

Ayesha Iftikhar Ahmed

Centre for Multidisciplinary & Intercultural Inquiry

University College London

Email: ayesha.ahmed.15@ucl.ac.uk

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1223-8166>

Biographical information:

Ayesha Iftikhar Ahmed completed her PhD in Comparative Literature at University College London in 2020. Her main research interest is the depiction of ethical dilemmas in postmodern literature and film.

Word count: 5760

Abstract

As noted by critics, sexual intimacy in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* emerges as an allegory of post-9/11 tensions. A prominent feature of the allegory is the depiction of healing as an opening for sexual intimacy. This paper demonstrates the invasiveness that healing acquires on account of the 9/11 novel's interweaving of intimacy and terror. The focus of this paper lies on the two instances of love-making, in which injuries are put to work in ways that expose how healing potentially trespasses on the inaccessibility of others. The text's arming of healing, which has hitherto not been accounted for by critics, is shown to spotlight the pitfalls that accompany the remedial potential of re-reading the other. As illustrated in this paper, the parallel between re-reading and the risk of healing not only reflects critically on the text's representation of healing but has an implicating effect on the reader.

Keywords: healing; invasiveness; reading; Stigmata.

**The Invasiveness of Healing in Mohsin Hamid's
*The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) opens in a crowded bazaar in Lahore, where Changez, the Pakistani narrator–protagonist, introduces himself to an American stranger as a “beard[ed]” “lover of America” (1). The introduction, which juxtaposes “beard” and “lover”, implies a relation between terror and intimacy. This relation is embodied by the run–in between the two strangers, which, held out as a *probable* post–9/11 encounter between a Pakistani suspected of terrorism and a possible CIA assassin, unexpectedly opens onto an intimate account of Changez's tortured relationship with post–9/11 America. The Pakistani university lecturer cum political activist opens up to the stranger about his four–year sojourn in America, during which he worked as an analyst for Underwood Samson, a prestigious corporate firm in New York City. This sojourn is recounted from the perspective of his longing for Erica, a wealthy American socialite, and his single–minded ambition to belong to the corporate elite of America. The narrator blames 9/11 and the War on Terror for disrupting his American dream of longing and belonging, yet he, simultaneously, implicates his dream in these political conflicts. For he not only entangles his romantic longing with his pursuit of *belonging* via a consistent conflation of America and Erica (Ahmed 1), but, in pointedly using “fundamentals” in the context of finance, he imbues be–longing with terroristic trappings.

As noted by critics, the stress on Am/Erica points to the troubled romance as a possible allegory of post–9/11 tensions between America and its dreaded (Muslim) others (Hartnell 344; Ilott 581; Morey 140–1). The most flagrant use of allegory crops up in the depiction of love–making, which draws on images of 9/11, suggesting a relation between sexual intimacy (penetration) and invasion (Hartnell 344). The allegorical implications of intimacy have a

significant bearing on the representation of healing, which opens up the possibility of love-making in the first place, but also renders it ethically problematic. In longing to be intimate with Erica, Changez comes up against Erica's preoccupation with her dead lover, Chris. The Pakistani protagonist resolves to cure Erica's obsession, but feels guilty about satisfying his sexual longing through healing her of her nostalgia for Chris. The dead lover is crucial to the text's arming of healing. For Chris's Christ-like connotations are deliberately linked to Christopher Columbus's Christianity-driven mission of colonizing the New World (Hartnell 343; Ilott 579), for the sake of re-staging a traditional reading: the war on terror as an extension of European imperialism (Hartnell 337).

In this paper, the allegorical cast of intimacy is shown to give rise to a distinctly invasive version of healing. I explore the invasiveness of healing via the two episodes of sexual intimacy, which, respectively, feature a bruise that opens onto sexual violation and a subversive re-reading of the Stigmata, one that deliberately mirrors the post-9/11 association between Islam and terrorism. The text radicalizes the Christian concept, which does not feature as such but is an extension of a bruise that draws heavily on a Persian literary rendition of the Stigmata. These loaded representations offer a critical stance on the war on terror's corrective agenda. As such, they underscore the necessity of re-reading the other. However, they also embody the problem of re-reading via the invasiveness they confer on healing. This version of healing is insightful, for it exposes risks that arise from the *meaning* we give to the needs of others. Yet the bruise and Stigmata draw attention to the *constructs* that prop up this re-reading of healing. This self-reflexive approach, which has an implicating effect on the reader, lays bare how the remedial potential of re-reading is not exempt from the violence of representation. In explicating the

violence of healing and its bearing on re-reading, this paper fills a significant gap in Anna Hartnell's reading of the allegorical depiction of healing.

