pays careful attention to the setting where most of the plot takes place, that is, the house of Marcus Caldwell. The first image introduced in the house is the unusual ceiling to which hundreds of books have been fastened with iron nails. Though their placement is explained later in the novel, the image is bluntly described as : “A spike driven through the pages of history, a spike through the pages of love, a spike through the sacred” (5). This striking image becomes a metaphor for Aslam’s Afghanistan and the disruption that violence has long been to the existence and aesthetics of the nation and its inhabitants. The novel explains that these

books came to be placed in their unusual location due to the threat of Taliban raids, which caused Marcus' already-traumatized wife, Katrina, to nail them to the ceiling in a crazed effort toward preservation.

The image of the books and the ceiling occurs several times during the novel, marking its importance as a central trope in the text. In this initial description, Aslam names the iron spike as violently penetrating history, love, and the sacred, signifying the dimension of the nation that tyranny and war has disrupted or destroyed. In addition to these abstractions, the books also stand as symbols of communication, art, beauty, and understanding, all marred and pierced by nails driven through as a result of threat and terror. Aslam's prose shows very adeptly how Afghanistan's history has been dictated by the greed and the politics of world powers, even reaching as far back as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan. The temporalities of the novel wander through Afghanistan's location as a battle site between the British and Russians, and narrate the Soviet occupation in the late 1970s. The novel also touches on the following proxy war between the Soviets and the Americans, the support of the Taliban by Pakistan, the invasion by the United States in 2001, and the resulting conflict between foreign troops and insurgents. Ultimately, imperialism and oppression act as the nail through the entirety of the novel, piercing history and disrupting its nature.

Though neither Aslam nor his text makes an attempt to claim a moral authority when it comes to spirituality or the sacred, it is clear that the religious extremism that occurs within the borders of Afghanistan is the "spike through the sacred" that Aslam describes. While Aslam describes himself as "culturally a Muslim," but a "non-believer," he consistently places highest value on humanist understandings and empathy

rather than religious dogma in the novel. Marcus tells Lara, who has arrived at the house while searching for the truth of her brother's disappearance, of his wife, Qatrina: "Neither of us believed in an afterlife...It makes us cherish this life and this world more. That is much better than the talk about eternity and the hereafter. Death is *not* greater than life...She represented us humans doing all the things that Allah is supposed to do" (176). Aslam's sense of the sacred is clearly punctured by fundamentalism and religiously motivated war within Afghanistan's border, preempting values of kindness, service, and empathy.

Finally, within Aslam's initial description of the books nailed to the ceiling, he writes that there is a spike through the pages of love. The emotional plot of the novel is driven by romantic tragedy, ultimately caused by a lack of understanding and empathy and finally by death and war. There are no happily ever-afters in *The Wasted Vigil* because romance and love have been stabbed and transformed by violence. Each of the romantic relationships Aslam describes experiences periods of stability and joy, but is ultimately destroyed by death. Similarly, there exists in the novel the beginnings of friendships and alliances across ideological chasms, but such momentary acceptances are often disrupted by zealous beliefs, only present because of the manipulations of those in governments and those wishing to be. However, Aslam makes it clear through his opening image that he doesn't believe tragedy in love to be a universal inevitability, but a direct result of forces of oppression and tyranny.

Shortly after describing the image of the books nailed to the ceiling, Aslam moves to the remainder of the house, creating meaning by its very design. The original owner of the house has been a master painter and calligrapher—and his profession works as

another allusion, like the books, to art, beauty, and communication. The artist has designed the house for the woman whom he has wished to be his wife, painting each of the first five rooms in dedication to the five senses. As the couple's courtship progresses, they moves from one room to the next, advancing from sight to hearing to smell to touch to taste and then finally ascending to the highest level in the house, the combination of all the themes in the prior rooms as well as "an interior dedicated to love, the ultimate human wonder," depicting "scenes of lovers either in an embrace or traveling towards each other through forest and meadow" (10-11). This house, constructed for love and romance and used as another symbol, has suffered a similar fate to the books under threat of the Taliban's regime. In order to avoid the Taliban's wrath over the depiction of living things, the walls have been replastered with mud to conceal the paintings beneath. Also, as the Taliban retreats from the military presence of the United States, Marcus begins to remove the mud from the walls of art as the books fall from the ceiling and Lara replaces them on the shelves of the library, signifying a movement toward the establishment of peace and liberty. With the mud removed from the walls, the highest room reveals the fact that the images of romantic love are badly damaged by bullets, demonstrating the irreversible damage incurred by the disruptions and suffering within the borders of Afghanistan, particularly to those ideals of greatest magnitude to Aslam: understanding and love. Lara reinforces these values as the antitheses to the atrocities of the Taliban regime: "When the Taliban came to the house they had proceeded to annihilate anything they considered un-Islamic within it. What they had heard about this room [wholly dedicated to love] had enraged them the most. This they wanted to blow up..." (11).

Lara's further description of the room could serve as a description of the lovers in the novel, their relationships shattered by violence and death:

Lara's eyes moved across the shattered skin of the walls, the light picking up hints of gold here and there. This country was one of the greatest tragedies of the age. Torn to pieces by the many hands of war, by the various hatreds and failings of the world. Two million deaths over the past quarter-century. Several of the lovers on the walls were on their own because of the obliterating impact of the bullets—nothing but a gash or a terrible ripping away where the corresponding man or woman used to be. A shredded limb, a lost eye. (11)

This image plays out at a personal level for several of the characters that have come together in the house; David, Marcus, and Lara have each lost their lover to political violence.

