Re-Imagining Identity and Nation in South Asian Diaspora Fiction

: Jordan Nelson*

Jordan Nelson recently graduated from The College of Wooster, Ohio with a degree in English. He aims to pursue a doctoral degree in English, and is particularly interested in post-colonial and global literatures.

As the machinations of globalization lead to an increasingly interconnected world, individuals begin to inhabit multiple spheres—cultural, linguistic, national, economic, etc. As individuals find themselves split between multiple levels, they also gain the enhanced perspective that accompanies the blending together of these different perspectives. "The truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision", explains Homi K. Bhabha in the introduction to The Location of Culture. In this way, the split individual constitutes, in reality, the doubled individual. Specifically, this essay will explore the ways in which migration—and the accompanying sense of place or placelessness—influences sentiments of national identity and belonging in the works of three writers. I will accomplish this by first outlining the identity crises faced by both the nation of Pakistan and the citizens of that nation and subsequently consider the ways in which migrant writers from South Asia reconfigure the history and reality of Pakistan as well as their own identities as migrant writers through fiction. The writers Mohsin Hamid, Mohammed Hanif, and Salman Rushdie employ fiction as a mechanism of the imagination to dis-member the narrative imposed on it by the global hegemonic center and re-member (by re-imagining) a personal narrative of Pakistan.

Friedman predicates this geographic and religious-cultural binary opposition, interestingly enough, on singularity and multiplicity: the holy singularity of Catholic (European) Christians who are enemies of all idolatry and heresy in contrast to the multiple peoples, territories, and countries of India. In the world narrated by Columbus and the Catholics, who collectively act as agents of a hegemonic center, the Catholics depict themselves as the bearers of the holy faith, thus situating themselves in a position removed from the rest of the world who is either "indoctrinated" by Mahomet or who practices idolatry.

Columbus situates his projected conversion of the Indians upon a decidedly essentialist stratagem, implying that an entire peoples (of different countries and territories) disposition can be singularly comprehended and subsequently manipulated in such a way as to appropriate them into the discourse of the hegemonic center. Perhaps there
exists no symbol for this center’s virulent narrative projections onto the peripheries than the fact that Columbus’ incorrect labeling of the aboriginal peoples living in the Americas as “Indians” not only threatens to reduce all peripheries to a singular category of Other, but also endures into the present day.

Despite the fact that he experiences this televised event in person, Ali’s own words do not suffice in describing this moment; instead, he must channel a TV clip, and his personal, localized becomes the (inter)national spectacle—extended to whomever the “you” is who reads his lines.

The Western hegemonic center also persists into the present day as Friedman’s comparison of his and Columbus’s voyages illustrates. The contemporary West, projects onto Pakistan its perception of the state as not-yet democratic, oppressively militaristic, and fundamentally Islamic. Edward W. Said explains how in the mid-1970s, with Washington’s realization of Pakistan’s sudden ability to hassle the United States, ushered a shift of Pakistan’s position in the US consciousness from barely acknowledged to news-worthy. What is more, Said explains how this spontaneous transition implicates not only the media in “unrestrained” and “immediate” knee-jerk portrayals of Islam and the states associated with it, but also liberal intellectual publications:

There was no real transition from one to the other. Neither was there any significant segment of the population ready to explain or identify what appeared to be a new phenomenon [...] As a result the image of Islam today, in every place that one encounters it, is an unrestrained and immediate one. [...] More disturbingly, however, it is regularly apparent in higher forms of general cultural argument, most often as a subject reflected on with gravity and seriousness in important liberal journals. In this respect, because of the changes in intellectual-geopolitical thinking that I have described, there is little difference between them and the mass media.

Hence, Philip Oldenburg, as a more recent example, portrays Pakistan as a juvenile democracy lagging behind India’s democracy because of religious, cultural, and military factors—in short, as he believes it was fated to do from its inception. Edward W. Said corroborates this popular Western perception of Pakistan as an oppressive dictatorship.