Healing through Re-Reading:

The relation between healing and re-reading, which functions as a frame for the violence of healing, is forged by the premise of mutual suspicion that underpins the narrator's encounter with the stranger. This premise, which conditions Changez's narration, is neither confirmed nor refuted by the text. As a result, there is an unrelenting play on "suspicion", which poses the threat of immediate violence *and*, simultaneously, bears a remedial dimension due to the lack of closure intrinsic to "suspicion". The open-endedness of "suspicion" offers the possibility of re-reading those who inspire terror in us. However, what the text does not lose sight of is that the affirmative sense of "suspicion" is only tenable in relation to the risk it is traditionally associated with.

What heightens the relation between "suspicion" and re-reading is the narrator's use of "paranoia", which he confesses to having been "plagued by" ever since his "comrades" "warned" him "that America might react to [his] admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate [him] or worse" (207-8). "[P]aranoia" reflects on the other within the self, drawing attention what the self cannot fully master about itself. As such, it reflects critically on the narrator's suspicions regarding the stranger, that is, effectively renders them *suspect*, pointing to the blind spot that underpins reading the other. Changez sets out to test his "paranoia" via his encounter with his suspected adversary, thereby situating an external conflict in relation to an inner one. This self-reflexive move leaves "terror" open to other possibilities, such as the self's "fear" regarding its own instability. In a sense, "terror" comes home to the self (the narrator and reader), gesturing at another meaning of the terror-intimacy nexus.

The terrors of re-reading come home to the reader via the novel's inconclusive ending, which leaves the encounter between the two strangers poised on a note of imminent violence. The healing potential of re-reading is severely tested via the threat that lines this gaping hole. The deadly void, which follows in the wake of the narrator's re-readings, stresses the necessity of being more giving in one's reading of the other in a context where this affirmative possibility could potentially result in death. The suggestion of physical violence in the non-ending resonates with "real" concerns faced by the reader in a post-9/11 world. This suggestion brings about a shift in the role of the reader, who is invited to come up with a possible ending to the encounter. The reader is given the opportunity of rendering the text whole and is confronted with the challenge of imagining a hopeful resolution to the tension-filled encounter. Yet the very act of responding to the gap invariably involves infringing on the text. The reader's sense of self is equally at stake, for the hint of violence has the potential to elicit a shockingly visceral response from him/her.

The pitfalls that line the necessity of re-reading are directly related to the self's instability (otherness). For the narrator's re-readings of healing, intimacy and terror emerge on the basis of what he suspects, that is, from the perspective of what he cannot know for certain. This focus on not-knowing coincides with the stress that Jacques Derrida lays on mortal limitations in his reading of signification. Derrida undertakes this reading with the help of an invented notion, *différance*, by means of which he looks into the mortal conditions under which representation takes place. These conditions bear on the self's ability to know itself, which is shown to be limited because the self is in the dark about its own death. In illustrating how this gap within the self unfolds in terms of difference and deferral in signification, *différance* gives a diachronic dimension to Saussure's synchronic account of signification, in which meaning is said to be

produced through differences between signs (Norris 91). What *différance* demonstrates is that differing takes time, as in entails delay or deferral (Nuyen 29). The aspect of deferral suggests that signification is contingent on loss, that something is excluded in the construction of meaning. Because exclusionary violence plays a constitutive role in signification, each and every meaning is said to be haunted by what it excludes. That is, the excluded others that go into the making of a concept render it undecidable, or torn between its denotative meaning and the innumerable connotations it harbors.

Violent Intimations of Healing:

In line with the logic of undecidability, “healing” is stalked by connotations of harm in the two episodes of sexual intimacy. In both instances, the relation between healing and harm is put to work in different but related ways. Alongside the traditional sense of “healing” (a response *to* injury), the text not only foregrounds how curing the other can negatively impact the healer, but implies that the very act of healing gives rise to wounds.