Though Marcus is already widowed at the commencement of the novel and we only learn about his marriage to Qatrina through flashbacks throughout the text, theirs is the most emblematic romance, for they create a marriage marked by equality, respect, and understanding, even crossing national lines without subjection to hierarchies and oppression. Marcus, British by birth and a medical doctor by profession, has said that Qatrina has given him Afghanistan as her dowry and he fully adopts his new country instead of expecting his new wife to relocate to his relatively safe homeland. He also has converted to Islam though he and his wife do not believe in god, in order to be legally married according to Afghan law. Defying convention and religion, Qatrina does not want a ceremony at all, but accedes on the stipulation that a woman perform the ritual as "Nowhere does the Koran state that only men may conduct the wedding," and she feels it her and her new husband's responsibility to "help change things" (29). Like most well-intentioned characters in the novel, Qatrina is not rewarded kindly for her resistance against patriarchy and religious dictatorship. Marcus recounts her death at the hands of

the Taliban: “A public spectacle after the Friday prayers, her punishment for living in sin, the thirty-nine-year marriage to Marcus void in the eyes of the Taliban because the ceremony had been conducted by a female. A microphone had been placed close to her for her screams to be heard clearly by everyone” (29).

Despite the appearance of Marcus’ story to be a traditionally orientalist tale of exotic desire and foreign conquest, Aslam creates the marriage between Marcus and Qatrina as an exemplary transcultural relationship, disrupted only by the interplay of geopolitical forces. Marcus acknowledges the possible misinterpretations and ironies of his personal history, concluding foreign involvement to be the primary cause of his suffering:

A daughter, a wife, a grandson....You could say this place took away all I had....I could so easily appear to be one of those unfortunate white men you hear about, who thought too lovingly of the other races and civilizations of the world, who left his own country in the West to set up home among them in the East, and was ruined as a result, paying dearly for his foolish mistake. His life smashed to pieces by the barbarians surrounding him....

But you see, the West was involved in the ruining of this place, in the ruining of my life. There would have been no downfall if this country had been left to itself by others. (64)

These involvements play differently into the lives of Qatrina and Marcus at various points in the novel. Even when they are forced into the service of warlords, Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan, respectively, the power of these warlords is a direct result of American funding to combat Soviet power in the 1980s. Years rife with the rivalry between warlords and the resulting civil wars elicit years of exile, separation, pain, and terror for both Marcus and Qatrina, yet Marcus notes the beginning of Taliban rule to be the beginning of even greater suffering, thereby explaining the misery within the country to be the product of multiple forces.

Further suffering results when Marcus makes efforts towards reclaiming items signifying love and art as well as the sacred. Upon trying to recover from another man's home a chest full of paintings that Qatrina has created to depict the ninety-nine names of Allah, Marcus is apprehended by Taliban members who incarcerate him for theft and sentence him to have one of his hands amputated. In a cruel twist of fortune, Qatrina is forced to perform the amputation, marking her break with reality and her descent into madness. It is when Marcus returns from receiving treatment for this wound that he finds the books nailed to the ceiling—iron spikes driven through love by forces of oppression.

Former CIA operative, David Town's love story within the novel takes an almost equally tragic path to that of Marcus and Qatrina's, but his tragedy is the result of different forces, combining in different proportions. David himself offers a complex character, motivated by a range of good intentions as well as American rhetoric. On the one hand, he provides a model for ideal involvement in international aid as he finances several schools in Afghanistan, "[keeping] himself in the background, . . . letting a group of committed and intelligent local people get on with the details," and yet, on the other hand, his former involvement in Afghan affairs is based on his hatred of the Soviet Union and the desire for revenge over his brother's death in Vietnam (42). He feigns objectivity, however, insisting that "[b]y the time he came to Peshawar as an employee of the CIA, his opposition to Communism was the result of study and contemplation. Not something that grew out of a personal wound. He was in Peshawar as a believer" (112). In doing so, he provides a site for the consideration as to whether an individual can transcend past wounds and biases to form political opinions and a basis for activism. Regardless of whether Aslam suggests that this transcendence is possible, David "had

never felt himself surrounded by forces larger than himself,” though all of the events in which he is involved in the context of the novel strongly contradict this belief (128).

In one such example, David’s first lover, Marcus and Qatrina’s daughter Zameen, serves as a site of intersection for nearly every oppressive force in the novel and, ultimately, is killed to serve the interests of the United States government. She is first captured by the Soviets after a cleric names her as an insurgent to protect the murder of his wife from discovery. During her internment, a Soviet soldier repeatedly rapes her, though, in the light of day, he is ashamed of his actions. Though free from captivity, when David meets Zameen she is still mired under layers of oppression; she is a woman, making her particularly vulnerable to the fundamentalists taking over Peshawar; she is mother to a child of rape; and she has no choice but to be a pawn within the power politics of Soviet, Islamist, American and civil forces in order to survive. Subject to the intersection of these powers, Zameen, much like her mother, is willing to undertake a high degree of risk to aid those in more unfortunate positions, particularly women, as she provides a place and means for the refugee women to support themselves even though the fundamentalists have outlawed it. Even though David does not fully comprehend how his actions impact both Zameen and her son, Zameen understands the larger consequences of his actions. When he asks if she is all right after several bombing raids destroyed camps near where they live, she shoots back, “We have to be, don’t we? Just as long as you Americans and Soviets can play your games over there—nothing else matters” (131).

