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Brand Pakistan: A Reception-Oriented Study of Pakistani Anglophone Fiction

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Abstract

My research considers the reception of (selected) contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction in the current global literary marketplace. It argues that these texts are embedded in transnational networks and structures in ways that significantly impact on their reception both in South Asia (Pakistan and India) and in “the West” (the UK and the US). The theoretical framework employed is that of literary reception studies: I argue that how fictional texts are received (as evidenced in initial book reviews) tells us a great deal about the ideological assumptions of the “interpretive communities” (in Stanley Fish’s term) that consume and promote them. I draw on the work of literary critics such as Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, Sandra Ponzanesi, Ana Cristina Mendes and Lisa Lau, who consider the ways in which “Third world” or “postcolonial” literature has been commodified as a result of global publishing and consumption trends. Via the comparative analysis of initial reviews of selected Pakistani novels, I discuss the commonalities and differences between their reception in various locations. I discuss *The Wandering Falcon* (2011), *The Golden Legend* (2017) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and the reviews of these novels published in leading literary magazines/supplements and newspapers in Pakistan, India, the UK and the US. My work involves discussion of how Pakistani literature is branded for an international market and how this impact on “local” (South Asian) reception. I address the frequently cited concern that globally focused Pakistani authors “sell-out” or even betray the nation and its people in their literary representations, pandering to international market demands in search of commercial success and literary recognition.

For my father who passed away on 17 October 2018

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Introduction

The banyan tree, the gulmahor,
 and all mem-sahibs of Lahore –
 I sing of you, for love and cash
 (for poets need a place to crash,
 in Islington, if not Mayfair –
 Please God, not Newham is my prayer).
 Lahore is fine in winter time,
 but when the temp begins to climb
 we brave the food on PIA
 to pen our eclogues far away.
 So, gentle reader, do not stray,
 I promise you that same bouquet,
 the one I sold you once before,
 the spice and smells of old Lahore,
 and chauffeured cars and so much more
 (Mohsin Hamid et. al. “How to Write About Pakistan” n.p.)¹

In 2010 during my M.Phil program at Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, I came across the writings of Mohsin Hamid and Bapsi Sidhwa as part of a course on Pakistani Anglophone fiction.² I wondered why the local market was suddenly full of (pirated editions

¹ This poem is part of an essay “How to Write About Pakistan” written by prominent Pakistani Anglophone writers Mohsin Hamid, Mohammed Hanif, Daniyal Mueenuddin and Kamila Shamsie (*Granta* 112: Pakistan).

² An M.Phil in the Pakistani educational system is a second Master’s degree.

of) English books written by Pakistani authors and why so many Pakistani universities had begun to include these works in the curriculum. I noticed that the books published in the 1990s and early 2000s were often concerned with diaspora, with colourful (paisley) title pages and images of saris, maple leaves, children with dreamy eyes or tribal men carrying guns. There were endorsements on the covers that spoke of these works as highly innovative and authentic. I became interested in the factors that had brought about this sudden abundance of Pakistani Anglophone writing, leading me to ask, who determines what circulates in the literary market, how is the market created, and is there a particular type of Pakistani text that sells? Who was publishing these books, especially when Pakistani publishers were scarce?³ What was the influence of international publishers or their sister branches in India, and what factors determined whether a book would become a literary success or a bestseller? How these factors were related to globalisation and, ultimately, how might this affect Pakistani Anglophone fiction?

I decided to explore such issues, however, I was reminded early in the project that the lustre of recent Pakistani Anglophone fiction is not only a question of aesthetic merit, but is also bound up with a number of political, cultural and global factors, the roles of which are significant. Pakistani Anglophone fiction is not without critical merit, but its reception is intimately bound up with issues that are played out on the world stage and the global literary market. My research explores the extent to which contemporary Pakistani texts are commodified by publishers and reviewers alike and how evaluations of their “literary value” are influenced by the geopolitical contexts in which they are published, promoted and reviewed. This involves complex questions about national identity, ostensible authorial intent

³ In 2016, Kanishka Gupta, an Indian literary agent working for Pakistani authors noted that: “One has to realise that the publishing scene in Pakistan is pathetic to non-existent. OUP [Oxford University Press] Pakistan is the only reputed publishing house in the country and they work with specific kinds of books. There is no scope for fiction writers, literary and commercial Pakistani writers have almost no option but to publish in India, or in the UK or the US” (Maham Javaid n.p.).

(as promoted by author/publisher) and the vexed relationship between literary evaluation and politics. In what follows I will discuss the (initial) reception of three novels only, recognising that these are part of a wider discussion. Nonetheless, I believe that the trends evidenced in the reception of these representative texts can be extended to many Pakistani Anglophone fictional texts published in recent years. I contend that literary works create their audience to some extent, yet the expectations of target audiences and professional readers also leave their mark on textual interpretation and evaluation. The specific conditions under which texts are read have the potential to produce divergent reader responses, and the production of meaning is dependent upon extrinsic factors beyond the book as much as an intrinsic literary content. This raises questions about the textual engagement of readers and how a particular readership selects a text and responds to it, shedding light on the “interpretive communities” (in Stanley Fish’s term; *What is a Text?* 335) to which they belong.

My investigation of the selected texts focuses on readerly reception, and authorial intention insofar as these elements can be determined by authors’ comments about their work, and the extent to which the interaction of the two constructs Pakistani Anglophone fiction in the global literary marketplace. As a student and a researcher in the field of Literary and Reception Studies, I am aware of the potentially subjective nature of my research topic and my research choices made regarding the area of research, the thesis topic and the questions I ask, that inevitably stem from my Pakistani identity. Having lived in Pakistan under the shadow of terrorism due to the war in Afghanistan following 9/11 adds an element of emotionality in my writing.⁴ Contrarily, my education at Massey University (and my experiences while living outside of Pakistan for years) have equipped me with a western analytical toolkit that some local Pakistani readers may feel has deteriorated my national loyalty. Nevertheless, the fusion

⁴ Fatima Junaid, a doctoral student at Massey University’s School of Business, articulates this trauma well in “Different Worlds: Migrating to New Zealand from Pakistan” published in *Stuff*, New Zealand.

of these two disparate elements provides this work with a beneficial inside-outsider perspective.

The challenges that might arise from this dual positioning – as an insider and outsider – are discussed by Pakistani-American academic and critic Masood Raja, in a recent essay on readerly expectations. Noticing the “tension between national expectations of Pakistani Writing in English and its reception beyond the nation” (“Competing Habitus” 349), Raja argues that “[w]hile the authors see themselves as cultural critics and tend to highlight the darkest and the most troubling aspects of Pakistani culture, the Pakistani readers, constantly under attack from various kinds of [w]estern media, see such representations as a betrayal” (“The Pakistani English Novel” 2). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus”, Raja proposes that there is a “nationalistic habitus” and a “cosmopolitan habitus” (350) and argues that local readers, situated in the former, do not view Pakistani Anglophone texts “simply as literary representations” (351) and respond to their critical portrayal of Pakistan with expressions of “national anxiety” (351). For example, he narrates how highly educated Pakistani students “with aesthetic ‘tastes’” often find the works of Pakistani Anglophone authors deeply troubling as, in their opinion, those books tend to represent Pakistan very negatively (“Competing Habitus” 350). Raja himself appears to identify with the views of those in the “national habitus” when he complains that Pakistani Anglophone fiction has become “the ultimate window into Pakistani culture” for his American students. This is problematic, in his eyes, because this literature “normalises” the negative portrayal of Pakistan by rehashing “plausible stereotypes” of patriarchy, sectarian conflicts and terrorism (“Competing Habitus” 351) instead of any other aspect from Pakistani life (“Competing Habitus” 354). Raja argues that the attempt to appeal to local and international readers places Pakistani Anglophone authors in a “double-bind” as they must cater to the demands of the metropolitan market and the pressures of their own primary culture. He argues,

Within the global arena of cultural representation there are no unmotivated texts or transparent representations: all acts of representation come with cultural and political baggage and are read and consumed within the larger context of socially produced knowledge about broader and specific cultures But within this realm of cultural exchange, Pakistani writers of English must also bear in mind that the stories they tell are not just stories but also windows into their primary culture, and these windows cannot just be opened onto the very worst vistas of that primary culture, they must also provide a wider and deeper look at what is loveable and salutary about that culture. (358)

Raja holds Pakistani authors responsible for unconsciously incorporating the expectations of the metropolitan market within their writing (350), and he is not alone in raising such concerns.

In *The Encyclopedia of the Novel* (2011), Peter Melville Logan et al. inform us that the notable works of diasporic Pakistani authors are “all concerned with issues of nationalism, belonging, marginality, and the representation of Pakistan. Politics continues to play a dominant role in Pakistani writing, although it is woven into the lives of a broad spectrum of characters” (750). This implies that political concerns overshadow literary content. In an interview with Snehal Shingavi, another Pakistani academic, Mushtaq Bilal raises similar concerns while discussing the political ramifications of Pakistani Anglophone literature that reaches the global literary marketplace. He maintains that this “literature has similar concerns about the world, Islam, and American foreign policy and speaks to a global ideology” with the image of Pakistan being “lawless, conservative, reactionary, orthodox Muslim, anti-woman, and run by military dictatorships and crazy politicians” (“What We Talk” n.p.). Bilal speaks of the dangers that result from such representations for international readers and chides Pakistani Anglophone writers for giving readers in “America and the UK exactly what they want” (“What We Talk” n.p.). He cites the example of Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* which,

he claims, includes “every single stereotype about honor killing” (“What We Talk” n.p.). Moreover, he emphasises that this literature tends to ignore the real struggle of many Pakistanis against dictatorship under the Musharraf and Zia regimes, and “pretends that the fight against dictatorship happens [only] in literature” (“What we talk” n.p.).⁵

Maniza Naqvi, another prominent Pakistani writer-critic, raises similar concerns in her essay “Pakistani English Fiction’s Search for Approval and Recognition,” published in Pakistan’s prominent newspaper *Dawn*. The issues she raises are at the forefront of my study:

Is Pakistani fiction that gets international recognition part of a new world literature that, in turn, feeds a narrative [about the nation] dominant in the current global order? When called out for promoting the dominant narratives of global power or for downright misrepresentations in their fiction, our writers are quick to their own defense, haughtily shrugging off the accusation by glibly pointing out that they write ‘lies,’ after all that is what fiction means. (n.p.)

Of course, these commentators are not suggesting that Pakistani Anglophone fiction is overtly maligning the country’s image. Nonetheless, they suggest that stories produced and circulated about Pakistan need to be read in conjunction with the globally prevalent and politically-charged narratives about Pakistan, and Muslim countries that circulate in the West, especially since 9/11. Notoriously associated with Osama bin Laden’s hide-out, and as the birthplace of Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban, Pakistan has a bad reputation.⁶ Additionally, Pakistan is often mistakenly represented as a part of the Middle-East,

⁵ General Pervez Musharraf and General Zia ul Haq were military dictators who later toppled civilian governments and ruled Pakistan from 2001-2008 and 1977-1988 respectively.

⁶ In 2016, members of the Foreign Service program (comprising diplomats) at the University of Oxford were asked three things that come to their mind when they heard the word “Pakistan.” The majority answered in terms of nuclear weapons, terrorism, security, Islam, and the Taliban. The participants included 4 women and 8 men from nine different nationalities – the US, Japan, Britain, Poland, China, South Korea, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In 2013, in a poll conducted by the BBC in 25 different countries, Pakistan was declared the second most unpopular country (AFP “Pakistan ‘second most unpopular’ n.p.). Further, Pakistan is described by *The Atlantic*’s Jeffrey Goldberg and Marc Ambinder as “the ally from hell” (n.p.).

and its citizens as camel-riding desert dwellers, despite it being the third most populous Muslim country in the world (as well as a known front-line ally in the War on Terror).⁷ Despite the desire to update this image of the nation, Pakistani Anglophone writers tread a fine line when writing for the global market if they hope to achieve good sales. Their work is often read within the context of already circulating (negative) images about the country itself and Islam more generally. Compounding this is the sense that Pakistan, like other foreign nations, is immediately knowable to metropolitan readers through these fictional narratives about the country. This tendency to read fictional narratives as providers of anthropological facts is something to which I will return in the next Chapter.

Mustansar Hussain Tarar, a well-known Urdu writer, voices these concerns in his interview with Nasir Abbas Nayyar, “These English writers are my friends — Mohammed Hanif, H M Naqvi, Kamila Shamsie. I do have some differences with them because they mostly play to the gallery. They write what the West wants to read... They have to compromise.” (n.p.) The compromise Tarar is referring to here mean surrender to the dictates of the global literary marketplace which allow Pakistani Anglophone writers, like other global writers, to get published. Whether or not this is true, is debatable; how these texts are received, however, introduces another set of concerns, albeit related ones.

Pakistani Anglophone Fiction: From Humble Beginnings to “the Pak Pack Takes Over”⁸

There is a noted correlation between the rising global prominence of Pakistani Anglophone fiction and the events of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Western

⁷ In one of the (five-starred) reviews for Nobel Prize laureate Malala’s book *I am Malala* (2013), a reviewer on Amazon confuses Pakistan with Palestine saying, “I really enjoyed reading the history of Palestine from a young woman” (n.p.).

⁸ The title is taken from Bina Shah’s article in *Hindustan Times* with the same name “The Pak pack takes over the literary world?” published on 26 October 2010.

readers appear to have begun reading Pakistani literature to fulfil a desire for ‘information’ about the region, a desire mistakenly derived from the naïve assumption that all Muslims are the same (and potential terrorists), and the misguided notion that Pakistan or Afghanistan are interchangeable.

Commentators such as Maniza Naqvi and Mushtaq Bilal have noted this tendency. Globally, attention was drawn to writers of Pakistani origins like Mohammed Hanif, Hamid, Daniyal Mueenuddin, H.M. Naqvi, and Ahmad, and greater recognition was accorded to more established authors such as Aamer Hussein, Aslam and Kamila Shamsie. Arguably, this increased visibility is connected to the renewed public interest in the region that, in the jargon of international relations, came to be known as “Af-Pak” in the wake of the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. Given such claims, I will offer a brief background of Pakistani Anglophone fiction to highlight the change of direction it took in approximately the first decade of the twenty-first century.

First, however, a note on terminology. My employment of the term “Anglophone fiction,” instead of “Pakistani English fiction,” aims to draw attention to the colonial roots of Pakistani literature and suggests how far this literature has branched from this colonial origin, while still being tied to it in numerous ways. (It is for this reason that I also refer to Pakistani fiction, at various points in this thesis, as “postcolonial”). My focus on fiction written in English invites questions about what proportion of the Pakistani population routinely speaks and writes in English, and of their competence in reading (Pakistani) Anglophone fiction.⁹ This naming also draws attention to the situation of Pakistani writers based in global metropolitan centres, their choice to write in English, and the complex relationships between power, politics and language that are played out in the contemporary world.

⁹ According to Sabiha Mansoor’s study on the status and role of regional languages in Pakistan (2004), ‘Urdu’ and ‘English’ enjoy ‘high status’ and are reserved for public and official use and also dominate the regional languages – politically, economically, and culturally (334).

Pakistani Anglophone fiction is a relatively new emerging *commodity* in the global literary marketplace in comparison to its better-known counterparts like African and Indian Anglophone fictions. In *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), Tariq Rahman states that African literature first gained western attention in the late 1950s (3) while Naveen Zahra Minai argues that Pakistani Anglophone literature began to gain limited visibility in the 1980s only after Indian Anglophone fiction came under the western spotlight (292). A general assumption about Pakistani Anglophone literature, as claimed by Rahman almost thirty years ago, is that it emerged as a direct consequence of British colonisation of the South Asian subcontinent. Some refute this claim, like celebrated Pakistani poet and critic Alamgir Hashmi, who argues that the usage of English in South Asia for literary purposes predates the British Raj. He offers the example of *Travels* penned by Sake Deen Mohammad in 1794 and adds that the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Syed Amir Ali, Hamid Ali Khan and Lutfullah were published before colonisation (“Prolegomena to the Study of Pakistani English” 110). However, such writings are largely unknown, within significant international impact, and, therefore I accord with Rahman’s view. During Indo-Pak’s colonisation, when English became the official language, many locals adopted it to explain their culture and religion to the British colonisers and to establish contacts with their British rulers. It was also at this time that some authors began to write literature in English.

Various prominent Pakistani and international literary critics like Rahman, Muneeza Shamsie, Alamgir Hashmi, David Waterman and Aroosa Kanwal have characterised Pakistani Anglophone fiction writers/writing according to different subsets. Rahman uses temporal categories such as Pre-Partition Fiction, The 1950s, The 1960s, The 1970s and The 1980s with separate space devoted to the representative figures of each era. In contrast, M. Shamsie roughly classifies Pakistani Anglophone writers into generational groups: the First, the Second and a “more promising Third generation of young writers” (*A Dragonfly* 155). Kanwal, in

Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction, posits 9/11 as the main dividing line between the earlier works and the contemporary ones and the ‘turning point’ for this generation, while M. Shamsie does not. Waterman classifies Pakistani Anglophone writers as belonging to one of two “waves”: authors in the first wave wrote before the recent surge in Pakistani fiction and those in the second wave wrote in the 2000s. For this research, I use M. Shamsie’s third classification, the Third generation of Pakistani Anglophone fiction writers.

The “First generation” of Pakistani Anglophone writers penned their works prior to Partition, and were writing from what was then India. They are classified as Pakistani on the basis of their location (they lived in the part of India that later became Pakistan) or based on their Islamic faith. They include Ahmed Ali (*Twilight in Delhi*, 1940), political activist Mumtaz Shah Nawaz (*The Heart Divided*, 1947) and their relatively less-known contemporaries Firoz Khan Noon and Khawaja Ahmad Abbas.¹⁰ Rahman claims that their highly-Anglicised writings aim primarily at establishing contact between British colonisers and locals (15). The “Second generation” writers were located in the new nation of Pakistan and/or included those who grew up in India and migrated to Pakistan after Partition. They are remarkably different from the first group; they developed their own style of writing, quite distinct from their predecessors. This was perhaps because English was domesticated in Pakistan after Partition and gained a degree of social prestige. Among the writers in this period are Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah (*The Young Wife and Other Stories*, 1958), Zulfikar Ghose (*The Murder of Aziz Khan*, 1967, a trilogy entitled *The Incredible Brazilian*, 1972-1978, *The Triple Mirror of the Self*, 1992, *Veronica and the Gongora Passion: Stories, Fictions, Tales and One Fable*, 1998), Bapsi Sidhwa (*The Crow Eaters*, 1978, *Ice Candy Man*, 1988, *The Bride*, 1990, *An American Brat*, 1994, *Their*

¹⁰ Known as Sir Firoz Khan Noon, he wrote *Canada and India* published in 1939 and later a biography *From Memory* published in 1966. Khawaja Ahmad Abbas wrote around 70 different works including novels in English, Urdu and Hindi languages. His first novel *Tomorrow is Ours! A Novel of India of Today* was penned in 1943. Notably, Abbas chose to stay in India after partition and it is only his “Muslim” identity that makes him Pakistani in the eyes of critics.

Language of Love, 2013), and Sara Suleri (*Meatless Days*, 1989, *Boys will be Boys: A Daughter's Elegy*, 2003). These writings primarily deal with domestic issues, including the repression of women in patriarchal Pakistani society, and show little concern for global political issues.

The third group of Pakistani Anglophone writers, according to M. Shamsie's categorisation, are those who have published internationally successful fiction(s) since the turn of the 21st century and received global awards. Interestingly, in almost all cases (except Ahmad's), these "Pakistani" writers were either born outside of Pakistan, or left for western countries at an early age, or have settled there at the time in which they wrote. Thus, English is a (if not *the*) primary language for the majority. This category includes Mohsin Hamid (*Moth Smoke*, 2000, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, 2013, and *Exit West*, 2017); Mohammed Hanif (*A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, 2008, and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, 2011); Daniyal Mueenuddin (*In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 2009); Kamila Shamsie (*In the City by the Sea*, 1998, *Salt and Saffron*, 2000, *Kartography*, 2002; *Broken Verses*, 2005, *Burnt Shadows*, 2009, *A God in Every Stone*, 2014, and *Home Fire*, 2017); Uzma Aslam Khan (*The Story of Noble Rot*, 2001, *Trespassing*, 2003, *The Geometry of God*, 2008, and *Thinner Than Skin*, 2012); Jamil Ahmad (*The Wandering Falcon*, 2011); Nadeem Aslam (*Season of the Rainbirds*, 1993, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, 2004, *The Wasted Vigil*, 2008, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 2013, and *The Golden Legend*, 2017), Qaisra Shahraz (*The Holy Woman*, 2001, *Typhoon*, 2003, and *Revolt*, 2013) and Hanif Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, 1990, *The Black Album*, 1995, *My Beautiful Laundrette and Other Writings*, 1996, *Intimacy*, 1998, *Gabriel's Gift*, 2001, *The Body*, 2003, *My Ear at His Heart*, 2004, *When the Night Begins*, 2004, *Something to Tell You*, 2008, *The Last Word*, 2014, and *The Nothing*,

2017).¹¹ Lesser known authors in this group include Maha Khan Phillips (*Beautiful from this Angle*, 2010 and *The Curse of Mohenjo Daro*, 2017) Omar Shahid Hamid (*The Prisoner: A Novel*, 2013, *The Spinner's Tale*, 2015, *The Party Worker*, 2017, and *The Fix*, 2019) and Feryal Ali Gohar (*The Scent of Wet Earth in August*, 2002 and *No Space for further Burials*, 2007).

Writing on Pakistani Anglophone fiction, Claire Chambers groups Hamid, Hanif, K. Shamsie, Mueenuddin and Aslam together as the “big five” who have gained international critical acclaim over the past decade (“A Comparative Approach to Pakistani Fiction in English” 122-3). K. Shamsie has termed these emerging writers (including herself) the “Pak Pack” (quoted in Bina Shah “The Pak Pack” n.p.). Many of these writers (not only limited to the big-five) are accused by local readership and critics of having “wavy links” to Pakistan (Chambers 123). It could be argued that such authors are not “authentic” Pakistani writers and, indeed, some have then charged them with bringing shame to their country through the use of topics such as fettered female sexuality, punishment for blasphemy, the enforced requirement for women to wear the veil, and rape (etc.) which are usually considered taboo in Pakistani society. In this context, M. Shamsie criticises this (Pakistani) attitude to question the “identity” of Pakistani diasporic Anglophone writers, who may have been born or educated in Pakistan but have migrated, or have Pakistani parents and live elsewhere” (*A Dragonfly in the Sun* xxiii). In her recent essay “Divergent discourses: Human rights” (2018), Shazia Sadaf notes the difficulties faced by these writers who find themselves “navigating the paradox of conflicting responsibilities” in writing “about the present-day injustices caused by the failure of the state without being accused of subscribing to [w]estern agendas” (141).

Certainly, the vast majority of the current generation of “Pakistani” Anglophone writers are either transnational or cosmopolitan and cannot be exclusively taken as “Pakistani” in any

¹¹ K. Shamsie, Aslam and Kureishi clearly straddle both the second and third generations, but are included in the latter because of their continued publication and international recognition in the twenty-first century.

simple geographical sense, as will be discussed in Chapter One. Indeed, Cara Cilano uses the word “transnational” to describe these authors (“Extreme Edges” 193). She identifies the new generation of Pakistani writers as global citizens, whose merging of local with global trends marks a break from 1990s nationalistic fiction. Nearly all of them have been either educated in the US or the UK or have lived outside Pakistan for a significant period. For example, Hamid is simultaneously linked to Pakistan, America (where he studied and worked, leaving after 9/11) and England (he holds British nationality and has resided there for many years). Aslam is a Pakistan born (Gujranwala) writer who immigrated to the UK as a teenager; K. Shamsie, a Karachiite by birth, is a British national who studied in New York; U. Khan was born in Pakistan but studied in the US, and spent her formative years in varied locations such as the Philippines, Japan and England; Mueenuddin is a Pakistani-American writer. Clearly, these writers “live-in-between” nations, occupying an interstitial space due to their privileged international mobility. They also, simultaneously, stay connected to their country of birth (or of their parents’ birth). Most Pakistani English fiction writers writing today continue to shuttle between Pakistan – their country of (familial) origin – and their adopted homes, the US and the UK.

A brief consideration of some recent contemporary Pakistani fiction also reveals the global nature of the settings in these works. Aslam’s first novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), is set in rural Pakistan, while his *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) is set in a fictional British locale called Dasht-e-Tanhaii, and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) in Afghanistan. Although he returns to a western Pakistani/eastern Afghani setting in *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013), the novel looks out on the world, exploring the War on Terror from the perspectives of local, Muslim characters. K. Shamsie’s first two novels, *Kartography* (2002) and *Broken Verses* (2005), are set in Pakistan, but her third, *Burnt Shadows* (2009), deals with global issues in a wide variety of international settings in different periods of the twentieth century, culminating in 9/11. Her

A God in Every Stone (2014) is a travel story of a London-based archaeologist's travels to Peshawar; *Home Fire* (2017) is about issues of Muslim identity in Britain. The action in Hamid's debut novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000), takes place in Lahore, and while this is also the setting for his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), the majority of the latter details the narrator's experiences of living in the US and his decision to return to Pakistan following 9/11. His next two works, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and *Exit West* (2017), are set in imaginary/unnamed locales; the former is a fictional self-help book which charts the steps of progression for an ordinary Asian while the latter highlights the current refugee crisis. Increasingly, then, the works of these "Pakistani" writers portray locales and concerns that extend well beyond the borders of the nation. As Naqvi succinctly suggests in the Pakistani current affairs magazine *Herald*, "[contemporary Pakistani] fiction straddles many worlds and is eloquent in all. [...] This is global storytelling. Not Pakistani per se" (n.p.)

Questions about the proclaimed "local" nature of such "global" storytellers have been granted significant attention in the past decade or so. In "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities", Tim Brennan argues that the "Indianness" of western-resident "Indian" writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie becomes a (saleable) "mark of distinction in a world supposedly exempt from national belonging" (2). In this way, he maintains, they fulfil

[T]he paradoxical expectations of a metropolitan public ... satisfy the unwritten guidelines of metropolitan taste by supplying the market demand for novelty, either as exotica, political expose, or simple *Schadenfreude* ... they also deviate from these guidelines by being deliberately pedagogic. (10)

Graham Huggan adds that such literature is "primarily an export product, aimed at a largely foreign audience for whom the writer acts, willingly or not, as cultural spokesperson or interpreter" (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 34). This gives rise to the question of authorial authenticity and authority which plays a crucial role in the reception and promotion of Pakistani

Anglophone fiction. As James Procter and Bethan Benwell suggest, authenticity is a “pivotal paratext, part and parcel” in the analysis of many postcolonial texts (*Reading Across Worlds* 139). These Pakistani Anglophone writings, by some modern-day Scheherazades, are problematically viewed as truthful accounts. As will be discussed in the following chapter, defining what or who a Pakistani writer is, is challenging.

For the most part, according to Madeline Clements, Pakistani Anglophone writers “orient themselves towards the ‘global’ in their internationally disseminated novels, both in terms of their geopolitical subject matter and selection of settings which are of symbolic and strategic significance to world powers” (*Writing Islam* 9). M. Shamsie claims that writers like those mentioned above “write in liminal positions between West and East” (*And The World Changed* xi). This liminality is not necessarily negative. As Pakistani-American writer and critic Anis Shivani notes, the current generation of Pakistani writers receiving international attention “are injecting their country into world literature” (“What is World Literature?” n.p.). The liminality has also equipped these writers to consider how Pakistan is stereotyped globally, and why it is important to undo stereotypical and formulaic representations of the nation, as M. Bilal argues in *Writing Pakistan* (3).

Many contemporary Pakistani writers are global citizens, living in multiple locations across the world, and who therefore have a cosmopolitan or hybrid identity which allows them to navigate between a site of national (Third world) representation and a locus of consumption (mainly the UK/US). Ahmad, the author of *The Wandering Falcon* (discussed in Chapter Three), offers an exception, which is one of the reasons for selection as a case study. He is a “resident author”, having lived in Pakistan all of his life, and his book is wholly set in the country.¹² Regardless, despite being praised by many for being an “authentic representative”

¹² Terms such as resident author and diasporic author are frequently employed in Postcolonial studies to distinguish between ‘purely’ local and foreign writers. For instance, Ruvani Ranasinha employs this distinction in her discussion of South Asian Women writers (*Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women’s Fiction* 27).

of (certain aspects of historic) Pakistani culture, his work is nonetheless complicated by questions about his intended readership: is he writing for western consumers or a Pakistani audience? These issues become important when considering the reception to his work, as I will discuss in Chapter Three.

In what follows, I will use the term “Brand Pakistan” to discuss the production, circulation and reception (in terms of reviews) of Pakistani Anglophone fiction as it allows me to reflect on this fiction’s entanglement within market forces.¹³ My use of the term Brand Pakistan stems largely from an article published in *Granta* entitled “How to Write about Pakistan,” jointly written by several leading Pakistani writers, Hamid, Mueenuddin, Hanif, and K. Shamsie. The piece focuses on accusations levelled against their writing, exhibiting what Huggan refers to as “ironic self-consciousness” (*Postcolonial Exotic* xi),

When it comes to Pakistani writing, I would encourage us all to remember the brand. We are custodians of brand Pakistan. And beneficiaries Branding can be the difference between a novel about brown people and a best-selling novel about brown people. (n.p.)

In addition to a long section on the importance of mangoes to this “brand” (a popular trope in 1980s fiction, towards which Hanif nods in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*), the authors write sardonically about the packaging and promotion of Pakistani fiction:

It will become clear whether the Pakistan of our work is Indo-Pak or Af-Pak depending on whether the cover has paisley designs or bombs/minarets/menacing men in shalwar

¹³ Some of what follows has been adapted from my article, “‘Brand Pakistan’: Global Imaginings and National Concerns in Pakistani Anglophone Literature”, co-written with Nicholas Holm and Kim Worthington, published in *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Literature*.

kameezes If woman [*sic*] are on the cover, then the two possible Pakistans are expressed through choice of clothing: is it bridal wear or burkhas? (Hamid et al. n.p.)

This article ends with the poem “Desi Masala”, used as an epigraph for this chapter, which further disputes claim that these writers are commodifying traders of “Brand Pakistan.”

This, in the context of Brand Pakistan, means certain texts are preferred by the global literary marketplace over others. Caroline Koezler in *Critical Branding* () maintains, branding not only creates truths but “establishes some truths as more or, indeed, less valuable than others” (131). It, therefore, privileges certain truths over the others and “valorise[s] or devlaorise[s]” them (133), making people believe in certain realities over others. Borrowing from Sandra Ponzanesi’s *Postcolonial Cultural Industry* (76), I argue that branding converts Pakistani Anglophone fiction into literary commodities by ascribing ‘values’ that make it more desirable to global readers. One such value, in the post 9/11 context, is the provision of anthropological information about Pakistan, its people, religion(s) and culture. As Sadaf maintains, “Pakistani [A]nglophone writers have found a ... receptive publishing industry in the West that is ready to capitalise on the global curiosity about Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan” and have met with an avid reception in the global literary marketplace in the post 9/11 period (140).

In developing this discussion about the branding of Pakistani Anglophone fiction I have drawn on the work of critics such as Huggan, Brouillette, Lisa Lau, Ponzanesi and Procter and Benwell. While they do not write specifically about Pakistani literature, their wider discussions about the commodification of postcolonial literature have provided me with insights that can usefully be applied to Pakistani Anglophone fiction. This framework of branding connects this body of literature to the concepts of marketing and materiality which will be explained in the next chapter.

Apart from the work of these theorists, my research has been influenced by the approaches to texts that can be broadly gathered under the umbrella-term “Reception Studies.”¹⁴ Reception-oriented theorists are a broad group but, as the term suggests, share the assumption that textual meaning is (at least in part) generated by the interpretations of those who read/receive texts; it is not simply something the author inserts into texts for readers to *discover*. In the context of postcolonial reception, this indicates that readers coming from “outside” cultures may produce meanings that were not envisaged by writers with “inside” knowledge of a specific (postcolonial) nation. As a result of reading in this area (see Huggan 2001, Chris Bongie 2003, Brouillette 2007, Ruvani Ranasinha 2007, Benwell & Procter 2012), I became aware of a significant “research gap”: the lack of concrete, empirical evidence about the reception of postcolonial texts more generally, and Pakistani ones specifically, within transnational contexts. For reasons that will be outlined in Chapter Two (“Methodology”) my focus in this thesis is not on the (global) academic reception of Pakistani Anglophone texts but rather on their popular reception as this is revealed in initial reviews of novels published in widely disseminated newspapers and magazines.

Scope and Limitations

I began this research with an unwieldy number of questions and a vision of covering many more aspects concerning the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction than has been possible. Initially, I was interested in analysing a wide range of influences on the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction: the role of reviewers, prize administrators, educators, literary festival organisers, the paratextual features of the texts (book cover design, selection of jacket-cover blurb and other forms of publisher endorsement on/in the material text) and the

¹⁴ The foundational theories I will discuss in this regard are those of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish.

significance of authorial self-promotion in interviews, blogs and similar marketing avenues. I soon realised that this would be impossible to achieve in a study of this length. The question of the respective readership of these novels is not easy to answer as sales data are largely unavailable. While I was interested in conducting paratextual analyses, this would have involved a range of issues (for example, questions of design and specifics of marketing planning) that were beyond my expertise, and focus. Likewise, while consideration of the impact of literary festivals (in Pakistan, India, the UK and the US) on textual reception might provide a potentially rich source of data, this would be an extensive survey that was more rightly the subject of a thesis on marketing. It was my hope, regarding the creation of literary celebrity, to look at the correspondence between the authors and their publishers, following the model of Ranasingha's literary reception study, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain* (2007).¹⁵ However, as she clarifies, the equivalent data for the "post-Rushdie" generation is "yet to be archived" or is inaccessible "because of copyright law" – not to mention commercial sensitivities (7). My initial designs went even further. I also wanted to offer a comparison of how "professional" and "lay" readers responded to Pakistani Anglophone fiction (the distinction between these groups of readers is outlined by John Guillory in "The Ethical Practice of Modernity"). At the start of my research, I identified "lay" reviews of 150+ words on *Amazon* and *Goodreads* to compare these with reviews published in reputable newspapers and magazines, and academic journals/books, but as I developed my methodology, I became aware of the complexity and time constraints involved in doing such a study.

Another initial aim was to do a representative study of Pakistani Anglophone fiction by considering the reception of *all* the novels written by *all* the "big five" writers (as defined earlier) but I soon realised the extent of such a task. My work is thus far more modest than my

¹⁵ Another study which explores such correspondence and behind-the-scenes data is Anamik Saha's "The Postcolonial Cultural Economy: The politics of British Asian cultural production" (2009), later published in *Race and the Cultural Industries* (2018).

initial conception. As outlined in Chapter Two (“Methodology”), I have chosen to focus closely on the *initial* reception of only three texts published post 9/11 via the close analysis of reviewer responses in major newspapers and magazines, in Pakistan, India, the UK and the US.

Goals

I hope that this thesis will contribute to multiple fields of study in literature as it merges Reception Studies with postcolonial critique in a unique analysis of how Pakistani Anglophone fiction has been received in both “the West” and “the East” (although I will complicate such simple geographic identifications in what follows). There are (surprisingly) very few studies of (newspaper/journal initial) reviewer reception of fictional texts, and certainly none that consider Pakistani Anglophone fiction. There is also no transnational reception study (based on reviews, rather than academic articles, which are typically published well after novels are published) on Pakistani Anglophone literature and this thesis aims to fill in this lacuna.

A key aim that frames my work in this thesis is that my analyses of initial reviews of Pakistani Anglophone fiction will contribute, in a unique way, to the ongoing discussions about issues of authorial identity, authenticity and national representation when set against claims about the commodification of this body of literature. In their concluding remarks to *Routledge’s Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* (2018), the editors, Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam stress the need to fill the “critical vacuum” responsible for delay in world-wide recognition of Pakistani Anglophone writing. They urge a “revitalis[ation]” of the way this body of work is received (392). I sincerely hope that my research contributes to that goal.

Navigating the Thesis: An Overview

The general structure of my thesis is as follows: this introduction offers a broad overview of the Pakistani literary scene. The first chapter then presents theoretical premises which serve as the core of my study, linking it to the outline of my methodology in the next chapter. In the chapters that follow I consider the initial reception of three Pakistani texts in western (the UK and US) and eastern (Pakistani and Indian) publications, aiming to highlight the similarities and differences between their receptions in different reading “communities.” In the course of my discussion, I will suggest the problems that inhere when assumptions are made about singular national identities on the part of both authors and reviewers. A brief “road-map” of the thesis follows.

Chapter One: Theoretical Contexts and Framework pertains to the critical method used in this study, which is a mixture of both Reception Studies and branding. This chapter offers a guide to some of the key theories and assumptions that frame what follows. I briefly discuss relevant aspects of theory from the major Reception theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish in the first section. In the second section, I consider the vexed issues involved when claims are made about authorial national (i.e. Pakistani) identity, linking this to the wider postcolonial literary discussion. The literature review that follows discusses these identity issues, with reference, where necessary or relevant, to theorists such as Huggan, Brouillette, Ponzanesi and Lau. The last section of this chapter suggests how these different theoretical approaches might be combined for my research.

Chapter Two: Methodology explains my decision to conduct a study based on newspaper and magazine reviews. Here I explain the criteria of selecting reviews and introduce the newspapers/magazines in which they were published to my reader with a focus on their circulation and political leanings. I also outline the aspects I will discuss in the reviews, namely

their focus on authorial identity, the politics-aesthetics binary, readership, and how they imply their emphasis on authorial authenticity. I also explain my textual choices. The latter portion of the chapter then returns to several of the theoretical issues discussed in my introduction and Chapter One to suggest their particular relevance to the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction in the global literary marketplace.

Chapter Three: Reception of *The Wandering Falcon* — this chapter discusses the reception of Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* with a particular emphasis on the novel's unusual publication history. Ahmad was unable to find a publisher for the work when it was first written in the 1970s. Almost four decades later it was finally accepted for publication and became an international best-seller. The (re)valuation of the book invites questions about the extent to which its (final) successful reception depended less on aesthetic merit than changing geopolitical interests. I also discuss claims made by many reviewers about Ahmad's representational authority and the "authenticity" of his portrayal of North-West Pakistan, the novel's setting.

Chapter Four: Reception of *The Golden Legend* considers how Aslam's (self) promotion and "celebrity" has influenced the reception of his novel. I discuss how "Brand Aslam" draws on and amplifies elements of "Brand Pakistan" to secure the authority of Aslam's representations of the nation he left as a teenager. The review analysis sheds light on the difference (if any) in transnational reception in terms of Aslam's political and aesthetic choices, and his involvement as a literary celebrity.

Chapter Five: In this chapter, I discuss the relatively insipid reception to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in Pakistan (and South Asia more generally) in contrast to its (largely) glowing reception in the West (the UK & the US). Through review analysis, I discuss how this text addresses the anxieties around Pakistan and America (generalised as East-West relations),

taking Pakistani Anglophone fiction back to the traditional postcolonial resistance writing paradigm. I also consider the possible motivations for the focus on these anxieties.

Conclusion: I conclude the study by reflecting on the data analysis presented in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, and summarising the patterns and themes that run through the previous three chapters. I suggest avenues for further Reception Studies on Pakistani Anglophone literature. Finally, the Appendix contains all the reviews included in the thesis.

Chapter One: Theoretical Contexts and Framework

In the introduction, I laid the foundations for my thesis, introduced the aim and scope of my project and explained the importance of reception study of these texts that are read and marketed (branded) as “Pakistani.” This chapter will outline the key theoretical approaches employed in this study, particularly as they pertain to issues of (literary) textual reception, commodification, and marketing. This will necessarily also involve discussion of how authorial “identity” – especially when constructed in relation to nationhood – has been discussed and theorised in the past few decades, and how it impacts the reception of “Pakistani” texts. My focus will be on reception theory and, as this term suggests, how Pakistani Anglophone novels have been received, in local and global contexts, via the analysis of reviews. Inevitably, this task requires consideration of how texts have been promoted by publishers and self-promoted by authors (for example via interviews), and the influence this has on their reception.

In recent years significant attention has been paid to the *materiality* of books: how they are sold as commodities in a global marketplace.¹⁶ This indicates a shift away from (only) the close reading of texts to what Ana Cristina Mendes terms the “new sociology of literature” (215). This term refers to the consideration of the social, historical and political contexts in which texts are promoted and consumed. Likewise, Claire Squires recommends an investigation into the conditions of production, circulation and marketing of texts in the wake of “increasing commodification in the literary marketplace” (*Marketing Literature* 7). She focuses on the “promotional circuit” which involves the deliberate attempt to create authorial

¹⁶ See, for example, Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 2001; Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality*, 2005; Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, 2007; Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature*, 2007; Nicole Matthews & Nickianne Moody, *Judging a Book by its Cover*, 2007; Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives*, 2015 and Subha Xavier, *Migrant Text: Making and Marketing a Global French Literature*, 2016.

“celebrity” on the part of publishers, the wider strategies and tactics of the publishing industry, and the role of editors, literary agents and sales data (7).

In this chapter, I follow the critical direction(s) suggested by these theorists, who represent a growing acknowledgement of the need to pay attention to the material conditions of the production, consumption and dissemination of literary texts in the current global market. I acknowledge, then, the position expressed by Elizabeth Le Roux (in a discussion on South African fiction): that “books are not read in isolation” (65) because their production and readership is bound by transnational networks and that “the issue of reading should not be divorced from the material context, including the wider publishing context” (73). The first section of this chapter attends to the reception theory which anchors the reading practices of interpretive communities (Pakistan, India, the UK, and the US) selected for this study.

1.1 Reception Studies

As I have suggested, reading is not an isolated process in which an individual reader works to determine the singular meaning implanted in a text; a large number of factors work in different combinations to produce varying interpretations of the same text. How and who reads, and when and where, are vitally important. Perhaps this is why John Frow calls for the need to consider the “reading systems” manifested in the interpretive practices of readers (31). Likewise, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures* (2007), Catherine L. Innes stresses the importance of looking into a “variety of contexts” in which (postcolonial) literary works are read, contexts that are as much local or regional as they are global, and which – in keeping with the dictates of an increasingly global literary marketplace – may be local, regional and global simultaneously. In another article, “Cosmopolitan Readers and Postcolonial Identities,” Innes also advocates for an emphasis on readers’ cultural and

geographic perspectives and situations, rather than on the identity of the writer and her context (171).

Frow and Innes' comments align with what is often referred to as "Reception Studies" – although this general term risks the elision of several different approaches and emphases among theorists primarily interested in the way texts are received and read. Reception Studies (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) originated in the Constance School in Germany in the 1960s and achieved its peak during the 1970s and 1980s due to the work of scholars such as Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. In his book *Reception Theory* (1984), Robert Charles Holub describes this theoretical approach as a rejection of "text-best" literary criticism and "a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader" (xii). He argues that Reception Studies arose in reaction to social, intellectual and literary developments in western Germany during the late 1960s, where it was acknowledged that the text comes alive only through reader interaction: "the literary work is neither completely text nor completely the subjectivity of the reader, but a combination or merger of the two" (84).¹⁷ Terry Eagleton refers to Reception Studies as the examination of the reader's role in a "social and historical theory of meaning" (*Literary Theory* 107). He adds that "the act of consumption is itself constitutive of the existence of the literary text" (*Criticism and Ideology* 62). Relatedly, Jonathan Culler explains Reception Studies as "not a way of interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretive assumptions that give them meaning for different audiences at different periods" (qtd. in Staiger 2). Reception Studies, therefore, looks at the ways in which texts are socially *consumed* and how this changes their "intelligibility." A theorist working in this area might ask, what kinds of meanings does a text

¹⁷ Of course, similar ideas were being articulated in France simultaneously, perhaps most famously by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author." In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of influential American and British literary critics, such as Stanley Fish, also emphasised the important role of the reader in creating literary meaning, as discussed below.

have? For whom? In what circumstances? With what changes over time? And in what way is their interpretation the result of cognitive, emotional, social or political contexts?

Explaining the process of reading, Iser uses the term *Leerstellen* – often interpreted as “gaps” – to describe the phenomenon of expectation stimulated by the text (during creation) and later “filled” by the reader. Using another metaphor, he writes that “the ‘stars’ in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable” (qtd. in Holub 282). He stresses, then, the act of readerly supplementation – the filling in of gaps or joining of stars – that takes place in any act of textual interpretation, regardless of authorial intent. Reader-supplementation is dependent on subjective individual traits in the reader and on more general features, such as the reader’s education, nationality or ethnicity, age, gender, and the historical period in which they read. Replacing the word “text” with the word “work,” he argues that any work has two poles, an “artistic pole” (by which he means textual features created by the author) and an “aesthetic pole” which is “accomplished by the reader” in his/her acts of interpretation (*The Act of Reading* 21). A literary work stands half-way between the two poles, a positioning that Iser labels as one of “indeterminacy” (*The Act of Reading* 25). During the process of reading or de-coding, a reader goes through different stages of anticipation, retrospection and expectation. Iser argues that if a text fulfils all of a reader’s expectations it brings nothing but boredom, and if none are met, the reader might turn away from the text (*The Implied Reader* 275).

Iser uses the term “repertoire” to describe those aspects of a work that orient the reader’s interpretations and prevent his/her wholesale appropriation of meaning: “[the repertoire] reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized” (*The Act of Reading* 1). The repertoire is the “familiar territory” – familiar literary patterns and themes, and/or historical and social contexts – that is encoded within a text (more

or less “familiar” to each reader, of course). These are the fixed “stars” of the metaphor mentioned above and they impose limits on meaning construction even while the “gaps” or “unwritten implications” (*The Implied Reader* 280-81) are filled in by the reader. Reading, then, has an “inherently dynamic character” but meaning construction is not simply open-ended: interpretation is not an egoistic free-for-all because some aspects of a text (the “stars”) are fixed by the author. Importantly for my purposes, Iser suggests that the interpretations of individual readers can be revealing. In “Do I write for an Audience?” he contends, “if a literary text does something to its readers, it simultaneously tells us something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, and inclinations and eventually our overall makeup” (313). He makes a similar point in *The Act of Reading*: a reader’s textual interpretation “will also reflect various attitudes and norms of that public [in which a reader is situated], so that literature can be said to mirror the cultural code which conditions these judgements” (28). In a discussion on Iser’s key theories, Nasrullah Mambrol elaborates, “The aesthetic dimension of a literary work is localised in the act of its recreation by the reader, a process that is temporal and dialectical insofar as it allows the assumptions of the reader to interact with those of the text, yielding knowledge of not only the text but the reader herself” (n.p.). Iser also writes of the “paradoxical situation” in which the reader reveals aspects of himself to “experience a reality which is different from his own,” changing himself in the process (*The Implied Reader* 287).

The views of Hans Robert Jauss, another of the key forerunners in the field of Reception Studies and Iser’s Constance colleague, differ from Iser in a number of ways, perhaps most importantly in his historical emphasis. Drawing on the philosophical hermeneutics (especially *Truth and Method* (1979) of Hans-Georg Gadamer), Jauss argues that literary works are consumed/read against an existing *Erwartungshorizont* or “horizon of expectations,” which is a “set of expectations established by cultural norms, conventions and presuppositions that

inform how a reader understands and evaluates a literary work *at any given time*” (*Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982); qtd. Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi 140, emphasis mine). He suggests that three factors shape this horizon of expectations: previous understanding of the genre of a text, the themes of already familiar works, and “defamiliarisation” which is the contrast between literary and ordinary language. Jauss critiques both New Critical formalism and Marxism – the former because it ignores the importance of history in discussions of textual meaning and the latter because of its historical over-determination. Central to Jauss’ work is the notion that the perceived meaning of a work changes when the “horizon of expectations” changes – in other words, from one historical period to another. Literary texts are thus understood as historically active entities whose meanings and effects are contingent on the time in which they are read because horizons of expectations keep changing in accordance with the given historical period and culture. In this way, the aesthetic distance between early readers and later ones determines the value of a work. As Holub explains, “The text as a mediator between horizons is consequently an unstable commodity: as our present horizon changes, the nature of the fusion of horizons alters as well” (149). Jauss views literary meaning as the construct of a historically-situated reader or consumer and treats literature “as a dialectical process of production and reception” (Kathleen McCormick 57) where an aesthetic experience is bound up with an individual’s evaluation at any given time. So, for Jauss, it is a matter of historical shift, not a geographic movement as he uses temporal rather than spatial criteria. However, my examination will include analysis of how different reading communities view the same text at (almost) the same time: I am more concerned with spatial changes in the horizon of expectations when readers approach Pakistani Anglophone fiction. Jauss explains how the horizon of expectations is constructed and construed in a text:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very

specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the ‘middle and end,’ which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text. (Jauss 23)

While Jauss claims to recognize the importance of larger social and cultural issues in the temporally-distinct receptions of texts, he has been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to questions of ideology. McCormick suggests, for example, that the work of Jauss tends to focus exclusively on the aesthetic history, where the reader is usually conceived of as only a textual subject rather than as a subject of broader cultural systems (58). Irena R. Makaryk summarises this criticism, noting that detractors accuse Jauss (and also Iser) of a general failure to link literary history with larger concerns. They claim that the reader, in the reception theory of Jauss and Iser, is conceived of as an idealised individual rather than a social entity with political, ideological, and aesthetic dimensions (16-17).

My work extends on the ideas found in Jauss’ and Iser’s earlier works, to include consideration of the text’s previous critical and aesthetic reception “but also the political, institutional, and ideological contexts in which that criticism is written” (McCormick 57). This is important, given that my research treats the role of the reader primarily as a socio-political and geographic entity. Drawing on additional reception-oriented critical approaches, I use the ideas of Stanley Fish, whose most influential work *Is There a Text in this Class?* was published in the 1980s: his approach may be seen as a later contribution to Reception Studies (or an off-shoot of it, ‘reader-response criticism’).

Like other reception theorists, Fish argues that a text is meaningless without reader engagement, but he adds that the strategies a reader uses to interpret the meanings are not

individual but rather the property of a social community of readers. Fish's term "interpretive communities" (335) refers to the shared set of competencies, customs, codes and interests of a community to which individual readers belong. He elaborates,

[I]f the self is conceived of not as an independent entity but as a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it, then the meanings it confers on texts are not its own but have their source in the interpretive community (or communities) of which it is a function. (*Is There a Text?* 335)

These meanings stand as a "testimony to the power of an interpretive community to constitute the objects upon which its members (also and simultaneously constituted) can then agree" (Fish *Is There a Text* 338). They are not fixed, Fish maintains, and change depending on how persuasive a given community and its teachers (or cultural guardians, or the media) are. Therefore, the meaning is dependent on group influence. The influences exerted by interpretive communities exist prior to any individual act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the reverse. In "Interpreting the "Variorum" (1976), Fish writes: "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (483). He adds,

An interpretive community is not objective because, as a bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals, its perspective is interested rather than neutral; but by the very same reasoning, the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they do not proceed from an isolated individual but from a public and conventional point of view. (*Is There a Text?* 14)

This study will focus on the role of the reader (reviewer) and whether his/her textual response can be attributed to a specific interpretive community. This summary of some key aspects of Reception Studies is necessarily brief. However, in the chapters that follow, I acknowledge the ideas noted above, namely that textual interpretation is (at least in part) the product of individual reader engagement with any given text; that all readers are “situated” in temporal, geographic and ideological terms, and this impacts on their interpretations; and that readers are not isolated individuals but members of “interpretive communities”, the influence and mediation of which significantly impacts their textual evaluations. A text, then, is capable of eliciting multiple different realisations and observing these different realisations offers insight into not only the ideological assumptions that shape the interpretations of individual readers but the communities within which they exist. This is important for discussion in the chapters that follow, for at least two reasons. Firstly, because a great number of the reviews of Pakistani fiction draw extensively – indeed naively – on biographical facts about the “real author” (this is most evident in the case of Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) i.e. the way the author is imagined in these reviews has a strong bearing on how their work is interpreted. Secondly, I will demonstrate that reader/reviewer constructions of the implied (and real) author of Pakistani Anglophone texts are influenced by the differing contexts (“communities”) within which they are situated.

1.1.1 Implied Author and Implied Reader

Jean Paul Sartre, in “What is Literature?” (1968), states that any aesthetic creation includes a picture of a reader/audience for which it was created (qtd. in Eagleton *Literary Theory* 72). This idea is indicative of the “readerly turn” that characterised the 1960s and 1970s and has remained key to literary studies since. Sartre’s comment aligns in several ways with

Iser's notion of "the implied reader," which itself extends the notion of the "implied author" (and the reader) postulated by Wayne C. Booth. This latter concept was first mentioned in Booth's essay "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*" (1952) but is most fully developed in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). In a discussion of Booth's ideas, Dan Shen informs us that

The difference between the implied author (the second self) and the real author (the first self) is between the person assuming a certain air or adopting a particular stance *when writing* the text and the same person in daily life *out of* the writing process. And on the decoding side, the implied author is the textual image which readers infer during the reading process. (12, emphasis in original)

The implied author, this suggests, is the *image* of the author within the text, created by the real author himself: the author's "second self." Secondly, it is the *imagined* real author created by readers as they read a text.

While I wholly endorse the idea of the distinction between the real and implied author, I suggest, following Iser, that a significant problem in Booth's formulation is his failure to adequately account for the reader's "decoding" (in Shen's term) of the authorial "second self." How individual readers interpret aspects of a text like a word choice, humour or character introduction will differ from reader to reader, and this will affect their interpretation of what they imagine to be the "implied author," aside from any assumptions they make about the "actual" one. Authorial identification, like textual "decoding," depends significantly on their social, geographic, historical and ideological context (and the "interpretive" communities" to which they belong).

It is also noteworthy that implied, real and ideal readers are not the only reader constructs in Reception Studies. There is also an *intended reader* ("intendierter Leser"), a

concept introduced by Erwin Wolff in 1971 (qtd. in Daniel Wilson 849). Wolff's intended reader is who the author has in mind for his work or the "ideal" representation which he conceives of his audience and which "conditions" his work to a much greater extent than the real reader (D. Wilson 849). This intended reader, Holub suggests, "can be determined not only by textual clues in the work being read but also by adjacent works and even by the author's (and presumably other authors') remarks on his/her public" (152). While the implied reader is mainly a construct to explain a reader's textual interaction, the ideal reader is a construct that refers to a reader who will fully understand textual nuances as construed by the implied author. It is the implied/intended audience, which is an effect of the text, structured in *response* to the specific lexical and tonal features of a text. In *The Act of Reading*, Iser asserts that the ideal reader is "a structural impossibility as far as literary communication is concerned [because] an ideal reader would have to have an identical code to that of the author" (29). Iser roundly dismisses it as "fictional" (if "useful"):

The ideal reader, unlike the contemporary reader, is a purely fictional being; he has no basis in reality and it is this very fact that makes him so useful: as a fictional being, he can close the gaps that constantly appear in any analysis of literary effects and responses. He can be endowed with a variety of qualities in accordance with whatever problem he is called upon to help solve. (29)

According to Iser, the implied reader of a text is wholly distinct from whatever "ideal reader" the author might have imagined as she wrote, and also from any individual actual reader.¹⁸ The implied reader

¹⁸ Reception theorists, in an attempt to move away from the (impossible) notion of a singular (exact authorial replica) "ideal reader," have used a wide array of terms to define the reader that any given text appears to assume will perform an "ideal reading" to a "greater or lesser degree of ambiguity": "model reader" (Umberto Eco 7); "competent reader" (Culler 149); "idealized reader" (D. Wilson 848); "intended reader" (Erwin Wolff/Hannelore Link, qtd. in D. Wilson 849) and so on. In what follows I will adopt the term "ideal reader(s)" to refer to readers

[E]mbodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader. (*The Act* 34)

The “ideal reader,” then, is a hypothetical reader who has all the qualities, knowledge and competence and ideological persuasion to read the text exactly as the author intended it to be read. S/he is a “fiction,” according to Iser, because only a replica of the real author would suffice. Nonetheless, as Peter Hühn et al. of *The Handbook of Narratology* assert, “every work contains, to a greater or lesser degree of ambiguity, signs pointing to its ideal reading” (303).

In contrast to Booth, however, Iser does not believe the ideal reader is simply encoded in a text; rather s/he is an effect of the dynamic, interactive reading process achieved by any given actual reader in response to the “repertoire” (his knowledge) of the text. He stresses the “intersubjective structure of the process” of meaning construction which refers to the reader’s cognitive understanding through reading a particular text against what he knows earlier and his anticipation for the future (*The Act of Reading* 108). In this respect, Iser lays more importance on the role of the actual reader than Booth does, and, so too, on the “preferences, dispositions and attitudes” of the actual reader (“Interview” 64) and how these affect textual interpretation.

Iser’s various discussions of the reading process, and the (conceptual and real) agents it involves (“The Reading Process” 280), is important to the work undertaken in this thesis, which seeks to understand how the differing contexts (personal, sociological, ideological) within which readers/reviewers respond to Pakistani Anglophone fiction may influence their textual evaluations.

that we can infer an author has imagined as the ‘most perfect’ recipient of his/her text, while I am fully aware that *the* ideal reader is, as Iser suggests, a “fiction.”

The concepts of ideal reader, the actual reader/author and the implied reader/author – offer a way of beginning to discuss why this may be the case. To supplement these terms, I will introduce another pair: the global reader/author. This global reader is generally considered the recipient of fiction written by writers from the Third world but is also globally-oriented, likewise, the authors are sometimes transnational/global (as will be explained). Before discussing this further, however, it is necessary to attempt to define what constitutes Pakistani Anglophone fiction, and, equally importantly, who might be characterised as a Pakistani Anglophone writer (or reviewer). The following section will consider the conditions of production and reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction.

1.2 Pakistani Anglophone Literature: Issues of Reception, Branding and Authorial Identity

My project is fundamentally comparative and focused on the assessment of “Pakistani (Anglophone) literature”, as a category of “world literature” and on the ways, it is *circulated* (by the publishing industry) and *read* in transnational circuits. David Damrosch describes world literature not as a “canon of texts” but as a “mode of circulation and reading” (5).¹⁹ This claim is one that resonates deeply with the research undertaken in this thesis and the methodology that informs it. The reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction is inextricably linked to factors such as the interaction between the centre and the periphery, and transnational circulation as literary critics like Aijaz Ahmad, Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, Lisa Lau, and Sandra Ponzanesi argue. Their work, in various ways, focuses on how (ostensibly) local literatures from the periphery (in this case Third world in general and Pakistan specifically)

¹⁹ By circulated and read, I mean any work that has moved away from its origins and is read in different reading constituencies. In the words of Damrosch, “a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture” (4, emphasis original).

have been produced, consumed, commodified and incorporated by the metropolitan centre. This recognition of market forces invites a far more nuanced discussion about (and anticipation of) textual reception in the global marketplace.

A common perception in (postcolonial) literary critical theory is that the texts from the Third world are dependent on the approval of global literary centres as discussed in Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (1999). In this, "world literature" is interchangeably referred to as "international literary space" (4) structured in a hierarchy of the centre, sub-centres, and the periphery according to "the uneven distribution of resources among national literary spaces" (86). The more literary capital the participants – the publishers and the authors – accumulate through the transaction, the more central the position they occupy and, accordingly, the more power and authority they assert over those with less literary capital. As a result, in Casanova's Eurocentric approach, cities such as Paris, London, New York, and Berlin occupy the literary centre and sub-centres, and "Third world" countries exist on the literary periphery. Similarly, in "Conjectures on World Literature," Franco Moretti, ostensibly speaking about the world economic system model, states that "the literature around us is now unmistakably a planetary system", one "with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality" (54, 56). It is significant, however, that the literary centres for contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writing are not only limited to the West (and North). India, with "its thriving publishing industry" has also been added to the list, as noted by Pakistani academic/critic Maniza Naqvi (n.p.). Pakistani academic Bilal Tanweer calls India "a local reference point" (qtd. in Sauleha Kamal *Dawn* n.p.) whilst acknowledging that India has not yet acquired the stature of metropolitan centres.²⁰ In her article on the publishing environment in India, Urvashi Butalia places India as a lucrative

²⁰ This is important because the local Pakistani publishing industry (for a population of 201.9 million people) is still in its nascent stages. See "Market Overview: Pakistan's Emerging Publishing Industry" by Claudia Kaiser.

location for international publishers due to the “cheaper ... print services” and “growing [writing] market” (111). This has resulted in major publishing houses as Random House, Harper Collins, Hachette, and Scribner opening in India, which reflects the growing trend of local publications.

As mentioned, the key contemporary literary theorists who explore these dimensions of local and centre in relation to the commodification of literary texts include Huggan, Brouillette, Ponzanesi and Lau. Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) is an examination of the complicity between the local and the centre in the context of the global capitalist system. He describes the commodification of cultural difference or otherness as a feature of what he terms “the alterity industry” (x) which, in his view, can be described as a “gigantic parasite feeding off cultural difference, or, more precisely, the exotic” (6). He cautions against assuming that the fictional representation of cultural “alterity” offers real-life access to the lived reality of “exotic” others. He uses the term “postcolonial exotic” to describe the deliberate domesticating process through which commodities are taken from the margins and absorbed into mainstream (western/northern) culture, resulting in “commodity fetishism” (xvi, 22).

Brouillette, another well-known materialist critic, also identifies the link between postcolonial and cosmopolitan works and the publishing market in her seminal work *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007) where she advocates for the recognition of literature’s commodified status. In a later article, “The Literary as a Cultural Industry,” authors Brouillette and Christopher Doody assert the need to understand postcolonial literature in relation to the realm of industry (100). Explaining the role of metropolitan locations, which in their view exert both enabling and constraining effects on the periphery, they argue that the “locus of production and consumption that drives the trade [in literature], and hence the economic beneficiaries of its operations, remains centred in the

Anglo-American metropolis” (58). She notes the increasing role of New York and a decreasing role of London in setting aesthetic standards for texts from the periphery.

Extending Brouillette’s ideas on commodified literature and geographical parity, gender and postcolonial critic Ponzanesi explores how texts from formerly colonised nations are often considered as “ambassadors of identity, nationhood and cosmopolitanism”, considering this treatment accorded to these texts as a part of “postcolonial cultural industry” (*The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* 3). She asserts that “the fashionability of a Third World culture/ postcolonial culture is a two-way boutique window, contingent upon the successive approval of and metamorphosing by [w]estern consumers” (2). She replaces Huggan’s term “alterity industry” with “otherness industry” defining it as “a mechanism which thrives on the invention and admiration of exotic traditions” (*The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* 1). Similarly, she uses the term “new Orientalism” to refer to the process of production and consumption of postcolonial literature in which authors themselves may be complicit and treats authors as “brand names” produced by publishers (4). Like Brouillette, she views “western consumers” as the approving factor behind the popularity and acceptance of postcolonial cultural artefacts (2). However, she is also careful to avoid the idea that the postcolonial field is a sell-out (9) and distances herself from generalised claims that the local has been extensively modified by the global and exists *only* as “commodified exotica” (10). She argues that the global cultural industry is not (simply) “cannibaliz[ing] the postcolonial hype for commercial purposes” (47); rather it promotes “new aesthetic and political parameters” in the postcolonial global market (47). She claims, however, that instead of “broadening” the field, this promotion has narrowed the field of known postcolonial literature, due to its focus on only a few authors (48).

Pakistani academic Mazhar Hayat, in explaining the nexus between globalisation and the literary market, argues that (commercially) successful world literature gains popularity

because it deals with issues that are popular in the western world at the time of publication, rather than due to its intrinsic literary merits. He cites examples such as Afghani writer Khalid Hussseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), the Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai's *I am Malala* (2013), and the Serbian writer Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel* (1989). He notes that the major western publishing centres (London, Paris and New York) dominate the literary market and this situation pushes the non-western world to the margins and requires them to look up to the West for acceptance and fame – a phenomenon Hayat names (in racial terms) as “white noise” (28).

1.2.1 The issues of Branding

As earlier stated in the Introduction, I follow Ponzanesi insofar as I treat recent Pakistani Anglophone fiction as a cultural “brand” which serves as a niche product within the global literary marketplace. Earlier Pakistani fiction (written from 1947-2001) tended to offer cultural stories but after 9/11, and in the context of the War on Terror, the nation's literature became increasingly political. Aroosa Kanwal suggests that

The fiction written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 focused more on dilemmas associated with diasporic Pakistani/Muslims... . Later, a series of novels featuring the war in Afghanistan shifted the focus from Pakistani diasporas to the devastated land of Afghanistan. ... The most recent [Kanwal wrote this in 2015] development in ‘post-9/11 fiction’ can be seen in the shift of focus to Pakistan against the backdrop of the devastating impact of the US drone attacks. (200)

I suggest that the political nature of this writing is closely bound up with its brand.

What I mean by brand is the unique and distinguishing combination of characteristics and images which are consciously or intuitively linked to something in consumers' minds. Joanne Lynch and Leslie de Chernatony (2004) define brand as a cluster of functional and

emotional values, attributed to a product, that promise a unique experience between a buyer and a purchaser (404). Celia Lury also describes brand in economic terms by describing it as “central feature of contemporary economic life” (27). However, it has been argued that in order to be successful, branding operates on the principle of disinterestedness; it creates an aura of inherent value without any apparent economic motif. Miriam Greenberg uses the term “mystical veil” to describe the means by which the social and commercial origins of the commodity are obscured. On a large scale this results in the creation of an industry which produces and circulates these veils and “devises methods for knitting [them] together to give the illusion of totality” (31). In this way, branding creates long-term value for a commodity while masking its conditions of production and circulation and in doing so creates and maintains “particular versions of identity, authenticity and recognition” (Aronczyk 59).

The work of John and Jean Comaroff, in *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), offers helpful ways of articulating the commodified nature of nationality/culture/ethnicity and its branding. They argue that “cultural identity ... represents itself ever more like two things at once: the object of choice and self-construction, typically through the act of consumption, and the manifest product of biology, genetics, human essence” (1). They maintain that in an era of capitalist globalisation, cultures are essentialised as brands (patenting customary ways of living or custom and objects and for example) and the most sustainable and successful – in market terms – are the ones that sell (in all senses). This also means, as Nicholas Holm suggests, that “cultural objects [can] no longer be approached primarily as formalist works, but instead as constellations of identity, ideology and materiality” (13). Pakistani Anglophone fiction is one such “object”, although this is not unique to Pakistani Anglophone literature alone, of course. However, the branding of this body of fiction as “Pakistani” invites questions about not only

what kind of Pakistani literature sells in the global marketplace but also how we might define a “Pakistani author” or “Pakistani Anglophone literature”.²¹

My understanding of the term ‘nation branding’ comes from Simon Anholt who, in 1996, equated national reputation with nation branding referring to countries’ attempts to generate positive interest in their unique, distinct culture and economy amidst globalisation (15). He further links this reputation of places to the brand images of “products and companies” which take strength from geographical origin (57). In recent times, nation branding is defined by Keith Dinnie in *Nation Branding* (2015) as the “unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (5). In this sense, nation brand serves as an identity toolkit for its citizens as well as the global perceivers. In a similar vein, Melissa Aronczyk defines nation branding, in *Branding the Nation* (2013) as “a form of ‘soft’ power, in contrast to the ‘hard’ power of military or economic assets” (16). It functions, she suggests, “to help the nation-state successfully compete for international capital in areas such as tourism, foreign direct investment, import-export trade, higher education, and skilled labour” (16). A key aspect of nation branding is that it distinguishes the nation from others, thus determining its exchange value in the market. In short, it creates the image and perception of a specific nation (including via the use of stereotypes) in the global context.

According to Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, “[national/cultural/ethnic] communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the *style* in which they are imagined” (6; my italics). However nation branding is not without its perils. A nation’s residents (and also its others) may not recognise or support the “style” of the brand. In other words, they may have varied opinions and competing visions of national identity in the face of

²¹ A question like this “what does it mean to be a true or real Pakistani?” also forms the base of Pakistani-American critic Waseem Anwar’s essay “On the Wings of ‘Poesy’” (370).

the demands that the global marketplace makes of it. It has been suggested that that national brands are negotiated and renegotiated in variety of arenas, including literature. Dinnie maintains that “poets, playwrights, novelists and other creative writers ... potentially play a significant role in enhancing their nation’s reputation” (45). In the following section I will consider how nation branding relates to consumption, and the role of this for Pakistani Anglophone fiction.

Aronczyk claims that it is “capitalism that forms the spirit of nationalism” (128) and successful national brands are ones that modify themselves accordingly, although the representation may or may not coincide with the reality. This is related to Dinnie’s postulation that “nations do not have the choice of being branded or not” (166) and, if they are unhappy with the perception produced by the brand, all they can do is strive to present a ‘better’ version, one that attributes greater (or more beneficial) value. Caroline Koelger, in *Critical Branding: Postcolonial Studies and the Market* (2018), takes issue with the idea that the commodification of literary ‘products’ is necessarily negative: “this is rooted in an essentialist understanding of commodification as inherently bad.” She argues that being able to identify as Pakistani writer or to identify a text as Pakistani, makes the writer/text, in her words, “placeable, readable, and understandable” in the global marketplace (77). As the *dominant* transnational literary corporations are strongly grounded in Anglo-American centres, ostensible authorial diversity is a result of a commodified marketplace, in which the very location of authors serves as an integral part of their “worth.” As mentioned earlier, Huggan and Brouillette trenchantly support the idea that the success of many contemporary postcolonial writers with their “celebrity glamour” and “national representativeness” (Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* x, xv) is the result of “fetishistic localism” (Brouillette *Postcolonial Writers* 88; *Postcolonial Exotic* 81). This behaviour is characterised by the authors’ attempt to fulfil a foreign (usually metropolitan) reading community’s desire to gain “access to the cultural other” (Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic*

158). In this way, Huggan argues, some of the celebrity types resort to “staged marginality” which he defines as “the process by which marginalised individuals or social groups are moved to dramatise their ‘subordinate’ status for the benefit of a majority or mainstream audience” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 87). Brouillette likewise suggests that such writers use their marginal status to gain visibility on the global radar (*Postcolonial Writers* 15), which results in “inclusivity and universality” but justifies already existing “forms of dominance” in the hierarchy of white first world writers and ‘others’ (*Postcolonial Writers* 89). Such assessments are complicated or perhaps confirmed when we consider writers such as (“Pakistani”) Zulfikar Ghose. He authored works such as *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967), the trilogy *The Incredible Brazilian* (1972-1978) and *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1992). His latest collections of essays *Beckett’s Company: Selected Essays* (2009) was published by Oxford University Press, Karachi. Born in Sialkot (Pakistan), Ghose moved with his family to the UK after partition. In 1964, he married a Brazilian artist and has lived in the US since. His “act of political refusal” to use Pakistan as a geographical location in his later works cost him his formerly accredited authoritative status in the global market place (Brouillette, “Postcolonial Authorship” 98; *Postcolonial Writers* 58). In such terms his literary celebrity status hinged on his national identity²².

In the work of the aforementioned theorists, the picture of the literary world that emerges is one which is defined by geographic location. Globalisation serves as the sanctioning neo-colonising force which restricts the emancipation of ex-centric narratives from the exotic bandwagon of otherness. It is a world in which publishers are hungrily after the next Arundhati Roy, the next Haruki Murakami, and the next Paulo Coelho. In the words of Pakistani critic Aijaz Ahmad, Third world literature in English is a product of the imaginings of the West

²² However, Koelger resists this idea, or at least invites reconsideration of the idea that “authenticity” and “resistance” are simply binarily opposed to commodification and branding.

which has been successfully fashioned into “a global merchandising tool” (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* 13). In a discussion of Indian literary production in the global marketplace, Pavithra Narayanan argues that “English studies in the West still remains locked within nations, because although the work of scholars in postcolonial studies is global in scope, it is national in its location”, leading her to assert that the “national paradigms define the scholarship” (5). This view is endorsed by Naqvi who, in relation to contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writers, questions why their work is routinely judged and bound by their places of origin and national identity. She suggests that Pakistani authors gain credence only after metropolitan agents and editors “give their nod of approval” (n.p.) or when they comply with the rules of branding.

My research hinges on the paradoxical idea that Third world literature is branded and marketed as “local” by nationality, despite the transnational nature of authors, readers and the literary marketplace. However, it is not easy to lay blame on any one agent (publishers, market, authors, readership) for commodification or nation branding. Brouillette informs us that “the industry now brands literature more by authorship than by other aspects or ways of approaching a given work’s meaning” (“Postcolonial Authorship Revisited” 94). This is endorsed by Benwell and Procter in their assessment of book clubs; they argue that the author’s persona serves as “a pivotal paratext, part and parcel of broader accounts of contemporary literary commodification” (*Reading Across* 139). Ponzanesi points out that (nationally) “representative” authors are framed as “brands” of their countries due to the efforts of agents, publishers, book-sellers, critics, film-makers and reviewers – those who profit from this (*The Postcolonial* 4). In her opinion, this reduces the status of authors to that of “commodit[ies]” (76). Likewise, Juliet Gardiner discusses this “celebretization” and “circulation” of the author in the context of increasing literary commodification, arguing that contemporary book

publications are “branded” by the authorial presence (“Recuperating the Author” 262-3). I will address this country-of-origin effect in Pakistani literature in what follows.

Authors can thus be understood, in Brouillette’s term, as “promotional subject[s]” that advance the financial aims of publishers in the sense that the writers stand as “representatives of their purported societies, ‘cultures’, nationalities or subnationalities” (*Postcolonial Writers* 95, 97). Related to this is the phenomenon of literary celebrity, is the rise of authors to the status of ‘celebrities’ owing to promotional activities and publicity, including interviews.²³ In *Rivers of Ink* (2018), Claire Chambers considers literary celebrity and “the management of the author’s image” as important factors in the global literary marketplace (12).

Investigating authorial branding in the British literary world specifically, English and Frow use the term “celebrity novelists” to refer to those “personalities whose ‘real-life’ stories have become objects of special fascination and intense scrutiny, effectively dominating the reception of their work” (39). They refer to a phenomenon created by “the logic of commerce” in which authors are part of the “promotional apparatus” of the marketing industry (50) and carefully manage the representation and reception of their personality in conjunction with their publishers. A significant distinction introduced by English and Frow is between authors as “brand names” and as “celebrities.”²⁴ They purport: “most of the world’s best-selling authors ... are mere names: powerful brand names, to be sure, but lacking the aura of “personality,” possessing no resonance as public media figures, and hence not functioning as celebrities at

²³ This is discussed at length in Timothy Brennan’s *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997), and later by Moran in *Star Authors* (2000), Huggan in *Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), James English in *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), and in a later book chapter with John Frow entitled “Literary Authorship and Celebrity Culture” (2008), Squires in *Marketing Literature* (2007), Sarah Brouillette in *Postcolonial Writers* (2011), Benwell & Procter in *Reading Across Worlds* (2014) and *Postcolonial Audiences: Readers, Viewers and Reception* (with Gemma Robinson in 2012), *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* (2014) by Sandra Ponzanesi, “Recuperating the Author” by Juliet Gardiner (2000), Eefje Claassen in *Author Representations in Literary Reading* (2012), Ellis Cashmore in *Celebrity Culture* (2006) and in the Canadian context by Lorraine York in *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007).

²⁴ In another book chapter entitled “Signature and Brand”, Frow uses the term signature to imply an author’s authenticity resulting in increased aesthetic value. Differentiating between “aesthetics of brand” and “aesthetics of signature” he defines brand as “corporate,” used to separate a “product range” from other products (63).

all” (43). In general, the distinction between branding and celebrity is useful but this study’s focus on biography in the context of the Pakistani authors being studied means that it is not relevant in this particular case. (One may, however, say that Hamid and Aslam are powerful literary celebrities, and Jamil Ahmad only a brand name, due to his only work).

Joe Moran investigates the phenomenon of “literary celebrity”, defining (selected) authors as “both cultural capital and marketable commodity” (6). These authors, he continues, are

[T]hose who are reviewed and discussed in the media at length, who win literary prizes, whose books are studied in universities and who are employed on talk shows They are, in short, usually ‘crossover’ successes who emphasize both marketability and traditional cultural hierarchies (6).

Moran discusses how various authors actively negotiate their celebrity status through public speeches, interviews, web sites and blogs, their photographs on book covers, and so on. Citing Moran, Squires defines celebrity authors as those whose public image (through readings in bookshops, literary festivals and promotional tours, for example) is created within a commodified marketplace (*Marketing Literature* 37, 179). She argues that the award of literary prizes increases their “commodification and celebritization” (“Novelistic Production” 191) resulting in the creation of “literary celebrities” (*Marketing Literature* 189). This is important to my research because the three authors whose reviews I consider in-depth are promoted, in various ways, as “celebrities” – and their celebrity is intimately connected to their national identity as Pakistani authors.

An important consideration in this discussion is the extent to which “Pakistani” authors actively self-promote and, in doing so, draw on their “authority” as national representatives. In *Author Representations in Literary Reading*, Eefje Claassen considers the influence of

authors' statements about their work (22-23).²⁵ These statements, she contends, are linked to the need for contemporary authors to sell their "product" by giving public appearances, readings, talks and interviews. In her article "Pakistani English Fiction's Search for Approval and Recognition," Naqvi argues that it often seems that western "praise has been more for the celebrity of the writers than for their writing" (n.p.). These western readers, she notes, know of Pakistani Anglophone writers through the articles/reviews written by "novelists of Pakistani origin" in major outlets like *The New York Times*, *Financial Times* and *The Guardian* (n.p.).²⁶ Hamid (see Chapter Five) steers clearly away from labels such as "Muslim" or "Pakistani" (preferring the term "mongrel"), however his non-fiction writings (mainly published in *The Guardian*), on a variety of issues concerning Muslims and Pakistan, nonetheless encourage readers to see him as a Pakistani author first and foremost. In contrast, and as discussed further in Chapter Four, Nadeem Aslam consistently links himself to Pakistan and asserts his Pakistaniness (and authority to write on Pakistani issues) in numerous interviews (with Maya Jaggi "Interview: Nadeem Aslam" n.p.; with Terry Hong "An Interview with Nadeem Aslam" n.p.; with Faber and Faber "Editor to Author: An Interview" n.p.; and with Naeem "Interview: Nadeem Aslam" n.p.).

The extent to which these "real" or "actual" authors of fiction are constructed as (implied) authors is also vital to their branding and promotion, and reader responses to their

²⁵ As an example of the ways in which authorial nationality not only "sells" but can be "produced," she discusses Australian author Helen Darville who falsely claimed Ukranian heredity when she published her first book under the name Helen Demidenko, *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994), about a Ukrainian family's complicity with the Nazis. She donned ethnic Ukranian costume in her interviews, signed Ukrainian inscriptions in books, and successfully presented the image of national representational authority and authenticity to the public. Such "striking images" are hard for readers to resist, suggests Claassen, and certainly influence the reception of the text (20).

²⁶ For instance, Hanif contributed numerous articles to *The New York Times*, each of which references a specific cultural context and reflects on his ("Pakistani") cultural authority: "Censorship Under Military Dictators Was Bad. It May Be Worse in a Democracy" (17 Oct. 2018), "Blasphemy, Pakistan's New Religion" (02 Nov. 2018), "I Worry about Muslims", "Young Pakistan Is Ready to 'Just Do It.' Whatever 'It' Is" (17 Dec. 2015). Likewise, the titles of articles written for *The Guardian* highlight Hamid's cultural context: "Mohsin Hamid: 'Islam is Not a Monolith'" (19 May 2013) "Mohsin Hamid on the Rise of Nationalism: 'In the Land of the Pure No one is Pure Enough'" (27 Jan. 2018), "Mohsin Hamid on the Dangers of Nostalgia: We Need to Imagine a Brighter Future" (25 Feb. 2017), "Mohsin Hamid: 'If You Want to See What Tribalism Will do to the West, Look at Pakistan'" (09 Dec. 2017).

work. This is intimately bound up with questions to do with the localised, national branding of their work. It also clearly impacts on the “implied reader” assumed by the writers in the interactive process of textual meaning construction (following Iser, as discussed above). In this respect, while the “real” author is necessarily distinct from the “implied author” imagined by the reader, the latter is nonetheless in part a product of not only the formal aspects and content of a text but also of the authorial image created by the writer and his publishing team through promotional activities.

This is cogently argued by Zita Farkas, who draws on the work of Bourdieu and Squires, albeit in the context of authorial gender, rather than national identity. Farkas raises questions about how “literary practices such as publicity and marketing” impact a “writer’s identity and his or her work” (122). She usefully distinguishes between the terms “author” and “writer,” as follows:

[T]he author, the ‘embodied subject,’ is part of a complex interplay between work, autobiography and social/cultural formations. I distinguish between ‘author’ and ‘writer.’ I apply the term ‘author’ to the discursive construction of the writer. The ‘writer’ refers to the individual person [who penned a specific text]. (123)

As Farkas notes, Squires considers the extent to which novels such as Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* “were framed by the writer’s national identity” (123). Squires suggests that this forecloses interpretive responses, “locking authors and their works into [national] stereotypes” (*Marketing Literature* 122). Farkas concludes that “the process of marketing the writer’s work is branded by the writer’s [national] identity. In the urge to label and sell, the identity of the writer frames the book and the writer’s persona can easily overshadow it” (124). I acknowledge these ideas, while also noting a slippage in Farkas’ terminology. Surely what is meant is that “the identity of the (constructed)

author frames the book and the *author's* persona can easily overshadow it". I recognise, of course, that the identity of the author is constructed by appeal to the writer's (real) identity. In the chapters that follow, questions raised here will be at the forefront of my discussion. The extent to which the construction and branding of selected writers as "Pakistani" authors, in reviews of their fiction, impacts on the assessment of their "commodity" value, is something that deserves careful consideration.

1.2.2 Pakistani Anglophone Literature and Authors

In this section, I will further define the 'transnational' status of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. Understood in the terms proposed by the Comaroffs, Ahmad and Squires, the term "Pakistani author" has become a geographical and political marker for writers whose work is marketed as representative of their national origin, even if they are dealing with a wide variety of topics and places beyond their nationality. Ever since its creation, Pakistan has grappled with the issue of defining its identity in ways that are symptomatic of Benedict Anderson's concept of a nation as "an imagined political community" (6) premised not on disputed geographical boundaries (drawn by departing British colonisers), but connectedness in a cultural and ideological sense. Traditionally (and this proviso is important) the western concept of a nation has most often been associated with the sharing of one language and one religion – a criterion which Pakistan apparently fulfils via the binding forces of Urdu and Islam (despite multiple provincial languages and dialects and the existence of other religious minorities). However, French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, among many others, highlights the conflicts that lurk beneath Pakistani nationhood. He argues that Islam has been used to produce and nurture nationalistic sentiments among diverse ethnicities (e.g. Punjabis, Sindhis, Balochs

and Pakhtuns) who do not share ideological, cultural, or ethnic values (36). In this sense, Pakistan is a mosaic, like so many postcolonial nations – a synthetic product of various ethnicities with small fractions of minorities conjoined under the banner of Islamic Pakistan. Inter-ethnic tensions have existed as long as the nation has. Yet, despite these differences and tensions, there is also a strong desire to possess a distinct, and globally understood, national identity, as Pakistani historian Mubarak Ali suggests:

Since the beginning Pakistan has been confronted with the monumental task of formulating a national identity distinct from India. Born out of a schism of the old civilization of India, Pakistan has debated over the construction of a culture of its own, a culture which will not only be different from that of India but one that the rest of the world can understand. (250)

Questions about Pakistani authorship are further complicated by their implication in wider conflicts regarding the nature of the Pakistani nation. Given Ali's assessment of this "monumental task," it seems important to consider the label "Pakistani author", given that an easy classification in terms of national boundaries is impossible and unwise. To date, the issue of Pakistani authorial identity has received very little serious attention from critical or popular readers. The country's West-based "transnational" authors (as discussed in my introductory chapter) are not precisely declared as impostors but "resident" critics and readers routinely accuse them of misrepresenting the nation under which they are branded. The fact that "Pakistaniness" cannot be measured through any ancestry test, especially given the recent origin of the nation during partition from India, complicates these issues further.

Essentialist identifications on the basis of the geographical location of the author are problematic, as many "Pakistani Anglophone writers" have long been residents in western metropolitan centres. For instance, Mushtaq Bilal in *Writing Pakistan* (2016) reports,

Importantly, the few contemporary writers who are generally considered ‘Pakistani’ in the Anglophone publishing world are not just ‘Pakistani’. For example, Moshin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, Nadeem Aslam and Aamer Hussein are all British nationals. Writers like Bapsi Sidhwa and Daniyal Mueenuddin are American nationals, and Musharraf Ali Farooqi holds a Canadian passport. (2)

This raises many questions. Do the writers in question affiliate themselves with Pakistan? In what ways? How do critics from within and without the nation define them? Are they lauded as authentic, “representative” insiders giving access to international readers and if so, who by? Are they accepted and respected from within the nation as a voice *for* the nation, as brand Pakistan authors? Claims about authorial national identity are therefore a particularly nuanced and unstable issue in the context of Pakistani Anglophone literature, complicated by western mainstream media (mis)representations of Pakistan.

Pakistan and its literature are far from alone in the investigation of these issues: J.M. Coetzee, for example, has lived in Australia for many years, and much of his fiction is allegorical or without a clear “national” setting, dealing instead with transnational issues of racial and gender oppression. However, he is almost always referred to as a “South African” writer, a reference to the country in which he was born and lived for the first part of his life. New Zealand writer Keri Hulme provides another example. Hulme is well known for her Booker Prize-winning novel *the bone people*, which highlights aspects of her Māori identity and which won the Mobil Pegasus Award for Māori Writing in 1984. She was subsequently criticised by New Zealand author and critic C.K. Stead who challenged this identification given Hulme is genetically only “one-eighth” Māori as only one of her great grandparents was Māori (Margery Fee 13). Similarly, in Canada, for example, award-winning author Joseph Boyden’s (ethnic) identity was questioned after his long-standing claim to have First Nation heritage was challenged by critics like Jorge Barrera in an article written in *National News* (n.p.). Boyden

was disparagingly referred to as “a white kid from Willowdale with native roots” (Tanya Talaga n.p.). Likewise, the case of dark-skinned Australian author Colin Thomas Johnson, popularly known by his pseudonym Mudrooroo, brings to the fore the contested issue of biological inheritance and social affiliation, concomitantly speaking of impersonation and belonging (Adam Shoemaker 2).²⁷ He was exposed as a *cultural imposter* involved in “fraudulence” when an ancestry test failed to link him to the Nyoongah people he claimed to descend from and he was publicly vilified (Rosemary Berg 142).