The problem of re-reading frames the ethically problematic depiction of healing, which arises because, in the allegorical depictions of intimacy, the war on terror is re-presented as a corrective action underpinned by a ruthless capitalistic agenda. In effect, invasiveness emerges because the text co-implicates healing and the war on terror, a feature that has not been accounted for by Hartnell (2010), who, in reading the allegorical love story as a remedial alternative to the war on terror (344), separates healing from military operations. What is telling, with regard to the problem of re-reading, is that the co-implication effectively dismantles the explicit opposition that the narrator sets up between the possibility of healing and America’s military response to 9/11: “America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you” (190).

This inconsistency undermines Changez mastery over his critique of the war on terror,¹ which is said to mirror 9/11 discourse: “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” (135). The “thrust” of Changez’s counter narrative gestures at the formative role of “repressions, silences, misunderstandings, manipulations, [and] prejudices” in the construction of discourse. As such, it underscores “the need to continuously change (or negotiate prejudiced) perspectives” (Mohr 82). Yet this “thrust” also reflects on the exclusionary violence that underpins his more inclusive account of healing, which features a glaring gap via the inconsistency in the relation between healing and the war on terror. The text performs the problem of re-reading through this gap.

The healing–war on terror parallel emerges as a possible projection on the part of the narrator, whose role as healer is shown to be implicated in the warlike dimension of capitalism.² A former corporate analyst, the narrator speaks of valuation as that which demands a “[f]ocus on *the fundamentals*” (italics in original 112). This “focus”, said to be dictated by America’s economic interests in “Third World” countries (77), strategically converts Islamic fundamentalism into “a single–minded attention to financial detail” (112), with a view to “acqui[ring]” “ailing” companies (108). The ruthless, “shark”–like practices of Underwood

¹The absence of mastery is vividly captured by Lindsay Balfour, who dwells on the fatal otherness that constitutes the narrative in the following terms: “[T]he stranger that will leave him [Changez] heartbroken, strip him of both worldly possession and emotional passion, and eventually get him killed” (222). Balfour examines Changez’s narration in the context of Derrida’s notion of autoimmunity, which reflects directly on *différance*, in that it refers to how a mortal entity, be it a living or conceptual one, harbors the potential to destroy itself through its mechanisms of immunity because it is constituted on the basis of that which undermines it.

²For an in-depth analysis of the 9/11 novel’s critique of capitalism, consult David Gay’s “Confronting Myths of Difference: Fundamentalism, Religion and Globalization in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*”, *Religious Studies and Theology* 30.1 (2011): 57–70.

Samson (80) are shown in the context of healing. They are represented as a means of “restor[ing] things to what they were” (12) with respect to Changez’s family’s financial status in Lahore. His family, financially outstripped by the rising business class in Lahore, is compared to the “old European aristocracy in the nineteenth century, confronted by the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie” (12). Changez attempts to bridge this gap in his native identity through working for Underwood Samson, pointedly referred to as the “American Empire” (173).

The relation between healing and “acquisition” of the “ailing” erupts in Changez’s first attempt at sexual intimacy, the timing of which is crucial, for it takes place shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Centre. Although Chris’s death predates 9/11 by a year, Erica entangles this personal loss with the “attacks” (91), which are said to stir up “old thoughts in [her] head” (91). Her fractured “state”, mirroring that of post-9/11 America, induces Changez “to serve as her anchor” (98–9). The implications of “anchor[ing]” surface in the first episode of love-making, in which she invites him to inspect her bruised ribcage, an injury sustained by her during “tae kwon do practice” (101). Changez views the bruise “in the glow of the television” (101), the medium through which he witnesses 9/11 (82). This setting alerts one to the *invasive* presence of symbolism, which, as pointed out by Ilott, pushes the reader to resist simplifying “stereotypes” (581). By using a bruise—typically a minor injury that heals on its own—to mediate Erica’s recurring grief and post-9/11 America’s wounded condition, the text stages the reductive dimension of re-reading. This dimension, highlighted through the flagrant use of allegory, lines the narrator’s critique of Erica’s “powerful nostalgia” for Chris(t) (129) and the war on terror’s “dangerous nostalgia” for a “fictitious” era of “moral certainty” (130-31). Nostalgia is said to render post-9/11 America prone to “posturing”, which applies equally to an Erica who is described as sporting her bruise like a heroine of “a graphic novel” (102).

