

Insurgent Metaphors: Decentering 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*¹

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“What’s going on out in the world?”

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

“That’s not the world, it’s just the neighborhood,” Hiroko said sharply. (*Burnt Shadows* 250)

This conversation between the Japanese-Pakistani woman Hiroko Tanaka and her American friend Kim Burton, set in New York just a few days after September 11, 2001, exemplifies a state of postcolonial exasperation. Hiroko’s antagonism is targeted at American isolationist policies that craft the “war on terror” within the jurisdiction of justice, retribution, and deterrence while ignoring the global reverberation of the violence unleashed in its name. As Richard Gray has argued, this inward-looking American response is endemic to many novels written in the United States after 9/11. As such, these novels remain mired in the personal, where “cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists” (Gray 135). Preoccupied with the perceived psychological and political changes in the country after 9/11, these novels fail to acknowledge that American life has continued at an unabated pace—whereas life in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan has been radically destabilized. In their steadfast reflection upon the changing contours of the American self, these novels effectively sidestep any attempt to imagine those who fall outside that literary and political citizenship.² If, as Gray notes, “Sex, love, the public and the private, art and economics everything has changed . . . from the mate-

rial fabric of our lives to our terms of consciousness" (131), then this restructuring of sentiment must account for the lives of those for whom September 11, 2001 functions not as a universal signifier but as just one marker of the continuous violence with which they live. (131).

Many scholars have weighed in on the question of an appropriate novelistic response to 9/11. According to some, prose reinvigorated by the multiple underpinnings of the immigrant novel, bearing witness to the changing demographics of American society with its "strategy of de-territorialisation," is better suited than its American-born counterpart to navigate the aftermath of 9/11 (Gray 141). Michael Rothberg avers that this faith in the immigrant novel to "open up and hybridize American culture" needs to be supplemented by a "fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship," which not only imagines the American citizen from varied points of origin but also questions the multiple modalities of cultural and national citizenship (154). Thus, both scholars place their faith in literary narratives that arrive at American life from a slant—immigrant, racial, and international. However, not everyone shares this resounding confidence in immigrant literature. For Ali Behdad, the relationship of the immigrant to the United States remains too fraught with marginalization to serve as the site of renewal, and he advocates an interrogation of historical narratives of the "alien" in the United States.³ And Susan Koshy asks instead: "What alternative histories could we write if we substituted 9/11 with other events[?] . . . Can a historicism that focuses on national contexts address the far-reaching meanings of the events?" (301). Thus, scholars chart the cultural and literary resonance of the 9/11 signifier along bifurcating modes—one that identifies it as a catalyst for the reinvigoration of the novel form, and the other that debates it as a point of origin for the unfolding of the new millennium.

If, in between this avowal of multiplicity in literature and the purported disavowal of history in politics and culture, novelists are "to insert themselves into the space between conflicting interests and practices and then dramatize the contradictions that conflict engenders," then the postcolonial world, especially Pakistan as it lies at the center of the present conflict, provides an ocularity without which the literary be-

quest of 9/11 is only partially visible (Gray 147). While both Gray and Rothberg hope the American novel will rise up to this revolutionary task of engaging with 9/11 and its aftermath, and Ali and Koshy call for a paradigmatic restructuring, such a de-centering of political and literary narrative is already available in novels written by the Pakistani writers Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie.

Mirroring nineteenth-century European notions of colonialism, popular western perception tends to view the conflicts generated by 9/11 as similarly benevolent endeavors—chivalric crusades to rescue Muslim women chafing under the burden of the veil, or politically idealistic measures to bring democracy to pre-modern, dictatorial regimes. Writers from the postcolonial world, deeply imbued with a historical sense of colonial power and postcolonial conflict, often provide a vital counter-narrative, and the postcolonial novel in English is particularly suited to address issues of terror and power. As Elleke Boehmer points out, “By contrast with Anglo-American novelists . . . who regard terror as a force that cannot be incorporated within civic society, I would suggest that in the globalized world terror is a force that has been *incorporated everywhere*” (145; emphasis in original). Thus, unlike the American or the British novel, which may treat 9/11 or 7/7 as the cataclysmic end of civilization and modernity, postcolonial novels arrive at the same juncture having comprehended the world as always conflicted and contradictory. Where its western counterpart may trace the cleaving of the once whole world into modern and regressive, peaceful and violent, educated and illiterate, secular and fundamentalist, the postcolonial novel begins with a world already disillusioned and fragmented along these lines. Thus, modernity in the postcolonial novel is unsettled by a historicity that questions the constitutive elements of crisis.