It is important to consider why authorial national identity is such a significant aspect of how authors and their works are received. What prevents Mudrooroo from writing about aboriginal issues or Hulme describing the experiences of growing up in a Māori household? This could be accepted and lauded: a writer from a certain nation, culture, or ethnicity should not be expected to write only about that nation, culture or ethnicity. Tina Makareti, a New Zealand based author, aptly comments “these days, we tend to be tribal and align ourselves with a particular iwi. But we all have many tribal and ancestral affiliations; that’s what needs acknowledging and celebrating” (n.p.). Her comments are akin to Hamid’s statement that “being an outsider has its advantages” (Hasan Zaidi n.p.). These challenges to rigid, essentialist notions of (national and ethnic) identity are crucial in discussions of Pakistani Anglophone writers, especially the third group of current Pakistani Anglophone writers (as discussed in the introduction). This is becoming more and more significant in the era of globalisation. Hamid, Aslam, Mueenuddin, Hanif and K. Shamsie, for example, quite evidently do not neatly fit into a singular national or representative category: as discussed earlier with reference to Cara Cilano, Clements, Muneeza Shamsie and Bilal, these writers are transnational, and their writing has a global focus.²⁸

²⁷ He changed his name to Mudrooroo in 1988 as an act of political defiance. It means paperbark and refers to a dead aboriginal language in south-western Australia. This is reflective of his focus on identity and authenticity in ancient Indigenous art.

²⁸ (Cilano 193; Clements *Writing Islam* 9; M. Shamsie *And the World Changed*; Bilal *Writing Pakistan* 3).

This “liminality” of many contemporary (postcolonial) writers – positioned as both “representative” insiders *and* cosmopolitan “outsiders” – is precisely what helps to sell their texts on the international market, Brouillette argues. They are a “saleable” part of the postcolonial publishing industry because of their ostensible national identity and biography and yet also somehow outside of this identity which gives supposed authorial prestige as an internationally saleable commodity (*Postcolonial Writers* 7). Additionally, in promotional and marketing avenues, the “foreign” names of authors are used as markers of national authenticity, helping to expand the international circulation of the narratives, and resulting in the works becoming a ‘national brand’. Timothy Brennan, considering this process in the context of contemporary cosmopolitanism, rather disparagingly refers to such writers as a “transnational class of globe-trotting/frequent-fliers” whose western education or diasporic lives are nonetheless saleable because their foreign names afford a certain exotic charm (*At Home* 59).

Unsurprisingly, such writers have been accused of being “native informers”, or of being part of a process of “cultural insiderism” (Edward Said, qtd. in Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* 264).²⁹ Similarly, F. Nazir argues that Pakistani Anglophone writers are often treated as “native informants” by theorists and critics located mostly in the West and in this way are burdened with a duty of representation which the writers may not be able, or even willing, to carry (367). Writing from Pakistan, Naqvi also uses the phrase “native informers” to describe Pakistani Anglophone writers (n.p.). In this sociocultural sense, their “insider” status is considered highly suspicious. This is important to the case studies considered later in this thesis. Many claims are made about the authors’ representational authority, or lack of it. Their “authenticity” as Pakistani writers is frequently mentioned, whether in positive or negative terms. This has led me to question whether claims about “authenticity” – on the part of authors, their publishers

²⁹ In their book *Going Global: the Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj use the term “native informants” to refer to “Third world” writers who, apparently benefit from their identification as “other” to the West.

and their reviewers – are in fact better understood as “brand” claims targeted to, or made in response to, ‘market demands.’

The purpose of my study is to evaluate the status of Pakistani Anglophone fiction in the global literary marketplace. To do so, I will examine the responses of four different groups of influential readers towards a selection of contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction. These reviewers write for major international newspapers and literary supplements and have been grouped according to location/nationality – western (largely British and American), Indian and Pakistani – to assess not only the commonalities and differences between their responses but also how this literature has been read and circulated globally. By grouping readers in this manner, I am not suggesting a monolithic homogenous readership in each national group: the dangers of such (national) essentialism are acknowledged in the following section where the “identity” of Pakistani authors is discussed. I remain alert to Frow’s caution to such an approach; he stresses that in reading and the production of cultural value, there is a “danger of positing imaginary social unities as the explanatory basis of cultural texts” (*Cultural Studies* 13). Nonetheless positing imaginary social unities has shaped much postcolonial literary theory to date. In his book chapter on Pakistani Anglophone fiction “De/reconstructing Identities”, Faisal Nazir argues that “the binary opposition identified and deconstructed in fiction and criticism is generally between Pakistan and the West” (361), a binaristic focus that I resist. I intend to look at the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction if only to expose the flaws in doing so. This is particularly important since the historical, social and political conditions that shape non-discursive practices such as canon formation in academic institutions differ in different locations.

To complicate matters, many contemporary authors and readers, like reviewers, are often geographically mobile, a situation that challenges these fixed national categorisations. “Pakistani” reviewers, for instance, write for British newspapers (e.g. Kamila Shamsie

reviewing *The Wandering Falcon*), whilst American reviewers like Madeline Clements write for the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*. These examples are indicative of fluidity within groups. American paper *National Review*'s Ann Marlowe, in her review of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is overtly critical of the text because, having spent time living in Pakistan, she believes Hamid's portrayals are inaccurate: she criticises him for what she claims is his use of re-Orientalist strategies to "sell out" the nation in his fictional narrative (see Chapter Five). Nonetheless, the situated specificity of reading and reviewing acts cannot simply be ignored because authors continue to be marketed in terms of their nationality and reviews for quite locally specific national audiences or consumers. Paradoxically, as Bethan Benwell and James Procter note, readers are "networked, not simply part of a closed circle of consumption" (*Reading Across* 3). They are "always entangled within wider transnational networks of production and consumption" in the global world (*Reading Across* 2).³⁰ As Arjun Appadurai cautions, this does not mean that readers and audiences are automatically free-floating nomadic subjects, out of place or between places, but rather that the global media and circulation of goods (including literary goods) have generated modes of consumption and habits of reading and viewing, which can no longer be simply understood as geographically rooted or bounded as they were historically: readers have been subject to a process of "deterritorialisation" (4). But, as Benwell and Procter argue, there is need to see "why place continues to orientate, and be orientated by, the reading of literature" in a world of increased mobility (*Reading Across* 61). The readers in their study used their location in meaning-making processes, "read in terms of roots as much as routes" (97) and at the same time while describing a particular work, the readers adhered to the norms of their reading groups.

³⁰ Benwell & Procter studied (recorded and analysed) 30 different (spatially) international book clubs who read Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004). The readers in this case were a mix of lay and professionals. Their work identifies the significance of location in interpretation, and the readers' adherence to the codes of their reading communities which they call "community of practice". Notably, the readers' interpretations did not differ significantly, and they concluded that the readers were transnationally connected.

To resolve this complexity, I will be focusing on the (geographic) “origin” of the sources in which the reviews are published and are read (circulated), rather than the reviewers’ origin. This approach is recommended by American book reviewer Gail Pool in her *Faint Praise*; she argues that the review source matters more than the reviewer her/himself (35). In her reception study on French Migrant fiction, Subha Xavier purports that “newspapers cater to a broad, disparate, mass audience defined by locality” (17). As a result of those issues, my analyses retain the East-West locational divide specifically in terms of “national specificity” as Laura Chrisman has argued for a better understanding of the reception of postcolonial literature. She also notes, the “publication and reception” of South African literary fiction is a geographical process due to varied readers and reading formations, which results in varied aesthetic and political evaluation (120). The same can be said about Pakistani Anglophone fiction whose readers are geographically diverse.

1.2.3 Authenticity, Realism and Orientalism

Issues to do with authorial “authenticity” (in the representation of ex-centric locales) have been a perennial problem for postcolonial/cosmopolitan writing in general. The word “authentic” derives from the Greek word “*authentēs*” which has the dual meaning of “one who acts with authority” and “made by one’s own hand” (Regina Bendix 14). In response to Frederic Jameson’s idea of Third world literature as national allegories, that “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (69, emphasis in original), A. Ahmad argues against Jameson’s singular reduction of Third world authors to “authentic” commentators on their nation/culture. He explains that such authors are “immediately elevated to the lonely splendour of a ‘representative’ – of a race, a continent, a civilization, even the “third world” (“Jameson’s

Rhetoric of Otherness” 5). In this way, these writers’ works are not appreciated for their individual aesthetics but are made to stand as representative of the authors’ locality or national identity. Likewise in *The Romance of Authenticity* (2004), which deals with the reception of ethnic writers, Jeff Karem purports that “peripheral” literature is expected to capture and convey regionally “authentic” material to its readership at the cost of literary evaluation not only on the level of production (author and publishers) but also at reception (readership) (4). These authors as “cultural representatives,” he continues, are expected to produce a “true, actual and authoritative” version of their countries to meet the anthropological expectations of their readers (205). Discussing such issues in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamla Shahsi Kumar argues that the term “authentic” has become “taboo in professional circles not only because of the recognition that the bestowment of the label removes agency from the labelled, but also because it has come to signify far too much at once, and thus nothing at all” (30). Authenticity emerges as the singular crucial criteria for evaluation of works from the Third world. Kumar notes, importantly, that in offering a pure image of a nation or a culture, authenticity is tied to essentialism. It promotes an unproblematic, referential assumption of direct access to the other, turning texts into manuals of information.

Kumar is not alone in recognising the problems that attend claims about authorial representative authority. German ethnology professor Regina Bendix, for example, remarks, “we have created a market of identifiable authenticities,” (3) where “authenticity bestows a legitimating sheen” (7). Paul Gilroy is even more direct in his claim that “authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities” (*The Black Atlantic* 99). This is precisely what underlies Huggan’s usage of the disparaging term, the “cult of authenticity” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 155) in the broader context of the material reception of texts and Lau’s assertion that postcolonial works (especially of diasporic authors) are evaluated on the criteria of authenticity, distortion and inaccuracy (“Re-orientalism in Contemporary Indian” 23). Once a cultural item,

like a book, has been declared authentic, the demand for it rises, and so does its market value, thereby making authenticity a convenient marketing tool. It is less important to define what is or is not “authentic” or even what “authentic” means precisely. Rather, we need to consider who needs authenticity, and why and how this authenticity has been used, suggests Bendix (21).

The term “realism” is closely associated with “authenticity” and the two are often used as if synonymous. In *Reading Across Worlds*, a study of textual reception in transnational contexts, Benwell and Procter claim that realism is a “principal rallying term” in “transnational book controversies” (123). Defined as an affective engagement with the cultural realm portrayed in the text, they argue that realism is a “value ritually embraced by lay readers and rejected by professional readers” (49). One effect of this affective engagement (what I call as *readerly desires*) is the tension between politics and form/aesthetics, with a general tendency to emphasise the former at the expense of the latter. Traditionally in assessments of postcolonial literature, the focus has been more on political aspects like resistance (along with issues such as globalisation, diaspora, the politics of representation and the environment), than on aesthetics. Brouillette suggests that “readers want to be educated to a certain degree about ‘other’ realities – so that political material becomes eminently marketable” (“Postcolonial Authorship” 89-90) in the form of catering to readerly desires. Huggan and Brouillette suggest that metropolitan readerly desires and pressure from the Anglo-American publishing industry result in peripheral writers being coerced into providing “authentic” themes and portrayals and forced to negotiate these expectations. Deepika Bahri comments on the “remarkable lack of a sufficiently developed critical framework for addressing ‘the aesthetic dimension’ ... of postcolonial literature” (1). Ponzanesi notes that the parameters of reception of postcolonial texts have shifted from “literariness and craftsmanship ... to new, more evasive cultural concepts ranging from cosmopolitanism to authenticity and ethnic-chic”, blurring the

boundaries between literary and commercial fiction (*The Postcolonial* 74). Likewise, Innes claims that western readings of postcolonial literature are “cultural and anthropological analyses” where readers and critics are looking for factual information, rather than fictional pleasure (“Cosmopolitan Readers” 180). Readers thus approach such literary texts looking for information, with expectations that the texts will provide sociological or anthropological insights. In this vein, Salman Rushdie comments on the reception of *Midnight’s Children* (1991), expressing his frustration that readers mistook the book for an “inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia” or “guide-book” (*Imaginary Homelands* 25). In the context of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, this concern is addressed by F. Nazir, who argues that Pakistani novels are rarely treated as literary texts but rather as “interventions in ongoing debates on identity, culture, and politics” (361). Naqvi endorses this belief, mocking the information-based reading practices for reading Pakistani Anglophone fiction: he states, “much is expected from our [Pakistani] writers. They are expected to be intellectuals able to map injustices, the logic of war and military occupation and the subversion of truth. They are expected to be well versed in the reality that is the world order” (n.p.). Unsurprisingly, in her study on Pakistani Anglophone fiction, Shazia Sadaf advocates for an investigation into the way global readers read this fiction for the cultural/ religious insights it might offer (“*I Am Malala*” 138). In response to such reading practices, Elleke Boehmer stresses the need for an “aesthetic turn” in postcolonial literary studies, where aesthetic refers to an appreciation of the beauty of a work, its literariness (“A Postcolonial Aesthetic” 170).

Huggan, however, suggests that postcolonial authors *can* maintain cultural autonomy if they consciously avoid manipulating and exploiting what is unique and different about their culture and adopt what he terms “strategic exoticism” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 32). Others, he suggests (naming Rushdie and Roy as examples), simultaneously critique and profit from “strategic exoticism” (*Postcolonial Exotic* xi, 73, 81) which is “designed to trap the unwary

reader into complicity with the Orientalisms” that their novels simultaneously condemn (*Postcolonial Exotic* 77). The cosmopolitan reader, in this analysis, becomes a “voyeuristic consumer,” whether she realises this or not (*Postcolonial Exotic* 72). These discussions are of course abstract as it is difficult to say exactly where and when in text writers are being “strategic” or have entirely submitted to the expectations of readers. Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner assert much the same about “marginal” authors in their essay “Commodification”:

[S]tagged marginality or strategic exoticism can also be viewed as a tool of commodification that uses [the author’s] location outside the mainstream in order to sell a product to specific reading audiences, thereby serving as another example of the entanglement of the postcolonial with global capitalism. (201)

Brouillette and Ponzanesi address similar concerns but argue that many authors have a good understanding of the global literary marketplace’s dynamics and manage to find a balance between meeting readerly expectations and not “selling out” their culture/nation (*Postcolonial Writers* 26-43; *The Postcolonial* 46).

For others, like Lau and Mendes (in a discussion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*), writers like Hamid are unable to “escape the loop of orientalism and re-orientalism”, proving the extent to which East and West are trapped in a “circular mode of relational identity” (“Post-9/11 Re-orientalism” 78, 89). Lau extends this critique further in her essay “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals” (2009)³¹ in which she accuses South Asian diasporic authors of pandering to the global marketplace and readership – a phenomenon she terms “Re-Orientalism”: “the orient continues to be orientalised” (573) by

³¹ Lau’s article, published in *Modern Asian Studies* (2009) and a book chapter in *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology* (2015) share the title “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals”. To differentiate, I will be using “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” to refer to the journal article and “Re-Orientalism The Perpetration” (without colon) for the book chapter.

recreating its own otherness.³² According to Lau (some) writers from the East (in particular South Asia) may have gained the ability to self-represent (rather than be represented by the West) but have, rather ironically, continued to draw on western referential points and use western yardsticks when they do so. She notes that “when the opportunity arose to move away from Orientalism, the direction some diasporic authors have chosen to move in is Re-Orientalism” (“Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” 590). Lau is particularly critical of diasporic (non-resident) authors whose positioning (as insider and outsider), and access to more powerful and influential western marketing platforms, has helped spread the process of re-Orientalism (“Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” 574) with their resultant outperforming of local authors. She accuses diasporic writers of casting themselves in the role of (cultural/national) “guide and translator” with the desire to gain “credibility as having authentic accounts to impart” (“Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” 585). The role entails an over-assertion of their South Asian identity, reinforcement of stereotypes and portrayal of characters as “recognisably Indian and displaying ostentatiously Indian behavioural traits, such as being completely intolerant of their daughters marrying outside race and cast” (“Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” 85). These writers make “truth-claims” by writing semi-autobiographical stories with “explicit and deliberate explanation of cultural norms” (“Re-Orientalism The Perpetration” 118-120). At the same time, she asserts, these writers want to disassociate themselves from the culture they are representing by offering a “criticism of backward traditions and patriarchal oppressions” and “demonstrating a love of what is regarded as western ideals of equality, individual autonomy, freedom of speech, etc.” (“Re-Orientalism The Perpetration” 120). In “Re-Orientalism in contemporary Indian Writing in English”, Lau further develops these claims, suggesting that many South Asian (particularly Indian) writers are involved in re-Orientalist practices such as

³² Lau’s “re-Orientalism” is another name for Huggan’s alterity industry (*Postcolonial Exotic* 12), Gayatri Spivak’s “new Orientalism” (Spivak 277), Elleke Boehmer’s “neo-Orientalism” (Boehmer “Questions of Neo-Orientalism” 18), and Brouillette’s “meta-orientalism” (“On the Entrepreneurial Ethos” 54).

“exaggeration, typecasting, stereotyping, exoticising, pandering to western tastes, demands and expectations, selling out, and having mercenary motives (16-17). Lau’s (and Mendes’) primary critique is directed at an “elite group of Orientals” who position themselves as representatives and who are supported by western publishing and literary establishments (“Introducing re-Orientalism” 4).³³

The oft-repeated word “exotic” warrants further discussion in the context of Pakistani Anglophone fiction due to the perception that Pakistani authors might be involved in ‘re-Oriental’ practices. Although Huggan describes exotic as not an “inherent *quality*” but a particular mode of “aesthetic *perception*” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 13, emphasis in original), it is simple to point out the common “exotic” tropes which “manufacture otherness” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 13) in South Asian writing. In an infographic on a South Asian American blog, a regular contributor Manish Vij describes tropes that broadly comprise popular constructions of South Asian diasporic culture in the West as eastern sensuality, ethnic dress, Indian cuisine, arranged marriage, interracial romance, and second-generation cultural confusion (n.p.). In her study on authenticity in South Asian fiction, another Indian researcher Tammara A. Bhalla suggests that these tropes emphasise the clash between modernity and tradition, or the clash between eastern and western traditions (111); she blames western readerly desire for “authentic” Indian texts for this “fetishiz[ation]” (85). The Indian critic Inderpal Grewal identifies common tropes in Indian fiction as repressed women in arranged marriages, spices (Indian cuisine), oppressive men, exoticised sexuality, and the binary of modernity and tradition (74-79). Ponzanesi claims that these oriental or exotic elements are “spicy food, luxurious textiles and home decorations, spiritual quests or alternative healing methods” with a colourful locale (*The Postcolonial* 10).

³³ See also Saadia Toor’s article, “Indo-Chic” (2004) which places the blame equally on both international “[w]estern capitalist elites and hippies” and a domestic national market in the form of “young, cosmopolitan, hip and urban Indians” who “consume India from within” (1).

In the context of contemporary Pakistani literature (the fourth and continuing phase discussed in the introductory chapter), the exotic elements have been supplemented, or are entwined with, more overtly political elements to create what Brennan calls the “politico-exotic” (qtd. in Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* 12), particularly in the years since 9/11 and the American War on Terror.³⁴ With respect to Pakistani Anglophone writing, the globally anticipated tropes are of “stereotypically ‘fundamental’ Islam and Islamic identity” and “Af-Pak settings” (Clements *Writing Islam* 135, 126), “Jihadi Islam” (Aamir Mufti 174), “terrorism, Jihad, Mangoes, Biryani, Cricket, patriarchal society, Islam, polarization of secularism and fundamentalism” (Naveen Zehra Minai 294) and “honour killings, forced marriage, physical abuse, disfigurement, oppression and the withholding of basic rights” as Gohar Karim Khan suggests in her doctoral thesis, “Narrating Pakistan Transnationally” (33). The recent “politico-exotic” portrayal of Pakistan is arguably drawn from, and packaged with, images of the nation as dangerous, violent and a hot-bed of Islamic terrorism. Bruce Riedel, in “Pakistan and Terror: The Eye of the Storm,” bluntly summarises this international assessment of the nation:

Pakistan is the most dangerous country in the world today. All of the nightmares of the twenty-first century come together in Pakistan: nuclear proliferation, drug smuggling, military dictatorship and above all, international terrorism. Pakistan is almost uniquely both a major victim of terrorism and a major sponsor of terrorism. It has been the scene of horrific acts of violence. (32)

It is therefore relevant to ask to what degree Pakistani Anglophone fiction confirms or enforces such a claim (especially evident in journalistic discourse), and to what extent authors might capitalise on the “terror” (in all senses) that ostensibly shapes the nation.

³⁴ Brennan originally uses the phrase “politico-erotic” in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (10) but Huggan misattributes it as “politico-exotic”.

“Brand Pakistan” gained prominence due to its engagement with the issues of Muslim identity and terrorism (regardless of the “aesthetic” qualities of any given work). Clearly, the extent to which writers who are branded as ‘Pakistani’ confirm, undermine, or exploit marketing assumptions (and readership appeal) is an important discussion point. A significant majority of Pakistani writers rebuff the allegation of exoticism or specific branding in contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literature. Hamid, for example, states that “I try not to mention the minaret, because when I’m in Lahore, I don’t notice it” (“The Reluctant Novelist” n.p.), suggesting that he is not concerned with cultural icons to promote his work. Another successful Pakistani writer Mohammed Hanif, author of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), dismisses any such pressure from market forces by asserting that he freely writes whatever he wants (*Bilal Writing Pakistan* 4). In *The Guardian* interview with Natalie Hanman, K. Shamsie insists that Pakistani writers are telling stories no different from other writers across the globe, but nonetheless acknowledges the demands of international readers, stating that “there will be journalists who come to you and they want to find the Muslim in you, the Pakistan in you” (“Where is the American Writer” n.p.) In contrast, Pakistani writer Uzma Aslam Khan speaks of the pressure Pakistani writers face in having to conform to popular western clichés, but she asserts that they can choose to resist these temptations literary market thrust onto them (“If this were” n.p). Clearly, Pakistani Anglophone fiction is subject to a complex interplay with market forces, particularly in the years since 9/11. How contemporary authors facilitate the reading of their texts as exemplars of “Brand Pakistan” and how eastern and western readers receive their texts (given this pervasive framing of the nation’s literary outputs), is the focus of this thesis.

Given that my case studies address the reception of selected Pakistani Anglophone texts in both the metropole (the UK, the US) and in South Asia (via analysis of reviews from Pakistan and India), it is important to note that Pakistani novelists are the subject of sometimes quite derogatory assessments by readers situated “at home.” This refers to an important issue of

difference in reception of this fiction in different locations. Rohma Saleem's essay "Marketing Otherness: A Re-Orientalist Gaze into Pakistani fiction with Focus on *Trespassing* and *Typhoon*" (2017) offers a telling example. The essay explores the extent to which Pakistani novelists U. Khan (*Trespassing* 2003) and Qaisra Shahraz (*Typhoon* 2007) might be guilty of pandering to western desires for the reconfirmation of stereotypical and essentialist notions about Pakistan and Islam, particularly with respect to the portrayal of women. In her reading, the novels are reduced to texts which simply "appease the [w]estern thirst for the mysterious and elusive East" and reiterate "vilifying tropes of [the] East as necessarily backward, steeped in poverty, corruption, conservatism, a natural antithesis of the liberated West" ("Marketing Otherness" abstract); in short, they are described as "deliberately ... appealing to the voyeuristic demands of the western reader" (140). Pakistani Anglophone writers (via brief analyses of U. Khan's and Shahraz's novels) are accused of attempting "to stand [in] as intermediaries as translator of one culture for the other", which "suits them to perfection, since it gives their role heightened significance" (141). Saleem uncritically adopts Lau's suggestion that some Indian writers may be "guilty of skewered, partial, and selective representation, or willful misrepresentation altogether ..., or outright betrayal" and asserts that "the scenario is not much different [in the] Pakistani literary scene" (142). She argues that Pakistani writers have just two options: "either exotic representation of [the] Orient or an engagement in subversive criticism of one's traditions" (142, emphasis added); they are either "native informers" beguiled by the prospect of international fame and financial reward, or "authentic" (a word that haunts this thesis) representatives of their nation. This is an unfortunate re-inscription of the kind of either/or logic that shadows and stymies some postcolonial and neo-colonial critical discourses (including those of "western" academics); the logic appears blind to the hybrid or "mongrel" (self-) positioning of so many contemporary Pakistani writers, including those *branded as* Pakistani. Saleem dismisses U. Khan's and Shahraz's novels as

exemplars of literary “betrayal” – not only of (authentic) Pakistan but also of Islam (both of which are problematically, monolithically conceived): she reads them as anti-Muslim texts produced for “anti-Muslim (western) consumers” (148).

The inclusion of local language phrases in novels is dismissed as pandering to “occidental tastes” (151); cosmopolitan authors are reduced to the role of outsiders “peeping” in on Pakistani culture (152) and accused of “rehashing the same worn out themes” of “marginalised women, the almost unbridgeable gaps between privileged and non-privileged, ... riots, chaos, ... lack of security, strikes, lockouts, shutter downs” (153).³⁵ In summary, “Pakistani English fiction writers are playing second fiddle to their western counterparts who deem Pakistan primitive in every sense of the word” (154). She argues, “[t]his kind of literature is lavishly praised for its miniaturist description but *its intention* is nothing more than to feed the western desire of knowing the east” (155, emphasis added). As these comments suggest, broad and undefended assumptions are made concerning how the West “deems” Pakistan (and its authors), and about authorial “intention.” These assumptions challenge extensive critical debate and claims about authorial intentionality to be problematic. Saleem’s essay highlights the perils inherent in uncritical (essentialist) assumptions about Pakistani authorial identity and Pakistani literature. It glosses over important relationships between notions of authenticity, exoticism, and cosmopolitanism that should, I contend, inform analyses of Pakistani Anglophone literature – and its relationship with the publishers, publicists, and readers.

Critical debate reverts far too easily to convenient assertions about the trope of “insider” and “outsider” representational veracity – “authenticity” – and draws attention to issues of the “moral discourse of legitimacy, obligation and (dis)loyalty” as suggested by Benwell and Procter (*Reading Across* 130). As I have suggested, such claims are fraught by assumptions

³⁵ Indigenous, non-English words and phrases might function to challenge (western) readers’ attempts to homogenise and appropriate the culture/ethnicity portrayed in postcolonial texts. The extensive ‘African Language Debate’, played out between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and commentators on their respective works, is just one example (Biodun Jeyifo 135).

about “real” (“authentic”) or “posturing” (“inauthentic”) national, cultural or ethnic identities, complicated by discussions about whether the author(s) in question really are Pakistani or qualified to write as such, given that in so many cases they write from (comfortable, if not elite) positions in the West and, assumedly, they write for western readers rather than ones “at home.” When a text crosses the nation’s borders, to what extent does its author intend to “feed” the western desires for (mistaken) knowledge about Pakistan, as Saleem implies is the case? Regardless of authorial intention (which this study roundly dismisses in favour of reader reception), to what extent are these texts read by international readers as merely an entertaining information manual about a far-off land? Is K. Shamsie naïve, misguided, or correct when she writes, “I don’t think a good novel works if you are trying to pander to a particular kind of market” (qtd. in Bilal *Writing Pakistan* 149). This invites some difficult questions for the texts which are promoted as “Brand Pakistan”. Do Anglophone Pakistani cosmopolitan writers anticipate an ideal reader based in the West? To what extent might they deliberately write for such a reader? Can they be accused of ‘selling out’ their culture and nation for fame and money?

1.3 Connecting Reception with Production: The Issues to Explore

Much depends on an assessment of the “ideal reader” in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, just as it does on questions to do with both the reader and author “implied” as a result of the reader’s (or in the case of this thesis, reviewer’s) engagement with any specific text. Questions to do with the “real” author or “real” reader of texts need to be subordinated to those of the reader/author that is *implied*, as any specific reader engages with any particular text in any specific interpretive scenario. Of course, this doesn’t suggest an interpretive ‘free-for-all’: each text includes “fixed stars” (in Iser’s analogy) that both guide and constrain reader interpretation

to some degree. Nonetheless, both responses to these stars, and the nature of the lines drawn between them, will be (following Fish) influenced by the “interpretive communities” within which readers are situated. Although Harry Garuba argues in *The African Imagination* that “Difference in location usually translates to a change in perspective, an adjustment in the direction of professional practice, critical, and research agenda” (145), this “situation” may not be geographical, but instead political, religious, cultural or ideological; the interpretive community could be socially based.

Many literary critics have suggested that the ideal reader of postcolonial literature (here Pakistani Anglophone fiction) is metropolitan (or at least cosmopolitan) – that is, a “global” rather than “local” reader. When Huggan says the First world consumes postcolonial literature as an exotic commodity which packages the culturally different other in a “reassuringly familiar form” (22), he is assuming a metropolitan audience.³⁶ Ruvani Ranasinha, in a discussion of contemporary diasporic South Asian women’s fiction,³⁷ similarly suggests all Euro-American readers are the intended audience of South Asian fiction, particularly after 9/11 (31); in examining the Indian Anglophone fiction Ashwinee Pendharkar claims that a metropolitan Anglophone audience is the “assumed intended [ideal] audience of Indian English literature” (36). Writing sardonically, Naqvi laments that Pakistani Anglophone writers do not take into account a Pakistani readership and do not “mention reviews and interviews published in Pakistani magazines or newspapers” on their websites. This, she opines, is because for Pakistani Anglophone writers, “the opinions of outsiders matter the most” (n.p.). If this is so, then “local” readers may feel excluded from the assumed interpretive community (ideal

³⁶ Although Huggan clarifies “it would be misleading ... to gauge their [texts’] value only to western metropolitan response” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 30).

³⁷ She looks at the works of A. Roy, Kiran Desai, Monica Ali, K. Shamsie, Sorayya Khan, Lahiri and others.

readers) of a text.³⁸ It is also noteworthy that Pakistani readership is nominal in comparison to an international readership.

Raja also comments on the “tension between national expectations of Pakistani Writing in English and its reception beyond the nation” (“Competing Habitus” 349). He argues (in an earlier article) that “[w]hile the authors see themselves as cultural critics and tend to highlight the darkest and most troubling aspects of Pakistani culture, Pakistani readers, constantly under attack from various kinds of western media, see such representations as a betrayal” (“Pakistani English Novel” 2). Local readers do not view the content of such texts “simply as literary representations” (351) and, in their responses, express “national anxiety” (351). Extending his concept of habitus to the reading of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, Raja proposes that readers occupy either a “nationalistic habitus” or a “cosmopolitan habitus” (“Competing Habitus” 350). He notes how highly educated Pakistani students “with aesthetic ‘tastes’ often find the works of Pakistani Anglophone authors deeply troubling as, in their opinion, they tend to represent Pakistan negatively” (“Competing Habitus” 350). Raja himself appears to identify with readers from/in the “national habitus” when he complains that Pakistani Anglophone fiction has become “the ultimate window into Pakistani culture” for his American students. This is problematic, in his eyes, because this literature “normalises” the view of Pakistan as a ‘dark place’ by rehashing “plausible stereotypes” of patriarchy, sectarian conflicts and terrorism instead of focusing on a “Pakistan of natural beauty and some cultural value” (“Competing Habitus” 351-354).³⁹ These expectations, Raja argues, place Pakistani Anglophone authors in a “double-bind” as they must meet the expectations of the metropolitan

³⁸ In *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English* (2004), Kristi Bohata argues as much with respect to Welsh writing/readers, suggesting the reading is difficult for Welsh readers who find themselves excluded from the implied audience.

³⁹ See also an article published in *Herald Dawn*, “Whose Pakistan? Whose Picture?” in which Zahra Sabri, a local literature student, claims Pakistani Anglophone fiction does not meet the expectations of local readers because the middle-class reader cannot identify with its explanatory nature, thematic choices (such as the East-West clash) and British or American writing style (n.p).

market (to achieve high sales numbers) and the pressures and pulls of their own primary culture. While this may certainly be the case in some instances, Raja's argument relies far too heavily on the notion that authors belong to, live in or identify with only *one* nation (see discussions of Hamid and Aslam, in Chapters Five and Four). As I have suggested, this is not always the case: many successful writers who are described as "Pakistani" are better understood as "cosmopolitan." (An exception is Ahmad, discussed in Chapter Three).

Not all critics share such opinions, however. In "Cosmopolitan Reading" Kwame A. Appiah argues, "we will miss a great deal if we treat [this postcolonial literature] as addressed to a "[w]estern reader with cosmopolitan tastes" ("Cosmopolitan Reading" 212). Innes offers a somewhat different suggestion in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*: she argues that much postcolonial fiction is not intended for one particular readership only, but anticipates a dual readership of "excluded readers" and "inside readers," resulting in what she calls a "double audience."⁴⁰ For her, an excluded reader (or outsider) is someone who is excluded from the intimate cultural knowledge appealed to by the text, a metropolitan reader often connected with the former coloniser. An inside reader, conversely, is a member of a community identified with the (formerly) colonised people/culture represented by a text (172). Certain elements of a text will make sense to a particular group of readers, whilst others may not notice those references. She urges consideration of the response of both groups of readers, stressing that the "construction of a *multiple or hybrid reader* is one of the properties of many postcolonial texts" (171, emphasis mine). Some researchers like Pendharkar, in her thesis on the reception of Indian English fiction in France, India and England (2011), have used this idea of inside *and* outside – hybrid – readers to explore how geographic location impacts on the meanings ascribed to the texts she considers. This focus on dual readership or different

⁴⁰ Australian cultural and media studies academic Ken Gelder proposes that cultural proximity plays a significant role in understanding a text and uses the term "proximate reading" and "distant reading" to describe this phenomenon (4).

interpretive communities is intimately bound up with claims about authenticity and representation.

Innes' claim, that many postcolonial texts are written for a dual audience, is useful when we consider the differences among actual readers, and the extent to which they may have "insider" knowledge about a particular culture or nation. Pakistani-American academic and critic Masood Raja argues in "Competing Habitus" that this results in Anglophone texts from the margins, or ones translated into English, being received differently in their country of origin than in the western world (349). This phenomenon is particularly striking in the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which garnered extensive international visibility and yet received very little attention in Pakistan when it was first published. A prominent Pakistani Anglophone writer, Sidhwa, in a *Dawn* interview regarding the publication of her novel *The Crow Eaters* (1978), laments the tendency of the Pakistani public and critics to look "westward for approval" (Staff "Interview: Bapsi Sidhwa" n.p.). She wryly explains that her novel was ignored locally until it was published and earned glowing reviews in the UK. Afterwards, she says, "the Pakistani press began to love the book" (n.p.).⁴¹ M. Naqvi, in a relatively recent article, shares this opinion. She notes that Pakistani Anglophone writers have "a small readership within the country" and argues that, as a result, their works are aimed at a "larger market abroad and among the diaspora," and that their work "feeds a narrative dominant in the current global order" propagated after 9/11 (n.p.). In contrast, speaking of the reception of his novel *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), Nadeem Aslam comments on the positive reception his text met in "India and Pakistan" where it was praised as "a lovely book, a beautiful book," but was described as a "dark book, a bleak book" in the West. He purports, "the darkness was mentioned by the Eastern publishers but as a third or fourth thing. The beauty was mentioned

⁴¹ K. Shamsie take a starkly different position. In "I Know Most Readers," she criticises an interviewer for assuming Pakistani Anglophone writing is "aim[ed] for a market abroad." In her opinion, Pakistani readers "don't seem to think that the books written by Pakistani writers aren't for them" (Muhammad Badar Alam, et al. n.p.).

by the [w]estern publishers, but as a third or fourth thing” (“An Interview with Nadeem Aslam” n.p.). Given the differences in (East/West) reception noted by both Sidhwa and Aslam, it is important to consider not only the (assumed) ideal readers of texts but also the expectations of actual readers situated “differently.” Whether or not such stark differences exist, and if they do, to what extent, is a key question addressed in this thesis.

Nevertheless, Pakistani Anglophone fiction, or the literary “Brand Pakistan,” appears to face a complex interplay with market forces. The impact of such forces on the production, marketing and reception of postcolonial literature more generally has been quite widely discussed in recent years, however, this has not often been extended to Pakistani literature except in the kinds of “informal” comments – made in interviews, blogs or short opinion-pieces – highlighted in the preceding discussion. In the analyses that follow, I consider how Pakistani Anglophone authors are branded, and how the writers position themselves in the global marketplace. I analyse the reading responses found in initial newspaper and magazine reviews of three Pakistani Anglophone novels: these responses are from different readers from different (geographical) reading constituencies, and are compared to author branding by way of interviews and writings). A guiding assumption for these analyses is that careful attention must be paid to distinctions not only between “real” and “implied” authors but also to “ideal,” “implied” and “real” readers mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter. As noted, an ideal reader of the text is a fictional impossibility, while the implied reader is an entity that is expected to understand the textual nuances and codes. While these questions are relevant to authorial intention (and difficult to answer), the review based reception is more concerned with the real reader and her horizon of expectation, giving rise to what Fish calls an ‘interpretive community’ bound up with varied geographical, socio-political, and ideological contexts.

Chapter Two: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I explored the extent to which contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction is trapped (or complicit) in the mechanics of the global literary marketplace. In particular, I highlighted the vexed issue of interpretive communities, readership, authorial identity, and the ways this literature and its authors are marketed. The appeal that is made to local (Pakistani) qualities, to achieve commercial success in the global literary market, is a phenomenon I termed “Brand Pakistan”. To undertake a reception study of selected novels in different reading constituencies, in this chapter I explain the importance of reviews (and review sources) in this chapter.

My decision to conduct a reception study via initial reviews in the leading, major newspapers and associated literary supplements is grounded in the concerns raised by

influential scholars, for example, Graham Huggan who has stressed the need to “work on the geographical and historical particularities of audience and reception in postcolonial literary studies” (“A Preface: Reflections” xiv). He argues that scholars have been reluctant to “look at the issues of audience and reception in the disparate literatures they study” (“A Preface: Reflections” xv). This view is endorsed by Bethan Benwell, James Procter and Gemma Robinson who express their surprise that audiences, readers and reception have not featured more prominently in postcolonial studies (*Postcolonial Audiences* 6). In separate work, Benwell and Procter complain of the dearth of “concrete empirical evidence” in reception research in transnational contexts (*Reading Across* 17) as previously mentioned in Chapter One. They acknowledge the importance of considering plural readers who differ in their cultural and geographical placements and therefore might offer different interpretations when they approach a text.

Drawing on the work of Stanley Fish, Janice Radway similarly maintains that textual meaning is constructed by a community of readers who respond to it (*Reading the Romance* 20). This multiplicity of meaning, she maintains, is the result of “a host of material and social factors” governing the production of literary texts which, in turn, affects book purchases (*Reading the Romance* 19). The broader implication of this is that the texts we analyse are, to some degree, determined by the “social location” and “cultural competencies” of “our situated site of readership” (*Reading* 8). As also variously argued by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, Radway thus understands that evaluative responses to literature are the product of interplays between authorial choices and the life experiences, cultural/historical/geographical positioning, and ideological assumptions which subsequently frame readers’ understandings of the world.

As discussed in my previous chapters, the reception of texts is not only the product of reader subjectivity. It is also determined by many material factors which, for my purposes

include: Anglo-American market demand; publisher promotional strategies; the dominance of cosmopolitan or diasporic Pakistani Anglophone authors; and a current tendency in (western) readers to focus on political rather than aesthetic aspects of Pakistani fiction. Zita Farkas informs us that literary reception is constructed by the “social and cultural discourses” and an “interconnection of a multiplicity of practices” including the processes of marketing and publishing, academic and literary evaluation, authorial interviews and reviews in popular media and public appearances and prize giving (122). Therefore, a full account of textual reception would include a discussion of various editions and translations of the selected novels/works; their circulation and sales numbers; press and magazine reviews, followed by academic responses (which inevitably come later); discussion of textual/authorial consecration in the form of prizes and awards garnered; blog commentaries; correspondence between authors and their publishers; and authorial (self) promotion via interviews, and participation in literary festivals. Although desirable, such a comprehensive overview is well beyond the scope of this thesis (as pointed out in the introduction). Given my limited scope, I have chosen to focus closely on just one of these elements: initial press and magazine reviews complemented by interviews of authors of the texts selected, not least because of the important role they play in encouraging (or discouraging) circulation and sales. To test the degree and nature of responses in the varied interpretive communities, I have chosen to undertake a comparative analysis of responses expressed in the newspaper/magazine reviews of selected texts that emerged from Pakistan, neighbouring India and the hub of cultural production and dissemination — the US and the UK.

Nicholas Holm, in an article on critical capital and reading, asserts that “critics and reviewers manifest dispositions in ways that go beyond personal preference, and instead can be understood as both determining and determined by the wider cultural field” (7). This is reflected in a study on “foreign literature” in American media, where Susanne Janssen points

out that “Newspaper coverage of [foreign] literature is ... likely to have a local bias” in its evaluation of works of foreign authors (13). Work by Wendy Griswold, in a transnational reception study of fiction by West-Indian writer George Lamming, appears to accord with Janssen. She considers readers from three different reading constituencies and concludes that they read West-Indian fiction differently: American reviewers are concerned more with the race of the author, UK reviewers read the work in stylistic terms (to avoid discussion on issues such as colonialism), while West-Indian reviewers focus on issues of “personal and national identity” (1076). However, Griswold warns that not all literary works “can sustain such extensive multiple interpretations” (1105), and in some cases, there is considerable convergence, overlaps or alignments between readers from different localities.

Surprisingly little academic attention has been paid to the impact and influence of book reviews. Where extended analysis in this vein occurs, it tends to be in the fields of Marketing and Applied Linguistics, but even here the number of offerings is limited and yet informal internet sources are replete with information, often from publishing houses, about the importance of reviews. In most cases, they are deemed important because they offer an author “greater visibility, [a] greater chance of getting found” and “more sales” (Gail Woodard n.p.). One site unequivocally states, “More reviews equal more sales for authors and more informed readers” and notes that “[o]ver 85% of all Amazon Kindle readers rely heavily on book reviews before making an online order to have the copy of the book” (“12 Reasons Why Book Reviews Are Important” n.p.). Another asserts, “[b]ook reviews, whether they are from readers or from third-party sources, are essential as what they say about [a] book determines the type of publicity received and in a large degree, whether the book will sell” (Leonard Tillerman n.p.).

Reviews published in well-known publications such as *The Times* or *The New York Review of Books* – whether favourable or otherwise – offer exposure that can subsequently affect book sales and authorial reputation. In their investigative study on the connection

between Amazon book reviews and sales, Judith A. Chevalier and Dina Mayzlin assert that book reviews lead to “an increase in relative sales” (345).⁴² Similarly, Wenzhou Zhang, in his study on the effect of media coverage on book sales, labels newspapers as “authoritative, selective, documentary and timely sources of information” (27). Although Zhang does not specifically mention the individual role of newspaper reviews on sales, he concludes that the power of television, internet and newspaper coverage, combined, can boost sales significantly. Adam Krefman, the publisher (and publicist) of Cornelia Nixon’s *Jarrettsville*’s (2009), also suggests the importance of positive reviews in major newspapers; commenting on a negative review the novel received from *The New York Times*, he notes:

So the question becomes, a positive review there, how much might it have helped? Probably given the level of distribution [we achieved], it probably would have been very positive for sales, certainly for Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and the library business. The other thing that happens with something like the *New York Times* is that it’s a tastemaker so an endorsement there usually means we do an email blast and reconnect with other pending opportunities that may be on the fence as to whether they’re going to review the book or not. So it allows us to keep the momentum going in a forward manner (qtd. in Clayton Childress 179)

Krefman’s assertion that this newspaper (and presumably others like it) is “a tastemaker”, is revealing. Reviews, even if impartial, effectively offer “an endorsement” (or not) that can significantly affect sales. Appearing on *The New York Times*’ Best Seller List significantly

⁴² Oprah Winfrey is another cultural authority notable for her role in promoting and influencing the sales of novels and ensuring their commercial success through her book club (Rooney ix; Cecilia Konchar Farr 2). Most of the works selected for her “Book Club” have achieved significant sales and stayed on *The New York Times* bestseller lists for around fifteen weeks (Farr 16). African-American author Pearl Cleage, whose work *We Speak Your Names* (2005) was promoted by Oprah, notes, “I don’t think being chosen by the Oprah Book Club makes celebrities out of authors Being picked doesn’t change who you are. It changes how many books you’re likely to sell” (Rooney 4).

boosts book sales, as Tong Bao and Tung-lung Chang argue in their studies on Amazon Book Sales (3). Similarly, Jonah Berger et. al, who examined the impact of *The New York Times* reviews on book sales, note that these reviews have a “persuasive impact” on book readers (819). They also point out the positive reviews have a larger impact on sales than negative reviews but negative reviews, nevertheless, lead to significant increases in sales. This, they contend, is especially true for new authors (830). Contrarily, their study shows that negative reviews result in a decrease in sales in the case of already established authors (831).

C. J. Van Rees also stresses the influential nature of book reviews: the “borrowing behaviour of amateurs of literature [from libraries] is likely to be influenced, albeit indirectly, by the way reviewers, critics and text book writers have assessed a work” (281). He claims that reviewers (along with critics) have the “statutory authority” (282) to legitimise or, in Pierre Bourdieu’s notion, to *consecrate* literary works (275). In a recent online blurb about the importance of book reviews, aimed at writers, Gail Woodard from the Dudley Court Press offers a link between the kind of qualitative evaluation undertaken by book reviewers and increased sales: “the presence of book reviews can help *validate the worthiness* of a book and establish *who the book’s audience is*. Then once validated, other similar people are much more likely to want to join their peers and buy that same book” (n.p., emphasis mine). The phrase “validate the worthiness of a book” is telling; the claim that book reviews “establish who the book’s audience is” is even more so. This implies that reviews target specific audiences rather than envisage a homogenous readership. The validations they offer are intended to appeal to a specific group of readers or an “interpretive community” (Fish *Is there a Text?* 335).

This is why Lorna Sage refers to reviews “as the immediate barometer” of a book’s success, especially in terms of marketing (264). Sage maintains that reviewers quite often shift the reader focus to the author, by “collud[ing]” with the author, paying them attention and

“mak[ing] a noise about them” (263). Speaking of the importance of book reviews, Gail Pool also adds,

[Book reviews] matter not only to authors, publishers, and critics, those of us in the field whose livelihood and egos are involved; they matter not only to the readers who are trying to use them to guide their reading; they also matter to readers who don’t read reviews. *They influence reading*. (3, emphasis mine)

Pool argues that reviews not only influence literary standards but also cultural attitudes and that they offer readers both “consumer advice and cultural guidance” (4).

In exploring “how a literary work becomes a masterpiece” (the title of another essay), Rees divides literary critics into three types: “journalistic reviewers, essayists and academic critics” (397). Explaining this, he notes that essayists publish literary essays in (high-brow but generalist) journals or magazines; academic criticism refers to items in scholarly publications, and journalistic reviewers publish in populist newspapers and magazines. Phillipa Chong also uses this categorisation in her review-based study on reading difference (2011), where she considers a book review to be an important guide that “lays out the strengths and weaknesses of a text” (64). Chong describes journalistic reviewing as “popular” which deals with contemporary and new fiction saying: “newspaper and magazine critics decide what few titles among the leagues of newly-published works will receive any critical attention with far-reaching consequences for an author’s success” (65-66). While clearly disparaged as a “lesser form” by most critics, in her study on reviews and authorial promotion, Janssen claims that “journalistic criticism” is crucial to the formation of a literary canon as it precedes other forms of criticism in evaluating literature (265). She argues that the other two forms of criticism (essays and academic articles) tend to “reproduce” the initial judgement of journalistic criticism and give attention to those authors promoted through newspapers and magazines (266). This

idea is also endorsed by Pool, Arzu Roditakis (in her review-based reception study on the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk (2015) and Jerome McGann in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (1985). McGann notes that the “critical history ... [of a literary work] dates from the first responses and reviews it receives. These reactions ... *modify the author’s purposes and intentions*, sometimes drastically, and they remain part of the processive life [of the work] as it passes on to future readers” (24, emphasis mine). I have italicised what I believe to be a crucial claim in the above comment by McGann: what he is suggesting is that how an (influential) reviewer responds to a text can “modify” what an author intended his or her work to mean. This is, of course, an extension of the kinds of claims made by Reception Studies critics, discussed earlier: textual meaning is determined, at least in part, by readers, regardless of authorial intention or purpose. However, McGann extends this discussion by claiming that reader responses can sometimes have a “drastic” effect on textual meaning. Moreover, he posits initial reviews and their “first responses” as crucial to the “processive life” of a text – in other words, they influence the later responses of “future readers” (24). In short, he stresses the influence such reviews have on reader reception, subsequent sales, and later academic evaluations.

With these ideas in mind, I have chosen to focus on initial reviews of Pakistani Anglophone selected fiction, written soon after publication, which appeared in the leading international newspapers and magazines (in print/online). My interest is in the *initial* reception of these works rather than responses by academic critics writing whose evaluations are published later. Initial reviews, in sources renowned for intelligent (if not always impartial) evaluation for a general readership, offer interested readers an endorsement (or otherwise) for a given text. These early reviews, especially in leading newspapers, have the potential to significantly influence reader-response and, as noted, book sales. My aim is to carefully consider what reviewers have highlighted as important in each novel and whether this differs

between reviews aimed at different reading constituencies. Moreover, as the review process is a branding tool with commercial consequences, my work attempts to show how reviewer emphasise on authorial nationality works to establish Pakistani Anglophone as a brand. A detailed discussion of my methods will follow in the section “Textual Selection.”

2.1 Readers of Reading: The Role of Reviewers

Reviewers, insofar as they offer “consumer advice and cultural guidance” (Pool 4) are examples of what Bourdieu refers to as “culture intermediaries, a group that mediates how goods (or services, practices, people) are perceived and engaged with by others, and makes claims to professional expertise in “taste and value within specific cultural fields” (*A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) qtd. in Maguire and Matthews 2). Holm, citing Bourdieu, refers to these intermediaries as the “producers of programmes on TV and radio or the critics of ‘quality’ newspapers and magazines and all writer-journalists and journalist-writers” (7). Within this group, reviewers and critics play a particularly relevant role in establishing a writer’s status, because, importantly, they are structurally attuned to the tastes, priorities and dispositions of the cultural fields in which they operate and can therefore potentially influence tastes (7). Reviewers and critics thus emerge as pivotal in establishing the authority of authors. I will return to the vexed issue of authorial/authority creation below, but for now, it is worth noting that “the mediation of cultural forms” is a much broader process than Bourdieu imagined, “it is important that nobody likely disagrees with the notion that cultural journalists and reviewers are ‘for sure’ cultural intermediaries who create and attribute symbolic value to cultural objects” (qtd. in Semi Purhonen et al. 10).

In *Reading with Oprah*, Kathleen Rooney refers to the “consecrating” agency of book reviewers:

[A]ll taste is dictated, if not by recognized cultural authorities at the so-called top, then from somewhere. All reviewing of or advocacy for a particular book – whether it appears on the book’s jacket, in the *New York Times Book Review*, or elsewhere – may be construed as a suggestion or even gentle coercion from those in positions of cultural power to those at lower levels. (10, emphasis in original)

Similarly, in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, sociologist Andrew Ross suggests that cultural commentators (like book reviewers) shape public tastes because they are expected to “know best”. This cultural authority then “secures [them] the power” to “both command and serve” (3).⁴³ Moreover, they also “define what is popular and what is legitimate” (5). Claire Squires’ work on literary marketing offers further instructive commentary on this “legitimizing” activity. Book reviewers are “very visible,” she suggests, and a “frequently self-reflexive participant in the dialogue” between him/herself and his/her reader. Her evaluations are influential in terms of marketing processes and the “concomitant creation of reading communities” (*Marketing Literature* 66-67). She observes, crucially, that reviewing is not only an act of reading, but an act of writing as well and approvingly quotes Robert McCrum to assert that the review is “a transmitter of information” (67). In this regard, Iser’s distinction between “real” and “implied” authors and readers is relevant. The (real) writer of fiction is to be understood as distinct from the “implied author” constructed by a reader’s interaction with a text, so too are writers of reviews constructed as “implied writers” by *their* readers (in this thesis, me as a reader). In both cases, how readers (of novels, and reviews) are situated – culturally, historically, and geographically – is significant, as are the “interpretive communities” to which they belong. In this sense, the reviewer is a mediator, a ‘filter’, but also,

⁴³ American novelist Jonathan Franzen writes about the influence literary magazine *Time* had on his father: “I can report that my father, who was not a reader, nevertheless had some acquaintance with James Baldwin and John Cheever, because *Time* magazine put them on its cover, and *Time*, for my father, was the ultimate cultural authority” (38-39).

in her role in assessment of the book, part of the process of marketing communications, an opinion leader, shaper and influencer, influential in shaping reading habits and of constructing meanings that are then affirmed or contested by readers.

It can be concluded from the aforementioned discussion, that reviewers are an extension both of editorial tradition and the literary editor's review orientation. They have the competence to review books and they also have to negotiate the institutional voice of any particular publication they are writing for. In this context, James Curran argues in *Media and Democracy* (2011), that a "[l]iterary editors' choice of book is influenced by their cultural values" (177). These reviewers are in some instances other representational authors writing about similar topics; in other instances, they are journalists. As Curran reports, "only one out of 22 literary editors [selected for his study] had not worked as a journalist before appointment" (179). He adds, "These are a mixture of professional writers, journalists and academics, with particular areas of expertise" (183). As Angshuman Kar in his reception study on Indian writer Kunal Basu notes, some of the reviewers are academics as well who are "appointed by magazine or newspaper literary editors" (16). Other times many novelists and poets are book-reviewers themselves (Lorna Sage 262). Pool explains that the "editors often solicit reviews from authors, especially if they're celebrated writers whose names might bring status and readers to the book page, or in newspapers, if they're local writers, particularly if their books have done well" (39). Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner, who also attribute a crucial role to the reviews in the marketing of books and introducing "author[s] to potential readers", purport that "a common strategy to market new novels is to obtain the praise of well-established authors who explore similar topics. These authors then serve as references for subsequent reviews in newspapers, journals, online platforms etc." (206). Pool endorses this by informing us that editors often turn to fiction writers whose main interest is to promote their "own names and their latest works, which are carefully mentioned in the contributors' notes" after the review

(41). She talks about publishing giant Amazon's promotional guide for authors who are advised to frequently review books as it will result in more sales "if you review a good number of popular novels by bestselling authors, your name and book title will be seen thousands of times" (41). Pool also informs us that apart from authors as reviewers there are "instructors or professors" who "review so frequently that it seems to me they have to be considered in some sense professionals" (37). So, there is a close nexus among literary authors, journalists and the reviewers in the contemporary literary marketplace.

Likewise, in *Under the Cover: The Creation, Production, and Reception of a Novel* (2017), sociologist Clayton Childress refers to the reviewer selection as commonly a "matching process" where the ideal reviewer is usually the one who has "written a book of the same genre or type" (171). For these "*practitioners* of the same art" (171, emphasis in original) reviewing is only a "sideline activity" (171). He proposes the term, the code of author omertà (associated with the Sicilian Mafia), as an informal oath of both honour and silence that demands negative reviews should remain private to practitioners of the field. Whilst "assassination reviews" rarely occur (172), Childress claims that exceptions do occur when the reviews are written by full-time critics who can afford to add negative comments. Colloquially the term 'author omertà' is used pejoratively, but I do not use it disparagingly. From the above discussion, it appears that the reviewers in newspapers and magazines may be academics, fellow writers and journalists, disparate groups each with their objectives and biases. It is imperative to differentiate if the reviews written by fellow writers are any different (in terms of emphasis on content or context) than reviewers such as journalists.

Finally, what Squires calls "[t]he issue of audience" needs careful consideration, particularly if we agree with Squires' claim that the evaluative, taste-establishing writing of reviewers, at least in part, helps in the creation of "reading communities" (*Marketing Literature* 66). Reviewers, like novelists, write for "ideal readers"; but the degree to which their actual

readers match their ideal varies from context to context. If implied readers are constructed (c.f. Iser) via their mediated engagement with a specific text, this construction applies to both reviewers as readers and the readers of reviews. It is in this sense, I believe, that we should understand Squires' claims about the capacity of reviews to form interpretive reading communities. Of course, actual/real reading communities exist beyond the review (or novel) and it is feasible to assume that there is a correlation between the "ideal" audience imagined by the writer of a review and the "real audience" of that review, given that readers are likely to select a review source that, at least in general terms, accords with their generalised proclivities and tastes. ("Left-leaning" readers are more likely to choose to read reviews in a "left-leaning" newspaper or magazine, for example.) This considerably implicates me (an actual – and Pakistani – reader) in my role as a reader/critic of selected book reviews of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. As I clarified in the introduction of this thesis, this reflects on my "national habitus" which may influence my commentary on the reviews and evaluation of the reviewers.

2.2 Textual Selection

As a critical reader of Pakistani writers/authors, it is necessary to offer an account of my selection of texts for close, case-study analysis. My choices were not arbitrary but rather determined by several critical and pragmatic factors. The texts selected are chosen less for my personal opinion on their inherent merit than on the reception they have received globally. I have chosen three novels that have received international acclaim for different reasons, even though in each instance the bulk of reviewers have focused on the national identity of the text's author: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011), and Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017). These texts have all achieved notable commercial success and have become commodities circulating within the global

literary marketplace. The extent to which the construction of their authors *as Pakistani* has influenced their success is a question to which I will return in my case study analyses. These novels provide particularly rich sites for consideration of the branding of Pakistani Anglophone fiction/authors, and the authors of this fiction, in the global marketplace. Pragmatically, I have selected texts that have received (relatively) significant review coverage internationally, both “at home” (Pakistan), in neighbouring India and the West (the UK and the US).

As discussed in the introduction, this study initially aimed to look at the works of the “Big Five” Pakistani writers which includes Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Daniyal Muenuddin, Kamila Shamsie and Mohammed Hanif. No critical study on Pakistani Anglophone fiction is complete without Hamid, a stature he has earned through his luminous stories (as discussed in the introduction and later in Chapter Five); Although Jamil Ahmad is not included in the group, his *The Wandering Falcon* is a near-perfect example (in my opinion) of a (Pakistani Anglophone) text which became relevant only by the change in extrinsic circumstances developing publishing and readerly interest (see Chapter Three). The choice was then to be made between Aslam, Mueenuddin, Hanif and K. Shamsie, which I narrowed down to Aslam and K. Shamsie because of their popularity and presence in the global literary marketplace. This is because Mueenuddin has written only one short story collection entitled *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. While Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* seemed a suitable choice due to its apparently political content (in dealing with Pakistan’s politics of the 1970s), I wanted a contemporary novel. Out of Aslam and K. Shamsie’s latest novels *The Golden Legend* and *Home Fire* (again to present a continuum from a text immediately published after 9/11 in 2007 to a fairly recent text published in 2017), *The Golden Legend* stood out because of its thematic concerns (relevant to Brand Pakistan) and the articles that predicted it might win the Man Booker Prize (see Chapter Four). Unfortunately, it was Hamid’s *Exit West* that was shortlisted by the Man Booker Prize committee later on (“Mohsin Hamid’s Exit

West shortlisted for Man Booker Prize” n.p.) and K. Shamsie’s *Home Fire* won the Women’s Prize for Fiction in 2018 (Alison Flood n.p.) and the London Hellenic Prize (“Staff Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* wins” n.p.). By 2018, it was too late to change my text selection. Nonetheless, while *The Golden Legend* may not have been awarded any major literary prizes, it constitutes an important contribution to the thesis because it provides an example to discuss the issue of branding and literary celebrity in detail.

Readers may note that the three texts I have selected as case studies were written by men and so are not “representative” in gendered terms. Certainly, one of the “Big Five” contemporary authors mentioned is a woman, K. Shamsie. I have explained my choice of Aslam’s *The Golden Legend* over K. Shamsie’s *Home Fire* on the previous page. My decisions were pragmatic and focused on a range of criteria, but gender was not one of them. I acknowledge that questions to do with authorial gender, and how this may impact on (international) textual reception this could make for a valuable study, one that I might undertake in future. This could be particularly interesting given the common (Western) perception that Muslim (and South Asian) women are subject to misogynistic abuse in a variety of ways. Some works of fiction by Pakistani women (and of course, men too) confirm such assumptions, others challenge or complicate them.⁴⁴ How international reviewers respond to such representations, and what kinds of claims are made about the authority (and market value) of the writers based not only on their nationality but also their gender (and how the two interrelate), opens up a huge area of debate that it is simply not possible to consider in the present work.

Using the guidelines mentioned here and in the previous chapter, I will explore the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. To do so I will use the selected texts and author interviews and writings to discuss branding (by reviewers and the authors themselves), keeping

⁴⁴ There are an increasing number of female Pakistani fiction writers who are achieving international attention, for example Fatima Bhutto, Shaila Abdullah, Nafisa Haji, Sabyn Javeri, Saba Imtiaz, and Ayesha Tariq to name a few.

in my mind the points raised by Farkas in the previous chapter. Rees also recommends that the author's reputation (as created through his previous works or supplementary sources such as interviews and writings), and the effect this reputation produces on the reviews, is worthy of consideration. The biographical consistency surrounding the authorial personae behind these works, and the thematic consistency across the works themselves, at least as it has been manufactured through their high-profile public reception, is a significant aspect of any reception study. This phenomenon has been discussed at great length in the previous chapter under the heading *Brand Pakistan*. As mentioned in Chapter One, "Theoretical Contexts" with reference to Rees, a celebrity writer will likely be discussed positively by reviewers, and negative comments will rarely appear in reviews (286). In "Reviewing", Janssen investigates the phenomenon of literary celebrity, referring to author interviews, lectures, and essays, and participation in literary festivals as "interventions" to impress reviewers-critics in gaining positive reviews and also responding to them (268), as will become evident in the upcoming analysis chapters. Unsurprisingly, Roditakis, in her study on Turkish author Pamuk, recommends that news articles on Pamuk, interviews conducted with him, and his essays should be considered alongside the reviews, as all these journalistic texts contribute to the reception (3). Mindful of how this authorial branding influences these journalistic texts, these questions will form a major part of my review analysis.

In relation to authorial identity, Chong claims that reviewers are concerned with the ethnicity or race of the authors (69). This ethnicity is described covertly and is mentioned in the reviews for three reasons: to establish the authenticity of the author; as an instance of classification as major or minor literature; and thirdly as identifying international talent. She reports that authenticity is established to draw parallels between the author and the setting of the story and to emphasise authors' first-hand knowledge or experience with these "exotic locales" (72). Griswold also supports the idea of authenticity, clarifying that reviewers take

into account several attributes like the publishing house, and the readership of the author when reviewing a book, rather than assessing it based on purely aesthetic criteria (1093). Likewise, Kamla Shashi Kumar, in her study on Indian author Jhumpa Lahiri, regards reviews and interviews published in journals and newspapers as a significant indicator of greater trends in literary authenticity because they influence public reception (10). This issue of authenticity and local origins, as earlier mentioned in Chapter One, forms the core of my study.

Along with literary celebrity, I will also consider the issue of literary centres. Along with the theorists discussed in Chapter One, Chong and Griswold also take into account the centrality of literary centres in their reviews, arguing that western critics pay more attention to western works. Chong notes that “American critics are more likely to review work by domestic over foreign writers because of America’s central position as a cultural producer within the global literary system” (66). Among the foreign-titles reviewed, American critics (not reviewers specifically) are also more likely to review writers from nations with strong “geo-linguistic” ties to the US (i.e. countries that are geographically proximate and whose national languages are similar): the reviewers make this selection for the writers using their own interpretive strategies. In her investigation of the reception of foreign literature in the US media, Janssen’s study also supports these results by informing us that *The New York Times* devotes “relatively limited coverage” to foreign literature, i.e. approximately one quarter. This she suggests, highlights “America’s increasingly central position” in the “cultural-world system” of the twenty-first century (12), which further reinforces the claims posited by Brouillette, Huggan, Ponzanesi and Lau in Chapter One.⁴⁵

A secondary aspect of my analysis will be to assess whether some reviews “appear to be concocted out of ingredients derived from previous reviews and interviews”, as Rees suggests in his study (294). This refers to the slippages such as “factual errors” – “publishers,

⁴⁵ Although Pascale Casanova puts Paris as one of the literary centres as well.

dates, page numbers, names of characters, even titles and authors” reported incorrectly (Pool 73).

In her *Faint Praise*, Gail Pool refers to the news function of books (specifically in American papers) which leads reviewers to look for qualities such as “newsworthiness and timelessness” –features not really appropriate for literary analysis but which are appreciated in newspaper reviews (92). As we see here, reviewers, through a focus on authenticity and realism, have reflected on their desire for such features as politics and contemporary contextualisation. Given the concerns raised in “Theoretical Contexts and Framework”, I will examine reviews to assess whether political concerns are still an essential factor in literary evaluation and interpretation, or if literary analysis (or a focus on aesthetic elements), is the focus. Although Chong’s study ascertains that reviewers are equally likely to discuss the merits of plot and characterisation, regardless of whether they have mentioned the race or ethnicity of the writer, they were significantly more likely to remark upon prose and tone if they also marked the writer’s race or ethnicity in the reviews (79) resulting in more focus on literary/aesthetic elements.

My close reading of the selected reviews resulted in the identification of several repeated themes or threads of discussion, with varying degrees of emphasis. Whether these different emphases can in any way be aligned with the location in which the reviews were published, or the “interpretive communities” to which each reviewer appears to identify with/belong, are key questions, given my earlier assertion that the meaning readers confer on texts may not be the result of their unique individuality but a result of the interpretive communities to which they belong. The repeated themes/threads I will focus on relate to issues of “authenticity” and so the (selected) authors’ authority as a representative voice for Pakistan; their representation of the East/West conflict/ “Clash of Civilisation” (if any) and the extent to which they engage with “orientalism” or “exoticism” (the issues discussed in the previous

chapter); and, finally, issues relating to textual aesthetics and how these might reflect, advance or undermine their ostensible politics. The review analysis will not be limited to the aforementioned issues and the focus will be on the common themes (such as literariness, authorial identity, and content) that emerge from the initial readings of reviews.

2.3 Sources Selection

This section offers a brief profile of the newspapers and magazines whose reviews form the bulk of this work. The press sources selected in each reading constituency are relatively few given that I am considering initial reviews published in “market-leading” international newspapers and associated publications. In “How Reviewers Reach Consensus”, Rees suggests that, to determine the authority of a review, one needs to look at the number of titles reviewed per issue, the size of their reviews, their scope, the reviewer’s background (their level of education and their occupation) and the regularity of their contributions, the intellectual level of the information they give and that of their respective readerships, and the scope of their (nationwide or metropolitan) distribution (285). Further, he claims that the “regional reviewers” or small review sources will follow the lead of “reviewers of repute” as the smaller outlets follow the lead of more established ones, in giving a positive or negative review and even if they decide to dissent, their arguments hold less weight for their readership (286).

On this basis, I have chosen to exclude reviews from *Kirkus Review*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal* due to their brevity and the reasons listed by Pool who labels them as “trade press” (23). She argues that these publications are for booksellers and libraries and are not meant for the general reading public. I have also excluded academic responses as these undertake a very different kind of interpretive work, they do not circulate in the same

way, and they usually take a longer period to be published due to the peer-review process involved (my work involves a study of *initial* reception, as previously mentioned). In selecting reviews for comparative assessment, a number of criteria were engaged. Importantly, I attempted to source all reviews of the selected texts published by major newspapers/literary supplements in the given locales (Pakistan, India, the UK and the US) in the period immediately (within a year or two preferably) after publication. The authority of the source was imperative, as was its substantial readership (and therefore its importance as a review source). Besides, the length of the review was a factor for selection. Albert R. Vogeler defines a review as usually “an essay, short or long, summarizing and analysing a book and discussing its importance in some category of literature” (1). Here the significant word, I believe, is “essay” – with the understanding that an essay cannot be advanced in the space of a paragraph or a few hundred words. I have, therefore, selected reviews that extend to 500 words or more, with a few exceptions when no reviews were available, or the review used was significant. For instance, Andrew Anthony’s review of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in *The Guardian* is included even though it is merely 300 words because Anthony’s right-wing stance highlights reading differences. I have also added two blog entries *Pakistaniat* (in the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) and *Pak Tea House* (in the case of *The Wandering Falcon*) because not enough local reviews were available for the texts, as a consequence of the limited reading culture in Pakistan.⁴⁶ These two sources are significant and have often reviewed contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction for their Pakistani readership.

Only 14.6 million Pakistanis read a newspaper at least once a week (an estimate based on 2009 data by the Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics) but, one newspaper is typically

⁴⁶ In an unpublished thesis investigating reading culture in Pakistan (2012), I look at the grim situation where parents and teachers are uncomfortable with children reading story books or anything other than textbooks. Academic reading is considered superior to recreational reading, and aesthetics are ignored for the sake of information. This results in a nation with weak inclination towards reading, where it is fashionable and acceptable to say, “oh, we don’t read” (94). In her interview, published in *The Missing Slate*, the Pakistani poet Ilona Yusuf endorses this by saying “reading outside of your textbooks is not encouraged” (n.p).

shared by many people, which makes the reading figures much higher than the reported circulation. According to the author of *The Muslim Extremist Discourse: Constructing Us versus Them* (2015) Faizullah Jan, newspapers are more influential than television in moulding public opinion, which in turn determines political decisions (although the situation has changed after 2010 with the introduction of so many more media channels) (31). There are more than 1,700 daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly newspapers published in English, Urdu, Pashto, Sindhi and other regional languages in Pakistan (Jan 32). Out of these, there are relatively few newspapers and magazines that give sustained attention to fictional writing in English. These include widely circulated newspapers in English such as *The News*, *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Daily Times* and *The Friday Times*.

The most significant of these newspapers is *Dawn*,⁴⁷ the widely read major Pakistani English newspaper and one of the oldest English dailies of Pakistan with its Sunday *Books and Authors* supplement and *Herald* magazine, both major sources for introducing and reviewing new local or international writings (Jan 39). Rai Akhtar in *Media, Religion and Politics* argues that *Dawn* has an elitist character and readership (xviii); and in Mostafa Mousavipour's words, it is "a liberal, secular paper with moderate views" (509). The prominent others, with lesser readership and lesser general coverage, include *Pakistan Today*, and the blogs *Pak Tea House* and *Pakistaniat*. *The Express Tribune*, like other papers selected (except *The Nation* and *The News*) ostensibly caters to the modern face of Pakistan (Mousavipour 50) and a liberal audience. *The News* is also one of Pakistan's leading English dailies, published by the Jang group – a group that owns several media channels (Mousavipour 509; Sherry Ricchiardi 27). It leans towards a conservative political stance (Ricchiardi 17) and is widely popular in metropolitan and semi-elitist circles but is not as influential as *Dawn* (Ghulam Shabbir et al. 44). *The Daily Times* is praised as an outspoken and bold newspaper which advocates liberal

⁴⁷ Written largely for an elite group of educated English readers.

and secular viewpoints (Nadia Farrah Shoeb 41). It provides extensive coverage of militant activities in Pakistan and is a strong critic of Islamic fundamentalism. The paper gained prominence (or notoriety) in local quarters due to its editor Najam Sethi's fiery stance against the Pakistani government under General Pervez Musharraf. Sethi is now associated with *Friday Times*, a weekly magazine that defines itself as a "truly independent and liberal paper" (*Times* Editorial on 15th-anniversary n.p.). *Pakistan Today*, launched in 2010, defines itself as a liberal, moderate newspaper (Gilles Boquerat 47). *The Nation* is published by the Nawa-e-Waqt group and is considered "a religiously conservative daily that has become increasingly anti-American in recent years" (Lawrence Pintak & Syed Javed Nazir 650). *The New Yorker* reporter Nicholas Schmidle, in his article on Osama bin Laden, categorises it as a "jingoistic newspaper" popularly known as a mouthpiece for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) (39). Ricchiardi also views *The Nation* as a "textbook example of how Pakistan's conspiracy theories work" (16).

Evidently, these newspapers typically promote liberal values (apart from *The News* and *The Nation* which are right-wing) and tend to have more influence on opinion-makers, politicians, and business workers (IMS report qtd. in Ricchiardi 10). In her report on Pakistani media, Ricchiardi views these newspapers as a

Prism through which its citizens view America and the world. It is particularly troubling when inflammatory conspiracy theories and misinformation fill airwaves and news pages The media are feeding the nation's paranoia as relations between the United States and Pakistan sink to their lowest point in years. (5)

She does note that the situation is not very different in America where the "American public had been terrified by images of Pakistan as the most dangerous country in the world" (5).

As mentioned earlier, an exception to my focus on newspaper and magazines reviews is the use of blogs. The first of these is *Pakistaniat* or “All Things Pakistan” a popular literary blog reminiscent of a popular Pakistani journal *Pakistaniat* (which has not reviewed any of the texts selected). The other, is *Pak Tea House*, a popular online blog based on the gatherings of a group of intellectuals previously associated with pre-partition hotel *Pak Tea House* which hosted groups of local authors. The blog is led by local writer Raza Rumi who describes it on the website as promoting “debate, pluralism and tolerance” (n.p.).

India’s literacy rate is much higher than Pakistan, Census India notes that 74% of Indians were literate in 2011 (126). Writing for an Indian website *The Quint*, Rosheena Zehra notes newspaper circulation in India is 62.8 million in 2016 which is growing exponentially every year (n.p.). Rajini Vaidyanathan claims that this rise is against the trends in the UK and the US markets where many newspapers have been discontinued: he cites globalisation and cheap newspaper prices as two of the main factors that have brought the boom in India (n.p.). The major Indian sources which review literature in English are *India Today*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu’s Sunday Magazine* (hereafter *The Hindu*), *The Indian Express*, *Outlook India Magazine* and *DNA India*. The Indian papers in English are relatively conservative in both their political outlook and their choice of stories (John Frandon 242) and Asha Kasbekar describes these newspapers as “pretty dry and sober” with their concentration on promoting national sentiments, whilst simultaneously being the voice of the liberal section of society (121). Almost all have websites, with *The Times of India*, *The Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* providing the most up-to-date and detailed news services (David Abrams 60).

In contrast, in the UK and the US numerous newspapers and literary supplements review fictional writing in English. Drawing on Brouillette’s account of the most prominent Anglophone review outlets (*Postcolonial Writers* 55), in the UK context I will be looking at reviews published in five newspapers *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Financial Times*, *The*

Economist, *The Irish Times*, and two literary journals *London Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement (TLS)*. The *TLS* is considered a good indicator of reviewed works' "early reception" (Bridgit McCafferty and Arianne Hartsell-Gundy 102). It has a reputation for being the godfather of existing book reviews and has been described as the cultural powerhouse, alongside *The New York Review of Books*, and *London Review of Books* (Vogeler 2). Similarly, *London Review of Books* bills itself as a magazine of "culture and ideas" and is regarded as "the most successful and controversial" literary publication which publishes long coherent pieces catering to "literary minds" (Elizabeth Day n.p.). *The Guardian* is the most significant review source among the British newspapers which has an extended review section, usually in its Sunday supplement, *The Observer*. *The Independent* is also a left-leaning British newspaper which offers "thoughtful review coverage" (Susan Osborne 79). *The Irish Times*, is likewise noted for its liberal and progressive ideology and has been compared to *The New York Times* in terms of its "excellent reporting, more international news, and quality commentary" (Richard Finnegan and Edward McCarron 151). *Financial Times* has a smaller readership base than the other newspapers; however, despite its low circulation, as Ian MacRury notes, the publication's readers are "affluent and influential opinion formers" (93). *The Economist* is a weekly magazine which focuses on the promotion of liberalism including gay rights, and drugs legalisation. Typically, the names of its reviewers/reporters are undisclosed, so as to "create the illusion" that they promote "disinterested truth" (John Ralston Saul 115).

Finally, there are the American review sources. "Book reviewing in America", Pool informs us, "is a hybrid occupation. Part trade and part profession, part art and part craft, part literature and part journalism, it lies somewhere between the work world and the fringes of the world of letters" (34). In the US, key sources of literary reviews are newspapers *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle* (known as the *SF Gate*). Others include magazines *The New York*

Review of Books, *National Review* and *The Brooklyn Rail*. Intended to cater to the intellectual circles of society, *The New York Review of Books* is known for its fiery political stance, especially demonstrated during the Iraq war and after 9/11. Vogeler calls the publication “one of the great institutions of intellectual life” (2). *The New York Times* is the largest daily metropolitan newspaper in the US with an extensive book review section which covers more popular books. The winner of 95 Pulitzer prizes, it is often relied upon as the “official and authoritative reference for modern events” (Pal Kolste 261).⁴⁸ Chong identifies *The New York Times Book Review* and *The New Yorker* as examples of the most influential review outlets in the literary field – both cater to “well-educated” and “largely professional” readership, she claims (68). *The Washington Post* is associated with a “dynamic audience” and “highly educated markets” in America (WashPost PR n.p.), and therefore caters to the same “upscale audience niche” (Jon Richardson 31). It leans towards a conservative pole. *The Los Angeles Times* is considered to have a moderate liberal bias (“Media Bias/Fact Check” n.p.) and, according to its current owner Shoon-Shiong, is focused on curbing fake news and catering to interests of its readers (Rory Carroll “The billionaire” n.p.). The conservative semi-monthly magazine *National Review* is dubbed as the “bible of American conservatism” (Johann Harri n.p.). *The Brooklyn Rail* is a non-profit monthly journal with detailed critical essays and a publication of 20,000; it is freely distributed among its audiences to reflect the city’s cultural and artistic talent (“About the *Brooklyn Rail*” n.p.). *SF Gate* is a moderately left-wing California based newspaper which has won a Pulitzer Prize for its news reportage and has increasingly changed its focus from international coverage to national (“San Francisco Chronicle” n.p.). *The Seattle Times* has the largest circulation in Washington and leans towards a liberal pole (“Media Bias/Fact Check” n.p.). *The New Republic* is an American (political) magazine and is considered a “public space for informed debate about the country’s direction”

⁴⁸ *The New York Times* website puts the number as 127.

(John B. Judis n.p.). The magazine shifted its role from a political magazine to become a media company (Judis n.p.) with a liberal political orientation, offering analysis on international and domestic affairs to the educated and relatively elite. *Washington Independent Review of Books* is an online website dedicated to detailed book reviews which, their website claims, fill the gap for readers “who are frustrated by the disappearance of high-quality book reviews and book-review sections in major newspapers” (n.p.). I also include a Pakistani-American community-based magazine *Pakistan Link* which is the “largest USA based Pakistani American newspaper” (as described on its website) and is sold at grocery stores. Catering predominantly to the Pakistani American community, it offers a useful tool to compare and contrast Pakistani-American reading interpretations (Deborah Kopka 118). All the US papers selected are left-leaning, except *National Review* and *The Washington Post*.

Keeping in mind the information on sources, and the issues of literary reception discussed in this and the previous chapters, I will move on to the reception of Ahmad’s *The Wandering Falcon* in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Reception of *The Wandering Falcon*

3.1 Introduction

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) offers a striking example of how historical and political contexts impact on the reception of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. The novel was published in 2011 by Ahmad, a Pakistani bureaucrat,⁴⁹ who served in Balochistan and Khaybar Pakhtonakhwa (earlier known as North-West Frontier Province) during the 1950s.⁵⁰ Ahmad penned the novel in the 1970s and completed it in 1973, but due to a lack of publishing interest, the manuscript remained in storage for almost four decades. After a chapter from the manuscript, "The Sins of the Mother," was published in *Granta*'s special edition on Pakistani literature (2010), amidst post-9/11 interest in the people of FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Lands), Ahmad gained attention and a publication contract for the entire book from Penguin India. It was initially published on 28 March 2011 in India, followed by international publication (the accounts of publication vary as is evident in the reviews). In September that year, it was released in the UK by Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin India, and in the US by Riverhead Books in October. Subsequently, the novel was nominated for prizes such as the Man Asian Literary Prize (shortlisted in 2011), the Commonwealth Book Prize (2012),⁵¹ and was a finalist for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature (2013) and the Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize (2011, in India). It was also named as one of the best books of

⁴⁹ Ahmad was born in the Indian part of the sub-continent in Jalandhar in 1933. He studied law and history at the University of Punjab and later joined the Pakistani civil service in 1954. After his retirement he lived in the capital city Islamabad with his German-national environmentalist wife Helga Ahmad who played a vital role in editing the manuscript.

⁵⁰ The name change happened on 15 April 2010, after an amendment to Pakistan's constitution.

⁵¹ Ahmad is the second Pakistani author to win the award after Mohammed Hanif won it for his *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* in 2008.

2011 by *Publishers Weekly*. Unfortunately, Ahmad passed away in July 2014 without publishing any further literary work.

Pakistani (London-based) academic Moni Mohsin, in *The Guardian*, positions *The Wandering Falcon* second in her list of the top ten novels about Pakistan, commenting specifically on the significance of the novel's setting: "the region that forms the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan – today's 'Af-Pak', in US state department speak" (n.p.). *Publishers Weekly* also nominated it as one of the best books of 2011, stressing the significance of the fictional setting in praise of the novel, describing it as "a gripping book, as important for illuminating the current state of this region as it is timeless in its beautiful imagery and rhythmic prose" (n.p.). It is clear, then, that the novel belatedly transformed Ahmad into an international literary figure, whilst receiving praise for its portrayal of a region about which there is a dearth of literature in English, certainly from a Pakistani perspective.⁵²

The Wandering Falcon became a publishable proposition in 2011, despite being refused 40 years earlier, due to the vastly different global geopolitical circumstances at play in the 1970s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Post 9/11 and during the War on Terror, there was substantial worldwide political and cultural interest in Muslim-majority nations, notably Afghanistan and its neighbour Pakistan – particularly after the invasion of the former by US (and allied) forces in the attempt to oust Al-Qaeda terrorists. It was widely believed that the leader of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, escaped the invasion, probably with the help of the local Afghan militant group – the Taliban – by crossing the border into western Pakistan where he regrouped his forces.⁵³ The territory in which many of the anti- Al-Qaeda

⁵² I must also note that Ahmad is not the first Pakistani to write about this region, another Pakistani political agent Akbar Ahmed based in Waziristan wrote *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* (1991): however, *The Wandering Falcon* is classified as a fictional narrative, whilst the former text is non-fictional.

⁵³ It is widely believed that bin Laden was responsible for masterminding many acts of terrorism conducted by Al Qaeda, including the 1998 bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 11 September 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre. There is often an unfortunate conflation between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Ted Galen Carpenter writes, "Al Qaeda is a global terrorist movement with the United States (including the American homeland) as a prominent, if not the primary, target. The Taliban is a Pashtun political movement with a focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan's largely Pashtun border-region. Its principal adversaries are

(and anti-Taliban) battles were fought was the rugged Tora Bora Mountains in south-eastern Afghanistan/north-western Pakistan. This is the region in which *The Wandering Falcon* is set. It is highly likely that the topicality of the text's setting, along with its ostensibly "authentic" portrayal of local tribal culture, played a significant role in Penguin's decision to publish the novel.

The first section of this chapter will offer a summary of the novel. Then, prior to the review analysis, I will discuss the publication of *The Wandering Falcon*; afterwards I will look at the reception of the novel by analysing reviews published in the four different reading constituencies that I have chosen to consider in this thesis. *The Wandering Falcon* is a collection of nine loosely connected chapters/stories that have been read, in composite, as a novel. It is set in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the 1960s and earlier, at a time before the strict border policies that exist today were enforced. The various sections of the text are united by a recurrent character Tor Baz (the Urdu word for the black falcon) who symbolically stands for all tribesmen and their lives. Through the perspectives of different people who adopt Tor Baz, Ahmad offers many references to the "Pushtunwali" – the code of tribal customs and traditions which governs tribal life with respect to matters of honour and prestige (*The Wandering Falcon* 69). Tor Baz is not, however, always a participant in each chapter. In the first two chapters, "The Sins of the Mother" and "A Point of Honor", we learn that Tor Baz's parents were stoned to death in the name of honour by their tribe, Siahpads, six years after fleeing their community because they committed adultery (Tor Baz, their child, was thus born in exile; he also watched his parents' brutal murder). The story then moves from Tor

rival ethnic groups" (n.p.). Tricia Bacon similarly notes, "The Taliban continues to be staunchly focused on Afghanistan and has never embraced al-Qaeda's global jihadist ambitions. For its part, al-Qaeda has consistently pursued its agenda with a disregard for how doing so has affected the Taliban" (n.p.). In the War on Terror the Allied focus of attack increasingly became the Taliban because their leader refused to give up bin Laden. However, the two groups have very different agendas. As Carpenter notes: "We [America] portray a party [Taliban] with a limited, localized agenda as a global terrorist adversary that has the United States in its crosshairs, when it was never anything of the sort" (n.p.).

Baz's back story to focus on other tribes. In the third chapter, "The Death of Camels", we are introduced to the Kharot tribe, Powinda (nomads), who are accustomed to crossing the Af-Pak border during winter for the sake of their animals.⁵⁴ When the strict frontier policy of no border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan without permits (an earlier form of visa) is enforced, the tribe attempts to cross the border with a copy of the Holy Quran on their heads, indicating the local belief that no one will harm them due to the Quran. This, unfortunately, fails to save them from frontier police bullets, revealing the tribesmen's relative naivety and simplistic religious beliefs. It also offers what Peer describes as "a blistering critique of the ruthless ways of nation states, as they seek to impose artificially constructed borders on older, more fluid worlds" (n.p.) The story of Dawa Khan's failed attempt to avenge his cousin's murder follows. Due to a tribal custom that women and children should not be affected by the revenge, Khan waits until the murderer's children grow up. However, before he can exact his revenge, the murderer dies of natural causes. While this story can be seen as "informing" about the acceptable practice of revenge-killing, it also, nonetheless, reveals the extent to which respect for women and children are encoded in tribal custom.

Other chapters in the novel explore similar aspects of local traditions. In "The Mullah," Mullah Barrerai adopts seven-year-old Tor Baz after the killing of members of the Kharot tribe by the frontier police in chapter three. Barrerai is a manipulator and is hated by the Bhattani tribe whom he tricks, promising them gold if they help him assist the British during a border feud with Germans "in the name of money and religion" (107).⁵⁵ In the next chapter

⁵⁴ In the words of Karim Khan, the Powinda leader, "How is it possible for us to be treated as belonging to Afghanistan? We stay for a few months there and for a few months in Pakistan. The rest of the time we spend moving. We are Powindas and belong to all countries, or to none" (*The Wandering Falcon* 72).

⁵⁵ In *Edge of Empire* (2011), a book about British tribal administration in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, British war studies professor Christian Tripodi explains, "Money was integral to the tribal problem in a variety of ways. The payment of allowances ... was the primary method by which the British secured their relationship with them. This was less a case of blackmail to prevent the tribes from engaging in their more rambunctious habits, or indeed bribery, but rather a cost effective method of ensuring security in one of the most fragile parts of the empire... In return, the tribes policed themselves, promising not to interfere with British lines of communication and theoretically ceasing their raiding activities into the settled districts of the Peshawar plains (138).