Of course, part of the West’s hegemonic narrative of Pakistan is shaped by global events of the time, particularly the Cold War. During this time, the West exerted its hegemonic power of narrative over the margins by describing the world in a series of stark demarcations in the Three Worlds Theory. This theory describes the First World as the capitalist US and its allies, the Second World as the communist Soviet Union and its allies, and the Third World as the non-aligned states in limbo between the First and Second Worlds. Said explains the relationship between the Western minds’ perceptions of Islamic states within the context of a Cold-War compartmentalization of the world: “What there is of value in Islam is principally its anticommunism, with the additional irony that almost invariably anticommunism in the Islamic world has been synonymous with repressive pro-American regimes. Pakistan’s Zia al-Haq is a perfect case in point.”

After all, as Youssef Yahmad reminds us in “Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, and Salman Rushdie: Resisting the Ambivalence of Postcolonial Theory,” “Past and present forms of colonialism have always masked their true objectives behind statements or gestures of benevolence and respect for the other.” The East-West opposition constructed by Columbus has thus shifted subtly from a territorial imperialism to an economic and cultural imperialism.

With an understanding of the strikingly imperialist stakes raised by globalization in tandem with the hegemonic center’s descriptions of the peripheries in general—and Pakistan in particular—we can begin interrogating the novels of Mohammed Hanif, Mohsin Hamid, and Salman Rushdie. It is worth noting straight away that my own linguistic limitations imperil the present study by trembling behind the boundaries of the ethnocentric. That is, I am only able to read and consider texts written in English. While deconstructing the Three Worlds Theory in his essay “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness in the ‘National Allegory’” Aijaz Ahmad explains the implications of such an
Major literary traditions—such as those of Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu and half a dozen others in India alone—remain [...] virtually unknown to the American literary theorist. Consequently, the few writers who happen to write in English are valorized beyond measure. Witness, for example, the characterization of Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children in the New York Times as “a Continent finding its voice”—as if one has no voice if one does not speak in English."

To be sure, I am missing out on whole swathes of texts written in languages beyond my grasp, but the upshot is that these writers have lived in the hubs of the West—New York and London—and write in English to include these audiences in their discourses. In this way, their writings, accessible to the Anglicized spheres, constitute "counterviews,” which Youssef Yacoubi affirms, "Oppos[e] the domination and duration of totalizing narratives."

Looking at novels is perhaps not the most intuitive way to gain insight into how Pakistan re-imagines itself in a global setting through such counterviews, but Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us how closely intertwined nationalism and the imagination are: "Nationalism is the product of a collective imagination constructed through rememoration. It is the comparativist imagination that undoes that possessive spell."

The three texts I am primarily concerned with—Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Mohammed Hanif’s A Case of Exploding Mangoes, and Salman Rushdie’s Shame—all confront the fragmentation of identity in an increasingly globalized world. Mohammed Hanif’s A Case of Exploding Mangoes raises the issue of a Pakistan that is not only fragmented along lines of military and civilian, but also of the media, both domestic and foreign. In the novel’s Prologue, Ali Shigri, Junior Under Officer of Pakistan Air Force, casually mentions the TV clip of General Zia walking towards the plane that would crash, ending his life: "You might have seen me on TV after the crash. The clip is short and everything in it is sun-bleached and slightly faded. It was pulled after the first two bulletins because it seemed to be having an adverse impact on the morale of the armed forces."

Ali soon, however, deconstructs the Three Worlds Theory’s stark boundary-drawing of the world, hinting instead at a world in which the mingling of remains—or excess—results in a fragmented, hybridized world. "...undermines the Three Worlds Theory’s stark boundary-drawing of the world, hinting instead at a world in which the mingling of remains—or excess—results in a fragmented, hybridized world."
the First World are present and implicated in the Third World while bits of the Third World are similarly present and implicated in the First World—undermines the Three Worlds Theory’s stark boundary-drawing of the world, hinting instead at a world in which the mingling of remains—or excess—results in a fragmented, hybridized world.

