

MOHSIN HAMID AND THE NOVEL OF GLOBALIZATION

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June, 2014

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With the rise of globalization, people and cultures are interconnected economically, culturally, and socially like never before. Where nationalism defined much of the modern period, defining how people formed social bonds and allegiances, as well as how nations develop industrially and institutionally, the current period of globalization is defined by transnational interaction in all spheres of human life. Economic borders are being dissolved by multinational corporations, and cultural products and commodities flow through a global network of interlinked cities; the global capitalist system defines, organizes, and largely determines the lives of people the world over. This inescapable interdependency is reorganizing social and cultural life, and with this reorganization, the ways in which peoples, nations, and cultures do and can coexist are being reexamined. New, more appropriate ways of viewing an emerging global culture are being sought, ones that promote cohesion and similarity, while at the same time pulling away from the emphasis on difference. Mohsin Hamid's work seeks to display these commonalities, providing a narrative which proposes to establish empathetic bonds by unmasking the deeper, foundational aspects of the global system. Rather than promoting ethnic and racial divides, which are, as recent studies have shown, culturally constructed and empirically unfounded, his novels demonstrate that access to monetary and cultural capital are much more formative in determining how and by what means humans can globally and interdependently exist and coexist.

MOHSIN HAMID AND THE NOVEL OF GLOBALIZATION

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

M.A. in English

by

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June, 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my director, Dr. Rick Taylor, for unfaltering support and guidance throughout my career at East Carolina University. It was through his encouragement and support that I began to seriously consider applying to PhD programs, and it was Dr. Taylor who spent hours discussing programs with me, helping me find a path, and guiding me through the application process. Even when I was unsure of what lay ahead, his incredible optimism and unflinching encouragement drove me to push forward. For all he has done, I cannot begin to express my gratitude. I would also like to thank Dr. Kristy Ulibarri for putting me on the path toward critical and cultural studies, for challenging me when I absolutely needed it, and for teaching me that it is possible to be uncompromisingly authentic. Over the last year and a half, Dr. Ulibarri has consistently provided me with invaluable feedback and insights, provoking me to think and write more clearly and insightfully. Thank you as well to Dr. Su-ching Huang for providing very helpful support and encouragement during the writing of my thesis, and for questioning and calling for clarity when necessary. I would finally like to thank Dr. Seodial Deena, who helped me immensely in my development as a scholar. It was Dr. Deena who helped me publish a scholarly essay, and it is due also to him that I have been accepted to present at numerous international conferences during the last few months.

Thanks to the English Program at East Carolina University. I could not have asked for better, more supportive professors, who consistently opened doors for me that I had previously not known existed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We are all refugees from our childhoods. And so we turn, among other things, to stories. To write a story, to read a story, is to be a refugee from the state of refugees. Writers and readers seek a solution to the problem that time passes, that those who have gone are gone and those who will go, which is to say every one of us, will go. For there was a moment when anything was possible. And there will be a moment when nothing is possible. But in between we can create.

--*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, 219

I believe that the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel. And I believe that the world is suffering from a deficit of empathy at the moment: the political positions of both Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush are founded on failures of empathy, failures of compassion towards people who seem different.

--Mohsin Hamid (Interview with Harcourt)

In his widely influential essay “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” Roland Barthes writes that “there are countless forms of narrative in the world...” and that the “infinite variety of forms” are “present at all times, in all places, in all societies” (237). Barthes observes that

narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds...like life itself, [narrative] is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural (237).

Narrative is, in short, how we place ourselves spatially and temporally in the world. Narrative is how we conceptualize the past, and it is how we are able to conceive of a future. It is how we create every kind of conceivable common social meaning and unity. We take pieces from the madness, and create a trajectory—a causality, a *lineage*—without which we would have, arguably, no identity and no language.

And yet, as Barthes points out, narrative takes on an seemingly limitless number of forms. Modern narrative, particularly the novel as a form but also consumable, homogenous

history (newspapers, non-fiction books), is often intrinsically tied to nationality and nationalism. A historical narrative is used by a nation to provide cultural cohesion, often homogenizing massive groups of very different peoples under the guise of a few fundamental and essential tenets—tenets which are often more exclusionary than inclusionary¹, which are used to provide distinction and superiority, and also to excuse brutality. Essentially, a singular, *imagined* narrative causality provides a group of people with the basic means for the production of nationalism.

In tracing the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson rightly observes that

the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for “re-presenting” the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation (24-25).

Ultimately, the form of the commodifiable, intelligible narrative (whether history, news, or fiction) is able to exist due to specific, cultural and historic social formations, namely that of an extremely large, standardized community, which has the industrial means to both produce and consume replicas of cultural artifacts on mass scale. Prose narrative relies on the central tenets of a nation in order to produce characters and situations that will coincide with the familiar structures of cultural production. Anderson shows how novel-length prose narratives produce these characters and situations in order to be “embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers” (26), and in fact, these characters, who may not meet in the novel, can exist coherently by a preconceived massive social web in which people are united by a single time and space.

With the rise of globalization, however, people and cultures are interconnected economically, culturally, and socially like never before. New, more appropriate ways of viewing and representing an emerging global culture are being sought, ones that promote cohesion and similarity, while at the same time pulling away from the nationalistic emphasis on difference. Mohsin Hamid's work seeks to uncover and unmask these commonalities, providing a narrative which can perhaps allow empathy to be by unmasking the deeper, foundational aspects of a global system. Rather than promoting ethnic and racial divides, which are culturally constructed and, as recent studies have shown, empirically unfounded, his novels demonstrate that access to monetary and cultural capital are much more formative in determining how and by what means humans can globally and interdependently both exist and coexist.

Transnational writers, who have emerged from varying cultural perspectives, are, perhaps, predisposed toward insight not afforded to those writing embedded within a singular perspective. Since roughly the mid-20th century, due to the collapse of colonial empires, the rise of globalization and the interdependent social, cultural, and economic web it has created, and the ability to migrate, travel, and communicate over vast distances, there has been an explosion of writers from across the former colonies who have produced work seeking to convey their experience. The later stages of colonialism saw the rise of hegemonic institutions which sought not force (though force was certainly always a lurking and often visible threat) but indoctrination and inclusion into the cultural system—schools were built so that the colonized could be indoctrinated into the colonizer's system, indigenous languages were banned, the history of the colonizers was taught with little or no regard for the experience of the colonized. As a result, these writers were almost without exception educated in colonial schools, often English or

French-speaking, and many if not most went on to elitist universities within the empire itself. They read and modeled their craft after a neatly packed, commodifiable and easily exportable body of “canonical” work—the “best”² of what the empire had produced.

Though there have been many great postcolonial works which have sought to challenge and expose the underlying assumptions of the status quo in various ways in order to shine a new light on a various aspect of human life and interaction, there is perhaps an even more vast body of relatively synonymous and homogenized work—usually with characters who experience what Westerners *believe* or want them to experience—that often functions as an appendage to the Western canon proper. Collections of this work, compiled typically by Western elites, are peddled to mass audiences as representative of the larger, falsely homogenous body of what it means to be “ethnic.” Collections such as, for instance, the popular “ethnic” textbook *Growing up Ethnic in America*, sift through the mass body of what can be classified as ethnic and pick out benevolent and exoticized gems that the reader can use to become familiar with the “ethnic” experience. The problem is that like the larger ethnic canon, these literary productions by these craft-oriented writers³ often revolve around almost the same exact story line, and are packed full of similar experiences, challenges, and motifs, regardless of the ethnicity or background of the characters. These writers are usually similarly educated, often touting an M.F.A., and who have learned, effectively, how to properly commoditize their ethnicity into neat, unobtrusive literary consumable bits. These stories reinforce the image of the other, and strengthen the walls of otherness by relying on “clashes of civilizations” and other essentialisms.

Thus, the ethnic craze is as exoticized and stereotypical as ever. The writers who produce this ethnic “drive through” are usually posh, upper-middle class individuals, indoctrinated more into the American cultural system than into the “culture” they ostensibly represent. Essentially, much

of the work that occupies the “ethnic” canon has largely carved a niche from which similar cultural commodities can be produced⁴. And yet, challenges are being made to this larger system of ethnic production. Writers are refusing to produce work expected of those with their particular pigmentation. They are refusing to place ethnicity as the underlying component of difference. I argue that Mohsin Hamid is at the forefront of this shift.

Beginning with *Moth Smoke*, though the novel takes place in Pakistan, Hamid refuses the rustic, pre-industrial, utopian characters which often pepper ethnic literature. In fact, he refuses to foreground ethnicity at all, focusing rather on economic divisions to which ethnicity becomes an asset, not a means. Not relying on the essentialisms that often are used to manufacture conflict in multicultural work, Hamid constructs a novel that can in a sense take place anywhere, and in doing so he exposes more central problems which unite people in the global capitalist system, exposing the underlying economic foundation upon which ethnic and class distinctions arise.

In an age of globalization, complex patterns of migration, and rapid intercultural exchange, there is, as represented by Hamid’s work, a necessity for a unique and different narrative trajectory—one that is defined by pluralism, by a reformulation of concepts and the basic and often hidden assumptions that guide human life. What is sought is a more fitting way of acceptance of the other, and how the other is thought of and indeed constructed. A dated idea of separateness is, in fact, foundational to “multiculturalism,” and this is why I propose that it is problematic if not harmful as a term. Multicultural literature and attempts at multicultural societies often reinforce “Orientalized” differences and projections by reinforcing distinctions and essentialities, and other past-oriented “pure” cultural elements, which are assumed to be natural. Granted, this is done, supposedly, in the name of embracing difference; yet, multiculturalism creates this very exoticism and difference, if only to, in the best case scenario,

to include and appreciate it. These communities often embrace stereotypes and generalizations as a way to feign *expected* difference, but what is actually communicated is a willingness to play the game in a benign, exoticized way. This is apparent through the craze of “multicultural” literature as the perpetual next big event in literature—a medium which is consumed mainly by university-oriented bourgeois *because* many of these anthologized “multicultural” authors have hegemonically Orientalized and exoticized themselves. Multiculturalism I argue is premised upon self-othering and creating an easily commodifiable yet stereotypical experience which is marketed still to—and meant to appeal to—those of a neocolonizing culture or class, perhaps slightly aware or even guilty of their position. Pride parades, ethnic restaurants decked out in pastiche and tacky cultural commodities (which rely on essentialist stereotypes), for example, also support this conclusion.

Since 9/11, there have been numerous studies produced by critics who seek to outline the literary and cultural shift as incited by the attacks. Most have focused on, as in this exemplary though by no means unique passage from Georgiana Banita’s book *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture After 9/11*, the “narrative strategies in post-9/11 fiction [that] resonate with issues of race, spectatorship, profiling, torture, and mourning that circle around 9/11 and its aftermath” (1). Though an important effort, this swollen line of criticism continually seeks to examine the bandage and those who applied it, while ignoring both the wound, its implications, and those who saw it as a necessary consequence for the collective hubris of a nation. Moreover, it represents the crisis in representation, where, in an increasingly global space, the other, or the subaltern, seeks no longer to be represented or re-presented by someone who has an “appropriate” voice (author, politician, philanthropist, economist and so on), but who seek to present themselves on their own terms and to be heard.

Richard Gray's book *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, though relying upon generally the same writers, begins to question how 9/11—the “transitional event”—is perceived. Gray's work questions an output that relies generally upon a singular perspective. His book begins to question the perspective produced mainly by Anglocentric “literary” writers, artists, and filmmakers who speak for both themselves and the other, relying on manufactured and fabricated “clash of civilizations” with whom, in Martin Amis's words as quoted by Gray, “all over again...the west confronts an irrationalist, agonistic, theocratic/ideocratic system which is essentially and unappeasably opposed to its existence” (85). This is of course, in retrospect, bigoted, inflated, and typical of the rhetorically bloated responses to the 9/11 attack. What these writers *are* right about, however, is that there has been a change, just not the one they have envisioned. The change, in my estimation, is that work produced by one-sided perspectives and orientalist clichés and projections has lost its eminence. No longer is it unquestionably acceptable for, for instance, even a distinguished writer like John Updike to use orientalist texts in order to explore Islam and terrorism through the eyes of a young, Muslim protagonist. Indeed, few usages of literary license seem more absurd and distasteful, if not outright irresponsible. There is a new cosmopolitanism, a quest for an honest perspective, an authentic representation, and Mohsin Hamid's work not only anticipates this shift, but delivers a new vision in which minority writers can actually speak.

Therefore, I align myself with the cultural critics who claim that:

- 1) 9/11 incited a major shift in global politics—specifically the decline of U.S. global sovereignty and the increase of a less U.S.-centered plurality,
- 2) And that there has been a similar shift in literary production, marked by the dissolution of rigid cultural, national, and political allegiances—where individuals and writers alike

move within and between cultures with less essentialized and stereotypical reliances. I argue that this represents an important shift from “U.S.-centered plurality” (where any plurality takes its departure from the core, hegemonic culture) to, what I consider to be a more appropriate and more representative term: cosmopolitanism.