“Kidnapping”, the now-adult Tor Baz is working as an informer for a local deputy commissioner. The chapter presents the story of the Mehsud tribe (described as the “wolves of Waziristan”) who kidnap a man because he failed to pay the required “bride price” to his fiancée’s father: a custom where the groom pays money to the bride’s parents, signifying the value the tribe accord to women. In the sixth chapter, entitled “The Guide”, the adult Tor Baz acts as a guide for a dying person who returns to his Afridi tribe. The next chapter “A Pound of Opium” is about a girl Sherakai who is sold for a pound of opium and a hundred rupees to a local prince; her mother pays money to the prince for her return and weds her again. Chapter Eight, “The Betrothal of Shah Zarina,” is based in the Gujjar tribe where Shah Zarina marries a man who owns a bear. He arranges food and accommodation for the bear instead of her as he believes that he “can get another wife but not another bear” (221). This treatment prompts Shah Zarina to run away. In the last chapter, “Sale Completed,” Tor Baz ponders whether to sell or keep Shah Zarina after he buys her from Mian Mandi – the market where eloped women are sold. As this summary suggests, each story is centred on a particular tribe or a tribal incident and there is no logical coherence among chapters except for the thread that follows Tor Baz’s development. The text is peppered with proverbs signifying the importance of “wit” and the uniqueness and importance of tribal wisdom.

A key reason for selecting this text for my study is due to its unique publication history (that it was published decades after writing) and what this reveals about the global “cultural industry.” This time-lapse between the writing and the publication demonstrates how the “value” of a text can change from one historical moment to another and further suggests how political circumstances impact on literary evaluations. In short, assumptions about the value of the book – as a saleable commodity – changed between the 1970s and the 2010s. The text was forgotten for most of the twentieth century until it was rediscovered and marketed as part of post 9/11 interest in the region in which it was set, a context to which the novel could not refer.

This is a very clear example of one of the main premises of this study, as laid out in Chapter One, that the reception of a text is significantly determined by the historical and cultural specificities of production and promotion.

The text reveals the extent to which the transformation of “fields of cultural production can alter the very act of value attribution” as asserted by Wenceslas Lizé (1). *The Wandering Falcon*, I suggest, sheds light on what James English refers to as the authority of the dominant agents of literary production and promotion and the extent to which promotional strategies are intimately connected to issues of literary evaluation (*The Economy* 53). This chapter also raises questions about how a literary text achieves commercial success and how the geopolitical context of both its setting and the location of the author affects publication and reception. *The Wandering Falcon* thus invites consideration of how, in the words of Ana Cristina Mendes, “the production, distribution, and reception of texts are regulated by specific institutions that canonise authors, trends and writing styles” (“The Marketing of Literature” 217). It also suggests the importance of the national branding of literature in the global market.

3.2 Ahmad as the Voice of Balochistan

Unlike the other authors I discuss, Ahmad lived in Pakistan all his life and, I propose, his resident status impacted on the text’s reception (first negatively, later positively). The initial failure to secure a publisher for this work appears to confirm Elleke Boehmer’s claim that “postcolonial writers who retain a more national focus, who don’t straddle worlds, or translate as well, do not rank as high in the West as do their migrant fellows” (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 239). Another reason for selecting this novel for consideration in my thesis is that it is the only *Pakistani-authored* Anglophone text that fills the lacuna of representation of Balochistan. Although Balochistan was a popular setting for colonial writers such as Rudyard

Kipling and Mitford, until recently Balochis were absent from Pakistani prose writing in English. Kamila Shamsie argues that state censorship is one of the reasons behind this silencing (Bilal *Writing Pakistan* 150). Pakistani writer Fatima Bhutto endorses this view in her book *Songs of Blood and Sword* by introducing Balochistan as “a province blighted by Pakistan” (115). Similarly, Claire Chambers notes that at the time of partition, Balochistan (Pakistan’s largest province) was promised, but did not ultimately achieve, independence and, resultingly the “volatile Balochistan [...] trouble[s] the idea of Pakistan” (*Rivers of Ink* 47). She draws attention to Baloch’s “tripartite scattering between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran with that of their relations, the Kurds, between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey” (“The Baloch” n.p.), which adds layers of complexity to its relationship with Pakistan. Arguably, Balochistan and FATA are treated as peripheral regions even within Pakistan, which may explain their lack of literary representation in Pakistani Anglophone fiction.

Unsurprisingly, many critics and reviewers have praised Ahmad for “unsilencing Balochistan” in his portrayal of this province while also noticing that “from a Baloch perspective Ahmad might appear just as much of an interloper as ... earlier British authors Kipling, Mitford, and de Windt” (Chambers “The Baloch” n.p.) due to Ahmad’s privileged status as an administrator in the area. In his review of the text, Bruce King brands it as “a missing link in the history of Pakistani literature” due to the insight it provides into tribal culture (325). Muneeza Shamsie credits Ahmad for offering “rare insights” into Balochistan’s tribal culture, suggesting that *The Wandering Falcon* was “showered with critical acclaim” due to “the growing international interest in Pakistani English literature” (“Pakistani English Novels” 166, 149). She claims that Ahmad’s knowledge of the remote regional areas enabled him to present a different view of the tribal areas which are now a “focal point of US and European foreign policy” (“Pakistani English Novels” 166). Likewise, Shazia Sadaf praises Ahmad for restoring the dignity of tribal life usually seen in the West as “uncivilised”:

By providing a historical understanding of the tarnished tribal belt that is now widely popularised in the [w]estern world as a hub of the Taliban leadership, high-tech warfare, and the target for US drone strikes, the stories offer rare insight into the Pashtun tribal principles that have puzzled the West. These tribal areas bordering Iran and Afghanistan are often reported as ‘lawless’ and dangerous in the international media.” (“Understanding Tribal Codes” 144)

As noted by Sadaf, many reviewers and commentators praise the novel for its ostensible (historical and social) insight into a real experience of, and authentic information about, the region and its inhabitants. I recall here Sarah Brouillette’s comments, discussed in my first chapter, about how postcolonial authors are often branded in terms of nationality and promoted as “representatives of their purported societies, ‘cultures’, nationalities or subnationalities” (*Postcolonial Writers* 97). Paul Gilroy is even more direct in his assertion that “authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities” (*The Black Atlantic* 99). The following comments, by Peer in a review for *The Guardian*, suggest the extent to which Ahmad has been read in terms of his “authentic” representations of Baloch culture:

Although the tribal areas of Pakistan have dominated the news and opinion pages for years, rarely has a writer shown greater empathy for its people, or brought such wisdom and knowledge to writing about a terrain largely inaccessible to journalists and writers. The Pak-Afghan frontier has become synonymous with terrorists and the mechanised war of drones. The ambitions and interests of nation states – America, Pakistan, [and] Afghanistan – have rendered invisible the Baluch. Jamil’s stories return the humanity to this devastated region. His characters defy the much-used categories of our times: moderates or extremists, Salafis or Sufis, pro or anti-American. Their concerns are often ordinary, mostly difficult struggles for a life of dignity and love. (n.p.)

Peer admits the appeal of this novel significantly hinges upon the location of its setting – Af-Pak. It could be argued that the “value” of the novel, for many, was/is in its perceived role as an “insider’s” witness to south-eastern Afghani/north-western Pakistani tribal culture (n.p.).

Problematically, and as pointed out earlier by critics/reviewers, Ahmad is not Balochi, despite having lived in the area for some time. One online review magazine, *Book Browse*, states, “The media today speak about this unimaginably remote region, a geopolitical hotbed of conspiracies, drone attacks, and conflict, but in the rich, dramatic tones of a master storyteller, this stunning, honor-bound culture is revealed *from the inside*” (n.p., emphasis mine). This statement assumes the authenticity or authority of the author in speaking either of or for the Baloch people. In contrast, in her book chapter “The Taming of the Tribal”, Uzma Abid Ansari broaches the question of Ahmad’s authority to write for/of the tribes because of his “subject position [which is] embedded in a colonialist and ultimately orientalist discourse of the British Raj” (153) as a political agent appointed in the tribal land. She argues that the text presents “a simplified image which is easily judged and ‘othered’ by mainstream populations both in Pakistan and abroad” (151). This simplified image is “romanticised as nomadic and peripheral” and later “internalised [as] orientalist representations” (151). I endorse her earlier observation but draw on this only as a means of reinforcing Ahmad’s positioning – by himself and his publishers – in the reading of this text. It is worth recalling Graham Huggan’s claims – discussed in my previous chapter – concerning the marketability of “anthropological-exotic” fictions (*Postcolonial Exotic* 3) “that emanate, or are perceived as emanating, from cultures considered to be different, strange, ‘exotic’” (25). He further adds:

Exoticist spectacle, commodity fetishism and the aesthetics of decontextualisation are all at work ... in the production, transmission and consumption of postcolonial literary/cultural texts. They are also at work in the metropolitan marketing of marginal

products and in their attempted assimilation to mainstream discourses of cross-cultural representation. (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 20)

The exotic in this case is the tribal region of Pakistan frequently represented in news media as an area bombarded by American drones. The appeal of this “anthropological-exotic” text is arguably considerably heightened due to its politically (or militaristically) engaged setting which is of interest to contemporary major global powers: *The Wandering Falcon* is branded as a text which offers to explain this setting to its readers. The comments of Glen Jennings regarding the novel are apt:

It would be a failure of imagination not to make the connections between Jamil Ahmad’s fictionalized history and what is happening today in Afghanistan and his homeland of Pakistan. The mountains, deserts and broken hills of *The Wandering Falcon* are the same ones that CIA drones fly over. The suspicion of outsiders, the shifting sands of tribal allegiances and the cycles of vengeance are familiar. (“The Land of Blood and Stones” 180)

Jennings’ observations here are reminiscent of André Lefevere’s concerns about African literature in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (2017) that publishers cater to heightened western interest and to attract this “potential White liberal” readership, they present books with a “historical moment” i.e. offer a book about Africa when it is in the news outside Africa (94). *The Wandering Falcon* reflects the interests of a contemporary readership concerned with the backdrop of the American “War on Terror”.

3.3 Review Analysis

The Wandering Falcon received a warm reception in all interpretive communities, particularly in Pakistan (evident in seven different reviews in major papers) when compared with other examples of local Anglophone fiction to which the Pakistani reviewers were slow to respond. This may be reflective of nationalistic pride, given Ahmad's status as a "resident" writer in contrast to Hamid and Aslam, both of whom spent extended periods living outside Pakistan. I would also attribute it to the fact that the novel was seen as a "corrective" to international assumptions about the region in which it was set. However complicated the relationship of Balochistan is with the wider nation of Pakistan, in the face of international claims made about the province it is still fiercely defended as an integral part of Pakistan. There is significant resistance to the international designation of the province as a "terrorist lair," as is discussed in *Dawn* review). Almost all the Pakistani reviews were written immediately after the publication of the work except for those in *The Express Tribune* and the *Pak Tea House*. The novel's reception in India was also positive and relatively expansive with review-interviews published in leading papers and magazines such as *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*, *India Today*, *Outlook India* and *DNA India*. This could be attributed to Ahmad's privileged status and connections within Pakistan. Besides, four reviews were selected from the US (*The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *Washington Independent Review of Books* and US-Pakistani community-based newspaper *Pakistan Link*) and five from the UK. These are lengthy reviews in major sources: *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian* (reviewed twice), *The Independent* and the *TLS*. Here is a list of the reviews published in the selected four reading constituencies.

Table 1: Review Sources for The Wandering Falcon

Source	Title	Reviewer	Publication	Location
<i>The Friday Times</i>	"Follow the Falcon" (Interview-Article)	Rakhshanda Jalil	06 May 2011	Pakistan

<i>Dawn</i>	“Cover story: Wilderness, Wilderness”	Bilal Tanweer	11 June 2011	Pakistan
<i>Daily Times</i>	“Inside Pakistan’s Wild West”	Afraah Jamal	02 July 2011	Pakistan
<i>Pakistan Today</i>	“Tribal Areas Inspire the ‘Wandering Falcon’” (Review-article)	AFP	17 October 2011	Pakistan
<i>The Nation</i> ⁵⁶	“Wandering Falcon Captures Raw Romance of Badlands” (Review-article)	Staff Reporter	17 October 2011	Pakistan
<i>The Express Tribune</i>	“‘The Wandering Falcon’: Understanding Balochistan, the Literary Way”	Fatima Majeed	30 August 2014	Pakistan
<i>Pak Tea House</i>	“Review: The Wandering Falcon – Exploding the Myth about Tribal Culture(s) in Pakistan”	Aslam Kakar	07 March 2016	Pakistan
<i>Financial Times</i>	“ <i>The Wandering Falcon</i> ”	Alice Albinia	23 May 2011	UK
<i>The Guardian</i>	“The Wandering Falcon by Jamil Ahmad – Review”	Basharat Peer	25 June 2011	UK
	“The Wandering Falcon by Jamil Ahmad – Review”	Kamila Shamsie	14 August 2011	UK
<i>Times Literary Supplement</i> ⁵⁷	“Border Crossing”	Madeline Clements	01 July 2011	UK
<i>The Independent</i>	“The Wandering Falcon, by Jamil Ahmad”	Arifa Akbar	07 July 2011	UK
<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	“Pakistan’s Unlikely Storyteller of the Swat Valley”	Alex Rodriguez	26 September 2011	US
<i>Washington Independent Review of Books</i>	“The Wandering Falcon”	Susan Storer Clark	17 October 2011	US
<i>Pakistan Link</i>	Riveting Tale about Pakistan’s Edge	Syed Arif Hussaini	21 October 2011	US
<i>The New Republic</i>	“The Progress of the Nomads”	Anna Badkhen	29 November 2011	US
<i>India Today</i>	“In a Land Without Mercy”	Janice Pariat	29 April 2011	India

⁵⁶ The *Pakistan Times* and *The Nation* reviews are almost identical except that half of the *Pakistan Times* review is deleted in *The Nation*.

⁵⁷ Henceforth referred to as the *TLS*.

<i>Outlook India</i>	“View from an Eyrie”	Sunil Sethi	09 May 2011	India
<i>DNA India</i>	“Book Review: ‘The Wandering Falcon’”	Srinath Perur	31 July 2011	India
<i>The Hindu</i> ⁵⁸	““There’s a Time for Everything” (an interview with brief commentary)	Anita Joshua	08 January 2012	India

In *At Home in the World* (1997), Timothy Brennan argues that reviews of postcolonial texts are often written by “critics who by name or accent or place of birth command an immediate and often *suspicious* authority of the new literatures under review” (48, my emphasis). Brennan’s use of the adjective “suspicious” implies that the publishing industry carefully chooses (or facilitates the choice of) what Bourdieu describes as “agents of consecration” who establish a writer’s status for their readership by virtue of being attuned to the dispositions of distinct “locales” or “cultural fields” (*Distinction* 240; *The Field of Cultural Production* 12). While Brennan presents this in a negative light, Huggan refers to such selected and targeted reviewers as “legitimising agents” who are part of a wider process of managing postcolonial authors’ personae and the reception of their works in the international sphere (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 12). Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner, in *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism*, make a related claim referring to it as a common strategy to market new postcolonial novels by obtaining “the praise of well-established authors who explore similar topics. These authors then serve as references for subsequent reviews in newspapers, journals, and online platforms.” (206). Such strategies signal the reviewers’ authoritative and culture-specific knowledge, or “insider status” via-a-vis the location from which the author hails or in which the fiction is set. They are used to show that these reviewers have knowledge about the texts being reviewed, but also show the interconnectedness of the literary marketplace. Many of the initial reviewers of *The Wandering Falcon*, across different reading constituencies, are either academics with

⁵⁸ This review was published in the Sunday magazine of the paper.

specialist interests in South-Asian/Pakistani literature (like Clements) or South-Asian Pakistani writers (often cosmopolitan) themselves. The review that appeared in the oldest and most widely read Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn*, is by a Pakistani writer, translator and academic Bilal Tanweer. In an interview with Saeed ur Rehman, Tanweer asserts that his writing style has a “very local Pakistani perspective”, stressing “I interpret the world through my local references” (“I imagine” n.p.). His primary audience is, he claims, first “his own self” and then “the bilingual readers of South Asia” followed by “everybody else”; he notes that “I have my Manto and Ibn-e-Safi covered” (“I Imagine” n.p.).⁵⁹ Tanweer thus clearly positions himself (despite his western education) as a local writer who writes for a local, South Asian readership.

The Friday Times’s review is by Indian fiction writer, translator, academic, historian and critic Rakhshanda Jalil who works for the promotion of Hindi-Urdu literature. In an interview with the *Indian Express*, Jalil, answering a question about the role of marketing in the success of books, articulates her clear awareness of the role that marketing plays in the successful reception of literature (“The Great Transition” n.p.).

Writing for the popular Pakistani blog *Pak Tea House*, Aslam Kakar is a PhD student in the area of Global Affairs at Rutgers University, Pashto/Urdu interpreter for Amnesty International UK and a freelance writer (for a Pakistan based bilingual youth magazine *Laaltain* and *Pak Tea House*) that focuses on religious extremism and human rights in Pakistan. In an interview with Muslim American Leadership Alliance, he cites the US as “one of the most

⁵⁹ Saadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955) was a Pakistani (Indian born) Urdu writer, popular as a playwright and a short story writer. He is known as a storyteller par excellence and considered one of the finest 20th century Urdu writers on partition, contemporary politics and social issues. In response to allegations of obscenity in his literature, he says, “I am no sensationalist. Why would I want to take the clothes off a society, civilization and culture that is, in any case, naked? Yes, it is true I make no attempt to dress it – because it is not my job; that is a dressmaker’s job. People say I write with a black pen, but I never write on a black board with a black chalk. I always use a white chalk so that the blackness of the board is clearly visible” (Jalil x).

Ibn-e-Safi was the pen name of Asrar Ahmad who wrote best-selling Urdu fiction producing “241 detective novels, a film script, and a pile of short stories, essays, articles and poems” (Srinath Perur “Urdu pulp fiction” n.p.). He is known for his mystery fiction, the *Imran Series* (an Urdu spy novel series), and *Jasoosi Duniya* (*The Spy World*). These two are highly popular among the South Asian readership even though their content is not limited to Pakistan. In terms of comparison, the *Imran Series* is an Urdu equivalent of the English fantasy series *Harry Potter*.

amazing places for the freedom of expression (MALA n.p.). This statement reflects not only Kakar's liberal leanings but also his clear "slant" in favour of US politics, which may have been articulated precisely for the envisaged readership for this interview. There is limited information about the other Pakistani reviewers. *The Daily Times* is known for its fiery and outspoken stance against Islamic fundamentalism and controversial editorials and its reviewer, Afrah Jamal, is a freelance writer and regular contributor to Pakistani newspapers. The books that she reviews – for instance Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) – suggest a clearly liberal ideological bent. *The Express Tribune* reviewer Fatima Majeed is simply described on the paper's website as "an avid reader, freelance writer and home-maker" (n.p.). She graduated from a Punjab University, Lahore, and is also a blogger. The same review is published in *Pakistan Today* and *The Nation* and no information is available on the reviewer.

Among Pakistani reviewers, Tanweer emphasises his "local Pakistani perspective" and acknowledges the South Asian bilingual readership for his writings (n.p.). Kakar stresses freedom of expression in his interview which suggests that his review will highlight human rights concerns (in the context of concerns raised in the introductory section of this chapter). The rest of the reviewers are freelance journalists – a feature quite common with reviews published in Pakistan (and unlike other reading groups) as discussed in later chapters.

Among Indian reviewers, the *India Today's* reviewer Janice Pariat is a locally acclaimed Indian fiction writer, poet and an academic with a degree in Archaeology. Her fiction combines socio-political events with magic realism and often moves between disparate settings such as London and Delhi. While there are no direct records of her views on Pakistan, the issues she addresses in her fiction suggest her concerns with socio-political problems. *Outlook India's* magazine reviewer Sunil Sethi is a Delhi based editor, columnist and host of a popular local literary TV show *Just Books*. In an interview with the Indian writer Satish Padmanabhan, Sethi talks about his preference for books which achieve "the intensification of reality"; he also

stresses his belief in the “transformative” and “life changing” property of “fiction, placed in history” (n.p.). This reflects on his appreciation for realistic historic fiction – therefore, it is unsurprising that he is reviewing *The Wandering Falcon*, a book which fulfils these criteria. The interview published in *The Hindu* is by Anita Joshua who was an Islamabad-based correspondent for the magazine (Ayesha Siddiqi n.p.). She frequently writes on Indian politics for *The Telegraph India* and speaks against the conservative right-wing Narendra Modi’s government.⁶⁰ She praised Joshua for “mak[ing] the effort to reach out to wherever she could find real people in a city” instead of just staying confined to her diplomatic zone and limited circle (Siddiqi n.p.). *DNA India*’s reviewer Srinath Perur is an author and a contributor for the Indian and British papers on the topics of science, class anxiety and travel (Perur “The End of the World” n.p.). In describing his minimalistic writing style, S. Bageshree notes, Perur does not “offer a series of exotic, adjective-laden location and food descriptions” (n.p.). Out of four Indian reviewers, Joshua is a journalist, Sethi is a journalist and a writer, and the remaining two – Pariat and Perur – are also established writers. Pariat’s domain is socio-political writings, while Perur has expertise in travel writing: these themes are treated in Ahmad’s work is both socio-political and (loosely) an instance of travel writing, which explains the selection of these reviewers.

The majority of the British reviewers are fellow literary writers with a special focus on the South Asian region. For instance, *The Guardian*’s reviewer Basharat Peer is a Kashmiri journalist, writer, an opinion editor and a political analyst on South Asian politics based in New York City. In this book *Curfewed Night* (2008) and in another article, “Kashmir’s Forever War” (published in *Granta* 112), he blames India for human rights abuses and for killing innocent Kashmiris which results in retaliation against Indian armed forces. In contrast, he holds Pakistan responsible for offering support to Islamist groups which recruit disgruntled

⁶⁰ Narendra Modi is the 18th Prime Minister of India, who took office in 2014.

Kashmiris. He does not directly refer to his ideology in his writings, however, it appears from the general tenor of these articles (aforementioned and also “India’s Nationalist Assault on Intellectuals and Students” n.p.), that he condemns conservative Pakistani, Turkish and Indian governments, criticising national political agendas that dominate at the expense of individuals.

The second British review, published two months after Peer’s in *The Guardian*’s Sunday edition, is by a well-known Pakistani writer, Kamila Shamsie. She often contributes material concerning Pakistan’s socio-political situation to various newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes. John Freeman notes the BBC often calls on her as a commentator “to have a discussion about Pakistan, Muslims in Britain or in literature, cricket, post 7/7 life, or virtually anything that needs a commentator for South Asia” (“Kamila Shamsie” n.p.).⁶¹ As her various writings attest, she is positioned on the political liberal-left.

The *TLS* reviewer Madeline Clements is, as noted in Chapter One, an academic with a special interest in South-Asian/Pakistani literature (where she has travelled) (“Teesside University” n.p.). She is the author of *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective: Rushdie, Hamid, Aslam and Shamsie* (2015) and contributes regularly to Pakistani and international literary journals and papers. Writing for *The Independent*, Arifa Akbar is a Pakistani-British journalist, theatre critic, (former) editor of *The Independent* and a reviewer.⁶² She arranged a Muslim literary festival (“M-Fest”) at the British Library in London in 2018 and in an interview with *The London Book Fair*, described it as an attempt to “challeng[e] stereotypes around Muslims” (n.p.). When asked by Thea Lenarduzzi what she thinks the elements of a good book review are, she enlists length and evaluation as key factors (n.p.).

The review from the *Financial Times* is by the British journalist and author Alice Albinia who has travelled across Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet and Delhi (described in her book

⁶¹ A reference to the 7 July 2005 London bombings.

⁶² Her mother migrated from Pakistan to Britain, she herself was born and raised in Britain.

Empires of the Indus, 2010). She can be described as a ‘travel writer’ – although this is a label she resists: “I know more about the interior of Sindh than I do about the interior of Sussex,” she said in an interview with Tehmina Ahmed for Pakistani *Newsline* magazine (n.p.), staking a claim to her authority to write as an insider in Pakistan.

The writer of the US review in a mainstream newspaper, *The Los Angeles Times* is journalist Alex Rodriguez who served as the newspaper’s Pakistan Bureau Chief from 2009 until 2013. On the *Chicago Tribune* website, he is described as “covering one of America’s most important – and difficult – allies in the war on terror” (“Connect the Reporter” n.p.). He has significant experience reporting on areas of global conflict (he earlier served as bureau chief in Moscow) and his interest in militarised zones is worth noting in the context of his review of *The Wandering Falcon*. *The New Republic*’s Russian American reviewer Anna Badkhen is the author of six non-fiction books and a wartime journalist. In order to write her books she lived in Afghanistan and also travelled to western Pakistan. In an article “Rescue the North” she speaks affectionately of the Afghan people, signifying her intimate knowledge and sympathy for the people and the area (n.p.). In a review of her work *The World is a Carpet*, Zarmina Rafi appreciates Badkhen for not “reduc[ing] them [Afghan people] to merely a simple people. She is careful to veer away from the lens of exoticism with which to view the locals she meets” (n.p.). *Washington Independent Review of Books*’ reviewer Susan Storer Clark is a broadcast journalist, musician, reviewer and writer of *The Monk Woman’s Daughter* – a historical novel about nineteenth-century urban racist, and anti-immigrant America (Mike Wold n.p.). On her website, she describes her writing as driven by curiosity (“About: Susan Storer Clark” n.p.). *Pakistan Link*’s Pakistani-American reviewer Syed Arif Hussaini has contributed hundreds of articles, on politics, economics and cultural comparison, to the paper since 2013. He is also the author of the book *Glimpses of Life in America* (2007), which covers his life in post-9/11 America.

As the above suggests, many of the UK/US reviewers/journalists have personal experience of Pakistan (through travel), which is presumably why they were invited to review Ahmad's novel. For instance, Peer, K. Shamsie, Clements, Akbar and Albinia (UK reviewers) all have connections to Pakistan in some way – K. Shamsie is Pakistani, Clements and Albinia have been to Pakistan, Akbar has a Pakistani mother, while Peer is Kashmiri and knows Pakistan and the minority experience. The American reviewers are predominantly wartime journalists and authors – Rodriguez and Badkhen have covered Moscow and Afghanistan previously and are noted for their work; Clark has written about 19th century racist America; while Hussaini speaks about his life after 9/11 in his book. There is some possibility, then, that their (US) approach to the novel "risks", in the words of Priyamvada Gopal, "consolidating a much-used optic, familiar to us from journalistic and political discourse, which reduces contemporary Pakistan to the US-sponsored 'War on Terror'" ("Of Capitalism and Critique" 23). This, I will argue, is evident in their comments in relation to a number of common threads found among reviews of *The Wandering Falcon*. These include the story of its publication, commentary on the book's political significance, the nature and extent of Ahmad's role as a "native informant," and discussion of aesthetic aspects including the role of the landscape and questions about genre.

3.3.1 Publication Story

The unusual story of *The Wandering Falcon*'s eventual publication is discussed by most reviewers. C.J. Van Rees asserts that "a text has to pass through the selection filters of a publication house" to be "appreciated as literary and of a high standard" ("How a Literary Work Becomes a Masterpiece" 400). However, it seems that the "literary" evaluation of the novel was secondary to the publisher's assessment of its topicality. A book that was deemed to have insufficient merit to publish in the 1970s was revaluated and deemed to be valuable due

to changing geopolitical contexts. There are several slightly different versions of how this text came to be written and published. Given that most of the initial reviews were published in Pakistan, it is fitting to begin by discussing these. An article published in *Pakistan Today* and then reprinted, in shortened form, in *The Nation*, typifies responses that focus on the age of the author and the long delay between the writing and publication of the text. The reviewer enthusiastically states that “a retired Pakistani civil servant nearing eighty may not sound like the most obvious debut author to take the international publishing world by storm, but Ahmad has done precisely that” (n.p.). S/he (the reviewer’s gender is not revealed) suggests that while the author’s age marks him as different from other (young) Pakistani young writers, Ahmad, like them, has a “captive audience in the West following the 9/11 attacks” (n.p.).

In a similar vein, Jalil, *The Friday Times* reviewer of the novel, also eagerly emphasises Ahmad’s unusual literary debut “at the age of 78” (n.p.). In her words, “when that maiden foray into the world of literature carries the promise of greatness, you know you are witnessing the birth of a very special writer” (n.p.). The confusion between the time of writing and time of publication/review, many decades later, continues in her effusive assertion that “for a writer who has debuted at an age when most are putting down their pens, he writes with a surprising ease and confidence” (n.p.). This assertion plays into the anachronistic “branding” of the author as somehow both “aged” and contemporary by completely obfuscating the decades-long gap between the “penning” and publication of the text and the political imperatives that may have made the latter possible. Kakar, in *Pak Tea House*, begins his review by rhetorically questioning what kept the novelist from tossing the manuscript out after its initial rejection. In a key part of the review Kakar says, “[a]ll writers, particularly the beginners, must understand that no writing is a waste. Good or bad writing is really a subjective opinion” (n.p.). This stress on “subjective opinion” undermines the idea that aesthetic value is a fixed and trans-historical

quality and accords with reader-response theorists' claims that the meaning and value of literary texts is not something innate but rather the effect of situated responses.

Not all Pakistani reviewers have repeated the same mistake regarding the time-lapse between writing and publication of this work, but the number of years that the manuscript lay dormant varies, as do the reasons reviewers provide for its contemporary publication and success. *The Express Tribune* reviewer Majeed states that the text was written "34 years ago" (n.p.) and only recently became "extremely relevant to the current global situation rampant with [the] discourse of convenience" (n.p.).⁶³ The "discourse of convenience" is a term employed by Pakistani writer Sara Suleri in *Meatless Days* in which she writes that Third world women are "locatable only as a discourse of convenience" (20). Majeed's use of the phrase implies that the globalised marketplace determines which words and experiences are seen or "located" and which are discarded, according to criteria of expedience (sales) rather than intrinsic worth. Like the other (South Asian) reviewers, she gives credit to *Granta* for being the launching pad for Ahmad's later publication success.

The *Dawn* review begins by surveying recent responses to the novel published in Pakistan and abroad. According to the reviewer Tanweer, these early reviews fall into two general categories: firstly, those which consider the text in relation to geopolitical concerns (Muslim extremism, terrorism, the Af-Pak border issues); and secondly, those that are less interested in politics than in Ahmad's individual story, and "seem to be revelling in the apparently astonishing fact that somebody has written something at age 78" (n.p.). The latter is not technically true, of course, but this has not prevented some reviewers from enthusiastically focussing on this point.

⁶³ Jamal, the reviewer for *The Daily Times*, clearly mentions the time gap of "38 odd years" between the text's writing and its publication, twice at the beginning of the review, and again at the end (n.p.).

Focus on the “publication story” of the novel is also evident in the British reviews. K. Shamsie, writing in *The Guardian*, offers an account of the novel’s belated publication:

In the early 70s, Ahmad, a civil servant in those parts of Pakistan now frequently in the news with the adjective “lawless” appended to them, wrote a collection of loosely interlinked stories about the people and tribes among whom he’d been working. More than three decades later, his brother turned on the radio and heard about a short story competition in its inaugural year – he submitted Ahmad’s entire manuscript. It arrived past the deadline and the judges (of whom I was one) never saw any of the stories. But the critic Faiza Sultan Khan, who was co-founder and administrator of the prize, saw the promise in the manuscript and sent it to an editor at Penguin India. (n.p.)

A similar version is offered by Peer in *The Guardian*:

In 2008, [Ahmad] was 75, retired from civil service, and living in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. Two young Pakistani women, a Lahore-based book-seller, Ayesha Raja, and a Karachi-based columnist and editor, Faiza Sultan Khan, called on Pakistani authors to submit stories for a competition. Ahmad’s younger brother insisted that he must show them his work. After reworking the 35-year-old manuscript, Ahmad sent it to Khan, who championed it, and showed it to an editor at Penguin. (n.p.)

Peer goes on to declare *The Wandering Falcon* to be “one of the finest collections of short stories to come out of [S]outh Asia in decades,” (n.p.) suggesting that “the power and beauty of these stories are unparalleled in most fiction to come out of [S]outh Asia” (n.p.). The obvious question this raises is why this same text, dismissed as unpublishable decades earlier, was the recipient of such lavish praise when it was ultimately published. In the *TLS* Clements uses the phrase “three decades in hibernation, and perhaps a lifetime in generation” (21) to describe the

novel. While the aforementioned reviewers have acknowledged the gap between publication and writing, some British reviewers have ignored it. For instance, *The Independent's* reviewer Akbar projects Ahmad as a “bright new discovery, at the age of 78” (n.p.). She also associates the publication of the work with *Granta's* coverage of its short story “The Sins of the Mother” – a story which features honour killing.⁶⁴ The reviewer in the *Financial Times* ignores this publishing discussion and just mentions that the stories are set in a time before the “CIA and Osama Bin Laden” (n.p.).

Similarly, the American review in *The Los Angeles Times* pays attention to the unusual circumstances of the novel's publication; while *The New Republic's* Badkhen devotes a paragraph to discussing its publication and how even after decades it has “passed the test of time beautifully” (n.p.). *Washington Independent Review of Books* reviewer Clark downplays the publication background by providing one line of information: “He is now 80 years old, and *The Wandering Falcon* is his first novel” (n.p.). A similar tendency is evident in *Pakistan Link* where Hussaini brands Ahmad as an “overnight ... gifted story teller” due to his “just published book” (n.p.). In contrast, among the Indian reviews, *The Hindu's* reviewer Joshua notes the story was penned down “over three decades” (n.p.) but Perur in *DNA India* falls into the trap of considering Ahmad as a “first-time author at 78” which should give “reassurance” to the writers “who have diligently been putting off writing their first book” (n.p.) – an issue pointed out by *Dawn* earlier. The remainder of the reviewers do not address this crucial piece of information that explains the heightened importance of fictional locale for a contemporary readership.

⁶⁴ Honour killing *does* occur in South Asia (India and Pakistan; according to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, at least 869 honour killings happened in 2013 in Pakistan) but is not mandated by Islam and is culturally related. For instance see M. Ilyas Khan's “Pakistan ‘honour’ killing: Why clerics’ call may fall on deaf ears” in BBC news where Khan explains it as a “function of culture” (n.p.). The practice has been linked with Muslim fundamentalism and extremism, often in sensationalised ways, particularly since 9/11. Interestingly, the chapter “The Sins of the Mother” that *Granta* chose to publish from Ahmad's book centres on honour killing. Unsurprisingly, Mary Fitzgerald in her article “Granta's dark portrait of Pakistan” questions the magazine's selection of stories for reinforcing negative and stereotypical images (n.p.).

Among Pakistani readers, three review sources – namely *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune* and *The Daily Times* – acknowledge the time gap, while it is ignored in *Pakistan Today* and *The Friday Times*. Similarly, it is reported among the prominent UK review sources such as *The Guardian* and the *TLS*, while *The Independent* and the *Financial Times* do not mention this. Among the Indian sources, only *India Today* mentions it in the review. Half of the American reviews (*The Los Angeles Times* and *The New Republic*) note it, while the others (*Washington Independent Review* and *Pakistan Link*) ignore it. Problematically, non-acknowledgement or ignorance of the gap between writing and publication is that it potentially delivers a mistaken message for implied readers, especially those that are unfamiliar with the region in which the novel is set (although there is a possibility that the book’s blurb may include this information). Readers might imagine the people who live here (and in Pakistan more generally) are *today* still like those portrayed in the novel. This is particularly problematic due to the significant international media focus on the Af-Pak region in the past decade or so because of its imbrication in global politics. Without clearly establishing the time of writing, the portrayal of the region and its people in the novel – which is widely promoted as being based on Ahmad’s “real” experiences risks being misleading, aside from the fact that the author may be viewed as an “interloper” of sorts. The potential evocation of a timeless image of “the tribes” of Pakistan is dangerous for the implied readers.

3.3.2 Ahmad’s Biography

In addition to discussing the publication story, almost every review also includes a discussion of Ahmad’s life story. As James Procter and Bethan Benwell purport in their book club discussions in *Reading Across Worlds*, “biography serves as an alibi to the authenticity and reality of fictional narrative ...” (110). Because Ahmad lived in the tribal area for some

time and may well have been the recipient of the tribe's famed hospitality, whatever he has written about them is deemed an authoritative, truthful, authentic representation of their lives. This ignores the clear power-differentials that would have existed between Pakhtuns and a state-sanctioned civil servant like Ahmad: almost all the reviewers share an oft-repeated assertion that the author's status is as a cultural representative of the tribal area portrayed in the novel. As mentioned earlier regarding Jeff Karem, such cultural representatives are supposed to offer a "true, actual and authoritative" version of their countries to meet the anthropological expectations of their readers, and this serves as a major factor in their positive reception, as opposed to an aesthetic evaluation (205). Undoubtedly, Ahmad lived in the area for years and had a working command of the Pashtu language (the lingua franca of tribes), however, Ahmad's status there was as a "political officer" whose role was to implement the Frontier Crimes Regulation Law initially introduced by the British colonisers to delimit and pacify unruly Pashtun tribes (Christian Tripodi, "Peacemaking through Bribes or Cultural Empathy?" 125). Acknowledging this suggests that he is implicated in the dynamics of power and knowledge production of the regions under his administrative control. His social status during the two decades he spent in FATA and Balochistan was certainly tied to his political position as a government representative and bureaucrat. This privilege goes unquestioned and unnoticed in the reviews. In her article "The Taming of the Tribal," Ansari cites Tripodi, arguing that Ahmad's status is "embedded in a colonialist and ultimately orientalist discourse of the legacy of the British Raj" (153). As noted previously, Chambers has raised a similar concern, albeit from an ethnic perspective: "From a Baloch perspective, the Punjabi author Ahmad could similarly be cast as an interloper, alongside those earlier British authors, Kipling, Mitford, and de Windt": Chambers, however, ultimately dismisses his 'interloper status' in favour of his years-long stay in the region (*Rivers of Ink* 48).

Much depends on identifying Ahmad's assumed ideal audience. Are westerners, or the neo-colonial Pakistani Anglophone elite, Ahmad's ideal readers of *The Wandering Falcon*? Was the novel imagined by Ahmad as "primarily an export product, aimed at a largely foreign audience for whom the writer acts, willingly or not, as cultural spokesperson or interpreter" (Huggan, *Postcolonial Exotic* 34)? It is difficult to determine who the author's ideal readers were, but his reversion to a timeless, often stereotypical portrayal of "tribes" (understood in universal terms) certainly resonates with the majority of western and eastern reviewers, who primarily accepted his work as "authentic."

Arguably, behind the sheen of authenticity, Ahmad's text feeds a readerly desire for a limited range of ethnically "authentic" and "romantic" tropes. One of the disadvantages of focusing so extensively on the biography of the author in the reviews is that the focus is shifted from the text itself. *The Wandering Falcon* is a fictional work, however, the reviews treat it as an anthropological work similar to those of British authors such as Sir George Campbell, Sir Henry Walter Bellew, Thomas Holdich and Sir Olaf Caroe. Notably, the majority of reviewers do grant Ahmad representational authority. *The Express Tribune* review, for example, mentions the status of the writer as "Chief Secretary of Balochistan" to re-assert Ahmad's authority in *speaking for* the tribal region, branding the novel as an "unadulterated version" of a now marketable world. In *The Daily Times*, the reviewer Jamal devotes the space of three lines to discuss Ahmad's "special insight into the ways of the tribes" (n.p.) owing to his service in KPK and Balochistan. She concludes that "the past ten years have wrought a radical change in the tribal makeup, rendering formerly inaccessible regions unrecognisable. Now viewed as militant sanctuaries, still inhospitable but inaccessible no more, ... these pages provide the most authentic portrait yet of these ungoverned places" (n.p.). *Pak Tea House*'s review strikes a similar chord by describing the "author's first-hand experience as a civil servant for decades in the tribal regions of Pakistan" (n.p.). However, it is *Pakistan Today*'s review which gives the

most space to introduce the author and his work in the tribal area. It talks in detail about Ahmad's personal life and his preference(s), favouring the author over the book itself. Similarly, Jalil in *The Friday Times* review/interview offers a dashing introduction (using a full-length paragraph) to Ahmad, paying scant attention to the contents of his fiction or its literary qualities; "Ahmad ... served mainly in the Frontier Province and in Baluchistan...he acquired a working knowledge of Pushto" (n.p.). The overall impression given by the reviewers is that, due to his extensive local experience, Ahmad has the authority and credibility to speak about tribal issues.

The Guardian reviewer Peer also mentions that Ahmad learnt Pashtu and felt at home in the "dreaded frontier" where he "took notes, and by 1974 had turned his impressions into a collection of inter-linked stories" (n.p.). Peer's account includes details of Ahmad's status as a civil servant, his willingness to stay there (unlike other officers), along with comments on his fluency in Pashtu and the diary notes he kept, suggesting the "truthfulness" of the recorded information that was later transformed into stories. The second reviewer for *The Guardian*, K. Shamsie, also briefly mentions Ahmad's role as a civil servant and his close connection to the world he narrates in his tales. The *TLS* review establishes Ahmad's authentic status by correlating details in Ahmad's stories (ranging from the late 1950s to 1970s) to his postings in the region (21). Akbar, in her *The Independent* review, similarly foregrounds Ahmad's biographical details as a means of securing his authoritative status as a commentator on "the Frontier Province and Balochistan" in which he had "spent decades" serving "the Pakistani civil service to which he dedicated "a lifetime's work" (n.p.).

Among the Indian reviews, *Outlook India* magazine immediately connects Ahmad's life as a civil servant and political agent to his story-writing talent. The same information is used concisely in the *India Today's* review in slightly different words (n.p.). *The Hindu* article offers little insight into the novel, instead offering a collection of excerpts from an interview

Joshua conducted with Ahmad that focus on the same general biographical information as other reviews. The important phrase she uses to describe the manuscript is its composition based on “diary jottings” (n.p.), once again suggesting the accuracy and truthfulness of the text and its status as ethnographic work based on first-hand experience and observation. *DNA India*’s reviewer Perur speaks directly about “Ahmad’s ethnographic intent” because of his insights into “Balochistan through Waziristan and the Khyber, ending in Mohmand” and in his portrayal of characters as the “representatives of a tribe” (n.p.). This, he argues, becomes possible because Ahmad knows about the “landscape ... its people and their rhythms of life” (n.p.). He further notes that this information comes via Ahmad’s career as an administrator in the region. This is reiterated in *India Today* where Pariat informs her readers that Ahmad knows this land because “he was a member of the Civil Service of Pakistan and served mainly in the Frontier Province and Balochistan” (n.p.). Clearly, the reviewers emphasise the authenticity of the narrative, owing to the writer’s background as a participant in the tribal culture.

In an interview with CNN-IBN’s Amrita Tripathi, Ahmad distances himself from being positioned as a literary authority on “the tribal areas” in north-western Pakistan. He clarifies that he can only talk about the period during which he lived and worked in the tribal areas and cannot comment on the situation that prevailed at the time of the novel’s publication. Nevertheless, he is asked to respond to the killing of bin Laden or the questions about Mehsuds and the Wazirs, to which he replies, “I am not a trained anthropologist” (“Q&A with Author” n.p.). Ahmad resists attempts to classify this book as “deeply political” – a phrase used by the interviewer Malavika Velayanikal.⁶⁵ He replies, “Let me reaffirm that this is a book of fiction” (“Extraordinary Tales” n.p.). In *The Los Angeles Times*, Rodriguez notes Ahmad’s resistance to the casting of the book as nonfiction:

⁶⁵ The questions include observations about tribesmen, the exoticism of land, empathetic portrayal of tribesmen, the experience of a political agent, his career as a civil servant, writing style, literary influences, a possible next book about Kabul, current reading, and books to recommend (n.p.).

Finished in 1973, the manuscript sat in a drawer for years. On occasion, Ahmad would show it to publishers in London, who were lukewarm. One suggested recasting the book as nonfiction. "I said, 'Sorry, but I'm not an academic or an anthropologist. This is fiction,'" Ahmad recalled. ("Extraordinary Tales" n.p.)

Ahmad, thus, intervenes to correct his celebrity image being reproduced in the media. Despite his wariness at being cast as a factual cultural informant, the vast majority of responses to the novel have read him in precisely this way. Ahmad's insistence on the fictional nature of the stories – that they not be read as providing anthropological insights into north-western Pakistani/south-eastern Afghani tribal culture – is important in relation to the book's literary categorisation and its publication. When asked by *The Hindu's* interviewer Joshua about whether the current timing (the aftermath of 9/11) may be a factor behind the book's publication, Ahmad replied, "yes, that's possible, that's possible. Really, I have no idea why it happened one way 30 years ago and another way now" and concludes, "[t]here is a time and chance for everything. Perhaps the right time for the book was not four decades ago" ("There's a Time" n.p.). While the author repeatedly attempts to stress the literariness of the text in numerous interviews, reviewers acknowledge the change in 'interpretive horizons' or a 'new historical moment' which made the publication possible. Indeed the emphasis paid to the contemporary situation in the tribal lands rather than on the novel itself seems to confirm Maniza Naqvi's and Faisal Nazir's assertion that Pakistani writers are "expected to be intellectuals able to map injustices, [and] the logic of war" (Naqvi n.p.) with the result that literary works are often read as "interventions in ongoing debates on identity, culture, and politics" (F. Nazir 361).

3.3.3 Anthropological Insight

Contrary to Ahmad's insistence that he is a writer of fiction, not an anthropologist, many reviewers offer commentary on the anthropological insight of *The Wandering Falcon*. In this respect, Tanweer, *Dawn* reviewer, treats what he considers the novel's 'real' readers rather harshly. He is concerned that the book is written for western readers interested in the anthropological insights, and that the book will make them read it as a "Manual of Tribal Ways of Life" (n.p.). He writes,

You know it's that old tosh, looking to fiction for factual information. ... [F]iction from Pakistan is not supposed to have artistic engagements – it's required to provide information not an experience. In other words, it must be a reliable Dispatch from the Terrorists [*sic*] Lair and have clear policy implications for all the experts on Pakistan to evaluate. (n.p.)

He suggests that *The Wandering Falcon* risks being reduced to an exoticising information manual that invites readerly "appropriation" (n.p.). Disapproving of such a politicised reception, he asserts that the novel may well be read by people seeking answers to questions such as, "why are people in tribal areas going over to the Taliban, why are they this way, and well, how [*sic*] are they anyway, and why don't we know anything about them in the first place – and like, why aren't they on TV?" (n.p.). To support his claims, he refers to a CNN interview in which the only one of the seven questions directed to Ahmad about the book was about "literature" while the rest sought "factual information" about its setting (n.p.).⁶⁶ He concludes with the assertion that, despite the novel's flaws, "there is much here to recommend itself to a reader who is *willing to read it as fiction* and not as a Manual of Tribal Ways of Life" (n.p., my emphasis) referring again to the reading modes of the real readers.

⁶⁶ The CNN-IBN interviewer for "Q&A with author of 'The Wandering Falcon'" was Amrita Tripathi who asks questions about how things have changed in tribal area, his reaction about the killing of bin Laden, his observations of tribal workings and their anger, information about the Mehsud and the Wazir tribes, and his literary debut. The purely textual question is "what do you think happens to Torbaz next?" (Ahmad "Q&A" n.p.)

In the same vein, *The Express Tribune* reviewer, Majeed, like Tanweer, contends that “the instant recipe to literary fame is taking up the post 9/11 theme, especially if you are lucky enough to belong to the troubled areas,” – areas which have become “marketable to a nauseating extent” (n.p.). This comment ignores the fact that Ahmad does not “belong” to these areas but was instead a civil servant who worked in the region for some years. Nevertheless, she lavishes praise on Ahmad for presenting the stories of the “deserts of Balochistan, without botox-ing them for modern sensibilities” as, to her, “[t]he culture and stories of Balochistan have never made it to the national literary scenario and whenever they do, they are trite and whitewashed to fit into the politically correct national narrative” (n.p.). This review differs from that in *Dawn* which describes *The Wandering Falcon* as an effective “cultural document” without “agendas” and “commercialism” (n.p.). *The Daily Times* reviewer, Jamal, comments on the general political situation as well as acknowledging that the work is about “lawless frontiers” which, she asserts, have acquired a more “menacing look and feel” in the contemporary era (n.p.). Repeatedly, she connects the fiction to recent ‘real’ events. She employs clichés such as “a hot bed of militancy” and “no man’s land” to describe the region in which the novel is set (n.p.); rather bizarrely, she relates kidnapping incidents in the novel to those portrayed in Greg Mortenson’s ostensibly true memoir *Three Cups of Tea* (2006). In this, he claims that the people of Balochistan pride themselves on playing perfect hosts to abductees and guests alike (55).⁶⁷ Thus, again, the review praises the fictional narrative for its ability to offer insights into real-life contemporary Balochistan. The reviews in *Pakistan Today* and *The Nation* make similar problematic connections between the fictional world and the real: both are peppered with references to the “Taliban” and “Al-Qaeda,” neither of which existed at the

⁶⁷ Greg Mortenson is an American mountaineer, writer and professional speaker. He is co-author of *Three Cups of Tea* with David Oliver Relin, published by Penguin in 2006. The book stayed on *The New York Times* best seller list for four years (2007-2011) and, owing to its popularity, is translated into 47 different languages. In it, Mortenson mentions the challenges he faced while climbing K2 in 1993, one of them being kidnapped by Taliban – the event which is being alluded here.

time Ahmad wrote, but serve as an important context for the themes in the stories. The review (as they are essentially the same) quotes Ahmad's US editor of Riverhead publications, Laura Perciasepe, and her hope that the "book will shed light on a region isolated from the outside world" for American readers. *The Friday Times'* reviewer Jalil focuses on Ahmad's interview instead of adding her own comments and offers a summary of the textual content. She includes captioned pictures in the review, featuring hijabi women, militants dancing around a fire, a deserted picture of North Waziristan, and one of Ahmad himself sitting amidst Balochi locals. These marketing images reinforce her suggestion that the novel offers a "glimpse into life in the 'forbidden' and remote areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan" (n.p.), once again conflating the fictional setting and present day "Af-Pak" (n.p.).

Kakar's *Pak Tea House* review is quite different in its focus and is written for a local Pakistani audience. He uses his review as a medium to stress the marginalisation of Baloch and tribal people in the current Pakistani political situation; he urges Pakistani media to divert their gaze inward, to national political concerns, instead of fixating on the problems in Palestine or elsewhere in the world. This focus of the review on Pakistan's internal politics not only stems from Kakar's career as a human rights' activist but also signifies Pakistani reviewers' gaze turning inwards, on internal political issues. This is what Ahmad is also doing in his sympathetic portrayal of tribes, as will be explained later, but it is noteworthy that the US/UK reviewers and even the rest of the Pakistani and Indian reviewers have read the novel amidst the international attention on Pakistani tribes.

The attributes which Tanweer criticises in *The Wandering Falcon* are those which are lauded in other Pakistani and British reviews. For instance, *The Guardian* reviewer K. Shamsie offers fulsome praise to Ahmad for familiarising the world with names such as Waziristan and

the Mehsuds which were unheard of in the international media four decades ago.⁶⁸ Noting the anthropological “feel” of the text, she argues that this does not “detract from its charm” as it has all the elements of a good story (n.p.). *The Guardian*’s other review, by Peer, includes a picture captioned “border crossings ... a guerrilla from the Marri tribe prepares rockets for firing on a Pakistani troop outpost” (n.p.) problematically contextualising his review of the novel with reference to contemporary events in the Balochistan region. Another British review, written by Albinia in the *Financial Times*, connects the fictional events to the contemporary political locale but acknowledges that the events in the stories happened before the arrival of the Soviets, the CIA and bin Laden (n.p.). While *The Independent* review merely mentions the setting of the story as the tribal region bordering Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, the *TLS* review credits Ahmad for bringing social and cultural insight to the “‘tribal areas’ of Pakistan: Waziristan, Baluchistan, and the forbidding-sounding Frontier” (21).

Tanweer’s apprehensions that the book will be read for “factual information” seem to be confirmed in the review in *The Los Angeles Times*. Rodriguez informs his readers that the text “moves far beyond the [w]estern media’s stereotypical depiction of the tribal areas and lays bare the nature of a place that is now a focal point of U.S. and European foreign policy” (n.p.). He notes that the book is about the area which is “known to the West mainly as Al Qaeda’s post-Sept. 11 sanctuary and home to a volatile mix of Islamic militant groups” (n.p.). Similar comments are evident in *Pakistan Link* where Hussaini overtly refers to the book’s “worldwide attention” to the “significance of the locale of the story in the context of the ongoing war in Afghanistan” (n.p.). Focusing further on the international significance of this locale, he refers to it as a producer of “many suicide bombers”, and as the “hiding place of

⁶⁸ Mehsuds and Wazirs are the two primary ethnic groups in the Pakhtun community living in Waziristan. In their article, “Wayward in Waziristan”, Akbar Ahmed and Harrison Akins note, “Fixated on the spectres of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, U.S. policymakers have ignored the local culture and history of the tribes in Waziristan, primarily the Wazir and Mehsud tribes” (n.p.). The Mehsud and Wazir tribes provided support for the Haqqani network and Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Islamic terrorists and Taliban” (n.p.). *The New Republic*’s reviewer Badkhen also notes that the spatial locale of Ahmad’s book is a region known as “Pakistan’s tribal badlands” in “journalistic shorthand” referring to it as a “volatile tribal belt” (n.p.). *Washington Independent*’s reviewer Clark briefly notes the political background as “pre-Soviet, pre-Taliban time” and as a region of “extreme geopolitical significance” contextualising the narrative for contemporary readers, and acknowledging that the narrative is from a different era (n.p.).

The Indian reviews interpret the book in a similar way. Joshua in *The Hindu* describes the novel as being set “way before the belt along the Afghan border became the headline-grabber that it has been post 9/11,” once again using the War on Terror to situate the novel for readers (n.p.). A similar approach is evident in Perur’s *DNA India* review: he notes, “Much of the current interest in the region today ... is centred around Waziristan, refuge of the Taliban after 2001,” (n.p.) highlighting the text as an introduction to “this fascinating region and the tribes that inhabit it” (n.p.). He does clarify, however, that the book’s temporal setting is significantly earlier than the time of publication. In *Outlook India* magazine Sethi brands the text as “a first novel” characterised by the “truthful” portrayal of tribal life and its “casual bloodshed and deprivation” (n.p.). This depiction serves as a forbidding backdrop, he argues, suggesting that “anything could happen” in this harsh area (n.p.).

As mentioned earlier in the introductory section of this chapter with reference to Lafevere’s concept of historical moment, the reviews have read the novel in connection to the Taliban and the “War on Terror” and have appreciated its insights using the adjectives such as ‘rare’ and ‘raw’, referring to the novel’s usefulness in a changed context. The word Taliban or Talibanisation is mentioned seventeen times in this collection of reviews, seven times in Pakistani reviews, five times in Indian ones and five times in the American reviews. Surprisingly, the word doesn’t appear in any of the British reviews. Three of the reviewers, *The*

Friday Times, *The Hindu* and Peer from *The Guardian* have used the word “rare” to lavish praise on Ahmad’s portrayal of Af-Pak tribes (n.p.). *The Friday Times* describes the text’s “rare insight and compassion to a subject and a people that have invariably invited fear and mistrust” (n.p.); *The Hindu* describes it as a “rare sympathetic Punjabi voice on the tribal areas” (n.p.); while *The Guardian* reviewer Peer claims, “rarely has a writer shown greater empathy for its people or brought such wisdom and knowledge to writing about a terrain largely inaccessible to journalists and writers” (n.p.). This reiteration of the descriptor “rare” further authenticates the text’s status as a *novel* commodity. *DNA India*’s Perur appreciates Ahmad for offering “a glimpse into a world that is slowly disappearing” (n.p.) albeit without adhering to the word “raw” or “rare”. This endorsement is cemented in reviews such as those in *The Friday Times* and *Pakistan Today/The Nation* in which the novel and its content are described as “raw” (n.p.). These comments suggest that, for these reviewers, the literary merit of the text is subjective to the information it offers.

Many reviews convey the impression that readers are offered the opportunity to experience “authentic” tribal culture. Pakistani readers tend to value *The Wandering Falcon* for its insights into the troubled Balochistan area, about which not a great deal is known, even within Pakistan. The text offers an opportunity for Pakistanis to know about the culture of the tribal people who are a part of their nation. British and American reviewers also appreciate the “anthropological” aspects of the text – but not for “local” reasons. These reader responses to the “authenticity” of *The Wandering Falcon* may contribute to the revival and reuse of “exotic” stereotypes that reinforce the already existing (religious militant) image of Pakhtuns and imply the mistaken singularity (or uni-dimensionality) of the tribes.

3.3.4 Realism and Sympathy

Indeed, the empathetic and “realistic” nature of Ahmad’s portrayal of tribal culture in *The Wandering Falcon* is frequently addressed by reviewers. This raises interesting questions, opening on to a debate much discussed in postcolonial literary studies about how literary realism in the portrayal of cultures other than our own, might involve what Eli Park Sorensen refers to as the “suppression of difference” (111). David Palumbo-Liu argues that “[r]ealist literature ... is the genre most concerned with the issue of representing otherness accurately, as set within worlds *that ground others in our world*” (28, my emphasis). If literature is “charged with delivering the lives of others to us for our enrichment and betterment” (Palumbo-Liu 27) it could (through empathy) also face the charge of “devolving into a colonizing appropriation” (Kimberly Chabot Davis 399). Explaining this in her reception study of Oprah’s book club, Davis defines empathy as “a cognitive recognition of distinctions between self and other” (403) which, if not carefully considered, could result in an “imperialistic drive to incorporate the other into the self” (405). This connects with what theorists such as Huggan, Brouillette, Lau and others (see Chapter One) have described as the “exoticisation” of otherness in postcolonial literature, which they view as a central component of the global marketability of postcolonial texts: different cultures and people are presented to us in ways that familiarise the “strange,” rendering them into objects for “consumption.” This is reminiscent, too, of Huggan’s argument that postcolonial novels invite readers to enjoy a “touristic spectacle” of others and otherness (“The Postcolonial Exotic: Rushdie’s ‘Booker of Bookers’” 26-27). Although it can be read as learning about the experiences of otherness and recognising our shared humanity and sameness, Huggan maintains, the practitioners of the exotic are not interested in learning about other cultures – their concern is superficial.

Many of the reviewers of *The Wandering Falcon* refer both to the novel’s realism and the sympathy this engenders for the tribespeople portrayed. Moreover, some also comment on how the text troubles conventional images of the tribes, portraying them as more than illiterate

savages. Majeed, the reviewer for the Pakistani magazine *The Express Tribune*, credits Ahmad for portraying tribal people and customs objectively and with respect (n.p.). The way in which she frames her admiration suggests moral judgement against the kinds of people who live in urban Pakistan and, perhaps, implies a political judgement too, against those Pakistanis who dismiss the tribal lands as lawless backwaters. She quotes Ahmad approvingly, “the tribes had far more grace, a far greater sense of honour, rectitude, truth – the qualities we associate with a decent human being – than you find in the cities” (n.p.). The reviewer for *Pak Tea House*, Kakar, is far more expansive, devoting considerable space to what he terms the “*authentic* nature of the tribal cultural personality” (n.p., my emphasis) whether it is revealed in honour killing or hospitality. The high praise continues, in a passage that reveals both his distrust of media representation of the tribal lands and a political stance consistent with his academic interest in peace and justice studies:

The novel also sharply mirrors the tribal wit and wisdom and the integrity of tribal cultural personality overshadowed by clichés like the ‘hot bed of militancy’ and ‘no man’s land’ used very often by the media to describe the tribal areas and its people. It sets to explode such platitudes, and, instead, offers a holistic insight into a much [more] complex way of life that the tribal people are unknown for. (n.p.)

His emphasis on human rights and rejection of religious extremism are evident in his review including the appeal to the Pakistani government to “reintegrate” (n.p.) tribal people into the mainstream political system, while also inveighing against honour killing and the Jirga system’s implication in the area’s modern democracy.⁶⁹ This review, like many of those that

⁶⁹ The people of Balochistan often complain about political and economic marginalisation in Pakistan, primarily due to what is perceived as the “colonisation of their province by the Punjab-dominated military”: tensions with the central government are not new to Balochistan, given the uneven distribution of power, which favours the federation at the cost of the federal units. The Baloch have long demanded a restructured relationship that would transfer powers from central government to the provinces (*Asia Report* “Pakistan: The Worsening Conflict in Balochistan” i).

appear in Pakistani sources, is firmly directed to local, Pakistani readers and internal political concerns.

The Friday Times reviewer, Jalil, foregrounds Balochistan's isolation, and the moral qualities of its people, by quoting Ahmad: "in the two years I spent in the Baluch area of Chagai, there was not a single theft; the Mengal tribe who used to migrate southwards during winter used to leave their houses unlocked and their stores of grain unprotected" (n.p.). She repeatedly expresses her admiration for Ahmad's empathy towards the tribal code of life. The review, replete with quotations drawn from a conversation with Ahmad, reports him as saying, "I think the Baluch, particularly, can hold their hands high in any assembly of men" (n.p.). Authorial comments such as this suggest veracity in his portrayals in the novel. Authorial authenticity is implied, especially when his diary entries are referenced, as they are in reviews by Peer (*The Guardian*) and Joshua (*The Hindu*). This sense of veracity is further endorsed by Ahmad's reply to Velayanikal, where he refers to his selection for the "Frontier list" that "offered [him] ... a unique opportunity to learn the details and intricacies of the way of life of such communities" (n.p.). Such comments confirm how appeals to authorial representational authority may mask the appropriation associated with an outside speaking as if from the *inside*. Although Ahmad stayed in the region for decades, his position as a Pakistani government's agent accorded him authority: he was never truly one of the tribesmen.

In his *Dawn* review, Tanweer critiques Ahmad's plodding realism, which he believes comes at the cost of aesthetic value. He objects to the disjointed plot ("it would be much more accurate to call this work a collection of interconnected stories ... rather than a novel, which usually requires much greater narrative coherence and thrust"), and a variety of stylistic flaws that include

A steady presence of needless adverbs and adjectives, ... tired, unimaginative similes and metaphors ... [and] the plain dead commentary which is present in abundance and

is the main distraction from the stories. There are digressions here on writ of the state, citizenship, civilisation, and ways of life of the nomads, on the geography of Lower Chitral, on the Pakistani media for not faithfully reporting the plight of the Baloch, and then some.

These criticisms suggest that the novel's value lies only in its content, primarily in its representation of tribes. However, in Palumbo-Liu's terms, this is an "excess of otherness" (29), which I argue may be seen as an example of the commodified realism Benwell and Procter discuss (*Reading Across* 119).

The reviews published in the British papers (except that in *Financial Times*) comment on Ahmad's empathetic portrayal of the FATA tribes. Peer, assuming a contemporary context, commends Ahmad for his careful portrayal of a largely unknown people who have been reduced to pawns in larger global conflicts: "the Pak-Afghan frontier has become synonymous with terrorists and the mechanised war of drones. The ambitions and interests of nation states – America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan – have rendered the Baloch invisible. Jamil's stories return the humanity to this devastated region" (n.p.). Ahmad does this, Peer opines, by resisting the binary categorisation of extremists or moderates which is in vogue in our current historical moment: "His characters defy the much-used categories of our times: moderates or extremists, Salafis or Sufis, pro or anti-American. Their concerns are often ordinary, mostly difficult struggles for a life of dignity and love" (n.p.). Ahmad avoids these categories because clearly, these stereotypes didn't exist at the time of the novel's writing, but Peer's appeal to these affective concerns may be seen as gesturing to what Benwell and Procter find praiseworthy in realist postcolonial texts, that is, the invitation to readers for doing "affective engagement" (*Reading Across* 123) along with a significant marketing tool to place text within a contemporary context. The suggestion that the text engenders such an emotive readerly response may well strengthen what Peer describes as Ahmad's "blistering critique of the

ruthless ways of nation states, as they seek to impose artificially constructed borders on older, more fluid worlds” (n.p.). Peer’s pluralisation of that which threatens the tribal people – “nation states,” “modern governments” (n.p.) – suggests his review is directed to an international implied readership, rather than a specifically Pakistani, or even a South Asian one.

The Guardian’s other reviewer, K. Shamsie, speaks about the novel’s affective qualities only as a “part of the immersive power of the book [that] comes from Ahmad’s ability to combine a clear affection and respect for this world of tribal discipline with a clear-eyed look at its harshness” (n.p.). Her emphasis on Ahmad’s abilities as a storyteller are balanced against her assessment of the novel’s ethnographic bent: she claims, “If at moments the writing has the feel of anthropology rather than fiction, this does not detract from its charm” (n.p.). Clements, writing in the *TLS*, also comments favourably on the realistic and empathetic elements of the novel: “Ahmad’s shrewd and candid visions of frontier life reinforce – often with humour, but always with respect – the notion that opposing epistemologies may contend and coexist peaceably here” (21). This is evident, too, in the *Financial Times* review which praises Ahmad’s representation of the tribal world for being “drawn with tenderness but without sentimentality” (n.p.). Albinia notes that Ahmad’s portrayal, though sympathetic, tends to bring out “harsher aspects of frontier life: ritual honour killings, blood feuds, the sale and prostitution of women by fathers and husbands” (n.p.). This type of reading, which acknowledges Ahmad’s focus on the harshness of frontier life, is unique to this review and the Pakistani review *Dawn*: the remainder of the reviewers focus primarily on the sympathy Ahmad accords to the tribes, reading the text against the backdrop of tribal images in the mainstream media.

Much like Jalil, Rodriguez, writing for *The Los Angeles Times*, seeks to secure the truthfulness of Ahmad’s representations via the inclusion of snippets of conversation with the author. He discusses how Ahmad related the origins of the text to him. Apparently, after showing his wife some of his (poor) poems she said: “Why don’t you write about something

you know?” and suggested Ahmad write about “the tribes of Pakistan’s northwest frontier” (n.p.). Rodriguez stresses the realism of the text further by quoting the approving comments of an apparently authoritative Pakistani ‘insider,’ “Ameena Saiyid, managing director for Oxford University Press Pakistan and a co-founder of the Karachi festival” (n.p.). He notes that she described “Ahmad’s writing style as ‘natural and very forthright... It just came across as something very true and real’” (n.p.). However, Ahmad’s ‘knowing,’ and the ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ of his portrayals, is undercut later in the review when Rodriguez writes:

[Ahmad’s] sleepy green eyes widen as he explains how his fascination with tribal life began, when as a boy in British India’s Punjab plains he excitedly leafed through stacks of books about tribes of all stripes: North America’s Indians, the bands of West Africa, the clans of the Scottish Highlands.

I had an interest in the tribes per se, even in school,” Ahmad said “So that acted as a catalyst. I developed this interest early. And when I was selected for the civil service, you were given a choice where to serve. And my first choice was what was called the frontier list. (n.p.)

The specific tribes of the northwest-frontier region are here conflated with “tribes” worldwide and even if Ahmad came to appreciate the uniqueness of the tribes with whom he worked for fifteen years as a civil servant, his interest in and activity of ethnographic documentation is highlighted. The overall effect of the review is to paradoxically confirm Ahmad’s credentials as a “native informer,” even while it acknowledges that he is an outsider to the region and the people that he writes so “truthfully” about.

Akbar in *The Independent* similarly notes (like Hussaini and Rodriguez) that “[w]ith this novel, Ahmad has followed Mark Twain’s advice to write what he knows. And what he knows is all the more fiction-worthy for his lived experience among these hardy people, much

feared and little known” (n.p.). Likewise, Hussaini in *Pakistan Link* declares Ahmad an insider who has “lived with them [tribes] a good part of his life”. Nevertheless, he carefully establishes the book’s fictional status by asserting that it “is not a research product like the authoritative work ‘The Pathans’ by Sir Olaf Caroe, a senior British administrator and a former Governor of the Frontier Province” (n.p.). However, he does foreground Ahmad’s efforts to portray the “inhospitable conditions” of the tribespeople, declaring the work as “much a work of fiction as it is a humanized presentation of the way of life of the people” (n.p.) because he writes “about a subject he knows best” (n.p.). He compares this “humanized presentation” and “empathy” with Manto’s writings about “the lives of ordinary citizens” during Indo-Pak partition in 1947. *The New Republic*’s Badkhen focuses on Ahmad’s realistic but respectful portrayal of the tribal culture noting that he does not “romanticize the tribespeople, nor does he condemn them. There is a sense that he truly loves them, accepting them in their entirety, with their strengths and their flaws” (n.p.). This, she notes, assists readers in gaining knowledge about the tribespeople:

Women who insist on taking their chicken on months-long desert treks and shame their husbands into battle; of men who sell women into prostitution and cheat their way out of revenge killings by wearing children’s clothes – for the Pashtun honor code, Pashtunwali, prohibits visiting revenge on children (this, too, we learn from the novel).
(n.p.)

Clearly, Badkhen praises the text for its insights into tribal culture, for “breathing life” into otherwise “two-dimensional stick figures”, a view that is combined with her admiration for tribes, which she refers to as Kuchi tribespeople (specifics signifying her knowledge about tribes) in the review at least twice. She attributes these insights to Ahmad’s work as a civil servant in Pakistan and the Pakistani embassy at Kabul – information which she also uses to rebuff accusations that Ahmad is “an outsider” (n.p.). Her review opens with an elaborate

setting in Afghanistan where she is watching nomads migrating from Pakistan and is replete with background information about the sufferings of tribespeople and the use of this area by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and America for political gains from the 1980s to the present. Her review is symptomatic of her earlier writings in its focus on offering more anthropological information for her readership.

Clark, in *Washington Independent Review of Books*, recommends the novel for readers “to whom the tribal cultures of that region are a mystery” (n.p.) and refers to the portrayal as “sympathetic but not sentimental” (n.p.). She also attributes this “powerful[l]” writing to Ahmad who “knows [his subject] well having spent several decades in the remote tribal areas as a civil servant for the government of Pakistan” (n.p.). A similar validation of Ahmad as an authoritative champion for Pashtun tribal character and values is evident in Joshua’s *The Hindu* review which also uses extensive biographical information and interviews comments to suggest that *The Wandering Falcon* is not simply a fictional text but one that might encourage readers to better understand “the tribal system.” Here, Ahmad stresses the *historical* nature of his text – “the flavour of life and description of certain societies *as they existed half-a-century* ago aroused interest and curiosity of the current generation” (“There’s a Time n.p., my emphasis) – but even here a generalising tendency is evident in his reference to “certain societies” rather than the particularities of one regional “tribe”. He further adds,

It is possible that the happenings in the past three decades, the wars and genocides in Africa, the Balkans, in Asia, in Central America and the simmering tensions have brought about a realisation that fostering and understanding the tribal system could lead to greater stability and less disequilibrium and that tensions that erupt could be handled, more competently, if tribal sensitivities are taken into account. *The Wandering Falcon* is a work of fiction but it does try to offer images of tribal life which are other than that of ‘uncivilized savages’. (“There’s a Time” n.p.)

The universalising tendencies promoted in the review are further cemented by inclusion of Ahmad's comment in Joshua's *The Hindu* article that, "I am, and have always been a great admirer of *the tribal system* and believe that it is the least tyrannical and the least inequitable of all forms of human collectivity" ("There's a Time" n.p., my emphasis). He continues, "I also believe that it [the tribal system] suffered great harassment from other rival lower systems, nation states, feudalism, empires, consumer capitalist societies, socialist societies" ("There's a Time" n.p.). In highlighting comments such as these, Joshua appears to promote the novel as "realistic," but non-specific in this realism. Its realism is not supportive of a *specific* "tribe" or set of "tribal customs" but rather as a counter to modernity more generally, characterised by (a rather confusing) set of characteristics: "nation states, feudalism, empires, consumer capitalist societies, socialist societies" (Ahmad "There's a Time" n.p.). Particularly telling is Joshua's report of Ahmad's response to the question "What was it that drew you to tribal culture to such an extent that you opted to work in the frontier areas?" To this, he responds, "I cannot say for sure but it is possible that the choice of reading suggested to me by my teachers and elders may have acted as a catalyst in developing an interest in *the tribes*" ("There is a Time" n.p.). Likewise, in his interview with Velayanikal, he reiterates his interest in the tribes: "I became interested in tribes at a young age. This interest expanded as I read book after book on the suffering, persecution and harassment that tribes have suffered over more than two millennia in all the five continents" ("Extraordinary Tales" n.p.). The emphasis on Ahmad's "interest in the tribes" being initiated by "his teachers and elders" (in British-controlled Punjab), conjoined with the conflation of Pashtun culture with global "tribal culture" more generally, suggests the importance of the kinds of critique advanced by critics such as Palumbo-Liu and E. Sorensen discussed above.

Thus, although Ahmad portrays the tribes empathetically, this representation can be seen as politically charged – a point raised by Sorensen earlier, and ignored by the reviewers

due to their eagerness for reality and insight into the region. It is noteworthy that Ahmad stresses in the same interview with Joshua that “the scenes in the book precede the Afghan war and the interventions of major powers in the region, which has led to ‘unintended consequences’ of violence and fracture of the old tribal system” (Ahmad “There’s a Time” n.p.). Ahmad here resists the conflation of his earlier account of north-western tribal systems with current-day politics: “I am out of touch with the current system. It would not be right on my part to offer any comments based on second-hand reports and observations” (“There’s a Time” n.p.). Nonetheless, in this review, Ahmad’s carefully specified realism for Pashtun tribal culture is employed to advance a far more generalising and politicised comment on the current global situation by the reviewer.

The majority of the reviews construct *The Wandering Falcon*, and the region and people it portrays, not simply as a “touristic ... spectacle” (Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* 203) but as a political vehicle, one which they use to promote their values, beliefs and opinions, not least by careful reportage of authorial commentary and selective quotations from the novel. They do so by promoting the novel’s realism, as a text written by someone who really *knows* the tribal lands and its people and highlight Ahmad’s sympathetic portrayal of the tribes. For instance, Kakar, as a human rights activist, uses his *Pak Tea House* review to point out human rights and freedom issues in Balochistan, whilst *The Guardian*’s reviewer Peer, who has criticised conservative nation-state systems, appreciates Ahmad for presenting a critique on rigid geographical boundaries separating countries. Further, *Dawn*’s reviewer Tanweer has projected himself as a local Pakistani writer for whom the local readership matters the most, and uses his review to reflect on the novel’s appropriation for “international readers” who are concerned with the anthropological value of the text (n.p.). Jalil’s awareness of good marketing is reflected in her ignorance of the publication story, and marketing of Ahmad as a “very special writer” who made a “literary debut” at the age of 70. This is supported with captioned pictures

of tribes and the Taliban that brand the novel in the contemporary geopolitical context (n.p.). Likewise, K. Shamsie in *The Guardian* is again explaining the terms like Mehsuds and Wazirs for her readership – the ways she does for her British audience in her shows. In the *Financial Times*, Albinia points out, using her experiences in the region that Ahmad brings to fore the harsher aspects of the tribes (n.p.). *The Independent*'s Akbar is concerned about challenging stereotypes about Muslims, so we find her appreciating Ahmad for his insights on “much feared and little known” tribes (n.p.). *The New Republic*'s Badkhen praises the affection and sympathy Ahmad accords to tribes, something which she has also focused on; even her review opens with a description of nomads (n.p.). And finally, *Pakistan Link*'s reviewer Hussaini author of a memoir about 9/11, situates his review and the novel in the context of current international attention towards FATA and Balochistan (n.p.). All this reflects on how reviewers' own ideological beliefs and issues have influenced their reading of the reviews.

3.3.5 Aesthetic Aspects

Tellingly, the literary merit of *The Wandering Falcon* is something rarely discussed in the majority of reviews. When aesthetic aspects of the text are mentioned these are almost always secondary to assertions about the novel's “authenticity,” Ahmad's credibility as a commentator on the “Af-Pak” tribal region, and various political claims favoured by individual reviewers. When aesthetics is discussed, a key difference between the various reviews is whether the reviewer considers the text to be a novel or a collection of short stories or a brief commentary on Ahmad's writing style. These evaluations of the text's genre, however, are almost always subordinate to assertions about its current value in politico-anthropological terms. *Dawn*'s reviewer, for example, challenges the description of the text as a “novel,” as

described on the book jacket, seeing it, rather, as a “collection of interconnected stories” which lacks the “narrative coherence” (n.p.) a reader would expect from a novel. Similar views are expressed in the reviews published in Pakistan and the ones published in different reading constituencies. At times, reviewers begin by referring to the text as a novel and then resort to discussing it as a collection of stories. In other instances, reviewers use the generalising terms “book” or “work” in the discussion of the text. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the overall judgement of the reviewers varies about the categorisation of the novel. It is described as a “short story” in three Pakistani reviews (*Dawn*, *The Express Tribune* and *Pakistan Today*), one Indian (*DNA India*) and one British (*The Guardian*). *Washington Independent Review* and *The New Republic* called it a novel (n.p.). The opinion is mixed (in that the reviewer uses both novel and short story to describe the text) in two of the Pakistani reviews (*Pak Tea House* and *The Friday Times*), in one British (the *TLS*), two American (*The Los Angeles Times* and *Pakistan Link* which calls it “barely ... a novel” (n.p.) and one Indian review (*The Hindu*). Pariaht in *India Today* classifies the text as a novella. One British review (*The Guardian Observer*) and one Indian (*Outlook India*) review each dismissed this categorisation as unimportant.

Ahmad’s publishers seem to have chosen to market the book as a novel because as Chambers puts it, the “novel has always been a market-based literary form” (“Novelistic Production” 189). In an article entitled “Judging a Book by Its Cover”, Claire Squires regards the novel as the most commodified literary form (specifically from 1945-2000) (189). Ahmad’s response to a question posed by *The Hindu* reviewer, about whether the text is a novel or collection of short stories, is informative: “I do not reject the description of connected short stories. Indeed, I have always believed that human lives conform more closely to the connected short-story mode rather than the orderly and uninterrupted flow of a novel” (n.p.). This comment could also be extended to the “stories” often told about nations or cultures: that they are linear and “coherent.” Surely one of the key things a reader is invited to take from their

reading of the text is that such imaginary coherence is a fiction – certainly for the tribal people of Balochistan who are more ‘organic’ and ‘unruly’ in nature – given that this region has its separate laws different from the rest of Pakistan. Therefore, readers are encouraged to view this coherence as unnatural for the tribesmen.

Another aspect of this aesthetic-oriented reception is visible in a discussion of characterisation. In dealing with specific characters, opinions differ as to which character is the novel’s focus. As might be expected, some reviewers have taken the eponymous Tor Baz to be the protagonist (*The Guardian*, *India Today*, *Outlook India* and *Washington Independent Review* – which rejects Tor Baz as a failed characterisation). The majority of the reviewers, however, mention the landscape as the primary character. For instance, in the *Dawn* review, Tanweer labels the landscape as the second strongest character playing “the subdued-starring role” and representing the link between stories, the first strongest character, he claims, is Mullah Barrerai, and Tor Baz is a “marginal presence” (n.p.). *The Daily Times* gives “the star billing ... to a land that has become a near permanent fixture on the western world’s radar” (n.p.). *The Express Tribune* claims that “the barren and unforgiving landscape of the desert and mountains become an important character and relay more information than the expression of characters” (n.p.). *Pak Tea House* reviewer Kakar claims that “the survival of people in the rugged and naturally unjust terrain is the recurring theme of the book” (n.p.). *DNA India* contends “far more central is the landscape and the people who inhabit it” (n.p.). *Financial Times* gives equal status to Tor Baz and the landscape. *Pakistan Link* reiterates the significance of “locale with its particular cultural milieu” that is “the constant feature and serves as the central piece in the fascinating mosaic crafted by Jamil Ahmad” (n.p.). Not only is the region significant in terms of content, but it also takes prominence in the literary evaluation of the text.

Very few reviewers comment on Ahmad's writing style. *The New Republic* describes it as "stripped down prose" which paints nomads' life with "wide, airy brush strokes" (n.p.). Similarly, the other American paper *Pakistan Link* (that serves a particular Pakistani-American community) appreciate the text for its "economy of words", comparing Ahmad to Manto and Earnest Hemingway. The same qualities referred to as "spare" prose are appreciated by *DNA India*, which points out that it is "in keeping with the setting" (n.p.). *India Today's* reviewer Pariat lavishes praise on the prosaic features, the "stark simplicity, the fable-like clarity and abruptness of dialogue, and the haunting description of [*sic*] apocalyptic landscape" (n.p.). *The Independent's* Akbar comments on the simplicity of narration which gives "a fable-like effect" to the story. Among Pakistani reviews, *The Friday Times* appreciates the straightforward way the text is written. The only critical voice is *Dawn's* reviewer Tanweer who complains of cracks in the story including digressions for anthropological information, poor quality prose that represents "a steady presence of needless adverbs and adjectives," and poor editing (n.p.). In his interview with Velayanikal, Ahmad says that he followed the writing style of "avoid[ing] fluff" taught to him during his training at the Pakistan Civil Service Academy ("Extraordinary Tales" n.p.).

Evidently, the review readings operate within a regime of value that privileges authenticity (Procter and Benwell *Reading Across* 103) and by an appeal to suggest how this book primarily confirms a pre-existing social reality. Further, as I argue, reception of its (literary) merit is clearly influenced by the (geopolitical) contexts and the interpretive horizons within which it is reviewed.

3.4 Conclusion

As the preceding discussion suggests, the publication and subsequent success of *The Wandering Falcon* in the international market is largely the result of external geopolitical

factors, supporting the idea that “fields of cultural production can alter the very act of value attribution” (Lizé 1). Although a few Pakistani reviewers (in *Pak Tea House* and *Dawn*) have read the novel in relation to internal politics, with a focus on the marginalisation of Balochistan in the nation, the majority are more interested in its significance in the international market. Ahmad is routinely promoted not simply as a Pakistani author but as an authoritative voice for the people (and landscape) of the tribal areas of northern Pakistan. In the majority of the reviews, the novel is portrayed as a realistic, authentic representation of the Pashtun and Baloch communities and the liminal landscape they occupy. The tendency is to imply that Balochistan is a timeless, unchanging region and that the place and people about whom Ahmad wrote forty-odd years ago remain the same today. Badkhen, in *The New Republic*, even adds a poem by Merwin, to refer to this timelessness.

[I]t is the late poems
 that are made of words
 that have come the whole way
 they have been there

Such responses reinforce a stereotypical image of this area. This is particularly ironic given that international interest in the region is the result of decidedly contemporary historical events (since 9/11 and the War on Terror, in particular).

In almost all reviews, the text is framed as a political vehicle rather than as an aesthetic object. When questions of literary value do arise, they are couched in terms that validate the novel’s realism and affective qualities. According to E. Sorensen and Palumbo-Liu, appeals to realism and “accuracy” in texts facilitate the “suppression of difference” (Sorensen 111) by “representing otherness” (Palumbo-Liu 28). Palumbo-Liu argues that the worst kind of such commodification occurs in realist texts. “Storytelling,” he asserts, “attempts to bridge the

distance between self and other via the particular language of literary realism” (29). Such claims are made in service of his argument that only non-realist texts, ones in which there is a troubling “excess of otherness,” are able to avoid the appropriation of otherness. Procter and Benwell challenge such claims by arguing that “[i]t doesn’t *necessarily* follow ... that ... realism promotes an unproblematic, referential assumption of direct access to an unmediated, transparently coherent and therefore commodified other” (*Reading Across* 119, emphasis original). In particular, they stress the affective responses that realism might engender, such as the “imaginary identification and emotional attachments” that arise from empathetic portrayal and sympathetic reading: “affective engagement ... and the intimate forging of ‘acquaintance’ with fictional others” (*Reading Across* 116-117). In the emphasis on the realism and affective qualities of *The Wandering Falcon* many reviewers familiarise and appropriate the “different” tribesmen and encourage the novel’s readers to recognise the “shared humanity” of the tribesmen.

The reviewers write, almost without exception, from a position that simply accepts Ahmad’s status as an “insider” who has the authority to speak of and for the tribes. This is so even in those reviews that acknowledge he is not a Balochistani native but was in the region as a British-educated government employee from Punjab, with a working knowledge of the language and the people that he wrote about. Indeed, this positioning is repeated in the reviews, as a *security* for his representative authority, rather than as something that might undermine it. Only Tanweer appears to acknowledge that this risks the novel being read as a “Manual of Tribal Ways of Life” (n.p.) and warns against “looking to fiction for factual information” (n.p.). This is a danger that Ahmad himself warns against in the excerpted interview comments provided in Joshua’s review, however, this has been largely ignored by the reviewers. As a result, reviewers in all reading constituencies primarily use the book as the basis for the

romanticisation and exoticisation of Pashtun and Balochistani tribal life (except for those published in *Dawn* and *The Financial Times*).

The Wandering Falcon was more widely reviewed in Pakistan than the others discussed in this thesis. This appears to contradict Bapsi Sidhwa's claim, discussed in my first chapter, that the Pakistani public and critics look "westward for approval" ("Interview: Bapsi Sidhwa" n.p.). Nonetheless, a recurring focus in Pakistani reviewers is how valuable this text is for an *international* audience. In this way, they confirm Naqvi's suggestion that Pakistani Anglophone works are published for a "larger market abroad and among the diaspora," and tend to "fee[d] a narrative dominant in the current global order" propagated after 9/11 (n.p.). The book was also widely reviewed in the west, refuting assertions made by critics such as Brennan (discussed in Chapter One) that the work of diasporic writers are given more international attention than the local ones.

As my discussion suggests, the interpretive communities to which reviewers belong are varied and fluid, rather than fixed in terms of national identity. This makes it impossible to uphold the simplistic binaries that suggest easily discernible differences between east/west readers. For instance, K. Shamsie's review appeared in *The Guardian*, and the Indian reviewer Jalil wrote for a Pakistani publication, *Friday Times*. It appears that the reviewer's political interests and leanings, as these might be suggested by biographical information, are more important to their interpretations of the book than the location in which their review was published or their ostensible national identity. Where there are differences in interpretation, this is the result of a reviewer's specific interests rather than his or her nationality. Thus, Kakar focuses on issues to do with human rights, for example, and Tanweer comments on the significance of the book for Pakistani readers, reflecting the assertion that his ideal audience is Pakistani. It can be concluded that "local" texts can be "appropriated" *internally and externally* due to renewed interest in their setting, even if for vastly different reasons: In the case of local

Pakistani reviewers, this is due to the liberation movement in Balochistan; in the case of international reviewers this is due to interest in the Af-Pak war region. Both the reviews of and marketing for *The Wandering Falcon* reveal that it is appreciated more as a political object than a literary one.

Chapter Four: Reception of *The Golden Legend*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at the reception of *The Golden Legend* (2017) from one of the “big-five” Pakistani authors Nadeem Aslam. This is his fifth novel and was published in India on 11 January 2017 by Penguin Random House and in Britain on 12 January 2017 by Faber and Faber. An American edition was released by Vintage on 24 April 2018.