Popular American discourse has remained mostly concerned with the cultural peculiarities of non-western and Islamic cultures such as those of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, especially as they coalesce in the figure of the terrorist. Thus, in the reevaluation of feeling, memory, and history prompted by 9/11, the multiple and shifting notions of the “other” now converge to form a singular entity. This figure of decrepitude, available in the many images of the non-western, Islamic,

bearded, turbaned, radical *jihadi* is invoked in popular media to give credence to American lives. While the media prevalently constructs the figure of the terrorist with the accompanying markers of illiteracy, fundamentalism, hatred, and violence, this figure is rearticulated through postcolonial fiction to produce the disempowered refugee, the disenchanting immigrant, and the dissident citizen. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie intervene in this crisis of representation by adding depth and meaning to such stories and thus tell the tale, to use Jasbir Puar's phrase, "beyond the ocular" (174).

***The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)**

Mohsin Hamid's provocatively titled novel charts a dialogue between a Pakistani man, Changez, and an unnamed American at a street cafe in Lahore, Pakistan. Changez narrates the story of his once charmed life as a successful immigrant to the United States who traveled to places as far-flung as Athens, Manila, and Valparaiso. The fixity of location in Lahore—the narrative in real time—versus the cosmopolitanism of the American existence—the recall of memory—situates the Pakistani and the American as inhabitants of divergent worlds and temporalities. In a restructuring of contemporary political hierarchy, the Pakistani speaks and the American is silent. The conversation—or perhaps more appropriately, the monologue—is a political and personal rumination on Changez's life: it charts his move from Pakistan to Princeton and then to a meritoriously-earned position at the financial firm Underwood Samson, his short-lived and tumultuous love affair with a fellow Princeton graduate, Erica, and his eventual disenchantment and devolution into extremism. This litany of events defies the expectations of fundamentalism as it aligns radicalism with the modern, secular, educated, and privileged Pakistani elite, rather than with the prescriptive pre-modern regressive, illiterate, and intolerant *jihadi*. The novel is significant not only for its characterization of the fundamentalist but also for its form, which creates a voice for the Pakistani in congruence with his listener and thus insists upon a measure of complicity, for the reader and the American, in the crafting of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Changez, literally and figuratively imprisoned by his conflicted perception of the world and by his immigrant experience of American imperialism as a young Muslim male after 9/11, seeks to establish an account of his life. Changez's conversation with the American is bereft of inference to creed or faith, and Islam functions more as a cultural identifier than as an instructive dogma. However, the difference between culture and religion is always slippery, or as Gayatri Spivak states, "it is neither possible nor desirable to be precise here" (105). In fact, Changez refers more often to his training in American finance than he does to Islam or Pakistan. In his courtly but menacing monologue, Changez puts to use skills honed during his position at Underwood Samson. In the dominant discourse of the "terrorist," the opposing forces of rationality and hysteria battle for control of the individual, but in the novel it is difficult to discern whether the assuredness of Changez's narrative comes from his increasing fundamentalism or from the arrogance he has imbibed through corporate financial power. Thus, the rigidity of Changez's perspective is as much a product of the capitalist hierarchies of American power as it is of radicalized Islam, and this difficulty of discernment aligns the fundamentalist with the capitalist. In a chilling yet honest portrayal of his reaction to 9/11, Changez states: "I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Trade center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (72–73). The image of the American capitalist machinery ground to a halt by a handful of men permits a secular and empathetic (and capitalist) Changez a certain degree of satisfaction, mitigated only by the apprehension of the havoc to follow. On his flight back to the United States from Manila, where he had seen the attacks on television, Changez is strip-searched and flies back "uncomfortable in my own face" (73). It is this dual identification, both as victim and attacker, that initiates Changez's dissatisfaction with his American life. Hamid's novel intervenes in the debates surrounding the cultural and literary products of 9/11 by posing important questions of duality and affect for the Pakistani protagonist.

In *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Boehmer suggests that perceived anti-Western fundamentalism may be reconfigured as resistance to an imposed or inflicted modernity. Invoking Dipesh Chakraborty's idea of "seizing hold" of modernity by colonized nationalists as their urgent insistence on the "now" of their political demands, as against the "not yet," Boehmer proposes that the "postcolonial novel, play, or poem might be understood as itself an alternative mode of seizing hold upon the now, upon the right to define the moment" (148). Read through that dictum of seizing the right to "define the moment," *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the work of a formerly colonized subject, the narrative of the new immigrant, and a story of return to the postcolonial nation. Hamid's own biography reflects these trifurcated notions of origin and questions the ease with which the native, the immigrant, or the cosmopolitan is defined. Born and educated in Pakistan, Hamid came to the United States as a student and immigrant, shifted to the United Kingdom and acquired British citizenship, and finally returned to Pakistan as a dual Pakistani-British national. Thus, the novel reflects Hamid's own complicated experiences in the way it grapples with the meaning of immigration, belonging, and return. A refusal to be fixed by the imperial or western gaze is central to Hamid's task; the resistance to an *a priori* condemnation of 9/11 opposes the tacit belief that references to the day begin with a denunciatory clause; and shifting markers of origin and purpose allow *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to serve as a site of critical and imaginative refraction.

