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## The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing

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## Global Pakistan in the wake of 9/11

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## 4

GLOBAL PAKISTAN IN THE  
WAKE OF 9/11*Ulka Anjaria*

The events of 9/11 brought Pakistan once again into a global light, but largely through negative representations. I argue that anglophone Pakistani literature written since 2001 has been the key site of contesting these negative representations by offering a new understanding of Pakistan's place in the global imaginary. The chapter will show how internationally well-known authors Kamila Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, and Mohsin Hamid are among those involved in rethinking Pakistan's place in the world through their novels and, in this way, in thinking the global novel anew. Their works offer new imaginaries that take into account global power inequalities, but also present alternative spatial formations. In *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Shamsie develops the concept of postcolonial globality to situate Pakistan within a transnational and transhistorical episteme that both celebrates cosmopolitanism and draws attention to its limits in the contemporary, post-2001 world. In *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), Hanif uses the logic of conspiracy to both underline global complicity in Pakistani politics and to imagine new networks and collectivities as a response to it. And in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), and *Exit West* (2017), Hamid questions the relationship between identity and place, first by allegorising cultural misunderstanding, and second by eliminating the specificity of place altogether. Together, these three authors offer new modes of representing global Pakistan outside of the dominant discourse of 9/11.

**Postcolonial globality**

The postcolonial novel has always been a place of interchange and mixing, as epitomised by the works of Salman Rushdie (Jani 2010) and Amitav Ghosh, in particular his Ibis trilogy (Luo 2013). Origins are presented as mixed and hybrid, power as weak rather than strong, and language as a key site of subject-formation (Bhabha 1994). This is clear in postcolonial theory and has been evinced in the anglophone Indian novel, though perhaps less so in its Pakistani counterpart.<sup>2</sup> But in the wake of 9/11 and the explosion of globally successful Pakistani novels, we see more of a turn to a representation of globality. We might even say that those events are what made the Pakistani novel 'postcolonial'.<sup>3</sup>

Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* represents this global turn in anglophone Pakistani fiction through the globe-crossing story of Hiroko Tanaka and her transnational group of family and

acquaintances from 1945 to 2002. The novel's epic sweep is markedly different from Shamsie's earlier novel *Kartography* (2002), which briefly follows Raheen in her college years abroad, but is intensely located and particular in its discussion of what it means to love the wounded city of Karachi. By contrast, *Burnt Shadows* refuses to be anchored in any one place, moving from Nagasaki to Delhi to Karachi to Afghanistan to New York. Displacement becomes the prerequisite of narrative here, as it is with Rushdie and Ghosh – the idea that it is in travel and movement that stories are born and that, conversely, the huge thing we understand as the globe can only be understood by means of stories. Translation and polyglottism are also tropes in global postcolonial fiction, and we see that in this novel as well, with Hiroko beginning as a German teacher (Shamsie 2009: 12) and then translating for the American army in the wake of the atomic bomb (2009: 63), and Raza as a teenager doing a multilingual crossword puzzle with ease, 'with its Japanese and Urdu clues and German and English solutions' (2009: 131).

But in Shamsie's version, this vision of twentieth-century cosmopolitan fluidity and movement is born in wounds, in this case two wounds occurring almost simultaneously: the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki and the Partition of India two years later. While Hiroko retains literal scars from the first, the second causes emotional scars for her husband Sajjad, as he is forced to rediscover home all over again when, after their honeymoon in Istanbul, he is not let back into the country: 'They said I chose to leave [...] They said I'm one of the Muslims who chose to leave India. It can't be unchosen [...] They said I can't go back to Dilli, I can't go back home' (2009: 127). Partition leaves its mark on several generations in Pakistan, and particularly in Karachi, a city fundamentally changed by the division of the subcontinent and the mass migrations that followed. Sajjad's hope for his own son's professional success is thus part of a larger wish across the city that the impact of Partition will finally be overcome: 'Every father in this neighbourhood of migrants, each with stories of all they had lost and all they had started to rebuild after Partition, made a similar speech to his son' (2009:138).