How Media Constructs Reality
Hanif also demonstrates in A Case of Exploding Mangoes, how the media may be imagined—revised and removed from reality—in such a way as to engineer public opinion (i.e., through propaganda). In a brief but telling passage, Hanif illustrates how the American media has garnered public support for the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan:

[The news anchor] had started using Pakistan’s flag as the backdrop for her show [...] The creme de la creme of the East Texas community and would-be supporters of the jihad against the Soviets were sent invitation cards [to a charity ball] carrying a picture of a dead Afghan child (caption: Better dead than red). Others showed a nameless Afghan mujahid in an old shawl with a rocket launcher on his shoulder (caption: your ten dollars can help him bring down a Russian Hind helicopter).¹⁷

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Identity: Torn between New York and Lahore
This fragmented, multiplicitous identity— that engenders the double vision described by Bhabha—results from the deconstruction of a binary oppositional way of viewing the spaces here and there. Changez, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist, travels from Pakistan to the United States to attend university and eventually work for a successful consulting firm.
Towards the beginning of his time in the United States, Changez views Pakistan and the United States as binary opposites:

In the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent.21

In this formulation, the United States and Pakistan perform a delicate dance of reversal wherein they always diametrically oppose one another. Moreover, Changez describes how Pakistan re-imagines itself through storytelling; these stories provide counterviews, to borrow a familiar term from Yacoubi, that combat US media portrayal of Pakistan (echoing Said's warnings of media portrayals of Islam) as violently radical and underscore the storytellers' (and Changez's and Hamid's) endeavors to re-imagine their own nationalisms. In Changez's case, this involves remembering ancient glory in order to recuperate it in the present position. Ironically, these ancient glories and empires—of both Pakistan and the US—occurred at a time before either nation existed, when they were themselves colonial holdings (of the Mughals in the case of Pakistan and of the British in the case of the US).

By invoking such ancient glory, Changez conforms to the framework of nationalism set forth by Spivak:

Nationalism was tied to the circumstances of one’s birth, its recoding in terms of migration, marriage and history disappearing into claims to ancient birth. Its ingredients are to be found in the very assumptions of what I later learned to call reproductive heteronormativity. [...] And the important question was: are you natural or naturalized? [...] When I look at Todor Zhivkov’s arguments that Bulgarians had an organized state before the Russians, they were Christians before the Russians, I think of this: ancient claims to things becoming nationalism by virtue of a shared ancestry.22

In fact, not only do Changez's claims to realizing civilization before the Americans constitute such a nationalism of heteronormative (ancient) origin, but they (paradoxically) also unify the two states; that is, just as the organized state and Christianity comprise a shared ancestry of the Bulgarians and Russians, so too does the creation of planned and sanitary, civilized and glorious cities embody a shared goal and ancestry of Pakistan and the United States. On this note of shared-but-opposite nationalisms, Ahmad writes of Frederic Jameson's haste, in advocating for the canonization of so-called ”Third-World literature,” of essentializing global historicity in such a way as to preclude different ”worlds” from overlapping; specifically, Jameson establishes ”third-world nationalisms” and ”American postmodernism” as binary opposites: ”The only choice for the ‘third world’ is said to be between its ‘nationalisms’ and a ‘global American postmodernist culture.’”23 But the hyperreality of media and reality in Hanif’s re-imagining of Pakistan and US in conjunction with their similar expressions of nationalism in Hamid’s novel demonstrate that—much like the shared remains in the coffins in Hanif’s novel—both worlds mingle significantly, inhabiting shared spaces.

Still, the Three Worlds Theory strives tirelessly to site the so-called ”Third World” in a liminal space between the ”First” and ”Second” Worlds. Changez submits to this hegemonic narrative of the Third World, initially reacting to his perceived binary opposition of Pakistan and the United States by expressing belonging not to either nation, but instead to entities in the margins between nations, companies and cities: ”I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm’s impressive offices made me proud.”24 Ironically, the very institution in which Changez takes refuge from this national binary opposition is itself a farcical, mythological liminal space; as Ahmad, a self-described Marxist, explains,

The most powerful capitalist firms, originating in particular imperialist countries but commanding global investments and networks of transport and communication, proclaim themselves nevertheless as being multi-nationals and trans-nationals, as if their origins in the United states or the Federal German Republic was a mere myth and as if their ability to accumulate surplus-value from a dozen countries or more was none other than an excess of be-
longing. Capitalist firms originating in the imperialist countries, tout themselves as multi-national or trans-national due to a perceived excess of belonging, or belonging due to non-belonging. In this way, these firms endeavor to illustrate themselves as multi-/trans-national through the same mechanisms that make the migrant multi-/trans-national. The irony of their self-portrayal, of course, is that the very sphere of power that enables these firms to portray themselves as multi-/trans-national is that power discourse to which the migrant does not have access and consequently casts him or her within the excess of belonging.

