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## Terrorism, Islamization, and Human Rights: How Post 9/11 Pakistani English Literature Speaks to the World

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in English

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# **Terrorism, Islamization, and Human Rights: How Post 9/11 Pakistani English Literature Speaks to the World**

## **Abstract**

The start of the twenty-first century has witnessed a simultaneous rise of three areas of scholarly interest: 9/11 literature, human rights discourse, and War on Terror studies. The resulting intersections between literature and human rights, foregrounded by an overarching narrative of terror, have led to a new area of interdisciplinary enquiry broadly classed under human rights literature, at the point of the convergence of which lies the idea of human empathy. Concurrently with the development of human rights literature as a distinct field of study, two new strains of Pakistani literature have emerged on the Anglophone literary scene. Firstly, there are biographical works by women, co-authored with Western journalists, that have become controversial because there are contesting claims about human rights that emerge from their authorship, circulation and reception. Secondly, there are works of fiction, with the potential to be read as rights narratives, that problematize the current universal view of human rights based in the Western tradition of liberalism. The role of these writings is both valuable and disputable, as is reflected in its widely divergent reception by local and global audiences, and in its ambivalent position vis-a-vis universal human rights debates. Therefore, an examination of how Pakistani English literature speaks to the global reader is not only timely, but gainful in its insights.

My dissertation has a two-pronged focus. I examine memoirs by Malala Yousafzai and Mukhtaran Mai to highlight how conflicting reader reactions in Pakistan and in the Western world shape such memoirs' conversation with human rights in the current climate of geopolitical tension. I also analyze recent fiction by Mohsin Hamid, Muhammed Hanif, Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Nadeem Aslam and Jamil Ahmad who face a double

challenge: writing about human rights violations in Pakistan without being accused of subscribing to Western agendas that promote the same instances of violence to justify military intervention in the region, and shifting the focus of 9/11 trauma writing to include the equally calamitous human rights issues that have resulted in its global aftermath. I propose that close readings of contemporary Pakistani literature can aid in promoting the pluralities of vision that support the “new universalism” movement in human rights as a viable option for global solidarity.

**Key Words:**

Pakistani Anglophone literature, human rights, 9/11 literature, War on Terror, memoirs, Malala Yousafzai, Mukhtaran Mai, Muhammed Hanif, Mohsin Hamid, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Jamil Ahmad, Kamila Shamsie, Nadeem Aslam

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When I was writing the dissertation for my first doctoral degree some years ago, I could never have imagined that I would be writing my second one a decade later. If completing the first one had been a monumental task, I cannot say writing now has been any easier, even with the benefit of prior experience. It is mainly due to the excellent academic support at Western, and the encouragement of so many of my friends and family members, that I have managed to finish within the four-year framework.

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## Introduction

### After 9/11: A New wave of Pakistani Anglophone Literature

I believe that the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel. And I believe that the world is suffering from a deficit of empathy at the moment. (Mohsin Hamid, *Harcourt Interview*, 2007)

I must find what I have in common with others. Not what sets me apart . . . then the book will have a better chance of connecting with others. (Nadeem Aslam; “Where to Begin,” 2010)

In 2015, the Modern Language Association (*MLA*) published a volume titled *Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies*, which makes important advances in the pedagogical field of human rights literature. Its publication follows a decade-long enquiry by humanities scholars into how neo-imperialism, global mistrust, and human suffering could be more productively examined through the human rights lens in a post 9/11 world. The first significant conference on the topic “Humanities and Human Rights” was held at the City University of New York in October 2005, and was soon followed by a special issue of *PMLA* that grew out of the arguments raised during the conference. The main challenge faced was whether the existing human rights idiom could be adapted to this new form of interrogation without succumbing to the hegemonic tendencies of its predominantly Western<sup>1</sup> logic, and addressing problems like, “[h]ow to square the obvious and blatant violations of the rights of Afghans, Iraqis, and Palestinians...with the official rhetoric of the United Nations,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, I restrict the use of the term “Western” to a) define countries historically derived from and influenced by European cultures which hold ideologically similar socio-political views; and b) First World countries with capitalist economies. The intention is not to overlook the complexity of this term in other contexts.



nongovernmental organizations, and the White House?” (McClennen and Moore 2016, 3-5). As the enquiry expanded, the emphasis of the discussions also extended to how pedagogies in literature and cultural studies complicate the interpretation of human rights discourse.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, it led to the suggestion in that “[t]eachers in human rights and literature classrooms... must present human rights through the scope of their own doubled optic: as a discourse and practice of social justice and as a vehicle or alibi for militaristic neo-imperialism” (Moore and Goldberg 2015, 5).

Following upon recent scholarship that stresses a more nuanced instruction for reading texts with a human rights focus, my study examines the application of human rights discussions in the specific context of recent Pakistani Anglophone literature, and offers an additional perspective for analyzing contemporary writing from previously colonized countries. I propose that a broader contextualization of contemporary literary texts within the colonial history of the Indian Sub-continent can yield important insights into the current contradictions within human rights debates in the post 9/11 period: for example, the contradiction of how the logic of universal human rights discourse can coexist in a world in which undefinable<sup>3</sup> enemies are excluded from the same rights through legal codification.

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “human rights discourse” for the official language used in the articulation and documentation of human rights, e.g. formal statements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*UDHR*). This language is distinct from its “vernacular” usage which employs “a culturally and socially specific language of class and identity that differentiates its users from those whose social status and alternative literacy constitute the official language of power” (Hauser 444). See Hauser, Gerard A. “The Moral Vernacular of Human Rights Discourse” *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 41.4 (2008): 440-466.

<sup>3</sup> “The individuals with whom the United States and its allies currently at war defy easy definition, much less understanding” (Friedman 2011). The “enemy” in the War on Terror is an elusive entity defined by the United States *Authorization for Use of Military Force* signed on September 14, 2001 as “those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons” (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/23/text/enr>).

The continuity of such “states of exception”<sup>4</sup> can be traced in the usage of terms like “Subjects” instead of “Citizens” during the Empire, to “illegal enemy combatants”<sup>5</sup> instead of “prisoners of war (POW)” in the recent War on Terror. In both cases, human rights exceptions have been justified: on moral grounds of the civilizing mission in the former case, and for matters of national security in the latter.

According to Bonny Ibhawoh<sup>6</sup>, the link between colonialism and human rights can be identified on three levels. The first link relates to the rationale and origins of European colonialism, what was seen to be the duty of the civilized Europeans to spread the liberal Enlightenment ideas of democracy, freedom and the rights of humans to uncivilized nations. The second link is with the anti-colonial nationalist struggles in Asia and Africa at the end of colonialism in the twentieth century that “drew on the same language of rights that had earlier been used to justify colonialism to demand independence and self-determination” (361). The third link pertains to the legacy of colonialism beyond the mid-twentieth century that

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<sup>4</sup> A “state of exception” is the power of a government, or a sovereign to transcend the rule of law in the name of larger public good, which is increasingly becoming the norm, turning democracies states into totalitarian states. Read Agamben’s *State of Exception* (2005) for an examination of “states of exception” in the post 9/11 period.

<sup>5</sup> William J. Haynes II, JD, General Counsel of the US Department of Defense, wrote in a 12 December 2002 memo to the Council on Foreign Relations: “‘Enemy combatant’ is a general category that subsumes two sub-categories: lawful and unlawful combatants...Lawful combatants receive prisoner of war (POW) status and the protections of the Third Geneva Convention. Unlawful combatants do not receive POW status and do not receive the full protections of the Third Geneva Convention. The President has determined that al Qaida members are unlawful combatants because (among other reasons) they are members of a non-state actor terrorist group that does not receive the protections of the Third Geneva Convention. He additionally determined that the Taliban detainees are unlawful combatants because they do not satisfy the criteria for POW status set out in Article 4 of the Third Geneva Convention.” (<http://usiraq.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000934>)

<sup>6</sup> Ibhawoh, Bonny. “Colonialism”. *Encyclopedia of Human Rights*. Editor in Chief, David P. Forsythe. Volume 1.

continues to dominate discourses of universal human rights, which is why cultural relativists<sup>7</sup> and pluralists<sup>8</sup> have referred to colonial history in order to dispute the United Nations international human rights norms that are seen to be “Western oriented and not adequately reflective of non-Western perspectives” (362). Cultural relativists compare universal human rights movement with the eighteenth and nineteenth century Eurocentric colonial projects “that promoted a homogenizing worldview and cast societies into superior and subordinate positions” (362). The United States’ military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the post 9/11 era that are articulated as freedom missions,<sup>9</sup> have “reinforced this postcolonial skepticism about rights discourse” (Ibhowah, 362). It is the continuing challenge to the paradigm of universal human rights posed by colonial legacies that is of importance to this research project.

Because this project is based on the intersections between literary and social-science discourses, situating the position of “contemporary Pakistani literature” within the canon of World Anglophone literature is helpful here. Within the scope of this study, I define the new wave of Pakistani literature as fiction and non-fiction writings in English by Pakistani citizens, of Pakistani descent, or belonging to the Pakistani diaspora, written after 11 September 2001. My study particularizes post 9/11 Pakistani writings as being implicitly or explicitly reflective of Pakistan’s ambivalent position in the War on Terror and human rights

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<sup>7</sup> Cultural Relativists believe that human rights are dependent upon culture, and therefore no single definition of moral principles can be applied to all cultures across the globe.

<sup>8</sup> Pluralists follow the “doctrine of multiplicity” and believe that a diverse society made up of people belonging to different races, religions, backgrounds and opinions is a good thing.

<sup>9</sup> The US military name for the Afghanistan war was “Operation Enduring Freedom” from October 2001 to 31 December 2014, replaced by “Operation Freedom’s Sentinel”. The invasion of Iraq was known as “Operation Iraqi Freedom” until September 2010, then renamed “Operation New Dawn”.

debates. Not only does this literature extend the scope of the 9/11 genre to include settings, themes and perspectives beyond the United States as the imaginative centre, its trajectory reflects a shift from “postcolonial” literature that is often confrontational, to “transnational” literature that aims to bridge gaps of religious and cultural understanding by providing a multi-dimensional view of 9/11 as a turning point in modern history.

Despite a certain optimism about the future that can be traced in the new wave of Pakistani literature, it is still linked closely to its colonial legacy. My broader aim is to underline, through an analysis of contemporary Pakistani literature, the close link between the colonizing project of imperial powers in the past and the Western ideals of liberal enlightenment that form the basis of human rights as they are understood today. I draw upon Alice Conklin’s key essay, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms?” (1998), that highlights the connection between the civilizing mission of Western empires in the nineteenth century, and the “legal means of codification” through which the colonizers justified “state-sanctioned violence” under the guise of human rights (419-421). Conklin acknowledges the work of critics like Edward Said in identifying the hypocrisy of Western democracies that touted civilization as a universal aim that was their duty to oversee, while perpetuating a difference between races by creating knowledge about the “Other” as inferior. However, she believes that critics have “committed the historical sin of reading motives backward from consequences without examining their connections or the material and cultural circumstances in which these motives were produced in the first place” (Conklin, 421). One important aspect that Conklin believes to have been overlooked is that Western liberalism did not just produce difference; its universalizing aspect created commonalities as well, ones which “caused many Westerners to see their ideas of freedom as basic human rights, to which all of humankind is entitled” (422). This dichotomy between discourses of

difference and the idea of universality that has underpinned imperialism, is also mirrored in the contradictions of human rights discourses in the modern era. Conklin suggests that instead of looking at the history of colonies in isolation, it is more productive that “the contingent and contradictory registers of liberal discourse must now be recovered and analyzed” in relation to the modern global age if the ideals of universal human rights are to be reached (441-42). In my opinion, recent literature from Pakistan lends itself well to such methods of reanalysis, as will be attempted in the coming chapters, and can be valuable in interdisciplinary areas of human rights, postcolonial literature, women and gender studies, global studies and cultural studies.

My view is also informed by Elizabeth Anker’s recent essay “Teaching the Legal Imperialism Debate over Human Rights” (in Moore and Goldberg 2015) which calls to attention the increasing focus on the postcolonial world in human rights discourse that makes humanitarianism and human rights activism synonymous with Western foreign aid projects. By extension, it judges postcolonial nation-states’ respect for human rights as a measurement of their civilizational progress (39). Anker warns that challenging human rights in a literature classroom requires the instructor to be unusually circumspect because of the general resistance to a critique of its motives, and that a delicate balance must be kept between the interrogation of rights and the larger considerations of social justice (40). One of the techniques she puts forward is to introduce to students the cultural imperialism<sup>10</sup> debate in

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<sup>10</sup> Universalism vs. Cultural Relativism is a longstanding debate in human rights discourse. The Universalist stance treats human rights as universal and applicable to all human beings equally. Cultural Relativism argues that human rights are dependent on culture, and therefore no single definition of moral principles can be applied to all cultures across the globe. The general concern of relativists arises from the view that the principles upon which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is structured, stem from Western political history. In response, Jack Donnelly (2013), proposes a multidimensional space that accommodates elements from both universality and relativity, which he terms

human rights, and to frame texts within a history of colonization (41). In response to these suggestions, a parallel aim of my research is to foster a nuanced approach for the teaching of Pakistani literature from a human rights lens, in the light of the geopolitical history that complicates its role in the global War on Terror.

After the events of 11 September 2001, human rights have become an increasingly important area of enquiry with the changing perceptions about the US involvement in the War on Terror and the ensuing global questions about the human cost of this project. This has led to a simultaneous rise of three areas of scholarly interest: 9/11 literature, human rights discourse, and War on Terror studies. The resulting intersections between literature and human rights, foregrounded by an overarching narrative of terror, have opened a new line of interdisciplinary enquiry broadly classed under human rights literature.

Although there are contesting schools of thought about the nature of the relationship between narrative and human rights, the most influential scholars in this area, like Lynn Hunt, Joseph Slaughter, Kay Schaffer's and Sidonie Smith concur that narratives have played a role in mobilizing the politics of human rights discourse; however, Hunt prefers a linear historical view of the link between narrative and moral responsibility, and the interest of the latter lies in the contribution of different narrative forms, like the novel and personal writings, in the development of human rights discourse (Dawes and Gupta 2014, 150-151).

A helpful introductory step for scholarship in the area is to identify the idea of human empathy as the point of convergence of literature and human rights. It is interesting that the term "empathy" has its origins in the English language only in the early twentieth century. From its initial usage in the field of psychology, the word entered popular vocabulary around

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"relatively universal" (105). He believes that in the contemporary world relativity operates within the boundaries drawn by universal human rights.

the same period as the formal articulation of human rights in the 1940s. British psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener first translated the word from the German *Einfühlung* (“in-feeling”<sup>11</sup>) into the English term “empathy” in 1909.<sup>12</sup> The shift from the concept of sympathy which stood for “aesthetic feeling” in the nineteenth century, to the coining of the word empathy in the twentieth century which is associated with “social understanding,” has meant that the latter term is used synonymously with altruism and social justice (Swanson 2013, 128). The application of this word has also expanded from psychology into social sciences and the humanities.

Recent studies have focussed on literature’s capacity to evoke empathy in readers as a key factor in the recognition of human dignity and humanitarian action (Hunt 2007; Slaughter 2007, 2012; Barnett 201; Anker 2012; O’Gorman 2015). As Amy Kaminsky (2009) reminds us, “the right to produce, circulate, and read literary texts is a subset of human rights, literature constitutes a piece of the very stuff of human rights” (44). Article 19 of *UDHR* guarantees freedom of expression and to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” The rising interest in this area can be gauged from a recent scientific experiment carried out at the University of Toronto to investigate literature’s potential to increase empathy in readers.<sup>13</sup> The results, published in *Scientific Study of Literature*, suggest a positive role of literature in facilitating development of empathy.

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<sup>11</sup> See Mallgrave, Harry Francis, and Eleftherios Ikononou, eds. *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics*, 1873-1893.

<sup>12</sup> Read Greiner, Rae. “1909: The Introduction of the Word ‘Empathy’ into English” for a detailed etymological examination of the difference in meaning between “sympathy” and “empathy”. See also: Jahoda, Gustav, “Theodor Lipps and the Shift from ‘Sympathy’ to ‘Empathy’” (2005).

<sup>13</sup> See: Djikic, Maja, Keith Oatley and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu. “Reading Other Minds: Effects of Literature on Empathy.” *Scientific Study of Literature* 3.1 (2013): 28–47. Doi: 10.1075/ssol.3.1.06dji

Indeed, critics like Tim Gauthier (2015), have stressed the increased importance of empathy in 9/11 literature. In his book *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness*, Gauthier points out that the celebration of diversity in contemporary times has cultivated an awareness of “otherness” more than recognizing similarities. With otherness comes a need for empathy. The otherness, he believes, is partly a reaction to the colonial taint of homogeneity, yet wonders that although “a shift away from such homogenizing and domineering impulses was deeply necessary, . . . have we perhaps moved too far in the other direction?”. In an age preoccupied with borders and security, empathy can open “channels of potential interaction and understanding between diverse others” (29). Therefore, even if empathy is not intrinsically moral, nor does it always work towards the right action<sup>14</sup>, it is still an effective tool to counter polarity of views between the Us vs. Them divide.

Before examining Pakistani literature’s potential to evoke empathy, it is important to delineate the two different kinds of Pakistani Anglophone writings that have met with an avid reception in the Western literary market in the post 9/11 period. Both strains connect with human rights discourse in divergent ways. Firstly, there are autobiographical works, mostly by women, often written in collaboration with journalists, that are intentionally geared towards rights awareness; secondly, there are works of fiction, with the potential to be read as rights narratives that problematize commonly understood interpretations of human rights. The role of these writings is both valuable and disputable, as is reflected in its widely divergent reception by global and local audiences, and in its ambivalent position vis-a-vis universal human rights debates, mainly because Pakistani authors find themselves navigating the paradox of conflicting responsibilities: to write about present day injustices caused by the

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed reading, see: Oxley, Julinna C. *The Moral Dimensions of Empathy: Limits and Applications in Ethical Theory and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.



failure of the state without being accused of subscribing to Western agendas that promote the same instances of violence to justify military aggression in Pakistan. Therefore, an examination of how Pakistani English literature speaks to the global reader is not only timely, but gainful in its insights.

In the case of memoirs, increasingly regarded as the most effective conduits for human rights awareness because of their testimonial value (Schaffer & Smith 2004), recent Pakistani writings have generated the most debate. Autobiographical works, have therefore become political and controversial in nature, because human rights issues that emerge from their writing and circulation. Treating contemporary Pakistani memoirs as straightforward instruments for defending human rights in the Third World<sup>15</sup> is, therefore, a simplistic approach. It is mainly for this reason that memoirs like Malala Yousafzai's *I am Malala*, and Mukhtaran Mai's *In the Name of Honour* (2007), despite their wide international acclaim, have garnered a largely negative reaction in Pakistan.

Such memoirs, mostly written in collaboration with Western journalists, have been criticised by Pakistani fiction writers like Fatima Bhutto (2013) because one is “never sure whose voice is leading whose,” or whether its “message will be colonised by one power or other for its own insidious agendas”. These memoirs influence the shaping of public opinion by limiting the knowledge about Pakistan to its most negative aspects. Thus, a reader

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<sup>15</sup> The term “Third World” has a history associated with the politics of the Cold War period, when the United States, the United Kingdom and its allies were referred to as the First World; the Soviet Union, China, and the Communist Bloc were Second World countries; and countries non-aligned with either of these groups were termed Third-World. The term “Third World” has since been used more generally to refer to developing countries with poor economies and limited industrialization. In this dissertation, my use of this term stands interchangeably for the Global South: less developed and often poorer. It is not, however, my intention to ignore the contestation about the stereotypical use of this word, especially since some of the traditionally seen Third World countries like Brazil and India have now emerged as powerful economies in their own right.

becomes unknowingly complicit in utilizing the cause of women's rights for justifying war because the language of human rights is interchangeable with the discourse for freedom, and has gained an authority in international circles (Abu-Lughod 2013, 81). Academics have voiced their concern about this trend, especially "predominant paradigm framing the production, circulation and reception of these [women's rights] narratives" (Zine et al. 2007, 272).

To counter the appropriation of these life narratives by the West, it is important to suggest strategies that encourage contextualized readings to allow for a broader and more fruitful engagement with such memoirs, one through which the writings can be analyzed not only for their content, but also as commodities that can influence global audiences in complex ways. To this end, it is crucial to highlight the ideological and geo-political positions of the local versus global readership in effort to bridge current divisions.

As far as Pakistani fiction is concerned, it is perhaps portentous that the new wave of writing has emerged on the Anglophone literary scene concurrently with the development of human rights literature as a distinct field. Indeed, authors including Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Muhammad Hanif and Jamil Ahmad have attracted significant international accolades and literary prizes. These newly emergent writers, jokingly dubbed the "Pak Pack" by Kamila Shamsie (quoted in Shah 2010), have captured more attention in the post 9/11 period than at any prior time, mainly because with the international focus turning to Pakistan's role in the War on Terror, Pakistani writers in English have found a more receptive publishing industry in the West that is ready to capitalize on the global curiosity about Pakistan and the neighboring Afghanistan.

Pakistani authors demonstrate an awareness of their responsibility in bridging cultural barriers through the written word, increasingly making a mark in global academia. Novels

like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) are read in postcolonial courses at universities around the world as an example of "writing back" to the West. Others, like *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) by Nadeem Aslam, or *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie, that speak directly to the War on Terror and its effect on Pakistani identity, are read as examples of contemporary Anglophone literature that reflect a sense of optimism about overcoming differences in a period of dire conflict. Jamil Ahmad's fiction, in contrast, is retrospective<sup>16</sup> in its method and content. Although it is in an altogether unique style, being the first and only book by the author, based on his personal experiences as a civil servant in Pakistan's tribal belt, Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* is still driven by a similar commitment to historicity.

From Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), to his recent novel *Exit West* (2017), the effort to both write back and write beyond 9/11 is evident. In a recent interview, Hamid said that it is time that the attention of writers turns towards the future: "I think we need to radically reimagine the future. Citizens, artist, writers, politicians, everyone. What's happening now is our failure to come up with radical new futures that we think could maybe come in to existence. If we don't, then that space is abandoned to people who are peddling nostalgic disasters" (Hamid quoted in Milo 2017). Hamid's view of a radical change is to stop writing cyclically from within a disaster site, which is primarily what 9/11 literature from the West has done. Limiting 9/11 fiction to trauma writing curtails the very use of

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<sup>16</sup> In *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11*, Aroosa Kanwal categorizes fiction produced by Pakistani writers in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks as 'post 9/11 fiction,' and 'retrospective prologues to post 9/11 fiction.' The first category foregrounds the 'repercussions of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the lives of Pakistanis in the diaspora and at home,' and writings in the latter category 'look at political decisions and social factors in Pakistan from the late 1970s onwards that have contributed towards Pakistan's image as a terrorist land, particularly after 9/11' (Kanwal 7). As such, Shamsie's novel falls in the first category, while Ahmad's novel falls close to, if not perfectly, in the second. Ahmad's stories are set in pre-1970s Pakistan, but identify an important connecting thread with a colonial past that still reverberates in tribal lives today.

empathy in overcoming differences, by making it exclusive to one side of the Us versus Them divide. In her book *The Moral Dimensions of Empathy* (2011), Julinna Oxley explains that empathy is biased, in that one is more likely to empathize with people closest them, “with victims in an immediate situation...with those who are present, rather than those who are absent” (3-4). In most cases, 9/11 fiction in the West invites a one-way empathy towards American victims, while excluding from a claim to empathy the victims of the global reverberations of the consequent war on terror. It is therefore important to stress that writers “work to establish a sphere wherein each voice has an equal opportunity of being heard” (Gauthier 2015, 10).

One of the reasons why contemporary Pakistani writers like Kamila Shamsie and Nadeem Aslam are important in this regard is that their writings reflect a sway between optimism and pessimism, and represent the somewhat ambivalent position of Pakistani Anglophone writers in response to the geo-political future of the world beyond 9/11. Both authors remind readers that there is a prior history that feeds into the events of 9/11, yet the ambivalence of their position also arises from the fact that their writing cannot avoid being political to some extent. Indeed, Aslam admits: “I come from Pakistan and live in England as a brown man. I don’t have the luxury to be non-political, either in life or in my work” (Aslam quoted in Doshi 2017). Another important point to note is that fiction writers in Pakistan have directed their writing towards a double-pronged approach to human rights: to highlight violations of Pakistani citizens arising from international geopolitical interferences (Shamsie, Aslam and Hamid), but also to expose failures of the Pakistani state. Examples of the latter would be Muhammad Hanif’s (2012) *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and Daniyal Mueenuddin’s (2010 b.) *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, both of which lay bare issues like acid violence

again women, power politics, police incompetence, gross neglect of patients in hospitals, discrimination against minorities, and rampant corruption.

In looking at how both fictional and non-fictional narratives shape the understanding of human rights, the scope of this study will be limited to the context of post 9/11 Pakistan, especially rights in relation to the War on Terror. These observations will be made through a combination of methodologies: by tracing the patterns of reader reception of Pakistani writings in local newspaper reports<sup>17</sup> and reviews, and in international news and media<sup>18</sup>; supporting critical views with insights from authors' interviews and book reports, and examining official human rights reports and government documents<sup>19</sup>; as well as through close readings of contemporary Pakistani fiction by Shamsie, Hamid, Hanif, Mueenuddin and Ahmad, in combination with a study of theoretical works on human rights and War on Terror.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters, structured to commence with an overview of the history of human rights, the importance of the narrative form in its development, and the complexity in reading post 9/11 Pakistani literature as human rights narratives. Subsequent chapters separately address the two kinds of Pakistani writings: memoirs and fiction. Firstly, there is a closer examination of two representative memoirs by women, followed by fiction written about women and their position in Pakistani society, and lastly, fiction that relates to the War on Terror and international human rights. The

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<sup>17</sup> Some Pakistani newspapers that I have drawn from include: *Dawn*, *Herald*, *Geo News*, *Daily Times*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*.

<sup>18</sup> International media sources include: *TIME*, *BBC*, *NBC*, *CNN*, *CBC*, *NPR*, *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Independent*, *The Spectator*, *The Telegraph*, *The Globe and the Mail*, *The Economist*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Hindu*, *Tehelka*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express*.

<sup>19</sup> I have consulted official documents from the following human rights organizations: UNHCR, UNESCO, *Asian Human Rights Commission*, International Crisis Group.

dissertation concludes with the future direction of Pakistani Anglophone literature, and traces the trends in the most recent fiction emerging from Pakistan.

As Moore and Goldberg suggest, it is important to understand the evolution of normative human rights when we read literary texts for their illumination of these rights both “as founded on particular assumptions” and “as subject to change” (2). Chapter one, which charts this evolution, is divided in three sections. The first section briefly traces the origins of human rights, and follows the different ways in which human rights movement has been historicized in recent years; from its roots in the European Enlightenment, to the drafting to the three key declarations of human rights that have led to its present importance as a discourse of universalism. The section also looks at the difficulties in the discourse of universal human rights, particularly following matters of global security in the post 9/11 period. The second section makes the important connection between literature and human rights, drawing on recent important theoretical works in this area by Hunt, Anker and Slaughter, among others. It also delineates the challenges in reading these texts as useful commentaries in the field of human rights. The last section examines Pakistani literature’s confrontation with two conflicting responsibilities: to write about human rights abuses, while not appearing to be complicit in Western agendas that promote the very same instances of violence to justify military action in Pakistan.

Chapter two is also divided into three sections. Section one provides a concise overview of the current women’s rights laws in Pakistan, the discrepancies between Islamic *Sharia* laws and international human rights laws, and the problems in their interpretation and implementation. The second and the third sections offer a close examination two biographies by Pakistani women, both written in collaboration with Western journalists. The rise of human rights discourse has led to memoirs becoming useful conduits for rights awareness.

The publication of works like *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai and *In the Name of Honour* by Mukhtaran Mai are driven by the same purpose, and Western readers have recognized in them an obvious message about women's rights. However, the reception of these works has been less celebratory in Pakistan than in the West. This difference points to the complex roles of post 9/11 audiences in making sense of an age that has witnessed the War on Terror concurrently with the universalization project of human rights. It is, therefore, pertinent to look beyond these memoirs as straightforward human rights narratives, to critique the books as commodities driven by the politics of its production, marketing and reception. Analysed in this light, these memoirs raise different, but equally important questions, about the role of the global publishing machine in the legitimization of areas of human rights concern. This chapter aims to highlight how conflicting reader reactions in Pakistan and in the Western world shape the books' conversation with human rights in the current climate of geopolitical tension.

The third chapter examines the representation of Pakistani women in recent fiction, and how Pakistani authors highlight their changing roles in Pakistani society and the challenges they still face in getting their rights. The first section weaves together three recent conceptual developments about female identity in the Pakistani imagination which concern the creation of a female super-heroine figure. I explore the benefits and limitations of a literary and artistic representation of this figure in championing Pakistani women's rights causes. In his latest novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Mohammed Hanif says he wanted to create a "superwoman figure". Around the same time, a Pakistani animator also released a serial about a super-heroine who turns from a schoolteacher into *Burka Avenger* to fight the Taliban who stand against female education. A parallel theme can be seen in the induction of fully veiled women commandos by the Pakistan army, trained to fight terrorists in Northern

Pakistan. All these recent developments offer insights into the difficulty in the legitimization of a Pakistani super-heroine figure, one that fits within the religious and nationalist ideologies of post 9/11 Pakistan. This section examines how the role of a Pakistani super-heroine is different than its Western counterpart, and whether such an ideal is indeed useful for the larger population of women of Pakistan. The second section explores how Pakistani fiction attempts to break Western stereotypical representations of Pakistani women as veiled and oppressed. A significant number of women in urban Pakistan are highly educated and hold powerful positions. In recent years, women from middle and lower classes in Pakistan have also tried to cross gender barriers and push back social boundaries. Through close reading of Daniyal Mueenuddin's short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* I examine how the author contends that traditional Pakistani masculinity is threatened by women's increasing freedom.

Chapter four is a critical commentary on four Pakistani novels (*Burnt Shadows*, *The Blind Man's Garden*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *The Wandering Falcon*) that respond to the events of 9/11 and the war on terror in its aftermath. These novels reflect the ambivalence of contemporary Pakistani fiction writers oscillating between the responsibility to historicize 9/11 from an alternative perspective, one that challenges the one-sided Western view of the event, and the wish to project a global future beyond the event. In all four novels, the importance of history in making sense of the events that led up to 9/11, and the devastating effects of the war on terror, hold primary focus. However, interspersed in the narrative is also a hope to fill the gaps in understanding between the East and the West through the literary medium.

The concluding section sums up the contributions of Pakistani literature in the twentieth and twenty-first century Anglophone literary canon, and identifies future trends in



Pakistani writing, including the move towards speculative fiction and issues of border crossings and immigration in new fiction, like *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, and *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam. I suggest that Pakistani speculative fiction offers new avenues of research for future scholars in this area.

## Chapter 1

### Human Rights and Literature

Cultural discourses and their texts, in many media forms and genres, tell stories of what it means to be human or to be denied humanity, and of these storytelling forms, Literature is by far the most persuasive. (Pramod Nayar 2016)

In the above-mentioned quote, Nayar (2016) echoes the opinion of several scholars in the field of human rights literature in recent times (Slaughter 2007; Dawes 2007; Anker 2012) in identifying the importance of both *telling* and of *listening* to stories as central to the project of humanitarian action (xi). This makes storytelling, both fiction and non-fiction, essential to the understanding of the human subject.

Contemporary Pakistani literature provides narratives with a historical subtext grounded in a colonial legacy that can be instrumental in shedding light on the contradictions in human rights discourse, particularly in relation to the War on Terror. It is important to trace back the contradictory nature of human rights before attempting an analysis of the contribution of Pakistani writings to the topic. Therefore, I revert to a brief overview of the origin and the evolution of human rights at the start of my dissertation to serve as the foundation of this study. I also address the problems faced in a consensus about a universal definition of rights. Furthermore, in this chapter, I outline the different ways in which the connection between human rights discourse and literature has been theorised by contemporary scholars, and introduce the broader challenges of reading contemporary Pakistani English writings from global and regional human rights perspectives in the post-9/11 period of geopolitical tension. The sub-sections elaborate on each of these topics separately and provide a background for the later chapters that engage directly with Pakistani literature.

## Review of Critical Work on the Origins of Human Rights:

*Inter arma enim silent lex*

In times of war, the law falls silent.<sup>20</sup>

Any attempt at historicizing human rights is faced with an immediate dilemma: while humans have always had “natural” rights, the articulation of these rights has had a relatively recent past, now generally recognized in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, passed in 1948. It is the articulation of these rights originating in the West and its permeation into global contexts that is of interest to this study. Tracing the language and idiom of what is now recognized as international human rights bill is important for comparisons with localized or traditional understandings of human rights in other parts of the world that have often resulted in tensions and debates about the effectiveness of the universal project of human rights altogether.

The term “human rights” was not widely or significantly used prior to the 1940s, and to understand what this “inchoate” term encompasses, attempts have been made in recent years to historicize the field. Understandably so, it is difficult to trace the origins of human rights when they are seen to arise from the “natural” rights of man. Any attempt at identifying spatial or temporal starting points for these rights seems illogical because of the very fact that they have always existed. Nevertheless, any enquiry into the history of modern human rights must include a survey of the period of Western enlightenment, past three milestone declarations: The *American Declaration of Independence* in 1776; the *French Declaration of*

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<sup>20</sup> From the Latin speech, *Pro Tito Annio Milone ad Iudicem Oratio (Pro Milone)* made by Marcus Tullius Cicero in defense of his friend Titus Annius Milo. Online at <[https://archive.org/stream/oratioprotitoann00ciceuoft/oratioprotitoann00ciceuoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/oratioprotitoann00ciceuoft/oratioprotitoann00ciceuoft_djvu.txt)>

*the Rights of Man & Citizen* in 1789; and the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948.

As Kenneth Cmiel (2004) points out, it is important to note that the first two declarations meant for these rights to be protected by the national states within their own boundaries only. Not until the 1940s, was there any serious effort made for these rights to be monitored by international bodies. After the atrocities witnessed during World War II, like the mass killing of Jews in gas chambers and starvation in concentration camps, as well as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a law against genocide was passed by the United Nations and the international community was asked to ensure its protection. Thus, the move from nations safeguarding rights, to an international commitment to human rights can be seen to have taken place only in the mid-twentieth century. This marks the shift from politics to activism. If eighteenth century enlightenment is seen to be the source of human rights awareness in the field of politics, then the 1940s is the first wave that ushered in an era of international activism for these rights (Cmiel, 126). The Cold War years following WWII saw a dampening of interest in human rights and only in the 1970s came a renewed period of interest in the rights of individuals. This second wave witnessed an emergence of NGOs like *Amnesty International* in 1961, and *Human Rights Watch* in 1978, originally called *Helsinki Watch* which was created in New York to surveil the Soviet Union's compliance to the Helsinki Accord. It had a public policy of naming-and-shaming any act of violation by reporting it to the media and making it known through well-known newspapers like *The New York Times* and through channels like the BBC. This activism was the result of globalization that saw the human rights movement shift from the United Nations to international NGOs. UN representatives were sidelined, and so was the importance of their work agenda in support of the "right to self-determination of peoples". The Western NGOs concentrated only

on exposing abuses of civil and political rights around the world and tensions between the UN and NGOs grew. Only with the end of the Cold War in 1980s, did the struggle for human rights return to the UN as it became apparent that there was a need for drafting international laws if any real progress was to be made in areas such as the rights of women and indigenous peoples (Cmiel, 130).

The first clear understanding of the developmental blocks of human rights was proposed in 1979 by Karel Vasak at the *International Institute of Human Rights* in Strasbourg, although Vasak had hinted at that division earlier (Vasak 1977). The division is the now widely recognized as the “Three Generations of Human Rights”: namely, the civic-political, socio-economic, and collective-developmental. These are seen to broadly correspond with the three tenets, Liberty-Equality-Fraternity, of the French Revolution of 1789. According to the Levine Institute’s description, the first-generation civic-political rights are about liberty, safeguarding an individual from the state and allowing participation in political life. Articles 3 to 21 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* protect these rights. The social-economic rights of the second generation guarantee equality to rights like education, employment, health etc. and specify the duties of the state towards individuals in ensuring equality. Articles 22 to 27 of the *Universal Declaration* protect these rights and these are also a part of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*. The third generation collective-developmental rights are more contested than the other two mainly because these are interpreted differently in different global regions and need the collaboration and involvement of both international states and individual citizens. These include environmental laws, and rights to cultural, economic and political freedom, including rights of self-determination of peoples. This category is also called “solidarity rights” and have

been expressed as “soft laws,” e.g. the *1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, and the *1994 Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights*.<sup>21</sup>

The three-generational model of human rights has more recently met with criticism from several scholars (Wellman 2000; Ife 2010; Macklem 2014). The classification of human rights that was based on the geopolitical situation between 1940s and 1990s is no longer considered to be satisfactory or relevant. The historically ordered three generations from eighteenth century liberalism, to nineteenth century socialism, and into twentieth century visions of solidarity are too grounded in Western ideals to represent a universal picture of human rights. Also, the labels, first, second, and third might appear to some to be indicative of prioritizing some rights over others, e.g. third generation rights not being as important as first generation rights. There is also the suggestion in this classification that the first and second generation rights were solely rights of the individual, while the third-generation rights are collective rights. This parallels the Western rise of individualism<sup>22</sup> with the development of human rights. But individual rights can sometimes be applied collectively as well, like first generation freedom of expression, and second generation ones like women’s right to education. In the same vein, third generation rights like clean environment, or economic conditions, can benefit individuals as much as the community (Ife 2010, 114-116). Also, Vasak’s metaphor of “generations” incorrectly conveys the sense that one set of human rights were replaced by the next generation of human rights. Wellman (2000) thinks that the three-generational metaphor is both dangerous and misleading, and because generations succeed

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<sup>21</sup> For a description of these rights see “Three Generations of Human Rights.” The Levin Institute. The State University of New York. <<http://www.globalization101.org/three-generations-of-rights/>>

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed examination of individualism’s origins in Western thought, read: Siedentop, Larry. *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. Penguin Books, London, 2015.

one another, the impression is that one set of rights is replaced by another, much like parents are succeeded by their children, which is not true in the case of these rights (641). To avoid such problems, instead of the numbered categorization, Johan Galtung (1994) suggested colour codes for the three kinds of human rights: blue for civic-political, red for social-economic, and green for collective rights, which suggest parallels with political ideologies. However, that does not answer all the debates about how and why human rights developed from the past to its present-day position. As Macklem points out, these chronological accounts of human rights do not offer anything meaningful about human rights in international law, which are of a much more recent value (4).

Among the historians who have taken on the challenge to bridge the gap between the global (universal) and the local (particular), Lynn Hunt's (2007) important contribution to the historiography of human rights is considered important on two counts. Firstly, she overcomes the stumbling block that human rights have been present as long as humans have existed and that there can be no real point of tracing an origin of these rights. She shifts her enquiry away from the argument about the intrinsic presence of these rights, to identifying what point in time we started speaking about human rights as a "meaningful concept and a viable political project" (Pendas 98). An initial understanding of human rights starts from the premise in the American declaration that these are "self-evident" truths for all humans without exception. Therefore, human rights "require three interlocking qualities: rights must be *natural* (inherent in human beings); *equal* (the same for everyone); and *universal* (applicable everywhere). For rights to be *human* rights, all humans everywhere in the world must possess them equally and only because of their status as human beings" (Hunt, 20). But for Hunt, the three qualities of naturalness, equality, and universality are not sufficient to define human rights. "Human rights only become meaningful when they gain political content. They are not the rights of

humans in a state of nature; they are right of humans in society. They are not human rights as opposed to divine rights, or human rights as opposed to animal rights; they are rights of humans vis-à-vis each other. They are therefore rights guaranteed in the secular political world (even if they are called ‘sacred’), and they are rights that require active participation from those who hold them” (21).

Secondly, although Hunt follows other historians (Ishay 2004; Lauren 2011) in identifying the origins of human rights in the Western enlightenment period of the eighteenth century, she deems the greater influence on the concept of human rights to be enlightened *feelings* rather than enlightenment *ideas* (Emphasis original. Pendas, 98). In Hunt’s words, “[t]he claim of self-evidence relies ultimately on an emotional appeal; it is convincing if it strikes a chord within each person. Moreover, we are most certain that a human right is at issue when we feel horrified by its violation” (26). Because emotion is the basis for understanding these rights, it is important that the language appeals to the senses as well as to the intellect. That is why, for Hunt, literature provides the necessary aesthetic tool for evoking the “self-evidence” needed to recognize the rights of others.

As Hunt argues, human rights are not just a doctrine formulated in documents; they rest on a disposition toward other people, a set of convictions about what people are like and how they know right or wrong in the secular world. Philosophical ideas, legal traditions, and revolutionary politics had to have this kind of inner emotional reference point for human rights to be truly “self-evident” (27).

Hunt identifies “autonomy” and “empathy” as the two main qualities needed for the development of human rights. These qualities are culture-specific and connected to both bodily and emotional experiences. The slow evolution of Western enlightenment ideas that spanned centuries, resulted in the weaning of man from the communal to an individual state.



Along with legal and emotional independence, came the ideas that every “body” is autonomous and the feeling that other “bodies” must also think and feel in the same manner; therefore, human rights “depend both on self-possession and on the recognition that all others are equally self-possessed” (29). Hunt believes that the human rights revolution is an ongoing one. This means that it is a continuing debate which has not, and can never reach, a definitive conclusion that can be “declared” evident once and for all times. Because feelings of empathy and selfhood are involved in forming the foundational conviction that outlines the natural rights of a human, our understanding of these rights and who has claim to these rights change with time and circumstance. Sometimes the emotions that underpin the understanding human rights change in reaction to the very act of declaration (Hunt, 29).

