

TAINTED THROUGH TRANSFER: DIS/CONNECTIVE RESIDUES IN MOHSIN HAMID'S
CONTAMINATED FICTION

by

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Given the profusion of negative terminology ascribed to non-Western migrants generally, coupled with Mohsin Hamid's extensive and recurring implementation of ecological and biological collapse in his first three published novels, this thesis will foreground scientific concepts which undermine Eastern representation. I argue that while Hamid illustrates real-world ecological, biological, political, and ideological contamination, he does so by employing an historic use of metaphors and imagery which highlight an inevitably poisoned, infected, or contagious Pakistani people. This emotionally inciting device ultimately reduces his characters' vitality and agency, thereby transferring a tainted impression onto his Western readers, one which denies visions of cultural and political equality between the East and West. His work problematically rearticulates a disconnected, ethnically subordinate image of Pakistani society at a time when cultural sensitivity and global connectivity is paramount to peaceful multicultural and international relations.

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CONTAMINATED FICTION

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate the mind of this work to my migrant ancestors, whose dusty, gray wrappings I have only recently begun to unwind. Your faithful determination to sacrifice the familiar in honor of the promise of a better existence has inspired my own optimistic risk-taking and filtered how I interpret the migrations of others. By crossing oceans and dotting the American landscape from one coast to the other, you have reminded me that no effort, even my own, is without escort and lasting global significance. May this work be the beginning of many more familial junctions from which the whole is edified.

I dedicate the spirit of this work to my children, Nathan and Jonathan, and my husband, Dan. You habitually demonstrate that a well-chosen and well-placed word can change the course and the experience of life itself. For your immeasurable patience and conviction that the investment in my own higher education is time well-spent, I am deeply grateful. For your interchange of ideas and vocalized compassion toward the excluded Other within the respective realms you each occupy, I am incredibly proud and hope this work serves to echo your emboldened actions.

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CHAPTER ONE: IM/MIGRANT OTHER: THE INFECTED NEXUS OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE AND THE HUMANITIES

The literary works of Mohsin Hamid are receiving increased commendation for their mass appeal and political global relevance. Critical attention has primarily centered on how Hamid's deteriorating Pakistani settings and his characters' declining socio-economic status reveal the failing consequences of Western neoliberalism, especially as applied to the East under the inescapable networks of globalization. Having lived, learned, and labored in Pakistan, America, and England, Hamid is uniquely positioned to address and interpret both Eastern and Western material realities and cultural perspectives through his literature. While scholars have acknowledged Hamid's unique position as political mediator, they have neglected the manner in which Hamid conveys cultural disparities toward political asymmetry. I suggest that Hamid's hybridization has slanted his language in favor of scientific metaphor which consistently demeans his native Lahore, and by extension non-Western society. I offer that the prevalence of compromised biological and ecological soundness illustrated in his novels upsets his readers' possible notions of similarity and equality. Not only have critics been silent regarding Hamid's repeated juxtaposition of Pakistani society with the overtly contaminated surroundings he narrates, but in doing so they overlook a monolithic historical precedent in literature –the enduring longevity of colonialist rhetoric. Even among democratic, postcolonial, and hybridized literary authors who seek cultural and political harmony, Eastern marginalization persists.

Contemporary rhetoric which typically describes the Eastern or Southern migrant is grounded in the corporeal. Representations of migratory populations often materialize in the imaginary as an aggregation of unhealthy, compromised bodies whose disease targets the established population. To those within proximity of transmission, migrants manifest collectively

as a potentially contagious pathogen, physiologically and socio-politically. To decrease susceptibility, the Westerner has been encouraged by state and medical authorities to take hygienic, preventative, and distancing measures.

The politicization of biological pathology has an established history, one which pivots upon etymology and metaphor. From the outset of this thesis, I want to note that when words such as “pollute,” “infect,” “invade,” and “penetrate” have been employed in various literatures as signifiers for the mobile Other, it has not been simply a matter of hyperbole, oratorical convenience, or aesthetic appeal. Rather, it has been spurred by generations of laboratory research. Living and active specimens gave rise to medical theories of disease which ultimately determined that human bodies were jeopardized by global migrations and population shifts. Because of this genesis, a microbiological system undergirds discourse aimed at negotiating the boundaries between the Westerner and non-Westerner. Contention between the two borders is not only a geopolitical development, namely, a defensive move to safeguard land borders. Rather, it entails a defensive negotiation of bodily terrain. By analyzing the metaphysical experience of difference through its historical, physical underpinnings, readers more easily comprehend the apprehension between cultural spaces in opposition today. It enables them to acutely perceive and lay hold of the basis for fear that attends encroaching global migration.

The French literary structuralist Roland Barthes identified a pertinent bifurcation: “the metaphor of the Text separates from that of the work” (1473). Yielding to such a separation, this thesis proposes to investigate Hamid’s partitioning of metaphor to describe the Pakistani in decidedly negative terms. Quite compellingly, Barthes himself employs biological metaphor to explicate his own theory regarding the divergence of Text and its metaphor. He states that the work of Text:

refers to the image of the *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by ‘development’ (a word which is significantly ambiguous, at once biological and rhetorical); the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image, moreover, close to current biological conceptions of the living being) (Barthes 1473).

If authors and literary critics alike co-opt biological metaphor such as “organism” to more clearly convey meaning in fields other than science, then it is useful to consider its effectiveness (Barthes 1473). It is reasonable to suggest that congruence between the connotations of the raw text and the text’s descriptive allusions is essential. Curiously, Hamid’s novels resist such congruence. His scientifically rife narrations undermine fair Pakistani representation thus offering critics a unique angle from which to engage the inherent cultural contradictions facing many multicultural authors as they strive to reach English audiences.

Medical advances have historically influenced the dialogic interchange between Westerner and non-Westerner as I will explain more thoroughly in following chapters. Mohsin Hamid’s biological paradigm harmonizes with this historical progression making Davis and Morris’ overarching rationale insightful. In *Biocultures Manifesto*, they assert that “culture and history must be rethought with an understanding of their inextricable, if highly variable, relation to biology” (411). As the humanities and the sciences have perpetually been segregated as academic disciplines in the modern and post-modern eras, many scholars support a return to integration and incorporation: “In every university, in almost every department, there are already scholars working in interdisciplinary fields that require, even demand, a merger of science and society” (Davis and Morris, 412). Reasons for this “merger” or arguably better stated, this resistance to division, are multiple (Davis and Morris, 412). At the most basic level, biological

processes cannot be cleanly extracted from an organism's outward animations. Direct encounters among organisms within given environments illuminate the constitution of life as a phenomenon. Interactions between living things work to clarify the varied constituent parts which comprise volatile life. Further, acts which are directed toward the body, emanating from the body, incorporated by the body or transmitted among these have significant influence on how life is experienced metaphysically. For example, a healthy diet usually leads to increased cognition or living in a hostile environment usually begets fear and aggression. Human values then, are often, if not always, corporeally determined and made manifest. To neglect how physicality is presented among alternate cultures is to neglect a measure of multicultural meaning. Importantly, such neglect within the analysis of multicultural literature "is doomed to be reductionist at best and inaccurate at worst" (Davis and Morris, 411).

Mohsin Hamid hinted at the presence of this interdisciplinary fusion in his 2013 lecture titled, "I Don't Believe in Reality" when he stated:

When I say 'I don't believe in reality' what I mean is not that we aren't all here or that this isn't happening. It is; we are. But rather that we are constructing this at the same time, you know, whether you are a zen master or a sufi mystic or a modern day neuro-scientist. Worldviews that we've had since ancient times and that we're getting now through contemporary science, both suggest that the self is a kind of illusion. That's central to almost every ancient religious tradition. It's also something that contemporary MRI imagery of brains at work tends to reinforce.

As the quest of humanities is often to pinpoint the nature, boundary, or permeability of selfhood as practiced in social and political contexts, what Hamid acknowledges is a consensus among deeply polarized disciplines. Contemporary science and ancient religion (the physical and the

metaphysical) are moving in the same direction. Selfhood exists in both, but critically, its movement is too often captured and catalogued bilaterally.

It seems fitting then, under the pretext of mediating Pakistani and American selfhood as illustrated by Hamid that an analysis of his three novels be cast where the biological and ideological meet. Hamid's work bombards his audience with imagery and metaphor that engage physicality through the offended senses. From this offense, the reader may competently resolve why *Moth Smoke* stagnantly lingers, what precisely *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reinscribes as fundamental, and how *Get[ting] Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* deposits a persistent, heart-breaking residue.

I establish the historical basis for this thesis' framework through two Yale graduates, Dr. Frank Snowden, who specializes in the History of Medicine and Dr. Laura Otis, who holds degrees in molecular biophysics and biochemistry, neuroscience, and comparative literature (Frank Snowden, Laura Otis). Otis' work is especially apropos since her book, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics*, upholds that "The fiction and scientific writing of authors who excelled in both fields seemed to me the best possible terrain on which to study how literary and medical representations of selfhood cross-pollinated one another" (2). I contend that Otis' observations of rhetorical transfer occurring centuries ago continue to reveal "cross-pollinat[ions]" as evidenced by the literary tropes Hamid favors (Otis 2).

Of the seven remarkable scientist/authors Otis features, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, a Nobel-awarded neurohistologist from Spain, offers a comprehensive look into the ambiguity of language, its colonial foundation, and its societal implications. For example, "In his *Precepts and Counsels for Scientific Investigation*, he compared the brain to a tree because of their common

ability to send out new shoots” (Otis 85). As Otis notes, “his scientific and creative writing is alive with metaphors, and he seems highly aware of the role that language plays in constructing scientific knowledge” (85). Notice that Hamid, Cajal, and Barthes assent to the idea of spontaneous construction. For Hamid, assemblage pertains to his ideas of reality – “we are constructing this at the same time” (Hamid, *I Don’t*). For Cajal, it is scientific knowledge. Intriguingly, however, Hamid fastens his collaborative view in place via scientific discovery - “contemporary MRI imagery” (*I Don’t*). Therefore, both Cajal and Hamid incline toward cognitive creations which are inseparable from their physical manifestations. They confirm Barthes’ observations that a given literary description contains dual potentialities: it is “at once biological and rhetorical” (1473).

Cajal’s keen awareness of his active role in knowledge construction did not fend off its tinge with violence; “In his writing the scientist becomes a *conquistador* in the primeval forest” (Otis 85). Within such exotic “forest[s]” lay open a host of unexplored “tree[s]” for harvest by this colonial neurohistologist (Otis 85). Cajal’s work which “associates the body with society” and “His view of the cell both as an individual and as a unit in a greater being,” demanded a bounded conception of one’s individual and corporate territory (Otis 86). Further, by mandating a hierarchical classification, Cajal suggests the individual unit’s function within the whole determined its value socio-politically. In fact, Cajal writes “that the ultimate goal of fighting these diseases was to make Africa more accessible to Europeans” (Otis 88). Like many other European scientists of his period, the pain with which Cajal worked to trace and ameliorate illness was suffused with imperial motivation: “the bodies of the black Africans served to render visible the microbial threats to Europeans” (Otis 88). So while Cajal was uncharacteristically attuned to language’s role in creating new understandings, his nationally-biased condescension

over alien ecological and biological terrain was unarguably bigoted. Further, it neglected the foresight that employing such language could one day disfavor his own society as evidenced in the repulsion of Latino/a immigrants by United States' policy today (Otis 86).

Roland Eckert noted that “Both violence suffered and violence exercised change a person’s world view” (23). As I interrogate rhetorical violence in Hamid’s work, it will be to the extent that his biological metaphors construct a Pakistani worldview fixated on bodily hostility and victimization. Davis and Morris stress that “science is only as good as its categories and methods – and that methods and categories have been thoroughly questioned, elaborated, and refined on the humanities side of that divide” (414). The actual existence of a “divide” remains open to question; however, in the case of the scientist or the author, rhetoric proves vital and manages, even unwittingly, to steer toward domination.

Sir William Blackstone’s eighteenth-century work as a jurist formed “the basis of university legal education in England and North America.” His “Commentaries on the Laws of England in Four Books” provides an early look into the relationship and extensive reach adjoining matters of law, science, and religion. In it, he asserted:

This law of nature, being coeval with mankind and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding all over the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid derive all their force, and all their authority mediately or immediately, from this original (William Blackstone, Blackstone).

Hamid’s plots and their implications within all three of his novels beg for the reader’s judgment by the novels’ conclusions. *Moth Smoke*, in particular, served as Hamid’s final thesis as a Harvard law student. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to tease out the exact co-

dependencies of law, science, and religion, it is worth noting that a legal colonial precedent was established centuries ago wherein those realms were decidedly connected. Blackstone's assertion necessitates that one accept as fact there is such a "law of nature" and that its adjudication is "binding all over the globe." It problematically demands that there is a universal interpretation and a consistent societal application of such law. In addition, where law is "coeval with mankind" treads dangerously close to drawing the kinds of analogies and producing the kinds of metaphors, like Cajal, which devalue given individuals and societies, especially those embedded with a perceived biological variant.

Ed Cohen, author of *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body*, notes reflexively that "Scientific medicine holds that biological processes appear lawful because they incorporate the same fundamental characteristics which all (known) matter displays" (46). Conceding a factual linkage between living and non-living "matter" as operative contingent to "law" adds persuasive juridical weight to any scientific metaphor describing human behavior in catalogued and ostensibly obedient terms (Cohen 46). The articulation of law today typically co-opts scientific representation for political purposes; the *illegal* immigrant is either *contaminated* or *contagious* and therefore should be avoided. However, Cohen reminds that etymology two millenia ago established the antithesis. "Immunity derives from the Latin (*im + munis*), where the root *munis* gestures toward responsibility for 'shared duties, charges, or services' (*OED*)" (Cohen 35, 40). He adds, "Within Roman law, the establishment of *municipia* [in current usage, *municipal*] both acknowledges and seeks to resolve the tensions among geographic localizations, political boundaries, and citizenship" (Cohen 42). Therefore, when microbes were conceived in terms of bodily invasion and defense, the human immune system instantly became a political entity. As social analysts or political activists reckon

with the placement of the migrant in terms of legal inclusion, history unfolds its collusion with science: “bioscience recruits immunity at the end of the nineteenth century to describe the abilities of – and the presumed necessity for – organisms to ‘defend themselves’ against the pathogenic microbes that live around and within them” (Cohen 61). Certainly, nineteenth-century “recruit[ment]” gathered perennial support, for immunity as a twin biological and political concept persists into and beyond the twentieth century. California’s Proposition 187, for example, advocated territorial segregation of immigrants in 1994 using exactly the terms and rationale established centuries beforehand.

The discourse of the Proposition 187 campaign accomplished this characterization through metaphors of ‘pollution,’ ‘infection,’ and ‘infestation.’ These clusters created images of biological invasion or contamination that structured discourse about immigration and fueled the Proposition 187 movement (Cisneros 572).

With exclusion intended, the symbiotic alliance between signifiers for both law and science persist in the Western media as well as in ethnic fiction. Hamid enfolds both legal judgment and insult toward his migratory Pakistani characters demonstrating the reality that migrants are still coded as contaminated deviants who are pleading for legal *immunity* today.

In this chapter I have noted the inevitable consolidation of science and the humanities through their shared linguistic conceptions. As language predominantly defines the marginalization of the non-Western immigrant, the historical, medical, and legal collusions attending specific language choices offers readers of multicultural literature new insights because of their joint intersections. Hamid’s use of scientific analogy in his fiction tilts toward political oppression and varies from that in Ramón y Cajal’s scientific writings only in the conspicuousness of its denigration. Once alerted to the historic and political connotations that

scientific terms continue to carry, readers may begin to see how Hamid's biological and ecological metaphors perpetuate ethnic violence. In the chapters to follow, I will offer that although Mohsin Hamid is much praised for his ability to bridge multiethnic division because of his Pakistani-American/English hybridization, his position and intent do not make him invulnerable to the dominance of colonial rhetoric. His literature, like most, has involuntarily yet dramatically reproduced the taint of non-Western cultural stigmas.