Not only does Changez, perceiving himself to be trapped in the limbo between hegemonic center and marginalized periphery, lose sense of his belonging to Pakistan, but he also does not feel attached to the United States: "In a subway car, my skin would typically fall in the middle of the color spectrum. On street corners, tourists would ask me for directions. Was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker." Instead of feeling a belonging to the nation, Changez associates with the metropolis. Even Changez's diction when describing his position in the middle of the color spectrum in the subway car sites him in the middle of two absolutes; this spectrum is familiar to Changez, for as he asserts in the book's opening, "We have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier." (The sentiments of belonging engendered by the spectrum—an image of fragmented multiplicity—also extends to the American in Lahore.) New York instills a sense of belonging in Changez because of the familiar, homely comforts it offers: taxi drivers who speak Urdu, a Punjab deli that sits a mere two blocks from his apartment, and a float that plays a song he remembers from his cousin's wedding. Changez reconfigures his sense of belonging by translating his past into his present, the culture, food, language, and space of Pakistan into New York.

Spivak, though, questions when the love of one’s culture becomes the nation thing? Pared down, this love or attachment is more like comfort. It is not really the declared love of country, full-blown nationalism. Despite the fact that his belonging to the cosmopolitan space of New York over the national space of the US revolves around a translation of past familiarity into his present, Changez's affiliation with the localized setting over the nation proper also extends to Pakistan. In the novel's opening, Changez describes himself not as a native of Pakistan, but rather as a native of Lahore: "Since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer my services to you." However, such cosmopolitan intimacy and belonging (based in heteronormative origin) is not enough for Changez to be of service; it must be hybridized with his experience of the second-person American's space and language. Changez does curtail his belonging to either sphere, however, through his articles: he describes English not as his but your language, and Lahore not as his but as this city.

The storyteller affirms that the solution to recuperating a national historical past is through the imaginative rememoration of it to craft a new reality that doffs the dominant narratives.

Here we see the double-vision that results from Changez's being split across continents, nations, and metropolises. His doubleness derives from both a split and symmetry: "I felt I was entering in New York the very same social class that my family was falling out of in Lahore. Perhaps this accounted for a good part of the comfort and satisfaction I found in my new environment." His symmetrical/split doubleness paradoxically stems from an inverse—that is to say, oppositional—relationship between his class-habitus of Lahore and New York—but an inverse that is only possible because of a shared trait. This doubleness enables him to inhabit and feel a personal belonging to both spheres: to experience a love of nation/state and family, and to treat his American guest to the most perfect cup of tea Lahore has to offer; to associate with New York instantaneously and embark on a high-prestige, high-salary career.
Changez's ability to inhabit multiple spaces also enables him to criticize them both. Changez can criticize US military action in Afghanistan by framing it within his knowledge of American popular culture, namely Terminator—but a version of Terminator in which "The roles reversed so that the machines were cast as heroes." Beyond using American popular culture to support criticism of the US, Changez also criticizes the unyielding nostalgia of Pakistan: "Some of my relatives held on to imagined memories the way homeless people hold onto lottery tickets. Nostalgia was their crack cocaine, if you will, and my childhood was littered with the consequences of their addiction: unserviceable debts, squabbles over inheritances, the odd alcoholic or suicide." Changez's family members attempt to resist their waning status and wealth, and their attempts at immutability affect the next generation; memory, imagination, and an inflexible desire to hold onto the past work in tandem to create a dangerous nostalgia that harms both present and future generations. It is fitting that Changez invokes homelessness as an analog to his relatives gripping their imagined memories, for both the homeless man with the lottery ticket and Changez's relatives with their imagined memories lose sight of both their homes and themselves. After 9/11 Changez also sees—and criticizes—the tendency of the US to also resist change, succumbing to a "dangerous nostalgia":