A good example of the change in an understanding of rights at different points in historical time, can be seen in the circumstances that led to the human rights treaty most pertinent to any postcolonial enquiry: The United Nations *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Eventually passed in 1966, its first article reads: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.<sup>23</sup> The journey from the promise of self-determination rights to its realization in the form of international law<sup>24</sup> is

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<sup>23</sup> *UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Treaties.un.org. Web. <<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20999/volume-999-I-14668-English.pdf>>

<sup>24</sup> When discussing international laws, it is important to highlight the difference between “International Law” and the “Supranational Institutions” that can impose decisions on otherwise democratic states. Unlike the term Inter-national organization “which is a system where states cooperate to common goals. The will of the organization is the result of internal procedures aimed at putting together the will of the largest number of states, as expressed by representatives of states,” a Supra-national organization “is able to impose its decisions even over states who disagree. And, in order to do so, it enjoys its own legitimacy, derived directly from citizens.”  
<https://supranationaldemocracy.net/2015/02/10/supranational-vs-international/>

essential in piecing together the whole picture of human rights history. It is also the rights article which has been of primary interest to the ex-colonies in their liberation struggle, but has been the one most contested by Westerners “who did not agree that this was a fundamental human right” (Cmiel, 123). The enthusiasm of the Allied governments at the start of World War II in signing the Atlantic Treaty promising self-determination rights, waned in the postwar years when faced with a “contest between international human rights and national sovereignty” that forced them to recognize “the profound difficulty of having it both ways” (Lauren, 155). That the realization was a difficult one can be judged from the way leaders tried to delay its inevitable consequences, like the question of the final liquidation of the British Empire. When prompted to remember the promise of self-determination rights in the *Atlantic Charter*, Churchill was quick to step back and say, it was “no more than a simple, rough and ready, war-time statement of a goal” (Quoted by Lauren, 155). This strain of resistance to anti-colonialist struggle in the evolution of human rights identified by Lauren is itself indicative of the Western origins of what we understand as the human rights movement today. Also, the fact that historians like Samuel Moyon (2010) will go to great lengths to prove “Why Anticolonialism Wasn’t a Human Rights Movement” (84), brings into focus the different political driving forces behind the two parallel movements and highlights the importance of this difference “because it forces a new perspective on the relationship between Western universalism and global struggle” (86). For post-World War II anticolonialist leaders, individual rights did not matter as much as collective rights that offered them liberation from empire. Consequently, they found in the language of human rights an ally in their fight for freedom as separate nations. The main connection between human rights and anticolonial struggle is in the appropriation by nationalist leaderships of rights discourse for the cause of decolonization, and in the overlapping narratives of both

movements prompted by shared historical circumstance. The Oxford *Encyclopedia of Human Rights* states that “although not often recognized as such, anticolonial struggles were not only nationalist movements but also veritable rights movements” (364). This connection is of continuing importance in that it translates into current global dilemmas:

Three main features of colonial rule tended to hinder human rights. First, the basic shape of the colonial states themselves was the consequence of European administrative convenience or imperial competition. Second, colonial states installed authoritarian frameworks for local administration, reducing most indigenous rulers to relatively minor cogs in the administrative machinery and leaving until the terminal days of colonialism the creation of a veneer of democratization. Third, colonial states introduced and widely applied European law codes, notably in the urban areas, whereas traditional legal precepts were incompletely codified and relegated to inferior position in civil law, particularly in the rural areas. These historical realities shape the human rights conditions in many postcolonial societies. It has therefore been suggested that formerly colonized African and Asian countries need to adopt regimes of human rights that not only are founded on basic universal human standards but also take into account the distinctive historical legacies of colonialism for human rights in these societies. (Forsyth, *Encyclopaedia of Human Rights*, 370)

Because of the continuing challenges that the colonial legacy poses for universal human rights, it is important to address whether international human rights law still offers a viable solution toward world peace and solidarity given that its history reveals it to be a purely Western construct in its connection to the rise of liberalism. Also, whether the local/universal divide in human rights discourse can ever be overcome for the term not to become an “empty signifier” (Cmiel, 126); and can regional histories of human rights ever be merged successfully with global ones without getting into further quagmires like “What are the

relevant archives and sources? In what languages? How does one acquire the necessary local knowledge to write transnational histories of multiple locations?" (Pendas, 96).

One of the responses to this dilemma would be to redefine the concept of universalism altogether. Stanton notes that after much derision by postmodernist scholars like Lyotard, the term "universalism" has entered the literary and human rights vocabulary with renewed significance (65). This time, turning back on Lyotard's rejection of grand narratives and privileging of the local and particular, Amanda Anderson (1998) has heralded the start of what she terms a "new universalism," which can be better described by what it must *not* be, rather than what it should be.<sup>25</sup> Besides not being essentialist, ancient and classical, it must *not* be static, immutable, and singular. Instead, it is hoped for the new universal to be historic, contingent, contextual, and above all, plural. But these poststructuralist peculiarities that "are designed to permeate the universal with constitutive peculiarity. . . [may] turn the new universalism into a catachresis" (Stanton, 66). A universalism constructed out of shifting particulars is in itself a paradox.

These debates around universal vs. particular rights are daunting for historians and human rights scholars alike, who continue to look for answers. However, over a period of time, particulars have been absorbed in the universalism that these rights promise, e.g. the *Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and their Families* in 1999 and the United Nations declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples in 2007 are examples of this development. The "ongoing production of new texts to affirm rights that new contextual conditions make apparent and that require address undermines the notion of a fixed, timeless,

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<sup>25</sup> Stanton quoting Amanda Anderson, "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism and the Divided Legacies of Modernity," *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 265.

eternal universalism in this regime” (Stanton, 69). A continual redefinition of the terms “human” and “universal” that responds to historical changes of context might be the only way forward.

The biggest change in the human rights, one that needs examination, is the shift of focus from the post-Cold War collective rights movement to matters of state security. With the new terminology of “global war on terror,” abbreviated as GWOT, “[t]errorism has become a global condition; it is no longer confined to individual nation-states” (Christie, 6). The universalization of terror terminology has displaced international human rights norms, and “at the moment these are being reshaped so that they might be sacrificed to the expediency of security from terror” (Christie, 9). Michael Ignatieff gives a very good example of this kind of a change in his article in *The New York Times* when he draws attention to the extent to which human rights had become an ascendant moral vocabulary in foreign affairs since the end of the Cold War, but has lost its potency since 9/11. As evidence of this alarming decline of the moral element in human rights, Ignatieff gives very pertinent examples:

Western pressure on China to honour human rights, never especially effective, has stopped altogether. Chinese support for the war on terror has secured Western silence about repression in the Xinjiang region. China now says it has a problem there with Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists, and it is straining to link them to Al Qaeda. . . A similar chill is settling over world politics. Australia's government uses the threat of terrorism to justify incarcerating Afghan refugees in a desert compound. . . And President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has decided that his longtime political opponents are really “terrorists.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “Is the Human Rights Era Ending,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2002. Retrieved October 15, 2015.  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/05/opinion/is-the-human-rights-era-ending.html>>

In this period of obsession with the perceived threat of terrorism, the challenge for human rights is to pull itself out of this crisis by finding a balance between security and liberty. If human rights discourse was the order of the day in the post-Cold War period, then matters of global security have supplanted that narrative today. The implications of GWOT on the development of human rights is still unfolding and there is a dire need for new solutions to age old problems.

### **The Rise of an Inter-discipline: Literature and Human Rights**

“Human Rights Literature,” as a term, was conceptualized in 2010 in the foreword “The Tremendous Power of Literature” to an anthology of short stories by writers from around the world titled *Freedom*. This collection of stories was published to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Writings that fall under this classification are driven by a belief that literature has the power to bring about a change in the world by promoting a universal understanding of human pain and suffering, resulting in renewed social commitment towards a collective improvement in the lives of fellow human beings. This discipline is based in what was termed “Engaged Literature” by Jean-Paul Sartre in his famous essay “What is Literature?” published in 1948, written in the post World War II period that Joseph R. Slaughter identifies as the key moment of convergence between literature and human rights, and also the same year in which the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Sartre thought it the moral duty of writers to directly address political issues, make known the oppressors, and bring about awareness to the oppressed about their rights. As Kaminsky reminds us, “the right to produce, circulate, and read literary texts is a subset of human rights, literature constitutes a piece of the very stuff of human rights” (44). Article 19 of UDHR

guarantees freedom of expression and to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Yet, Human Rights Literature sets itself a difficult task simply because human rights concerns can have shifting perspectives in a culturally diverse world.

Literature’s connection with human rights can be addressed from two angles: Firstly, the act of writing is consciously driven to reveal human rights violations, atrocities, and acts of terror with the purpose of triggering reform; and secondly, by employing specific reading strategies, literary texts can yield human rights lessons even when they do not directly represent specific acts of violence. Of the former kind, testimonies and life-writing about pain and suffering have emerged as obvious examples of the close connection between literature and human rights. A recent development is that narrative memory, or the “telling” of stories about horrifying atrocities, does more than just reveal the truth or stand as official testimony of a crime. It is also a healing process that is important in its own right. It gives a voice to sufferers and is, therefore in itself a basic right to speech as opposed to being silenced (Peters 19). Julie Peters (2012) traces the genealogy of the modern concept of the term “literature” in which “fictionality takes a central place” and the modern application of the word “rights” as “possessed innately by virtue of one’s humanity,” to have emerged simultaneously in the eighteenth century (22). During the eighteenth century, as both these concepts were becoming familiar in common discourse, they were already influencing each other. Literary texts were influencing the imagination of citizens newly becoming aware of their rights; and political writings like pamphlets and public speeches were relying on literary aesthetic and narrative. Moving into the nineteenth and early twentieth century, rights and humanitarian discourse continued to utilize literature as a vehicle for creating “narratives of power”. From the second half of the twentieth century however, in the wake of horrific atrocities seen in the

world wars, and the more recent acts of terrorism, literature has taken on a new role in the form of “narratives of suffering” that bring the private into the public sphere as a new extension of humanitarianism. Narratives of suffering give a new sense of legitimacy to the discourses of both human rights and literature which were seen to have exhausted their original defining paradigms by the late twentieth century, and since both are “institutionally redemptive projects,” they have much to gain: literature redeems itself from the charge of “aesthetic detachment,” while human rights from “taint of technocratic trade” (Peters, 32-34).

Another important contribution of life-writing from different parts of the globe in extending the understanding of human rights, is that they tell localized stories of injustices that may not always employ normative human rights discourse as it is understood in the West. As such, these narratives “can trouble established interpretations of rights violations, shift definitions and framings of human rights, and test modes of advocacy” and “[i]n doing so, they both affirm something called ‘human rights,’ always a moving target rather than a fixed concept, and redefine the grounds upon which those rights are asserted” (Schaffer and Smith, 229). In this sense, theoretically, memoirs or indeed other forms of life-writing can extend the scope of human rights by incorporating cultural difference, and by posing a healthy ongoing challenge to the way these rights are articulated within and outside of the United Nations, pushing for social change.

The second angle from which the connection between literature and human rights can be viewed involves using the analytical lens of human rights in critiquing and teaching literary texts to better understand injustices and atrocities in multiple cultural and historical contexts. In tracing the development of human rights and literature as an inter-discipline, Goldberg and Moore (2012) comment that although the etymological connection between the humanities and human rights is quite evident, their pairing together as an academic field is



new. Human rights scholars have often recognized the importance of reading cultural texts to understand the struggle against injustices, and similarly, literature academics have always concentrated on the various interpretations of texts that represent suffering, only recently have both come together as an interdisciplinary field of study expanding from “questions and approaches developed over several decades in trauma, postcolonial, holocaust and genocide, and feminist studies” (Goldberg & Moore 2012, 1-2).

The merger of human rights and literature is not without its problems. Firstly, there are tensions between the “theoretical, esoteric, and aesthetic properties of the concept of human rights,” and the “legal, practical, and political instruments” of human rights activism, a relationship which is both problematic and productive in understanding of human rights (McClennen & Moore 2015, 2). And secondly, the fields of human rights and literature are both informed by multiple other fields of study like history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, media and film, political science, feminism, and economics, to name a few, which makes an interdisciplinary study that moves beyond the “compartmentalization of knowledge” in each of these fields especially challenging (Goldberg & Moore 2012, 3). Added to that is the matter of the political responsibility of textual interpretations that highlight human rights issues:

Literary texts that represent state-sponsored or condoned atrocities, and the critical analysis and teaching of those texts, function together to bring cultural production and scholarly activity into the realm of transnational politics. . . Like the writers of the texts they study, scholars and teachers of this literature have also been active participants in the struggle for human rights, not unproblematically, telling the story of those who tell the story, bringing these accounts to the attention of a broader intellectual community, disentangling their complexities, and teaching the texts that spread the word. (Kaminsky, 45)

Considering the political climate of an increasingly suspicious world under capitalist forces, and the resulting nation-state ideologies that resort to the use of terror tactics as a means of retaliation, it is vital to create strategies of reading that are progressive, or at the very least enable overarching views that read particular acts of injustice within a larger political and historical framework. Because of their contamination by global capitalism, Pheng Cheah (2016) terms human rights as “violent gifts”. According to Cheah,

The irreducible contamination of the subject of human rights indicates that we can no longer theorize the normativity of rights claims in terms of the rational universality of a pure, atemporal and context-independent human dignity that is ultimately separated from economics or politics. . . Human rights are generated as concrete rights at the level of bodily needs and materialized through institutional practices as part of a complex of processes by which global capitalism continually sustains and reproduces itself through the production of human subjects with rights” (171-172).

Goldberg and Moore agree that the role of humanities should be to rethink the concept of freedom not as an escape *from*, but more as a condition to be achieved *within* the present reality of global capitalism (2012, 6), which is why reading strategies should be adapted to allow for the development of this view.

Theoretical works on human rights literature are trying to achieve these progressive goals. Goldberg and Moore’s more recent work, “Meditations on a Fractured Terrain: Human Rights and Literature” (2013) examines literature’s engagement with human rights and its relationship with atrocities around the world: “Our aim is to suggest a way of reading into and out of the *blast wave*, that space-time where so much is vanished. Such a way of reading would lift matter from the void and invite participation in the ethical task of generating meaning that is not limited by structures of identification or of instrumentalization, yet can attend to historical relationships and gaps in the existing frameworks of international

humanitarian and human rights laws (Emphasis added. 2013, 17)". Literature about catastrophes like the dropping of the atomic bomb, or the more recent 9/11 attacks all "share significant causal factors and reverberations" (Goldberg & Moore 2013, 15). The right strategies for reading literary texts about these events and making comparisons between such texts allow for a productive study of similarities and convergences among events of terror around the world. Calling such strategies "reading in and out of the blast wave" is an accurate way to put it. Instead of just reading each catastrophe in isolation, it should also be read as part of a reverberation caused by many factors beyond where and when the event happened. At the same time, readers must be cautious not to end up with singular interpretations of such literary texts. Otherwise these would end up no different than any hegemonic narrative constructed to be read only in one particular manner (Goldberg and Moore 2013, 16).

Besides the more obvious political reasons for reading human rights in literature today, several scholars have made the connection on a more elemental level. In different ways, most of these works make an important but basic connection between literature and the human about how fiction speaks to the emotion which is vital for understanding the concept of dignity that is central to the articulation of human rights. Of these works, as mentioned earlier, Lynn Hunt's *Inventing Human Rights* (2007) makes an important contribution. According to Hunt, modern experiences continue to shape our understanding of human rights whether they come from public art exhibitions or reading novels, because these experiences teach us how to empathize with fellow human beings (Hunt, 32). Adding on to such experiences is the increasing influence of electronic media and online exchange of ideas. The whirring speed and wide-reaching scope of ideas from around the world problematizes any straightforward definition of human rights. What was at first thought of as "self-evident" is not so clearly evident any more. As Hunt points out: "This claim of self-evidence, crucial to

human rights even now, gives rise to a paradox: if equality of rights is so self-evident, then why did this assertion have to [be] made and why was it only made in specific times and places? How can human rights be universal if they are not universally recognized?" (Hunt, 19-20)

Hunt traces the evolution of the term "human rights" and its various definitions across the centuries and also looks at eighteenth century epistolary novels, specifically Samuel Richardson's novels as models for inter-subjectivity and imagining equality that led to the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789. Hunt's main argument is that novels promote a strong sense of empathy that is essential for humanitarian feeling, and that is what translates into the language of universal human rights. For emphasis on such universal ties, she draws heavily on Benedict Anderson's idea about the importance of print culture in imagining communities that go beyond geographical boundaries. In her view, "imagined empathy" (32) is the premise for human rights, much like imagined communities are the foundation for nationalism. The novel, she argues, has been instrumental in the development of both these movements. In her last chapters, Hunt does point out the limitations of her theory about empathy; that although novel writing in the eighteenth century promoted the culture of empathy, it has also led to the sensationalism in the depiction of violence. Once the representation of violence and suffering is used for exploitative reasons, then empathy is not the main outcome. Added to this are the difficulties in overcoming colonial legacies and new structures of imperial power that stand in the way of a universal language of human rights. Michael Barnett (2011) shares Hunt's view about the difficulties of seeing empathy as a conceptual starting point for human rights. He points out the many criticisms levelled against humanitarianism, like Noam Chomsky's opinion that it serves only the interests of the powerful, and others that follow Marx's views on religion in reducing

humanitarianism to just a consolation strategy for the rich that helps them feel that they have in some way contributed to doing the right thing. Elizabeth Anker (2012), whose work is discussed in detail later in the chapter, also thinks that the evocation of empathy is likely to replace concrete action by fulfilling the sense of a moral responsibility that many people have, simply by making them feel good. Yet, despite these criticisms, Barnett insists that he treats humanitarianism “as a morally complicated creature, a flawed hero defined by the passions, politics, and powers of its times even as it tries to rise above them (7)”. Similarly, Hunt defends her views by concluding that however slow the international human rights bodies might be in responding to injustices, or their oftentimes failures in fulfilling the desired goals, “[h]uman rights are our only commonly shared bulwark against those evils” and that “[w]e must continually improve on the eighteenth-century version of human rights” (212).

Joseph Slaughter (2007) takes a step further and makes another equally important contribution to the field by comparing human rights discourse to the tradition of *bildungsroman* in literature. According to Slaughter, the German *bildung* philosophy is a reaction to the French revolution, one that later developed into the tradition of *bildungsroman* as a prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century genre. Slaughter makes a crucial connection between the writing of *The Rise of the Novel* by the literary critic Ian Watt and the drafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by Alan Watt, both emerging from the same concerns about human emancipation following World War II. While Ian Watt used *Robinson Crusoe* as an example of the German idea of *bildung*, which literally translates as “education or formation” to exemplify human individualism in the novel, the same novel’s character Crusoe became central to the modification by Alan Watt concerning the wording of a crucial clause in the UDHR. This modification in the draft shifted the whole emphasis from the individual alone,

to the more complex relationship between the individual and society in the understanding of “human obligation” (Slaughter 2007, 46). Slaughter treats human rights discourse and bildungsroman tradition as “enabling fictions” that use the “free and full development of the human personality” as literary allegories that make similar appeals (Slaughter 2012, 42). Yet paradoxically, both narratives oscillate between the value of human personality in its individual development, and its place within the societal framework. Thus, it seems that human rights law and the novel must mediate between the individual and the society by taking “two persons as subjects: the individual and the state, which historically is both the violator of human rights and the administrative unit that capacitates individuals as beneficiaries of human rights” (Slaughter 2012, 45). In that sense, the rights of “Friday” in Robinson Crusoe become a contestable field and thus this subaltern viewpoint is very pertinent to the postcolonial field of enquiry in which this study primarily based.

Elizabeth Anker takes a different view in *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature*, and critiques the idea of human dignity that propels human rights law, which she thinks is merely a fictitious construct. She identifies two paradoxes that “bedevil . . . [the] ‘liberal’ articulation of human rights.” Firstly, she thinks that liberal human rights discourses “exhibit a profound ambivalence toward embodiment” (Anker, 2). By that she means that the western enlightenment tradition that is a precursor to human rights, has preferred the intellect over the body following Cartesian ideas of duality and Kantian morals. As such, this view ignores corporeal and indigenous factors that are core dimensions of an embodied experience. This gives human rights a decidedly Eurocentric inheritance “overlooking circumstances wherein local, or indigenized, human rights vernaculars operate without reference to such a limited philosophical blueprint” (Anker, 4).

Secondly, Anker examines the paradox that arises from the language of human rights itself. She thinks that more recently human rights discourse has diverted from its original noble mission into “an obstructionist idiom that increasingly fulfills the opportunistic ends of selfish actors” (Anker, 2). In other words, the language of human rights has become polluted with neo-imperialist thinking and corrupt agendas, and does not necessarily serve the true cause of social justice. Human rights as a concept is therefore an intellectual construct, valuing Western philosophical ideals rather than something that is understood through physical experiences by the body. Following the identification of these basic problems in human rights narratives, Anker suggests a solution for these through the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty, the world was perceived primarily through the body, and he stressed embodiment to be a more direct source of knowledge than consciousness as traditionally thought. Therefore, Anker holds the opinion that his philosophy “gestures toward how a crucial fleshiness, density, and porosity might be returned to the dangerously idealized, and thus enfeebled subject that liberalism posits as the bearer of human rights” (49). Since Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of Art for an “embodied cognition,” and thinks that this medium can “estrangle the subject’s ordinary habits of seeing,” Anker follows that literature can help with better levels of human understanding (Anker 74). Using the phenomenological framework of Merleau-Ponty, Anker examines four novels at length in the rest of her book, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) by Nawal El Saadawi, *Disgrace* (1999) by J.M. Coetzee, and *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy for their aesthetic contribution in tracking an “embodied consciousness” (Anker, 74).

Nick Mansfield (2012) directs us to other equally important questions regarding the value of literature in promoting human rights. Mansfield starts by introducing the paradox

that human rights like any other kind of law, becomes violent in its end to counter violence, at times even more violent than the violence that it intends to target. Human rights discourse is therefore connected with violence in two ways. Firstly, it was the violence of wars itself that initially gave it articulation. And secondly, it is complicit with violence in its commitment to annihilate injustice through arbitrary power (Mansfield, 202). There must need be *some* law that is enforceable in case of human rights violation, and the authority of this law is problematic because we are in an age where human rights discourse has become a universally defended principle and it is very difficult to contest it. As such, human rights discourse has become a justification for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, and for the worldwide deployment of United Nations forces. This is not to simplistically conclude that human rights have merely been used in recent times as a tool for neo-imperialistic gains, but that it is important to heed that all factors of violations of human rights do not stem from identical political and social backgrounds. Mansfield, therefore, asks the question: what role can literature play in such a situation? He identifies four main impulses that motivate authors to write about human rights: to *remember*, to *reveal*, to *remind*, and to *resolve* (Mansfield, 203). The first, to *remember*, is propelled by a wish to commemorate appalling historical events like Nazi genocide, so that these do not slip into oblivion. The second, to *reveal*, aims to uncover atrocities that happen out of sight, and to bring them to public notice and condemnation. This is an appeal for change. The third, to *remind*, has a moral tone the purpose of which is to wake the public from their other preoccupations that make them immune to the suffering of others. The fourth, to *resolve*, is a wish for finding an active resolution to human rights atrocities.

Although it is well and good to identify what the creative role of a writer can be in promoting human rights, Mansfield points out where the problem with this kind of literature



lies. As in any liberal tradition, it relies on “a logic of *the secret*” which implies that once something is “revealed” or uncovered, that one can somehow move past it to an ideal resolution (Mansfield, 205). Mansfield uses Mario Perniola’s work on the nature of secret to explain the problem with human rights literature, which lies in that the revelation of truth by itself is not enough to trigger a positive response towards a solution. Therefore, in writings that aim to reveal atrocities, or even commemorate them, the act of revelation is considered important, as if reaching the truth about these happenings in the world is the only step needed for its correction. What is ignored in this scenario is the need for *analysis* of historical truth. The drive for transparency of human rights violations without an attempt to understand the underlying causes, results in action (sometimes violent) justified by the mere act of revelation alone. Perniola suggests an alternative to the logic of the secret, one that he calls the *enigma*. The difference between a secret and an enigma is that while the former focuses on the act of revelation as sufficient to cause “outrage and action”, enigma represents an area of the multiple unknowns that are complex and require deep investigation. The nature of the truth is therefore not secret but enigmatic, and once the truth comes out into the open, the solutions may be varied and contradictory. Mansfield finds that postmodern literature and the importance attached to individual subjectivities by Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger and Lacan, for example, matches very well with doing away with single-ended interpretations. Therefore, modern fiction is well suited to displaying human rights issues in an “enigmatic” form that invites an intelligent reappraisal of situations.

Andy Mousley’s (2013) more recent publication *Literature and the Human: Criticism, Theory, Practice* is a close study of why literature is so important to the conception of a human. Mousley carries out insightful readings of wide-ranging literary texts, from Donne, Shakespeare and Beckett through to Mohsin Hamid’s *A Reluctant Fundamentalist* on a

chapter-wise journey that frames key terms that are applicable in seeking the universal element in varied human experience. In the chapter titled “Beholding,” which is very pertinent to my enquiry, Mousley explains why he suggests an “oddly antiquated term” in a book that aims to “re-invent a critical vocabulary for a contemporary readership” (139). He reminds us that the word “behold” is used in the Bible in places where man is commanded to pay heed to meanings that have a divine significance. He is of the opinion, that literature both “invites as well as confers special attention” which he calls the two aspects of beholding:

[L]iterary texts to varying degrees draw attention to themselves in their difference from ordinary communication and/or ordinary reality: and they thereby draw attention through that difference to the significance of what they represent or evoke. The more extreme the emphasis is upon the former, the more difficult it may be to “see through” the artwork to what is being beheld. The more extreme the emphasis upon the latter, the more confidence the artwork will seem to have in its powers of beholding. (Mousley, 141)

In this sense, Mousley does provide techniques for interpreting literature today that are sympathetic to recognizing common human elements even against the larger difficulties of universalization.

That being said, the role of empathy in human rights for which literature is claimed to be a vehicle (Hunt, 2007) can also sometimes become a manipulative tool. Evoking empathy is only effective in instigating a change if the situational differences under which the rights violations occurred are clearly understood. Therefore, the role of literature in seeing and framing things differently is of urgent value in a global age, and I argue that the contribution of Pakistani literature is of prime significance in the current human rights debate, given that Pakistan is both the victim of and forced to be a party to the War on Terror.

## Pakistani Anglophone Literature and International Human

### Rights Discourse

For God's sake, O Afghans and fellow Pashtuns,  
 Talk a little about Western colonization,  
 About what's going on with my poor nation in my homeland,  
 About the words of bombardment against our innocent women.  
 May this emotionless pen be broken and lost,  
 The one that still talks about love and the beloved.  
 If the homeland is crying, people are crying and wounds are crying;  
 O Zakir, don't you hear the words of pain and injuries?<sup>27</sup>

Since India's independence from the British rule in 1947, accompanied by the formation of Pakistan as an independent nation, Pakistan has moved from being the secular state of Muhammed Ali Jinnah's vision to adopting the title of an Islamic Republic under the constitution of 1956, and finally declaring Islam as the state religion in the 1973 constitution. Part IX, article 227 of the Constitution states: "All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Quran and Sunnah, in this Part referred to as the Injunctions of Islam, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions".<sup>28</sup> Tensions have, therefore, existed between the constitutional commitment to equality and Islamization policies that have been central to national identity politics in Pakistan (Mullally 2005, 342). Also, since women are central to the nationalist project, the most commonly known national and international accusations against Pakistan's human rights failings are in connection to women's rights. Even though Pakistan has signed or

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<sup>27</sup> From "Poem by Zakir, September 8, 2008," Alex Strick van Linschoten & Felix Kuehn, *Poetry of the Taliban* (London: C. Hurst, 2012), 135.

<sup>28</sup> The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.  
 <<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/part9.html> >

ratified some of the UN international treaties like CEDAW *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (accession 1996), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ratification 2008), *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (ratification 1992), human rights activists within Pakistan express the view that this is done only for image-building of the state at the international level (Rafique 2016). Despite the reservations of the international community, local women activists are working towards women's rights awareness in Pakistan, establishing organizations like *Aurat Foundation*, *All Pakistan Women's Association*, *Women's Rights Association Pakistan* (WRA), *Pakistani Women's Human Rights Organization*, to name a few. However, most of these organizations are run by middle-class, educated groups of whose work the strictly religious population remains suspicious. Besides these mainly secular organizations, there is an increasing bulk of scholarship on the safeguarding of human rights within the Islamic conventions, although that too is a cause of further debate because of the differences in interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah by various scholars (Hassan, 2002).

There are thirteen independent human rights NGOs currently operational in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> Of these the most well-known is the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, set up by lawyer and activist Asma Jehangir in 1987, with a mission to work for the ratification and implementation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in Pakistan. According to its website, "Besides monitoring human rights violations and seeking redress through public campaigns, lobbying and intervention in courts, HRCP organizes seminars, workshops and fact finding missions. It also issues a monthly magazine in the Urdu language called *Jehd-i-Haq* and an annual report on the state of human rights in the country, available in both

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<sup>29</sup> < [http://www.ngos.org.pk/rights/human\\_rights\\_ngos\\_pakistan.htm](http://www.ngos.org.pk/rights/human_rights_ngos_pakistan.htm) >

English and Urdu.”<sup>30</sup> This monthly magazine consistently takes up issues that arise from the clash between the interpretation of Islamic laws by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)<sup>31</sup> and secular legislation of the Government of Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> Yet, despite the work of these organizations, it must be noted that the discourse on human rights and Islam in Pakistan is complicated by the multiple views that are held by different mindsets. Hassan (2002) identifies the two high profile groups that represent these opposing opinions, both of which she thinks of as extremist viewpoints. The first mindset, Hassan writes, is represented by figures like Dr. Farhat Hashmi, “who consider themselves the custodians of Islam, which they generally define in narrowly construed literalistic and legalistic terms.” The second is represented by secular figures like Asma Jahangir and other leaders of the Human Rights organizations “who consider themselves the guardians of human rights, which they see as being incompatible with religion, particularly Islam” (151).

According to Hassan, even though religious extremists in Pakistan have been staunchly against any change in the traditional roles of women and are against modernity which they associate with the decay of Muslim family values, “it is important to note that it [extremism] is also to be found in the utterances and actions of those who regard religion, especially Islam, negatively. In asserting that Islam and human rights are mutually exclusive, advocates of human rights, such as Asma Jahangir, adopt a position that is untenable both on theoretical and pragmatic grounds. The Qur’an strongly affirms all the fundamental human rights” (151). The same mindsets are reflected in the response to literature written in English,

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<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Commission of Pakistan <<http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/about-hrcp/mission-vision/>>

<sup>31</sup> The Council of Islamic Ideology, Government of Pakistan < <http://cii.gov.pk> >

<sup>32</sup> A good example is the magazine’s stance in its April 2016 edition against the CII’s recent decision deeming “light beatings” of wives by husbands permissible. < <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/JH-June-2016.pdf> >

with secular and religious readers reacting differently to its conversation with particular vs. universal human rights. The choice of writing in English is sometimes equated with elite secularist views that a large population of Pakistanis see as conceding to a Western normative system. Hassan, who is herself an American-Pakistani theologian of progressive Islam and an authority on the Qur'an as a "Magna Carta of human rights", rightly questions the validity of the universalization project of human rights in the face of the reality of these dual mindsets in the everyday lives of Pakistanis. In Hassan's view, since the vast majority of Pakistanis are of a religious mindset, the secular advocates of human rights make a grave oversight in neglecting Islam in their discourse, mainly because "religious and anti-religious extremisms feed into one another." She insists that

...it is legitimate to ask how the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan – the non- governmental organization which has virtual monopoly of the human rights discourse in Pakistan and receives an enormous amount of funding from Western donors – can claim to represent the people of Pakistan, who are near universally believers and regard Islam as the matrix in which their lives are rooted, when it holds the position that Islam should not be part of the human rights discourse except in a negative sense. (Hassan, 152)

It is questions such as the ones raised by Hassan that problematize the intersectional role of Pakistani literature and international human rights discourse. This is in addition to the challenges this interdisciplinary genre already faces because of the paradoxical nature of human rights.

The human rights movement has been faced with many paradoxes that are recognized as inevitable. Perhaps that is the reason why there are still doubts about what can realistically be achieved through the rights movement with its continually shifting perspectives. Others, however, would argue that "paradox does not necessarily impede human rights, but actually

gives them form, shape, and purpose” (Mullins, 122). What this implies is that paradoxes battle inertia and help to keep human rights in a state of flux along changing contexts.

Goldberg and Moore list these well-known paradoxes in that: a) Individuals look to be protected by the state that itself threatens their rights; b) citizenship offers the least protection to the ones most vulnerable to harm; c) those who testify against violence to give suffering a legal recognition, themselves suffer violence for doing so; d) witnesses cannot speak of their suffering when they are dead; e) rights institutions themselves serve the causes of imperialism and capitalist gain. This last paradox has perhaps caused postcolonial scholars the most chagrin because “Human rights and ‘humanitarianism’ are extensions of political power within imperial frameworks that claim to critique imperialism, but that may well end up reinforcing it” (Mullins, 121). Added to that, there are paradoxes within *International Humanitarian Law*: that it seeks to balance violence suffered by innocent civilians during wartime with the reasons that legally justify military action; and that “terrorism” is identified as non-legalised warfare and is therefore excluded from being protected by humanitarian law (Goldberg & Moore, 18).

This situation also deters any definitive and sustained action to stop terrible human rights abuses inside Pakistan. Due to the general hostility in Pakistan towards Western interference in state affairs, it condones secrecy about internal rights violations (e.g. against women and minorities) in service of what is conceived to be the larger cause of nationalism and the protection of state integrity. The dilemma for the state is that it cannot respond to internal human rights atrocities without also being pressurised by the public to demand justice for casualties of War on Terror in international human rights forums. That is a slippery path because of Pakistan’s economic dependence on the larger game players in the field of human rights law. In the negative Pakistani responses to memoirs that promote

human rights, like the ones by Malala Yousafzai and Mukhtaran Mai written in collaboration with and distributed by publishing companies in the West, and in fiction that recreates similar reactions in characters placed within paradoxical situations, it is easy to identify a surge in the very violence that human rights seek to stop. Between Pakistan's increasing tilt towards national "secrecy" about human rights violations, and the West's preoccupation with "revealing the secret" (in Mansfield's terms) as being the logical step to a resolution, there is a slippage of real responsibility.

While memoirs of suffering by Pakistani women are vigorously marketed in the West, any literature that speaks from the perspective of the "enemy," like the recently published *Poetry of the Taliban* (2012), has only been denounced for giving terrorists a voice. Richard Kemp, a former British army commander, finds no hypocrisy in his comment cautioning against "being taken in by a lot of self-justifying propaganda". He says, "What we need to remember is that these are fascist, murdering thugs who suppress women and kill people without mercy if they do not agree with them, and of course are killing our soldiers. . . It doesn't do anything but give the oxygen of publicity to an extremist group which is the enemy of this country."<sup>33</sup> Comments like these are often considered justifiable in view of the article 19 (3) of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* prohibiting "incitement to terrorism" for the protection of national security and public order, which are both set out as legitimate grounds for limiting freedom of expression. However, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in a fact sheet about "Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism," (2008) cautions against the article's misuse as well:

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<sup>33</sup> Julian Borger, "Taliban Poetry Book Denounced by Former British Commander" in *The Guardian*, 4 May 2012. Online <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/04/taliban-poetry-book-denounced-british>>



Great care must be taken, however, to ensure that any restriction on the right to freedom of expression is both necessary and proportional. This is especially important given that freedom of expression is an essential foundation of a democratic society, and its enjoyment is linked with other important rights, including the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, belief and opinion.<sup>34</sup>

This example complicates the role of literature in the promotion of human rights because sometimes the very articles of human rights serve to curtail freedom of expression. If a piece of writing, like the poetry of the Taliban, is not openly inciting terrorism but provides a useful channel for understanding a different ideological system, then condemnation and bad publicity of the book is itself, a violation.

Generally, a call for an implementation of third generation human rights on a global level is a monumentally difficult task. It puts rights of peoples in a contention with international human rights laws that promise solidarity. But that is a flimsy promise, considering the obstacles in its way. It raises the same question of terrorist vs. freedom fighter that threatens a unanimous understanding of human rights on an international level. Thus, although human rights covenants lay down that all peoples have the right to self-determination and can freely determine their political status, lawyers around the world generally read this to imply that force can be used as means to free oneself from colonial oppression. Yet “how could one tell when some group of freedom fighters are acting as a people or when they are merely revolutionary terrorists or a guerrilla band pursuing its own agenda? One cannot appeal to any set of norms that defines the people and identifies those who are authorized to act on its behalf” (Wellman, 655).

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<sup>34</sup> “Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism,” Fact Sheet no.32, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): Geneva, 2008.  
<<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf>>

Language has also played an important part in the structuring of human rights norms. During war on terror, new terms have been created through language use, like “enemy combatant”<sup>35</sup> and “extraordinary rendition”<sup>36</sup> problematize the connection between human rights and language, causing Salman Rushdie to protest the “improper” use of language by the United States (McClennen and Moore 6). Since it was humanities that had first suggested the decentring of meanings in the twentieth century, mainly with a view to “deconstruct Western epistemes” and to challenge power structures, by the turn of the twenty-first century, especially after 9/11, it was felt that “the rejection of totalizing and normative concepts” needed to be balanced with “a commitment to rescue rights from those who were using vague language to create legal norms that guaranteed a system of ongoing power and impunity” (McClennen & Moore, 7).

It follows then, that in countries like Pakistan where terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism have more recently been associated with rising nationalism, labels like “terrorist” and “*jihadist*” have been redefined in the language of human rights, to signify threats to Western liberal ideals. Any traditional or religious contexts that could offer an insight into their actions is not fully explored in a climate that favours universal human rights

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<sup>35</sup> “An ‘enemy combatant’ is an individual who, under the laws and customs of war, may be detained for the duration of an armed conflict. In the current conflict with al Qaida and the Taliban, the term includes a member, agent, or associate of al Qaida or the Taliban. In applying this definition, the United States government has acted consistently with the observation of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Ex parte Quirin*, 317 U.S. 1, 37-38 (1942): ‘Citizens who associate themselves with the military arm of the enemy government, and with its aid, guidance and direction enter this country bent on hostile acts are enemy belligerents within the meaning of the Hague Convention and the law of war.’” William Haynes, “Enemy Combatants” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 12 December, 2002) <<http://www.cfr.org/international-law/enemy-combatants/p5312>>

<sup>36</sup> “The act of taking prisoners to another country in order to do things to them that would not be allowed in your own country, for example, torturing them in order to make them give you information.” Cambridge Dictionary Online. <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/extraordinary-rendition>>

controlled by Western norms. The civilizing mission of the Western lore, the one that is identified as the savage-victim-saviour (SVS) metaphor by Makau Mutua (2002) has extended itself into human rights script, in which “democracy and western liberalism are internationalized to redeem savage non-Western cultures from themselves, and to alleviate the suffering of victims, who are generally non-western and non-European. The images of the savage Taliban, the Afghan victims mired in pre-modernity, and the American saviors put the metaphor in sharp relief (5).” In the case of Pakistan and Afghanistan,<sup>37</sup> broadly speaking, the SVS metaphor that is usually applied is: religious extremism as the savage, veiled women and school-less children as victims, and the United States as the saviour armed with protective drones. In Mutua’s words, “[t]he message is loud and clear. Islamic societies must Westernize or perish” (3). What this effectively translates as is that the human rights corpus which is defended and promulgated by its “official guardians” is not, in truth, a universal representation of these rights, which should ideally reflect cultural diversity in all its complexity. It is, in fact, indifferent and even hostile to these differences: “The advocacy of

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<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of this study, in which the emphasis is on human rights discourse in the context of the US led War on Terror, instances of Afghanistan and Pakistan are sometimes coupled together. The reason for this is that the language, culture and ethnicity of the Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan and in Afghanistan is the same. The Pak-Afghan border is a porous one, and the fluid movement of the Taliban is the reason Pakistan is so heavily involved in this war, both against the militant elements that threaten national security, and in “helping” the US fish out Al-Qaeda and other terror organizations like the Haqqani network. There is a large Afghan population in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (previously the North-West Frontier Province) and Baluchistan, from the influx of refugees in the Soviet-Afghan war between 1979 and 1989. The Afghan fighters, called the “Mujahideen” (Freedom Fighters) who were aided and trained by western countries against Soviet forces, belonged predominantly to same tribe, the Pashtuns or the Pathans, as most of the Taliban today. Because most families of the Mujahideen took refuge in Pakistan, their connection with Pakistan is very strong and their next generation considers Pakistan to be their homeland. One of the aims of the Taliban is to take control of the whole area, controlling both Pakistan and Afghanistan under the banner of a Sharia government. This is a lingering battle from the one against the British government in 1893 when the Durand Line, a 2,250 km long border was drawn between British India (now Pakistan) and Afghanistan, splitting ethnic Pashtun and Baluch tribes into two on either side of the dividing line.

human rights across cultural borders is then an attempt to displace the local non-Western culture with the ‘universal’ culture of human rights. *Human rights therefore becomes the universal culture*” (Emphasis in original. Mutua, 5).

Pakistani authors who want to address human rights violations through their fiction face a dual task of representation that must be realistic and constructive, yet at the same time be mindful of national identity and religious dignity. Writers, if they choose to do so, must tackle human rights issues from two angles: uncover and expose human rights violations that plague the country from within with a view to precipitate necessary action by the state; and demand world attention towards the atrocities carried out during the U.S. led War on Terror campaign that allows innocent civilians to be killed in drone strikes, or detained on suspicion of terror plotting. Pakistani writers have a chance to voice and record the suffering of ordinary citizens of Pakistan caused by the failure of a corrupt state that offers women, religious minorities, and the underprivileged no protection against poverty, death, disease and unemployment, but also to report the casualties suffered by innocent people caught in the War on Terror campaign which ironically sees them both as perpetrators and victims of the same violence. Such literature must achieve these ends not just by evoking empathy, but by encouraging a historical understanding of how things progressively reached this stage of suspicion and misunderstanding.

One of the contributions of Western media and literature in this war is that it has been utilized to “dehumanize” (Carpi, 101) the perceived enemy. The language often used in the media does not describe a known enemy, but *creates* these enemies: “History offers many fertile examples of how enemies are made into the Other, dragged symbolically backwards down the evolutionary ladder until they are no longer seen as human, but as insect or animal, germ or disease” (Steuter and Wills, 153). In several popular books, for example Åsne

Seierstad and Ingrid Christophersen's *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2003), Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea* (2006), and Yvonne Ridley's *In the Hands of the Taliban: Her Extraordinary Story* (2001), usually with title covers showing images of veiled/burqa-clad women, or turbaned, wild-looking Taliban, both the images and the language become tools for creating victims in Pak-Afghan women, and for dehumanizing the men into uncivilized animals. Steuter and Wills hold the opinion that the metaphors used by the West when reporting on the enemy in the war on terror, is one consistent with animals:

Examining media content reveals a pattern of animal symbolism and related metaphors such as the hunt. Reports on the war on terror are filled with terms implying the pursuit of an animal, using verbs such as hunt, trap, snare, net and corral. The much-used phrase 'hunt for terrorists' has widely replaced more neutral verbs like 'search' or 'look for'. When the 'hunt' is successful, terrorists are 'caught in a trap'; the enemy is described as 'scurrying for cover' or 'slithering out of our grasp'. The danger in such depictions is the way in which they represent their subjects as animals to be captured and eliminated. The mainstream proliferation of such language has the effect of justifying it; such phrases come to seem like simple, natural descriptions rather than motivated, symbolic choices that perform significant ideological work. These phrases, constantly reiterated, take on a collective force, shaping the conceptual frameworks by which we understand the war on terror. (Steuter and Wills 2010, 156)

The point is that if the use of language in the discourse of war is powerful enough to "create" enemies and strip them of their human dignity, then the enemy's claim to human rights might be just as easily waived. Pakistani authors must therefore take on the project of restoring human dignity by providing contexts in their writings that allow alternative metaphors to compete. This is not to say that terrorism should be condoned, but that sweeping stereotyping of a group of people should be challenged to foster a better climate for developing mutual understanding.

There is no doubt that the events of 11 September 2001 have changed the way the world thinks. If the metaphor of a “bomb” is used to describe the after effects of the 9/11 attacks, then an “effort of the literary archive to restore memory, culture, and, not least, the possibility of interpretation is necessitated by the vacuum created by the bomb, an emptily signifying space left up for grabs in the aftermath” (Goldberg & Moore 2013). Pakistani writers must try to fill part of that vacuum. However, Mutua asserts that the narrative space that opened after 9/11 was too quickly filled by the US refrain “you are either with us, or you are against us.” According to him the “us vs. them” dichotomy has existed unbroken through centuries of Western history and in the practice of human rights. Therefore, the origin of international law can only be understood by locating it in the colonial project from which it originally sprung. Mutua calls the Imperial period of history the “Age of Europe,” a “historical and philosophical paradigm of European hegemony imposed over the globe,” and startlingly concludes that: “International law is the legal fiction that was deployed to create and justify the Age of Europe” (1).