Changez also strikes a nostalgic pose and, in so doing, constructs an overlap between the multivalent bruise and the terror-inflected Stigmata. He re-renders the “posturing” of injured Am/Erica on the basis of a bruise that conveniently locates itself on his rib cage. Acquired due to a road collision in Lahore, the injury is used as a conduit for his memories of intimacy with Erica, who is rumored to be dead. Mourning his separation from her, he adopts the pose of bruised lover: “I stared at myself in the mirror and touched my skin with my fingers and hoped that the mark would not soon fade” (197). By assuming a nurturing stance towards a “mark” that mirrors Erica’s bruise, he offers a critical take on how we draw on tragic narratives in constructing our wounding experiences. For this mirroring does not merely render his injury into a “mark” of his intimacy with her but embeds his longing for her within *her* pining for Chris. This embedding of love wounds is reminiscent of Ilyās Ben Yūsuf Nizami Ganjawi’s Persian version of *Laila Majnun*, a famous Arabian-Persian love legend. The bruise emerges as a Sufic precursor of the radicalized Stigmata via its link to *Laila Majnun*, which offers a literary rendition of the Christian concept by imbuing a wound with overlapping relationships:

As children attending the *madrassa*, [Laila and Majnun] were totally infatuated with each other. Majnun is related to behave in a strange way. At a writing lesson, he was found by the *mullah* repeating not the name of God, ‘Allah’, as ordered, but misspelling it, rearranging the signs into ‘Laila, Laila’. The teacher became furious and punished the enamoured pupil by striking him. At that very moment, Laila cried out in pain; she was so much at one with Majnun that her body showed the same bloody marks of punishment as his. (Italics in original de Groot 126)

In line with Sufism's "liberal" approach to Islam (Murphy & Malik 18),³ *Laila Majnun* reconfigures the hierarchy between God and mortals. That is, it negotiates a connection with God through an amorous equation. The aspect of divinity, however, is built into this non-sexual equation, in which Laila and Majnun do not consummate their longing for each other.

The unconsummated longing of the legendary lovers brings the relation between the bruise and sexual intimacy into sharp focus. The stress on celibacy in *Laila Majnun* is built into the conflict that lines the bruise's relation to sex. Not surprisingly, this conflict erupts in the context of reading the other; for Changez has difficulty reading Erica's invitation: "Do you want to see [the bruise]?" which he, initially, mistakes for a "jok[e]" (101). This difficulty, arguably, crops up because of his interest in her body: "I commanded myself to focus on her bruise" (102). Indeed, his very decision to act as her "anchor" (99) is accompanied by the tension that stalks his desire for her: "The pride of her stance [...] the failure of her garments to cloak the memory of those naked breasts I had seen in Greece: all these things filled me with desire. *And yet* I was also filled with protectiveness" (my italics 98). The pull and tug between sexual desire and the responsibility of healing her, conveyed via "and yet", flares up in the bruise episode. For his initial tenderness: "I touched her, placing my fingers on her bruise" is overtaken by his sexual desire, which takes an unexpectedly violent turn in the face of Erica's sexual unresponsiveness: "Mainly she was silent and unmoving, but such was my desire that I overlooked the growing wound this inflicted on my pride and continued. I found it difficult to enter her; it was as though

³ Changez, in turn, takes considerable license with Sufism, which he provocatively alludes to in relation to warfare. More specifically, he compares the meditation practices of "Sufi mystics" to the tactics of "ancient warriors" (14). In line with the text's questioning of re-reading, this comparison shifts militancy from fundamental to unorthodox interpretations of Islam.

she was not aroused. She said nothing while I was inside her, but I could see her discomfort, and so I forced myself to stop” (102).

For Sarah Illott, “Erica’s passivity” and “the force required to enter her” suggest “rape”, the “reality” of which is “disguis[ed]” by the narrator (579). The possibility that the narrator could be “disguising” the “reality” of rape is relevant to the text’s scrutiny of re-reading. For “rape” is used figuratively by Erica’s father in his evaluation of Pakistan’s domestic problems. The “man of consequence in the corporate world” states that Pakistan has been “raped” by its own “elite” (63). This critique of Pakistan plundering itself, underpinned by a “typically *American* undercurrent of condescension” (italics in original 63), is countered by the narrator via a representation of post-9/11 America invading itself for the sake of feeling whole: “[America’s] flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields [...] They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America*—not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different” (italics in original 90). America’s self-invasion is an image that posits violence on the inside of healing.⁴ This image subversively mirrors the rapaciousness of elitism, which is attributed to the war on terror. However, the narrator becomes a target of his own critique via his former membership of the Underwood Samson “meritocracy” (39). Due to the self-implicating effect of the more inclusive re-presentations of “rape”, self-invasion emerges at work, first and foremost, at the level of re-reading.