These geopolitical “games” become personal once again to David when he learns of the responsibility he bears for Zameen’s death. Rather than being simply a casualty of

civil war as he has originally thought, David learns that his best friend and fellow operative, Christopher Palantine, has killed Zameen as a precaution against her spying for the Soviet government because of her close relationship with David. When David discovers the truth behind her death, he “realize[s], he had been stepping on his own footprints” (138). In this sense, the role of David’s action in causing the death of his lover parallels the retracing steps of subterfuge and manipulation of the American military when they invaded Afghanistan in 2001, finding their own tracks in their former support of the Taliban as a tool to combat Soviet power (138). In Aslam’s view, though America’s previous involvement was designed to elicit consequences that would remain quite separate from the story of the United States itself, when the American military returned to Afghanistan following the attacks of 9/11, the American military was able to understand its contribution to its own national tragedy. Aslam makes the connection between choice and consequence explicit in the epigraph that precedes the novel, quoting “Zbigniew Brzezinski, (President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor, asked if he regretted ‘having supported Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists)’: “‘What is more important to the history of the world—the Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? A few agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?’” (1). In the novel, both David and the American military later regret what they originally have considered to be harmless involvement, recognizing their own contributions to loss and tragedy.

David’s second love story involves the bridging of ideological distance and the forming of bonds despite personal bias. David becomes sexually involved with Lara despite the fact that she is Russian and a part of the empire he has fought against for so

long. Actual experience with Lara as an individual confronts David's foundational anti-Soviet beliefs and his personal justifications that have enabled him to participate in killing citizens and eradicating armies as part of an anti-communist crusade. His former stereotypes are challenged when he develops empathy and understanding through romance, illustrating what Aslam sees to be the process of building connections through difference.

Lara provides a face to the Soviet individuals and adds a dimension of humanity to their existence that David has never considered in his actions as a CIA operative. When David confesses that he has done nothing to stop a Soviet bombing raid on an Afghan refugee camp so that cruelty of the Soviets would be revealed to the world, thereby justifying the further sacrifice of thousands of lives to save the world from communism, Lara again confronts David with the individual implications of his actions. While he rationalizes the refugee deaths as a necessary sacrifice to prevent a greater number of deaths later, Lara raises the issue of agency, a principle important to both her and Aslam. "I am not arguing with you," she tells David. "But really, I can't ignore the fact that nobody asked them if they wanted to sacrifice their lives. For all I know probably all of them would have willingly gone to their deaths to secure a better future for their land, for the world. But no one asked them" (290). Because of Lara, David must question his own limited view of reality. Should he and the CIA, who are located squarely in the center of the global power concentration, be allowed to make decisions that dictate the fate of the rest of the world? Lara can so poignantly question the power and entitlement David so naturally assumes because of her experience in Soviet Russia. Even though this experience is marginalized in a global context, Lara is important as an

individual to David, rather than simply as a citizen of a state or a member of an ethnic group. Aslam seems to allow Lara to speak for all globally powerless individuals:

But whatever any of them thought, one thing was always certain: even though they suffered, and had to struggle at times to bring meaning and even the most basic dignity into their existence, and even though in their search for justice and truthfulness they were beaten down and met with disappointment again and again—their lives were not available for use as an illustration. Theirs were not stories that could be read as an affirmation of another system. (232).

Hence, Aslam articulates his re-centering discourse within the novel: to personalize politics and demonstrate how larger forces collide and react at the level of the individual, resisting a narrative that leaves history collective and faceless.

As their individual understanding of one another increases within the setting of Marcus' house, Lara and David's growing sexual relationship temporally parallels the revealing and reconstruction in the house of the mural that depicts the lovers. As Lara and David are figuratively pieced back together through their relationship with each other, they also, like some of the images, are shown to be irreparably damaged by the bullet holes and the violent collision of powerful forces. Thus, though forming new bonds heals some of the scars left by past tragedies for both David and Lara, Aslam acknowledges that some wounds of the past cannot be healed by the efforts of the present or the possibilities of the future.

Aslam presents love and romance as a dominant symbol within the novel, but he also presents love as the method to overcome a past fraught with international greed and grudges. "I don't think the novelist's job is to pose solutions," Aslam affirms in an interview, "but to find out how best to live. That is the intention in each of my books" (qtd. in Sethi). It is clear in *The Wasted Vigil* that Aslam considers a paradigm of

empathy and understanding to be the best approach to life and relationships between both individuals and nations. As Marcus recounts:

The entire world it seemed had fought in this country, had made mistakes in this country, but mistakes had consequences and he didn't know who to blame for those consequences. Afghanistan itself, Russia, the United States, Britain, Arabia, Pakistan? One day he thought of capturing a bulbul that had flown into the house. In the end he knew he could never eat anything he had heard sing. (29-30)

The characters within the novel that develop romantic relationships, or any relationship for that matter, in a sense, hear each other sing. In terms of international significance, romance represents a forgoing of pride and ambition and an increase in intimacy and empathy, an effort toward understanding. Marcus, an ideal and nationless character of sorts, wants the sides to more fully view each other, to see the other side naked and human, ultimately “the tears of one side fully visible to the other” (315). Love is used as a complex metaphor in the novel, not just a simplistic and naïve reconciliation, but the interplay of past and present, the life of one partner having previously influenced the other. Even amidst such war and destruction, Marcus maintains love as the solution. He considers: “Yes, love is still a possibility in a land such as this, though love means an eradication of selfishness and it could easily be assumed that in a country like this selfishness was the main tool of survival, everyone a mercenary” (265). The main ingredient needed to heal centuries of self-interest and greed is sacrifice and altruism, compassion and understanding—in a word: love.

