

Representations of the Other in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*

By:

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Abstract: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a more recent and contemporary portrayal of 9/11 fiction. This thesis uses postcolonial theory to analyze Mohsin Hamid's novel, published in 2007. The novel chronicles the protagonist Changez's life before, during, and after the 9/11 and how his view of America's capitalism and imperialism-centered society and his identity shifts in the wake of the attacks. It is allegories to display identity and has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural 'exchange' to the Pakistani immigrant named Changez Khan in the novel. The novel stands out because it is told from the point of view of a Pakistani immigrant to an American looking for a job to fulfill his dream. The postcolonial tropes allow for an acute interrogation of the historicizing of 9/11 and what role fiction has in creating and re-imagining history. The novel allows us to see how postcolonial tropes have evolved and

remained after September 11 attacks. Also, the features of trauma fiction are briefly introduced to determine those featured in Hamid's text, which exposes identity problems and searches for the answers to existential queries. Such issues as the deterioration of the American dream, the fight against American imperialism and the relationship between East and West, prejudices that rule the American society, and inward transformation are the main ones that feature in this study.

Key words: Identity diaspora, Mohsin Hamid, War on Terror, Islamphobia.

۱.۱. Introduction

Mohsen Hamid was born in ۱۹۷۱ in Lahore, Pakistan, where he spent nearly half his life, and the rest in London, New York, and California. Hamid worked for several years as a financial and management consultant in New York. In ۲۰۰۱, he went to London where he lives now, and works as a journalist. His father was a university professor and was enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Stanford University. He moved back with his family to Lahore, Pakistan. Mohsin Hamid is the author of four novels, *Moth Smoke* (۲۰۰۰) about a banker in Lahore who loses his job and becomes unemployed and addicted to narcotics and crimes, while his country teeters on the brink of a nuclear war. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (۲۰۰۷), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (۲۰۱۳), and *Exit West* (۲۰۱۷). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in ۲۰۰۷ was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

The novel follows a Pakistani financial analyst leaving the United States after a failed relationship and the events of ۹/۱۱. Changez Khan is the main character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the fact that he is an ambitious man chasing his dream, but when he lived in America he constantly faced discrimination, especially after the ۹/۱۱ events. The whole story seems as if it is a dramatic monologue. It is situated in a cafe in Lahore, and a Pakistani is telling his life story to an American. The Pakistani happens to be a former American (New Yorker) successful graduate of Princeton University, who at one time had a great job and an American friend. After the ۹/۱۱ attack, he retreats from it all and his dream of being an American faded. Hamid's book explicitly talks about the struggle of Muslims in Western Capitalism. Also concerns the crucial issues of an immigrant identity conflict as (Others) are confused about their identity of eastern people in the West. The novel is about the clash of two cultures, two world views, and two civilizations after the ۹/۱۱ attacks in The United States of America.

The Muslim world and the West have caught Changez between the two cultures, the East and the West. the novel by focusing on the reaction of Muslims toward the Twin Tower attacks. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by

Mohsin Hamid strongly exhibits America's discriminatory attitude towards Muslims, particularly towards Pakistanis, after the tragic incident of 9/11 in which the World Trade Centre collapsed. Changez, the protagonist of the novel and mouthpiece of Hamid, describes the relationship between America and Pakistan. After pursuing higher education in America, Changez works to accomplish his 'American dream' and gets a job at Underwood Samson & Company. He loves America more than his motherland and prefers to be a New Yorker rather than a Pakistani. He leaves his ethnic identity, longs for American identity, and works laboriously to acquire it. He often compares New York with Lahore and affirms the superiority of the former over the latter. Hamid establishes through its central character Changez Khan. As an immigrant, Changez lives in America and yearns to accomplish his 'American dream' and feels like an American rather than a Pakistani. We find how Changez, a lover of America, turns the country's enemy because of America's changed attitude towards Muslims after 9/11. Changez tries to prove his loyalty and patriotism towards his host country but fails. When he is unable to restore his lost identity, he starts protesting against the host country, which is a sign of cultural resistance on his part. The novel central theme is identity diaspora, Islamophobia, and War on Terror.