Michael Rothberg's call for a "complementary centrifugal mapping that charts the outward movement of American power" as a corollary to Richard Gray's "centripetal . . . movement toward America" still positions the United States at the center of the circle (153). Instead, postcolonial fiction insists either on a lateral mapping outside American power or on a consideration of the ways in which local experience is linked to global structures of dominance. Changez is disenchanted and sullen upon his return to Pakistan, but his eventual decline into radicalism is prompted not by 9/11 but by the tensions between India and Pakistan. An attack on the Indian Parliament by armed men in December 2001, ostensibly orchestrated by Pakistan, pushes the Indian army to take up offensive

positions along the border between the two nuclear powers. The “war on terror” has upped the ante for retaliation, and for Changez and his family “there was unanimity in the belief that India would do all it could to harm them, and that despite the assistance they had given America in Afghanistan, America would not fight at our side” (Hamid 205). The prospect of war with India unsettles Changez even more than the “war on terror” in Afghanistan or the racial profiling in the United States: “I felt powerless; I was angry at our weakness, at our vulnerability to intimidation of this sort from our—admittedly much larger—neighbor to the east. Yes, we had nuclear weapons, and yes, our soldiers would not back down, but we were being threatened nonetheless, and there was nothing I could do about it but lie in my bed, unable to sleep” (128). These moments of epiphany for Changez occur at various locations outside the United States. The myth of the perfect immigrant, as well as the perfect America, is dismantled for Changez in these locations that speak to the complex history of American imperialism—the Philippines, Chile, and finally Pakistan. The idiom of the local, the novel indicates, is often a more powerful agent of change than the globalized narratives of terror and war.

The position of the postcolonial subject is useful too in mounting a critique of the neo-imperial nature of the war on terror, which is, as Boehmer suggests, an “imperialist agenda inextricably entwined with the history of neoliberal globalization and America’s place within it” (14). The cracks in Changez’s love affair with America (symbolized in his ill-fated love for Erica) are a result of his dissatisfaction with both American politics and the American financial world. In an intricate mapping of identity—from student to immigrant to dissident—Changez is initially the power-hungry usurper who supplants Americans from their positions. But that rise to American power is overturned as Changez, the oppositional alien, rejects his American life and returns to Pakistan, thereby justifying the American hierarchy that holds people like him at bay and “enables the construction of a normalized notion of citizen as white, English-speaking, law-abiding, hard-working, and heteronormal” (Behdad 289). This racialized perspective is minutely interwoven into the psychological, cultural, and legislative definition of American

citizenry. In fact, Changez's desperation to have a part of the American life—corporate power, an American girlfriend—overwhelms Changez to the extent that he asks Erica to imagine he is her dead, white, American boyfriend because it is the only way for him to consummate his desire: "It was as though we were under a spell, transported where I was Chris and she was with Chris, and we made love with a physical intimacy that Erica and I had never enjoyed. Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*" (Hamid 105). Changez's willing erasure of his Muslim, Pakistani self to gain access to the white American woman symbolizes the privileges of the white American male as well as the hollowness of a "neoliberal globalization" in which Changez may partake of the American body but not of its inviolable soul. Anna Hartnell reads this interaction between Changez, Erica, and Chris as a "deceptively simple" and misleading allegory:

The ways in which Changez's and Erica's lovemaking alludes to the violent penetration of American space as represented by the 9/11 attacks are obvious. Changez notes a "violent undertone" to their act of apparent physical intimacy, an act that, rather than bringing Erica out of herself as Changez hopes, sends her into a spiraling cycle of introspection, and ultimately, self-destruction. Instead of turning to face the rest of the world, Erica fixates on the evidence of her own mortality—Chris—by investing in a melancholic stance that refuses the act of mourning. (310)

At the heart of Erica's failure to envision Changez as a lover or partner is her inability to imagine herself as a person engaged with the world. Hartnell's allegorical reading of (Am)Erica, as a character who slips into a "spiraling cycle of introspection . . . instead of turning to face the rest of the world," mirrors the isolating nature of the American response to 9/11 and is set askance to the proper "act of mourning." The war on terror and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, outward-directed actions that affected different parts of the world, stem nevertheless from narrow and shortsighted inward-looking concerns that are also a mark of privilege. Thus, while the white American woman Erica, as suggested by

Hartnell, can retreat from the world after 9/11, Changez, the Muslim Pakistani male, is propelled by the same events into the grim actuality of his transnational existence and conflicted relationship to the United States. At this juncture, the novel provides a variation on Gray's theme of "emotional entanglements" as the sole viable representation of "cataclysmic public events" by recasting the love affair as a failed mediation between cultures, countries, religions, race, and politics.