That the war on terrorism will have strong implications on the infringement of human rights, is evident. Not only because it stalls any “robust dialogue on the scope of human rights,” but that it allows the United States to dictate some rights as preferred, and exclude others (Mutua, 2). Any alternative perspective on human rights than the one defined in the Western liberal tradition is therefore seen to sympathize with terrorism in the post 9/11 good vs. evil rhetoric. But from such critiques at least some progress can be made towards exposing the biases in human rights debates. Whether that can lead to the universality of rights remains to be seen.

The relentless efforts to universalize an essentially European corpus of human rights through Western crusades cannot succeed. Nor will demonizing those who resist it. The critiques of the corpus from Africans, Asians, Muslims, Hindus, and

a host of critical thinkers from around the world are the one avenue through which human rights can be redeemed and truly universalized...These substantive critiques must be carried out with urgency, otherwise the war on terror will destroy whatever consensus has developed to date. (Mutua, 12)

What seems clear is that trying to end the debate about universal vs. particular in human rights is not a useful exercise. Heuhls identifies the positives in the continuing universal/particular paradox of human rights by turning to Wendy Brown: “We will not figure out what human rights are when we determine how universal or particular they can or should be; we will figure out what they are when we determine what they are besides a site of conflict between universal and particular” (3). To make such attempts, the series of paradoxes that keep emerging in human rights must be identified and even welcomed. In an examination of these contradictions lies the key against stagnation of human rights discourse, something which recent history has revealed to be continually evolving in time. The following chapters are an attempt to focus on English literature emerging from Pakistan through the lens of human rights precisely to identify the paradoxes that can contribute to solving the conflict between the universal and the particular.

## Chapter 2

### Islamization and the Articulation of Women's Rights in Pakistani

#### Writings

All the people unravelled a sari.  
 It stretched from Lahore to Hyderabad,  
 wavered across the Arabian Sea,  
 shot through with stars,  
 fluttering with sparrows and quails.  
 They threaded it with roads,  
 undulations of land.

Eventually  
 they wrapped and wrapped me in it  
 whispering *Your body is your country*.<sup>38</sup>

#### Women's Rights in Pakistan: An Overview

The extract from Moniza Alvi's poem quoted above shows a Pakistani woman's double awareness: she is told that her body represents her country's identity, and she also knows that she is tightly bound within its cultural fabric. Her struggle for rights is caught between Islamic and secular identity politics that are reflected in the contradictory positions of women's movements in Pakistan. Whether it is women's memoirs, or novels and short stories, Pakistani authors are responding to gender and violation of rights within the country. From memoirs like Malala Yousafzai's *I am Malala* about the female right to education and

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<sup>38</sup> From "The Sari" by Moniza Alvi in *Split World: Poems 1990 - 2005* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2008). Reproduced online.  
 <<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/sari>>



Mukhtar Mai's *In the name of Honour* about exposing rape culture in Pakistan, to novels like Muhammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* about female acid-attack victims and Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories about class-gender injustices, these writings show a heightened focus on women's issues. In order to achieve a better understanding of Pakistani literature's interplay with women's rights, a brief overview of the complexity of the contemporary women's movement in Pakistan is a good place to start.

Women's rights in Pakistan are embroiled in a political legacy that stretches from British rule in India to the present US-led War on Terror and its support of the ongoing Pakistani military action in the tribal regions of the country. Throughout Pakistan's history, women have been pawns in a nationalist project as well as in the global game of political power. I agree with McClintock's view that precisely because Anderson's nationalisms are "imagined constructions" based in cultural and historical *difference*, they inevitably "depend on powerful constructions of gender," as a result of which women are "typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (McClintock 1993, 61). I argue that Pakistani women have more recently been reemployed in a new metaphoric/symbolic role in the post 9/11 wave of nationalist discourse, and because nationalism is "constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse, and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (McClintock 1993, 63), the role of literature in perpetuating or discrediting such gendered symbolism is important in understanding national identity as well as highlighting areas of human rights concern.

At the present, according to the 2015 Asia Report<sup>39</sup>, women in Pakistan still face discriminatory laws despite the efforts of women's rights activists and female members in the

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<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group. "Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan." Asia Report N°265, 8 April 2015. Web. < <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/pakistan/265-women-violence-and-conflict-in-pakistan.pdf>>

federal and provincial parliament. This is mainly because of the failure in the implementation of the laws drafted to protect women in recent years, and the lack of accountability for government institutions' negligence in ensuring justice for women. A Pakistani woman is often denied any real justice because she is in a vulnerable position that can be exploited by both national and international forces. As Uzma Aslam Khan, a contemporary Pakistani writer and feminist, points out:

For women from lands colonized by successive Empires – first the British, now the American—the struggle for self-ownership, self-representation, and intellectual recognition is as pertinent as ever. In the nineteenth century, the moral justification of slavery and imperialism was “civilizing” the native; nowadays the justification is “liberating” the native. Freeing Muslim women in particular is a choice excuse. Regarding her emancipation, capitalists, communists, and conservative Muslims always agree: Muslim women are the sign posts of their separate camps. (Khan, “Pakistan: Women and Fiction Today”)

Three legal barriers still bar Pakistani women from steps towards any real economic and political empowerment that could play a role in stopping the violence against them and securing their constitutional rights to gender equality. These barriers range from the laws of the British Empire in India; General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization laws in the 1970s through 1980s, and more recent laws like the *Nizam-e-Adl* put in place to appease radical Islamic *Sharia* movements in Pakistan in the last decade. Short descriptions of the three legal barriers are as follows:

Firstly, FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulation 1901), with its origins in the Murderous Outrages Regulation (MOR; Act XXIII of 1867, and IV of 1901), was set in place according to the British Law to counter the opposition of the *Pashtun* (also called *Pathan*) tribes to British

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rule. It allows that punishment be given to entire tribes, including women and children, for crimes committed by any one of its members. These same laws are currently applied by the Government of Pakistan to FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) residents, which limit the application of fundamental rights in the region. Additionally, because of the non-protection of the right to education, the literacy rate is very low in FATA at a mere 3% for women. There is also a non-availability of basic health services (Mazhar A. Khan 2014, 251). Although in 2011 President Asif Zardari amended the FCR through a presidential order, the implementation of this amendment has not been witnessed. Among the proposed changes is the clause for the protection of women, children below 16, and all people above 65 from collective responsibility arrest.

The second legal barrier was the *Hudood Ordinances* (1979) that include the *Zina Hudood Ordinance*<sup>40</sup> and the promulgation of the new *Law of Evidence* (1984), which was the result of the process of Islamization under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq (1977-88) through the implementation of the *Sharia* laws and the establishment of Federal *Shariat* Courts (1980) in Pakistan. The *Hudood Ordinance* criminalizes *Zina*, which is defined as extra-marital sex and includes adultery and fornication, as a state offence rather than a personal offence. Moreover, it makes no distinction between consensual sex and rape, whereby the victims of rape are liable to the same punishment as adultery. The Law of Evidence states that the testimony of a woman be treated as half that of a man's in a Pakistani court of law. After General Zia-ul-Haq's fatal plane crash in 1988, the two successive elected governments of Benazir Bhutto (1988-90; 1993-96) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93; 1997-99) refrained from challenging these fundamentalist laws set in place by the Zia regime. The next

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<sup>40</sup> For details see Nisrine Abiad's *Sharia, Muslim States and International Human Rights Treaty* (London: British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2008) p.133-137.

military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, who came to power in 1999 proposed a practice of Islam which he termed as “enlightened moderation” instead of the fundamentalist way of thinking, derived from an admiration for Turkish Mustafa Kemal Attaturk as a figure-head for modernization of Islam. However, Musharraf faced grave criticism for his progressive stance from Islamist groups in Pakistan and amid violent retaliation from religious hard-liners, he subsequently retreated from this position.<sup>41</sup>

In 2006, President Musharraf proposed a reform of the *Zina Ordinance* once more and finally the *Protection of Women Act* was passed in the National Assembly and became law on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006. This law separated rape from *zina* offence and made it prosecutable under civil law rather than Sharia law. However, these reforms were at the time, and are still violently opposed by Islamist political parties in Pakistan<sup>42</sup> who called it “a secular conspiracy”.<sup>43</sup> Human rights groups and activists have also criticized the bill, saying that the “compromise made by the government with respect to amendments in the Hudood laws is nothing more than a joke.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Ishtiaq Ahmed, “Pakistan's Human Rights Obligations”. *Daily Times*, Pakistan, November 30, 2003. Accessed on 24 November 2015. <<http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/editorial/30-Nov-2003/op-ed-pakistan-s-human-rights-obligations-ishtiaq-ahmed>>

<sup>42</sup> See Barbara Plett, “How Pakistan's rape reform ran aground,” BBC News, 15 September 2006. Accessed 10 December 2015. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/5346968.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5346968.stm)

<sup>43</sup> See Syed Shoaib Hasan, “Strong feelings over Pakistan rape laws,” BBC News, 15 November 2006. Accessed 10 December 2015. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6152520.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6152520.stm)

<sup>44</sup> “HRCF expresses its acute disappointment that the rights of women have been dealt with in so cavalier a fashion. The so-called Women's Protection Bill is a farcical attempt at making Hudood Ordinances palatable. In the first place, the implications of the ordinances go far beyond discrimination and persecution of women on the plea of morality. For instance, the law prescribes punishments which are inhuman and allows for evidence of male Muslim witnesses for application of Hadd punishments. However, women accused under Tazir punishment of Zina (adultery) are its main victims. There are ample examples of victims of rape being imprisoned under accusations of zina. The Women's Protection Bill has addressed none of these concerns. In addition the government has agreed to replace Section 3 of the

The point to note here is that the timing of the events of 1979 in the broader region of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, and more particularly the political developments in Pakistan, ultimately led to the Islamization of neighboring Afghanistan<sup>45</sup>. As Rahat Imran points out, Iran's Islamic revolution under Ayatollah Khomeini, coupled with Pakistan's Islamization under Zia-ul-Haq's martial law were the two main reasons for the backward slide of women's rights in the region. That, together with the effects of the Soviet-Afghan war and the Hudood Ordinance enforced by the military regime within Pakistan comprised "the four major events in 1979 that collectively had a profound impact on Pakistani society" (Imran, 79-80). The continuing Islamization process has influenced and empowered most Pakistani men and has helped uphold the traditional patriarchal system through its extreme fundamentalist approach to religion. The result has been that despite the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, article 25 which delineates the fundamental rights of Pakistani citizens including the protection of the rights of women, and Pakistan's ratification of the CEDAW convention (the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) in 1996, violence against women is still rising uncurbed. As Ishtiaq Ahmed (2003) suggests,

It seems that once the origin or basis of a law or a rule is claimed to be Islamic, governments and political leaders dare not repeal them. The political costs of defying such a stricture are too high and most of the time governments simply do

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draft by subjecting the interpretation of the Ordinance according to the injunctions of Islam. Such open-ended jurisdiction granted to an already cowed down judiciary will result in authentication of the most conservative form of religious interpretation. It will also be detrimental to the rights of non-Muslim citizens, who may not subscribe to Islamic principles. The addition of Section 3, could also undo the meaningful amendment made in the law in 1996 (The Abolition of the Punishment of whipping Act, 1996), which abolished mandatory public whippings for the crimes of Zina and Zina-bil-jabr (rape)." Asma Jehangir, "Pakistan: Women's protection Bill a farce," Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in *Women Living Under Muslim Law*. <http://www.wluml.org/node/3194>. Accessed 10 December 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Throughout this study, it has been made evident that there is a socio-political link between the condition of Pakistani and the Afghan people. As such, the history of both countries becomes important in analyzing writings by Pakistani authors.

not act, or act inconsistently. Thus, signing or ratifying international human rights treaties remains virtually a symbolic act and many treaties even when signed can be ignored with impunity. Despite all the media attention, human rights remain peripheral to the actual politics of our times.

A selective implementation of Islamic laws, ones that have been insulated against appeals of international human rights law by deeming these laws as unalterable in Islam, has led to a crisis in the situation of women in Pakistan. The education system in Pakistan is also implicated in upholding the unquestionability of these religious laws by only drawing academic texts from selective histories of its past. This breeds intolerance for alternative interpretations of religious laws in the light of pre-Islamic conditions that might explain their temporal significance. Uzma Aslam Khan laments that General Zia's Shariah, including the Hudood and blasphemy laws, were not only "draconian" but also restricted secular education.

[Zia] banned the teaching of evolution. History books were rewritten. Pakistan's founding was revised from 1947 to the 8th Century and the arrival of the Arabs. At school, I learned about the Muslim rulers—Arabs, Afghans, Turks—and of course the British. Our non-Anglican, pre-Islamic legacy was buried. Instead of helping us remember, our history was telling us to forget" ("Pakistan: Women and Fiction Today").

The third, and more recent legal development was the *Nizam-e-Adl* Regulation (English: Order of Justice), a controversial act passed on 13 April 2009 by Pakistan's government. It formally established *Sharia* law in the Malakand division after a successful Pakistani military operation in Swat Valley against the Taliban rule. This was the result of a "peace deal" made with the Taliban in exchange for their surrender of arms, allowing for *Sharia* law to be practiced in Swat in specifically created Islamic courts. Since a narrow interpretation of Islamic laws by conservative clerics largely affects women, *Nizam-e-Adl* was seen, in effect,

as an extension and legitimization of the same oppression that was carried out during the Taliban regime. Human Rights activists felt that due to the exclusion of women from the process of a resolution of conflict, “‘peace’ deals are being waged on women’s bodies” instead of providing them any real justice (Parashar ,108). The struggle for women’s rights, mainly by educated, urban women in Pakistan<sup>46</sup>, has made little impact because of the “dismal role played by the law enforcing agencies and judiciary [that] has disappointed the masses to the extent that seeking refuge in religion is gaining currency” (Rashid, 100); as a result of the lack in provision of state education in remote areas, it has been easier for Islamists to press their own brand of ideology in religious schools and among the female population. Pakistani state sponsored efforts like the official commissions on women (1955, 1976, 1985, 2001) have over the years allowed only a limited involvement with conservative Islamists and rural lower middle class women and their concerns. The elite urban women, for whom the socio-economic differences with the other groups was too wide to overcome without fear of Islamists joining their membership, caused a rural/urban split (Rashid, 100). This split is apparent in that conservative women’s groups do not agree with the demands for freedom made by WAF (Women’s Action Forum) because they reject secularism. Instead, they glorify Muslim women in Islamic history and welcome the restrictions placed on women in *Sharia* as evidence of being good Muslims. Besides causing an uneasy division among women activists in Pakistan, this situation problematizes any singular definition of women’s

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<sup>46</sup> Tehmina Rashid writes about the difficult positioning of Women’s movements in Pakistan: “When Zia introduced his Islamic laws. . . he enjoyed the full support of puritans who not only legitimized his dictatorship but also eroded the few gains of Pakistani women. This led to a strong resistance from urban upper/middle-class educated women who formed the Women Action Forum (WAF) and demanded these laws be rescinded. This movement remained confined to major urban centres and the educated class, but kept an apolitical stance as many women belonged to the elite, their men serving in the bureaucracy or military. Political parties remained aloof as women’s rights have always remained peripheral in their agendas” p.95.

rights within Pakistan. Therefore, although *Nizam-e-Adl* is seen to be detrimental to women's rights from a secular perspective, the increasing number of Islamist women's groups do not hold the same view.<sup>47</sup> Yet, even though secular women activists recognize the restrictions that an application of *Sharia* laws can place on women, and voice their concerns openly, female representatives in the parliament still choose to stay largely silent on the matter. Rashid criticizes women parliament members having remained silent about the approval of the *Nizam-e-Adl* Regulation. This lack of resistance is indicative of the short-term vision of the upper-class women as representatives of the female population of Pakistan. They settle thankfully for a role within a strict religious framework and thus legitimize the use of Islam, even when does not allow them flexibility for negotiation outside its boundaries. (Rashid, 100-101).

I would like to stress here that even though women have become scapegoats in the religious-political battle for power in Pakistan, a fairly large section of the conservative female population in Pakistan is wilfully encouraging hard-line Islamic laws in recent years. That shift itself is a result of the changes in Pakistan's political climate that reveals a paradoxical relationship between women and faith-based politics. Where Zia's Islamist views that called for *Chader aur Chardewari* (Veiling and Seclusion) of women and the

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<sup>47</sup> Women students of *Jamia Hafsa*, an Islamic seminary in Islamabad, for example, have often come out on the streets, in favour of the promulgation of *Sharia* laws, and have often harassed western dressed women in the streets of Islamabad. The Pakistani media dubbed them "chicks with sticks" because they carried long sticks to defend their school against the military operation carried out under the orders of General Parvez Musharraf against their aggressive actions in 2006. For more information read: Afiya Shehrbano Zia, "Faith-based Politics, Enlightened Moderation and the Pakistani Women's Movement," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1):2009, 236; Somini Sengupta, "Red Mosque Fueled Islamic Fire in Young Women", *The New York Times*, July 24, 2007 & Jannat Jalil, "Pakistan's Islamic girl schools," *BBC News*, 19 September 2005. Accessed 4 December 2015. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4258224.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4258224.stm)



enforcement of *Hudood* Ordinances had caused Islamic Modernist Feminism<sup>48</sup> to flourish, Musharraf's regime calling for "Enlightened Moderation" in Islam in response to the 9/11 backlash against Islamic fundamentalism, has seen more and more Pakistani women opt for *hijabs* and strict religious adherence, to the point that it caused "a split in the women's movement after 25 years, when the right wing women's movement withdrew from the consensus that the discriminatory Zina Ordinance contravened the Quranic understanding of adultery. Instead, right wing women reversed their long-standing support from the campaign to repeal this law. They actively organised protests and opposed, in Parliament, the efforts of the progressives to repeal or reform the controversial Zina laws" (Zia 2009, 226). Thus, the strife between secular and religious identity politics within the women's rights movement in Pakistan cannot be overlooked when analyzing the literary texts under discussion.

Added to the above mentioned legal impediments and Pakistan's internal politics, cultural perspectives in international women's rights debates are a cause of more detriment than good for the state of Pakistani women. The post cold-war era saw a reawakening in the understanding of human rights, at a time when these concerns moved from boundaries of the state to a larger international forum for action. Women's rights gained momentum as several UN and other global women's conferences in the 1990s mobilised women from local to global platforms in order to seek policy changes. At the same time, a new global division was taking place that resulted in identity politics driven by differences between religion and

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<sup>48</sup> "The Islamic feminists of the 1980s in Pakistan wished to sieve out the patriarchy from a male-defined Islam and saw religion as a pawn abused by an oppressive state. Their project became to reclaim feminist possibilities within a reformed Islam and they were well supported by sympathetic international donors for such efforts. However, this strategy, despite some acclaim by Iranian Islamic feminists, has been criticised for paying a price whereby the feminism part of Islamic feminism gets subsumed and relegated as a lesser appendage to the more compelling and overarching Islamic phenomena." Afiya Shehrbano Zia, "Faith-based Politics, Enlightened Moderation and the Pakistani Women's Movement," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1):2009, p. 231.

culture. While the global South rejected universal human rights as alien to their culture, the global north identified the same differences as the main cause for the underdevelopment of women in these countries, allowing for political and strategic interventions. The biggest example of this game being played out is in the coming into power of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1996 whose premise for removing women from the public sphere was to protect them from the corrupting influence of the West, while the state of the same women was used as the reason for US army “attack on Afghanistan to ‘save’ its women from the savagery of the Taliban” (Yakin 2012). Focusing on women’s rights issues solely from the cultural perspective bypasses the problem of gender inequality and the economic and political reasons that perpetuate these problems. Furthermore, the blame is easily shifted away from the effects of capitalism and global power structures that are part of the problem, and “absolves the rich countries of responsibility for the suffering caused by these processes and blames local people, such as battering husbands, oppressive men who veil their wives, and knife-wielding fans of FGM, for the suffering” (Merry 2003, 16-17).

Any discourse of cultural authenticity sometimes serves to work against women’s rights as it is this discourse that is strategically played by both sides as justifications of their own political and economic ends, leaving the real problems of women unmet in the debate. Culturalising women’s rights “provides a perfect alibi for the traditional patriarchs to evade any responsibility to accommodate women’s rights claims; cultural interpretation of women’s subordination relieves rich countries of the responsibility for dispossessions caused by capitalism, neoliberalism, militarism, occupation and armed conflicts” (Yakin 2012).

That said, some of the biggest causes of violence in Pakistan, of which a majority of instances go unreported, are indeed culturally nurtured and protected, and therefore taboo

subjects. Acid-violence against women with reported cases at an average of 200 a year<sup>49</sup>, honour-killings that are still sometimes openly defended by men in powerful government positions<sup>50</sup>, and rape instances that are routinely kept under cover because of culturally perpetuated concepts of shame and dishonor, are all real problems that are explored in contemporary writings and have become a subject-matter of real urgency. The post 9/11 political climate, in which the role of women as nationalist symbols has become ever more pronounced in Pakistan, problematizes any straightforward representation of women's situation. As Haq points out: "For most Islamic fundamentalists the Muslim women have become that symbolic space on which the battle with the 'corrupt' and 'infidel' West must be fought and the sanctity and honor of Islam must be protected. But the realities of Muslim women's lives are varied and complex" (159). It is this complexity that Pakistani writers in English are hoped to address in their role as carriers of the "burden of representation". This burden is two-fold. First, Pakistani writers included in this study are pressed by a national religious sentiment to defend Islam and its treatment of women. Muhammed Hanif voices this burden of responsibility assumed by contemporary post 9/11 Pakistani English writers in his article titled "I Worry About Muslims" in *The New York Times*. He admits: "mostly I worry about my kind of Muslims, those who are expected to explain to the world what real Islam is like. We so-called moderate Muslims are urged to take control of the narrative and

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<sup>49</sup> See Ameena Ilahi, "Acid Crimes: A Growing Crisis in Pakistan," *The Asia Foundation*, October 1, 2014. Accessed online on December 16, 2015.

<http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/10/01/acid-crimes-a-growing-crisis-in-pakistan/>

<sup>50</sup> A good example of this can be seen in this report: "The [honour] killings [in Baluchistan] have been defended by politicians from Baluchistan. Reacting to a female colleague's attempt to raise the issue in parliament, Israrullah Zehri said such acts were part of a 'centuries-old tradition' and he would 'continue to defend them'." Omar Waraich. "Five women beaten and buried alive in Pakistan 'honour killing'," *Independent*, September 1, 2008. Accessed online on December 16, 2015.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/five-women-beaten-and-buried-alive-in-pakistan-honour-killing-915714.html>

wrest it away from the radicals — as though we were MFA students in a creative writing class struggling with midterm submissions, rather than 1.6 billion people of maddening diversity” (n.p.). Secondly, and perhaps the more achievable aim, is to counter-balance the neo-orientalist tendencies in popular Western writings that tend to simply cast *all* Muslim women as victims of violence. Uzma Aslam Khan, a well-known contemporary Pakistani writer in English, articulates the dilemma of fiction writing in Pakistan today particularly well.

In an atmosphere like this, what can I say about women and fiction? First, consider what is written about “us.” Since 9/11, a cornucopia of “true stories” from the Islamic world have been consumed, all packaged in identical covers: women behind burqas. . . This type of narrative is double-edged: suffering is sold to help justify war; war is peddled as the cure to suffering, not the cause. In order to compete, fiction by Muslim women must offer similar storylines: silent, submissive protagonists, preferably liberated by the West. . . If she doesn’t need liberating, why read her? (“Pakistan: Women and Fiction Today”)

It is becoming increasingly obvious that Islamist women in *hijabs* are achieving a different kind of agency in Pakistan today. Rather than being veiled victims, they have gained power by opting to stay within an Islamic framework of Sharia law.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the ideas about women’s rights in Pakistan appear to be shifting away from the universal definitions of these rights. As Muslim women have sought a new kind of Islamic agency, their depiction by the Western world has evolved into a practice of what Riley calls “transnational sexism” (2) which is simultaneously contradictory: while Muslim women are seen as victims in need of

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<sup>51</sup> The “agency conferring” role of the *Al-Huda* Women’s Movement in Pakistan has been discussed in detail by Amineh Ahmed, “Women’s Agency in Muslim Society,” in *The Sage Handbook of Islamic Studies*, eds. Akbar S Ahmed, Tamara Sonn (London: Sage, 2010) p.220-223.

rescue from patriarchal fundamentalism, they are at the same time viewed as dangerous themselves in their Islamist tendencies.

According to Riley, because Muslim women are thought to be controlled by primitive and brutal, men who brainwash them into fundamentalist ideas, in contrast, “Western men are posited as liberal and free-thinking, and appreciative of every aspect of female liberation. They therefore pose no threat to the women of Afghanistan and Iraq. On the contrary, Western men are the potential saviors of these women (3). Whereas “native” men are thought to be both dangerous *toward* women in their objectification of them; and dangerous *for* women in that they influence them into accepting extremist ideologies, Western men contrastingly become both benign and benevolent. Ratna Kapur makes a very strong statement about the dangers of embroiling the veiled woman image in the war between good and evil perpetrated by the 9/11 political rhetoric of the West, with its faulty assumptions about culture and religious identity.

Kapur identifies three consequences of these assumptions: Firstly, it perpetuates the idea that outside the Western world, culture is something that exists merely as a habit, that Muslims are “a museumized people” who conform without argument or debate (216). Secondly, it is a very “stagnant” understanding of culture, overlooking the existence of moderate thinking Muslims, and stubbornly denies the cultural complexity of the Islamic world. Thirdly, when the identity of a group of people is based on their religion alone, it privileges and gives undue power to religious authority, and consequently, as in the case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, it facilitates the voice of religious authority and amplifies the fundamentalist message of the clerics even though, in reality, their hold is not as strong over the general population (Kapur, 216-217). Such thinking only widens the divide by cultivating

alienation, and unwittingly giving more power to the very fundamentalist religious elements that threaten and violate women's rights.

Writing about and by women that use the unveiling as a metaphor for freedom are therefore themselves violations of women's rights rather than instruments for liberation.

Moreover, the patronizing Western approach that suggests that the liberation of women in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan is dependent on Western military intervention not only overlooks, but supersedes the local histories of previous struggles for rights made by women on their own from behind the veil with a different cultural measure of success.

Caught between larger forces, women, as a result, have felt increasingly powerless. As Uzma Aslam Khan puts it, Pakistani women can rarely be heard from her own perspective because “[l]ocal religious zealots control her in the name of Islam; the West controls her in the name of freedom. She is never consulted: why should she be, when she has no intellect, no artistry? She does not belong to herself but to others, white, brown, and black” (Khan “Pakistan: Women and Fiction Today”).

In the next sections of this chapter I will analyze autobiographical writings by Pakistani women, taking Malala Yousafzai and Mukhtaran Mai's memoirs as cases in point. I will unpack the politics of their publication and examine the complications that arise from issues such as co-authorship of both with well-known Western journalists.

## **Voicing Pakistani Women: Memoirs and Biographies in English**

A Pakistani woman who ventures to write a memoir, especially if it reflects her experiences as a person facing restrictions on her freedom, or indeed physical or emotional violence, faces a daunting prospect. To project her voice beyond the society that is the primary source of her oppression, she needs to have the language and means to reach an

international audience. This need places her in a vulnerable position, one that accentuates her already precarious condition. The problem of such a woman is complex because she “enters a commercial book industry that on the one hand has begun to treat her texts as a hot commodity, and on the other hand has a limited repertoire for placing her work” (Kahf, 78). In the post 9/11 market, there are only two “Eurocentrically slanted slots” for Muslim women: “No matter how much a Muslim woman may have something different to say, by the time it goes through the “machine” of the publishing industry, it is likely to come out the other end packaged as either a ‘Victim Story’ or ‘Escapee Story’” (Kahf, 78).

The choice of writing in English has always been suspect in countries with a colonial past and although repeatedly stressed by Pakistani authors to be a matter of personal preference, setting the Anglophone genre apart automatically categorizes these writings in a “role”. Hence, readers in Pakistan often have a reaction akin to suspicion about Pakistani, especially women writers, who choose to publish in the English language. Pakistani readership has been particularly reactionary in the post 9/11 period to “human rights biographies” by women published in the West, which they feel have been appropriated for political causes.

The fact that there are very few publishers in Pakistan, for fiction or autobiographical writing in English, has compounded the problem and played into the hands of the Western publishing “machine”. The problems of publishing in Pakistan are several, as reported in *DAWN*: “Apart from battling piracy and copyright issues, publishers here are also faced with a constant threat and so monitor what they publish. Controversial topics are avoided at all cost, and as a result, many stick to publishing non-fiction. Grants and funding on an institutional level have encouraged research-based books to be published widely but fiction clearly lags behind” (Rafi 2013). Of the handful of publishers in Pakistan, *Sang-e-Meel*

*Publications* publish mainly in Urdu and only publish a few English books, mostly on topics of history and religion. Oxford University Press Pakistan only publishes educational books, no fiction or biography. *Alhamra* publishers have published some good fiction in English, but seem to have become less active recently. *ILQA* is a new publishing house and has published children's fiction in English in the last four years. Bina Shah, who is one of the very few fiction writers published locally, talks about the woes of publishing in Pakistan as an English writer, where "marketing and distribution have always been in need of more support and attention, with not enough people to do the job. You really have to do a great deal of self-promotion. In addition, in recent years, with Alhamra and even SAMA going inactive, and OUP deciding to no longer publish original fiction, writers in Pakistan are pretty blocked in their attempts to break-through," Shah adds: "Publishers and agents abroad are not that interested in Pakistani writing, no matter what they may have said. Once they have one or two Pakistanis on their lists, they're not really looking for any more. And once the 'war on terror' changes focus or locus, Pakistan will no longer be 'terrorist flavour of the month' and there will be even less attention on whatever commercial fiction might have served that need."<sup>52</sup>

Recently, while most English fiction writers in Pakistan have turned to the larger Western publishing companies in an effort to benefit from the global focus on Pakistan, memoirs by Pakistani women have been actively solicited by publishers, with offers of Western journalists to co-author their stories. These neo-Orientalist writings are in demand by the publishing industry because they feed into the White saviour complex propagated by the War on Terror. As Kahf points out, because the publishers push writers into the packages

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<sup>52</sup> Bina Shah quoted in "Tales of Woe" by Haneen S. Rafi in *DAWN*, May 19, 2013. Accessed 24 December 24, 2015. < <http://www.dawn.com/news/1027397/tales-of-woe-2>>



of the “Victim/Escapee” because these are familiar “well-travelled ruts” for readers to follow in the West. At the end of the day, it is all about marketability of the book, because this is the kind of story of oppression that is expected

It’s always about anything but the unwillingness of white people to depart from stereotyped thinking, from the moment her writing group says, “Yes, you *must* write about your experiences of child abuse/marital rape/forced veiling/honor killing [insert Muslim oppression of choice here], because that’s the story we need to hear from a Muslim woman. Give us more like *that*, never mind those other topics you also write about,” to the editor saying, “Can you make this more rebellious? We think that’s where the heat of your story really is. The other stuff you write is a trifle boring, and when you talk about loving your faith, it’s preachy--- it’s not *accessible* to the general reader.” (Kahf, 81)

There are two important lessons to be learnt from the situation that Pakistani Muslim women writers find themselves in. Firstly, that auto/biographical writers need to find the right balance in their material to combat the pressures of the editors, and if their works are translated, to involve a local bilingual interpreter for due vigilance to help the author “push against the rut of expectations” (Kahf, 81). And noticeably, since memoirs by Pakistani women tend to be co-authored because of language restraints, as is the case with both the biographical works that are a part of this study, these writings become cogs in much bigger wheels of media imperialism. Noting this fact, Abu-Lughod writes that because most books that have been written with the help of ghost-writers or journalist co-writers, they are often “mediated in complex ways,” (89). As a result, when these memoirs are read in book clubs or in other organized reading groups in the West as testimonies of female oppression, the narratives are often mistaken by public to be true and unquestionable accounts of people and places. Thus, they fuel “gendered Orientalism,” and consolidate the idea of an “IslamLand” that has little basis (Abu-Lughod, 88).

Secondly, in sharp contrast, there is an equally negative role played by “merciless Muslim readers” who indiscriminately see every successful woman writer’s work as catering to Western agendas and blame them for selling their own values short (Kahf, 82). Thus, the woman writer faces two equally insurmountable obstacles. In the case of Pakistan where a post 9/11 religious sentiment is easily fanned when faced with any criticism regarding policy, reporting on genuine women’s rights abuses has caused the most discernable anger and suspicion as far as readers’ reactions are concerned. This suspicion, however, is not limited to the Pakistani readership which has sometimes been unfairly and indiscriminately labelled as a victim of a recent “Talibanization” of thought. Several prominent theorists and academicians have also raised similar concerns about post 9/11 representation of Muslim women in print culture.

Since 9/11 and the ongoing ‘war on terror’, narratives by and about Muslim women have been increasingly commodified, circulated and uncritically consumed, particularly in the West. As part of this process, a proliferation of books promising to take the Western reader ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ the veil of Muslim society and ‘demystify’ the lives of Muslim women have been fodder for a fetishistic voyeurism rooted in the Orientalist and Western feminist preoccupation with ‘unveiling’ Muslim women’s bodies and lives. Of particular interest and concern to this special issue is the predominant paradigm framing the production, circulation and reception of these narratives.

Playing the role of the ‘native informant’ some Muslim feminist scholars have also framed their analysis of Islam and gender in imperialist feminist terms, thus replicating, rather than undermining, the colonial discourse on Muslim women,” particularly “sensationalist biographic tell-all books” (Zine et al., 272-273).

Armed with these observations, I argue that the relationship between biographical writings and human rights is more complex than the sum content of these narratives. The politics of their publication and marketing raise human rights concerns of a different sort than the kind

that these books relate the stories of: gang rape, or the right to female education, for example, matters of concern though these certainly are. In looking at two of the most well-known post 9/11 examples of biographies by Pakistani women, I will attempt to comment on the complexity of these writings vis-à-vis international human rights discourse.

### ***I Am Malala: Human Rights, and the Politics of the Production, Marketing, and Reception of the Post 9/11 Memoir***<sup>53</sup>

The fact that Malala is seen as the ultimate symbol of Pakistan's failure towards girls and the only form of hyper-secularized feminism imagined in Pakistan has the dual effect of racializing Islam and erasing the multi-faceted feminist work that has always been part of Pakistani culture and political fabric. (Charania 2015, 68)

The last decade of the twentieth century, saw the simultaneous rise of human rights discourse, and life narrations that tell stories of injustice, oppression, and violence. Biographies and memoirs have since become the most compelling vehicles for advancing human rights, promoting the rise of interdisciplinary studies that treat "life narratives and human rights campaigns as multidimensional domains that merge and intersect at critical points, unfolding within and enfolding one another in an ethical relationship that is simultaneously productive of claims for social justice and problematic for the furtherance of this goal" (Schaffer & Smith 2004, 2). It follows then, that such interdisciplinary literature is almost always political, and oftentimes controversial in nature because there are contesting

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<sup>53</sup> This section has previously been published as a journal article: "I Am Malala: Human Rights, and the Politics of Production, Marketing, and Reception of the Post 9/11 Memoir." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 19.6 (2017): 855-871. DOI:10.1080/1369801X.2017.1347053

claims about human rights that emerge from their writing and circulation. Therefore, making a general case for contemporary post 9/11 life writing as a straightforward instrument for the promotion of human rights is not only simplistic; it is dangerously optimistic in a period impacted by the War on Terror.

In Malala Yousafzai's case, because of the global symbol that she has become since she was shot into fame by the Taliban in October 2012, her memoir is seen to play a significant role in highlighting human rights violations in terrorist controlled zones. Since its initial publication, affordable paperback editions have made this memoir a popular choice in school curricula and book clubs readings. Read in a prescriptive manner dictated by curriculum outcomes or end-of-book discussion questions, the book influences the shaping of public opinion about Malala's attackers and their ideology. Thus, a reader<sup>54</sup> becomes unwittingly embroiled in configuring what Lila Abu-Lughod calls a "new common sense about going to war for women," (2013, 81) which gains its authority by employing a human rights idiom that has internationally been affirmed and made synonymous with freedom of choice and its value. The language of human rights has become so important in defining a "universal metric of humanity," that drawing upon women's rights discourse brings

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<sup>54</sup>For the most part in this article, I prefer the use of the term "audiences" over "readers" for two reasons. Firstly, I do not want to imply that there is always an "ideal" (Culler 2006) or "model" (Eco 1979) reader of human rights narratives in whom "empathy" is evoked as a necessary response to stories of suffering. I also want to avoid the neat (though sometimes contested) distinction between "lay" and "professional" readers (Guillory 2001) of literary texts, mainly because this article examines the book's reception both as a text *and* a "cultural commodity" (Huggan 1994). Secondly, because *I am Malala* is a memoir that is media related, I use the term "audiences" for readers with preconceived notions that affect the reception of the book. Notions of "location" and "identity," (see Procter 2009) in this case, do influence reader-response: thus, the use of "Western" and "Pakistani" readers as a broad (if rather simplistic) distinction.

validation to other public discourses in America and Europe through its strong emotional appeal (Abu-Lughod 2013, 81).

For this reason, any critical engagement with *I am Malala* must not simply be limited to examining the veracity of its content and the importance of its overt message. When life stories are read in conjunction with human rights campaigns, they undergo a contextual transformation that is controlled by the book's production, circulation, and reception (Schaffer and Smith 2004, 5). Moreover, the author becomes "irrelevant to the realities of production," but "essential to the mediated and fragmenting hyperrealities of promotion" (Brouillette 2007, 67). Malala's fame is essential to the promotion of her book as a marketable commodity, but she has little control over how her packaged narrative is received by diverse audiences. Critics generally agree that for narratives to become effective vehicles for human rights advocacy, they must evoke "empathy" in readers (Hunt 2007; Barnett 2011). As Slaughter (2014) puts it, human rights narrators, journalists among them, are "enchanters," who, through evoking empathy, create better worlds where "injustice is being addressed (if not remedied)," and "villains are shamed (if not punished)" (49). However, there are limitations to human empathy "when we make some people's troubles our business, while we ignore the troubles of others" (Ignatieff 1999, 1). The sentiment of many Pakistanis that the "troubles of others" have been ignored behind Malala's over-celebration, is reflected in the publication of *I am Not Malala* (2015) by All Pakistan Private Schools Federation (APPSF), as a rebuttal to Malala's book. Such a strong negative reaction has surprised Malala's Western applauders.

The memoir's foremost banner is girls' right to education. Indeed, Malala's commitment to learning, and her conviction of her right to free speech, are genuine facets of her personality. She shares this enthusiasm for education with millions of other Pakistani

children who continue to attend school despite the imminent danger that they face daily. If this be a mark of courage, then Aitzaz Hassan, the fifteen-year old boy blown up while jostling a suicide bomber in a bid to stop him from entering his school in Hangu on 7 January 2014, is a paragon of valour. So are the 144 school children, all boys except one, who were shot in cold blood by the Taliban in Army Public School Peshawar on 16 December 2014; and the more recent shootings of 22 male students of the Baacha Khan University Charsadda in Pakistan on 21 January 2016. All these attacks are claimed by the Taliban to have been in retaliation to the ongoing Pakistan Army offensive against their groups in the North Waziristan tribal areas at the repeated US insistence that Pakistan “can and must do more”.<sup>55</sup> The real problem is obviously much bigger and deeper than just girls’ education.

Malala’s construction as an icon is built on the premise of female education because the theme of liberating women has a special resonance in the global War on Terror discourse. From a sociological viewpoint, the process of the “iconization” of a figure into global view requires a synthesis of the “particular” and the “universal,” and is therefore often political, since it is driven by the “culturally anchored schemas” about an ideal society held by the actors whose interest it serves; consequently, “icons are. . . *inseparable from their creators*” (Oleson 2016, 311. Emphasis in original). Although the Pakistani media certainly contributed to Malala’s early celebrity status through television and local newspaper reporting, it was the universalization of her iconic status in the Western media, following her medical treatment and “adoption” by the United Kingdom, that caused the first wave of animosity against her. *I am Malala* is contentious in Pakistan because it is seen to be an appropriation of her story by the West for political causes, and has inevitably led to what Oleson terms a “de-iconization”

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<sup>55</sup> “Obama says Pakistan ‘can and must’ do more against terrorism.” *DAWN*.

movement against Malala (2016, 312). The animosity is less toward her person than her universalized persona.

Malala's story started when a BBC reporter Abdul Hai Kakar was assigned to find a schoolgirl who might be willing to share her experiences in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, where the Taliban had taken control in 2009, ordering the closure of all girls' schools in the region. Anyone going against their edict was threatened with death. Kakar asked Ziauddin Yousafzai for help in this regard because he was an influential public speaker in the area, was often heard debating in favour of girls' education, and owned a private school in Mingora, Swat. After failing to convince the parents of two other girls who were both willing to collaborate with Kakar, Ziauddin put forward his own 11-year-old daughter Malala, who started narrating the day's happenings to Kakar in a 30-minute conversation in Urdu, held every day for a ten-week period (Ali 2012). The diary first appeared on the BBC Urdu webpage in January 2009, under the pen name "Gul Makai" (cornflower). In the diary, Malala spoke of her fears about the Taliban's dismantling of schools. Ziauddin's involvement with this project might partly have stemmed from his fear of losing his livelihood as a school owner.<sup>56</sup>

Following her last blog for the BBC, Malala made several appearances on Pakistani TV speaking against the Taliban. Ziauddin was later approached by Adam B. Ellick of *The New York Times* to make a documentary about the military operation in Swat against the Taliban, which was aired in 2009 under the title *Class Dismissed*. Malala's growing publicity

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<sup>56</sup> "When it came to the Taliban's campaign to close girls' schools in the valley, the Yousafzai family was threatened ideologically but also financially—education was, after all, the family business." See Shahan Mufti's "Media darling: Malala Yousafzai's long and delicate dance with the press."

became tiresome for the Taliban who feared a decline in their popularity among the conservative masses of the tribal belt in Pakistan.

Before the Taliban takeover, the people of Swat had been disgruntled with the Pakistani Government for side-lining their interests since the princely state of Swat was officially dissolved and brought under Pakistani law in 1969 (Perlez and Shah 2009). In the devastating earthquake in Pakistan on 8 October 2005, the upper Swat Valley was difficult to access and before government aid could reach there, the Taliban groups poured in to help the people, who never forgot Taliban support during that time. When Sufi Muhammad<sup>57</sup> set up a form of Islamic *Shariah* in Swat, most people were in favour of their system. At the time, seeing hope for speedy justice, many Swatis donated large sums of their gold and money to the cause of the Taliban (Bergen and Tiedemann 2013, 295-296; Yousafzai 2013, 117).