⁴By insinuating “invasion” on the inside of healing, the text links reinforces Derrida’s reading of the history of 9/11. The philosopher likened Al-Qaeda to an auto-immune disorder because it was originally “a system of self defense”, put in place by the West, in which Muslim Mujahedeen were trained to “fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan” (Appelbaum 100), but this mechanism later turned to attacking the home body itself (the West).

Self-implication is also borne out by the protagonist's "rape" of Erica, which reflects critically on the narrator's insinuation of sexuality into a love legend that revolves around longing for the sake of longing, not having. Indeed, the text cuts into its eroticizing of the bruise through its framing of the physical mark in the light of the Islamic ritual of fasting. In this rendition, which harks back to Laila and Majnun's spiritual love, Erica's "bruised" "flesh", a mark of her pining for Chris(t), is paralleled with the physical impact of "the month of fasting" (152). The Islamic ritual of fasting, known for healing the body and soul (Hazafa, Rehman and Jabeen 116), is used to *frame* Am/Erica's corporate hunger, which figures as the main "thrust" behind the [S]tigmatization of the war on terror. However, this framing of the other emerges as another instance of self-implication due to Changez's "*hung[er]*" for corporate Am/Erica (italics in original 13). Although longing for the sake of longing is glorified due to the reference to fasting, the latter's "bruis[ing]" effect cuts into its healing potential. The link between the bruise and the disruptive Stigmata is bolstered by this ambivalent re-reading of fasting, which also offers a hyperbolic take on Erica's "dormant" sexuality (103), an effect she attributes to Chris's death. The dead lover's stifling effect on her sexuality—a problematizing of Laila and Majnun's chaste relationship—is viewed by the narrator as an opening for affirmative intervention.

The Stigmatization of Healing:

In the first instance of intimacy, Changez's sexual desire overtakes his affirmative intervention (consoling a grieving Erica), whereas, the second time around, he designs a healing initiative that accommodates his agenda of having Erica. More specifically, he impersonates Chris in bed for the sake of "extricating [Erica] from the maze of her psychosis" (119). He pathologizes her grief because it stands in the way of his "hold[ing] onto her" (119). Since her elitist background holds out the possibility of restoring his social status "in Lahore" (97), he is both implicated in and

excluded by post-9/11 Am/ Erica's nostalgic pining for Chris(t). The dead lover's "*Old World* appeal" (italics in original 30) not only symbolizes the war on terror's imperialistic agenda but also the colonial associations of the protagonist's feudal belonging. Hartnell argues that Am/Erica's nostalgia is both mediated and disrupted via Changez's sexual role-play. The latter is said to symbolize a "postcolonial moment" that calls on America to move out of the shadow of its European colonial history (337) by embodying its potential for racial inclusion (343). This "moment" is described as a healing initiative that, contrary to what "Changez hopes", fails in "bringing Erica out of herself", send[ing] her into a spiraling cycle of introspection and, ultimately, self-destruction" (344). In short, America falls short of its potential to rise above racial differences because of its inability to embrace the Pakistani's otherness (343).

The stress on failure in Hartnell's reading presupposes a traditional, non-violent sense of healing, which, as illustrated in my reading of the bruise, is countered by the text. However, her point regarding Changez's conflicted equation with Am/Erica's nostalgia invites a re-reading that opens onto the text's (de)construction of healing. For, in positioning the protagonist on the inside and outside of Am/Erica's nostalgia, the text reflects how the inside of any given entity is constituted on the basis of what it excludes. The inside-outside feature of signification is borne out by the image of Am/Erica's self-invasion,⁵ an image that not only factors into the text's re-reading of healing but points to how this re-reading cuts into itself. The self-invasiveness of re-reading comes through because the narrator makes a point of implicating himself in that which he uses to render healing violent, such as the entanglement between insistent sexual longing and

⁵ The inside-outside feature of signification is rendered by the narrator in the context of relationships. It is noteworthy that autonomy is spoken of as an illusion: "[I]t is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us" (197).

corporate hunger. He puts his own re-reading of healing in perspective by recounting his attempts to be on the inside of his identity through having Am/Erica.

