



Dynamic Identity: A Postcolonial Study of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract

This research focuses on the dynamic and fluid identity of the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a novel by Mohsin Hamid (1971-). It claims that the protagonist's identity is continuously reconstructed with extrinsic and intrinsic ruptures through the lens of postcolonial theory because it provides a framework to analyze identity formation process, particularly the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said (1953-2003) with dual identity and psychological split by Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). The research discusses how the protagonist's identity is shaped by the global power relations, racial mistrust, and power conflict in America after the 9/11 attacks. It analyzes some of the crucial scenes of the novel and demonstrates how Islamophobia and Western stereotyping generate a crisis in which belonging as well as subjectivity are at stake for Changez in his double consciousness toward resistance. His journey from a New York-based corporate elite to an opponent of American imperialism in Lahore is a tale about decolonizing both political and personal aspects. The form of the novel, as a monologue directed at an American man, emphasizes the ways in which identity shakes under the pressure of fear and suspicion. Furthermore, this research contributes to broader discussions of migrant identity, postcolonial resistance, and the capacity of literature to undermine dominant ways of seeing and treating the Other.

Keywords: Postcolonial Identity, Orientalism, Islamophobia, Decolonization, The Reluctant Fundamentalist.

ناسنامه‌ی گۆراو: خویندنه‌وه‌یه‌کی پاشداگیرگه‌خوازی بۆ رۆمانی "بناژۆخوازی دردۆنگ"ی موحسین حه‌مید

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پوخته

ئهم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ تیشک ده‌خاته سه‌ر ناسنامه‌ی گۆراو و شلی پالنه‌وانی رۆمانی "بناژۆخوازی دردۆنگ"ی موحسین حه‌مید. توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ که‌ ده‌یه‌وێت ب‌لێت ناسنامه‌ی پالنه‌وانی رۆمانه‌که‌ به‌به‌رده‌وامی به‌هۆی ترازانه‌ ناوه‌کی و ده‌ره‌کیه‌ کانه‌وه‌ بنیاتده‌نرێته‌وه‌. له‌رێی هاوینه‌ی تیوری پاشداگیرگه‌خوازییه‌وه‌، به‌تایبه‌تیی "رۆژه‌لاتناسی"ی ئیدوارد سه‌عید و دو-ناسنامه‌ی و دوکه‌رتبونی ده‌رونی فرانتس فانۆن، ئهم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ تاوتوێی ئه‌وه‌ ده‌کات چۆن ناسنامه‌ی چه‌نگیزی پالنه‌وانی رۆمانه‌که‌ له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای په‌یوه‌ندییه‌کانی هێزی جیهانی، بێمتانه‌ی نه‌ژادی و مملانی جیۆسیاسی له‌ ئه‌مریکا پاش هێرشه‌کانی ۱۱ی سێپته‌مبه‌ر شکۆشیوه‌ وه‌رده‌گرێت. توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ که‌ شیکاری هه‌ندیک دیمه‌نی هه‌ره‌گرنگی رۆمانه‌که‌ ده‌کات و ده‌ری ده‌خات چۆن ئیسلامۆفۆبیا و مۆرکه‌وتنه‌ی جیگیرکراو [ستیریۆتایپ]ی رۆژئاوایی قه‌یرانیک ده‌خوێنن تیدا وابه‌سته‌ی و خۆیه‌تی چه‌نگیز له‌ دوانه‌ هۆشیارییه‌که‌وه‌ به‌ره‌و به‌رخۆدان ده‌که‌ونه‌ مه‌ترسییه‌وه‌. گه‌شتی کاراکته‌ری سه‌ره‌کی رۆمانه‌که‌ له‌ ده‌سته‌بژێرکی دامه‌زراوه‌یه‌که‌وه‌ له‌ نیویۆرک به‌ره‌و نه‌یاریکی ئیمپریالیزمی ئه‌مریکی له‌ لاهۆر، چیرۆکیه‌که‌ له‌مه‌ر دژه‌داگیرکاری یان ئاوه‌ژوکردنه‌وه‌ی داگیرکاری سیاسی و که‌سی. فۆرمی رۆمانه‌که‌، که‌ مۆنۆلۆگی ئاراسته‌کراوه‌ بۆ گۆنگریکی ئه‌مریکی، جه‌خت ده‌کاته‌وه‌ له‌ وه‌وش و بارانه‌ی تیدا ناسنامه‌ له‌ ژێر په‌ستانی ترس و گوماندا ده‌له‌رزێ و ده‌له‌قێ. سه‌رباری ئه‌وه‌ش، ئهم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ به‌شداری ده‌کات له‌ باسیکی به‌رفه‌وان سه‌باره‌ت به‌ ناسنامه‌ی کۆچه‌ر، به‌رخۆدانی پاشداگیرگه‌خوازی و توانایی ئه‌ده‌ب بۆ لاواکردنی شتیوازه‌ زاله‌کانی بینین و مامه‌له‌کردن له‌ گه‌ل "ئه‌وی دیکه‌".