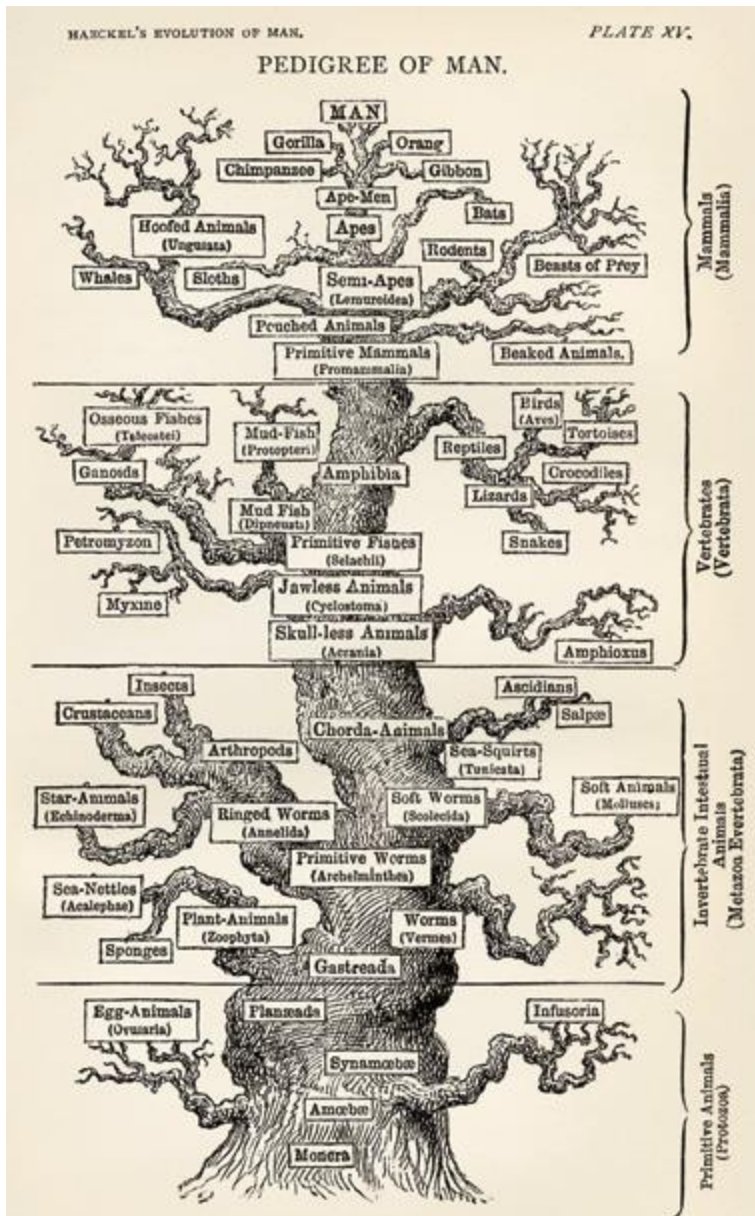
CHAPTER TWO: HAMID'S MENACING TAXONOMIES

John Gamber claims that in order to promote “marginalized groups” multicultural authors “draw on parallels to the nonhuman – to other animals, plants, and landscapes that have been cast as waste or wastelands, beyond reclamation or outside human (or preferred human) habitation” (5). Before delving into Hamid’s microbiological allusions, those entities and processes which are only apparent through a microscope, this chapter peers into Hamid’s use of metaphors stemming from the macrobiological world: namely the fauna within their ecological sphere which are regularly observed with the naked eye. These will be abundantly evident as devices and incorporations from which Hamid’s audience gathers impressions and associations regarding his fictionalized native city, Lahore. They will also serve to concretize the microbiological connections to be made later which do not lend themselves as easily to such visualization.

In *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid employs an intermittent smattering of references to the animal kingdom. In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid uses simile to describe Daru’s drug-induced symptoms: “by midday spasms of pain rip down my vertebrae, arching my body like a poisoned rat’s...my ecstasy’s aftermath” (Hamid, *Moth* 94). On a subsequent occasion, after having been violently attacked in retribution for selling drugs to a minor, Daru is reduced even further. At first human, then a complex mammal (rat), he descends yet lower on Haeckel’s “Pedigree of Man” (see diagram p.16) devolving finally into a undeveloped insect. While recovering in the hospital, he senses, “My cocoon is too tight. Uncontained by my broken body, blood and wet flesh combine with cloth, bonding me to my bandages. Wrapped inside my painkillers and the shell of my scars and bruises like a slow-growing larva, I wait” (Hamid, *Moth* 213).

These two passages isolate Daru’s victimization through an animal body. The receipt of

violence attends the diminished stature of rats and larva which are generally regarded as inferior by humans. As parasitic vermin, they are not only judged as subordinate to man, but also to their specie counterparts; the loyal dog being more highly respected than the rat or the industrious bee accorded more value than a mosquito larvae.



In addition to this inference, both invasive analogous organisms are directionally acted upon.

Through Daru, they are passively framed as having succumbed to the superior control of

narcotics. Notwithstanding that the former was instigated as a means to alleviate emotional pain and the latter was to diminish the physical, both circumstances feature the animal body as subject to, if not punished by, external substance. In the Foucauldian manner, the rat's body which figured Daru's body was rendered "docile" by a dominant power, but for the purpose of extermination, it rendered them noticeably "[in]capable" rather than "capable" (Foucault, *Discipline* 1637). Figured helplessly, Daru's agency is foreclosed offering little opportunity for future empowerment.

Hamid does not directly indicate the species of larva Daru parodies as he recuperates (though one might be quick to assume a moth species because of the novel's title). He does nonetheless refer back to larva just eighteen pages afterward giving his readers a possible inkling. While anticipating the arrival of the monsoon season, Daru reflects that "this year I see it as a time of festering, not rebirth...And the larva already wriggling in dark pools of water will soon erupt into swarms of mosquitoes" (Hamid, *Moth* 231). It uniquely suits Daru's character development as an illegal drug-user turned dealer that the mosquito rather than the moth figures the allusion. Because the mosquito is an iconic carrier of disease through its hypodermic proboscis, it complements Daru's newfound professional posture as a penetrating and defiling "pestilence."

Hamid's mosquito trope is extended further in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. He contextualizes the admonition to "Avoid Idealists" through species adaptation and competition. The protagonist adopts the necessary survival skills to gain ground among other competitive species and biotic factors (*How* 55). He describes the "malcontented, and ambitious" students in collective terms stating, "There they find an amenable environment" (Hamid, *How* 58). This naturalist undertone is reiterated two paragraphs later when Hamid juxtaposes the "Mosquitoes

[which] are rampant, having entered through the unrepaired mesh that now only partially covers the windows” (Hamid, *How* 58, 59). Both the students and the mosquitoes alight upon their new biomes through defective mechanisms which were preceded by inhospitable conditions. Yet, as the analogy holds, its actors are accursed. Hamid’s portrait of safety-seeking mosquitoes is followed by violence: “You slap one feasting on your forearm” (Hamid, *How* 59). Hamid implies a limit to human social adaptability because of its attachment to more powerful ideological hierarchies. There appears to be certain classifications of *organisms* that will neither penetrate nor belong to more advanced societies and therefore, should be restrained from intermingling.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, by way of simulating a self-help book, emphasizes the power of the individual. Like any self-help book, it denotes that assistance from others is largely unnecessary. Correspondingly, Hamid makes his protagonist’s loneliness and isolation visible throughout the novel and at odds with the goals the protagonist attempts. In the case of the analogy drawn between the “Asian” student and the flying pest, the protagonist’s newly acquired gang protection on campus ensures that he is “not an *isolated* and impoverished individual, weak prey for the societally strong, punishable with a slap” (Hamid, *How* 61, emphasis added). In order not to compromise his financial ends, the struggling student must face the limitations his position as an outlier requires. Empowerment, at least for a time, is secured by group attachment. In this plot development, Hamid confirms the rigidity of class structure and reveals that legal nonconformity in route to civil security is often mandatory. Foucault observes a similar tendency in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*:

In the classical period, there opened up in the confines or interstices of society the confused, tolerant, and dangerous domain of the ‘outlaw’ or at least of that which eluded the direct hold of power: an uncertain space that was for criminality a training ground and

a region of refuge; there poverty, unemployment, pursued innocence, cunning, and the struggle against the powerful, the refusal of obligations and laws, and organized crime all came together as chance and fortune would dictate (1641).

With limited options available for “direct hold of power,” Hamid’s aspiring businessman seeks an indirect “hold” through his association with “organized crime” (Foucault, *Discipline* 1641). Mosquitoes seeking “refuge” through the torn “mesh” are the “outlaws” who assault the students’ flesh (Foucault, *Discipline* 1641, Hamid, *How* 58, 60). They become symbolic for the university students whose “neighborly cheating” in order to gain college entrance and secure status in an act of dissent. The mosquitoes and the students illegitimately and collectively penetrate the asylum of weaker Others who cannot repel them.

As Hamid engages imbalances of power between striving Others, he does so through complex forms of speciesism. His competitive characterizations and juxtapositions of lowly mosquitoes challenge “human exceptionalism, the notion that we as a species are utterly or essentially different from all other life on the planet” (Gambler 3). Of note however, is that Hamid bypasses any obligation to characterize or juxtapose the Westerner in this way.

“Weak prey” in dread of dominant predators is a hyperbolic metaphor which Hamid employs heavy-handedly in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, *How* 61). In another etymological collusion of law and science, the Middle English origin of the word “prey” denotes “plunder taken in war” (prey). Mutual suspicion alternates between Changez and his American (presumably military) interlocutor. Hamid heightens the fomenting intimidation each feel toward the other and exploits the stereotypical threat that the Western/Eastern Other poses. He does this by linking America’s “War on Terror” to vignettes of startled animal behavior while under the predator’s gaze. Changez remains hypervigilant toward his American listener, subverting and

mocking America's political claim to end terrorism. He offers a counter-narrative which situates the wary Pakistani as the "peacekeeping force." For example, while seated in the heart of the city following a blackout (understood as thwarting accurate perception), Changez taunts upon the return of the lights saying, "Ah, they are back! Thank goodness. It was nothing more than a momentary disruption. And you – to jump as though you were a mouse suddenly under the shadow of a hawk" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 60-61)! Here Changez overturns which "animal" – the Pakistani or the American —has the dominant position and superior vision. Hamid's choice of the word "hawk" brings to mind species similarity, where the hawk and the American eagle share excellent vision and similar dispositions as "birds of prey." However, Changez reverses the dominant actor in the zoological relationship. The American assailant, now reduced to a mouse, not only lacks a hawk's vision and stealth, but becomes fearful prey. This comparison gestures toward the political disparities brought about by American military deployment in Pakistan and foresees its inversion.

In this scene Changez appears to relish the emotional retribution visited upon the vulnerable soldier. However, Changez displays a hypocritical lust for intimidation even though his words commend peace. He asserts his supremacy while seated in Lahore's market as he condemns America's stance in the *marketplace*. He informs the soldier, "As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 168). As readily observed in this example, I propose that Hamid's narratives shed far more light on difference than they do on similarity, frustrating readers' authentic opportunities for "*shared pain*" and the unification it can afford (Hamid, *Reluctant* 168, emphasis added).

Hamid's recurring theme of destructive filth radiates through casting Changez and the

American as carnivorous consumers. Changez recommends the “purity of the fare” offered in “Old Anarkali,” while ridiculing the Western diet, specifically those elements devoid of natural meat (Hamid, *Reluctant* 101). Coincidentally, by categorizing his two protagonists as predator and prey, Hamid suggests a meta-division. Not only are customary diets specific to certain cultures which arise according to hospitable ecosystems, but an animal’s diet earmarks its zoological species. In this way, Changez deepens the dissociation between him and the American by underscoring the varied *natural* dietary inclusions and exclusions of these two predators. They appear phylogenetically divergent.

Ironically, Changez claims to be bridging cultural division while recommending dietary improvements. Nevertheless, his cold and measured tone causes readers to distrust the “purity” of Changez’ intent toward the stranger even while he vouchsafes the purity of the meat. Apposing the threat of deception with potentially tainted meat depresses the term “purity” as it highlights the ambiguous aspects of human character and motive. Changez’s final admission that the meat is not pure further convolutes this ambiguity. He states,

Not for us the vegetarian recipes one finds across the border to the east, nor the sanitized, sterilized, processed meats so common in your homeland! Here we are not squeamish when it comes to facing the consequences of our desire (Hamid, *Reluctant* 101).

“Consequences” contrasted with “sanitized” and “sterilized” confirms that the meat served in Old Anarkali does in fact carry a health risk because it has been left to natural decaying processes (Hamid, *Reluctant* 101). Despite this, Changez makes clear he prefers the natural, notably achieved through incorporation rather than avoidance of microbial risk. Dorion Sagan states that “Organisms evolve not just by competition and ‘survival of the fittest,’ but also by cooperation and symbiosis...all nucleated cells represent the successful fusion of two or more

bacterial lineages” (72). In short, Changez supports dietary contamination as beneficial. John Gamber calls incorporations like this “positive pollutions” arguing that they “represent a multitude of transgressive mixings that might be historically coded as negative, but which are demonstrated to be anything but” (7).

Because Hamid’s negatively saturated tropes are plentiful, they give the critic ample opportunity to challenge or confirm whether or not “transgressive mixings” can work toward positive multicultural relations. For Changez, discourse regarding interspecies ingestion gestures toward intraspecies relevance. Like partaking the contaminated meat, shall the American and the Pakistani continue to imbibe the *taint* of each other’s ideology through sustained conversation?

Fear remains palpable throughout the novel’s monologue as a scurrilous constituent of the predator/prey relationship. Changez, in a state of anticipation, informs that “Lahori cuisine...a purely carnivorous feast” is comprised of “*predatory delicacies*” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 101). After both men have been served their meal, Changez intensifies the intimacy of perceived fear by stating,

The time has now come for us to dirty our hands. There is great satisfaction to be had in touching one’s prey; indeed, millennia of evolution ensure that manipulating our meals with our skin heightens our sense of taste—and our appetite, for that matter (Hamid, *Reluctant* 123).

This allusion to mortal combat evinces humanity’s historical and increasing “appetite” for bloodshed (Hamid, *Reluctant* 123). Changez’s address to a defensive American in this section evokes the mechanization of war and isolates American technological prowess which has eliminated the need for hand-to-hand combat. Changez’s directive to “dirty our hands” is an intimidating one and seeks to level the asymmetrical global battlefield.

Narrating intimidation suits Hamid's personal affinity for the "word *mongrel* because it generally has the connotation of being bad and inferior to a purebred dog" (Singh 149, emphasis added). Hamid, like his character Changez, has been forced to negotiate Western xenophobic attitudes that his cultural hybridity often creates. Exhibiting traits on both sides of the cultural miscegenation, Hamid reflects through Changez the propensity to internalize divided loyalties and deal with the subsequent inevitable rejection in aggressive ways. It is reasonable then that Hamid dispatches a mongrel's measured growl to incite fear at the dining table in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. However, his guttural vocalization combined with overall passivity reveal the conflict: "Changez is a mongrel who resists his mongrelization" (Singh 156). Like the novel itself which carries the threat of harm without any real violence being narrated, Changez embodies more threatening bark than piercing bite.

Taxonomy, namely the classification of organisms according to the similarities present in their anatomies, comes to light during Changez's admonition to the stranger. Hamid suggests functional neurological differences between the two as evidenced in mammalian and reptilian regions of the human brain. Changez registers "great satisfaction...in touching one's prey," a complex emotion emanating from the limbic system (Hamid, *Reluctant* 123). This response follows the alarming "fight or flight" activation arising from the reptilian brainstem and cerebellum engaged during the hunt. His literal articulation highlights the neocortex where linguistic abstraction occurs, thus enabling speech patterns and species to species communication. With multiple brain systems in play, it follows that Changez urges the American to *contemplate* the level of engagement of his own faculties:

Let us, like the bats, exercise our other senses, since our eyes are of diminishing utility.