I argue that Hamid’s work is exemplary of both these shifts, in that it refuses to be either “ethnic” or “multicultural.” Indeed, Hamid eschews relying on racial, religious, cultural, or national distinctions as solely responsible for conflict. Rather, when, in his novels, these distinctions do surface, they are tools that economic power and privilege create in order to justify exploitation, as well as make it ethically excusable. Particularly in a globalized world where cultural institutions—such as elite, Western universities—are becoming “brand names” marketed particularly to those in developing countries as a means of “escape,⁵” one’s status is determined by the ability to perform confidently “cultural whiteness⁶” rather than colorational whiteness.

The most important shift Hamid exemplifies is the foregrounding of economics rather than culture (as in multiculturalism), and it is this emphasis which allows his fiction to change the way the globalized system can be examined. This trend is also supported by recent, revolutionary scientific studies, such as the recent conclusions by the Human Genome Project, which have determined that,

DNA studies do not indicate that separate classifiable subspecies (races) exist within modern humans. While different genes for physical traits such as skin and hair color can be identified between individuals, no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome exist to distinguish one race from another. There also is no genetic basis for divisions of human ethnicity. People who have lived in the same geographic region for many generations may have some alleles in common,

but no allele will be found in all members of one population and in no members of any other (“Minority, Race, and Genomics”)

Hamid’s work thus aligns with and anticipated not only social and literary trends, but scientific data as well.

As Paul Jay writes in a passage which supports my contention, “my point is not that the other [multicultural] writers...*ignore* economic change, but that they give decided prominence to the cultural dislocations that stem from it. Hamid, in effect, reverses the trend, giving prominence to economic change as the source of cultural dislocation” (68). Indeed, the characters that populate Hamid’s novels face, at root, the economic, social, and materialistic challenges of global capitalism—they struggle to “make it,” and other barriers become symptoms of this particular kind of struggle. Other classifications—cultural, ideological, racial—become tools of increasing or decreasing power. As Edward Said writes in *Covering Islam*, “There is never interpretation, understanding and knowledge when there is no interest” (12).

In an article Hamid wrote shortly after 9/11, as quoted by Jay, he writes that

Pakistan needs more globalization, not less...[Pakistan] needs ‘jobs and access to the markets and knowledge and entertainment of the wider world... We need access to purchasers for our goods, investors in our industries. With these things come greater growth and stability, which then become self-reinforcing” (61).

Pakistan needs to be able to shape itself economically, to be able to have the tools to speak and operate for itself. What it doesn’t need—or what is a peripheral need—is others to appreciate its essentialized cultural heritage. In Hamid there are no rustic characters who live in a utopian pre-history, calmly tilling the soil at one with nature until brutal industrialization steps in, as is common in earlier “ethnic” works. Though Hamid focuses on Pakistan, his novels are not

nationalistic, but rather they seek⁷ ways in which a more globally equal “playing field” can be devised without relying on imaginary “natures” or past utopias. As Benedict Anderson observes, nationalism is a Western construct, and the appeal to it in itself is not only neglecting the larger issue, but is reinforcing the inability to properly assess the roots of inequality.

Hamid’s take on globalization, however, should not remain unqualified. As the emphasis on the idea that there are infinite ways of viewing an issue is at the heart of Hamid’s work, “his writings present a profoundly ambivalent relationship to globalization” (Jay, 62). If the development of autonomous economic interests are needed, Hamid, in both his fiction and non-fiction, continuously emphasizes the importance of transparency and the profoundly destructive nature of corruption. In *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, characters rise to economic prosperity only through various forms of corruption, and always at the expense of others. Those with the means to be corrupt—through inherited means or political ties—have access to the global economy, and the poor characters in his novels occupy a very different world, one where the local economy is a perpetual dead-end.

Yet, for Hamid, as previously demonstrated, globalization is not the underlying structural problem. The problem, in a world that is becoming increasingly urban and where the majority of the world’s population lives in urban areas, is the increasing physical and emotional isolation. Though all of his works have elements of love, emotional contact, and are “love stories” in a sense as Hamid likes to point out, they are of a unique kind. Whatever love exists in the novels is never realized, and is always undermined by economic difficulties and ambitions. In fact, the novels, given the nature of the emotional bonds between the interested characters, would be better labeled as “lust-stories.” Indeed, there are no characters (outside of those from an older generation, parents, etc.) who are really capable of being romantically involved for an extended

period. Through all his work, romantic interests are always accompanied by an element personal advancement. Bodies of women and men are valued and commoditized and suited for conquest. Even what could possibly be read as the best representation “love”— in *Rising Asia* between “you” (the protagonist) and “pretty girl”—is rendered impossible, at least until the end where the characters are elderly and beyond ambition.

On a broader scale the underlying complication remains one of establishing relationships with others that are not driven by economic or social personal advancement. A central issue in these works is that of establishing parts of the human experience that are not commodifiable. Where urbanization and industrial capitalism tends to isolate individuals from both themselves and others, from their environment, and from the means to provide their own survival (all issues central to *Rising Asia*), his novels in structure, narrative style, and content, force the reader by making him or her an active character, to deal and come to terms with perception and perspective in order to allow the reader to become, in a sense, a variety of others, not, hopefully, too unlike him or herself; Hamid’s novels are meant to allow and strengthen the bonds of human empathy.

I use the term empathy rather than sympathy not only because it is a term that Hamid employs frequently himself, but, as the OED clarifies, “empathy means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another...whereas sympathy means ‘feeling of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortunes’” (OED). This is a slight oversimplification of the broad usages and implications of both words, however, empathy generally denotes a deeper connection with another—one of a shared experience and a common *humanity*—and also the ability to recognize one’s self in another, and vice-versa. This is an important distinction, and the difference, it seems to me, is one of recognizing one’s own experience within the experience of another.

Notes

¹ Derrida traces ethnography to the Early Modern Period, when mercantile European states entered into heavy competition with each other, and also began searching for wealth and goods abroad to satisfy demands. This early competition in Europe and the very different cultures which merchants and explorers met abroad, made it necessary to create distinctions and superiorities to justify dehumanization and exploitation. This early competition for limited wealth (limitations which were created) stretched to the necessity for “essentialized” distinctions also racially, ethnically, and provided essential class distinctions as well. In short, enormous clans of homogenized people were born of difference from a taxonomy of constructed others, *not* from similarities within.

² A better description would be “most appropriate,” as the authors incorporated into the canon were often conservative and nationalistic, thus suitable for incorporation.

³ I am referring mainly to U.S. based, popular ethnic writers who write mainly in English; I am not referring to by any means to the large amount of incredible writers who have had a huge impact on “world” literature (such as “Latin American boom,” great African writers such as Achebe, wa Thiong'o, Salih, Mahfouz) but who in no way participate in the generic, popular “ethnic” craze.

⁵ It is less important today what one’s ethnicity is than where one went to school, or how much “cultural capital” one has acquired. Western, elite universities market themselves globally, drawing in the “best and brightest” students from across the globe each year; almost all top U.S. universities have outpost schools across the globe, which recruit ambitious students and give them a Western, capitalist education, and by doing so they created an almost inescapable hegemonic stronghold to the point where, as seen in *Moth Smoke*, local universities are considered slipshod, if not outright mocked. Degrees awarded from them, like Daru’s, are considered next to worthless even by the locals, compared to foreign degrees. The hegemonic power this practice wields is incredible.

⁶ This is of course a problematic term, and I use it for lack of a better one. Further, perhaps words with polemical natures are useful in stirring up necessary debate.

⁷ I emphasize “seek” because these issues are far from being solved; in fact, questions, much like humanity, are narratives as well, and, being so, mutate rather than resolve.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF AIR-CONDITIONING: *MOTH SMOKE* AND THE POST-POLITICAL SUBJECT

In a lecture given at the Singapore Writers Festival in 2013, Mohsin Hamid, explaining the final structure of his novel *Moth Smoke*, revealed that rather than writing a dissertation for his law degree he proposed, to a professor teaching on law and literature, to write a novel. His proposal was that “the novel [will] be a trial...it will present contradictory narratives where the reader will be a kind of judge, trying to figure out what happened. In a sense it will be an investigation into how litigation works and whether we can find truth through the judicial process” (“Singapore”). Although Hamid began drafting the novel while at Princeton under the tutelage of Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Morrison, this re-structuring of the novel marks an important step in Hamid’s development as a novelist, one where he begins to carve out the thematic interests he will develop in different strains throughout all of his work; these interests are, namely: the emphasis on perspective and subjectivity; the proposal that there can never be a singular “truth”; and the emphasis on the foundational role of economics, particularly in transcultural and class interaction.

For instance, Paul Jay, author of *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, argues in an essay on Hamid that, “with its sustained focus on the effects of economic globalization, Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* stands apart from many South Asian English-language novels popular with readers and academics in the West” (51). Comparing Hamid with many of the regions renowned and canonized writers, Jay observes that “while the fiction of... Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra... Jhumpa Lahiri and Manil Suri deals tangentially with economic change, these writers are primarily interested in the nature of cultural production and identity in an increasingly hybridized postcolonial world” (51). Instead, using a somewhat clunky term Hamid himself used in an interview, Jay writes that “in *Moth Smoke*,

however, Hamid sets out to analyze contemporary Lahore through a ‘post-post-colonial’ framework, one less interested in foregrounding the persistent effects of British colonization that dramatizing how economic globalization has transformed Lahore and the characters populating his novel” (52). In a world where racial lines are blurred by, in a sense, a globalizing caste system reliant less on skin coloration than by ability to accumulate both monetary and economic capital, Hamid rightly foregrounds the economic disparities imposed by the rigid exploitative systems left by the exiting colonizers, who often left in place individuals and systems corrupted by the desire to replicate the elitist, capitalist core wealthy societies.

Hamid said that he wrote the novel partly because

there was so much Asian literature, yet I hadn’t read anything that represented the urban reality of growing up in Lahore, which I had experiences where people were running around doing all sorts of unsavory things... I wanted to write about a world of crime, drug use, sexuality...urban noir, and not about sort of the rustic countryside, magic and these kinds of things (“Singapore”).

This shift in narrative content presents one of the major difficulties a reader has while reading Hamid’s texts: though it takes place in a foreign land, Pakistan, which is projected still as mystical, ominous, exotically barbaric and immoral, it is not appropriately “ethnic.” It is a work which glosses over what is typically foregrounded in ethnic/migrant literature, and in doing so it is, for some readers, too familiar—the situations being of the sort that can and do happen anywhere any everywhere. Essentially, in writing a novel that eschews the generic “ethnic” plot and the categories that allow the classification of multicultural literature, Hamid challenges the notions of what it means to be, or in fact how one *becomes*, an “other.” Though it may seem implicitly inappropriate to those readers who read ethnic literature for a largely manufactured,

exoticized experience of the ethnic other—with their hands in the soil, their immoral tyrants, their desire for wholeness in a world of hybridity—what Hamid foregrounds is similarity and common humanity. He asserts *subjectivity* on the terms he finds most appropriate, not on the terms of easily digestible multicultural and orientalist projections.

At first, for example, a careful reader might be troubled by the lack of references to colonialism, particularly ones which focus on the barbarous razing of Indian/Pakistani culture by the British, and the long tradition of exploitation of a people. Certainly we have in many ways not even scratched the surface in exposing the ways in which the global system is set up to exploit “peripheral” societies. However, many postcolonial societies are perhaps even further away from re-affirming the type of ownership that is necessary to move beyond a culture of blame and continuous looking backwards to a fabled past to a culture which realizes that past injustices can only be truly rectified in the conditioning of a more just and appropriate future. Hamid’s use of Pakistani/South Asian history affirms self-reliance, intended to highlight the fact that Pakistan has a long and distinguished history that existed long before colonization, and that this should be emphasized, particularly as Pakistan strives for more autonomy; in a post-postcolonial period, Hamid’s work seeks to decenter Western influence rather than reinforce the notion that Pakistan has been simply molded, shaped, defined, and civilized by the colonizers.

As history is arguably the most important narrative in terms of giving a people and social definition, one must continuously question the provisional narrative, and, what’s more, a critically thinking culture must realize that the truth is not singular, as cultures are not, and as people are not. *Moth Smoke* intends to convey a new egalitarian plurality in which cultures do not have to abide by the distinctions and essentialisms laid out by the “separate-but-equal” standpoint of multiculturalism. Therefore, I will use a word proposed by Kwame Appiah, David

Harvey and other distinguished theorists, which I think is better suited for the aims of my essay, that word, or concept, being cosmopolitanism.