The first section of this chapter will provide an introduction to Aslam’s self-positioning in terms of his national identity; the later section of this essay will offer review analysis, with particular attention paid to the similarities and differences in reading(s) of different interpretive communities. Based on this analysis, the chapter will explore issues of transcultural readership, Aslam’s awareness of the reception/publication context in which he writes, and the negotiation of the aesthetics and politics of literature within the reviews. I draw attention to Michel Foucault’s assertion “that [those] aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections” (qtd. in Adrian Wilson 123) and that these impact our way of handling texts. The “identity” we attribute to an author, including his or her “national identity” differs, to varying degrees, from the real individual who wrote a given book, depending on the kinds of “projections” made by readers and the communities they inhabit. The value and meaning we attribute to texts are intimately bound up with how we mediate the distance between an author and the reader’s positionality. However, these projections are not simply the result of reader positioning; they are also the result of authorial (self) promotion. The (implied) author emerges as a “figure,” in Foucault’s term, a construct of his/her promotion, and our situated responses to this. It is this that enables readers to make

claims about a writer's authenticity or authority, for example, in their representations of a specific place and the politics and history that characterise it.

How a reader responds to a text is not only determined by where they are situated – their community, whether geographical or ideological – but also by their preconceptions about an author. How an author is portrayed or portrays him/herself in 'real' life – in interviews, marketing blurb, public appearance at book launches, book readings or literary festivals, or as a result of prizes awarded – influences a reader's reception of a text, sometimes to a significant degree. As highlighted throughout this thesis, I am particularly interested in how the branding of authors in terms of their national identity (here, Pakistan) not only influences reader responses but also the commodity value of their work in the global literary market. The staggered publication schedule for this novel is indicative of a growing trend to publish first in India, then elsewhere, as the centres of publication shift from Anglo-American metropolises to East-Asian ones (even though the firms are still multinational), a trend that was mentioned earlier in Chapter One ("Theoretical Contexts"). In this chapter, I will consider reviews of *The Golden Legend*, and discuss how they have been influenced by the writer's promotion as an author with the knowledge and authority to represent Pakistan.

Set in contemporary Pakistan, the novel interposes real historical events (from 2000 to the present) into the fiction. These include the Raymond Davis incident from 2011,⁷⁰ a 2011 blasphemy case where Punjab's twenty-sixth Governor Salman Taseer was murdered for

⁷⁰ Raymond Davis was an American spy and a CIA contractor who shot two men, Faizan Haider and Muhammad Faheem in Lahore, Punjab on 27 January 2011. A third man, Ebadur Rehman, was killed by a Land Cruiser which came to help Davis after the incident. While the Pakistani government charged Davis with double murder and possession of illegal firearms, the American government insisted that Davis be released due to the diplomatic immunity afforded him under his CIA contract. After approximately two months, on 16 March, he was released from prison when monetary compensation of \$2.4 million was provided to the affected families under Sharia law. Notably, diyyat (monetary compensation) in Sharia law is only allowed if families accept blood money without pressure: this did not happen in this case, as one of the widows committed suicide, fearing Davis' release. Under Islamic law the next-of-kin can neither forgive unconditionally nor accept blood money: this money cleared the Pakistani government of blame. Davis' accomplices were never prosecuted and left Pakistan.

ostensible heresy and his killer Mumtaz Qadri was later hung,⁷¹ and the 2013 burning of Christian homes in the Joseph Colony, Lahore.⁷² The complex plot of the novel revolves around a liberal and cosmopolitan couple, Nargis and her husband Massud, who live in the fictional Pakistani city of Zamana. The couple has adopted Helen, who lived with her biological father Lily in their compound and whose mother, Grace, has passed away. Lily, a Christian rickshaw driver, is in love with the local Muslim cleric's widowed daughter Aysha but is forced to keep his love hidden from the local community due to religious differences. The novel opens with Massud and Nargis transporting library books to a new building. While they are on the Grand Trunk Road, an unnamed American assailant starts shooting which results in several deaths, including that of Massud, and the destruction of culturally significant work, the 987-pages-long *The Golden Book*. Afterwards, Nargis is forced to forgive the American shooter due to pressure from the Pakistani and American governments. An ISI (Intelligence Services of Pakistan) officer appointed to the case gives Nargis two weeks to make up her mind and testify in court. Meanwhile, the situation in Zamana worsens when some miscreants take charge of a local mosque's minaret and start announcing people's secrets on the loudspeaker every midnight, including the revelation of Lily and Aysha's love affair. Enraged local Muslim people accuse Lily of blasphemy and burn down the Christian half of the town in retaliation. Nargis and (now adult) Helen, who works as a journalist, then flee to an island assisted by Imran aka Moscow (a minor character symbolising the Kashmiri freedom movement). Imran and Helen fall in love on the island, suggestive of religious unity, signified through a common

⁷¹ Salman Taseer served as Governor of Punjab from 2008 to 2011. He was also a prominent businessman and economist. In a TV interview on 25 November 2010, Taseer commented on blasphemy laws and gave support to Asia Bibi, a Christian woman accused of blasphemy. Declan Walsh in *The Guardian* reports Taseer saying, "I went to see her with my wife and daughter. Some have supported me; other[s] are against me But if I do not stand by my conscience, then who will?" (n.p.). A few months later on 4 January 2011, his own bodyguard Mumtaz Qadri, who was part of a security entourage provided by the Police department, shot him seventeen times. While this killing reflects a broader pattern of religious intolerance in Pakistan, it also reflects the role of media in igniting this crisis as the TV host misquoted Taseer's words, inciting his murder.

⁷² In Joseph colony 125 homes were allegedly burnt by a mob who reacted to rumours that a Christian man had committed blasphemy; no one was killed in this incident (Muhammad Faisal Ali n.p.)

prayer area where anyone can pray freely. Lily is killed by the mob and his soul joins Nargis, Helen and Imran later on the island. Finally, in a flashback, we are told of Nargis' earlier religious identity as a Christian (with the name Margaret) and how she had to pretend to be Muslim to fit into Muslim society. While the plot suggests that Nargis, Helen and Imran may be found one day and killed, the story ends on a positive note.

4.2 Brand Aslam

Aslam's careful (auto) biographical (self) presentation serves as a pivotal factor behind his promotion as a *Pakistani* "literary celebrity." His "brand" is intimately bound up with the larger branding of Pakistani Anglophone literature. Consideration of the intersection or interrelationship between these two types of branding offers a way to understand how the commercialisation of local national identity functions in the international marketplace. I borrow the term "literary celebrity" from Joe Moran who, in *Star Authors*, argues that "authors actively negotiate their celebrity rather than simply having it imposed upon them" (10). Importantly, he suggests that celebrity status "has been conferred on authors who have the potential to be commercially successful and penetrate into mainstream media but are also perceived as in some sense culturally 'authoritative'" (6). Likewise, Claire Squires also maintains, the role of the authors who are "high in the hierarchy of marketability" is expanded far beyond the mere writer of the text (*Marketing Literature* 37), so much so that the "image" (37), or what I call "brand", is used to promote the work of the author. I will argue that Aslam's insistence on styling himself shows the extent to which he is not only aware of the way he is marketed but that he actively seeks to promote his cultural authority similarly to authors such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy.

Among the authors selected for this study, perhaps no one has a more acute sense of his audience's demands and expectations than Aslam. This awareness repeatedly resurfaces in his promotional interviews. For instance, speaking with Claudia Kramatschek, Aslam explains the different responses he received for his earlier book *The Wasted Vigil* (2008):

It is odd that the response to this book has been so strange. Last year, I gave a reading in New York and someone stood up and said, 'How dare you! You are saying that you are anti-American, that you are pro-jihadi-violence.' The following week I went to Pakistan and gave a reading and someone in the audience stood up and said: 'How dare you say all these things! You are pro-American and you are anti-Islam.' The next week I went to India, and in New Delhi there was a group of Communist students who stood up and said: 'How dare you say these things about Communism!' So the whole scenario that I had set up in the novel – I have a Communist, I have an American, I have a Muslim, I have a moderate Muslim – was being played out on a large scale. (Aslam "Interview with Nadeem Aslam 'Within Three'" n.p.)

As mentioned earlier in Chapter One ("Theoretical Contexts"), Aslam commented on the positive reception his novel *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) received in "India and Pakistan" where it was praised as "a lovely book, a beautiful book," but was described in the West as a "dark book, a bleak book" (Aslam "An Interview with Nadeem Aslam" n.p.). He continues, "[t]he darkness was mentioned by the Eastern publishers, but as a third or fourth thing. The beauty was mentioned by the [w]estern publishers, but as a third or fourth thing" ("An Interview with Nadeem Aslam" n.p.). The comments are indicative of Aslam's awareness of how his work might potentially be read in different reading constituencies or, in Stanley Fish's term, "interpretive communities" (*Is There a Text?* 335). Not only do these observations suggest his awareness of multiple audiences, and reader diversity, they also indicate an

awareness of the importance of reader location – specifically identified in terms of nationality. He narrates how the meanings tied to his texts are globally mediated. However, Aslam emphatically denies that he writes for any specific readership or audience or has any ‘ideal’ reader in mind. In “Where to begin”, published in *Granta*, he describes his writing as an act of self-exploration and an attempt to connect with himself (n.p.). He reiterates this in his interview with Amina Yaqin, saying, “I think the guy who ends up being the audience is me” (“Nadeem Aslam in Conversation” 44). Thus, while Aslam is demonstrably aware of the circuits of transnational reception and varied readership(s), he also denies having a specific or preferential readership in mind.

Many of Aslam’s interviews serve as a major influence in creating the public perception of his fiction and his authority to write “authentically” about Pakistan. Aslam, a first-generation migrant in Britain, seems to take pleasure in the way that publishers promote him and his works as authoritative commentaries on the nation he left in his early teens. His brand encompasses the entire authentic minority diasporic package that Aslam, his publishers, reviewers and readers have crafted together. The real-life story of how Aslam became a writer, rising from university drop-out to a member of the Royal Society of London, dominates the reception of his work and has become the object of special fascination.⁷³ Aslam was born in 1966 in Gujranwala, a Punjabi town north of Lahore. When he was fourteen, he and his family were forced to flee Pakistan for England because his uncle was arrested by the Pakistani government operating under President General Zia-ul-Haq:⁷⁴ the charges were apparently anti-national activities. Maya Jaggi, writing in *The Guardian*, offers the following account, drawing on Aslam’s words from a 2013 interview:

⁷³ James English and John Frow argue in their book chapter “Literary Authorship and Celebrity Culture” that the “real-life” stories of literary celebrities “have become objects of special fascination and intense scrutiny, effectively dominating the reception of their work” (39).

⁷⁴ General Zia ul Haq served as 6th president of Pakistan from 1978 until his death in 1988. He was a right-wing conservative military dictator who overthrew the elected government for Islamisation in the country.

Aslam was 11 when General Zia ul-Haq seized power in a military coup in 1977, with a drive for ‘Islamic values’. ‘He changed the entire texture of Pakistani life,’ Aslam recalls. ‘People began to give children Arabic names. There were public floggings and hangings.’

‘My father and uncles, radical communists, were among those who said don’t do this, don’t encourage this mindset.’ As Zia clamped down, ‘journalists and writers were arrested, or had to leave the country in fear.’ One uncle was ‘taken away and tortured’. (‘Interview: Nadeem Aslam: A Life’ n.p.)⁷⁵

This story (and that of Zia’s era in general) dominates many of Aslam’s reviews and interviews and portrays Aslam and his family as survivors of Islamic persecution. After finishing school, Aslam enrolled at the University of Manchester to study biochemistry but chose not to finish his degree, instead of becoming a writer. In an interview with Yaqin, he details his self-education as a writer:

I would ask people, ‘Who is a great novelist?’ Somebody would say ‘D H Lawrence’ and I would pick up the first novel by Lawrence, then the second, third, fourth, sixth, seventh, fifteenth et cetera. Then I read everything by Faulkner, Naipaul, everything. This was me teaching myself ... [b]ecause I had dropped out of university. So many things, that maybe I can’t even do this, maybe I don’t have English. So I sat down and copied the whole of *Lolita* by hand [...]. I copied the whole of *Moby Dick*, the whole of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the whole of *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner. (‘Nadeem Aslam in Conversation’ 40)

⁷⁵ In his interview with Snehal Shingavi, Mushtaq Bilal maintains the “biggest question which dominates Pakistani literature in English is the Zia legacy. All of Pakistani English literature thinks the Zia era was bad and the Bhutto era was good” (‘What we talk about’ n.p.). Aslam also appears to be part of this tradition.

Aslam here describes his obsession and struggle to ‘fit into’ the clan of canonical western writers: his copying enabled him to adopt not only widely-accepted themes but also textual nuances. This account serves to construct him as a methodical yet romantic author for whom “words seem to be flowing ... into ... my hand, then down the pen, and onto the page – blood becoming ink” (Aslam “An Interview with Nadeem” n.p.). His attempts to position himself as a unique, tortured artist appear to have succeeded, given the attention he has received not only from various publishers but also from his readers.

Aslam has long been promoted and positioned – by himself and his publishers – as a writer who is self-educated, reclusive and something of a “romantic author,” an identification that in the words of Juliet Gardiner, adds “prestige and value” to his works (“What is an Author?” 68). Aslam claims, “[m]y writing has cost me almost everything. Sometimes friendship, love and never enough money,” and notes that the author “lives alone, working for long periods in unusual seclusion” (qtd. in Jaggi “Nadeem Aslam: A Life” n.p.). This emphasis on Aslam’s image as a romantic (yet political) author works well in what Clayton Childress calls the “name-economy” (44) where having an established name usually serves as a “promissory note” (44) for further works and adds “value” to one’s writing (46). The by-line of an interview in *The Independent* states, for example, “while writing his new novel, Nadeem Aslam didn’t see a single person for seven months; his food was left for him when he was asleep, and he didn’t even realise when it was New Year’s Eve” (“I Put my Grief” n.p.). Tishani Doshi informs readers that Aslam blindfolded himself while writing *The Blind Man’s Garden*, stayed up all night and did not meet anyone for weeks (“I Know Him” n.p.). In other interviews, (for instance with *Newsline*’s Raza Naeem) Aslam reiterates his preference for isolation: “after six months, I go away to the north of England to write. There is a secluded cottage in the Yorkshire hills London and other cities are too distracting for me to concentrate on my writing” (“Interview: Nadeem Aslam” n.p.). This desire/need for seclusion

is foregrounded insistently, as in this example when he discusses the writing of *Maps for Lost Lovers*:

‘I basically removed myself from the world,’ he explains quietly. ‘My life has been so reduced. I didn’t have a mobile phone until I’d finished my book and could afford one, and until there was any need. Now I am trying to engage with the world – things like e-mail and the internet.’ (“Nadeem Aslam: A Question” n.p.)

The conclusion we are invited to draw from such comments is that Aslam is an author who has no interest in the wider world of economic exchange or the global literary marketplace: he reinforces the stereotype of a romantic author who writes without economic considerations, suffering for his art. He contends, “I don’t think a writer even has the need for publication. If someone took me to a mountain of gold and asked me, ‘Will you stop writing?’ I could not do it”; a statement that reflects this romantic stance (Aslam “I Like to be” n.p.).

Aslam’s repeated emphasis on being disinterested in material wealth accords with what Sarah Brouillette terms “a systematic denial of the economic motivations for authorship” on the part of many postcolonial authors writing about their nations/cultures (*Postcolonial Writers* 147), perhaps revealing what she describes as the (disavowed) complicity between literature and economics by such authors. It also reflects on what Caroline Koegler notes (in the context of a discussion of Commonwealth/marginal authors) as an attempt to highlight a “brand narrative of ‘originality’” (95). While such romantic branding usually goes uncriticised, a few have commented on precisely this, like Charlotte Grimshaw in her review of *The Blind Man’s Garden*: “Aslam’s surreal fairy-tale elements are slightly too cute, as is his public claim to have spent periods with his eyes taped shut to experience blindness while writing the novel” (n.p.).

While this “romantic” (self) image may seem to counter the overtly political nature of Aslam’s writing, the latter is, arguably, an extension of this: he positions himself and has been

positioned as a champion against injustice and a voice for those on the margins because he occupied these margins (as an artist, if not as an immigrant). His “marginality” is thus politicised in ways that shore up his authority to speak for/of those on the margins. Of Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Soumya Bhattacharya in *The Guardian* writes, “This is that rare sort of book that gives a voice to those whose voices are seldom heard” (n.p.). This role, as one who speaks for those who lack the ability to do so, is one Aslam readily adopts and reinforces. In a recent interview following the publication of *The Golden Legend*, Aslam asserts his job as a writer is to “be a voice that is not the majority voice” (Aslam “I Like to be” n.p.) and suggests he can do this because he himself has always remained on the margins.

In numerous interviews, Aslam also asserts the political orientation of his work: “I want my work to be political like the work of Milosz, Garcia Marquez, Faiz, Mahasweta Devi, Naipaul, Morrison, Berger, Camus, Baldwin” (“Nadeem Aslam? ‘I Know’” n.p.). In an interview with *Newsline* magazine, he writes, “I am interested in politics, in religion, so all of that goes into the books” (Naeem n.p.) and this is reiterated in his interview with Faber & Faber (“Editor to Author: An Interview with Nadeem Aslam (Part One)” n.p.) where he revealingly connects his political interests to his national identity. He explains that writing has always been a “public act” for him because being in Pakistan meant his involvement in (dangerous) politics:

Even when I was a child – at 14 you are more or less still a child – and my father was involved in politics, I was in danger! They could have taken me away in order to force my father to do what they wanted him to do. So whether you like it or not, politics is there”. (“Within Three or Four” n.p.)

For all his stress on isolation and chosen withdrawal, Aslam’s work is replete with references to real world events, especially those in Pakistan, on which he repeatedly asserts his authority to represent. Some readers have questioned this; for example in her analysis of *The Wasted*

Vigil and *The Blind Man's Garden*, Margaret Scanlan questions if readers are “hearing stories from history or mythology, or verifiable facts about recent events?” (113). This raises questions about national branding, particularly in literature written by those that purport to speak authoritatively from and of the margins. Brouillette argues that politically-invested literature, particularly from Third world nations, or written in authoritative voices claiming to know/belong to them, is “eminently marketable” because of western desires to “be educated, to a certain degree about ‘other’ realities” (*Postcolonial Writers* 60). This “desire” to know others, I suggest, is very clearly evident in the reviews of Aslam’s work.

4.2.1 Aslam as a Pakistani/Global writer

Although Aslam began writing and publishing well before 9/11, Muneeza Shamsie categorises him as a Pakistani writer who gained international acclaim in the years that followed these events. She writes, “Nadeem Aslam and [Kamila] Shamsie published their first novels at the age of 24, before the new millennium, and became part of the glittering generation of rising Pakistani English novelists which emerged between 2000 and 2011 (“Pakistani English Novels in the New Millennium” 152). Today he is one of the most popular Pakistani Anglophone writers along with Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie and Mohammed Hanif, and has received extensive praise in the form of critical acclaim and many literary awards. While he lives in London, Aslam regularly attends the Karachi Literary Festival, organised by Oxford University Press Pakistan annually since 2012, where readers have the opportunity to talk to celebrated Pakistani and international writers. His first novel, *Season of the Rainbirds*, was published in 1993 and won the Betty Trask Award (1994) and the Author’s Club First Novel Award (1993). It was also shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and the Whitbread First Novel Awards in 1994 as well. His next novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), published

eleven years later, was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and received the Encore and Kiriama Pacific Rim Awards in 2005. It was also shortlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award in 2006. His third novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), was shortlisted for the Warwick Prize of Writing. *The Blind Man's Garden*, published in 2013 was nominated for the Royal Society of Literature's Ondaatje Prize for writing (2014); it was also shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2014.

Central to his public persona is Aslam's "hyphenated identity." He is defined as a "British-Pakistani" author in *The Express Tribune* ("A Rendezvous" n.p.); as a "Pakistan-born British writer" in *The Hindu* (Aslam "I Know Him" n.p.); "the Pakistan-born author" in *The Guardian's* headline, and later as an author "living in Yorkshire" ("I do Hope" n.p.); and as "Pakistan-born, British-educated-and-domiciled in *Wasafiri* (Aslam "Nadeem Aslam in Conversation" 43). Claire Chambers describes him as an author occupying a liminal position: "he is neither a diasporic 'British Pakistani writer', nor a Pakistani writer, but is situated in an in-between position, complicating conceptual boundaries between East and West" (*British Muslim Fictions* 134). In an interview published in *The Independent*, Aslam describes himself as culturally Muslim but a non-believer ("Nadeem Aslam: A Question of Honour" n.p.). While his novels focus on Pakistan and its people (but are not restricted to them), Aslam repeatedly resists any attempt to link him to particular geographic settings. In response to Anita Sethi's question on belonging, Aslam responds,

A writer really has no place, ultimately. The most alive you are is when you are working or thinking about your work. Whichever place gives me the opportunity to be in that state is home. At the moment it's England. At the moment it's here. As a writer, the only nationality I have is at my desk. ("I Put My Grief" n.p.)

This reluctance to be linked definitively to either Pakistan or England and an emphasis on cosmopolitan identity is a significant aspect of Aslam's personal brand. It permits him to be at once a representative "Pakistani" author (as he is so often labelled), who can occupy the position of once-insider "informant," and also to suitably distance himself from the nation when required. In Brouillette's terms, he may be labelled "literary intermediary between his Third world subjects and the privileged audience that reads about their plight" (*Postcolonial Writers* 35). In this way, Aslam emerges as a 'dependable' author for the publishing industry which relies on the international success of "Brand Aslam" which, in the words of Sandra Ponzanesi, is "able to replicate its appeal due to its established familiarity" (*Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* 21).

By presenting himself as bridging the two cultures, Aslam can claim insider knowledge that allows him to profit in the context of the international publishing system interested in his voicing of local experience, particularly in the context of the War on Terror that framed several of his (Pakistani-focused) novels. As I have suggested above, "marginality" is something that Aslam insists is a key aspect of his (writerly) identity and with that comes the idea of representational authenticity and of him being a literary representative for Pakistan. In some interviews (primarily Pakistan based), Aslam explicitly expresses his Pakistani connection: for instance, in an interview with *The Express Tribune*, he notes, "Even when I'm in England, Pakistan is home to me" ("A Rendezvous" n.p.); and in *Newsline* magazine, he claims, "You must remember that I come from a country – Pakistan – and a part of the world, the Islamic world" ("Interview: Nadeem Aslam" n.p.). However, in other interviews (outside Pakistan), Aslam stresses his dual (or cosmopolitan) identity: in Faber & Faber, he maintains, "I belong to both England and Pakistan. I always say that I could live anywhere if I loved someone. So I would be happy to belong to a third country too" ("Editor to Author: An Interview (Part Two)" n.p.). Talking with Yaqin he says that "I was born in Pakistan and now live in Britain"

(“Nadeem Aslam in Conversation” 43). Indeed, the way that Aslam talks about his Pakistani origins in many interviews, and the way that he is discussed by many interviewers, places him as an “exotic” writer living in Britain. More specifically, he has been given the mandate to write about issues relating to Islam, and Islamic culture, given the country of his birth.

It is unsurprising then, that he is lauded for reflecting on Islam and Islamic themes. He is from “there” and has knowledge and experience of what he is writing about. In an article on *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Yaqin purports that Aslam offers an “authentic Pakistani perspective” through the narrative (“Cosmopolitan Ventures” 1). In a recent interview with East in *The Guardian* whose sub-heading reads, “The Pakistan-born author on intolerance, love, and the parallels between Yorkshire and the land”, Aslam actively works to connect seven out of nine answers to Pakistan through the invocation of first-hand experience (n.p.).⁷⁶ Likewise in his interview with Zakaria he is asked to comment on the religiopolitical situation in Pakistan. The same tendency is evident in his interview with Faber & Faber (“Editor to Author: An Interview” n.p.), in his interview with Razeshta Sethna published in *Dawn* (“Interview” n.p.), and in his interview with *Newsline* magazine (“Interview: Nadeem Aslam” n.p.). Aslam’s careful performance of his role as a “native” author amplified by interviews and reviewers, is reminiscent of Huggan’s observation that postcolonial writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, “although all longstanding British citizens have frequently been perceived either as marginal or as coming from other places” (*The Postcolonial Exotic* xii).

However, although Aslam claims an authentic connection to Pakistan/Islam, in practice his books, particularly *The Golden Legend*, offer a version of Third world history that conforms to the image of such countries as it is perpetuated in the mainstream western media. The exotic, dangerous and other is foregrounded, which is suggestive of what Huggan terms the fetishising

⁷⁶ In response to the question, “Which book changed your life?”, for example, Aslam answers, “A biology textbook. In Pakistan, they didn’t get introduced until I was in junior school and the religious teacher at my school resigned, outraged at the idea that something other than his version of how the human race came into being was presented. In that moment I saw the idea of evolution that was more akin to my sensibilities” (“I do Hope” n.p.).

lens of exotic representations in postcolonial literature, “an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar” (*Postcolonial Exotic* ix), or what Brouillette (citing Bishnupriya Ghosh) terms as “fetishistic localism” (*Postcolonial Writers* 88). His insistence on weaving actual events (which have often received considerable media coverage in the West) into his fiction links him to “the otherness industry” (Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* xiii). Aslam says that much of his fiction is based on real events in Pakistan. The beginning is always something in the news. In *Granta*’s edition on Pakistan, John Freeman laments that there are not always writers available who can tell their nation’s stories. Aslam, however, portrays himself as an author willing and able to adopt this role, suggesting that he knows “exactly what’s happening right now with Pakistan” (Lisa Mullins n.p.). In this manner, Aslam makes use of the “politico-exotic” in Huggan’s words (*Postcolonial Exotic* xi) or the “politico-erotic” in Brennan’s words (*At Home* 10), by strategically employing a highly desirable database of familiar tropes and aesthetic devices (as explained in Chapter One) associated with the Third world/Islam. This can be understood in relation to Lisa Lau’s complaint that South Asian writers living in the West often re-Orientalise their countries in literature and that some diasporic authors have chosen to rehash stereotypes by using their positionality and access to the international publishing market (“Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration” 583-590). Aslam goes to considerable lengths to graft exoticism onto his celebrity image. He stresses to Yaqin that “I actually insist that I want Pakistani motifs [on book covers]” (“Nadeem Aslam in Conversation” 42). In numerous interviews, Aslam emphasises these Pakistani motifs: “Jasmine, motia and gulmohars are what I relate to when it comes to flowers”; the birds he thinks of are “bulbuls” instead of “western birds” (“A Rendezvous” n.p.); “the mangoes, the monsoon and the spices, the verandahs and the mosquito nets and the extended families” (“Where to Begin” n.p.); and Pakistani Sufi poets, djinns and his comparison of Urdu with English (“Editor to Author: An Interview (Part Two)” n.p.). In

the latter interview, he explains how he insisted on having a grapevine on the cover of *The Blind Man's Garden* and additional motifs on the spine as a reflection of his "Pakistani" background: "'Some paisley thing on the spine?' I insisted. 'This is my background. I do not want to leave it out'" (43). He explains that exotic or tourist clichés (in Huggan's sense) are a part of his heritage and he says his reason for utilising them, is "to lull people into thinking that they were in some exotic land" (Mullins n.p.). He further explains in his essay "Where to Begin":

Who will tell Derek Walcott that the blue of the Caribbean Sea is a bit of tourist-board cliché? The palm trees, the warm sands, the beauty of the black women and the beauty of the black men: every page the great man has ever written is full of these things. 'Verandahs, where the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master ... (n.p.)

This implies that he sees these elements as strong marketing elements and insists on their addition as a part of his brand. However, often, these details come across as overpowering and dominate the narrative. It is unsurprising, then, that in his review of *The Wasted Vigil*, James Buchan refers to the text as "a stylistic minefield of the oriental-exotic" (n.p.).

4.2.2 Aslam's Oeuvre

In this section, I refer to common features of Aslam's novels which continue in *The Golden Legend*, to establish the conditions under which the novel was received by reviewers. As Jauss asserts, "the new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, changed or just reproduced" (13). The most significant is Aslam's use of poetic prose and vivid imagery which serve as a

contrast to the novel's brutal happenings. In his first novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1992), the language is rich and Aslam relies on native Urdu words like *Baba* and *Abba* (father), and *aata* (flour) to describe the local flavour. Other novels contain lush prose and heavy symbolism, sometimes to the extent of magic realism, for instance, Lindsey Moore mentions this lyrical beauty intermixed with "foreboding undertones" as typical of Aslam's style (7). Likewise, Doshi informs her readers that "beauty is juxtaposed with a kind of terror" in Aslam's novels, particularly in *The Golden Legend* (Aslam "'I Know Him'" n.p.). In the same interview, she attests that the central concern of Aslam's novels is to explore whether "the horrors of the world diminish the beauty of the world, and – equally importantly – does the beauty of the world diminish the horrors of the world?" (n.p.). This is again repeated in his interview with Faber & Faber where Aslam asserts, "my work has both beauty and the terror of existence" ("Editor to Author: An Interview (Part One)" n.p.); and in *The Guardian* where he describes his writing as "beauty amid fear and intolerance" ("I do Hope" n.p.). However, Aslam expresses surprise that readers find his works "dark or bleak" and insists that they have "happy ending[s]", though not in the conventional sense (Hong n.p.).

Another key, a repeated factor that animates Aslam's oeuvre is his treatment of Islam – specifically Islamic fundamentalism. M. Shamsie in her "Pakistani English Novels in the New Millennium" argues that concerns related to "religious extremism" are central to his fiction (149). Indeed, Aslam's novels tend to replay a familiar binary of "good" and "bad" Muslims, with good Muslims being liberal and promoting western values, and bad ones portrayed as religious fanatics and potential terrorists (Tinka van Wijngaarden 50). For instance, Aslam's first novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1992), tells the story of a Pakistani village in the 1980s, exploring the theme of politico-religious discrimination through the depiction of Christian sewerage worker Benjamin Massih. The setting is a timeless world as

represented by the fictional locale of Zamana.⁷⁷ Like the minarets exposing secrets in *The Golden Legend*, *Season* relies on a nineteen-year-old sack of missing letters which unveils the political and religious tensions in an isolated community. A Christian girl, Elizabeth, is paraded naked in the streets because she is discovered to be in a live-in relationship with the local Deputy Commissioner Azhar which angers (and interests) people more than the secrets the letters may reveal. *Season* portrays a conservative religious people (presented through the characters of Maulana Dawood and Maulana Hafeez) who resist science and view television and cinema as instruments of the devil.

Aslam's second novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2003), explores the theme of honour-killing. The setting is Dasht-e-Tanhaii ("The Solitary Desert") which is a ghetto occupied by Pakistani immigrants (living in Britain) whose lives are still governed by Islamic rules, despite having lived there for over forty years. There is a clear dichotomy between the characters: those whose strict religious views (like Kaukab) are presented as incompatible with the western world, and the liberals who resist the orthodox practices of the community (like Shams, Kaukab's husband). The younger generation is shown as more immersed in western culture, as portrayed through the couple's children Mah-Jabin (who marries her cousin in Pakistan and returns to England after the marriage fails) and Charag (who chooses to be an artist against his parents' wishes). Chambers et al., in their essay on contemporary British fiction, complain of Aslam's "problematic overloading of religious maltreatment in the novel": the novel deals with honour killing and "subsidiary cruelties include the violent exorcism of djinns, women's lack of rights under Islamic divorce and the pernicious effects of gender segregation" ("Sexual Misery" 73).

⁷⁷ Zamana is a commonly used word in Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Arabic and Turkish. It literally means "the times" and using it as a fictional locale implies the timelessness of the story (which is dangerous if the text is read as a representative work for Pakistani society).

In his next two novels, Aslam's focus shifts to Afghan-Pakistani concerns in the wake of 9/11. In *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), he recounts how the young fundamentalist Muslim Casa changes after he is helped by American soldiers. A staunch religious element is presented through villagers who dislike liberalism. British-born Marcus (the liberal voice in the text) has his hand cut off by the Taliban and is later hung because he drew pictures – an act the Taliban disapproved of (and there were books concealed in the house by his wife Qatrina). This cultural oppression is further linked to the wider significance of Buddhist civilisation (and the remaining artefacts) in Peshawar/Afghanistan and to wider colonising forces such as Britain, Russia and the US operating in the region; there is also a commentary on the Zia regime in Pakistan. In one of the reviews of the novel, in the *Telegraph*, Sameer Rahim condemns “doggy generalisations” in the text such as Aslam's statement that “the religion of Islam at its core does not believe in the study of science” (n.p.). His fourth novel *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) uses the theme of the Taliban (through their leader Kyra) and their control over liberal Rohan's local school to discuss Islamic teachings and their utilisation for emotional manipulation. Michael and Jeo, two tribal Pakistani brothers run away to Afghanistan to help people wounded in the War on Terror and learn that they share the same basic humanitarian values with American forces. These two novels can be termed as war discourses which explain the impact of trauma on everyday life. Scanlan claims that Aslam “rewrites” the narrative of 9/11 (103), “while presenting history in bits of information with no obvious relevance to its narrative” in both *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden* (109).⁷⁸

Almost all of Aslam's works are centred on precisely these kinds of issues, namely, “East-West encounters, tradition and modernity, the global and the local, and [...] religion and secularism” (“I Know Him” n.p.). Aroosa Kanwal, in her book *Rethinking Identities*, notes

⁷⁸ She further adds, “Is it true that one must bury a ‘rose-ringed parakeet’ under a ‘neem tree’ and no other ...? Do Afghani peasant women really speak quietly in the early morning so as not to interrupt ‘the pure pleasure of living’, or are they sometimes cross, as [w]estern women are?... If bird-pardoners who trap birds and then exact a donation to ransom them really exist, *Blind Man's Garden* offers no supporting details” (109).

Aslam increasingly deals with political content in his works. She asserts that a “persistent theme in his writing, whether pre-or post-9/11, has remained the encounter between the West and Islam and the resultant issues of religious identity and othering” (158). In an article in *Dawn*, the writer describes Aslam’s characters as “often deeply religious and conservative, disenchanted with the modern world and suspicious of the West” (“Novelist Nadeem Aslam Wins Yale Prize” n.p.). Usually, these East-West encounters involve generational differences in the novels: a discussed specifically concerning *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the younger generation is more inclined towards a western life-style and liberalism while the elder one rigidly adheres to Islamic laws. Likewise, all the novels focus on Af-Pakistan locations or communities: a Pakistani village (*Season of the Rainbirds*); a Pakistani community in a fictional British city (*Maps for Lost Lovers*); or a fictional city within Pakistan (*The Golden Legend*). *The Blind Man’s Garden* and *The Wasted Vigil* are set in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, or the “Af-Pak” region, often in the news since 2001. In *The Golden Legend*, Nargis and Massud inhabit a globalised, cosmopolitan milieu in which transgressive desire is a marker of secular and ‘modern’ identity. In contrast, the fundamentalists in the novel represent a traditional, non-modern religious sensibility. Arguably, this diminishes his texts to certain formulas: ghettoised communities, liberal husbands which are reduced in some way – blind (Rohan in *A Blind Man’s Garden*), weak (Shams in *Maps for Lost Lovers*), or murdered (Massud in *The Golden Legend*). The older women are often deeply conservative (like mother Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*) and there are many extremist and conservative Mullahs who are also terrorists (in *The Wasted Vigil*, *The Blind Man’s Garden*). According to Sandra van Lente, Aslam’s novels exalt western ideals as more desirable norms (107-60) and appear to suggest that Muslim cultures still need to adopt Enlightenment ideals and develop a more rational approach towards religion.

This emphasis has been noted by many critics. Peter Morey, in his analysis of *The Wasted Vigil*, questions whether Aslam frames Afghanistan in the “approved ways” of the West

by portraying “tribalism, brutality, misogyny, and repression”, and in this way “reinforc[es] and recycl[es] the West’s existing prejudices” (*Islamophobia and the Novel* 198-199). He argues that Aslam (and K. Shamsie) write global novels but “they operate from within the historical discourses that have helped to naturalize that very same foundation” (210), producing novels that rehash familiar and often Islamophobic themes. This is problematic because, as discussed, Aslam insists that he writes with the authority of experience and insider cultural knowledge. In various interviews, Aslam states that “subject matters” come first in his writing (Aslam “Nadeem Aslam in Conversation” 43) and that the beginning of every story “is always something in the news” (Mullins n.p.). Of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for example, he says, “nothing in that novel was made up I lived in that community and my family still does” (“A Life in Writing” n.p.). Talking about *The Wasted Vigil*, he stresses that he interviewed two-hundred Afghan refugees in Britain for the content (“A Life in Writing” n.p.), again emphasising the ostensible ‘reality’ of his fiction.

4.3 Review Analysis

Due to the novel’s recent publication, the number of reviews is limited, especially in Pakistan. Usually, reviews in Pakistan are published after a particular work has won an award or is made into a movie (as seen in the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* or *The Wandering Falcon*). However, as I have discussed earlier in Chapter Two “Methodology”, I am concerned with the early reception of the texts as this shapes subsequent reviews. Below, is a list of the reviews selected for the comparison:

Table 2: Review Sources in *The Golden Legend*⁷⁹

Source	Title	Reviewer	Publication	Location
<i>Dawn</i>	“Fiction: In an Age of Violence”	Muneeza Shamsie	05 May 2017	Pakistan
<i>The Express Tribune</i>	“ <i>Exit West</i> and ‘ <i>The Golden Legend</i> ’ could be Pakistan’s Literary Game-changers”	Hurmat Kazmi	27 July 2017	Pakistan
<i>The New York Journal of Books</i>	“ <i>The Golden Legend</i> : A Review”	Saadia Farqui	17 April 2017	US
<i>The Washington Post</i>	“ <i>The Golden Legend</i> , by Nadeem Aslam, Follows an Imperilled Widow in Pakistan”	Mushtaq Bilal	24 April 2017	US
<i>The New York Times</i>	“Fleeing a Fictional World of Despots and Drones”	Francine Prose	19 May 2017	US
<i>National Review</i>	“On the Run”	Randy Boyagoda	29 May 2017	US
<i>The Guardian</i>	“ <i>The Golden Legend</i> Review – Beauty and Pain in Pakistan”	Lara Feigel	28 December 2016	UK
<i>The Irish Times</i>	“ <i>The Golden Legend</i> Review: Creation and Destruction in Pakistan”	Eileen Battersby	14 January 2017	UK
<i>The Times Literary Supplement (TLS)</i>	“Murderous Siblings”	Rupert Shortt	18 January 2017	UK
<i>The Economist</i>	“Nadeem Aslam Shows How to Make Great Literature Out of Despotism”	Anonymous	22 April 2017	UK
<i>Hindustan Times</i> ⁸⁰	“Book Review: This Story of Star-crossed Lovers Set in Pakistan is a Must Read”	Indo-Asian News Service (IANS)	01 April 2017	India
<i>The Indian Express</i>	“Reality Bites”	Devapriya Roy	01 April 2017	India

⁷⁹ The reviews were published online, therefore no page numbers are given except in the case of the *TLS*, (pages 21-22).

⁸⁰ This review is heavily influenced by *The Guardian*’s review published four months earlier. This review also mistakenly reports Aslam to be author of 6 (six) novels when he has written 5 (five) so far. This factual discrepancy is not present in any other reviews. It is the only instance of slippage in review as discussed with reference to Rees in Chapter Two.

These schematic patterns of reception include discussion about politics, the portrayal of religious issues, Aslam's writing style and his stature as a Pakistani/global writer. *Dawn's* reviewer Muneeza Shamsie is an established critic, literary journalist and the author of *Hybrid Tapestries* (2017). She holds positions on the Advisory Committee of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and Lahore Literary Festival ("The Literary Encyclopedia" n.p.). She has lived most of her life in England but currently resides in Karachi. Hurmat Kazmi is a graduate of the prominent business school *IBA* in Pakistan and has contributed several fictional articles to *The Express Tribune* and *Dawn*. In her article on The Man Booker Prize, A. Roy credits "Clairvoyant award of the week" to Kazmi for predicting K. Shamsie and Hamid's longlisting for the prize (n.p.). Therefore, one of the reviewers among the Pakistani reviews is an established writer and the other is a relatively recent member of the reviewing world.

The Washington Post's reviewer Mushtaq Bilal is a Fulbright doctorate fellow working on comparative literature in New York. He authored *Writing Pakistan* (2016), which explores the issues of Pakistani readership (within and outside Pakistan) and authorial identity through semi-structured interviews with Pakistani Anglophone writers. He describes Pakistani Anglophone fiction as "one of the most politically engaged bodies of contemporary literature" (25). In the review of his book, Madeline Clements describes Bilal's questions on authorial identities as "awkwardly ... political" and "somewhat crude" ("Literary Concerns" n.p.).

The New York Times reviewer, Francine Prose, is the author of 21 works of fiction. She is known for withdrawing from Charlie Hebdo's Freedom of Expression Courage Award, in protest against its satirical cartoons, which she describes as a cultural prejudice ("I admire Charlie Hebdo's courage" n.p.). She was declared (along with five others) "the fellow-travellers" of "fanatical Islam" by Salman Rushdie (Flood n.p.). *The New York Journal of*

Books' Pakistani-American reviewer Saadia Faruqi is an interfaith activist. Her books are indicative of her desire to teach Americans religious sensitivity after 9/11, a task she describes as her "Jihad" (Kate Silver n.p.). Evidently, she is working, through her fiction, as a cultural ambassador for Islam in a bid to resist stereotypical representations of Muslims in America. Among the three reviewers for the American papers, two of them are Pakistani. *The Guardian* reviewer, Lara Feigel, is an academic and a writer (on war). She describes herself as a "literary critic" and "cultural historian" who is "fascinated by the relationship between life, literature and history" and attempts to "intertwine" these elements in her writing ("About Lara Feigel" n.p.). In a review for *The Love-charm*, Feigel is described as an author who "writes with modesty and grace, never patronises or sentimentalises her subjects, and makes the reader glad to be sharing her ideas" (Richard Daveport-Hines n.p.).

The *TLS* reviewer Rupert Shortt is an author, a former visiting fellow at Oxford University, and the editor of the religion section of the magazine. In his interview with Alan Johnson, Shortt explains that the persecution of minority Christian groups is "widespread": and from "a vast belt of land from Morocco to Pakistan there is scarcely a single country in which Christians can worship entirely without harassment" (n.p.). In contrast, he views Islam as a religion which spread by the sword "from a very early moment", and he questions what he terms as a "victimhood narrative of certain Islamists" (n.p.). He explains, "[t]he lie at the heart of the al-Qaeda narrative is that Muslims are targeted and persecuted like no other group. That to me rests on a falsification of history and that needs to be resisted" (Johnson n.p.). His book *Christianophobia* also discusses Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws which demonstrates Shortt's awareness of, and research into Islamic practices.⁸¹

⁸¹ In his review of *Christianophobia*, Brian Stanley questions if the anti-blasphemy laws were introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq, as Shortt claims. Stanley clarifies that Zia's legislation was built on the Indian penal code of 1860, drafted in 1837 by English Whig Lord Macaulay, "with a view to maintaining inter-communal harmony in British India" (n.p.).

The Irish Times American-Irish author and reviewer, Eileen Battersby started reviewing fiction in 1984 and won the National Arts Journalist of the Year Award four times and the National Critic of the Year Award in 2012 (“Staff: Los Angeles Review of Books” n.p.). Her obituary in *The Irish Times* (2018), describes her as “one of the country’s leading critics with an encyclopedic knowledge of the literary canon” (Bookseller Staff n.p.). Among the British reviewers, there are no apparent similarities except that they are all writers, although of varying kinds: one writes about religion, another about women and war, and the third is a journalist.

The Indian Express reviewer, Devapriya Roy, has a PhD in Literature, is a travel writer, and a regular contributor to local papers. In her review of British-Pakistani writer Reham Khan’s book on her ex-husband and current prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, D. Roy admits her ignorance of Pakistani politics (“There’s much more to Reham” n.p.).

Information on *The Economist* and *Hindustan Times* reviewers is not available. As this summary makes clear, most of the reviewers are affiliated with academia and several are the authors of novels that treat similar themes (to Aslam). In this respect, they seem to support Clayton Childress’ claim that the “vast majority of reviewers are also practitioners of the art they are reviewing and write reviews only as a side-line activity” as earlier laid out in Chapter One (171). He argues that these kinds of reviewers follow “a code of silence” which he calls “code of *author Omertà*” and tacitly agree to not “assassinate” the writer in their reviews. This might explain why there are no wholly negative reviews for *The Golden Legend* are quite balanced. Even Prose, in *The New York Times Review*, while disparaging Aslam’s style in a full-length paragraph, calls him a “gifted writer” in the concluding line (n.p.).

4.3.1 Politics

Commonly, the reviews of Aslam's works emphasise his explicit integration of political elements. Earlier, I suggested that a tendency to read postcolonial works in political terms often fails to consider any literary merit: many critics and reviewers focus on the socio-political or anthropological information that this text might offer. Indeed, many early reviews of *The Golden Legend* stress the novel's political engagement, at the expense of any significant discussion of literary merit. Writing for Pakistan's major daily newspaper *Dawn*, for example, M. Shamsie views *The Golden Legend* as a continued investigation into "politicised religious extremism" in Pakistan and its impact on Christian minorities. She notes that the same theme was taken up by Aslam in his first novel *Season of the Rainbirds* (1992) which also explored the themes of religious discrimination in a timeless world, the fictional setting of Heer. Like the minarets exposing secrets in *The Golden Legend*, *Season of the Rainbirds* relies on letters which expose the secret of a local judge's murder. Similarly, the reviewer Kazmi in the Pakistani *The Express Tribune* considers a central feature of *The Golden Legend* to be its exploration of "political turmoil" in contemporary Pakistan with "subtle nods to actual political and social incidents" (n.p.). Given the significance of the Davis episode in the contemporary Pakistani political arena, it is unsurprising that Pakistani reviewers have paid particular attention to Aslam's representation of these events in the novel. M. Shamsie, for example, discusses Aslam's portrayal of this incident:

[T]he accidental killing of Massud, a gifted architect in Zamana, during an encounter between two armed motorbike riders and a trigger-happy American man has resonance with the Raymond Davis affair, as does the American offer of blood money to the heirs of the murdered men in exchange for the killer's freedom. (n.p.)

Her review focuses particularly on the Pakistani ISI's (Inter-Services Intelligence) role in convincing Nargis to forgive the culprit, which is read as analogous to the Davis incident, a contextual detail explained earlier in my textual summary above. Like M. Shamsie, Kazmi's *The Express Tribune* review draws attention to not only the Davis incident but also other contemporary events. These include the lynching and burning of Christian communities, and the armed invasion of the offices of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, which led to the death of 12 people, including the managing editor Stéphane Charbonnier.

In contrast, only two of the American reviewers discuss the Davis incident. *National Review*'s Randy Boyagoda links Massud's death in the novel to the Davis matter, referring to this and the resulting dispute over diplomatic immunity as a "local-cum-international imbroglio" (n.p.). *The Washington Post* reviewer, Bilal, also draws an overt parallel between the political reality and fictional events, stressing that Aslam is "making use of all the sentiments echoed by middle class Pakistanis" who are unhappy with Pakistan's submissive role in its relationship with the US (n.p.). Two out of four UK-based reviews (*The Economist* and *The Irish Times*) directly links Massud's death to the Davis incident. *The Guardian* and the *TLS* reviewers ignore it and *The Irish Times* reviewer only mentions it fleetingly. Among the Indian reviews, *The Indian Express* reviewer D. Roy links this central incident to Davis but the *Hindustan Times* review does not.

While almost half of the reviewers comment on the significance of the political aspects in the novel, the emphasis varies. The American reviewers tend to ignore or downplay links between the novel's fictional representations and the historical Davis incident, as do reviews published in the UK. One possible explanation for this difference in emphasis is that the reviewers contributing to Pakistani and Indian papers are likely to be well aware of the incident and so are their intended South-Asian readers, while readers of the American and British papers

are likely to be less familiar: this reflects on western reviewers' distance from treating real events as indicative of the 'meaning' of a fictional text. Thus, in Pakistani writer Bilal's contribution to *The Washington Post*, these references are arguably minimised probably because his American intended readers are not likely to be familiar with, or significantly interested in, the Davis incident. There may be another explanation, however. Apparently, CIA agents from the American government approached the two leading American papers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, requesting that they remain quiet (at least initially) about the Davis issue, and particularly about his identity as a CIA operative (Brisbane "An American in Pakistan"; Sorkin, "Keeping Quiet about Davis"). Amy Davidson Sorkin asks in her article "Keeping Quiet about Davis,"

[W]ho was the intended audience, or, rather, non-audience, for the silence? [...] So news outlets were asked not to tell Americans, among others, what Pakistanis were already reading? (It is also interesting that this involved elevating the "authoritative" *Times* and disparaging the Pakistani press – which was actually ahead on the story).
(n.p.)

This is not a unique instance of attempts to silence press reportage. In *Manufacturing the News* (1980), Mark Fishman reports that throughout the Iran-Iraq catastrophe the media both in the UK and the US commonly followed the dictates of their foreign affairs office (69). Their self-censorship suggests that reviewers take into consideration (and are influenced by) their American and British readership as an intrinsic element of their reviews and only focus on what is relevant for their readership without politicising their content – a feature typical with newspaper reviews.

More generally, a recurring tendency in the reviews is to discuss *The Golden Legend* in terms of a broader sense of political engagement and relevance. *The New York Journal of Books*

reviewer Faruqi notices that Aslam “blends the political with the fictional with finesse” (n.p.). Similarly, *The New York Times* review is entitled “Fleeing a Fictional World of Despots and Drones” followed by a summary of the incident that led to Massud’s death (n.p.): the evocative title foregrounds Prose’s highly political interpretation of this novel and evokes the idea of a dark, backward Pakistan. In terms of content, or branding where value is ascribed to certain textual features, Aslam’s works are appreciated for another kind of exoticism. This is explained in Chapter One (“Theoretical Contexts”) with reference to Pakistani author Bina Shah who argues “bombs, ill treatment of women and terrorism” have become “sexy” in the western world (“Paperback Writers” n.p.). The exotic, in *Brand Aslam*, in this sense appears to be the emphasis on “Muslim fundamentalism” and an image of dark Pakistan, a place full of bigoted Muslims, where only a few voices are liberal. A perfect instance of the amalgamation of the two – exotic and dark Pakistan – is in Aslam’s interview with *The Express Tribune* where he explains the meaning of Heer, the fictional locale of *The Blind Man’s Garden*. Heer is the eponymous central character of one of the legends of Punjab written in 1766 by Punjabi poet Waris Shah. Aslam uses the name as a fictional setting: “while some consider her [Heer] a hero, others consider her tribe [Jhang] a symbol of shame as this eventually led to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi – a militant organisation” (Aslam “A Rendezvous” n.p.). In Aslam’s case, these two instances of the exotic appear to be working closely together and are reflective of Aslam’s embodiment as a product and generator of the (Pakistani Anglophone) literary market.

Nearly all of the reviewers acknowledge the author’s obsession with controversial themes. *The New York Journal of Books* reviewer Faruqi writes of Aslam’s emphasis on “Pakistan’s foreign policy and Islamic fundamentalism” (n.p.), while *The Washington Post* reviewer criticises Aslam for excessive “topical snippets” such as “Pakistan right-wingers slaughtering a cow on an Indian flag, extrajudicial killings by the police, a coffee shop owner getting killed for celebrating Valentine’s Day”: Faruqi contends that these elements disrupt the

main narrative (n.p.). Among the UK reviews, *The Guardian* reviewer devotes a complete paragraph to linking *The Golden Legend* with Aslam's previous works (primarily *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden*) suggesting that they all explore the War on Terror and the resultant tragedies that have ensued: "the country he depicts is one bent on completing what the west has begun with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan" (n.p.). Lauding Aslam's cultural authority, *The Guardian* reviewer Feigel focuses on authenticity in the narrative by informing readers that Aslam has a good "grasp of the ongoing terrorism in Pakistan, India and Kashmir" happening in the name of religion (n.p.). Likewise, the *TLS* reviewer Shortt credits Aslam for highlighting the nefarious effects of the American drone policy (22). *The Economist's* review-article informs us that the themes of this novel resonate with those evident throughout Aslam's literary oeuvre. The same sentiments are echoed in one of the Pakistani reviews where *The Express Tribune's* reviewer Kazmi labels Aslam as "the polemicist" who deliberately employs controversial themes (n.p.). The *Hindustan Times* reviewer's comment is more telling: Aslam is classified as a "master story teller, [who] acts like a psychiatrist, diagnosing his readers while building the plot on his characters," implying that Aslam has carefully judged, and written for, a specific kind of (intended) reader (n.p.).

This willingness to match readerly expectations or the utilisation of literary formulae points towards Aslam's manipulation of commercially viable metropolitan codes, which Huggan points to in *The Postcolonial Exotic* through his discussion of the Booker Prize (81). This literary formula in Pakistan's case, after 9/11, is politics and religion: Aslam can be seen to carefully situate himself in the tradition adopted by other Pakistani writers, one which could be termed as the "fetishisation of cultural otherness" (*Postcolonial Exotic* 111). Arguably, Aslam has anticipated western readers who expect to be educated about 'others', using "political material [that is] eminently marketable" (Brouillette "Postcolonial Authorship" 89-90). Indeed Aslam's authority as a writer with insider cultural and political knowledge is lauded

in nearly all of the reviews especially in *The Guardian*, the *TLS*, *The Express Tribune* and *Hindustan Times*, *The New York Journal of Books*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Aslam's insider "authority" is asserted with reference to what I label "brand Aslam," the author's self-conscious self-positioning as a spokesperson for and of Pakistan. While not all the reviewers have commented on his national identity, *The Washington Post's* reviewer gives significant space to Aslam's biographic details, informing the readers of his dual nationality (Pakistani-British) and the circumstances of his migration to Britain. Among the Pakistani reviews, *The Express Tribune* specifically labels him as a Pakistani writer. Among the UK reviews, *The Guardian* review mentions that Aslam is writing about his "native" country in this novel. *The Irish Times* reviewer Battersby briefly introduces him as a "Pakistan-born, London-based writer" (n.p.). *The Economist* review does not comment on his authorial or national identity but links the fleeing scene in the novel to the author himself when his family fled persecution in Pakistan. Among the Indian reviews, the *Hindustan Times* example opens with an emphasis on Aslam's migration to the UK as a teenager. By introducing Aslam as a UK-based Pakistani author and further detailing his story of settling in Britain, reviewers suggest that Aslam has sufficient "native" (Pakistani) authority to pass native knowledge on to his readers. In this way, the reviewer establishes Aslam's Pakistani identity while also emphasising his British heritage. *The Indian Express* also introduces him as a "Pakistani-British writer" (n.p.) highlighting his multicultural roots and thus creating the image of an authentic *and* exotic writer, tacitly endorsing a local knowledge that arguably far exceeds his actual contact or experience. There is no debate regarding Aslam's qualification to represent "his" Pakistani community. Although the *TLS* and *Dawn* reviewers point out some factual discrepancies (as will be explained later), overall, Aslam's status as a cultural spokesperson

remains unchallenged in these reviews and they endorse his authority to speak as a Pakistani author.

4.3.2 Religion

A key aspect of the political readings of *The Golden Legend* is the reviewers' focus on representations of religious discrimination or fundamentalism in the novel. This is discussed in Chapter One "Theoretical Contexts" with reference to Elleke Boehmer who complains that postcolonial works (or works from the margins) are read politically: their political content gains them awards and any aesthetic element is usually ignored (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures* 42). The US reviews tend to understand *The Golden Legend* as a novel that is primarily about blasphemy and religious discrimination. For instance, Bilal in *The Washington Post* reads the book as essentially the story of Helen, who is caught up in a deadly heresy controversy and asserts that it is the "systematic persecution" of minorities which is the subject of *The Golden Legend*. His review draws attention to what he refers to as Pakistan's obsession with "Islamic identity" (n.p.).⁸² *The New York Journal of Books'* reviewer Faruqi shares the same concern for religious minorities in Pakistan and appreciates Aslam for "lay[ing] bare these shameful conditions" in *The Golden Legend*. She credits the writer for boldly taking up the issue of Muslim-Christian relations, and for highlighting the "desperate lives" of the Christian community, in relation to Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws. As an interfaith activist,

⁸² As part of this argument, Bilal states that the receding minority's religious population in Pakistan is now three percent in comparison to 23 percent at the time of partition: this is not entirely true. These statistics appear to have been derived from Indian writer Meena Menon's book *Reporting Pakistan*, where she writes that minorities were 25 percent of the population which 'dwindled' to five percent or less after 1947 partition (Asif Noorani n.p.). Pointing to this flaw, Noorani refutes Menon's data (quoted by Bilal here), in his article "Pakistan via Indian eyes," published in *Dawn*: he writes, "in those days, Pakistan comprised two wings and [...] in 1947, in fact right up to 1971, the more populous eastern wing had a much larger proportion of Hindus. So the statement [of dwindling minority] is unrealistic, to say the least" (n.p.). This is not to disparage Aslam's subject matter but to clarify the figures *The Washington Post* reviewer offers his readers.

she chooses to highlight the incident between Helen and the shopkeeper's assistant boy where the latter intends to injure Helen on the presumption that the colour of Christian blood is different from that of Muslims. She has to cut herself to prove their blood is the same. Likewise, *The New York Times* reviewer Prose highlights the novel's focus on governmental, military or sectarian violence and on blasphemy which is considered a capital crime in Pakistan. *National Review's* Boyagoda, who reads the book in terms of intercultural understanding, does not directly address the theme of blasphemy but highlights several incidents of sectarian violence in the novel (n.p.). All of these reviews accept that Aslam offers a truthful portrait of 'real' religious concerns in Pakistan.

Among the Indian reviews, *Hindustan Times's* review places more emphasis on the "fundamentalist elements", labelling it a story of "sectarian violence" which echoes the "contemporary socio-political situation in Pakistan" (n.p.), giving further credence to Aslam's view of Pakistan. *The Indian Express* reviewer D. Roy considers Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws the central issue in the novel. Her review offers a religiopolitical context for the story but mistakenly suggests that Helen was accused of blasphemy when only Lily was. Pakistani *Dawn* reviewer M. Shamsie also reads the book in terms of "politicised religious extremism" (n.p.) and its impacts on Christian minorities. She links fictional incidents to actual events that happened in Pakistan and were reported by media, including house burning and even the immolation of a Christian town in response to accusations of blasphemy. This contextualisation serves to broaden the interpretive horizon of the implied readers of her review. But given that she writes for a Pakistani newspaper, her implied audience is Pakistani (though affluent Pakistanis) who would most likely already be aware of these incidents. It may be that M. Shamsie, being an expatriate, felt the need to assert her "insider identity", and therefore make her review authentic for her readers.

As discussed in my first chapter, authenticity, realism or “the cult of authenticity” in the broader context of the material reception of texts (Huggan *Postcolonial Exotic* 155) is significant in the discussion of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. Huggan argues that the constructs of “marginality” and “authenticity” circulate as markers of the commodification of the post-colonial exotic. Most of the reviewers of *The Golden Legend* praise the novel for its truthful, authentic representation of “dark” aspects of Pakistan, especially in relation to matters of religion. Aslam’s status as a truthful informant is undisputed and virtually all the American reviews note the novel’s realism. There are notable similarities among the reviewers: *The Washington Post* reviewer Bilal lauds the book as a “powerful and timely comment” on the precarious state of religious minorities in Pakistan and an honest mirror on the Pakistani state and society, while also warning that many Pakistani readers might find it ugly because it is too realistic. Notably, he also complains of Aslam’s tendency to add too much information which, in his opinion, results in “frequent narrative detours” (n.p.). Similarly, for *The New York Times* reviewer Prose, this is realistic fiction where Aslam portrays “a nightmare” of the “most turbulent and painful aspects of everyday life in contemporary urban Pakistan” (n.p.). She claims that the novel depicts “misery and cruelty” (n.p.) but ultimately “it is far more than the sum of horrors it contains” (n.p.). Writing for *The New York Journal of Books*, Faruqi maintains, “Pakistan is portrayed in an unflinchingly *truthful* light, with none of her flaws left unobserved” (n.p., my emphasis). The flaws, she claims, are a checklist about Pakistan, including bigotry among the public, abuse of women, and corruption of police officers, violence, terror, and hate. Faruqi generalises the conditions in Pakistan based on the novel’s depictions: “this is *exactly* the homeland of millions of Pakistanis who struggle to survive there in difficult conditions” (n.p., emphasis mine). Still, she does not judge it as entirely depressing, noting that “Pakistan is more than the news, and sometimes a good novel like *The Golden Legend* helps bridge the gap” (n.p.). The *National Review*’s Boyagoda is rather more

circumspect, suggesting that the novel appears to confirm every “newsfeed stereotype about prospects in an unstable, poor, violent, Muslim-majority country” (n.p.). Boyagoda positions himself at a critical distance from Aslam’s vision of Pakistan, which in his words, is almost reduced to the “world-historical capital of fatalism” – although he does suggest the novel is redeemed by its emphasis on “love” and “beauty” (n.p.).

The tendency to read the novel as a social realist narrative is also apparent in the UK reviews. For instance, the review-article in *The Economist*, assessing the novel for its accuracy, informs its readers of the incidents that are truthfully represented in the text including an attack on a Sufi shrine in 2010, the chapter about a Catholic bishop and the description of graffiti “Indian dogs go home” on Kashmiri walls (n.p.). The *TLS* reviewer Shortt suggests that the novel “holds the mirror up to history” endorsing the novel as authentic: he does, however, admit that certain textual situations such as Nargis’ withholding of her past, and the “married bishops” are a “little far-fetched” and factually incorrect (22). He also complains that Aslam spends too much time introducing the characters’ “back stories” and “ordeals” (21). *The Guardian* reviewer calls Aslam a “traditional realist” (n.p.) who gives beauty (in the form of love) more space than terror in *The Golden Legend*, unlike in his previous works. *The Irish Times* review by Battersby is entitled “Beauty is Confronted with Terrorism” and *The Economist* reviewer labels it as a work that achieves the status of “great literature out of despotism” (n.p.). Among the Indian reviews, *The Indian Express* reviewer D. Roy views it as a novel which offers a “searing glimpse into the life and times of contemporary Pakistan” again implying the accuracy of the story (n.p.).

Some reviewers are more nuanced in their discussion of the novel’s “accuracy”. *The Guardian* reviewer Feigel views the novel’s landscape as one of irrational sectarian violence, rivalry and cruelty and significantly points out, “we’re told that, though Pakistan is so violent, there’s a ‘deep desire to avoid confrontation’” (n.p.). Likewise, *The Irish Times*’ detailed

review by Battersby, admires Aslam for presenting “ongoing” violence and terrorism in Pakistan, India and Kashmir “in the name of religion” (n.p.). However, she also exerts her critical distance from Aslam’s fictional rendering of Pakistan, noting a degree of exaggeration: “Pakistan is represented as a terrified and terrifying place in which the slightest word or gesture will be seen as blasphemous and the only outcome is death. Beatings and killings fill the pages, as do abuse, rage and hatred” (n.p.). She also protests that the plot is side-lined for the sake of rich symbolism, historical, quranic and mythological references and anecdotes which results in “information overshadow[ing] the fictional narrative” (n.p.). After noting that Aslam has over-stretched the image of dark Pakistan and acknowledging the information overload, she does mention that some of the details such as the “mass graves of Kashmiris,” and “suicide bombers avenging Islam’s insult” are realistic (n.p.).

Another observation that recurs in the religious interpretations of *The Golden Legend* is the persecution of Christians and Christianity. Almost half of the *TLS* review provide elaborate contextual details of Christian mistreatment in Pakistan. Declaring the book to be a “forceful examination” of corrupt religiopolitical practices, Shortt explains the murder of slain Salman Taseer “who had also enraged extremists by speaking out in defence of religious minorities” (21). Moreover, the review also contains a statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the mistreatment of Christians in Pakistan. Shortt questions a factual detail in the novel, namely a Catholic archbishop being a family man as married bishops are rare, but ultimately dismisses his own objection in favour of Aslam’s right to creative licence. This is also the only review which accuses Aslam of unjustifiably blaming India for the problems in Kashmir,⁸³ looking for a “scapegoat” to blame for Pakistan’s problems, and still adhering to a

⁸³ Kashmir is a disputed territory between Pakistan and India. During partition, the UN conducted a plebiscite in Kashmir to determine its accession. For a fair plebiscite to occur, India needed to allow the UN to operate freely and both India and Pakistan were required to remove their forces. Currently, 2/3 of Kashmir is with India and the other is with Pakistan. Pakistan considers Kashmir to be an integral part of its territory, mainly due to its Muslim majority (98% at the time of partition), while India dismisses it as a mere separatist movement. For more information read Victoria Schofield’s “Kashmir’s Forgotten Plebiscite” published by BBC news.

victim mentality (n.p.).⁸⁴ *The Indian Express* review repeats the claim of “excessive reportage” which, it believes, has completely overshadowed the storyline” (n.p.). These assessments are an explicit counter to the notion that (western or Indian) readers approach Pakistani Anglophone fiction merely for anthropological or historical information, accepting the writer’s views without question.

In contrast, the Pakistani reviews have attempted to dispel the image presented by Aslam of “dark Pakistan” riddled with religious intolerance and social discrimination: they challenge Aslam’s implication that Pakistani Christians are made to do low paid jobs primarily as sewer workers.⁸⁵ M. Shamsie, in *Dawn*, questions why Aslam depicts the entire Christian population in Pakistan as “the progeny of sweepers, including Nargis and her uncle, the sophisticated and learned Bishop Solomon” (n.p.). M. Shamsie’s review softens the image of dark Pakistan for her implied readers, who are likely to be middle class/elite and who would object to the exaggerated depictions of social and religious conditions in the novel. She challenges Aslam’s portrayal of Helen’s painful assimilation into mainstream Pakistani society: “she didn’t necessarily have to carry her own glass, cup and spoon with her” (n.p.); and she asserts that not all Christians are accused of smelling of sewage or have to convert to Islam. Therefore, she rectifies the image of Pakistan for her implied readership.

⁸⁴ Aslam digresses from the internationally accepted position of political correctness which states that India is battling against Pakistani terrorism in Kashmir (Schofield 15; International Relations and Security Network 14; Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan 177; Barkha Dutt n.p.).

⁸⁵ Writing for the *Foreign Policy*, Usman Ahmad explains that “There is also a deep-rooted, caste-based discrimination that has existed in South Asia for hundreds of years. For example the derogatory term “churha” (sweepers) is commonly used to describe Christians. Historically most Christians in Pakistan are converts from lowly Hindu castes and the stigma and exclusion resulting from this has not left them” (n.p.).

4.3.3 Aesthetic Aspects

As previously explained, Aslam's works are stylistically well-crafted with lush prose and vivid images, to the extent that they appear to some as "a stylistic minefield of the oriental-exotic" (Buchan n.p.). In the reviews analysed, Aslam's aesthetics, such as his use of lyricism and poetic prose, are given considerable importance. One reviewer from each reading constituency (*The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Hindustan Times*) alludes to the concept of magic realism in relation to the text. *The New York Times* describes it as a work of magic realism with "an added layer of symbolism", and while *The Guardian* argues that the book cannot be classified as magic realism, it nonetheless suggests that its "realism" is tempered with aspects of "fable" (n.p.). Similarly, the *Hindustan Times* review uses the words "realism", "fantasy" and "fable" to emphasise the genre of the novel (which the reviewer loosely classifies as a "romantic novel" n.p.).

Both Pakistani reviews, especially the one in *Dawn*, appreciate Aslam's use of metaphor and allegory as essential elements of the story. Moreover, the *Dawn* review also praises Aslam's ability to "juxtapose history, literature and art with blind prejudice and violence" (n.p.), confirming a common claim that Aslam's works offer a mixture of beauty and terror. M. Shamsie chooses to highlight textual metaphorical and allegorical references to significant mosques in Turkey and Spain, the emphasis on Sufi traditions and mysticism and, at the same time, a drone attack in Waziristan. *The Express Tribune* review appreciates that the book is "less heavy-handed" than earlier works by Aslam but still retains "plenty of lyricism", making it a work of "stylistic brilliance" in its glorification of the "ignored minutia of daily life" (n.p.). Similarly, both Indian reviews have been celebratory in the commendation of aesthetic features. The *Hindustan Times* reviewer praises the "lively and colourful aspects" of Aslam's novels and describes *The Golden Legend* as "vividly beautiful, lucidly painful and yet

surprisingly convincing” (n.p.). *The Indian Express* reviewer, D. Roy, presents Aslam as a poet or a painter due to his pictorial compositions, prompting her reader to think likewise.

In contrast, the UK based reviews complain of the excessive symbolism in the text. For instance, *The Guardian* review asserts that the “heavy” symbolism in *The Golden Legend* overshadows characterisation and plot. *The Irish Times*’ reviewer Battersby finds much to complain about regarding Aslam’s style. She claims that the lyricism is “stiff, overly formal, and even awkward”, there is “too much symbolism”, the dialogues are flat and the word choice is “archaic” (n.p.). She recommends that the novel “should have [had] a closer copy edit” to have these errors removed before publication (n.p.). Although the *TLS* review appreciates Aslam’s prose for being pithy or rhetorical and lyrical, it criticises his over-use of “long clauses” which hinder narrative rhythm (22).

The US reviews express similar concerns. *The Washington Post*, while discussing the aesthetic merits of the text, views Aslam’s melodramatic one-liners (such as, “this world is the last thing God will ever tell us”) as “unnecessary pontifications” (n.p.). Similarly, *National Review* complains of “throbbing” symbolism which makes the book difficult to “relish” (n.p.). Finally, *The New York Journal of Books*’ reviewer Faruqi reports that the imagery created by Aslam’s words uplifts but at the same time makes textual understanding difficult. From the aforementioned discussion, it is evident that, although the aesthetic aspects are addressed by all the reviewers, their treatment differs in different reading constituencies. Both local (Pakistani/Indian) reviews have celebrated the lush prose and vivid images in *The Golden Legend*, lauding it as a positive element of the text, while the majority of the UK and US reviews (three each) and one Indian review suggest that these elements detract from the book’s intelligibility.

4.4 Conclusion

It has been widely claimed that a common (western) readerly expectation of literature from Pakistan, after 9/11, is that it provides insights into the nation's politics and (Islamic) religion. Via the consideration of initial reviews, a key question this chapter asks is whether Aslam meets such expectations and thus engages in what Huggan calls the "fetishisation of cultural otherness" (*Postcolonial Exotic* 111), and Brouillette refers to as the exploitation of "political material [that is] eminently marketable" ("Postcolonial Authorship" 89-90). Further, I have sought to identify whether these expectations are also evident in what might be called the Pakistani "interpretive community."

Overall, the reviewers, regardless of publication locality, read *The Golden Legend* as a welcome and representative addition to Aslam's oeuvre. In most, the focus is on the "political representation" and "authenticity" of Aslam's portrayals of Pakistan. Many reviews relay aspects of his (auto) biography to secure his authority to write about and for Pakistan: Aslam is most often introduced as Pakistani or as a British-Pakistani and described as being the victim of political and religious fundamentalism, someone whose family was forced to flee their homeland. His authority as a cultural spokesperson is further reinforced through references to his previous works and their focus on Pakistan or Pakistani characters. In many interviews, Aslam has insisted on his insider knowledge of Pakistan and the truthfulness of his depictions, as he does in the following comment on *The Golden Legend*: "I've been to the madrassas in Pakistan. I've been to the so-called terrorist training camps, and I've talked to the people who are there" ("I do Hope" n.p.). It is unsurprising, then, that Aslam emerges in these reviews as what Huggan refers to as a "bona fide cultural representative" – a term articulated in the context of the following rhetorical question: "To what extent does the value ascribed to [postcolonial authors who represent their respective cultures] and attributed to their writing depend on their

capacity to operate, not just as *representers* of culture but as bona fide *representatives*?” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 26, emphasis original). Huggan continues, in discussing such “representatives”, “perhaps [it is] less accurate to think of them as cultural translators than as *culture brokers* mediating the trade in exotic – culturally ‘othered’ – goods” (26). Brouillette similarly describes these processes of “brokered” valuation with an emphasis on authorial “projection” (in Foucault’s term): “The author’s name and attached personae have become key focal points for the marketing of literary texts, such that one could argue that the current industry brands literature more by authorship than by other aspects of or ways of approaching a given work’s meaning” (*Postcolonial Writers* 65). In this respect, Aslam seems to accord with the conflicted figure of the postcolonial author, as defined by Brouillette: “Those writing from or about the developing world, [who] situate[] their narratives within an often violent political history [and who] are expected to act as interpreters of locations they are connected to through personal biography” (*Postcolonial Writers* 70). This is what I discussed with reference to Philipa Chong in Chapter Two that reviewers tend to discuss authors’ nationalities to reinforce their first-hand knowledge about a novel’s setting and thereby influence public reception (72).

The “attached personae” of authors is not simply imposed on them by publishers and marketers; it is also something authors themselves actively produce in interviews and public appearances. This is certainly the case for Aslam who, as discussed, repeatedly appeals to (selected) aspects of his biography to construct himself as an authoritative (Pakistani) representative, and this has influenced his reception. However, this is also complicated by a desire to distance himself from this role, as is evident in his more generalised, universalising and aesthetic claims about his work (and his tendency to compare himself with canonical English writers). Huggan argues that “postcolonial writers and thinkers” are “both aware of and resistant to their interpellation as marginal spokespersons, institutionalised cultural

commentators and representative (iconic) figures” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 26). This appears to be true for Aslam who says in an interview with Hong, “[a]t the most basic level I don’t look at my characters as representatives of a religion, or nation, or ideology. I don’t really care about countries – I am more interested in people” (n.p.).

The “resistance” to which Huggan refers is clearly evident in multiple comments Aslam has made about himself and his work. Aslam wavers between asserting his Pakistani representational authority and resisting this in the name of his art. He declares himself to be “different” in Britain (or “marginal”) because of his national heritage and yet a citizen of no country: “A writer really has no place, ultimately” (“Editor to Author: An Interview (Part One)” n.p.); In the second part of the interview he makes similar claims about the trans-national identity of writers like himself. Almost in the same breath, however, he articulates his difference from British writers, as a “hybrid” writer:

Language on the whole is one of my great loves, but I am aware of the fact that I do not use the English language in the same way that someone born in the Britain would. The language I use has the 26 letters of the English alphabet, but they seem aware of the presence of the 38 letters of the Urdu’s alphabet too.

And as with language, so with place: I belong to both England and Pakistan.
 (“Editor to Author: An Interview (Part Two)” n.p.)

Aslam seems, like Hamid, to want to position himself as both a “local” and an “outsider” – a (hybrid) cosmopolitan in the disparaging terms suggested by Timothy Brennan: “*local* while denying its local character” (“Cosmo-Theory” 659-660, emphasis original) and benefitting from both, in terms of marketability and audience.

Nearly all the reviews have acknowledged Aslam’s hyphenated identity and yet appear to insist on his authority to write about the country he left as a teenager. Most praise his

representation of “dark” aspects of Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on conservative Islam. Virtually all the reviews grant Aslam the status of a “native informant” although at the same time question his “excessive” and “exaggerated” emphasis on negative aspects of Pakistan such as terrorism, violence and religious intolerance. Others point to factual errors and inconsistencies in the plot, for example, K. Shamsie challenges his portrayal of Christian minorities in Pakistan and Shortt questions his portrayal of a married Catholic Bishop. Although the reviewers appear to buy into “Brand Aslam” (and the associated “Pakistaniness” of the author) they also display a contradictory stance that undermines some aspects of Aslam’s self-positioning by sometimes querying his accuracy. This suggests the power of Aslam’s established reputation, built on decades of self-promotion. “Brand Aslam” mediates interpretations of the novel in the reviews. As Gardiner argues in “Recuperating the Author,” authorial intention is “re-biographized”, in ways that influence interpretation through strategies of “genre branding, promotional supplement[s] and marketing strategies” (274).

In interviews and autobiographical writing Aslam portrays himself as something of a tortured artist, driven by nothing but a desire to represent what is “real” and true – what *means* – even if it is not entirely factual. Brouillette discusses such portrayals in relation to postcolonial writers more generally, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. She suggests that “an author’s attempt at self-definition ... manifest[s] itself as hints of nostalgia for an autonomous past” (that of the “romantic-era’s professional author-cum-genius figure”) and yet “that nostalgia rapidly gives way to a will to be reconciled with a global market for cultural products” (*Postcolonial Writers* 68-69). What Brouillette calls “nostalgia” can be seen in Aslam’s multiple claims where he stresses the “reality” of his work in relation to his role as an *artist* somehow exempt from the petty issues of (national) politics: “Everything I write about is taken from real life” (“Editor to Author: An Interview (Part One)” n.p.). He adds,

My work has both beauty and the terror of existence – my aim is to show the ugliness without destroying the reader’s capacity for love and happiness. I wish to celebrate the fact of being alive on this planet. Living inside this body with its five senses. And, once again, it all comes from real life.” (“Editor to Author: An Interview (Part Two)” n.p.)

The “real” world that Aslam repeatedly portrays is that of the country he left at the age of fourteen, and the “terror” and “ugliness” he represents has its locus here. It is this “reality” – and “violent political history” – that the majority of reviewers focus on and accept *as real* (despite quibbles about some factual details and a sense, for some, that the novel is rather too overloaded with “topical snippets” (as per Bilal in *The Washington Post*): a dark, desperate Pakistan characterised by cruelty and brutality born from religious intolerance.

The paradox, then, is that most of the reviews call into question Aslam’s fictional representation and yet, also, praise his ability to “hol[d] the mirror up to history” (Shortt n.p.) and “offer a searing glimpse into the life and times of contemporary Pakistan” (Roy n.p.). The author’s repeated insistence that his art “all comes from real life” seems to allow him to do misrepresentation. My analysis of the reviews suggests that they confirm Huggan’s assertion about reader responses to postcolonial texts more generally: “despite their fictional status, [these works are read] for the anthropological information they provide” (*Postcolonial Exotic* vii). As a result of the (self) promotion that mediates his reviewers’ responses, not only does Aslam emerge as a saleable commodity in the international literary market, so too does the nation he *represents*.

Chapter Five: Reception of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

5.1 Introduction

The initial reception of Mohsin Hamid's first two novels, *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) offer striking insights into how reader positioning and socio-politico-historical-publication contexts influence reader response and evaluation of texts. The difference in their reception appears to confirm Masood Raja's claim that Anglophone texts from the margins receive a different reception in their country of origin and the West and that these differences can be explained due to readers' "nationalistic habitus" ("Competing Habitus" 348). When first published, *Moth Smoke* was enthusiastically received in Pakistan and neighbouring India but barely registered in the wider global literary market. In contrast, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* gained very little 'local' attention when first published but became something of an 'overnight sensation' in the West where it was widely reviewed to considerable acclaim and received numerous awards.⁸⁶ (It also caused some controversy, especially among 'lay' readers who objected to what they perceived as the novel's anti-American sentiments.) A few Pakistani and Indian reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

⁸⁶ Awards include the Man Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlisted in 2007 with a prize of \$120,000), *The New York Times* Notable Book of the Year award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize (2008, Eurasia Region), the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award (2008), the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (shortlisted in 2009), the Ambassador Book Award (2008) and also the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature (2008). *The Guardian* selected it as one of the books which defined the 2000s ("What We Were Reading" n.p.). In terms of sales, it vaulted to fourth on *The New York Times* best seller list from 2007 to 2011 (Jane Perlez "A Pakistani-American Voice in Search of a True Home"). It has been translated into many different languages. The story was also adapted into a movie by Mira Nair in 2012 which received significant acclaim. The novel also gained remarkable fame after being included in the curriculum of many international universities: these include several American universities, including Georgetown, Rutgers University, Tulane, and Washington University (Abhimanyu Chandra n.p.) and British universities including Newcastle University ("Press Office: Award-winning author to speak" n.p.); and several New Zealand universities such as Massey University (as a part of "Introduction to English Studies" n.p.) and Otago University ("English at Otago" n.p.). There is no critical text on Pakistani Anglophone fiction (after 2007) which does not refer to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* – this is testament of its status.

appeared belatedly (as I will explain in the review analysis section later) in response to this international attention and far more after the novel was made into an internationally-released film in 2013. This suggests that Maniza Naqvi is correct when she claims that, for Pakistani readers and writers of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, “the opinions of outsiders matter the most” (n.p.). However, the reason for this belated reviewer attention in Pakistan could be more benign: South Asian readers were not interested in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because, fundamentally, it was not addressed to this audience but rather to readers in the West. In her article “Perpetual Motion”, Rafia Zakaria argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an explanation of Pakistan for “an unseen Western audience” (n.p.) and that it continues the tradition of “writing back” to the colonisers by early Indian English writers (as discussed in my Introduction) “with the specific intention of rectifying Western misconceptions” (n.p.).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist opens at a restaurant in Lahore where the Pakistani protagonist Changez talks, in monologue, to an unnamed American man. He discusses his feudal background in Pakistan, his life as a student at Princeton, US, and the way he embraced the “American Dream” of (migrant) success by accepting an elite job at the firm Underwood Samson (via acronym suggesting the “US”). Here he learns financial “fundamentals” in the name of maximising profit and is assigned the responsibility of evaluating businesses for their profitability (and so instigating the closure of those that fail to perform in economic terms). He also relates his failed love affair with an American woman, Erica, who apparently commits suicide, unable to relinquish her love for her first boyfriend, Chris, who died of cancer. The thrust of his story is to relate his gradual general disenchantment with the country, as a result of American responses to him – a dark-skinned, bearded outsider – following 9/11. He relates how this “racial profiling,” in addition to a crucial meeting with a man named Juan Batista in Chile, where he has to evaluate a book-selling, encourages him to rethink his “fundamentals” and those of the nation in which he thought he was accepted. Changez informs his American

listener (and the reader) that he decided to return to Pakistan in the wake of 9/11, took a job at a local college and began agitating against American foreign policy (in the backdrop of the impending Indo-Pak 2001-02 standoff). After the meal is over, Changez and the American leave the restaurant and are followed by a bearded waiter. The conclusion is ambiguous about the (ideological) identity of Changez and his interlocutor. Has Changez become an “anti-American” (fundamentalist) threat, potentially setting up some kind of “cell” amongst his students in Pakistan? Is the American a CIA operative with a mission to eliminate this threat? Has Changez “set up” the American and is leading him to a deadly ambush or is the American an undercover CIA agent sent to kill Changez? Or could the two just be chance acquaintances, who meet randomly at a café and decide to share the route home to their various destinations?

Three events stand out in the novel (and are discussed most often by reviewers): the first is the “smile” that flickers on Changez’ lips after the twin-towers’ demise; the second is the ambiguous ending about who, if anyone, gets killed in the end – the American or Changez – or whether anything actually happens?; the third is Changez’ assignment in Chile and meeting with Juan Bautista who shares the story of Christian janissaries forced by Muslims to fight against the Christian Empire during Crusades. It is implied that as a result of hearing this story, Changez re-evaluates his status as a traitor to his religion and culture. Is he a “Muslim janissary” in service of western capitalist fundamentals?

5.1.1 *Moth Smoke as Prequel*

As a result of the interest in Hamid’s second novel, western critical attention was retrospectively focused on the first, *Moth Smoke* which is set in late-1990s Lahore, a city overshadowed by the nuclear stand-off between Pakistan and India. The novel is framed as his trial, with the reader positioned, in the second person, as the judge. The narrative traces the

downfall of brilliant Darashikoh Shezad (“Daru”) after he loses his job in a local bank and faces many obstacles in his attempt to achieve social and financial success due to his middle-class origins. He is in love with Mumtaz, the wife of his childhood best friend, Aurangzeb (“Ozi”), and begins an affair with her. Mumtaz, we come to learn, has a secret career as an investigative journalist (unusual for a Pakistani woman) and it is her love for drugs, sports and issues to do with inequity, and an obvious sexual attraction, that joins her with Daru. Daru’s downward trajectory reaches its nadir when he is arrested for a murder he did not commit but before this, we are given ample examples of his (moral and social) decline that result from his illicit sexual engagement, ostracising views on Pakistan’s nuclear bomb testing, drug-taking and links with drug dealer and rickshaw driver Murad Badshah. *Moth Smoke* focuses on Daru’s personal crisis after he witnesses Ozi’s land cruiser crushing (and killing) a young boy and has to revise his (moral) evaluation of his erstwhile best friend. Later, Ozi is instrumental in Daru’s wrongful arrest for the boy’s murder. All this happens in the backdrop of key Moghul historical which offer an allegorical reading of the novel.

Hamid’s debut novel was very well received in South Asia and reportedly achieved a something of a cult [status] in Pakistan and even India” (David Pilling n.p.). As Pilling suggests, the local popularity of the book is most likely “because it is about a conflict within” Pakistan, and also between Pakistan and India. Relative wealth in Lahore is indicated in the novel by those who drive large cars (Pajeros and land-cruisers), can afford air conditioning, and have the means and contacts to thwart justice. The descriptions of unbearable heat, power-outages, customary behaviours (food, dress and language), class-divisions and so on would have been very familiar to those upwardly mobile Pakistanis (and Indians) able to read English – a small number of Pakistanis who were, most likely, Hamid’s ideal readers. It was also excitingly *new*, in terms of content and thematic concerns, for South Asian writing at the time, as Hamid has noted about the novel:

When [*Moth Smoke*] came out, South Asian literature was in a very different space. It was the village, magic, rope tricks, that kind of stuff. Heroin-using, an affair – it hadn't really been done in literary fiction. [...] The idea of South Asian fiction *written for South Asians, feeling and sounding like it is written for South Asians* as opposed to the 'must-be-anointed-abroad' thing. That's why *Moth Smoke* is a bigger deal in South Asia than it was abroad. ("Mohsin Hamid on Writing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" n.p., my emphasis)

Hamid here clearly stresses how reader evaluation depends on the specifics of location and "interpretive community": this text was popular in South Asia (and presumably, not so popular in the West) because it was "written for South Asians" and "feel[s] and sound[s] like it is written for South Asians." (In contrast, I suggest, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* feels and sounds like it was written for western readers.)

The relative lack of interest and acclaim in the West for *Moth Smoke* is to be expected for a first novel by a writer from a country with limited visibility on the (literary) western radar at the time, and, moreover, a novel set in middle-class Lahore and largely focused on middle-class Lahorian concerns, despite the suggestion by some that these concerns are 'universal.'⁸⁷ An exception to this lack of western attention was a review in *The New York Times* by South Asian Indian-American novelist Jhumpa Lahiri, published in March 2000, which expresses appreciation for the novel's explanation of Pakistan's changing social scene. Lahiri is sceptical, however, about the novel's literary merit, especially the multiple points of view employed, which she refers to as "distracting" because of "the constant shifting of gears" (n.p.). The only

⁸⁷ *Moth Smoke* was briefly mentioned in *The New York Review of Books* and in *The New York Review of Books* where Anita Desai read it in conjunction with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983) (n.p.). There is also a very brief mention (around a couple of lines) of the book in the magazine's "Notable Books" for 2000 (n.p.). It did win a Betty Trask Award, for first novels written by authors under the age of 35, who reside in a current or former Commonwealth nation (2001) and was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway award – for first books of fiction.

other western review of significance appeared in *The Independent*. The author, Aamer Hussein, a Pakistani-born writer who lives in London, expresses concern over Hamid's use of "narrative teases" and "overblown language" (Aamer Hussein n.p.). Expectedly, the interest in *Moth Smoke* accelerated after *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* gained attention in the West: Pilling mentions that its "re-release in the UK [gave] it a second life" (n.p.). After Penguin re-issued it in paperback form in 2011, a small number of reviews were published, for instance in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Suggesting the influence of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* on the (re)reading of the earlier novel, in *The Independent*, Brandon Robshaw describes *Moth Smoke* as a "tense thriller with a shock ending" (n.p.) in contrast to the newspaper's 2007 categorisation of the text as a social novel.