Your ears must be exhausted; the time has come to employ your *tongue* – for taste, if

nothing more, although I hope you can be persuaded to *speak* (Hamid, *Reluctant* 76, emphasis added)!

Though there are many effects which Hamid's choice of the dramatic monologue produces for this novel, one which arises from an evolutionary perspective is Changez's condescension. The muted American performs at a presumably lower taxonomic stage. This allows the Pakistani to jeer at the American's inferior adaptabilities since complex speech is generally indicative of advanced brain systems and more "progressive" forms of life. Changez, as a spokesman for the people of Lahore, sarcastically resists the notion that Eastern populations are inherently, genetically, and linguistically subpar.

Punctuating the dichotomy between stereotypical advanced West and primitive East conceptions, Hamid crafts a *March of Progress* reversal. The bodily position of mobilized Easterners and Westerners signal their taxonomic standing. Where *Homo sapiens* over time eschewed travel on all fours for an upright bipedal existence, Changez counters Western conceptions of linear progress by informing that in Lahore, "it is the man with four wheels who is forced to dismount and become part of the crowd" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 32). Through Changez as well as the protagonists in *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid acknowledges a difference in the way the two cultures figure advancement and prominence. The successful Westerner treads closer to isolation (living as a solitary animal) while the prosperous Easterner strides closer to intimacy and inclusion (living as a social one). Dishearteningly, Hamid's novels cast these categories as rigid as a taxonomic genus thus communicating that they are unable to be contravened by his characters.

In Chapter Two I have drawn attention to the literary predisposition for framing multicultural relationships through zoological analogies. Given Hamid's extensive use of this

device, his presumed resistance to social, class, and political oppression on ethnic grounds is tenuous. The species distinctions he fashions underscore Eastern/Western difference rather than similarity and therefore counteract visions of equality and harmony. Hybridity rarely accomplishes a functional advantage for his Pakistani characters and competition through incorporation brings about no lasting political leverage. Predator and prey classifications between Westerner and Easterner do little more than classify and divide because Hamid neglects to narrate the empowerment either designation could contain. These novels, though not received by critics as such, operate as contemporary Pakistani cultural tragedies. They describe a population “beyond reclamation” and inescapably menaced (Gamber).

CHAPTER THREE: ECOLOGICAL CURRENTS OF CORRUPTION

Adding depth to his readers' perception of difference, Hamid envelops his *zoological* characters in corrupted ecological habitats and atmospheres. His protagonists smell decaying flesh, choke on the polluted air, drink and bathe in contaminated water, wither in unbearable heat, and scramble for sustenance. Not only are the people he presents desecrated, but so are the environments on which their life depends. Portraits of Pakistan emerge as consistently filth-ridden. Hamid overloads his characters' senses with these abiotic factors to the extent they rob them of vitality. He dubiously suggests they lack the force to counter these overwhelming ecological currents.

Hamid's images often pair the zoological and meteorological as an instrument of difference. Daru, in *Moth Smoke*, reflects, "I'm filthy and it's begun to get hot again. The wind blowing through the branches of the banyan tree carries the smell of parched land that has waited too long for too small a drink" (Hamid 109). Composed within this metaphor are Hamid's typical devices. "Filth[y]" begins the scene of depletion describing the individual and is succeeded by an unpleasant scent anchored to a particular volatile environment (Hamid, *Moth* 109). Where Hamid had featured decreased taxonomic station as discussed in chapter two, he now convolutes biotic exceptionalism with abiotic significance. This queries whether or not the organism is superior to the conditions in which it thrives. To illustrate, one might expect a filthy body to register its own odor first, but instead, Daru fixates outward as the wind carries the scent of the arid land toward him. Daru effectively decentralizes himself. Through the personification of the banyan tree, the craving of both Daru and the tree are understood. Their thirst signals dwindling life function and for Daru, it forecasts economic and spiritual desiccation as well. Not only does Hamid describe the wait for water as "too long," but should the "drink" come, it will be insufficient (Hamid,

Moth 109).

Munazza Yaqoob claimed that *Moth Smoke* “presents a society where a division has occurred between man and environment” and that the “People in Lahore do not live their life in alliance with nature” (96, 98). Reiterating this foreboding timbre in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid writes, “The evening sky is orange, heavy with suspended dust from thousands upon thousands of construction sites, fertile soil gouged by shovels, dried by the sun and scattered by the wind” (113). In this instance, human enterprise has compromised the vitality of the land as the wind’s particulates bear witness. Restated in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez remarks, “There, sir, do you smell it: the aroma of dust on that warm breeze?” (Hamid 156). These atmospheric descriptions are consistent with Hamid’s emphasis on pollution where Hamid is not merely acquainting his reader with Pakistani ecologies and landscapes, but is representing them within a geopolitical context. In fact, in Lahore, “As a result of air pollution [‘which is 6.4 times higher than World Health Organization guidelines’] about 1,250 people die each year ...and a large number are suffering from serious health hazards especially diseases related to eyes, respiratory system, heart, skin, and brain” (Yaqoob 93, 95). These “health hazards” are to a great extent symptomatic of a Pakistan struggling to compete within the global financial market (Yaqoob 95). Neoliberalist fervor has precipitated uncontrolled urbanization, driving the population out of rural areas to make their living. The “gouged” soil and the dusty atmosphere are just a few of the ecological signatures ultimately shaped by Western capitalism (Hamid, *How* 113). Further, because civic infrastructure is weakly subsidized, financial policy imprints on the corporeal as well. Respiration, skin absorption, and surface abrasion reveal Pakistani incorporations of global financial political practice. Hamid’s invention of Ozi, Daru’s wealthy best friend in *Moth Smoke*, delivers the autocratic perspective: “Aurangzeb, more than

most men, sought to master his environment” (Hamid 114). Through dogged pursuit of corporate success, Ozi was able to keep the negative bodily ramifications of applied neoliberalism at bay.

Such mastery is elusive however; the supremacy and unpredictability of climatic forces surface at different locations globally and Hamid’s texts reflect this. Humankind cannot repel the monsoons, floods, drought, and dust storms Hamid narrates. Oppositely, Hamid shows the repercussions of human violence (attempted mastery) through its effects on the breathable atmosphere, particularly following 9/11 and how oblivious humans can be to those effects. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez admits “It is remarkable indeed how we human beings are capable of delighting in the mating call of a flower while we are surrounded by the charred carcasses of our fellow animals” (Hamid 78). Here, Hamid juxtaposes the presumably natural (flower) with the presumably unnatural (mass murder). Appropriating the sense of smell at Ground Zero, where one inhaled a mélange of perfumed flowers and putrid flesh simultaneously, Changez exposes the irresistibility of the natural. He also implies that human awareness on environmental and social matters is selective. Damningly, it favors the pleasant and denies the call to mutual responsibility over what is not.

By framing the tragic aftermath this way, Hamid calls into the question the instigating factors and pre-existing human conditions which compounded to incite terrorist action. He effectively distances his Pakistani nationality from its association with terror. Indeed, as Claudia Perner writes, “Pakistan is often perceived as merely one of those far-away places that serve as breeding grounds for extremism and violence” (23). By appealing to the numbed acuteness of Americans’ physical senses and their preference for the aesthetic, Hamid painfully probes the deadening of the humane sensibilities among the Western citizenry toward the non-Westerner which followed.

Moral culpability is addressed again through climatic environments in *Moth Smoke*. Daru reminisces fondly about the “andhi,” a strong dust storm preceding the monsoon season, because when he was a child it had “washed away the heat, leaving everything cool and clean” (Hamid, *Moth* 107). Interestingly, readers notice that age, innocence and cleanliness are united in this nostalgia. Therefore, when the andhi comes and “dies unexpectedly, without much rain” in Daru’s adulthood, Hamid foists the growing blight of guilt and its predication on time. Not only has Daru aged, indicating his diminished innocence, but correspondingly so has the andhi, weakening the prospect of renewal. Hamid personifies the untimely death of this natural phenomenon, conceivably ushered in by human-aggravated climate change. The promise of rebirth is denied as a result of continued malpractice, thus for Daru and the andhi, fatalism reigns.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia features other cyclical tamperings which evoke ecological entropy. *You*, the protagonist, repulsively observe the village’s watering habits. The “increasingly fickle atmospheric currents” provide the reservoir for “The people of your village [to] relieve themselves downstream of where they wash their clothes, a place in turn downstream of where they drink” (Hamid 6). Not only does Hamid include the interdependence of humankind on its natural environment, but acknowledges that nature’s sustainability is limited given human interference. In addition to the river currents, the “atmospheric currents” are deemed “increasingly fickle,” because of human defilement (Hamid, *How* 6). Perpetually then, the interconnection of tainted water currents which flow from one village to another is inevitable and precarious: “Farther upstream the village before yours does the same” (Hamid, *How* 6). Hamid appears to claim that as long as humans depend on non-human substances and processes, they will inevitably influence and be influenced by them. In the matter of Pakistani

representation, Hamid's blurring of defiled water with the ones who consume it is a particularly repugnant analogy for the Western reader.

However, Hamid's accounting of potable water in Pakistan in recent times appears to be a substantiated one. For example, Karachi, the last city which the Indus River passes before emptying into the Arabian Sea,

receives water which has been used for municipal, agricultural, and industrial purposes, often several times. None of the cities...along the Indus River treat the water before discharging it into the river...The contamination ranges from highly saline irrigation return water laced with agricultural chemicals including pesticides to industrial pollutants and human and livestock excreta (Rahman, Lee, Khan 343).

Further exacerbating Karachi's supply is the fact that its residents have only "20 liters" of water available "per person daily" (Rahman, Lee, and Khan 344). Put in global perspective, this contrasts with an average of 340 liters of usage by the American citizen (Perlman). Even though the water cycle proceeds according to the known laws of nature, it too is not exempt from human intervention and partisan manipulation. If man has "master[ed] his environment," as Hamid investigates in his fiction, Pakistan has done so poorly (Hamid, *Moth* 114).

What is offered as "fickle" in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* turns sinister in *Moth Smoke*. Environments are presented with hostile overtones. The lack of natural or manmade cooling makes compatibility between humans and their food source dubious: "the food in [Daru's] house spoils overnight, consumed by colored molds that spread like cancer. Overripe fruit bursts open, unhealthy flesh oozing out of ruptures in sickly skin" (Hamid, *Moth* 231). On one level, this occurrence is completely organic, reflecting the cycle of all living things. Yet, because Hamid has chosen to aggregate words such as "spoils," "cancer," "bursts," "flesh,"

“ruptures,” and “sickly,” the reader must re-inscribe the event as exceptionally unnatural or at least avoidable and highly undesirable (Hamid, *Moth* 231). Due to the inevitable incorporation of this corrupted nourishment, Daru and those like him, are necessarily jeopardized and weakened.

This passage, as with many others Hamid authors, works as a visual aperture in conjunction with his character’s internal state. These aforementioned descriptors could just as easily define Daru’s physical and psychological condition at the end of the novel. Significantly, the profusion of “sickly” images manifest when Daru’s thoughts are *consumed* by making a profit (Hamid, *Moth* 231). He has lost himself to a network of avarice. Yaqoob argues that “Darashikoh’s fall is not the morally corrupt and economically unbalanced society. In reality as the hovering images of heat, dust, smoke and stench suggest, it is the devastating effect of polluted environment” (93). However, in spite of my emphasis on “polluted environment[s]” thus far, Yaqoob’s polarized thinking misses the suffusion between “polluted” societal character and its interaction with the environment along a network of inter-receptive societal spheres (93). Bidirectional flows are traceable and inescapable. The primary relevance of Hamid’s polluted landscapes, I assert, lies beyond the quantifiable health of the environment or human intervention. Instead, it is the consistency of Hamid’s contemptible analogies as they figure in the reader’s mind and to what lasting imprint. In what direction do these images point his audience with regard to ethnic marginalization or entrenched national affiliation? This issue is one to which I will justifiably return.

Climatic influence on human behavior is given a juridical look when Daru editorializes that “the rains have brought flooding to the Punjab and a crime wave to Lahore” (Hamid, *Moth* 225). Specifically noting that “heists and holdups and the odd bombing,” accompany these personified rains, readers may note Hamid’s inferential linkage between chaotic weather and

outbreaks of mayhem, but more likely, the seasonal rains read metaphorically. Just as the dried-up andhi threatened biological and ecological renewal, so does flooding threaten life's continuance. Both weather extremes have the potential to lead to a devastating end. Similar to extremes in human behavior, they often lead to excessive lack or overabundance. Interestingly, public discourse which usually discriminates between those who have from those who have not, Hamid cleverly transforms into a controversy over quantity. Water is beneficial, but *how much* water is efficacious and sustainable? The pertinent question of *how much* readily adapts to his implied narrative criticism of geopolitics and socio-economics in the era of globalization as well.

Hamid expands his eye toward competition as ciphered earlier in the predator/prey relationship when he writes that the crime waves which followed the flooding “compete with aerial food drops and humanitarian heroics for headline space on the front pages of the newspapers” (*Moth Smoke*, 225). Certainly, these crime waves and the food drops were not sentient competitors, but rather the human organisms orchestrating them were. Source scarcity then, triggers the animalistic behavior one might observe in a pack species. The crime and media “feeding” frenzies, though disparate in form, indicate a unified instinct borne out of a gnawing sense of lack. The progressive *nature* from which capitalism and globalization spring, Hamid shows to be nothing more than reconstituted animalistic competition – a squabble over territory and resources.

Curiously, however, these differences in form indicate radical divisions and classifications of the global population. During Lahore's flood, the Pakistani population seized upon local material goods, while the humanitarian aid presumably gifted by Western populations seized upon international publicity. This modest detail confesses a drastic difference in territorial scope. It defies the suggestion of intraspecific competition as seen when the same species

compete for the same resource. Instead, Hamid subtly affirms species dissimilarity once again, predicated upon varying limits of environmental supply. Accordingly, the two crowds (the media and the mob/the global North and the global South) possess instinctually different palates. Hamid drafts characters which exhibit an almost inherent division contingent upon their respective ecospheres. This tact cunningly evades direct cultural offense by couching the partition within metaphor.

Ending this chapter is a final note on human competition tied to ecology through *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez accentuates human difference via territorial adaptability and climate preference. Necessarily a move to mark his territory and his comfort within it, Changez basks in warmth while stating, “The sun, although hot, has such a soothing effect. Or should I say, it has such a soothing effect on us, for you sir, continue to appear ill at ease” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 31). Akin to the distress an endothermic creature would have in a sweltering environment, Changez metaphorically boasts in his exothermic plasticity and suitability within his Lahore habitat. He mocks the fact that his listener cannot acclimatize. Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir, who claimed that “essence does not precede existence,” Changez’s pronouncements conclude the opposite; there is an American archetype, an “Eternal [American]” who is “born” and in spite of nurture “rather becomes” unequivocally what his or her American nature has dictated (Simone de Beauvoir 1403, de Beauvoir 1407). Of importance here is Changez’s concession that disparate national and ethnic characterizations cannot be altered, which complicates the search for transnational common ground. Further highlighting his regional domination, Changez identifies with his larger cast of hawks by his use of the plural pronoun “us,” which contrasts with the solitary American “sir” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 31). Changez subverts

American geopolitical ubiquity and takes advantage of the soldier's isolation. Through this mysterious character, Hamid seems to confirm three well-worn idioms: strength in numbers can be countered by dividing and conquering, but only if accorded a home field advantage.