Burnt Shadows

Why should rules of conduct be the only things untouched by war, she once asked him? Everything from the past is passed.

-Kamila Shamsie, Burnt Shadows

Kamila Shamsie's personal history reads much the same as the authors' previously discussed in that she was born in Pakistan, raised in Karachi, but relocated to the United States to attend university. She currently maintains residence in both Karachi and London. Her upbringing is distinct in one particularly pertinent way; that is, her family is distinctly affluent, literary, and activist. Her mother is Muneeza Shamsie, a literary critic and anthologizer of Pakistani fiction, particularly the fiction of women. In this respect, Shamsie escaped at least the familial pressure to become only a wife and mother and was instead encouraged to pursue a life centered around creativity and education. Because there were already several published female writers in her family, Shamsie's ambition to become an author was taken seriously.

Burnt Shadows is Shamsie's fifth novel and her first departure from setting her writing solely in Karachi. Adopting a more global context allows Shamsie to discuss more articulately events very important to her. "The war on terror had sunk very deep for me so I knew the book would be an allegory in some way," she explains ("Kamila Shamsie gets personal with history"). She continues, clarifying, "it was never going to be about a clash between civilisations because I don't believe in that phrase. Instead I was interested in what happens when people from different nations come together when those nations are at war." A globally pertinent consideration, this notion becomes the

anchoring theme of the novel. Contiguous to this contemplation, Shamsie continues, “I’ve always been interested in national identity as something porous—half my family crossed over from India during Partition yet I grew up with India and Pakistan at war.” This concept of nationality and belonging to a state figures prominently in the text, in that Shamsie’s most ideal characters transcend such bounded definitions.

Though many expected this to be her “9/11 novel,” Shamsie resents this label, preferring instead to refer to the “War on Terror” as it does not place the acts of the terrorists as the center, but focuses on the decisions and consequences of various governments and individuals. She does not directly narrate the time of the attacks in the text, but picks up the story in New York in December 2001, after the towers have fallen. She notes this as a deliberate choice and specific shift of focus. In an interview with Michele Filgate, Shamsie explains: “There are plenty of books about the effects of 9/11, and what that day itself meant for the people of New York. But I was interested in looking at the human cost of actions which are carried out by ‘legitimate’ governments, often with popular support (the bombing of Nagasaki, Britain’s games of Empire in India, Pakistan and Russia and America’s actions in Afghanistan in the 80’s, the War on Terror...).” Similar in this way to Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*, Shamsie’s novel brings the consequences of these “legitimate” actions to the level of the personal and provides a study on how global forces move people between countries and towards and away from each other.

Shamsie’s primary purpose in the novel seems to be the drawing of parallels between previous and current conflicts and how the past constitutes the present. The novel opens with a mysterious prologue briefly detailing an unnamed prisoner’s initiation

into an unknown prison; we later learn the prisoner to be Raza Ashraf, Hiroko and Sajjad's son, as he enters Guantanamo Bay. The prologue concludes: "*How did it come to this*, he wonders" (1). The entire novel works fundamentally as an answer to this question on both a personal and political scale and once again, the romances and relationships within it serve as an access point through which the reader can understand the complexities of the power relations and misunderstandings described in the novel, as well as the solutions and ideals that Shamsie offers as alternatives. With her novel spanning approximately five and a half decades, Shamsie tries to offer much of the history that answers "How did we come to this?" in regards to the War of/on Terror. She explores the implications of the atomic bombs dropped in Japan, with particular emphasis on the second bomb that obliterated Nagasaki. Shamsie also examines the partition of British India in 1947 and the migrations between the new borders of India and Pakistan, the underbelly of proxy war of the United States and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and finally the aftermath of 9/11 in both New York and Central Asia. All of these events are narrated and explored with one family placed in the middle of the frame to give inconceivable events a sense of scale and perspective.

Hiroko Tanaka is the only permanent presence within the novel, with her experience spanning all of these events, and her personal life and loves acting as a direct commentary on them. She experiences the tragedy of 1945 Nagasaki in a very personal way as her fiancé Konrad Weiss is killed and her native city destroyed. The event is permanently inscribed on her body as, at the time of the attack, she is wearing a white silk kimono with dark cranes emblazoned on the back and, as the bomb detonates, the heat from the blast is reflected off the light parts of her clothing and intensified through

the dark areas. Consequently, Hiroko has permanent bird-shaped burns across her back; thus she forever carries a visual and sensory reminder to herself and others of the atom bomb inscribed on her body.