Following the ban on Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) ordered by President Musharraf in 2002, and the subsequent arrest of Sufi Muhammad, his son-in-law, Mullah Fazlullah, took over the leadership. Fazlullah set up an FM radio station and broadcast Islamic sermons to the people. Intrigued at first, most people followed his instructions (Geiser 2012, 710). Nicknamed Radio Mullah, his control became very brutal and increasingly difficult to challenge (Siddiqi and Sajid 2014, 58). When videos of beating women in public for violating Islamic laws leaked out into the rest of Pakistan, things came to a head (Walsh 2009). The Pakistan Army was sent into Swat in 2009. After a successful military operation, the Taliban retreated and saw the masses turn their backs on them. Years of suicide bombings and guerrilla warfare left their image more tarnished than ever. Malala's

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<sup>57</sup> Sufi Muhammad is the founder of TSNM (Terhreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi), a Islamist group first set up in 1992. He is best known for taking control of the Swat valley in Pakistan, and imposing a strict version of *Sharia* in the area. TSNM was banned by the Pakistan government in 2002 as a militant/terrorist organization.



TV appearances did not help. As a desperate measure, the Taliban *Shura* (meeting of elders) decided to have Malala gunned down. On 12 October 2012, in Mingora, Swat, their appointed gunman had Malala identified by her classmates in her school bus on her way back from school, and shot her in the head. Two of her other friends were injured too, but Malala was seriously wounded. She was taken to a Pakistani Military hospital for immediate treatment, and was later flown to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham UK for further life-saving surgical procedures. Her subsequent survival was the beginning of a whole new chapter. In this case, it is not wrong to say that Malala “had greatness thrust upon her in the form of an assassin’s bullet” (Chakrabarty 2013). Since then, Malala has made the United Kingdom her adoptive country, and has won numerous prizes and awards including the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (2013) and the Simone de Beauvoir Prize (2013), and has become the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate (2015).

Malala’s memoir is an extended media project, one in which both Malala and Ziauddin had sought active participation in the beginning (Mufti 2013). The media’s strategic role in the promotion of her public image is vital to an examination of her book’s reception. From her initial rise to fame through her BBC blog publication, to the first documentary about her made by Adam Ellick of *The New York Times* in 2009, the wide news coverage of her shooting in 2012, and her subsequent collaboration with Christina Lamb, a journalist and foreign correspondent for *The Sunday Times*, in writing her memoir in 2013, Malala and the media have had an intricate relationship in the shaping of her story for consumption. This relationship has continued following Malala’s Nobel prize win, as David Guggenheim’s new documentary *He Named me Malala* was released by *Fox Searchlight* in 2015, with broadcasting rights bought by *National Geographic* to air the film in 171 countries in 45 languages. Malala’s story is therefore anchored firmly in women’s rights discourse at a time

when the fight against global terrorism is packaged by mainstream media in the West as a parallel movement for third-world women's freedom.

Historically, the media's involvement in the discovery and projection of human rights violations only became prominent in the 1990s, when several governments started incorporating human rights principles in their legal frameworks. A 2002 report by the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP) says that the most influential media organizations are concentrated in the global North, and the prioritizing of human rights issues by reporters carries strong implications, and also observes that "*the media do not explain and contextualise human rights information as well as they might*" (Emphasis in original). Prioritizing of some events over others has been especially noticeable in post 9/11 reporting (Hoskin and O'Loughlin 2010).

Pakistan has witnessed a rising nationalist sentiment in response. Examples of media coverage of the Raymond Davis incident<sup>58</sup>, Aafia Siddiqui's case<sup>59</sup>, and Osama Bin Laden's death<sup>60</sup> in Abbottabad, reveal the extent to which Pakistanis have become suspicious of Western reporting, perceived to be a manipulation of facts to malign the country. These reservations have precluded some readers in Pakistan from feeling "empathy" for Malala's story as a human rights testimonial, partly because the co-author is a British journalist. Furthermore, the choice of photograph on the book cover is reminiscent of *National Geographic* and *TIME* magazine covers from the Soviet Afghan war, which frame a gaze usually driven by political discourses. Such framing "essentially involves selection and

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<sup>58</sup> Read Declan Walsh's "Truth hard to find in US-Pakistan war of words over Raymond Davis."

<sup>59</sup> Read "Representations of Aafia Siddiqui in Media," *Pakistan Media Watch*.

<sup>60</sup> For conspiracy theories in Pakistani media following Osama Bin Laden's death, read Graeme Smith's "Republic of Fables: Pakistan's reaction to Osama's killing shows it's a country of contradictions."

saliency.” (Entman 1993, 51) of which the literal yellow and red frames of *National Geographic* and *TIME* magazine covers are a good example.

As Richard Stengel (2010), the editor of the book celebrating *TIMES*' 87 years, admits: “*TIME*'s iconic red border symbolizes a bold, even arrogant idea. Everything inside that red border is worth knowing, and whatever is outside of it, well, not so much.” *I am Malala*'s book jacket, like Malala's *TIME* cover, lends itself well to the same tradition as the iconic photograph of the nameless “Afghan Girl” by the journalist Steve McCurry on the June 1985 cover of the *National Geographic*. The intensity in her green eyes was seen to project Afghan pain and Soviet cruelty, thus validating US support of Afghan Mujahideen. Seventeen years later, the Mujahideen re-emerged in the Western media as the Taliban, suspected of supporting Al-Qaeda. Stories about their cruelty to women in forcing them to wear burqas started to recirculate, and the Afghan Girl was searched out of her nameless life. Rebranded Sharbat Gula, with her face unveiled, her story “devolve[d] into the stuff of tourist spectacle,” (Huggan 1994, 27) once more, as she appeared on the *National Geographic* cover and TV screens (Newman 2002). Only the villains changed (from the Soviets to the Taliban); the victim (the Afghan woman), and heroes (the US saviours), remained the same.

Helped by the fact that Malala Yousafzai was so coldly shot by the Taliban, she has become the perfect poster child for girls' rights advocacy. With her head covered in a dupatta on her book cover, like the Afghan Girl, she makes the exotic accessible in a frame that casts her as a familiar victim. Marketed by Edelman, the global PR firm with clients that include Microsoft and Starbucks (Usborne 2013), Malala has become “Brand Malala,” (Grayson 2013) and will likely be bound to this image with her side-parted hair and dupatta-clad head for the rest of her life, even if she ever wanted a change in her appearance. Ironically, her fame in the name of freedom of speech, has made her lose her freedom of choice.

Another noteworthy angle is the role of the journalists' neglect in Malala's shooting, which has not been adequately debated. Protection of children's rights was certainly overlooked at the time, as pointed out by Syed Irfan Ashraf, a Pakistani journalist and co-producer of the *New York Times* documentary, who admits to not being quite blameless himself. Raising questions about journalistic ethics in projecting Malala's story, he accuses the *BBC* and *The New York Times* of failure to protect the identity of a vulnerable child asked to voice her views at a time when the Taliban were openly threatening anyone who dared to challenge their control:

Would it do the same if it were covering some violent group inside the US?  
 Would journalists in the west put their own children at risk the way they do with children in poor countries? The fact is insensitive treatment by elite media outlets such as *The New York Times* and the *BBC* made Malala vulnerable to Taliban attack, with horrible consequences for the teenage girl. . . I believe the *BBC* was at best careless of Malala's safety; at worst, in violation of an ethical code. The diary was a commitment between Malala and the *BBC* correspondent Abdul Hai Kakkar. Who leaked Malala's identity to other journalists in Peshawar? (Ashraf 2013, 15-16)

There are conflicting accounts<sup>61</sup>, however, about who leaked Malala's identity. Some reports claim that Ziauddin himself revealed her identity at a press club event in Peshawar (Cooke 2012; Baker 2012). Shahan Mufti (2014) even suggests that Ziauddin taught his daughter to participate with him in a "delicate dance" with the local and international media, willingly pushing her into an eager media's embrace because of his own political ambitions; that he is therefore complicit in endangering her life. To be fair, although Ziauddin was clearly aware of the risk he was taking, he only anticipated a direct threat to his own life, not to young

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<sup>61</sup> Read Syed I. Ashraf's detailed report Malala's identity leakage, *ViewsWeek*.

Malala's. Nevertheless, Ziauddin's influence on his daughter meant that Malala made herself readily accessible to journalists. A psychiatrist, Dr. Mohammad Ayub, who was at the hospital where Malala was first taken after being shot, felt that she "was like a suicide bomber, brainwashed into putting herself in danger" (quoted by Baker 2012). Ellick also recalls with unease Malala's "ambitious father, the media, and the role that we all played in the tragedy of her life" (Johnson and Ellick 2013, 0:52-1:01). Ellick claims that he had discussed the danger with the family in making the documentary with Ziauddin and his editors in New York, but that Ziauddin had no reservations about using "his telegenic daughter to bolster his cause in the media" (3:17-3:20). Ellick adds: "the way he pushed Malala to join the fight sometimes reminded me of a parent, pushing their kid to become the next tennis star, or beauty pageant winner" (3:37- 3:45).

It is, therefore, no surprise that the media platform has held an attraction for Malala, not only because of her father's influence, but also because as a child she witnessed first-hand the power that Fazlullah had exercised through FM radio. In her interview on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart that aired on 18 June 2015, she spoke about her awareness of the power of the media: "We spoke up for our rights to every media channel, to every newspaper, that we could" (10:56-11:01). Her book repeatedly reveals her active pursuit of journalistic mediums. She writes that it was "thrilling" for her "to see her words on the [BBC] website" (156). Also, she recalls thinking while entering the offices of *Geo*, a Pakistani news channel, that "*the media needs interviews,*" (emphasis in original) after which, she writes "the more interviews I gave, the stronger I felt" (Yousafzai 2013, 141). Some saw Malala's involvement with the media as dangerous, but Bede Sheppard, from the children's division of *Human Rights Watch* maintained that the solution was not silence children's voices, but for the Pakistani government to make sure that they could speak safely (Cooke 2012, n.p.). By neatly

shifting the blame onto the Pakistani government, both journalistic ethics and a responsibility toward a complete contextualization of Malala's story, are left unfulfilled.

Today, Malala can speak from the safety of Western protection. In her famous UN speech, Malala's words "moved the world," according to *Human Rights Watch*. Yet, many Pakistanis have retracted their initial sympathy and admiration for her, more so after the publication of her book. This negative feeling was triggered initially by her emphatic use of the word "terrorist" that appears, only too easily, to reinforce the "Us" and "Them" binary that was perpetrated by President Bush's 9/11 address. During Tremonti's (2013) *CBC* radio interview, Malala talks about how life changed after the Taliban came to power: "Like in the movie, something bad was happening in the movie of our life. The Taliban, they... the terrorists we call them, because they are terrorists and they are extremists, they started to misuse the name of Islam for their own personal benefits." There is nothing wrong with her message, except that her language places her firmly on one side of the Bush-divide, giving rise to a discourse of exclusion and "othering". The term "terrorism" has taken hold as an ideology in the dangerous semantics of the post 9/11 era. This causes a problem in that "terrorism" is often used both intentionally and unintentionally to muddle distinct causes and acts into one singular problem" (Moeller 2009, 22).

A few weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Laura Bush's Radio Address on 17 November 2001, single-handedly connected the state of Afghan women with the fight against terrorism: "Only the terrorists and the Taliban forbid education to women. . . The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women." Therefore, when Malala naively writes about liking "Justin Bieber songs and Twilight movies," and wanting "the best face-lightening creams," (7) it is read as a Westernized view of freedom: like the freedom of wearing nail polish and listening to music that Laura Bush sought for Afghan women. Since

the speech, the US War on Terror has been intertwined with the project of liberation of the oppressed Muslim woman, and perhaps more than anything, it is this complicity in the rhetoric of terror that has made ordinary Pakistanis regard Malala's canonization by the West with unease, if not downright suspicion.

According to Malala's memoir (2013), whenever she says she wants to leave Birmingham, her father answers: "No . . . These schools are good. You should stay here and gather knowledge so you can use your words powerfully" (311). It is no wonder that when she says she wants to "be trained well with the weapon of knowledge" to "fight more effectively" on her return to Pakistan, it sounds eerily like a past colonial agenda (311). Whose "knowledge" is the weapon, Pakistanis wonder. It is likely to be Christina Lamb's voice, reminiscent of Macaulay's, that writes of Madrassa education as a place where "[t]hey learn that there is no such thing as science or literature, that dinosaurs never existed and man never went to the moon" (Yousafzai 2013, 107). The imperialist cause had used women in the past, just as it had used education as a justification for their rule. Similar justifications are mobilized for the neo-imperialist project today. Publicizing the need to save oppressed Muslim women from "savage" control, and education as the means to do it, lends itself very well to staging and maintaining hegemony.

Malala enters the political scene at a particularly crucial time. As a result of post 9/11 global politics, Muslim women have emerged as a new kind of subaltern, appropriated by two opposing sides to support "the grand narrative of Islam for one group and the grand narrative of modernity by the other" (Brohi 2008, 134). While Salma Yaqoob (2008), a Pakistani feminist, voices the widely felt complaint that Muslim women are unfairly used as symbols of Islamic tyranny in the War on Terror (150), Sherene Razack (2008) blames Western feminists for participating in this new form of imperialism through the "politics of

rescue,” establishing the idea that “it is through gender that we can tell the difference between those who are modern and those who are not” (17). Women are scapegoats in Pakistan’s uneasy position as a US ally in waging a war within its own boundaries, caught between global (liberal) and national (religious) interests. Due to the complexity of Pakistan’s political situation, any external criticism of its patriarchal structures only results in extremism as a counter measure. The defensive reaction of the Muslim world to their negative representation can be seen in their attempt at countering these views with “a hyperperformivity” of Muslimness (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 17). Expecting self-criticism from conservative Muslims in places like Pakistan is naïve, especially when they feel constantly demonized, and think that admitting their shortcomings would be tantamount to washing their dirty linen in public (Yaqoob 2008, 151).

Malala’s fame has created more problems than solutions. Students from a string of schools across Pakistan refused the suggestion that their schools be named after Malala, for fear of reprisals. Pakistanis are suspicious of the girl who got a coveted British visa while thousands of young children are dying at home, and now call her “Malala Drama-zai” (Crilly; Ashfaque Yousafzai 2013). As noted in a *Guardian* article on 10 November 2013, Kashif Mirza, the chairman of the *All Pakistan Private Schools Federation*, banned Malala’s book in its affiliated schools, blaming her book for making her “a tool in the hands of the Western powers.” It is unfortunate that for all the speeches Malala makes, she is still the subaltern because she is vulnerable to manipulation, whether it is by her father who is constantly shaping her thoughts and words, or Christina Lamb, whose own knowledge of Pakistan’s official history informs much of the commentary in *I am Malala*. Abu-Lughod (2013) points out that because contemporary memoirs are mostly co-written with journalists or ghost-writers, readers should be aware of the complex ways in which these writings are often



mediated (89). Fatima Bhutto (2013), a Pakistani writer and the niece of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, makes a similar point:

Ghostwritten books pose a constant difficulty – you are never sure whose voice is leading whose... It's hardly an exact science, guessing when the ghostwriter's voice takes over from the author's, but in the description, for example, of the scale of Pakistan's devastating 2005 earthquake, the reader is told that the damage “affected 30,000 square kilometres, an area as big as the American state of Connecticut”, and the stiff, know-it-all voice of a foreign correspondent resounds... here in Pakistan anger towards this ambitious young campaigner is as strong as ever. Amid the bile, there is a genuine concern that this extraordinary girl's courageous and articulate message will be colonised by one power or other for its own insidious agendas. She is young and the forces around her are strong and often sinister when it comes to their designs on the global south. There is a reason we know Malala's story but not that of Noor Aziz, eight years old when killed by a drone strike in Pakistan; Zayda Ali Mohammed Nasser, dead at seven from a drone strike in Yemen; or Abeer Qassim Hamza al Janabi, the 14-year-old girl raped and set on fire by US troops in Mahmudiyah, Iraq. “I wasn't thinking these people were humans,” one of the soldiers involved, Steven Green, said of his Iraqi victims.”

Taliban fears about Westernization, although grossly obsessive, mirror the concerns about “cultural invasion” that were voiced by the adherents of the media imperialism (Chadha & Kavoori 2000, 416). On 15 July 2013, Adnan Rasheed, the spokesperson for the Taliban, wrote an open letter to Malala. The document was sent to Rob Crilly, the Pakistan correspondent of *The Telegraph*, on 17 July 2013, in which Rasheed insists that Malala was not shot for going to school, but for her “propagandist” language against the Taliban, and for using her “tongue on the behest of the others.” He writes:

I want to draw your attention to an extract from the minute written by Sir T.B Macaulay to British parliament dated 2nd February 1835 about what type of

education system is required in Indian sub-continent to replace the Muslim education system. He stated “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” This was and this is the plan and mission of this so called education system for which you are ready to die, for which UNO takes you to their office to produce more and more Asians in blood but English in taste, to produce more and more Africans in color but English in opinion, to produce more and more non English people but English in morale [*sic*].

Although the media dismissed Rasheed’s letter as a further demonstration of the failed logic of the Taliban, Macaulay’s *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) still rankles postcolonial sensibilities (Shams 2013). There is a fear that Malala may have become one of “Macaulay’s children” (Lal 1989, 25). Therefore, when Rasheed says he agrees with Malala about the importance of a teacher, pen and book, but questions “which teacher which pen and which book?” his point resonates with many confused Pakistanis faced with a new identity crisis, “even though they should know better” (Crilly 2013).

A general climate of discontent has popularized Assed Baig’s (2013) column, with its idea of Malala as the “good native.” Baig supports Malala’s fight for education, but feels exasperated with the duplicity of Western politicians and the media in their selective use of Malala’s story: “Malala is the good native, she does not criticise the West, she does not talk about the drone strikes, she is the perfect candidate for the white man to relieve his burden and save the native.... The Western savior complex has hijacked Malala's message.” One should note that Baig’s article of 15 July 2013 about Malala’s silence regarding U.S. drone attacks had appeared *earlier* than (and might well have prompted) Malala’s mention of drones in her meeting with President Obama on 11 October 2013. Malala should be credited with responding to the grievances of Pakistanis by discussing drone strikes at a meeting

where it was likely to make the biggest impact. Yet, despite her conscious effort to do so, both Hart (2013, 2014) and Khalek (2013) report in *FAIR* (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) that Malala's comment in her talk with the President was not widely reported in 2012, but was covered only after she had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, "which raises questions about whether the media outlets praising this extraordinary girl for speaking out are even listening to what she has to say" (Khalek 2013). In a later paperback edition of *I am Malala* (2015), in response to the criticism from Pakistan, Malala has added in her prologue a line about her comment to President Obama concerning drone attacks (xix).

Irrespective of Malala's words, the general view in Pakistan is that Malala has not only given the US a moral framework for bombing their perceived enemies, but has also provided a political justification of revenge because it has "supplemented vengeance with altruism" (Brohi 2008). The idea of a Western conspiracy has spread like a raging forest fire. So much, in fact, that a newspaper article by Nadeem Paracha (2013), satirizing the paranoia of Pakistanis, was read as true, even when a disclaimer was added to warn the readers. Quite evidently tongue-in-cheek, Paracha writes that a doctor in Swat, whose hobby is collecting earwax, has claimed to have Malala's childhood earwax, and a DNA analysis has shown her not to be a Pathan, but a Caucasian from Poland. Having confronted her father with the report, "Malala's father told the doctor that Malala's real name was Jane and she was born in Hungary in 1997. Her real biological parents were Christian missionaries who, after travelling to Swat in 2002, left Malala as a gift to her adopted parents after they secretly converted to Christianity". That such an obviously satirical piece is believed to be true by some, says much about the extent of an ordinary Pakistani's suspicions about the West. Dr. Shakil Afridi's involvement in collecting DNA samples in and around Abbottabad under the

guise of immunization, planned by the US intelligence to find the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden, provides fuel for such rampant suspicions.

It should be no surprise, then, that the reception of Malala's memoir is markedly different in Pakistan from the response it has elicited in the West. In 2005, the *Human Rights Commission of Pakistan* reported a complete breakdown in the law-and-order situation in the country, "compounding the sense of insecurity unleashed by the inequalities of neo-liberal globalization and the 'war on terror'" (Shani 2007, 126). Pakistan had no choice but to side with the US or be "bombed back to the stone-age"<sup>62</sup>. In a country where emotions understandably run high due to the escalating rate of civilian deaths because of retaliatory Taliban attacks against government's support for US drone strikes, the hyper-celebration of Malala is seen to be a blatant mockery. Using her image on every magazine cover and TV channel in the world only to amplify the failure of the Pakistani state seems unfair to many. Following Malala's UN speech, the people of Pakistan felt that she "was being used to make Pakistan feel guilty for actions that were the fault of the Western powers in the first place" (Shah 2013). Although most educated Pakistanis are uneasy with the backlash against Malala, many can understand that the international drama about Malala injures Pakistani identity which has been in a confused state for some time now.

Huma Yusuf (2013) sums up the discomfort of Malala's critics in three points: "Her fame highlights Pakistan's most negative aspect (rampant militancy); her education campaign echoes Western agendas; and the West's admiration of her is hypocritical because it overlooks the plight of other innocent victims, like the casualties of U.S. drone strikes" (n.p.). The confusion of the Pakistani people is evident also from the sharp divide between the

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<sup>62</sup> For details about this controversial quote that Pervez Musharraf wrote about in his book, read "'Back to the Stone Age': Origins of a Cliché" by Nick Cullather.

opinion of the elite and working classes. The rich upper class, a much smaller group generally viewed as progressive, secular and Westernized, is intensely disliked by the conservative Pakistanis caught in a nationalist frenzy. If the choice is between the Taliban and the drones, Pakistan is unequally divided. Although Taliban violence is seen to be evil, drones are widely regarded as more pernicious because the harm is inflicted by outside forces. On the other hand, the progressive activist groups reflect a different sentiment, exemplified in their placards at an Islamabad rally that read “Drones kill so Malala can live” (Waheed 2012). These opposing views have been vigorously debated between activists and academics like Afiya Shehribano Zia (2012) and Nivi Manchanda (2012), the former arguing that the “agent” (the Taliban) should not be made the “victim” (of culture, imperialism, global powers) by deflecting the responsibility of their crimes; and the latter claiming that this approach disregards the “structures of hegemonic masculinity, exclusionary heteronormativity, and more recently, divisive neoliberal development agendas.” Although there is no decisive viewpoint here, the value of the debate in relation to what *I am Malala* represents, is an essential aspect of the pedagogical utility of the book itself. Acknowledging the complexity of its narrative would ensure that memoirs like Malala’s do not contribute to what Hamid Dabashi (2006) calls a post 9/11 “collective amnesia” (n.p.) that discards history and banks on short term memory manufactured by a new military operation every few years.

The battle of good and evil between the Pak-Afghan tribal warfare and the high-tech weaponry of the War on Terror, for which Ahmed (2013) aptly uses metaphors of “the thistle and the drone,” is key to understanding conflicting audiences of Malala’s memoir. In human rights terms, there is much that can be learnt from this observation. While the book’s popularity in the West primarily rests in its advocacy of girls’ right to education, its harsh criticism directs attention toward the recent devaluation of Pakistani lives often dismissed as

“collateral damage” in the War on Terror. This dual message cannot be transmitted effectively if book-club culture unalterably solidifies the way that this memoir is read by the media-guided audiences in the West, or if it is taught in schools in a manner that inspires a rescue-narrative in response to the patriarchal violence it portrays. According to Zine (2014), such books “become pedagogical in that they purport to teach us something about the lives of other women through the imperiled difference they represent . . . most often leaving absent the structural conditions that shape their lives in the global postcolonial and neoimperial world” (186). Such “pedagogies of peril” (Zine 2014) must be avoided if the memoir’s contribution to human rights advocacy is recognized to be of any practical value. The MLA’s recently published volume (Moore and Goldberg 2015), makes important advances in the pedagogical field of human rights literature, suggesting that the most important task of an instructor in teaching rights narratives in a classroom “is to situate such prioritization of factual veracity in the epistemological tenets of individualist Western notions, contexts, and applications of truth-value and the narrative forms that have accompanied them into being” (4).

Recently, several reading strategies have been put forward that suggest more cognizant ways of interpreting *I Am Malala* (Khoja-Moolji 2015; Ryder 2015; Fitzpatrick 2017). While the critics generally agree that Malala has been appropriated by the West, all suggest more nuanced readings that move beyond what feeds global narratives of power. Whereas Khoja-Moolji (2015) draws attention to Malala’s subtler comments about women’s power and agency, Fitzpatrick (2017) highlights the parts where Malala’s voice comes through about “issues of power, class, corruption, and militarization that underlie our respective histories” (n.p.). Ryder (2015) adds that the real value in Malala’s words lies in that she stresses her identity as a Muslim woman with the freedom to speak out, yet also

points out that Islamization is a political movement, not a religious one. Ryder argues that “even as Malala relies on Western media to circulate her message, she persistently disrupts its dominant messages. The role of critics, then, should be to amplify these disruptions” (176).

Although strategies that encourage reading between the lines allow for a broader and more fruitful engagement with the memoir, unless the work is treated both as a testimony and a material commodity that is marketable in complex ways, no effective progress can be made towards universalizing human rights through literature. The two audiences of Malala’s memoir, divided by their ideological and geo-political positions, must be bridged. A failure to do so would be a failure also of Malala Yousafzai’s vision that “one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world” (UN Speech, 12 July 2013).

### ***In the Name of Honour: Mukhtar Mai’s Story, Women’s Rights, and Rape Laws in Pakistan***

I’m still trying to help out President Bush by tracking down Osama bin Laden.

After poking through remote parts of Pakistan, asking for a tall Arab with a beard, I can’t say I’ve earned that \$25 million reward.

But I did come across someone even more extraordinary than Osama. Usually we journalists write about rogues, but Mukhtaran Bibi could not be more altruistic or brave, as the men who gang-raped her discovered. *I firmly believe that the central moral challenge of this century, equivalent to the struggles against slavery in the 19th century or against totalitarianism in the 20th, will be to address sex inequality in the third world -- and it’s the stories of women like Ms. Mukhtaran that convince me this is so.*

So although I did not find Osama, I did encounter a much more ubiquitous form of evil and terror: *a culture, stretching across about half the globe, that chews up women and spits them out.*<sup>63</sup> (Emphasis added. Kristoff, “Sentenced to be Raped”)

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<sup>63</sup> Kristof, Nicholas D. “Sentenced to Be Raped,” *The New York Times*.

There are two questions that arise from newspaper articles like Nicholas Kristof's in *The New York Times*, written about Mukhtar Mai: firstly, the question about the Western world's authority of moral policing in the third world in the name of human rights; and secondly, their audacity in promoting a sweeping damnation of cultural values by highlighting one woman's story. By connecting Osama Bin Laden's search with Mukhtar Mai's discovery, and comparing both to be equally valid and important as justifications for US intervention in Pakistan, this news report also speaks volumes on its own about the embroilment of women in the War on Terror and how that affects the definition of human rights. This connects with Michael Ignatieff's (see chapter 1, 10)<sup>64</sup> question "whether the era of human rights has come and gone" after September 11, in the sense that human rights can no longer be separated from the War on Terror.

For this reason, the second memoir that I examine is Mukhtar's, from the rural Punjab in Pakistan, who is perhaps not as widely recognized as Malala Yousafzai. Her story is that of a victim of a tribal "honour" code. Claimed to have been gang-raped by order of a tribal council as punishment for her younger brother's alleged relationship with a woman from another clan, Mukhtar Mai spoke out with the help of international media, fighting for justice in the Pakistani courts. Her case brought to global attention the clash between religious and secular views of women's rights in Pakistan's ideological battlefield. In an already familiar reception pattern, although her real story evoked country wide outrage and sympathy in Pakistan, the appearance of her memoir co-written with a Western journalist, and marketed by a Western publishing company, triggered a religious and nationalistic defensiveness on part of the Pakistani public. The memoir was denounced for serving Western agendas since it

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Ignatieff, "Is the Human Rights Era Ending," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2002. Retrieved October 15, 2015.  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/05/opinion/is-the-human-rights-era-ending.html>>



painted Pakistan as a lawless country, unmindful of human rights protection. Pakistanis believed that such books disregarded the many positive efforts of human rights activists within Pakistan, and once again glorified the intervention of international NGOs as white saviours, protecting “brown women” from the honour codes set in place by “brown men” (to borrow Spivak’s terminology).

At the onset of this section, I want to clarify that my intention is not to dismiss Mukhtar Mai’s courage, nor to downplay the horror of her rape. Mai’s memoir is rightly regarded as an important human rights document because it charts the journey of a Pakistani woman’s fight for justice against rape. It is, however, complicated by several other factors. The observations here are made with a view to investigating the impact of a memoir that is a product of media sensationalism. Not unlike Malala Yousafzai’s memoir, Mai’s is also written jointly with the French journalist Marie-Therese Cuny. Therefore, any questions raised about the ethics of journalism in the reporting of this story, or its subsequent publication as a memoir, is a human rights concern in equal measure.

Mukhtar Mai is from Meerwala, a remote village in Northern Punjab in Pakistan, and belongs to the “peasant Gujar caste” (Mai, 1). The village is dominated by the local clan of Mastois, who are said to be powerful farmers. Although there are different versions of her gang rape story, depending on the witness accounts from either side, the generally held opinion is that Mukhtar’s brother Shakur was accused of having had sexual relations with Salma of the Mastoi tribe. According to Mukhtar’s memoir, her father Faridullah, her uncle, and the Mullah of the local mosque were in despair because the Mastois were refusing reconciliation for Shakur’s crime in the village council, a crime which Shakur claimed was fabricated after Mastoi men who sodomized and beat him got scared that he was going to talk to the police. Mukhtar backs Shakur’s version in her book:

[M]y father went to file a complaint with the police. Outraged that a Gujar peasant has defied them by sending policemen to their very doorstep, the proud Mastois have slightly modified their story: now they accuse Shakur of raping Salma. They claim that my brother has committed *zina-bil-jabar*, which in Pakistan means the sins of rape, adultery, or sexual relations without the sanctity of marriage. Before handing over my brother, the Mastois demanded that he be locked up, and they insisted that if he were released from jail, he should be returned to the custody of the Mastoi clan. *Zina* may be punishable by death, according to the Islamic code of sharia, so the police have locked up Shakur not only because he is accused of a serious crime but also to protect him from the violent Mastois, who want to take justice into their own hands. . . We know that the Mastois always take their revenge on a woman of a lower caste. (Mai, 3-4)

As a “last chance” to “calm the members of the council,” Mukhtar was told she was chosen to go and ask for forgiveness for her brother because she taught the Koran and was “respectable” (Mai, 2). However, on June 22, 2002, when she reached there, instead of reconciliation, there was retaliation. Four men dragged her into a barn, with the village looking on, and raped her repeatedly. She was then thrown outside the hut, “half-naked,” and the rapists tossed out her *shalwar* (local baggy trousers) after her (Mai, 10). A week after the incident, a local imam Abdul Razzaq spoke against the horrific honour rape in his Friday sermon, and brought a Pakistani journalist Mureed Abbas, who first broke the story in a local newspaper. Following a widespread condemnation by the public, as well as women activists within Pakistan, the international media caught up with Mai’s story when the BBC reported it on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2002,<sup>65</sup> followed by TIME Magazine on 8 July 2002.<sup>66</sup> Mukhtar Mai became an international media sensation. Under pressure from the international media and human rights

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<sup>65</sup> Owais Tohid. “Protests over Pakistan Gang Rape,” BBC, 3 July 2002. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2089624.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2089624.stm)>

<sup>66</sup> Brian Bennett. “A Violation of Justice,” TIME, 8 July, 2002.

groups, Pakistan government rushed the six accused Mastoi men through the faster anti-terrorism courts<sup>67</sup>, sentencing all to death on 31 August 2002 (Mai, 73) which is an exceptionally quick processing time for the Pakistani criminal justice system. The Pakistan government also offered Mukhtar Mai Rs. 500,000 in compensation, with the help of which Mukhtar set up a girls' school in her native village. Round the clock police protection was provided by the government, guarding her house because she feared retaliation from the Mastois. Three years later, following an appeal, five out of the six men charged originally were acquitted by the Lahore High Court in 2005 citing insufficient evidence as the reason. The punishment of the sixth man was reduced from a death sentence to life imprisonment. On 11 March 2005, the Federal Sharia Court in Pakistan intervened and took *suo motto* action to suspend this decision of Lahore High Court on 11 March, supported by the argument that Mai's case should have been tried under the Islamic Hudood laws.<sup>68</sup> Within three days, the Supreme Court of Pakistan overruled the Federal Sharia Court, stating that it did not have the authority to challenge the decision of a High Court. Instead the Supreme Court decided to hold a retrial in response to Mai's appeal and suspended the men's acquittal till the new hearings. However, in 2011, the Supreme Court too upheld the decision and acquitted the alleged rapists, causing outrage among human rights activists within and outside of Pakistan.

Since the incident, Mukhtar Mai has achieved the impossible by affecting a change in Pakistan's rape laws, leading to President Musharraf signing the Protection of Women Bill approved by the parliament on 15 November 2006. Under this bill, rape has been brought under the Pakistan Penal Code rather than the Islamic Sharia, and a judge can decide whether

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<sup>67</sup> Anti-Terrorism Courts were established in Pakistan in 1997 under the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

<sup>68</sup> "Rape Ruling in Pakistan Suspended," BBC, 11 March 2005.  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4339927.stm>>

to try rape cases in a criminal court or an Islamic court. While this means that the punishment of adultery is more lenient if treated as a criminal offence, adultery is still punishable by death under Hudood Laws. However, there are still loopholes in the application of this law and the Islamic political parties are violently opposed to the bill and are still fighting to get it overturned.<sup>69 70</sup>

Mai has also won numerous awards, both in Pakistan and internationally. The Pakistani government awarded Mai the Fatima Jinnah Gold Medal for bravery on 2 August 2005. On 2 November of the same year *Glamour* magazine named Mukhtar Mai Woman of the Year.<sup>71</sup> In April 2007 Mai received the North-South Prize (2006) of the Council of Europe for her contribution to human rights.<sup>72</sup> Laurentian University in Canada awarded an honorary doctorate degree to Mai in 2010.<sup>73</sup>

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The *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof's politically charged foreword leads a reader into Mukhtar Mai's memoir in English. While he repeatedly accuses the Pakistani government of being complicit in Mukhtar's oppression and the injustices she has faced, the introduction does nothing to acknowledge the role of ordinary Pakistani men and women who helped her, nor local activists who fought for Mukhtar's rights before the intervention of Western figures like himself. Going a step further, Kristof insists that when he went to see

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<sup>69</sup> Ilyas M. Khan, "Why is a Pakistani bill to protect women unpopular?" *BBC* 17 March 2006. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35811180>>

<sup>70</sup> Daniyal Hassan; Omar Farooq. "Women's Protection Bill — A case of men's insecurities." *DAWN* 14 March 2016. <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1245591>>

<sup>71</sup> Declan Walsh. "Pakistani rape victim is Glamour's woman of year." *The Guardian*, 2 November 2005. <<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/nov/02/pressandpublishing.pakistan>>

<sup>72</sup> "Mukhtar Mai nominated for the North-South Prize." *DAWN* 5 July 2006. <<http://www.dawn.com/news/200055/mukhtar-mai-nominated-for-north-south-prize>>

<sup>73</sup> "Laurentian to honour courage of rape victim." *Sudbury Star*, 29 September 2010. <<http://www.thesudburystar.com/2010/09/29/lu-to-honour-courage-of-rape-victim>>

Mukhtar in her village for a news report, “she took me aside and pretty much begged me to help,” after which he wrote a column that moved a deluge of American readers who wanted to come to her aid (Mai, ix). About local support he is less forthcoming, even though Mukhtar’s own account is appreciative of the help that she received from the Pakistani public. Rather, he uses blanket statements which suggest that practices such as nose-cutting is “a common Pakistani punishment administered to women in order to shame them forever,” and that all women who are raped generally kill themselves in Pakistan (Mai, xiv-xv). This view has trickled into subsequent media reports, resulting in irresponsible generalizations.<sup>74</sup>

In her article critiquing Kristof’s book *Half the Sky*, which also features Mukhtar Mai’s story as one of many accounts of the oppression of Third-World women, Sayantani DasGupta (2012) worries about “voyeurism and exotification: the way that global gender violence gets made pornographic” in such books, and is concerned about the lack of clarity in the goal of such exhibition from which the reader receives nothing more than a sense of relief that their own lives are not as bad as the women in the book. Moreover, DasGupta opines that the act of watching suffering from a distance limits action rather than propelling it. As Susan Sontag so aptly words it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question of what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing ‘we’ can do — but who is that ‘we’? — and nothing ‘they’ can do either — and who are ‘they’ — then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic. (Sontag, 99)

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<sup>74</sup> See for example news reports like this:

“‘In Pakistan, it is customary for victims of rape to take their own life rather than shaming their family,’ Laurentian said in a release. ‘In this instance, however, Mukhtar (Mai) Bibi found the courage to file a criminal complaint against the perpetrators, an act of bravery unheard of in one of the world’s most adverse climates for women.’” “Laurentian to honour courage of rape victim.” *Sudbury Star*, 29 September 2010.

The result of these accounts of gender-based injustice is that counterproductive formulations of countries, ones lacking the capability or willingness to protect their women, are pressed into the mind of readers that only “reinforce rather than undermine global patriarchy, while justifying paternalization, intervention—and even invasion of these ‘lesser’ places—by the countries of the Global North” (DasGupta).

Pakistani readers and academicians alike have had reservations about the reporting of Mai’s story and the politicization of her memoir.<sup>75</sup> Such opinions have been labelled as non-progressive and defensive. However, criticism of how Mai’s story has been publicized offers important insights and must be taken seriously. Mai herself is a double victim; firstly, of a crime against her body; and secondly, the subsequent commodification of her ordeal. Linda Alcoff (1991) points out in *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, that when people in position of privilege take on the voice for an underprivileged group, the result is only a reinforcement of the oppression they are trying to speak against (7).

Furthermore, although it is generally understood today that the meaning of a text is “plural and shifting,” and can be understood differently depending on who is the speaker, the fact still remains that “[w]hen writers from oppressed races and nationalities have insisted that all writing is political the claim has been dismissed as foolish, or grounded in *ressentiment*, or it is simply ignored; when prestigious European philosophers say that all

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<sup>75</sup> “I share with many such scholars who live and work in the global North, an anxiety regarding Muslim women and the circulation of orientalist tropes about them. It is my contention that the performative – that is to say, iterative – trope of the individual heroine, fighting bravely against a uniformly and always-already patriarchal, oppressive culture coded this way because of its adherence to Islam, exemplifies a (faux) feminism that undergirds and contributes to Islamophobia and the concomitant military adventurism in Muslim lands by the U.S. and its allies. . . . Such a ‘feminism’, therefore needs to be recognized and unmasked, clearing the path to more progressive futures.” Fawzia Afzal-Khan. “The Politics of Pity and the Individual Heroine Syndrome: Mukhtaran Mai and Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan.” *Performing Islam* 4.2 (2015): 151-71.

writing is political it is taken up as a new and original ‘truth’. . . The rituals of speaking that involve the location of speaker and listeners affect whether a claim is taken as a true, well-reasoned, compelling argument, or a significant idea” (Alcoff, 13). This effect can be seen in cases where memoirs by Pakistani women written collaboratively with Western women are labelled as “political” propaganda. This opinion among Pakistanis is often brushed off as the ignorant reaction of a nation not willing to promote change, and its leadership is blamed for propagating this view. For instance, Kristof gives two reasons for Pakistani government’s grievance with Mukhtar’s story in his foreword, at least one of which reads like childish attention seeking on the part of the government. Firstly, he writes “they feel she is displaying Pakistan’s dirty laundry in public, embarrassing her country,” and secondly, that “they are resentful that an uneducated peasant woman from Punjab village is celebrated as a hero, *getting more attention than they are*” (Emphasis added. Mai, x). This view infantilizes the Pakistani government and questions its decision-making ability. Although President Musharraf of Pakistan himself admitted that he had stopped Mukhtar Mai’s travel to Washington<sup>76</sup> and provided his reasons for doing so, Kristof’s chooses to ignore the many

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<sup>76</sup> President Parvez Musharraf clarified his point of view in response to questions about Mukhtar Mai’s alleged detention by the Pakistan Government. In his official blog “Write to the President,” he answers: “I am deeply pained on this unfortunate incident. Whilst I sincerely regret what Mai had to endure, the government is taking action to remedy it. Unfortunately, violence against women is not peculiar to Pakistani society alone. It is a worldwide phenomena and a curse on mankind. . . I have already publicly stated that I took the decision to stop her from going to the US myself. I took this decision in the best national interest of Pakistan because I truly believed that the invitation would have tarnished Pakistan’s international image rather than help improve the lot of women folk in Pakistan or elsewhere in the world. I believe there was a strong ulterior intent of maligning Pakistan by vested interests, rather than sincerely helping Mai out. Unfortunately my decision has been misinterpreted. It has been unfairly assumed that the government is not supportive of Mukhtaran Mai in her quest for justice. These assumptions are absolutely incorrect. I am an ardent advocate of women rights as can be seen by the many policies made for them during my tenure, as such I would be the last one to have opposed an effort which I believed would have assisted their struggle. It would have been appropriate had the organizers of this conference focused on a holistic approach to discussing violence against cases occurring all

instances in Mukhtar's memoir that show the Pakistani community to be aware of, and willing to counter problems like rape through their own initiative without being made to feel like a helpless Third-World nation relentlessly being chastised by the international media. As both Kahf (2006) and Yilin (2010) point out, the supportive role of Mukhtar's father, the village imam, the judge who spoke with Mukhtar, and the Pakistani journalist who first reported her story, were all overlooked in media reports.

Madiha Kark's (2013) study of Mukhtar Mai's rape case from the point of view of journalistic ethics, also criticizes the lack of context in the representation of her story by reporters. Kark's scrutiny of articles in the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* shows that most reporters made sweeping statements about the corruption and lack of serious initiative by the Pakistani police in acting against Mai's rapists. Kark notices that "[m]issing from these reports were statistics and the poor salary structure of Pakistani police officials" (42) which are contributing factors to their limitations. Also missing, according to her, are the inclusion of prominent progressive voices of Pakistani politicians who spoke up in Mai's defence, therefore giving a very "lopsided" view to the reporting (46).

The interest of Western journalists in the publication of Mukhtar's memoir is amply evident, even in "A Note to the Reader" by the publisher Philippe Robinet at the start of the book. He writes: "My colleagues and I made the arduous journey to the remote village of Meerwala, where we were welcomed by Mukhtar Mai and her friend Naseem Akhtar. *They were amazed that we had come all the way from France to suggest to Mukhtar Mai that we should write a book together*, a book that would help her in her struggle" (Emphasis added,

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over the world; with case studies of not just Mukhtaran Mai alone but others also to keep the subject in perspective. However, in this case I felt that Pakistan was being singled out without taking into consideration the government's efforts to assist in her ordeal." 29 June 2005. <<http://wayback.archive.org/web/20080819193753/http://www.presidentofpakistan.gov.pk/TPRespondsQsComplDetail.aspx?WTPresidentQsID=293>>



v). Robinet also says that it took “several hours of discussion” till they “all agreed” that the book would be written in collaboration with Marie-Therese Cuny, “a writer who has long dedicated herself to the cause of Women’s rights,” and would be published in France (v-vi). Also, as Yilin (2010) points out, “we do need to heed the different layers of mediation that have been invested in Mai’s memoir” because “Mai has been doubly silenced by both the local and global forces.” Robinet admits that there are challenges in representation because “Mukhtar Mai speaks only Saraiki and can read or write no other language” (vi). The conversation between Marie-Therese and Mai was facilitated by two other intermediaries, Mustafa Baloch and Saif Khan who translated Mai’s words to Marie-Therese, who “transformed Mukhtar’s emotions, thought, and impressions into this book, despite the hurdle posed by the great disparity of language” (Mai, vi). The voice of Mai is thus thrice removed.