I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back [...] what your fellow countrymen longed for was unclear to me—a time of unquestioned dominance? Of safety? Of moral certainty? I did not know—but that they were scrambling to don the costumes of another era was apparent. I felt treacherous for wondering whether that era was fictitious, and whether—if it could indeed be animat ed—it contained a part written for someone like me. Changez's criticisms of Pakistan's and America's tendencies to resist flux in favor of a more certain, glorious past share more than a "dangerous nostalgia"; between his relatives' imagined memories and his hunch that the past age of singular certainty into which America reaches is fictitious, both nations root their nationalisms in imagined pasts. And both his relatives' selfish nostalgia and the Americans' violent nostalgia leave little space for Changez, who is left in the margins between these two spaces. Confronting such questions of belonging, Changez attempts to recuperate a sense of concrete—and discrete—national identity through his (partially fulfilled) romantic relationship with the American girl Erica. To Changez's chagrin, however, Erica remains in love with her previous boyfriend, who passed away before she met Changez, making it difficult for Changez to enter into a real relationship with her. Changez compares her lingering love for her dead boyfriend to the imagined memories that constitute Pakistan's and the US's unbending nostalgias: "Perhaps theirs was a past all the more potent for its being imaginary. I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love: it was, after all, a religion that would not accept me as a convert. But I knew that she believed in it, and I felt small for being able to offer her nothing of comparable splendor instead." Just as such imagined memories of past greatness preclude Changez from realizing a (con-/dis-)crete national identity, so too does Erica's nostalgic fervor for the past prevent him from assimilating (not integrating, for the word "convert" has very ideologically appropriative undertones) into her present. Moreover, so intense is Erica's nostalgia that it provides no space for equivalence, defined by Spivak as "Learning to acknowledge that other things can occupy the unique space of the example of my first language." Erica's re-imagining of the past is so singular that it discounts the possibility of multiplicity.

Faced with Erica's closing off—both emotionally and physically, for Changez and Erica's first attempt at making love ends abortively—Changez attempts to enter Erica (and the US analogically) by assuming the guise of an imposter. When Erica, mourning Chris, retreats away from Changez and into her inner thoughts, Changez attempts to recuperate his connection with (and entrance into) Erica by telling her to pretend that he is Chris. She acquiesces, and Changez is "Transported to a world where I was Chris and she was with Chris, and we made love with a physical intimacy that Erica and I had never enjoyed. Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched him." Such an invocation of mimicry is reminiscent of Naipaul's mimic men (as described by Bhabha), and Changez's open eyes watching Erica's closed eyes situates him in the position of voyeur, of the outsider trying to gain a glimpse of the inside. Changez obliter ates his past identity in order to gain Erica's acceptance;
however, this act of pretending leaves Changez feeling shame: "I felt at once both satiated and ashamed. My satiation was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes." When Changez directs his eyes away from Erica's closed-off inside, he sees himself as fractured. But this fracturing also illuminates the fragmentation that endows him with Bhabha's double vision.

Salman Rushdie, in his novel Shame, also depicts the ways in which migration and imagination influence the fragmented sense of spatial and national belonging. The opening of Shame centers around the Shakil family and finds Old Mr. Shakil on his deathbed surrounded by his three daughters with rhyming names and identical appearances. Immediately after this death, the narrator provides an expository description of the three sisters' captivity within their father's mansion and the camaraderie that it inspired in them:

The three girls had been kept inside that labyrinthine mansion until his dying day; virtually uneducated, they were imprisoned in the zenana wing where they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed, imagining, during their pre-pubertal years, bizarre genitalia such as holes in the chest into which their own nipples might snugly fit, 'because for all we knew in those days,' they would remind each other amazedly in later life, 'fertilization might have been supposed to happen through the breast.'

Confined to the interior of their home, unable to interact with the external world, the three sisters constructed their own space and imagined ways of perpetuating this space. While the narrator explains that "This interminable captivity forged between the three sisters a bond of intimacy that would never be completely broken," the sisters' misconceptions about conception demonstrate that an interior shut off completely from the outside cannot sustain itself. Thus, only when the three sisters invite their neighbors from the town of Q. into their home for a party can they conceive a child. Of course, because the sisters all dress identically in such a manner as to make themselves all appear pregnant, and because the identity of their child's father is unknown, their son's origin is unknown.