In sum, the corrupted currents that run through Hamid's literature are not only ecologically based in reality, but formulate a divisive metaphor. Because of its position as a densely populated Eastern country struggling for economic ascendancy in the global market, Pakistan's commitment to national production has neglected the basic needs of its citizens. Access to food and clean water has been dismissed as a priority and Pakistan's intense climate has exacerbated the critical issue. Narrating this credible reality without resorting to inciting Western pity or disgust is understandably challenging. However, most of Hamid's fictive characters perform passively and are habitual recipients of polluted air, water, and food. Disturbingly, Hamid communicates an anemic Pakistani existence. Foregoing active engagement with these hostile environments and compromised standards of living point negatively to Pakistani acquiescence. Hamid entrenches Pakistani marginalization by attending to declining ecological surroundings. Nevertheless, while Hamid does not lift his characters from their polluted environments, he does suggest in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that Westerners would not fare much better. The current hierarchy which favors the West is only effective to the extent the global participants are suited to the current sociopolitical and geopolitical climate. Change the orientation to favor an alternate climate with a different ecology as Hamid has done, and the Westerner reveals himself to be perilously unfit.

CHAPTER FOUR: COLLAPSIBLE CONTAINERS AND PENETRABLE BARRIERS

As demonstrated in chapter 3, zoological, ecological, and meteorological images are readily visualized. Readers instantly register depictions of a bat, cocoon, mouse, hawk, charred carcass, wind, flood, or spoiled fruit within Hamid's texts. This same pattern protrudes as frequently, though perhaps less dramatically obvious, through Hamid's implementation of both the microbiological and microscopic. As this thesis examines the interpellation of difference, recognition becomes key — a recognition dependent upon sharp and discriminating visualization.

Laura Otis asserts that “To create meaning from what it sees, indeed, for there to be vision at all, the eye needs borders, differences that distinguish one object from another” (1). Unquestionably, the presence of light generates the literal sense of sight. Taken together with the exchange between Changez and the American in the Old Anarkali marketplace, the self-preserving panic the American experiences following the blackout is justified. More significantly, when either character enters a state in which there are no perceptible borders, whether between light and dark, living and non-living, or between Self and Other, the American and the Pakistani have theoretically disappeared. Otis continues her explanation of meaning in a Saussurean fashion by noting “When defining something, we typically compare it to something similar and then, like the eye, focus on the way it differs from the concepts most closely related to it” (1). The compatibility between visual perception and linguistics is pertinent if in fact “language does not consist of positive terms with meaning in and of themselves, but instead is a system of relations in which each term is defined by its difference from other terms” (Claude-Levi Strauss 1416). Differentiation stemming from comparison adds monumental strength to the metaphor since it confesses a measure of likeness even within difference. For example, when

Hamid writes, “Lying on your side with one ear on the packed earth, from your erect-worm’s-height perspective you watch your mother...” he admits the worm-likeness of his character in position and station. The “worm’s-height-perspective” communicates more than simply the protagonist is lying on the ground as worms lie on the ground, but that he, a destitute child, is economically and socially lowborn (Hamid, *How* 8). Since this passage is preceded by haughty seminarians who “walk tall, with chests out,” the demeaning conclusion is sealed, especially in light of the fact that the child and the worm can be trampled underfoot (Hamid, *How* 8). These comparisons often through metaphor require that Hamid chooses his descriptors carefully with attention to its imaginative boundary, lest they become unwieldy and unduly harmful.

Cell theory proposes a construct allowing socio-political *boundedness* to be discovered in Hamid’s texts. Tracing the connotative movement of the terms used in cell theory, such as “membrane” and “wall,” becomes especially relevant in gaining deeper understanding of his work. Hamid’s appropriation of scientific imagery via metaphor in his literature invites *new historicism* into the critical conversation. By applying historical scientific context to Hamid’s analogies through etymological consistency and shifts, critics may unlock a counter-argument to Jacques Derrida’s claim. The simultaneous unfolding of science and language dialectical practice resists the notion that “A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible” (Derrida 1830). At the very least, slices of distinct texts taken within wider historical and cultural fields of view yield a measure of perceptibility.

“Cell theory relies on the ability to perceive borders, for to see a structure under a microscope means to visualize a membrane that distinguishes it from its surroundings” Otis claims (4). Revolutionarily, Robert Hooke’s microscopy in the 1660’s ushered in a new revelation – “plant tissue consisted of individual subunits,” or cells (Otis 13). Through the

technological emergence of microscopy which granted Hooke the clarity needed to view “thin slices of cork,” he wrote the following in *Micrographia*:

I could exceedingly plainly perceive it to be all perforated and porous, much like a Honey-comb, but that the pores of it were not regular...these pores, or cells,...were indeed the first microscopical pores I ever saw, and perhaps, that were ever seen, for I had not met with any Writer or Person, that had made any mention of them before this (Robert Hooke).

As a first observer, Hooke established the nomenclature of “cell.” To him “the boxlike cells of cork reminded him of the cells of a monastery,” as well as sections of honeycomb, both of which share containment as their purpose (Caldwell). It is also worth mentioning then that both the monastery and the honeycomb comprise *pure* and *wholesome* substances and/or organisms which spiritually and physically *benefit* society at large.

Pervasive societal factors influence not only the language usage of Hooke’s day, but Hamid’s as well. The fact that Hooke paired the structure of cork cells to sacred spaces are a fascinating indication of the persistent commingling of religion within the cultural imaginary of the day. Anachronistically, the pairing reveals yet again the fastening of religion to science. As mentioned in chapter one, William Blackstone insisted that “This law of nature...[is] dictated by God himself,” penned over one hundred years after Hooke’s observations (Blackstone).

Yet, as the culture changes over time, some denotations remain and others lose their impact. Most readers today would not immediately imagine the cell as a monastery, but rather as a barred prison room. By way of example, *Moth Smoke*’s opening sentence in chapter one reads, “My cell is full of shadows” (Hamid 3). As the reader gathers context from the subsequent description of “rusted bars” and “concrete floor,” it becomes apparent that Hamid confirms the

reader's assumption of incarceration (Hamid 3). To ground this inclination etymologically, a leading entry to define "cell" reads, "A small room in which a prisoner is locked up" and is followed by "or in which a monk or nun sleeps" (cell). The denotative shift from religious cell to condemned cell is not happenstance. The constraints of national "laws" whereby one could further scientific discovery cohabitate with scientists' burning drive to uncover such politically universal natural "laws." This symbiotic relationship between the judicial and the scientific makes the facile power of both mutually reinforcing. Added to this earlier description of Daru in his prison cell, the last sentence of his opening paragraph reads, "People like stains dissolve into the grayness" (Hamid, *Moth* 3). Synthesizing this last sentence with his opening line, readers infer the dual meaning on elemental grounds. "Shadows" and "stains" evidence negative conversions due to superior forces (Hamid, *Moth* 3). They are products of superimposing interchanges and contacts in the physical world. As implemented by Hamid on the sociopolitical plane, "shadows" and "stains" in judicial spaces saturate *guilty* individuals like Daru, dissolving them into nothingness (Hamid, *Moth* 3).

In order to connect our current ideas of a bordered self, one that is principally resistant to being dissolved as a whole organism, the work of nineteenth century scientists proves informative. Theodor Schwann pursued unification among living things according to appreciable scientific law. He recognized "that animal tissues [also] consisted of cells" and "hoped to demonstrate that common structural and developmental principles" *governed* both plant and animal (Otis 13). Science now firmly establishes that an animal cell membrane exists, though it is significantly less pronounced and rigid than a plant's cell wall. Yet, at the time, Schwann "persisted" against sufficient evidence that this was the case. His search for encapsulating animal cell structures continued "because he *wanted* to see these boundaries" (Otis 13, emphasis added).

Fueled primarily by his philosophical orientation, Schwann's adherence to the idea that "individual cells [are constructed and behave] as individual people" is a founding contribution to microbiology and one which ironically still forwards weighty philosophical and sociopolitical consequence (Otis 15).

If cellular features are to enlighten study regarding the construction, containment, processes, and spatial dominion of an individual, then transporting those cells among a society of other cells and among other environments is essential if distinctions are to be made. Otis notes that "Anatomically, a membrane defines a cell's form; in essence, microscopists knew that cells existed because they could see their boundaries" (23). Necessarily then, if one agrees with the synonymy between self and cell, then individuals exist because their boundaries are also seen. This principle poses a two-fold question within Hamid's work: 1. To what extent does Hamid draw visible boundaries among his heterogenous, homogenous, or hybridized characters? and 2. In what instances does he blur either intentionally or accidentally those "essential" discernable barriers?

The pathologist Rudolf Virchow championed the idea of a bounded self in the mid nineteenth century and understood that the self and its constituent identity perpetuates by defense at its outermost surface. The rhetorical fraternity between selves and cells is politically gravid.

Regarding protectable barriers, Otis relates,

The membrane defined the cells not only because it made them visible and set their limits in a physical sense but also because it let them regulate their own inputs and outputs. While these semipermeable membranes never entirely sealed cells off from their environments, they allowed cells to resist them and to 'select' the molecules that could enter (23).

Notice the active voice which implies human cognizance and operant will through the terms “regulate,” “resist,” and “select” (Otis 23). This dated, but still prevalent scientific cellular articulation suggests agelessness since the ideas of territorial control and conquest markedly predate Hooke or Schwann’s biological discoveries. Additionally, contemporary multicultural theories inevitably refer back to it. For example, leading cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa challenged the polarized dichotomies within bordered thought by claiming that:

living in the borderlands creates a third space between cultures and social systems. The word ‘borderlands’ denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways (6).

Anzaldúa espouses a reciprocal understanding of the activities which occur in the “borderlands,” much akin to the activities seen in permeable cell membranes (6). Although her work mainly engages Chicana, feminist, and queer theories, her proposition of a mediate space is indeed relevant to Hamid’s fraught negotiation of difference. Ideally, for her, there would be no “shadow” or “stain” as witnessed in *Moth Smoke*’s opening pages, nor nameless characters in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, nor ambiguous places in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Instead, she would concretize a new, organic, claimable, yet adaptable zone. As I examine spaces of transaction, I do so with an eye toward retraction, contact, obstruction, permeability, and transformation. Scrutinizing whether Hamid has offered signifiers for membranes which can be seen, penetrated, resistant, or incorporative ultimately discloses the sovereignty and autonomy of his fictive individuals.

In all three novels examined here, Hamid summons the concept of containment. Nancy Easterlin notes that “container metaphors pervasively represent phenomenal and emotional

states” (161). In *Moth Smoke*, when Hamid assembles his readers for jury duty, they are introduced to Daru as one under indictment. However, it is clear that his case will not be a straightforward one. The knowledgeable Professor Julius Superb equates Daru’s case to a box. He states,

The accused is bright...an orphan. Extremely sympathetic. So the box is wide. The crime is violent and despicable: the needless killing of a boy. So the box is long. And the defense invokes a grand conspiracy, corruption, which is particularly resonant these days. So the box is tall (Hamid, *Moth* 38).

Working as a term, “box” is so titled by its three dimensions, which Superb quantifies, but its capacity and purpose as a container looms undetected in Superb’s description – similar to the “pores” in Hooke’s cork cells. Therefore, the criminal *case*, like the box, and arguably like the cell, carries an expectation of measurability and enclosure. Hamid disrupts the rigidity of this premise at the end of the novel when he writes, “And the accused, Darashikoh Shezad, coils without moving, explosive, motionless, barely contained” (Hamid, *Moth* 256). At this point in the plot development, all main characters in the narrative are blantly implicated in the manslaughter to some degree. Because of this, the sides of Superb’s “box” disintegrate and cannot hold the case itself, its witnesses, its circumstances, nor the one indicted (Hamid, *Moth* 38). The adjectives “explosive” and “barely contained” not only anticipate Daru’s retaliatory violence as one unfairly charged, but also confront the limited capacity of facts to contain all the *matter* necessary to determine justice as well as the accused’s limited capacity to contain his rage (Hamid, *Moth* 256). As described earlier regarding Schwann, Hamid shows society’s predilection for containment, where individuals, cells, and ideas are neatly ordered and confined.

Not only does this preference emerge in scientific and judicial matters, but also in realms

of the emotion. Wedged into the narrative dialogue between Changez and the American stranger, is a secondary narrative of Changez's romance and obsession with another American, Erica. While the former pair was connected by their mutual mistrust, Hamid differentiates the latter pair by contrasting their "solid" and "brittle" emotional states (*Reluctant* 19, 103). Erica identifies immediately that Changez "give[s] off this strong sense of home...[which] makes [him] feel solid" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 19, 22). Conversely, Changez deliberates whether or not to embrace Erica, because "she seemed too brittle to be touched" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 103). Aside from the obvious predator/prey allusion which characterizes Erica as a "lioness," her gradual consumption by depression inverts her presumably "strong" emotional constitution with Changez's supposedly "weak" one. Hamid gravitates toward portraying containment again, but this time he cultivates one that is blatantly passive in Erica. Changez observes that Erica "was struggling against a current that pulled her within herself, and her smile *contained* the fear that she might slip into her own depths, where she would be *trapped*, unable to breathe" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 86, emphasis added). In this instance, Hamid intimates that enclosure is claustrophobic and detrimental.

Not surprisingly, Hamid foreshadows Erica's despondency through an ecological image: her delight in rock pools. She pens to Changez that the pools "are like little worlds. Perfect, self-contained, transparent," but tellingly, she reveals her subjective deception (Hamid, *Reluctant* 68). For despite the fact that "They look like they're frozen in time...a wave crashes in and they start all over again with new fish left behind" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 68-69). Hamid demonstrates the capriciousness of time and the fragility of what appears to be an independent, "perfect, self-contained" individual (Hamid, *Reluctant* 68). Cellular and ecological microcosms reveal their penetrability by outside forces. Similarly, humans are also subject to their environments. Erica is

not as powerful as Changez had imagined. By way of tragedy, the narrative exposes how blindness to one's vulnerability and attachment to false notions of autonomy leads to destructive ends (Hamid, *Reluctant* 68). Intriguingly, Hamid subverts the perception of American power by characterizing these two alluring Americans as principally fragile. Emblematic of the cell, having a permeable membrane causes susceptibility to damage and death. Changez reflects on the illusion of one's impregnability when he states,

it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us (Hamid, *Reluctant* 173-174).

Hamid's protagonists resolutely counter notions of self-containment and self-determination. Relations of any kind, fraternal, romantic, or political induce permanent transformation.

Hamid's fiction is replete with images which show the violation of boundaries. Often he figures these through ordinary tangible barriers. For example, "your" workshop in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* houses a "funnel with a cotton sieve to remove visible impurities" from the water which "you" will bottle (Hamid, 100). Likewise, the window mesh designed to keep out the mosquitoes in *Moth Smoke* and the windscreen which "your guard shoots through thrice" in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* combine to emphasize man-made layers of boundary protection. Instead of granting generous and hopeful berths across boundaries as one might expect from large sections of his writing and his personal hybridity, Hamid negotiates boundaries far more ambivalently. Occasionally, he reveals them to be limiting, as though a right has been denied: various locked gates of the city were "Entry barriers...common to all industries" (Hamid, *Moth* 70). Most often however, he reveals the simultaneous threat and

protection that accompany them (Hamid, *Moth* 70). Relating his tour of Rhodes, Greece, Changez notes that the Greeks “guarded against the Turks, much like the [military]..., part of a wall against the East that still stands. How strange it was for me to think I grew up on the other side!” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 23). Here Hamid disparages Eastern/Western economic and political division. Yet, further along in the text, he also endorses segregation: “I do not mean to say we are all one...I am not opposed to the building of walls to shield oneself from harm” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 173-174). Whether Changez’s waffling opinion on insularity as a wise or detrimental political practice is a matter Hamid leaves to his reader.