But Shamsie's innovation in *Burnt Shadows* is to take this global imaginary and give it a contemporary gloss by beginning and ending the story in a specific, post-2001 moment and thus registering the consequences of this movement and fluidity in the post-9/11 world. For despite his multilingualism, Raza's relationship to movement and travel is much more uneasy than his parents'. While his parents ultimately adjust to life in Pakistan, despite living there initially against their will, Raza is perennially out of place (Henry 2017: 78–80). Even at a young age, he finds his racial difference from others a source of shame: 'He only spoke Japanese within the privacy of his home [...] Why allow the world to know his mind contained words from a country he'd never visited?' (Shamsie 2009:141). His fluid multilingualism, which on one hand he loves, also has an underside, as when faced with his school exams he sees a 'jumble of words' rather than meaning, 'and nonsensical answers to questions he didn't even understand kept coming to mind in Japanese' (2009: 146). In part this is because although he loves languages, the world around him seems to be getting more provincial and he is increasingly out of place in it:

[Languages] was a passion that could have no fulfilment, not here. Somewhere in the world perhaps there were institutions where you could dive from vocabulary to vocabulary and make that your life. But not here. 'Polyglot' was not any kind of practical career choice.

(2009: 148)

Transnational movement, which had been so transformative for his parents, becomes for Raza a form of loss. This is until he meets Harry Burton, in whom he finds a fellow polyglot (2009: 154), and, around the same time, Abdullah, the Hazara boy who mistakes him for an

Afghani and introduces him to the world of the *mujahideen*. In the late twentieth century, in the midst of the Cold War, these are the two fates for a shape-shifting hybrid such as Raza: the CIA or the *jihad*.

Following September 11 and the increased culture of paranoia it spawns, Raza's chameleon-like quality and his cultural fluidity end up costing him his freedom, as he is accused of being a spy by an American at the security firm to which he has been so loyal, and even the daughter of his family's long-time friends, Kim Barton, ends up putting him in danger because of her unfounded suspicions of his Hazara friend, Abdullah. Raza's ability to be 'at home' in so many different contexts is in fact a liability in a world increasingly divided between those who 'are either with us or against us', in George W. Bush's infamous words (CNN 2001). This is a somewhat ironic twist on the postcolonial global novel, which has long been considered an antidote to provincialist ways of thinking. Shamsie's novel is certainly that, but is also aware that the nuances of translation and an open, cultural relativity – those bastions of postcolonial thought – might not, in times of war, be the most feasible stances. It is precisely nuance and relativity that the so-called war on terror wanted to exterminate, and thus the fate of the postcolonial imagination is presented as tenuous.

### Conspiracy and network

If 9/11 stands as an impasse in Shamsie's vision of a world of global interchange, it – or rather the conspiracy-oriented logic it represented and caused to intensify – is deployed as a primary mode of meaning-making in Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. Here, conspiracy and plot, two key words that emerged out of the events of 11 September 2001, are reframed as novelistic structuring principles. Not only is the story about a series of conspiracies to assassinate the Pakistani president General Zia-ul-Haq, but its structure is itself one of mystery, in which the end is presented at the beginning, the various characters' intentions *vis-à-vis* the general are only gradually revealed, and related stories like that of Ali's father's death are told only towards the end. If a conspiracy is marked by deep levels of interconnectedness between people and/or things that at first do not seem related, then Hanif's novel recreates this logic in fictional form.