This chapter argues that *Moth Smoke* asserts a different causality, one that offers a pluralistic, forward-looking vision that in its very construction proposes not a removal of the atrocities of colonialism, but simply a way to move beyond a Western-centric tradition or orientation. True cosmopolitanism allows for overlap and does not create false distinctions. It embraces similarities and understands the myriad ways in which we share both similar and different experiences. It allows representation on its own terms, and disregards all prescriptions of what an individual should represent. Doing so would fall back to previous and imagined allegiances to a singular nation, people, or culture.

The impossibility of singular, unqualified truth is in fact the novel's central theme. The novel itself is a scaffold of various perspectives focusing on the central protagonist, Darashikoh (Daru) Shezad, the central antagonist, Aurangzeb (Ozi), and Ozi's wife, Mumtaz, who becomes Daru's lover. Both the characters and the plot are devised with a certain symmetry and duality in a way that is meant to both undermine and challenge formed judgments, opinions, and so forth, so that any quality the reader ascribes to a character or situation will always be accompanied by its opposite, its contradiction, rendering any sense of singular truth paradoxical and therefore impossible.

The initial, intertextual moment is the novel's frame, which, though brief, adds a profound and enlightening historical element to the text. As if almost a supplement to the time and place of the story, the novel opens with a brief passage which takes place during the decline of a very different, in a sense colonial, empire—the Mughal Empire. This short passage, which occupies the less than two page section before the first chapter, takes place during the final year of

Emperor Shah Jahan, who's reign "has been dubbed the 'Golden Age of the Mughals,'" (Long). Shah Jahan live from 1592 to 1666, and ruled the Mughals from 1628-58, after which his third eldest son famously seized power by killing his brother and locking up his father.

For the purposes of this essay, there are many obvious and also implicit parallels between this unusual historical anecdote and the main events of the novel, allowing the thematic questioning of the nature of truth and subjectivity to broaden historically, moving beyond the scope of the current events and current historical causalities. The period of the Moghul Empire which frames the story is where the main characters get their namesake. The relationships and situations of the historical characters, however, are slightly shifted in a way that allows Hamid to create a juxtaposition which demands that readers come to terms with the discrepancies between the historical events and the fictionalized plot of the novel. For example, Mumtaz gets her namesake from Shah Jahan's famously beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, for whom, in his later years, he built the Taj Mahal as a mausoleum. The Taj Mahal which bears her namesake took 22 years to complete, and is perhaps the greatest architectural masterpiece of the time, and certainly the greatest feat of Mughal architecture.

Roger D. Long writes,

In 1657 Shah Jahan became ill, and a murderous war of succession began among his four sons. His third son, Aurangzeb [Ozi's given name], emerged victorious. He imprisoned Shah Jahan in his Agra palace, where he spent the last year of his life, confined to Agra Fort, from which he could view, but never visit, the Taj Mahal. (Long)

In Hamid's text, however, Mumtaz is of course married to Ozi (Aurangzeb), and has an complicated affair with Daru; this revisionist structuring sheds light on what Hamid seeks

highlight in his work by the subtext that lies between the historical situation and the fictional. A facet of that subtext is that, whereas Jahan and Mumtaz were known for their great and eternal love for each other, as symbolized in the Taj Mahal, the emotions between the characters which one might first view as love are much more narcissistic and lust-driven; in fact, the triangle that emerges between Mumtaz, Ozi, and Daru, whether sexual and seemingly romantic, would be better classified not as love but as ephemeral, self-interested *accumulation* in the capitalistic sense. Each character in this tragic triangle is interested in each other based on the fulfillment of a social or material desire. Daru's situation is most obvious, because Daru's drive to rise above his social and economic status is the most intense and also the most destructive.

This frame challenges the reader to draw different, more expansive historical parallels, to seek a different combinations of events—two challenges that allow for the rethinking of history and what it means. The novel juxtaposes the relationships between historical characters with contemporary characters, which shed light on what the novel is exploring about contemporary forms of social interaction, whether interpersonally or internationally¹.

In the epigraph of Paul Jay's essay on *Moth Smoke*, Hamid observes

I certainly think there is a post-post-colonial generation. I'm sure a lot of voices your seeing coming out now are people who never had a colonial experience. We don't place a burden of guilt on someone who's no longer there. So it's like, what are we doing with where we come from, and how can we address the issue here. It's our fault if things aren't going well. That's a very different stance than a lot of what's come before. Also, people are writing about the subcontinent with eyes that are not meant to be seeing for someone who doesn't live there, people are not

exoticizing where they come from. I try not to mention the minaret,² because when I'm in Lahore, I don't notice it. The basic humanity is not different from place to place ("The Chronicle Online")

In this brief, summative passage, a lot of light is shed on Hamid's aspirations as a novelist. Historically, as in *Moth Smoke* and his other works, he attempts to revise many of the assumptions placed on the migrant/ethnic/postcolonial writer, and he, in a sense, refused to be placed in any of those categories. To foreground the minaret, for instance, would be to focus on a problem that the West *sees* in Pakistan; the minaret (synecdochically of course) is *not* the problem Pakistanis see within themselves. To center a piece on that, which would be most likely much easier (given the Western thirst for novels which highlight the brutality of another way of life and the willingness of many Western-based novelist to accommodate the West's desire to abuse Islam), would be to rely on the fallacy of the "clash of civilizations," which in itself is a Western idea.

Rather, in this work, Hamid focuses on Pakistan, on the world he knows, and in doing so seeks to find common bonds amongst different cultures—the two links being: ownership of history and future, and the material and economic problems faced by societies struggling with globalization and its implications and difficulties as well as the global class system it imposes.

The first link or challenge to a people is to take ownership of their own plight and begin to work towards a future that does *not* follow the brutal trajectory of colonialism. When asked why he chose to focus on the end of the Mughal Empire, "Hamid explained that he wanted a story that 'bypasses the colonial experience,' [as he] sees himself...as someone who has 'never had a colonial experience'". Rather, Jay writes that "Hamid sets out to analyze contemporary Lahore through a 'post-post-colonial' framework, one less interested in foregrounding the

persistent effects of British colonization than dramatizing how economic globalization has transformed Lahore and the characters populating his novel” (52). Though it may seem problematic that Hamid is overlooking colonialism, it is “colonialism” in the very strict and explicit sense, where a group of people are physically occupied, controlled, and exploited another. In this sense, this is not the experience of most born in Pakistan after the late 1940s. Hamid instead explores the deep, implicit, and inescapable situation of neocolonialism. As Jay observes “*Moth Smoke* focuses on a group of thoroughly Westernized young men and women from financially well-off families with American Master of Business Administration degrees (MBAs)” (52).

In fact, the characters lives are wholly guided, controlled, and destroyed by the bourgeois values, desires, and economic structures imposed by capitalism and globalization, most visibly through the emphasis and long explications by all the main characters on the importance of air-conditioning—which is symbolic for commodification and complete control/manipulation of one’s physical surroundings and “environment,” in a general sense. Throughout the novel, air-conditioning stands as the central motif, encapsulating and substantiating all the main themes of the novel. Every character in the novel has a stance on air-conditioning, which exposes their greater attitude toward the exterior world. The ways the characters use and react to air-conditioning symbolized the way they act and view the exterior world, and how they view their place in it. For instance, the following passage reflects Ozi’s deep obsession with having total and personal control over his external environment, fanatically and *excessively* spreading his own egotistically needs and desires over every aspect of the world he occupies, even the air:

[Ozi] was never happier than when his bedroom was so cold that he needed a heavy blanket to avoid shivering in the middle of summer. Conversely, he liked it to be so warm in winter that he could comfortably sleep naked without so much as a sheet. Aurangzeb, more than most men, sought to master his environment (105).

This reflects Ozi's occupation in the novel as representative of callous, economic greed, exploiting the people around him as well as the environment. Not only does he, for his own self-interest, exploit his wife, his father, as well as his friends and acquaintances, he uses up the resources of his country with no regard for anyone but himself. Exemplifying this point, the following dialogue takes place when the couple returns to Lahore and Ozi's wife Mumtaz, who, in contrast, hates air-conditioning, tries to persuade him against it:

“We have to conserve electricity,” she would say. “The entire country suffers because of the wastefulness of a privileged few.”

“I couldn't care less about the country,” Aurangzeb would reply. “Besides, you have a delusional and obsessive fear of pneumonia³.”

“I think you underestimate the risk pneumonia poses to all of us. Besides, I really do feel that we have a duty to use electricity responsibly”

“Then sleep outside. The AC stays on” (106).

This exchange mirrors Ozi's attitude towards exploitation, social movement, and, importantly, his father's corruption. Though Ozi is painted often as, if not a villain⁴, a compromised character, in keeping with the theme of “truth is perspective” he is given towards the novel a chance to explain himself and his actions. As he reasons,

Some people say my dad's corrupt and I'm his money launderer. Well, it's true enough. People are robbing the country blind, and if the choice is between being

held up at gunpoint or holding the gun, only a madman would choose to hand over his wallet rather than fill it with someone else's cash.

A similar pessimistic thread runs throughout the novel as idealist characters become more jaded, it is also the final position Daru assumes, as he actually ends up, with his mentor (in a sense) Murad Badshah, robbing a boutique frequented by wealthy clientele. Here lies another problematic parallel: both Ozi and Daru are feeding various addictions (to money, status, and power, and Daru to heroin in addition), and the only element that separates them is access to wealth and power. In what reads as a greater commentary on the class divide, the wealthy have the ability to make their theft legal, while the poor have no such power to create laws and regulations in their favor.

As Jay observes, regarding Hamid's ambivalence to globalization, Hamid's poorer characters seem trapped in a world where the local economy is a dead-end, but where the opportunities offered by the global economy are both profoundly uneven and deeply tied to corruption. The wealthier ones, like Ozi, make money from the global economy, but in ways that contribute to the poverty of the middle and lower classes. In his social criticism Hamid is torn between seeing globalization as a potentially productive force and one that is simply grinding down his own country" (62)

For instance, although Ozi and Daru grew up as best friends ("brothers" as they say throughout the novel), economic and social advantage continuously undermine the foundation of their relationship. As revealed at length through numerous flashbacks and expositions, Ozi and Daru, though parallel characters, are divided even before their births by the economic ambitions and ethical positions of their respective fathers. Daru's father, in a naturalistic sense, is punished

for his honesty and bravery, dying in “’71...of gangrene in a prisoner-of-war camp near Chittagong” (74) during the Bangladesh Liberation War. During this time Ozi’s father, who was Daru’s father’s “best friend at the military academy...occupied a cushy staff position as an ADC [Aide-de-camp] in Rawalpindi” (73). After the war Ozi’s father “slipped into the civil service, specializing, it’s said, in overpaying foreign companies for equipment and pocketing their kickbacks” (74). Their parents, or essentially the overarching greed, corruption, and civil war of their parents generation, set the stage for the general world the characters in the novel will inherit. It also sets the stage for the personal advantages and disadvantages the characters have socially, economically, and ethically. Daru inherits both his limited financial means from his father and also, at least in the beginning, his senses of injustice and dignity.

Ironically, it is, in fact, a sense of injustice and dignity that drive Daru into madness, and eventually to murder a child. He longed so badly to be above the means and laws of the average Pakistani, to be one of the select few who live carelessly, selfishly, and with seemingly unlimited power and money at their disposal. Daru’s life parallels Ozi’s from an early age, yet, although Daru does better in school than his elite classmates, he is continuously forced to take handouts in order to stabilize his precarious social position. His father dying when he was two, Daru had to face at a young age the knowledge that Ozi’s corrupt father was paying for his schooling, presumably due to an ongoing affair with his mother. In a sense, all that Daru held valuable, from his family to his ability to succeed to his sense of decency are corrupted by those with economic superiority. Eventually Ozi’s father stops funding Daru’s schooling, and although Daru performed at the top of his class, he was forced to watch his classmates leave from prestigious, Western universities, mostly in the U.S., while he was rejected due to his need for

financial aid. He excelled nonetheless in university in Pakistan. While working on a PhD, his girlfriend, as he says in the novel, “left me to pursue men with Pajeros⁵” (140).