Compromised municipal infrastructure and poverty predominates in Hamid’s fictive Lahore as it does in contemporary Pakistan. Mohammad Qadeer reports that Lahore “has been the capital of Punjab since the Middle Ages...The land settlement after the building of irrigation canals...in the 1920s created a rich class of newly minted landlords” (82). Hamid acknowledges the wealthy elite in the context of modernization, but he tempers this success by diagnosing its short-sightedness and failed implementation over the long term. It seems that “Lahore is itself shaped by global processes...the Lahore of *Moth Smoke* is no longer a fixed location, but a place in progress, whose content is increasingly determined by outside forces” (Anjaria). Likewise externally derived, Hamid informs in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that “our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs” (34). In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, he notices marked deterioration: “Your city’s neglected pipes are cracking” (Hamid 99). His satire on upward financial mobility thwarts idyllic and impenetrable models of contemporary civic engineering. Figuratively, he indicates the accompanying socio-economic tension: “Your city [which] is not laid out as a single-celled organism, with a wealthy nucleus surrounded by an ooze of slums...the poor live near the rich. Your own triangle-shaped community, not atypically is

bounded by all three” (Hamid, *How* 20). The “three” boundaries Hamid identifies are the open sewer, the railroad track, and the narrow alley (Hamid, *How* 20). Here, he drives at more than just permeability, but gaping pipelines and thoroughfares of corrupted flow. Willful inattention by *civic* officials do not prove *civilized*. Further, he insinuates that because of their close physical proximity and potency, the poor have contaminated the rich on multiple fronts.

Contrasting Changez’s agreement with “walls [which] shield oneself from harm” and *your* wariness toward the “ooze of slums” read in the two novels, Hamid presents the contemporary and bordered financial conditions in the Global South (*Reluctant* 174, *How* 20). Qadeer reports that from 1972-1977 in Lahore, “a ring of industries had emerged around the city, pulling in rural migrants and changing the social structure” (82). From 1978 on, it had transformed “into a sprawling and fast-paced metropolis of mercantile ethos” (Qadeer 82). Hamid’s attention to economic ascent through accelerated transformation reverberates again when he writes,

You see your city mutating around you, its zoning and planning restrictions slipping away, deep foundation pits and skeletal building sites occupying land that only a few years ago aerial photography would have shown puffed over with opulent, pastriesque villas...your former brother-in-law, still your deputy, sitting behind you and once again entreating you to take on more debt (*How* 179, 180).

Logically, a “wealthy nucleus” would have signaled a principally *healthy* one – a bounded city capable of defending itself from the interjecting, depleting “ooze” (Hamid, *How* 20). However, Perner observes in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that Changez “struggles to make his peace with the world’s most advanced civilization while his own country, formerly part of a wealthy empire, appears reduced to global irrelevance” (27). Perner implies that agreeing to current modes of

financial ascendancy assumes the attendant short and long-term risks.

Expendability falls in line with Hamid's decision to make the setting and monikers in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* obscure. "*Rising Asia*" hints paradoxically to both universality and ambiguity. Qadeer shares a profound insight from "a daughter of Lahore" who states, "one is always expecting to find Lahore without quite locating it" (86). The mutating cities present in all Hamid's novels nod to a vagueness brought about by Eastern participation in the financial market over which they have little control. Hamid writes, "We exist in a financial universe that is subject to massive gravitational pulls from states. States tug at us. States bend us. And, tirelessly, states seek to determine our orbits" (*How* 139). Neoliberalism in the current era of globalization has confused the anchoring of statehood. As *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* demonstrates, one Asian city could be any Asian city and any Asian city could be all of them. Nevertheless, Hamid paints Western-derived progress as the city's downfall; Greco-Roman influence which infused European/American global politics over the last few centuries in its current form is untenable for Pakistan. Underscoring this point while *you* attempt to succeed financially, Hamid explains, "Over the coming months your business is quantified, digitized, and jacked into a global network of finance, your activities subsumed with barely a ripple in a collective mathematical pool" (*How* 183). Of course, by the novel's end, *you* have lost your business entirely. Further, as a lower class laborer, *your* "brother creates a *membrane* around walls and fixtures as he paints – sweating in unventilated, infernally hot conditions" (Hamid, *How* 30, emphasis added). Hamid reveals that these frantic vocational endeavors inevitably result in poor working conditions and poor outcomes regardless of class. The wall in Rhodes has apparently transformed from a physical one girded by mortar to an economic wall supported by

globalization. Persistently however, “*against* the East [it] still stands” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 23, emphasis added).

Turning from personal, corporate, and national associations to familial ones, Hamid refreshes his biological trope abiotically and apocalyptically. He diverts briefly to atomic physics in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by submitting a clever turn of phrase. The “nuclear” conveyed in the passage below relates not only the atomic, but also the idea of a “nuclear” family. In both cases, the nuclear core is furnished with colossal cohesive power allowing it to retain its identity and inhibit its rupture. The protagonist informs,

In the history of the evolution of the family, you and the millions of other migrants like you represent an ongoing proliferation of the nuclear. It is an explosive transformation, the supportive, stifling, stabilizing bonds of extended relationships weakening and giving way, in their wake insecurity, anxiety, productivity, and potential (Hamid, *How* 14).

The metaphor implies that an outside agent has caused the cultural destabilization. However, unlike a great deal of Hamid’s writing which slants the Other toward oppression, this passage seems to fuse the positive and negative aspects of both the cohesion and the division. The family bonds were “supportive,” but they were also “stifling” (Hamid, *How* 14). The destabilization left “insecurity” and “anxiety,” but also generated “productivity, and potential” (Hamid, *How* 14). Given that *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* oscillates in and out of verbal irony and given that the context of this passage occurs as the rural family is over-awed by the city’s “marvels and visions,” it appears that Hamid enfolds satire yet again (Hamid, *How* 14). The family bonds are only “stifling” by Western urban standards. The “productivity, and potential” in Marxist fashion work toward decidedly capitalistic Western aims (Hamid, *How* 14). Nevertheless, despite this duality, the nuclear metaphor enhances and coalesces with biological/familial understandings.

The breaking of familial bonds by municipal power becomes more evident in the nuclear age. Splitting the integrity of the family, like splitting the integrity of an atom, heralds generational destruction.

Just as the nuclear membrane safeguards the stability of the nucleolus in eukaryotic cells, so too does the skin act as a membranous barrier from which the coherence of the individual is conceptualized. Skin cells form the enclosure by which individuals are separated and identified. A prime example of Hamid's frequent use of skin properties can be extracted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez reflects on his scar as a biological signifier for his lower economic status stating "you have noticed the scar on my forearm, here, where the skin is both darker and smoother than that which surrounds it" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 46). He continues by explaining that unlike similar scars which Americans often wear as badges in their daring pursuit of recreation, he, dissimilarly, was marred by molten candle wax in his efforts to provide basic necessities - to compensate for the oft-occurring electrical shortage in Lahore. The fact that Hamid includes the variegated appearance of Changez's forearm, where the scar is "darker and smoother," centers attention on the efficiency of dermal cells to repair the body, but their inability to reproduce original surface likeness (Hamid, *Reluctant* 46). The skin itself, and thus the man, has been permanently altered.

Scarred skin works symbolically to show that "the body is a 'text of culture'" (Susan Bordo, 2360). In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid reminds his reader that "Power prices have been rising...thanks to the privatization and boom of guaranteed-profit, project-financed, imported oil-fired electricity projects" (78). The accidental nature of Changez's scarring due to an energy shortage does not signal exactly the kind of "patholog[y] of resistance" that Bordo recognized, but does identify how Changez "inserted" his body "into the network of practices, institutions,

and technologies' within which bodies are produced and struggle against those very networks" (Susan Bordo, 2361). Importantly, Changez is acted upon and loses the "struggle" (Susan Bordo, 2361). The wax and the conditions which forced electrical load-shedding are beyond his control. Because skin is contextualized by national financial destabilization, Hamid exposes more than just human skin's limited protective functioning, he also adumbrates the more pressing issue of global economic inequality as *misprinted* on bodies.

Hamid often manipulates human flesh as a tactile borderland. As Daru copes with the loss of employment in *Moth Smoke*, he resigns himself to a dazed existence through drugs and alcohol. He ironically frames the transformation in the positive though by stating, "I shed my sobriety for a newer, livelier skin" (Hamid, *Moth* 92). Where sobriety and conformity had protected his ethics and belonging in corporate banking, once unemployed, Daru "clothes" himself with *protective* substances causing him to disregard his bodily appearance and attire.

Material clothing typically heralds not just comfort and modesty, but defense from biological and ethical contamination. Therefore, when Mumtaz asks Daru, "Do you have a shirt I can wear?" and he responds, "Nothing clean, I answer," Hamid's audience registers more than just dearth of material goods or cleanliness, but the absence of protection (Hamid, *Moth* 226). Memorably, Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* sheds all clothing layers just prior to taking her life: "Her clothes had been found on a rocky bluff overlooking the Hudson, neatly folded in a pile" (Hamid 163). Through tropes of skin exposure and enclosure, Hamid underscores the environmental and circumstantial threats from which men and women must corporeally insulate themselves. Their choices of "dress" are often sober appreciable dilemmas and potentially compel moral revision. When Changez quips that "what you wear is an often ignored but *vital*ly important factor" and self-consciously muses "I was the only non-American in our group, but I

suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, *cloaked by my suit*, by my expense account and most of all by my companions,” he reveals that style of clothing has an armor-like function (Hamid, *Reluctant* 74, 71, emphasis added). It operates defensively to produce normalization.

In spite of American privilege and inclusion seen exteriorly, Hamid sees fit to criticize the false security apparel seems to guarantee. In the wake of September 11th, Changez remarks on “America’s...dangerous nostalgia...[their] determination to look back...[to the] 2nd World War” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 115). He queries if America’s reversion was prompted by “unquestioned dominance? Of safety? Or moral certainty?,” until concluding that “they were scrambling to *don the costumes* of another era” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 115, emphasis added). Aside from flagging cultural differences, American clothing bespeaks nationalist confidence tied to uncontested national dominance, which Hamid cleverly exposes as a sham. By framing national security through the enclosure that attire appears to accomplish, Hamid interrogates clothing as a social performance and therefore subject to fluctuation which inherently threatens security.

Considering the “arbitrariness of social boundaries and the meaninglessness of social differences in light of biological sameness,” Hamid playfully orchestrates a monologue where Murad Badshah defends his substantial size (Otis 119). He takes issue with the connotations of the word “fat” saying it “implies a certain ungainliness, an inefficiency,...an unpleasant, unaesthetic quality” (Hamid, *Moth* 62). Curiously, as fat cells occupy subcutaneous layers of skin, Murad’s account of having “been shot at three times, hit twice (stomach and thigh)” is informed by his gelatinous physique. Strikingly facetious, Murad prefaces his story in a *penetrating* fashion by stating, “Allow me to begin at the outside and move in” (Hamid, *Moth* 62). Just as Badshah had questioned the legitimacy of the consensus that “Fat is bad” at the beginning of the chapter titled “The Big Man,” so the reader questions the undesirability of thick

inner cellulite, since it prevented his untimely and violent death (Hamid, *Moth* 63,66). “My full belly protects me” swings a punch at “health-crazy Americans” who believe their diet and exercise regimens guarantee an increased longevity (Hamid, *Moth* 14, Hamid, *Reluctant* 147).

As I conclude this chapter, I have presented kaleidoscopic examples of Hamid’s engagement with interrupted borders. The boxes of justice are collapsible. The psychic curtains drawn between lovers still generate osmotic relationships. Municipal planning eludes segregation. Gates, windows, walls, and sieves are passable. Fat, skin, and clothing demonstrate the normative and yet alterable function of protective layers on bodies. And finally, social and economic fortresses guarantee nothing more than their own ongoing reconstruction. Because lethal threats attend these experiential entities in Hamid’s fiction, I will now turn toward mortality as a primary drive of germ theory. Given that cells are bordered, but not independent and migratory organisms like germs, chapter five will demonstrate the how theories of disease transmission challenged not only notions of survival, but the popular idea of a bordered and defensible self.

CHAPTER FIVE: TERRORIZING TRANSMISSION

As seen in chapter three, cell theory rests on the perception of borders. Once borders are defined, the autonomy of the cell can be established. Its life processes, for better or worse, can be attributed to either its own inherency or an intrusive violation by another more powerful entity or means. However, if we merge the animation of those processes with malicious intent, “Germ theory, the idea that infectious diseases are caused by living organisms, encourages one to think in terms of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ to an even greater extent” (Otis 5). Crucially, the *individuals* which are inside or outside and they cross between those designations are imputed with moral significance.

If cells are not “perfect, self-contained,” as Erica envisioned rock pools to be, then the conditions under which cells become pervious and compromised are notable in the collective imagination (Hamid, *Reluctant* 68). A cell’s coherence and capacity to represent the analogous self is vital. Rutgers professor and author, Ed Cohen, proffers several statements for consideration: “The trope of invasion proliferates in medico-political discussions of epidemics in Europe,” “Biological immunity bodies forth an infectious metaphor that circulates equally within scientific and nonscientific discourses,” and finally, “Metaphor and theory exist symbiotically” (66, 33, 34). It is crucial to recognize that societal discriminations and prejudices which impose austere measures between the actions of Selves and Others are directly furthered and exacerbated by the language attending germ theory.

Yale Professor Frank Snowden in his course, *Epidemics in Western Society Since 1600*, vibrantly illustrates the nineteenth-century paranoia relative to the Other based on historical periods of microbiological siege. He specifically isolates Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Though he does concede the more traditional interpretation of Dracula’s symbolism “for repressed sexuality,

in the Victorian Era,” he asserts that it is also “an allegory for infectious disease; not a specific disease, but diseases like plague and cholera” (*Germ*). Snowden traces the importance of Dracula’s directionality through the narrative. The Count begins his journey in the East from the Black Sea, continues through the Mediterranean, and shadows the coasts of Spain and France before settling in England. Notably, he does not travel by foot as we observe in Frankenstein’s monster, but rather by boat and train. These modes are highly suggestive of immigration during this period and the pestilence which was (and still is) feared to accompany it. To solidify the claim, Snowden indicates that the “vampire hunters in the novel are doctors, physicians, whose mission is to destroy the invading vampire” (*Germ*). Even Stoker’s seasonal detail underscores Dracula’s flight to London: he “arrives in late August/September, just as cholera would have, or bubonic plague” (Snowden, *Germ*). The intricacy unraveled here is how scientific conceptualizations of the day *bled into* fictional writing generally and how Stoker’s characterization of this most infamous literary fiend reveals the saturation.

In order to appreciate the metaphorical development of disease or infection in society or literature, I will briefly historicize the advances and retreats of medical knowledge during the nineteenth century. While seemingly illogical today, several erroneous theories garnered overwhelming support: miasmatic and spontaneous generation among them. Prior to Joseph Lister’s hygienic regimen against sepsis, most doctors of the period formed no correlation between infection and the lack of a sterile environment. Doctors had no reason whatever to suspect that triaging swiftly from cadaver to newborn without washing surgical instruments or hands would cause potential harm. If a wound became infected, doctors explained the development in mystical ways – the infection spontaneously generated from within a narrow locality. Louis Pasteur famously put that conception to rest proclaiming that “an airborne

microorganism penetrated the wound and caused antiseptis...infection was the result of contamination, from the outside of the wound” (Snowden, *Germ*). Pasteur had upended the emphasis on interiority. Infection itself was unmasked as an exotic, living, and disturbingly extraneous migrant.

By contrast, the miasmatic theory of disease proposed that “a vaporous exhalation” or “emanation” was responsible for malaria and other ills including Black Death (miasma). Differing from contemporary valid understandings of environmental toxins today, miasmatic doctrine leaned heavily on odor and air currents as the offending phenomenon. Curiously, Snowden notes that miasmaticism is portrayed memorably in *Dracula* by means of “the flowers, the garlic, [and] the mists” which pervade the haunting scenes (*Germ*). The narrative peril invaded by way of inhalation. This mechanism is not without scientific merit; after all, respiratory distress and disease precipitated by noxious airborne chemicals is certainly credible. The distinction is that these older theories falsely accused these mechanisms and odors as causal for diseases transmitted otherwise. Radically then, when “Pasteur isolated a germ and convincingly linked it with a specific disease” and when Robert Koch “isolated the bacterium that causes tuberculosis...the greatest killer of the nineteenth century,” these men localized a given entity and popularized placing boundaries around a small and thus manageable foe (Snowden, *Germ*). Whereas one had little chance of defense against one’s day to day total immersion in an irrepressible atmosphere; microscopy, and eventually vaccination, provided the possibility of bona fide containment of a previously invisible, pernicious threat.