Conspiracy theories aside, US intelligence after September 11 noted 'the existence of a vast and complex transnational conspiracy behind the hijackings' (Crenshaw 2001: 425) which spoke of networks of influence and collaboration that went beyond what the world had seen before. Mainstream renderings of the event in the US stopped short of extending this network of transnational influences to America's own actions in the Cold War and beyond, leaving that work up to progressive and alternative media. The most significant of these actions was of course the US involvement in the Afghanistan war, in which Pakistan played the go-between, changing the nature of Pakistani society as much as it had a profound effect on geopolitics. Linking the CIA to the very *mujahideen* and Saudi financiers who backed the attacks on September 11, with the ISI and the Pakistani army as middle men, is part of the work of this novel, which is not so much uncovering a conspiracy as it is giving a full historical account which includes truths outside of the current US-sponsored global rhetoric of 'Islamic terrorism'. (US involvement in Afghanistan is also touched on, for this same reason, in *Burnt Shadows*.) Marieke de Goede argues that the network has become a key metaphor in thinking about 'global connectivity' and 'contemporary social life', including 'transnational danger' (2012: 215) such as 'the dispersed global terrorism threat, [...] the spread of (computer) viruses, [...] the identification of organized crime "hubs"' and 'the depiction of al Qaeda terrorism' (2012: 216). In Hanif's novel, the network is animated with the US as a constitutive part in order to counter dominant narratives of 9/11.

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* does this by alternating between the first-person narration of Ali Shigri, an officer in the Pakistani army, and third-person description – much of it satirical – of General Zia-ul-Haq, featuring, at close range, his religiosity, his paranoia, his irrationality, and even his stomach parasites. This fictionalised insider's account of the dictator is supplemented by various additional perspectives, including that of his wife, US ambassador Arnold Raphel and his wife, and General Akhtar. Raphel's own worries about the growing power of the CIA in Pakistan in relation to the US government underlines the sense of intrigue; he describes Islamabad as 'a whirl of conspiracies and dinner parties; there were more CIA subcontractors and cooks per household than meals in a day' (Hanif 2008: 76). Indeed, General Akhtar is shown secretly meeting Bill Casey, the CIA director (2008: 79); General Zia is consorting with businessmen in Lufkin, Texas (2008: 110); and Osama bin Laden (called OBL) 'of Laden and Co. Constructions' (2008: 230), shows up to a US-government party, saying that 'Allah has been very kind. There is no business like the construction business in times of war' (2008: 233). There is an element of farce to these representations as well, in scenes such as that where General Akhtar rehearses for the speech he will give when he wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in fighting the Soviets (2008: 200) and a US government Fourth of July party where American guests dress up like tribal Afghans.

But Hanif not only represents these real or fictional networks and conspiracies; we also have conspiracy and network as a fictional device, which presents different parts of the story as seemingly unrelated and then gradually linked together as the novel proceeds. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* begins at the end, at the moment right before Pak One takes off on the fatal flight. The novel's prologue describes a grainy clip as one might see in footage taken by an amateur on what later became a crime scene, so that 'everything in it is sun-bleached and slightly faded' (2008: 3). This falls into conventions of representing video security footage from crime scenes, where a few seconds of footage get played over and over again on the news following a crime or disaster. The main players in the conspiracy feature in the clip: General Zia, Arnold Raphel, and General Akhtar. This moment, the narrator tells us, marks the end of the war in Afghanistan 'and these men we see in the TV clip are the undisputed victors' (2008: 5). But they are all about to die in a plane crash whose cause will never be found: 'There will be no autopsies, the leads will run dry, investigations will be blocked, [and] there will be cover-ups to cover cover-ups [...] It would be said that this was the biggest cover-up in aviation history since the last biggest cover-up' (2008: 5). The only surviving witness is Ali, our narrator: 'I was the one who got away' (2008: 5).

The rest of the novel tells us not only how Ali got away, but how he got there in the first place, how the various other characters got there – most of them based on real-life individuals – and how they were involved in plotting General Zia's demise. Ali, for his part, wanted to kill General Zia in order to avenge his father's death, likely at the hands of Zia's men. Ali's plan, 'a fucked-up idea, which, like most fucked-up ideas, was conceived at the end of a very hot day in the Academy' (2008: 97), involved injecting General Zia with a drop of krait venom during a silent swordsman exercise performed for the general by a highly skilled squadron of soldiers. The truth behind this 'silent drill conspiracy' (2008: 97) is revealed in a series of flashbacks, in which Ali's seemingly innocent demeanour gradually gives way to a dark side.