Mai’s narrative has been “constructed” in such a way by her mediators as to highlight the importance of feminist intervention from women’s rights groups from “outside” of her own culture, which is shown by the media to be destructively patriarchal. Afzal-Khan (2015) explains that a rescue narrative “enacts, through the image of the ‘suffering other’, not so much a politics of the other’s accessing her ‘voice’ but the presence and self-recognition of the Western feminist who has rushed to that other’s rescue, whether through aid agencies, or through performances in the other’s name, or through ‘activist’ writing and publishing” (159). Afzal-Khan terms this “neo-liberal pity politics” (159) to be counterproductive in transnational feminist discourse.

Yilin (2010) makes a similar argument that while media versions of Mai’s story are examples of neo-orientalism in the way they sensationalize the barbarity of tribal communities in Pakistan; the memoir, on the other hand, is reflective of gender politics in the way that it emphasises the role of female activists in helping Mai find her identity. Therefore,

although Mai's story is one of courage and resilience, her brave deed is shown to have been facilitated by women's rights activists, and "has provided ideal raw material for editors and publishers to craft a successful story and demonstrate the triumph of the human rights campaign" (Yilin, 14).

One such local woman was Naseem Akhtar, the daughter of one of the policemen stationed outside Mai's house. Akhtar was studying law, and quickly intervened with an offer to take on the role of a mentor who would aid Mai's quest for justice. In the memoir, she is shown as Mai's saviour. Mai is convinced that "Naseem isn't the kind of person who would have imposed herself on [her], like some of the people who've been attracted by [her] 'notoriety'" (Mai, 83). In Mai's memoir, Naseem becomes both a guide and a spokesperson for her. Naseem tells Mai: "You are like a baby" (Mai 85). Most of the stories of injustices to women in Pakistan, and statistics from the reports of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan appear in the memoir as part of Naseem's project to educate Mai (122). But Naseem's effect on Mai in this story is dubious. Mai doubts her own strength in Naseem's presence, for instance when she says, "My lack of education cripples me...But Naseem knows what to say" (86). This does not reflect Mai's true courage in having spoken up even when she did not have formal knowledge of law like Naseem does. Naseem's is a feminist stance, one that is Western in its ideas. Naseem's assistance infantilizes Mai and "affirms [Naseem's] superiority at least in class and education by capitalizing on Mai's disadvantages of being of victim status" (Yilin, 14-15). Mai's transformation into a poster-woman for feminists in the West is achieved with Naseem's help, whom she calls "my sister in struggle" (Mai, 89). Naseem accompanies her in travels outside Pakistan, several images showing her

standing alongside Mai with famous figures like Hilary Clinton.<sup>77</sup> In a way, Mai has “helped” Naseem as much as she has aided Mai, by providing her with projection and fame through the international media.

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It is important to note that while some of the media sensationalism surrounding this incident is less obtrusive in Mai and Cuny’s book, in that it acknowledges the positive support of several local men during and after the ordeal, the fact remains that placing Kristof’s foreword at the start of the memoir and book club discussion questions included at the end of the memoir defeats the purpose of giving Mukhtar agency by telling her own story in her own voice. Moreover, the title of the memoir in English, *In the Name of Honor* brings home only the shortcomings of Pakistani culture and pins the reader’s stance, rather than highlighting the individual bravery and outspokenness of a woman who is a product of the same culture.

Another noteworthy point is that while the media representations of this story are driven by cultural imperialism, the memoir has become a human rights document. Different narrated versions of the incident overshadow not only the purity of Mai’s voice, but ignore the intersectional dimensions of the story as well. Through her memoir, it is not only Mai who is a subaltern seeking a voice. The voices of Salma, allegedly raped by Shakur, and Taj Jatoi, the mother of one of the alleged rapists who is now a sole bread earner for her family, are absent in this memoir.

With the media attention focused on Mukhtar’s rape, which horrified and captivated readers’ minds because it was “sanctioned” by a village council (Jirga) and as such was a blatant demonstration of the lapse in Pakistani state control, journalists conveniently forgot

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/dr-naseem-akhtar-and-mukhtar-mai-with-senator-hillary-news-photo/81072645>

Salma who also claims to have been raped by Mai's brother Shakur. Both the lack of clear evidence, and complete lack of agency in the larger international drama played out about Mukhtar's rape, Salma has been silenced. If what she claims is true, hers is an individual incident of rape, and in this instance, seems to have been unjustly dismissed even by Mukhtar herself. Salma is just as likely to be tried in Sharia court for fornication if she cannot prove her rape, which makes her motives in fabricating a rape rather unlikely. In her memoir, Mukhtar almost casually suggests that Salma was a "wild," "*supposedly* virgin" (emphasis added) girl who very likely seduced her brother and says that "[g]irls are supposed to keep their eyes modestly cast down, but Salma---she does whatever she wants. She is not afraid to be looked at, and she even makes sure she is!" (Mai, 54). Mukhtar's version of the story runs like this:

Word has it that Shakur was caught flirting with Salma. . . After accusing him of rape, the clan kidnapped, beat, and sodomized my brother to humiliate him. It was not until much later that Shakur spoke of these things, and then only to our father. . . Then, to conceal the rape of my young brother from the Jirga, the Mastois invented a new account in which Shakur had had sexual relations with Salma, who was supposedly a virgin. A dreadful crime. Girls are forbidden to even talk to boys. . . Salma is a rather wild young woman in her twenties. She may well have said something provocative to my brother, which is just like her, but he is certainly guilty of nothing more than encountering her at the edge of the Mastois' wheat field. Some in the village say that he flirted with her, or at least spoke to her, while others maintain that they were caught sitting together, holding hands. Depending on which clans these villagers belong to, the truth fades away in the dust of people's words. . . Shakur has done nothing wrong, I'm sure of it. (Mai, 14-15)

Later investigations have cast doubt over the truth of the whole story, including Salma's rape, Shakur's age at the time, and the reasons leading up to Mukhtar's rape. Salma Syed's (2003)

study about the lapse of journalistic ethics in the reporting of Mukhtar Mai's story follows two versions of the incident. Syed examines Mukhtar's version against the news editor Bronwyn Curran's, reported in her book *Into the Mirror: The Untold Story of Mukhtar Mai* (2008). As the news editor of Agence France Press (AFP) in 2002, responsible for all news coverage from Pakistan and Afghanistan for three years, Curran was the one who spread Mukhtar's story internationally (Syed 2003, 29). Later, however, Curran revisited the case and after reading all the court trial procedures and evidences both from the initial trial in 2002, and the appeal trial in 2005, she concluded that Mukhtar's story was reported irresponsibly by journalists, and that the actual events of 22 July 2002 were very different.

Although Curran's report is quite extensive, a point to note is her interview with Taj Mastoi, the mother of Abdul Khaliq, one of the alleged rapists. According to her, as a way of settling the score for Salma's rape by Shakur (Mai's brother) Mukhtar had been married in a verbal *Nikah* (Islamic marriage) ceremony to Abdul Khaliq on 22 June 2002, which was consummated during a three-night period before the reported rape incident (Syed quoting from Curran, 33). Taj Mastoi was harshly critical of the role of the international media in glorifying Mukhtar's one-sided story. Salma Syed writes that in November 2005 when Bronwyn Curran interviewed the Mastoi, it was three years after the actual rape and "Taj Mastoi was in her 60s. Two of her sons were accused of raping Mai, and another son was convicted of raping Shakur. Four of the brothers and two of the sons-in-law were accused of sanctioning the gang rape of Mai. Taj Mastoi's husband, Imam Baksh Mastoi, died in 2002. At the time of Curran's visit, she alone was taking care of 18 children and women. Two other women in the family joined Taj Mastoi in picking cotton and cutting wheat on the field of landlords for less than a dollar a day" (Curran quoted by Syed, 32-33). Taj Mastoi told Curran, "You come here to talk to me, but I don't want to talk to anyone! There is no justice for me.

No one wants to hear or tell our reality” (Curran 37, quoted by Syed 33). In this sense, activists who struggle for human rights awareness only free one subaltern voice at the expense of doubly silencing other women, like Taj Mastoi.

Human rights thus becomes a political project, one that supports only the discovery of the kind of violations that sustain stereotypes about non-Western cultures. Salma and Taj Jatoi do not fall on the right side of such discoveries. The integrity of the writer and publisher, as well as the international promotion of a memoir that tells only a one-sided version of a crime still unproven in the court of law, is questionable from a human rights perspective. At the end of the day, like Syed observes, even “[w]hile Curran has excellent points in her book and casts doubt on the validity of the hastily thrown-together trial, at the end of the day there is also no proof that Mai was **not** raped and no proof that Salma Mastoi **was** raped” (68).

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Pakistan’s legal system has been blamed for not providing speedy justice in cases of violence against women. Most of the commentary prompted by Mukhtar Mai’s account that charts the failure of the judicial system in Pakistan, is lacking in the examination of the historical background of the penal code inherited by the country which caused a collision between imperial and nationalist patriarchal interests which impacted women. While the fact remains that the Pakistani government has failed to address the loopholes in the system, a historically contextual understanding of the background helps in identifying how the problems have arisen and what might perhaps be done to rectify the shortcomings that stand in the way of the provision of justice in rape and honour killing cases.

Wasti (2010) makes an interesting historical study of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) drafted by the British Government between 1835-1837 and enforced 1860, which did not

consider honour-killing or honour- based revenge as “a cultural issue related to the Indian subcontinent, nor a socio-religious matter that belonged to a particular community or communities living in a particular geographical area but, a universally practiced phenomenon wherein men kill the men who commit adultery with their wives” (362). Prior to the promulgation of the new regulations (IPC) by the British, the Islamic Criminal Law practiced in India did not show any leniency towards rapists or honour-killers under *Qisas* law.<sup>78</sup> However, the British “under the provision of the grave and sudden provocation” (Wasti 364) allowed leniency in such cases because it was agreed during the drafting that “a violation of honour may stir up suddenly such a great passion in the hearts of the men that may kill the one who by words or actions committed such indecencies” which in time made honour crime generally regarded as acceptable under the IPC (Wasti, 365). This resulted in an institutionalization of the *Jirga* system through “the redefinition of crime, custom and law shaping honour codes by the British administration” and the local tribes (Detho and Barras 20). It created a “hybrid law” which is explained further by Detho and Barras of the Asian Human Rights Commission in these words:

In Sindh from the 1860s the British opted for strategic compromises to secure indirect rule through a class of local middlemen. This led to the merging of tribal arbitration with British law. The result was a new configuration of power, a nexus between the middlemen, chiefs and British administrators colluding in exercising power. It was at this time that the supreme jirga was established for the settlement of the inter-tribal disputes, including cases of honour killings. The 'barbaric'

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<sup>78</sup> “*Qisās* (retribution), is concerned with crimes against the person such as homicide, infliction of wounds, and battery. Punishment by retribution is set by law, but the victim or his next of kin may waive such retribution by accepting blood money or financial compensation (*diyyah*) or by forgoing the right altogether. Because of this waiver, it has been suggested that this crime is in the nature of a private injury, more akin to a tort than to a crime involving a public interest or concern.” (Farhat J. Ziadeh. “Criminal Law.” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* <<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0170> >)

customs that British law had opposed now became 'humane' methods for mediation, including encouraging them to exchange women as a means to settling disputes (21-22).

After the Partition of the Indian Sub-continent in 1947, The IPC was adopted in Pakistan unaltered and became the Pakistan Penal Code (Wasti, 370). But following the setting up of the Federal Shariat Courts by President Zia-ul-Haq under his Islamization project in 1980, which incorporated select Islamic laws into Pakistani law, there has been some discrepancy between the laws of the two parallel court systems in Pakistan. This often causes confusion, as Wasti points out: “Under section 338-F of the PPC judges are required to take guidance from the injunctions of the *Quran* and *Sunnah* while deciding cases under *qisas* and *diyat* law, on the other hand the constitution obliges them to accept the decisions of the Supreme Court as binding on them” (404). In Mai’s case, it is not so much direct negligence of a system that caused the delay in justice, but the complicated structure of the judiciary in Pakistan. Tina Karkera (2006) notes that the judicial system failure in Mai’s case must not be treated as separate from its larger historical context. Because Pakistani law is based in both Anglo-Saxon (High Court) and Islamic law (Shariat Court), Mai’s case is a good example of this struggle:

The Lahore High Court had appellate jurisdiction to hear her case, but the Shariat Court also had jurisdiction over the matter because the case involved a crime under Islamic law. Furthermore, not only is the judiciary tasked with resolving conflicts between the two types of laws, the reliance on Anglo-Saxon laws creates a problem in and of itself. Because most witnesses testify in the vernacular and such testimonies are then recorded into English, the translation may lose some of the witnesses’ actual testimonies. Additionally, many who live in villages are illiterate and often sign their statements without being able to read what has been written. (Karkera, 172)



The problem of illiteracy, language barriers and translation causes much miscommunication and delay in court trials and in recording accurate testimonials of violence against women. Added to this problem is the continuing acceptance by the State of the *Jirga* system in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), and PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas) that allows tribal elders to administer quick justice in the border areas of Pakistan, makes it difficult to decide the jurisdiction under which cases are handled. This is another colonial legacy. When the British took over Northern India as a part of the Empire, the colonizers found it hard to control the local tribes and “therefore came to a working agreement of a ‘live and let live’ policy in what came to be known as ‘Tribal Areas’” (Ali; Rehman, 44). Article 247 of the Pakistan Constitution upholds the separate legal status of the Tribal Areas, giving them control over their own justice system (Ali; Rehman 45). This unaltered law from the colonial era allows Jirga decisions to be valid even today, and the results can be seen in cases like Mukhtar Mai’s. Therefore, Mai’s memoir can be read effectively as a testimonial of human rights violation only if it prompts a contextual understanding of the multiple issues that stand in the way of women’s protection in Pakistan.

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In summation, Mukhtar Mai’s memoir has proved both problematic and beneficial from a human rights angle. There is no doubt that it serves to “discover” tribal injustices and violence against women in remote parts of Pakistan that need to be brought to light. Her memoir has prompted action on the part of the judiciary, and her bravery has helped other children in her village Meerwala get access to education for the first time through the schools Mai set up with help from the government of Pakistan and donations by international NGOs. Also, as mentioned in chapter one, since memoir writing is also an act of healing (Peters, 19),

besides being a testimony to a crime, it has been a healing process for Mai herself because it has allowed her to tell her story in a cathartic outpouring of frustration and grief.

However, I think the way this memoir is often read overlooks what Schaffer and Smith identify as the key role of localized stories of injustices that may not always employ modernist human rights discourse as it is understood in the West. According to Schaffer and Smith, as discussed in chapter one, these narratives “can trouble established interpretations of rights violations, shift definitions and framings of human rights, and test modes of advocacy” (229). Mai’s memoir is framed in complex ways that sometimes hamper a pluralistic view of human rights. As mentioned earlier, the introduction, foreword, and study guide between which Mai’s story is sandwiched, leave little room for an average reader to read the book without a preconceived set of ideas about Pakistan. Also, as Mansfield says, the revelation of truth by itself is not enough to trigger a positive response towards a solution (see chapter 1). Rather, the uncovering of human rights violations without an attempt to understand the underlying causes, results in strong (and sometimes violent) reactions justified by the mere act of revelation alone. Mai has lived in fear under police protection for years, even when she was celebrated for her bravery in revealing her story. The shame associated with recounting such an ordeal might not be understood fully by Western readers. Living in the same society after the hype of her publicity dies down is a difficult position to be in, and she is constantly under a threat of violence because of her action, even though she is admired as an icon for women’s rights. As in the case of *I am Malala*. Reading this memoir in a more informed way fosters a keener understanding of the problems that women continue to face in Pakistan.

## Chapter 3

### Representation of Women in Pakistani English Fiction

Several contemporary fiction writings from Pakistan have engaged with local women's rights issues in two ways. Firstly, while these writings do reflect some of the real problems faced by women in Pakistan, there is also a portrayal of powerful female characters who resist oppression in different ways, albeit with varying degrees of success. Secondly, a number of these works of fiction show a truncated masculinity<sup>79</sup> in response to a rising awareness of women's rights, even though this appears to be in direct contrast to the post 9/11 visual and narrative representations in the West of a renewed Islamized hyper-masculinity (Charania 2015, 35-36)<sup>80</sup> and the dangers it poses for the "imperilled" (Razack 2008) Muslim woman. Therefore, not only do some of these writings counter the negative image of Pakistani men by contextualizing their identity politics through fictional representations, but as sites of empowerment these texts also reconcile different and sometimes conflicting views of Pakistani women's agency.

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<sup>79</sup> See Maleeha Aslam's *Gender Based Explosions* for "emasculated masculinity" felt by Pakistani men in the post 9/11 period which she identifies as "a product of peripatetic marginalized contexts within which Muslim men continue to struggle globally subsequent to their racial vilification".

<sup>80</sup> See Moon Charania's examination of the *Economist* and *Newsweek* covers in January and November of 2008 respectively, both labelling Pakistan as "the most dangerous place on earth" with images of angry Pakistani men representing a "hyper-patriarchal, angry masculinity" that mark out these men's "hyper-masculinity [as] one of the reasons that Pakistani women are believed to be oppressed" (36). In stark juxtaposition is the *National Geographic* inside story image of a half-hidden, dupatta-clad woman (September 2007) under the title caption "Islam's Fault Line: Pakistan," which reifies the stereotypes of an oppressed woman who "as a metaphor for land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge" (29).

There are at least three reflections of women's empowerment in Pakistan. There are secular, western-educated, middle-class women who are vocal feminists and activists e.g. Asma Jehangir, Hina Jilani, Sabeen Mehmood; scholars like Muneeza Shamsie and Faryal Gohar; parliamentarians like Hina Rabbani Khar and Sharmila Farooqi; writers like Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan; and the most well-known icon of all, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Coming from privileged backgrounds themselves, these women take on the role of speakers for the rights of the poor subaltern women of Pakistan who are thought to have no voices of their own.

Then there are figures like Mukhtar Mai and Malala Yousafzai from different but humbler backgrounds, who overcome oppression and speak out against violence with the aid of international NGOs in a universally normative human rights discourse, much to the celebration and acclaim of the West.

Lastly, there are Islamic feminists (often opting for traditional *hijabs*, *niqabs*, or *burqas*) who argue for gender equality through their interpretation of the Quran and Shariah which seeks women's freedom and empowerment through a historical understanding of Islamic law. Different versions of this feminism are seen in Pakistani society, from the Burqa-clad "Chicks with Sticks"<sup>81</sup> of the Lal Masjid to the hijab-donned female commandoes of the Pakistan army, all of whom claim to administer the right kind of justice. Although these faith-based, veiled, traditional women's movements have always existed parallel to the modern, progressive and secular feminism in the period prior to 9/11, a general consensus is

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<sup>81</sup> This was the name jokingly given by the Pakistani press to the students of Jamia Hafsa Islamic seminary in Islamabad who, covered from top to toe in black and carrying large bamboo sticks, claimed to administer Islamic justice in the streets in 2007. Parvez Musharraf's government carried out a military operation against Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) between 3-11 July 2007, resulting in 154 deaths, including female students of the seminary. This operation was the beginning of the end of Musharraf's power as his popularity declined, leading to him tendering his resignation, and going into exile to avoid impeachment.

that this dichotomy has become more pronounced and urgent after the international focus on women during the War on Terror period “lending a certain political credibility and legitimacy to faith-based feminism as the alternative to a larger imperialist, US-sponsored, westernized women's rights discourse” (Shehrbano 2009, 31). At the same time, internal debates among liberal and conservative Muslim feminists<sup>82</sup> about the re/interpretation of Islamic texts is complicating this new wave of activism, a view that reflects both extremist and modernist religious trends. In both these cases, these veiled women subvert the neocolonial trope of the imprisoned, docile woman in need of Western help, and are instead now increasingly seen by the West as agentic, active “fighters” capable of carrying out suicide bombings and other acts of terror.

In such compounding circumstances around identity politics that pivot on the axes of gender, nationalism and the fight against terrorism, it is not surprising that female characters in novels from Pakistan reflect fragmented subjectivities. Charania (2015) asks a very pertinent question which is also the title of her book: “Will the real Pakistani woman please stand up?”<sup>83</sup> and elaborates that her “call of/for the ‘real’ subject provides an opportunity to explore the meaning of authenticity, artificiality and the (in)stability of both” (129). Who is the real Pakistani woman? The woman who is raped, beaten, and oppressed? The one who seeks agency through the veil? Or the educated Pakistani woman who insists that the world neglects her contribution to the public and political arena? As Farida Shaheed points out, Pakistani women present “a collage of startling contrasts and contradictions” ranging from

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<sup>82</sup> See Afiya Shehrbano (2015) for the difference of opinion between the two prominent figures in these debates: Dr Farhat Hashmi and Dr Riffat Hassan (33-34).

<sup>83</sup> The title of Moon Charania’s book is fashioned after the American TV show *To Tell the Truth* that ran from 1950-2002 in which a guest panel had to correctly identify one “real” from the two other “pretend” contestants through a series of questions, the last of which was “Will the real (x) please stand up?” revealing the actual central character. This emblematic phrase has since become a part of popular culture. (128-129)

highly educated professionals in the urban areas to rural women who seem to be stuck in the middle ages; yet even though there are several examples of exceptional Pakistani women, “their presence has failed to significantly alter a structural configuration that only enables a miniscule minority to excel while condemning the majority to a life of unchanging deprivation” (855).

In the following two sections, I will examine the fiction writings of two authors, Muhammad Hanif and Daniyal Mueenuddin, and comment on their representations of Pakistani women, their rights, and the limitations of their agency. In my examination, I will be attentive to whether these authors are “capitalizing on a kind of accounting of Pakistani women that positions the nation-state (Pakistan) in binary opposition to international civil society,” something that Charania accuses some Pakistani authors of having done (132).<sup>84</sup>

## **Champions of Women’s Rights? Super-heroines in the Pakistani Imagination: Mohammed Hanif’s *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti***

The idea of a Pakistani superwoman who could champion women’s rights had been brewing in the literary and artistic imagination within the country a couple of years before a real-life superheroine in the form of Malala Yousafzai [was] shot into international public view in October 2012. Mohammed Hanif’s initial attempt at writing about a Pakistani “superwoman figure” only ended up with the creation a very human Christian nurse character in a Karachi hospital in his second novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* that came out in October 2011 (*The*

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<sup>84</sup> See Charania’s views on *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan* by Rafia Zakaria (2015) that she thinks is “complicit in an ethnic and gendered mourning that politicizes, not the complexities of Pakistani women’s lives and labor, but derives its politics from dark negotiations with the psychic pleasures of raced nations and bodies” (133).

*Express Tribune* 2011; *Tehelka* 2011). In 2008, inspired by his editor at *Newsline* named Razia Bhatti, whom he calls a “real crusader,” because she wrote against powerful Pakistani game-players, Hanif initially came up with the concept of a story about a female avenger fighting back against Pakistan’s patriarchal society. He says, “I just had this idea of a female superhero flying around and kicking ass” but soon afterwards felt uncomfortable with the idea because “I was afraid I was writing a bad Hong Kong type of movie”<sup>85</sup>. In trying to find a more relatable Pakistani female figure, whose dedication in the face of adversity and hardship appeared to Hanif to be just as heroic, he fashioned Alice after the nurses he had seen take care of his ill mother in a Karachi hospital.

It is interesting to note that soon after Hanif’s idea of a “kickass” superheroine, Aaron Haroon, a well-known Pakistani singer, came up with just such a creation. Haroon’s animated children’s TV series *Burka Avenger* appeared on screen in July 2013 which tells the story of Jiya, schoolteacher who turns into a superheroine to fight bearded men [the Taliban] who want to shut down girls’ schools. Her disguise is a black *burka* that expands out into wings to help Jiya fly, while she uses pencils, pens and books hurled as weapons to defeat the enemy.

Although the character was conceptualized in 2010, the first episode of the animated series was completed in July 2012 and spookily foretold the shooting of Malala (*Peabody Awards* 2014; *A World at School* 2013). Hanif and Haroon had both wished to create superwomen to direct public awareness towards Pakistani women’s attempts to gain agency. Although their creations are artistically different, there are intersections between the two

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<sup>85</sup> In an interview by Dexter Filkins. “Dangerous Fictions.” *The New Yorker*, 9 May 2016. <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/09/a-pakistani-novelist-tests-the-limits>>

characters that reveal the challenges of reimagining a Pakistani female identity as a superheroine.

The polarized reactions in Pakistan to the acclamation of Malala Yousafzai by the West discussed in chapter two is a good measure of the complexity in the modelling of a Pakistani female icon. This complexity only deepens with the appearance in the United States of a Muslim Pakistani-American superheroine Kamala Khan in August 2013. She is the new Ms. Marvel of *Marvel Comics* with “body morphing powers” that fit strategically with her diasporic identity which is evidently moulded for the globalization era. This post 9/11 teenage heroine is born of Pakistani parents and lives in New Jersey. Kamala is promoted as “not [being] a poster girl for the religion [Islam]” which the creator Sana Amanat says is “just one aspect of the many ways she defines herself” (*Marvel* 2013). This puts Kamala, who significantly “does not cover her hair,” in sharp contrast with Pakistani constructs of a superheroine, an identity that is inextricably intertwined with issues of religious significance and nationalism.

A reconfiguration of post 9/11 identities in Pakistani Anglophone fiction has only recently been explored by scholars (Cilano 2013; Kanwal 2015). There are conflicting views about how these identities can be “rethought” in post 9/11 Pakistan where religious defensiveness drives the fashioning of new identities. For women, it has been a particularly difficult time. Global pressures force their nationalistic religious identity to marry the transnational spirit of secular freedom, which makes for uneasy bed-fellows. In the course of rethinking female identity during the period marked as a “clash of civilizations”, the real suffering of women in Pakistan is perhaps not objectively portrayed. Instead, the plight of women is used for furthering political agendas. Although Hanif’s choice of a Christian protagonist bypasses the troubled Islamic markers of acceptability (modest clothing and a



head-covering) that would be needed to qualify the creation of a Pakistani superwoman, for Haroon, who has chosen to make his superheroine acceptable in a hyper-charged Muslim society by having her don the very sign of her oppression as a costume, the challenge has been to make the *burka* change its marked symbolism and to relate it to progress. In this sense, at least Haroon's superheroine creation incorporates the reworking of the practice of hijab as a visible statement of a Muslim identity, and discourses that feature the practice of *hijab* (Muslim head-covering) as a sort of 'feminism in reverse'<sup>86</sup> to confront the existing stereotypes of Pakistani women.

Since the publication of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, most readers think the novel takes up the cause of the Christian minority in Pakistan and exposes the unjust treatment the community generally suffers. However, this is a story of Alice the woman, and as an everywoman she represents all the subaltern women by virtue of class in Pakistan, whether Muslim, Christian or any other minority religion. The character embodies the common range of reported incidents of violence against women in Pakistan. Alice is raped and slapped, tried in an unsympathetic court and sent unjustly to jail, subjected to sexual harassment and offered a marriage proposal at gunpoint, and is finally burnt to death in an acid attack by her own husband. But as a meagre consolation, she has healing powers and the ability to predict deaths. She offers life-giving prayers and wears a cross around her neck, while she recites the Muslim *Kalima* to dying patients. Any significance a reader might be likely to attach to

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<sup>86</sup> "[T]he apparent paradox of the return to the hijab among women in the public worlds of employment and education is not 'anti-feminist', but is a kind of 'feminism in reverse' with a moral connotation as well as a political one. The interweaving of secular and sacred concerns represented by the adoption of the veil also can be seen as a reaction against the secular feminism of the West, and as part of the search for an indigenous Islamic form of protest against male power and dominance in public society" (148). Watson, Helen. "Women and the Veil: Personal Responses to Global Process," *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, eds. Akbar S. Ahmed, Hastings Donnan (New York; London: Routledge, 1994).

Alice's faith soon loses focus against the slippery positioning of the other characters' religious identities. Her father is a "Choohra" who recites *Sura Asr* from the Quran to heal ulcers, Teddy Butt is a Muslim who casually wears a cross on a chain around his neck, and Sister Hina Alvi, a Christian, chooses to keep a Muslim name. That is not to say that religious intolerance in Pakistan is underplayed in this novel. To the contrary, Hanif often highlights the exclusionary attitude of the Muslims towards the Christian minority in Pakistan. But, the reasons for creating a female Christian protagonist are more complicated than what Hanif himself admits would merely have turned his story into "an anthropological treatise about the survival strategies employed by Catholics in predominantly Islamic societies" (96).

Alice is both intensely female in her physical appearance, and strangely masculine in her behavior. Her character causes a muddling of gender, religion, and societal norms and unsettles the reader's comfortable perception of how things are situated. Hanif uses two confusing symbols for Alice's identity that subvert any attempt at a straightforward interpretation. It is unclear whether this is intentionally achieved. In interviews about the novel, Hanif says that he wanted to write about a "superwoman figure" (*The Express Tribune* 2011; *Tehelka* 2011). Either Hanif means superwoman as in having supernatural powers, or that Alice is a woman who is a perfectionist and juggles work and her other duties in various capacities with a superhuman degree of competency. If it is the latter, it seems like Alice is less of the superwoman Mohammed Hanif intended her to be, than a Pakistani woman suffering from the "Superwoman Syndrome" (Shaevitz) with added religious and sexual pressure thrown in for good measure. Writer and activist Bina Shah acknowledges the presence of such "superwomanly" pressures about behavior and way of life that are imposed by parents, family, friends and peers, so that "being a Pakistani is often a feat of circus-like intensity that forces her to juggle the demands of society with her own personal desires and

goals” (4). Under such constraints, the only extraordinary thing about Alice is that she shows defiance against the acceptable norms of behavior in slashing one man’s penis, and stands accused of “causing grievous bodily harm with intent to murder” another. And that she dares to “behave like a son” (Hanif, 50-51). Her physical rebuttal of male oppression in Pakistan makes her a superwoman not unlike Haroon’s Burka Avenger, who literally battles with men.

Tellingly, Alice has already dreamt about the terrible outcome of that kind of defiance, something that warns the readers of the dangers women face. In the novel, she claims that she can see how people will die from looking at their faces. When her friend Noor exclaims that it’s a miracle and asks if she can predict her own death, she replies: “It’s not a miracle. It’s a bad dream. Actually I can see something in the mirror. But I don’t recognize it. It’s not me, it’s not even a human face. It’s a ghoul. I get frightened” (45). Very early in the story Alice dreams about her acid-burn death at the hands of her husband: “What was she doing in an ambulance? Why was her face covered in ice-cubes?” (10). That is indeed a sad ending for a super woman, but this ending can possibly be complicated by the role of the author’s gender and class in determining of the success or failure of a Pakistani superwoman figure.<sup>87</sup>

If, on the other hand, Hanif means for Alice to be superhumanly endowed, which is evidenced by Alice’s divine life-giving powers of prayer and her seer-like abilities, then Alice is certainly superior in strength, and by extension, a saviour. But Alice’s story is also the story of pain, humiliation, endurance, and ultimately sacrifice. As such, her depiction is symbolically consistent with a postmodern female-Christ figure more than a superwoman figure. In fact, Hanif emphasizes that link when he says, “Alice Bhatti was only eighteen and

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<sup>87</sup> In the coming chapters which examine novels by Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Ali Khan, I will revert back to this issue and make comparisons.

signed her name Alice J. Bhatti with the J crossed to look like a cross” (177). He even likens Alice’s body to Christ’s, except she has breasts:

Her ribs can be counted through her shirt, her collarbones stick out like sharpened boomerangs, her ankles look like a display from an anatomy lab; but her breasts...[are] like Persian cantaloupes that only grow in the desert and die if it rains more than once every season. At the age of fourteen, she performed in an Easter play and at school afterwards had to stand in front of the cross to have her picture taken. An old nun quipped that she looked like a *cross with tits*. (Hanif, 98. Emphasis added)

In “Divine Transgressions: The Female Christ-form in Art,” Julie Clague traces the female-Christ form in twentieth century art and the symbolic significance of such images. She gives examples of postmodern crisis of representation involving gender, like the first ever female-Christ creation shown in London in 1975, a bronze sculpture *Christa* by Edwina Sandys representing United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. It depicts a nude female with prominent breasts, her arms outstretched, effectively making a cross with her body (Sandys). In 1979, another bronze sculpture, *Crucified Woman*, by a Canadian sculptor Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey shows a naked woman displayed in cruciform. It was displayed in the chancel of Bloor Street United Church, Toronto, “coinciding with a Good Friday service on the theme of ‘Battered Wives’” (Clague, 50-51). There was widespread media coverage in Canada and the U.S. about the controversy it had caused at the time. Again, in 1984, a self-proclaimed Christian feminist James M. Murphy’s shocking sculpture *Christine on the Cross* was displayed at James Memorial Chapel in New York during Easter (For the image, see Clague, 53). The sculpture is of a nude woman nailed with spread-eagled legs on the arms of an inverted cross. Her hands are nailed together on the post of the cross above her head. *Christine* is a particularly striking symbolization of the suffering

of women. Yet the tortured body signifies not only sacrifice, but also glory, as is evident from the range of atonement theories like *Christus victor*, *Christus victima* etc.

In Clague's view, for people who have become numb over the years to the Christian cross with Jesus hanging on it, the shock of the female-Christ image acts as a reawakening of the horror of crucifixion and adds to its significance by upsetting the gender symbolism associated with it (60). The appeal of this new symbol with its blatant sexuality lies in that it acts as an alternative to the theological idea that the male form represents humanity. In the same stroke, it problematizes the asexuality that religious thinking traditionally attaches to a female icon.

The visual image of a crucified female-Christ offers a startling if limited antidote to Christian patriarchy. It does so, not solely by a transposition of gender – from male to female – but also by an injection of naked female sexuality into a symbol system in which the female body has been conceived of traditionally as an obstacle to the divine. The power and source of threat in these images is precisely the fact that female sexuality is exposed, laid bare for all to see. This contrasts with other female icons – the Virgin Mary being the most obvious – to the extent that the image is totally non-threatening: a mother-figure devoid of sexual potency. The overt sexualised humanity of the crucified female disturbs critics who (like the iconoclasts of old) see it as indecent and offensive to the divinity of Christ. (Clague, 58)

The play on symbolism of the female-Christ body that is both sexual yet divine invites debate. Some might feel that the Christa image reinforces the fact that a woman's body is always the victim at the hands of men. Alice remarks that working as a nurse not a single day passed “when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive. Suspicious husband, brother protecting his honour, father protecting his honour, son protecting his honour, jilted lover avenging his honour, feuding

farmers settling their water disputes, moneylenders collecting their interest: most of life's arguments, it seemed, got settled by *doing various things to a woman's body*" and follows with the ineffectual refrain that "she doesn't want to be that kind of a woman" (Emphasis added. Hanif, 100; 101). And because most religions, including Islam and Christianity, have placed value on suffering and endurance, in the end Hanif makes Alice go through just that by having her sacrificed at the altar of a jealous husband "protecting his honour". One could nevertheless argue in favour of Clague's view that despite the difficulties in the interpretation of the crucified Christa images, they are beneficial because "it is not just that women can see their own suffering in the Christa image but that they also find contained within it the possibility of healing" (59).

Pakistani artists have started addressing gender roles and preconceptions in equally startling ways. One of the best-known South Asian artists today, Rashid Rana's more contemporary approach to reflecting Pakistani women in art focusses on the duality of representations. "In this age of uncertainty we have lost the privilege of having one world view. Now every image, idea and truth (may it be ancient or modern) encompasses its opposite within itself. Thus we live in a state of duality." (Rana 2006). Rana's trio of digital art pieces titled *Veil I II & III*, each of which appears at a distance to be a woman in a *burka*, on closer inspection turns out to be made up of hundreds of thousands of small pixels of hardcore pornographic photos taken from internet websites and magazines (Rana 2004). This conflation of pious/prostitute image is significant because it calls into question the same issues that *Christa* images did in the western world in the twentieth century.

Hanif has employed both female-Christ and erotic-veiled images in his novel, and wittingly or unwittingly, because Alice is drawn as a non-Muslim character, it allows for such comparisons to be made without inciting criticism from the more radical Pakistani

readers. Commenting on the dangers of fiction writing in Pakistan, Filkins<sup>88</sup> thinks the book also has a great advantage because it is written in English which “occupies a paradoxical place in Pakistani society,” in that it is favoured by the elite classes as a colonial legacy, yet more than half of the Pakistani population being illiterate, or speaking the national or several regional languages, are not really influenced by English writings. This has given Anglophone writers “far more latitude to criticize authorities, both secular and religious, without retribution,” Filkins thinks, because Islamic clerics are less likely to read English fiction, and politicians are more concerned with the larger masses rather than the English-speaking elite. That is why the reaction to Hanif’s satirical writings has been somewhat benign. Hanif is reported by Filkins to have said, “Sometimes you get this feeling that you are basically writing for like-minded people.”

However, the question still remains, whether novels such as *Alice Bhatti*, if read by just a few elite readers, do actually bring about a larger empathetic awareness of human injustices within Pakistan itself--- enough to collate a public reaction and trigger a movement for change. There is, on the other hand, the likelihood that the Christian character of Alice and the English language in which this novel is written together might evoke more sympathy in Western readers, augmenting their general views about Pakistan’s failure in protecting minorities and women, while alienating the Pakistani reader from a depiction of these realities.

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Alice’s nun-like qualities are a strange contrast to her apparent sexuality. She is called “Sister Alice” at work, a title used for both a nurse and a nun. In Pakistan, where working

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<sup>88</sup> Filkins, Dexter. “Dangerous Fictions.” *The New Yorker*, 9 May 2016.  
<<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/09/a-pakistani-novelist-tests-the-limits>>

women in general, and Christian women in particular, are easy targets for sexual harassment, the title “sister” for a nurse is always used with irony, implying improper accessibility rather than pious sanctity. Alice contains a set of binaries within herself. In his book on superheroes, Ben Saunders investigates similar difficulties faced by William Marston in the construction of the first western fictional superheroine, Wonder Woman. Marston’s act of creation was “haunted by a series of powerful binarisms” that led him to the inevitable conclusion: “If the governing binary is that of God/human, then descending from it in parallel structure we can include the antagonistic couplings of: man/woman, spirituality/sexuality, mind/body, master/slave, reason/emotion, truth/rhetoric, and science/art” (Saunders, 37). This resulted in Super Woman being “a fantasy figure who asserts, against the entire masculinist symbolic order, that it is possible to be both beautiful *and* strong, to be nurturing *and* independent, to be emotional *and* intelligent, to be assertive *and* kind (Saunders, 70)”. Hanif’s Alice displays the same set of parallels. This similarity allows for a deconstructive approach that opens a wealth of possible interpretations that fall outside the limits that these binaries usually place upon our understanding. It allows us to even transcend these binaries altogether because the shift in one alters the understanding of the other in a relative measure, “[so] that our idea of the *difference* between such paired terms can change, and may even temporarily vanish, as we become more aware of the characteristics common to both, and the world that belongs to neither” (Saunders, 38).

Besides the obvious male/female (Christ/Christa) pairing, spirituality/sexuality binary is the one pairing that Alice displays most clearly. For work Alice “chooses a loose shirt and then over that loose shirt covers her chest with a dupatta, makes sure that even her neck is covered, ties her hair back, then makes sure her shalwar covers her ankles” (99) before she sets off for Sacred Heart, giving us the Christian version of the Muslim *hijab*: a nun’s



wimple. This seems to imply that even a non-Muslim Pakistani superheroine figure will always need the legitimization that a modest head covering offers her in a male-dominated society. Yet, her “milk-jugs” will still be fetishized and her “body parts” will enter a man’s mind every “nine-second cycle” (Hanif, 72; 41; 87). Alice knows that women “could be wearing a hijab, or covered in swathes of loose man-repelling fabric and they would still draw attention to themselves” and again, she “doesn’t want to be that kind of a woman” (Hanif, 102). Misused by men in the past, her “twenty-seven-year-old body is a compact little war zone where competing warriors have trampled and left their marks” which has resulted in her becoming “an all-weather, all-terrain fighter” (Hanif, 181). Ironically, being classed as an “untouchable” all her life, Alice herself decides to follow a policy of no-contact fighting, never touching male hands except in a professional capacity. She has “perfected no-touch transactions” (Hanif, 103).

This adherence to the acceptable “no-touch” framework makes it easier for Pakistani readers to open up to the idea of a local superheroine: that she fights while keeping the *Mahrem* principle intact. The *Mahrem* principle is based on the *Shariah* rule that except a set of unmarriageable members of the opposite sex with whom sexual relations would be deemed incestuous, a Muslim cannot touch or be alone with anyone of the opposite sex. *Burka Avenger’s* Jiya also fights men by throwing pens and books at her enemies, a no-touch martial art that cleverly evades the *Mahrem* hurdle. Her black robes are a merger of a burka and a nun’s habit, both markers of piety and sanctity.

The *Mahrem* superwoman theme has caught on in real life Pakistan, as reports about “female commandos” trained to fight the Taliban in northwestern tribal areas of Pakistan, have made headlines in several local and international news reports (*NBC; The Express Tribune; Daily Mail*). Like the *Burka Avenger*, these female officers are fully covered and

most wear *niqabs* (veil) as well as *hijabs* (head scarf), while carrying heavy artillery. Even though there are many women who prefer not to cover their heads in public service in Pakistan where a head covering is optional, it seems that the most noncontroversial way for women to venture out in the public domain as active fighters is when the *Mahrem* framework is unharmed. As Miranda Brar points out, increasingly Pakistani women have opted for wearing the hijab because it offers them a legitimate platform where they can exercise their agency even within the strict patriarchal system of dominance (5). The *burka* or *hijab* offers the option of “portable seclusion” (Papanek, 10) that makes it possible for characters like Jiya or real Pakistani female commandos to fight once the *purdah* costume is put on. Husain calls the induction of these female commandos “a form of portable intrusive surveillance” through which, “by taking their place alongside men, these women trouble the boundaries of *mahrem* rules, yet, they do so as veiled women, signaling through their bodies both compliance and transgression” (Husain 2015). The Pakistani State’s appropriation of the *Mahrem* principal to curb the clerics’ criticism to the induction of female commandos reflects the urgent need to find practical solutions to the problems that Haroon and Hanif address in their work.