Changez speaks vociferously of American imperialism when one of his students is disappeared in Pakistan. "Filled with rage at the mystery surrounding his treatment," he declares, "no country inflicts death so readily upon inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America" (Hamid 182). In his avatar as a zealot, Changez conveniently bypasses the complicity of the postcolonial state, Pakistan, in the covert nature of the "war on terror" and its seemingly endless reach into Afghani and Pakistani life. His student's disappearance is symbolic of the hypocrisy practiced by the United States—one in which the "the lives of those of us who lived in lands in which such killers also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage" (178). Oblivious to the ironies of his newfound criticism of the United States, Changez does not consider how, in the grip of its capitalist machinery, he too had once evaluated human beings within the cold facts of profit and loss.

"Like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe," Changez awaits the American agent who will finally accost him after his vitriolic speeches against the United States (183). The reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is twofold. Changez, like Kurtz, has "gone native" by reencountering his Pakistani self. However, unlike Kurtz, whose transformation from company bureaucrat to local inhabitant is a disgrace, Changez reenters his Pakistani life in a state of transcendent self-knowledge:

If we take into account the *journey* by which Changez arrives at his disenchanting and partisan position, we have an interesting snapshot of the bifurcation of the world after 9/11 and an awareness that old colonial instincts are still alive and well in the nations of the west—even if they sometimes cloak themselves nowadays in the rhetoric of globalization or liberal interventionism. (Morey 145)

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is both a meditation on the figure of the disenchanting immigrant and an investigation into the flimsy terms of postcolonial nationalist fervor. Pakistan, once the graveyard of a frustrated elite, prompts the flight of the immigrant to the land of opportunities, yet it is transformed upon Changez's return into the site of a rejuvenated national and cultural identity. The United States, where Changez had once sought advancement and prosperity, becomes the perpetrator of racism and injustice. Thus, the narrative questions the viability of the state as a formative concept for the composite nature of postcolonial and immigrant identity.

The novel ends on an ominous note, hinting at violence but enacting none. Changez continues his polemic on life and world politics as he and the American walk to the latter's hotel. But the waiter from the café appears, and "he is waving at me [Changez] to detain you [the American]" (Hamid 184). The last sentence of the novel leads the reader to believe that Changez means to shake the American's hand and that the American reaches into his jacket for a "glint of metal" (183). Changez's earlier assertion that "you should not believe we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (183) doubles as true and false. Why have Changez and the waiter followed the American? Why is the waiter signaling Changez? Why is the American reaching into his jacket? What is that "glint of metal"? The novel insists upon ambiguity and invokes in its listener (the American and, by extension, the reader) the very abstract notion of fear on which the stereotype of the terrorist is built. As Derrida and other theorists have pointed out, "terror" and the "war on terror" must invoke the original event and the possibility of its recurrence, thereby ensuring a constant and steady state of panic. Hamid uses that abstraction of impending doom as the final doubling motif. The reader is left with a foreboding of violence but also with the discomfort that such an assumption may be unwarranted and constructed purely by the discursive power of the novel. In its refusal to recuperate the Pakistani radical, the text repudiates the subduing of the Other. Changez is not offered up as a character who seeks approval or acceptance; the narrative does not allow the facile option of rehabilitat-

ing the Muslim radical. The redemption of the character, if any, is built on instability. Changez is both “us” and “them”: he is both “with us” and “against us.” The complicit and complex demarcations of victim and perpetrator are broken down as the novel unhinges the singular trajectories of terrorism and fundamentalism to reorient the narrative of modern secular subjectivity.