Ali goes through with the 'sword manoeuvre' (2008: 180) and poisons General Zia, but he 'gets away' in the end because so many others kill Zia at the same time. Indeed, almost every other character in the novel wants to kill Zia for his or her own reasons, and in his or her own way. General Akhtar wants Zia's power and so he plants air fresheners in Zia's plane loaded with poisonous VX gas. (In one of the many humorous scenes of the novel, General Akhtar tries to get CIA Director Coogan's support for getting rid of Zia, but Coogan is too involved watching

a replay of a Redskins–Buccaneers football game to listen. Thus when, with one eye on the television, he shouts, ‘Go get him’ (2008: 237), Akhtar takes it as a sign that he should proceed with his plan.) The union of mango farmers wants to kill Zia for his anti-union policies and send him the eponymous case of exploding mangoes as a gift. And the blind rape victim Zainab, one of many women adversely affected by Zia’s implementation of the Hudood ordinance in 1979 (Imran 2005), casts a curse upon Zia, which is heard by a crow flying overhead, who then flies kamikaze-style into Pak One.

There is certainly a jab here at Zia’s paranoia – when Zia repeatedly asks his security officer, ‘Who wants to kill me?’ (2008: 65), the answer is always, ‘Everyone’ (2008: 66) – but it is also a product of fiction itself, in which Hanif imagines a network that takes the place of what we might have earlier called ‘solidarity’ in response to authoritarian governments. The populace is so fragmented and has different aims, most of them petty and self-serving, and so the possibility of real solidarity or a grass-roots movement where all of Zia’s enemies might unite as one is largely precluded from the outset. What we have instead is a network or conspiracy of interlocking interests, and one utopic moment in which all the interests coincide, in this case to produce the spectacular event not only of Zia’s death, but of his death ‘many times over’ (2008: 323). The flip side of paranoia is that in fact, Zia *is* killed by everyone, in an inadvertent act of pseudo-collective revolt.

The doubleness of the title, the ‘case’ being both the mangoes gifted to Zia by the mango farmers’ union and the case as an incident to be investigated, offers a play on the idea of conspiracy, a lightness that pervades what could otherwise be a heavy – and even depressing – novel. Hanif registers both the truth about conspiracies – there are more connections than often meet the eye – but also their absurdity and their potential to cause paranoia. This balance between fate and agency appears throughout the novel, in Brigadier TM’s comment that ‘Life is in Allah’s hands [...] but I pack my own parachute’ (2008: 64) and in Ali’s self-referential commentary in the novel as a whole, such as when he asks his lover Obaid about the book he is reading, Gabriel García Márquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*: ‘Why keep reading it when you already know that the hero is going to die?’ (Hanif 2008: 279). The conspiracy form demands this new structure: action, then retrospective solution.

In this way, by counteracting the real and still-buried connections between the US and the Pakistani state with a conspiracy plot of his own – and one which includes homosexual love and elements of the absurd – Hanif rewrites conspiracy as a fruitful aesthetic space, rather than merely a geopolitical stranglehold on individual action and freedom. The novel offers a space where humour and love can flourish, even amidst the intensive connectivities that offer a spectacular future of state violence, with insidious collaborations between governments like those of America and Pakistan. In doing so, Hanif reclaims the global conspiracy as a thing of the imagination.

### The problem of place

If Shamsie and Hanif raise questions about new modes of connectivity in a world that, after 9/11, looks more broken or disconnected than ever, Hamid pushes these questions further through an intense questioning of place. While his first novel, *Moth Smoke*, is intensely located, following Darashikoh as he criss-crosses the streets and byways of Lahore, in the three novels that followed Hamid seems to be approaching the question of Pakistan askance, as it were, progressively emptying out place signifiers while still telling uniquely Pakistani stories – or, more specifically, stories that engage with the problem of what it means to be Pakistani in a post-9/11 world.