As this novel is, again, about the inability of reaching a pure, unquestionable truth and the unavailability of perspective, Daru’s fate is not merely one of pure fatalistic naturalism (He did kill a child, after all), although there certain are naturalistic elements as severely restricting economic and social limitations are imposed on him from an early age. As Ozi observes in the chapter where he is given a chance to argue his case, he observes that Daru was handed opportunities which he squandered. Not wanting handouts (yet existing in a world where who one knows either makes or breaks an individual, he argues) Daru has his schooling paid for, and Ozi’s father is also who got Daru his job at the “multinational” bank. Ozi makes his case by arguing that the world is corrupt—you can either steal or get robbed. He broadens the scope of his pessimistic position so that it becomes a sort of generic voice arguing that, basically, everything has gone so wrong that all one can do is get a piece before it’s all gone. He seems to be arguing that the sympathy for Daru derives from a metaphysical and false quality, when Daru is just as bad as the rest of the “bankers” and corrupt officials. He argues that Daru is not a

downtrodden...Champion of the Good [but]...A banker. An account manager...
and whose accounts does he manage, what clients does he please, whose
asses...does he kiss? Men like my father’s. So enough of this nonsense about me
being the big bad money launderer and Daru being hung out in the wash. We’re
all in this together. (187)

Ozi is aware of the implicit hypocrisy which allows both Daru to be sympathized with as a “terrible almost hero of a great story” (Hamid, *Moth* 8), and for him to be labeled in a negative way simply because he inherited status and corruption, and seeks to maintain it. In a convincing

reversal, Ozi directly challenges the reasons why the reader sympathizes with Daru, when most likely, in a different situation, Daru would have and in fact desired to be as corrupt as the rest of the social class he attempted to be part of. Further, Ozi calls to the reader's attention what is either conveniently overlooked or pinned on a single person, when the system is set up so that exploitation is, as many critics of capitalism have argued, both inherent and necessary⁶.

By pointing out, as he says, "we're all in this together," he gives examples of how, like Daru, the "good" is often directly reliant on or participates with the "questionable." He observes:

Well, what about the guys who give out the Nobel Prize? What are they? They're money launderers. They take the fortunes made out of dynamite, out of blowing people into bits, and make the family name of Nobel noble. The Rhodes Scholarship folks? They do the same thing: dry-clean our memories of one of the great white colonialists, of the men who didn't let niggers like us into their clubs or their parliaments, who gunned us down when we tried to protest.... (186)

Ozi's point is that the system is often conveniently and idealistically seen, by people such as Mumtaz and Daru, as parts that can be purged almost surgically. Often overlooked or ignored is the deep interdependence and relationships in the functions. Even the best, most representative of "good"—the Nobel Prize, the Rhodes Scholarship—often have corrupt and violent histories, and, as with both the examples he provides, the progeny of the originators (Alfred Nobel and Cecil Rhodes) continue to function in unsavory ways.

By allowing these various assumption to be questioned, by challenging not simply the characters but the readers opinions and feelings toward the characters, Hamid demonstrates that viewing from a variety of perspectives is essential to understanding the political, economic, and judicial system. Further, as the characters are embedded inn and deeply connected to an

international globalized system, rather than an isolated, national one, Leerom Medovoi argues that Hamid's work should be read as "post-national" and suffers if categorized as either Pakistani or American (645). Rather, Medovoi proposes a more appropriate starting point, which he terms "world-system literature," which, taking its departure from world-systems theory, he defines as "literature that maps the dynamics of the system as an interplay of subject and object—power and desire, force and affect—as they are propelled by the spatial dialectics of territory and capital" (657). In making the economics of globalization primary, full of characters who live in a world that transcends national boundaries, *Moth Smoke*, and in fact all his work, demand a reading that is, in effect, post-political and post-national.

These characters live in a world where they have not experienced the ideological clashes of previous generations. There is seemingly one clash of ideologies—for instance, when Daru sympathizes with the fundamentalists—aside from largely laughing it off, the system he longs to be a part of is never questioned. He understand their frustration as being due to not finding a place in the capitalist system, not in the desire to establish a different one. There are, in fact, numerous studies which link terrorism to the frustrations of large scale unemployment, poverty, who see first hand the spoils which they are banned from, among young populations⁷. Many countries in this region, who have long suffered violent pillaging from either the West directly or those often corrupt authoritarians Western governments have put in place, have sought, over the last decade or so, to put in place programs designed to give the young population, who desire families of their own that they are able to provide for, both employment and, more importantly, a sense of purpose. In this regard, the division between Daru and Ozi is that Daru, belonging to the large group of people excluded or partially excluded from the economic system (yet still, due to advertising and media are pumped from birth full of "American dream" ambitions⁸, believes that

things could be better, and Ozi, belonging to the oligarchical class who have everything, almost literally, believe that things could be worse.

This divide in perspective, along with the general difficulty of the poor to realize their ambitions, accounts for the positions of the characters who, in sense, steer Daru. Though they are all at a basic level, trying to make their way, to get ahead, in a naturalistic sense they are subject to the roles that they were born into. Ozi makes his way by exploiting the system and government officials because he is able to. His methods are the most socially acceptable and, if not legal, certainly condoned implicitly. Murad Badshah, Daru's mentor after his "fall" from the slippery social ground he once occupied, being from a class without the means to bribery or corporate theft, conducts, in his words, "a little redistribution of wealth on my own" (63) Badshah, despite is position outside of the class of wealth and privilege, perhaps sees the way the system works better than anyone. He understands that no only is one's labor (property of person) a commodity, but that the sale of this labor depends on the means and whims of those who are willing purchase that labor. Badshah observes,

It is my passionately held belief that the right to possess property is at best a contingent one. When disparities become too great, a superior right, that to life, outweighs the right to property. Ergo, the very poor have the right to steal from the very rich. Indeed, I would go so far as to say the poor have a duty to do so, for history has shown that the inaction of the working classes perpetuates their subjugation. (64)

Badshah centers his argument around the "primacy of the right to life," extending it so that it not only encompasses killing indirectly through exploitation, oppression, and environmental destruction, but also to the killing of systematic killing of animals. Though all characters through

action and dialogue explore this theme of “right to life” or, in some cases “right to live exactly the way one chooses despite any consequences,” Badshah extends this “right to life” argument into every aspect of contemporary life, essentially pointing out that devaluing life is at the heart of the functioning of the economic systems, and extending it to the hoarding and destruction of grains in order to keep prices artificially high, to the production of deodorants.

Though perhaps fatalistic, the novel demands the reader to realize the interconnectedness of human life, and also to question deeply the social situations into which people, even those who are seemingly different from ourselves, are born. As culture, race, religion, and ethnicity are rightly deemphasized, he focuses on what is fundamental and collective—the right and desire to live, to provide, and to flourish in ways that our global economic situation has devised for us.

Perhaps most importantly, the novel possesses no characters who are bad or evil because it is their essential nature. Rather, there are characters who do bad things, sometimes very bad things, and who do good things, and sometimes very good things. Each character in the novel has his or her own situation in which he or she exists and operates accordingly—if not completely justifiable, the decisions and choices made in the novel have understandable logic. This in itself defies orientalist lenses because it contextualized the acts, gives various perspectives, and focuses on the individual and not on the group or the culture. It is often easy and beneficial to vilify an group of people based on geography, culture, religion, or political system, but what *Moth Smoke* demonstrates is there are always numerous, and perhaps unlimited, ways of viewing situations. It is often beneficial to say, as Ozi does, that “they,” whoever they are, just are that way, or the system just works that way, without looking toward reason or understanding, but essential to this way of thinking are both a process of naturalizing what is not natural, and dehumanization.

Notes

¹ The characters are also represent larger ideological positions, which will be explored later. The various ideological concepts they embody becomes most explicit in their reactions to Pakistan's arms race with India which peaks in the novel in both countries successful testing of a nuclear weapon.

² Minaret: The tower of a mosque from which prayer is called five times a day, usually through the use of a loud speaker.

³ In an earlier passage it is revealed that "AC had almost killer her when she was young... She came home from a school football match..., took off her cloths in front of the AC, caught pneumonia, and spent two weeks in a hospital with a tube draining her lungs, battling for her life" (105). This emphasis on pneumonia in the novel can be compared with the affects of brutal heat due to global warming, an issue that is implicit in the above argument over AC, but surfaces explicitly numerous times in the novel. According to a recent article published in the medical journal, *The Lancet*,

According to WHO estimates, 450 million cases of pneumonia are recorded every year; about 4 million people die from this illness, accounting for 7% of total mortality of 57 million people.^{6,7} The highest incidences arise in children younger than 5 years and in adults older than 75 years... In developing countries, incidence could be five times higher than in developed regions. In children, 156 million episodes of pneumonia are recorded annually, of which 151 million are present in developing countries (1264)

Like climate change, these cases are largely preventable. Through her fear of pneumonia, Mumtaz reveals a keen foresight and understanding of the plight of her country.

⁴ Mumtaz, who we learn at the end has been telling Daru's story as she imagines it from his perspective, works hard to make it known, to both Daru and the reader, that Ozi is not a "bad" person.

⁵ Mitsubishi Pajero's symbolize not only the pinnacle of material wealth in the novel, given the rugged terrain of Pakistan and the conditions of the streets, they also symbolize ultimate power over and control of the natural environment. As Ozi says in his chapter: "The Roads are falling apart, so you need a Pajero or a Land Cruiser" (185).

⁶ An good example would be those who call, in some way, for the end of exploitation, corruption, and what is essentially slave labor (saying one message, perhaps protesting it), and then shopping at Walmart (which sends the exact opposite message to corporations: "keep using and buying from starving Bangladeshis if you want to stay in business").

⁷ The average age in Pakistan is just over 22 years old.

⁸ This will be explored 4th chapter.

CHAPTER 3: AGAINST FUNDAMENTALISM: “MONGROLIZATION” AND THE BREAKING OF FICTIONAL WALLS IN *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And the I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was remarkably pleased. (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 72)

In a controversial essay entitled “Requiem for the Twin Towers” in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard, writing of the profound symbolism behind the events of 9/11, observes, “They say terrorism is ‘blind’, but the towers were blind too—monoliths no longer open to the outside world, but subject to artificial conditioning” (39). These blind monoliths and this artificial conditioning, backed by roughly ten years during the 1990s of unrivaled global American dominance, became the very symbols of affluence and excess, both at home and abroad. During this period, due to the sheer magnitude of the global drive toward the international version of the American Dream, the U.S. developed a brazen belief in its own exceptionalism, paralleling the height of violent exclusivity on a global scale. Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* traces the implications of this pre-9/11 world through the global and symbolic crisis of 9/11. Through his protagonist, Changez, Hamid explores the vast infatuation inspired by the power of this American system, following it in various forms—his economic stature and power as explored in his relationship with Jim, his infatuation with [Am]Erica, and his ethical and moral relationship with Juan-Bautista—through to its destruction during the events of 9/11 and the vast changes that these events incited.

Through Changez’s story, Hamid explores how the events of 9/11 brought the trajectory of hedonistic dominance directly into vision, violently exposing the interconnectedness of various social bodies. I argue that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, through this exploration, asserts a new form of transnational narrative in which we can directly see the Other, not through

Orientalist stereotypes, but through the narrative process of embedding ourselves in another's perspective, becoming, as it were, empathetic through empathizing with the voice of the protagonist whose experience becomes our own.

Further, I argue that novelists like Hamid put forth a new kind of transnational narrative, distinct from the Anglophone literary manifestations of 9/11 and the post-9/11 condition. Peter Morey observes in his essay “‘The Rules of the Game Have Changed’: Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and post-9/11 Fiction” that,

initial fictional responses to 9/11 often took the form either of “trauma narratives” attempting to trace the psychological scarring and mental realignments of characters caught up in the Twin Towers attacks, or semi-fictionalized “Muslim misery memoirs” which often serve to underscore the injustices of Islamic rule and justify neoconservative interventionism” (136).

Both manifestations of these types of post-9/11 narrative follow the similar, segregated forms that occupied the trajectory of the pre-9/11 novel in the West. Looking at the works of a major American writer like Don DeLillo, one finds the similar Orientalist perceptions of the Other (not experienced, but simply *researched*) in *Falling Man* as the earlier works, indicating resistance to perceiving in truly globalized way. Similar observations can be made of most influential Western, post-9/11 works, which indicates the resilience of the previously established, separatist, nationalistic values. Similar to Morey, who argues that Hamid’s novel represents a “*detritorialization* of the American novel” (138), I argue that Hamid’s novel conversely pioneers a new space for literature that transcends nationalism, breaks down and subverts artificial barriers, and affirms and indeed *subjectifies* the Other in an age that demands a new globalized narrative formed by “contact zones” and a more egalitarian global identity, especially

in the wake of 9/11. I argue that Hamid seeks establish a new, transnational narrative by using the very tools of hegemony—English, economics, and the *novel* (which is a bourgeois consumer product)—to build a “counter-language” or “counter-voice.” Hamid’s work, I claim, seeks to assert an equal voice for the subaltern not by preserving some isolationist idea of “traditional” culture, but by realizing that contemporary identity is often a hybridized formation, fluid and adaptive, rather than fixed.