***Burnt Shadows* (2009)**

“How did it come to this?” wonders a naked prisoner in the prologue to Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Burnt Shadows*. He thinks he will be “wearing an orange jumpsuit” when he is eventually dressed (1). The widely distributed images of Guantanamo Bay allow no mystery about the context of this incarceration. Shamsie’s narrative, ambitious in its geographic and chronological reach, is the unfolding of the prisoner’s story. The novel takes the reader from Japan moments before the atomic bomb annihilates the inhabitants of Nagasaki, to India at the eve of independence and partition, to Pakistan in the grips of military dictatorships and CIA activity, and finally to the United States and Afghanistan amidst the war on terror. This geographic march of crisis carries out the novel’s imperative to place one of the protagonists, as a vehicle of insight and experience, at a series of global catastrophes. This imperative is matched by the myriad national and cultural allegiances of the characters: the Japanese woman Hiroko Tanaka, who loses her German fiancé Konrad Weiss to the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, moves to colonial India to meet his half-sister Ilse Weiss and her English husband, marries their Muslim clerk Sajjad Ashraf, is displaced with him to Pakistan after Partition, and moves to New York after Sajjad’s death to live with Ilse Weiss; Hiroko and Sajjad’s son, the Japanese-Pakistani Raza Konrad Ashraf, who comes of age in Pakistan, works in Dubai, the United States, and then Afghanistan, and whose life changes dramatically because of his friendship with a young Afghani boy and the arrival of Ilse Weiss’ son, Harry; the German-English woman Ilse Weiss who moves from India to the United States; her son and Sajjad’s friend, the Englishman Harry, who lives as a child in India, as an adult in the U.S., and dies in Afghanistan; and his daughter, the American Kim Burton, a structural engineer grap-

pling with her fragmented family and country after 9/11, who is named after the Irish-British urchin in Kipling's novel *Kim*.

In this rich tapestry of personal and national stories, Shamsie anchors the moral core of the novel with Hiroko Tanaka-Ashraf who, as the *Hibakusha* (survivor of the atomic explosion), serves as a living reminder of violence. It is through her compelling perspective that the novel conveys its didactic view on the failure of the modern nation-state. Imperial Japan and England, postcolonial India and Pakistan, a neocolonial United States, and a Talibanized Afghanistan are all indicted as perpetrators of violence and injustice. Hiroko serves as "the novel's interpreter of personal and collective losses, of stories of estrangement and reconnections, betrayal and atonement . . . [.] and Shamsie transcends the narrow confines of ethnicity and religion responsible for the worst excesses of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (Zinck 53). What is missing perhaps from Shamsie's novel is a viable political entity that is not somehow compromised by these histories. The colonial and post-colonial disjuncture of the novel provides a "historical conscience—and consciousness" for the imperialist forms of the contemporary globalized moment (Loomba 1–2). By layering her narrative with an almost unbearable burden of history—World War II, British Imperialism, India's Independence and Partition, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and its Talibanization, 9/11 and the subsequent American incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq—Shamsie insists that the reader acknowledge the historical relationship between imperialist world orders and terrorism. By decentering the nation and privileging the global relationships of colonialism, culture, and history, Shamsie unsettles the seamless singularity with which temporal and religious binaries (modern/regressive, secular/fundamentalist, western/non-western) are enacted to justify the war on terror. Thus, in *Burnt Shadows*, the global, as Saskia Sassen formulates in her discussion of the word, "is partly endogenous to the national rather than a formation that stands outside of it . . . [.] and this expands the range of actors who are conceivably global" (82).

History, in Shamsie's novel, is neither rhetorical nor literary but rather a set of material and political conditions under which the individual labours for meaning. *Burnt Shadows* takes seriously "its commitment to

cross-border interaction and ethically inspired adjustments to the other . . . to expand and complicate, as well as question, the shared languages and common frames of reference, legacies of a colonial history, which make globalization possible” (Boehmer 146). Contemporary notions of the global, transmuted through the supposedly unending availability of information in the virtual age, often imply a mobility of culture and bodies that is set above class, nation, ethnicity, or race. Immigrant stories that do not follow the privileged path of legality, documentation, invitation, and acceptance underscore the unstable nature of such notions. In Shamsie’s novel, the ease with which European identity might change is set against the rigidity with which non-European identities are viewed. The Englishman Harry has his place in the world reaffirmed no matter where he is—whether as a colonialist in India, as an upperclass Englishman in England, as an English immigrant to the United States, as a CIA operative in Pakistan, or finally as a private arms contractor in Afghanistan. Though Harry is never entirely comfortable in any of these locations and is eventually killed, his discomfort has less to do with a scarcity of institutional or political positions available to him and more to do with his own inability to find home. Harry’s effortless reconnaissance of the world signals the uneven social capital wielded by the characters. Whereas race, class, and nationality serve Harry’s goals, Raza’s life is dominated by the constraints of such categories.