Mohsin Hamid, though an author far removed from nineteenth-century Europe in both period and culture, retools Stoker’s frightful device. He incorporates miasmaticism by forwarding poisonous ambiance in his three novels. First, in *Moth Smoke*, the overt title and close-up front

cover image of a man exhaling a winding trail of smoke draws the reader's attention to corrupted air. The narrative's profuse portrayments of the protagonists' inhaled drug and cigarette usage suggests a self-administered poisoning. Daru's self-sabotage is not only symptomatic, but ostensibly corrective. Within the first pages, Daru is arrested by "the drying smell of a man's insides burning in my nostrils" as he waits in his cell (Hamid, *Moth* 3). By paragraph's end, the man's "insides" materialize not as dead remains, but as human waste: "I hear the man who had been heaving scuttle in a corner" (Hamid, *Moth* 3). Human filth, then, envelopes Daru's senses and corresponds with the ethically repulsive testimonies (byproducts) given by all the protagonists at the trial. Their actions are ultimately reactionary and their cause has a constitutionally human, albeit disgust-provoking origin. To compensate, Daru, and arguably the other characters in the novel, attempt to mask the migratory odors and offenses which have infiltrated their experience against their will.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist also devotes attention to contaminated diffusion. As Changez reflects on the 9/11 tragedy, he recalls that in the streets of New York City "A peculiar odor lingered in the air; the smoldering wreckage downtown made its way into our lungs" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 80). While rejecting the dogmatically capitalistic mindset of Underwood Samson, he describes, "I was eager to seize any pretext to avoid returning to the poisonous atmosphere of our team room" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 150). Both of these textual references present a toxicant which shadows Changez and underscore the pungency and wastefulness of global economics. The former event having devastated material resources - "wreckage" and the latter, having ravaged human spirit - "team" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 80, 150). Interestingly, Hamid chronicles odors impartially. He accounts for them as experienced by the American too: "Ah, I see you have detected a scent...your senses are as acute as those of a fox in the wild. It is rather

pleasant, is it not?” Hamid underscores an odor’s far-reaching potential and contrasts its penetrability through great distance (“we smelled our destination before we saw it”) with its potency when confined (Changez shunned “the poisonous atmosphere of [his] team room”) (Hamid, *Reluctant* 141,150). Taken together, Hamid demonstrates the miasmatic and irresistible qualities of socioeconomic practice.

In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid takes miasmatic turns through descriptions like the “synthetic lemon-lime aroma of insect repellent” on *your* son’s skin as well as the “scalding breeze carrying to your nose the blood-like aroma of dust” (Hamid, *How* 146, 155). Hamid’s attachment to this olfactory metaphor is not only consistently applied within all his novels, but they often introduce his readers to the Pakistani characters and settings. Note how his depiction of “your father” who “makes his way to the ridge behind which he prefers to defecate” is followed by the village’s textile plant which is situated by a brook that is “partly used as drainage for the fart-smelling gray effluent that results” (Hamid, *How* 6,7). Both conjure sensory disgust. Having just clarified that “your” hepatitis E had a fecal-oral transmission, Hamid drives home the fact that filth and disease emanate and rise in “Rising Asia” (Hamid, *How* 4). While the contamination of filth or the contraction of disease initially occurs at a body’s borders, the devastating effects are unavoidably confined within it. Hamid incidentally correlates this reality to the idiom “Filthy Rich” within his title, making it an especially condemning and euphemistic one.

Determining the biological cause or verifiable danger presented by these circulating odors is tangential in Hamid’s narratives. Their significance lies in how the odors kindle the idea that his settings are dangerous to the bodies that experience them. His descriptive metaphors generate hypochondria among his readers, not unlike that experienced by the nineteenth-century

populous during an epidemic. However, the vapors ultimately do not herald physical catastrophe. They symbolize societal inequities traced to governmental and private misdeeds, mainly figured in their plots through questionable business dealings, adultery, bribery, involuntary manslaughter, class marginalization, and oppression. Attempted rectification of these “odors” appears destructively futile, as seen when Daru notes, “The ashtray’s full. Joints have started giving me a headache rather than a buzz. Their smoke lingers in my sinuses, in my nasal cavities, air trapped in pockets between irritated membranes” (Hamid, *Moth* 121). Yaqoob proposes that *Moth Smoke’s* characters “desperately attempt to stave off their spiritual and emotional death and regenerate their human selves through drugs, sex, and other material luxuries but to no avail” (94). Lingering and potent smells then are signposts to transgression. When Daru reaches his breaking point, he exasperates, “Even when I’m done [vomiting], the stench lingers in the house” (Hamid, *Moth* 197). Amelioration of these societal ills, like unpleasant odors and poisons in the air, resists completion.

As cited by Otis, “social historian Alain Corbin” argues that the “‘rise of the concept of the individual’ . . . may have promoted the ‘privatization of human waste’ in the late eighteenth century” (10). The political structure attending the word “privatization,” of course, cannot be separated from economics (Otis 10). Therefore, as science and philosophy congealed within a stratified society, “odors revealed identity” and thereafter “the poor became one with the filth amid which they lived” (Otis 10). Given the stench attending the defecating, vomiting, and unbathed impoverished residents featured in Hamid’s narratives, “Filthy” and “Rich” are a contradiction in terms and Hamid seals the antithetical association.

Unlike Lucy’s white garlic flowers which halted contamination by Dracula, Hamid’s narratives supply no suffusive protection. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* eases readers

into this reality. His one-adjective description of “your” “tubucular teacher” impresses faintly, yet it subtly hints at the former epidemic, still not eradicated (Hamid, *How* 21). Paint inhalation is weakly resisted by “your brother” who works for a “master” who provides neither “goggles” nor “respirators...placing thin cotton rags over their mouths and noses instead” (Hamid, *How* 30-32). “You” also prepare a flimsy barrier to block noxious vapors during a riot. When “smoke and tear gas coil in the air...A vinegar-soaked scarf hangs at your neck as you drive, ready to serve as a makeshift filter against the fumes” (Hamid, *How* 119). Hamid’s recirculation of this redolent analogue establishes several orientations. It grounds his characters in their corporeal qualities in their own right. It highlights the negative material manifestations of “progress” in the East as influenced by Western exchange, and much more significantly, it connotes a power differential where human-controlled processes (including ideological ones) have produced unintended consequences which invisibly compromise bodies. If critics dismiss Hamid’s miasmatic devices as simply aesthetic or emotive, they will miss the importance of the motif. Namely, that one cannot easily grasp the pathology of global inequities nor stop their advancement. Their causes are multiple, ostensibly everywhere, and yet defy detection. Despite their seeming invisibility, one can literally see their outworkings; their existence and power is undeniably read on the populous.

Medical theory’s shift away from miasma and toward direct contact recalified ideas of conquest: “If one believes that invisible germs, spread by human contact, can make one sick, one becomes more and more anxious about penetration and about any connection with other people – the same anxieties inspired by imperialism” (Otis 5). Cajal’s scientific writings expose the colonial paradigm through the frequency of words like “invasion” for “infection,” descriptions of tenements as “an environment teeming with enemies,” and his microbiological research as “an

all-out war” (Otis 67). The fact that the players in this contest were unequally matched in size and visibility, made the battle all the more mythical. “In the 1880s because of their miniscule size and deadly effects, bacteria became a metaphor through which one could articulate fears about all invisible enemies...Smallness itself became menacing” (Otis 94). The conquering European mindset, clearly designed to swell the impact and reach of the nation state, complicated the stratification between microbe and individual: “When microbes ‘invaded,’ they – the simplest form of life – could defeat the most highly evolved and complex” (Otis 67-68). Ergo, as contagionism established itself, so did the bifurcating taxonomies among lifeforms. Threats to given forms or species of life were necessarily perpetrated by those less advanced, less biologically civilized, one might suggest. Coupled with egregious applications of the ideas fueled by social Darwinism and embarking on the future developing field of eugenics, contagionism generated an intimidation all its own.

Ironically, contagionism did not prevail without a fight. Anticontagionists, despite the growing evidence to the contrary, clung to their miasmatic imaginings. Interestingly, this ongoing debate was infused by scientists’ political ideology. Max van Pettenkofer constellated his research locally. His German nationalism was eclipsed by his “local interest of Bavaria and Munich, and indeed his theories coincided” at the local level (Snowden, *Contagionism*). On the other hand, “Robert Koch...an icon and promoter of the power of the centralized German state...defended the centralizing and imperial interest of the German Reich” (Snowden, *Contagionism*). Although he and Pasteur’s efforts were scientifically compatible and combined to advance medical knowledge in profound ways, the two cultivated a personal rivalry since “French and German medical science” were entities born out of “two hostile national powers” (Snowden, *Germ*). Despite their personal nationalist divisions, both men, as contagionists,

understood on scientific as well as political grounds that “in the name of state power, one could institute the most draconian measures... You could sequester and confine individuals, you could limit civil liberty, and you could radically control the movement of goods and trade” (Snowden, *Contagionism*). Therefore, in the face of microbial outbreak or in the earnest pursuit of its prevention, Europe was constrained to synthesize its scientific beliefs with its political ones. Defense of the populous depended on protection of national borders and the detection of a contagious strain must be swiftly followed by its binding, in effect “quarantine, the great contagionist measure” (Snowden, *Contagionism*). In this light, xenophobia during this scientific revolution required only a small reactionary step forward. Incredibly, its logic is still salient today. Cisneros notes “The best option to deal with the mobile threat [of immigrants] presented in news media discourse is to corral and quarantine the pollutants” (593).

Cajal’s conception of a “secret revenge” against rogue microbes situates itself comfortably in present understandings between nation states and foreign “invasion” (Otis 67). Regarding war, Hans-Heiner Kuhne recognized that “Any state needs a judicial justification to impose a penalty on a person. In war, however, as soon as it is declared, the state is permitted to kill the enemy without further justification” (15). As the embodiment of contagion transposed itself onto immigrant identities, “a new international legal dimension... *the concept of unilateral war*” was rationalized; “The enemy is no longer a party to a conflict but an evil being, holding no rights” (Kuhne 15). Thus, the conflation of the offensive microbe with its localized host made the slide toward the violent enforcement of anti-immigration policy cognitively effortless.

Of course, racial and national bigotry did not remain confined to Cajal’s Europe. “Epidemics... raised questions of individual autonomy and the proper role of government” as the Director of the Center for the History of Medicine and Public Health documents (O’Sullivan.)

City Boards of Health established themselves in America, first in New York in 1866 and by 1891, the federal government passed the Immigration Act which would bar “those suffering loathsome or contagious diseases” from U.S. shores (Origins). In the following 1908 newspaper image captioned “AT THE GATES” (pictured below) Poultney Bigelow writes,



AT THE GATES.
Our safety depends upon official vigilance.

“Cholera, yellow fever, and smallpox recoil in fear as a quarantine barrier and an angel bearing a shield of cleanliness blocks their way through the Port of New York” (O’Sullivan). The fact that diseases in this image are moribund personifications should not be underestimated. The angel whose “shield of cleanliness” defends the nation must destroy the contaminated body and its

disease coterminously. Although Hamid does not directly draw out obstructed transnational migrations in these three novels, he does, nevertheless, deposit the remaining vestiges of censored entry. Because *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set in America during the attacks on the World Trade Center, just a few miles from the iconic Ellis Island “Gateway,” the role of Changez as an insider/outsider is particularly poignant. When the country was in relative peace and while Changez was contributing to its financial good as a lucrative businessman, Changez’s hybridity helped him pass as American. However, once the *body* of the hijackers resembled his own (as made plain by his “lustrous beard”) and once the threatening foreign *body* was identified the way cholera, smallpox, and yellow fever had been centuries before, Changez was wholly ostracized (Hamid, *Reluctant* 76). Appearance itself erased actual conduct. Changez recalls, “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty when we arrived. I was separated from my team at immigration” and “Being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection” (Hamid 75, 157). As earlier traced in Pasteur’s work, an outwardly identifiable contagion was responsible for many diseases. Likewise, in the case of a terrorist onslaught, no consideration was given to the internal national dispositions which made America vulnerable to attack. The pristine and coherent nature of the country’s body politic must be preserved. Although Hamid’s volumes do not present the non-Westerner at various stations along a path of migratory resistance, they do meticulously observe the tracks which have consigned the unclean and vanquished migrant as a *fait accompli*. His threatening terrors have already been identified, confined, and eradicated.

Chapter five has presented an historical look at methods of disease transfer which have worked their way into societal imaginings of the alien migrant. The theories of miasmatism and contagionism lend themselves to be used as evocative literary devices and are densely traceable

in Hamid's novels. Not only does he use these metaphoric modes to depict the Eastern alien as principally and inherently contaminated in body, but his literature subtly suggests that Western economic structures exacerbate the Easterner's already deplorable condition. In keeping with the principles of contagionism, the contagious foreigner can be localized. However, Western society's overreaction to a perceived contagious threat and its compulsion to visibly identify and remove it has confused the pathogen (for example, terror) with the body that presumably carries it (Pakistan). Although, Hamid addresses Western culpability, the lion's share of his literature neglects to portray Pakistani characters resistant to Western socioeconomic dominance. Because they appear more permeable and less bordered, they are more susceptible to corruption and necessarily less sovereign than their Western counterparts. The overall impact on the Western reader is a negative one; colonial dominance and cultural divisions preferring the West remain largely intact.

CHAPTER SIX: KEEPING VIGILANCE INVIOLATE

Thus far chapters within this thesis have emphasized the significance and implications of conceptualizing boundaries in the identification of visible and invisible physical threat. Hamid's novels present specific breaches of relational boundaries in a similarly ominous way, usually working to heighten the tension within the narrative and seldom affecting positive ends. However, all trespasses catalyze an irrevocable transformation. His fictive associations support what the prominent American neurologist in the nineteenth century, S. Weir Mitchell observed: "disease resulted from a failure of containment and a violation of personal boundaries" (Otis 41).

A few evidences of personal risk and rupture in Hamid's narratives arrive in the form of direct skin-to-substance contact, skin-to-skin contact, and the emotional contacts seen in romantic and fraternal intimacy. Hands, therefore, abound in Hamid's work and signal transformation. In *Moth Smoke*, Daru glances down to notice that he "can make out the grime on [his] fingers against the white of the envelope" (Hamid 4). Daru's legal case, in fact, is framed as one where the guilty has "blood on his hands...The blood of a child" (Hamid, *Moth* 6). Early in this narrative, Hamid features guilt through direct physical touch. Purity and innocence are figured banally in the manner of *clean hands* and *pure hearts*. However, Hamid presses beyond merely using metaphoric stain to signify guilt. He observes what remains on both sides of the transmission. As Daru grasps the envelope mentioned above, readers conceive that some of the grime from his hands has been lost to the envelope and conversely, the envelope has logically received a portion of the grime. Hamid stresses this interpretation by phrasing "the white of the envelope" rather than "the white envelope" (*Moth* 4, emphasis added). In this way, "white" operates apart from the envelope signifying more than literal description. Again, Hamid invokes the prospect of innocence here, yet like the envelope, because Daru allegedly has a child's

“blood on his hands,” then by forensic extension, the child would also have Daru’s DNA on or even in his wounded and bloody body. Both parties would have been duly and irrevocably affected.