In the “Concluding Notes” of his book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, John Maynard Keynes writes that “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist” (383). Though Keynes was speaking on economics specifically, this highlights the main ideological disjunction between theory and popular praxis, and the time it takes research and ideas to reach a mass audience or popular culture. Over the course of the 20th century, research in the social sciences as well as the applied sciences, has led to major advancements in the ways we perceive the nature of identity, knowledge, and culture; this research has exposed deep flaws in our epistemological understanding of the nation and nationality, of the self and identity, and of culture and an individual’s problematic relationship to the cultural Other.

The bifurcated relationships, however, are being fundamentally challenged with globalization, and extreme economic, cultural, and physical interconnectedness. Race, gender, language, and culture—all of which have been used to define “nationality” or exceptionalism in various ways—once seen as set as stable traits and characteristics, are now seen by cultural theorists and socioanthropologists alike as fluid and unstable processes defined and created by social conditions and mediated by language. Jean-Francois Bayart, following the work of an array of intellectuals before him, notes in his book *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* that,

There are few contemporary matters that do not involve the problem of the illusion of identity [and that] the general opening up of societies—globalization—is accompanied by the exacerbation of particular identities, whether religious, national, or ethnic” (x).

The rise of fundamentalism can be attributed to the rejection of the power structures of globalization. In some way, all fundamentalism is built upon the mythology of a fixed, stable and, as Bayart observes, “exacerbated” form of cultural identity, often posited on the existence of some “golden age” vision of cultural purity—a vision, which should be noted, lacks all historicity, and is itself a social invention. Bayart writes that only during and after German Romanticism did “culture [become] a principle of exclusion by being a badge of uniqueness and belongingness, fueling nationalism, and, ultimately, far worse things” (xii).

Fundamentalism is essentially an inward gaze into one’s own culture in order to find the gems of some sort of imagined authenticity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined “fundamentalism” as the “strict adherence to ancient or fundamental doctrines, with no concessions to modern developments in thought or customs” (“Fundamentalism”). However, Claudia Perner, in her essay, “Tracing the Fundamentalist in Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” notes the impossibility of the latter part of this definition, noting that “the organization and structure of many fundamentalist groups as well as their use of modern technology and media imply otherwise” (24). Essentially, the concessions made undermines the supposed “purity” of these movements, and expose their true roots in the struggle for power, particularly in a world that has oppressed or rejected them—culturally, economically, linguistic, or militarily.

Perner writes, in her examination of fundamentalism in the novel, that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “offers insights into the motivations and sentiments of a person who in the West might all too easily be dismissed as a fundamentalist” (29). Although Changez’s path is explicit and overt, the paths of many others are much more subtle, muddy, and complex, Changez, in his more allegorical features, is a map to this *image* or spectacle of fundamentalism.

In the first few pages, it is very clear that they are sizing each other up in terms of stereotypes—indicating an equal adherence to a nationalistic view of the Other, they are “seeing as” rather than simply “seeing.” As Orientalism is enforced by an exclusionary nationalist identity—as is fundamentalism—and a projected stasis on the Other, this novel employs the projections of stereotyping the Other in order to undermine them with subtle parody. With this in mind, after Changez explains to the American, who assumes that Changez has identified him as such by “the color of [his] skin” (1) or his clothing, that it was not these qualities, but his “*bearing* that allowed [Changez] to identify [the American]” (2).

In an interview with Akhil Sharma, Hamid stated that his characters are, at a certain point, “what if” versions of paths he potentially could have chosen in his own life. Speaking of his protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Changez, he says that “walking through with Changez was an alternative to walking through that journey myself, which I didn’t want to do in my own life, but which I felt impulses toward” (“*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Mohsin Hamid in Conversation with Akhil Sharma”). He says Changez,

is someone who by nature tends to think that the way to resolve a conflicted identity or soul is to take one aspect, and attempt to inhabit that aspect to the fullest; whereas I think, personally, that that’s a road to disaster...It’s a lot better to admit that you’re completely confused, and have multiple competing claims as

you are as a person, than to say that after [years] in America or Pakistan that [you're] either American or Pakistani. (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Mohsin Hamid in Conversation with Akhil Sharma")

With this in mind, one begins to see *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a novel of reversals. Similar to Hamid, who graduated from Princeton and Harvard and worked at the firm McKinsey and Company, Changez is a protagonist deeply embedded first in U.S. scholastic and economic elitism, studying on full scholarship at Princeton and then working for the fictional, yet no less prestigious, consultancy firm Underwood Samson. Whereas common fundamentalist or reactionary propaganda would have one believe that fundamentalist movements come from innate and enlightened visions of "truth," in reality many fundamentalist movements, at least regarding those leading them, come from participating in the very system they reject, which often has in some way rejected them.

As in *Moth Smoke*, Hamid traces not only the history of Pakistan, but the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism and globalization. Following this trajectory toward globalization, Changez's initial quest is defined by his desire to be part of the new, global elite class. At the beginning of the novel, very self-consciously Changez desperately seeks to win the approval of the American. In the frame story, Changez pains himself to convince the voiceless American that he too, in a pre-globalized world, was once part of the wealthy class in Pakistan. Changez says, "I am not poor; far from it" (3). He elaborates on his families previous wealth, land-ownership, his father and grandfather both "attending university in England," and he concludes by saying, "We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener—which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth" (9-10). Clearly, Changez is expressing a desire to set up a space in which he will be seen not as the potentially dangerous Other, but as someone

that commands the same dignity and respect as Americans so often demand when dealing with the Other.

Further, to the silenced America Changez begins basically by summarizing his “American” resume, as Changez self-consciously panders almost for the gaze of this American to place him on equal ground. The American is very obviously uncomfortable, as is shown through the actions Changez narrates, and Changez very obviously seeks to comfort the American by proving his own *worth* as a human being. Worth, however, appears to be for the American to decide and is dictated by American values and propriety.

One of the ways Hamid allows Changez equal footing is not only by silencing the largely Western audience to whom he is addressing but by using the second-person to control, guide, and even force the audience to see the world from the perspective of a feared and vilified group of people. In breaking down the barriers of difference, the frame narrative first seeks to defeat the most obvious of visible distinguishing human traits. Changez first separates the American addressee’s identity from himself, falsifying the most obvious distinctions:

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit (1-2)

Changez systematically strips the American of broader, visible qualities, and then assigns him his one defining, yet elusive and cryptic, quality, which Changez labels as his “*bearing*” (2). Once stripped of his exterior qualities and immersed into the budding narrative, Changez guides this “speechless addressee” through Lahore, Pakistan. Hamid’s Lahore, Hartnell writes,

“deliberately filters the city through Orientalist stereotypes, demonstrating its status as a menace to the imagination of the western reader” (83).

But, where the science of Orientalism has been traditionally a long monologue of Western scholarship, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* first guides the reader into seeing the world through the eyes of an outsider Other protagonist, and then places the reader in a position to see Orientalism and the simplistic bigotry that often ensues through the eyes of the “Other.” In short, the narrative allows us to see the world through the Other’s eyes, and then, because we inevitably identify with the protagonist, allows us to see a distorted Orientalist and bigoted projection of ourselves. This method is extremely effective in re-humanizing the traditionally dehumanized Other, as it allows the reader to experience through narrative identification the “Other” side.

Throughout the novel there is the tension of potential conflict and direct physical violence. Like the frame story of *One Thousand and One Nights* provided by Scheherazade, what keeps the violence at bay throughout the narrative is the suspense provided by the story itself. In a metafictional way, the story’s frame is a tribute to storytelling and also to the regional tradition of framed and layered narratives. In setting up the narrative frame this way, we can see that it is the story (of narrative art itself) which *allows* dialogue between people, and which has traditionally laid the groundwork for all other aspects of social, cultural and civilized life. Specifically, the frame narrative in this story makes possible the dialogue between people of different cultures with different national, economic, and ideological positions and purposes.

Peter Morey, author of a new study of post-9/11 political and nationalistic representation of the Muslim Other, writes in a discussion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, argues that this work is an

example of a sort of deterritorialization of literature which forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, “Them and Us” and so on—those categories continuously insisted upon in “war on terror” discourse. (138)

If there is an art form thoughtful enough to create different, more empathetic human bonds and meaning in a global culture, that art form can only be literature. Whereas Hollywood has been boarded up with the propagandic tactics of a war-mongering state, producing dehumanized, immoral, and often violent Muslim Others—and movies are, besides, image-oriented and external—literature essentially creates internal human perspective creates human bonds and meaning. This is not as device, but the essence of the contemporary form of the written word. In fact, in what should perhaps long ago been a truism, In fact recent research at “The New School in New York City have found evidence that literary fiction improves a reader’s capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling” (Chaiet). Indeed, stories create social bonds, which transcend the individual and belong to the group’s collective effort at creating meaning.

More broadly, a civilization, a culture, and a people need, arguably, above all else, a national/social narrative, mythology, or history to provide a unifying and empathetic and inclusive (and also exclusive) definition of who they are as a group. These narratives often center upon some kind of similar origin to provide unity to a people. So in this way a narrative or story *is* what civilized people, what brings them together, and what allows them to build and organize themselves and produce other facets of cultural life. For instance, it is only after the frame story has set itself up and its characters spatially and temporally, that the richness of human life becomes apparent: only after Changez and the American establish a causal, narrative frame, can the landscape, architecture, and cuisine be added to the narrative which has brought them

together. A similar narrative is what allows us to identify and empathize with Others. The challenge, in the contemporary, globalized, post 9/11 world is to provide a space where people who've traditionally been divided by ideology, nationality, and culture, can come together, listen to each other, and find some broader human unifying narrative; Hamid rises to the challenge by using the art of narrative itself to provide a place where people come together and *listen*.

Along these lines, in an essay exploring U.S. multiculturalism within the novel, Anna Hartnell writes that,

While *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques the melting pot conception of American society in its manifestation both before and after 9/11—indeed, the novel questions this supposed break—it also insists on a shared vision of society that eludes many accounts of multiculturalism (83).

Essentially, the novel in both form and content works towards a globalized place where cultures—erroneously perceived as foundationally different—can achieve disarming moments of dialogue. Where the propaganda of government policies or programs such as the “war on terror” dehumanizes, vilified, and rationalized the wholesale slaughter of anyone labeled a “terrorist,” and the pillaging of any foreign land the U.S. government chooses, this novel seeks to re-humanize Other, simply by allowing a space where the Other, or “subaltern,” to speak on equal footing with the oppressors.

Delphine Munos, employing whiteness studies and psychoanalytical theory, observes that only after the attacks on 9/11 does Changez experience a “crisis in self-identification” noting that, until then, Changez had been a “model-minority” (396)—model-minority, of course, in the perception of the “American gaze.” As he travels as a consultant first to the Philippines and then to Chile, Changez experiences moral and ethical challenges as he becomes overpowered by his

identification with the local. Like many soon-to-be fundamentalists, his crisis stems from viewing himself, inescapably, as the Other. He overcomes this crisis however, turning blindly away from it and the people he find himself empathizing with, and embeds himself further in the ruthless inequality he conveniently allows himself to ignore based on his ambitions. In the novel, the events of 9/11 and the subsequent dissolution—symbolically and physically—of the singular, seemingly omnipotent system forced Changez to confront his ambivalences. Further, Changez overtly becomes the Other when he returns from the Philippines just after 9/11, and is detained in the airport; despite his interior challenges it is his treatment by the U.S., with its violent and exclusionary manifestations of xenophobia, bigotry, and fundamentalist—fundamentalist in the sense of a question for cultural “purification”—fear, which caused Changez himself to turn towards Pakistani nationalism.

What makes this narrative particularly bold is not simply that it challenges specifically our post-9/11 version of the Other nor that it allows us to see through the eyes of the “voiceless.” Its edginess comes from what it forces us to examine while we’re immersed within the protagonist. The boldest of these examinations is of course the events of 9/11 itself. Here, we experience Changez initial response to the events of 9/11:

I turned on my television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but the news. 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 (72).

This passage no doubt is meant to use the reader’s identification with the protagonist as a way to force the reader into a confused and conflicted viewpoint. The narrative here works against

comfortable perspectives, as it silences the socially scripted responses one is expected to employ as a response to sensitive issues or “shock words” like “terrorism” and “9/11.” Typically, the easiest, most “patriotic” of responses is to not allow any dialogue whatsoever on the topic of 9/11, and instead to respond with blind and thoughtless anger and fear. To say the least, for a reader properly fulfilling his or her role as a reader and immersing him or herself in the narrative and also in the lives, thoughts, and emotions of the characters, this response is challenged and made much more difficult, especially after watching a generic caricature of it as portrayed in *Fundamentalist*.