Nevertheless, the use of a *burka* for legitimizing a Pakistani superheroine whether fictional or in real life is not without complications, especially in the post 9/11 scenario where women weigh prominently in nationalistic discourse. In an interview to the *CNN*, the creator of *Burka Avenger* Haroon defends his choice of a costume for Jiya: “She doesn't use the burqa because she's oppressed. She uses it, she chooses to wear it to hide her identity the way superheroes wear their costumes to hide an identity. Like Batman or Catwoman. By wearing a burqa, she is showing she is a Muslim woman and superhero. And that she stands for all the good things of Islam and the real Islamic values -- which are equality, woman's rights, education and peace -- rather than the way Islam has been hijacked by radical

elements” (CNN). Similarly, even though *The Peabody Award* website claims that in the “children’s series *Burka Avenger*, a symbol of women’s subjugation becomes a super-heroine’s mask,” conservative factions within Pakistan complain that the TV series ridicules the *burka* and the beard, both of which are well recognized markers of Islamic principles. Nighat Dad, the director of the *Digital Rights Foundation* in Lahore, highlights the concerns of a different kind by Pakistani feminists who contend that the utilization of any kind of oppressive religious clothing cannot be amply justified even if it is for a worthy purpose. “Feminists are apprehensive that over time, given the popular appeal of *Burka Avenger*, it might develop into a Pakistani cultural icon. In that case, young girls may look up to *Burka Avenger* as a role model. That may, in turn, contribute to the promotion of ‘burka culture’ in Pakistani society” (Dad). If it is thought that changing a symbol of oppression into an emblem of freedom for women is as easy as appropriating the burka for a superhero costume, several unaddressed concerns will continue to rear their heads. The donning or abandoning of a veil has a deeper religious, cultural, and personal significance than what a character like *Jiya*’s would have many believe. Western feminists have long been charged with clumping together veiling and human rights across the world as a singular issue (Mohanty 1988; 2003), and veiled Pakistani superheroines are likely to fall under a similar charge. The trouble with reading *Burka Avenger* as a counter-narrative is that it does not “shift attention away from the burqa altogether but instead treat[s] it as a locus of liberation. As if Muslim women who don’t cover our heads are proven not to be oppressed. Or if we choose to cover our heads, then clearly we’re free” (Fikri).

The problem with a female body in a representational role, whether it is for freedom or as a nationalist or socio-religious symbol, is in the intersections that inevitably result from this image. In the case of a superheroine like *Wonder Woman*, whose very first appearance in

a costume of stars and stripes stands for post-World War America where a woman is gaining freedom and power, Emad poses an important question: “What happens when gender and nation intersect in the sexualized body of a comic book superhero?” Tracing Wonder Woman’s evolution from the second world war to the post 9/11 America, for Emad her body is the “historical site for the interplay of the culturally oppositional spheres of femininity vs. (masculine) nation, private sexuality vs. public politics/war, and relationships vs. action in battle” (979). As an imagined community, the American nation’s representational body is feminized as Wonder Woman in line with Marston’s wish for her to be “psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should . . . rule the world” (quoted in Knowles, 162). Yet this image of a “hypersexualized” superheroine must be kept in control through bondage in chains and ropes, which is a common theme in Wonder Woman comics, because “[h]ypersexualizing Wonder Woman’s body assures that female power is reigned in, tacitly directing the primary purpose of the body decorated in nationalist iconography to be an object for male sexual pleasure” (Emad, 982). Following Domosh and Seager’s (172) view that an imagined nation is gendered alternately as masculine and feminine, where the former represents the political, official and warring sphere and the latter is for a natural, protective, and motherly sphere, Emad suggests that Wonder Woman embodies both spheres relative to a historically evolving idea of nationhood: “Whenever feminine nationhood threatens to become overly masculine, the images of Wonder Woman become increasingly sexualized and her body becomes subject to bondage. Nationalism comic book style reveals a great deal about prevalent cultural messages about gender: as an icon of the nation, Wonder Woman must always assert her femininity, whether as a marriageable “Diana Prince,” a long-haired ingenue, or a body in bondage; the feminized nation is always at risk of becoming a menace to society” (82-983). In the case of Alice Bhatti with her over emphasized breasts, and the

overtly feminine symbol of the burka in in *Burka Avenger*, we detect parallels to Wonder Woman's bondage in chains. Alice's rebellious masculinity is consistently tempered by references to her sexuality pinned down by a masculine gaze. She battles against this bondage and it is no wonder that in the novel Alice Bhatti instructs the tailor as she leaves his shop: "When you stitch the shirt, can you please make my privileges look a bit flat?" (Hanif, 103).

The questions that arise are whether a Pakistani superheroine's failure to be truly emancipated can be attributed to the threat that her masculinity poses to the symbol of nationhood at a fragile time in Pakistan's history. Are the breasts/burqa reigning-in techniques, or assertions of the femininity of the nation-state increasingly seen as aggressive and volatile by the outside world. Do the masculine and feminine spheres merge successfully in the veiled-commando image of the Pakistani female fighter to counter that image? Or does that leave the idea of a successful Pakistani superheroine open to be hijacked by the U.S. in the creation of the Ms. Marvel Kamala Khan whose free choice about clothing and head-covering challenges the nation-state iconography? Certainly, superheroines as nationalist icons reflect political identities. It is therefore pertinent to note that the American Wonder Woman, in a significant post 9/11 move, *throws off* the "chadhr" [*sic*] (full body covering) she wears to on her visit to "help" Islamic states in order to make a statement about freedom (See image 20. Emad, 979), while *Burka Avenger*, the post 9/11 Pakistani superheroine *pulls* on the burka for emancipation. Clearly, each embodies in her choice a larger nationalist narrative.

Traditionally however, a female icon for the Pakistani nation has always been synonymous with sacrifice. Sister Hina Alvi reminds Alice of Pakistan's first female icon, Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. The interesting thing is that she is remembered for her sacrifice and nun-like devotion, both having thereafter

become high pedestals for Pakistani women to aspire to, without ever getting much male acknowledgement for it. “Did you know that Fatima was a dentist, a trained dentist? But she sacrificed her whole life for this country. And how do we remember her? As an old spinster. Someone gives you their whole life and what do you call them: mother of the nation. Now if her brother is the father of the nation, how can she be the mother of the nation? They should have called her *sister* of the nation, but no. Because then people might have mistaken her for a nurse, one of us. It’s a nation of perverts, I tell you” (57). This lack of respect is something Alice has experienced herself, because although she is called Sister Alice on the wards, she knows that mostly “people call her ‘daughter’ or ‘sister’ and then do exactly what they would do with their own sisters and daughters: they treat her like a slave they bought at a clearance sale” (86). Hanif’s attempt at elevating a female character from the most oppressed section of the Pakistani society into a superwoman is commendable only as a conceptual challenge. It certainly makes the reader think about the complexity of the issue at hand. But the end of the day, fictional superheroines like Alice Bhatti only provide flimsy dreams of female emancipation. What has been more effectively achieved however, is a Christa image. The closest Pakistani parallel to female crucifixion is a slow death from an acid attack. According to *Acid Survivors Pakistan*, in Pakistan “Acid Violence disproportionately affects women at 70% of all cases, and 65% of the attacks on these women are related to divorce and refusal of marriage or sexual advances”. In carrying out a cruel acid attack against his wife, Teddy Butt follows a well-recognized path of violence against women. Alice is sacrificed at the male altar to become a martyr and female saint. Nothing much has changed. If sacrifice is iconic, Alice dies a superwoman, as do many women every day.

The curious blend of piety and strength that is needed to constitute a Pakistani superwoman, her sexuality duly reined in by Islamic *mahrem* rules at the same time, makes

for a very precarious iconic figure teetering between tradition and progress. *Burka Avenger* might seem courageous in her ninja-like moves against bearded men and corrupt bureaucrats, but Jiya still hides behind a veil. In the case of a real Pakistani superwoman perhaps success would be getting respect and recognition without the disguise. One wonders if Hanif was being plainly sarcastic when he said he wanted to write about a superwoman figure when he so obviously ends up creating a female saint. Or perhaps he started out to write about one, but discovered during the process the difficulty of this project. The latter is more likely since the novel shows how Alice is systematically crushed, and as Hanif himself commented, “Alice may have been a superhero, but in Pakistan not even female superheroes can prevail”.<sup>89</sup>

As far as the connection between human rights and literature is concerned, the novel simultaneously succeeds and fails. It succeeds in giving a poor and disadvantaged Alice-the-woman the capability and drive to do what she wants which challenges the stereotypical image of the subaltern Pakistani woman, while at the same time demonstrating male insecurity through Teddy-Butt-the-Pakistani-man’s precarious position in a traditionally patriarchal nation. But the novel fails in that Alice’s success is passive and does not derive any action or change through the novel’s plot that might stimulate Pakistani readers towards concrete steps in real life. Neither does it successfully agitate the universal human rights idiom for Western readers by proposing particular solutions, or local resistance to violence through other characters.

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<sup>89</sup> Hanif interviewed by Dexter Filkins, 2016.

## **Breaking Pakistani Female Stereotypes: Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms Other Wonders*<sup>90</sup>**

‘The world is like a cucumber. Today it’s in your hand, tomorrow it’s up your ass.’<sup>91</sup>

Daniyal Mueenuddin’s *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* opens a door into contemporary Pakistan. The interlinked stories have female characters from a broad cross-section of the Pakistani society who do not portray their subjugation under a patriarchal system in isolation, but balance it with the many ways in which they practice their agency within the class divisions. By extension, these stories reflect a society shaped by a traditionally understood concept of masculinity faced with conditions of rapid social and political change. In Mueenuddin’s work there is a subtle undercurrent of a threat to this sustained sense of masculinity.<sup>92</sup> Through the complex dynamics between male and female characters, these stories communicate a slow erosion of Pakistani masculinity and highlight the resistance of women to patriarchy within the societal limitations they face. The portrayal of strong women in these contemporary stories challenge the post 9/11 stereotyping of Pakistani women as non-agentic and controlled by men that is often projected in popular media reporting on the

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<sup>90</sup> A previous version of this section has been published as a journal article: “Daniyal Mueenuddin’s Dying Men.” *South Asian History and Culture*. Special Issue: Mapping South Asian Masculinities: Men and Political Crises 5.4 (2014): 490-504.

<sup>91</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 85.

<sup>92</sup> Maleeha Aslam’s book *Gender-based Explosions* is perhaps the only work offering a definition of Pakistani masculinity in a contemporary context by analysing qualitative data collected from samples taken from three social strata: low socio-economic group, socially stigmatized and distressed, and university students and professionals. Chapter 7 titled ‘Self-image, social expectations and pressures’ is about the self-sustained pressures and expectations that Pakistani men subject themselves to in order to uphold their masculinity. This role is increasingly hard to maintain as more women have started working outside the house.



war on terror campaigns in this region, and through literature that sustains these views.<sup>93</sup> International human rights reports have repeatedly included the instances of violence against women as the failure of Pakistan government.<sup>94 95</sup> Instead of a sweeping condemnation of state policies that overlooks most underlying causes of violations of human rights, Mueeuddin's stories point at the recent precariousness of masculine identity in Pakistan as a reason which has contributed to increased violence and a failure of the protection of the rights of women and the underprivileged in society.

Pakistani masculinity is multifaceted and complicated because it is built on widely divergent grounds of religious beliefs, tribal values, physical factors and deep-rooted class divisions. A modern Pakistani man struggles to juggle his conflicting roles: pious yet virile; loving yet dominant; married yet unfettered; modern yet traditional. In a country where class is established and maintained primarily through material or social dominance, masculinity is predatory. Nowhere is the show of dominance more effective than in the control of the female body. This control is often legitimized through religion, and it has become one of the main hallmarks of Pakistani masculinity. With very few exceptions, men of all ages and across all social strata feel under pressure to both exhibit, and maintain their power over

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Anker writes in "Teaching the Legal Imperialism Debate Over Human Rights" (Moore, Alexandra S., and Elizabeth S. Goldberg. *Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 38. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2015): "Certain human rights best sellers, such as any of Khalid Husseini's novels, provide case studies that disclose how popular fiction both exoticizes the non-Western world and promotes coercive Western intervention within its crises" and are a part of "the self-indulgent and consumer-based 'armchair activism' fashionably marketed at the Western women's book club circuit" (42).

<sup>94</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2016: Pakistan. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/pakistan>

<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2015: Pakistan. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/pakistan#49dda6>

women, within the means available to them. This pressure is more or less true in all Muslim populations. Kandiyoti's comments on masculinity/femininity in Turkey, has a familiar ring:

The more compelling the myth of male superiority becomes ... the more difficult it is for men to live up to it. Masculinity is not an ascribed but an achieved status, one that is never permanently achieved, because the danger of being unmanned is ever present. Thus, proving one's masculinity is a constant preoccupation as is the concern over the loss of masculinity. It may not be surprising to find that in cultures such as Turkey, which controls female sexuality rigidly and at the same time requires that men flaunt their masculine prowess, men are intensely preoccupied with possible loss of sexual identity. This state of affairs could partially account for the persistent element of danger associated with the female sex, an element that introduces the possibility of subjugation through violence especially when and if female behaviour is construed as a slight against masculinity or male "honour". (Kandiyoti, 317-338)

Increasingly, with the spread of education and the globalizing influence of electronic multimedia, Pakistani women are challenging this male dominance in varying capacities within different classes of society. This has aroused feelings of insecurity within men.

Mueenuddin's interwoven stories allow a cross-sectional view of the Pakistani class system as it stands today. The vocabulary hints at male insecurity in Pakistan even though that might not have been the author's primary intention. At a time when the global reader's curiosity about Pakistani society is in a heightened state, anthropological readings of these stories (and similar works) are inevitable. The metaphoric undertones of the text suggest a crumbling of the self-imposed masculinity that has been uneasily and unsuccessfully sustained by Pakistani men since independence, and is increasingly being confronted by human rights norms as unacceptable.

Pakistan has a Muslim majority and because it is an Islamic state, despite the presence of a sizeable non-Muslim population, in dominant discourse Pakistani masculinity is seen to

be synonymous with Islamic masculinity. In Pakistan, where provincial culture is generally considered to be a true representation of national culture,<sup>96</sup> both exhibit a form of masculinity that is believed to be prescribed by Islam. For this reason, it can be argued that the stories, even if limited to the Punjab province and Muslim characters, nevertheless project hope for rethinking masculinity following the “death” of the hollow masculinity that has been long prevalent across Pakistan. Indeed, in some stories men do successfully impose their power over female characters in the end, appearing to sustain the traditional hierarchy. Nevertheless, consistent portrayals of death, and metaphors for death within the text, present the reader with an interesting interpretive dichotomy that suggest a change in circumstances.

In these modern tales, the totems of masculine power are all there: expensive cars, pulsating generators and powerful machines; long roads, agricultural lands and urban mansions; wives, heirs and young mistresses. Yet in them the reader discovers a growing sense of decay and dissatisfaction. Large houses are musty and crumbling or childless and empty, lands are sold or taken over, women are old and bitter or youthful but conniving. Nothing is right, and death waits in every story-room that is entered. These are male deaths by an overwhelming ratio. Of the eight stories, six revolve around or result in a man’s death. Besides literal deaths, a morbid panoply of metaphoric deaths underline the stories. None of the stories have happy endings.

The eight stories spin around the central axis of K.K. Harouni, a former bureaucrat and feudal landlord, who is a consistent reference point in every story and is in a way an embodiment of patriarchy. Two of the stories, “Our Lady of Paris” and “A Spoiled Man,” tentacle out to his nephew Sohail Harouni and a servant at his estate, Rezak. Three others move progressively down the social ladder from K.K. Harouni’s land manager Nabi Bakhsh

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<sup>96</sup> Afzal, Shah and Amjad, 336.

Jaglani in “Provide, Provide” to Nawab in “Nawabdin Electrician,” sliding downward still to Rafik the valet in “Saleema”. The remaining two stories are roped in through a common acquaintance of the Harouni family. The sessions judge in “About a Burning Girl” knows K.K. Harouni, and in “Lily” MP Makhdoom Talwan’s nephew Murad Talwan meets his future wife at Sohail Harouni’s party in Islamabad. The pivotal story, “In Other Rooms, Other Wonders,” which appropriately lends its name to the whole collection, is the only one in which K.K. Harouni himself appears as a key character.

Behind the male characters determined in their pursuit of masculine power, we find cold, purposeful females. Most of these women, although portrayed as economically dependent or even helpless, render the men hollow on an emotional level. The dichotomy between the defense of the insignia of masculinity, and the leakage of real power behind the masculine façade, creates a rare pathos.

The most obvious clue to the demise of masculinity, despite a preservation of its external trappings, is in the descriptions. Female characters in the stories have a disturbingly masculine aura. Although the subtle shade of “female masculinity” in these stories is not as boldly outlined as Judith Halberstam’s ground-breaking definition, its detection in the text is significant. According masculine traits to women agitates a purely male claim to masculinity, freeing it from gender constraints. Mueenuddin’s female characters “perform masculinity,” and as a result, men are left with a rather ineffective “prosthetic” masculinity to uphold in view of their biological maleness.<sup>97</sup>

To varying degrees, women in the stories plant themselves in a position of dominance within each social class. Tahmina Rashid notes how Pakistani “discourses” involve the manner in which women and their bodies are spoken and written about, and more

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<sup>97</sup> Halberstam, 3.

fundamentally, what these words and attributions reveal about the cultural metaphors that shape dominant “realities”.<sup>98</sup> According to Rashid the “formation of ‘body identity’ through a political process reflects, reinforces, and even challenges the distribution of power between men and women.”<sup>99</sup> Mueenuddin, wittingly or unwittingly, presents rogue discourses in his stories, which masculinize at least one physical attribute in most of his otherwise feminine characters, stripping the traditionally dominant male image of its authority. Prying apart masculinity from maleness brings into question the exclusivity of man’s control in society, especially over women. This leaves a telltale “lack” in the masculine role. Traditionally, a semiotic approach to gender allots lack to the feminine, not masculine, since “In the semiotic opposition of masculinity and femininity, masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority. The phallus is the master signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack” (Connell, 70).

Mueenuddin’s characters, however, reflect a subtle yet identifiable shift in these roles. In the first story “Nawabdin Electrician,” Nawab repairs machines, rides a motorcycle and brings home the money, but it is his wife who has a “strong body” and a “long mannish face” and to whom he responds “obediently”.<sup>100</sup> In “Saleema,” the maid with “deep-set eyes,” leaves her own pitiful husband with an “emaciated face” and rotting “yellow teeth” sobbing like a child, and determinedly sets out to seduce Rafiq the valet. She is, we are told, “exactly as tall as him”.<sup>101</sup> Jaglani’s mistress Zainab, in “Provide, Provide” has “strong hands” and a face which is “angular, with high cheekbones” and which appears to Jaglani to be “too forceful” and reminds him of a “cattle thief”.<sup>102</sup> Jaglani, who “could order men arrested or

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<sup>98</sup> Rashid, “Militarized Masculinities,” 566 – 578.

<sup>99</sup> Rashid, 567-68.

<sup>100</sup> Mueenuddin, “Nawabdin Electrician,” 6.

<sup>101</sup> Mueenuddin, “Saleema,” 18, 31.

<sup>102</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 57, 55.

released, could appoint them to government posts, could have government officers removed,” himself “feared Zainab” whom the village men think is “like a hatchet.”<sup>103</sup> “About a Burning Girl” shows us a sessions judge in the Lahore High Court whose wife is an “iron lady” and “the poor man’s Lady Macbeth” in his own words.<sup>104</sup> He pays his “respects” to her every morning as she sips tea in bed.

In contrast, male characters undergo consistent truncations in stature. Shot in the groin, Nawabdin suffers a narrow escape from possible impotency. Rezak is stripped by the police and tortured horrendously, his legs tied wide apart. Jaglani develops a fatal cancer, and witnesses a cruel decline in political and physical power as he helplessly awaits his own death. K.K. Harouni has a serious heart condition, his earnings are dwindling, and he is being manipulated into selling off large chunks of his land at nominal prices. Murad Talwan, with his “feminine lips” suffers being cuckolded. Rafik has thin arms and body, false teeth, and an inadequate “rotating” mouth. Images of men in dentures and yellowing teeth recur in the stories as motifs of eroding power.

The description of K.K. Harouni’s dead body, in particular, can be viewed as a metaphor for the death of the traditional Pakistani male within Mueenuddin’s story realm. The corpse is a mockery of his earlier image as a polo and tennis player, with a “handsome golden face” like a god.<sup>105</sup> In death, “[t]he body of K. K. Harouni lay on the floor, wrapped in a white cloth, his jaw bound closed with a white bandage, the knot tied jauntily near one ear. His dentures had been lost, and his cheeks had caved in. His body had shrunk, lying among rose petals scattered by the servants”.<sup>106</sup> He is survived by three authoritative daughters. The

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<sup>103</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 65, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Mueenuddin, “About a Burning Girl,” 88, 89, 93.

<sup>105</sup> Mueenuddin, “In Other Rooms, Other Wonders,” 101.

<sup>106</sup> Mueenuddin, “In Other Rooms, Other Wonders,” 127.

house is also teeming with women, like ants around a dead insect. Harouni's old wife and his mistress Husna are there and "all sorts of women had come, women from all phases of K. K.'s life, and more kept arriving, clicking through the front vestibule in high heels, spilling out into other rooms."<sup>107</sup> The crowds of women are reminders of the absence of male heirs. This surrounds Harouni's death with a sense of feminine triumph in outnumbering and outliving men.

Rezak's death in "A Spoiled Man" evokes the same pathos. The story revolves around Rezak, a poor man who is employed by Sonya, Sohail Harouni's wife, to tend to the orchard because she feels sorry for him. As his condition improves, he builds himself a wooden shack on stilts at the back of the orchard and marries a "simple" girl who cannot talk but tends to his house. The marriage makes him feel that he can finally join the male ranks. He now feels their equal when he is among the men in the bazaar. One day he comes home to find his wife missing and much as he tries finding her, she seems to have disappeared. A plea to help find her results in Sonya calling a high police official to look into the matter. Ironically, the police carry Rezak off and torture him as a suspect. But before the police realize their mistake the psychological damage is already done. Rezak's budding claim to masculinity based on heterosexual coupledness is crushed and he is humiliated. Following this, he seems to simply allow himself to die and is buried at the bottom of the orchard. The vocabulary echoes his diminishment. The "smallness" of Rezak's grave surprises Sohail Harouni's wife. The locks on his cabin break off in time, like "falling leaves," the cupboards are "emptied," and Sonya's attention to his existence is slowly "fading".<sup>108</sup> It is also pertinent that this last story

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>108</sup> Mueenuddin, "A Spoiled Man," 237.

in the collection ends with a man's death, stacked marble gravestones, and tools representing masculinity "files and a hammer, a plane, a level" lying useless and rusting.

This shrinkage of the male image is made obvious when women muse with detachment over male death in Mueenuddin's stories, like the italicized reflection of Lily as she sits in the sickroom of Murad's dying father: "*It's a little dying world...* this household, these servants, the old man at the center."<sup>109</sup> Murad's father is no less paltry than Harouni. Surrounded by medicines, his resigned expression, "dentures in his mouth shifting and making a clicking sound," echoes regret. We are told that Murad's "overwhelming mother, cut from the same pattern as his aunts, had destroyed his father by inches."<sup>110</sup> Murad himself speaks of "his fear of being consumed by a woman" being a constant and potent threat in his life.<sup>111</sup> Yet he marries Lily who poses a similar threat to him with her wish for independence and liberation. Murad and his father are both losers with their emotional dependence on their wives. Even when Murad manages to reassert his dominance in the end, he cannot really be sure of Lily's fidelity in the future. His masculinity is dependent on her obedience. In Pakistan, Aslam opines, "men's dependence on women, if voiced publicly, can stigmatize their masculinity permanently" (Aslam, 189). Murad chooses not to voice his need.

Of all the male insignia, cars are the most prominent in these stories. These are more than mere symbols of power. Ownership and control of vehicles reflect a territorial impulse and their defense partakes of an essential war of survival. In "Nawabdin Electrician" the main character strives for hierarchical recognition in a world of competing males. His work as an electrician is an extended sexual metaphor. The readers follow his phallic initiation into an imperiled fraternity. With the village men crowded around, he enters a room housing an

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<sup>109</sup> Mueenuddin, "Lily," 179.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.



unresponsive pump and electric motor, and “takes liberties” with it. Flipping out his “screwdriver, blunt and long,” he cracks “the shield hiding the machine’s penetralia”.<sup>112</sup> He smears the machine with “sticky mango sap” and miraculously has the pump started. It is this success in proving his ascendancy over machines that earns him a motorcycle from K.K. Harouni, and it is the defense of the same motorcycle that causes him a serious injury. With the ownership of a vehicle, he finally achieves that much desired first badge in a wheeled, masculine world: “The motorcycle increased his status, gave him weight, so that people began calling him ‘Uncle,’ and asking his opinion on world affairs, about which he absolutely knew nothing.”<sup>113</sup> It is consequently inevitable that Nawabdin should be envied by lesser equipped, aspirant males in the area. Almost predictably, one evening he finds himself held at gunpoint by a ruffian from a nearby village, who wants to steal his motorcycle. The ensuing scuffle is a battle for possession of wheels. As each man makes a grab for the motorcycle in turn, the thief shoots the electrician in the groin, but “Nawab couldn’t let him get away with this. The bike belonged to him.”<sup>114</sup> With the blood “warm in his pants,” he watches the robber as he “stood the motorcycle up, pushed it twenty feet, panting, then tried to start it.” At this point, men from the village intervene and in turn, shoot the robber. Both men are taken to a nearby dispensary where Nawabdin, emerging as the brave defender of his trophy, replies to the pharmacist’s enquiry about the cause of his injury with: “He tried to snatch my motorbike, but I didn’t let him.”<sup>115</sup> To his relief, he is given the assurance that the bullet has missed his genitals, and at least one aspect of his masculinity is secure. Unlike Nawabdin, who gets special care and treatment, the robber has no such claim to manhood. In

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<sup>112</sup> Mueenuddin, “Nawabdin Electrician,” 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

the pharmacist's indifferent dismissal of him – “He's a dead man” -- we see his smooth slide into oblivion even before he actually breathes his last. His inability to get the bike is more decisively terminal than his literal death. The story ends with one man dead, and Nawabdin thinking “of the motorcycle, saved, and the glory of saving it” and the extent that his stature “was growing” as a result.<sup>116</sup>

The vehicles in Mueenuddin's world appropriately reflect each owner's rightful place in the social strata. Nawabdin's *Honda70* motorcycle is hierarchically inferior to Jaglani's *Jeep*, which is in turn less powerful than Makhdoom Talwan's roaring new *Pajero* land cruiser. The sessions judge is in a weaker position with a *Suzuki* car that reflects a civil-servant's postcolonial fall from grace. He admits:

The car I drive is another of my trials. I fit inside of it like an orang-utan in a shipping cage; but for the moment, on a gazetted salary of fourteen thousand rupees, I do not presume to get a bigger one. The British built the large but run down house in which I am quartered. My wife got this residence allotted to us by spending a month camped in the living room of her second cousin, a deputy additional secretary, and our greatest fear is that someone senior to me will see it and covet it and take it.<sup>117</sup>

Faced with his dominant wife, a deteriorating house and a small car do nothing to restore his crumbling manhood. Coming home one evening, the judge guesses from a “guest's enormous Land Cruiser parked in the verandah, she must be the wife of a *big fish*” that his own wife is aiming to catch, and resigns himself to a lesser position of power. Aslam's study highlights the areas of stress for contemporary Pakistani males in the “dynamics of gender relations where men cannot see women as inspirational without being perceived as a ‘wimp’ and

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>117</sup> Mueenuddin, “About a Burning Girl,” 86.

cannot take financial help from their own wives for fear of being labeled ‘dishonourable’ and having their social reputation stigmatized.”<sup>118</sup> In that sense then, the judge in this story is a failure.

With his aging but still graceful twin *Mercedes* saloon cars that signify old money, K.K. Harouni is the last king in a shifting era of traditional masculinity. The jeep-owners, on the other hand, only reflect a desperate plea for recognition through the louder roar of their expensive vehicles. The *Suzuki* cars, however, merely diminish its owners. It is interesting to note that Mohsin Hamid’s novel *Moth Smoke* set in contemporary Pakistan plays on a similar connection between masculine power and car ownership. The main character Darashikoh Shehzad, insecure after having lost his job, is acutely aware of his friend Ozi’s *Pajero* which “moves like a bull, powerful and single-minded,” mocking his diminishment. As he drives through red lights Ozi educates him about the Pakistani rules, of which “the first is, bigger cars have the right of way.”<sup>119</sup> Darashikoh measures his lack almost painfully in “the difference in the sounds of slamming car doors: the deep thuds of the *Pajero* and Land Cruiser, the nervous cough of [his] *Suzuki*.”<sup>120</sup> The same recurrent parallelism turns the vehicle war between Murad Badshah’s clan of rickshaw drivers and yellow-cab owners into a battle of the “four-wheeled” and “three-wheeled” alpha males of the public transport industry in Lahore.

A stark projection of such emblems of masculinity foils the internal insecurity of the male characters. The female characters show an emotional frigidity that offsets the men’s neediness. Maleeha Aslam’s research reveals that Pakistani “men who were influenced by women were considered ‘wimps’ by other men and often ridiculed” and that “an attachment

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<sup>118</sup> Aslam, 199.

<sup>119</sup> Hamid, *Moth Smoke*, 25.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

to women was considered a sign of weakness” (Aslam 183). Not only that, but men in Aslam’s research group “confided that at times, in attempting to keep the power balance in their favour, they do the exact opposite to what they are asked by their wives” (Aslam 183). Although Mueenuddin’s female characters play the obvious role of the oppressed, yet the subtext reveals that it is the men who end up in an emotionally weakened state. In *Provide, Provide*, Zainab is reserved and we are told that “her lips would never be hungry.” Although Jaglani continually tells her he loves her, she “[does] not caress him” and he finds “no response in her eyes.”<sup>121</sup> Her focus is on getting a baby since neither her own husband, nor Jaglani has impregnated her. When she pleads with Jaglani to give her his son’s child to raise, he knows her demand is in payment for living with him in feigned ignorance of their sham marriage, but he succumbs nonetheless. In snatching another man’s wife because he is socially superior, yet prioritizing his first wife and sons to keep up a worldly charade, he seems to hold all the reins of power. His lands and the surrounding village are named “Dunyapur” meaning “a small world”. Yet he is horrified by the realization that this perfect world “had been spoiled for him by the presence of Zainab.” The reduction of his person starts from within, as he is hollowed out by a cancerous growth, which is a manifestation of his emotional erosion. His derision of himself is deathlier than his disease.

He reproached himself for taking his eldest son’s daughter and giving her to Zainab, transplanting the little girl onto such different stock. Secretly, and most bitterly, he blamed himself for having been so weak as to love a woman who had never loved him. He made an idol of her, lavished himself upon her sexual body, gave himself to a woman who never gave back, except in the most practical terms. She blotted the cleanliness of his life trajectory, which he had always before believed in. She represented the culmination of his ascendance, the reward of his virtue and striving, and showed him how little it had all been, his life and

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<sup>121</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 59.

his ambitions. All of it had been thrown away, his manliness and strength, for a pair of legs that clasped his waist and a pair of eyes that pierced him and that yet had at bottom the deadness of foil.<sup>122</sup>

When he says goodbye to her for the last time, his half-hearted assurance that his sons will look after her, is met with a clipped “Fine” from Zainab. Although he walks out and gets into his jeep, which is being polished by Mustafa the driver as usual, the gleaming jeep does nothing to elevate him. It only serves to highlight the incongruity between his inner state and his outward appearance.

Similarly, in the central story the young girl Husna, who sets out to climb the social ladder to “escape the gloominess of her parents’ house” by hooking the great K.K. Harouni himself, displays a cold ambition. On their first night together, Harouni is touched that she is a virgin but realizes that what he at first mistook for shyness was actually “a focus in her eyes, expressing a hooded rage to get what she wanted.”<sup>123</sup> She wheedles money from him to fill two steel trunks kept locked in her room with “everything from raw silk to electric sandwich makers.” Watching Harouni dead in the end, Husna looks at two of the society women gossiping at the funeral, and feels that “she want[s] to be like them, they were what she had lost.” She has lost not a man she loved, but the social station. Yet she considers herself at least materially victorious when she carries away the heavy steel trunks as her booty, even if she has lost her position to the more powerful Harouni daughters. The Harouni daughters’ claim on “masculinity” is more powerful in being heirs than Husna’s is now that Harouni is dead. As Harouni’s mistress, Husna’s young body was the instrument of power. A female body outside of a masculine need holds little power and projects no threat.

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<sup>122</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 75.

<sup>123</sup> Mueenuddin, “In Other Rooms,” 115.

Mueenuddin's stories present defiant female bodies under an uncomfortable masculine gaze. The interesting twist lies in the helplessness and powerlessness of the male characters against the stark reality of these female bodies. Rashid's opinion is that,

In Pakistan, the female body has been politicized to such an extent that it functions as a battleground for ideological, philosophical, and religious debates and agendas between the pseudo-modernist military regimes and traditionalist *mullahs*. Pakistani women embody and practice the value systems of society through their bodies and their social behaviour. The ruling elite often conform to the traditionalists (religious and cultural) and lack the political will to seriously challenge existing practices. Rather, it exploits the situation to use female bodies as a tool to support, protest, and subvert the rules of patriarchal societies. Since the prevailing discourses and practices continuously abuse and marginalize women through their socially constructed bodies, *it makes sense that new knowledge and critiques should be closely linked to women's varied experiences of those bodies*. (Emphasis mine. Rashid, 568.)

In that sense then these stories do offer an alternative look at female bodies than the normative one in Pakistan. The main female character in "Saleema" has no scruples in using her body to get financial security. We witness a defiant role-reversal in that Saleema is not the victim. In fact, she is the one who sets out to hunt the males and asks herself, "*After all, why not? Why shouldn't I?*" She violates the traditional role by revealing her impatience with Rafik's hesitation in succumbing to her:

She looked over at him, his serious wrinkled face, his stubble. Despite the rain, moths circled around the lamps hanging from the ceiling. She kept bumping her hip against the pillar. *Come on, come on*, she thought. Finally, he said, 'Well at least they haven't started planting the cotton yet.'

She turned, with her back to the pillar. 'Rafik, we're both from the village, we know all this.'

He looked over at her quickly. His face seemed hard. She had startled him. Then he did come over.<sup>124</sup>

Instead of waiting for Rafik to make the first move, she puts an end to his small-talk by effectively challenging him to make a physical move. When he hesitates, she puts her arms around him. An open acknowledgement and exposure of female eroticism challenges the “value systems” put in place for Pakistani women that Rashid has highlighted. In a brazen move, Mueenuddin draws the reader towards “the calendar on the wall that showed a picture of the Kaaba, the black cloths covering the stone and crowds circling around it” as a mocking religious backdrop to Saleema’s blatant rebuttal of its strictures:

She felt aroused, yet wanted to get up, to go somewhere. She took off his clothes, peeling off his tan socks. Their skins touched. Standing up and going to the corner, she bent down on purpose to pick up her shirt, letting him see her. She saw reflected in his eyes the beauty of her young body.<sup>125</sup>

Having worked her way into Rafik’s bed, she keeps him in a sustained “disturbed” state by sleeping naked. This overt flaunting of a female body projects the text as a statement of change. Similarly, in “Lily,” we see a woman belonging to the Pakistani middle class, and her very different concept of freedom. Rather than using her feminine powers for financial gains, she seeks a freedom of choice in how to live her life. The story follows Lily who, tired of her social life in the city, seeks the commitment of marriage and looks forward to a quieter life of running a house on a remote farm. She wants to leave her old life with her sexual escapades behind. Very soon the novelty wears off and Lily finds herself craving the society of her old friends whom she persuades Murad to invite to the farm. With their arrival, her sense of

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<sup>124</sup> Mueenuddin, “Saleema,” 31.

<sup>125</sup> Mueenuddin, “Saleema,” 36.

frustration increases. She sleeps with one of the male guests at her party in a bid to exercise her freedom. When Murad reminds Lily of her earlier resolutions, she confronts her husband with “You like me when I’m tied up with a pink bow around my neck like a kitten. I am not the type to be dutiful. I’m messy and willful and self-destructive.”<sup>126</sup> And though she feels that she has “wronged” Murad by sleeping with another man at her house party, “yet the tension of the past and her sense of being unworthy ha[s] disappeared.”<sup>127</sup> She is surprised at her sense of liberation in shaking off her guilt, and anticipates becoming “old and self-forgiving.”<sup>128</sup> Lily’s is the image of a female that challenges Pakistani masculinity represented by Murad’s character within the framework of this story.

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There are three levels on which Mueenuddin’s representative male figures fail to conform to their traditionally prescribed roles: the heroic, the social, and the personal. The loss of the Pakistani heroic ideal is represented in the institutional corruption reflected through the male characters in positions of power, and their fall from grace. On a social level, the struggle to sustain material or financial superiority over other males is shown to dent masculinity. But perhaps, in personal relationships with women, a loss of control over female body/behavior becomes the biggest reason for a sense of inadequacy in the male characters. The reasons for this loss are complex. Durre S. Ahmed (1994) talks of the great sense of insecurity that a Pakistani male faces. This sense of loss is a result of a long historical journey, according to Ahmed. Ever since the conception of Pakistan, the country has not seen stability.

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<sup>126</sup> Mueenuddin, “Lily,” 205.

<sup>127</sup> Mueenuddin, “Lily,” 207.

<sup>128</sup> Mueenuddin, “Lily,” 209.



The rapidly changing geopolitical scene, especially the collapse of communism, has left many Pakistani moderns treading air. The situation is exacerbated by moderns also feeling trapped in the current largely negative image of Islam as it has emerged, preceding and in the aftermath of the Gulf War ... Hence the attempts for the formulation of an identity vis-à-vis Islam and the west, leading to a bewildering array of combinations in nomenclature. (Ahmed, *Masculinity, Rationality and Religion*, 111.)

As a result, many have more recently sought out Islam in a hair-splittingly extreme form. Among those who do not want to take a religious stance there is a growing despair, greatest in those who are close to or above forty years in age. It is interesting to note that most of the male characters in Mueenuddin's stories are aging men caught in a conflicting warp between centuries-old expectations, and a modern accusatory world of a reawakened stance on human rights. Ahmed points out that this "is the first post-partition generation, at this stage caught between a rapidly receding, if not gone, sense of security that was present with the parental, founding fathers" (111).

Ahmed is of the opinion, that the archetypical heroic man is a key determinant of modern human behavior, and that it "is instrumental in bringing into consciousness the interplay between individual achievement, human limitation, and the need to belong to a social group" (Ahmed [appendix I.A, 119] 121.). She traces myths and archetypes of a male hero in Pakistan and the inevitable death of each, leaving behind outlines of imagined identities that cannot be filled in. According to her the first masculine "monotheistic hero" that early Pakistan had as an archetype was Jinnah. However, the contradiction in Jinnah's personal versus political image has made him an uneasy heroic ideal to follow. Sayyed and Tyrer discuss at length the consequence of "ancestor worship" in Pakistan and the transformation of Jinnah into the *Quaid-e-Azam* (Sayyid and Tyrer, 57–75.). Jinnah's greatest

tragedy, in their opinion, is that in his posthumous re-creation as a national hero Pakistan has found an excuse for deferring its decolonization. Yet in Jinnah's figure even today the location of either Islamism or secularism is a futile exercise. Rereading history to look for Jinnah's approval or disapproval of a religious state has caused anxiety. Ambiguity about his "Western" preferences in language, dress and food has only resulted in more confusion. This continual rehabilitation of Jinnah as a key figure makes him an uncomfortable role model for Pakistani men, in particular. Since a monotheistic archetype is a fusion of both the principle of unity, and a concern with individual perfection, it is destined to fail as an ideal.<sup>129</sup> It does not allow for the decline and fall necessary for the making of a hero.

Next is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who "perhaps came closest to the myth of the hero in terms of betrayal, hubris and fall," (Ahmed, 114) with his powerful political entry and his shockingly fateful end. For a while Bhutto's secular influence had allowed Pakistani men to show more tolerance for women. With his controversial hanging, Zia-ul-Haq's new wave of Islamic frenzy redefined masculinity for a second time. Passing of the Hudood Ordinance in Pakistan in 1979 had massive repercussions. The Hudood Law was intended to implement Islamic *Sharia* law, by enforcing punishments mentioned in the Quran for *Zina* (extramarital sex), among other things. The ordinance was later criticized as leading to an unfair incarceration of women and in facilitating women's oppression by men (Imran, 78-100).

Despite the suppressed criticism felt at the time, what followed was "the first literal fusion of

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<sup>129</sup> We can see the failure of the Jinnah archetype (also known as the Quaid-Azam, or the supreme leader) manifested through passages like the one in "Provide, Provide" with its reference to Jinnah's forgotten photo, as Jaglani waits in the anteroom of the corrupt Punjab Chief Minister:

Jaglani waited in the anteroom with twenty or thirty other supplicants, mostly provincial politicians from the business classes, who gathered in circles or huddled together on grimy sofas, speaking in undertones or puffing cigarettes. Two pictures hung on a wall of the dirty smoky room, one of the country's founder, the Quaid-e-Azam, and next to it, just slightly lower, a photo of the party leader. (72-73)

the heroic/martial archetype and its monotheistic counterpart with the advent of Zia-ul-Haq, consolidating further the violence inherent to the masculine-religious perspective” (Ahmed 114). As Maleeha Aslam points out:

Misogyny was institutionalized in law during General Zia’s regime (1979-1988). The state started promoting *ulema* for political gains and to give Islam an “official” face. Maceration of the feminine side of Islam was indirectly allowed by a state that was driven by “militaristic machismo” and interested in promoting an “*ulemasculinised* theology” that was primarily “aggressive and violent” (158).

Exercising control over women thus became synonymous with Pakistani/Islamic masculinity. With slow but inevitable progress in the areas of female education and empowerment, however, this masculinity faced an increasing challenge. None of the political male heroes had significantly augmented the Pakistani male image within the social framework. The fall of each only contributed to an increasing sense of the loss of masculine identity.

New definitions of masculinity in a post-partition Pakistan have always had to juggle religious doctrines against secular progress. The futility of such a position has complicated things further. Since the justification of Pakistan’s creation was based on the practice of Islam, anything other than a prescribed Islamic masculinity has never stood a good chance. Yet the longing for more tolerance of subordinate or other performances of masculinity has continued. Mueenuddin weaves into his stories an ambivalent view of a colonial past that has contributed to the evolution of a strictly religious form of masculinity which has been defiantly maintained by Pakistani men since independence. In most cases, his characters express nostalgia for the British rule, coupled with regret about the rising materialism and corruption in its wake. Murad says in exasperation, “I swear, it’s impossible to get anything done in this country. We just sit around scratching our fleas and telling lies. The British should come back.” The people with real positions of power are conspicuously projected as

anglophiles. When Jaglani goes to see the Chief Minister of Punjab to plead for a seat in the assembly for his son, he is put in his place by the differences in clothing and appearance prior to any verbal rebuff. The Minister sits behind a desk, “his Western clothes, a pinstripe suit and gold cuff links and English shoes, distinguishing him from Jaglani.”<sup>130</sup> Even the minor characters hark back to the Raj. Mian Sarkar, the reader of the sessions judge and another shadow of a colonial past, is always dressed in a three-piece suit like an Anglo-Indian baboo. Because the judge has no real authority and is merely an apathetical, hollowed designation of power long past, Mian Sarkar becomes the real doer and informer of a changed order with ready truisms like “For every lock there is a key” and “In Pakistan all things can be arranged.”<sup>131</sup> Mueenuddin’s narratives hint at the oscillating love-hate relationship with the west which has torn male identities into varied stances that range from extreme servility, to an aggressive defiance through flaunting of wealth, to a nostalgic re-enactment of anglicized nobility. We see shades of all these in the stories. In Jaglani and Makhdoom Talwan’s characters, clad in native *kurtas* and turbans, we have men seizing material power to counter old insecurities; in Murad and his father a weak reflection of colonial fidelity; and in the characters of Rafik and Rezak a deep-rooted, three-hundred-year strain of bred obedience.