Hamid describes Daru’s various encounters with drugs by seemingly insignificant details. Readers see this first mentioned when “I light up while rubbing the hash and tobacco residue off my hand and onto my jeans” (Hamid, *Moth* 9). Hamid could have easily elected to truncate the sentence by eliminating “and onto my jeans” (Hamid, *Moth* 9). However, this detail directs the reader’s attention to the protagonist’s desire not only to remove visible and uncomfortable residue from his fingers, but to suggest that the residue must necessarily depart and relocate. It, like political corruption or like the *tainted* Other, does not disappear simply because its particles escape one’s purview.

In two different scenes in *Moth Smoke*, Hamid illustrates permanent staining through spilled ink. He notes “the work of the unsheathed fountain pen” which formed “a growing ink stain on his shirt pocket” (Hamid, *Moth* 111). Hamid couples this spillage with the professor’s distinctive “absentmindedness,” thus noting his negligent culpability. He returns to the inked image later with his servant, Manucci. Manucci is depicted throughout the narrative as long-suffering, naïve, and loyal. So when Daru donates an ink-stained “old kurta shalwar” to him which previously belonged to one of his reckless “little cousins,” he becomes particularly disturbed to find “the stain is hardly visible” (Hamid, *Moth* 186). Intriguingly, his agitation follows his self-comparison: “I look from myself, in my dirty jeans and T-shirt, to Manucci, in his crisp white cotton, and feel a strange sense of unease” (Hamid, *Moth* 186). Manucci had for all intents and purposes removed from his second-hand apparel the stain which signaled first-degree guilt. Fatty Chacha’s compliment for “looking very smart” while wearing it demonstrated

Manucci's growing positive reception despite his fraudulent past (Hamid, *Moth* 186).

Comparatively, Daru's soiled clothing and general appearance works in reverse. They, as well as Daru's demeanor, prompt Fatty Chacha to ask "is there some kind of infection? You seem ill" perturbing Daru's annoyed conscience even further (Hamid, *Moth* 241). Unnerved and unwilling to improve his own situation, Daru exercises his positional power over Manucci by assigning a punishment to fit his infraction. For his *crime* of superficial stainlessness, for denying identification with his former sin, Daru instructs him to make it visible – to soil himself with the guilt of another: "Go clean my bathroom...And scrub behind the toilet. It's getting filthy." (Hamid, *Moth* 187). Within a few weeks, Daru resorts to physical violence against Manucci in an attempt to rid his conscience of the caustically innocent reminder.

Hamid uses the physicality of direct contamination to illustrate contamination metaphysically as well. Daru and Mumtaz's multiple instances of partaking the same cigarette or joint indicates how intimacy is generated through shared human contact with an intermediary (and incidentally lucrative) substance. This interpretation has its precedent in the fact that Daru vows to re-convert his best friend Ozi back to smoking because of his longing for fraternal reconnection. Though resistant to take up the bad habit again, Ozi recalls fondly his adolescent hours spent smoking with Daru, stating under pseudonyms,

Ro and Lain realize they're in love one evening on Ro's roof, as they lie on their backs sharing a joint... 'I love you,' Lain says suddenly. And Ro, who's probably surprised, even more so when he realizes that he's been longing to hear those words for some time, says, 'I love you, too' (Hamid, *Moth* 209).

By association then, smoking, a process causing an original substance to undergo lasting changes in its composition through burning, becomes a gesture toward mutual influence between Ozi and

Daru. For them, the suspended boundary protection between their mouths and the joint achieves not only mutual acceptance, but permanent fraternal change. Daru's nostalgia and remorse concerning his weakened adult relationship with Ozi surface when he realizes that Ozi has been permanently changed by other *outside* influences as well, particularly corrupting and Western ones.

The intentional violation of boundaries producing guilt is more readily described in the sexual context in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Here readers are introduced to a young "pretty girl" who out of dire family circumstance must work to support her parents. Entering the modeling industry, her boss "demands physical favors" from her (Hamid, *How* 51). Notably, Hamid adds the prepositional phrase "In exchange" to once again denote the mutual liability of the contact. It suggests the deferment of border vigilance to acquire a more highly valued commodity (Hamid, *How* 51). The boundary weakness of the pretty girl's manager is immediate sexual gratification while the boundary weakness of the pretty girl is continual financial need. Yet, despite that both *business partners* display these vulnerabilities, the pretty girl is the only one Hamid narrates as suffering guilt and shame when her boundary is violated.

Reading virginity as innocence, the pretty girl notwithstanding her sexual compromise, is still desirous of keeping her virginity intact. Therefore, she submits to oral sex and anal sex believing "much to [her manager's] surprise and delight, [it] would allow her to preserve her virginity" (Hamid, *How* 51). Through consensual and yet financially necessary sex, Hamid shows that the exchange between manager and employee is not an equal one. While Hamid does not belabor the pretty girl's abuse as a minor or its lasting effects in the novel, he does formulate an emotionally reticent female character who cannot envision herself in a long-term committed relationship with a partner. The pretty girl's defiled physical parameters encourage her over time

to concede the virginity issue: “as the months passed, she came to doubt this logic, and eventually she permitted vaginal sex as well” (Hamid, *How* 51). Having collapsed her bodily parameters, the pretty girl is permanently altered and like Daru from *Moth Smoke*, her guilt is signified through specific forms of direct contact with persons and economies over which she has no control.

The plot within *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* expounds upon the invasive nature of *securing* a business education in corporate America and globalized Pakistan. While no obvious passages lay this out didactically in this particular novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* succinctly summarizes it: “Penetration and education, the two are intertwined in the lives of many around you” (*How* 24). Tellingly, this “penetration” is accompanied by abuse. The contaminated “Asian” grade-school classroom houses some “of the brightest students, [who] have drawn some of the most severe punishments” by their resentful teacher (Hamid, *How* 24). His “steady dose of violence...helps education penetrate another thick skull” (Hamid, *How* 24). In this instance, however fleeting, Hamid annexes the objects of the metaphor of penetration. Both the intellect and the body which houses it are subject to forcible transgression. Hamid conflates the inviolate conception of the self, specifically through violence. His narrative effectively corresponds with Dorion Sagan’s view of selfhood: “The body is not one self but a fiction of a self, built from a mass of interacting, supervening selves. A body’s capacities are literally the result of what it incorporates; the self is not only corporal but corporate” (175). As Hamid is apt to do, he challenges connotations of “corporate” and “corporation” as applied to corporate America. Specifically, he suggests that others must incorporate the American paradigm. For Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Underwood Samson did in fact have

“the potential to transform [his] life,” to make him financially secure, as long as he submissively consented to “facilitating this project of domination” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 14, 156).

Most profoundly, Hamid describes penetration of psychological and emotional borders as a latent form of domination. His narrative situations cleverly reveal aspects of identity as perceived by others. Recalling the essentiality of clear vision for the microscopist, likewise in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez is struck by the fact that his mentor, Jim had “seen through me in a few minutes more clearly than had many people who had known me for years” (Hamid 9). Jim, in his deliberate investigation of Changez “continued to look at [him] in his steady, penetrating manner” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 42). What is clear here is Changez’s acute awareness that the boundaries which had thus far sufficed to protect his hybridized Pakistani-American persona were, like a cell membrane, not as solid as he had imagined. “Glaring” revealed its “intimate” and violent nature as “something we men of Lahore take seriously” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 67). Requisitely, it divulged the imbalance of power exposing Jim as the dominant of the two.

The superior gaze recurs as a power structure in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Hamid writes, “Meeting the gaze of a landlord has been a risky business in these parts for centuries...Recently some men have begun to do it...Your father is not one of them” (Hamid *How* 8). Turning to the protagonist’s mother, readers find that she “cleans the courtyard under the gaze of her mother-in-law” who “looks on in unquenchable disapproval” (Hamid, *How* 9). Hamid’s portraits of glaring employers and parents echo a hierarchical construct which is revealed either by sustained or inhibited eye contact. The duration and expression of respective gazes impart expected social parameters to the one gazed upon. From them, one is able to calculate the limits of oneself. Intriguingly, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez’s

enjoyment of American privilege is disturbed by a “Filipino driver” with a condemning gaze (Hamid, 67). This incident marks Changez’s breach of conscience and precipitates his move back to Lahore. Yet, unexpectedly, Hamid does not frame this enlightenment as altogether liberating. He writes, “I was dazzled and rendered *immobile* by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 145, emphasis added). Hamid seems to suggest that people conditioned to the dominant gazes of others may be enamored by their removal, but they will also be incapacitated by the abruptness of the transition. Further, without visible interpolation, they lack an identifiable psychological self-structure. In fact, during “the threshold of great change” Changez admits, “I lacked a stable core” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 148). Keeping in mind Changez is Pakistani and was “plagued by paranoia, by an intermittent sense that [he was] being observed” informs the reader that even Pakistani self-understanding is molded by American’s commanding interference (Hamid, *Reluctant* 183).

Hamid’s characters’ identification as either one penetrated or one penetrable offer provocative implications. In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, “your” business ventures begin to unravel when they are “tossed to the wolf pack of public opinion” and the “unsubstantiated rumors of your shady dealings” are made known (Hamid 190). Hamid writes “You have always been an outsider, and finally you have been wounded” (*How* 190). Interestingly, this woundedness, while bitter, is also cordially accepted: “It almost seems that a part of you perversely welcomes being humbled in this way” (Hamid, *How* 191). This passage poses the conflicted negotiation of self-preservation and belonging. Hamid adds, “It is only natural that you be sacrificed so that the rest of the herd may prance on” (*How* 190). Angling toward predator and prey metaphor once more through the images of “wolf pack” and “herd,” Hamid requires the reader to determine in which “pack” or “herd” he belongs while the

protagonist does the same. Interrogating the limits of inside and outside in this metaphor is again essential. If “you have [*truly*] always been an outsider” while running with the herd, Hamid would have no grounds to link *your* association with “the rest of the herd,” yet he does so (*How* 190). Additionally, since herds offer protection from outside threat and a measure of communal care, one would expect expulsion from the herd (if genuinely a part of it) to produce regret. Instead, in this instance, it ushers relief. The contradiction Hamid fashions in this account highlights the puzzling paradigm of sealed borders – those which determine who is inside and outside of corporate success. More accurately, these designations appear indisputably fluid and thus defy possession and defense. For the protagonist, the “welcome[d]” penetrating wound enables him to see surface impermanence and thus willingly “slough off [his] wealth, like an animal molting in the autumn” (Hamid, *How* 191).

One of the more moving relationships narrated in Hamid’s fiction occurs between Changez and Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Just as the gaze conveys dominance in other segments, so too, do readers track it at the start of Changez’s romantic infatuation with Erica. While Erica sunbathes topless, Changez is humorously caught staring. He discloses his vacillating discomfort by confessing, “I tried not to stare...I was forced to stare” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 23). Visual penetration signals Changez’s sexual desire, as well as his inclination to remain subordinate. When this preferred relational dynamic shifts, Changez suffers extensive guilt. The text reveals this tendency again in the development of their sexual relationship. Changez notes that “The entrance between her legs was wet and dilated, but was at the same time oddly rigid; it reminded me – unwillingly – of a wound, giving our sex a violent undertone despite the gentleness with which I attempted to move” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 106). He goes on to express his guilt over feeling “both satiated and ashamed” after their love-making (Hamid,

Reluctant 106). Hamid commandeers advancing levels of frustrated intimacy for Changez, much like the strained and guilt-tinged relationship between Eastern and Western nations. Awkward eye contact (colonial desire) leads to floundering bodily contact (treaties and wars), leaving the psychological juncture (mutual trust) as the final and deepest proving ground.

Yaqoob's review of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* recognizes that Hamid's "portrayal of a socially, emotionally, and psychologically sick people living in a sick environment has skillfully made the external internal and the internal external" (94). However, this reversal is helpful only to the extent of diagnosis, not cure. Changez reminisces about his first family dinner with Erica and admits that she "seemed happy that I was there, and her happiness *infected* me as well" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 54, emphasis added). Noteworthy is the directional flow of change from Erica to Changez. As Erica succumbs to the force of her depression, Changez's relational impotency makes him equally distraught. He states, "What was essential was that I seek to understand why I failed to penetrate the membrane with which she guarded her psyche" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 140).

Determined to effect a mutual transformation in Erica (a reciprocal "infection"), Changez contrives a different tact. He decides, "my more direct approaches had been rejected, but with sufficient insight I might yet be welcomed through a process of osmosis" (Hamid, *Reluctant* 140). His desperate strategies prove terminally ineffectual by the novel's end because Erica is not reached and is psychologically driven to commit suicide. Hamid crafts a double tragedy in this aspect of his narrative, one rooted in vigilance toward one's own affective borders. Changez suffers emotional pain for willingly leaving them open to Erica and Erica suffers emotional pain leading to death for stubbornly leaving them closed.

Changez and Erica illustrate well what was earlier described about the cell: their membrane “let(s) them regulate their own inputs and outputs” (Otis 23). Such regulation occurs physiologically when building antibodies to fight infection or disease. However, since voluntary and involuntary factors working together govern a body’s immune system, the body’s capacity to resist is understandably limited. Hamid reveals this to be true in matters biological, psychological, and relational. By isolating these involuntary dependencies on other people, systems, and things as well as highlighting the general lack of control one has in keeping desired *substances* in and undesired substances out, Hamid shows how permeable individuals are and how osmotic interrelationships can be.

Since multicultural and transnational studies often feature resistance as their hallmark, especially resistance to racially dominant social structures, when Hamid illustrates that socio-political systems are also subject to both voluntary and involuntary factors, he challenges the rallying cry to resist. Marcus Garvey, a notable contributor during the Harlem Renaissance, quipped, “Ask me personally the cause of my success, and I say opposition; oppose me, and I fight the more” (1003). Hamid intersects Garvey’s certainty with reasonable doubt. He reveals how certain individual members within a given system are fundamentally ill-equipped to do battle (Daru in *Moth Smoke*) and how certain systems themselves exponentially destabilize resistance efforts (Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*).

Yet remarkably similar to the production of helpful leukocytes in the body, the greater the evidence of struggle, the greater is the chance of survival. Ed Cohen notes, “To say that organisms require immunity to survive implies not only that they conform to the laws of nature in a general sense, but also that their complex physiologies correspond to the nuances of the law in their innermost workings” (45). At times literal and at times metaphorical, Hamid pinpoints

perceived migrant success and failure through their lawful acquiescence to principles of immunity - biologically, culturally, and politically. If these successes and failures are actually subordinate to specific principles, rather than individual effort or border maintenance, then the compromised *immunity* Hamid portrays within his characters cannot be prevented.

In *Moth Smoke* the scarcity of air conditioning becomes a focal point and flags reduced status. However, from a physiological perspective, Murad Badshah “considered [them] unnatural and dangerous” (Hamid, *Moth* 113). He claimed “Your pores will get out of shape if you rely on ACs for your cooling...one day you might need to rely on your body again and your body won’t be there for you” (Hamid, *Moth* 113). For Badshah, triumph comes through struggle; therefore, his “finely honed sweat distribution system” was a matter of pride (Hamid, *Moth* 113). Both his theory and his pride gained ground when he saw “the rich people...as he drove past their open gates, fanning themselves” (Hamid, *Moth* 113). The fact that Hamid includes the phrase “open gates” is not incidental (*Moth* 113). Reinforcing Badshah’s support of sweating coupled with the image of “open” pores, Hamid shows that the affluent segment in Lahore countered the dysregulation of their circulatory systems externally. The rich resisted their disturbed internal environment by attempting to alter their external one, which of course emphasized they had the means to do so. By contrast, Badshah’s unconventional resistance efforts to sweat do not gain him popularity, but rather disdain, making him a poor example of successful opposition.