Because she has no family and connections remaining in ruined Nagasaki, Hiroko travels to Delhi in search of Konrad's half-sister, who is married to James Burton, a British colonial. Hiroko, thus, with the embodiment of war and terror, traverses geography from one site of conflict to another. Her move is also a bold illustration of a woman not daunted and enclosed by one traumatic experience. Within the Burtons' house, several relationships develop that shed light onto the dynamics on which Shamsie weaves her text: Hiroko forms a close bond with Elizabeth Burton who grows increasingly discontented with her marriage; the colonial relationship between James and his Indian assistant, Sajjad Ashraf, transforms, and most importantly, Hiroko and Sajjad fall in love. In this interlocking of relationships, Japanese, German, British, and Indian nationals play out their destinies, despite each of their nations having recently been at war with one another.

Hiroko, the only one of the characters that is physically present to see how the past has woven together to form the present for the Tanaka-Ashrafs and Weiss-Burtons, is presented as an effectively ideal character. She is virtually nationless and religionless, crossing borders with ease and agreeing to compromises without surrendering strength or agency. She is also produced as a character that sees no ethnicity in others either, speaking several languages and crossing cultural and racial borders in each of her two love affairs throughout the novel. She willingly submits to opportunities for love, but is never subjugated or coerced by these opportunities.

In essence, Hiroko is Shamsie's model of statelessness. She is not bound by conventions of any culture or by borders because she rejects the state as an appropriate mode of division and control. In Japan she is already alienated from the state and society because her father has been deemed a traitor and she is therefore generally shunned. At the time the novel commences, she already has the ability to cross borders, a tendency that separates her from the perceived solidarity of the concept of nationhood. She teaches German at the local school and speaks English as well, along with planning to marry a German, Konrad Weiss. After Weiss dies in the nuclear explosion in Nagasaki, Hiroko travels to India to find his sister, using her independence and fluidity of national identity. Hiroko has near absolute autonomy in her mobility, having "not thought of destination so much as departure, wheeling through the world with the awful freedom of someone with no one to answer to. She had become, in fact, a figure out of myth. The character who loses everything and is born anew in blood" (50). Hiroko remains virtually a "figure out of myth" throughout the novel, traveling to sites of conflict and rising out of literal and figurative ash, bearing an allusion to the mythical phoenix on her back.

Hiroko is also transported into an entirely different class structure as well as location and because her socioeconomic and ethnic status cannot be directly translated into any recognized category in India, the sense of her mobility within the novel is heightened. She is a guest of James and Elizabeth Burton, placing her outside the servant class; though she is essentially a stranger to them, she is treated with hospitality and respect. But she is not part of the colonial ruling elite, thus making her a figure of liminality. Because of her migration, she acts as the personification of Shamsie's ideal citizen—stateless and classless, able to live where she wants and make connections,

particularly romantic ones, with whomever she chooses. Especially in Shamsie's choice of Hiroko's nationality, she is created as a character that defies all expectations. As Elizabeth recounts: "So much for those demure Japanese women of all the stories she'd heard. Here was one who would squeeze the sun in her fist if she ever got the chance; yes, and tilt her head back to swallow its liquid light" (47). Thus, Hiroko confronts social constraints on many levels, demonstrating a mobility of identity as well as class and nationality.

This mobility allows her to form a relationship with Sajjad, even though it is frowned upon by her hosts because he is quite clearly a colonial subject. Sajjad himself is a product of separations and boundaries, mainly those between the colonizers and those native to India. The first thing Shamsie reveals about him is his thoughts on the boundaries that divide his immediate world. He ponders the division between English Delhi and Indian Dilli, "the rhythmically beating heart of cultural India" and we soon learn that his life is spent crossing this divide, devoid of real power once he enters into imperial territory (33). Consequently, he is painfully aware of the boundaries imposed by colonization and sees its symbolism all around him, even in how the English gardens and dwellings are arranged. He observes: "Flowerpots: it summed it all up. No trees growing in courtyards for the English, no rooms clustered around those courtyards; instead, separations and demarcations" (33). Thus, he is always a trespasser in Delhi, even though he holds a prestigious occupation there, working as an assistant for the lawyer, James Burton. Because he is one of the few Indians who are allowed to cross over to the imperial district, he observes: "I am like those occasional pigeons...[a]t home in Dilli but

breaking free of the rest of my flock to investigate the air of Delhi,” suggesting that he never feels truly comfortable among the streets and inhabitants of the English sector (34).

The power hierarchy between James and Sajjad is constantly highlighted by Shamsie as she underlines the fact that, even though they seem to have a reasonably egalitarian relationship or even “friendship,” James has the power and Sajjad is subject to his decisions. Even James himself recognizes this dynamic in regards to giving his old clothes to Sajjad; in doing so, he assuages his colonial guilt through his charity, yet still maintains his power in deciding under what conditions this generosity will be bestowed. James remarks to Elizabeth: “Discarded clothes as metaphor for the end of Empire. That’s an interesting one. I don’t care how he looks at my shirt so long as he allows me to choose the moment at which it becomes his” (35). Sajjad is also aware of the politics between them. While playing chess, Sajjad always allows James to decide who will have the first move, regardless of whose turn it actually is. Though this interaction has become a joke between the two men, it still displays their colonial relationship to Sajjad: “He knew how important it was to James to enact these moments of camaraderie which undercut the rigidity of the barriers between them. That it was only in James’s hands to choose when to undercut and when to affirm the barriers was something Sajjad accepted as inevitable and James never even considered” (39).