Identity issues trail from postcolonial perplexities to a more incisive sense of isolation, following the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. Older characters in the stories are captions of a postcolonial sense of loss. Sent to England for what was considered better education, they came back almost inevitably with a heightened awareness of lack. Men with brown skins and “white” values could never quite reconcile themselves

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<sup>130</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 73.

<sup>131</sup> Mueenuddin, “About a Burning Girl,” 98, 99.

with either their birth-cultures, or their adopted identities. Murad's father is one such character.

In a photograph Murad had shown her of his father as a young man at Oxford many years ago, lanky, with Murad's long and delicate face, not quite smiling, wearing an overcoat, a scarf tied tightly around his neck—already he looked cautious, insulated, at loss.<sup>132</sup>

Sohail Harouni's mother warns Helen, his American girlfriend, about Pakistan and its complexes. She tells her, "You would hate Pakistan. You're not built for it, you're too straight and you don't put enough value on decorative, superficial things- and that's the only way to get by there." Rafia's meaningful answer to Helen's question about the possibility of Sohail settling in America outlines the dilemma of a Pakistani male:

"And how would that be? He would be emasculated, not American and not with any place in Pakistan, working at a job he wouldn't like. I see these boys come through Karachi on two-week vacations--the boys who settled in America--and they always have this odd tamed look, a bit sheepish. It's so much worse after 9/11-- they more or less apologize daily. Sohail's background will always be a factor...He is proud of who he is, but they would knock a bit of that out of him. In any case, for you he would do it, join a law firm in New York. He would even stay with you, if that's what you wanted. But I promise you, he wouldn't be happy, he wouldn't feed the best part of himself."

Helen looked at Rafia squarely. "And in Pakistan will he feed that best part?"

"I don't know," cried Rafia, startling Helen. "I don't know."<sup>133</sup>

Rafia's unsure reply to Helen's question about whether Sohail's identity was any more secure in Pakistan is the telltale mark of a sense of bewilderment about the foundering state of Pakistani masculinity today.

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<sup>132</sup> Mueenuddin, "Lily," 181

<sup>133</sup> Mueenuddin, "Our Lady of Paris," 149.

Mueenuddin's depictions mirror the contemporary situation in Pakistan. To contest a loss of identity and a sense of diminishment, Pakistani men appear to have driven themselves towards violence and manipulation in the bid to win back their self-worth and the brunt of that violence is directed at women or the poor classes in general. The inclusion of instances of such violence in contemporary writings from Pakistan help identify its causes in larger geopolitical movements. In his book *Aspects of Violence*, Willem Schinkel differentiates between state violence, personal violence, and structural violence. Structural violence is, according to him "most often neglected" but at the same time the most common, as the reasons for this kind of violence lie in a series of "differentiations":

...structural violence thus exists in a situation in which relative social position is a main structuring factor, where an uneven division of knowledge exists, where access to information is scarce and unevenly divided, where money as a generalized communicative medium structures a social system. With respect to the differentiation between societal subsystems, it exists in the dividedness of the subject which has become fractured, decentred. It also exists in the structural coupling of certain function systems, for instance when the economic system causes resonance in interaction-systems. Such resonance can help explain forms of domestic violence, which are related to notions of masculinity and femininity. (Schinkel 185)

Various shades of violence are at play in Mueennuddin's stories. From the calculated burning of a wife by her husband in "About a Burning Girl" to the unfeeling beatings administered by the police to an innocent man in "A Spoiled Man," readers get a sense of the thinly curbed frustrations of Pakistani men. The indifferent tone in reporting such violence bespeaks a resignation in the face of the complexity of structural violence. Here,

[s]tructural violence exists, in Foucault's terms, as a normalized state of affairs. It is the way things are. The subsistence of relations of dominance and dependence

that arises out of the particular differentiation of a social system is itself a form of violence, of reduction of being, which is unrecognized as such because of the very character of structural violence: no agency can be pointed out as its intentional source. Since the ideology of violence accords only to intentional agentic violence the label of “violence”, the status quo of any social system cannot be recognized as violent. (Schinkel 186)

Research carried out by UNDP in 2010 exploring Pakistani masculinities, finds that men think “violent behaviour and harassment of powerless groups [is] a part of being a real man.”<sup>134</sup> The attitude of the policemen who beat Rezak in “A Spoiled Man,” shows a cultivated callousness which reflects that real-world attitude.

The two uniformed policemen lifted Rezak off the hook and threw him to the ground. Rubbing his hands together, the big man looked down at Rezak appraisingly, as if considering his next move.

“Stretch him out and bring me the strap.”

They pulled down his *shalvar*, carried him to a bench, and stretched him out on it, one pulling his arms and one pulling his feet. They had removed his *kurta* when they hung him up on the wall.

The big man brandished what looked like the sole of an enormous shoe, with writing on one side in thick black script. “See what it says? It says ‘Sweetheart, where did you sleep last night?’ Understand?”

Without warning, he swung.

Rezak shrieked, a startled high-pitched sound. He never had felt pain like this, which spread flickering all through his body.

Another policeman came into the room when Rezak screamed and stood by the door, watching, with a grin on his face.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Understanding Masculinities.

<sup>135</sup> Mueenuddin, “A Spoiled Man,” 231, 232.

Jaglani, in “Provide, Provide,” uses harassment to get what he wants when he forces Zainab’s husband, who is helpless and poor, to leave her. When the husband pleads, “I beg you, don’t take what’s mine. You have so much, and I so little,” Jaglani unflinchingly replies with “I have so much because I took what I wanted. Go away.”<sup>136</sup> In turn, Makhdoom Tulwan is cruel to Shabbir, Jaglani’s son, and sends him out of the election campaign in humiliation. Power is thus maintained through brutality.

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The underlying metaphoric theme of Mueenuddin’s work points toward a declining masculine order. While that may or may not necessarily reflect a real change, but the text could be read as a desire to trouble the existing framework of Pakistani masculinity to allow for a positive change towards women’s empowerment. Death, disease, and loss are essential for new life and new beginnings. As such, the collection is not painting a dire picture.

References to strewn, useless, or rusting tools are utilized as symbols of ineffective masculinities in many of the stories. The tools are often shown in repose and are only dimly illuminated against a swallowing nighttime darkness. In “Nawabdin Electrician,” we see the moon at night ‘throwing dim shadows around the machinery strewn about, plows and planters, drags, harrows.’<sup>137</sup> The headlights of Jaglani’s jeep, as it drives into the dusk, illuminate ‘the tractors standing in a row along the wall, plows and harrows and disks here and there.’<sup>138</sup> Rezak’s files, hammer, plane and a level lie useless in his hut after his death, mocking his incapacity at keeping a wife. Tractors, jeeps, cars and motorcycles feature prominently in these stories as means of keeping up appearances, but in Lily’s dream they are a metaphor for change.

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<sup>136</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 64.

<sup>137</sup> Mueenuddin, “Nawabdin Electrician,” 9.

<sup>138</sup> Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide,” 67.



She had a dream. Flying alone in an airplane, high above the clouds through an ice blue sky, the wing caught fire, orange and flickering. Metal flew off in sheets, the machinery coming apart. A panel above her opened, crumpling back, throwing her out into the slipstream, and her parachute shook out like hair falling loose, streaming lines, then a canopy overhead. The plane spiralled away below her until it became a speck and hit the ground with a burst of flame, as she drifted down alone through an enormous sky.<sup>139</sup>

Lily's "drifting through an enormous sky" and the plane which she sheds off is her metamorphosis into a free-flying state from a mechanized male one. The image of machinery coming apart is a reinforcement of the idea of crumbling masculinity. Yet paradoxically, hopelessness is not the axial theme. In showcasing disintegration and decay, the possibility of an organic cycle of healthy rebirth is the real revelation. Mueenuddin's revealing chain of stories propels readers towards an anticipation of undiscovered wonders yet awaiting us through new doors into other rooms of the future. These new rooms are ones that are filled with hope for a change.

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<sup>139</sup> Mueenuddin, "Lily," 158.

## Chapter 4

### The Global War on Terror and Human Dignity

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. (First preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 1948.)

What can I offer as a way forward?

Perhaps only this: instead of accepting that Afghanistan is the “good”, necessary war, speak of America’s role in creating the Taliban, and in multiplying them these eight long years. Leave the fiction to us: you do the confessing. (Uzma Aslam Khan. “Pakistan: Women and Fiction Today” in *World Pulse*. 18 August 2009)

In her recent book on the subject, Kanwal (2016) classifies contemporary Pakistani writings into “post 9/11 fiction,” and “retrospective prologues to post 9/11 fiction,” of which the first category foregrounds the immediate repercussions of the New York attacks on Pakistani lives both at home and in the diaspora, while the latter reflects the political decisions and social upheavals in Pakistan’s past that have led up to the country’s image as a terrorist haven in the post 9/11 period (7). To comment further on the role of this new fiction, I will examine four representative works: Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Nadeem Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013), and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) that fall in Kanwal’s first category, and Jamil Ahmad’s *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) that falls in the second.

One effective method of a critical engagement with contemporary Pakistani fiction involves a three-pronged examination which firstly, positions its role as a valuable counter-

narrative to 9/11 writings in the West; secondly, traces its contribution to the ensuing War on Terror debates; and thirdly, finds in these writings possible alignments of vision towards a future beyond the events. The essential goal of such an examination is a recalibration of the literary focus from trauma writing<sup>140</sup> and the immediate concerns about national security that followed the catastrophic events of 9/11, to include the equally calamitous issues of human rights and loss of dignity that have resulted in its global aftermath. Achieving this aim through storytelling lies in blurring the defining lines between perpetrator and victim, Us and Them, and the past and the present in relation to the War on Terror.

Just a few days after the event, novelist Ian McEwan wrote in *The Guardian* (15 September 2001) about the loss of lives in the twin tower attacks, comparing each single person's death as "an explosion in itself, wrecking the lives of those nearest." McEwan made two key remarks. For one, he made a connection between the importance of empathy and the role of the human imagination in transporting it to others: "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality." In other words, he made the connection between creative empathy and being human, which is the basis for human rights literature. But more importantly, he also pointed at the failure of the larger American public to look beyond their personal lives "on recent foreign policy failures, or geopolitical strategy, or the operational range of helicopter gunships" that might have led up to this catastrophe. Yet, despite drawing attention to these important points, McEwan attributes the power of empathy to the grieving Americans by employing the pronoun "we" throughout the essay, while firmly separating the

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<sup>140</sup> For more about "trauma writing," after 9/11 read: Keeble, Arin. *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014. Also: Donn, Katharina. *A Poetics of Trauma after 9/11: Representing Trauma in a Digitized Present*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

hijackers as “fanatical” in their “dehumanising hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy.” For McEwan, “[a]mong their crimes was a failure of the imagination,” a comment which perhaps sets the tone for a new way of looking at the Us vs. Them divide: along the lines of human imagination.

Although McEwan’s reaction as a writer is perfectly understandable given the inhuman nature of the attacks, it limits the very use of empathy in overcoming differences by making it exclusive to one side of the divide. Perhaps 9/11 fiction writers in the West are guilty of inviting a one-way empathy towards their own victims, being trapped in “tropes of melancholy, trauma, respectfulness and bewilderment that have hindered, so far, [alternative] representations of the attacks” (Randall 2011, 135). The ensuing War on Terror, that has resulted in taking the lives of thousands of innocent victims, requires a proportionate evocation of global empathy through creative outlets. A reason why contemporary Pakistani writers like Kamila Shamsie are important in this regard, is that their writings make a balanced appeal to humanity. In her interview with Singh (2010), Shamsie defends her bleak view in *Burnt Shadows* of all nation-states that justify horrors through a rhetoric of war, including America, and says, “[t]oo many people seem to think I’m making a particular comment on America, but really I’m taking about nations in wartime and the particular inhuman logic they start to follow when they decide what is an acceptable price for some other nations people to pay.”

Several critics have elaborated upon the contributions and limitations of the 9/11 genre in making sense of the incomprehensible tragedy of the attacks in New York (Versluys 2009; Dāwes 2011; Banita, 2012; Gray 2012; Keeble, 2014). Most of these studies critique mainstream Western fiction, offering no significant comparisons with global writings that

respond differently to the event,<sup>141</sup> even when non-Western fiction writers have taken on, in several important ways, the bridging role that critics have hoped to be the uniting aim of 9/11 literature. However, there are several important observations made by these critics that lay the foundation for a pluralistic approach to this genre.

In *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, Gray points out that since the war with Great Britain in 1812, America had never experienced an actual invasion on its own soil until the events of 9/11. If the destruction in the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings or the destruction in Vietnam, for instance, is compared quantitatively with the loss of 2995 lives in the attack on the Twin Towers, the reaction to the latter might appear extreme to people living in countries that have had more direct experiences of wars (Gray 2012, 4-5). As the Afghan character, Abdullah, in *Burnt Shadows* tells an American character, Kim: “War is like a disease. Until you’ve had it, you don’t know it. . . countries like yours they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. The disease always happens somewhere else. It’s why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better” (*Burnt Shadows*, 350). Both Shamsie and Ahmad’s fiction advises against a narrow vision of war in a time of complex global entanglements.

America’s global War on Terror was triggered by a geographically contained yet metonymically colossal event. The cinematic effect of the World Trade Centre towers falling, being watched in real-time across the globe, was not only extremely shocking and symbolically important, but also very hard for the American people to articulate thereafter.

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<sup>141</sup> One possible exception here is Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the work of a Pakistani author that has entered the mainstream cannon of 9/11 novels and has been discussed by several critics including Gray (2012), Keeble (2014) and O’Gorman (2015). Besides Dāwes, who complains that there are only ‘six or seven most widely reviewed texts about the attacks (by Foer, Updike, DeLillo, Kalfus, Messud, and McInerney)’ (22), perhaps O’Gorman’s *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel*, provides the most diverse look at 9/11 fiction.

As such, 9/11 is more emphatically a “semiotic event, involving the total breakdown of all meaning-making systems” (Versluys 2009, 2). It is the difficulty in the articulation of such an attack that Gray thinks American writers must try to address through a “circuitous” approach (40). In focusing on fictitious, individual traumas experienced on the day, some writers have “domesticated,” (Gray 2012, 30) the event, and thereby evaded the indescribable horror of its larger, more devastating global repercussions. Instead, Gray suggests a metaphoric treatment, one that privileges deterritorialization and unfamiliarity, and urges an examination outside of the immediate tragedy. Other critics have emphasized the importance of placing 9/11 events in a larger context in fiction, like Dāwes’ “diagnostic” approach, one of the six categories she identifies in 9/11 fiction which explore the aftermath of the event (Dāwes 2011). Banita (2012) particularly stresses the application of retrospective historicization in such writings that ought to prompt questions about “how knowledge of the past (and its residual traces) inflects our understanding of the present, seen not as a break with history but as its organic outcome” (4).

O’Gorman (2015) makes a more insightful observation regarding the limitations of post 9/11 literature by Western authors, even though critics like McEwan promote its empathetic role. While O’Gorman agrees that literature that engages with the 9/11 tragedy helps readers identify with others through evoking empathy, he feels that it can do more; it can potentially lead readers to rethink the systems that gave rise to the self vs. other divisions in the first place, and how these differences were conceptualized to begin with (5). He feels that although several writers have attempted to empathize with the Muslim “Other”, ironically the “otherness” is consistently upheld by the very fact that it is so archaically emphasized, even as the world claims an era of globalization. In response, non-Western/American writers from countries like Pakistan have attempted “blurring the

boundaries between the domestic and the foreign in a way that draws attention to the element of the other within the self, as well as the self within the other” (O’Gorman 2015, 6). The purpose is to generate more than just a single-faceted empathy that perpetuates difference, and to provide multifaceted frameworks that question the very existence of these divisions.

Therefore, in the light of the critiques discussed above, one possible way of “expanding the 9/11 genre”<sup>142</sup> beyond novels that deal directly with the events of the tragic day itself and the entailing trauma, is to destabilize the category of the popular Western 9/11 novel through a larger engagement with the global reverberations of the event, including the War on Terror. A step towards such an expansion would be to dislodge national solidarity as the *only* metaphor for 9/11. Because all the “real time” images shown by the media during the event were so eerily like events previously seen in popular movies and read in fiction (Gray 2012, 9), the use of the falling tower image has provided a ready-made symbol for American trauma fiction in the post 9/11 period, where rising from the ashes literally and simultaneously stands for survival, resilience and patriotism. There is no denying that this symbolism has helped the public come to terms with such an unspeakable event by emphasizing the positives; nevertheless, it has also hampered alternative views outside this nationalist solidarity. A rigid, singular symbolism shuts out differences in perspective. Instead, it creates other-hoods and nation-state ideologies based on these very differences.

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<sup>142</sup> I borrow O’Gorman’s term here. (p.10)

## Representations of the War on Terror: Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt*

### *Shadows*

I continue to be quite annoyed when people say--and a lot of people say this--that my novel starts with the bombing of Nagasaki and ends with 9/11. It ends with the War on Terror. That's an important distinction. It begins and ends with nation-states, and what they will do in the name of self-defense. (Kamila Shamsie, interviewed by Singh, 2010)

In response to the cinematic falling-tower trope of the 9/11 novel, Shamsie's work is what can be called a "widescreen"<sup>143</sup> novel, in that instead of zooming in on the 9/11 tragedy, it not only spans out, but expands horizontally across a wider historical timeline. Starting with the 1945 Nagasaki bombings in Japan, to the partition of India in 1947, post-partition Karachi in Pakistan, the soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, New York attacks in 2001, it ends with the War on Terror and Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba. These historical turning points around wars are held together by the life stories of two families: the Tanaka-Ashrafs (Japanese-Pakistani), and Weiss-Burtons (German-British) whose children, Raza and Harry not only inherit the history of past wars, but also get embroiled in the new War against Terror, in which the enemy is as unidentifiable as the nationless identities of the main characters. Although *Burnt Shadows* has simultaneously been commended for its "epic"<sup>144</sup> sweep, and criticized for "fracturing" the personal stories of the characters by repeatedly

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<sup>143</sup> Increasingly, the term 'widescreen' is being used to describe trends in recent comic books: 'it's a technique that makes the comics page look like a series of frame captures from a big action movie ... People are generally portrait-shaped, not landscape-shaped, so all you can show of a character in a "widescreen" panel is a little horizontal cross-section, without room for much body language; if two or more characters are interacting, they have to be lined up just right.' See Wolk, Douglas' 'Emanata: Scanning the Horizon.'

For the use of this term for novels, see Ken MacConnell's blog, 'Widescreen Sci-Fi Novels.'

<sup>144</sup> See Anita Desai's praise for *Burnt Shadows*.  
<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/164822/burnt-shadows>



resorting to “broad narrative strokes” (Celt, 2009), this compromise allows for a disruption of the close-up views of the 9/11 tragedy for a Western audience. The widescreen technique allows Shamsie to broaden the canvas of understanding and make sense of the attacks.

I was aware that conversation about 9/11 tended to treat it as though that date was the Ground Zero of history, as if it occurred in a vacuum, and as someone who grew up in Pakistan in the 1980s, during the U.S.-Pakistan involvement in Afghanistan and the political support given to jihad as an anti-Soviet tool, I couldn't possibly see things that way. There were earlier stories feeding into the story of 9/11, so there's no possibility I would write a novel that looks at that one date as if history proceeds from it but doesn't precede it. (Shamsie, interviewed by Singh, 2010)

Shamsie invites readers to remember the key role of the Mujahideen in the Soviet-Afghan war by articulating its importance through Raza's Pathan friend Abdullah, who has experienced life in refugee camps as the lost child of the Mujahideen; places that he calls “enemies of dignity” where people live like animals (*Burnt Shadows*, 219). After escaping to the United States, Abdullah tells Harry's daughter Kim how grateful he is that at least a retired Afghan teacher in New York credits their wasted valour: “Not everyone forgot. What we had done, for Afghanistan, for the world. Not everyone forgot” (*Burnt Shadows*, 350).

Both Shamsie and Ahmad's novels at the same time lend themselves well to the genre of Human Rights Literature emerging in the last decade of the twentieth century, which is a product of a simultaneous rise in international human rights discourse, and fictions that narrate stories of injustices and human atrocities worldwide. Since rights discourse has increasingly been appropriated for geopolitical strategizing, such writings inevitably carry a political subtext. Ideas of “human dignity and bodily integrity” (Anker 2012) are therefore important in analysing Pakistani fiction that tackles themes of terrorism and war.

International Human rights laws are based in the idea of human dignity.<sup>145</sup> In his essay on “Human Dignity and Human Rights,” (Henk and Gordijn 2014, 50) Adorno clarifies its importance by pointing out the three pivotal positions that the concept of dignity occupies in human rights documents: Firstly, that this right is “inherent” to all humans (as the preamble to *UDHR* clearly states); secondly, that being an “equal” right held by every human for being human, any discrimination is contrary to human dignity (“free and *equal* in dignity and rights” *UDHR*, Article 1); and thirdly, that if these rights are *derived* from the fact of being human, no government has the authority to strip them away (“these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person” 1966 *International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, Preambles). On these levels, Shamsie’s novel addresses discrimination and the loss of human dignity in tortures during war; while Ahmad questions the power of governments taking away the rights of tribal communities in Pakistan.

*Burnt Shadows* begins with a prologue that shows an unnamed character in Guantanamo Bay prison, stripped of his clothes, and along with them, his dignity as a human. He asks, both of himself and the world at large: “How did it come to this?”. This rhetorical question representing the disconnect and loss of human empathy in a disjointed world is echoed in the voices of several characters bridged across the timeline of the novel. Hiroko Tanaka wonders in Nagasaki in August 1945: “What prompted this falling-off of love?” (7). Sajjad asks himself in desperation during the Indian partition in 1947: “What am I holding on to? Just kite-strings attached to air at either end” (114). Kim seeks answers to the same difficult question, “What’s going on out in the world?” in New York in 2001 (254).

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<sup>145</sup> First preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948: *Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.*

The divergent answers to these questions within *Burnt shadows* reflect the ambivalence of Pakistani Anglophone writers in response to the geo-political future of the world beyond 9/11. One is in the pessimistic voice of Yoshi Watanabe dying of cancer, who sees a parallel between the inevitability of his body overcome by disease, and the inevitability of the disease of vengeance overtaking the world: “Them or me. Them or me. . . Between the dead cells mushrooming inside my body and those out there, annihilating a section of the world, there is no choice. There is not even a question of choice” (297). The strife between the internal turmoil of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan, and the externally imposed stereotyping of every Pakistani as a terrorist, hardly leaves room for optimism. In this case, a historicity of “particulars” is a necessary theme for Pakistani writers to try and link the past to where things stand at present.

The second response is in Harry’s voice of optimism, even though it is tinged with a certain irony: “Here was internationalism, powered by capitalism. Different worlds moving from their separate spheres into a new kind of geometry,” (207) yet “[w]hatever might be happening in the wider world, at least the Weiss-Burtens and the Tanaka-Ashrafs had finally found spaces to cohabit in, complicated shared history giving nothing but depth to the reservoir of their friendships” (282). While Yatanabe’s voice represents the futility of a larger universal vision; Harry’s places hope in individual visions bridging gaps in global understanding. By weaving together into the novel’s fabric characters from Japan, Germany, Britain, the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan who comment on the experiences of war, Shamsie also promises hope in their attempts to overcome past differences through friendship. These characters, whose lives are threaded with violence and genocide, have fluid identities that defy national borders.

Raza's fluid identity in the novel not only invites empathy, but also emphasizes the futility of nationalist identities. Raza is born of a Japanese mother, who claims she has "no interest in belonging to anything as contradictorily insubstantial and damaging as a nation," (207) and a Pakistani father. Raza looks confusingly like a Hazara; he is mistaken to be an Afghan; he is also a polyglot. All these nations have suffered violence in wars driven by the interests of the United States. If the unidentified Guantanamo Bay prisoner wearing an orange jumpsuit in the novel's prologue is meant to be Raza, then his collective identity is more reflective of the fear and subverted "fundamentalism" of the West than linked to any fundamental nationalist representation. As O'Gorman (2015) puts it, a reader is "prompted to acknowledge that beyond the stereotype-induced, reductive identities that are projected onto him by others, there lies a human being as complex and contradictory as any other, irreducible to any label based upon race, nationality or religion" (136-37). Under the jumpsuit that strips Raza of humanity, there is a man with an inherent dignity: that whatever he may be accused of, there are larger forces beyond his control that drive his actions. The message is, that he is not the sum of those external ideologies.

Shamsie very skilfully links together Japan and Afghanistan, both bearing scars of US attacks, through Hiroko's harrowing dreams that intermingle the two as facets of the same larger canvas of global power struggle against which individual acts of sacrifice fade into oblivion:

[Hiroko] drifted to sleep. In her dream, Raza was speaking to an Afghan boy, was also her ex-student, Joseph, the kamikaze pilot. "Maybe I won't join the Air Force," Joseph, who was also the Afghan boy, said. Raza sneered. "Scared, little boy?" Joseph stood up taller, unfurling his black wings, and when he opened his mouth desiccated cherry blossom cascaded out, blanketing the dry soil of Afghanistan. (*Burnt Shadows*, 228)

By fusing the image of the kamikaze pilot and the Afghan suicide bomber, Shamsie symbolizes in their black unfurling wings the inevitable reactionary cataclysm seen in the West's feared "terrorist" today. She does not look at global events in isolation, but strings them together through a superimposition of historical images into a multidimensional picture.

## **Understanding Tribal Community Codes in the Age of Terror:**

### **Jamil Ahmed's *The Wandering Falcon***

Although Jamil Ahmad's purpose in *The Wandering Falcon* is similar to Shamsie's, the text operates in a different way. Ahmad's work fits into Kanwal's second category, but his novel is more than merely retrospective. More in line with Banita's suggestion, Ahmad's stories are not merely presenting a nostalgic view of Pakistan's tribal populations. His work charts a continuing trend from the past to the present time of misconceptions about the Pashtun communities, from the British rule, post-partition Pakistan and the Soviet-Afghan war, through to the military operations and US drone attacks carried out in these areas today. By choosing to write fiction which is also in a manner an anthropological treatise about tribal codes, Ahmad hopes to bring about an awareness of the need to preserve these traditional communities against modern warfare, which has now been dubbed 'Global War on the Tribes' by Akbar Ahmed (2013).

*The Wandering Falcon* is also a good example of the current marketability of Pakistani fiction from a consumerist perspective. As Ahmad said in his interview for *NPR*, his wife Helga had tried to get it published in the United States and the UK upon its completion in 1973, but no publishing company had shown any interest at the time. In 2011,

however, Penguin readily agreed. Obviously, a larger shift in readers' interest justified its publication after 9/11.

Ahmad's collection of interconnected short stories is set in the volatile regions of Baluchistan and North-West Pakistan, places which now widely recognized in the Western world as hubs of the Taliban leadership, high-tech warfare, and targets of drone strikes. These tribal areas bordering Iran and Afghanistan have been reported as 'lawless' and dangerous in the international media. Ahmad's depiction of the nomadic code of life in which the individual is of far less importance than the collective tribal community, explores the clash between tribal honour-codes and state laws, and the collision between tradition and modernity. In that sense, Ahmad's stories re-dignify the ancient communal ways of life thought by the West to be barbaric. Instead, the stories facilitate a historical understanding of the tarnished tribal belt that is currently embroiled in America's war on terror, offering a rare insight into the past, and the Pashtun tribal principles that have baffled the West.

Ahmad's first and only novel was published in 2011, when he was 79 years old. Having worked as a Civil officer for the Government of Pakistan since 1954, during his long service years Ahmad was posted to several of the tribal areas on border with Afghanistan and Iran, from Quetta in the south west, to Waziristan and the Swat valley in the North-West Frontier Province, now renamed Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. His novel was reworked in the post 9/11 decade from the short stories he wrote during the 1970s in the tribal areas, inspired by what he had observed. One orphan character named Tor Baz (black falcon), born out of wedlock to a woman who elopes with a servant and is shot by her family to restore honour, is the wandering falcon of the title who travels along the tribal belt. He appears in and out of the stories that otherwise recount incidents about the various tribes, like the Wazirs, the Mehsuds, the Mohmands that he comes across, and the Pashtun code of honour.

The reason why Ahmad conveys this ancient code successfully is that he does not present a romanticized view of the *Pashtuns* or *Pathans*.<sup>146</sup> His stories neither exoticize nor condemn their ways; and his is neither a judgemental nor a biased representation. Ahmad's writing is non-sentimental and sparse like the tribal settings the stories are set against. He writes about the harsh realities of tribal lives, about killing in the name of honour, about kidnapping for ransom, about unrelenting family feuds, even about the buying and selling of women. But he also writes about strong gun-wielding women, hospitality and protection, about commitment and respect, about justice and valour. In Ahmad's own words about these tribal areas: "It is brutal, undoubtedly. But what I wanted to convey - and there's probably worse brutality in the cities and in the plains; brutality exists. But how the tribes deal with it, I thought was clean and clear. There's a clear dividing line between right and wrong" (*NPR Interview*, 2011). He explains the compulsion behind these actions, by weaving into his stories the dignity and integrity of these codes, for which the collective term *Pukhtunwali* or *Pashtunwali* (code of life/Way of the Pashtuns) is used. These moral codes might be very different from the Western concept of morality, but they have sustained a societal structure successfully for centuries, till it was disrupted by the outside world. It is an egalitarian system where leadership is not inherited, but decided by a *Jirga* (council).<sup>147</sup>

A few examples of the many codes Ahmad's stories demonstrate are:

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<sup>146</sup> *Pushtun*, *Pukhtun*, and *Pathan* refer to the same tribe whose ancient mother tongue is *Pushto* or *Pushtu*. This ethnic group is native to Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan.

<sup>147</sup> See 'A Point of Honour' in *The Wandering Falcon*, in which Jangu Khan speaks against district officers' interference in appointing a leader for their tribe: 'We allow the right to make and unmake chiefs only to ourselves. We do not accept the power of anyone else to decide who our chief shall or shall not be' (37).

*Melmastia* is hospitality. Inside a host's home, the guest will be sheltered and protected, without the expectation of any return or favour.<sup>148</sup>

*Nanawatai* is for asylum, or refuge. The literal meaning is "to go in" and it is used to describe protection given to a person who enters a Pashtun's house and requests a sanctuary. In *Pashtunwali*, this request cannot be refused. Once *nanawatai* is requested, the host must protect the guest at the cost of his own life and property, even if the requester is his enemy, and even if the protection is against the law. It is said that Osama Bin Laden was granted *nanawatai* by Mullah Umar.

*Namus* is the protection of women from harm.

*Nang* is the honour. It includes defending the weak.

*Badal* is revenge or justice. It is the only way to restore lost honour. Honour is connected to land, possessions, and women. For a Pashtun death is preferable to a loss of honour.

*The Wandering Falcon* starts with the story of Tor Baz's illegitimate birth, which defies the main code of Pashtunwali: *Nang*. The loss of honour, or *Nang*, in the elopement of Tor Baz's mother, brings disrepute her father's *Namus*. The unquestioning need for revenge or *Badal* to restore honour is the plot of the story. *Nanawatai* is requested by Tor Baz's father of the soldiers guarding the Pak-Afghan border, who being non-Pashtun, refuse it. Since the Subedar (head of the soldiers) is aware of the strict obligation of *nanawatai*, as well as the importance of *badal*, he tells Tor Baz's father: "Refuge. . . I cannot offer. I know your laws well, and neither I nor any man of mine shall come between a man and the laws of his tribe. . . [but] shelter is yours for the asking. For as long as you wish it, for as long as you want to stay" (6).

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<sup>148</sup> See "A Kidnapping" in *TWF*, in which hostages in captivity are fed better than the kidnapper's own sons.



In another place, Ahmad stresses the Pashtuns' extreme obedience to their tribal codes with a humorous account of how one character Dawa Khan is disappointed he cannot avenge the murder of a cousin from the dead murderer's sons because of their cunning in finding loopholes around the same staunch tradition:

[Dawa Khan] came every year, hoping the boys would take to wearing shalwars (trousers), signifying their having grown up, so that he could avenge his cousin. The Pushtunwali, the traditional code of the Pashtuns, was clear that revenge cannot be visited on women and children. The wearing of a shalwar signified transition into manhood, yet year after year the boys cheated him by refusing to wear trousers. For all he knew, these perfidious Kakars might well refuse to wear shalwars in his lifetime (69).

Tradition, therefore, trumps everything and can sometimes provide surprising flexibility and protection within its otherwise unbending moral code.

Tor Baz's name, meaning a falcon, reminds the readers of parallels between the beauty and cruelty of the animal kingdom and the ancient tribal way of life, harmonious with nature. Both are beautiful yet cruel worlds where freedom is valued, survival is necessary, and territorial instincts are strong. According to Ahmad, 'tribes are the earliest building blocks of humanity, which functioned for centuries until they started clashing with nation states and empires.'<sup>149</sup> In his own words, "[t]he first thing is for all of us to understand the tribes, to resonate, to harmonize, to have the same beat as the tribes. Because frankly speaking, I still think that each one of us has a tribal gene...embedded inside" (*NPR Interview*).

Ahmad's stories respond to the demonization of the tribal areas of Pakistan in the post 9/11 period with three counterpoints. Firstly, that the history of Pashtun resistance to Western

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<sup>149</sup> See "Wandering Falcon Captures Raw Romance of Badlands." *The Nation*.

interference is older than the war on terror intervention, and their extreme antagonism needs to be historically contextualized to facilitate a better understanding and an effective reconciliation. The colonization of India by the British, their attempts at controlling the tribal lands, and the demarcation of the Durand line dividing the Pashtun tribes into Pakistan and Afghanistan marks the start of the Pashtun's animosity towards the foreigner, who has been seen to be an enemy ever since. The stories incorporate the different threats to their freedom that the tribes have faced over the years, e.g. the FCR (Frontier Crime Regulation) by the British that promised non-interference in tribal customs in return for obedience but included the controversial clause that the whole tribe, including women and children, could be jailed and punished for the crime of an individual ("A Kidnapping," 130). Or, the new borders that forbid their traditional seasonal migrations from the hills to the foot lands ("The Death of Camels," 72-73), and the government officers who support their appointed chiefs over democratically elected ones by the tribes ("A Point of Honour," 37).

Secondly, that the locals of tribal areas in Pakistan should not be stereotyped as radical Islamists. Their code is *Pashtunwali* above religion.<sup>150</sup> Contrary to Western understanding, *Pashtunwali* is not directly connected to Islam. It is a code much older than Islam. In fact, the *Jirga* (a council of tribal elders) system of justice, which seeks mediation and arbitration, has often been in contradiction with Sharia law. Sir Olaf Caroe, the British Governor of the North-West Frontier Province between 1946 and 1947, wrote in his famous history *The Pathans* (1958) that the Pashtuns try "at all costs to resist subjection and to preserve their own peculiar way of life. To attain this end, they were always prepared to make use of adventitious aids such as appeals with a pan-Islamic flavour." Traditionally, the

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<sup>150</sup> Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP) and Saferworld. *The Jirga: Justice and Conflict Transformation*. Report, 2012, p. 7.

tribes prefer following their own rules and their own centuries-old feuds within their own clans. However, in times of foreign invasion, they have often been rallied to collectively take up arms under the Islamic banner to protect their lands.

Ahmad's story informs the reader that the Pashtuns were convinced to side with the Germans in the Second World War against the British through a scheme under which "eight battle standards or flags, one for each of ... [the clans] had been made in Germany with suitable verses from the Holy Koran embroidered on them" (171) which were sent to the tribes through Turkey and Afghanistan to entice them into fighting the British occupation as a holy war. Something similar happened during the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s, when the tribes supported the Mujahideen against Soviet occupation. Later, however, after the Taliban took over control using Sharia to spread terror, the Pashtuns recoiled and have since battled against Islamic extremists whose cruelty goes against Pashtunwali. Ahmad believes that by indiscriminately classing all tribal people of Pakistan as extremists, the West has done itself a disservice. In Ahmad's words: "One thing is very clear, that you see a lot of mistakes have been made in the recent past. [The drone attacks] are, in a way, destroying a system which was a strong countervailing system to ... [terrorism and] all [that]...is happening today" (*NPR* interview). Although Ahmad is reluctant about making direct political statements, he communicates his anger about what he sees as the destruction of the tribal leadership as result of Pakistan and the United States' collective sponsorship of the Afghan Mujahedeen against the Soviet occupation, which he sees as the very root of the escalating problems in the region at present. Ahmad says, "I'm angry about it. I could call them [Mujahideen] Frankensteins, these monsters who were created and they stood by and watched the tribes being decimated."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> See "Wandering Falcon Captures Raw Romance of Badlands."

The third point that Ahmad's stories make is that contrary to the view propagated by the *UNESCO Charter of the Book* which equates illiteracy with backwardness and places the "writing man's burden" on the civilized world to educate the non-reading nations (Brouillette 2012, n. p.) the oral traditions of the "illiterate" tribal groups are grounded in a different, yet highly sophisticated sense of justice that has been successfully practiced for centuries. The Pashtunwali code has a *Jirga* (local council of elders) system as for preventing conflicts through mutual consensus, often finding means of compromise. A *Jirga* enforces an unwritten law called *narkh* and "where authority is contested by a well-armed citizenry, the *Jirga's* verdicts, delivered with the warring parties' consent, tend to be more enforceable than off-the-peg legal or Islamic judgments."<sup>152</sup> Indeed, in recent years Pakistani academics have urged human rights organizations to recognize that the *Jirga* system is an established custom with "unmatched potentials for conflict resolution in the Pukhtoon belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan," and instead of discarding these systems as barbaric, the West must concentrate on "how the ancient traditions and practices can inform the modern systems" of justice (Yousafzai and Gohar 2005, 11).

Joseph Slaughter (2007) points out that the *UNESCO Charter of the Book* (1972) has valorized reading and writing not only as tools for acquiring the knowledge considered necessary for socioeconomic advancement, but also as a medium through which an individual finds imaginative extension into the world (272). This has cemented a view that literacy equals modernity, rationality, and freedom for the individual. In contrast, the oral tradition is associated with primitiveness and confinement within communal structures (Slaughter, 279). In Slaughter's words, "[s]uch a configuration of the contrast between illiteracy and literacy,

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<sup>152</sup> See 'Pushtunwali: Honour Among Them,' for a detailed report on the Pashtunwali code as distinct from the Islamic Sharia.

and a functionalization of the relation between literacy and modernity, defines orality against literacy as the negative condition of and a menace (or affront) to literacy which is itself naturalized as the normal state of modern social affairs both intra- and internationally” (Slaughter 2007, 279). This, as Slaughter puts it, disenfranchises illiteracy and excludes such groups from the “incorporation” of a “lettered society” (279).

Ahmad seeks to counter this idea in his novel that illiterate tribes with oral traditions are lawless and barbaric. In several interviews, Ahmad reiterates that during his time in the tribal belt, he found the locals to be sometimes “more civilized than the so called civilized people” (*NPR* interview) and that although they didn't know how to read or write, they knew the basics of what human values were and demonstrated it in their actions. Historically speaking, from the period of the British rule in India the tribes have been suspicious of Western education, fearing contamination of their traditional teachings. In the story “The Guide,” one of the tribal leaders is going to attend *Jirga* to decide the fate of government sanctioned schools in the area and says, “Some feel that this amounts to a violation of our freedom and independence, and the tribes are to meet tomorrow to decide whether to keep the schools or do away with them” (179). The written word, therefore, has never been as influential for the Pashtuns as the unwritten staunchness of *Pushtunwali*.

It is novels like Jamil Ahmed's that prompt important realizations that honour codes and tribal loyalty to land will become a destructive force, as it has shown to have become, when the genie comes out of the bottle. When the world interferes with, and tries to forcefully subdue these communities, as Akbar Ahmed points out, the thistle-like characteristics of these people, their “love of freedom, egalitarianism, tribal lineage system defined by common ancestors and clans, a martial tradition, and a highly-developed code of honour and revenge” (Akbar Ahmed, 5) will clash with globalization symbolized by the

drone, and in the end, one set of values will die. The resonating words of Jules Stewart (2006) in *The Khyber Rifles: From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*, “[t]he Pathan asks only one thing of the outside world, to be left alone,” are perhaps as applicable today as they were during colonial times.

## **History, Justice, and the War on Terror: Nadeem Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden***

I ask myself if this is what a novel or a story can be – that the reader is locked in a space with the victim and the perpetrator and those who love the victim. Imagine if we were there at Abu Ghraib, in those terrible rooms and hallways, and imagine if the parents of the men being abused were there too, watching. But then it’s not “watching”. It’s “witnessing”.<sup>153</sup>

Nadeem Aslam’s novel *The Blind Man’s Garden* is about “witnessing” versions of justice driven by different ideologies of power. It also reflects the author’s commitment to historicity as an essential element of the novel’s structure, aimed at broadening the canvas of twenty-first century writing that faces the pressures of representing an increasingly divided world. Like other contemporary Pakistani authors discussed in this chapter, Aslam emphasizes a historical approach. He does so, perhaps, more emphatically than others. It is not surprising that the novel starts with the observation: “*History is the third parent*” (5. Italics in original). What we inherit from history shapes who we are.

*The Blind Man’s Garden* is set in the period immediately following 9/11 in a fictional Pakistani city called Heer. The blind character of the title is Rohan, who set up a school with his wife, Sophia in Heer. His two sons, Jeo, and the adopted Mikal, are the characters around

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<sup>153</sup> Nadeem Aslam. “Where to Begin.” *Granta*. 29 September 2010. <https://granta.com/where-to-begin/>

whom the story of war, terror, death and love is spun. Both men love the same woman, Naheed, who is married to Jeo out of duty and gratitude to his father. Both men go to Peshawar on their own personal missions to help the innocent during the war on terror in Afghanistan. Jeo dies, and Mikal, without knowing about his death, traverses through a complex tapestry that records all the violations and injustices that are suffered by innocent men (and women) caught between the warring Islamist factions, and the US military that pays \$5000 per head for a caught terrorist. Who is a real terrorist, who hands over whom as the accused, and who gets tortured by the Americans, is the conundrum that this story presents. In a telling story, Aslam exposes not only the rampant corruption and ideological fissures within the region, from state failures of the Pakistan government to dangerous jihadist movements that recruit young boys as suicide bombers, but also reveals the paradox of the US stripping innocent detainees of their basic human rights in the name of protecting these very rights.

That Aslam chooses to write the narrative in the present tense is also significant, as it sustains a sense of an evolving, ever-present history. The word history is everywhere manifest in the novel. The main journey undertaken by the three central characters is a physical journey towards Afghanistan, but a metaphoric journey in the present towards a living past, as “with each minute they [Jeo, Mikal and Rohan] are moving deeper and deeper towards the war, into the crosshairs of history” (42). When Rohan follows in his sons’ footsteps, looking for them, he encounters an unkempt fakir, bound in thick chains, dragging several yards of them behind him, each link representing someone’s wish. Before renouncing the materialistic world without justice, the fakir tells Rohan, he was a judge. The chains the fakir carries around him, he explains, represent the *Ahl-e-Havas* (People of Greed) who are bound to the desire for power, whom he distinguishes from the *Ahl-e-Dil* (People of Heart)

who are free of fetters. In reply to Rohan's question about whether that is the cause for the present discord in the world, the fakir says, "Whoever has power desires to hold on to power. That is the case both with the Taliban and the West," and ends with words that perhaps sum up the theme of Aslam's novel: "*Nothing is ever over. Time is unimportant*" (78. Emphasis added). History, in other words, triumphs over the present time in that it always exists within it.