Because of this lost origin, perhaps, their child, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is not burdened by the same immobility as his mothers; on the contrary, Omar Khayyam demonstrates a desire for the outside. For his twelfth birthday present, the only gift he requests from his mothers is to strike out into the external world. Furthermore, not only does Omar Khayyam lust for the exterior, but he fears the boundaries that enclose his town of Q.:

Omar Khayyam Shakil was afflicted, from his earliest days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned-upside-down. And by something worse: the fear that he was living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment. Through an old telescope, from the upper-storey windows of the house, the child Omar Khayyam surveyed the emptiness of the landscape around Q., which convinced him that he must be near the very Rim of Things, and that beyond the Impossible Mountains on the horizons must lie the great nothing into which, in his nightmares, he had begun to tumble with monotonous regularity. The most alarming aspect of these dreams was the sleep-sense that his plunges into the void were somehow appropriate, that he deserved no better.

Thus, despite a desire to experience the outside world, Omar Khayyam, like his three mothers, suffers from a claustrophobic fear of entrapment. Just as Omar Khayyam's three mothers hermit themselves within the mansion, so too does Omar Khayyam trap himself within Q. to avoid crossing the frontiers. Contrary to Changez's globe trotting in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, the characters of Shame paint a very different picture of Pakistan, that of a cage: "The sense that Pakistan is a cage is already there,

By belonging to both and neither, by inhabiting both spheres, Changez is able to extend shared loves and criticisms to both—in short; he can provide a counter-view that challenges static, singular boundaries and narratives of the nations.
in the opening episodes, where the Shakil sisters—the three mothers of the 'peripheral hero,' Omar Khayyam—are cloistered twice over: first by their father [...] and then by themselves [...] And this sense of being trapped permeates the whole book, right up to the final denouement where we find that even dictators cannot cross the 'frontier' and escape their cage.441 Omar Khayyam's wanderlust, then, becomes tempered by his own agoraphobic perceptions of the frontier.

When Omar Khayyam does leave the shelter of his home to enter the city of Q., he inhabits the space of the peripheral outsider. On the school playground, he enjoyed his “near-invisibility,”42 taking a kind of vicarious pleasure from the activities of those around him:

As he grew older, and was permitted to stay out later, he became skilled in his chosen pursuit; the town yielded up its secrets to his omnipresent eyes. Through inefficient chick-blinds he spied on the couplings of the postman Ibadalla with the widow Balloch, and also, in another place, with her best friend Zeenat Kabuli, so that the notorious occasion on which the postman, the leather-goods merchant and the loud-mouthed Bilal went at one another with knives in a gully and ended up stone dead, all three of them, was no mystery to him.43

Omar Khayyam inhabits the space of marginalized outsider, invisible to the population at large of even his own town. Omar Khayyam is displaced in his own town by his own peripheral nature; as he himself describes himself, “You see before you [...] a fellow who is not even the hero of his own life; a man born and raised in the condition of being out of things. Heredity counts, don't you think so?”44 Indeed, Omar Khayyam seems to occupy that space between belonging and not-belonging. Said, in "Reflections on Exile," meditates on this liminal space: "And just beyond the frontier between "us" and the "outsiders" is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons.445 Of course, Martin Heidegger sees such frontiers, or boundaries, as open spaces: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing [...]Accordingly, spaces receive their being from locations and not from space."446

As far as exile and migration are concerned in the writings of Mohsin Hamid, Mohammed Hanif, and Salman Rushdie, these boundaries occur not only on a national level, but also on the personal level of the temporal and the personal history.

It is certainly arrogant for America (or perhaps any singly-acting agent, for that matter) to essentialize a discrete identity for India or Pakistan, for even the citizens of these countries are constantly performing and improvising new national identities.

All three novels deal not just with fragmented national identities, but also with the reclamation of personal and national histories. Their unique narrative structures testify to this rememorial and restorative goal. All three novels are told by first-person narrators. In Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist the narrative is transmitted through Changez’s first-person dialogue with an American man sitting in a restaurant. This story and exchange is made even more uncanny by the fact that while the reader progresses through the tale, Changez addresses the American man in the second-person, making it feel as though Changez puts words into the reader's mouth; in this way, Changez challenges the notion of a Western hegemonic center narrating the periphery by reversing the roles, literally writing the reader—and his/her thoughts and words—into the story. Hanif’s A Case of Exploding Mangoes vacillates between Ali Shigri’s first-person recounting of his own story in the present tense and a third-person telling of General Zia’s story. In this way, there is a clear boundary between the personal, localized present and the national, mythic past.