It seems clear that *Moth Smoke* cannot easily be charged with what Sarah Brouillette refers to as "fetishistic localism" (*Postcolonial Writers* 88) – characterised by an author's attempt to fulfil a foreign (usually metropolitan) reading community's desire to attain knowledge of a "cultural other." It is also hard to argue, along Graham Huggan's lines, that in this text Hamid resorts to "staged marginality," characterised by the writing by "marginalised individuals or social groups [who] are moved to dramatise their 'subordinate' status for the benefit of a majority or mainstream audience" (*Postcolonial Exotic* 87). Indeed, as Hamid suggests, this novel was "written for South Asians" (Pilling n.p.). This attribution of an ideal South Asian reading audience cannot, however, be extended to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The differing 'local' and western responses (in terms of numbers of reviews in each location) to *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not only to do with their content and settings but also *when* they were published. This "when" is particularly important in discussions of contemporary Pakistani fiction: *Moth Smoke* was published the year before the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on various American sites on 11 September 2001. While *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was read with a decidedly "ethnographic" focus and

“anthropological” eye, as I have discussed in my first chapter, seeking authoritative information about not only Islam but also (to be frank) Islamic fundamentalist terrorists. The degree to which postcolonial authors may be strategically complicit in ‘feeding’ such readerly desires and expectations to gain international acclaim is, as I have discussed, extensively debated in discussions of Pakistani Anglophone literature. Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner, for example, directly link “staged marginality” or “strategic exoticism” with “commodification” insofar as literature accused of such deliberate anticipation of consumer demand “uses [the author’s] location outside the mainstream to sell a product to specific reading audiences” (201). It could be argued, however, that some Pakistani authors anticipated and responded to post-9/11 international interest by not simply “re-orientalising” their nation/people/Islam but rather by writing what might be called “de-orientalising,” educative fiction. This is fiction that contributes, according to Madeline Clements:

[A] pan-Islamic attempt to respond in some measure and in English to the reductive and polarising perceptions of Muslims and Islam produced after the attacks on the World Trade Centre, and the hostile climate of the ensuing “war on terror” (*Writing Islam* 16)

Whether writing for an intended western audience has resulted in simplification, re-Orientalism or “selling out” on the part of postcolonial (and Pakistani) authors is a question that repeatedly surfaces in literary criticism. Peter Morey suggests this about *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, referring to it a “diasporic English-language text that has reaped the rewards of its position as a successful global commodity” and calls both Hamid and the text the “beneficiaries of the globalized book market” (*Islamophobia and the Novel* 213). Setting aside the vexed issue of commodification, for now, it is nonetheless clear that Hamid’s second novel, which was not only published after 9/11 but directly engages with the events on this day and their aftermath,

was not “written for South Asians,” or not primarily for them in the same way as *Moth Smoke*.⁸⁸ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it has received a great deal more attention in the West than his first. One of the points Said emphasises in *Orientalism* is the authority of the European-American academy and the power/knowledge axis circulating around it; *Moth Smoke*’s transition from the local to the global, after years of being largely ignored by reviewers, is, arguably, an instance of this phenomenon: international readers of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* began to reconsider *Moth Smoke*.

This said, there are dangers in making claims about the extent to which different reading responses can *simply* be attributed to readers’ geographic locations, particularly if such claims reinforce a clear-cut East-West binary. As I’ve noted, in the case of writers branded “Pakistani,” many no longer live in Pakistan or have spent extensive periods living in the West. They are “glocal” rather than local and often live in or identify with more than one nation and/or culture. The same applies to many *reviewers*, in South Asia and the US/Britain. It is perhaps best, then, to take a cue from Gabrielle Bellot’s comments on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: how one reads the novel (especially on its ending), she asserts, “largely depends on *what one assumes* about Pakistan and America” (n.p., my emphasis). In the discussion of reviews of the novel (below), I have thus tried to determine what each reviewer “assumes about Pakistan and America” given the content and tone of their reviews – and, also, what I have been able to learn about the “identity” of the reviewer and the newspaper or magazine in which the review appears. This means, of course, that I have imposed my own assumptions on the “implied author” of each review and recognise that it is more than likely that my interpretations of the reviews depend in no small way on what I “assume” about both Pakistan and America.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ It could be that he anticipated a “dual readership” of the kind proposed by Catherine Innes (discussed in my first chapter), one comprising “inside readers” (Pakistani) and “excluded readers” (western).

⁸⁹ As I have acknowledged in the introduction and “Methodology” chapter, my reading of the reviews as a “real reader” is representation of my dispositions, intentions and inclinations.

Hamid appears to have written the novel anticipating, even inviting, divergent reader responses: “The novel is not supposed to have a correct answer,” he said in an interview with Deborah Solomon. “It’s a mirror. It really is just a conversation, and *different people will read it in different ways*” (“The Stranger” n.p., my emphasis). The idea that how people respond to the novel might reflect back (“mirror”) *themselves* is central to reader-response theory more generally. Wolfgang Iser, quoted in my first chapter, uses the metaphor of a “divining rod” rather than a “mirror” to make a claim about reading more generally: “if a literary text does something to its readers, it simultaneously *tells us something about them*. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, and inclinations and eventually our overall makeup” (“Do I write for an Audience?” 313, my emphasis). For later reader-reception theorists like Stanley Fish, however, if the individual reader’s response is not simply subjective but, like the reader him/herself, is “a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it, then the meanings [s/he] confers on texts are not [his/her] own but have their source in *the interpretive community (or communities)* of which [they are] a function” (*Is There a Text in this Class?* 335, my emphasis). What seems crucial here is the parenthetical plural introduced by Fish: the meaning readers confer on texts may not be the result of their unique individuality (an idea he resists) or their positioning in a singular “interpretive community” but a result of the interpretive *communities* to which they belong. Many writers of “Pakistani” fiction, and the readers/reviewers of such fiction, are positioned in multiple “interpretive communities” as a result of their globalised identities and cannot simply be reduced to a simple locational “habitus.”

5.2 Contextualising Mohsin Hamid and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

In this chapter, I examine how certain features, effects or patterns in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* have been foregrounded in particular initial reviews of the novel and consider

whether reviewers' differing responses are reflective of their national/cultural identity and, if so, to what extent the reviewer's "habitus" (Pakistan, India, the UK and the US) might contribute to their evaluations of the novel. I do so to suggest that while reviewer location is important it is not the only determining factor in textual evaluation.

The idea that Changez might be a (Muslim) terrorist varies according to the readership (and might appeal to some right-leaning western readers). So too the idea that Changez' American listener might be a government agent (which may appeal to more conservative Pakistani or Muslim readers). Hamid upsets the easy responses of readers by not offering a definite answer key questions: Who dies in the end, if anyone dies? Is Changez really a terrorist? Is the American a contractor on an assassination mission? Why did Changez smile after looking at television footage of the Twin Towers attack? In many interviews, Hamid has emphasised his deliberate intention to refuse any easy identification of Changez as a "terrorist," or any simple response to the novel or its conclusion. He tries, he says, to write "novels that maximise [the] possibility of opening themselves up to *being read in different ways*, to involving the reader as a kind of character, indeed as a kind of co-writer" and stated that "I don't intend my novels as puzzles. I intend them as invitations to dance" ("On Writing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" n.p., emphasis mine). As he explains in an interview published in *Harcourt*:

[B]y taking readers inside a man who both loves and is angered by America, and hopefully by allowing readers to feel what that man feels, I hope to show that the world is more complicated than politicians and newspapers usually have time for. We need to stop being so confused by the fear we are fed: a shared humanity unites us with people we are encouraged to think of as our enemies. (n.p.)

Although Hamid invites the reading of his novel “in different ways” I suggest that even without this overt invitation it would have been read “differently,” due to its ambiguous nature, with much of that difference attributable to the “interpretive communities” inhabited by his readers. Reader responses to the ambiguous ending do far more to suggest the reader’s ideological leanings than they do to shed light on what Hamid ‘really meant’. How they read the ending, and the novel as a whole offers insight into what they assume about Pakistan and America. Bluntly, those who read the ending as a suggestion that Changez has become a “(reluctant) Islamic terrorist” reveal more about their ideological positioning than they shed light on the author.

5.2.1 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as 9/11 Fiction

Before I turn to a discussion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*’s initial (review) reception, some preliminary remarks about the contexts (cultural and geographical) in which the novel’s readers operate are necessary. I have suggested that the significant western response to the novel is reflective of widespread interest in the region known as ‘Af-Pak’ in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent American invasion of Afghanistan. Noting that a special issue (2010) of the magazine *Granta* features Pakistan and focuses almost entirely on the “War on Terror years, the political upheaval, the instability, the danger and death,” Pakistani writer Bina Shah finds herself wondering whether violence and terror have become “sexy to Western readers,” implicating some writers in a “cold-blooded consideration of the market trends” (152). However, Shah ultimately concedes that events pursuant to 11 September 2001 “have been so overwhelming and all-surrounding” that they cannot be evaded as creative concerns by writers from the region (151). The “most dangerous country on earth” she notes wryly, “is a pretty

exciting place in which to be a writer” (153). Shah’s comments suggest a kind of sensationalist fascination with the topic of terrorism etc. on the part of western readers. But in her book *Hybrid Tapestries*, Muneeza Shamsie considers the possibility that for some readers (e.g. educated, academic, or otherwise intellectually driven readers), the attraction seems to be with an attempt to understand fundamentalism, world politics, historical events, and war rather than just being titillated by these concerns. She writes (although a bit pejoratively), “In the West, the 9/11 attacks led to a preoccupation with words such as ‘terrorism,’ ‘fundamentalists,’ and ‘Muslims’” (401).

Many fictional texts were written in response to, or about, the events of 9/11 – so many that they earned their own title, “9/11 fiction” worldwide.⁹⁰ Many academic books and articles have been written about this body of fiction.⁹¹ Important fictional texts in this sub-genre include Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005), Martin Amis’ *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta* (2006), Claire Messus’s *The Emperor’s Children* (2006), John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2007), Don de Lillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) and Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherworld* (2008). These are, of course, texts by western authors: a few by writers with eastern connections are Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), Laila Lalami’s *Secret Son* (2010) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) among novels.⁹² The western fictional examples have, until quite recently, been the ones most often discussed under the heading of “9/11 fiction”. In very general terms, such texts tend to focus on American (and western, more generally) experiences in the aftermath of 9/11: trauma and “working through,” the difficulties of bearing witness, the impossibility of representing the

⁹⁰ According to a BBC article published in 2011, 164 novels have been written on American 9/11 (Alizeh Kohari n.p.) while Däwes has identified 231 novels worldwide (8).

⁹¹ Examples include Robert Gray’s *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011); Tim S. Gauthier’s *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (2015); Magali Cornier Michael’s *Narrative Innovation in 9/11 Fiction* (2014); Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook and Sebastian Groes’ (eds.) *Women’s Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts* (2014); Daniel O’Gorman’s *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel* (2015); and Arin Keeble’s *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity* (2014).

⁹² Although see Aroosa Kanwal’s *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11* (2015) and Masood Ashraf Raja’s *The Religious Right and the Talibanization of America* (2016).

‘unrepresentable’ and the fall from innocence to experience with an emphasis, then, on nostalgia for a lost past. In this sense, many are what Birgit Dāwes calls “diagnostic” or “symbolic” in her book *Ground Zero Fiction* (2011). When these texts pay attention to the (non-American, terrorist) “other”, Dāwes refers to this attention as an “appropriative approach” – that is, the texts seek to “appropriate[e] ... the perpetrator’s voice from the outside” (248). Robert Gray suggests of these novels that many resorts to simplistic binaries and “locate crisis in terms of opposition – them and us, the personal and the political, the oppressor and the victim” (65). These are, of course, broad generalisations but suggest a critical consensus that many (western) 9/11 novels (certainly those published in the first five-odd years after the terrorist attacks) are inwardly focused and often rely on stereotypical assumptions about “them and us.”

In contrast, suggests M. Shamsie, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is “the first Pakistani-English novel to challenge these assumptions” (*Hybrid Tapestries* 401). Hamid presents an alternative – and critical – view of America and American lifestyle and values, seen from the perspective of a highly educated Muslim and Pakistani citizen. It has, according to academic Irfan Khawaja, “come to be regarded by critics as offering an authoritative account by a self-styled insider of Muslim resentment for America” (54). The novel constitutes an answer to the question “why do they hate us?”, raised by Kamila Shamsie in her essay “The Storytellers of Empire” which translates to “Who are these people and what do they have to do with us?” and adds up to the body of novels written about 9/11 (n.p.). I would suggest that Hamid’s work could be read as engaging in what Huggan terms “staged marginality” (*Postcolonial Exotic* xii) – not staged in the sense of being fake, but performatively “simulating the conditions in which the dominant (in this case white Anglo-Saxon) culture perceives ... marginalised people” as Peter Morey argues in *Islamophobia and the Novel* (218). The term “staged marginality” is used by Huggan to describe the process by which writers occupying

outsider positions within western literary and cultural landscapes employ and dramatise their ‘alienness’ to cater to the taste of the audience and its desire for exotic otherness (*Postcolonial Exotic* xii). Writers who stage marginality, he argues, are bound up in the larger process of cultural commodification that characterise the global literary marketplace and yet within this they have some degree of “power ... to exercise agency over their work” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 30). Precisely because they are aware of the process and risks of orientalising exoticism, they can manipulate and play with “exoticist codes of representation” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 32). “[P]ostcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within,” writes Huggan, “either manage to subvert these codes or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power” (32). In this way, “exoticism is repoliticised” and can “unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness” (*Postcolonial Exotic* ix).

There are risks involved in employing such a strategy. Ostensible de-orientalising of a text may be perceived as re-orientalising it if it fails to fulfil the role of subversion (see Lau, “Re-Orientalism and South Asian” 4). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for example, Hamid’s decision to represent the East-West relationship entirely through an eastern/Oriental lens could be perceived as further polarising East and West. This is an aggressive re-orientalism, deliberate, dichotomising, and confrontational. Written from a Muslim immigrant perspective, the text invites readers to reflect on the usual orientalist bifurcation of “us” vs. “them” but instead of portraying Pakistan from an American perspective, it depicts America through the eyes of a Pakistani American narrator. Whether this tactic of reversal is seen as a method of empowerment in the commodified world of postcolonial literature, or whether it appears to reinforce stark divisions between East and West, depends on reader interpretation. This raises an inevitable if important question: to what extent might the foregrounding of ‘popular’ western political concerns be read as a deliberate ploy on the part of writers ‘from the margins,’ like Hamid, in anticipation of western/global recognition and book sales? Cultural theorist Timothy

Brennan, in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, suggests “today a new literary genre is emerging that gives the impression of having been produced precisely with an eye to their postcolonial reception” (108). Do ‘postcolonial’ writers, like Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, embrace, and even exploit otherness (in themselves as authors, their characters, and their settings), with an eye on the end-goal of western reception (and book sales)? Or do they instead write ‘authentically’ as cultural representatives with the aim of ‘educating’ western readers about their specifically ‘other’ nation/culture/ethnicity? While I recognise the problems involved in making assertions about authorial intentionality and their ‘deliberate’ aims, this can be justified, in large part, by assessing what authors have had to say about their goals and intentions – particularly authors as prolific as Hamid is in discussing his work. How Hamid positions himself – and his writing – in multiple interviews and non-fictional essays has surely impacted how his work has been received.

5.2.2 Hamid’s Self-positioning

Hamid has rarely represented himself as a Muslim writer; neither has he claimed himself to be a precisely Pakistani one.⁹³ When asked about his home, Hamid describes himself as a resident of three places, Pakistan, America and Europe:

Either way, the basic itinerary of my life has been this: born in Lahore, moved to San Francisco at age three, to Lahore again at nine, to New Jersey at 18, to Lahore a third time at 22, to Boston at 23, New York at 26, London at 30, and Lahore a fourth time at

⁹³ An exception is in an interview with Deborah Solomon where he positions himself as a writer from the Muslim world, if not specifically Muslim himself: he states, “But there are not many of us from the Muslim world who are getting heard over here. And the ones who are mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves” (n.p.).

38. (I've had multi-month stints in Manila and Milan as well.) ("Mohsin Hamid on Writing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" n.p.)

The profile that emerges is of a cosmopolitan who has thrived in different places. Hamid frequently describes himself as a "nomad" and a "mongrel" in Rushdiesque fashion ("Deconstructing Terror" n.p.), and as someone who is "hybridized" ("From Refugees to Politics" n.p.). He writes,

My friend, a Lahore-born nomad like myself, had a theory about us," he writes. "We spoke Urdu, cooked mutter keema, danced the bhangra, regularly overslept, we had roots. And yet we drifted. So he called us water lilies, after a plant rooted not in dry earth but in ponds and streams. ("I Love this Dirty Town" n.p.)

Despite Hamid's emphasis on his cosmopolitan identity, after the publication of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, he appears to have taken on the ambitious role of an East/West cultural mediator. This is visible in much of his non-fictional writing, including journalistic opinion pieces featured in western newspapers as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, such as "Pakistan Must not be Abandoned," "Pakistan's Silent Majority is Not to be Feared," and "Why Do They Hate Us?" As a consequence, in some quarters he is seen as a representative Pakistani author (Hamid "The Reluctant Interpreter" n.p.; Claudia Perner 23). Hamid has done little to distance himself from this dominant perception. For instance, interviewer Pilling claims that Hamid's relocation back to Pakistan was as much an attempt "to fend off criticism that for someone who writes about Pakistan he was out of touch with his homeland", as it was to stay close to family and remove himself from post-9/11 challenges in the US. Unsurprisingly, newspapers and periodicals in the US and the UK have sought him out as an interpreter of things Pakistani and Afghani. In 2013, the magazine *Foreign*

Policy named him one of the world's "100 Leading Global Thinkers" for precisely this intermediary role.

But at the same time, Hamid seems to contest such pigeon-holing. In an interview with James Adams, Hamid admits that he has had to be careful not to become one of those westernised "go-to poster guys" representative of a country or generation (n.p.). In another interview, he explains his unease at being labelled Pakistani: "In Pakistan, where I was born, I've lived less than half my life. I feel like a migrant even in Pakistan" (Olivia Ho n.p.). Hamid points out that in spite of his possession of a British passport and the fact that he has never held an American one, he is perceived as a "Pakistani writer" in the UK, whereas in the US, he is described as a "Pakistani American" (Anna Hartnell 340). Describing an interview with Hamid, Khaleeli writes, "Hamid certainly looks at ease. His accent is a fluid mix of British and American pronunciations, with Pakistani inflections, while his clothes are dark, smart and neutral" (Hamid "Pakistan and India" n.p.). Similarly, Pilling makes note of Hamid's "impeccable English" (n.p.). For all his insistence on his cosmopolitan identity, many commentators on Hamid assume that he speaks to the West on behalf of Muslims and Pakistanis. For instance, Gohar Karim Khan, in her PhD dissertation, describes Hamid as "a novelist and a journalist representative of Pakistan and the Muslim community" (173). In an interview with Katherine Federici Greenwood, Hamid's friend and an Indian-American author, Suketu Mehta, notes that Hamid is "expected to speak on behalf of all the other Pakistanis who do not have a forum" in the West. "I think people will read this book and empathize a lot more with what it feels like to be human and targeted or categorized," Mehta states (n.p.). So, while Hamid is cast in the role of Pakistani spokesperson, his anxiety at that positioning is visible.

A number of interviews provide insight into Hamid's perceived relationship with his readers. Hamid explains that dramatic monologue form of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* means the narrative reads as if being explained to a westerner. He acknowledges the necessity

of “structures” but immediately afterwards distances himself from the readership this implies, “I don’t have a Lahori reader or an Australian reader. To a certain extent, I write for myself in the sense that I try to write books I would like to read” (“Against Binaries” n.p.). Hamid clarifies that he does not specifically write for any particular audience: he feels he is part of both the western and the Pakistani audience and does not believe in the monolithic “western audience” (“Against Binaries” n.p.). In an interview with Carl Wilkinson from *Financial Times*, he altered the question of “audience” to “places”, declaring that his “books are different because they were written in different places” (“I’m Back!” n.p.). He further explains,

The Reluctant Fundamentalist was written in significant part looking back on America while living in London, and that reflects itself in the European modernist structure and the particular voice. *Moth Smoke* was written looking at Pakistan from America, and there is a much more Americanised voice and perspective in that book. And *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) was looking at Pakistan from Pakistan, but having been to lots of other places” (“I’m Back!” n.p.)

Hamid here speaks of his awareness of the audience located in different geographical settings and his evident geographical mobility. This awareness reflects in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which consistently addresses its readers in the second-person pronoun “you.” In the review analyses that follow, I will look at the readings of different reviewers with a focus on the novel’s themes and style in the backdrop of Hamid’s public appearance and his interviews.

5.3 Review Analysis

In accordance with the selection criteria discussed in my methodology chapter, I have identified the following initial reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as the basis for my

discussion of its reader reception.⁹⁴ The list is arranged chronologically according to different reading constituencies (starting with Pakistan):

Table 3: Review Sources in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Source	Reviewer	Title	Publication	Location
<i>The News</i>	Saeed ur Rehman	“Success of Understatement”	29 April 2007	Pakistan
<i>Dawn</i>	Rafia Zakaria	“The Real Pakistan”	08 May 2013	Pakistan
	Shahbano Bilgrami	“ <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> by Mohsin Hamid”	24 June 2007	Pakistan
<i>Pakistaniat</i>	Adnan Ahmad	“Book Review: Mohsin Hamid’s <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> ”	01 July 2007	Pakistan
<i>The Seattle Times</i>	Paula Bock	“An American Dream Turns to Dust in the Rubble of the Twin Towers”	10 April 2007	US
<i>SF Gate</i>	Chandras Choudhury	“A Pakistani Empowered and Repulsed by America”	11 April 2007	US
<i>The Washington Post</i>	Laila Halaby	“Return of the Native”	22 April 2007	US
<i>The New York Times</i>	Karen Olsson	“I Pledge Allegiance”	22 April 2007	US
<i>The Brooklyn Rail</i>	Marina Budhos	“Fiction: Runes of Ruins”	02 May 2007	US
<i>National Review</i>	Ann Marlowe	“Buying Anti-American”	14 May 2007	US
<i>The New York Review of Books</i>	Sarah Kerr	“In the Terror House of Mirrors”	11 October 2007	US
<i>The Guardian</i>	James Lasdun	“The Empire Strikes Back”	03 March 2007	UK
	Jim Ottewill	“Mistaken Identities”	11 March 2007	UK

⁹⁴ A few of the reviews published are not included in the analysis. These include the UK based review published in *The Times* (London) by Trevor Lewis as it does not meet the minimum word requirement of 500 words. This also includes a few reviews of significance published elsewhere, including Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Two of them are the book reviews published in *The Globe and Mail* (“9/11 Change Everything” by Patrick Lohier’ and “The Reluctant Interpreter” by James Adams) and in *The Toronto Star* (“Taut Tale of Two Cities, Cultures” by Vit Wagner). There are also two movie reviews by Jay Stone published on Canada.com, one of which is about movie director Mira Nair. In New Zealand, there are no book reviews, but *Stuff* published a movie review “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” immediately after its release in 2013 (Linda Burgess n.p.). The novel review entitled “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” by Soumya Bhattacharya appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 14 April 2007; while the movie review entitled “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is Shadowed by Terrorism” by David Stratton, was published by *The Australian* on 18 May 2013.

	Andrew Anthony	“ <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> by Mohsin Hamid – Review”	23 December 2012	UK
<i>The Telegraph</i>	Alastair Sooke	“Man Booker 2007 Prize: The Reluctant Fundamentalist”	18 April 2007	UK
<i>London Review of Books</i>	Amit Chaudhuri	“Not Entirely Like Me”	04 October 2007	UK
<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>	Roz Kaveney	“Losing America”	12 October 2007	UK
<i>India Today</i>	Shri Prasannarajan	“Book Review: The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid.”	16 April 2007	India
<i>Outlook India</i>	Tabish Khair	“Unquiet American: A Monologue”	23 April 2007	India
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	Aasheesh Sharma	“Politics as Personal”	16 April 2007	India
	Manish Chand	“Book Review: The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid”	01 November 2008	India

As the table shows, seventeen major reviews were published when the novel was first released (2007) in the four locations I have chosen to survey. The second flush of review interest occurred during 2012-2013 when the movie version was in making and released. From this latter group, only two are specifically about the book, and I have also chosen to include them as sources. As I have discussed, Pakistani reviews of the novel published immediately after the novel’s publication are scarce. A full-length review of the book in the country’s preeminent source of literary reviews, *Dawn*, was published (in 2007) but I only found a significantly “adapted” version of this review in *Asian Review of Books* as mentioned by the latter’s editor in our correspondence. *Dawn* didn’t respond to my queries. Therefore, this review is included (by the same author who wrote for *Dawn*), but I wish to clarify that my source is *Asian Review of Books*.

I intend to assess whether reviewer responses to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* might reveal something about what the reviewer assumes about Pakistan and America or, put another way, whether his or her reviews might be considered as reflective of the “interpretive

community/ies” to which they belong. As such, it is useful to summarise what I have been able to learn about the “identity” of the reviewer and the newspaper or magazine in which their review appears. Among the Pakistani group, the reviews considered are published in *The News*, *Dawn* and on a blog *Pakistaniaat*. *The News* reviewer, Saeed ur Rehman, is a translator and a postcolonial researcher, who, at the time of writing his review, was based in Berlin. The third reviewer Shahbano Bilgrami is an award-winning Pakistani writer, editor, poet and a book reviewer. In an interview with Pooja Pande, she mentions that many Indian and Pakistani reviewers feel that foreign writers are unable to capture the South Asian experience (n.p.) but advocates for positive reviews for such writing in general.

The reviewer for *Dawn*, Rafia Zakaria, is also an academic whose work deals with the topic of women’s rights in Pakistan. Her *The New York Times* Op-Ed “The Myth of Women’s Empowerment” (2017) was shared over 30K times on Facebook (as described on the website of Columbia University). *Pakistaniaat* reviewer, Adnan Ahmad, was, at the time of writing the review, resident in the US but has now returned to his home country, Pakistan. In the by-line for his review, he is described as “a free-lance writer working in the financial sector” (n.p.). All four reviewers of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in Pakistani media are thus clearly cosmopolitan by virtue of their lengthy residency and extensive education undertaken outside of Pakistan. Moreover, although their assumed primary audience is Pakistani, they write in English and both they, and their readers, can be assumed to belong to the small, elite group of Pakistanis that can read and write in English and thus have a “transnational” outlook, at least in part, as a result of their education. All three, moreover, clearly hold (and express in their various publications) attitudes that can fairly be said to be ones that are strongly liberal and egalitarian – none could be said to espouse conservative Pakistani (or Muslim) opinions.

The American reviews belong to a diverse group. Writing for *The New York Times* is Karen Olsson – an American fiction writer and a journalist associated known for her left-wing

political writings. In an interview with Teresa Taylor, she expresses how important it is to reflect on “other viewpoints and critical attitudes” and not just be swayed with mainstream patriotic sentiments in America (Olsson “Karen Olsson –Texas Observer” 276). *The New York Review of Books* reviewer Sarah Kerr is a Washington-based, long-time contributor to the magazine on issues of culture and politics (including a review on Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction) and also a reviewer for book store Barnes and Noble. *The Washington Post* reviewer Laila Halaby is a famed Lebanese-American poet and author who writing deals with the issues of exile and cross-cultural encounter.⁹⁵ Similarly, the reviewer for *The Brooklyn Rail*, Marina Budhos is an acclaimed academic and author of mixed Indian-US descent, who writes about the challenges of Muslim citizenship, surveillance, and immigration in the 9/11 context and its socio-political impacts.⁹⁶

Writing for the conservative American paper *National Review*, Ann Rachel Marlowe is a Jewish-American critic, war-time journalist, attorney, businesswoman and a writer with a PhD. She has published two memoirs and frequently writes about US counterinsurgency in Afghanistan which she visited many times during 2002-2011. In one of her articles “Two Myths about Afghanistan” published in *The Washington Post*, she gives extensive praise to American efforts in Afghanistan (n.p.). Her viewpoint comes across as conservative and nationalistic. Marlowe’s ideological bent, coupled with her journalistic experience of the Af-Pak region is different from other American reviewers and this is reflected in her comments on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

⁹⁵ Halaby states, “In life and in stories I love contrasts and unlikely juxtapositions, which perhaps is the result of coming from two distinct cultures. I see artists as translators/interpreters who give us a glimpse at a situation or a person or a feeling in some more accessible medium. They can also offer us an eye into someone else’s world and help dispel stereotypes and misconceptions by tugging at that universal spot, the humanity within us all” (“Winner of the Pen” n.p.).

⁹⁶ In her review on Indian authors of diasporic origins, entitled “Post-9/11 Indian English Diaspora Fiction: Contexts and Concerns,” Angshuman Kar presents her as an Indian author (43).

The Seattle Times review is by Paula Bock who is a staff writer known for her investigative reporting. In 2002 she travelled (with photographer Betty Udesen) to Zimbabwe to write about HIV/AIDS for the paper and wrote a story “In Her Mother’s Shoes” which won several national and international awards (244). She has no direct connection to Pakistan, but her career as a civil rights activist probably explains why she was selected by the editorial board for this review made her fit for the review. The *SF Gate*’s reviewer is Chandrabhas Choudhury, a famed left-wing Indian novelist whose writings explore cultural, religious and political issues in India (Neha Kirpal n.p.). He frequently speaks against conservative Indian government policies on his twitter account.

The UK-based reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are published in *The Guardian*, the *TLS*, and the *London Review of Books*. Surprisingly, the text was reviewed three times in *The Guardian*, probably because Hamid is a regular contributor to the paper. The first reviewer (and the only one who is himself not a fiction writer) Jim Ottewill, is a British journalist, copywriter (for music) and content manager with a Bachelor’s degree in English literature (“Jim’s Liverpool” n.p.). The second is James Lasdun, a regular reviewer for this and other publications, a US-based British Jewish poet and award-winning fiction writer. His works explore the psycho-social differences between his English roots and his adopted home, America. The third reviewer for *The Guardian* is Andrew Anthony who is also an award-winning writer, an investigative journalist, and a regular book reviewer. His fictional work *The Fallout* (2007) explores a variety of topics such as racism, multiculturalism and Islamophobia and primarily documents his disenchantment with the liberal-left. He categorises 9/11 as a “hinge-moment in his political trajectory” (qtd. in Simon Cottee 17) which made him aware of “a new reality” (17). In condemning anti-westernism, he accuses Muslims of hypersensitivity and of adopting the role of victims.

The *London Review of Books* review is by Amit Chaudhuri, an academic, poet, reviewer, critic, and a well-established writer (of five novels on diasporic and identity themes) of Indian origins. In an article on non-western literature that appeared in *The Guardian*, he says, “All literatures outside western ones are wilfully underrated” due to their author’s ethnic background (“All non-western literature” n.p.). The *TLS* reviewer, Roz Kaveney, is a British writer, pop culture critic, poet, feminist, reviewer and a transgender rights activist.⁹⁷ She is described by *Huffington Post* contributor Diriye Osman as “one of the most incisive literary multi-hyphenates at work today” (n.p.).⁹⁸ *The Telegraph*’s reviewer Alastair Sooke is primarily a (deputy) art critic for the paper (from 2003) and on the Turner Prize selection panel for contemporary art. He is also a renowned broadcaster for his BBC commentaries (on the program *The Culture Show*) on (primarily British) art history and has written several books on modern and ancient (Greek/Roman) art.⁹⁹

Four reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* were published in India. Writing for *India Today* is Shri Prasannarajan, an editor (currently for the *Open Magazine* India) and an essayist who has written extensively on literature and politics. He is known for his conservative attitudes, and in one of his articles, he has described Pakistan as a “historical error” where “scriptural cold-bloodedness still has quasi-official protection” (“The Crown Prince of Bone-Saw Kingdom” n.p.). Manish Chand is a *Hindustan Times*’ political correspondent and the assistant editor of the paper who also covers crimes section (*Hindustan Times* “Manish Chand” n.p.). Aasheesh Sharma, the second reviewer for *Hindustan Times*, is an India-based journalist currently associated with *India Today* after obtaining a degree in journalism from Delhi University. He has frequently written on politics and culture and describes himself on his

⁹⁷ Her works such as *Dialectic of the Flesh* (2012), *Tiny Pieces of Skull* (2015), and *Rituals – Rhapsody of Blood* (2012-2014) can be categorised as fantasy fiction that deals with women/gay rights.

⁹⁸ In an article entitled “A Trump Christmas Carol”, Kaveney, with others, expresses dismay at American president Donald Trump’s discriminatory religious policies against Muslims (n.p.).

⁹⁹ His works include *Roy Lichtenstein: How Modern Art was Saved by Donald Duck* (2013), and *Pop Art: A Colourful History* (2015).

twitter account as anti-racist and liberal. *Outlook India*’s editor (and reviewer) Tabish Khair is an India-born Denmark-based academic and author whose work grapples with the challenges of Jihad and Islam in the contemporary world – themes quite similar to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.¹⁰⁰

As these summaries indicate, many of these reviewers are academics and/or authors whose works deal with intercultural issues and that makes them, in the words of Clayton Childress, “practitioners of the same art [fictional writing]” (171). Halaby, Choudhury, Zakaria, Khair, Budhos and Kaveney are grouped in this category. The others (two each from *The Guardian*, and *Hindustan Times* and one each from *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *India Today* and *National Review*) are investigative journalists, the last of which worked in this capacity with the American army. Most of the reviewers have strong commitments to human rights and tend to espouse liberal sentiments although three, as noted, have right-wing leanings. These different outlooks appear to have influenced the various reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as I discuss below.

5.3.1 Form/Aesthetic Elements

The Reluctant Fundamentalist was appreciated for its stylistic and literary qualities by the majority of the American reviewers. This is especially true of the review in *The New York Review of Books*, which articulates appreciation for novel’s literariness, specifically its ambiguity. It is described as interrogative of the reader’s assumptions, “elegant” in form, unlike *Moth Smoke*, and is not “scattered in construction.” Likewise, Choudhury in the *SF Gate* compares Hamid’s style to that of Dostoyevsky, Ivan Karamazov, and Orhan Pamuk, and calls

¹⁰⁰ As the titles of his books, like *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (2012), *Just another Jihadi Jane* (2016), and *The New Xenophobia* (2016), suggest.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist an “accomplished novel” (n.p.). The majority of the American reviews – those in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Brooklyn Rail* - appreciate that the novel is “different” from the mainstream. In *The New York Times*, Olsson credits Hamid for not writing another typical one-sided story of an immigrant’s alienating experience of discrimination and ignorance. Instead, Changez’ class aspirations, inner struggles and his resentments are described as refreshing. Halaby’s comments in *The Washington Post* are even more adulatory as she writes, “Extreme times call for extreme reactions, extreme writing. Hamid has done something extraordinary with this novel, and for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth reading” (n.p.). Her aesthetic evaluation of Hamid’s “extreme writing” is politically charged, linking stylistic innovation with the desirability of “a different view of the aftermath of 9/11” (n.p.). Budhos, in *The Brooklyn Rail*, is far less adulatory. She directly accuses Hamid of exploiting 9/11 praises *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a 9/11 novel which uses “reality” as a selling-factor in a time when “fiction sales [had] beg[un] to plummet” and, further, argues that he uses “anti-Americanism” (n.p.) as an important branding factor for the text. The review describes Hamid’s style as “spare” and “minimal” in contrast to “the paisley froth of Updike’s prose” but notes that the secondary characters are “schematic” i.e. simplified and symbolic due to the novel’s minimalist style (n.p.).

Mixed critique (appreciation of content and rejection of form) is expressed in the (arguably) conservative paper *The Seattle Times*. Bock uses the phrase “different flavour” to describe Changez’ insights into the western culture and claims that Hamid’s novel is a “seething commentary on America’s reputation in the non-western world” (n.p.). She finds it “extraordinary” because its perspective is so different from other 9/11 texts, although she finds no value in the novel’s ambiguous ending, comparing it to a freshman’s writing course piece. Overall, however, she acknowledges that the novel is “brilliantly written and well worth a read”

(n.p.). In contrast, Marlowe in the *National Review* single-handedly rejects the novel, referring to it as a “dreadful book” by literary standards, and describing it as “antiAmerican agitprop clumsily masquerading as a work of art” (n.p., punctuation original). Dismissing the idea that the novel might be exploring the conflicted, “divided” identity of American immigrants (like Changez), she condemns Hamid for “playing the “Muslim rage” card” and accuses him of “fraudulence and cheap cynicism” (n.p.). Changez is also rejected as a “poorly constructed and implausible character whose anti-Americanism is more aesthetic and snobbish than ideological” (n.p.). In this way, she states that the novel fails aesthetically because of its anti-American content, in contrast to Budhos who argues that the same “anti-Americanism” is a saleable feature.

Among the UK reviews, the three *The Guardian* reviews differ in their estimations of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*’s literary worth. The one which devotes the most space is James Lasdun’s review which describes the novel as “an intelligent, highly engaging piece of work” but suggests the use of extended allegory is “intrusive” and has a “stiffening effect on the narrative”, resulting in an “essayistic” piece (n.p.). Lasdun focuses on the construction of “symmetries and reciprocities” in the narrative which are seen as both a “strength and weakness” in the novel (n.p.). In addition to noting the allegorical significance of Erica’s name (Am-Erica), he also suggests that Chris’ name is significant because it recalls Christopher Columbus, thus representing the “nation’s [America’s] fraught relationship with its moment of European discovery and conquest” (n.p.).

Acknowledging the “allegorical symmetry” of the novel, Chaudhuri in the *London Review of Books*, comments on its unconventional dramatic form which, he asserts, is a mixture of South-Asian Anglophone writing genres: “autobiography; travelogue; the novel of diaspora or exile” (n.p.). Similarly, Kaveney, in the *TLS* review, hints at the complexity of the novel by referring to the “narrative games” Hamid plays (23). She compares Hamid’s use of ambiguity

to that of Conrad's in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) which also uses a framed monologue form. Sooke, from *The Telegraph*, also compares it to *Heart of Darkness*, referring to the conclusion as a "masterstroke of ambiguity" (n.p.) He classifies it as a thought-provoking "novella" and a "piece of technically accomplished writing" that is simultaneously entertaining (n.p.). Chaudhuri also responds positively to the novel's overt use of allegory, writing that "there's an almost delightful allegorical symmetry to the flow of events, as well as a sensuousness and finish that might belong to some other form of art: music, perhaps" (n.p.). *The New York Times'* reviewer Olsson does not comment on the allegorical structure of the novel but does note the allegorical names of the key characters (including that of Changez, whose name alludes to Genghis Khan). Kerr's review in *The New York Review of Books* is specifically concerned with the allegorical structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and argues that the novel's ambiguity is an effect of its interrogation of readers' assumptions. Kerr focuses, in particular, on the novel's employment of stereotypes to convey the widespread prejudices and biases that people from one nation have about people from other nations (in this case Pakistan and the US). But she suggests that the novel fails to evade the stereotypes it apparently seeks to highlight and undermine: "We're left to ponder the symbolism of Changez having been caught up in the game of symbolism – a game we ourselves have been known to play" (n.p.).

Many reviewers (from all reading groups) call attention to the novel's unconventional monologic form. Khair whose review is entitled "Unquiet American: A Monologue" credits the monologue (in its imitation of 18th-century monologues) as a major reason for the book's popularity (n.p.). Kerr, for example, comments on its "unusual structure" (n.p.) and *Pakistaniat* reviewer Ahmad observes that the narrative keeps both Changez' listener and Hamid's reader intensely engaged throughout the novel (n.p.). Other reviewers attribute different effects to the author's choice of the form: *The Washington Post's* Halaby suggests the novel enables Hamid to write an intimate conversation where the "reader and listener become one" (n.p.). Anthony

focuses on the monologue as a writing device, describing it as an “extremely formal, and one-sided” conversation which is utilised to establish “a beguiling and troubling hold on the reader” (n.p.) This conversation (as in monologue), he argues, reveals the “issues of cultural identity, American power and the victimisation of Pakistan” (n.p.). Although, like Marlowe and Budhos, he also criticises Hamid’s anti-Americanism. He accuses the novelist of attempting to “take refuge in crowd-pleasing anti-Americanism” instead of challenging what he describes as the “unreluctant fundamentalist” (n.p.). One reviewer from the UK, and two each from Pakistan and India – Chaudhuri, Bilgrami, Rehman, Khair and Sharma respectively – purport Hamid’s purpose is to perform an (East-West) role-reversal by giving voice to the East and silencing the West. For Chaudhuri, Changez’ monologue is a long confession addressed to the hapless and increasingly “reluctant” interlocutor (n.p.). His review is focused on a personal encounter (evident through the title “Not Entirely like Me”) he had two decades earlier, the experience of which he utilises for textual interpretation. Unlike many other reviewers/readers at the time (and since), Chaudhuri suggests that the “reluctant fundamentalist” of the novel’s title is the American, not Changez (n.p.). In contrast, Bilgrami reads the monologue “as the voice of a man” who eventually becomes a reluctant (Muslim) fundamentalist a technique and which allows Hamid to offer “intimate access to his protagonist’s mind” (n.p.). She praises Hamid for his ability to “build suspense” in the narrative as a result of this device (n.p.). Rehman considers the monologue an extremely controlled way of telling a story which limits the voice, narration and commentary to Changez. Sharma, who categorises the text as a “thrilling novella,” views the monologue as a device that allows the reader to “see America, Erica, Americans, Pakistan, modernity, Pakistanis’ through Changez’ eyes” (n.p.).

In their attempts to situate the novel aesthetically, a number of reviewers have compared *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to *Moth Smoke*. This occurs most often in Pakistani and Indian reviewers. The *Pakistaniat* reviewer suggests that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Hamid achieves the same ambiguous effects as he does in *Moth Smoke* but, in discarding polyphonic first-person voices, offers a far more mature questioning of “the truth” as a result of its single monologue (n.p.). *The News* review opens with a discussion of *Moth Smoke* which Rehman regards as Hamid’s successful experiment in employing multiple points of view, and narrative voices. Rehman lauds Hamid for the successful reinvigoration in *Moth Smoke*, for contemporary Pakistani readers, “of classic Urdu literary symbols like the moth, the flame, feuds and the intoxicated lovers” (n.p.). Comparing the two novels, Rehman then judges *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a more mature performance with a story of relatively greater significance, because of Hamid’s taut control over the narrative and his employment of understatement (n.p.). Bilgrami in the first of the *Dawn* reviews compares Changez to *Moth Smoke*’s protagonist Daru; the second *Dawn* reviewer Zakaria does not consider *Moth Smoke*, instead of placing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* alongside *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013). This is understandable given that her review was written in 2013 when the latter was published; nonetheless, lack of any reference to *Moth Smoke* is notable in the context of my discussion. Among Indian reviews, only *Hindustan Times* does not mention *Moth Smoke*. Prasannarajan, in *India Today*, appreciates *Moth Smoke* as an award-winning debut, in his/her review of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Khair in *Outlook India*, is honest enough to admit that he has not read *Moth Smoke* but signals the early novel as important in the understanding of Hamid’s work when he finishes his review by informing readers of his upcoming purchase of *Moth Smoke*.

In contrast, there are limited references to *Moth Smoke* in western reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which is to be expected. Given how little attention to earlier novel received in the West, readers of the reviews were unlikely to be familiar with the novel. It is also likely that western reviewers have paid more attention to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* than *Moth Smoke* given the political context foregrounded in the content of the former, its

provocatively politicised title, and the heightened interest in (Islamic) terrorism in the years dominated by “the war on terror”. Kerr is an exception as she sets up *Moth Smoke* as a foil to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. She describes the frame as “anthropological, pedagogical, and descriptive”, and she declares that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is far more elegant in form and more coherent. Marlowe, in contrast to the general indifference/ignorance of western reviewers to Hamid’s earlier novel, unequivocally states: “*Moth Smoke* was a better book,” It was obviously a first effort, laboriously constructed, and with contrived characters, but the dialogue was snappy and realistic” (n.p.).

As the above summary of reviewers’ comments on aesthetic aspects of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests, many reviewers, regardless of location, link discussions about the novel’s form to concerns about politics: they note that the effect of the monologue form, for example, enables the “other side” to speak, challenging the dominance of American (and western) accounts of Muslim immigrants or the war in Afghanistan. When reviewer responses located (or the location of the publication in which their review appears) than it is to do with ideological differences. While there are some noteworthy trends in the aesthetic evaluations of the novel (and the ideological assumptions these suggest) made by reviews published in the “East” and the “West” – although there are also sufficient overlaps and shared opinions to render any simple geographical dichotomy very problematic.

5.3.2 Nationality & (Auto)biography

Despite the academic commonplace that it is deeply mistaken and problematic to conflate the author of a text with its narrator or protagonist, precisely such a conflation occurs in many generalist (and lay) responses to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as an assessment of initial reviews reveals. One plausible explanation for this lies in the notions of branding of

authors and as cultural representatives laid bare in Chapter One. John Mullan reports a tendency amongst *The Guardian's Book Club* audience to take the novel's contents literally, by assuming an autobiographical overlap between the Harvard-educated author and his Princeton-educated protagonist/narrator (n.p.). Perhaps most importantly, Hamid, like his protagonist, is an immigrant in America – or, rather, Hamid was when he wrote the novel (he subsequently became a resident in the UK and resettled in Pakistan in 2014). Given these similarities, it is perhaps easy to assume that Changez is merely a proxy for Hamid; that Changez gives voice to what Hamid, as a Pakistani immigrant feels about, say, America, his status as a (betraying) modern-day “janissary,” and his attitudes towards American global politics following 9/11 (n.p.). It is surely, then, just another small step to assume that because Changez smiles when he first sees news footage of the Twin Towers’ attacks, Hamid did the same. I am writing here about another kind of ‘authenticity’ then, related to but not the same as that conferred by (ostensibly) national identity: biographical authenticity which is a contestable term and, as explained in Chapter One, a perennial bugbear in postcolonial studies.

Khair, writing in *Outlook India*, rather cynically defines 9/11 and its aftermath (akin to the US-USSR Cold War) as an “after-shed” moment which brought golden opportunities for writers to “combine thrills with thought, action with analysis” (n.p.), initially implying that Hamid may be just another writer who utilises the literary opportunity brought about by 9/11. However, he also suggests that Hamid’s work is unlike that of a growing list of “9/11” writers, (he mentions Salman Rushdie, John Updike, Jan Guillou and Frederick Forsyth) who have “only scratched the surface of phenomena that remain, finally, beyond the comprehension of the classes to which these writers, and many of their readers, belong” (n.p.). Here, he refers to Hamid’s Pakistani diasporic (and working-class) origins which made him easy to write a novel that depicts 9/11, much better than the other writers. He argues that Hamid’s work is a “glorious exception” as he does not portray the other/religious fundamentalist as a uni-dimensional

incarnation of evil. He suggests this is because Hamid hails from Pakistan, which allows him to speak with “sympathy and thought” about the complex issue of Islamic fundamentalism (n.p.). Likewise, the Pakistani reviewer Rehman from *The News*, in discussing the political significance of the novel, writes

For the first time in Pakistan’s intricate and messy relationship with the United States of America, we have a scenario, though fictional, where the American listens to the Pakistani for such a long time. The American voice is missing or is only present through the Pakistani voice. The various ramifications of this fictional interaction are healthy for Pakistani literature as well as Pakistani identity (n.p.).

Unsurprisingly, given its content, the novel’s engagement with 9/11 and its aftermath is mentioned by many reviewers and, inevitably, this almost always involves commentary on Hamid’s status as a “Pakistani” writer and, too, on the political/religious identity this might imply. The notion that an author’s national identity confers representational ‘accuracy’ or ‘authenticity’ on a text set in the nation, or when dealing with issues related to the nation from which s/he hails is a commonly asserted claim but one I have sought to complicate in this thesis. As I suggested in my first chapter, one of the complicating factors in assertions relating to authorial national identity is the fact that many contemporary writers, living and working globally, cannot be simply identified as ‘being from’ (and so able to speak for) a singular geographical/national ‘place.’ Indeed, one of the charges frequently levelled against Pakistani Anglophone writers, often by readers from within Pakistan, is that because these writers are insufficiently connected to the nation (owing to dual nationality, education/settlement abroad, and other mitigating factors) they do not have the authority to write as representatives of Pakistan, and whatever they write is therefore potentially inauthentic or even a possible betrayal. Ironically, however, the assertion of a writer’s national identity, and so his or her

implied (national/cultural) representative authority, is a key aspect of global marketing. As Brouillette argues in *Postcolonial Writers*, “the postcolonial author has emerged as a profoundly complicit and compromised figure whose authority rests, however uncomfortably, in the nature of his connection to the specificity of a given political location” (3-4). This, she continues, is intimately linked to the “privileged metropolitan markets” to which these authors wish to cater. This suggests that the demand for “authenticity” in literary representation creates a double bind for writers from the margins keen to sell their work in metropolitan markets: that which determines their popular and critical success may also derive from complicitous betrayal. This focus on political location and witness can be seen in the concerns of the Pakistani reviewers, among which only *Dawn* reviewer Bilgrami labels the book as a “9/11 novel that explores an issue that has obsessed *the West* since the Twin Towers fell” (n.p., my emphasis).

The Washington Post reviewer Halaby asserts, “Hamid’s writing is strongest when Changez is analysing the finer points of being a foreigner”, where he is “well-liked as an exotic acquaintance” (n.p.). She suggests that Hamid’s “delightfully distinct” style, manifest in Changez’ monologue, is “[p]erhaps because [Hamid] speak[s] Urdu and English” (n.p.). Among the British reviewers, the question of Hamid’s culturally Pakistani authenticity is of paramount significance. *The Guardian* reviewer Lasdun points out that Hamid offers “astute cultural observation[s]” in writing about East-West encounters (n.p.) and, while he has reservations about the novel’s success, he argues that the author’s knowledge about another culture could result in a better future novel. Anthony, also writes in *The Guardian* reviewer, argues that Hamid’s task “as a novelist is to capture a particular reality and give authentic voice to the characters therein. And in this he has succeeded with a success that is quite mesmerising” (n.p.). He commends Hamid for “giv[ing] authentic voice to the characters” (n.p.) by which we must assume Changez, the narrator. Alone among the reviews published in the western newspapers and magazines, only Marlowe dismisses the authenticity of Hamid’s

characterisation and she does so in vitriolic terms, describing the novel as “Islamic minstrelism” that sells the western audience “what it expects to hear from angry Muslims” (n.p.).

Hamid has insisted in interviews that Changez is not an autobiographical character and not one with whose views he entirely sympathises. He asserts that he wrote the book to “provoke” readers and give them a worthy “interlocutor” (“Mohsin Hamid in Conversation” n.p.). He also suggests that the novel might represent “a divided man’s conversation with himself” (“My Reluctant Fundamentalist” n.p.). It is surely telling that while reviewers from within Pakistan, like Rehman, describe the novel as a “mature performance” and as providing a story of “great significance” (Rehman n.p.), the issue of the authenticity of its representation of Pakistan, or a Pakistani’s (i.e. Changez’) attitude towards America and terrorism, is not generally raised. The only exception is the review in *Pakistaniat*, where Ahmad points out that Hamid evades the subject of Changez’ return to Lahore and the issues he might face, again reading the fictional narrative as a real-life document.

If an author’s national ‘identity’ is so often evoked as a means of authenticating his or her cultural/national representations, so too is authorial biography. According to Brouillette, biographical authenticity, and the geographical/cultural specificity it offers has a significant impact on the reception of postcolonial literary texts (*Postcolonial Writers* 147): an author who is established as ‘from’ the margins is considered a valid ‘interpreter’ of the location with which she is associated, biographically and geographically. It is necessary to consider how the various reviewers *situate* both the author Hamid, and the novel. This ‘situating’ occurs in at least two, often interrelated ways, as is common practice in the literary reviews: the first attempts to ‘place’ the author in relation to common literary forms and other literary works (including the author’s own), recalling Hans Robert Jauss’ “horizon of (aesthetic) expectations” (*Toward an*

Aesthetic 31); the second attempts to place the author historically, geographically and culturally, often as a means of making claims about his or her political or ideological beliefs.

Five of the reviewers (two each from the US and the UK, and one Indian) have suggested Changez closely resembles Hamid himself (but have been careful to not wholly conflate the two). For example, Karen Olsson in *The New York Times* foregrounds the fact that both Hamid and Changez studied at prestigious US universities and worked in the American corporate sector and implies that Changez' close observations and descriptions of the Ivy League meritocracy and corporate capitalism are ones shared by the author. Kerr, in *The New York Review of Books*, describes both Changez and Hamid as "privileged" because they act as cultural intermediaries between different worlds (n.p.). While in the *London Review of Books*, Chaudhuri writes about the remarkable similarity between the author and his spokesperson, Changez. *The Telegraph* reviewer Sooke suggests that Hamid has *deliberately* made this novel more autobiographical than *Moth Smoke* (by picking up details such as Lahore, Princeton and the job as a management consultant in New York). Prasannarajan, writing in *India Today*, points out the similarity between Changez' "biographical details like nationality, Princeton, and management job in New York, [and those of] his creator, who, according to the author introduction in the Indian edition, writes on world politics from a 'Muslim perspective'" (n.p.). Accurately, however, he notes, that the word Muslim "doesn't appear in the confessions of the reluctant fundamentalist" (n.p.) which makes Changez' ideology different from Hamid as Changez never identifies himself in terms of religion.

Importantly, however, all of the aforementioned reviewers have carefully differentiated between Changez and Hamid because they find Changez' rejection of America either unconvincing or too forceful. Only Marlowe entirely conflates the author and protagonist, sarcastically writing, "Hamid, I mean, Changez": this comment assumes an affinity between the narrator's and author's views on 9/11 and the US war in Afghanistan. She is unwillingly to

consider Changez as a convincing character in the text because of the political nature of her reading. She asserts that Hamid's opinion pieces in papers like *The Guardian* have a stark resemblance to Changez' spoken opinions, that reflect on "hateful characterizations of Americans" (n.p.). She suggests that the narrator's oft-quoted statement that he was "remarkably pleased" when watching footage of 9/11 "meshes all too well with the author's September 23, 2001, *Time* piece, which fails to mention the attacks and instead argues against the "overthrow of the Taliban" (n.p.).¹⁰¹ She continues that it is almost certain that Hamid agrees with what Changez has to say while watching an account of the Afghan war on TV, lamenting the "mismatch" between "American bombers with their twenty-first-century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below" (n.p.). Importantly, this is because Marlowe supports the US military intervention in Afghanistan which she understands as liberating for Afghans. Changez, she opines, is unable to extend his compassion to the Afghans who were victims of the Taliban, and the same seems true of Hamid. She berates *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* for not supporting American sentiments, and for thus (in her opinion) defending the Taliban noting, "Changez is unable to extend his compassion to the Afghans who were victims of the Taliban, and the same seems true of Hamid" (n.p.). There is nothing equivocal in her claim that "people who are buying *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are sending their money to someone who is aggressively anti-American" (n.p.). Behind this statement is the assumption is that "worthy" literature, by definition, is pro-American. She seems oblivious to the fact that some readers may be anti-American. Many are Anti-American (or at least anti-

¹⁰¹ In his article "The Usual Ally", Hamid charts an historical roadmap of the Pak-America relationship, detailing how America left Pakistan to deal with the Soviet war's aftermath. Citing the Afghanistan war as a concern for Pakistan and its citizens, Hamid writes, "In Pakistan, my friends and family are frightened, as they should be when the most powerful military in the world is sent to do a task best accomplished by schoolteachers, police forces, persuasion and time" (n.p.). It in no way supports the Taliban, as Marlowe argues in her review. But because Marlowe is critical of the anti-American sentiment in the novel (coming from a country known for its fundamentalist stance, as Hamid details in his *Time* article); her tone is very critical due to the lack of apology.

American involvement in countries where they have no business being). Her review assumes there is only one kind of reader of the novel – a reader like her.

In contrast, neither of *The Guardian* reviewers take up the issue of (ostensible) autobiographical elements in the text; nor does Halaby in *The Washington Post* or Kaveney in the *TLS*. Likewise, none of the reviewers from Pakistan seem interested in the apparent autobiographical links between Changez and Hamid. However, almost all Pakistani reviewers seek to analyse and comment on Changez' character (and implied politics) and in this way, more or less directly, assert their interpretation of the novel's political thrust (and so too, presumably, the author's). Among the Indian reviews, it is only the *Hindustan Times* that discusses this personal-political dynamic in detail. Sharma notes, "it is the personal becoming the political, the political colouring the personal that is depicted with astoundingly clear cloudiness" (n.p.) and refers to this cloudiness as a major contributing reason for the novel's ambiguity.

In situating the novel, Olsson, in *The New York Times*, refers to *One Thousand and One Nights* (popularly known as the *Arabian Nights*), suggesting that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has an "Arabian Nights-style urgency: the end of the story may mean the death of the teller" (n.p.). Similarly, Kerr, in *The New York Review of Books*, comments on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s "classical tale-telling with its ope[n] invitation to sit for a while" (n.p.). This mention of tale-telling is suggestive of Scheherazade telling tales. In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Elleke Boehmer notes the extent to which the *Arabian Nights* features in the nineteenth-century European imagination as a "signifier" for oriental "magic and the exotic"

The abundant metaphors and similes inspired by the *Arabian Nights* in nineteenth-century literature amply testify to the literary and generative role of colonial description. Their prevalence also offers an instance of orientalist thought: the way in which the West perceived the East as taking the form of its own fantasies of a paradisaal

orient. So intensively was *Nights* mined for tropes of richness and delight that it became itself, as a phrase, a signifier or shorthand for magic or the exotic. (45)

While the two mainstream American reviewers no doubt refer to the *Arabian Nights* to suggest the similarity between Scheherazade and Hamid's narrator's use of tale-telling to (perhaps) delay death, it is surely not coincidental that they evoke a quintessentially "oriental" text in doing so. In this way, subtly, yet firmly, they situate the novel, its author and its protagonist as "oriental" – without needing to use this word. But there are other reviews where these terms are used directly.

For instance, Marlowe criticises Hamid for utilising Oriental "tools" to popularise the novel: she argues that publishers are complicit in this exercise, in that, "given the right authentic apparatus, this clumsy Orientalism from an Oriental passes without remark" (n.p.). She thus accuses Hamid of poorly achieved re-Orientalism, suggesting he has realised that to sell books in the West there is "greater mileage" in adopting clichéd, stylised, "oriental" language and motifs, than in writing well (n.p.). In a comment that reeks of (neo) colonial assumptions about "Orientals" as beholden to the West, she accuses Hamid of selling the western audience what it expects to hear from "angry Muslims" (n.p.). She argues that he has "sold a second-hand Orientalism to readers he thinks are too poorly travelled and too provincial to recognise it for the crap that it is" (n.p.). In Marlowe's opinion, Hamid's implied readers are western, poorly travelled and familiar with only "second-hand" "Oriental" tropes (n.p.). Marlowe dismisses the novel as "tripe," and as an instance of anti-American propaganda. Her suggestion that Hamid is trading an 'Oriental' culture for literary reputation using his Pakistani identity ("the merchant [Hamid] is a thoroughly Westernized, privileged beneficiary of American largesse" (n.p.) – accords with the naïve response of some lay readers – who have accused the book of blatantly fostering sympathy for Islamic fundamentalism.

Reviewers in the South-Asian newspapers and magazines do not mention *The Arabian Nights*, appealing instead to western classics in their attempt to situate the novel aesthetically. Among the Indian reviewers, Tabish Khair, for example, notes a parallel between Changez' story-telling and Coleridge's poem *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*; *Hindustan Times'* reviewer Sharma mentions that Hamid's style is "reminiscent of the Russian masters" (n.p.). This is quite similar to the *SF Gate's* reviewer's comparison of Hamid with Dostoevsky and Pamuk, but he also draws an elaborate parallel (due to the dramatic monologue form) with Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (n.p.). Bilgrami, in *Dawn*, also compares him to Dostoevsky when referring to the novel's literary merit. She writes, "Once critics have compared your work to Dostoevsky's, you can safely assume that you have made it in the world of literary fiction" (n.p.). Hamid's comparison with the canonical western classics by those South-Asian reviewers may simply bid to elevate the writing from the margins and ensure its categorisation as "great" literature.

It is clear that most reviewers make claims about Hamid's national identity, describing him as "Pakistani," even if resident in the US, in their evaluations of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. This does not result in a simple bifurcation of "East" and "West" reader responses, however. Certainly, reviewers from South Asia tend to appeal to western classics in an apparent attempt to suggest the literary merits of the novel. In contrast, several western reviewers suggest the "Asian" nature of the work with reference to *Arabian Nights*. However, almost all reviewers agree that Hamid's "Pakistani" identity gives credibility to his portrayal of Changez' experiences as a Muslim immigrant in post-9/11 America. The exception, as noted, is Marlowe who, confusingly, posits Changez as both "anti-American" and a traitor to Af-Pak concerns. Her response to the novel is determined by her ideological conceptions about what a "Pakistani" novelist should espouse, politically.

5.3.3 Changez as a Character: Moral Evaluations

In many reviews' questions about the ethical/political value of the novel are linked to Hamid's portrayal of Changez. Not all reviewers respond to Changez as believable ("realistic") or sufficiently (morally) complex. Lasdun assesses Changez as a "*potentially* fascinating character" (n.p., my emphasis) but as the qualifier suggests, he finds the novel (and protagonist) wanting in various ways. This is perhaps due to his rejection of Changez' "sympathetic" response towards the Twin Towers' destruction which is linked to Lasdun's asserted belief that (good) literary works usually shun characters who are prone to lecturing and undue moralising, of which he accuses the protagonist (n.p.). Moreover, he states that he is unable to discern in Changez any "morally superior alternative set of values" to those which Changez himself rejects (n.p.). The other *Guardian* reviewer Anthony similarly finds Changez' apparent pleasure (if this is indeed what his smile suggests) at images of 9/11 problematic but regards him as "a sympathetic figure in spite of some objectionable opinions" (n.p.). The phrasing here is significant. This is a clear example of just how politically-invested many ostensibly literary evaluations are. It also clearly suggests the implied readers Lasdun is addressing – ones who cannot imagine why some disenfranchised others might, even fleetingly, a sense that western/US global dominance can be challenged.

Other American reviews are more discerning. *The Washington Post* review suggests the portrayal of Changez' position as one vilified after 9/11, despite him not being consistently "likeable or noble", is a key component of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* success (n.p.). In *the Seattle Times*, Bock praises Hamid for portraying Changez convincingly, so that readers may understand his anger "even if they don't agree with it" (n.p.). In *the Brooklyn Rail*, Budhos describes Changez a "reluctant-anti-American" rather "reluctant fundamentalist" (n.p.). It is only in *National Review* where Marlowe forthrightly dismisses him as a "poorly constructed

and implausible character” because his “anti-Americanism is more aesthetic and snobbish than ideological” (n.p.).

Two out of three Indian reviews discuss the characterisation of Changez. Prasannarajan, in *India Today*, characterises Changez as an engaging, even if not equally convincing, soliloquist struggling to place his story at the meeting point of conflicting geopolitical and cultural sensibilities and describes him as a “reborn preacher of anti-Americanism” (n.p.). This assessment is repeated in a 2014 article, entitled “The Pathology of Anti-Americanism,” in which he portrays Changez as symptomatic of Anti-American sentiments that are not “strange” to his conservative Indian readership:

That character in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* who smiled as he watched the twin towers burning on his television was not a stranger. For those fed on the mythology of America as a source of all our sorrows, it was a sight of secret pleasure – the shared perversion of anti-Americanism. (n.p.)

In contrast, the remaining two reviewers – from India – disagree that the readers will sympathise with his textual portrayal.

Another prominent feature is about Changez’ identity as a Muslim man. Nowhere in the text does he assert his religious identity as a Muslim, and yet some of the reviewers have conflated his Pakistani identity with an adherence to Islam. For instance, in *The Guardian*, Ottewill describes Changez as a “Muslim man” who “spirals to the depths of a paranoid crisis of identity” as a result of his religious/cultural identifications (n.p.). He suggests this tendency to view Changez as a simply “Muslim” man brings to the fore the globally politicised emphasis on religion that framed the novel’s publication (n.p.).

Anthony, the other reviewer for *The Guardian*, considers Changez an “alienated Pakistani” in the US and a sympathetic figure for this reason. He regards Changez as a

representative for all Pakistanis. In a manner dismissive of possible differences between “Pakistanis,” broadly generalising Changez’ perspective to that of the entire Pakistani public: as a representation of a reluctant, less-intellectual and anti-American crowd as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is in no way a critique of Pakistan’s intellectual denial. If anything it could be described as an example of it” (n.p.). Here, a fictional character is made to stand as a representative of approximately 193.2 million people. Similarly, *The Brooklyn Rail* describes Changez as representative of his nation, suggests his portrayal invites readers to reconsider their views about Pakistan. In her *TLS* review, Kaveney reads Changez as an ordinary Muslim who is not a product of Al-Qaeda but a “traditional middle-class life of servants ... where Islam is just one aspect of the air he [Changez] breathes” (23).

Issues to do with Changez’ national identity are discussed by Kerr in *The New York Times*, who presents Changez as a “promising, frustrated son of Lahore” who is eager to show the best side of Pakistan (n.p.). In the Indian and Pakistani reviews, likewise, the emphasis is on differentiating Changez’ frustrations about US inclusivity and his nationhood from a religious fundamentalist as in *Hindustan Times* which makes no reference to Islam and describes Changez as a “modern [day] Pakistan[i]” (n.p.). In contrast, both Khair (in *Outlook India*) and Rehman (in *The News*) use charged phrases such as “Madrassa student like Taliban” or “Mullah” (respectively) to describe Changez in ways that invite identifying him with Muslim fundamentalist. Rehman expresses his surprise at Changez’ rejection of the US because Changez unlike typical terrorists (described in news) doesn’t seek refuge in Islam. Prasannarajan, in *India Today*, differs from the more nuanced comments of many other reviewers by suggesting that it is easy to identify Changez with “mainstream terrorists, hijackers or suicidal bombers.” The novel, in his opinion, appears to be “the testament of a man who, at first sight, seems to have been born out of yesterday’s headlines” (n.p.). He speaks of Changez as an “elegantly crafted miniature of a permanent outsider” who is too dangerous to

be alive in the real world – a comment that suggests his view that Hamid has his sights fixed on the “headlines” that might interest (western) readers (n.p.). This reading is unsurprising when read within the context of Prasannarajan’s numerous articles against Pakistan, and the author’s conservative leanings.

Prasannarajan’s depiction of Changez in his *India Today* review is shared by *The New York Times* review by Olsson, who suggests Changez is portrayed as a “benign tumour” waiting for its turn to “burst” in America. The portrayal of a foreigner who refuses to ‘melt’ into the multicultural ‘pot’ is a dangerous one as it sustains a cultural nationalism that is hostile to the host country, Olsson argues (n.p.). In developing this metaphor, she suggests that those, like Changez, “who have grown disenchanted with America” might pose a security threat to America as they are waiting to inflict terror; an idea that echoes the usual metaphor regarding the unmeltable status of foreign immigrants (n.p.).

The values which might serve as the basis of Changez’ rejection of America is another discussion in which many of the reviews engage. Among the American reviews, Marlowe in the *National Review* complains that Changez does not share western values but instead claims his allegiance to “secular, liberal Pakistanis” ones (n.p.). Her primary objection is that Hamid has not praised America for its role in bringing “freedom of speech” to Afghanistan and Iraq in its “war on terror” interventions (n.p.). It appears that Marlowe reviews the novel based on her understanding of America’s rightful engagement in the “war on terror” and this has widely influenced her evaluation of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Similarly evoking debates about politics, in her the *TLS* review, Kaveney comments on the “value system” in which Changez was raised in urban Pakistan and states for her readership that this system is different from Al-Qaeda’s (23). Writing for *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books*, Lasdun and Chaudhuri respectively also comment on what they understand to be Changez’ politically-

motivated decision to leave the US and suggest this is morally correct. Such evaluations of the morality of Changez' choice to return to Pakistan are not evident in the Pakistani reviews.

5.3.4 Fundamentalism

One of the premises of reader-response theory is that textual evaluation is the result of readers' knowledge, beliefs and historically/culturally-inflected ideological assumptions. However, they are not simply subjective because individual readers do not exist or form opinions in isolations. They are constituted as subjects by virtue of the "communities" to which they belong – communities that can be literally located in a particular place but are, more often, "imagined" ones (in Benedict Anderson's sense). How one reads a novel, then, depends on one's ideological positioning and this impacts on one's sympathetic identification with characters/ narrators. Hamid's comments on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* quoted earlier in this chapter, suggest his awareness of this: "different people will read it in different ways." How readers respond to his "game of mirrors" is reflective of their values, and fears. The same applies to readers' interpretation of the novel's title in which Hamid has, surely, provocatively, employed the word "fundamentalism."

Edward Said, in *Covering Islam*, notes that the term "fundamentalism" has tended to become synonymous with Islam in the past decade or so: the "average reader comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same thing" (xvi). The representations of Islam in the West, he argues, are constructed by a web of institutions including the academy, the government and the media. However, this is not the 'Islam' that millions of people around the world recognise (126). Hamid is surely aware that the word "fundamentalist", especially after 9/11, has become intimately associated with (Muslim) religious extremism and terrorism as the

enemy of western liberalism. The identity of the ‘fundamentalist’ in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and the nature of his fundamentalism is reflective of the reader’s assumptions.

The pairing of the word “fundamentalist” with the almost oxymoronic adjective “reluctant” (can a fundamentalist be reluctant?), spurred considerable debate in initial reviews and has continued to do so in the years since the novel was published. In discussions of this aspect of the novel, the extent to which evaluations of the novel – based on aesthetic “horizons of expectation” – are intimately connected to reviewers’ political /ideological assumptions are revealed. This revelation is found in reviewer discussions concerning the type of “fundamentalism” that is at stake: religious or capitalist? Among Pakistani reviews, Ahmad (in *Pakistaniat*) argues that the novel “is not ‘really’ about fundamentalism” (n.p.) hinting at the allegorical and symbolic nature of the text which questions readers’ beliefs. In contrast, Rehman assumes “fundamentalist” refers to Islamic fundamentalism in the novel (n.p.). Rather simplistically he asserts that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows us that “either one can be subsumed in the West or withdraw into fundamentalism” (n.p.).

The American reviewers are more astute in this aspect of their analysis, with most recognising the ambiguity of the novel’s title. Nonetheless, their commentary often exposes contentious responses to the provocative noun Hamid has chosen. Olsson, writing in *The New York Review of Books*, views the title as ironically ambiguous because this, she purports, forces readers to question whether every anti-American critic hailing from a Muslim country should be labelled as (religious) fundamentalist (let alone a potential terrorist), and asks whether the term should instead be reserved for (western) capitalists obsessed with the “fundamental” goal of monetary gain. As she succinctly observes, “the fundamentalist, and potential assassin, may be sitting on either side of the table” (n.p.). Olsson refers to the way contemporary capitalism, as defined by neoliberalism, has become market fundamentalism, an overarching faith in open markets and free trade.

Kaveney makes a similar observation in her the *TLS* review, encouraging readers to consider whether the word “fundamentalist” refers to “the anti-American academic Changez becomes on his return to Pakistan, or ... the shiny functionary of late American capitalist he turned into while living in the United States?” (23). *The Guardian* reviewer Lasdun, likewise suggests that the novel builds up the reader’s anticipation that Changez has moved “all the way over to the dark side of Islamic fundamentalism” (n.p.) following 9/11, however reluctantly, but instead reveals that the fundamentalism reluctantly embraced by Changez is that of western capitalism. Clearly, these reviewers suggest that the nature of Changez’ “fundamentalism” is precisely what is at stake in the novel.

In contrast, two reviewers, Anthony and Marlowe, seem oblivious to the ambiguity of the novel’s title. Both assume, uncritically, that Hamid’s use of the word “fundamentalism,” refers unequivocally to Muslim religious extremism. Interestingly, and quite astonishingly, Marlowe (in line with her claims that Hamid is a mimicking “minstrel” who writes to appeal to ignorant and untraveled western readers) suggests that Hamid lacks Islamic knowledge as he, she notes, fails to refer to the “apparatus of Islam” in the text (n.p.). She indicts Changez for not being religious as he never refers to his religion in his address: “not one hadith, not one quote from a sura, not a hint of the narrator’s religious affiliation makes its way into the text of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” (n.p.).¹⁰² That her assessment ignores the significance of the absence of precisely such ‘evidence’ of Changez’ religiously-motivated fervour tells us about what Marlowe assumes to be marketable for her readers and their potential interest(s). The paucity of Marlowe’s assessment is easily dismissed for its sheer inability to recognise the ambiguity introduced by Hamid’s choice to use the word “fundamentalist” in the title of a novel that ‘turns’ on the events of 9/11.

¹⁰² A hadith is a saying of Prophet Muhammad while a Sura is a chapter of Quran.

For *The Guardian* reviewer Anthony, fundamentalism means “anti-American sentiments” depicted through, in his words, the “fashionable opinion” (n.p.) that America has created its enemies. He finds this ideology rampant in the novel and offers generalised (and unsupported) claims about Pakistan and its population, describing it as “a country blighted by fundamentalists who display no hint of reluctance at all” (n.p.). He further notes:

Indeed some argue that the social and political crisis into which Pakistan appears to be sinking ever deeper is at least partly the result of its political class refusing to challenge the unreluctant fundamentalists, preferring instead to take refuge in crowd-pleasing anti-Americanism. (n.p.)

Tellingly, Anthony provides no information about the “some” (clearly western voices) to whose argument he appeals but if one reads *The Fallout* (his book that charts his journey as an anti-liberal, pro-American voice). The nature and source of his assumptions become clear.

In contrast, Khair, in *India Today*, defines the word fundamentalist as (negative) “rigidity” or stasis (n.p.). He urges readers to consider the contextual meaning of fundamentalism: does it refer to when Changez was a “westernised, clean-shaved, alcohol-imbibing yuppie at Underwood Samson” (n.p.) where he learnt and practised capitalist fundamentals better than his colleagues or when he grew his beard, following 9/11? In such terms, Erica is a fundamentalist too because of her refusal to move forward following Chris’ death. The subtitle to Khair’s review – “A Pakistan-born graduate’s journey from yuppiedom to fundamentalism” – implies that a journey towards fundamentalism is not necessarily negative; later in the review, the word “journey” is replaced by “movement” and these neutral lexical choices (instead of, for example, “downward trajectory,” “demise,” or “downfall”) are suggestive of Khair’s neutral viewpoint towards the “fundamentalism” depicted in the novel (n.p.).

Among Pakistani reviews, Bilgrami in *Dawn* review, discuss fundamentalism in connection to Underwood Samsons and equates it with Hamid's "subtle commentary on American neoimperialism" (n.p.). Zakaria suggests the word highlights an ideological vs. economic debate in her *Dawn* review (2013), one which has deeper implications for Pakistan. She writes,

Is the real Pakistani the hardscrabble slum child who wants a school, a job, a chance to succeed? Or is the real Pakistani the disillusioned newly returned immigrant son who finds that neither the simplistic rhetoric of foreign opportunity nor the simple militarism of Islamism defines him? (n.p.)

This way, she raises similar concerns to those of Rehman: "either one can be subsumed in the West or withdraw into fundamentalism" (n.p.).

On the matter of Changez as a religious terrorist, Kerr (American), Khair (Indian) and Rehman (Pakistani) all point out how different Changez is from a Mullah.¹⁰³ Kerr argues that he is just another educated person who becomes "disenchanted" with capitalist America (n.p.). Both Khair and Rehman stress the differences between Changez and a "Mullah" because Changez does not find refuge in religion. Khair appreciates Hamid's attempt to complicate the notion of fundamentalism to make the readers rethink the notion deeply. This, she reflects, garners Hamid "anglophone legibility" (n.p.), and is likely, in her opinion, to improve the circulation and reception of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

This suggestion, that Hamid has deliberately employed and complicated the notion of "fundamentalism" to achieve visibility (and presumably sales) in the West, deserves further attention. Certainly, the extent to which *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reifies, or conversely challenges, the familiar binary of East/West, or Us/Them, is a topic that animates many of the

¹⁰³ Mullah is a pejorative term for a Muslim religious leader.

initial reviews of the novel (and the later critical debates as discussed in the following pages). This challenges Hamid's insistence, in many interviews/published comments that he regards himself as a "mongrel" ("Deconstructing Terror" n.p.) with a global identity, not exclusively the West or East.

5.3.4 Clash of Civilisations

Almost all the reviews, to a greater or lesser extent focus on the post-9/11 relationship between the (Muslim) East and the (Christian) West that the text presents and complicates. For example, Lasdun, in *The Guardian*, names his review "The Empire Strikes Back," thus drawing attention to the postcolonial lens he uses to review the novel. In describing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as "set on the treacherous faultlines of current east/west relations", he invokes Samuel P. Huntington's popular work *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) in which Huntington argues that the "fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" (22). Similarly, Ottewill declares the novel a successful attempt to depict the strained relationship between the East and the West amidst an international environment full of suspicion, especially since 9/11 and the "War on Terror" (n.p.). The novel is, he writes, "an elegant and sharp indictment of the clouds of suspicion that now shroud our world" (n.p.). Likewise, *The Telegraph's* reviewer Sooke reads it as a "microcosm of the cankerous suspicion between East and West" in the backdrop of the "war on terror" (n.p.). Noticeably different is *The Guardian* reviewer Anthony, who does not contextualise Pakistan and America as the East and the West unlike the reviewers discussed above; likewise, a discussion of this aspect is missing in other British reviews such as those in *London Review of Books* and the *TLS*.

American reviews tend to follow the approach of the majority of British commentators. Kerr, in *The New York Review of Books*, for example, suggests that the novel depicts the East

and the West as two separate, mutually exclusive hemispheres, where the only contact place is a neutral space like Greece where Changez and Erica holidayed together. In *The Brooklyn Rail*, Budhos reads the novel in terms of what it means for its implied readers i.e. the American readership: “For, of course, the unnamed American is the reader, too” (n.p.). Reading it as a confession, in the context of immigrants and American invasions, she explains the text invites readers to experience “new and discomfiting perspectives” or an “uneasy shift of perspectives” as America portrayed in the role of “imperialists”, “talented or ruthless emissaries of global business” (n.p.). She continues,

As an American, one finds oneself arguing with the narrator (is Pakistan entirely vulnerable and weak during the face-off with India in 2002? Is business consulting really the same as janissaries – captured Christian boys – used by the Ottoman Empire?) (n.p.)

The result, she claims, is that the novel encourages American readers to reconsider their assumption about not only their nation but also Pakistan. The Indian reviewers, especially Prasannarajan writing in *India Today*, instead of focusing on the rather too apparent and “deceptive, simplistic and clichéd” issue of “east-is-east-and-west-is-west”, describe the novel’s central concern as being the existential crisis of Changez.

The *Hindustan Times* reviewer Sharma declares *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is concerned with “the fissures that have been created across the world after September 11, 2001” and reads it as a story that “investigates a clash of civilisations in one man” (n.p.) referring to Changez as a person who has “fallen through the cracks” (n.p.). In contrast with Budhos’ assumptions about an implied American readership, Sharma’s review reflects on the novel’s intelligibility for “the urbane subcontinental reader” with which he identifies. He refers to Changez as an “antihero,” noting: “what makes him so believable – especially to the urbane

subcontinental reader – is that he is like us: one foot firmly set in the cultural ground of his own backyard, modern Pakistan; another foot in the globalised world of Americana where one knows one's Paltrow from one's Spears.” (n.p.)

Although the reviews published in Pakistan also comment on East-West relations, they are highly defensive about Changez' fictional decisions (with their real-life consequences) and express an overriding concern with the effects of 9/11 on the living experience of Pakistani immigrants abroad. This may reflect the fact that many of the Pakistani reviews have lived/studied abroad. In *Pakistaniat*, Ahmad surmises that the novel's main theme is distrust between East and West but also argues that Changez' decision to reject America and return to Pakistan is irrational and impulsive. He writes, “Changez' decisions in the post 9/11 insecure times, especially for the Pakistani community, were both irrational and impulsive” (n.p.). *The News* reviewer Rehman is more vehement in his criticism of the apparent either/or choice that Changez faces, “either one can be subsumed in the West or withdraw into fundamentalism” (n.p.). He regards this choice as implausible and too narrow while at the same time noting that it is reflective of the assumptions of “many Pakistanis who believe that the world comprises of two neat halves” (n.p.). He seems unaware of Hamid's attempt to problematize binary categories of the East and the West and uses in the terms of Orient and Occident to reiterate the notion of a civilisational divide.

Related to the generalisation of Pakistan and America as the East and the West respectively, is the aspect of intercultural romance between Changez and Erica. In *Shattered Myths*, Said observes that the relationship between the East and the West has often been described in gendered (and sexual) terms with the eastern subject depicted as ‘feminine’ in relation to the ‘masculine’ West (93). This, he claims, is often allegorised in the depiction of relationships between an indigenous woman and a white man in Oriental texts. Clearly, this is reversed in Hamid's portrayal of white/western Erica's relationship with brown/eastern

Changez. Nonetheless, as many reviewers note, their relationship remains open to allegorical reading.

Among the American reviews, *The New York Review of Books*' review devotes a fair amount of space to discussing Erica as a metonymic representative of America. Described as a beautiful, blond and athletic character whose wealth helps her survive in an idealist world, she is viewed as Hamid's portrayal of America. The reviewer Kerr informs her readers that Erica was "strong" and "hearty" before 9/11 but, following this, after the death of her beloved Chris (symbolic of confident Christian America that 'died' as a result of 9/11), she turns into a weak, depressed and self-obsessed individual who only "half-returns" Changez' love (n.p.). In *The New York Times*' review, Olsson points out that Erica's character is sketchy, like all the secondary characters in the novel, nevertheless, she characterises Erica as "uninhibited," "friendly," and symbolic of America until, after 9/11, her pathological sadness leads her to disappear from the narrative by introducing elements of romance. While these two have only focused on Erica as a symbolic character, *The Washington Post*'s reviewer Halaby focuses on the wider Changez-Erica relationship which she considers a subsidiary plot that softens the narrative. *The Seattle Times*' review does not exactly explain the symbolic/allegorical nature of Erica. Instead, Bock notes that Erica is like "a beautiful but emotionally fragile classmate from Manhattan's upper echelon who is still mourning her first love, a childhood boyfriend who died of cancer" who "later abandons him [Changez] for her dead lover" (n.p.). Choudhury in the *SF Gate* review notes that both America and Erica suffer from "a dangerous nostalgia" and comments on how Changez has to pose as his dead rival Chris in an attempt to advance their relationship.

Among the British reviews, *The Guardian* reviewer Ottewill just briefly mentions Erica as a "beautiful American woman" with whom Changez falls in love. The other reviewer Lasdun describes Erica as "beautiful", "privileged", "patrician" and a "troubled Wasp princess" (n.p.).

Like several of the American reviewers, he characterises the Changez-Erica relationship as “slightly abstracted” and as having a “thin-blooded quality” (n.p.) while he views the process of her transformation as sketchy and “undersubstantiated” he justifies it as an allegorical construct. He assumes, rather astonishingly, that the Changez-Erica romantic bond is free of “racial tensions that traditionally afflict such couples in literature” but, he later notices (like the *SF Gate* reviewer), that Changez plays the role of Erica’s dead, *white* boyfriend, Chris, during sexually intimate scenes. In the *TLS* review, Kaveney also points out, like *The Guardian* reviewer Lasdun, that Changez only receives love from Erica when he “acts as a surrogate for the dead Chris” (23). She (symbolically America) can only spare “crumbs of love from the nostalgia” to immigrant, implying that immigrants are not fully accepted (23). She reads the “sad” story of Erica as one of the metaphors for Changez’ disenchantment with America: he is not white enough. Moreover, while *The Telegraph*’s reviewer Sooke doesn’t read the Erica-Changez relationship as symbolic, nevertheless he devotes two paragraphs in his short review to discuss their relationship, signifying his implied readership’s probable interest in this aspect.

Among the Indian reviews, the *India Today* review portrays Erica as one of the defining features of Changez’ American life before 9/11, along-side his employer Underwood Samson. Erica is depicted as “enigmatically remote”, suffering from “chronic nostalgia” because she cannot get rid of feelings for her dead lover (n.p.). Even though Changez leaves America, a part of America-Erica still lives within him. *Outlook India* reviewer Khair views Erica – the rich, beautiful American girl – as another fundamentalist like Changez, in her inability to forget her childhood boyfriend and lover, Chris. Erica is allegorically read as an indicator of Changez’ downfall in *Hindustan Times* (n.p.).

Tellingly, the Pakistani reviewers do not generally give much space to the Erica-Changez relationship and do not consider it in allegorical terms. Ahmad is an exception; he devotes almost a third of his review to discuss the relationship but does so in terms of a realist

assessment of plot and character. He reads Erica as a psychologically damaged soul who never belonged to Changez. This is complemented by *The News*' reviewer Rehman who links Changez' dissatisfaction with America with his "doomed-love-affair" with "psychologically fragile" Erica (n.p.). Bilgrami in *Dawn* refers to Erica as a stepping stone to Changez' elite life (n.p.). This aspect is missing from the other *Dawn* review, which focuses instead on the ideological issues discussed in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and its implications for Pakistan.

5.4 Conclusion

In my introduction, I discussed how I began this project with the assumption that differing reviewer responses to Pakistani Anglophone fiction would unambiguously reflect the nationality of the reviewer. I was particularly interested in how the reviewer's *national* "habitus" (Pakistan, India, the UK and the US) might contribute to their fictional evaluations. However, my analysis of reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* confirms something that has become increasingly clear as my research has progressed: the notion of "habitus" needs to extend beyond that of geographical location alone and encompass the ideological "communities" in which individual reviewers might "imaginatively" exist (I am here combining insights drawn from both Fish and Anderson). Of course, the geographical and cultural location of individual impacts his or her ideological assumptions, often significantly, but this is never all-encompassing. And in a world (and literary market) that is increasingly cosmopolitan, it is mistaken to assume that readers from the West and the East will respond to literary texts in diametrically opposed ways.