The text props up its re-reading of healing by setting up the bruise and the Stigmata as constructs on the inside and outside of each other. This inside-outside relation is forged because the bruise re-plays a Sufic re-reading of the Christian concept. The conflicting perspectives that make up the Abrahamic tradition are re-staged by the two constructs,⁶ which overlap in the context of friction. The Stigmata is invaded by sexuality on account of its overlapping boundary with the bruise. Yet the latter, with its oriental framing, also cuts into itself by incorporating sexuality. For the ability to “*savor* the denial of gratification” is not only described as the “most un-American of pleasures” but is clearly posited on the side of Pakistani culture (italics in original 79).

The bruise’s self-invasiveness in the context of re-presentation offers a symbolic re-reading of what is physically experienced by mortals in receiving the sacred Stigmata. The latter, which denotes the “rewrit[ing]” of “Christ’s crucifixion” “on other bodies”, perhaps by God, or through “psychic identification” (Robson 76), does not feature as such in the second instance of sexual intimacy. For the Christian concept, negotiated via the overdetermined bruise, is converted into rigorously allegorical construct, one that performs the self-invasiveness of re-reading. This construct is invaded from within via Changez’s “preten[se]” of being Chris(t), which enables him to infiltrate Erica’s inscrutable bond with her dead beloved. The latter, spoken of as “a religion that would not accept [Changez] as a convert” (129), situates the protagonist’s sexual role-play, that is, his mediation and disruption of Am/Erica’s nostalgia for Chris(t), in the

⁶ 9/11 is commonly perceived as an instance in which the “Abrahamic religions”, “*properly* understood” as “antithetical to violence”, were “hijack[ed]” by the terrorists (italics in original Sherwood “Binding-Unbinding” 821).

context of inaccessibility. The Stigmata—physical wounds that embody a relation to Christ, who represents God in the flesh and intercedes with Him on behalf of mortals— epitomizes mediation in the context of inaccessibility. This context is rendered inclusive of disruption via the sexual role-play, by means of which Changez mediates Erica’s reunion with Chris(t) but for the sake of disrupting their relation.⁷ In so doing, he manifests healing as disruptive. The disruptiveness of healing signals that the Christian concept is treated in the context of signification. For, according to *différance*, it is because mediation unavoidably conditions signification that a relation to the other is a (non)relation to the other’s otherness.

Changez performs the disruption that conditions signification by appropriating the identity of Chris(t), who is on the inside and outside of healing because he is dead yet, nonetheless, intrinsic to Erica’s self. She can only find sexual release in fantasizing about her dead beloved, which is why the latter is viewed by the protagonist, not only as an obstacle to but a means of intimacy with her. The disruptive effects of mediation are constructed via Changez’s usurpation of Chris(t)’s inside-outside position in a context of healing. These effects play out in the depiction of sexual intimacy: “It was as though we were under a spell, 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 [...] I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*” (italics in original 120). The recurring use of “shut” in a context of relation, intimacy and connection bears out the exclusionary violence that constitutes these possibilities. “[S]hut” also reflects on how the construction of Chris(t) as a curable malady undercuts the healer’s agenda of replacing his “rival” (121). The invasiveness of this agenda is built into the Chris–Erica bond, which is re-

⁷ It is interesting that, although Hartnell sticks with the traditional (non-violent) sense of healing, she regards the protagonist’s attempt to disrupt Am/Erica’s nostalgic longing for its European origins as a possibility of healing, or rendering the US more open to otherness.

presented as a “conversation” immune to Changez’s “intrusion”, occurring on some plane that [he] could not reach or even properly see” (128).⁸

The impenetrability attributed to the lovers’ rarefied connection links up with the narrator’s reflection on his “fail[ure] to penetrate the membrane with which [Erica] guarded her psyche” (160). The sexual framing of his desire to understand Erica harks back to the figurative use of “rape”. That is, the use of “penetrate” reinforces the impression that sexual intimacy is constructed with a view to targeting the problem of re-presentation, which, in the text, is brought to bear on the potential invasiveness of understanding the needs of others.