Strangely, even though Hiroko is of a different ethnicity than the Burtons, she is never subject to the same barriers as Sajjad because of her familial connection to the Burtons. Consequently, because Hiroko is associated with the social class to which the Burtons belong, it becomes problematic when she and Sajjad develop a relationship, resulting in James dismissing Sajjad from his service for impropriety. However, outside

of the divisions enforced by the Burtons, the relationship between Sajjad and Hiroko is still a possibility based on the affection between them and their shared ideals. Neither accepts the idea that woman is to be subjugated. Hiroko has already established herself as an independent individual; thus, these two are determined to forge a relationship despite the wishes of those around them. Sajjad's mother has filled his childhood with images of women as strong-willed warriors; however, she cautions him against applying the word "modern" to such women as she fears the term to be a national strategy influenced by Western ideas to remove individuals from their people and their heritage. It would appear that Shamsie agrees with Sajjad's mother and hesitates to categorize Hiroko as a "modern" woman as she is never disconnected from her past, but has the constant reminders of the burns inscribed on her back. She, therefore, transcends conventional configurations of womanhood in Japanese, Indian, and Pakistani society, but does not transcend her past. This continual link to her past is not her tragedy, however, but her strength as she provides a voice of peace and rationality throughout the novel in an effort to avoid further local and global conflicts.

Together, Hiroko and Sajjad transcend all of the boundaries that Shamsie sees as problematic in the majority of the lives around them and, in doing so, they are Shamsie's model of an ideal relationship. Elizabeth warns Hiroko that the various boundaries they are attempting to cross are too established to make their relationship a real possibility, noting the multiple levels where they would normally encounter resistance:

His is a world you either grow up in or to which you remain for ever an outsider. And maybe he'd give up that world for you—if that's what it took to have you in his life—but when that first intensity of passion passed, he'd regret it, and he'd blame you. Women enter their husbands' lives, Hiroko—all around the world. It doesn't happen the other way around. We are the ones who adapt. Not them. They don't know how to do it. They don't see why they should do it. (99)

Thus, Elizabeth echoes the stereotypical relationship between men and women at the time since she has been forced to leave her home in Europe because of her marriage to James. But through a combination of fate and individual will, Hiroko and Sajjad do not fall victim to these tendencies, rather find themselves in more neutral ground after their marriage. Initially, because James Burton facilitates an extended honeymoon in Turkey in order for Hiroko and Sajjad to escape the violence of the British withdrawal from India, and afterward because the Indian Consulate will not readmit them to Delhi, Hiroko and Sajjad never return to either of their homes, but spend their marriage on the somewhat neutral ground of Pakistan. In effect, both become exiles and establish a new home together. Hence, Shamsie's plot does not answer the question as to whether transcultural relationships can survive in an environment where one party is more comfortable than the other or if these alliances require neutrality to survive.

Even before this permanent move to Pakistan from India, both Sajjad and Hiroko forsake their respective worlds in order to forge a healthy, egalitarian relationship. Sajjad tells Hiroko he wouldn't have come for her if his mother had still been alive, still confining him to family life and tradition. Neither partner has even seen the other in their "true world" and, in fact, those worlds "do[n't] [even] exist any more," irrevocably changed by destruction and death (114). With violence and change obliterating each of their original spheres, both Sajjad and Hiroko share their pain with their partner and forge a bond from their suffering rather than perpetuating the inequalities and brutality that brought about their current circumstances. Sajjad tells Hiroko: "I have to learn how to live in a new world. With new rules. As you have had to do. No, as you are doing.

Perhaps it would be less lonely for both of us to have a companion. Some constancy is comforting during change” (115).

Shamsie’s model of Sajjad and Hiroko provides a clear contrast to Hamid’s example of Changez and Erica, where the unwillingness to share pain brings about further grief and separation. In contrast to the sexual experience of Changez and Erica, which is marked by impenetrable boundaries and misplaced desire, as Sajjad and Hiroko make love, Sajjad touches the birds burned into Hiroko’s back, thus connecting with the pain that has shaped her identity and demonstrating a complete acceptance of her past. In a similar motion of acceptance, since Hiroko claims no allegiance to any religion, much like Marcus in *The Wasted Vigil*, she formally converts to Islam to make her union with Sajjad easier to legalize as well as to facilitate an easier transition for his family to deal with. Thus, though Hiroko and Sajjad transgress, their transgressions have a more favorable ending than those committed by the characters in *Trespassing*.

When analyzing Hiroko’s character, language is an important consideration. She is a translator by occupation, further signifying her ability to transcend borders and cultural divides. Thus, immediately after she arrives in India, Hiroko wants to learn Urdu, the local language, even though the Burtons assure her that there is no need, considering the colonial privilege she is granted due to her relationship with them. Nevertheless, she learns Urdu quickly and she and Sajjad use both it and English in their communication. This multilingual form of communication implies her ability and willingness to compromise and adapt. Similarly, she speaks in English to James and German to Elizabeth, demonstrating the ability of language to forge bonds of understanding between divergent groups. However, Shamise is also aware of the

discursive power associated with the appropriation of language. This theme runs through the initial scenes in India in which Sajjad asks James Burton, “Do you think an Englishman will ever write a masterpiece in Urdu?” James answers: “No...If there ever was a time we were interested in entering your world in that way, it’s long past. And you wouldn’t know what to do with us if we tried” (40). This exchange indicates that both James and Sajjad see English as a language of power, but Sajjad also sees value in appropriation.