Similarly, Rushdie’s Shame is told in the storytelling mode by a storyteller who often reflects on his own life chattily. The storyteller is hyper cognizant of the question of owning and telling history. At one point, the storyteller, much like Changez, puts words into his accusers’ mouths: "Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!"
Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies? In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie writes, “The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed. […] Fragmentation makes trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities.” In Shame, the storyteller responds to such policing of historical boundaries by blending reality and representation, much like the media in A Case of Exploding Mangoes: “The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist[sic], like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary.”

The storyteller affirms that the solution to recuperating a national historical past is through the imaginative rememoration of it to craft a new reality that doffs the dominant narratives.

However, to return to the question of exile, migration, displacement, and boundary (as raised above by Said and Heidegger), where Rushdie’s storyteller displays anxiety when talking about Pakistan, he assumes an overtly authoritative voice when discussing migration:

All migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes—but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognize them, because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging.

The storyteller contrasts the continuity and belonging of the strangers with the fragmentation and non-belonging of the migrant. In fact, even the storyteller himself is sometimes displaced within the narrative. On several occasions, the storyteller places himself in a position external and subordinate to the narrative; on these occasions, he must take his cue from the fictional characters he has created, such as when he omits a sex scene: “(Taking a leaf out of Bariamma’s book, I have turned a blind eye and snored loudly while Raza Hyder visited the dormitory of the forty women and made this miracle [of childbirth] possible.)” Placing his mimicry of the fictional characters within parentheses further accentuates the peripheral implications of this narrative gesture.

Rushdie later blends reality and fiction within the context of migrancy and exile further by quoting Milan Kundera: “The exiled Czech writer Kundera once wrote: ‘A name means continuity with the past and people without a past are people without a name.’ But I am dealing with a past that refuses to be suppressed.” Said also notes the intersections of past and exile, using it to observe the intersections between exile and nationalism. Said sees nationalism and exile as two sides of the same coin, two binaries that define and enclose one another: “[The question of exile’s and nationalism’s intrinsic values] assumes that exile and nationalism can be discussed neutrally, without reference to each other. They cannot be. Because both terms include everything from the most collective of collective sentiments to the most private of private emotions, there is hardly language adequate for both.”

We thus return to Changez, and the changes he undergoes.

After living in the United States and seeing the way US perceives and treats South Asia (largely a result of the Three Worlds Theory), Changez experiences a newfound nationalism and decides to return for good. Upon his arrival, he realizes that things are not as he remembered: “But as I reacclimatized and my surroundings once again became familiar, it occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country’s elite.” Changez’s migrancy makes him a foreigner.
in his own home; thus we see the connection between nationalism, exile, and migrancy. Changez prophetically and po­
etically describes the migrant’s encounter with being knocked around by boundaries when he notices "A firefly bumping repeatedly against the window of a house, unable to comprehend the glass that barred its way." Changez, too, bumps repeatedly into barriers on a national level as he attempts to re-imagine and reconfigure his own nationalisms; unlike the firefly, though, Changez seems hyperaware of the barriers in his way.

I had been telling you earlier, sir, of how I left America. The truth of my experience complicates that seemingly simple assertion; I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth.

Erica is inextricably tied to Changez’s belonging in both Pakistan and the US. Upon arriving in the US, Changez finds himself stripped of his past and struggles to find ways to glimpse vestiges of Lahore in New York; in Lahore, Changez similarly finds himself stripped of something of his past self. Changez loses something of his past not only in his immigration to the US, but also in his emigration from the US, after he has inhabited it and hybridized his identity with it. Of course, though, he benefits from belonging to both (and neither) simultaneously: his fragmentation bestows upon him the broken mirror that Rushdie valorizes so highly. Indeed, the parts of Lahore that Changez notes are those buildings that “function geographically and architecturally as a link between the ancient and contemporary parts of our city.” Changez, much like the architectural synchronism that he respects in Lahore, also serves as a link of sorts, exhibiting the double-vision and double-belonging that Bhabha speaks of in The Location of Culture. Upon realizing his double-vision and fragmented, multiple national belongings, Changez observes that he has “issued a firefly’s glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations.” Once recognized, the very barriers that once stood in Changez’s—and the firefly’s—way (fragmented, split identities) give way to mechanisms for ascending to a more enlightened existence of double-belonging through excess belonging. By belonging to both and neither, by inhabiting both spheres, Changez is able to extend shared loves and criticisms to both—in short; he can provide a counterview that challenges static, singular boundaries and narratives of the nations.