The nationality of reviewers can be discussed as *part* of the equation when considering their reader responses, but it does not wholly determine them. How they interpret a text, for example, will depend on assumptions they draw about the intended audience of the work and

these assumptions, in turn, will be the result of an author's choice of setting, thematic focus, characterisation, and so on. It is this, I have claimed, that accounts for the relative popularity of Hamid's *Moth Smoke* in South Asia and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in the West. Hamid himself suggests that the former "feel[s] and sound[s] like it was written for South Asians," while it could be argued that the latter appears to be written for western implied readers. There is a danger, however, that an insistence on clear-cut differences between eastern and western responses relies too heavily on notions of *the East* and *the West* as exclusive and homogenous entities and reinforces problematic binary assumptions.

For a start, this assumes that readers/reviewers are unproblematically situated in one single place, when in fact, as my summaries of reviewer biographies reveal, many reviewers are globally-mobile and hold world views (quite literally) that are multi-perspectival and diverse. Related to this is the (mistaken) assumption that readers only belong to one identifiable community. Instead, I have suggested, we should pay attention to the plural communities within which reviewers (and many general readers) are situated. My analysis in this chapter suggests that reviewer responses are less reflective of their physical location (or the physical location of the publication in which their reviews appear) than of their ideological "habitus." Reader responses are less determined by nationalistic identifications than the ideological "interpretive communities" to which they belong. For instance, reviewers like Marlowe, Anthony and Prasannarajan, all of whom critique the novel for its anti-American sentiments, hail from America, the UK and India, respectively. What they share in common is not their nationality but values that appear to characterise the conservative right and publish in newspapers known for their conservatism, such as *National Review* and *India Today*. (*The Guardian*, in which Anthony's review is published, is an exception, although his right-wing stance remains evident and was perhaps deliberately chosen to counter the two other, more liberal, reviews published in the same newspaper.) Chaudhuri, a reviewer with Indian origins,

writes for the *London Review of Books*; Choudhury, likewise originally from India, writes for the American *SF Gate* and appears to espouse opinions – as these can be determined from their responses to the novel – that are broadly liberal.

The reviews do, however, appear to confirm Brouillette's assertion that authorial nationality is frequently used to assert the writer's authority to speak on behalf of others from "the margins." The majority of the reviewers focus on Hamid's biography and many link the author with his protagonist/narrator, often quite naively assuming they share similar attitudes and beliefs. It is for this reason that several imply that Changez "smile" in response to the destruction of the Twin Towers is reflective of the author's attitudes and deduce that Hamid himself was pleased by these events – this is particularly evident in Prasannarajan's review in *India Today*. Almost all the British, American and Indian reviewers comment on Hamid's "hybrid" or "hyphenated" diasporic identity and they assume he has the authority to write about Pakistani diasporic experience – particularly about how it feels to be a foreigner in the US – and many suggest this adds "authenticity" to his portrayal of Changez. The American reviewer Halaby goes as far as suggesting that Hamid's biographicality is what makes the text interesting and distinctive. Of all the reviewers, only Marlowe suggests that Hamid's authenticity is "staged," in Huggan's term, and charges him with using re-orientalist tools or "second-hand Orientalism" to increase international book sales. In contrast, Hamid's diasporic identity is not raised in the Pakistani reviews, perhaps because they seek to claim the author as (fully) Pakistani.

In my discussion of reviews of *The Wandering Falcon*, I suggested that the text was widely promoted by reviewers for its capacity to inform westerners about the remote hinterlands of Pakistan, particularly the Af-Pak border areas that have gained so much notoriety since 9/11. Given that the majority of the (embedded) narrative in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set in the US there are obviously few claims made by reviewers about the

informational value of the novel as a “touristic guide” to Pakistan, but many suggest that it is informational nonetheless: it provides information about how Pakistanis living in the West *feel*. There is far more emphasis in the reviews on the aesthetics of Hamid’s novel in comparison to *The Wandering Falcon*; while *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is generally more positively reviewed, in terms of aesthetics, than *The Golden Notebook*. American and British reviews tend to approach the novel as an example of the 9/11 subgenre, a category of writing with which they would have been very familiar at the time it was published. They discuss the social ruptures portrayed in the novel, emphasising questions to do with Changez’ experiences as a bearded foreigner in post-9/11 New York and American “nostalgia” for pre-9/11 certainty and security. Many praise the novel for being the first to offer a “non-western” fictional account of 9/11 and its aftermath and the general tendency is to draw attention to the ways in which the monologue form reinforces the content by “giving voice” to the immigrant Pakistani narrator and “silencing” his American listener. In contrast, the trend in many Indian and Pakistani reviews is to engage with the success or not of the novel’s psychological realism. They tend to focus on questions to do with Changez’ psychological state (and how persuasively this is rendered), rather than him as a symbol for disenfranchised immigrants in the USA. Several suggest that Changez’ behaviour is not representative of how a Pakistani/South Asian would react in the circumstances outlined. Ahmad, for example, regards Changez’ behaviour as irrational and impulsive, while Rehman argues that Changez’ fictional decisions are implausible.

Not surprisingly, issues to do with the novel’s title – especially the word “fundamentalist” are emphasised in almost all the reviews. The majority of the British and American reviews comment on the ambiguity of the term, noting that it could imply that Changez is either a religious (Islamic) fundamentalist *or* a capitalist one. However, the reviewers I have identified as writing from a more right-wing perspective tend to assume the

former: Changez' story is one about the making of a terrorist. This is quite different in the Pakistani reviews which tend to define "fundamentalism" (as implied by the novel's title) as referring to American neo-imperialism. While this might appear to confirm the claim that national "habitus" impacts literary evaluation, it could be argued that these interpretive differences are not simply to do with location but are ideological and stem from the real-life concerns of the Pakistani reviewers. It appears, for example, that the Pakistani reviewers are more defensive about the potential linkage of the term with terrorism.

One of the most striking things that my analysis of initial reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has revealed is the way in which reviewers themselves are complicit in reifying the East/West binaries that Hamid himself seems to repeatedly challenge in his many interviews and commentaries on the book. As I noted earlier in this chapter, Hamid characteristically describes himself as "hybrid" or a "mongrel" and has emphatically insisted on the damaging consequences of binary thinking (us/them, West/East, Christians/Muslims) on many occasions. He has "explained" the novel as being precisely about this: the dangers of the West's refusal of "hybridity" and its insistence that those "with beards" (Muslims) can never be part of "us"/the US. The consequence, he implies, is that it will force those who seek to assimilate or move between countries and cultures to make singular choices, as Changez perhaps does. But in portraying this forced 'choice' on the part of Changez, Hamid is surely not endorsing a retrenchment into either/or geographical identity. Yet this is how many reviewers evaluate the novel – as one that reifies binaries between the East and West. My discussion hopes to suggest that not only does the novel challenge such reification, but the complex and multifaceted responses of reviewers do so too.

Conclusion

When it comes to Pakistani writing, I would encourage us all to remember the brand. We are custodians of brand Pakistan. And beneficiaries. The brand slaps an extra zero onto our advances, if not more. Branding can be the difference between a novel about brown people and a best-selling novel about brown people. It is our duty to maintain and build that brand.

I know I don't need to reiterate here what brand Pakistan stands for, but since my future income-stream is tied up with what you all do with it, I'm going to do so anyway. Brand Pakistan is a horror brand...

(Mohsin Hamid et. al. "How to Write About Pakistan" n.p.)

In my first chapter, I quoted a question posed by Maniza Naqvi: "Is [*sic*] Pakistani fiction that gets international recognition part of new world literature that, in turn, feeds a narrative [about the nation] dominant in the current global order?" (n.p.). In other words, does such fiction, as Mushtaq Bilal asks, give readers in "America and the UK exactly what they want"? (Bilal "The Golden Legend" n.p.). Naqvi and Bilal are by no means the only Pakistani critics to ask such questions, as I have discussed at some length. Most often, questions like these are rhetorical in tenor, with the implied answer being: "Yes. Pakistani fiction that gets international recognition betrays the nation by shoring up the prejudicial assumptions of western readers." What is at stake is not simply international acclaim, but rather the commercial success of this fiction in the global *market*. As Mustansar Hussain Tarar asserts of writers such as Mohammed Hanif, H. M. Naqvi and Kamila Shamsie, "[t]hey write what the West wants to read. They argue that literary agents push them to include "those things" (Tarar n.p.). "Those

things” here refers to negative portrayals of a “dark” Pakistan and a misogynistic, punitive, fundamentalist Islam – things that “scare the shit” out of western readers (in a comfortable kind of way) as the writers of my epigraph to this chapter parodically suggest – “things” intended to produce “best-selling” novels and “sla[p] an extra zero” on Pakistani writers’ advances (n.p.).

Claims like these are frequently made about postcolonial/contemporary Third world literature more generally. They have been forcefully debated and promoted by literary critics of a materialist bent, such as those I refer to throughout this dissertation, like Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, Lisa Lau, and Sandra Ponzanesi. While I do not want to dismiss the work of these theorists, on whose insights I draw repeatedly, or their divergent and challenging commentary, I have sought to challenge some aspects of their claims via an “evidential” study of reader responses to Pakistani Anglophone fiction. For these theorists, to sell their books internationally postcolonial or Third world writers “sell out” their nation, consciously or not;¹⁰⁴ to greater or lesser degrees, they re-Orientalise the Orient by writing *what western readers want to read*. In the case of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, then, Pakistani fiction writers confirm western stereotypical assumptions, from the significance of mangoes and fundamentalist religious zealots to suicide bombers, terrorists and female abuse. They offer exoticising portrayals of Pakistan that “feed” western desires for knowledge of the “other” in ways that can be comfortably domesticated.

Although Huggan and Brouillette (etc.) published their important works some time ago, their ideas continue to circulate in recent discussions of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. In *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* (2019), for example, Masood Ashraf Raja asserts of this body of writing that it “mobilis[es]” “stereotypes” about the nation that

¹⁰⁴ As noted, Huggan suggests such representations may be deliberate and “strategic” to challenge such assumptions, but most often is not.

“then crystallise in the minds of ... *metropolitan readers*” (354; my emphasis); “most Pakistani authors writing in English ... unconsciously forestall and incorporate the expectations of the metropolitan market within their writing” (350). Raja’s claims are not only made about metropolitan readers but extend to Pakistani readers, too. He distinguishes between Pakistani *authors* writing in English, who occupy what he calls a “cosmopolitan habitus,” and Pakistani *readers* of this writing who occupy a “nationalistic habitus.” The word “habitus” in his essay is drawn from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills and inclinations, extending to tastes and evaluations, which people possess as a result of their lived experiences – a key (but not all-consuming) aspect of such experience being, for Raja, geographical situation. The “cosmopolitan habitus” of Pakistani Anglophone writers, argues Raja, is an “imaginative” one. It is “already placed in an elsewhere [beyond the nation], an elsewhere that comes across as natural but is determined by the metropolitan publishing industry and its financial and artistic imperatives” (350). Conversely the “nationalistic habitus” in which Pakistani readers are situated, he insists, “constructs not only the expectations of its inhabitants about the nature of their national identity, but also how that national identity is represented and perceived elsewhere in the world” (351). I began my doctoral research with an unquestioning acceptance of such claims, expecting that empirical research (via geographically defined reader-response analysis) would prove them correct. This has not been the case, however, or, at least, not so simple.

While I was aware that no sustained analysis of reader responses to Pakistani fiction had been undertaken, I assumed that if one was undertaken, as I proposed, it would reveal clear differences between Pakistani (and South Asian more generally) responses and metropolitan (American and British) ones. In particular, I expected these two groups of readers to display divergent responses to the “authenticity” of portrayals of Pakistan and Pakistanis in this fiction. As a means of distinguishing between the responses of such differently-situated readers, in my

first chapter I introduced some key terms drawn from reader-response theory, elaborating on the distinction between “ideal,” “implied” and “actual” readers. In the terms of the above-mentioned theorists, the “implied” reader of Pakistani Anglophone fiction is metropolitan. Bluntly, in their analysis, Pakistani writers write for western readers in anticipation of global attention and the accompanying monetary gains this brings. I realised, however, that such claims were routinely made without any kind of empirical evidence. Based on the critical claims made by such theorists, I began with several assumptions that my subsequent research has invited me to challenge. I expected that a reader response survey would find different, even competing, responses to this fiction depending on the nationality of reviewers. In particular, I assumed that “real” Pakistani/South Asian readers, ones who do not confirm with the “ideal” reader anticipated in such fiction, would read the novels differently from metropolitan (American/British) ones.

As described in my Methodology chapter, I selected three contemporary, internationally-successful Pakistani novels and analysed responses to them as these were evident in book reviews published at the time each novel was released. I grouped these responses into four “constituencies” based on the geographic location of the magazine or newspaper in which the reviews appeared: Pakistan, India, US and Britain. I aimed to consider whether readers (reviewers) in different constituencies conform to or depart from the expectations that inform the kinds of theories mentioned, whether their evaluations reveal marked differences and, if so, what the nature of these differences is.

Given the frequently asserted claim that an author’s national identity confers (or is believed to confer) representational “accuracy” or “authenticity” on a text set in a particular nation, or when portraying issues related to that nation, it was necessary for me to first define “Pakistani Anglophone fiction.” It quickly became apparent that this was not a straightforward task. In critical accounts of Pakistani Anglophone fiction influenced by the aforementioned

theorists, the (literary) world appears neatly divided along familiar binary lines: the West and the rest, the metropole and the periphery, with the former term in each pair “consuming” the latter. As Faisal Nazir suggests with specific reference to Pakistani fiction, “the binary opposition identified and deconstructed in fiction and criticism is generally between Pakistan and the West” (361). In consequence, he argues, the “conflict of identity in Pakistani Anglophone fiction is frequently presented and debated as one between an Eastern, Islamic identity and a Western, liberal/secular one” (361). Arguably, definitions of national literature are premised on what John Frow, quoted earlier, refers to as “imaginary social unities,” or at least imaginary *national* unities, “as the explanatory basis of cultural texts” (*Cultural Studies* 13). Indeed, postcolonial or “World” literature is routinely defined by the geographic location and nationality of distinct groups of writers (Indian literature, Canadian literature, New Zealand literature, etc.), the ‘localness’ of which are threatened by the insidious market forces of neo-colonial globalism. This results in a paradox neatly summed up by David Damrosch: “a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture” (4, emphasis original). In this interpretation, Pakistani literature only has an “effective life” as a distinct category of world literature when understood in relationship with other (national) literatures in the “world market.” Aijaz Ahmad elaborates:

[T]he forces and countries that have played the leading role in the making of that market will also play a leading role in the making of that literature. By “making” here I do not mean “production”; commodities that circulate in the world market are not always produced in the capitalist centres. By “making” here I mean evaluation, accumulation, dissemination, and profit: both money-profit and cultural profit. (“The Communist” 24)

Problematically, an impossible ideal of national “authenticity” (and identity) is implicit in – and indeed shores up – the very idea that nationally-defined writers are reduced to what Gayatri Spivak calls “native informants” in the global market, “staging” marginality for profit, and selling out national/cultural difference for “profit” in both A. Ahmad’s senses. Erik Falk has noted as much in a discussion of what he refers to as “Huggan’s foundational idea of authenticity.” “For Huggan,” he writes, “the ‘postcolonial exotic’ turns cultural difference into marketable goods, but the only conceivable way out of this situation is closed: recourse to *a true cultural difference*, one untainted by market forces and commodification” (402-3; my emphasis). Falk argues that Brouillette’s development of Huggan’s work is more nuanced but ultimately resorts to similar essentialism. Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes are alert to the dangers of (nationalistic) essentialism and what they refer to as “reductive notions of authenticity” (7), noting that, “[i]n an increasingly globalized world, the Occident is no longer restricted to a western (European) sphere, while the Orient, similarly no longer confined to the East, can be found in Occidental spaces and spheres” (10). Nonetheless, in a definition of “re-Orientalism”, they accuse (some) South Asian (Indian) writers of the “strategic use of positivist essentialism” (8; here quoting Spivak) and of “utiliz[ing] positionality [in the East] to prove eligibility as representative and validity of testimony and authenticity” (7). In short, on their account, South Asian writers (by which they largely mean Indian ones) – “a comprador intelligentsia, with the power of representation” (6) – are complicit, in variously self-conscious ways, of “continuing to serve up the East as spectacle” (7). As I have suggested, similar claims are made about Pakistani writers of English literature and, latent in such claims is the notion that there is a “real,” essential Pakistan that such writers betray by their (fake) claims of representational authority.

To avoid such essentialism – the idea that there might be a true, culturally different Pakistani Anglophone literature against which we can judge literature that is “tainted by market

forces” – in my second chapter I argued for the necessity of understanding Pakistani Anglophone literature as a “brand.” By this I do not mean to suggest that this writing, and the writers of it, should be chastised for “selling out,” but rather seek to stress that such writing *necessarily* exists as a product of the global literary market. It is also not my intention to suggest that writers of Pakistani Anglophone literature are hapless pawns of international forces, rather they should be understood as active and at least partially-reflexive contributors to the production of that “brand”. Writers of brand Pakistan need not be understood as simply or inevitably cultural informants; they can also be understood as self-aware agents who consciously intervene in the global perception of Pakistan. Besides, the social consequences of their representations cannot be determined by interpretive analysis alone; it requires an analysis of the multiple ways in which multiple readers, situated in different “constituencies,” respond and make sense of their contributions.

To complicate matters, as outlined in my first chapter, many contemporary Pakistani authors no longer live in Pakistan or did not do so at the time they penned the novels under discussion. Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam were British residents at the time they published *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Golden Notebook*, respectively, and Hamid studied and worked in the US for many years prior to this. Even Jamil Ahmad, the only “resident” Pakistani author considered, was educated in English during the colonial era during which time he was “seduced by tales of ‘cowboys and Indians’ as a schoolboy” (AFP n.p.). Just as importantly, many of the *reviewers* of these writers’ novels are equally international as my brief biographical notes on each reveal. Not all reviewers who publish in western publications were born, or reside permanently, in the West; while some of the reviewers publishing in Pakistani newspapers are westerners. Several of the reviewers, in all “constituencies,” can fairly be termed “global citizens” who have travelled widely and lived outside their countries of birth for extended periods. Moreover, the implied readers of reviews published in Pakistani

newspapers and magazines cannot be generalised as representative of all Pakistanis. The majority are Pakistani-born readers of reviews written in English about fiction written in English – with the implication being that they belong to a middle/upper-class elite who are to some extent “anglicised” by virtue of their education. What all this means is that claims made about nationally distinct readers (reviewers and readers of reviews), responding to nationally-defined authors, like the ones I reproduce above and throughout this thesis, need to be carefully qualified and closely considered. It is such a qualified consideration that I attempt in my analysis of reader responses, via initial reviews, to *The Wandering Falcon*, *The Golden Legend* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The Wandering Falcon speaks to how shifting (historico-political) contexts influence both (the possibility of) publication and evaluations of the literary worth of a text marketed in terms of both its author’s nationality and the geographically distinct place/people he represents. Reviewer responses suggest how the novel fulfils the reader’s desires to “know” Balochistan and FATA. Many of the reviews credit J. Ahmad with being “the voice of Balochistan” able to offer “rare insights” into Balochistan’s unique tribal culture, insights gleaned “from the inside.” Almost all the reviewers, from all constituencies, discuss the novel in terms of its realism and informational value (Bilal Tanweer is a forceful exception). While quite a few acknowledge the 30-year gap between the time of writing and publication as part of the author’s back-story, many still assume or imply that the region and people portrayed in the novel are still the same now as they were when Ahmad originally wrote the novel.

The general tendency is thus for reviewers to assume that J. Ahmad speaks authoritatively about – even for – the tribes, even when the reviewers note that the author hailed from southern Pakistan and was in the tribal regions as a British-educated government employee. Strikingly, it is not only western reviewers who romanticise and exoticise Pashtun and Balochistani tribal life: Indian and Pakistani reviewers do so too, even as they tend to

suggest that the value of the book is in its appeal for an international audience. Differences in reviewer evaluations are therefore less correlated with the national identity of the reviewer than with their political leanings. Reviewers from both the East and the West appropriate the text in service of political claims – whether these are to do with a post-9/11 interest in the Afghani/Pakistani border areas or Balochistani civil rights and calls for independence. With very few exceptions the book is appreciated for anthropological and political rather than aesthetic reasons.

My discussion of Aslam, and *The Golden Legend*, reveals how authors can be complicit in the promotion of their work as exemplars of “Brand Pakistan” and themselves as authoritative “Pakistani” voices. Of the three novels considered in this thesis, *The Golden Legend* comes the closest to confirming the kinds of accusations of national “betrayal” in pursuit of global (financial) success, so often laid against postcolonial texts by the postcolonial critics. A large number of the British, American and Indian reviews of Aslam’s novel draw on elements of Aslam’s (auto)biography and the many interviews he has given. In these, he frequently portrays himself as a spokesperson for and about Pakistan (and Pakistanis), particularly a “dark” Pakistan beset by Islamic extremism, the mistreatment of (religious) minorities and women, and political corruption. Few reviewers question his authority to adopt this role, despite several noting that Aslam left Pakistan at the age of 14. As in many of his novels, in *The Golden Notebook* Aslam weaves actual events into the fictional narrative further securing the “veracity” of his portrayals of Pakistani religion and politics. Aslam’s authority as a writer with insider cultural and political knowledge is praised in the majority of the metropolitan reviews of *The Golden Notebook*. While some reviewers find his writing style overblown, and even take issue with small factual details in the novel, for the most part, these concerns are dismissed in favour of praise for ability to “hol[d] the mirror up to history” (Shortt 22) and “offer a searing glimpse into the life and times of contemporary Pakistan” (Roy n.p).

Commonly, the reviews of Aslam's works emphasise his explicit integration of political elements. Earlier, I suggested that a tendency to read postcolonial works in political terms often fails to consider any literary merit: many critics and reviewers focus on the socio-political or anthropological information that this text might offer. Indeed, many early reviews of *The Golden Legend* stress the novel's political engagement, at the expense of any significant discussion of literary merit. There were only two initial reviews of the novel published in Pakistan, one very brief. The other, by K. Shamsie, draws attention to the inclusion of "real" events in the novel but does not offer commentary on this apart from a single sentence in which she questions the accuracy of Aslam's generalising portrayal of Christians in the novel. It is difficult to assess any clear differences between "Pakistani" and non-Pakistani reviews of the novel, however, the paucity of Pakistani reviews is noteworthy. This seems to suggest that the novel held little interest for Pakistani readers – or at least the editors of Pakistani newspapers and magazines believed this to be the case.

Based on the limited number of reviews, the initial of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also reflects limited "home" interest in this novel by a diasporic Pakistani author writing about diasporic concerns. Unlike *Moth Smoke*, Hamid's first novel, set in Lahore and centred on "local" characters and concerns, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was not extensively reviewed in Pakistan, although it was widely reviewed outside the nation. I have suggested that one reason for this is that South Asian readers were not particularly interested in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because it was primarily addressed to readers in the West. Moreover, I argue that rather than re-Orientalising Pakistan, the novel might be understood as "de-orientalising": an attempt, in the words of Madeline Clements, "to respond in some measure and in English to the reductive and polarising perceptions of Muslims and Islam produced after the attacks on the World Trade Centre" (*Writing Islam* 16). In making this claim, there is a need to note the dangers of assuming authorial intention— something that many reviewers do, particularly in

conflating Hamid with his protagonist/narrator Changez. Responses to the novel, as evident in initial reviews, tell us less about what Hamid “really” thought or meant than what reviewers think about the US and Pakistan. As Gabrielle Bellot notes, how one reads *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “largely depends on *what one assumes* about Pakistan and America” (n.p., my emphasis). Reader responses, then, might tell us a great deal about the reader and his or her politics. This certainly appears to be the case in reviews of the novel. While there are some differences between “eastern” and “western” reviews there are larger differences between reviewers writing for the same reading “constituencies,” especially in relation to both Changez’ and Hamid’s ostensible politics. Pakistani and Indian interpretive communities focus more on questions to do with the ‘realistic’ portrayal of character and identity, while the US and UK based reading communities read the book in allegorical terms. When western reviewers do focus on the character it is on the success (or not) of Hamid’s portrayal of the psychology of ethnically-targeted immigrants, or “the terrorist mind,” rather than in aesthetic terms. Despite this, my analysis of reviews of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* led me to assert that the nationality of reviewers can only be discussed as a *part* of the equation when considering their responses and one that is of demonstrably lesser significance than their deducible ideological leanings.

My initial assumption was that the texts would be received differently by readers in nationally-defined “constituency” given that they were being published almost simultaneously everywhere. However, as my research progressed I realised that it is difficult to define reviewers in terms of their geographic location due to their multiple allegiances, but their opinions and interpretive leanings are often shared across constituencies. While some reception differences can be discerned across the East-West divide, the divergence(s) in reading(s) are not as drastic as prior theoretical work suggests should be expected.

In the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the divergences tend to be ideological rather than geographical – between reviewers promoting right-wing and left-wing stances, especially in relation to the portrayal of America in the novel. Right-leaning reviewers in all geographical locations vilify the novel on account of its ostensible anti-Americanism. Left-leaning reviewers appreciate it for projecting the viewpoint of “others.” *The Wandering Falcon* is admired by almost all the reviewers for its political importance and insight although there are differences between those who suggest its value in terms of Pakistani internal politics and those who suggest its value is for the ethnographic information (about the Taliban “hub”) it offers international readers. Finally, the representational veracity of *The Golden Legend* has been accepted by almost all reviewers, regardless of the location in which their reviews were published and the majority of reviewers accept Aslam’s authority to write truthfully about “dark” Pakistan.

The absence of stark differences that might be attributed to the geographical “habitus” of reviewers may be due to the professional and educational “habitus” many share. Most of the reviews published in British or American newspapers and magazines were written by fellow writers, or journalists or academics (of a wide variety of national origins). This is true, too, of quite a few of the reviews published in Pakistan and India, although there are a greater number of freelance writers in these reviewing “constituencies.” This reflects on the intimate link between the writing, publishing and marketing world and the fluidity and interpenetration of “interpretive communities” rather than stark differences between East and West or the periphery and the metropole. This is no doubt, at least in part, because the majority of the reviewers from Pakistan and India are a part of a privileged elite who can read and write in English. Their hybrid (or cosmopolitan) identities (Muneeza Shamsie, K. Shamsie, Tanweer, and Bilal, for instance) offer the increased opportunities to review Pakistani Anglophone literature and also reflects on the shared interpretive practices that shape the global marketing

of literature (of which reviewing is a part). But, of course, the readers of these reviews in Pakistan and India, are also part of this privileged elite. My research reinforces a picture of a cosmopolitan community where writers, publishers, reviewers and readers are interconnected and participate equally in the marketing of Pakistani Anglophone fiction in globally accepted ways and where the boundaries between ‘local’ and ‘international’ readership are blurred. There is no “authentic” or “purely Pakistani” market for, or readers of, this fiction – just as there is no simple or singular “authentic” Pakistan. To berate authors for “selling out,” or lament that they do so, appears to reify a binary between East and West that these novels – and their authors and reviewers – disavow.

What this study suggests is that the East-West distinctions traditionally magnified in sweeping critical claims such as those I have outlined throughout this thesis are insufficiently supported by empirical data. My analysis of reader responses to (selected) Pakistani fictional texts suggests that there is a great deal of commonality and overlap between interpretive evaluations from the various geographical constituencies I have considered. Certainly, there are some differences, but these can no way be generalised with reference to a “local”/“metropolitan” or Oriental/Occidental binary.

While the book reviews and authorial interviews selected for this study provide some sense of these overlapping interpretive tendencies there is, however, a need for a further study addressing material that was outside the scope of this study (as outlined in my Introduction). For example, there is much that could be learnt from a systematic analysis of online reviews including blogs, reviews by lay readers, and interviews with readers, and the analysis of variant book-cover designs and responses to these, depending on the location of publication and readership. It would be beneficial, too, to situate Pakistani Anglophone literature and its global reception not only in discussions about World Literature, Postcolonial Studies or Comparative

Literature but also in fields such as Migration Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology and Media Studies.

What does this mean for Pakistani Anglophone fiction? It means that the interconnected global literary market offers writing and publishing opportunities to Pakistani Anglophone writers that do not simply involve selling out or betrayal of the nation. It is true that one of the writers I have considered, Aslam, carefully fosters an authorial persona that makes claims for national (Pakistani) representational authority. But this does not simply result in metropolitan acclaim and local rejection. In contrast, Hamid resists such labels, asserting a “hybrid” (national and cultural) identity and yet is read, and praised, as Pakistani (and/or Muslim) on both sides of the East/West divide. Ahmad is read, at home and in the West, for his “realism” in depicting the North-western tribal culture and the (anachronistic) informational value his text. It may well be that when writers are promoted as part of a (national) brand then publishing becomes easier, sales increase and the brand continues to influence the reception of new, similarly branded texts. However, this need not mean resigned capitulation to the demands of “the market.” Nor does it mean that such texts simply portray and confirm existing (western) stereotypes. Of course, this is a danger and, of the three texts considered in this thesis, one that Aslam comes closest to enacting. However, nationally branded texts may also undermine, unsettle and upset stereotypical assumptions. They might offer alternative perspectives on events of global significance and be recognised by readers from the East and the West for doing so.

Appendix¹⁰⁵

AFP: Tribal Areas Inspire the ‘Wandering Falcon’

Pakistan Today

17 October 2011

A retired Pakistani civil servant nearing 80 may not sound like the most obvious debut author to take the international publishing world by storm, but Jamil Ahmad has done precisely that. Over a cup of tea and a glass of lime juice, he talks about a career as an administrator along Pakistan’s desolate borders with Afghanistan and Iran, and how he turned those memories into a book that has earned rave reviews.

“The Wandering Falcon”, published by Riverhead Books in the United States this month, captures the raw romance of Pakistan’s wildest terrain-associated today in the West with Taliban lairs and Al-Qaeda terror plots. Seduced by tales of ‘cowboys and Indians’ as a schoolboy, Ahmad quickly developed a lifelong passion for the tribal way of life in Baluchistan and the tribal areas along the Afghan border in the northwest. He joined the civil service in 1954 and later became commissioner of Swat, a north-western district where in 2009 a major operation was carried out against a Taliban insurgency, and of Waziristan, today the focus of the CIA’s most active drone war against Taliban fighters. He served at the embassy in Kabul from 1978 to 1980, a crucial time for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, coinciding with the Soviet invasion of the former. When he showed his German wife Helga some poetry, she dismissed it as “rubbish” and told him to write about something he knew, namely, the tribal way of life.

¹⁰⁵ Appendix contains all reviews which are copied directly from the source websites as verbatim. It is, therefore, expected to have a few inconsistencies in terms of spellings.

The result was a manuscript finished in 1974 and tucked away in a drawer. Helga, “like a bulldog”, kept showing it to people over 20 years. Then Ahmad’s brother heard a short story competition on the radio, called up Helga for a photocopy and submitted the draft, which attracted local attention and ultimately wound its way to the publishers. The book is a collection of gently interlinking short stories, all but one featuring Tor Baz, a boy born to a couple who elope. He becomes the “Wandering Falcon” after his parents are killed. Contemporaries have queued up to pay homage to Ahmad for what Kashmir writer Basharat Peer described as “one of the finest collections of short stories to come out of South Asia in decades”.

With the United States fighting a covert war against militants in Pakistan and locked into the 10-year conflict in Afghanistan, Ahmad’s US editor hopes the book will shed light on a region isolated from the outside world. Laura Perciasepe says it is a “clear and powerful story” set in an area “of great interest and importance to American readers, but so little understood”. Ahmad’s age and background clearly set him apart from the urbane group of young writers responsible for a renaissance in Pakistani literature that has found a captive audience in the West following the 9/11 attacks. For one thing, Ahmad has never been fond of cities. For another, he doesn’t like to travel. He turned down invitations to book launches in India and the United States “because of all that checking in at airports and hotels”. Something of a “wandering falcon” himself, he moved constantly as a child around India with a father who worked in the judiciary. “There was no anchor point. We moved all the time.” Today he lives in Islamabad largely for practical reasons because as Helga said, what would they do about doctors and dentists in Chitral, up in the Hindu Kush Mountains where he originally wanted to retire.

Sipping a blend of Earl Grey and Darjeeling, and lighting up one cigarette after another, he chuckles over fond memories of Baluchistan, training in Britain and even a brief stint at the

Irish Peat Board. He sees tribes as the earliest building blocks of humanity, which functioned for centuries until they started clashing with nation states and empires. “There’s a tribal gene, as I said, somewhere embedded in each one of us,” he says. But Ahmad writes also of a lost world. It is difficult to imagine today, for example, a civil servant living with his German wife on a hill miles from anywhere with only a militia post for company. In Baluchistan, Helga was frequently left alone, having to look after three children under five without electricity or running water. Once, Ahmad got a message saying “the tap is leaking”. He thought “silly girl, what do I do, sitting on the Iranian border?”

“So I came back after 10 days and I find the message she sent was ‘the baby is seriously ill’ and the militia has transmitted the other side of the paper, which was her personal note that the tap was leaking,” he said. By then, the crisis was over and the baby had recovered — doused in olive oil, the only remedy to hand.

Ahmad, Adnan: Book Review: Mohsin Hamid’s *‘The Reluctant Fundamentalist’*
Pakistaniat

01 July 2007

I finished reading Mohsin Hamid’s second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* over the weekend. His first novel *Moth Smoke* captured my imagination quite vividly with several fascinating monologues in the novel and a theme that had everything to do with my generation and that age of mine. The author in between these two novels has aged and matured just like his readers including myself.

The new novel involves only one monologue with a man named Changez telling his story to an American, sitting at a restaurant in old Anarkali in Lahore. He keeps both his listener and his reader intensely engaged for about 184 pages, which is the entire length of the novel.

The novel's main theme revolves around an increasing distrust between the East and the West and a troubled love story that at times makes one almost feel sick deep within but its intensity never fades throughout the course of the monologue. In the end it is a story about a twenty-two year old who acts his age in turbulent times and in a love triangle where his rival has long passed away leaving behind a psychologically damaged soul who may never love again. Changez' decisions in the post 9/11 insecure times, especially for the Pakistani community, were both irrational and impulsive. India-Pakistan tensions of 2002 with his family without him in Lahore, perceived, and often real, discrimination against Pakistani Americans during that time, and his mutilated romance with a fellow Princetonian, all play a part in his decision to quit and go back and take up a job of a lecturer at a university in Lahore.

Just like Dara, "the apostate" of *Moth Smoke*, Changez, the reluctant fundamentalist, too goes down the spiral, given the consequences and magnitude of his decisions, but somehow he stays composed throughout the course of this story, unlike Dara. However, Changez is a lot less compelling character than Dara Shikoh and that goes well with the complex and uncertain undertones of the novel, which is really not about fundamentalism.

Mohsin Hamid completely evades the daunting issues Changez might have had faced in Lahore upon his return and always gets lofty when talking about his native city. He does so may be because he wanted the story to be only about New York or may be to contain the length in this unique style of writing in a single monologue or simply because he wants these questions to linger on readers' mind as he ends the novel on an unsure note. Like the question about the girl who never was his and may never be but still exists in his memory or the questions about the identity of the gentleman he had been talking to throughout the story.

About Adnan Ahmad: *Adnan is a free-lance writer and works in financial sector. He lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.*

Akbar, Arifa: *The Wandering Falcon*, By Jamil Ahmad
The Independent

19 May 2012

The Wandering Falcon's opening chapter appeared in a collection of essays and short stories on Pakistan last year, marking Jamil Ahmad's debut as a fiction writer. "The Sins of the Mother" dramatised a tribal honour killing and was written with such a terrible beauty that its author became Penguin's bright new discovery, at the age of 78. Ahmad had, until his retirement, spent decades in the Pakistani civil service, stationed in the Frontier Province and Balochistan. These territories, which comprise the semi-autonomous tribal belt along Iran and Afghanistan's borders, are inhabited by clans that follow their own ancient "jirga" system of justice over Pakistan's official laws of jurisprudence.

With this novel, Ahmad has followed Mark Twain's advice to write what he knows. And what he knows is all the more fiction-worthy for his lived experience among these hardy people, much feared and little known. Learning the lore of this land, rich in natural beauty and governed by ancient custom and internecine rivalry, appears to have been a lifetime's work for Ahmad. The region itself now becomes the tragic protagonist of this highly accomplished first novel, revealing both its stubbornly unyielding character and the fortunes of the people it crushes in its indefatigable battle against modernity. The story is set in recent decades, despite the medieval undertones. It begins with the revenge killing of a servant who runs away with his master's daughter. Five years after their escape into the desert dunes, the couple is hunted

down. The servant is stoned to death, his young son bearing witness to the justice meted out to those who betray the tribe.

It is this orphaned boy, Tor Baz, whom the reader follows as he wanders nomadically, his personal fortunes criss-crossing with the men and women from the various tribes - the Afridis, Wazirs, Bhattanis, Gujjars and Masuds. There are over-burdened fathers who have forgotten the names of their children, women sold as virgins or whores at market, rebel mullahs, outlaws and once-great tribal leaders whose lion pride has been cut down by old age.

A broader politics of the territory emerges through his encounters – the tribal leaders' historic alliance with the Germans during the Second World War; the Soviet invasion; old enmities against the British. Tor Baz is no hero, but he is a survivor. As a boy, his fortunes lie in the hands of the men who adopt him. He realises that the frequency with which his adoptive fathers perish reflects the dangers of embedding himself within one tribe, and he learns to align himself with whoever will help him. An official who cannot pin-down Tor Baz's tribal loyalties asks him who he is: "Think of Tor Baz as your hunting falcon," he answers enigmatically. For the reader, Tor Baz stays distant and unknowable. We see through him the tribes he meets and the laws that govern their lives and deaths.

His psychological opacity chimes with the novel's subject matter - a community led by machismo where people cannot afford to mourn their losses for too long if they are to survive. The simplicity of the narration gives a fable-like effect to the storytelling. Its elegiac voice mourns the lot of the characters, yet refuses to judge the laws that trap them. They are neither romanticised nor vilified, but shown in all their terrible, resilient beauty.

Albinia, Alice: *The Wandering Falcon*, by Jamil Ahmad
Financial Times

23 May 2011

These nine tautly written stories follow the fortunes of the “wandering falcon” of the title – a Pakistani boy, Tor Baz. Beginning in the 1950s, in the Baluchistan desert, the narrative moves slowly northwards through the tribal areas that border Afghanistan, concluding some two decades later near the mountains of Chitral. Tor Baz is only a glancing presence in these pages, more narrative device than character. But the conceit works well, providing a decorous fictional veil behind which the author, Jamil Ahmad, can focus on the themes that have affected him during a civil service career spent in this unusual landscape. His interests turn out to be in the harsher aspects of frontier life: ritual honour killings, blood feuds, the sale and prostitution of women by fathers and husbands. The book ends with Tor Baz tricking a slave-market vendor into parting with a prize virgin cut-price, by pretending to want her as his wife.

There are some fantastic stories. “The Sins of the Mother” is a devastating account of the few snatched years of domestic contentment that precede the killing of Tor Baz’s parents. “Point of Honour” describes how a group of Baluch rebels are tricked by the government into turning themselves in – only to be thrown in jail. “The Death of Camels” shows how the creation of Pakistan, and the sealing of its border with Afghanistan, ruined the lives of the nomads who once moved their flocks freely between both countries. The dilemma of these illiterate people – bamboozled by bureaucrats and betrayed by each other – is drawn with tenderness but without sentimentality.

As Tor Baz reflects, “Who but God knows what the future holds for me and for this land?” Who indeed. Ahmad’s vision is unremittingly bleak. His characters’ lives are blighted by hunger, government interference, whim and fate (and this was before the Soviets, the CIA and Osama bin Laden came on the scene). But Ahmad is a deft storyteller and his slim volume possesses a strong allure.

About Alice Albinia: *Alice Albinia's 'Empires of the Indus' won the Somerset Maugham and Dolman Travel Prize. Her first novel 'Leela's Book' is published in June (Harvill Secker)*

Anthony, Andrew: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid – Review
The Guardian

23 December 2012

An alienated Pakistani tells his life story to an American stranger in Mohsin Hamid's mesmerising second novel.

Mohsin Hamid's novel seamlessly combines ideology and emotion, politics and the personal. It is a truism bordering on a tautology to note that first-person novels are all about voice, but seldom can that observation have been more apposite than in the case of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Right from his solicitous first sentence, "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?" the narrator, Changez, establishes a beguiling and yet troubling hold on the reader as he confides his life story to an American stranger in a Lahore cafe.

We learn that Changez is a highly educated Pakistani who worked as a financial analyst for a prestigious firm in New York. But after a disastrous love affair and the September 11 attacks, his western life collapses and he returns disillusioned and alienated to Pakistan. All of this Changez reveals in an almost archly formal, and epically one-sided, conversation with the mysterious stranger that rolls back and forth over his developing concern with issues of cultural identity, American power and the victimisation of Pakistan.

The stranger is fidgety and anxious, and at first Changez's elaborate self-justifications for his contentious sentiments begin to suggest that perhaps he is a more sinister figure than he allows. Gradually, however, we are brought to wonder whether the person in jeopardy is not

the stranger, but Changez himself. One of the novel's notable achievements is the seamless manner in which ideology and emotion, politics and the personal are brought together into a vivid picture of an individual's globalised revolt. But more intriguing, and arguably more impressive, is the fact that Changez is a sympathetic figure in spite of some objectionable opinions – he admits, for example, to being “remarkably pleased” by 9/11.

In a sense, he is the embodiment of the argument that says that America has created its own enemies. Although that outlook may be fashionable on some US campuses, it has become practically universal in Pakistan, a country blighted by fundamentalists who display no hint of reluctance at all. Indeed some argue that the social and political crisis into which Pakistan appears to be sinking ever deeper is at least partly the result of its political class refusing to challenge these unreluctant fundamentalists, preferring instead to take refuge in crowd-pleasing anti-Americanism. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is in no way a critique of Pakistan's intellectual denial. If anything it could be described as an example of it. But if that were the case, it would do nothing to undermine its strength as a novel. It's not Hamid's job to right the problems of his country of birth. His job as a novelist is to capture a particular reality and give authentic voice to the characters therein. And in this he has succeeded with a sureness that is quite mesmerising.

Badkhen, Anna: The Progress of the Nomads
The New Republic

29 November 2011

The Riders advanced at a four-beat gait on an unpaved track that bisected swatches of hilly farmland. Flint jingled under their donkeys' hoofs. The tiny mirrors sewn into the skullcaps of the men and the enormous homespun silk scarves of the women shimmered in the

sun, reflecting fragments of their world: the cerulean fields of chicory, the emerald slopes of winter wheat, the quivering gold of Afghan road dust churned up by their procession and suspended between heaven and earth. Slightly to the riders' side, their sheep ambled along a narrow rim of shade where rowan trees drooped with the saccharine blossoms the women believed to be an aphrodisiac.

The dazzling caravan drew closer and I raised my notebook and pen in the universal plea for journalistic alms. The riders, both women and men, raised their hands in greeting. They did not slow down. They were Kuchi tribespeople: nomads who wander with the seasons between the vertiginous mountains of Afghanistan and the lowland pastures of Pakistan in a stately minuet of annual migration. They were not about to break their pace for me. They were not about to break their pace for anyone. They had been riding at this pace through this land, year after year, for centuries.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *The Wandering Falcon*, Jamil Ahmad's marvel of a novel about the people who live along the border that divides Afghanistan and Pakistan, is its author's ability to maintain that pace. Ahmad unscrolls the unending sands and unyielding mountains of the herders' seasonal passage in a language as unhurried and precise as the sparse and iambic landscape they traverse. Here is a band of Baluch rebels steering their camels toward a water hole: Patiently, they had skirted stretches of oily, ocher-colored quicksand and had bravely pushed their animals through the bruising patches of camel-thorn bushes and burning salt flats.

Ahmad burdens his prose with no unnecessary curlicues. Like a Kuchi tribesman, he brings along on his literary hejira only what is absolutely essential. But in his stripped-down prose lies a beauty that is almost sublime, akin to the beauty his nomads find in the land that nourishes and bedevils them, offering them a thousand shades of gray and brown, with which it tinted its hills, its sands, and its earth. There were subtle changes of color in the blackness of

the nights and the brightness of the days, and the vigorous colors of the tiny desert flowers hidden in the dusty bushes, and of the gliding snakes and scurrying lizards as they buried themselves in the sand.

Ahmad, who is eighty years old and lives in Islamabad, may be an outsider, but he is not a newcomer: he spent decades working as a civil servant on development in western Pakistan and at his country's embassy in Kabul. Exoticizing his characters—the washed-up former mountain guide who sells his daughter into marriage for a pound of opium; the deranged double-crossing mullah; the man who kills his beloved to protect her from her husband's wrath—would have been easy, but it would have been a cheap trick. Instead Ahmad lifts the veil from their little-known culture delicately, respectfully, allowing us a look without violating their privacy. We learn of women who insist on taking their chicken on months-long desert treks and shame their husbands into battle; of men who sell women into prostitution and cheat their way out of revenge killings by wearing children's clothes—for the Pashtun honor code, *Pushtunwali*, prohibits visiting revenge on children (this, too, we learn from the novel). Ahmad does not romanticize the tribespeople, nor does he condemn them. One gets a sense that he truly loves them, accepting them in their entirety, with their strengths and their flaws. A migrating herdsman accepts both an unexpectedly lush pasture and a relentless sandstorm this way.

Nostalgia, writes Svetlana Boym in her fine study of the subject, “is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythm of our dreams.” *The Wandering Falcon*, then, is an indelibly nostalgic novel: it honors the slower rhythm of a threatened lifestyle. In Ahmad's novel and in real life, the traditional paths of tribespeople increasingly collide with a formidable enemy: modernity. Both the nomads' cyclical pilgrimage and the ancient honor-code-based order of the settled tribes are at risk in a land where more and more often high-tech warfare, checkpoints, paved roads, and borders dictate the dispensation of their

justice and the course of their journeys—in sum, where the accoutrements of what we call progress interfere.

Their migration routes and system of government were first disrupted by the British demarcation, in 1948, of the 1,600-mile border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which divided the tribes, and destabilized further in the 1980s, when the United States and Saudi Arabia poured approximately \$1 billion a year in weapons and training of anti-Soviet mujaheddin in the tribal areas. In the '90s, Pakistan used the region to train, fund, and dispatch militants to fight Indian forces over the control of Kashmir. Today the Taliban use it as a training base and safe haven and American drones drop bombs on it.

The World Food Program estimates that nearly half of the nomads who summered in Afghanistan in the '70s gave up their lifestyle before the American-led invasion a decade ago. The last ten years have not been kind to the Kuchi, either. In over a decade of reportage from Afghanistan, I have seen more Kuchi families huddling under grimy, UNHCR-issued tarps than resting under hand-woven woollen tents or herding their animals through pastures. For decades now, nomadism in Afghanistan and Pakistan has “constituted defiance to certain concepts, which the world was beginning to associate with civilization itself. Concepts such as statehood, citizenship, undivided loyalty to one state, settled life as opposed to nomadic life, and the writ of the state as opposed to tribal discipline,” writes Ahmad. “The pressures,” he goes on, “were inexorable. One set of values, one way of life, had to die. In this clash, the state, as always, proved stronger than the individual. The new way of life triumphed over the old.”

The Wandering Falcon does not denounce modern (and largely western) ideas of time and progress in the merciless way of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It mourns them. In the chapter dedicated almost entirely to the devastation wrought upon the herders by the newly enforced border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, soldiers at a Pakistani checkpoint fire upon

a large band of nomads who defy the order to turn back. Ahmad paints the massacre in few wide, airy brush strokes:

The firing was indiscriminate. Men, women, and children died. Gul Jana's belief that the Koran would prevent tragedy died, too. Dawa Khan fell dead in the raking fire. There is no gratuitous violence in this scene of carnage. There is deep melancholy. *The Wandering Falcon* is a glimpse into the volatile tribal belt that today potentially holds the key to ending, or prolonging indefinitely, America's longest war. Shamefully, it is a region the majority of western readers knows about either as "Pakistan's tribal badlands," a common journalistic shorthand, or through the racist brush-offs of earlier invaders. Winston Churchill called its inhabitants "a numerous population in a state of warlike leisure," not to mention "savages of the Stone Age." The journalist David Rohde, whose account of his seven months in Taliban captivity in western Pakistan in 2008 and 2009 may be the most insightful look to date at the way fundamentalist insurgents there operate, describes it as "a backwater roughly the size of Massachusetts . . . dominated by Pashtun tribes known for their independence, criminality, and fighting skills." To many a western eye, the people who inhabit this region are almost cartoonish, two-dimensional stick figures. Ahmad's exquisite book breathes life into them.

Yet *The Wandering Falcon* is a book that almost wasn't. Ahmad wrote it in the early '70s; it is his only work of fiction. For years, the manuscript sat in his drawer. Publishers he approached in London were not interested; maybe they found the subject too obscure. In 2008, Ahmad submitted one of the chapters to a short story competition in Pakistan; the organizer showed it to an editor at Penguin Books. The publishing house bought it the following year. Perhaps, like the well-worn routes of its nomads, the book set its own pace, a pace that defied the accelerated clip of modern publishing. It passed the test of time beautifully. As W.S. Merwin has written,

it is the late poems

that are made of words

that have come the whole way

they have been there

About Anna Badkhen: Anna Badkhen is the author of *Peace Meals: Candy-Wrapped Kalashnikovs and Other War Stories* and *Waiting for the Taliban*, now available in paperback. She is writing a book about timelessness.

Battersby, Eileen: *The Golden Legend* Review: Creation and Destruction in Pakistan
The Irish Times

14 January 2017

Beauty is confronted by terrorism in Nadeem Aslam's certain Man Booker contender Nadeem Aslam: his language makes one engage with every word.

It was a marriage of minds – Massud and Nargis, both architects. He is a sensitive dreamer, distressed by the pain of others; she is a resilient survivor. Her life has been based on one small deception. They share a love of beauty expressed through mutual devotion and the buildings they create.

The Golden Legend, the opulent and dramatic fifth novel by the Pakistan-born, London-based writer Nadeem Aslam, begins on a morning when the couple are about to join in an informal celebration. In reality, it is a communal task, the transferral of sacred texts from an old library to a new one that they have designed. The books are to be passed, from hand to hand, along a mile-long route. It is a marvellous image, characteristic of the visual allure that Aslam consistently brings to his art.

Yet chance intervenes in the form of an American who launches what appears to be a terrorist attack in this fictional Pakistani city. Several people are killed, including several bystanders. Efforts are made to cover up the incident, the US government insists the man is a diplomat, even the president makes a plea, and the openly corrupt Pakistani police set out to threaten the grieving relatives into “forgiving” the American in exchange for cash settlements and, ultimately, US citizenship.

From the outset of an overwhelmingly political novel that will undoubtedly be a Man Booker contender, Aslam, whose exciting work includes *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013), juxtaposes the beauty of tradition with the violence and menace of a world gone mad. Massud awakes to the call of the predawn prayer. “He imagined the worshippers approaching the eighteenth-century mosque in silence, some of them carrying lanterns. The sight of empty shoes at the thresholds of mosques had always made him think that the men had been transformed into pure spirit just before entering.” In Massud Aslam has created a character who, having been born into privilege and a life of the mind, has continued to live through his intellect. For his wife it was different; she discovered grief at an early age.

Choice objects

Now in their 50s, they live in a beautiful, sun-filled space that they have created in a former paper factory, and they have surrounded themselves with choice objects, such as “a metal helmet for a stallion from the times of the Crusades . . . and the vertebrae of a whale from a bay in Antarctica”. Two elaborate model mosques, used as private reading spaces in a large book-lined room, are hoisted up and down according to the season.

It all seems a bit precious: “Numerous pairs of bird wings were hanging from nails driven into the far wall of the kitchen.” It is an obvious repetition of the image of the ceiling

described in Aslam's finest work, *The Wasted Vigil*, into which hundreds of books were held in place by iron nails.

This couple exists at a remove and can drop everything to research Tolstoy's reaction to Pushkin's death in 1837 – when Tolstoy was nine. They have no children but have educated Helen, the daughter of their servants, as if she were their own. At 19 the girl has already angered the authorities with articles that have been published in the local newspaper. Her mother, Grace, had been brutally murdered, and Helen lives with her father, whose name is Lily. Plot is little more than a minor irrelevance to Aslam, an innate literary stylist with a finely honed visual sensibility whose interest is dictated by the individual responses of his characters to the violence of Islamism. As will be expected, *The Golden Legend* is gracefully poised and rich in symbolism, anecdotes and passing references to mythology, history and, of course, the Koran.

Among the most memorable devices is a great book of wisdom, gathered by Massud's father. It is damaged by a vindictive interrogator yet is lovingly repaired, mainly by Nargis, using golden thread. When a sanctuary is found on the island where Massud and Nargis created a mosque that became tainted by vicious attacks, it is impossible not to think of Prospero's island.

Name of religion

Aslam is a romantic whose intent is polemical, and he has an almost Shakespearean feel for violence as well as a grasp of the ongoing terrorism committed across Pakistan, India and Kashmir in the name of religion. Pakistan is represented as a terrified and terrifying place in which the slightest word or gesture will be seen as blasphemous and the only outcome is death. Beatings and killings fill the pages, as do abuse, rage and hatred.

The attitude to women is appalling, and although it is noticeable that Aslam has created independent woman characters in this novel, they are treated terribly; Nargis is insulted in her home, a young girl is raped more than 30 times in one attack, and the mother of Imran, a young

Kashmiri terrorist in training, was so badly beaten when she was pregnant with him that he was born with a broken arm.

Information often overshadows the fictional narrative, but then the reality is immense: “The mass graves of Kashmiris, who had been killed and buried in secret by Indian soldiers, were beginning to be discovered by then, and thousands of young men were missing – either murdered or crossing the border into Pakistan for guerrilla training.” Suicide bombers intent on avenging insults to their Islamist beliefs fill the pages. Yet somehow Aslam’s languid prose sustains moments and images of seductive eloquence. The account of a dead soul’s odyssey following an escape attempt through the sewers is breath-taking.

That said, his prose for all its lyricism is at times stiff, overly formal, even awkward; a dying man gazes at his wife’s face “as though absorbing her details for the last time”. Elsewhere Helen looks up from her work “to gather or refine her thoughts”. Helen decides to draw her lover as he sleeps: “She moved with skill, the mind combining its existence with the hand.” Aslam’s word choice can also be archaic: using the Elizabethan “miscreant” instead of “terrorist” or “suicide bomber” jars, whereas a suicide bomber is referred to as having “exploded himself”. It is an important novel of death, cruelty, injustice, atrocities and righteous anger.

The novel should have a closer copy edit, but this is because Aslam is such a gifted writer. The delicate physicality of his language makes one engage with every word; you read his books but also see them: he demands an almost surreal level of engagement. Bodies are broken and smashed. A little boy loses both of his legs in an explosion but assures his new friends at school that “the real reason for my missing legs is that I had wings growing on my ankles and was able to fly”. He had to hide them for a while, because a jealous sorcerer wanted them. There are irritants – flat dialogue and perhaps too much symbolism. Even so, this urgent, undeniably passionate and wayward novel convinces through the sheer cumulative force of its

intent and a random array of dazzling anecdotes and historical references, which help deflect the brutalities of religious fanaticism at its most unforgiving.

About Eileen Battersby: *Eileen Battersby is Literary Correspondent. Her debut novel, *Teethmarks on My Tongue*, is published by Dalkey Archive Press.*

Bilal, Mushtaq: 'The Golden Legend,' by Nadeem Aslam, Follows an Imperilled Widow in Pakistan

The Washington Post

24 April 2017

Ever since its independence in 1947, Pakistan has been struggling to forge an Islamic identity. But this struggle has taken a massive toll on the country's religious minorities, which have declined from 23 percent of the population in 1947 to only 3 percent today. This systematic persecution is the subject of "The Golden Legend," by Nadeem Aslam, who was born in Pakistan and moved to Britain as a teenager. He is the author of four previous novels, including "Maps for Lost Lovers."

At the center of the story are Nargis and Massud, a happily married couple living in the fictional city of Zamana, modeled after Lahore. Both are accomplished architects. During the inauguration of a library they designed, Massud is struck by a stray bullet fired by an American spy who was escaping two muggers. After Massud's death, a "soldier-spy" visits Nargis to persuade her to forgive the American, while the local cleric wants her not to let the American off the hook to "show the government [of Pakistan] that, unlike them, you face Mecca when you pray, not Washington."

Aslam complicates this situation by revealing that Nargis was born Margaret — a Christian. She first pretended to be a Muslim when she stood in place of a girl named Nargis in a school competition. This faux Muslim identity thrilled young Margaret because "she didn't

necessarily have to carry her own glass, cup and spoon with her. No one said she smelled faintly of sewage. No one asked her when she intended to convert to the Only True Religion.” Later, when Margaret came to Zamana to attend art school, she met and fell in love with Massud — and carried her deceit into their relationship.

But Margaret’s plight is overshadowed by a crisis involving the family of her housekeeper, whose daughter, Helen, gets caught in a deadly heresy controversy. Soon, Margaret and Helen find themselves fleeing their homes together.

Aslam is at his best when he writes about the hopes and fears, the dreams and desires of characters like Nargis. But at times, he seems overly keen to include as many topical snippets as possible, resulting in frequent narrative detours: Pakistani right-wingers slaughtering a cow on an Indian flag, extrajudicial killings by the police, a coffee-shop owner getting killed for celebrating Valentine’s Day. Also, Aslam’s melodramatic one-liners — beginning with the first sentence of the novel, “This world is the last thing God will ever tell us” — can sound like unnecessary pontifications.

That said, “The Golden Legend” is a powerful and timely comment on the precarious state of religious minorities in Pakistan and an honest mirror to the Pakistani state and society. If Pakistanis find their reflection a bit too ugly, they should know whom to blame.

About Mushtaq Bilal: *Mushtaq Bilal’s book “Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood and Fiction” was published last year. Michael Dirda is on vacation.*

Bilgrami, Shahbano: *Asian Review of Books*
The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid

24 June 2007

Once critics have compared your work to Dostoevsky's, you can safely assume that you have made it in the world of literary fiction. Princeton graduate Mohsin Hamid's second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has, within months of publication, garnered an impressive array of accolades. Not only was it one of the hottest titles at this year's London Book Fair, it has also made it to Barnes & Noble Recommends, and the list goes on. Like his first novel, the critically acclaimed *Moth Smoke*, which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year in 2000, Hamid transforms current issues into the stuff of great fiction through the elegant simplicity of his prose.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a 9/11 novel that explores an issue that has obsessed the West since the Twin Towers fell: the psychology of the people who were responsible for the attack. While books that deal with 9/11 touch upon the 'fundamentalist' tangentially, there are few, if any, which get right to the heart of the matter like Hamid's does. The novel is, in fact, a monologue in the voice of a man who eventually becomes a 'reluctant fundamentalist'. This man, Changez, is a promising young Princeton graduate from Pakistan whose dreams of making it big in America turn sour when the climate of the nation changes after 9/11. In a swiftly-darkening café in Lahore's Anarkali, a now-bearded and cynical Changez recounts his story to an American whose constant text-messaging and evident agitation suggest that he is more than just a casual tourist.

The use of monologue in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* allows Hamid intimate access to his protagonist's mind. Not without its limitations, monologue is used here with great effectiveness, particularly in helping to build suspense. Changez's tone, which is sometimes exaggeratedly polite, sometimes darkly menacing, is laced with the bitter irony of hindsight as he takes his silent interlocutor through the various stages of his disillusionment with the American dream.

Like Hamid's Daru Shezad in *Moth Smoke*, Changez is, in some respects, an outsider. While studying at Princeton automatically confers membership to an exclusive club, he is different from his American counterparts. In addition to being Pakistani and, therefore, foreign, he is deeply ashamed of the current state of his family's finances, which have necessitated his application for foreign aid. When, therefore, the highly competitive valuation firm Underwood Samson hires him, his boss, Jim, recognizes that he is 'hungry' and keeps reminding him that they are 'different'. (Jim also comes from a working-class background.)

For a while, Changez seems to fit right into Underwood Samson's corporate culture. He quickly rises to the top, becoming Jim's 'fair-haired boy' in a matter of months. The company's stress on 'fundamentals'—'Maximum return was the maxim to which we returned, time and again'—allows Changez to work on projects with an aggressive single-mindedness that impresses his bosses. In his private life, too, Changez gains entry to New York's elite through his relationship with Erica, a woman whom he meets on a trip to Greece. However, while away on assignment in the Philippines in September of 2001, the unthinkable happens: there is an attack on the World Trade Center. Changez's life in America swiftly unravels proving, perhaps, how weak and foundationless it was to begin with.

Changez's disillusionment with America and Underwood Samson (which some say is a veiled allusion to the United States) is conveyed gradually, the seeds of it planted well before the climax. Even when Changez visits Greece with a group of Princetonians, he wonders 'by what quirk of human history my companions—many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they—were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as if they were its ruling class.' After 9/11, however, America itself changes, its people 'gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage.' In some respects, much as post-9/11 America yearns for a lost past—an existence free of 'terror'—Changez's girlfriend

Erica retreats within herself, choosing to live out her fantasies with her dead boyfriend, Chris, instead of facing life as it is.

Hamid's dissection of the 'reluctant fundamentalist' carries with it a not-so-subtle commentary on American neo-imperialism. When Changez is posted on assignment to Chile, he meets Juan-Bautista, who points out the similarities between his position as an employee of an American company and that of the janissaries, Christian boys inducted by the Ottomans into the Muslim army. As Juan-Bautista says, the janissaries 'were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to.' In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, therefore, Hamid touches upon a number of urgent issues—global imperialism and its effects on culture, religion, and individual identity, imbalances of power and wealth—making this novel hugely important in the ongoing dialogue between east and west.

Editor's note: This review is adapted from a review originally published in 'Herald', Dawn Group of Newspapers, Karachi, Pakistan.

About Shahbano Bilgrami: *Shahbano Bilgrami's first novel, 'Without Dreams', was published in November 2007 and was longlisted for the 2007 Man Asian Literary Prize.*

Bock, Paula: An American Dream Turns to Dust in the Rubble of the Twin Towers
The Seattle Times

10 April 2007

The summer before 9/11, Mohsin Hamid completed the first draft of a novel about a Muslim man working in corporate America who decides to return to his native.

The summer before 9/11, Mohsin Hamid completed the first draft of a novel about a Muslim man working in corporate America who decides to return to his native Pakistan. Then

the World Trade Center was bombed, effectively swamping his story. It took the novelist years to digest the fallout and incorporate current events into “The Reluctant Fundamentalist.”

Lucky he did. Sept. 11 serves as pivot for an existential crisis suffered by Hamid’s narrator, Changez, a recent Princeton grad (straight-A student, soccer star) who hails from a once wealthy Punjabi family in Pakistan. Like his central character, Hamid grew up in Lahore, attended Princeton and Harvard Law School, worked in corporate New York and returned to Pakistan after 9/11.

The novel opens at an outdoor café in the old quarter of Lahore as Changez chats with a burly unidentified American about the perfect cup of tea. Or, rather, chats at him. As teatime becomes dinner, and dusk deepens into night, Changez unfolds his life story to the uneasy stranger who is not just a Quiet American—he is silent.

After Princeton, Changez joined a prestigious New York “valuation” firm and also became smitten with Erica, a beautiful but emotionally fragile classmate from Manhattan’s upper echelon who is still mourning her first love, a childhood boyfriend who died of cancer. The high-flying job and budding love affair open portals to New York’s high society, and like Jay Gatsby before him, Changez is a talented social climber. Yet because he’s also an outsider to western culture, his insights lend a different flavor.

While traveling with wealthy classmates in Greece, Changez notes their heedlessness with money, their self-righteousness in dealing with Greeks twice their age, their lack of respect for elders. “I found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions—many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they—were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class.” Changez’s voice is extraordinary. Cultivated, restrained, yet also barbed and passionate, it evokes the power of butler Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro’s “The Remains of the Day.” Hamid

meticulously maintains this voice throughout the 184-page monologue, even as Changez implodes post-9/11.

On business in Manila, Changez witnesses the collapse of the twin towers on television. “... I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased ... I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.” *Schadenfreude*—even though Changez was educated at an elite American university, infatuated with an American woman, and earning a lucrative American salary.

Initially, Changez cannot articulate why he feels a growing distaste for America and for the American he was fast becoming. But post-9/11, as he’s hassled (because of his new in-your-face beard?), as Erica abandons him for her dead lover and his family in Pakistan is threatened by war with India, his discontent crystallizes. “I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable,” Changez reflects while flying back from Santiago after purposefully botching business there. “Finance was the primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this.” His anger recalls the wrath of Kip, the Sikh demolitions expert in Michael Ondaatje’s “The English Patient” who rails against western nations after hearing news of the atomic bombings in Japan, convinced America would never have inflicted such pain on a white nation.

Of course, on 9/11, America *was* the bombing victim. So why is Changez lashing out against America? It’s because, at his core, Changez still considers himself a man from Lahore, a foreigner whom America will never truly accept. As an outsider, he feels personally insulted by American foreign policy, particularly its heavy hand in Asia during the 50 years after Kip’s war. “Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East and now Afghanistan,” he

resentfully reels off the list. “In each of the major conflicts ... that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role.”

That 9/11 should trigger rage—against America—in the soul of a Princeton soccer star who once *embraced* America is Hamid’s seething commentary on America’s reputation in the non-western world today. The author develops Changez’s character so convincingly that by mid-book, readers understand Changez’s anger, even if they don’t agree with it.

It’s too bad Hamid decided to punt on the last page with an ambiguous ending worthy of a freshman fiction-writing seminar. The rest of the novel is brilliantly written and well worth a read.

Boyagoda, Randy: On the Run
National Review

29 May 2017

Things being as bad as they are, . . . this world won’t last for much longer,” an old baker observes partway through Nadeem Aslam’s hard-eyed new novel. The baker’s young nephew Imran has already seen too much of the world to be persuaded by such avuncular hopefulness, and very much holds with his brother Laal’s view: “I’ve got worse news for you, uncle. . . . The world will survive forever, with everything staying exactly as it is now.” One sentence later, this youthful fatalism proves more than a cheap tough pose: We learn that Imran’s “brother was gunned down outside the baker’s shop, the corpse dragged through the streets behind a military vehicle over the coming days, until nothing remained at the end of the rope. Imran managed to disappear and began another long journey, this time towards Pakistan.”

The poor guy! In Aslam’s rendering, present-day Pakistan just might be the world-historical capital of fatalism. After all, this is a place where men matter-of-factly raise their

shirts to assure one another they're not wearing suicide-bomber vests; where an intelligence officer roughs up a grieving widow in her home and then demands that he be shown out formally like a proper guest; where a four-year-old boy dies soon after his father converts to Christianity, "poisoned, everyone suspected, for being the child of an apostate, by someone in [the] family." Elsewhere, the leader of a sectarian mob turns down a request "to burn down every Christian house before daybreak," but not out of mercy: He's the local landlord and he needs the rent money from an alleged blasphemer's coreligionists. He successfully encourages the mob to focus its fury on that one man. Meanwhile, the survivors of family members killed as part of a CIA-related gunfight rage against America but accept U.S. citizenship as reparation and migrate there.

Why bother reading an imaginative work shot through, indeed endlessly strafed, with such bleakness and brutality? Won't it merely confirm just about every newsfeed stereotype about prospects in an unstable, poor, violent, Muslim-majority country? In fact, as he did with his four acclaimed earlier novels, Aslam reveals — with much subtlety and many lyrical transports — small but undeniable portions of sacrifice, courage, love, and even beauty at work in an otherwise harrowing world.

The novel's characters and events are haunted by the life and death of Massud, a 55-year-old architect. With his elegant wife, the fellow architect Nargis, he leads a quiet, cosmopolitan existence in a simple compound situated close by the Grand Trunk Road ("one of the planet's great sinews"), in the middle of a lightly fictionalized version of Lahore that Aslam names Zamana. The architects' home is full of models from around the world that inspire their work. They are keen to design monuments and buildings that celebrate and enact cross-cultural understandings and sympathies, and they have ensured that their illiterate Christian servants' daughter Helen has had an excellent education, one that has made her a budding journalist. In sum, they are gentle, earnest, and self-consciously enlightened people

who worry that division and barbarism too often win out against unity and goodness when it comes to religious complexities in Pakistan, and they sincerely want to do something about this.

In other words, they are not long for this world. While traveling to take part in the formal opening of a new city library the couple has designed, Massud is killed in a firefight that breaks out between an alleged CIA agent and local gunmen who could have any number of identities and allegiances. Afterward, seeking only to mourn her husband's loss on her own terms, Nargis is pulled into a local-cum-international imbroglio whose details recall actual events from 2011 that featured onetime CIA contractor Raymond Davis and disputes over diplomatic immunity and U.S.-government reparations for foreign citizens. Aslam is less interested in reconstructing recent geopolitical controversies, though, than in revealing the human cost of trying to live through and beyond them — especially for Nargis, whose beloved dies before she can tell him the great secret of her life: She was born and raised a Christian but has lived as a Muslim since her early twenties, according to a rationale that Aslam discloses in a series of affecting flashbacks.

Nargis adamantly and bravely refuses to play a part in the cynical political theater that's being engineered out of her husband's death, and the intelligence officer assigned to change her mind intensifies his investigation into her background. In turn, her secret is imperiled, as are the lives of many others connected to her, including an aged Anglican bishop, Nargis's longtime servant Lily, and Lily's daughter Helen and her would-be beau Imran, who turns out to be a onetime recruit to Kashmiri militancy who has turned into a permanent runaway. His conversion from radicalism owes to his good sense, decency, and inherent concern for others.

Aslam provides each of these characters with fully fledged backstories that are often engrossing, but as the story reaches its second half, his moving around between his characters' personal histories unnecessarily saps the great propulsive energy of the novel's present-day

plots. The latter heighten in tension as the characters' parallel situations begin to intersect and intensify in peril. In effect, all are on the run, for reasons that often involve being accused of insulting Islam or threatening public order; all try to offer help, hope, and refuge to one another; and all are somehow connected to Nargis's secret, which means, ultimately, that the state has a grim interest in their doings. Aslam's plotting of pursuit, evasion, capture, and escape is intricate and engrossing, provided we accept his invitation to enjoy old-fashioned coincidences along the way (and we should).

His own earnest, even throbbing symbolism might prove harder to enjoy. For example, there is a 987-page book created by Massud's father, which was inspired by the medieval book of hagiographies that also provides this novel with its title. The version of Massud's father is a self-selected compendium of "the countless ideas and thoughts that had travelled over the ages from one part of the planet to another. It outlined and examined how disparate events in the history of the world had influenced each other, the hidden or forgotten contributions that one set of humans had made towards the happiness and knowledge of another." Massud was carrying this book when he was killed. It was all but destroyed in the encircling chaos, and the novel's other characters devote their rare free and safe time to repairing it. There's a clear double moral on offer here — about loyalty to a loved one and the ideas that inspired him, and about affirming the power of intercultural understanding to overcome despair and ignorance.

Far less obvious and precious, and thereby far more moving and memorable, is the sudden and stunning decision that one of the main characters makes at novel's end. This is a decision that extends two people's lives for at least another day, provided they first outrun the latest sectarian mob chasing after them.

About Randy Boyagoda: *Mr. Boyagoda, a novelist, is the principal and the vice president of the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, where he is also a professor of English and holds the Basilian Chair in Christianity, Arts, and Letters.*

Budhos, Marina: Fiction: Runes of Ruins
The Brooklyn Rail

02 May 2007

Over five years since the Twin Towers attack, we now have the term “9/11 literature.” It’s also no secret in the publishing industry that after 9/11, fiction sales began to plummet, as literary works—always a hard sell—became even harder to move off the store shelves. “People want reality,” was the automatic answer given by editors—as if reality does not exist in fiction; as if somehow, in such a difficult, gloomy moment for Americans, fiction became frivolous and indulgent, once we were stunned awake from our complacent slumber to realize we are a superpower hated by many. The inner life, characters, seemed almost a luxury. We needed to put ourselves on a diet of essential nutrients: learning about the world.

We now have literature—novels, even—that allows us again that delicious sensation of the inner life, permeated with the melancholic, vulnerable atmosphere of a world that will never be the same. And yet what precisely do we mean by this category of 9/11 literature? Is it simply novels that have incorporated the events and speak to our new frailties? Or how American and western lives have subtly and not-so-subtly shifted since the shock of a terrorist attack? In this regard, novels such as Claire Messud’s *The Emperor’s Children* and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* form satisfying ‘before and after’ bookends: each traces the ways that the comfortable middle class was jolted by this tragedy.

But the attempt to understand 9/11, the edges of empire and its geopolitical dimensions—so large, so abstract and hard to grasp through the narrower prisms of fiction—this is yet another frontier in literature. In the last year, two novels have attempted

to grasp that most toxic and relevant of points of view: anti-Americanism—John Updike’s *Terrorist* and Mohsin Hamid’s recently published *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

In the case of the Updike—a quintessentially American writer, with his felicitous prose about middle-aged suburbia—inhabits the mind of a young terrorist infatuated with radical fundamentalism. Sadly, this is where Updike fails, dreadfully. As a writer, he made his job easier—Ahmad, the boy, is the product of a brief marriage between a confused Irish-American woman and an Egyptian man who couldn’t “hack it” in the U.S., and is growing up in battered Paterson, NJ. I often drive through Paterson, and it is a cinematic journey through America’s urban blight and immigrant regeneration—but Updike’s rust-belt city, reclaimed by Middle-Eastern immigrants and a black underclass, is a wooden exercise in sociology. Though Ahmad’s background could have been interesting material—did he gravitate to radical ideas to feel pure, whole, unsullied by racial mixture?—he arrives in the novel already a formed believer, a teenage zombie of ideological spoutings, rendered incongruously in Updike’s patrician voice.

Indeed the best parts of the book resemble those other domestically-situated 9-11 novels: especially the portrait of Jack Levy, a high school counselor who has taken an interest in Ahmad, and then embarks into familiar Updike territory: an affair with Ahmad’s mother. This is what Updike is so good at—that souring, dispirited angst of aging America, and it is only when Levy observes his student that Ahmad comes to life as simply a strange and troubled teenager. And there are moments when the narrative breaks over a huge, breath-taking social vista, showing the novel’s larger ambitions—the collective upturning since the attack:

The dozing giant of American racism, lulled by decades of official liberal singsong, stirred anew as African Americans and Hispanics, who (it was often

complained) “can’t even speak English properly,” acquired the authority to frisk, to question, to delay, to grant or deny admission and the permission to fly....To the well-paid professionals who traveled the airways and frequented the newly fortified government buildings, it appears that a dusky underclass has been given tyrannical power.

Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* takes the form of 9/11 literature further—he keeps us moving on that same highway, hurtling us toward the edge of new and discomfiting perspectives. As opposed to the paisley froth of Updike’s prose, Hamid’s style is very spare, minimal, almost naïve in its approach—which comes to be its menacing allure. The novel is written in the form of a dialogue between Changez, an over-solicitous young Pakistani, and an unnamed American, who meet in a Lahore cafe. It is this uneasy-making form, sometimes imperfect, but always compelling, that makes this a fascinating, haunting read. For, of course, the unnamed American is the reader, too.

At the outset of the novel, the frame comes off a bit gimmicky; there is a divide between outside voice and the inner tale of Changez, a bright, promising graduate of Princeton who lands a coveted job as a business consultant and is soon ensconced in Manhattan privilege. But as the novel progresses, the two voices fuse: the openhearted confession of an immigrant is soon laced with sourness; a hovering disappointment with the American dream and all it exacts, morally and politically. This is a tale of conversion, from an eager immigrant to America to an outsider bruised and angered by America the empire.

The novel is a beguiling, intentional misnomer—Changez is not a reluctant fundamentalist, but a reluctant anti-American. For so much is about perception—political perception—and it is the menacing overlay of the American listener, positioned as the reader, which keeps us on edge. By the end, we keep asking: is Changez part of a terrorist cell? Or is the unknown American a CIA operative? The answer is not so important, but

rather the confusing mix of signals, the ways in which our societies are inextricably tangled and misread each other. As Changez says,

“... 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.”

This is not to say that as a reader one swallows Changez’s narrative with credulity. As an American, one finds oneself arguing with the narrator (is Pakistan entirely vulnerable and weak during the face-off with India in 2002? Is business consulting really the same as janissaries—captured Christian boys—used by the Ottoman Empire?) And the novel’s spare prose renders some of the secondary characters schematic—his mentor, for instance, stands in as the one-note gay outsider who has “made it” in corporate America. However, what makes this novel such an absorbing read is the unsettling dialogue it creates within the reader. Its minimalism, which leaves so much room for argument, also renders our complicity, forcing us to actively talk back, unable to retreat to our national borders with their complacent certainties. Changez’s discomfort becomes our own discomfort.

That is the essential difference between these two novels: Updike is a post-war American writer, giving us ideology as something formed and hardened, rather than a process going on all over the globe, right now. Hamid, in this sly form, gives us the opportunity to experience our own changing, confused reactions as part of this fluid moment. Are we imperialists, as his narrator indicates? Are we a beacon of opportunity for the talented or ruthless emissaries of global business? Must immigrants shed their allegiances and perspectives as our country invades?

Our understanding of ourselves as individuals in an empire is deeply fluid now, especially as we find ourselves deep in a war in Iraq and another in Afghanistan. In fact, we are living in a time of powerful flux and porousness, where truth, politics, and identity can be elusive, and it is refreshing to read a novel that reflects this reality. One moment Changez is a terrorist; at another, an over-eager talker—or both. In another instant we, the unnamed American, are an operative, or just an uneasy traveler, filled with apprehensions and images of dangerous Pakistan.

In American culture we celebrate the individual, and have developed a literature that records, with exquisite fineness, states of individual consciousness, of which Updike is one of its best practitioners. With 9/11, it was not just the Twin Towers that toppled; it was our very identity, our sense of imperviousness. Yet one cannot “force” a political awakening in the characters in our literature—otherwise we will have prescriptive screeds. Novels such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, with its echoes of Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, or Nadine Gordimer’s apartheid novels, point us toward another vista in 9/11 literature. This is fiction that gives us an uneasy shift of perspectives, a moral disquiet remembered beyond the last page; for there is no last word.

Chand, Manish: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
India Today

01 November 2008

Mohsin Hamid’s book projects the cultural conflicts that educated Muslim youths are faced with in the United States.

Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an incisive portrait of the transformation of a Princeton-educated Pakistani youth with a cushy American job and

an American girlfriend into an America-baiting radical with a sneaking sympathy for the 9/11 attackers. In many ways, Hamid's novel dramatises simultaneous schizophrenia and romance with the American dream many educated Muslim youths experience as they go about making existential choices in a world caught in the treacherous currents of East-West encounters.

The narrative is cunningly constructed as a monologue of Changez, a Pakistani 20-something young man who lands a plum job in New York and falls in love with the beautiful but troubled Erica (a subtle play on Am-Erica), with an unidentified American as his sole listener in a restaurant in the famous old Anarkali Bazar in Lahore. This is, however, just the frame. Hamid's second novel after *Moth Smoke* (2000) has a more ambitious and apt theme as it digs deeper into the psychology of fundamentalism and the roots of Muslim anger against an arrogant and insufferable America as it interferes in the affairs of others, be it "Vietnam, the Middle East and now Afghanistan", without being shrill or loud.

The bright and beautiful American dream turns sour for Changez one fine day in Manila where he had gone to value an ailing company for Underwood Samson, an elite firm that proudly flaunts "Focus on the fundamentals" as its motto - an ironic reference to capitalist fundamentalism as opposed to the one of Islamic variety.

As he switches on TV on that scary day in contemporary world history - September 11, 2001 - he found his inner voice articulating cultural conflicts he had chosen to gloss over in the midst of the good things of life Manhattan offered. "Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased," observes Changez. This was his moment of conversion; and from this point onwards his self-deprecating voice, alternatively wry and witty, acquires an edge of touchiness and anguish.

Another hinge moment in Changez's life occurs in Valparaiso where he had gone to evaluate an old publishing company targeted for a takeover. Over lunch, the publisher, in an oblique hint at his predicament, tells him the story of Janissaries of the Ottoman empire, who

were captured Christian boys trained to fight against their own people, which they willingly did with singular ferocity. “I was a modern-day Janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine...” observes Changez in a biting moment of self-knowledge.

Hamid’s novel is thus part fiction, part history and part polemics that is firmly grounded in bruising realities of the post 9/11 world and its troubled dialectic between Islam and the West. It also illuminates the temptations of radicalism and fundamentalism for well-heeled, educated youth who for all their success in the West still feel a sense of deep alienation and ennui in their adopted homelands, as was the case with the key perpetrators of 9/11 attacks and more recently of some suspects in the failed UK terror plot. Not that they have a morally superior alternative in place.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator, who has reluctantly returned home, mocks at his own paranoia and that of his American interlocutor. “It seems an obvious thing to say but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins.” It is in these troubled and self-conscious soliloquies one can find insights into the misguided clash of civilisations that is being enacted by fanatics on both sides of the divide.

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Chaudhuri, Amit: Not Entirely Like Me
London Review of Books

March 2007

In 1989, I was invited to a party in London. I was a graduate student at Oxford, supposedly writing a dissertation on D.H. Lawrence but actually doing nothing of the sort.

Instead, I'd completed a short novel; an extract from it had appeared in this paper, as had a poem and a review. It was on the basis of these that I must have been invited that night to the party, which was a celebration of the *London Review of Books*'s tenth anniversary.

Generally uncomfortable at literary gatherings, as all of us probably are, I was cushioned against the brunt of celebrity and erudite chatter by my former tutor at UCL. Various covers of past issues were on display, I seem to recall; one of them had a photograph of Salman Rushdie, which I looked at disbelievingly, as you might at someone you'd known as a child, who'd become famous for some unforeseeable feat, like holding their breath for ten minutes underwater, or journeying to Jupiter; for the fatwa had been recently announced. In the midst of the laughter and condiments of the evening, I was suddenly reminded of what a serious business literature, and life, really were.

I was introduced to several people I admired, and mistaken for another Indian contributor, the late Raj Chandavarkar, by Ian Jack. I ate canapés, searched for something to say to Frank Kermode, and had a glass of red wine. I generally feel neither one way nor another about drinking, but my listlessness about consuming alcohol offends only Indian acquaintances, not Western ones. However, in Oxford, imbibing the occasional port or wine was proving unavoidable, and not unpleasant.

It was mildly wet that evening, but it had stopped drizzling by the time I'd reached the stop at Marble Arch for the Citylink coach back to Oxford. It wasn't very late, and it must have been a weekday, because there was hardly anyone else at the stop. The other figure beside me, I realised with a sort of relief (certain emotions are as involuntary as intakes of breath), was a South Asian (or, as I'd probably have thought in those days, 'someone from the subcontinent'), a man of my height and age. He warmed to me as well; just the nature of our glances was enough to establish that we weren't unhappy to see each other. Soon we began to talk; he was from Pakistan. This, after the small delay between hearing it and understanding it, pleased me;

it gave a new dimension to the encounter, of the seemingly familiar becoming imperceptibly unfamiliar – and, as a result, promising.

He was not, I realised in a few minutes after we'd begun to talk, from the same class background as myself. His clothes were of a different weave; his English was different. And this, along with the fact that he was from Pakistan, not to speak of an openness and charm he had, was one of the reasons for my being attracted to his company. There are many upper-middle-class people in South Asia (as there probably are anywhere else) who feel at once less than themselves in, and superior to, their own class, and are drawn to people outside it. This might be a form of naivety as well as a sign of youthfulness; it's to invent someone else, and also never to delve properly into why one can't be with them for more than an hour-long journey, or the duration of a momentary encounter, to gloss over the reasons for meeting and separation, and the cause of the division. There's no real and enduring equality between the classes in India; yet the idea of class itself presupposes a notional human equality in a way in which caste, for instance (which plays a subliminal role among all religions in South Asia), doesn't. And yet, for all that, class, here, carries with it an old, autochthonic magic, and, as a consequence, an offering – and often, on the part of the upper classes, a presumption – of certain kinds of comfort. In a realm of putative equality, such as the Marble Arch coach stop, the lower-middle-class person might appear to possess a simplicity that is child-like to the upper-middle-class one, as well as a patience and clear-sightedness that reminds the latter of his parents, of the wisdom of age. It's possible that, for the lower-middle-class man, the other seems to be at once more privileged and educated, and less worldly-wise and intelligent; that he'd view him, then, with a mixture of envy and forbearance. Neither is absolutely sure, in their exchange with the other, of who's the child and who the adult, and at which particular point in time. This gives the encounter its promise as well as its misunderstandings and its share of unhappy surprises.

When the largely empty coach arrived, our casual but solicitous bonhomie, our comfortableness in each other's presence, meant that we sat together without giving it too much thought. The conversation continued, until – I can't remember what took it in this direction – the subject of religion and belief came up. I didn't mind. It's another thing I'd noticed in encounters of this sort as a student: that, talking across a semi-familiar, barely-acknowledged divide of difference and even inequality, it's possible to broach the big subjects. The discussion might almost inevitably, at some point, tackle God, or destiny, or death. This might be an implicit, sly reference to the fact that fate – something that was seemingly entirely arbitrary – brought us together, and gave us our different futures. I was always moved and illuminated by what I heard, because of the straightforwardly human, rather than oracular, quality of what was said. These were subjects and instincts you had to suppress among people of your own background; the phrase 'matters of life and death', for them, was incontrovertibly a euphemism – for deadlines and social commitments.

In Oxford, among graduate students in the English department, it was even forbidden, I'd noticed, to speak about literature. This had little to do with an ideological position derived from critical theory, which still belonged largely in the background in 1989; it was simply a taboo that was commonly observed. Among Indian students, talk about human emotion in particular – falling in love, homesickness – was considered imbecilic; you had to talk about junior research fellowships, Indian politics, American universities, or the joys of visiting Venice. In the end, I think it must have been homesickness that drew me to this man. 'But there is something I do not understand about Hinduism,' he said, polite but forthright – yet maybe not absolutely forthright, because he was troubled by something beyond the question. It looked as though a moment of reckoning, much-delayed, had come.

'What is it?' I asked; my smile was meant to be accommodating, but also to remind him, I hoped, that I wasn't a representative of the Hindu faith.

‘The idea of reincarnation – I have a problem with it,’ he said.

‘Well, it’s difficult to take literally,’ I conceded.

‘No, it is not a logical idea,’ he persisted, frowning as the coach went down the darkness of the motorway without urgency. He was following a train of thought, and now he turned and confronted me, still, however, courteous. ‘Suppose you were to die, but, sometime before you died, you were to have relations with your wife.’ There was no one at this time I knew that I wanted to marry, and I remember envisioning a faceless, elusive, vaguely Indian woman. ‘Suppose just after you died after having relations your wife became pregnant.’ He looked at me and I nodded at the complexity of this strange, already posthumous future. ‘Then’ – here was the clincher – ‘your soul, or whatever you call it, can enter the foetus in your wife’s womb?’ He stared at me in expectation; I was silent, and he took it to mean that I wasn’t convinced. ‘Can it not?’ he asked, and I nodded distantly: ‘I suppose it can.’ ‘That is,’ he concluded vigorously, ‘according to this idea, you can be born as your own son.’