There is no doubt that the image of Pakistan in the world changed following 9/11, culminating, perhaps, in the discovery of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011. This change was twofold: a suspicion of Pakistan in its role as a US ally and simultaneously a suspicion of all Muslim men as potential terrorists, which manifested in various hate crimes in the United States as well as increased scrutiny at airports and elsewhere. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set in this particular moment when Muslim men, even those who have completely bought into the American capitalist dream, are still suspected of being disloyal. It traces Changez as he gets a high-profile job with the investment banking firm Underwood Samson after graduating from Princeton. Changez does very well at the firm until the events of 9/11 compel him to rethink his place in America. But beyond this narrative of progressive alienation, the novel raises questions about empathy and relatability in the way we read as a whole. The story is structured around an encounter between Changez and an anonymous interlocutor in Lahore. Changez and his interlocutor mistrust one another, not knowing whether the story each is telling is true or whether the other is, respectively, a terrorist and an assassin. The story ends on this mutual mistrust: 'It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins' (Hamid 2007: 183). As the two men part, the American can see nothing but a waiter who 'is rapidly closing in [...] [and] waving at me to detain you' and the protagonist hopes that the 'glint of metal' in the interlocutor's jacket is 'the holder of your business cards' (2007: 184) – but the novel ends there, and we are never sure if they are who they say they are. The uncertainty of the encounter becomes the crucial frame of the book, raising questions about cultural misunderstanding and stereotypes: it is likely that while some readers would interpret the protagonist as a terrorist, others might see the American as a CIA agent, spy, or assassin. Like *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* defines the post-2001 era as one of mutual and sustained mistrust. However, by framing the story as an unresolved encounter and leaving the ending open, the novel also asks larger metafictional questions about how readers relate to certain characters and not to others, which characters we empathise with and how that empathy shapes the story, and the centrality of these questions to the category of the global novel (Anjaria 2016).

In contrast to *Moth Smoke*, which is absolutely a Lahore novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set mostly in New York and follows Changez on his global travels, with only the frame taking place in Lahore. However, this elaboration of globality reads as a different project from Shamsie's discussed above, as here the global story is not one of hybridity and interchange but instead a story of the unitary homogenisation of global difference by the gavel of a hard-nosed, American capitalism. Lahore is significant in this story because it bears the double-brunt of American hegemony; the so-called war on terror is presented as the flip side of predatory capitalism. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is thus a Pakistani novel in a very different way from *Moth Smoke*; it is mostly set outside of Pakistan, but its entire vision of the world is filtered through the kind of global peripherality intensified in Pakistan following 9/11, in which capitalism and military force work together in increasingly terroristic ways.

Hamid seems to want to pursue this question of what it means to write a Pakistani novel in the post-9/11 world in his next two novels, both of which have no specified place setting. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is a parody of a self-help book, told in the second person by an unnamed narrator. The narrator's story begins in what is clearly a Third World village, though few specifics are given, and then moves to an anonymous Third World city. In an interview about the novel, Hamid explained the decision to leave the setting unspecified by saying that 'the ingrained view is that South Asia is an exotic place, a peculiar place and a central place – [that] is a colonial mindset'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it seems, removing place altogether is a rejoinder to that

mindset. This sense of Pakistan's peculiarity has been even further intensified post-9/11, where 'Pakistan' has been overdetermined by the global language used to describe it, leaving very little space for alternative definitions. *Rising Asia* is a novel about aspiration and love, not terror and violence. Hamid suggests that if he had introduced the word 'Pakistan', those everyday stories would be overrun by pressing political concerns.