۱.۲. Discussions:

The concepts of "the Other" and "identity conflict" in Mohsen Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are the major questions that have been raised. These questions are especially related to the protagonist of the novel Changez and the stranger CIA agent. The author presented this novel as a model for the contemporary issues between the West, and The Middle East, a problem that is still vivid in the present time. The identity of Pakistanis is more endangered in the post-9/11 situation than it was ever before. Being Pakistani means being a part of a society divided into various groups at war with one another on religious, sectarian, and political grounds. The author shows how marginalized they are in their society due to political, intellectual, and religious differences. Thus, in the ۲۱st -century identity of a common person living in Pakistan has become even more precarious than

it was ever before. This highlights a situation in which humanity is no longer valued and people are disgraced, killed, and deprived of their rights because of their loyalties to the opposite set of beliefs. The problem is not only in Pakistan or Afghanistan but many Muslim immigrants whose identities are easy targets for public opinion and media in Western countries. The West does not look at them as citizens but looks at them as terrorists or as extremists. Identity issues are not resolved even at present. The protagonist in the American community suffers and faces racism and ethnic discrimination which makes him feel like "the Other", or outsider, especially after the 9/11,

and the collapse of two trade towers in New York. These crises led to the fading away of his identity, and his dream of being recognized as a New Yorker. These led to economic and cultural conflicts between the West and Muslims. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (٢٠٠٧) breaks the stereotypes and misconceptions that promote prejudiced and biased views against those people who are considered as "others." Other indicates the inferiority of people

because of differences in color, religion, and nation. Gail Ching-Liang Low (١٩٩٦) states in his book "*White Skins- Black Masks*" "The reflected image in any case is not the self but an image of the self as Other; identification is hence both confession and nonrecognition. (p.١٩٤). These others try to fit within a society that has isolated them by following the method of 'mimicry' as Homi K Bhabha has used the term for the colonized subjects who copy their colonial masters to save lots of their skin. Similarly, in this context, marginalized groups behave just like the colonized subjects. The point is

The United States of America and the world entered the era of binary opposition: "Us and the Others." Before September 11th attacks, being a believer of Islam meant something new unknown, or exceptional; however, during the immediate aftermath. Muslims were often treated as enemies, murderers, and terrorists. This situation has resulted in the seclusion of ethnic communities and, especially isolation of Muslim communities or maybe inter-ethnic violence. The American society was confused and

confused, which was the consequence of the lack of information. Even though masses media provided wide-ranging discussions about tragic events, society could not comprehend the tragedy. Moreover, the impact of the country has become the impact of the whole world, becoming an everlasting stigmatic phenomenon. Thus, the position of the Muslim writers is most significant for the best understanding of the aftermath. After ٩/١١ the Muslim community became suspected, of 'Stereotypes of Muslims that already exist.' Because the religion of Islam to many American people it's meant extremism or terrorism. And the term "Islamophobia" appeared for several decades, and suddenly the world entered a period of Islamophobia and binary division. The United States and the West after September ١١, ٢٠٠١, shaped Islam with racism and Islamophobia. Raymond Taras (٢٠١٣) states that people judging others based on the

color of their skin or their clothing created a kind of hostility towards Muslims called "Islamophobia". These forms of racism shaped Changez and his impressions of the United States. It's clear after ٩/١١ the Muslim community became suspected, of stereotypes of Muslims that already exist. Because of the religion of Islam, many American Muslims are accused of extremism and terrorism. The term "Islamophobia" appeared for several decades, and suddenly the world entered a period of Islamophobia and binary division. After September ١١, this issue became even more acute, continuing the matter of developing mutual understanding between the West and Islam that has emerged from misunderstandings on both sides. Racism has become more prevalent in Islamophobia and stigmatization of Muslims today than in the past. (pp. ٤١٧-٤٣٣). In the words of Nazry Bahraw's article entitled "Mohsin Hamid's War on Error: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a Post-Truth Novel" the idea of "climate of fear following ٩/١١ led to the proliferation of 'Islamophobia', itself a neologism connoting – according to a ٢٠٠٤ report from a national commission on Islam in Britain – prejudice against Islam and Muslims in countries like the United Kingdom[.....]. There are, in essence, two competing narratives resulting from the ٩/١١ attacks. The first postulate Islamic fundamentalism as the enemy of the democracy' that America embodies: an enemy that must be eradicated. This narrative is most clearly expressed in the United