Conversely, Shamsie’s writing is an example of the appropriation of colonial language to write narratives of resistance. This act is reflected later when Sajjad proclaims that “[m]odern India will start the day the English leave. Or perhaps it started the day we used their language to tell them to go home” (54). The irony in this particular statement is that both Sajjad and Shamsie only partially believe it. Shamsie’s entire novel, as well as her other texts, explains the lasting effects of colonialism and continuing imperialism, supported by the discursive power of language. However, Shamsie herself is an eloquent example of Sajjad’s postcolonial statement, appropriating the language of the West “to tell them to go home.”

While Hiroko not only is an unusual character in her transcendence of the categories of class, gender, and race, she also disrupts hierarchies based on identity markers by her very presence. It is only after their marriage that Sajjad decides to leave his position as clerk/assistant to James Burton and join an Indian law firm. At the new firm, the solicitor confirms his resignation as an act of resistance. “Time we stopped letting the English take the credit for all the work we do,” he tells Sajjad. “You know more about the law than any of these fresh-faced boys with their newly inked law

degrees. It's a disgrace how James Burton has squandered your talents" (115). Thus, Hiroko, through her love, turns Sajjad into an activist. When Elizabeth makes a comment about sending Henry, her little son, away so he would not think of India as his home, Sajjad verbally objects, making it "hard to say if Elizabeth or Sajjad was more surprised at his tone after eight years during which he used only excessive politeness as a weapon against her. But they were both aware that this would not have happened if Hiroko hadn't been standing there, disrupting all hierarchies" (84).

Hiroko's legacy extends to the future, not only of the Burtons, but of her own family. Her son Raza grows up essentially rejecting Islam and religion as he excels in all of his other subjects, but is unable to learn the material for his religion class. He also embodies mobility throughout his life, crossing borders and feeling no real tie to country or state, but only to specific people. And acting as an example of a woman taking charge of her own destiny, Hiroko shows Elizabeth Burton that she does not have to stay in a loveless marriage. The crux of her influence and Shamsie's use of her as an ideal is summed up in the statement: "And she, Hiroko Tanaka, was the one to show both Sajjad and the Burtons that there was no need to imagine such walls between their worlds. Konrad had been right to say barriers were made of metal that could turn fluid when touched simultaneously by people on either side" (83).

In *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko serves to exemplify how divides of culture, language, religion, ethnicity, and ideology can be transcended and more congenial relationships created between individuals and nations. Like Aslam, Shamsie writes to explain the misunderstandings and events that have caused the War of/on Terror, using a sweeping view of twentieth-century history to explain the globally collective question: "How did it

come to this?" She also is interested in how these events impact individuals and how the decisions of individuals and governments construct the future. For her own family, Sajjad is killed for being mistaken as a CIA informant during the Soviet-American proxy war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Raza is imprisoned after 9/11 for being mistaken as a terrorist. Thus, the question is answered for Raza: despite his transcendence and mobility, his race is visibly inscribed upon him like the birds on his mother's back. The resulting racially-based assumption by the American police of his terrorist intent, combined with the mistakes and misunderstandings of his past leads to imprisonment for Raza. Hence, Shamsie also suggests that this same racism and misconstruction answers that question on a global level post-9/11: "How did it come to this?"

Aside from the main romance of Sajjad and Hiroko, the plot of the novel is driven by alliances between characters as well as accidents and misinterpretations, demonstrating strong similarities with the novels of both Aslam and Khan already discussed in this thesis. What is unique about this text, however, is the cosmopolitan nature of the plot and characters that Shamsie invents. While both *Trespassing* and *The Wasted Vigil* are extremely limited in location, *Burnt Shadows* arcs through both time and space, offering a larger scope of application for its readers.

Conclusion

Nadeem Aslam writes:

I...*always* begin with the conviction that there is nothing extraordinary or special about me. I am one of billions of people on this planet. So if something is true of me, then there is every likelihood that it is true of billions of others. I must find what I have in common with others. Not what sets me apart. Some concerns are universal: *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.* If, I as a writer, have thought about a subject honestly enough – from that position of humbleness, and with all of my intelligence and knowledge at hand – then the book will have a better chance of connecting with others...So how to write about Pakistan...? Always begin with the conviction that there is nothing special or extraordinary about you. (“Where to Begin”)

So, “How to write about Pakistan?” These authors write about Pakistan (among other foreign locales) by addressing themes that are universal and humanizing, such as love, loss, and the adaptation to changing local and global circumstances. However, based on their locations, the novels in this thesis also share a similar concern with power and its unequal distribution worldwide based upon ethnicity, location, and nationality. The use of postcolonial theory allows a more complete understanding of the concerns and agendas particular to the writers. Because postcolonial theory deals specifically with oppression and the myriad ways that it can play out upon individuals, it provides a useful method through which to deconstruct politically-oriented texts originating from regions marginalized by current geopolitics. Similarly, because women are subject to oppression based on gender in addition to race, feminist critique must be incorporated to fully consider how power is concentrated and handled.

Since the novels analyzed in this thesis are geographically and ideologically similar, they share themes more specific than those universal in literature. In particular, *Trespassing*, *The Wasted Vigil*, and *Burnt Shadows* are all concerned with how the

decisions and actions of the past create present realities, both at the scales of politics and individuals. Likewise, they explore the ways larger contexts of conflict and injustice play out on a personal level. Additionally, because the authors tell stories of violence and war as well as trauma on a personal level, they often propose a model relationship, like Marcus and Qatrina, or individual, such as Hiroko, to demonstrate how these differences could be solved and the wounds of history healed.