As observed by Changez description of the 9/11 events, in what is often called “postmodern warfare,” beginning with Vietnam, there is very clean, filmic quality to contemporary war, at least from an American perspective, which is part of the reason why the events of 9/11 were so rupturing. War, arguably since the American Civil War, has been a foreign affair. Americans join almost at their leisure, fight on foreign soil, and ultimately control when and when battles will be fought and when they will exit. Since Vietnam, war has been cleaned up, packaged, and specific moments are portrayed neatly on a television screen. The enemies experience the bulk of the casualties, and their civilians suffer while ours watch a “spectacle” version of propagandized events from the comfort of a couch, switching it off at their leisure. 9/11 brought those same filmic, neatly-packaged qualities, yet in reverse: it was American civilians being watching, attacked on *American* soil. Much to the horror of the American public, they were watching themselves. That we as readers are empathizing with Changez—which is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the novel to our cultures “sensibilities—allows the reader see from the perspective of the Other. Through both the events of 9/11 and our identification with Changez, the Western reader can begin to imagine what it

must be like to watch one's *own* people—in an often racist, intolerant, misinformed portrayal—ravaged by a foreign people.

Following this passage, Changez seeks desperately to justify his response. Faced with the disgust of the American, he says “please believe me when I tell you I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others” (72). Rather, in maintaining his attempt to “re-humanize” the Muslim other, Changez challenges the blind assumptions often ascribed to a throwaway, guilt-relieving phrase such as “war is war” (an unvoiced statement which the American clearly counters with in the following passage) or something equally as barbaric. Changez states:

But surely you cannot be completely innocent of such feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips—so prevalent these days—of American munitions laying waste to the structures of your enemies?

But you are at war, you say? (73)

What Changez, and through him Hamid, is ultimately calling for is a broader reevaluation of human worth. By placing both characters on equal ground, by disorienting the reader by placing him in what a typical reader might view as a hostile, backwards, barbaric place far from the edges of civilization, and also entering the reader into an Other protagonist, the novel forces us to view ourselves and our simple Orientalist judgments through the eyes of whom we as a culture often thoughtlessly dehumanize, and whose life we through judgments and military actions deem worth less than our own.

This further breaks down a singular, nationalistic cultural mythology, which serves often as war-fueling propaganda. Rather than the one sided, hegemonic narrative, which “official” history usually is, this places the accepted U.S. narrative in a position of silence, in a position of juxtaposition, and in a position of equality with the narrative of what would otherwise be the

voiceless Other. This sets the reader a decentered narrative two perspectives inform each other; more importantly, the reader forced to look at the cultural of the West through the eyes of the Other. Where traditional history provided a single-sided narrative that induces cultural myopia, Hamid's narrative placed the reader within a cultural "contact zone," which allows the reader to perceive his or her own reality comparatively, critically, and analytically. Like the Other (Changez fictionally, or Hamid authorially), here the Western reader becomes a participatory subject in the creation of knowledge about the world.

Carlos Fuentes, in an article for *The Nation*, wrote that,

when we embrace the Other, we not only meet ourselves, we embrace the marginal images that the modern world, optimistic and progressive as it has been, has shunned and has paid a price for forgetting (411).

Most Western texts, particularly major American works such as DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Updike's *Terrorist*, to come out of 9/11 have tended to be solipsistic, utilizing the techniques of postmodernism and the trauma narrative; however, in marginalized places—marginalized in the sense that they don't produce or take part in the economic processes that define their plight or the vast amounts of cultural products that they consume—there has been a new confidence, and a new *awareness* that now is the time to assert themselves as subjects. Whereas this has been increasingly decentering in terms of economic and political hegemony, especially when compared with the U.S. stronghold of the 80s and 90s, it has led to a rise in confident, assertive fiction, where writers like Hamid no longer need to give heed to the intimidation radiated by a world dominated by a single superpower.

Jean Baudrillard has observed that the tactics of modern terrorism, unlike traditional war, which is largely won by casualties inflicted and occupation, rely mainly upon the symbolism of

the attacks. In “Requiem for the Twin Towers,” he writes, “The collapse of the towers is the major symbolic event. Imagine they had not collapsed, or only one had collapsed: the effect would not have been the same at all. The fragility of global power would not have been so strikingly proven” (43). This mirrors precisely what Changez reveals to the American in attempting, somewhat in vain, to excuse his pleasure in watching the towers fall. Changez relates, in a passage that could almost have been written by Baudrillard:

at that moment, my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack—death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes—no, I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees (73).

Essentially, for the disenfranchised, for the voiceless, terrorism in a global, singular system becomes a tool, for the powerless, subaltern, and invisible to once again *become* visible, to be seen. Hamid’s book is, perhaps, a less violent way to “level the playing field.”

Towards the end of the novel, edging toward the height of Changez’s internal crisis, he travels to Chile to appraise a publishing firm that specializes in “literary” books. “Trade,” the name of the literary branch of the publishing house,

With its stable of literary—defined for all practical purposes as commercially unviable—authors was a drag on the rest of the enterprise; our task was to determine the value of the asset if that drag were shut down (142).

Juan-Bautista, the old man who “had run the company for many years... [although] did not own it” (142) singles Changez out after he tells him that his father was a poet, once fairly famous in the Punjab. The situation—essentially the perfect internal and external “storm” for Changez—

highlights all of the main themes the novel broaches upon. He is de-situated, elevated physically in the mountains, in the ruins of a small village, shutting down, not incidentally, a literary book publisher, a field to which he has genealogical bonds, and natural interests. Bautista singles out Changez, leaning on him heavily, finding in an anthology some translated poems by his father. This incident exemplifies one of the narrative's major themes, the power and transference of empathy through both culture and language, through the device of literature or, more broadly, narrative.

In this way, Bautista becomes the personification of the cultural and temporal power of literature as a meaning-making device. Not long after Changez narrates speaking of Bautista, Perhaps he was gifted with remarkable powers of empathy and had observed in me a dilemma that out of compassion he thought he could help me resolve; perhaps he saw among his enemies one who was weak and could easily be brought down; perhaps it was mere coincidence. Sentimentally, I would like to believe in the first of these possibilities. But regardless, Juan-Bautista added considerable momentum to my inflective journey, a journey that continues to this day (146).

This passage reflects, or reifies, the transformative, meaning-making nature of literature. Like what Hamid is doing using the transnational novel in English form, literature, personified through Bautista, adds to the depth and process of one's inner journey. Where a nation's official narrative (or mythology) increases fervent nationalism and blindness, these comparative "contact zones" allow one to see the depth of complexity of the *human* narrative, which transcends both borders and simplistic, exterior methods of cultural production.

In a brilliant and insightful reversal, Juan-Bautista, after asking Changez if he's heard of the "janissaries," explains what they are:

'They were Christian boys,' he explained, 'captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to.' (151)

This passage highlights the nature of oppressive systems, and the ways in which class systems embed themselves in both the oppressors and the oppressed, or the masters and the slaves. Further, it highlights the impermanence of power by evoking a previous period where the Middle Eastern world was at a peak of civilization, at a time when Europe was comparatively basic and undeveloped.

A major shift in contemporary writers like Hamid is the use of English as a global language. Where earlier novelists from developing countries have often shown extreme ambivalence toward the use of English, at times rejecting it entirely as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o did famously, Hamid has made a conscious decision to be a "Pakistani English-language novelist." One of the core arguments of the rejection of English is Thiong'o's essay "Decolonization of the Mind," where he writes, "But by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neocolonial slavish and cringing spirit?" (101). I argue that this argument is simplistic, reactionary, and essentially fundamentalist. It is backward-looking, relying on the fundamentalist argument that in order to reinstate a better world, we must purify our culture, our language, our *nation* by relying on previous (though fictional) states of being. Though language certainly is the way that people access and formulate the world, it cannot be self-consciously manufactured by a people wishing to purify themselves

by reinstating so older order. This vision, which lacks all historicity, ignores, as Slavoj Zizek notes, that “fundamentalism is not left over from part of an older order, but part of the global process” (Zizek).

Certainly, and traditionally, the dominant language is in a position of power, as are those who speak it “purely.” The worldview or ideology which is contained in this language is indeed closest—or most familiar—to the reality of the native speakers. However, to turn inward to a previous time when global culture and global language could be refused inconsequentially or unproblematically is to naively believe that the world can be stabilized and returned to some previous state. This is of course a fiction, as are all “golden ages.”

Hamid, educated at both Princeton and Harvard, as well as his character Changez, are very capable of accessing and *creating* the world in both Urdu and in English. In an era of burgeoning globalization, there will inevitably be a lingua franca which corresponds this cultural, economically, and politically absolutely interconnected world. Certainly, and traditionally, the dominant language is in a position of power, as are those who speak it “purely.” The worldview or ideology which is contained in this language is indeed closest—or most familiar—to the reality of the native speakers. However, to turn inward to a previous time when global culture and global language could be refused inconsequentially or unproblematically is to naively believe that the world can be stabilized and returned to some previous state.

Hamid’s approach, then, stems from a very different ideological position, as to the best method of asserting one’s culture and one’s identity into a position of subjectification. Jean-Francois Bayart writes in his book *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, “We know from having read Max Weber that man is an animal caught in webs of meaning he has himself woven” (21). We know from Althusser and Habermas that these webs of meaning which produce

both social bonds and cultural meaning stem from language, which is the process of constructing the world.

Hamid, of course, is aware and capable enough in both Urdu and English to be able to critically examine the world in both languages. However, rather than refusing English, he explores the effects this global world has on an Other, processes it, then manifests that vision into English, subverting the dominance *not* to merely invert it, but to flatten it. Unlike many of those who attack dominant groups, who, as Paulo Freire observes, “house” the oppressor’s consciousness, Hamid seeks to “level the playing field” to one of subjectification and equal voice. Effectively, Hamid for a moment silences a culture who has for a long time heard nothing but its own voice, and he had made this culture listen. He has not simply rejected a narrative, but has done what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “retelling a story in one’s own words” (294).

Contrarily to Thiong’o’s argument, bell hooks in an essay entitled “Language” discussed that when Africans arrived in the U.S. as slaves there was not one unified language in which they could communicate with each other. Similar to Changez’s experience in the Philippines and in Chile, it was their position against the oppressors and their visible appearance that unified them. She writes,

I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor’s language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance. I imagine that the moment they realized the oppressor’s language, seized and spoken by the tongues of the colonized, could be a space of bonding was joyous. (169).

She observes this oppressor language became a subversive “counter-language,” enabling “rebellion and resistance” (171). Where Thiong’o’s approach is a fundamentalist quest for a past

purity, hooks observations rely on the idea that language is a process, as is the world we live it, being made and remade, and that language as a process can be transformative, subversive, and can create *new* spaces for the Other.

But there is some necessity, even among Pakistani readers, behind Hamid's choice. Speaking of a Lahore literary festival that he helped organize, he said that, of the 25,000 or so people who attended, "the bulk of them were young college students; the bulk of those were first generation English-speakers, and they were reading English-language novels." He notes that

[Pakistan] has many different languages. Urdu, the national language, isn't most people's first language. So if they have to pick a language to read in, I think many people are picking [one] that connects them to the world and that allows them to encounter some different types of ideas....So, I think [English] is a very valid language to be writing in for Pakistanis too. ("Extended Interview: Jeffrey Brown talks with Mohsin Hamid")

As the quotes from both hooks and Hamid indicate, language can both mirror and allow interconnectedness, and, as Hamid's novel shows, even English can be subversive of hegemonic powers, and it can be transformative of worldviews, and of our perceptions of that very world. Even a national language like Urdu is not in any way objectively "national" but, like all national languages, is itself based upon disenfranchisement and inequalities in the structures of power.

Homi K. Bhabha writes in his essay, "The Commitment to Theory":

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory...may open the way to conceptualizing and *international* culture, based

not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity (38).

In an interview with Harleen Singh for the journal *Ariel*, Hamid speaks of “mongrel” or “hybridized identities,” which says he intends in a “positive sense.” In an argument which echoes many strains of neocolonial or postcolonial literary and social theory, especially that of Bhabha, Hamid notes how these “hybridized identities are under attack” (149). He speaks of a “blurring” of peoples, geographies, and identities, which is a process becoming more apparent and visible in a world growing deeply interconnected and interdependent. The ideas he suggests seem to attempt to defeat the nationalistic tendencies and propaganda and also artificial borders which are growing not only more arbitrary, but also more exclusive and harmful. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* at its heart challenges the ways we construct our nationalized, social identities, particularly in how we devise differences which allow ourselves to separate ourselves from Others. These differences—as people and places become hybridized and a conglomeration of cultural artifacts and behaviors—exist even less in reality, occupying simply the spaces of our imaginations. Contrarily, these projected differences between people also have the power to be destructive on a larger scale than ever before, mirroring the scale and ability of humanity to achieve almost instant warfare with anyone, anywhere. In the interview Hamid speaks of equality, but equality in the sense that everyone, not just some, are equal on a global, not simply national, scale. In this sense, both the American and Changez are on the brink of entering a revolutionary and responsible way of existing in a world where all “borders” are becoming murkier.