States government's The 9/11 Commission Report (٢٠٠٤). The second narrative suggests that blaming Islamic fundamentalism for 9/11 obscures other, deeper issues – such as inequality itself – manifesting, amongst others, as American dominance over weaker states and/or peoples" (p.٢٦٥). This means that Islamic fundamentalists are the personification of evil itself. In a ٢٠١٣ essay entitled, "Islam is Not a Monolith" Hamid returns to the issue of the novel's title, declaring that he often hears it said, in both Pakistan and the USA, that his

novel "is about a man who becomes an Islamic fundamentalist" Hamid continues by listing the characteristics of Changez that suggest that he is not an Islamic fundamentalist, and notes: "His beliefs could quite plausibly be those of a secular humanist. And yet he calls himself a Muslim, and is angry with US foreign policy, and grows a beard – and that seems to be enough [to make readers believe he is an Islamic fundamentalist" (p.١٨٥). It is like being in the novel joke which Erica understands to be a joke when Changez said, "hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability"(p.٣٣). Hamid uses this example to complain about the tendency in the West to see "Islam" as a "monolith". According to Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (١٩٩٤), "the conflict of cultures and community has been mainly represented in spatial terms and binary geopolitical polarities" –Islamic fundamentalists vs. Western literary modernists, the quarrel of the ancient (ascriptive) migrants and modern(ironic) metropolitans"(p.٣٢٢). The critic, Homi K. Bhabha adds that "postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, and peoples. They formulate their nations, races, communities, and peoples. In the novel *Changez* never answers Erica's father's criticism of the situation in Pakistan " Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers " (p.٦٢). merely stating that "my

family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that" (p.٦٣). Changez himself shows an inability to conceive of a change that could escape Oriental immobility. Simply fails to register the need for change in his society in terms of the inequalities, injustices, and exploitation caused by inequalities of class and wealth. Like imperialism before it, global capitalism thrives on such ignorance: thus Changez's new counter-capitalism doctrine will pose no threat to the continuing disciplinary power of capitalism. The mutual distrust and suspicion between Easterners and Westerners in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is articulated through the deployment of Orientalist stereotypes and references to near-contemporary history of the past history of Pakistan and the Ottoman Empire. Changez criticizes the Orientalizing vision of many Westerners vis-à-vis Pakistan and the non-Western world more generally, and he compares America and Pakistan in ways that favor the latter or that seek to find similarities between various aspects of the two worlds. He also asserts the past glories of Pakistan, although, ironically, this can also be seen as a common Orientalist stereotype. Indeed, even when Changez attacks Western views of Pakistan, he uses images which echo the Orientalist descriptions of the East as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The most relevant of these stereotypes of the Orient are those of Western superiority over the Orient, Western progress and development versus Oriental stasis or backwardness, and Oriental difference/exoticism, as Said argues: "Western Orientalism drew attention to

the debased position of the Orient" and it assumed "an unchanging Orient, absolutely different [. . .]from the West". The Orient is also associated with "the freedom of licentious sex, and thus with sensuality and exoticism. Moreover, Orientalism further defines the East as "backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded" (٩٦-٢٠٧). Changez was continuously disappointed and rejected when he found his "American identity" deteriorated. This is the struggle between the two identities that appeared in his trip to the Philippines tries very hard to show that he is the best. However, the white American in the company is treated differently from his treatment. From that moment on, he cannot escape his cultural identity and feels ashamed of it. He reproaches himself for choosing to be an American when he wants to be seen in a

favorable position This is evidently how Hamid in the novel shows Changez's identity conflict and rejection of American culture.

Changez feels distinctly Pakistani and un-American at Princeton, but fully American. when he starts working in finance in New York he says "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city" (p. 11). His love for American civilization is beyond the boundaries of this country. He remains grateful to his host nation for allotting educational and job opportunities to him and blessing him with someone (Erica) whom he loves the most. He expresses this feeling in the following manner: —I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman" (p. 11).

Describing postcolonial thoughts on identity conflict, Bhabha writes in his book *The Location of Culture*:

"I use these postcolonial portraits because they seize on the vanishing point

of two familiar traditions in the discourse of identity: the philosophical the tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (Human) nature; and the anthropological view of the difference between human identity as located in the division of Nature/Culture " (p. 11).

Changez is fascinated by the idea of identifying as an American, seeking to alter his behavior to match his American colleagues. In the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Changez, the protagonist, after losing his identity, protests against American imperialism. Hamid depicts that American society is full of racial and cultural prejudices against people from non-European countries, especially Muslims. He shows that the ethnic and cultural Othering of American culture influences him and pushes him on the path toward his search for his identity. After the 9/11 attacks, it caused racial discrimination and strict laws against immigrants and refugees, especially Muslims, and this is what happened to Changez in the United States he says," I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world[.....]had seen a sharp downturn in activity levels following the

September attacks, and Wainwright had shared with me a rumor that cutbacks were on their way"(p. ٥٥).