In line with the penetration-invasion parallel, Changez re-presents the consummation of his sexual [P]assion in terms of his being invaded by otherness: “I cannot, of course, claim that I was *possessed*, but at the same time I was not myself” (italics in original 120). This image of self-invasion reflects on his agenda of being on the inside of his elusive self via Am/Erica. Because it is constantly recycled in the text, this image of self-invasion becomes less about what it seemingly targets—the war on terror—and more about the process of re-reading. At the level of signification, Changez’s invasive healing of Am/Erica is symbolic of the infringement inevitably involved in re-reading, or giving a more comprehensive (whole) picture of the other. The self’s pursuit of feeling whole through others points to the permeability of boundaries, which are renegotiated via re-reading. Although re-reading makes it possible to be more inclusive towards what was formerly excluded, accommodating otherness (be it of the self or actual others) can be a violating experience.

⁸ In forging a parallel between 9/11 and the lovers’ rarefied connection, the use of “plane” also reflects on the difficulty of reading Islamic fundamentalism.

The indeterminate boundary between the self and other is also shown to give rise to projection, which the text gestures at by comparing “[t]he entrance between [Erica’s] legs” to “a wound” (120). This “wound”, which functions as a simile, is used to construct a reference to “blood”, which turns out to be equally groundless: “More than once I smelled what I thought to be blood, but when I reached down to ascertain with my fingers whether it was her time of month, I found them unstained” (120). By embedding baseless references to “wound” and “blood” in the context of his mediation of Am/Erica’s reunion with Chris(t), the narrator *contrives* an allegorical re-presentation of the Stigmata, one that subversively mirrors the war on terror’s reductive perspective on Islam. His agenda, however, is rendered into a projection by “a wound” that is merely a figure of speech. This flagrantly flawed re-presentation emerges as another instance of self-invasive self-reflexivity, one that also targets the religious significance the hijackers projected onto their invasion of America.⁹

In projecting the “wound” onto the vulva, the text approaches the Stigmata through the lens of history and fiction. For this instance can be read as a potentially provocative re-reading of the woman-centric history of stigmatics (Lachapelle 80). It also evokes Ron Hansen’s novel, *Mariette in Ecstasy* (1991), which uses the Stigmata to revisit the “close connection between divine and erotic love in the Western mystical tradition” (Jasper 71). The postcolonial tradition of using the Stigmata as a means of healing racial wounds is reworked by the narrator,¹⁰ who implicitly plays on “particularized marks of piety” in relation to the “negative connotations” of stigma (Dailey 277). Changez, who is called a “[f]ucking Arab” and threatened with physical

⁹ Two of the hijackers who crashed the planes into the World Trade Towers on 9 September 2011 left behind documents which likened the attacks to Ibrahim’s sacrifice to God (Sherwood *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths* 24).

¹⁰ Phyllis Alesia Perry’s *Stigmata* (1999), featuring an African-American protagonist, draws on the Christian concept as a means of “heal[ing] the wounds of slavery” (Patton 60).

violence by a stranger in a “parking lot” (133–4), faces the stigma of being a Muslim male in post-9/11 America. On his part, the stigmatized protagonist, who views Erica’s longing for Chris(t) as a *mark* of “her psychosis”, replays the war on terror via his attempts to deliver her from a dreaded other.

The narrator, on the inside and outside of his stigmatization of the war on terror, subjects the reader to this position in the context of the text’s re-presentation of healing. This position, laid bare via the non-ending, is constructed because the narrator gives explicit and implicit cues to the reader. In this paper, I have responded to cues that implicitly point to a tension-filled overlap between the allegorical re-presentation of the bruise and the Stigmata. Constructed on the basis of fictional works and literary tropes, this overlap gives rise to and cuts into the re-presentation of healing. The risk of transgression that lines this overlap reflects on conflicts grounded in the Abrahamic tradition, more specifically, the political conflict between Islamic terrorism and the war on terror. On a more holistic level, the text’s re-reading of this conflict via the constructed bruise and Stigmata is shown to reflect on the risks of re-reading (being more inclusive of) the other. The pitfalls of resolving the problem of terror through re-reading are symbolized by the text’s re-reading of healing as invasive. The endless play on invasiveness, signaling what is *fundamentally* risky about healing others, namely making sense of their needs, is linked to key concerns: How should one respond to others in need of help? Are they in need of help, or is that our perception? In healing others, what is at stake for us and them?