Changez, in responding the post-9/11 world, says: “it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly given itself to a dangerous nostalgia at that time...for the first time I was struck

by its determination to look back” (114-115). Hamid’s narrative and each character within it are all centered upon this nostalgic resistance, and all expose different possibilities of the destruction this nostalgia brings about. That the book concludes with an open ending, and one potentially violent, rests on the fact that much of the ominous quality of the book rests on the fact that Changez, the American, and Erica all “resist their mongrelization” (150). The narrative exposes the harm of forcing the world to be what can be called a “simulacra” of some previous time. Echoing the obvious symbolism in the protagonist’s name, Jim, his mentor at Underwood Samson says it best: “Time only moves in one direction. Remember that. Things always change” (96).

Change, in fact, is antithetical to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism, regardless of what part of the world it stems, always seeks to reinstate a “golden age,” a moment in time that was utopian, pure, but which unfortunately lacks all historicity. As Renato Constantino writes in *Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness*, “a policy based on the present as past and not on the present as future is backward, for it is premised not on evolving conditions but on conditions that are already dying away” (42).

Ultimately, the broader implications of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is that narrative not only is the foundation of our ability to find social definition, the fluidity of a cultural narrative or history allows us to redefine ourselves, our assumptions, and the way we view and form empathetic bonds with Other’s allowing us to reformulation ideas of difference, as well as inclusion and exclusion. At a time both when the U.S. has become increasingly inward-looking—perhaps as an effect of not wanting to look in the mirror—and where militarily, economically, and politically it is crucial that the U.S. look toward the Other in new ways, a

novel like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can provide the inciting narrative of a new, more tolerant, more empathetic worldview.

CHAPTER 4: THE GLOBAL CITY: *HOW TO GET RICH IN RISING ASIA AND THE OUTSOURCING OF THE AMERICAN DREAM*

In *Planet of Slums*, an insightful book about the profound urbanization in the developing world and the disturbing nature of the sprawling slums urbanization produces, Mike Davis writes that,

The global countryside...has reached its maximum population, and will begin to shrink after 2020. As a result, cities will account for virtually all future world population growth, which is expected to peak at about 10 billion in 2050....

Ninety-five percent of this final buildout of humanity will occur in the urban areas of developing countries, whose populations will double to nearly 4 billion in the next generation. (2)

As Davis observes, cities in developing countries are growing at alarming rates, as entire generations of the population are flooding toward urban centers, all with prospects and dreams of a better future. Although demographic studies in developing countries are notoriously difficult to conduct (if they're even attempted), the 2007 population of Lahore, Pakistan was projected at 7 million people. This is, however, a rough estimate, "based upon the inter censal annual growth rate" and the data collected from a 1998 census which put the Lahore's population—the largest in the Punjab—at 6,318,745 people (Jamal and Mahzar). From 2001 to 2006, the average growth of the urban area of Lahore was approximately twelve square kilometers per year ("Spatio-temporal"). Granted, the last census conducted in the city took place more than 15 years ago, and, at the current speed of globalization along with rampant migration, huge numbers of people in developing countries such as Pakistan remain unaccounted for and undeclared, people who have lived and continue to live without formal documentation.

Yet, the overarching point is clear. Urban populations and cityscapes are growing enormously, and the numbers outlined above do not even account for partial or seasonal migration, as in places like China (as population movement is restricted) where, each spring roughly 150 million migrant workers working in cities return home for Chinese New Year, taking part yearly in the largest mass migration in human history.

Globally, these workers have abandoned the countryside for the bright lights and big dreams that cities invariably offer. Coming mainly from rural areas that often remain partially unaccounted for by centralized institutions—people are often undocumented, unincorporated into capitalism and the global monetary system, subsisting or attempting to on agriculture and trade, and so on—the pull of the city and the journey to it is not merely a physical ordeal, but also one that becomes largely symbolic. The city is not merely a physical space, it is a doorway to a wholly different way of human existence; it is a concept and a symbol of prosperity and wealth. Capturing the implications of this profound journey, as the family in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and as “you,” the protagonist, sit on the roof of an overloaded bus, you pass through not only physical space but also a space that is metaphorical, emotional, and ideologically overwhelming. The city rising up around the family, bombarding them with the lights, buildings, advertisements, and bustle, which, though stimulating at first, leaves the protagonist eventually desensitized.

For the protagonist and his family, the promises made by global capitalism until this moment, have only been made through interaction with those who have been processed by urbanity or through the various, farther reaching cultural aspects of globalization—this cultural globalization being the perfected images of a largely falsified and unrealistic way of life, which are consumed through television, and advertisements of various kinds, as well as the ever sought

after success story which serves to legitimize ambitions of wealth, upward mobility and economic independence, and a higher, Western standard of living. What is largely fictional or extremely rare begins to be seen worldwide as the promises of industrialization, capitalism, and material consumption. Along with the exportation of capitalism and its myriad tenets, this is the exported, hegemonic hold of the American dream gone global. Perhaps a better label would be the “capitalist dream,” a dream which drives all the characters in all of Hamid’s novels, but never in such a profound way as it guides the lives, from birth to death, of the focal characters in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.

In his 1931 book *The Epic of America*, James Truslow Adams writes that the ideal of the American dream is that “dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (215). Built on the infallibility of this almost karmic equation in which individuals yield top dollar for their metaphysical worth—as it is not clear who provides the valuation—regardless of market values, exchange rates, social status, education and so forth, this model assumes that the American social system allows perfect agency and independence. This belief has permeated worldwide based partially on extremely rare success stories, but mostly due to the consumption of American cultural products and those modeled after them. Cities globally continue to be flooded with those willing to live in squalid, horrific conditions, desperate for the promises of economic and material gain—this happens despite ever increasing wealth disparity worldwide.

In all of Hamid’s novels characters are desperate to achieve this very dream; though it is supposedly based on everyone having equal agency, it is often only based on a single individuals, and promotes, if not demands, self-interest. Otherwise, enormous and growing

inequality wouldn't remain so largely overlooked. As seen in *Moth Smoke*, this personal quest for capitalistic gain and the material good that signify social status, and this is the fanatical quest that drives Daru to murder. He desperately desires to transcend the life he was born into, and the ideology that brought him to these desires could have been penned by Adams himself. Daru lusts to be initiated into the few oligarchical international elite, who recreate, as the novel suggests, the living standards of the West wherever they are, taking "their environment" with them despite economic, social, or environmental costs to those without similar means. What's more, Daru knows from his childhood that, having outperformed his classmates in school, there is no reason for him to not be included in their elitist, corrupt oligarchy besides his economic and social background. And in this Hamid hints at a more general and basic truth about capitalism—it would be impossible, environmentally if nothing else, for everyone to live and consume like those at the top of the pyramid. This theme as well runs through all of Hamid's work.

How to Get Rich in Rising Asia, confronts directly the problems and challenges of the global city in the developing world. The novel looks at the "global city" as not only a function of globalization, but as a function of urban capitalism and industrialization. Though Hamid is consistently ambivalent about the processes of globalization, never taking an unmitigated stand for or against, his most recent novel foregrounds issues such as corruption, population growth, and increasing isolation, along with the commodification of all aspects of human life—issues which must be raised in order to move forward in a more ethical or perhaps simply a less devastating way.

Like Hamid's other two novels, *Rising Asia* pins the foundational, underlying issues and problems of global capitalism not on racial or ethnic divides, but on economic and social access, as well as the ability to accumulate capital, both cultural and monetary. Hamid constantly creates

a global network in which individuals live, particularly the post-national elite whose business ventures and monetary accumulation results from the ability to tap into a vien of linked networks and cities. The capitalism dream becomes not the ability to transcend one's social position at birth, but the fateful inclusion in global network that allows an individual to function unregulated and thus above any singular state system.

Providing a definition of "global cities" in her book *Global Networks, Interlinked Cities*, Saskia Sassen writes that global cities are

different from the capitals of erstwhile empires, in that they are a function of cross-border networks rather than simply the most powerful cities of an empire. There is, in my conceptualization, no such entity as a single global city as there could be a single capital of an empire; the category "global city" only makes sense as a component of a global network of strategic sites. The corporate subsector which contains the global control and command functions is partly embedded in this network (31).

Sassen claims that the interconnectedness of network flow of cities is essential to understanding the global economic situation. Hamid, whose father is an economist who received his PhD from Stanford, was certainly aware of this global economic network from a young age. Though *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects Hamid's time working for the prestigious global management consulting firm, James O. McKinsey and Company, and addresses the human aspect of the "global city" and global economics with a broad scope, *Rising Asia* focuses on a microcosm of the issues surrounding this global network; where *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was geographical in scope, *Rising Asia* is singularly located and largely temporal in movement, focusing on a single city (unnamed, though it is very obviously modeled after Lahore).

Embedding the reader in a second-person narrative, he makes the characters just specific enough to make them believable, yet generalized enough so that their experience can be applied conceptually to the almost archetypal, underlying experiences and desires which drive the global capitalist system.

In an interview at the Chicago Humanities Festival, Hamid discusses the epic scope of the book, stating that a major change since his last two books, was that, writing this book

I became a father... moved back to Pakistan, and moved back in with my parents, and live in this extended family household, with grandparents, parents—my wife and myself—and children. Among the various...things that resulted from this for me as a novelist was a sense of feeling very powerfully drawn to...the idea of confronting the arc of life, from birth to death (“Chicago”).

He also noted that, whereas the protagonists from his first two novels were, in a sense, alter-egos of himself, “being a father, I felt...a permission to imagine people, to imagine what it would be like to be someone, because I could now think that anybody is somebody’s child.... I now [think] that maybe people that are seemingly different aren’t really all that different” (“Chicago”). In imagining people this way, Hamid creates in his novel a generalized arc, in which the reader is again an active participant. He seeks to uncover basic similarities which guide the arc of contemporary human life, seemingly excavating an underlying current upon which desires and dreams are played out.

As noted above, Hamid refuses the advice commonly given to and by writers: to be specific. In fact, the characters, the plot, and the physical world of the novel are mainly pronouns and indistinct descriptions. There is, very generally, the protagonist, “you,” siblings, a “pretty girl,” a village, and a city. The protagonist goes to “a university,” sells water, meets a bureaucrat

who demands to be bribed. Not only do the generalities of the novel suggest a simulated pluralistic reality, they seem to be taken from an archetypal Hollywood action film, complete with murders, corruption, and explosions. By watching this world, it seems to say, we have begun to live in it. Movies, in fact, throughout the narrative, are an extremely important motif—both “you” and the “pretty girl” explicitly modeling their lives after the general of an underdog protagonist in an action film. Even the “boyish gunman,” of whose life the reader is given a glimpse near just before he is killed, listens to “movie songs” (132) before purchasing a cigarette and riding his motorcycle (an image that evokes not only James Dean but a number of “rebel” Hollywood characters) to his execution-style death. What the narrative never lets the reader forget is that, however much the characters desire to be movie star beauties and tycoons, these image-based realities are always draped over, in some way, real human beings. Though evocative of James Dean, the young boy simply wants a T-shirt “with a psychedelic hawk” to impress “the girl with dimples from his neighborhood” (132). He is sure she will notice him once he has the money to purchase the shirt.

Disguised as a “self-help” book, the narrator speaks directly to the reader. It requires the reader to play along as the “purchaser” of a self help book, which will ostensibly assist the reader in becoming “filthy rich in rising Asia.” Over the course of twelve chapters the reader lives a life, from birth to death. Each of the twelve chapters—evocative of both a “twelve-step” program and of a *season* of life—begins with a metafictional commentary, where the narrator addresses the reader, offering suggestions on how to read the work, what self-help books are and why they’re read, as well as musings about the trajectory of this recommended life and its events.

Each of these introductory musings undermine what the book, if taken at face value, feigns to do. In this way the book sets up a structure that is really a dialectical process, where the

surface level and the ironic, satirical level work together (or perhaps against each other) to force the reader to process two contrasting strains, which allows a sort of synthesis produced by conflicting ideas, commentaries, and events. For instance, the book's opening sets the stage for its contradictory nature: "Look, unless you're writing one, a self-help book is an oxymoron. You read a self-help book so someone who isn't yourself can help you, that someone being the author" (3). Immediately, the book brings itself into question, exposing the flawed, underlying foundation. The effect creates the theme, as touched on in the earlier chapters, of numerous perspectives, opinions, and truths revolving around, in this case, a category of books. The paradox is deepened, claiming that perhaps all books are self-help or self-improvement books in which the reader appeals to the writer for help. In a sense, the genre is extended to religious books, but, regarding this claim, the narrator notes that there are others who, regarding the last claim in particular, would claim that those who say this of religious texts "should be pinned to the ground and bled dry with the slow slice of a blade across their throats. So it's wisest simply to note a divergence of views on that subcategory and move swiftly on" (3). As in all Hamid's books, there is no solid ground in which one can form a definitive opinion of the events, of the characters, or of the meaning itself and which emphasizes the centrality of this "divergence of views."