Homi Bhabha emphasizes, "the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations" (p. ٢٥١). Hamid suggests that his mask of "whiteness" is quickly torn apart when he is subjected to humiliation and racial discrimination in the airport. He says: "When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners"(p. ٣٦). Changez becomes a victim of

racist feelings when one offender deliberately seeks to intimidate him with derogatory racist language. Indeed in America after ٢٠٠١ there has been an increase in suspicion, verbal attacks, and attacks on people and institutions perceived to be Muslim. This is clear, " I shifted my stance, presenting him with my side and raising my hands to shoulder height; I thought he might be mad, or drunk; I thought also that he might be a mugger, and I prepared to

defend me or to strike[...]the first allowed himself to be led away, Fucking Arab" (p. ٥٤). Changez finds himself as salve even

treated like a criminal, ugly, and suspected at the New York airport after the ٢٠٠١ attacks. separated from his colleagues at the immigration counter upon his return from Manila. He joins the queue for foreigners. Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skins, White Mask* (١٩٥٢) similarly claims that "the Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering" (p. ١١٣).

The most significant Hamid's use of the beard on some occasions this part of the body is used to strengthen the image of a Muslim as "the Other". For example, when he decided to keep a beard after the September ١١ attacks as a way to fortify his identity.

So he found himself subjected to verbal abuse by strangers. For example in the novel when Changez defended his actions by claiming that beards are popular in Pakistan, Wainwright responded: "Jerk chicken is common

where I come from,” he replied, “but I don’t smear it all over my face”(p. ٥٩). Hamid writes that while Changez faced discrimination from the American public because of his beard when Erica smiled and said she found it makes him look “You look cute, Your beard brings out your eyes”, and another time she says; " she had found me rather dashing in my new beard" (pp. ٦٠-٧٣). This means Changez represents the Other because of his race and cultural differences. Azhar Mankhi Hameed's thesis ٢٠١٦ titled “The Representation of Two Different World-Views Through the Use of Dramatic Monologue: An Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*,” explores that "to understand the change in Changez, one has to understand how the political and personal feed one another: Which is stronger, politics or love, is like asking which is stronger, exhaling or inhaling. They are two sides of the same thing" (p. ٢٨). The point is that discrimination and suspicion fuels Changez's xenophobia and alienation as he frees himself from the influence of the West. Hamid is pointing his finger at American society and showing that everything is not perfect with it. In America after ٩/١١, Muslims are considered alienated and accused of terrorism, yet it seems ironic to demonize them as "Other" Muslims in a country like the United States, which has always prided itself on being a democratic country, and insists that all its citizens are equal before the law. On the contrary, democracy is viewed exclusively as the American way of life while Islam is associated with terrorism and violence. Muslims' feelings of fear, alienation, and loss of their identity post ٩/١١.

After the ٩/١١ attacks, Changez lost his American dream as a New Yorker this dream turned to dust after the collapse of the twin towers. Changez's pleasures could be seen when the security of the American lifestyle is shaken by the attacks when the two hijacked aircraft crashed into the two World Trade Centers. He felt pleasure when saw TV in his Manila hotel room. “The twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed in New York, causing at least three thousand victims. And then I smiled" (p. ٢٥). I realized that is the moment someone brought America to its knees, "I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so

visibly brought America to her knees" (ibid). Postcolonial Hamid, through his novel, blames America for its insistence on living in the past and continuing to follow imperialistic policies. He also criticizes America for its refusal to accept the culture and the political realities of today's world. He shows that America has not taken into account the national and cultural aspirations and identities of others. Post 9/11 xenophobia, which was based on the religious and racial "Other", proves particularly problematic to Changez who was determined to achieve his dream and love America. The alienation of Muslims at various levels of social and political life in America after the 9/11 attacks made him hate America and its culture. In his article titled

Changez annoyed when the United States used its bombers and killed thousands of civilians in Afghanistan. He says, "something happened that upset my equanimity, The bombing of Afghanistan had already been underway for a fortnight, and I had been avoiding the evening news when I chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban" (p. ٤٦).