When Harry finds Sajjad and Hiroko in Pakistan, he feels at home with them instantly. That Sajjad is now a Pakistani rather than an Indian, and that he is married to a Japanese woman, and that he is now the father of a boy, and that the meeting is in Pakistan and not in India, are secondary to Harry. Harry goes on to befriend Sajjad’s son Raza and encourages him to apply to universities in the United States:

“I’m pretty sure you and America will like each other. Forget like. Love at first sight—that’s how it was for America and me. I was twelve when I went there, and I knew right away that I’d found home. . . . In India I would always have been an Englishman. In America, everyone can be American.” “Not me,” says the Japanese-Pakistani Raza, “You look like Clint

Eastwood and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. So, of course you can be American. I look like not this and not that.” (Shamsie 185)

Even without the experience of immigration, Raza is savvy enough to counter the artifice in Harry’s naiveté that envisions American citizenship as a universally bestowed largesse. The histories of race-based citizenship in the United States, or America’s record of race relations, or his own privilege as a former colonialist, escape the English-American Harry entirely. In this failure of imagination, Harry echoes the dominant ethos of the neo-colonial moment in which American citizenship, and its foundation on whiteness, is obscured by the discourse of the terrorist Other, whose racial and religious identity is seen as integrally oppositional to white citizenship rather than constructed and marginalized by it. This particular strand of being modern as citizens “has a history, which is, in part, a history of the western world and its way of knowing itself through others” (Lowe 1). American modernity, with its faith in the secular democratic citizenry, recognizes itself not through an inclusion of multivalent identities but rather through the exclusion of the Other.

Raza Konrad Ashraf, the Japanese-Pakistani polyglot fluent in Urdu, English, Japanese, and Pashto, is on both sides of the war on terror. Recruited by Harry to work for an American military contractor, Raza serves the American war in Afghanistan through translation. As a Muslim Pakistani, Raza is indispensable to the war effort, but in his multi-racial/lingual/national allegiances he also symbolizes an amorphous global identity that exceeds the strict demarcation of borders and loyalty after 9/11—as an American coworker remarks, “The translation genius. You can name your salary in corporations around the world. And you certainly have no sense of brotherhood with anyone” (Shamsie 304). In his book, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Zygmunt Bauman describes a similar process in which the figure of the stranger dismantles the “insider-outsider” hierarchies that allow modern societal orders to police themselves. Thus, someone like Raza, who passes for both the secular, modern, multicultural subject and the potential fundamentalist, Muslim terrorist, poses an interminable problem of comprehension or—as Peter Morey

and Amina Yaqin state—is always in the position of the “unassimilated interloper,” who in “one of the key strategies for creating normativity in western nations since 9/11 . . . perform national belonging” (150). Raza finds his ambivalent and ambiguous status untenable, as he must continuously prove his loyalty or risk distrust. When the suspicion for Harry’s assassination in Afghanistan rests on him, Raza flees the egalitarian façade of American judicial process and enters the unforgiving world of human trafficking. These choices then cause a particular trajectory of events that lead up to the novel’s uneasy denouement.

Raza looks for his childhood friend, Abdullah, an Afghani refugee to Pakistan, with whom he had, in a misguided notion of adventure, once traveled to a militant training camp. When Raza realizes that Abdullah is now an immigrant in New York, also on the run from the FBI, Raza sets in motion a series of events to rescue him. Raza asks Kim Burton, Harry’s daughter, to drive Abdullah to Canada from where Abdullah’s family has arranged to have him trafficked back to Afghanistan. Kim informs the authorities, but she cannot predict the outcome of her action. Raza realizes that the same man who has brought him to Canada will ferry Abdullah back to Afghanistan, and Raza decides to go in his stead to meet his friend, Abdullah. A glimpse of the police entering the diner where he and Abdullah are meeting prompts Raza to exchange his coat with Abdullah and take his place, and because Kim and Raza have never met, Kim does not realize that she has inadvertently managed the arrest of a man her father loved as a son.

The complicated familial history of the Weiss-Burtons and the Tanaka-Ashrafs, often rendered mythological by Shamsie as the story of the spider who spun its web to protect the prophet Mohammad, serves a dual function. It is, at one level, a narrative of human emotions, but it is also a parable of culture and nations told through the complex and intertwining political relationships of Germany, England, India, Japan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the United States, and Canada. As the moral core of the novel, Hiroko serves as a palimpsestic acknowledgement that these overlapping strands of history, though disparate and seemingly unconnected, tell a common story of loss. When she finds a poster which “consisted of a picture of a young man and the words: MISSING

SINCE 9/11. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT LUIS RIVERA PLEASE CALL . . . Hiroko thought of the train station at Nagasaki, the day Yoshi had taken her to Tokyo. The walls plastered with signs asking for news of missing people” (Shamsie 274). 9/11 is terrible in its audacity and scope, but it is insignificant in scale to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Hiroko’s move to New York is prompted not by her husband’s death but, echoing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by the jingoistic declaration of nuclear arsenal by India and Pakistan. This moment of narrative and temporal dislocation emphasizes the overarching theme of the novel, which insists upon a reconsideration of national concerns within transnational structures of memory.