In centralizing difference, Hamid early on emphasizes the fluctuation or decentralization of the self. What he creates also through the way the narrative is constructed is that the "self" is not singular, but part of a larger, interconnected web in which we all exist. By broadening the definition of self, of what makes up the self and of how the self is conceived, he calls our attention to the notion that "the idea of self in the land of self-help is a slippery one. And slippery can be good..." (4). For instance, much of the subtext and irony in the work is grounded in

making the reader realize that the workings of the self, like those of the city (which require often millions of “selves” in order to exist), are contingent upon others, as well as social, historical, and economic forces, and so on.

Like *Moth Smoke* these forces are often unsaid and implicit, including those of neocolonialism and capitalism, which in the novel center around what I have called the extension of the American dream. For instance, almost immediately after the protagonist, “you,” is introduced as a child, in a revealing passage the reader is told that “your anguish is the anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all the more remarkable since you’ve never seen any of these things” (4). It is remarkable and revelatory because, although these childhood expectations are familiar to a middle-class Western readership, that same readership would not typically expect them to play a role in the life of a child from an obviously impoverished rural Pakistani family. And yet, with globalization, the commodities and rituals of Western capitalism, and the meanings and signifiers they carry have found their way even to the seemingly remote (remote only if the center is considered to be somewhere else) and unexpected places. Of course, these tenets of Western culture pass through various filters along the way, but account for the draw of the city and the specific kind of standard of living mobility it symbolizes.

This duality of rural, pre-industrial life and urban, capitalist life permeate the novel in a variety of ways, which account for the novel’s ability to expand its theme by their juxtaposition. As the family leaves their rural, agricultural existence, which perhaps defined the family’s means of subsistence for many generations, the style of the narrative allows the narrator to convey a sense of what they are leaving, in a broad scope which encompasses the general transition from

agrarian life to capitalist. The nameless family and the lack of any personalizing traits allows the scope of their departure to expand so it becomes a metaphor for this linear aspect—the collective *stages*—of holistic humanity. This collective linearity is augmented always by the circularity of life's processes, which the narrative never fails to emphasize by employing characters which represent the recurrence of life's stages. For instance, though the family is in a sense moving toward a different and foreign mode of existence, the circularity of familial relations is emphasized in the narrator comparing the parent/child relationship as one akin to the nourishing and growing of crops—cyclical in that children become parents, parents become grandparents over metaphoric and reoccurring seasons. In other passages this rural trope recurs in characters mirroring each others movements, particularly when performing social tasks.

And yet, the village, which has a history of being often idealized as a sort of pure, utopian state in modern culture, is also not free from the linear movement. As the city spreads outward, the consequences of its modes of operation spread further. Due to the changing economic and environmental conditions, which the protagonist will directly and knowingly contribute to later in the novel, the farmland is becoming barren, the environment more fickle and devastating, and the streets and rivers increasingly filled with industrial sewage. A passage describing the process, directly and metaphorically, reads,

the people of your village relieve themselves downstream of when they wash their clothes, a place in turn downstream of where they drink. Farther upstream, the village before yours does the same. Farther still, where the water emerges from the hills as a sometimes-gushing brook, it is partly employed in the industrial processes of an old, rusting, and subscale textile plant, and partly used as a drainage for the fart-smelling gray effluent that results (7).

Essentially, as the landscape moves towards the city (the industrial area, which is also the outskirts of the city) the reader is lead to the representative source: a textile plant, symbolic of industrial social and economic exploitation. The larger metaphor, in this system spreading outward towards rural areas, is that everyone “defecates” on each other.

Although rural life is tied to agriculture, community, and circularity, it remains in the novel qualified and never idealistic. As Hamid vary rarely and briefly touches on agricultural life in any of his works, it also remains somewhat abstract and metaphorical. City life, however, takes on a prominent role, as, of course, urbanization occupies the thematic concern of the novel. In contrast to rural, agrarian life, urbanization represents the linear strain of the novel, signifying isolation, callousness, selfishness, and material desire. The journey to a city, for a resident of a developing country, as the narrative proclaims, “a few hours on a bus from rural remoteness to urban centrality [can] appear to span millennia” (13). This process carries not only the weight of geographical, architectural, and industrial transformation, but also ideological transformation. As the characters move toward the urban landscape, streets become less makeshift, electricity appears and, significantly, so do “shop signs and glorious, magnificent billboards” (14). “You,” the protagonist, are suddenly bombarded with the suffocating sprawl of material and monetary lust; the world becomes a series of fragmented, flashing images, and “at each subsequent wonder you think you have arrived...and each time you are proven wrong until you *cease thinking* and simply surrender to the layers of marvels and visions washing over you...until they end, without warning...and you are finally, irrevocably there” (14). As this passage highlights, the bombardment of images and commodities, the overpowering intimidation of buildings render the migrant, perhaps for the first time, unable to even comprehend his or her environment. The attachment to the environment vanishes, and despite the enormous population the “clan” shrinks

away and “you embody one of the great changes of your time. Where once your clan was innumerable, not infinite but of a large number not readily known, now there are five of you. Five” (14). The individual moves to complete separateness from continuity, from bonds that establish the knowledge of the experience of a common humanity, and left the “wake” of these bonds is “insecurity, anxiety, productivity, and potential” (15). The subtext of the process of “becoming filthy rich” is that one must sacrifice oneself to the capitalist system completely in order to progress. And, as the narrative individual progress often requires corruption, immorality, and the foregoing of any sustained connections.

Employing subtle irony to make its thematic suggestions, the novel relies on subtext and evasive connotations that carry the reader towards paradoxes and questions. As a self-help book disguised as a novel, it questions the nature and function of both. While novels or, specifically, foreign novels are “an impulse to understand distant lands that because of globalization are increasingly affecting life in your own...” (19), “self-help” books often isolate a section of human life in order to talk one through a sort of surgical procedure on oneself. The “self-help” superficial level of the book guides the reader through extremely narrow, myopic procedures which are steps towards getting rich. They include essentially foregoing any human, emotion connections or bonds, overlooking or ignoring any moral or ethical inclinations, and setting one’s sights on making money at all costs regardless of what is sacrificed. Yet, at the deeper, novelistic level, the actual reader guided through a complex subtexual system which makes the interconnectedness of the system and the necessity of empathy visible. Globalization in a sense, as noted above, asks one to understand and empathize with people supposedly very different from oneself; yet, due industrialization, standardizations, wage-labor, and the masking and

dehumanizing effects of exchange value, the processes of capitalism demand ignorance to the human aspects of daily life in order to function.

In “developed” countries, self-help books can function unproblematically because whatever the book is helping one to acquire is easily isolated. One can, ostensibly, work towards *acquiring* spirituality, self-esteem, a perfect marriage, financial stability, etc. with little interruption. In a developing country, as in *Rising Asia*, “your city is not laid out as a single-celled organism, with a wealthy nucleus surrounded by an ooze of slums” (*Rising Asia*, 20). Unlike developed countries (or the way of life within them), “the poor live near the rich” (20). You cannot easily ignore the interdependency, and the knowledge that, side by side, those who have everything, by corruption and status at birth, live besides those with nothing based *not* on metaphysical “ability” as Adams would have one believe, but guided by the fate ascribed to one at birth. Of course, there are exceptions, often more created than realistic, that serve to legitimize enormous gaps in wealth and the ability to achieve.

This naturalism appears throughout the novel, particularly in the respective situations of the three siblings whose lives take vary different courses based on the order in which they were conceived, as well as their gender. As the narrator explains,

There are forks in the road to wealth that have nothing to do with choice or desire or effort, forks that have to do with chance, and in your case, the order of your birth is one of these. Third means you are not heading back to the village. Third means you are not working as a painter’s assistant. Third also means you are not, like the fourth of you three surviving siblings, a tiny skeleton in a small grave... (33).

Like the situation of the protagonist, Hamid's novels consistently emphasize chance. Similar to Daru, who, though more successful than his classmates, did not have the means to access the social status he desired, the sister, though better and more invested in her schooling than either of her two male siblings, is delivered to an elderly man in the village from which the family came. All three siblings are more or less spun into their situation from birth; even for the protagonist, though he does do a limited amount of social climbing, does so at the cost of foregoing essentially any lengthy connection with anything, living or environmental. The protagonist constantly looks to possess what he doesn't have though believes he should, similar to, ostensibly, the reader of a self-help book.

Mirroring the protagonist throughout the entirety of the novel is the pretty girls. Both characters, through their similarities and ambitions (as well as their desires for each other, or more generally, an emotional, connected life) they expose in each other, to the reader, what could have been. Not only does chance and fate enter the realm of the social and economic situations they were born into, their self-serving ambitions literally pull them apart. They seek to "make something of themselves," yet this very definition of what "something" *is* is fatalistic and predetermined. It comes from somewhere within the heart of a system, which in the end deems them expendable. And yet, in their old age, when their ambitions of Hollywood-style power and stardom fade, they come together, finally able to sacrifice just enough of themselves to be able to find comfort in an other. Thus, *Rising Asia*, unlike Hamid's other two novels, ends hopefully, fulfilling the cycle: despite the sound and the fury which has rendered the characters in their finances and prestige more or less where they started, they have, in the relationship they have had with each other, and the protagonist with his son, "been beyond [themselves]" (228).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, works like Hamid's—works that defy classification by their very nature—can promote a new way of conceiving literature, based on plurality, hybridity, and mutation of form. Especially in the wake of new scientific studies that have determined that there are “no classifiable races...[that] exist within modern humans” (“Minorities, Race, and Genomics”), and that racial and ethnic distinctions are social projections of biological traits which do not exist, questions must be asked regarding the foundational relationships between peoples. Why, for instance, are race and ethnicity cultural and historical phenomena, and is there a deeper, more structural reason for their occurrence? The same questions must be asked regarding culture, and its functions, particularly in an age where individuals from different cultures can transcend that cultural climate and geography within seconds, through the use of the internet and other communicative devices, or simply travel. An individual can today wake up in Dubai or Beijing, and take an afternoon nap in New York. Individuals in almost any given culture access daily the artifacts of another culture. The interlinking of physical, social, and economic life contribute holistically to the formation global culture.

Hamid's work asks the questions implied by this formation, and, though not providing an answer, point towards a hypothesis, focused not on “culture norms” or even clashes, but on the basic economic questions of survival, and how an individual *is able* to survive within global capitalism. His work questions how global capitalism functions, and how it defines contemporary life. Emphasizing both fate and chance, it exemplifies how one group of people manage to have an economic stronghold over another. His work examines the cultural hegemony which accompanies the cultural data pumping into individuals from across the globe through

television, movies, books, magazines and so forth. This hegemonic data is programmed in the structure and content of restaurants, grocery stores, into the very structure of towns and cities, and is built into virtually every piece of clothing produces. Hamid's work examines how exactly this system functions and how it designs our interconnected relationships. The lives of the characters of his novels are structured by these fundamental issues, questions, and concerns; they are *not* structured by class and cultural difference as explanations in themselves. Class, culture, and social position are symptoms of the foundational economic structure which determines and defines how individuals and various groups of people live, and if indeed they are able to do so. What's more, this underlying structure determines what we desire and what we deem valuable.

Hamid's work does not point definitively toward any one conclusion, but it does challenge the reader directly to see others and themselves in a new way. His work emphasizes the limitations of a singular perspective and a singular truth, and guides the reader towards empathy by eschewing essentialisms and naturalizations, focusing rather on similarities, on the "play" of culture, and truth, and any given reality. Perhaps even, Hamid's work, with its emphasis not on nation or culture but on post-nationalism and the underlying economic structure, can incite a new way of understanding categorization, particularly in relation to culture and literature.

A new literary astrology in a sense can redefines the way we conceive of human and cultural relationships. This new network refuses national lineages, and allows for "play" because it studies the ebb and flow of what structures relationships, movements, and interactions. It also defies subjective classifications such as "great" or "timeless" and other superlatives which degrade and disguise the workings of the system in which it exists. This system opens up literature for a whole new way of interpretation, one that is premised more upon inclusion than

exclusion, on similarity rather than difference. If there is difference, Hamid's work questions why it has been created. Hierarchies premised on "purity" and other racist projections are dissolved at the very core by works that promote simultaneity, difference, and cosmopolitanism. Refusing the very qualities which allow dehumanization, Hamid emphasizes fluidity, perspective, play, and chance, which foregrounds interconnection and interdependence. In being relieved of their "natural" state, ethnicity and race become merely the tools of oppression.

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