The text’s version of healing enables a reading of the ethical possibility from the perspective of what is excluded in traditional representations. More importantly, it is particularly relevant to the difficulty of resolving the problem of terror. Nonetheless, the re-reading of healing is implicated in that which it exposes: the problem of re-reading. This problem is also

performed by the reader, who brings what is implicit, such as the bruise's link to the Stigmata, in relation to the text's explicit attack on the construction of discourse. While this strategy of reading enlarges the frame of the text, it also exposes the self-invasiveness of the narrator's framing of the other. The feature of framing also cuts into the reader, whose agenda—pinpointing the constructs that prop up the re-reading of healing—is conditioned by the text's inside-outside positioning of the other.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Ayesha. "The Transgressions of Belonging in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Tropos* 4 (2017): 1–6. [doi:10.14324/111.2057-2212.069](https://doi.org/10.14324/111.2057-2212.069)
- Appelbaum, Robert. "Fantasias of Terrorism." *Journal for Cultural Research* 18.2 (2014): 99–113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2013.851848>
- Balfour, Lindsay Anne. "Risky Cosmopolitanism: Intimacy and Autoimmunity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58.3 (2017): 214–225. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2016.1192984>
- Dailey, Alice. "Stigma and Stigmata: Medieval Hagiography and Michael Landy's *SaintsAlive*." *Word and Image* 32.3 (2016): 275–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2016.1188347>
- De Groot, Rokus. "The Arabic-Persian Story of Laila and Majnun and its Reception in Indian Arts." *Indian Musicological Society. Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 36/37 (2006): 120-148.
- Gay, David. "Confronting Myths of Difference: Fundamentalism, Religion and Globalization in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Religious Studies and Theology* 30.1 (2011): 57–70. [doi:10.1558/rsth.v30i1.57](https://doi.org/10.1558/rsth.v30i1.57)
- Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Penguin 2007.

- Hartnell, Anna. "Moving Through America: Race, Place and Resistance in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* Vol. 46.3–4 (2010): 336–348.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2010.482407>
- Hazafa, Abu, et al. "The Health Impacts of Ramadan Fasting." *Journal of Nutrition Fasting and Health* 7.3(2019):116-20. DOI: [10.22038/jnfh.2019.40505.1197](https://doi.org/10.22038/jnfh.2019.40505.1197)
- Ilott, Sarah. "Generic Frameworks and Active Readership in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50.5 (2014): 571–583.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.852129>
- Jasper, David. "The Erotic and the Mystical in Postmodernity." *Theology & Sexuality* 11.2 (2005): 71-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835805051879>
- Lachapele, Sofie. "Between Miracle and Sickness: Louise Lateau and the experience of Stigmata and Ecstasy." *Configurations* 12.1 (2004): 77-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2005.0003>
- Mohr, Dunja A. "Terror as Catalyst? Negotiations of Silences, Perspectives, and Complicities in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, Ali Smith's *The Accidental* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*. Edited by Dunja A. Mohr & Birgit Däwes. Brill Rodopi: Leiden & Boston, 2016.
- Morey, Peter. "'The Rules of the Game have Changed': Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Post-9/11 Fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.2 (2011): 135–146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.557184>
- Murphy, Eamon, and Ahmad Rashid Malik. "Pakistan Jihad: The Making of Religious Terrorism." *IPRI Journal* IX. 2(2009):17-31.
- Norris, Christopher. *Derrida*. Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987.

Nuyen, A.T. "Derrida's Deconstruction: Wholeness and Différance." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy New Series* 3.1 (1989): 26–38.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25669901>

Patton, Venetria K. "Stigmata: Embodying the Scars of Slavery." *Imagining the Black Female Body: Reconciling image in Print and Visual Culture*. Ed. Carole E. Henderson. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 59-76.

Robson, Kathryn. *Writing Wounds: Inscription of Trauma in Post–1968 French Women's Life–Writing. Genus Gender in Modern Culture, vol.4*. Rodopi, 2004.

Sherwood, Yvonne. "Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the 'Sacrifice' of Abraham's Beloved Son." *Journal of the American Academy Of Religion* 72.4 (2004): 821-61.

---. "The Hagaramic and the Abrahamic: or Abraham the Non–European."

Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 17– 46.