Afghanistan during the "War on Terror" became political turmoil and bloodshed. Changez was accused of terrorism organizations. Changez reassures him that he does not believe in violence and bloodshed, "I can assure you, I am no ally of killers; I am simply a university lecturer, nothing more nor less" (p. ٨٠). Hamid invokes the irony of this self-motivated political maneuver on the part of America, with the "War on Terror," led by the United States. As theorist and critic Bhabha (١٩٩٤) referred to the terrorist attacks that affected Bombay on sectarian and ethnic grounds, states "the world's media, busily searching for historical precedents after 9/11, did not spare a thought for that day in Bombay. Attacks of terror and incidents of communal rioting have tragically left their mark on a city that seems, on the surface, to work busily against, and across, such ethnic and religious boundaries" (p. xxiv). Changez carries deep concerns about his country. He is upset about the Indian-Pakistani

conflict, he worried that his country might be on a verge of war, especially after the Indian parliament attacks. He says; " I should have been ecstatic, but earlier that week armed men had assaulted the Indian parliament, and instead of celebrating my good fortune, I was confronting the possibility that soon my country could be at war" (p. ٥٥). Mohsin Hamid shows that America manages its affairs around the world like a neo-colonial power. A novel such as Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* (٢٠٠٧) may be read as a counter-narrative to the post-٩/١١ War on Terror. In the novel "America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity but also in your own" (p. ٧٤). Homi K Bhabha (١٩٩٤) by referring to paranoia "The frustrated wish 'I want him to love me,' turns into its opposite 'I hate him' and thence through projection and the exclusion of the first person, 'He hates me'"(p. ١٤٢). Changez wanted and tried very hard to be accepted in American society, but what happened was the opposite. Hamid depicts the neo-colonial American behavior and its interference in Islamic countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

He also blames America for its assumptions of superiority and insistence on treating cultures and people as "others" with their own cultural and political identities. Bhabha ١٩٩٤ confirms that the purpose of colonial discourse is to consider the colonized as inferior to the colonizers based on race. He states "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types based on racial origin, to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction"(p. ١٠١). Indeed the same can be said of Changez's dissatisfaction with American political and social life, which had been accumulating much before ٩/١١, though largely unnoticed by him. More recently, the "war on terror" was launched by the United States in ٢٠٠١ to depose the Taliban regime. As a result, Afghanistan has been the target of negative stereotypes pervasive in the Anglo-American popular consciousness, which immediately and instinctively associate the country with, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and the restriction of individual rights. In ٢٠٠٧ Ania Loomba's book titled, *Colonialism/ post-colonialism* emphasizes that "since

the events of ١١ September ٢٠٠١, the so-called global war on terror, and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is harder than ever to see our world as simply 'postcolonial' (p.٢١٣).

١.٣. Conclusion:

Changez depicts the darker side of American culture. Hamid depicts that American society is full of racial and cultural prejudices against people from non-European countries, especially Muslims. He shows that the ethnic and “In-betweenness” can be understood in Changez and how the American culture influences him and pushes him on the path towards his search for his identity neither Pakistani nor New Yorker. The ٩/١١ attacks, caused racial discrimination and strict laws against Muslim immigrants and refugees.

Muslims who left their homelands to work, educate, integrate, and embrace the American dream. For Changez, the events of September ١١ dealt a fatal blow to the American dream he had embraced. This may also reflect that the situation of immigrant Muslims has changed irreparably. The ٩/ ١١ attacks lead "War on Terror" and Islamophobia this is clearly how it affected the Islamic world. Changez begins to see America as heartless and selfish, abusing people and destroying their lives, whether abroad or on its soil, to benefit itself. His behavior was meant to push people away from him especially his colleague Underwood Samson because of his beard. The point is that we find Mohsen Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a pivotal novel, as it refutes Western prejudices against Pakistanis by giving a message of peace. It deals ironically with the war on terror and all kinds of violence. It makes a vicious atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion that followed the September ١١ attacks. The point is that ٩/١١ events we find Muhsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a pivotal novel, as it refutes Western prejudices against Pakistanis by giving a message of peace. It deals ironically with the war on terror and all kinds of violence. It makes a vicious atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion that followed the September ١١ attacks. The point is that the "War on Terror" and Islamophobia

becomes an ideal tool after the Cold War by enabling the United States and its allies to continue the new imperial exemption by waging an endless war.

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