He probably hadn’t meant to challenge me; he’d probably sensed that I wasn’t religious, and took this as an opportunity to clear up a metaphysical glitch with someone who at least nominally belonged to the faith.

‘Religions are not rational,’ I responded weakly; and then, because I could get childish in an argument, added: ‘The Koran isn’t completely logical, is it?’

‘It is completely logical,’ he corrected me. I have a memory of the eerie Hoover building passing by.

‘Really?’ I said. ‘Everything in it makes sense?’

He turned to me, unruffled, as if to someone who was ignorant about the basic facts of existence. ‘The Koran is completely logical because it is the only book in the world that is the word of God.’ This was spoken with almost a publisher’s zeal, a sales pitch to end all sales pitches.

My childish stubbornness was growing. ‘How do you know?’ I asked. He stared at me, again, as at an ignoramus, and I said: ‘How do you know it is the word of God?’

‘Because it says so in the Koran,’ he replied. Instantly, his expression changed, as if he’d decided he wanted to shrug off this business; it didn’t interest him any more. ‘Excuse me, if I am not mistaken, you have been drinking?’

I stared at him, astonished that the anniversary wine, this residue of literary hobnobbing, should still be issuing from my breath (no wonder they call alcohol ‘spirits’). Indignant, but not insulted, I said: ‘I wasn’t “drinking”. I just had a glass of wine.’

After this, we reached a sort of impasse. We must have pretended to doze; I remember the lights coming on, and him getting off somewhere on the outskirts of Oxford. It would be simple enough to dismiss the man’s remarks as stereotypical; and yet I couldn’t wish away his warmth, his accessibility, the sense of comfort he gave out. It was a comfort I couldn’t have expected from someone of my own background (we might never have entered into a conversation); this was part of an older equation, thrown out of its own context, involving an old sense of dependence, and possibly, on my part, a subtle taking advantage of. Whether or not that equation was unfair and weighted on one side – it was – there was no point in denying that its emotions were complex and real. Our equality – at once false and true – inside the coach had led him to open up with me, with such awkward results.

Like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, I believe that there are certain statements and positions you just can’t agree with. Unlike them, though, I have a pathological inability to take extreme opinions or actions, including religious ones, at face value. I don’t only mean that political parties – the BJP in India is a good example – blatantly manoeuvre religion for political gain (the way in which British political parties use the issue of immigration is a subtle, undeniable modulation of this); I mean that there are certain views and acts – voiced

on evangelical radio stations, executed by suicide bombers – that make you speculate about them beyond their stated motives and objectives.

To confuse matters, there's the curious human affinity that draws us – not through conscious effort, or as a result of an education in multiculturalism – to those who are, culturally and in other ways, unlike us, until, sometimes, we realise with a shock that we don't know them. The unsaid is at work in motives and actions on both sides; in the group of people we call 'us', and in those we begin to name, at certain moments, 'them'. The unsaid undercuts the dichotomy that Hitchens imposes on the debate, between the 'literalists' – the archbishops, priests and mullahs, the unemployed bus driver or corporate professional turned 'fundamentalist' – and the 'ironists', or novelists like Salman Rushdie. Irony is taken as an acceptable manner of not saying something, or saying something and meaning the opposite; but the unsaid that governs the terrorist's attenuated destiny, the mullah's rant, and Hitchens's polemic, isn't irony, but something else.

As reviews of Mohsin Hamid's second novel began to appear earlier this year, I was reminded, for some reason, of that encounter from almost twenty years ago. Not that my story and Hamid's are exactly similar; but there are several points of contact. Sometimes, while reading reviews of a book, you find (especially if there's something about it that's begun to intrigue you) that you've begun to invent it, that you're already becoming familiar, in a silently persuaded way, with a work you really don't know. At some point, my story became part of what I imagined Hamid's novel to be. What had brought these two stories together in my mind – one a memory, the other an outline of a novel I hadn't read – was the crucial piece of information that Hamid's book was a monologue, or a dialogue in which you never heard the other voice, which emerges from a chance, even bizarre, encounter between a Pakistani man and someone who at first appears to be an American tourist, on the streets of Lahore. The novel is structured around this encounter, but it isn't directly about it: what it's about (in the form of

a long confession addressed to the hapless and increasingly ‘reluctant’ interlocutor) is the speaker’s previous life in America, leading up to his present one in Lahore. But the idea of the encounter and, along with it, of the present moment, the here and now, is an all-important one to the novel, despite its being a structural device (or maybe precisely because of this), primarily a part of what used to be called ‘form’, and only secondarily, and by implication, informing ‘content’. These elements must have led to that feeling of growing recognition and to that interweaving in my mind; the notion of the unforeseen encounter and its consequences, or its ultimate lack of consequence, and, more pressingly, that of the urgency of the present moment, its magic and deceptions, its spaciousness and promise, its political immediacy, and the constant, unfulfillable sense of illumination it offers.

Having become almost too well acquainted with my construct of the novel, I risked being disappointed when I read it. That wasn’t to be. The former was quite different from the latter, but the journey from one to the other was seamless, and, from the start, I was gripped. The differences were obvious. Hamid’s narrator, Changez, is neither entirely like me nor my companion on the coach. He is one of South Asia’s proliferating and, by now, customary success stories, the sort magazines probably leap to associate with India, but could equally well come out of Pakistan. A Princeton graduate, like Hamid, Changez – again, not unlike Hamid – has worked in what might loosely be called the corporate-financial world in New York, a driven and exceptionally energetic domain. In contrast, I strongly suspect, to the man I met in Marble Arch, Changez used to be a believer in Western corporate meritocracy. Indeed, he’d been a star performer for an acquisitions firm called Underwood Samson; the fruits of belief have been tangible, the costs – which Changez becomes more aware of after 11 September – intangible and alienating, as they often are. Changez had a girlfriend, Erica (most reviewers have pointed out Hamid’s penchant for allegorical naming), a delicate, privileged, quite probably WASP woman with literary talent and ambitions, with whom he had a curious, largely asexual

relationship. The relationship, like Erica's sanity, begins to come undone by the second half of this short novel; under some mysterious psychological duress, possibly to do with Chris, a lover who died (several works are glancingly but effectively invoked by Hamid, including 'The Dead'), she becomes increasingly inaccessible and remote. At the same time, Changez's treasured American self, especially after it experiences a contradictory and scandalous moment of happiness on witnessing the destruction of the Twin Towers on television in a hotel room in Manila, begins to crumble, as does his sense of his corporate mission:

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realised that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.

Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist. 'Not fiction but news': Hamid is unobtrusively, but constantly, addressing the reader, hinting at how to read his novel; how not to be manipulated and led in the way that, in a sense, Changez's companion is, but to become attuned to its hidden, recurrent inversions. There's an almost delightful allegorical symmetry to the flow of events, as well as a sensuousness and finish that might belong to some other form of art: music, perhaps.

Despite its minute probing into the narrator's thoughts, this is not a conventional psychological novel; much of its magic – the enchantment and innocence of the relationship, the absolute familiarity and foreignness of America, the fragrant boisterousness and menace of Lahore – hinges on the unsaid. Hamid manages marvellously well in creating a novel that's rendered entirely in terms of the spoken word, and governed by the shape of what's evaded or not uttered. Two registers of the word 'formal' come to mind as one reads. One has to do with politeness, etiquette, and even over-elaboration and circumlocution. In the book, it has to do

with the way in which something spontaneous and immediate, like speech, is constantly qualified by adornment ('irresistibly refined or oddly anachronistic', as Changez says while speculating about the qualities in him that Erica might have been drawn to), and comes to seem disorienting and at one remove. The other has to do with Hamid's own craft and practice, his working within the genre of the novella, James's 'blessed *nouvelle*', with its unique tensions, restrictions and essential playfulness. The pressures and deflections of the form allow Hamid to visit the various genres that are common to South Asian anglophone writing, which are often connected with the revelation of identity – autobiography; travelogue; the novel of diaspora or exile – and to commit himself to none of these. For both author and narrator are involved in various kinds of disclosure, and yet are always making the temptations of disclosure and topicality (to do with Pakistani, immigrant or Muslim identity; to do with 9/11) surrender to formal – in both senses of the word – considerations. The result is a cool equipoise that is not possible in 'real life', where our desires for both the earthly and the immutable generally end up being so messy; but no less moving or true for having achieved a sort of perfection.

Choudhury, Chandras: Review / A Pakistani Empowered and Repulsed by America
SFGATE

11 April 2007

"The Reluctant Fundamentalist," Mohsin Hamid's taut and accomplished second novel, takes the form of a single monologue we are asked to imagine as a dialogue.

Changez, a resident of the Pakistani city of Lahore, encounters by chance or purpose an American tourist on the streets of his city, and presses his hospitality upon him. They get to talking (we never actually hear the interlocutor, only Changez's reactions to him), and Changez loses no time in revealing that he has considerable experience of America. He is, we learn, a

graduate of Princeton, worked subsequently for a prominent American firm and even had a love affair with an American girl. Then how is he now here? Changez's story, which seems to gush from him like blood from a wound, traces the self's shifting sense of itself against the rumblings of a rudely shaken world.

Changez is the scion of a prominent Lahore family, their wealth in decline but their prestige intact. A bright student, he wins a scholarship to Princeton, where many of his American peers come from the same class of their society as he does of his -- only they are far richer and more strident. The bright allure of meritocratic America seems to Changez in direct contrast to the tired air of his home country, its attention focused on military skirmishes with neighboring India. On graduating he takes up a lucrative offer from Underwood and Samson, a leading valuation firm, and becomes part of a global elite, flying business class from country to country. "I felt bathed in a warm sense of accomplishment," he recalls. "Nothing troubled me; I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet."

Changez falls in love with Erica, a girl from a wealthy American family. As their attachment develops, he learns that Erica has a past: Her longtime boyfriend, Chris, died recently. Changez thinks that it is only a matter of time before Erica leaves behind her memories and embraces the present, but disturbingly she seems instead to regress, and he feels powerless to help her.

Changez, then, has multiple allegiances to America. Yet, while on assignment in the Philippines, when he sees on TV the spectacle of the World Trade Center being erased by terrorists, he finds himself perplexed by the fact that his immediate reaction is one of satisfaction. "[A]t that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack," he analyzes. "... No, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees."

Those italics, of which there are many in “The Reluctant Fundamentalist,” are Hamid’s way of signaling tremors in his otherwise understated writing; they are suggestive also of the cadences of Changez’s analytical mind at work, searching for the most precise nuances and distinctions. Hamid sculpts for his protagonist a slightly superior, orotund voice (“we are both fortunately possessed of those aspects of stature and appearance that tend to give ruffians pause”), which, under the pressure of its past, can lift itself up into a sonorous poetry: “I responded to the gravity of an invisible moon at my core, and I undertook journeys I had not expected to take.”

After the 9/11 attacks, Changez finds that, because of his ethnicity, he is viewed with suspicion as he never was before. He is alarmed also by the martial stance of his adopted country, intent upon a reprisal that will lead to the deaths of many more innocents. He finds that America is in the grip of “a dangerous nostalgia” not too dissimilar to that of Erica, pining for her departed companion. It is a powerful conceit.

But Changez’s doubts and fears are not solely directed outward. He begins to see himself, too, as complicit with a world order he finds morally repugnant. After all, “finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised his power.” He feels he cannot abide any more within his insulated world: He has been happy in a copse, but now he sees the woods. Hamid’s narration recalls not just a Dostoyevskian universe of humiliation, resentment and self-loathing, but even Dostoyevsky’s pairs or doubles: Attempting to get Erica to warm to him in bed, Changez invites her to imagine he is Chris, his dead rival.

And like Ivan Karamazov, who rather than believe in an unjust order decides to “return my ticket,” Changez, too, forsakes his life in America and returns to Pakistan to teach. During the course of his narration, which ingests the words of his companion as if to reverse American trespasses upon his part of the world, he asserts repeatedly that he means him no harm. But the

reader has heard in his voice the dark undertow of what Orhan Pamuk has called “the anger of the damned,” and is not so sure.

Clark, Susan Storer: *The Wandering Falcon*
Washington Independent Review of Books

17 October 2011

A debut collection of linked stories present extremes of climate and culture in the remote border lands where Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran meet. The remote area where Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran meet provides the setting for *The Wandering Falcon*. On a map the borders are clearly delineated, but in this book and on the ground, these national borders blur. Jamil Ahmad writes powerfully of the austere beauty and harshness of the environment, a subject he knows well having spent several decades in the remote tribal areas as a civil servant for the government of Pakistan. He is now 80 years old, and *The Wandering Falcon* is his first novel.

As the story begins, a young man and a woman are struggling toward a remote army post during a lull in sandstorms created by the dreaded “wind of a hundred and twenty days.” They ask for refuge, but are denied it because the wording of the request implies that they are in trouble. They then ask for shelter, and their request is granted. Soon afterward, the woman gives birth to the boy who is the novel’s central character.

They stay at the outpost for four years, until their presence is discovered by members of her family and the husband she deserted. The couple flee with their little boy, but they are caught and stoned to death at a water hole. The little boy is left alone in the desert, with only the family’s dead camel to shelter him from a sandstorm. He is rescued by six Baluch tribesmen, rebels who have been fighting the Pakistani army but are now on their way to a

town. They have been summoned for what they believe to be peace talks, but since none of them can read, they don't really know what the document said. As it turns out, they are given a short, dishonest trial, condemned and executed. Ahmad writes, "These men died a total and final death. They will live in no songs ... What died with them was a part of the Baluch people themselves. A little of their spontaneity in offering affection, and something of their graciousness and trust."

The boy is informally adopted by an officer in the Pakistani Army, a subedar, who takes him to another remote army post. When the subedar is relieved of his post years later, he tells the boy he cannot take him, and entrusts him to the care of a wandering mullah.

The next chapter begins with the sounding of an alarm in a Bhattani village because a boy has disappeared while grazing sheep. The villagers find the young shepherd dead and disemboweled, another boy bound to a tree and nearby, a mullah staring into space. The villagers kill the mullah, and the parents of the dead boy take in the other boy and give him their son's name, Tor Baz, or "black falcon." Only at this point, when he's 11 or 12, does the novel's central character get a name.

Tor Baz is a character in each of the stories in this book, although seldom an important figure. Several of the stories dramatically present the clash of cultures. In one, the government has decided that there will be no movement between borders without documents. The nomadic tribes find this problematic because wandering with their animals to find better pastures is a matter of life or death; they have no documents and no way of obtaining any. They also find the constraint laughable: "It would be like trying to stop migrating birds or the locusts." But they are stopped by the army, massacred by soldiers with machine guns as they try to cross the border. Kidnapping is shown to be a seasonal industry for some tribes. As Ahmad writes: "If nature provides them sustenance for only ten days a year, they believe in their right to demand

the rest of their sustenance from their fellow men who live oily, fat, and comfortable lives on the plains.”

Ahmad has written a fascinating book, especially for the reader to whom the tribal cultures of that region are a mystery. It is sympathetic but not sentimental, and most chapters begin with a spare, vivid description of a specific place where part of the story is set. Although these stories apparently occur in a pre-Soviet, pre-Taliban time, it is clear why the values people held then endure now. Although the area has become one of enormous geopolitical significance, its inaccessible world, with extremes of climate and culture, is one that many readers will not understand at the beginning of the book, and understand much better at the end. Ahmad’s slender book is a mind-opener, as well as an engaging read.

About Susan Storer Clark: *Susan Storer Clark, a former broadcast journalist and retired civil servant, has been a member of the Holey Road Writers for more than 10 years and contributes often to The Independent. She recently completed a novel set in 19th-century America.*

Clements, Madeline: Border Crossings
The TLS

01 July 2011

The Wandering Falcon is a first novel, written by a former Pakistani civil servant who was born years before his country’s painful making. Unlike many recent highly contemporary works of Pakistani literature in English, it has been, in its author’s words, three decades “in hibernation”, and perhaps a lifetime in generation. Better described as a collection of loosely linked short stories, this unhurried work wanders with its nomadic characters through a

geographical region which remains little known: the “tribal areas” of Pakistan: Waziristan, Baluchistan, and the forbidding-sounding Frontier. Its narratives unfold over a period roughly (but not exactly) concurrent with Jamil Ahmad’s posting there from around the late 1950s and into the 1970s. Ahmad portrays this as a time of disturbing change for the tribal people living there. As he is at pains to point out, boundaries which were once traversable were beginning to be policed, with devastating consequences for those whose survival depended on being able to pass freely through the places where borders meet.

The stories here touch on a range of topics, from the difficulties of internal migration, to marriage and the myth of return, regional politics, clan loyalty, seasonal customs and the pragmatic manipulation of tribal codes, and Ahmad’s handling of this material makes *The Wandering Falcon* distinctive. Standing at a remove from his subjects, he shifts the emphasis away from the stereotypical and sensational, making strange what might be taken for granted, and gradually bringing to light things which might remain unseen, showing the ways in which the lonely, barren environment shapes the mentality of those who live there, and noting the small, often symbolic exchanges that take place between the people. The opening story, “The Sins of the Mother”, describes the orphaning of a male child born to an unmarried couple, who are sheltered by soldiers when they flee their tribe but are doomed to pay the blood price of transgressing its laws. The tale of their illicit love might seem to follow a predictably tragic trajectory, ending as it does with a brutal “honour killing”. Yet its most haunting aspects are to be found elsewhere. For example, Ahmad describes the man’s tender appeal to his traumatized lover to take down the tower-topped gate she has put up to hide their room from view, suggesting that he finds this aggressive act of possession profoundly depressing in a world where they themselves have fallen foul of “barriers”.

Their son who is later named “tor Baz” (the black falcon) is a recurring presence in this fiction. An itinerant figure of undisclosed tribal origin, he makes occasional incursions as an

informer, prospector and guide, and serves to thread the novel's stories together. Sometimes he lingers too long in the background of someone else's story, an awkward presence; at others he thrusts his way all too briefly through the peripheries. His irregular entrances and exits replicate the life patterns of those who exist by passing through, on the make, on the move, or in flight from a problematic identity. For Tor Baz, goals such as becoming a chief and remaining single are not easily achieved, and his life does not follow a neat narrative line. Ahmad has admitted that it seemed "unnatural" to try to structure the novel around "a perpetually strong central character", although his friends advised him to do so; his creation of Tor Baz may be understood to reflect his feeling that it is "only for brief moments" that we "bob to the surface" of life.

Tor Baz brings to mind roving figures from earlier works of fiction, such as the elusive Tay John, the half-breed protagonist of Howard O'Hagan's mid-twentieth century novel, who negotiates the emerging frontiers of the Canadian Northwest. Like Tay Joh, *The Wandering Falcon* incorporates tales within its tales, which unsettle our impressions of the characters and their perspectives, and infuse these desert stories with the eerie strangeness of seafarer's yarns. One such is the legend of the Mullah Barrerai, a peripatetic holy man whom we encounter in different guises, first as a lucid scholar in the margins of other tales, then as a crazed cannibal. Shot dead by members of the Bhattani tribe for disembowelling a child, and subsequently demonized, the Mullah suffers a madness that is left unexplained, but his epitaph is rewritten by a former officer of the Scouts who lingers by his grave. Keen to emphasize the man's cunning and generosity of spirit, at least in his covert dealings with the British during the Second World War, the officer overlooks the Mullah's local betrayals – they do not seem important in his world view. Meanwhile his Bhattani interlocutor, the tribal chief, remains unconvinced – politely he explains that Mullah's heinous crimes against his tribe are not

diminished because he committed them “out of friendship for you”. He then offers the gentleman tea.

Ahmad’s shrewd and candid visions of frontier life reinforce – often with humour, but always with respect—the notion that opposing epistemologies may contend and coexist peaceably here. As Tor Baz points out to a visitor, “it is not necessary that I should be right in this matter”. It does seem important, however, that his opinion is heard.

Faruqi, Saadia: *The Golden Legend: A Novel*
The New York Journal of Books

17 April 2017

The desperate lives of Christians in many Muslim majority countries is no secret. It is a matter of shame for those who call themselves liberal and humanitarian that so many minority religions face persecution in countries such as Pakistan. Nadeem Aslam lays bare these shameful conditions in his latest novel *The Golden Legend*. Aslam is no newcomer to controversial topics in fiction. His earlier works include *The Map for Lost Lovers*, which takes a hard look at England’s expatriate Pakistani community, and *Vigil*, which showcases the horrors of Afghanistan’s many wars. Interviews of Aslam show him to be an intense writer who blends the political with the fictional with finesse.

The Golden Legend boldly takes on the issue of Muslim-Christian relations in the backdrop of Pakistan’s harsh blasphemy laws. The story revolves around Nargis, whose husband Massud is killed in a shootout by an American spy early in the novel. Later, she is visited by a Pakistani army official to convince her—brutally—to forgive the shooter and then by a jihadi group who wants her to do the opposite.

There are complications along the way. Nargis is secretly Christian, and has been pretending to be Muslim for years. Her Christian servant girl Helen comes inadvertently under fire for heresy. Finally, the two leave their hometown to escape the forces—political, religious, and societal—willing to kill for their own gains.

Front and center in the novel are mentions of how Christians are treated in Pakistan. In one instance the girl Helen is accosted by a servant boy who holds out a knife almost in a trance, threatening to cut her. He insists on wanting to see what color her blood is, for his mother has told him that the blood of Christians is black. Helen is scared and angry, but finally she relents. She pricks her finger herself to show him that her blood is the same color as hers.

That and multiple other instances in the book showcase the immense nature of the divide between the two religions, created by a toxic mixture of illiteracy, political fear mongering, and prejudice. Aslam has a certain flair for dramatizing the problems inherent in Pakistan and its surrounding nations. He doesn't hesitate to draw attention to politically controversial topics such as America's foreign policy, Islamic fundamentalism, or the ugliness of human nature.

Pakistan is portrayed in an unflinchingly truthful light, with none of her flaws left unobserved. Bigotry among the public, check. Abuse of women, check. Corruption of police officers, check. Violence, terror, and hate, check. This is the land that hundreds of millions of Pakistanis know as their own, where they struggle to survive without losing everything. Readers will find many passages difficult to read, but the imagery created by Aslam's words make it fascinating nonetheless.

At the end of it all, *The Golden Legend* is not a despairing book, despite the dark subject matter. The characters themselves have dredges of hope and they look forward despite their trials to the promise of a better future. They realize time and again that every Pakistani is not full of bigotry, that all government officials are not corrupt. They see the good around them,

and this allows them to move forward even when circumstances seem extremely dire. Pakistan is more than the news, and sometimes a good novel like *The Golden Legend* helps bridge the gap.

About Saadia Faruqi: *Saadia Faruqi is Pakistani American author of the short story collection Brick Walls: Tales of Hope and Courage from Pakistan. Her writing has appeared in such venues as Huffington Post and The Islamic Monthly. She is also an interfaith activist and speaker.*

Feigel, Lara: *The Golden Legend* Review – Beauty and Pain in Pakistan
The Guardian

28 December 2016

Realism and fable combine in Nadeem Aslam's tale of terrorism, tragedy and romance across religious divides.

‘Two of their buildings fell down and they think they know about the world’s darkness, about how unsafe a place it is capable of being!’ remarks a character in Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). That was a novel set in Afghanistan amid the ruins of war, juxtaposing eastern and western characters united by the experience of loss. He continued with this setting in his *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013), this time populating Afghanistan with characters from his native Pakistan. Now, in his fifth novel, Aslam returns to Pakistan itself for the first time since his 1993 debut, *Season of the Rainbirds*. And the country he depicts is one bent on completing what the west has begun with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, by revealing quite how dark and unsafe the world can be. This is a landscape of irrational sectarian violence, rivalry and cruelty.

The novel opens with the death of the middle-aged architect Massud, who leaves behind his wife and collaborator Nargis. Together, they have created a collection of exquisite buildings and fought for culture in a hostile world. He is accidentally shot during the inauguration of a new library they've designed in the fictional city of Zamana, as they form part of a mile-long human chain to transport the precious books to their new home. After Massud's death, the grieving Nargis is left as guardian to Helen, the daughter of their Christian servants, whom they have brought up as a kind of surrogate child. Both are in danger. Nargis is pursued by a US intelligence officer, who wishes her to publicly forgive the American who killed Massud. Helen is the target of Islamic extremists who see her journalism as heretical and believe that Christians should be driven from Pakistan.

As in all his previous novels, Aslam mingles beauty and pain, but this time he gives the beauty more breathing space than he has for a while. Helen falls in love with Imran, a Kashmiri terrorist-in-training, who has escaped from his camp after realising that he was expected to engage in brutal acts in Pakistan. Prospero-like, Aslam creates an enchanted island for his young lovers, presided over by the mournful Nargis. She and her husband had built a mosque on this deserted island on the outskirts of Zamana, intended through its architecture to heal the rifts between different branches of Islam. The original plan was that a Hindu temple and a church would be erected beside it. However, this idealism proved misplaced, and the island was abandoned after a murder was committed inside the mosque. Now the trio retreat from the world, able to forget their religious and national differences. But they know they will be discovered and undergo more suffering.

The trio retreat from the world and forge a pan-religious, pan-national haven. But they know it cannot last. If the symbolism sounds heavy, then that's because it is. There's also a book, written by Massud's father and torn up by the ignorant US intelligence officer, which celebrates ideas that have travelled over the ages from one part of the planet to another. The

characters spend their days on the island sewing page after page back together with a golden thread. Aslam is in many ways a traditional realist: he wanders into the head of one character after another at will. But he's writing a form of realism in which individual psychology is often secondary to larger symbolic structures and archetypes. He is magician-like not just in conjuring the island but in his general narrative style, because he has the power to magic into being symbolic images and to rescue characters from near-impossible situations. Just when everything seems to be falling apart, the two people who most need to find each other will coincide in an unlikely place, enabling the story to continue.

This isn't "magical realism": it's all within the bounds of earthly possibility, if not within the bounds of credibility. It's also not the old-fashioned epic romance the title might suggest, because the political sphere depicted is so horribly accurate in its violence and cynicism. If character is secondary to archetype, this reflects the reality of a world in which the individual is frequently secondary to collective ideology.

Ultimately, Aslam doesn't allow this ideology to triumph, because the consolation offered by both the visual beauty and the coincidences comes in the service of a redemptive moral view. This is a morality in which love, kindness and respect for the individual can and must survive. We're told that, though Pakistan is so violent, there's a "deep desire to avoid confrontation". Ordinary people wish to be left alone, "finding pockets of love and comfort within the strict laws governing them". The enchanted island is such a pocket given dazzling physical form, as is the glass museum where Imran briefly finds refuge.

Evil here is not innate. Nargis's uncle sees it as "another word for stupidity, for not knowing what really mattered in life". In the face of this, there's a collective spirit that makes its way across the country, enabling a communality of the good or the sane. It's this that makes reading this exquisite, painful book not merely bearable but exhilarating, as it counters the despair with hope.

Aout Lara Feigel: *Lara Feigel is the author of The Bitter Taste of Victory (Bloomsbury).*

Halaby, Laila: Return of the Native
The Washington Post

22 April 2007

Some books are acts of courage, maybe because the author tries out an unproven style, addresses an unpopular theme or allows characters to say things that no one wants to hear. Mohsin Hamid's new novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, does all those things. Told in the form of an extended monologue, the novel reflects on a young Pakistani's almost five years in America. After excelling at Princeton, Changez had become a highly regarded employee at a prestigious financial firm. He seemed to have achieved the perfect American life. We know from the beginning, however, that it will not last long.

Changez narrates his story from a café in Lahore, his birthplace, while speaking to an American man whose role is unclear. Changez tells him, "Yes, I was happy in that moment. I felt bathed in a warm sense of accomplishment. Nothing troubled me; I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet." (Tellingly, while he didn't see himself as a foreigner during this time, the two colleagues closest to him were also outsiders: one "non-white," the other a gay man who grew up poor.) In the aftermath of Sept. 11, as the tone of the country becomes more hostile, Changez's corporate cloak lifts, and his life in America no longer seems so perfect.

Paralleling the narrative of Changez's work life is the tale of his romantic involvement with Erica, an elegant and well-to-do New Yorker who has emotional baggage that eventually leads to a breakdown. The impossible love story softens the book, allowing Changez to tell the

same story from a different perspective. Both of his potential conquests (America, Erica) have deep appeal, yet both have been damaged, making it impossible for them to be part of Changez's life.

Hamid's writing is strongest when Changez is analyzing the finer points of being a foreigner, "well-liked as an exotic acquaintance." When he goes out with Erica, he takes "advantage of the ethnic exception clause that is written into every code of etiquette" and wears a kurta and jeans because his blazer looks shabby. Later, when he is back in Pakistan and his parents ask for details of his American life, he says, "It was odd to speak of that world here, as it would be odd to sing in a mosque; what is natural in one place can seem unnatural in another, and some concepts travel poorly, if at all."

Perhaps as a result of speaking Urdu and English, Hamid's style is delightfully distinct. His clever tale lingers in the mind, partly because of the nature and originality of the troubled love story and partly because of Changez himself, who is not always likable. Or noble.

The courage of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is in the telling of a story about a Pakistani man who makes it and then throws it away because he doesn't want it anymore, because he realizes that making it in America is not what he thought it was or what it used to be. The monologue form allows for an intimate conversation, as the reader and the American listener become one. Are we sitting across from Changez at a table in Lahore, joining him in a sumptuous dinner? Do his comments cause us to bristle, making us more and more uncomfortable?

Extreme times call for extreme reactions, extreme writing. Hamid has done something extraordinary with this novel, and for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth reading. ·

About Laila Halaby: *Laila Halaby, the author of "West of the Jordan" and "Once in a Promised Land."*

Hussaini, Syed Arif: *The Wandering Falcon* - Riveting Tale about Pakistan's Edge
Pakistan Link

21 October 2011

Jamil Ahmad, 80, a retired civil servant of Pakistan, has emerged overnight as a gifted story-teller and applauded in several literary circles of the world as a writer par excellence, with his just published book 'The Wandering Falcon'. The book is as much a work of fiction as it is a humanized presentation of the way of life of the people, particularly the nomadic tribes, inhabiting the edge of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.

Officially called the Federally Administered Areas (FATA), it is a territory geographically within Pakistan but beyond the applicability of that country's laws. It is governed by tribal chiefs who follow a unique code of conduct called Pakhtunwali. It lays down, *inter alia*, that besmirched honor must be avenged; sanctuary must be provided to anyone who seeks it; hospitality is a commandment rather than an option. The system devised by the British during their colonial period to maintain their suzerainty over the area has been followed by Pakistan since independence. The tribal heads remain in touch with the Political Agents appointed by Pakistan and receive subventions for loyalty.

Jamil Ahmad, on joining the Civil Service in 1954, elected to serve in that daunting area and developed a genuine rapport with the indigenous tribes enjoying their respect and affection. The nine interlinked short stories in his book, written over four decades back, portray a milieu of custom and cruelty, of hate and vendetta, of love and tenderness, of hardship and survival of a people long considered ferocious and unreliable.

The honesty and integrity that the author brings to bear on his narration endears him to the reader who is left with lingering thoughts even after finishing the book. Interestingly, the

stories were composed over three decades back before the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the emergence of the forces of resistance including the Taliban. The developments since then have changed the shape of things in several sectors, but the values cherished by the tribal people have remained almost intact. That is where the attraction and value of the book lies, apart from its beauty as a work of art. The book, released in the US in mid-October, has attracted worldwide attention owing to the significance of the locale of the story in the context of the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

That country has been called the graveyard of invaders. Alexander had warned that it would be easy to enter the country but difficult to get out. The British went to wars with Afghanistan but failed to conquer it; nor could Tsarist Russia. The Soviet occupation of the country in 1979 ended a decade later in disaster and in disintegration of that super power. Now, the United States is trying to relinquish its decade-old occupation but seems to be still groping for a successful exit strategy.

Never in the annals of history has a nation produced as many suicide bombers as have the dissidents in Afghanistan. What kind of people are these? Jamil Ahmad's book provides some useful insights. Hence, the spurt of interest noticed now in this work essentially of fiction. The locale of the story, Pakistan's tribal belt, sometimes called the badlands, has never been properly assimilated into modern statehood and it is known now in the West as the hiding place of Islamic terrorists and Taliban.

The book is not a research product like the authoritative work 'The Pathans' by Sir Olaf Caroe, a senior British administrator and a former Governor of the Frontier Province. But 'The Wandering Falcon' charts the lives of the tribal people who live in inhospitable conditions and are often misunderstood.

Jamil Ahmad has lived with them a good part of his life. His account may therefore be regarded as that of an insider. He has followed the dictum of Mark Twain that one must write

only about a subject he knows best. That explains the vividness and clarity in his narration. Sir Olaf Caroe has observed, “There is a strange fascination in living among the Pathans. Many attempts have been made to catch and convey that feeling, but the spell is elusive.” Jamil Ahmad’s attempt has been fairly successful; hence it has been widely applauded.

The book touches on various emotions: loyalty, commitment to family ties, camaraderie, clan cohesion, graciousness, forgiveness and the feeling of belonging to a tribe. The reader gets to feel such emotions through the experiences of Tor Baz, meaning literally the ‘black falcon’, who serves as the warp in the fictional tapestry. But, it would be not quite correct to say that the book is about Tor Baz. It is more about the unruly tribal belt of Pakistan with Tor Baz serving as the apparent link in seven different episodes, which barely cohere as a novel. The locale with its peculiar cultural milieu is the constant feature and serves as the central piece in the fascinating mosaic crafted by Jamil Ahmad.

His story in the *Wandering Falcon* begins in Baluchistan in early 1950s when the daughter of a tribal chief, married to an impotent man, elopes with a servant of his father and finds sanctuary in an isolated fort manned by some soldiers of Pakistan army. They are allowed to live in a corner of the fort where a son is born to them who is named Tor Baz. The tribe, Siahpad, hunt them down six years after the dishonor they had caused. Both were killed but the boy was left to die. He was found and adopted by another tribe. He keeps moving from area to area doing odd jobs for a living and unraveling in the process the values governing the lives of the tribesmen, the tragedies wrought by political boundaries restricting their free movement and nomadic life, the inhumanity of modern laws as against the humane Pakhtunwali. Two stories, *The Death of Camels* and *A Point of Honor*, symbolize the crisis and conflict in the lives of the simple tribal people caused by the encroaching modern way of life. The author’s empathy for the tribes and his forthright description of their feelings reminds one of Manto’s

remarkable stories about the tragedies in the lives of ordinary citizens that followed the partition of India.

One is also reminded to the simplicity of expression used by Hemingway in his masterly novel “The Old man and the Sea”. Jamil Ahmad’s prose also shows a similar economy of words, avoidance of compound sentences and restricting each sentence to less than 20 words. Jamil Ahmad may not be as great a storyteller as Manto or Hemingway but with his debut novel he has indeed carved a niche for himself among outstanding writers. By any standard, the book is a must read and reread.

IANs: Book Review: This Story of Star-Crossed Lovers Set in Pakistan is a Must Read
Hindustan Times

01 April 2017

UK-based Pakistani author Nadeem Aslam’s sixth novel, set in contemporary Pakistan, is a story of love set in a world beset with sectarian violence.

Nadeem Aslam never disappoints his readers and the characteristic features of his novels – vividly beautiful, lucidly painful and yet surprisingly convincing – tend to leave a lasting impression. It was this overwhelming sense of reverence for the Pakistan-born author that led one to flick through this brilliant novel, which combines realism and fable in a tale that is exhilarating as it counters despair with hope. *The Golden Legend* is a thrilling novel and carries more realism than meets the eye. Just like “the spring of hope” and “the winter of despair” that Dickens mentioned in the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Aslam’s fantastic work seems to reverberate with paradoxes and yet sounds surprisingly convincing.

The novel, set in contemporary Pakistan, begins on a dark note: The death of an architect, Massud, who leaves behind his wife and collaborator Nargis. Together, the husband-wife duo have worked hard to preserve culture and build exquisite buildings. All of this at a time when the world around them is turning increasingly hostile. After the death of her husband, Nargis is solely responsible for bringing up Helen, the daughter of their Christian servants. Now Helen too is unsafe. A journalist by profession, she is the target of Islamic fundamentalists who are not at ease with her reporting.

The fundamentalist elements, on their part, want the Christians to be driven away from Pakistan and Helen, being both a Christian and a journalist, finds it difficult to survive in the increasingly hostile surroundings. Meanwhile, Nargis is persuaded, or rather compelled, by a powerful US intelligence officer, who demands she publicly forgive the American citizen who killed her husband.

All of these little elements form the perfect background of violence and fear and allow for a classic shift in the plot. Aslam, in a departure from his previous novels, appears to have given greater emphasis on highlighting the lively and colourful aspects in this latest work. At this point in the narrative, enters Imran, a Kashmiri terrorist, who decides on a course-correction soon after learning that he is expected to kill and cause brutality in Pakistan itself. Straight out of some fairy tale, the next twist in the novel brings Helen and Imran face-to-face – and they fall in love. The love story comes to life on an island, where the two unusual souls – Helen, a Christian and the target of fundamentalists; and Imran, a Muslim and a former terrorist – seek to unite. Their love story seems to be just blossoming when darkness spreads once again.

It was on this very island that Nargis and her late husband Massud had built a mosque to bring the different branches of Islam together and decrease tensions among them. Massud had even planned to build a Hindu temple and a Church beside it to spread communal harmony

among the residents. Fate, however, had other plans. A murder is committed inside the mosque and the entire island is abandoned. The trio – Nargis, Helen and Imran – remain at constant risk of being discovered and harmed. So the characters must do something, right? As they say, “Love alone is not enough,” Helen and Imran, led by Nargis, must engage in something to keep the plot moving and its readers engrossed.

Aslam, a master storyteller, acts like a psychiatrist, diagnosing his readers while building the plot on his characters. Massud’s father had written a splendid book, honouring the great ideas and philosophies that spread over the ages. This book is, unfortunately, torn apart by the US intelligence officer. The three fugitives spend their time weaving the pages of this book back together with a golden thread. Could the story get more magical or realistic? Aslam is at his creative best in *The Golden Legend*, and he succeeds in busting all typical notions associated with romantic fiction. The novel, while being enchantingly romantic, reverberates with the contemporary socio-political situation in Pakistan.

Even as Pakistan is caught between violence and fundamentalist elements, Aslam elegantly portrays “the pockets of love” and the collective spirit of ordinary people, for whom evil is not a way of life but a stupidity, which has no place in their lives. No doubt the novel is full of despair and disdain, but at the heart of it lies hope. And this is what makes *The Golden Legend* an exhilarating read.

Jalil, Rakhshanda: Follow the Falcon
The Friday Times

05 June 2011

Rakhshanda Jalil is delighted by Jamil Ahmed’s debut fiction¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Jalil uses ‘Ahmed’ instead of ‘Ahmad’.

A literary debut at the age of 78 is unusual, to say the least. But when that maiden foray into the world of literature carries the promise of greatness, you know you are witnessing the birth of a very special writer. It is for this reason that I read ‘The Wandering Falcon’ with a sense of wonder and growing delight. Seldom does one get to read such spare but exquisite prose and rarer still is the writer who has such a sure grasp of his story.

Jamil Ahmad, born in Jalandhar in 1933, acquired degrees in Law and History from the University of the Punjab, joined the Civil Service of Pakistan in 1954, and served mainly in the Frontier Province and in Baluchistan. He was posted as Minister in Pakistan’s Embassy in Kabul at a critical time before and during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. At the time of his posting in the Frontier Province, he acquired a working knowledge of Pushto and his fluency continued to improve with increased usage. This facility allowed him to interact more freely with the local people. At one point, with the help of some friends from the Afridi tribe, he walked into the Tirah Valley, the heartland of the Afridis. This initiative created quite a stir, as it was the first-ever venture into this territory by a government representative.

Now he lives in Islamabad with his wife Helga Ahmad, a nationally recognized environmentalist and social worker who was awarded the Fatima Jinnah Gold Medal in 2007. My prediction is that Jamil Ahmad will be the Next Big Thing to hit Pakistani literature. Quite apart from its glimpse into life in the “forbidden” and remote areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, ‘The Wandering Falcon’ has been conceived in a most unusual way: as a series of inter-linked stories, each self-contained as chapters yet connected by something that runs through all of them. In an interview conducted from my home in New Delhi with Mr Ahmad via email, I wondered if this was by happy serendipity or devised for a particular reason.

Mr Ahmad tells me that he was posted in Swat as Commissioner in 1971 after it was merged into Pakistan. By then he had spent over a decade as political officer in the tribal areas of Pakistan -- in Quetta-Pishin and Chagai in Baluchistan, Khyber and Malakand (covering

Dir, Swat and Chitral), the Frontier and Dera Ismail Khan (covering North and South Waziristan). With some free time on his hands he thought initially of writing poetry. His wife, however, was dismissive about the quality of the few pieces he produced and suggested that he focus instead on the tribal areas, as much of his life had been spent in those parts.

Mr Ahmad took this advice and started scribbling bits and pieces, which Helga immediately transcribed on her typewriter with a German keyboard. Friends suggested that the writings be converted into fiction with a central character around which a book could be structured. Mr Ahmad, however, demurred, believing that a perpetually strong central character is unnatural. "I feel a human being is like a twig carried by a strong current. It is only for brief moments and infrequently that he bobs to the surface, but is then rapidly swept into the depth of the stream of life," he says, explaining the sequential nature of his narrative. One story from the book - *The Sins of the Mother*, about an eloping Baluch couple who risk everything by fleeing from their tribe - has been showcased in the Pakistan issue of *Granta* and generated a fair amount of interest in this most unusual author. The book's history is just as remarkable as the events it reflects. By 1974 the manuscript was completed in its raw form; it hibernated for over three decades. About three years ago, Mr Ahmad's brother, younger by fifteen years, heard of a short story competition. Since he vaguely remembered some 'pieces' Mr Ahmad had written, he asked Helga Ahmad to make a copy and send them across. From that point onwards, events moved swiftly. Mr Ahmad's brother felt that the manuscript merited being treated as a whole - not merely as a short story. He also strongly urged Mr Ahmad to refine it. Once suitably re-worked, it caught the attention of Faiza Sultan Khan, editor of the *Life's Too Short Literary Review*. Ms Khan then passed it on to Penguin India's Meru Gokhale, who acted as its Fairy Godmother.

Reading this slim book at a galloping pace, I felt like I was being taken by the hand and guided deep into a folded land of hills and valleys. Occupied by a tribal people united under

the banner of Islam but governed by a more ancient code of conduct, this is a dark world of abject poverty, deprivation and want, but also one that is lit from within. Translucent beams of Life irradiate it. The will to live, the zeal to carry on with dignity and grace, and the inherent desire in human beings - no matter how devastated by fate and circumstance - to rise above their condition permeates this seemingly dark domain. It could have been a wretched place, you feel, but is inexplicably not in the least. A deeply ingrained sense of honour, justice and loyalty permeates this world, which is as harsh and unforgiving as it is inscrutable to the outsider.

Jamil Ahmad brings a rare insight and compassion to a subject and a people that have invariably invited fear and mistrust. Asked what is the greatest bane of the life of these peoples, Mr Ahmad says: "The problem faced by the tribal people living in a harsh terrain are, by and large, no different from the more affluent people living in the fertile and productive areas. In my opinion, a feeling of envy, lust exists in equal measure in all societies. However, tribal societies have generally evolved a better system to manage 'conflict resolutions' than other forms of collectivities. The one negative factor which one comes across frequently -- especially in Pakhtun areas - is the absence of equal rights to those who do not belong to the dominant tribe of the area." And the greatest blessing? His answer is equally unequivocal: "Their greatest blessing is that their system is simple and stable. The line between right and wrong is drawn clearly. In the two years I spent in the Baluch area of Chagai, there was not a single theft; the Mengal tribe who used to migrate southwards during winter used to leave their houses unlocked and their stores of grain unprotected. Nobody ever touched the grain or the possessions they left behind."

The tribal areas are commonly perceived as remote and impenetrable and their people as inscrutable and incorrigible. Did he find it so? Again, one is struck by the empathy with which Mr Ahmed views his former charges when he says:

“I had and still retain a great respect for their code of life. I think the Baluch, particularly, can hold their heads high in any assembly of men. A one-line prescription in the British Government hand-book suggests: “Honor the Baluch”. As for “inscrutable”, I was amazed at the candor, openness and loyalty I was offered. Despite belonging to the plains of Punjab and speaking the local language imperfectly, I never felt an alien during my two decades with the tribes. Tribesmen tend to judge the qualities of the political officer by his code of conduct. He is offered respect if his quality of integrity, work ethics and fair play pass their test. If he fails to qualify, then disaster follows.”

Set in the decades preceding Talibanisation, *The Wandering Falcon* allows us to wander, like the falcon that soars high over hill and dale but takes in the minutest detail of life on the ground with its razor-sharp gaze. Appropriately enough, it has a boy protagonist called Tor Baz or the hunting falcon, the outsider looking in who connects the series of stories. While each chapter can be read as a self-contained short story, together they narrate the rite of passage of a boy -- whose lineage is unknown, whose parents were a runaway couple killed in cold blood to avenge the family honour, who belongs to neither this tribe nor that - as he learns to survive in a world that is both cruel and gentle, harsh and loving, fragile and unrelenting, timeless yet changing.

The notion of honour and its concomitant principles of loyalty, fidelity and truthfulness string the stories together as much as the coming of age of Tor Baz from infancy to adulthood. Underlying everything is a complicated and carefully maintained sense of hierarchy. For instance: ‘Those who possessed buffaloes and migrated every year looked down on those who owned only goats. Those with a few patches of land hewn into the high mountainsides would not marry into those who did not have any.’ Winters of misery and desperation followed by the short-lived spring of hope and the summer months of wandering are leavened by a highly codified set of principles that govern every moment from birth till death.

While the story of Tor Baz is fascinating for its glimpse into a world less travelled, Jamil Ahmad's prose makes it compelling and real. For a writer who has debuted at an age when most are putting down their pens, he writes with a surprising ease and confidence. Simple, spare and stark, his words are unembellished by rhetorical flourishes, his sentences shorn of even a trace of artifice or artfulness. There are no fancy turns of phrase, no verbal acoustics, no play upon words, nothing in fact to draw away from the stories he wants to tell in as straightforward a manner as possible. Here is writing - the finest one has read in a very long time in English by a South Asian writer - that ebbs and flows with such effortless ease and conveys the essence of the story in such few words that it catches you unawares with its freshness.

About Rakhshanda Jalil: *Rakhshanda Jalil lives in New Delhi and writes on issues of literature, culture and society.*

Jamal, Afrah: *The Wandering Falcon*
The Daily Times

First Published in Daily Times/ 02 July 2011

Jamil Ahmad's debut novel is ostensibly about a boy and a stretch of land. At first glance, there is nothing special about Tor Baz. Is he the hero? He seems strangely absent from a major part of the narrative, so not a hero in the traditional sense of the word. If this is a coming of age story, the star billing must go to a land that has become a near-permanent fixture on the western world's radar. Written sometime in the early 1970s and published in 2008, *The Wandering Falcon* is a fictional piece of work that charts a slow meandering course through the lawless frontiers. Undercurrents of danger have always coursed through its veins but recent events have bestowed a more menacing look and feel to the wild west of Pakistan.

Jamil Ahmad has a special insight into the ways of the tribes. As a Pakistani civil servant, he has served in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan for several years. By converting his acquired wisdom into an anthology of short stories, he provides a window into the heart and soul of a primitive system where honour and respect are the buzzwords while honour killings/revenge remain the unfortunate by-products. But, as he is quick to point out, it is not all bad. The writer manages to fit complex patterns into confined spaces. Using Tor Baz (the black falcon) sparingly allows a wider cast of characters to come forward and take centre-stage. Readers enter the perilous world of the Mehsuds, described as “*wolves*” in “*The Kidnapping*” for they hunt in packs, which makes lone hunters like the Wazirs “*the leopard*”. The matter of fact statement that winter signifies a time of “*raids, robberies and kidnappings*” and that “*in neither community is any stigma attached to hired assassin, thief, a kidnapper or an informer*” gives one pause. (P86)

This is an interesting observation given Greg Mortenson’s (of *Three Cups of Tea* fame) now disputed claim of being abducted in Waziristan. According to this book, these people pride themselves on playing perfect hosts to abductees and guests alike. But it is not just their famed hospitality or long-lasting blood feuds that are given prominence. The book keeps a tight focus on the human element in a way that is designed to trigger an empathetic reaction by a simple change of perspective. Tragedies like “*A Death of Camels*” resurrect forgotten ghosts going back in time to witness how the new demarcations along the Pak-Afghan border endangered the nomads’ way of life. “*A Point of Honour*” observes the grim fate that awaits a group of simpleminded Baloch and takes a swipe at the state machination responsible for exterminating “*a little of the spontaneity in offering affection, and something of their graciousness and trust*” (P 34).

While the stories touch on constants like honour, revenge, loyalty, friendship, oppression and betrayal, they move steadily towards darker territory past the social

stratification where marginalised sections of tribal society make their troubling debut. A woman is killed in the name of honour in the beginning and another is traded for opium and a hundred rupees in a later scene. Both “*A Pound of Opium*” and “*A Sale Completed*” plunge headlong into the abyss where women are sold into marriage or worse. Their hardiness and courage is given due attention and the spectacular injustice somehow gets upstaged by something called tradition. As for Tor Baz, he is present at the outset where a couple of elopers take refuge at an obscure military outpost and stays in sight as a young boy. Readers pick up his trail when he resurfaces as a young man in a bizarre world where informers advertise their business and settling disputes could mean going head to head in a battle of wits where wounded pride is the sole casualty.

Till the end, the protagonist remains on the periphery. He, like the land, is an enigma. And not being tethered to a single tribe means that he can weave his way in and out of no-go areas with ease. But he ties the seemingly disjointed portions of the book together, whether it is the story of a sardar who goes by the rank of a general (not a real general) with a son “*the colonel*”, again with no real claim to the title, or a mad mullah/clever conman/mentor who wanders the pages concocting an intricate plan involving German promises and British gold. Each story turns out to be a beautiful link forming an ancient chain carefully preserved in time.

The past ten years have wrought a radical change in the tribal makeup, rendering formerly inaccessible regions unrecognisable. Now viewed as militant sanctuaries, still inhospitable but inaccessible no more, for the words within these pages provide the most authentic portrait yet of these ungoverned places. The Wandering Falcon that had been waiting for 38 odd years to see the light of day has finally risen. At 78, Jamil Ahmad has written a tale that is both timeless and given the current state of affairs, timely.

Labels: Baluchistan Book; Review Jamil Ahmad; KPK; Mehsuds of Waziristan; Pakistan; Three Cups of Tea; Tribal Areas; Wild West.

Joshua, Anita: There's a Time for Everything
The Hindu Sunday Magazine

07 January 2012 15:40 Updated: 25 July 2016 19:32

Winning the Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize has not made Jamil Ahmad more willing-to-talk than how he chooses to be. Excerpts from an interview with the 80-year-old author who likes to maintain a low profile. A month ago, Jamil Ahmad became the second Pakistani author to win the Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize for *The Wandering Falcon* after Mohammed Hanif walked away with the honours in 2008 with his *The Case of Exploding Mangoes*.

For Ahmad—who is pushing 80—the award is just one in a series of surprises which have been coming his way since *The Wandering Falcon* was snapped up by a publisher over three decades after it was written. A retired civil servant, he penned the loosely-connected collection of short stories to fight the dreariness of working in the far-flung tribal areas of Pakistan in the early 1970s; way before the belt along the Afghanistan border became the headline-grabber that it has been post 9/11.

But for his younger brother's initiative of entering the manuscript for a literary award—albeit a tad late in 2010—*The Wandering Falcon* may still have been lying in a cupboard of the former Balochistan chief secretary's Islamabad home. Thus salvaged, the manuscript—which began as diary jottings which were then typed out by his German wife Helga—was picked up by Penguin India and edited. There has been no looking back since with the literary world taking note and toasting the arrival of arguably one of the oldest authors.

Q. How does it feel to have beaten younger writers to the Shakti Bhatt Prize for First Book?

A. *The Wandering Falcon* has offered me one surprise after another during the past one-and-a-half years. When it garnered the Shakti Bhatt Prize, my reaction was “what a pleasant surprise?” The feeling of beating other writers never crossed my mind.

Q. You say *The Wandering Falcon* has brought you several surprises over the past year-and-a-half. Could you please dwell on some of these surprises?

A. The first surprise was when it caught the interest of Ms. Faiza Sultan Khan in Karachi. She carried it to London and showed it to Meru Gokhale of Penguin India, who took a liking to it. What followed was the decision of Penguin India to publish it.

Q. You must be the senior-most writer in age to have won this award for maiden literary ventures. What, in your assessment, gave your book that edge?

A. I really don't know. It is possible that the flavour of life and description of certain societies as they existed half-a-century ago aroused interest and curiosity of the current generation.

Q. Do you think the attention that the war on terror has brought to Pakistan, particularly the tribal belt, has had some bearing on the success of your book?

A. Perhaps.

Q. Now that your book has been received so well, do you regret not having published it earlier?

A. No, I have no regrets. There is a time and chance for everything. Perhaps the right time for the book was not four decades ago.

Q. Since you have yourself mentioned in earlier interviews that the manuscript had been rejected in the past, what do you attribute the success of your book to?

A. It is possible that the happenings in the past three decades, the wars and genocides in Africa, the Balkans, in Asia, in Central America and the simmering tensions have brought about a realisation that fostering and understanding the tribal system could lead to greater stability and less disequilibrium and that tensions that erupt could be handled, more competently, if tribal sensitivities are taken into account. The Wandering Falcon is a work of fiction but it does try to offer images of tribal life which are other than that of “uncivilized savages”.

Q. Most readers and reviewers of your book can’t seem to figure out if it is a novel or a collection of short stories. How would you describe the book?

A. I do not reject the description of connected short stories. Indeed, I have always believed (and more so at my age) that human lives conform more closely to the connected short-story mode rather than the orderly and uninterrupted flow of a novel.

Q. What was it that drew you to tribal culture to such an extent that you opted to work in the frontier areas?

A. I cannot say for sure but it is possible that the choice of reading suggested to me by my teachers and elders may have acted as a catalyst in developing an interest in the tribes.

Q. And, is this book a conscious effort to make people understand the dynamics of tribal culture or is that just a chance outcome of your writing?

A. I am, and have always been a great admirer of the tribal system and believe that it is the least tyrannical and the least inequitable of all forms of human collectivity. I also believe that it suffered great harassment from other rival lower systems, nation states, feudalism, empires, consumer capitalist societies, socialist societies.

Q. You say the tribal system is probably the least tyrannical. But the general impression is that it is violent, particularly along the Durand Line. How would you reconcile these extreme

views? And, what about the rights of women or is that a fallout of the Talibanisation of the area.

A. The scenes in the book precede the Afghan war and the interventions of major powers in the region, which has led to “unintended consequences” of violence and fracture of the old tribal system.

Q. Speaking of Talibanisation, how and how much has it changed the areas you once engaged with as an administrator?

A. I am out of touch with the current system. It would not be right on my part to offer any comments based on second-hand reports and observations.

Q. Has the success of the book encouraged you to write another book? If yes, then when and what are you working on?

A. At this point I cannot answer Yes or No. I may take a decision in a month or two.

Q. Would you consider a Pashto translation of this book for, after all, yours is a rare sympathetic Punjabi voice on the tribal areas.

A. The Wylie Agency in London is handling translation rights to the book. It is they who will deal with any offer as they have done with other translation rights so far.

Kakar, Aslam: *The Wandering Falcon*
Pak Tea House

07 March 2016

Review: *The Wandering Falcon*—Exploding the Myth about Tribal Culture(s) in Pakistan

Labels: Jehan Naseem; Afghanistan; Baloch; Book Review; Jamil Ahmad; Media; NWFP;

Pakistan; People; Terrorism; The Wandering Falcon; Tribes

The Wandering Falcon, Jamil Ahmed's debut novel, was published in 2011—almost four decades after it was written in the early 1970s. Why it took so long for the novel to hit the bookstores' shelves were the endless rejections from publishers from around the world. One wonders what was it then that kept the author for so long from trashing the manuscript at first. Perhaps, it was the book's promising content and Ahmed's faith in his words, or, perhaps, his wife Helga's tenacity in introducing the manuscript to a wider network of journalists and writers globally till it was published finally in the US. And no wonder why Raza Rumi, a renown Pakistani journalist and author, says, 'this is the finest book amid all the other Pakistani writings in English'.

One way to look at the book is the incredible hope and power it gives to the aspirants of fiction writing. All writers, particularly the beginners, must understand that no writing is a waste. Good or bad writing is really a subjective opinion. One never knows when one's voice and story resonates with millions' others to change perceptions about people, places, and the world. The author's first-hand experience as a civil servant for decades in the tribal regions of Pakistan makes his' a unique voice to reveal the areas' complex socio-cultural dynamics. The story or stories of the novel, since it is a novel built on a collection of short stories with closely recurrent theme(s) throughout, take(s) place at the crossroads of tribal life and culture and the modern nation-state system. For example, how, in the novel, the check-posts at the Pak-Afghan border destroy the livelihood and meaning of life of the Afghan nomadic tribes that had taken them centuries to form.

I think the survival of people in the rugged and naturally unjust terrain is the recurring theme of the book. Whether it is the Baloch tribes' 'rebellion' against the Pakistani state; the Mehsuds' or the Waziris' tribal vendetta for supremacy; the nomads from Afghanistan fighting the odds of the nation state system; the killed couple, Gul Bibi and her lover, fleeing the spell of honor killing from the enraged Baloch tribesmen; their son, Tor Baz (Black Falcon), the

wandering protagonist who appears with peculiar faces in the novel; or, the two women, Sherakai and Shah Zarina, escaping domestic violence and hate into an unknown world, all are in quest for safer and better lives.

The novel also sharply mirrors the tribal wit and wisdom and the integrity of tribal cultural personality overshadowed by clichés like the ‘hot bed of militancy’ and ‘no man’s land’ used very often by the media to describe the tribal areas and its people. It sets to explode such platitudes, and, instead, offers a holistic insight into a much complex way of life that the tribal people are unknown for. In one of his interviews with a British journalist, Ahmed says that we all have the instinct of associating with a tribe, which is absolutely true and fine. He maintains that what he likes about the tribal people is the clarity and honesty in what they say or do—a tendency he finds the government and the system short of.

They are, Ahmed says, as honest about honor killing and working as informers for the state as about cooperating with it. An oddity as it is, the truth about it is impeccable. An example of such integrity from the book’s second chapter, *A Point of Honor*, is the ‘rebel’ Baloch tribesmen’s curiosity when the state officials ask them to swear an oath on the Koran for speaking the truth. In their culture, they swear by their chief—the sardar, not the book, Ahmed writes. Not only that, the officials also violate their offer for negotiations on just terms with the tribesmen by detaining them. And that is exactly what the Pakistani state has repeatedly done to a number of Baloch sardars in history. But, it’s media and Pakistani journalists, which Ahmed rightly points out, have been either silent or fussing about injustices and wrongs done to people in Palestine and elsewhere.

Finally, is it a weak state that shapes the tribal people’s social and political behavior and their affiliation to the tribes rather than the state or vice versa. Second, while absolutely agreeing with Ahmed about the much authentic nature of the tribal cultural personality, the question is how one can reconcile with this bitter truth reflected in acts of violence like honor

killings and endless tribal vendettas. Also, does the alternate dispute resolution mechanism, or the Jirga system, much effective as it is in some cases, truly fulfill people's needs and demands of social justice like in modern democracies. Ahmed's book is an open question to how the Pakistani state can look in a holistic manner to the woes of its forgotten lands and people and reintegrate them in the system with respect to their way of life.

Kaveney, Roz: *Losing America*
The TLS

12 October 2012

Belief is not an abstract thing; it has to do with the stories we tell and are told, stories from whose fruitful ambiguities belief springs. Mohsin Hamid's Man Booker-shortlisted novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is more inventive with narrative games than we expect it to be its apparently simple outset, and far more complex. The narrator Changez is talking, not to us but to an anonymous American he has approached, not by chance, in the streets of Lahore; it is never clear whether his narrative is intended to instruct or threaten the American by the way it explains Changez's life. It is also unclear what the title refers to: is the fundamentalist what the anti-American academic Changez becomes on his return to Pakistan, or is it the shiny functionary of late American capitalism he turned into, while living in the United States?

One of the crucial points in his narrative comes when a Chilean publisher points out to him that he has become the equivalent of a Turkish janissary – someone who has been adopted into an empire so completely that it has destroyed the value system into which he was born. The value system here is not the Islam of al-Qaeda so much as a traditional middle-class life of servants and the smell of jasmine; the paving stones of his home town, where Islam is just one aspect of the air he breathes. Changez returns home to fight for his country, fighting all the more passionately because he has been in love with America.

This crisp novella is also the story of Changez's defeat in love; he was the last best hope of the beautiful, doomed Erica, and in the end he was not enough. Erica is in love with the memory of her dead childhood friend, Chris, and comes close to loving Changez because his quietly intense moral sense makes him prepared to wait; she can only spare crumbs of love from the nostalgia that is eating her alive. When they do finally make love, he knows he is acting as her surrogate for the dead Chris; it is a way for them to be together. The sad story of Erica becomes one of the metaphors for Changez's disenchantment with America, in the aftermath of 9/11. It is not that he is treated badly, but he realizes that Americans expect to be liked, believe that the world will always be theirs, and, like Erica, they are being poisoned by this. At the end of the story, we do not know whether it is Changez who will be killed, or his American auditor. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a novel in which uncertainty prevails, in which references to *Heart of Darkness* suggest how much further we have wandered into ambiguity since Conrad.

Kazmi, Hurmat: 'Exit West' and 'The Golden Legend' could be Pakistan's literary Game-Changers
The Express Tribune

27 July 2017

While Hamid's lambent novel deals with the global refugee crises, Aslam's vital book reminds us of the copious injustices ubiquitous in our own country. This is a strong year for Pakistani fiction. Two excellent novels, '*Exit West*' and '*The Golden Legend*', by two excellent novelists, Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam, have been published to great critical acclaim. Another, '*Home Fire*' by Kamila Shamsie, is forthcoming in August and is already being

endorsed by a plethora of writers. Historically, the Man Booker Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the world, has been won by Indian writers five times. No Pakistani writer has won it and only three, including Aslam and Hamid, have been nominated. This year, with two strong and worthy contenders, Pakistani writers have a great chance of featuring on the long list, which will be announced today. *'Exit West'* is a searing and timely novel that charts the escape of two lovers from their unnamed war-torn hometown. Saeed and Nadia, characteristically polar opposites, meet and fall in love during the civil war. Blistering with desire but mired by the atrocities of the war, they are ensconced by market bombings, open-fires, militants and surveillance drones. A serendipitous encounter with an agent buys them the opportunity for escape, a chance to trickle through the uncanny magical doors like sand.

This is the first time Hamid has ventured into the capricious territory of magical realism, and in a novel that deals with profound themes, it somehow, oddly, surprisingly, works. The magical doors become a metaphor for the unpredictability and imperceptibility of escape. The doors, sucking them in, take them to the beaches of Greece, the gardens of England and the streets of the US. Each of these places is saturated with refugees; they live in tents, on the roads, and they are hurdled, condensed, hundreds in a single compound. With a supple aplomb that has characterised his earlier books, here, too, Hamid vivisects the emotional labour of his characters even as, on surface, he depicts their physical pain. With a shockingly acute insider's eye for detail, he unfurls the calculus of dislocation, the psychology of loss and the enigma of exile.

In this compelling novel, Hamid does much more than regurgitate the stereotypes and banalities that are globally percolating about the refugee crises. In spare and haunting prose, he stitches the wounds of his characters, the refugees, and as we, the readers, linger on, his words heal us too. Very different in style, writing and theme, but equally dazzling is Aslam's *'The Golden Legend'*. Aslam is a master of stylistic brilliance and in his latest book,

as in his earlier ones, he blends the beautiful and the revolting, the warming and the wrenching, together. The book is rife with subtle nods to actual political and social incidents in Pakistan. The Raymond Davis case, the lynching and burning of Christian communities, the murder of a newspaper editor over the publication of a controversial cartoon, all these tragedies feel very close to home.

Massud, an architect, is gunned down by an American man at a marketplace in the fictional city Zamana that seems to be a thinly disguised version of Lahore. After Massud's death, his wife, Nargis, is confronted with the demands of the Pakistan Military and the US intelligence who want her to publicly forgive the murderer. When mere insistence turns to brutal violence, Nargis and her Christian guardian, Helen, escape. Meanwhile, Helen's father, Lily, becomes involved in a scandal with the local Muslim cleric's daughter, Ayesha. When their 'disgraceful' union is publicly announced through the loudspeakers of the local mosque, hundreds of Christian houses in the vicinity are burned down and hundreds of Muslims are set loose to capture and murder the trespasser, Lily. Lily, Helen and Nargis, as well as their chance companion, Imran, are haunted by the effluvia of their past lives. Each is trying to escape violence, to protect their lives, and as their lives converge, during the climax scene, we are reminded of how dramatic and yet deeply moving Aslam's fiction can be.

It is a sad book, full of tragedies, violence, blood, injustice, and the knowledge of how each of this is incited by the arithmetic of power relations of class, religion and gender. But it is never devoid of warmth and hope. Aslam, the polemicist, suffuses the book with the political turmoil of our nation; Aslam, the writer, injects empathy into every crevice of this book and into his characters' lives. The prose feels less heavy-handed than in his previous books, though there is plenty of lyricism here too. The plot is a lesser concern to Aslam, a stylist who revels in the beauty of small, ephemeral moments, in the ignored minutia of daily life. While Hamid's lambent novel deals with the global refugee crises, Aslam's vital book reminds us of the

copious injustices ubiquitous in our own country. Hamid's book is just as vital and timely as Diksha Basu's *'The Windfall'*. Aslam's book is just as engrossing and compelling as Arundhati Roy's *'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness'*. But will Indian writers, once again, outweigh their cross-border counter parts in this year's literary prize bonanza? If there is any justice in these things, and if literary prizes mean anything at all, not one, but both of these books will be front-runners for this year's Booker Prize.

Kerr, Sarah: In the Terror House of Mirrors
The New York Review of Books

11 October 2007

Far from seeming bothered by the literariness of literature, Mohsin Hamid appears to savor it. Ambiguity starts out as the delicate organizing principle of his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. By the end of the book it has turned into the disturbing payoff. Hamid is a youngish writer born in Pakistan and educated at Princeton. He worked for a time as a New York finance consultant before quitting to write, and eventually moving to London. His first novel, *Moth Smoke*, centers on a young man from Lahore, intellectually gifted but stranded in a mortifying class limbo. With his military father dead, the young man's career depends on the intercession of people he's reluctant to ask for help. Jealously, often numbed by drugs, he watches as his rich, heedless best friend goes off to America, picks up a cosmopolitan sheen, and returns home, likely headed for a career of high-status corruption. Though the novel's construction feels scattered, it has energy and shrewd observations of contemporary urban Pakistan. In it we learn, for instance, how young Muslims flout their temperance laws, police fear the military, and how for all but the rich, air conditioning arbitrarily shuts down.

Hamid's new novel builds similar elements into a more elegant form, through which he weaves a steadier tension. At the center of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is another promising, frustrated son of Lahore. His name, Changez, sounds as allegorical as the Doll's, but according to interviews with Hamid the name refers obliquely to Genghis Khan, conqueror of Muslims, rather than to a concept of change. He comes from a once-elite family (how elite and how trustworthy a witness he is on the subject hover as questions), and is more painfully aware than anyone around him of his fragile standing.

Still, Changez has clearly tasted privilege, and for much of the novel, though only twenty-five years old, he describes in nostalgic past tense the chance he once had to claim that privilege for life. He attended Princeton. After college, in a kind of finance-world version of Top Gun, he beat out the competition to work at a small, famously ruthless Manhattan consulting firm. His job was to study the fundamentals of client businesses, sometimes in the States and sometimes in far-flung foreign locales, and then to advise them on which segments of their business (and so, indirectly, which employees) to dump. Also he was in love, a love that seems to have been only fleetingly, distractedly, and limply half-returned by a beautiful Princeton classmate named Erica.

When we meet Changez at the novel's beginning, in a café in the historic Lahore district of Old Anarkali, he has put the American period decisively behind him. To tell this story, Hamid has chosen an unusual structure. The novel will be a long monologue by Changez. To be precise: it will be Changez's half of a conversation, broken into chapters, with an American visitor to Lahore who is never named, directly pictured, or given a voice. Changez strikes up the stranger's acquaintance on the novel's first page. By the second page he is displaying a solicitousness that could be read as either generous and eager to show the best side of Pakistan by treating this representative of America like a VIP, or else controlling and potentially hostile:

“Come, tell me, what were you looking for? Surely, at this time of day, only one thing could have brought you to the district of Old Anarkali —named, as you may be aware, after a courtesan immured for loving a prince—and that is the quest for the perfect cup of tea. Have I guessed correctly? Then allow me, sir, to suggest my favorite among these many establishments.”

The odd formality of Changez’s speech here gives a sense of the novel’s lightly applied brush of the surreal; the idea of tea seems a winking nod to classical tale-telling with its opening invitation to sit for a while. And here already is the mild unease we’ll be made to feel throughout, not quite knowing the intentions of Changez— or the intentions, for that matter, of his conversation partner. Has this apparently coincidental meeting been plotted by one party looking to catch the other unawares? For just a split second, Hamid lets pass through the reader’s mind a couple of nervous-making scenarios. Could Changez have somehow drifted out of sympathy with the US to such an extent that he wishes America harm? Or perhaps that’s the suspicion of the nameless American, whom Changez describes at various points as possessing a bulked-up chest and the hardened face of a man on a mission and wearing a suit with a bulge in the inside jacket pocket that could theoretically be the outline of an undercover agent’s gun.

But maybe we the readers are the ones who jump to conclusions; maybe the book is intended as a Rorschach to reflect back our unconscious assumptions. In our not knowing lies the novel’s suspense, which is skillfully kept close to but never crosses into camp (although Changez’s fussy, persistent invitations to stretch out this companionship for a few more hours did once remind me of the sketch several years back on *Saturday Night Live* in which a half-mad mustachioed Christopher Walken talked into the camera attempting to seduce an unseen woman).

Maybe Changez just really wants to talk. And maybe what he has to say could be seen as somehow representative of what the many thousands of people like him from all over the world, people who have lived in and adored but grown disenchanted with America, might say if they had the chance. His memories are certainly rich with symbolism for us to unpack. There is Erica, blond and athletic, with family wealth that pays for her idealism, a winning but insensitive habit of emotional directness, and an unconscious power, for which she doesn't take responsibility, to injure when she withdraws her attention. Further loading up the parallel to America today, Erica was once strong and hearty but after college grew weak, depressed, absorbed in uncertainty since the death of a beloved boyfriend.

In any case, the thinness of her character doesn't really interfere with the qualities one savors after finishing the book. At his best Hamid makes interesting, occasionally electric use of a thematizing intellectual imagination, bringing to life some frisson of history almost as a stimulating professor might. Changez really falls for Erica, for instance, while they are traveling with a group—in Greece, that crossroads of East and West, where the origins of democracy sing in one key to America, and the depth and the proud, gloried longevity speak in quite another key, but just as intimately, to Pakistan.

So, too, when Changez travels for work. One of the most revealing moments in the book is a seeming throwaway. Presumably hours into his monologue, after he has been treating his tea companion to a long chain of sensitively described, often pedantically well-informed observations and memories, he mentions a trip he took for the financial firm to the Philippines. While on the job there, he marveled at Manila's gleaming business district:

"I expected to find a city like Lahore—or perhaps Karachi; what I found instead was a place of skyscrapers and superhighways. Yes, Manila had its slums; one saw them on the drive from the airport: vast districts of men in dirty white undershirts lounging idly in front of auto-repair shops—like a poorer version of the 1950s America depicted in such films as *Grease*. But

Manila's glittering skyline and walled enclaves for the ultra-rich were unlike anything I had seen in Pakistan."

To envy Manila and interpret its poverty through the lens of *Grease*! This is an intelligent, educated, well-traveled, even philosophical man. That does not exempt him from foggy thinking, and an insecurity that converts before it can even be registered into a kind of nostalgia. In fact, Changez displays multiple provincialities here. One has Lahore as its comfortable frame of reference; another luxuriates in the arrogant, sealed-off, denatured bubble of international finance. And then there's the third, generic, global dimension of popular culture. It's absorbed, spongelike, through hit movies and owned at this point by anyone who wants to stake a claim.

What prompted Changez to leave America? It was while in Manila, he tells the American, that he saw the news of September 11, and "despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased." Responding to the American's apparent agitation at this, Changez reassures him that he felt great sympathy for the suffering victims:

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

Eventually, the affair with the ever gloomier Erica over, angered by the bombing of Afghanistan while the formerly backslapping colleagues at his firm are disturbed by his increasingly erratic work and the new beard on his face, Changez seems almost to fade away from the States, to dematerialize, a flamed-out cosmopolitan, rather than to actively leave. The long afternoon and night in Old Anarkali wind down, or perhaps wind up, to the murkily opaque revelation by Changez of what he's doing today. He teaches at a university in Lahore, and has

become a mentor to dissenting students—part of a network advocating a drawing back from America and its influence.

And how far does this go? Changez's verbose explanations invite multiple, clashing interpretations; though we can't hear or see the American, we sense his tension. Hamid literally leaves us at the end in a kind of alley, the story suddenly suspended; it's even possible that some act of violence might occur. But more likely, we are left holding the bag of conflicting worldviews. We're left to ponder the symbolism of Changez having been caught up in the game of symbolism—a game we ourselves have been known to play. We're deep into the house of mirrors of stereotypes that seems so key to the experience of being alive now. Once the province of the provincial, now so hard not to resort to in order to organize mentally a chaotic world. Unjust, yet such stereotypes are not always devoid of truth. Not ordinarily great friends of the novel, but then we live in interesting times.

Khair, Tabish: *Unquiet American: A Monologue*
Outlook India

23 April 2007

A Pakistan-born Princeton graduate's journey from yuppiedom to fundamentalism

9/11, and its aftermath: not since the Cold War has an international situation provided as much opportunity for writers in the West to combine thrills with thought, action with analysis. Salman Rushdie, John Updike, Jan Guillou, Frederick Forsyth, all have given it a shot, and the list continues to expand. Of these, most novels have only scratched the surface of phenomena that remain, finally, beyond the comprehension of the classes to which these writers, and many of their readers, belong. The otherness of the religious fundamentalist, let alone the terrorist, remains incapable of narration, except as absolute evil, medieval stupidity or juvenile error, by people who have too much to lose and too little to resent.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a glorious exception to this rule. Its success depends not just on sympathy and thought, but also on this young novelist's deftness. To begin with, Hamid's protagonist-narrator, Changez, is a carefully delineated and located character: not just any 'fundamentalist', but a top graduate from Princeton, working for an elite firm, and hailing from a genteel family of professionals in Lahore. His trajectory to 'fundamentalism' is not confused with that of the madrassa student (like the Taliban), or the small-town immigrant worker in Riyadh, London or Delhi.

That in itself is an achievement. Hamid's use of 'fundamentalism' is not smeared with a broad brush, painted so liberally that it can't be used to understand, analyse or, for that matter, narrate. But it also presents some advantages: anglophone legibility, for instance. Hamid structures Changez's narrative of his own 'development' as a monologue, addressed to a mysterious American whom Changez befriends at a roadside hotel in Lahore. Wielded so lightly that one almost fails to notice the art and thought that went into it, Changez's monologue is a major success of the novel.

Despite its particular and contemporary vocabulary—"monickered" etc—Changez's monologue carries echoes of 18th-19th century monologues. The situation is similar, for instance, to that of the ancient mariner: a 'guest' is detained by a man, in this case Changez, with a disturbing story to tell. Even as the voice of Changez erases the voice of the American, except as reportage (thus reversing the usual situation), the monologue highlights a major flaw in our relationship to the other. For even a common vocabulary does not imply a shared language, or 'dialogue': Changez and the unnamed American share much, and still do not agree or trust each other.

But who is the 'reluctant fundamentalist'? Is it Changez, the bearded Princeton graduate who has left a cushy New York job and now teaches and organises students in Lahore? For if Changez is a fundamentalist now, thanks partly to his beard, he was once a westernised, clean-

shaven, alcohol-imbibing yuppie who had been taught, in his prestigious American company, to “focus on the fundamentals.” “This was Underwood Samson’s guiding principle, drilled into us since our first day at work. It mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail....” Changez’s move away from America is also a movement away from these “financial fundamentals” and back to a recent human history of powerlessness and resentment.

Changez comes to the point where, as a result of the ‘war on terror’, he realises “the lives of those of us who lived in lands in which such killers [terrorists] also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage”—and he switches his allegiance. He becomes a ‘fundamentalist’, but then what was he earlier on?

And what about Erica, the rich, beautiful American girl he falls in love with? Erica is still in love with her childhood sweetheart, who died of cancer. Is she any different from people like Changez, who cannot write off the present and the past for a promised future? Is she a ‘fundamentalist’ too? How does one live, or die, in a world in which some places (in space, time, or the mind) are blithely “condemned to atrophy”?

Hamid’s is too much a novel of the times to pose these questions directly. But unlike some much-hyped novels, it does not shirk or short-circuit such questioning. The narrative forces the reader to confront such questions, even while never losing the momentum of its brisk and captivating ‘story-telling.’ This novel is also a test. At the end of it, Changez and the American confront each other across their similarities and differences. For, perhaps, Changez has been setting up the American to be murdered by his fundamentalist disciples. Or perhaps the American is a professional sent to kill Changez. What ending, reader, would you choose? (Or is there a third possibility?) I know what I will choose. The Reluctant Fundamentalist is Hamid’s second novel. I never read the first one, *Moth Smoke*. I will buy it now.

(Tabish Khair’s novel, *Filming: A Love Story*, will be out soon.)

Lasdun, James: The Empire Strikes Back
The Guardian

03 Mar 2007

Mohsin Hamid's second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, says James Lasdun.

The janissaries of the Ottoman Empire were captured Christian boys trained to fight against their own people, which they did with singular ferocity. This interesting class of warrior is described during a business lunch to Changez, the young hero of Mohsin Hamid's second novel, at a moment of crisis over his own identity. Born in Pakistan, educated at Princeton and currently the hottest new employee at a New York firm specialising in ruthless appraisals of ailing companies being targeted for takeover, Changez recognises himself in the description. "I was a modern-day janissary," he observes, "a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine ..."

The recognition completes a process of inward transformation that began when he realised he was half-gladdened by the World Trade Center attacks, and it now prompts him to sabotage his own high-flying career, to give up his pursuit of the beautiful, troubled Wasp princess Erica and go back to Lahore. There, bearded and generally reacculturated, he meets an American in a restaurant in the Old Anarkali district, and buttonholes him with his life story. The novel is his monologue: a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous faultlines of current east/west relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual - but especially American - prejudice and misrepresentation.

The richest instance of the latter is in the way it plays with the idea of fundamentalism itself. From the title, and from the increasingly tense atmosphere arising between Changez and his American listener, the expectation is that Changez is moving towards the revelation that he has gone, however “reluctantly”, all the way over to the dark side of Islamic fundamentalism, and is possibly, even as he speaks, orchestrating some Daniel Pearl-like execution of his perhaps literally captive audience. But in a neat - arguably too neat - reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue here is that of US capitalism, specifically that practised by Changez’s former employer, Underwood Samson, whose motto, as they do their pitiless bit for globalisation, is “Focus on the fundamentals”. The subverted expectation very efficiently forces one to reconsider one’s preconceptions about such words and their meanings, and a point is duly scored for relativism.

This precise, rather classical orchestration of symmetries and reciprocities is both a strength and a weakness in the book. It fosters the kind of concentratedly astute cultural observation at which Hamid excels. At frequent intervals the narrative executes a nice flourish in the form of some densely emblematic image or epigrammatic remark. Changez pithily summarises, for instance, the experience of every happy Manhattan transplant when he declares: “I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker.” And his figure for that city in its ominously flag-bedecked state following the 9/11 attacks - “I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle” - is perfect both as a visual image and as a deepening of the book’s running theme of *sic transit gloria mundi* in which the triumphalist militarism of the US is repeatedly mapped over the ruined glory of the old Mughal empire.

But at the same time, this aphoristic tendency gives the story a slightly abstracted, thin-blooded quality. You notice this especially in the relationship between Changez and Erica. This privileged, patrician girl has a tragedy in her past: a childhood sweetheart named Chris, who

died in his teens. Her growing intimacy with Changez, while interestingly free of the racial tensions that traditionally afflict such couples in literature, is nevertheless thwarted by her inability to forget Chris or allow Changez to take his place. In the turbulence following September 11, this preoccupation with her own past becomes a crippling obsession - “she was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia” - resulting in a breakdown, hospitalisation and probable suicide. It all feels a little sketchy, psychologically: simultaneously over the top and undersubstantiated. But after a while you realise you’re not in the realm of psychology at all, but of allegory (and if you don’t, a nudge or two from the narrator - “it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia” - soon sets you straight). It dawns on you that Erica is America (Am-Erica) and that Chris’s name has been chosen to represent the nation’s fraught relationship with its moment of European discovery and conquest, while the narrator himself stands for the country’s consequent inability to accept, uh, changez.

To be fair, the allegory isn’t as glibly intrusive as that makes it sound, but it has a stiffening effect on the narrative, shifting it from the dramatic to the essayistic. It’s no great surprise to hear Changez drop his sinuously self-deprecating manner towards the end, in favour of something more finger-waggingly polemical: “I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan ...”

The nature of fiction is to make one distrustful of any character who lectures and castigates. By what higher personal virtue does Changez presume to judge? The question opens the book to the charge of a more serious flaw: one expects Changez’s opposition to America’s conduct to be founded on some morally superior alternative set of values. But aside from his discovery of his own patriotism, his repudiation of America in the wake of the September 11 attacks is a curiously frictionless, voluntary event, leaving one with an odd sense that his

decision to quit is ultimately just the superior opportunism of a well-trained appraiser of ailing companies, who knows which way the wind is blowing. A potentially fascinating character, but not, I think, what his creator intended.

There's undoubtedly a great novel waiting to be written out of the anguished material of these kinds of east/west encounters. This book may not be it, but its author (who won a Betty Trask award for his first novel, *Moth Smoke*) certainly has the potential to write it. My criticisms of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are a testament to its genuinely provocative nature, and it remains, at the very least, an intelligent, highly engaging piece of work.

About James Lasdun: *James Lasdun's most recent novel is Seven Lies (Vintage).*

Majeed, Fatima: 'The Wandering Falcon': Understanding Balochistan, the Literary Way
The Express Tribune

30 August 2014

Ahmad, retired Chief Secretary of Balochistan, has beautifully presented the stories of the deserts of Balochistan, without botox-ing them for modern sensibilities.

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* cruised into my bucket list when it was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize and Commonwealth Book Prize, but that was not the sole reason for it clicking with me. It was the debut work of the author at the age of 78 and was written long before we mired our stream of consciousness by replacing people with numbers and empathy with stock language for the tribal people of Pakistan.

Penned down some 34 years ago, the work of fiction has become extremely relevant to the current global situation rampant with discourse of convenience. The short stories shot to

fame after landing space in the prestigious *Granta*, the literary magazine. It could be termed as an unadulterated version of a world which has become marketable to a nauseating extent. Nowadays, the instant recipe to literary fame is taking up the post 9/11 theme, and twerk with personal style, especially if you are lucky enough to belong to the troubled areas (the only time you feel privileged for your motherland). *The Wandering Falcon* is immunised from this commercialism which makes it an effective cultural document.

The set of stories could be enjoyed individually, but they are also connected with the leitmotif of Tor Baz, a character which appears in every story and evolves in the process. The collection celebrates the tribal people as they are, without tinting them with post 9/11 clichés. It depicts people and their customs objectively, without being apologetic for them or demonising them. Ahmad served in tribal areas as a civil servant and developed enduring respect and understating for their culture. He said in an interview:

“I felt the tribes had far more grace, a far greater sense of honour, rectitude, truth — the qualities we associate with a decent human being — than you found in the cities”.

The narrative doesn't delve much into the emotions of character and by this technique of symbolic exclusion and holding back, becomes aligned with the cultural norms of the characters. Characters don't give away much through words and exude quintessential Baloch and tribal forbearance. The barren and unforgiving landscape of the desert and mountains become an important character and relay more information than the expression of characters. The culture and stories of Balochistan have never made it to the national literary scenario and whenever they do, they are trite and whitewashed to fit into the politically correct national narrative. Ahmad, retired Chief Secretary of Balochistan, has beautifully presented the stories of the desert without botox-ing them for modern sensibilities. The Sardar's daughter and her lover in *The Sins of the Mother* are aware of the fate awaiting them, yet they bear and raise

their son with dignified stoicism. Pathos seeps into the story when the lover sees two small towers around the newly built gate and says,

“My love, take away the towers, there is something about them I do not like”.

The towers, as the reader comes to know later, are symbolic of the lovers’ grave.

I enjoyed *Death of the Camels* most, which celebrated the obliterating Nomad traditions. The fearless Gul Jana defies the laws under the illusion that the Quran on her head would save her. Ahmad triumphs as an artist, when he juxtaposed dying Nomad culture against modern society law; make them wither mercilessly.

However, *A Point of Honour* is most relatable of all. The reader might face a guilt-trip after reading an emphatic account of Baloch rebels and how their culture and traditions are deeply misunderstood. The tragedy deepens when a ‘rebel’ Sardar honours the word of authorities and ends up in a magistrate’s office accused of killing many people and says, “If people in this room can be silent, thoughts shall come easier to me. We Baloch are used to the silence of the desert”. Though branded as guilty, the seven tribesmen walk out with their head high, portraying the ultimate trait of Baloch culture: bravery and stoicism. This book is a treat for the reader looking for stories without agendas.

Marlowe, Ann Rachel: Buying Anti-American
National Review

Politics and Policy 14 May 2007 10:00 AM

And the annoying whining in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* isn’t even authentic.

The commercial success and critical praise of Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* – currently on the *New York Times* best-seller list – are an ill omen for those

who support the ideals of liberal society, not only here but in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. As other writers notice its success, we can expect others to follow in its path of Islamic minstrelism, selling the Western audience what it expects to hear from angry Muslims. In this case, the merchant is a thoroughly Westernized, privileged beneficiary of American largesse. On the Powells.com website, Hamid disingenuously muses, “People often ask me if I am the book’s Pakistani protagonist. I wonder why they never ask if I am his American listener. After all, a novel can often be a divided man’s conversation with himself.”