The incongruity in choosing the United States as a site of refuge from nuclear posturing is not lost on Hiroko. When the well-meaning immigration official, “with a peace sign tattooed on his forearm,” notes her place of birth as Nagasaki, he states “It’s OK . . . You’ll be safe here.” Hiroko cannot believe his “obliviousness to irony” (287). This image of the United States as a haven from violence resurrects a dynamic in which the center remains immured from the periphery. However, even the safety felt at the symbolic core of the world is quickly shattered by 9/11. Hiroko’s son is arrested as a suspected terrorist, and her best friend’s granddaughter, Kim, becomes the unknowing instrument of his incarceration. Yet, Hiroko’s disillusionment with the nations she inhabits—Japan, India, Pakistan, and the United States—stems from a deeper and stronger sense of humanity than the injuries done to her or her family: “My stories seemed so small, so tiny a fragment in the big picture. Even Nagasaki—seventy-five thousand dead; it’s just a fraction of the seventy-two million who died in the war. A tiny fraction. Just over .001 per cent. Why all this fuss about .001 per cent?” (293). The novel’s imperative shifts the concerns of the self to the disproportionate wrongs borne by humanity and dismantles the structural configuration of the national that rests upon ethnic, religious, linguistic, or geographic singularity. Thus, the site of crisis is not simply a moment of withdrawal, self-recrimination, pity, or retreat for the individual but rather an exhortation for a committed engagement with one’s community, country, and culture in the transnational and collective histories of the world.

When Hiroko asks Kim for an explanation for her son's arrest, Kim replies: "I trusted my training. Don't you understand? If you suspect a threat you can't just ignore it because you wish—and I really really wish this—you lived in a world where all suspicion of Muslims is just prejudice, nothing more" (361). Kim's confidence in her "training," her knowing, is the privilege of the modern, western self who can with impunity produce information about the non-western subject. In fact, Kim's training proves to be inadequate, her perception faulty. That Abdullah is not a terrorist, and that the person who is arrested is not Abdullah, signify the absence/irrelevance of the non-western subject to this production of knowledge that assumes its own comprehensiveness. As Lisa Lowe states, what stands for universal history is often "anchored to a universal human subject[,] and . . . it reveals the claim to universality to be the guise of a partial, uninterested European history . . . and uncovers universal history as a history without a proper subject" (10). The terrorist Kim has identified does not exist. Abdullah and Raza do. But they are neither visible nor relevant to the political metanarratives. Kim's assurance that her particular racism is not a mistake, that she has, on account of her schooling, an entitled dispensation to judge the Other, alludes to the convoluted license of her subjectivity and to the presumed inconsequential nature of Abdullah's and Raza's lives. Reminiscent of her literary predecessor, the British Kim who passes for an Indian but remains true to his colonial and national lineage, Kim Burton reveals her true political and intellectual allegiance to the United States.

Symbolic of the different temporal and cultural worlds inhabited by Hiroko and Kim and the gulf of comprehension between them, the novel ends with a conversation about Nagasaki and the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. Hiroko declares:

When Konrad first heard of the concentration camps he said you have to deny people their humanity in order to decimate them. You don't. You just have to put them in little corners of the big picture. In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand dead? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one

Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb. (Shamsie 362)

Hiroko's anguished outburst rests not on the singular instance of inhumanity but on the willing complicity of the citizen in reproducing that moment. It is the second bomb that decimates Nagasaki. "To deny people their humanity" is to inflict violence upon those not deemed human, whereas the suitable expendability of people is to accept that the safety and survival of a core group supersedes the sanctity of all other lives. While the western conversation about terror might proceed along a linear narrative from September 2001, Shamsie's novel insists upon a series of disruptive and disorienting concentric images that build upon the context of imperialism and decolonization to dispute 9/11 as the overarching thematic of the last decade.

They make a desolation and call it peace. (Agha Shahid Ali)⁴

We have to plant our historiographical feet in the frontier space of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and north India to see the concerns which emerge from within a regional imagination, in a regionally specific conversation and in regional stories. To pay attention to the localised production of history and memory is to decontextualise the only context that appears relevant – the imperial one. This shift in perspective reveals that the oft-designated "frontier" has a centrality all of its own. (Manan Ahmed)