Aslam has made his reasons quite clear, that since we are witnessing a unique turn in the history of civilizations, his responsibility as a writer in making sense of these events is heavier:

History is important to me. Politics is important to me. I keep saying we've lived through an extraordinary decade, starting with the attacks on September 11, 2001 and ending with the Arab Spring. . . And between these two moments we had the war on terror, the call to Jihad, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Daniel Pearl, the murder of Benazir Bhutto, and the murder of Osama Bin Laden. I keep saying this clash between an incomplete understanding of the East and an incomplete understanding of the West seems to have taken place. (Aslam quoted in Yaqin 2015)

For this reason, Aslam inserts historical references as a versatile device to drive home several key points at strategic turns in the narrative. These snippets of history are, in most instances, highlights from pages of history books in Rohan's school, "Ardent Spirit" that serve to connect fictional happenings set in a recent post 9/11 period with real historical facts that lay out maps of oppression and revolution across the past. Often italicized for added emphasis, these insertions loop back into history: "*After Granada fell in 1492 two hundred thousand Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity. The Inquisition had corpses dug up to make sure they had not been buried facing Mecca, and women were forbidden from veiling themselves*" (Emphasis in original; *The Blind Man's Garden*, 23). Indeed, the reader is



reminded that Rohan's main mission in setting up the school was to remove the "century-old taint" of his great grandfather's "misguided. . . loyalty aligned with the British" that led to the slaying of his fellow country-men as a punishment for the Great Indian Mutiny in 1857 and made "one thousand years of Islamic rule [come] to an end in India, Britain assuming complete possession" (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 8-9). Thus, from the very first chapter, Aslam arches the reader's vision back from the novel's present in October 2001, at the start of what he says the Pakistanis have named the "Battle of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon," (6) to a flashback view colonial oppression, and further back in history to the Crusades. The problem at both points in history has been the idea that "there are no innocent people in a guilty nation" (6), which lies at the heart of both terrorist ideology, and the War on Terror alike. It is the right of innocent people to peace that is largely at stake in the wars of ideologies.

Matters of retribution and justice have two versions in the novel, both tit-for-tat. Reflections of each can be seen in Aslam's metaphors, like the "American warships that are as long as the Empire State Building is tall," (12) sending laser-guided bombs into Afghanistan; and in the views of characters like the disillusioned, radicalized Pakistan Army Major Kyra: "*We are not men of hate, but we must be men of justice*" (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 28. Emphasis in original). Between these two rigid views of retribution, Aslam's value as a contemporary Pakistani writer is in creating characters like Rohan and his son Jeo, who evoke equal empathy for both sides of the divide. Rohan says that "would have fought and defended with his arms" and "would have done all he could to save the blameless from dying in those attacked cities," (24) whether it was Peshawar or New York.

Aslam's use of italicized historical inserts play an obvious role in challenging the current stereotypes in human rights discourses that value Western liberal ideas as the only

valid sources of freedom, justice, and education. Through Rohan's commitment to education and its debt to Islamic scholarship, Aslam brings to the forefront the contribution of Muslims to education: "*It was in order to determine the exact direction of Mecca that Muslims had developed an interest in geometry and mathematics, and had eventually invented trigonometry*" (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 17. Emphasis in original). In recounting the reasons behind the naming of the sections of Rohan's school after great Muslim kingdoms of the past (Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, Istanbul, Delhi), Aslam also records how education was associated with Islam at a time when Christianity was in the dark ages. Outside Cordoba house a tablet records that "the Muslims of Spain had manufactured the first paper in Europe around 1150, and also that in 1221 the Holy Emperor Fredrick II had declared all official documents written on paper to be invalid—paper having become associated in Europe with Muslims" (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 17-18). Cairo, readers are reminded, had a "House of Science" that was created in 995 A.D. (18).

As a counterbalance to the past greatness of Islam, through the character of Kyra, Aslam shows its displacement and deterioration. Kyra represents the disillusionment of the Pakistani public with the West and its policies, and the belief that everything about terrorism and 9/11 was a "lie," a "conspiracy," and that "[i]t was all staged, to invent an excuse to begin invading Muslim lands one by one" (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 27). The shift from Islam and its peaceful message, to Islamization and its radical connection to power can be seen in the changing motto of Ardent Spirit, written on the arch above the school entrance:

When Rohan and his wife founded it, the arch had read *Education is the basis of law and order*. Soon the word *Islamic* was added before *Education*, by Rohan himself, against his wife's wishes. Over the years it has been amended further, going from *Islamic education is the basis of law and order* to *Islam is the basis of law* and then to *Islam is the purpose of life*, while these days it says *Islam is the purpose of life and death*. (*The Blind Man's Garden*, 27)

Yet, although the process of Islamization in Pakistan is shown in its dangerous angle, Aslam intersperses the story, again in italics, with extracts from the *Book of Prophet's Sayings* that exhibit two main themes of his novel. Firstly, in repeatedly quoting the string of witnesses through whom the word of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has been passed on and made continually present, Aslam emphasizes both the importance of a historical link and of witnessing:

*I was given the following words of the Prophet by Adam bin Ayaas, who was given them by Ibne Abi Zyeb, who was given them by Syed Makhbari, who in turn was given them by Abu Huraira. The Prophet said, "If anyone has been unjust towards someone, he should secure himself a pardon from the victim before it is too late. Otherwise, on Judgement Day, when the only valid currency will be a person's good conduct on earth, the good deeds of an unjust man will be transferred to his victim. And if he has no good deeds, then the victim's sins will be transferred to him." (The Blind Man's Garden, 110. Emphasis in original.)*

Secondly, the theme of justice is reinforced through these sayings that have sometimes been misread by certain Islamic factions as their duty to administer by force.

Despite the importance of history in Aslam's writing, the novel is Janus-faced, in that while it looks back to the past, the present time and effects of capitalist economies on the lives of third-world countries is also highlighted. The best example in this novel is the extended metaphor of the United States flag that Naheed's mother, Tara, agrees to stitch for making ends meet. The incongruity of the action lies in the carefulness with which she stitches it, and the purpose for which it was ordered: to burn in a street demonstration against America. The pieces of fabric that Tara chooses to fashion the stars and the stripes of the flag remind her of the blood and tears of her own nation's disadvantaged people on whose low paid service the capitalist countries depend. The colours are just as meaningful: strips of

white “as pure as a pilgrimage to Mecca,” the dark blue cut out from the “indigo tunics she sewed for the uniforms of a nearby girls’ school” (99). As she sews, she wonders:

Are the white and red stripes rivers of milk and wine, flowing under a sky  
bursting with the splendour of stars?  
Or are they paths soaked with blood, alternating with paths strewn with bleached  
white bones, leading out to a sea full of explosions? (100)

She also wonders if the blue and red in the flag means that the Americans own all the blues and reds in the world, including everything her own people hold dear, like the “Blue Mosque in Tabriz,” and “Red Fort in Delhi”? (100). The metaphor folds into the colours of American flag all the lost identity and cultural markers of the Muslims from the past; and in the making and burning of the flag the regret about Islam’s politicization in the present. The mismatch of how Tara relates to the red and blue of her own surroundings and the red and blue that the American flag seem to signify, reflects the global divide that Aslam articulates so well in his comment during an interview:

There’s a wonderful story in a compendium of tales called *Kalila-o-Dimna*. A king trains a monkey to be his bodyguard. One day the king is asleep and an ant crawls onto his chest. The monkey, thinking the king is in danger, picks up a knife, and in trying to stab the ant, actually kills the king. I think this is what we have. Al-Qaeda are saying that Islam is in danger from the West, and the American administration is telling us that Western values and freedoms are in danger from Islam. I think we need to keep an eye on these monkeys.  
(Michael E Halmshaw’s interview with Aslam, “Mystery Is All There Is”)

As a narrator, the author’s voice comes through clearly in *The Blind Man’s Garden* about the futility of this war, and the higher price that innocent people caught in this war pay in the name of collateral damage. He writes about the Daisy Cutter bombs, and that while the US casualties in the two-month war number only twelve, “thousands of Afghanistanis [*sic*] have

perished, fighters as well as bystanders” (112). Through Rohan’s inner thoughts, Aslam both voices and burdens the responsibility of this testimony because “Rohan doesn’t know who will speak the complicated truth, and he watches with attention as though at some point in future he himself will be asked to tell what he has seen” (112). Into the novel, Aslam weaves important turning points and changes in Pakistan’s socio-political fabric. From President Musharraf’s revelation that the US demanded Pakistan’s involvement in the War on Terror, otherwise it would be bombed “back to the Stone Age” (183), to the rapid Islamization among both men and women spreading through Pakistani madrassas in response (232), and the Pakistan Army’s operation against the Taliban in Waziristan (302).

Aslam’s 2013 novel includes an attack by a radical Islamist group on an English school thought to be “filling the heads of the children with un-Islamic things like music, and biology and English literature,” (152) eerily predicting, in an almost crystal-ball view, the attack on the Army Public School on 16 December 2014, in Peshawar, Pakistan. The attack mirrors the ideology of the Taliban attackers, who think it is a necessary retaliatory move in response to “reports that a religious school had been bombed by the Americans in Afghanistan, killing a number of small children” (179). When one of them voices a concern about the innocence of the children, another attacker says: “You must believe me when I say that I too am upset about the innocent children. But I feel Allah is asking us to sacrifice them to prove our love for Him, as He asked Ibrahim to cut the throat of his son to prove his obedience. With these few wounds we will heal Islam” (257).

Like Shamsie’s novel, Aslam’s main character, Mikal, is also shown in a “jumpsuit,” (161) kept in a cage in one of the notorious US detention centres. He is asked about his connection to “Osama Bin Laden, Mullah Omar or Ayman al-Zawahiri,” (161), physically tortured, deprived of sleep (193). Threats are made “against his family, including female

members. . . forced nudity. . . threatening to desecrate the Koran in front of him, placing him in prolonged stress positions, placing him in tight restraint jackets for many days and nights,” and then beaten even more for his “threatening behaviour” (194). Mikal thinks of the paradox of the situation: “The opposite of war is not peace but civilization, and civilization is purchased with violence and cold-blooded murder. With War” (113). Unless wars are fought to end wars, civilizations will lose.

Aslam’s writing does not shy away from writing about the failures of the Pakistani State and the civic society in protecting human rights as well. At several points in the story, Aslam incorporates important issues like blasphemy (231), Sharia law (94), and violence against women in Pakistani society (101). The readers are told that Tara was sexually assaulted by a man, but “she went to the police and they demanded--- in accordance with Sharia law--- proof from four male witnesses that it was indeed an assault and not consensual intercourse,” (94) and since Tara could not prove that, she was charged with adultery and jailed. This incident is a perfect example of the problems women have faced in getting justice in the Pakistani court system.

It is certainly interesting that two Pakistani authors, Aslam and Hanif, both highlight violence against women in almost identical passages:

During [Tara’s] adult life there has not been a single day when she has not heard of a woman killed with bullet or razor or rope, drowned or strangled with her own veil, buried alive or burned alive, poisoned or suffocated, having her nose cut off or entire face disfigured with acid. . . Every day there is news that a woman has had these things done to her in the name of honour-and-shame or Allah-and-Muhammad, by her father, her brother, her uncle, her nephew, her cousin, her husband, her husband’s father, her husband’s brother, her husband’s uncle, her husband’s nephew, her husband’s cousin, her son, her son-in-law, her lover. . . (Aslam, *The Blind Man’s Garden*, 101)

And in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammad Hanif:

During [Alice's] house job in Accidents and Emergency ... there was not one day --- one single day--- when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive. Suspicious husband, brother protecting his honour, father protecting his honour, son protecting his honour, jilted lover avenging his honour, feuding farmers settling their water disputes, moneylenders collecting their interest: most of life's arguments, it seemed, got settled by doing various things to a woman's body. (100)

Besides women's rights, there are several references to the bribery and cruelty of the police (227, 229), the dishonesty of shop sellers, the corruption of doctors (168), the duplicity of the ISI (263) and the rigid views of the clerics. The internal issues within Pakistan are uncovered to promote reader awareness with a hope to initiate change.

The most lasting message that a reader can take away from Aslam's novel is to find a way to move past retaliation; to accept responsibility. At one point in the novel, after suffering from torture and humiliation at the hands of an American Military Policeman who calls Pakistan "a caliphate of rubble", Mikal wishes he knew enough English to say: "*If I agree that what you say [about our country's corrupt state] is true, would you agree that your country played a part in ruining mine, however small?*" (169. Emphasis in original).

Despite everything that is happening in the world today, Aslam's wants his novels to reflect optimism:

I can't lose hope about anything -- East-West, Islam, USA. But that doesn't mean you will find conventional "happy endings" in my stories. I am puzzled when I am told that my books are dark or bleak. I think to have gained knowledge of why things went wrong for the characters in the stories, why things go wrong in real life for us, *is* a happy ending. (Aslam quoted in Hong 2013)

This optimism defines the fiction of most contemporary Pakistani writers. Instead of overcoming the boundaries of culture, religion, geography and race, their work invites pluralism, tolerance and understanding through empathy.

## **Pakistani Literature “Writes Back”:<sup>154</sup> Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

One of the gravest dangers to us now, second only to further terrorist attacks against our people, is that we will attempt to go on as before with the corporate program of global “free trade”, whatever the cost in freedom and civil rights, without self-questioning or self-criticism or public debate (Berry 2002, 85).

Compared to other contemporary Pakistani English writers, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is perhaps the most direct narrative response to 9/11. It delves into the complexity of Pakistan’s relationship with the West, particularly with the United States. Through his protagonist Changez, Hamid examines the deeply ambivalent nature of that relationship and the challenges of newfound identities in the current post-global paradigm.

The ambivalence of Changez owes to the fact that his country has also bought into the myth of global economy. He is a product of the utopian dream of this grand terminology. He is educated at Princeton and joins a firm that analyses the productivity of businesses. He is, in other words, “a lover of America.” It is only when he gains an insight into the workings of his company that he starts seeing it as another form of imperialism. Arundhati Roy’s words communicate the same concerns about globalization and its similarity to imperialism in a

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<sup>154</sup> I borrow this phrase from the title of the book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.



very succinct manner: “Corporate Globalization — or shall we call it by its name? — Imperialism — needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. . . . So this — all this — is ‘empire.’ This loyal confederation, this obscene accumulation of power, this greatly increased distance between those who make the decisions and those who have to suffer them” (Roy 2003).

The very title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is exploratory. The use of the word “fundamentalist” is initially read in its modern application, but as the story unravels, Hamid’s character prompts a questioning of the stereotypical definition of this term. In one of his key texts, Bobby Sayyid points out that “Islamic fundamentalism has become a metaphor for fundamentalism in general” (1997, 7), even though there are several different forms of fundamentalist idealologies in the world today other than those about Islam. The fixity of meaning attached to this term is due to the decentring nature of its “otherness,” which poses a threat to Eurocentric hegemony.

Sayyid maintains that the logic of eurocentrism is “an attempt to sustain the universality of the western project, in conditions in which its universality can no longer be taken for granted,” while the “logic of Islamism necessitates the provincialization of the West and its relocation as one centre among many” (Sayyid 1997, 128-129). Since the publication of Sayyid’s book in 1997, events have taken a turn where the West has felt itself directly targeted in terrorist attacks. The result has been a disillusionment with multiculturalism, especially in Britain following the 7/7 London attacks, and a renewed commitment to a reconfiguration of “Western” identity. After the events of 9/11, Huntington, the writer who gave currency to the phrase “Clash of Civilizations” spoke of the identity politics that have resulted from the collision of these binaries:

Before Sept. 11, Europe and America were moving apart on a whole series of issues from genetic foods to missile defense to a European military. The events of

Sept. 11 have for the moment changed that dramatically. After the terror attacks, the headline of *Le Monde* read “We are all Americans.” Echoing Kennedy, Berliners declared, “We are all New Yorkers.” As I said at the outset, in this sense Osama bin Laden has given back to the West its common identity. (Huntington 2013)

This kind of thinking has reinforced the East-West divide, where the West now reclaims a distinct hegemonic identity that has the power to shape knowledge about the “other” in shared narratives of trauma. Where discourses of domination emerge, issues of postcoloniality will persist: “The persistence—indeed reinvigoration—of colonial ways of looking thus sends us back to examine the means by which such structures of representation are created and circulated to take account of this double bind within which Muslims find themselves framed and already read” (Morey 2011, 43).

Lopez (2008) suggests a new name for literature written after 9/11. He calls it “Post-global,” in that since the rise of globalization in the 1980s and 90s, “its forces and proponents have suffered a series of such setbacks that have postponed, if not entirely derailed, the neoliberal dream of an integrated world regulated only by the global market and global capital” (511). Lopez recounts many events that have led up to the crisis of globalisation, like the Enron scam and the New Orleans disaster but maintains that the most memorable image out of all setbacks is one of the Twin Towers on falling, which provides “the most concise, visceral signifier to date of the failures of neoliberalism and globalization” (511). Lopez comments on the obvious lack of attention to visible minorities, women, or immigrants in the outpourings of literary responses, and admits feeling no surprise that most 9/11 narratives, for example recent fictions by Joyce Carol Oates, Ian McEwan, Reynolds Price, have protagonists who are rich, white Americans. Lopez, like Gray (2009) insists that American writing will never be the same again. Gray also lists trauma narratives written in the last

decade that have built up an archive of memory about the experience mostly from the American perspective. However, new post-global literature allows for the alternative perspective of the ones who are the most vulnerable victims of global capitalism. Memory is at play in Hamid's novel, but the memory is not one of acute, jolting trauma of the Americans on September 11, 2001. Changez's is a more reflective memory; a slow awakening to the truth that he has been no more than a "janissary" for the West (*Fundamentalist*, 151).

In a short story written for *The Guardian (UK)* on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, Kamila Shamsie's character Ayla, who has returned from the U.S. to work as a journalist for a Pakistani magazine in Karachi, becomes the mouthpiece for young Pakistanis caught in an identity crisis. Ayla is called "a burger" (Pakistani with Western ideas) by her colleagues, and when she suggests writing a commemorative piece on "How America Thinks about 9/11 Ten Years On," the editor tells her: "[W]e don't need a story on how America thinks about 9/11 Ten Years On. We already know they still think it's the Greatest Tragedy to hit Planet Earth. If you can't figure out a Pakistan angle for the issue maybe you should head back to Boston" (Shamsie 2011). A bomb blast is heard in the background and the office workers comment on the fact that a colleague who has just gone out to get petrol for the generator is not answering the phone. In the background, Ayla looks at a bumper sticker pasted on the office wall that reads: "America had 9/11; England had 7/7; India had 26/11; Pakistan has 24/7" (Shamsie 2011). Shamsie "talks back" to *The Guardian* through the Pakistani media's stance from within her fictional story. I agree with Lopez in that central to the "understanding of a nascent postglobal literature...[is] the representation of an emergent global urban subaltern, and narratives that offer a glimpse into the marginalized subjectivity and agency of ...the underdogs--/those who have experienced globalization from the bottom" (Lopez 2008, 513).

Hamid's novel is interesting in that its narrative "silences" the West. Quite literally, the monologue structure allows only Changez to speak. Like a ventriloquist, Changez speaks out his listener's interjections woven within his own speech. The interlocutor's contribution to the conversation is just limited to a few questions that he asks as Changez tells his story; or perhaps this is all Changez allows the reader to know about the "other". Changez channels the narrative into the "space between conflicting positions" that is prescribed by Morey (43). Following Gray's suggestion (borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari) that a *deterritorialization* is needed in literature after 9/11, Morey is of the opinion, that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a very good "example of deterritorialization of literature which forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, 'Them and Us' and so on – those categories continuously insisted upon in 'war on terror' discourse" (Morey 138).

The story is staged in the old part of Lahore in Pakistan, where after a chance meeting a conversation takes place between a bearded Pakistani called Changez, and an unnamed American man. The conversation is reported to the reader in a one-sided monologue. Everything about this plot agitates stereotypical ideas. The silent character is highly suspicious of his surroundings, including the man with the beard, yet he himself is the one with a holster under his jacket. Changez has all the outer hallmarks of a terrorist: a beard, a scar, a story about terrorism. Yet, the scar is not a product of a training camp, he assures the American mildly, but a burn mark from melting wax during electricity load shedding hours in Pakistan; and that his beard has nothing to do with fundamentalism, since he is a university professor. All the elements in the story that appear menacing to the American, like the waiter at the restaurant, the bats circling above, the *Pathan* watchman, are made soothingly benign by Changez's explanation. Still, the uncertainty only builds up on both sides. The American's

jittery attitude, his burly physique, and his satellite cell phone, are stereotypical markers of a CIA agent. Who is the predator and who the prey shifts throughout the story, the ending of which sees Changez walking the listener back to the hotel, while the waiter at the hotel follows some distance away, and the American pulling something out from under his jacket. There is a glint of steel. Who shoots, who dies, and who is the culprit is never revealed to the reader. As Scanlan observes, “How far to trust Changez becomes a question of the reader’s acuity and objectivity” (Scanlan 2010, 274). There is an irony in Changez’s confession. He invites a deeper investigation of conflicting histories of the same event, more by his apparent “confession” about being a lover of America, than by being accusatory. The irony is clear when he confesses: “I cannot now recall many of the details of the events I have been relating to you. But surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you—an American—will agree, it is the thrust of one’s narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one’s details” (*Fundamentalist*, 118).

Changez’s story is interesting in that it follows what is expected of a confessional novel that gives reasons for why someone would turn away from modernity to radicalism. Yet it is far from simplistic because Changez is neither angry, nor radical himself. He represents an educated class whose “blinders were coming off, and...was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of [his] arc of vision” (*Fundamentalist*, 145).

After studying at Princeton and landing a coveted position at a U.S. valuation firm, Underwood Samson (the initials read U. S.), he finds himself enraptured with America, as indeed he is with Erica (Am-Erica). Erica shows an interest in him, but she is living in a constant past replay of her life with her dead lover Chris, whose name “recalls not only Europe’s Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus’ encounter with the Americas” (Hartnell 2010, 343). She cannot progress past her old relationship to have any real chance

with Changez (read “changes”). After 9/11, she drifts away even further into nostalgia and eventually disappears. Morey (2011) makes an interesting parallel:

Erica is made symbolically to embody the whole fate of her home nation after September 11. The tentative flowering of her relationship with Changez represents the possibility of East/West rapprochement in the cosmopolitan spaces of New York, but she begins to diminish physically and mentally in the novel’s second half. Like her country, relying on the comforts of a military response and invoking the spirit of the Second World War in the weeks after 9/11, Erica disappears into a “dangerous nostalgia” (140).

Although Hartnell (2010) agrees that “following the logic of the novel’s symbolism, this is a story in which America is locked in a nostalgic embrace with Europe, an embrace that refuses to be transformed by the postcolonial moment that Changez potentially represents,” she insists that Erica disappears into a “beautiful nostalgia” rather than a “dangerous nostalgia” of post 9/11 self-righteous rage (343). Whatever the case, nostalgia stunts progress and is the opposite of what globalization must represent.

After his return, a bearded Changez suddenly finds himself being stared and cursed at in the New York subway. On his next work assignment, prompted by a Chilean publisher Juan-Bautista, whose business he has been sent to evaluate, he starts to see that he has been a slave to ideas not his own:

I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: 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 and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war...I had thrown in my lot with men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (*Fundamentalist*, 152).

That is the turning point when he decides to leave his job in the U.S. and return to Pakistan where he becomes a teacher at a university, trying to instill self-awareness in a young generation of Pakistanis.

The novel is littered with pregnant phrases. With comments like “I am a speaker of your language,” and “if only you understood Urdu” (*Fundamentalist*, 1, 6), Changez draws the reader’s attention to the connection between language and power. Colonial history is the best record of linguistic hegemony, manipulation through language, and the miscommunication that can often be a result. Changez says that his command of the English language has privileged him in America: “[L]ike Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine” (41-42). Throughout the novel, background images of British colonialism are interwoven with his current reflections on American imperialism. Changez points at colonial buildings in the Lahore, speaks of his father and grandfather’s British education, and points to a continuation of his nation’s oppression, from an occupied India to a financially dependent Pakistan: “I knew from my experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aids and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power” (*Fundamentalist*, 156).

It is ironic that Changez’s recovery of his self-identity comes not from being amongst his own, but from being *away* from his home. Distance allows him to focus on an identity that had become blurred at close range. His story makes the journey from his father’s obvious pride at his attending Princeton, his own sense of wonder of America and excitement at being employed by Underwood Samson, to a growing disillusionment with the same. The wooing of Erica, and her rejection of him, are the cause of his estrangement from America, and

therefore, from the “West”. His first twinge of consciousness comes in Manila, where he admits he “attempted to act and speak. . . like an American,” and when asked where he was from, he would reply that he was from New York (*Fundamentalist*, 65). He starts thinking after he sees, out of the window of his limousine, a driver of a Jeepney returning his gaze with “an undisguised hostility in his expression” (*Fundamentalist*, 66-67). The ensuing reflection takes him on the first steps of his journey towards a quest for his lost identity:

I remained preoccupied with this matter far longer than I should have, pursuing several possibilities that all assumed—as their unconscious starting point—that he and I shared a sort of Third World sensibility. Then one of my colleagues asked me a question, and when I turned to answer him, something rather strange took place. I looked at him—at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work—and thought, you are so *foreign*. I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him; I felt I was playacting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the street outside (*Fundamentalist*, 67).

This sudden sense of displacement that Changez feels is not unlike the thoughts of Ralph Singh in Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* where he has a sense of being “a man just created, just presented with a picture of himself” (Naipaul 2001, 237). A feeling of looking at oneself from the outside and encountering a stranger, is a familiar trope in postcolonial writing.

There is no clearer sense of Changez’s ambivalent feelings towards the West than his memory of the moment he heard about the collapse of New York’s World Trade Center. He admits that his immediate reaction when he watched the news on TV was unusual: “I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (*Fundamentalist*, 72). At the same time, being a person who was never indifferent to the suffering of others, Changez is confused about his own reaction: “So when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of



perplexity” (73). He says that at the time he was not thinking of the victims of the attack, but was “caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees,” and sensing the displeasure of the American character, defends himself by adding “Do you feel no joy at the video clips—so prevalent these days—of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies?” (73). Even though he defends his reaction by positioning it against similar American actions, nonetheless, to himself he is willing to question his ambivalent empathetic position: “I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me want to see America harmed? I did not know, then” (*Fundamentalist*, 73). In doing so, Hamid guides the reader into asking the same questions; perhaps finding answers through self-examination rather than according blame.

The idea of empathy becomes central to the novel again as the readers identify with Changez because of the use of the first-person monologue. The restriction that the monologue sets in place leaves the reader with little choice but to identify with Changez. This restriction demonstrates how Western viewpoints can be just as one-sided at times. Tracing Changez’s early life in which he recognizes himself to be a clone of Western ideas, allows readers to understand his animosity; mainly because representations are always aware of being seconds. Robert Spencer’s excellent essay urging a rereading of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* makes a point that the critique of Islamic fundamentalism undertaken by this novel must also be balanced by the novel submitting itself to a self-critique “of the West’s unselfconscious and even crusading faith in its own practices and values” following the recent terrorist events (Spencer 2010, 252). Hamid’s novel takes a step forward from novels like Rushdie’s in that its self-analytic tone invites a two-way reading of terrorism that moves beyond formulaic

representations. Spencer pinpoints the reason for the rise of religious fundamentalism as a response “albeit a misguided and profoundly destructive one, to the inequality, purposelessness and nihilism of late capitalism. Fundamentalist movements offer meaning where there is none, hope where it has been extinguished by poverty, and a sense of direction to those disregarded millions whom capitalism has rendered superfluous. This is an eruption of irrationality, in other words, that can be rationally explained” (Spencer 2010, 252-253).

Critics’ reaction to Hamid’s novel matches the ambivalence of Pakistani authors in addressing issues of human rights in a global world. While Hartnell (2010) sees in it a potential for transcending racial differences, Morey’s (2011) view is quite to the contrary. Hartnell argues that the difference between European nationalism and American nationalism lies in that the latter “has escaped from such episodes [of resistance] peculiarly unscathed because it is so often articulated as the realization of future ideals rather than as the celebration of a shared past” (342). Morey’s (2011) opinion is that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does not celebrate a “globalized” world, nor is it “a Rushdie-esque celebration of hybridity or cultural translation;” rather, it is “about the impossibility of maintaining this globalized, post-political identity position as the forces of resurgent nationalism develop” (142-143). Although I am inclined to agree with Morey about Hamid’s novel being a satire on the notion of globalization when there is such apparent exploitation by capitalist economies, I think that the novel is simultaneously inviting a more pluralistic viewpoint of the events of 9/11. Scanlan sums up this issue really well in writing that “Hamid teases the reader with the possibility that his novel ends a split second before a gunshot, a temporary and fragile reprieve from the inexorable logic of action and reprisal. We could hardly call that pause utopian, but we know it belongs to art rather than actual experience” (Scanlan 277).

Referring to Pakistan, when Erica's father tells Changez "You guys have got some serious problem with fundamentalism," the sweeping statement makes him "bridle" (55). As Morey points out: "Changez is never a religious fundamentalist. He does not even claim to have some renewed awakening of his faith after the discrimination he experiences in the second half of the book. As such, he cannot be dismissed as just another "hot head" or 'religious nutter'" (Morey 139) and when Changez says "All I knew was that my days of focussing on fundamentals were done" (*Fundamentalism*, 154) he is referring to the fundamentals of Underwood Samson, a valuation firm where "[m]aximum returns was the maxim" (38), not Islamic fundamentalism as the word has come to mean.

In the 9/11 fiction genre, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has gained a special significance as an alternative perspective on the most important event of the twenty-first century. In this position, it has become the best example of the importance of Pakistani fiction in Anglophone literature today, and has also problematized and challenged Western human rights discourses towards a more optimistic future by inviting global understanding.

## Conclusion

### The Future of Pakistani Literature in English

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 . . . Anyway, the point is that people from all over the world have come to know and love brand Pakistan for its ability to scare the shit out of them. Whatever you write, please respect this legacy. We're providing a service here. We're a twenty-storey straight-down vertical-dropping roller coaster for the mind. Yes, love etcetera is permissible. But bear in mind that Pakistan is a market-leader. The Most Dangerous Place in the World™.<sup>155</sup>

For all the dark humour of Daniyal Mueenuddin's response to "How to Write about Pakistan" in *Granta* (112), there is certain truth about how Pakistani writing is received by readers in the West. The interest in such books stems out of the curiosity about dangerous places where terrorism is thought to originate. The future of Pakistani English writing lies in extending out of this restrictive scope. The next progressive step in the future would be to move beyond the themes of terrorism and war, and to explore new genres of writing.

One positive outcome of the interest in Pakistani English writers is that it has opened avenues for international recognition for younger generations of writers who are testing new genres like speculative fiction. Secondly, Pakistan has witnessed, for the first time in many years, a local initiative to promote the publication of new English fiction. In 2017, Shandana Minhas announced the opening of a new publishing house *Mongrel Books* in Karachi, with a

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<sup>155</sup> Daniyal Mueenuddin. "How to Write about Pakistan." *Granta* 112, 28 September 2010. <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-pakistan/>

view to attract young writers in English who do not have the access or means to publish internationally. Minhas also wants to restore the self-esteem of Pakistani authors who “can’t see themselves till a European or American publisher/reviewer/bartender has seen them. (If a South Asian falls in a forest and there is no white person there to see it does he still make a sound?)” (Gupta interviewing Minhas, 29 January 2017). It is perhaps no co-incidence that the first full-length book published by Mongrel Books is a comedy Sci-fi novel, *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017) by Sidra F. Sheikh, which has been reviewed as “optimistic” in its outlook, even when it is “using comedy and nuance to tackle universal themes such as apathy and intolerance” (Feerasta 2017).

Similarly, Mohsin Hamid’s shift from writing *back*, to writing *beyond 9/11* is evident in his most recent novel of speculative fiction, *Exit West* (2017), one that eerily predicted a post Brexit-Trump future. In a recent interview, Hamid tells us he thinks that “think there’s been a failure of imagination. Everywhere around the world, people are having difficulty imagining a future” (Woodruff, *PBS News Hour*, 16 March 2017). This, he says, has happened because everywhere there is a call for going back towards past greatness, going to the pre-EU era in Britain, making America the great country of its past again, and for the Islamic world to go back to the time of the Caliphates. That is why he believes that the real “danger is that we’re not imagining futures, not imagining something where we can go to that’s different and progressive. And that’s, I think, part of the job of a novelist, is to start imagining those futures” (Woodruff 2017).

In *Exit West*, through the story of Saeed and Nadia, who are citizens of an unknown country, Hamid moves past colonization woes, and hurtles into the politics of global citizenship where the presence of magical ‘doors’ open into destinations around the world, literally defying the ‘borders’ that divide people today. These doors that allow access,

unchecked by barbed wires and walls, are wormholes through the border security concerns that have hampered cross-cultural understanding in recent years.

Not unsurprisingly, Nadeem Aslam's new novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) is also set in a fictional place called "Zamana," in a dystopian future, although it is a harsh and dangerous one where Islamic extremists have taken control, violent mobs lawlessly attack the weak, and the American Military drones fly overhead targeting civilians below. Despite its dark and cruel setting, the story still projects a future, one that is ultimately transformed by the resilience and cooperation of a group of people who believe in change.

As Pakistani English writing gains ground, new writers have earned recognition. Usman T. Malik, an award-winning speculative fiction writer from Pakistan, the winner of the *Bram Stoker Award for Short Fiction*, winner of the *British Fantasy Award*, twice finalist for the *Nebula Award*, and nominated for the *World Fantasy Award*, believes that "Encouraging science fiction, fantasy, and horror readership has the potential to alleviate or fix many of Pakistan's problems" (Malik 2015. Emphasis in original). He encourages a move back towards imagination because "Pakistanis are living in a country that has become the perfect dystopian setting, and . . . are so visionless and inured to the grim dark that [they] simply do not care. Reading escapist, fabulist or symbolical fiction is one way to regain hope, mutual tolerance and empathy." For this reason, together with Tehseen Baweja, a fellow speculative fiction writer, Malik has introduced the *Salam Award for Imaginative Fiction* for new Pakistani writers in 2017, named to honour Pakistani Nobel Prize winning scientist Dr. Abdus Salam.

Pakistani writers are taking the cue from Indian Sci-Fi writers like Anil Menon, who claims that South Asian fiction is going to

kick some major ass. . . The way I see it, the future used to happen exclusively in the US. It doesn't any more. The focus has shifted. The future has been

democratized. . . We've as much a shot at manufacturing the future as do the Americans. And we can probably do it cheaper too" (Basu quoting Menon, 2006).

In staking their place in an imagined future, even Pakistani women writers have come forward. Mahvesh Murad, editor of the *Apex Book of World SF 4* (2015), co-editor of *Jinnthology* (2017) and *Speculative Fiction 2016* (2017), is also making a mark. This is an important step towards challenging the stereotypes about Pakistani women's writing, moving away from topics of victimization into genres that allow imaginative expansion.

Having said that, new memoirs by Pakistani women are still appearing in bookstores, published by well-known Western publishing houses. Maria Toorpakai's memoir, co-written with Katharine Holstein, *A Different Kind of Daughter: The Girl Who Hid from the Taliban in Plain Sight* (2016), is another example of a life-story produced in collaboration with a journalist. With a subtitle that includes the word "Taliban," the publisher can be sure that the readers' curiosity is piqued. The book was soon followed by the documentary film about Toorpakai's life, *Girl Unbound* (2016), released on 11 September 2016 at the Toronto Film festival.

Before Toorpakai's memoir was published, her success as a female squash player from Pakistan's Waziristan region brought her to the attention of both Pakistani and international media, including the *BBC*<sup>156</sup> and *TIME*<sup>157</sup>, both covering the story of her unusual courage in pursuing squash professionally as a woman in a conservative society like Pakistan. In his blog, "Maria Toorpakai Wazir, New Media Project," Josh Portner points out

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<sup>156</sup> *BBC*. Jinkinson, Bethan. "Maria Toorpakai: The Pakistani squash star who had to pretend to be a boy." 19 March 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21799703>

<sup>157</sup> *TIME* NewsFeed. Pollak, Sorcha. "Pakistani Squash Player Fights for Women's Rights." 25 March 2013. <http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/03/25/pakistani-squash-player-fights-for-womens-rights/>

that although Toorpakai's achievements are truly commendable, media reports are selective in their coverage. While they report that Toorpakai and her family had received death threats for playing squash dressed as a boy (Abraham 2017), most stories do not include the support that she has received from the Pakistani government, or from the Squash Federation of Pakistan that offered to protect her house outside which a police checkpoint was set up, and that "snipers were positioned around the squash court" at the gym where she practiced. Portner believes that "the impact of articles not mentioning this protection is that it seems that it was Maria and her father all alone with no support, making the story that much more dramatic." In another article in *Muslimah Media Watch*, Merium contends that less international attention is paid to other female Pakistani players like Sana Mir, Shabana Akhtar, and Kiran Khan as successful cricket players, because they did not have to put up a fight against anyone to play. Therefore, they do not make good stories even though they are female players from the same country.

While one must recognize the importance of the debate about Maria's iconization in the West, much like Malala's, the reasons for the ambivalence of Pakistanis towards these Pakistani female figures must be addressed as well. As a public sporting figure, Toorpakai has garnered pride for Pakistanis, but has also faced criticism among conservative factions for not dressing modestly; more so since July 2017 when her sister Ayesha Gulalai Wazir, a member of the Pakistan parliament, hit the headlines after accusing Imran Khan, leader of the leading political party PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf), of sexual harassment.<sup>158</sup> Both sisters have come under fire, even from the more educated, elite followers of Imran Khan.<sup>159</sup> Both

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<sup>158</sup> "Imran Khan Sent Me inappropriate Text Messages, Claims Ayesha Gulalai." *Daily Pakistan*. 1 August 2017. <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/imran-sent-me-inappropriate-text-messages-claims-ayesha-gulalai/>

<sup>159</sup> "Ayesha Gulalai's harassment allegations against Imran Khan create storm" *South Asians for Human Rights*. 14 August 2017. <http://www.southasianrights.org/?p=10612>



sides accuse each other of being influenced by Western culture and therefore inadequate as national symbols; Imran Khan for his British ex-wife's lifestyle affecting his sons upbringing, and Ayesha Gulalai for her sister "wearing shorts" while playing squash and living in Toronto. This reflects the continuing use of gender and class distinctions as a point of contention around which politics and national identity are played out.

As a prologue to the examination of Mukhtaran Mai's memoir in chapter two, I would like to mention a more recent incident in Pakistan, one that almost mirrors Mai's ordeal of over a decade ago. On 18 July 2017, a panchayat (village council) of 40 men convened in Muzaffarabad's Rajpur area after the rape of a 12-year-old girl on 16 July. They ordered the initial rape victim's brother to rape the 17-year-old sister of the accused as an act of retribution in the name of justice. After the incident, the parents of the second rape victim filed an investigation report to the police on 20 July, followed by a second report on 24 July by the first victim's family, although they had initially wished not to disclose the matter (Gabol, DAWN, 26 July 2017). Although the news was widely reported by the international media<sup>160</sup> during the first week, and the Pakistani police quickly arrested twenty men charged with the crime, it remains to be seen whether justice will finally be served. It will also be interesting to follow this unnamed girl's story, and see whether it will lead to another memoir being published, or if Mukhtaran Mai's book has already filled that niche of "revenge rape" story. Mukhtaran Mai's response to the recent rape in *Geo News* on 27 July 2017 was: "My 15 years of struggle and effort to highlight this injustice has gone to waste. Nothing I said or

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<sup>160</sup> Among these, were reports by the *BBC* (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40731035>), *CNN* (<http://www.cnn.com/2017/07/27/asia/pakistan-revenge-rape/index.html>), *news.com.au* (<http://www.news.com.au/world/asia/pakistan-villagers-ordered-revenge-rape-of-teenage-girl/news-story/b2cbf611c470f6d31faf7f67340cdfc6>), *Khaleej Times* (<http://www.khaleejtimes.com/international/pakistan/pakistan-revenge-rape-four-more-arrested>), to name a few.

did was of any use.” Thus, the question remains how long women will continue to be pawns to serve national and international agendas, and whether the discovery of their stories helps their cause or simply exacerbates violence against the women whose stories are made public.

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As a parting thought, I want to stress that the main aim of my study is not to suggest that through the literary medium, specifically through Pakistani writings, conclusive solutions to human rights problems can be reached. Rather, the aim has been to highlight the role of these writings in attending to the histories that have shaped, and continue to complicate the discourse of human rights. That is why the sub-title of my dissertation does not claim to write about *What* Pakistani literature says to the world, but proposes to examine *How* it speaks to the world. Through the chapters in this dissertation, I have highlighted both the content and the context of contemporary Pakistani writing, and the difficult position of the authors in addressing the presence of both national and global forces that have caused human suffering in a world where universal human rights are said to exist. Because of their historical and political complexity, these writings can be most productively utilized in a cross-disciplinary classroom if encouraged to be read more perceptively from multiple perspectives, and taught within a contextual framework that allows for contesting interpretations to emerge. Pakistani fiction and memoirs are important, in their very ambivalence, because they have the potential to identify the challenges faced by a universal vision of human rights in a post 9/11 world; only then can progress be made.

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Curriculum Vitae

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- “Human Dignity, the War on Terror, and Post 9/11 Pakistani Literature.” Special Issue. Global Responses to War on Terror. *European Journal of English Studies*. Accepted. Forthcoming, 2018.
- “Daniyal Mueenuddin’s Dying Men.” *South Asian History and Culture*. Special Issue: Mapping South Asian Masculinities: Men and Political Crises 5.4 (2014): 490-504.  
Republished in *Mapping South Asian Masculinities: Men and Political Crises*. Ed. Chandrima Chakraborty. London: Routledge, 2015.
- “Colour Play in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 39.3 (2008): 73-84.  
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- “Postcolonial Loss of Identity and the Food Metaphor.” *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, University of Peshawar 19.2 (2011): 105-116.

## BOOK CHAPTERS:

“Divergent Discourses: Human Rights and Contemporary Pakistani Anglophone Literature.” *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing: Origins, Contestations, New Horizons*. Edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam. London: Taylor & Francis. Forthcoming 2018.

## CONFERENCE PAPERS:

- “Of Borders and Magic Doors: New Directions in Pakistani Fiction” South Asian Literary Association (SALA), Annual Conference, New York NY, USA, 8-9 January 2018. Abstract accepted.
- “*I Am Malala: A Human Rights Narrative?*” Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS). Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Ryerson University, Toronto ON, Canada. 27 May 2017.
- “Understanding Tribal Community Codes in the Age of Terror: Jamil Ahmed’s *The Wandering Falcon*” Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS). Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. University of Calgary, AB, Canada. 30 May 2016.
- “The Development of Anglo-Indian Loan Vocabulary” *East India Company and Language Symposium* at The British Library, London, UK. 15 June 2010.

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- “Marketable Memory: The Framing of Pak-Afghan Women in War on Terror” The Postcolonial Studies Group Symposium. *War on Terror: Reverberations & Recollections*. Western University, London Canada. 9 November 2015.
- “Rituals of Eating and Postcolonial Loss of Identity” *A. K. Smith Visiting Scholar Series*, Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, USA. 31 October 2013.

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