These model relationships are not without tensions and difficulties of their own, however, but provide an additional dimension of complexity and contradiction. Considering the number of pages the authors fill with the inevitability of tragedy, the solutions of love and understanding they propose seem somewhat superficial and trite. Hamid, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, asserts that a practice of sharing grief and favoring human connection over efficiency would serve to neutralize international hierarchies and prevent further violence and discord. Aslam uses *The Wasted Vigil* to extol the value of love, art, and literature to create an understanding that would preclude war and establish relationships on a larger scale that echo the equality, respect, and affection of the marriage between Marcus and Qatrina. Hiroko, in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, provides a model of resistance and resilience that demonstrates how one person's refusal to let her life be dictated by social constraints and national expectations can inspire change in many who come into contact with her. Though these morals lend a soothing sense of hope to the novels, they seem to oppose the flow of the plots that sweep nearly all of the characters downward into tragedy.

Though Hamid explicitly counters that, had both Erica and America, who she represents, shared their pain with others instead of longing for the circumstances of the

past and grieving change and trauma in isolation, they would have avoided ruin, the actual plot questions the certainty of this outcome. Changez and Eric's relationship is riddled with inequality and superficiality from the beginning and the downfall in their relationship as well as Erica's descent into depression and suicide cannot be neatly attributed to a failure in effort. There are forces at work that cannot be blamed on behavior, but seem rooted in fate and nature.

This same tension between the advice of the authors and the insight gleaned from their stories runs through the other novels as well. In *Trespassing*, Khan overtly expounds on the evils of the United States in manipulating the fates of other nations and exalts the virtue of protest and resistance, yet none of the characters that resist are able to affect any change for themselves or others. Despite both Riffat and Dia's effort toward self-determination, ultimately, they end up without what they desire. Similarly, though Khan appeals for the same effort toward autonomy and freedom from the expectations and pressures of external powers for the country of Pakistan, one can connect that this too is a futile effort.

Likewise, Aslam's recommendations in *The Wasted Vigil* counter the evidences of the plot. In the closing pages in particular, Aslam advises that love, education, and empathy have the potential to heal the wounds of the past at a causal instead of a symptomatic level, yet for even the most altruistic of characters, their loved ones are torn from them by the tragedy of war and the violence of hatred and rivalry. Qatrina is forced to cut off her own husband's hand and is killed afterward for her resistance to the Taliban. Their daughter and David's lover, Zameen is first kidnapped, imprisoned, and raped because of sheer bad luck and then is later assassinated because of her relationship

with David. David himself puts forth a great deal of effort into funding the building of a school that will educate girls, but the school is blown up before it is used. Despite possible suspicions concerning Casa, David shelters, feeds, and protects him, but in the end, is killed attempting to save the others from Casa's suicide bomb. Benedikt, Lara's brother, is conscripted by the Soviet army, defects out of principle to avoid further engagement with Afghan tribal forces and rescues Zameen, but is brutally killed by an Afghan warlord. Virtually every character that tries to resist the forces already in motion with the love and understanding that Aslam touts is met with further disaster because of their efforts. In that sense, both Khan and Aslam's novel are contradictory in that the ethics they espouse and the solutions they verbally offer oppose the empirical evidence of their stories.

Both Khan and Aslam exert particular effort into describing their settings of Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively, as relatable locations, free from pandering exoticism and predictable stereotypes. In doing so, they seek to avoid reinforcing the expectations of Western readers that South/Central Asia is a strange place where "bad things happen," but is a region with homes and addresses and romances and families and peopled with individuals facing challenges common to humanity. However, the plots of their novels fortify Orientalist notions that the area is inherently and unavoidably tragic and dangerous in nature, fated to violent and wretched ends regardless of efforts stemming from any location toward liberty and love.

Lastly, *Burnt Shadows* offers a very similar tension between morality and outcome. Shamsie initially asks the question: "*How did it come to this?*", and the reader assumes the answer to be based on a string of poor decisions and immoral behavior.

However, it turns out that the reasons for the tragedies in Hiroko's life, as well as the imprisonment of her son is due much more clearly to a series of unfortunate coincidences and the swirling of larger scale forces such as governments, agencies, and nations.

Thence, though the authors are somewhat advisory in their texts, they do not demonstrate empirically that their recommendations elicit any positive results, as is reflected in the both the relationships among characters as well as in their individual fates.

Ultimately, in order to explore these themes of fate and tragedy as well as to appeal to wider audiences, these postcolonial authors use conventional Western literary tropes and styles. In this thesis, I have specifically dealt with the trope of love and romance, and how it is used allegorically and symbolically, as well as to illustrate the bridging of difference of culture and nation through the building of relationships. Furthermore, since romance is often a site of struggle over power between genders, it can reflect hierarchical trends in a larger societal context.

Not all postcolonial texts are of equal merit; postcolonial texts, like any texts, are subject to rigorous literary criticism. However, most postcolonial novels provide insight into experience rather foreign to Western readers and foreground political agendas that may have been otherwise ignored. The strength in these novels that deal with political events in far-off places lies in the author's ability to explain without exoticizing, portraying a fresh but relatable experience that illustrates, in a complex way, matters common to humanity.

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