Hamid's most recent novel, *Exit West*, takes a similar approach, also refraining from naming the place of the story's origin even though, once again, it could easily be Pakistan. Here we have more direct references to religious nationalism and sectarian conflict as the reasons why the anonymous city erupts in war, but again the focus is on love and migration rather than on religion and conflict, and so the decision not to name the place seems a deliberate call for Pakistani writers to be able to tell *other* kinds of stories. While the Western marketplace for the global novel often calls for a certain kind of universal resonance (Rajan and Sharma 2006), Hamid's two most recent texts upend that formula by refusing to be educative and by pushing 'universalism' to its most extreme end, which is a denial of specificity altogether. This should not be read as a depoliticisation but as a rethinking of the very terminologies along which we imagine our political constructs: east vs west, universal vs particular, difference vs similarity. By undercutting our desire to specify and contextualise, Hamid's works stretch not only what the Pakistani novel does, but what the Pakistani novel *is*, after 9/11.<sup>5</sup>

Writing about Pakistani fiction in terms of 9/11 has the potential to recentre American exceptionalism (Singh 2012: 159) by focusing on a date that is important mostly in the US' own self-mythologising. This is far from my intention here. However, I suggest that the marker is useful insofar as it illuminates the renewed investment of Pakistani literature in questions of globality appropriate for a changing world order. In fact, as all these works show, cosmopolitanism, violence, Islamophobia, and cultural misunderstandings existed long before 9/11; however, the intensified cultural standoff that this event produced has the potential to shed light on Pakistan in new ways. 9/11 is not the defining point of Pakistani literature, nor will it be. But it is an optic that allows us to see certain trends in new ways.

It should also be stressed that the authors discussed here are three of Pakistan's most internationally recognised and do not represent the wide diversity of Pakistani fiction, not in English, let alone in Urdu, Punjabi, or other languages as well.<sup>6</sup> But as I have tried to show, their international recognition comes in part because they are all in different ways interested in the global *as a problem*, and they reflect that interest in their works. This seems to me as much an awareness of 'what sells' as a recognition that the problems of Pakistan are not Pakistan's alone, but are always mired in confluences of global, national, regional, and local concerns.

While Shamsie and Hamid have seemed to expand their scale as they continue to write (Shamsie's latest novel, *A God in Every Stone* (2014), also takes a broad historical and geographical sweep), Hanif has counterintuitively gone in the opposite direction with his second novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), which is set in Karachi and has intensely local concerns: daily violence, the state of Christian minorities, caste, and love. But the violence here is more on the level of the domestic and low-level urban warfare than the type of spectacular assassinations and global events discussed in his first book, in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*. Hanif's trajectory from the global to the local suggests that no author or literary culture proceeds in a unidirectional trend. Rather than read these three authors as symptoms of a broad-sweeping trajectory of the transformation of Pakistani fiction, then, we might see them as extended experiments with particular questions relating to form, scale, and the global novel. From this perspective, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is as much an experiment with localism as *Exit West* is with placelessness and the question of the universal.

## Notes

- 1 The three authors discussed here have all lived abroad, and Shamsie continues to do so. I agree with Chambers that 'it is [...] untenable to impose a distinction between diasporic and Pakistani-resident authors writing in English' (2011: 124) and I hope the argument of this chapter shows why.
- 2 See Rahman (2011), Werbner (2013), and Yaqin (2013) for useful discussions of cosmopolitanism in recent Pakistani fiction.
- 3 The relationship between the Pakistani novel in English and its better-known Indian counterpart has been discussed by Cilano (2009: 185–186).
- 4 This is also cited in Anjaria (2013), from which some of this discussion of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is taken.
- 5 See also Hamid's short story 'Terminator: Attack of the Drone' (2011), which similarly evacuates the specificity of place in the context of America's drone war.
- 6 Cilano records Kamila Shamsie's criticisms of a view on Pakistani literature that assumes that English-language writing is only an expression of a colonial mindset: 'Our [...] vexed relationship [...] with English is just not an issue' (2009: 192).

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