Postcolonial novels, preoccupied with the nation and with the fragmentation of decolonized identities, may seem hindered, even irretrievably disabled, in articulating a radical literary form. However, the relatively new construct of the nation also serves as a site of meaningful engagement and possibility. The birth of Pakistan with the concomitant decolonization of the Indian sub-continent is still an event in process, and these novels, holding true to Frantz Fanon's declaration that "national

consciousness, *which is not nationalism*, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (247; emphasis added), tell stories that are not simply national, individual, or allegorical but rather narratives in which such categories are contingent, even coterminous. Though notions of global modernity may speak of decentering the national, the nation is still the geopolitical entity in which globalization’s profound changes are most visible. Fredric Jameson’s now infamous essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” with its assertion that “all third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . national allegories” (69) has been complicated by many theorists including Aijaz Ahmad and Rosemary Marangoly George. In reiterating David Lloyd and Abdul JanMohamed’s assertion that “minority cultural forms become palatable,” George writes that “hegemonic arrangements . . . allow the west to requisition only those non-western literatures, music, or cuisines that do not require much effort to digest” (103). How then can one account for the circulation of postcolonial novels such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Burnt Shadows* among post-9/11 readerships, American, European, and South Asian? George reads Jameson’s essay as asserting that “not all texts are political, but that all politics in these texts is national allegory” and that these texts are thus “alien.” Jameson’s notion of “alienness” is significant, according to George, only because it is an “obstacle in the path of easy consumption” for a particular audience (103). I suggest, however, that the confluence of the aesthetic with the political, or the “consumption” of what is “palatable,” does not preclude the varied possibilities opened up by these stories, especially after September 2001. In the postcolonial novel, the individual (or the text) does not become a site of contestation or mediation only between the local constructions of community, family, or culture. An international dimension, which does not necessarily equate to international concerns, is intrinsic to a text in which a legacy of colonial culture and language situate the very forms of articulation.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist and *Burnt Shadows* do not render conciliatory narratives or offer easy consumption for either Western or South Asian readers. Neither Changez nor Raza rehabilitates himself as a model

subject of the American neoliberal project. They defy the expected logic by forsaking their states of immigration and thus challenge American citizenship and its supposedly inherent privileges. Rather than expounding on a teleological explication of third-world aspirations to first-world citizenship, these novels use the multiple subject positions of their protagonists to challenge the primacy of such an ambition. America as a desired destination is subject to interrogation, disruption, and refusal by the third-world subject. Thus, these novels propel attention to another kind of narrative history, one in which the subject is no longer beholden to anchor her or himself in migrant locales but is rooted, or rerouted, through the postcolonial nation. The third-world novel often serves as the refractive surface through which western subjectivity might define itself. In Shamsie's and Hamid's oeuvres this refractive surface is made central to the very process of first-world reconfiguration. In their critical reimagining of the relationships between the formerly colonized and once colonizing world, these novels serve as a "resurrected site of storytelling [where] one begins to ask . . . what is at stake in remembering and forgetting the past" (Yoneyama 81). The novels address such concerns through irony and paradox; allegory, if it appears, is global rather than national. The crisis of representation, the inability to imagine the Other, is also a moral crisis, and each of the novels ends with an ethical moment of choice. The onus of the interpretive decision rests upon the characters, and the reader is, by extension, implicated in the unfolding of the tale. Whereas most American novels about 9/11 have written of the event as an epistemic and discursive rupture in American lives, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Burnt Shadows* speak to the condition of those who are dually identified as symbols of secular, multicultural plurality and as potential terrorist threats. If, as Nancy Armstrong has argued, "novels that matter will . . . be those seen as having prepared us for an epistemic shift in how we imagine ourselves as human beings" (8), then these novels force us to acknowledge how we have failed to imagine anyone but ourselves in similarly meaningful ways.

Notes

- I am grateful to Susan S. Lanser, the reviewers, and the editors at ARIEL for comments on earlier versions of this article.
- 1 In his book, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), Santa Ana argues for the creation of “insurgent metaphors” to contest oppressive U.S. public discourse about minority communities. I have used his phrase for the title.
 - 2 Examples of such novels include *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Jonathan Safran Foer, 2005), *The Emperor’s Children* (Claire Messud, 2006), *Terrorist* (John Updike, 2006), *Saturday* (Ian McEwan, 2006), and *Falling Man: A Novel* (Don DeLillo, 2008).
 - 3 While Gray notes that the title character in Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* exemplifies the shuttling of identities endemic to immigrant life, postcolonial critics of Behdad’s persuasion have panned *Jasmine* for its stunted and stereotypical reiterations of gender, religion, sexuality, and nationality. The assumption that geographic and cultural displacement endows the individual, or their narrative, with an originality of vision is here rendered naïve.
 - 4 As quoted in Agha Shahid Ali’s *The Country without a Post Office* and quoted in turn by Kamila Shamsie in *Burnt Shadows*. It is based on a quote by Tacitus—“solitudinum faciunt et pacem appellant”—regarding Pax Romana.

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