Theoretically true, but Hamid’s published opinion pieces are nearly continuous with the hateful characterizations of Americans and America expressed in the long monologue that the book’s narrator, Changez, delivers to an unnamed American in a Lahore café. As a novel, *RF* is tripe—anti-American agitprop clumsily masquerading as a work of art. People who are buying *RF* are sending their money to someone who is aggressively anti-American. (The publicity for *RF* emphasizes Hamid’s American university degrees but does not mention that he turned in his green card in 2006 and applied for British citizenship instead.) Why are Americans buying this book? Part of the explanation must be their nearly boundless goodwill and naiveté, ever interested in finding out “why they hate us.” Changez, however, is not even one of “them”; he is not an Islamic fundamentalist, but a poorly constructed and implausible character whose anti-Americanism is more aesthetic and snobbish than ideological. It’s closer to a certain strain of European anti-Americanism than anything from the Muslim world.

The digs are predictable: Princeton’s Gothic-style buildings are younger than many of Lahore’s mosques but made to look older; an American character doesn’t give to beggars (there is no mention of the many in Pakistan who were deliberately maimed as children by their controllers); he is “well-traveled for an American,” but would not, of course, know Urdu (but how does Changez know, since the American never says anything?).

When Changez works briefly for an American firm in Manila, he learns to act like an American, which apparently means speaking rudely to older people and cutting to the front of lines. (Never mind that, almost anywhere in the third world, locals would rather work for Americans, who treat them well, than for their feudal-minded fellow countrymen. And I've also found that, whenever I'm in a crowd trying to get somewhere in the third world, it is the Americans and English who are left behind, while the locals charge forward ignoring the queue.) Hamid—I mean, Changez—even manages to get upset over the fact that there are many more Americans than Pakistanis at Princeton. “Americans faced much less daunting odds in the selection process.” Perhaps there are reasons Pakistanis are generally not ready for Princeton — say, the country's illiteracy rate (51.3 percent overall, 64.8 percent among women) and its per capita GDP of \$2,600. The fault lies with Pakistan's government, which might begin by offering free public education, not with Princeton's admissions committee. Hamid fails to note these facts, however, which figures, since he avowedly voted for Musharraf in 2002 and thinks Pakistan, far from being a borderline failed state, is doing just fine. “The country's image abroad remains far worse than the reality,” he proclaimed in *Time* in 2005, and this spring he reiterated his opinion in the *New York Times*.

The sneering tone of Changez's remarks to his American interlocutor would offend many readers if it were applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to blacks or Jews or, for that matter, Muslim Americans. But what will offend more is the similarity between the narrator's and the author's views of September 11 and the U.S. war in Afghanistan. The narrator's oft-quoted statement that he was “remarkably pleased” on 9/11 meshes all too well with the author's September 23, 2001, *Time* piece, which failed to mention the attacks and instead argues against the overthrow of the Taliban. “In Pakistan, my friends and family are frightened, as they should be when the most powerful military in the world is sent to do a task best accomplished by school teachers, police forces, persuasion, and time.” Ah yes, the school teachers that the Taliban was so keen

on encouraging. They would have cleared up the human-rights problems. Persuasion? That would have been a great solution. The Taliban was famous for its dedication to freedom of speech.

It is almost certain that Hamid agrees with what he has Changez say while watching the Afghan war on TV, lamenting the “mismatch” between “American bombers with their twenty-first century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below.” Never mind that there was a bit of a mismatch between the innocents working in the World Trade Center and the planes that hit them, or that many of the “Afghan tribesmen” were Pakistani jihadis brainwashed in the madrasas, or that no one was more glad to see them killed than the ethnic Tajjiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras they murdered, raped, and persecuted when they brutalized northern Afghanistan. Changez is unable to extend his compassion to the Afghans who were victims of the Taliban, and the same seems true of Hamid.

Potential purchasers of *RF* might want to consider these words from an interview with Hamid which the publisher of the book uses on its website as a promotion: “The political positions of both Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush are founded on failures of empathy, failures of compassion toward people who seem different.” Apparently Hamid was dozing off in classes at Princeton and Harvard Law when his professors discussed drawing distinctions. We didn’t go to war in Afghanistan because Osama bin Laden and his Taliban hosts are different, but because they were responsible for murdering a large number of innocent people in the U.S.

Reasonable people can disagree about the motivation behind and the execution of President Bush’s foreign policy. But no one could say that he deliberately ordered the execution of thousands of civilians, or that the U.S. attacked Iraq under his leadership because Iraqis “seem different.” In fact, those who led us to war believed that Iraqis are fundamentally *the same as* Americans; that they are capable of governing themselves and deserve to live with the

same human rights and dignity as Americans. That is why many of us who supported, and support, the war believe that we do so in the liberal tradition. As is becoming so popular nowadays, Hamid terms any disagreement with his views censorship, even though he shows little interest in supporting freedom of speech for anyone else. Hamid writes about the “censorship” of his views when a paragraph about “Muslim rage” was edited out of an article he published in the *New Statesman* in October 2006, but he won’t praise America’s bringing at least a relative freedom of speech to Afghanistan and Iraq. It’s hard to figure out how Hamid considers himself among “secular, liberal Pakistanis” when he does not defend the values liberal societies share worldwide.

On a purely literary level, *RF* is a dreadful book. Its title is only the beginning of its fraudulence and cheap cynicism, in that the narrator, while anti-American, never refers to his religion. Not one *hadith*, not one quote from a *sura*, not a hint of the narrator’s religious affiliation makes its way into the text of *RF*. Perhaps Hamid simply doesn’t know much about his religion or has judged that Americans would not have the patience for it. But it would be odd to have a long chat with a Muslim of the narrator’s purported convictions in which there was no mention of any of the apparatus of Islam.

Changez would be more sympathetic if he believed in something. Real terrorists have convictions—that’s what makes them dangerous, and it’s why at least some of them can be argued with. Hamid gives his protagonist only resentment. “The entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away.” (This would be in reference to the Afghan war, by the way.) Nor would a real person of any background anywhere speak the way Changez does: “When you sit in that fashion, sir, with your arm curved around the back of the empty chair beside you, a bulge manifests itself through the lightweight fabric of your suit”; “A more serious challenge would come from

Chuck's good—and similarly monosyllabically monikered – friend Mike”; “Yes, quite so, not as difficult as the time of carnage itself- said, sir, like a true soldier.”

Hamid claims that he's given Changez, “a voice born of the British colonial inflections taught in elite Pakistani schools and colored by an anachronistic, courtly menace that resonates well with popular western preconceptions of Islam”. I'd say he's sold a second-hand Orientalism to readers he thinks are too poorly travelled and too provincial to recognize it for the crap that it is—or too polite to wonder why a Princeton and Harvard grad has such a tin ear. The narrator's name is just as clumsily chosen as his words. Changez is a Turkish name, and a pagan one. Genghis Khan is no culture hero in the non-Turkic Islamic east, where he was a destroyer of cities and libraries and a mass murderer on the scale of Stalin and Hitler. The majority of his victims were Chinese or Muslim Persians, not Westerners (as that term might have been applied in the 13th century). And since the Mongols were religiously tolerant animists, he would not be a good model for an anti-American Islamic fundamentalist.

The ersatz “Eastern” diction Hamid gives Changez—like his name, like his absence of religious identity—would be laughed at if an American writer tried to foist such a poorly drawn character on his readers. But given the right “authentic” apparatus, this clumsy Orientalism from an Oriental passes without remark. What's sad about this is that Hamid's first novel, *Moth Smoke*, was a far better book. It was obviously a first effort, laboriously constructed, and with contrived characters, but the dialogue was snappy and realistic and the mise en scene far more convincing. But Hamid has obviously seen that there is greater mileage in playing the “Muslim rage” card and donning the mantle of Islamic minstrelism than in becoming a fine novelist. If I had any sympathy for him, I'd mourn his lack of respect for himself. As it is, I'm appalled at his lack of respect for his audience, his narrator, his narrator's American listener, his co-religionists who suffered under the Taliban and under Saddam, and for the victims of the World

Trade Center attack. Hamid's hypocrisies are all of a piece. Unfortunately, he is laughing all the way to the bank.

Olsson, Karen: I Pledge Allegiance
The New York Times Sunday Book Review

22 April 2007

This is a book that pivots on a smile. A third of the way through Mohsin Hamid's second novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," the narrator, a young Pakistani man named Changez, tells an American how he first learned of the destruction of the World Trade Center. While on a business trip to Manila, he turned on the television in his hotel room and saw the towers fall. "I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased."

The novel begins a few years after 9/11. Changez happens upon the American in Lahore, invites him to tea and tells him the story of his life in the months just before and after the attacks. That monologue is the substance of Hamid's elegant and chilling little novel. In 2001, as he explains, Changez was hardly a radical. Fresh out of Princeton, he was living in New York City and working as a financial analyst. He appears to have been something of a cipher, until his reaction to the attacks—that sudden smile—pierces the shell. It seems to have come as a surprise even to himself, and while hardly endearing, it sets his tale in motion.

A less sophisticated author might have told a one-note story in which an immigrant's experiences of discrimination and ignorance cause his alienation. But Hamid's novel, while it contains a few such moments, is distinguished by its portrayal of Changez's class aspirations and inner struggle. His resentment is at least in part self-loathing, directed at the American he'd been on his way to becoming. For to be an American, he declares, is to view the world in a

certain way—a perspective he absorbed in his eagerness to join the country's elite. His indoctrination, however, was never total. Starting with his job interview at Underwood Samson, a small firm that appraises businesses around the world, and a post graduation trip to Greece with friends from Princeton, Changez maintains an outsider's double perspective. On the trip he is smitten with Erica, one of the other travelers, but is also bothered by his rich friends' profligate spending and the condescension with which they give orders to anyone they've paid for a service: "I ... found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions—many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they—were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class." Yet even as he recognizes the foibles of that ruling class, Changez, who comes from a high-status but downwardly mobile family, also aspires to join it. Given his oft-mentioned phenomenal aptitude for his new job and a talent for winning over other people, that goal seems all but guaranteed.

By the time he reaches Manila, where he is sent to appraise a recording business, Changez finds himself trying to assert his Americanness. Suddenly he's the one ordering around men his father's age. Unnerved when a jeepney driver gives him a hostile look, Changez puzzles over its significance until he glances at one of his colleagues and feels his own hostility toward the other man's "oblivious immersion" in his work.

So which is he, the ignorant master or the canny subaltern? And has he sacrificed his identity in pursuit of status? Changez has already begun to ask himself these questions when he sees the towers fall. And in the wake of the attacks, as tensions escalate between India and Pakistan, and the United States is meanwhile caught up in patriotic displays that strike Changez as a dangerous form of nostalgia, he loses interest in his work. Assigned to help appraise a publishing company in Valparaiso, Chile, he spends his time visiting Neruda's house and lunching with the publisher, who compares Changez to a janissary—one of the Christian youths

captured and then conscripted by the Ottomans, compelled to do battle against their own civilization.

Yet there is still the matter of his beloved Erica, who is friendly with Changez but mourning the death of her former boyfriend, Chris, from lung cancer. Changez is polite and formal; Erica is uninhibited, going topless, for instance, on a beach in Greece. The two become intimate, but she is haunted by Chris, and after 9/11 her sadness mysteriously turns pathological. She lands in an institution, then disappears. This part of the story seems a bit too convenient—Erica’s obsession with the past engineered to dovetail with America’s nostalgia and with Changez’s yearning for a lost Lahore—while her disappearance neatly parallels his departure from America. (Our hero’s name gets no points for subtlety either.) Hamid, who himself attended Princeton and worked in corporate America, aptly captures the ethos and hypocrisies of the Ivy League meritocracy, but less so its individual members. Throughout the book, secondary characters are sketched rather than distinctively rendered.

We never learn the American man’s identity, yet Changez regularly interrupts the story to address him. Perhaps, it is suggested, he had been pursuing Changez, who has become a leader of anti-American protests. Apparently, the man is “on a mission”—and he may be carrying a weapon. While these interruptions come too frequently for my taste, they do lend his tale an Arabian Nights-style urgency: the end of the story may mean the death of the teller. It seems that Hamid would have us understand the novel’s title ironically. We are prodded to question whether every critic of America in a Muslim country should be labeled a fundamentalist, or whether the term more accurately describes the capitalists of the American upper class. Yet these queries seem blunter and less interesting than the novel itself, in which the fundamentalist, and potential assassin, may be sitting on either side of the table.

About Karen Olsson: *Karen Olsson is a senior editor at Texas Monthly and the author of the novel "Waterloo."*

Ottewill, Jim: Mistaken Identities
The Guardian

Sun 11 March 2007 00.06 GMT. First published on Sun 11 Mar 2007

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set in the atmosphere of suspicion following the 9/11 attacks

Mohsin Hamid's second novel is the story of a young Muslim man's loves and losses, daubed against the tumultuous backdrop of the political unrest that followed the attacks on the World Trade Centre on 9/11. Changez is a young Pakistani who has risen to the top of American society: after graduating from Princeton, he secures a top job on Wall Street and falls in love with a beautiful American woman named Erica. But the collapse of the Twin Towers sends Changez spiralling to the depths of a paranoid crisis of identity. Where does he belong? New York? Lahore? More important, which side should he be fighting for?

During the course of the novel, set during a return visit to Lahore, Changez tells his story to a mysterious American. He explains how he has struggled against the suspicions cast on him where, despite his achievements and ostensible 'Americanness', the colour of his skin is a veil implying 'terrorist.' As afternoon turns to evening on the Lahore street, Hamid cleverly brews an air of simmering distrust between Changez and his listener, subtly juxtaposing light and dark. The novel succeeds in wrapping an exploration of the straining relationship between East and West in a gripping yarn, which remains taut until the final pages. In the wake of 9/11, the international political landscape has become warped through mutual distrust and political

hyperbole. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an elegant and sharp indictment of the clouds of suspicion that now shroud our world.

Pariat, Janice: Pakistani Civil Servant Tells An Orphan's Story
Outlook India

29 April 2011 Issue Date: 09 May 2011 Updated: 07 May 2011

A lyrical rendition of the loss of nobility among the frontier tribes.

The narrative of *The Wandering Falcon*, Jamil Ahmad's debut novel, shifts as easily as the desert sands—one layering the other, fashioning a new landscape with each gust of wind. Set around the permeable borders of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, years before the rise of the Taliban, the novella tells the story of an orphaned boy named Tor Baz—the black falcon. Yet, the Pakistani writer masterfully delineates the lives of others around him, including his unfortunate parents, killed because his mother commits adultery; the Baluch men who pick him up; the half-Afridi, half-German traveller who hires him to be a guide; and the Gujjar tribe from whom his future wife runs away. These threads are gently loosed by Ahmad, picked up and woven into a work of powerful and daunting beauty.

There is something of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in Ahmad's prose—the same stark simplicity, the fable-like clarity and abruptness of dialogue, the haunting description of apocalyptic landscape: "Lonely, as all such posts are, this one is particularly frightening. No habitation for miles around and no vegetation except for a few wasted and barren date tree leaning crazily against each other." It is a land that Ahmad knows well. Born in Jalandhar in 1933, he was a member of the Civil Service of Pakistan and served mainly in the Frontier Province and Balochistan. The desert landscape is what the Yorkshire moors were to the Bronte

sisters, a character by itself, a living, breathing entity that hurls love, beauty and hardship at its inhabitants.

The characters too are rugged and strong, caught in a world that is rapidly changing, where nation-states and borders are coming into concrete existence. As Dawa Khan, one of the leaders of the nomadic Kharot tribe, says to Ghuncha Gul, a subedar at an outpost, “What is this I hear about the closing of the borders... It would be impossible to do that. It would be like attempting to stop migrating birds or the locusts.” The line captures how the Kharot people also followed a rhythm of life as natural to other animals in the region, one that is interrupted and stopped by violence and gunfire. *The Wandering Falcon* lyrically documents the loss of a centuries-old way of life, of the values of honour and nobility. When a group of Baluch men are tricked and trapped by the authorities, “what died with them was a part of the Baluch people themselves. A little of their spontaneity in offering affection and something of their graciousness and trust.”

Tor Baz becomes a trader of information to the subedars, a hired escort and guide, and he flits in and out of the narrative like a furtive animal, serving to tie all the stories together. He remains the quiet outsider. The old nomadic way of life may be disappearing but he continues to restlessly travel, constantly shielded from his companions and even the reader by a veil of mystery. He may be the central character in the book, but we are offered little more than a tantalising glance at his life, before he too wanders away into a land of perpetual sorrow.

Peer, Basharat: *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad – Review
The Guardian

Sat 25 June 2011 First published on Sat 25 June 2011

Jamil Ahmad’s collection of stories is a striking debut. Border crossings ... a guerrilla from the Marri tribe prepares rockets for firing on a Pakistani troop outpost, 2006.

Jamil Ahmad, a Pakistani civil servant, began his career in Baluchistan in the 1950s. Most civil servants posted to such a remote area as Baluchistan, North Western Frontier Province, or the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghan border would lobby hard for a posting in the bigger cities of Pakistan, but Ahmad stayed on, spending several decades working as an administrator. Unlike most officials from the plains, Ahmad learned Pashto, the language most tribes along the dreaded frontier speak. Along the way, he took notes, and by 1974 had turned his impressions into a collection of inter-linked stories.

Ahmad stashed away his first draft, leaving it untouched for three decades. In 2008, he was 75, retired from the civil service, and living in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. Two young Pakistani women, a Lahore-based bookseller, Aysha Raja, and a Karachi-based columnist and editor, Faiza Sultan Khan, called on Pakistani authors to submit stories for a competition. Ahmad's younger brother insisted that he must show them his work. After reworking the 35-year-old manuscript, Ahmad sent it to Khan, who championed it, and showed it to an editor at Penguin.

Two years later, Jamil Ahmad made his debut as the 78-year-old writer of *The Wandering Falcon*, one of the finest collections of short stories to come out of south Asia in decades. *The Wandering Falcon* begins in Baluchistan in the early 1950s, as a tribal chief's daughter married to an impotent man elopes with her father's servant and finds shelter in an isolated fort manned by a few dozen lonely soldiers. Ahmad conveys the fear and desperation of the lovers as he describes them being offered water on their arrival at the fort gates after an arduous trek. "As she sensed water, she started sucking his hand and fingers like a small animal. All of a sudden, she lunged towards the bucket, plunged her head into it and drank with long gasping sounds until she choked."

The couple finds shelter in an abandoned corner of the fort. A son is born, and they raise the child in a hidden corner for six years until the Siahpad, their tribe, sends men in pursuit of them. The couple and their son run for safety but are hunted down, and two stone shrines are raised over their graves as a sign of Siahpads' revenge. Tor Baz, the boy left to die, is adopted by Baluch rebels fighting the Pakistani government and grows up to be the wandering falcon of the title, a boy with no fixed identity, moving between precarious worlds full of humanity, courage, cruelty, and above all poverty so dire that survival seems to be the greatest virtue.

Although the tribal areas of Pakistan have dominated the news and opinion pages for years, rarely has a writer shown greater empathy for its people, or brought such wisdom and knowledge to writing about a terrain largely inaccessible to journalists and writers. The Pak-Afghan frontier has become synonymous with terrorists and the mechanised war of drones. The ambitions and interests of nation states – America, Pakistan, Afghanistan – have rendered invisible the Baluch. Jamil's stories return the humanity to this devastated region. His characters defy the much-used categories of our times: moderates or extremists, Salafis or Sufis, pro or anti-American. Their concerns are often ordinary, mostly difficult struggles for a life of dignity and love.

The Wandering Falcon is also a blistering critique of the ruthless ways of nation states, as they seek to impose artificially constructed borders on older, more fluid worlds. In one of the most powerful stories, "The Death of Camels", Ahmed describes the world of a tribe of cattle herders who moved their flocks from the Afghan mountains in winter to the plains of Pakistan in summer. One autumn, as the state of Pakistan tries to enforce its borders, a caravan of these nomads faces armed Pakistani soldiers who order them to return to the tribal territory. Curt orders are issued through amplifiers. Guns are pointed. A woman, unfamiliar with the ways of modern states, moves forward with some camels, carrying a copy of the Koran on her

head, assured the holy book would protect her. “They had hardly gone fifty yards when two machine guns opened up from either side and mowed down the camels. The firing was indiscriminate. Men, women, and children died. Gul Jana’s belief that the Koran would prevent tragedy died too.”

The clash between a people governing themselves through old tribal codes and the modern governments permeates Ahmad’s stories. Another story, “A Point of Honour”, shows a group of Baluch rebels, who had taken in the six-year-old Tor Baz after his parents’ murder, debating over a Pakistani government pamphlet announcing an offer of talks. The rebels, led by an old, half-blind chief, march proudly to an outpost of governance for talks, but end up being disarmed and sentenced to death for murder.

“There was complete and total silence about the Baluchis, their cause, their lives, and their deaths. No newspaper editor risked punishment on their behalf . . . No politician risked imprisonment: they would continue to talk of the rights of the individual, the dignity of man, the exploitation of the poor, but they would not expose the wrong done outside their front door,” Ahmad writes. Sadly, his words continue to ring true. This collection is reminiscent of the work of two masters of the short story: Saadat Hussain Manto’s stories of India’s violent partition and Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry stories. The power and beauty of these stories are unparalleled in most fiction to come out of south Asia.

About Basharat Peer: *Basharat Peer’s Curfewed Night (Harper Press) is an account of the Kashmir conflict.*

Perur, Srinath: Book Review: ‘The Wandering Falcon’
DNA India

31 July 2011

The Wandering Falcon offers a glimpse into a world that is slowly disappearing.

Those who have diligently been putting off writing their first book can take much reassurance from Jamil Ahmad, a first-time author at 78. Ahmad is a retired civil servant who was posted along the western border of Pakistan in various administrative capacities. *The Wandering Falcon* comes as an introduction in fiction to this fascinating region and the tribes that inhabit it.

This part of the world has a tradition of resisting external authority, and parts of it remain semi-autonomous even today as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Much of the current interest in the region today—in the world's expedient way—is centred around Waziristan, refuge of the Taliban after 2001. But Ahmad's book is set in a time before the current conflict. *The Wandering Falcon* is a collection of nine short stories tied together by a recurring character—Tor Baz, 'black falcon'. The first story is set "where the borders of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan meet" in a military outpost that shelters a Siahpad couple on the run. Tor Baz is born there, orphaned at five, and picked up at a waterhole by a group of Baluchs.

For the rest of the book, he makes appearances in different places: he witnesses the mutual incomprehension of a Brahui tribe's ways and the state's legal system, sees the disruption of the migratory Kharot tribe's life by national boundaries, is instructed by a mullah who arbitrated tribal alliances for the Germans and British in World War II, becomes an informer about the activities of the Wazirs and the Mahsuds ("the two predatory tribes of Waziristan"), guides an outsider going to his father's birth-place in insular Afridi territory, prospects for gemstones, and buys a woman in a slave market.

The curiously amoral Tor Baz is incidental to most of the stories, more a device than a character. Far more central is the landscape and the people who inhabit it. Perhaps it says something about an underlying commonality in the region and its way of life that Tor Baz clearly belongs to none of the tribes he spends time with, but is not completely alien to any of

them. Ahmad's ethnographic intent is evident. His falcon systematically moves along the border, from Baluchistan through Waziristan and the Khyber, ending in Mohmand. Some of his characters seem to lack an edge from having to be not just themselves, but also representatives of a tribe or a tendency or a plight. But this is perhaps inevitable given the nature of the enterprise.

Ahmad knows the landscape he is writing about, its people and their rhythms of life. His prose is spare in keeping with the setting—"whorls of bare, cruel rock [. . .] occasionally throwing up spires and lances of granite"—and its simplicity often gives it an incantatory feel. The writing is organic to its world, as in the description of an old man whose "eyebrows and eyelashes looked like patches of freshly fallen snow clinging bravely to a cliff face." Ahmad is alive to poignancy without being sentimental, and his stories have an easy naturalness to them. A couple of stories in the latter half of the book take mildly jarring turns, hinting that Ahmad's easy storytelling might not be entirely effortless. *The Wandering Falcon* offers a glimpse into a world that is slowly disappearing. But this is how it has always been, Ahmad might remind us, urging us to notice the ruins of elaborate water-channels on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, "patiently constructed by a people long since vanished and destroyed by another, also forgotten."

Prasannarajan, Shri: Book Review: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid
India Today

16 April 2007 Updated: 08 June 2011 08:07 IST

In a new 9/11 novel, a 22-year-old Pakistani immigrant and Ivy League topper breaks out of the American dream and comes home as a fundamentalist.

It was his last day in Manila, where he was on assignment. He turned on the television and thought what he saw was a film. Then he realised it was news. “I stared as one-and then the other-of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.” Why did Changez, 22-years-old, a topper at Princeton and now the brightest of the analysts at Underwood Samson, a valuation firm and an exalted brand name in New York, smile? Why did he, a Pakistani immigrant who is playing out the great American dream, a posh professional earning a lucrative pay cheque and in love with a blue-blooded American girl who has introduced him to the otherwise forbidden chic heart of Manhattan, want to see the country that defines him harmed? Why did Changez, instead of thinking about the victims of the attack, get caught up in “the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees?” Why did Changez smile?

In *Mohsin Hamid’s* second novel (his first, *Moth Smoke*, was an award winning debut), the metaphysical sharpness of the question is accentuated by its heartlessness, and in fictional terms, it is perhaps just opposite of what Umberto Eco posed in *The Name of the Rose*: why doesn’t Jesus smile? Changez’s smile, the first sign of a metamorphosis, is prefixed to history, which, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is an intrusion, an echo, an image, a rumour, an unsettling sensation. It is a smile made possible by memory and an exaggerated sense of inheritance and identity. The smile, in the glow of 9/11, should have looked devilish, despicable. For the length of a sentence or two in this slim, finely chiselled novel, it does. For the most part, though, Changez, the protagonist of the newest 9/11 novel, is an engaging, even if not equally convincing, soliloquist struggling to place his story at the meeting point of cultural as well as geopolitical incompatibilities.

The entire story unfolds as a monologue in a restaurant in Lahore’s Old Anarkali district. Changez, now a bearded lecturer at a local college, is telling his story to a mysterious

American. As the smell and sound and shades of the old city play with the pauses in his narrative, we, along with his opaque American listener, are transported into a world that shaped, and, inevitably, brought Changez back to the fundamentals. Post Princeton, the elitist Underwood Samson and the ethereal Erica defined Changez's life, till 9/11 happened. And both would contribute greatly to his Americanisation, and finally, to his liberation. The mantra he learns from the firm is: focus on the fundamentals. He does, he does it better than his peers. He has everything in him to be an efficient- creativity marinated in pragmatism- citizen in a meritocracy, of which Underwood Samson is a high shrine. 9/11 shatters the idyll, and he begins to drift; he begins to remember. He steps out of the American dream and realises his own strangeness. He misses home.

The breaking point comes when he is in the Chilean town of Valparaíso to evaluate an ailing publishing house. The potential victim of his 'efficiency' one day invites him to a sea bass lunch and tells him the story of the janissaries. They were Christian boys captured and trained by the Ottomans. As soldiers in a Muslim Army, "they were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilisations, so they had nothing else to turn to." He realises his own worthlessness: "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country (Afghanistan) with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war." He was preparing himself to be fired-to be unshackled.

Soon, he would lose the other piece of America-Erica (you can't miss the pun)-too. She, throughout the narrative, remains enigmatically remote. She suffers from chronic nostalgia. She is unable to give herself entirely to Changez, even if he is willing to take on the persona of her dead lover. As Erica, the only one in New York who found him rather dashing in his new beard, vanishes into the depths of her memories, Changez is further reminded of the fragility of his core. He is angry and helpless. Another war between India and Pakistan in the wake of

the attack on the Indian Parliament looks almost imminent. His family in Lahore has been feeling the heat for a while. He has to regain himself; he has to stop America, for “as a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you.” He has to come home.

Well, he returns to the fundamentals. When we meet him and his American listener, we anticipate some kind of dramatic resolution. No, he is not playing Omar Sheikh to another Daniel Pearl; he, such a fine storyteller, is incapable of deceptions. There is a kind of lightness about him. Even at home, this reborn preacher of anti-Americanism seems to have failed to shed his strangeness. He shares certain biographical details like nationality, Princeton, and management job in New York, with his creator, who, according to the author introduction in the Indian edition, writes on world politics from a “Muslim perspective”. Changez, for one thing, doesn’t see the world from an Islamic perspective. The word doesn’t appear in the confessions of the reluctant fundamentalist. He doesn’t even wallow in victimhood. His argument is existential. When it becomes political, it sounds simplistic, and innocently predictable. It is so easy to get trapped in the cliché of east-is-east-and-west-is-west. There is indeed a crisis of faith—an outsider’s faith in his ability to opt out. Changez’s freedom, in the end, is relative: Part of America—Erica—is within him, still. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the testament of a man who, at first sight, seems to have been born out of yesterday’s headlines. He could very well have been in the cockpit of one of those aircraft that hit the twin towers. Or, he could have been a suicide bomber in a Middle Eastern café waiting for his one way ticket to paradise. His personal refinement and educational qualifications are hardly incompatible with his shop-worn anti-Americanism. He is bound to become a notable citizen in fiction not because of his worldview—or his rejoinder. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an elegantly crafted miniature of a permanent outsider who knows that only the story can redeem him.

Prose, Francine: Fleeing a Fictional World of Despots and Drones
The New York Times

19 May 2017

How challenging it can be, these days, to distinguish the dystopian from the naturalistic, to tell the difference between an artist's darkest imaginings and current events. With its vision of a culture driven mad by technology, the British television series "Black Mirror" resembles 21st-century reality, fancifully tweaked. Mohsin Hamid's recent novel, "Exit West," depicts a near future in which the sheer number of people driven from their homes by war has destabilized global civilization. Wallace Shawn's new play, "Evening at the Talk House," posits a not-so-distant era in which ordinary citizens facilitate targeted long-distance killings as a way to pay the rent.

Now Nadeem Aslam's powerful and engrossing fifth novel, "The Golden Legend," introduces us to a world that may at first seem to be a dire and distorted version of our own. In the city Aslam calls Zamana, the rule of law is a distant memory and the social order has thoroughly deteriorated. Aslam's characters must struggle to survive in a society ruled by mob violence, sectarianism and intolerance, presided over by fanatical despots. Danger lurks everywhere: in the households and neighborhoods controlled by religious extremists and in the sky above, where drones take aim at civilians selected for execution by the American military. This apparent dystopia is, in fact, all too real. The nightmare Aslam so forcefully describes is, he suggests, a portrait of the most turbulent and painful aspects of everyday life in contemporary urban Pakistan.

As the novel opens, books are being transferred from an older library to a new structure that Massud and Nargis—a middle-aged married couple, both celebrated architects—have designed. Because the Islamic texts "contained the names of Allah and Muhammad

somewhere, it had been decided that they should be taken from one building to the other by hand. In a truck or cart the risk was too great of something coming into contact with uncleanness. Nargis and Massud would be walking to the nearby Grand Trunk Road to be part of a human chain, and the books would travel a mile-long succession of hands.” Among the treasures passed in this manner is a ninth-century Abbasid Quran, soon “followed by a book of Mughal paintings of which Rembrandt had made copies in 17th-century Holland.”

As the “human chain” performs its reverential ritual, two young men on a motorcycle attack a car that has stopped nearby. Riding in the car is an American, who promptly whips out his gun and fires blindly into the crowd. In the ensuing chaos, Massud is shot and killed. Within days, the grieving widow is visited by a mysterious and clearly sinister “soldier-spy” who informs her that, as a way to help calm the volatile, anti-American mood of the local population, she must declare in court that she has forgiven her husband’s murderer. When Nargis hesitates, her visitor makes it clear that unless she complies she will be made to suffer.

In fact, she is already suffering, as is nearly everyone in the novel. All the principal characters have lost loved ones to government, military or sectarian violence. A sister is raped by the military police and later commits suicide. A drone kills a group of men in Waziristan. The disfigured corpse of a journalist who reports on the attack is discovered in a sewer. Damaging secrets are being broadcast from the minaret of a local mosque, accusations that can prove fatal in a city in which blasphemy has become a capital crime.

Unsurprisingly, this violence begets more violence. We come to feel immense compassion for a young man named Imran who has been radicalized (and found his way to a terrorist training camp) after his father and older brother were killed by Indian soldiers because they had agitated for Kashmiri independence. And our sympathy for Imran grows as he realizes that he is incapable of the brutal acts he has been ordered to commit.

Fortunately, “The Golden Legend” is far more than the sum of the horrors it contains. Aslam, whose previous books include “The Blind Man’s Garden,” writes with great sensitivity and depth about the ways human beings behave under almost unimaginable pressure. He taps into a vein of something like magic realism to add a layer of symbolism to this otherwise realistic fiction: We are persuaded that Nargis should attempt to repair a shredded book with golden thread, though literal-minded readers may find themselves thinking that double-sided tape would have done the job more effectively.

As the violence escalates, the central characters become hunted fugitives, refugees in their own city. We learn their closely guarded secrets, and we come to share their terror of the probable consequences should those secrets be revealed. We read with increasing anxiety and in the growing hope that these heroic men and women—Christian and Muslim, from a wide range of backgrounds—will somehow triumph.

Despite the misery and cruelty it depicts, “The Golden Legend” is a heartening book, largely because of Aslam’s faith in the integrity and courage of his main characters and, one supposes, of real people like them. In the second half of the novel, Nargis and her companions find refuge on an island where she and Massud had built a mosque, a long-abandoned sanctuary intended to be used by all four sects of Islam. The blessed respite Nargis and the others discover, even if it may only be temporary, seems less like a symbolic plot turn than the summation of an argument: Guided by our better instincts and our common humanity, we may still find a way to live in peace.

About Francine Prose: *Francine Prose’s most recent novel is “Mister Monkey.”*

Rehman, Saeed Ur.: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist: Success of Understatement*
The News

Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2007.

Mohsin Hamid's 'Moth Smoke' marked an impressive debut. As a storyteller, he made a point by using multiple points of view and narrative voices and a clever, though somewhat too perfectly planned, twist at the end. Though the experimentation was useful in unearthing the numerous layers of an urban nightmare called Lahore, many reviewers considered the novel to be a brilliant tale which reinvented common symbols in Urdu literature for our postmodern age: the moth, the flame, the feuds of Mughal dynasties and the intoxicated lovers were all used for depicting an unhinged contemporary Lahore. Through this reuse, the novel laid bare the frenetic, drug-infused shenanigans of the elite of Lahore. For the novelist, it won him the Betty Trask award.

Still, if compared with 'Moth Smoke', though it is not fair comparison, for they deal with very different subjects, 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' is a more mature performance and tells a story of greater significance. What is immediately apparent is that Mohsin Hamid has developed an extremely controlled way of telling a story. The flaunting of literary tricks and self-reflexive cynicism of the multiple narrative voices are absent from this story. Instead, Hamid has done something which many Pakistani writers, especially those who write in Urdu, should learn: the art of understatement.

The deceptively easygoing narrative of 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' is about global geopolitical alliances and civilisational solidarity. In Anarkali Bazaar, our narrator, Changez, meets an unnamed American at a restaurant and proceeds to tell his story. The name of the narrator, because of the built-in pun (many internet-chat users prefer to use a 'z' instead of an 's' to pluralise words), somehow gives away the plot of the novel.

Changez begins to tell his story in the first person and Hamid limits the voice, narration and commentary to this narrator. Not even once, we hear the American interlocutor. The reader only accesses the American as his words are echoed in the questions or answers of Changez.

As far as storytelling is concerned, this device works perfectly and its deployment is superb. The politics of using this device are even more interesting. For the first time in Pakistan's intricate and messy relationship with the United States of America, we have a scenario, though fictional, where the American listens to the Pakistani for such a long time. The American voice is missing or is only present through the Pakistani voice. The various ramifications of this fictional interaction are healthy for Pakistani literature as well as Pakistani identity.

What is not very encouraging is that the narrator ultimately ends up believing in the division of identities. Either one can be subsumed in the West or withdraw into fundamentalism. This either-or problem is solved reluctantly by an intellectual rejection of the West (represented here by the USA) and uncritical solidarity with the Orient (represented by Pakistan): hence the title 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'.

The rejection of the USA by Changez is even more disturbing when one considers that he is an extremely successful financial analyst working for an elite firm in New York. Changez's rejection of the USA is different from that of a Mullah. Changez does not withdraw from his Western life because he has found religion as a zone of ultimate comfort but because he is not happy serving a civilisation which does not respect his culture of origin and because the USA is a shallow country (this is suggested in a discussion of the fake grandeur of the ersatz Gothic architecture of Princeton University). This dissatisfaction with many things American is not helped by a doomed love-affair with a psychologically fragile American girl named Erica. Changez's growing uneasiness with America intensifies when he becomes a target of a racist slur as his opponents mistake him as an Arab. Changez displays his capacity for potentially murderous rage, which is perhaps the most tense situation in the narrative. Even this incident does not lead to direct violence. It is a success of Hamid's understatement that it unnerves the reader with hints of, what sociologists' term as, structural violence.

The main resolution of the narrative comes at a location which is neither Pakistani nor the United States. On an assignment to Latin America, Changez meets an elderly publisher who provides the necessary epiphany for Changez to choose his sides. Changez sides with his culture of origin and gives up his role as globe-trotting mercenary of American capitalism.

All this makes fine storytelling: an easy grace, an unputdownable narrative, the familiar cultural and civilisational forces pulling and pushing the loyalties of Pakistanis everywhere in the world. What is disturbing about Changez is the way in which he reflects many Pakistanis who believe that the world comprises of two neat halves -- the West and the East -- and the twain will never meet peacefully. In this context, the schizophrenic split personality of the fundamentalist self as captured by Mohsin Hamid becomes very astute. As a depiction of the clash of fundamentalisms (to borrow a phrase from Tariq Ali), it is an excellent achievement. If one wants to learn something about how to question the civilisational divide, one has to turn to other books which help one question the solidity of identity labels. This book is a realistic depiction of those people who suspend their questioning in order to reach definite conclusions.

About Saeed ur Rehman: *The author is a researcher at Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin.*

Rodriguez, Alex: Pakistan's Unlikely Storyteller of the Swat Valley
The Los Angeles Times

26 September 2011

Nearly 40 years after Jamil Ahmad, now 80, completed his novel based on his experiences as a civil servant in Pakistan's tribal northwest, 'The Wandering Falcon' is getting raves. Reporting from Islamabad, Pakistan—Four decades ago, a rangy civil servant in charge

of overseeing the forested ridges and brick-hut villages of Pakistan's Swat Valley sought a pastime to get through slow days. He dabbled in poetry, composing haiku in longhand. His wife read the poems and called them "rubbish."

"Why don't you write about something you know?" Jamil Ahmad recalled his wife, Helga, telling him. She said his focus should be the tribes of Pakistan's northwest frontier, where Ahmad had worked for 15 years. He thought, "That makes sense." For the next two years, Ahmad worked on his novel. He hewed his characters from the tribal badlands, where Pashtun society has always been demarcated by strict codes of honor, yet where the region's remoteness and anarchic economy made smuggling, snitching and kidnapping routine occupations. He wrote about the harsh beauty of the Baluch desert, the stoning of adulterers, and a market where men shopped for women with the casualness of browsing for furniture.

Thirty-eight years would pass before the publication of "The Wandering Falcon," a collection of interwoven stories that is quickly making the 80-year-old retired bureaucrat Pakistan's unlikeliest literary star. Written long before the emergence of the Taliban, "The Wandering Falcon" moves far beyond the Western media's stereotypical depiction of the tribal areas and lays bare the nature of a place that is now a focal point of U.S. and European foreign policy.

The book, due for U.S. release in October, arrives at a time when Western publishers are taking notice of Pakistani authors. Mohammed Hanif won international acclaim for his 2008 debut novel, "A Case of Exploding Mangoes," a satirical fictionalization of the 1988 plane crash that killed Pakistani military ruler Gen. Zia ul-Haq. Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," the tale of a Pakistani who leaves a turbocharged career in post-Sept. 11 Manhattan to teach in Pakistan, reached No. 4 on the New York Times bestseller list. Daniyal Mueenuddin's "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," an exploration of corruption

and greed in feudal Punjab province, impressed the late U.S. envoy Richard C. Holbrooke enough that he gave President Obama a copy.

Ahmad brings a different vista to the literary landscape of a country known to the West mainly as Al Qaeda's post-Sept. 11 sanctuary and home to a volatile mix of Islamic militant groups. "Part of the immersive power of the book comes from Ahmad's ability to combine a clear affection and respect for this world of tribal discipline with a clear-eyed look at its harshness," Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie wrote in a review in Britain's Observer newspaper last month after the book's release in Europe.

"This is not a book in which a central protagonist will walk down a path and invite the readers to follow him, narrative and personality cohering around him along the way," Shamsie wrote. "Instead, it is a book of glimpses into a world of strict rules and codes, where the individual is of far less significance than the collective." Dressed all in khaki and seated in an armchair at his Islamabad home, Ahmad exudes an energy that belies his years. Wisps of white hair top his head and his sun-weathered face is long with age, but he spryly moves from anecdote to anecdote in meticulous detail. His sleepy green eyes widen as he explains how his fascination with tribal life began, when as a boy in British India's Punjab plains he excitedly leafed through stacks of books about tribes of all stripes: North America's Indians, the bands of West Africa, the clans of the Scottish Highlands.

"I had an interest in the tribes per se, even in school," Ahmad said between cigarette puffs. "So that acted as a catalyst. I developed this interest early. And when I was selected for the civil service, you were given a choice where to serve. And my first choice was what was called the frontier list." Stretching from the snowcapped peaks of the Hindu Kush down to the desert flats of northern Baluchistan, Pakistan's frontier for centuries has been home to the Pashtun, a proud tribal people with a history of resistance to foreign occupation, be it Britain's 19th century colonial exploits or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Taliban

militants waging war with the U.S. in Afghanistan are ethnic Pashtuns. Pashtuns adhere to a code of conduct known as *Pashtunwali*. Besmirched honor must be avenged. Sanctuary must be given to anyone who asks for it. Hospitality to visitors isn't an option; it's a commandment. Once exposed to *Pashtunwali*, Ahmad was deeply moved.

"I felt the tribes had far more grace, a far greater sense of honor, rectitude, truth — the qualities we associate with a decent human being—than you found in the cities," Ahmad said.

He began working in northwestern Pakistan in 1956, serving as the government's arm in a tribal world that relied on its own brands of justice. His experiences became fodder for the novel. He never took notes or kept a journal, but relied only on his "kit bag of memories," as he put it. In one chapter, a band of Mahsud tribesmen kidnap a group of teachers in Waziristan. A young assistant commissioner is dispatched to a neighboring tribe's *jirga*—a meeting of Bhattani elders—to warn them of their treaty obligations to turn over the kidnappers. Because the kidnappers escaped through Bhattani territory, the tribe was also accountable for the crime, according to treaty rules.

A tribal elder responds with a story of an eloping man and woman who are confronted and raped by a pack of ruffians. Afterward, when the man chastises the woman for being raped, she replies that although what happened to her was wrong, it was a natural act. What happened to him was not. The elder then tells the assistant commissioner, "You are like the man in the story.... You let them do it and when the deed is done, you rush out and vent your fury on others." Ahmad says he indeed sent a young officer to the *jirga*, who left humiliated after hearing the elder's story. The only difference was that the original crime was not a kidnapping, but the theft of rifles from a police checkpoint. Though thrust into a Pashtun tribal world leery of the federal government's oversight, Ahmad developed a rapport with elders and tribesmen that often produced memorable encounters. Some he recalls with a raspy chuckle.

Before taking an eight-day trip on mule into a Khyber valley controlled by a notoriously violent tribe, Ahmad learned that a tribal elder whom he had once befriended was preparing to ambush him. Ahmad took a different route and escaped unharmed. Sometime later, when Ahmad ran into the elder, the man explained that he set up the ambush because he was miffed that Ahmad had not told him of his trip in advance. The two men bear-hugged. “I felt my sunglasses crunching against my chest,” Ahmad said, smiling.

In 1971, when Ahmad was appointed commissioner of the Swat region, he began to write “off and on.” “As commissioner, one had time,” he said. “Sometimes I’d just play Scrabble.” At first, the manuscript was a collection of short stories. A friend who was the U.S. consul general in the city of Peshawar at the time read the stories and suggested it needed a central character that linked them. Ahmad created Tor Baz, Pashtun for “the black falcon,” an orphan boy who takes on a series of roles, an informant in one chapter, a mountain guide in another, a client at a market that bought and sold women at the novel’s conclusion.

Finished in 1973, the manuscript sat in a drawer for years. On occasion, Ahmad would show it to publishers in London, who were lukewarm. One suggested recasting the book as nonfiction. “I said, ‘Sorry, but I’m not an academic or an anthropologist. This is fiction,’” Ahmad recalled. Then, in 2008, Ahmad’s younger brother heard an ad on a Karachi radio station about an upcoming short story competition. The manuscript was submitted past the contest’s deadline, but the competition’s organizer was impressed with the work and showed it to an editor at Penguin Books’ India subsidiary. Penguin bought it the following year. In Pakistan, Ahmad’s writing has been getting rave reviews. “It took me by surprise, with its rich texture of observation, its uncanny power of making the eerie landscape come alive, and the sheer mastery of language,” said Asif Farrukhi, a Pakistani writer and co-founder of the Karachi Literature Festival. Aameena Saiyid, managing director for Oxford University Press Pakistan and a co-founder of the Karachi festival, called Ahmad’s writing style “natural and

very forthright.... It just came across as something very true and real.” Ahmad, who hasn’t written anything since finishing “Wandering Falcon” 38 years ago, hasn’t made up his mind about tackling a second book. “It depends on how this thing is received. If this is acceptable, then maybe I’ll try my hand.”

Roy, Devapriya: Reality Bites
The Indian Express

01 April 2017

Once upon a time, Badami Bagh was an orchard of almond trees, where, in 1857, revolutionaries carried out clandestine operations (later, the British hung them from the very branches they’d plotted under). In his fifth novel, *The Golden Legend*, noted Pakistani-British writer Nadeem Aslam takes us to Badami Bagh, a neighbourhood in the northern reaches of Zamana—Aslam’s fictionalized twin-city for Lahor—where Pakistan’s controversial blasphemy laws are to usher in a new age of persecution and bigotry, disturbing the little world of its chief protagonists, and offering a searing glimpse into the life and times of contemporary Pakistan.

After independence, it became home to a large-sized ghetto for working-class Christian families, who, in the face of persistent persecution in an increasingly Islamised society, are “docile and obedient”, employed mostly “as servants in the houses of Zamana’s Muslims” or to clean “the city’s roads and sewers”. Lily and Grace Masih live in a tenement in Badami Bagh and work in the home of Nargis and Massud, an upper-class architect-couple, who have converted a former paper factory into a sublime home for themselves, an artistic haven as it were, studded with “objects from which they might draw inspiration”. Helen, their only

daughter, is at home here; Nargis and Massud consider her a beloved niece, having lavished time and attention, in addition to money, on Helen's education and upbringing.

When the novel opens, however, this little ecosystem has fallen apart—and the end of innocence is brutal. Grace was murdered three years ago by a young radical who barely served any time in prison (the crime of killing a Christian is offset by learning the Quran by heart in prison). The mosque across Nargis and Massud's house has become a nest of jihadi extremists from Waziristan. And then, out of nowhere, as Massud and Nargis walk down the Grand Trunk Road with a mass of schoolchildren, shots ring out, and during a roadside shooting based on the infamous Raymond Davis episode (when a CIA contractor shot two men in broad daylight in Lahore), Massud dies.

Things come to a head when Nargis refuses to cooperate with the ISI in their attempt to negotiate a release for the American shooter—under Sharia law, a murderer can be forgiven by the relatives of the victims—and around the same time, both Helen and Lily are accused of blasphemy. Into this conundrum appears Imran, a young Kashmiri, a lapsed terrorist, one with stories of terrible torture and darkness of his own (it seems, his pregnant mother had been tortured by the Indian army so much that he was born with a broken arm). Against this backdrop of escalating violence, Imran and Helen must try to imagine a present, if not a future, for themselves, and explore all the tendernesses of first love.

While reading *The Golden Legend*, there are times I shut the book, and said aloud that the writer ought to have been a poet: for his strength is in capturing precisely those luminous moments that comment on tragedy with wounding obliqueness. At other times, though, I decided that it might have been better if Aslam were a painter, one of those who preferred canvases of staggering sizes that took years to complete—for there are pictorial compositions in its pages that are almost heart-stopping in their audacity. But, ultimately, Aslam is a novelist. And for a novel of this sort to work, a certain primal connection must result between the readers

and the characters, to evoke empathy, however unsophisticated. While deeply faithful to reportage, to the terrible crimes that keep happening to the characters and presumably to their real-life counterparts, in the past and present, in Kashmir, Lyallpur, and Zamana, in Badami Bagh and the Charagar mausoleum, all of which are drawn from life, *The Golden Legend* erects, as it were, a glass wall between the relentlessness of that world and the inner lives of the characters. Ironically, Aslam's Pakistan is so bleak and his Kashmir so violent that the catalogue of injustices takes over the narrative and completely overshadows the stories of his protagonists. The storms become the story, and in that, fail to do justice to the lives in disarray; the novel, as a whole, stands remote and cold and distant, and, disappointingly, fails to move.

Shamsie, Kamila: *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad – Review
The Guardian Observer

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Jamil Ahmad's collection of stories from Pakistan illuminates the harsh codes of the tribal lands

It is only fitting that a book as replete with storytelling as Jamil Ahmad's debut should have a stuff-of-fiction tale behind its own publication. In the early 70s, Ahmad, a civil servant in those parts of Pakistan now frequently in the news with the adjective "lawless" appended to them, wrote a collection of loosely interlinked stories about the people and tribes among whom he'd been working. More than three decades later, his brother turned on the radio and heard about a short story competition in its inaugural year – he submitted Ahmad's entire manuscript. It arrived past the deadline and the judges (of whom I was one) never saw any of the stories. But the critic Faiza Sultan Khan, who was co-founder and administrator of the prize, saw the

promise in the manuscript and sent it to an editor at Penguin India. Now, at 78, Ahmad is a published writer in a world that has become familiar with many of the names in his writing – Waziristan, the Mehsuds – for reasons that would have been impossible to predict nearly four decades ago.

Is this a novel or a collection of short stories? The question doesn't really matter in the reading of it. The child born in the first chapter/story appears, often in the most tangential fashion, in all the subsequent sections, except one. A third of the way through the book he is given a name: Tor Baz or Black Falcon. His character remains largely opaque as he appears in different guises – the orphaned child, the boy who moves from one guardian to another without a backward glance, the informer, the guide, the seller of women. The effect of this is strangely beguiling. This is not a book in which a central protagonist will walk down a path and invite the readers to follow him, narrative and personality cohering around him along the way. Instead, it is a book of glimpses into a world of strict rules and codes, where the individual is of far less significance than the collective.

It is also a world facing change: "This way of life had endured for centuries, but it would not last for ever. It constituted defiance to certain concepts, which the world was beginning to associate with civilisation itself. Concepts such as statehood, citizenship, undivided loyalty to one state; settled life as opposed to nomadic life, and the writ of the state as opposed to tribal discipline." Part of the immersive power of the book comes from Ahmad's ability to combine a clear affection and respect for this world of tribal discipline with a clear-eyed look at its harshness. In "The Sins of the Mother" a couple are killed for eloping together. Later, in "Sale Completed", a woman who has been abducted manages to escape and returns home to find her once-loving husband has remarried, and his new wife has borne him a son, which lifts her in prestige above the mother of his daughters; the woman, insulted and tormented by the new wife and her mother-in-law, chooses to be sold to a brothel, because, as

the man who conducts the sale surmises, “she prefers humiliation from total strangers than by those she knows”.

The women in this book are not cowering victims; strong-willed and sexual, they take hold of whatever agency is available to them, even if it only takes the form of leaving home and choosing to be sold in the marketplace. If at moments the writing has the feel of anthropology rather than fiction, this does not detract from its charm – take, for instance, the moment when Ahmad explains that being an informant is considered a perfectly acceptable way to earn a living – “one such person had even erected an arch to welcome a touring official, with a banner proudly proclaiming that it had been put up by a ‘Spy in the service of the government’.”

In “A Kidnapping” a government official approaches a tribe to make certain demands on them in the name of the law. Trapped between the power of the government and the power of a stronger tribe, the elder of the village tells a story. The official has the force of law behind him but he has no story to counter that of the elder, and so his case stands demolished. In this world where the better story wins it is no surprise that Jamil Ahmad felt so much at home.

About Kamila Shamsie: *Kamila Shamsie's most recent novel is Burnt Shadows (Bloomsbury).*

Shamsie, Muneeza: Fiction: An Age of Violence
Dawn

05 May 2017

Nadeem Aslam's novels are permeated with a poetic prose that juxtaposes history, literature, and art with blind prejudice and violence—fostered in the name of faith by vested interests—and the impact of these polarities on individuals and the communities they inhabit.

His new novel *The Golden Legend* returns to, and expands upon, a subject central to his very first, *Season of the Rainbirds*—the growth of politicised religious extremism in Pakistan and its impact on minorities, particularly the Christian community.

In *The Golden Legend* Aslam creates a fictitious Pakistani city, symbolically named Zamana, on the banks of the fictitious river Vela. Here the real and surreal merge to portray the fallout of Pakistan's role in geopolitics and the use of religious extremism as an instrument of war. The novel provides a harrowing portrait of a hapless people overtaken by the growing empowerment of the prejudiced, violent and hypocritical. The daily threat in the name of faith to those committed to Pakistan's intellectual heritage, its mystical Sufi traditions and a tolerant, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural society, is central to the plot, as is the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The accidental killing of Massud, a gifted architect in Zamana, during an encounter between two armed motorbike riders and a trigger-happy American man has resonance with the Raymond Davis affair, as does the American offer of blood money to the heirs of the murdered men in exchange for the killer's freedom. Massud's grief-stricken widow and fellow architect, Nargis, is asked by a man from military intelligence to accept the generous amount of blood money offered. When she refuses, the man slaps her around. He also tears up, page by page, a rare and precious book written by Massud's father. This becomes an act of personal violence as well as repudiation by "the deep state" of history, literature and culture: Massud's father had created a gargantuan text celebrating the commingling of cultures and ideas across continents and centuries. This book also refers to the pre-Partition, egalitarian, anti-British Ghadar Party which Massud's grandfather had joined when it was first established in California by a group of South Asians.

Aslam's skill lies in the interweaving of past and present to create a multi-layered narrative. The dreams that Nargis had shared with Massud of a more inclusive, tolerant culture

act as a foil to the unrelenting aggression and prejudice that Nargis, who was born Margaret, a Christian, has experienced and sought to escape—long ago, before she met Massud, she had left her home in Lyallpur for university in Zamana, forging documents that reinvented her as a Muslim.

Aslam's use of metaphor and allegory includes the description of a spacious home belonging to Massud and Nargis. The library is so vast that it includes two large, cabin-sized models of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey — both historic buildings created by Christian and Muslim influences. The house stands in a historic and once-leafy area called Badami Bagh where the erstwhile almond trees had once provided shelter to rebels during the 1857 Ghadar. Now treeless and edged by the houses of the rich, it is the poorest neighbourhood in Zamana, a cluster of hutments occupied by impoverished Christians including Massud and Nargis's housekeeper Lily, his wife Grace, and their bright daughter Helen.

Helen has been given the best of education by the childless Nargis and Massud who treat her virtually as their own, but she is haunted by the brutal murder of her mother Grace by a Muslim fanatic who was sentenced to life in prison. The upright judge who pronounced the sentence was promptly shot dead, while the killer's demonstration of piety in prison led to his premature release. This is one of several fictitious incidents with clear echoes to horrors reported in the Pakistani press, including the wanton burning of houses—or even an entire basti—belonging to Christians by enraged mobs on false charges of blasphemy. Added to this, the kindly old cleric at the mosque in Badami Bagh and his widowed daughter Aysha find themselves virtual hostages to Aysha's late husband's brother, a fierce extremist who occupies the mosque with his armed friends and spews hate from the loudspeakers every day. Aysha's husband in turn had been killed during an American drone attack in Waziristan.

Cause and effect are central to Aslam's work. His focus on Pakistan's poor Christians reflects his continuing preoccupation with the suffering of people considered the alien other by the majority community and stigmatised further by poverty. His depictions of the marginalised include his portrayal of an all-Asian working-class community in Britain in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Even so, in *The Golden Legend*, it remains uncertain why Aslam describes all Pakistani Christians as the progeny of sweepers, including Nargis and her uncle, the sophisticated and learned Bishop Solomon.

Aslam extends the discourse on minorities to India where Imran — nicknamed Moscow — grew up as an Indian Muslim of Kashmiri origin. In Kashmir, Imran's family suffers such brutalities at the hands of Indian authorities that he crosses over to Pakistan and joins a military training camp for Kashmiri freedom fighters. However, he finds his left-wing beliefs at odds with the right-wing extremism of his fellow guerrillas, and has to flee. He is now a hunted man on both sides of the border.

At a short distance from Zamana, the river Vela flows past a secluded island that Nargis and Massud bought long ago, where they had dreamed of creating a multi-faith community. Imran is given refuge there by Nargis and Helen. They, too, are in hiding: Nargis from "the deep state" and Helen from false accusations of blasphemy. In this secluded space, they repair Massud's father's book, their conversations permeated with references to music and song, literature and learning, but the tensions and dangers of Zamana soon encroach on their lives. Aslam's intricate tale of sadness and loss does not end there, however: ultimately he holds out a ray of light as the very title of the book suggests.

About Muneeza Shamsie: *The reviewer is a writer and critic.*

Sharma, Aasheesh: Politics as Personal
Hindustan Times

16 April 2007

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a thrilling monologue that needs to be read-and heard-from cover to cover. In Robert Browning's celebrated poem 'My Last Duchess', the narrator is addressing a gentleman who remains out of the reader's view throughout the poem. The Duke tells him of his wife whose portrait hangs on the wall "looking as if she were alive" and goes on to explain how she "*had a heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad/ Too easily impressed*". *By the time he goes on to tell his listener that she smiled a little too often at a little too many men, and that he then "gave commands;/Then all smiles stopped together"*, we can see the invisible listener recoil—and we recoil with him.

To make matters more uncomfortable, the Duke ends with a complete digression by which he shows his companion a statuette of Neptune "which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!" Thus, we recognise the presence of a complex, translucent character simply by listening to his words as they ricochet off another (invisible) man.

In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the dramatic monologue is conducted by Changez, who starts his conversation by approaching his 'listener' on a Lahore street with "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you?" In the one-way mirror behind which the reader fixes himself, Changez goes on to narrate the story of a period of his life much before he approaches his listener on the first page of this novella.<b1>

Like Browning's Duke, Changez not only lets his 'invisible' listener know of events that occurred in his life—events that left him, a Princeton graduate, working at a top-end valuation firm in New York, a changed man—but he also lets him have a peek into his soul. The gift of the gab as presented on print has never been so sharp as it is in Hamid's latest work. At one level, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about the fissures that have been created across

the world after September 11, 2001. Hamid's anti-hero, Changez, is just one of the many people who have fallen through the cracks and have been left split. What makes him so believable—especially to the urbane subcontinental reader—is that he is like us: one foot firmly set in the cultural ground of his own backyard, modern Pakistan; another foot in the globalised world of Americana where one knows one's Paltrow from one's Spears.

But Hamid has not only anchored his story in a post-9/11 world to investigate a clash of civilisations in one man. He has also dredged deep in Changez's soul to depict a personal catastrophe and its lingering aftermath. It is the personal becoming the political, the political colouring the personal that is depicted with astoundingly clear cloudiness in this slim, major book. Changez's life in America and his love for the American way of life are given additional flesh by the fact that he falls in love with Erica, a sensitive, upper-crust American.

The book is full of unobtrusive details that allow the reader to see America, Erica, Americans, Pakistan, modernity, Pakistanis through Changez's eyes—all presented to us through one 12-chaptered monologue. Two disasters in Changez's life occur almost simultaneously. The world is turned upside down after September 11, 2001, and he loses the love of a good American. Other catalysts such as night-glow images on TV of Afghanistan being pummelled by American bombs and Erica's downward spiral into depression that arises out of a manuscript being rejected only spur Changez to cross over to the 'other side'.

Through the narration we realise that the two events—9/11 and Erica distancing herself from him—become conflated in Changez's mind. Whether the goulash of the politics and the personal served to him in a chalice poisons his vision or clears it, Hamid never lets us know. To engage the reader for 184 pages with one man talking non-stop to another—narrating, teasing, theorising, whining, lecturing—is a truly impressive feat. Hamid pulls it off grandly in a style reminiscent of the Russian masters. The ever-persistent notion of his American listener's life being threatened by Changez—and the reader is only given hints that the former may not

have good intentions himself—makes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a delicately thrilling novella that leaves our ears ringing when we close the book.

Shortt, Rupert: Murderous Siblings
The TLS

18 January 2017

Corrupt religion and poisonous politics in Nadeem Aslam's poignant, intelligent new novel.

Tragedy consumed Gojra, a town in the Pakistani region of Punjab, during the late summer of 2009. Eight Christians, including a child, were burned alive in their homes as mobs went on the rampage after reports that a copy of the Qur'an had been desecrated in a village nearby. A false rumour had it that guests at a Christian wedding had not thrown proper money in the air, as is customary, but pieces of Islamic Scripture cut into the size of banknotes. About forty Christian households were set on fire. Unsupported by officialdom, the victims' families drew attention to their plight by laying the coffins of their loved ones on the tracks at the town's train station. After fresh threats from the perpetrators, now on bail, the main targets and witnesses of the original violence went into hiding or left the country altogether. This is no isolated case. It encapsulates the disease chronicled with a well-judged admixture of frankness and subtlety in Nadeem Aslam's immensely poignant fifth novel.

Seventeen months after the murders at Gojra, a statement from Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, reflected a further change for the worse across Pakistan: "In the story of some countries there comes a period when political and fictional murder becomes almost routine – Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century Germany and its neighbours that of Salman Taseer, the Muslim governor of Punjab, who had also enraged extremists by

speaking out in defence of religious minorities. Aslam's work is a forceful examination of how corrupt religion intersects with poisonous politics. In Urdu, including "the moment of death" and "hard times". It is also referenced in the last (via a quotation from *Paradise Lost*) as a mythical place within the sight of Eden.

The tale Aslam tells is plot-driven, however. At its heart are a pair of illicit interfaith romance ways map onto Catholic-Protestant collisions of yesteryear. The Deobandis are puritans. Sharply at odds with the more tolerant strain of faith embraced by many of the subcontinent's Mughal rulers between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Deobandi teaching opposes the Barelvi traditions of pilgrimage and veneration of saints.

When terrorists murder their fellow Muslims at a mausoleum in the novel's final chapters, malice is matched by twisted logic among the mob. Aysha – the widow of a Taliban-linked militant, but now in love with Lily, to her great cost – listens to speakers commending the two latest suicide bombers, "saying how they were the true heroes of Islam, that the forty-nine people who had died were not to be mourned because they were not real Muslims". Later she hears a sermon over the loudspeaker "telling everyone that the bombing had been carried out by the Americans who were 'no longer content in just killing us with our drones, but want to kill us openly on our streets ... and in our sacred houses of worship...'".

Certain situations here are a little far-fetched. One of the novel's leading characters was raised a Christian but has withheld this information even from her husband after feigning an Islamic identity to raise her prospects. Some will doubt the credibility of such a move, especially as she has had to leave her family behind for good. What is more, neither she nor her husband is especially devout. When not charting the ordeals and back-stories of his characters, however, Aslam takes charge of the narrative by depositing a helpful trail of intellectual breadcrumbs. We learn *inter alia* not just that

... an Anglican. Married Catholic priests are not unknown, but there are no married bishops.) The action mirrors that of a real-life figure, Bishop John Joseph of Faisalabad, who committed suicide with the same motive in 1998.

Aslam's mapping of the political labyrinth may not convince everyone. While he is right to castigate cynicism and corruption in the Pakistani intelligence world, the narrative blames too many of Kashmir's problems on India. Here, perhaps, the author overlooks his own broader message that Pakistani and wider Muslim society will only advance when it forsakes a victim mentality and a lust for scapegoats. And he has further lessons to learn about the value of rhythm. Too many of his sentences consist of a pair of long clauses harnessed by the same conjunction, "and". His prose has many virtues nonetheless: it can be pithy or rhetorical according to context. More abstract passages are lyrical but not overripe. The style serves the vision. A finely crafted denouement presents contrasting foretastes of the future – one bitter, the other a little more hopeful. Both ring true, confirming Nadeem Aslam's achievement. He has contrived a page-turner which also impresses by its intelligence, range and humanity.

Sooke, Alastair: Man Booker 2007 Prize: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
The Telegraph

18 April 2007

Mohsin Hamid's second novel is an impressively intelligent thriller. It is short, but as it progresses a grim sense of foreboding thickens until the final sentence, which is a masterstroke of ambiguity. I closed the book with a shudder. The action takes place at a café in the Old Anarkali district of Lahore during a single dusty evening. The book is narrated by a bearded Pakistani man called Changez, who buttonholes an American traveller and offloads the story of his life.

Since the American never speaks, and since Changez addresses him directly throughout (here's the first sentence: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?"), the reader is placed in the listener's shoes, creating a convincing effect of intimacy and immediacy. This is a hard formal trick to pull off - even over the brief course of a novella - but Hamid manages it with admirable skill.

Changez talks about his time in the US, where he attended Princeton before working for a blue-chip financial firm in New York. (Unlike many younger writers, Hamid seems to have made his second novel more autobiographical than his first, *Moth Smoke*: he grew up in Lahore, went to Princeton, and worked for several years as a management consultant in New York.) On holiday in Greece before starting his high-powered job, Changez fell in love with Erica, a pretty rich-kid from NYC's plutocracy. After joining his elite employer, he enjoyed rapid success and spent his free time hanging out with Erica and her hipster friends at TriBeCa loft parties. His life felt blessed. Yet Erica, though friendly, seemed distant, even depressive, and Changez slowly realised that he had become embroiled in a freaky love triangle that also included her childhood sweetheart Chris, who had died from lung cancer. The rest of the story, punctuated by Changez's unctuous concern for his companion as he breaks off to order jalebis and green tea, describes the souring of his personal American dream.

The book appears to build towards a drastic confession, possibly concerning how and why Changez eventually became a terrorist. He refers to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, describing himself as "a Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe", and we wonder whether the silent American is a secret-service operative sent to assassinate him. Glints of menace flash through the gloom, as when Changez jokes that he one day hopes to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability. Time and again he uses predatory imagery (sharks, foxes, hawks) yet we are never sure who is hunting, or being hunted. Hamid deliberately fosters this confusion, painstakingly tightening the tension.

While the “war on terror” rumbles on, this is a sharp, relevant book. Executed with cool control, it is a microcosm of the cankerous suspicion between East and West. But, more than that, it is a piece of technically accomplished writing that entertains at the same time as it makes you think.

Staff Reporter: Fiction about Pakistan
The Economist

22 April 2017

Nadeem Aslam shows how to make great literature out of despotism. Too much political exposition can be the death of fiction. Not so here.

There are two versions of how Pakistan got its name, both true. The original is the more prosaic. Choudhary Rahmat Ali, a Punjabi Muslim nationalist, invented it from the putative state’s component parts: the first letters of Punjab, Afghan province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Kashmir, Sindh and the final letters of Balochistan. The second, more beloved version, is that it is the product of two words in Urdu and Persian: *stan* and *pak*, which together mean “land of the pure”.

Pakistan has been trying to live up to the latter version from its birth. At partition it was cleansed of most Sikhs and Hindus. Starting in the 1950s, its increasingly strident constitutions swept away the secularism imagined by the nation’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In the 1980s blasphemy laws were dusted off and spruced up. They are now shiny with overuse. The most recent campaign of decontamination comes from the jihadists who would purge Pakistan of its Shias and Sufis. In a remarkable new novel Nadeem Aslam pours cold water over these efforts, dousing the very notion of purity itself.

Set in Zamana (Lahore in all but name) the novel begins on the Grand Trunk Road. Nargis and her husband Massud, both architects, form part of a human chain carefully transferring books containing the names of Allah or Muhammad within them from a library to new premises. The process is inefficient, but any other mode of transport, it is thought, might risk contact with uncleanness. Massud handles books from the Abbasid period, from Moorish Spain and 17th-century Holland. A car stops at a traffic light in front of him. A motorbike pulls up alongside. A gun is drawn. Shots ring out. Massud is killed in the crossfire. The book in Massud's hands as he dies is a work by his father, a 987-page meditation on the mingling of civilisations, which until then had disappeared.

In the very first chapter, Mr Aslam lays out, as in a manifesto, his pervading themes: intercultural exchange, piety, purity, violence. Mr Aslam, whose family fled persecution in Pakistan when he was 14 and settled in Britain, has returned to these themes repeatedly in his previous works. In "The Golden Legend", which came out in Britain in January and is now being published in America, he distils them into a work of quiet rage and searing beauty. The man who fired the gun turns out to be an American diplomat. After Massud's death an officer from Pakistan's military intelligence agency visits Nargis. She is persuaded, eventually, to forgive the foreigner, which under Sharia law would allow him to go free. The persuasion takes the form of requests, then commands, then violence, inflicted both upon her and her precious copy of Massud's father's book. The intelligence man cuts it to shreds.

Nargis is supported during this period by Helen, the teenage daughter of a Christian couple who worked as housekeepers for the architects. Helen's father, Lily, a widower, is having an affair with Aysha, the daughter of the neighbourhood's Muslim cleric, who also happens to be widowed. The pair try to keep their relationship secret; they know that Christians in Pakistan are jailed "for drinking water from a Muslim's glass". But news of it is broadcast over the mosque's loudspeakers. A dozen Christians are killed in the massacre that follows.

Lily disappears. Nargis, Helen, and a young Kashmiri man, Imran, who had been visiting them, flee to an abandoned mosque on an uninhabited island in the river that runs by the city. “The Golden Legend” is extravagant with imagery and elaborate with metaphor, but it is never in danger of collapsing under the weight of its prose; it is held up by the solidity of real life. The shooting at the start of the novel is a direct reference to an incident in 2011 involving a CIA contractor in Lahore. An account of an attack at a Sufi shrine includes details of how policemen carried away the heads of the suicide bombers from an attack in 2010. A chapter about a Catholic bishop is inspired by a scantily remembered event from 1998. Even the description of graffiti on Kashmiri walls—“Indian dogs go home”—is accurate.

Offsetting the hatred and bleakness are the luminous main characters: Nargis, Helen and Imran, for whom history, culture and religion are not circumscribed by hard boundaries. Painstakingly, they restore Massud’s father’s book, now thicker by half thanks to the golden thread they use to stitch it back together. Yet it is telling that they must go to an island to escape Zamana, which translates as “the world” or “the era”. The setting of “The Golden Legend” may be Pakistan, but the closing of minds and hearts it laments is universal. It is on the island that Helen reflects on everything that has passed through their land over the centuries: “And so it was that there was no absolute purity anywhere on the planet. The Land of the Pure did not exist.” It is a lesson lost on those who would aspire to make one.

This article appeared in the Books and Arts section of the print edition under the headline “Cleaning up”.

Staff Reporter: 'Wandering Falcon' Captures Raw Romance of Badlands
The Nation

17 October 2011

Islamabad (AFP) - A retired civil servant nearing 80 may not sound like the most obvious debut author to take the international publishing world by storm, but Jamil Ahmad has done precisely that. Over a cup of tea and a glass of lime juice, he talks about a career as an administrator along Pakistans desolate borders with Afghanistan and Iran, and how he turned those memories into a book that has earned rave reviews. *The Wandering Falcon*, published by Riverhead Books in the United States this month, captures the raw romance of Pakistans wildest terrain - associated today in the West with Taliban lairs and Al-Qaeda terror plots. Seduced by tales of 'cowboys and Indians as a schoolboy, Ahmad quickly developed a lifelong passion for the tribal way of life in Balochistan and the tribal areas along the Afghan border in the northwest. He joined the civil service in 1954 and later became commissioner of Swat. He served at the embassy in Kabul from 1978 to 1980, a crucial time for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, coinciding with the Soviet invasion of the former. When he showed his German wife Helga some poetry, she dismissed it as rubbish and told him to write about something he knew - namely, the tribal way of life. The result was a manuscript finished in 1974 and tucked away in a drawer. Helga, like a bulldog, kept showing it to people over 20 years.

Then Ahmads brother heard a short story competition on the radio, called up Helga for a photocopy and submitted the draft, which attracted local attention and ultimately wound its way to the publishers. The book is a collection of gently interlinking short stories, all but one featuring Tor Baz, a boy born to a couple who elope. He becomes the Wandering Falcon after his parents are killed. Contemporaries have queued up to pay homage to Ahmad for what Kashmir writer Basharat Peer described as one of the finest collections of short stories to come

out of South Asia in decades. With the United States fighting a covert war against militants in Pakistan and locked into the 10-year conflict in Afghanistan, Ahmads US editor hopes the book will shed light on a region isolated from the outside world. Laura Perciasepe says it is a clear and powerful story set in an area of great interest and importance to American readers, but so little understood. Ahmad's age and background clearly set him apart from the urbane group of young writers responsible for a renaissance in Pakistani literature that has found a captive audience in the West following the 9/11 attacks. For one thing, Ahmad has never been fond of cities. For another, he doesn't like to travel. He turned down invitations to book launches in India and the United States because of all that checking in at airports and hotels. Something of a Wandering Falcon himself, he moved constantly as a child around India with a father who worked in the judiciary. There was no anchor point. We moved all the time.

Today he lives in Islamabad largely for practical reasons because as Helga said, what would they do about doctors and dentists in Chitral, up in the Hindu Kush mountains where he originally wanted to retire. Sipping a blend of Earl Grey and Darjeeling, and lighting up one cigarette after another, he chuckles over fond memories of Balochistan, training in Britain and even a brief stint at the Irish Peat Board. He sees tribes as the earliest building blocks of humanity, which functioned for centuries until they started clashing with nation states and empires. There is a tribal gene, as I said, somewhere embedded in each one of us, he says. But Ahmad writes also of a lost world. It is difficult to imagine today, for example, a civil servant living with his German wife on a hill miles from anywhere with only a militia post for company. In Balochistan, Helga was frequently left alone, having to look after three children under five without electricity or running water. Once, Ahmad got a message saying the tap is leaking. He thought silly girl, what do I do, sitting on the Iranian border? So I came back after 10 days and I find the message she sent was 'the baby is seriously ill and the militia has transmitted the other side of the paper, which was her personal note that the tap was leaking, he said. By then,

the crisis was over and the baby had recovered - doused in olive oil, the only remedy to hand. Ahmad is reluctant to be drawn into politics, but he is angry about what he sees as the destruction of the tribal leadership as a result of Pakistan and the United States sponsoring the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviet occupation. I'm angry about it. I could call them Frankensteins, these monsters who were created and they stood by and watched the tribes being decimated.

For the moment, he has no clear plans for another book. But a consummate storyteller, he is captivated by the quirky characters and tragic incidents that helped set the mood for his book, and says perhaps he could write more about the background of tribal life. For example, there was one of his seniors so bored living in the middle of nowhere that he submitted fortnightly reports on the number of flies killed in the office - a practice that head office promptly demanded of others. Then there was a colleague who always dressed for dinner, gently mocked by the others for donning a cummerbund in the wilderness. And the day that a group of pretty models came looking for help when their bus from Tehran to Mumbai broke down. Ahmad was sitting under a tree, in his pyjamas. Today, he passes the time smoking, reading and playing cards. No snob, one book on the go is a bestselling crime thriller. I love reading trash, he smiles.

Tanweer, Bilal: Cover Story: Wilderness, Wilderness
Dawn

11 June 2011 From Inpaper Magazine

“There is nothing left of us in the wilderness save what the wilderness kept for itself.”—

Mahmoud Darwish.

Here are some facts: Jamil Ahmad is a Pakistani writer and a former civil servant. He has written a book of fiction set in the tribal areas. His age is 78. This is his first book. Now stretch these over one thousand words and you have a fairly good idea what is being said in about *The Wandering Falcon* in the South Asian literary community. I have yet to come across a review that treats it as a work of fiction and raises questions that are usually asked of fiction: plot, narrative techniques, characters, voice, etcetera. Most reviews seem to be revelling in the apparently astonishing fact that somebody has written something at age 78, while the rest make you think that this book is trying to wrestle with questions like: why are people in tribal areas going over to the Taliban, why are they this way, and well, how are they anyway, and why don't we know anything about them in the first place — and like, why aren't they on TV?

You know it's that old tosh, looking to fiction for factual information. But the scale on which it is happening in this case is alarming. One interviewer at CNN-IBN asks Jamil Ahmad a total of eight questions and only one references the word 'literature.' It's the last question of the interview: You've made this fabulous literary debut at 78! Was it a difficult process? Among her other, more 'normal' questions, was this one: Your reaction to the killing of Osama bin Laden? Umm... how about your reaction to the word 'fiction'? But there you have it. Fiction from Pakistan is not supposed to have artistic engagements — it's required to provide information not an experience. In other words, it must be a reliable Dispatch from the Terrorists Lair and have clear policy implications for all the experts on Pakistan to evaluate — and who isn't an Af-Pak guru these days?

If you trust the description on the book jacket, this is a 'novel' about the character, Tor Baz — the wandering falcon, the roving figure whose story we must pursue. As it turns out, he's only a marginal presence in what are nine distinct short stories, and he serves as little more than a device to bring a sense of unity to the stories. The device does not fail but it doesn't succeed spectacularly either, since Tor Baz remains a minor character in the stories and his

reappearance in various stories is rarely a significant event. For this reason, it would be much more accurate to call this work a collection of interconnected stories (i.e. standalone stories with recurring actors, settings, motifs, etcetera) rather than a novel, which usually requires much greater narrative coherence and thrust.

The subdued-starring role in this collection of nine stories is played by the physical setting itself: the wildernesses and the inaccessible hills and mountains of Balochistan and the Pak-Afghan tribal belt. This harsh and ruthless landscape recurs throughout the stories and serves as one of the more effective ways to link them. It is also the second strongest character in the book.

The strongest character however is the dreadful Mullah Barrerai — the charismatic preacher, wheeler dealer, a man-eater (yes, that's for real), conflict resolver, a devoted agent of dancing girls, a loyal friend to strangers, but ultimately, he's a chameleon and a wanderer. He's a surprisingly refreshing character who derives much of his appeal through his seemingly motiveless malice and kindness. He hovers large in the readers' imaginations because there is so little to either explain his actions or predict his behavior — yet he's a compelling presence on the page. Here he is delivering a sermon, describing the houris of paradise to a rapt audience: "Wondrous, fair, and who possess breasts which are beyond your imagination. Breasts so large that it would take a crow a full day and night to fly from one nipple to another." He is later asked by an officer of the Scouts if he believes this tall tale himself; he replies without blinking: "No" and goes on to argue that these stories are like "ointment, meant for healing, or like a piece of ice in the summer with which water in a glass is cooled. Would you call that piece of ice a lie?" The account of his life results in the most affecting and disturbing story of the collection.

But the real star of the stories is "The Sins of the Mother," which was also one of the highlights of Granta's Pakistan issue. It is a love and survival story of an eloped couple that's

trying to evade killing/capture by their tribe. They find refuge in a government fort that houses soldiers where they find cautious solace for a few years but their sins gradually catch up with them. This story is by far the finest in the collection for its narrative control, patient descriptions, and the gradual building of tension and emotion. It climaxes in a coldly executed scene of brutal killing which is remarkable for its unsentimental rendering and shows the deft hand of a real storyteller.

Another shocking and finely executed scene occurs in “The Death of Camels,” where the caravans of nomads, the Pawindahs, are shot down by soldiers for trying to cross over to the Pakistani side of the border. In this story we get close to the travails of this nomadic tribe and their mode of living. Among the many highlights of this story are surprising moments of sharp humor — when a Pawindah woman, for instance, insults a soldier for staring at her: “You there! Do you not know that you are smaller than my husband’s organ?” The story ends with us being witnesses to the massacre of the Pawindah caravans — “mowed” is the cold, precise verb that the author uses. But the story of the massacre doesn’t end there: once killed, the corpses then begin to stink, following which, we get this inspired moment: “The soldiers from the forts had to move out two days after the Pawindahs departed. The stench from the dead animals was so terrible that it was driving the soldiers mad. They also say that while camel bones and skulls have been bleached white with time, the shale gorge still reeks of death.”

These final lines also reflect the overarching conflict of this book: the state vs. everybody else. And the state always wins — even when it loses sometimes.

Having said this, *The Wandering Falcon* is also a catalog of missed opportunities. However, its shortcomings are not so much in its writing as in its editing. The running cracks in the stories stem from a steady presence of needless adverbs and adjectives (the travellers talk “brightly”; the old woman retorts “savagely”; the beard “ripples”; the trickle of water is “thin”), tired, unimaginative similes and metaphors (an old man’s voice is “clear and sharp like

the sound of plucked strings from a musical instrument”; the movement of the camel “swayed smoothly like the ears of wild grass sway smoothly with a light breeze”), or the plain dead commentary which is present in abundance and is the main distraction from the stories. There are digressions here on writ of the state, citizenship, civilisation, and ways of life of the nomads, on the geography of Lower Chitral, on the Pakistani media for not faithfully reporting the plight of the Baloch, and then some.

It’s not just the quality of prose that suffers as the collection wears on but also the quality of narration. Scenes are replaced with long expositions that deal summarily with potentially rich material. In the last story, for instance, a girl Shah Zarina is married off to a man who owns a bear and earns his living by its performances. Shah Zarina envies the bear for earning much greater fraction of her husband’s affections, time and care, and so, finally, one day she questions his reasons for allowing the bear to have a room of its own when they must sleep outside. He tells her flatly: “I can get another wife but not another bear.”

Zarina schemes to hurt the animal—she spices up its food and spikes the staff with nails which is used by her husband to smack the bear. She’s found out soon enough for this. As retribution, her husband gives her the exact number of blows with the spiked staff as he had given the bear earlier. He also ensures thereon that she receives the same food as the bear, the same bedding and much the same treatment otherwise.

Here is material of terrific possibilities, but all it receives is a hasty exposition of about three pages. The story then skips over to other things. The patient and meticulous hand we see in the first story is entirely absent here, and in other later stories. To be sure, there is a better book buried somewhere beneath this present book. Nonetheless, there is much here to recommend itself to a reader who is willing to read it as fiction and not as a *Manual of Tribal Ways of Life*. In the pantheon of the new writers from Pakistan, Jamil Ahmad is a welcome new addition.

About Bilal Tanweer: *The reviewer is a writer and translator. He teaches creative writing at LUMS.*

Zakaria, Rafia: *The Real Pakistan*
Dawn

08 May 2013

It would seem that the sorrows of the subcontinent are neatly divided into two. On one side lie the shroud-covered bodies of terror's victims. On the other lie the failures of urban survival, the burnt bodies of men from one factory fire in Baldia Town, the crushed bodies of women from a fallen building in Bangladesh. One set of tragedies is pinned to the dictates of ideology—the battles over the meaning of faith and life—and the other is determined by the wants of existence itself—the roof over the head, the cloth for the body. These questions of life find, if a culture is lucky, a place in art. In the story, the play, the poem or the novel, these questions are presented in a way easy enough to be considered by the ordinary and the confused. Is it economics and the droves of the urban poor eking out precarious livings in vast slums and crumbling factories that define the core of Pakistan's predicament? Or is it the wars of ideology, the questions of faith that are the better descriptors of the rifts that rend Pakistan?

At a time when both Pakistanis and the rest of the world seem confounded by these questions, the work of author Mohsin Hamid presents an insightful translation of the quandary. The film version of Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is currently being screened at movie theatres in the US, and the timing of its release could not be more apt. As American news outlets pore and ponder over every detail of the Tsarnaev brothers' lives and *Iron Man 3* presents again the terrorist ogre as the ultimate villain, here comes a cinematically brilliant production presenting the complications of a country reduced too often in the world's imagination to a singularly sinister place.

In exploring the dimensions of fundamentalism and civilisational conflict, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents an ideological frame of looking at Pakistan and what ails it. In Hamid's story, now committed to screen by Mira Nair, Pakistan comes alive not as the flat, churlishly constructed backdrop of a CIA operation (remember *Zero Dark Thirty*?) but as a country with real people, their personal lives torn apart by the vagaries of civilisational conflict.

Changez, the hard-working immigrant son, is disillusioned after the Sept 11 attacks—the suspicion they breed stealing from him the level playing field that America is supposed to represent. The young investment banker on his way to making a grand fortune in the glass-walled skyscrapers of New York finds himself reduced to a perennial terrorist suspect because of his Pakistani heritage, humiliated again and again by a racist and paranoid American political climate. He returns to Pakistan, and the narrative venue of the film is an interview with a foreign journalist, who promises to Changez that he will “listen to the whole story”.

The “whole story”, as presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is one of the complexities of ideology, of the questions money cannot answer and the allegiances money cannot buy. Changez leaves America, the land of capitalism and opportunity, to live a more ‘authentic’ existence in Pakistan, an exercise not without complications. However, if *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* paid homage to that frame of divining what best defines the country, Hamid's latest book, *How to get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, presents another. Here is life as seen through the eyes of a slum-dwelling kid, whose actions are dictated by the singular hunger of escaping poverty, whose relationships are as ruthless as his drive.

The unnamed protagonist lies, cheats, defrauds and does what he must to live. There is no question of faith here, no deep quandaries of ethics and no existential conflicts about authenticity. Unlike *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which is specifically located in Lahore, presenting the city's flair and flavour, *How To Get Filthy Rich* never reveals its location. The difference is crucial; the inference is that while Pakistan's ideological struggles make it unique,

its economic realities make it just like any other developing country. This then is the question before Pakistan as it stands to choose another leader. The frame that Pakistani voters consider more apt, the ideological or the economic, can determine the country's future.

Is the country going to focus on solving the problems that it shares with all the countries in South Asia and the rest of the developing world in its erstwhile race to the bottom, remembering the factory fires, the urban slums and the precariousness of survival? Or, is it going to decide its future and so its identity in relation to its ideological oppositions, the meddlesome intrusions of Western powers, the craving to return to an unseen, authentic past? Is the real Pakistani the hardscrabble slum child who wants a school, a job, a chance to succeed? Or is the real Pakistani the disillusioned newly returned immigrant son who finds that neither the simplistic rhetoric of foreign opportunity nor the simple militarism of Islamism defines him?

As several post-colonial authors have noted, the possibilities of regional solidarity in South Asia depend on which of these two frames are chosen. If Pakistan decides to define itself by the pragmatic universalities of economics over ideology, it can choose to create a relationship with the world based on the problems it holds in common with them. If it chooses to focus on its ideological rifts and divisions, it may remain apart and hence isolated. The real Pakistan, in terms of truth, may lie between the two—caught in the midst of the complications of both ideology and economics, the questions of hunger and heaven, each to be asked and answered soon at the ballot box.

About Rafia Zakaria: *The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.*

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