While ambient temperatures are of little political consequence superficially, Hamid’s persistent emphasis on ecology and pathology whisper the devastating connection. In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid describes the city as “intermittently perilous...[due in part to] the ferocious extremes of its temperatures and the antibiotic resistance of its microorganisms” (212). Subtly implied here is that microbiological threats can be immobilized if cooled. If

unchecked, they will proliferate. He also informs that “the aquifer below the city is plummeting and becoming more contaminated every year, poisonous chemicals and biological toxins seeping into it like adulterants into a heroin junkie’s collapsing vein” (Hamid, *How* 165). Here again, the “junkie” has become so accustomed to the “adulterant[s]” that it defines him (Hamid, *How* 165). Likewise, the pollutants and the city meld into one and the same material. Wresting the scientific factors underpinning why bacteria (single-celled and largely independent organisms) and viruses (elusively disordered, parasitic, and dependent entities) thrive in Hamid’s stories’ settings bolsters his human/contaminant metaphor. Contaminants are inescapable. They originate and propagate in ways orderly and chaotic from within and without.

As Hamid requires *you* to internalize *your* lessons of upward mobility in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, you notice that the “master” possesses “the white-tufted ear hair of a primate resistant to lethal tympanic parasites” (Hamid, 78). In this characterization of the master, immunity to poverty increases by exposure to financial excess and contrasts starkly with the destitution which decorates the main character’s family at the story’s onset. The young boy atop the “packed earth” was suffering (presumably unduly) from jaundice and the effects of hepatitis E (Hamid, *How* 4). Although the narrative unfolds as a unique self-help Bildungsroman, it enacts the twelve steps to success as a meager attempt to build immunity - to keep death at a distance – through wealth. Hamid prefigures these morbid “two way streets” in the second page of his novel when he writes “Everyone is going to die” precisely when the protagonist wrestles with whether or not his time has come (*How* 4, 77). Implementing microorganisms as a trope questions the advantageousness of avoiding contaminants if in fact immunity and survival is fostered by exposure.

This life and death tango which swivels on immunity emerges again when the protagonist becomes a father. Hamid writes, “Medicalized, bloody, and enacted to the sound of screaming and the smell of disinfectant, his birth was like a death” (*How* 148). The overall context of this passage speaks mostly to the father’s changing priorities and the growing family bond; however, the smell of disinfectant reiterates that invading microbes haunt various forms of life from their beginnings. Cohen notes, “Even before birth, the hardly visible world impinges on the human organism and threatens to compromise our borders. Amid this microscopic profusion, human life appears terribly, terribly vulnerable” (65). Hence, the miniscule, perhaps even more so than the macroscopic because of its invisibility, incites fear and compels decisive violent action – annihilation – in order for the *superior* form of life and its bonds to prevail. Prevalent configurations of the terrorist as a comparatively microscopic, inferior, and foreign migrant within a given national body work well in the public imagination to incite fear as well as forward an antidote. However, Hamid empties terrorism of its mortal pervasiveness by sharing this contrastive perspective:

When we talk about the ‘War on Terror,’ what can’t be denied is that a great deal of effort has gone into making us all afraid, whether we are in the Muslim world or sitting in New York wondering if some terrorist is going to kill you. The truth is that what *usually* kills people is cancer and cholesterol and malaria (Yaqin).

Given Hamid’s standpoint, readers could expect to see metaphorical emphases on the unseen and the unnamed contagion. The “underground water mains and sewers mingling” to yield “trace levels of feces and microorganisms capable of causing diarrhea, hepatitis, dysentery, and typhoid” is not simply commentary on Third World infrastructure and public health (Hamid, *How* 99). These alternate terrors express a perspective on mortality and isolates the mechanisms

by which survival in either biological or economic systems are guaranteed. He writes, “Those less well-off among the citizenry harden their immune systems by drinking freely, sometimes suffering losses in the process, especially of their young and their frail. Those more well-off have switched to bottled water” (Hamid, *How* 99). Biological and economic health converge, no matter the social strata. However, the compromise of the one is inevitably offset by the redoubled efforts of the other.

By understanding the compromised integrity of an organism’s boundaries and the intermittent connections each organism has to a variety of other organisms and systems, one glimpses the elusive nature of an immutable individuality. This last chapter has highlighted the various forms of irresistible physical and emotional contact that Hamid repeats between the characters in his literature. Attempted boundary guardianship inevitably fails. Protection of skin, sexual purity, fraternity, romance, conscience, and ideas of safety is fraught by mutual influence and mutual guilt. Immunity, a potential state gained by penetration and resistance “signifies a mode of boundary maintenance that characterizes a diverse range of possible actors from bodies to nations to the planet itself” (Cohen 33). Hamid’s specific metaphorical representations reflect this wide “range” and confront current antagonistic socio-political conditions between Eastern and Western Selves (Cohen 33). Dangerously however, Hamid reproduces Eastern players which are inevitably penetrated by and subservient to all external factors and Western actors. Significantly, his writing confirms that “we literally come from messmates and morphed diseases, organisms that ate and did not digest one another, and organisms that infected one another and killed each other and formed biochemical truces and merged” (Sagan 19). If Hamid’s readers are to conclude that Pakistanis are subject to more powerful principles or systems demanding mixture and necessitating the penetrability of barriers, then the systems

themselves should be more evenly applied to all global subjects. Yet, his narratives are startling one-sided and his readers rarely, if ever, witness a “truce[s]” or “merge[r]” that comprises or diversifies the Western experience. Further, in the few incidences when his protagonists’ permeability produced enhanced insight, the narratives stopped short of effecting an improvement which could be actively reached. Surveying these ethnic differences as manifestations of real or simulated border negotiation gone awry delivers new possibilities for the interpretation and remedy of global disharmony (Sagan 19).

CONCLUSION: MIASMATIC VORTEX OF MIMICRY

Mohsin Hamid's constellation of afflicted Pakistani bodies within their respective societies circumvents the need for wholesale didacticism. Perner writes that "Hamid appears to willingly accept the ambitious task of 'explaining' his country to his readers" in light of "the limited knowledge about other parts of the world that prevails in the West" (23). However, Hamid's statement at the Singapore Writer's Festival contradicts Perner's claim of authorial intent. He states, "I wanted to create a mirror for the reader and not a megaphone for myself" (*I Don't*). Given that one of Hamid's novels gives away Western inclination to amalgamate countries outside of the West (i.e. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*), Hamid readily understands that Pakistani representation for good or ill is often generalized by the West into broader Asian or Eastern imaginings. An incongruity emerges when reconciling how novels written and marketed to English-speaking Western audiences about Eastern/Asian/Pakistani experiences can "mirror" the Western reader. Given the sparse multicultural or multinational exposure generally, these novels must on some level project, if not imprint, Pakistani/Asian experiences and paradigms onto the non-Eastern reader. Under ideal circumstances, this would result in Western audiences absorbing and negotiating the candor and universality of the specific Eastern representation in order to bridge their own expansive cultural ignorance and division. Necessarily then, the text itself and the tenor of its projections demand a thorough investigation via their resistance or contribution to marginalization. Over fifty years ago, anthropologist and social theorist, Mary Douglas, understood that "We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva, and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society" (Madge). I contend that Hamid's profusion of secreting bodies in his fiction do precisely that – they symbolize a declining and condemned Pakistani society in perpetuum.

Media depictions of the wayward immigrant are helpful in analyzing literary representation as well. Cisneros reports that immigrants are often:

shown moving toward the camera; their movement is ‘directed towards the observer’s eye,’ which connotes that the immigrants are ‘coming at’ the viewer. This conveys a sense that the immigrants are invading our space and posing an immediate threat. The pollutant is on the move and will soon reach and contaminate the viewer (581).

One of the most captivating comparative features of Hamid’s three novels is its implementation of voice in conjunction with his contaminated metaphors. Among the three, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, through its dramatic monologue substantially captures the directionality of invasion. At no time is the reader not *faced with* an imposing, yet strangely sycophantic, Changez.

Moth Smoke takes a more distanced approach through the third person. The reader observes the narrative sphere as he would a fishbowl, perfectly situated to pass judgment on the straying occupants. This positionality, unfortunately, heightens the disconnection. The reader may sympathize with Daru and his counterparts, but he or she cannot escape deploring their collective and decidedly “Pakistani” actions. Because all are implicated in various infringements of law, the reader, especially the Western one, can maintain his latent sense of moral and national superiority.

Finally, in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, “you” are portrayed as “faceless and nameless; there are no particularities shown...thus transforming [you] the immigrant into a dangerous substance” (Cisneros 588). In spite of the intimacy which second person narration can afford through the transposition of “you” as the active participant, the lack of specificity, and the lack of community espoused in this novel renders the “Rising Asia[n]” migrant as perpetually

ostracized. As such, dehumanizing literary portrayals, all too often a pantomime of commonplace media representations, “convey no human connection to the immigrant,” serving instead to alienate and disempower him. Not only does this occur by way of the plot’s lived narrative experience, but also as a subjective disjuncture between the reader and the author (Cisneros 588).

If Hamid’s narrative panorama has the unique potential to “create social visions” and “influence...group interrelationships” and if, according to Hamid, a novel “explore[s] the way in which readers imagine – to reveal to the reader how they imagine,” then in the interest of equity, a multicultural author should be circumspect in the particular cultural scenery he or she consistently forwards to engage that reader’s imagination (Cisneros 573, Singh). Would not an abundance of viscerally contemptible and carnally evocative metaphors in the absence of positive visions skew even partially the imaginings of the reader toward the negative? Even if readers were to entertain the possibility of an ironic interpretation, the sheer volume of Hamid’s contaminated metaphors eventually foment Pakistani contemptibility by association. His constant suggestion either firmly establishes or re-calcifies the condescending parallel and does nothing to deconstruct such imaginings. If Hamid’s work is a mirror, it is a faulty one which projects, not reflects. Devastatingly, it projects old conceptualizations and outdated correspondences.

I am persuaded that what is transpiring and transferred in Hamid’s first three novels is a reconstitution of a colonial paradigm. Though the names and places have changed, their method of descriptive conveyance has not. So trenchantly has the metaphor for the polluted Other circulated that even brilliant, exacting, and well-intended contemporary authors forgo new conceptions. As highlighted in *The 21st Century Kulturkampf*,

The earlier and longer one has had a structure, the more it is cherished through the

dynamics of cognitive dissonance and is normalized and mythologized. Established structures lend security, familiarity, and confidence. Hence, normative upheavals and ideational revolutions are painful and relatively rare (Shoham 36).

Otis perceptively notes that “People [have] lived in the roles that they created for themselves, in minds subject to *language pandemics* and bodies subject to microbes” (147, emphasis added). As this thesis has revealed, the political incumbency attending pandemics inevitably lead to quarantine, thus making the contaminated metaphor a troubling tool favoring cultural exclusion. Hamid admits that “the notion of being an outsider is central to everything I do, not as an atypical condition but actually as possibly the typical condition” (Hamid, Mohsin). It appears not only has Hamid embraced exclusion for himself, but promotes narrative depictions where inclusion is impossible. During his childhood, Hamid desired to “reconcile these two worlds that [he] would move between – Pakistan and America” and while he has “tried to sort of create one world in which they would both fit,” he has not stylistically avoided the same internal dissolution from which his protagonists’ suffer (*I Don’t*). For example, Changez admits after encountering America, “I lost something of myself...that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth” (Hamid, *Reluctant* 172).

I propose that Hamid through attraction to and hybridization within Western culture has inadvertently camouflaged positive distinctions that could be articulated regarding his Eastern or hybridized society. Just as the protective defense mechanism of camouflage in the natural world signals inferiority, likewise, Hamid’s portraitures lack assertiveness and conceal the strength of global homogeneity and biological plurality because they blend so readily into the bordered nineteenth-century imagery of the non-Western Other. It seems that Hamid, like his character, Changez, “is very much in love with where he comes from, with Lahore, with Pakistan” (Yaqin).

Yet, at the same time, he self-deprecatingly accuses “Pakistanis [for being their]... own worst enemies” (Hong). Given this paradox - this cultural autoimmunity for which there is no treatment - one wonders if Hamid’s representations are symptomatic of a flailing Pakistani nationalism. Like the inhabitants of his novels, the non-Westerner has become foreign to himself, disoriented and struggling “to reassemble out of the present-time stories of numerous others the lifelong story of a plausible unitary self” (Hamid, *How* 160).

Hamid’s Pakistani citizens and migrants “out of love for a flame” have doubted their own beauty and therefore encircled the beauty of another – a presumably integrated, self-determined, and globally acknowledged identity (Hamid *Moth* 150). Hamid vulnerably illustrates the spellbinding symbiosis, “Is it just because I’m pathetic, helpless in my current state, completely dependent on her?...And I, the moth [Other] circling her candle, realize that she’s [the Westerner’s] not just a candle. She’s a moth as well, circling me” (*Moth* 222-223). The point is not that “Rising Asian[s]” have become equitably incorporated when Hamid writes, “We’re both the same;” it is rather that selfhood in the Global South has collapsed to the point of unrecognizability apart from a Western lens (*Moth* 223). Hamid rightly figures the “aggressive” and foreign moth’s body in *Moth Smoke* with swirling smoke arising from its “burning flesh” (Hamid, 150). The current *spiraling* circulation between Easterner and Westerner, whether in global economics or multicultural literary exchange, has caused the recognition of the Easterner to be distorted and blurred. The *moth* has escaped from view; Westerners only see the smoke of our violent contact with it.

Manucci cautions in *Moth Smoke* that “Love’s a dangerous thing” (Hamid, *Moth* 150). Certainly, the ascent of multicultural literature for English-speaking audiences is not without its own secret admirations. Troublingly,

Individuals or groups in a society regard the adoption and absorption of a more advanced and progressive culture as a panacea for all miseries and social ills. Eventually the task proves too formidable or the internal cultural mixture is thought to be impossible, and the innovation or rebellious zeal to integrate with the so-called 'enlightened' culture deteriorates into a superficial and shallow imitation of its external manifestations (Shoham 38).

Hamid's mimicry of infectious biological metaphors exemplifies this deterioration. Love for colonial rhetoric has supplanted the texts' pro-Eastern ambitions. Where filth, disease, toxicity, contagion, corruption, and inescapable poverty crown the characterizations of his characters (all of whom are anti-heroic), misplaced love has indeed become the non-Westerner's undoing. Shoham poignantly states, "With time, emulators of occidental cultures realized that they were in love with a mirage" (39).

Gravely at stake is the extent to which Hamid's mimesis shapes and colors the connections forged between cultures not yet cognizant of their own permeabilities and permutations. Cisneros underscores the metaphor's bilateral quality: "Even as this metaphoric articulation divides immigrants from mainstream American, 'immigration as pollution' also serves a unifying function, bringing together disparate groups of Americans under the banner of protecting the sanctity and integrity of the nation" (591). Fiction writers of the nineteenth century chronicled disease as a nemesis against the populous. Support was garnered and divisions between healthy and sick became more cleanly demarcated. Rothfield claims that today "disease is being used more explicitly in order to get at a truth that is now understood as primarily sociological" (7). Whether Rothfield is quantifiably correct may be debateable given the current profusion of viral epidemics or water and air pollution around the globe. However, his

observation that disease or any form of compromised health has the potential to “get at” a “sociological” truth is manifest in Hamid’s work (Rothfield 7).

Hamid’s emotively powerful writing forwards literal and dramatic accuracy. Because of this, its distinct capacity to entrench already precarious cultural divisions even further should not be underestimated. The tainted transfer of old schemas hazard cultural division, in spite of their being juxtaposed with evidences of individual permeability. Articulating new metaphorical and representational associations, those that do not conflate nonhuman agents of contamination with those involuntarily susceptible to them will welcome a dynamic systemic change in this era of political and cultural upheaval. Open systems of social recognition nurtured by new visionary rhetoric can usher in a positive miasma. Instead of being “a pervasive influence or atmosphere that tends to deplete or corrupt” misrepresented people, it can be repurposed to “deplete or corrupt” the sterile Western language systems which have perpetually framed the dissonance between Self and Other (miasma). Mutual reconnection or disconnection may enduringly transfer via just one well-placed or misplaced metaphorical word.

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