In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx writes,

Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an

Changez’s journey into and around boundaries, as Rushdie foretells in Shame, empties him of his personal history (much like Changez empties himself of his own personal history in order to enter Erica), and Changez worries that he is caught in limbo between the two: “I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither.” Changez experiences the discontinuity that Rushdie speaks of, worrying that he has no discrete belonging. We have discussed earlier how Changez’s attempts to integrate himself into the US gravitated around his relationship with Erica, but the reverse is also true; his relationship with Erica impacts his re-integration into Pakistan:

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alp upon the brain of the living. At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past.60

To be sure, Changez makes his own history, and he does so under the pressures and constraints of America’s and Pakistan’s pasts, both real and imagined. The imagining and structuring of new nationalisms and national identities, on the parts of Changez and the writers examined, does entail a bricolage of the sort described by Marx; they all conjure and combine the spirits of the multiple spaces, times, and nationalisms available to them. And while it is true that Changez cannot select the circumstances imposed on him by both nations (which forges his fragmented, multiple identity), he does have some agency insofar as he chooses his travels (here we begin to see the disparity between migrant and exile). While it may be problematic to conclude a paper examining Pakistan with a meditation on Indianness, I believe that Spivak’s response to a “multicultural” fair in Los Angeles in which some Indian girls performed “some sort of Indian classical dance” merits consideration: “We felt, some Indians, that on the Indian subcontinent we have not yet been able to work out what it is to be ‘Indian’ and as a result at this point the country is drowning in blood. But America knows. America knows: that is the Indian sector in the multicultural festival.”61 It is certainly arrogant for America (or perhaps any singly-acting agent, for that matter) to essentialize a discrete identity for India or Pakistan, for even the citizens of these countries are constantly performing and improvising new national identities. This is why Changez, for instance, does not perform an identity of Americanness or Pakistani-ness, but of both and neither at the same time, using components of each in the process. Similarly, these writers’ imaginings of Pakistani nationalisms rely on their experiences elsewhere: on their fragmented double-vision.

Conclusion

The imaginative re-memorations of Pakistan in Mohammed Hanif’s A Case of Exploding Mangoes, Salman Rushdie’s Shame, and Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist dis-member the center’s hegemonic projections of narrative onto the periphery through their fragmentation, in which a split individual becomes a double individual. Aijaz Ahmad explains this phenomenon as the excess of belonging: “The truth of being, to the extent that truth is at all possible, resides now in multiplicity of subject positions and an excess of belonging; the writer not only has all cultures available to him as resource, for consumption, but he actually belongs in all of them, because he belongs in none.”62 These texts by migrant writers illuminate how their attempts to remember and re-imagine a personal and national past results in a nationalism characterized by multiplicity. In doing so, these writers also demonstrate the failure and essentialism of the Three Worlds Theory; after all, how can such a totalizing theory of compartmentalization and delineation be applied to writers of such fragmented and multiple identities?

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Hanif imagines a concerted effort on the part of Pakistan’s (and the United States’) governments and medias to depict a nationalism that is hedged between reality and imagination to create a fragment-ed re-presentation of a multiplicitous Pakistan.
End Notes

3. Ibid., 3.
4. Ibid., 4.
15. Ibid., 4.
16. Ibid., 5-6.
17. Ibid., 106.
18. Ibid., 135.
20. Ibid.
22. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nationalism and the Imagination, 12.
26. Ibid., 33.
27. Ibid., 1.
29. Ibid., 1.
31. Ibid., 99.
32. Ibid., 71.
33. Ibid., 115.
34. Ibid., 114.
37. Ibid., 106.
39. Ibid.
42. Salman Rushdie, Shame, 45.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 24.
50. Ibid., 63-4.
51. Ibid., 77.
52. Ibid., 88.
55. Ibid., 63.
56. Ibid., 148.
57. Ibid., 172.
58. Ibid., 170.
59. Ibid., 183.