کلیله‌وشه‌کان: ناسنامه‌ی پاشداگیرگه‌خوازی، رۆژه‌لاتناسی، ئیسلامۆفۆبیا، نه‌هێشتنی داگیرکاری، بناژۆخوازی دردۆنگ.

1.1. Introduction

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) is a novel in which Mohsin Hamid delivers a haunting portrayal of dynamic identity in the world after the 9/11 attacks. He uses dramatic monologue as a form to narrate the story. The story is woven through Changez's speech to a nameless American in Lahore, a stylistic decision that reflects the novel's interest in the borderlands dividing confession and confrontation, intimacy and suspicion. The story

investigates the intersection of personal aspiration and policy-driven Othering, following Changez's evolution from a Wall Street genius, Princeton alumni, and metropolitan to a disappointed opponent of American hegemony. From the perspective of the novel, identity is not fixed or intrinsic, but constantly in flux, a site where external discourses confront internal psychological cracks and collusions.

The research discusses the novel from four interrelated angles, as an effort to highlight through contrast the various transformations of Changez's identity. The first one represents Edward Said's concept of Orientalism in postcolonial theory, exploring how the Western discourses build their 'Other' and how this 'Other' is apprehended by Changez. The second angle shifts its focus to the emergence of Islamophobia after 9/11. This section specifically examines the way in which the culture of fear and distrust in the country feeds into Changez's feeling of alienation and increasing marginality. The third takes a closer look at the psychological transformation of Changez within the context of two main concepts, double consciousness and psychological rupture, two terms related to Fanon's theory. The research investigates the idea of the deep clash that Changez experiences as he copes with the conflicting pressures he feels between his Pakistani roots and his desire to belong and be accepted by the American culture. The last one that examines Changez's return to Pakistan is seen as a symbolic act of resistance and decolonization, which will interpret his act as a refusal to accept and an attempt to reclaim the imposed identities and his cultural past.

1.1.1. Research Problem

Identity is one of the significant questions in postcolonial literature, as it helps readers in interpreting the psychological and political impact of colonialism, migration, and globalization on people. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez is wavering between belonging to and being rejected by both the East and the West. While numerous researchers such as Sobia Khan, Suzy Woltmann, Toqeer Ahmed and Adnan Mahmutovic have discussed the novel's contents regarding cultural clashes and anti-American sentiment, there has been very little focus on how Changez's identity is flexible and constantly changing. He is constructed through various pressures, not only Orientalism or Islamophobia but also emotional collapse and his own acts of rebellion. This paper seeks to analyze how Changez's identity is articulated, shattered, and reshaped both by external aspects and his own inner battle to thwart them.

1.1.2. Purposes of the Research

The research aims to investigate how the identity of Changez shifts in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Drawing on the ideas of the critic and postcolonial theorist Edward Said and the psychiatrist and writer Frantz Fanon who describes how colonialism and racial discrimination mess with people's sense of identity, Hamid enacts and challenges this discourse in the novel which explores the fate of Changez in America, followed by his return to Lahore. This research looks at the way Changez is caught up between two nations: Pakistan and America. It closely examines key passages in the novel to demonstrate how Changez reacts to prejudgments, stereotypes, and political pressure. Also, it investigates how the manner in which the story is recounted reflects Changez's dynamic and unstable identity.

1.1.3. The Significance of the Research

This research is significant because it reveals how identity functions in a world where people are commonly judged by race, religion or nationality. By making the experience of Changez the center of its attention, the study demonstrates how identity can lack stability and become a function of fear, prejudice and power. It also demonstrates how people can push back these forces and try to develop their own voice. This study contributes to the discussion about postcolonial literature by demonstrating how narratives such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* allow us to grapple with the denials that migrants face, especially in a world after 9/11.

1.2. Orientalism and the Construction of Other

Mohsin Hamid investigates post-9/11 cross-cultural relationships in the voice of Changez, a Pakistani who has grown up in America. At the center of the novel is the construction of the "Other," the Oriental figure, a subject Edward Said famously explicates in *Orientalism*. Said claims that the representation of the East by the West has always been singularizing and even violent, the West placing itself as the central norm by which all other civilization is measured, and positioning the Orient as an Other, passive, irrational, exotic and threatening (2003). Hamid's novel enacts and questions this discourse in its imagining of its protagonist's relocation to America and return to Lahore. Through its narratives of Changez's negotiation of identity in a world damaged by suspicion, capitalization and

imperial ideologies, the novel asserts how the process of Orientalizing the non-Westerner pervades and tastes its own toxic fruits.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist opens with Changez addressing an unnamed American: “Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America” (Hamid, 2008, 1). The beard becomes a symbol of suspicion after 9/11. It is a moment that illustrates how people from the East are made to seem foreign, or threatening, a classic expression of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. Changez feels obliged to put the American at ease, though he has no ill intentions. The quote reveals how the West frequently views people like Changez as an “Other,” and causes them to justify or defend themselves in order to be accepted.

Fear and stereotypes about Muslims in America intensified after 9/11. Changez’s beard, previously unremarkable, grows into a “symbol of protest” (Hamid, 2008, 147) and sets him up for suspicion, especially at Underwood Samson: “I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares” (Hamid, 2008, 148). People [Americans] associate appearance with terrorism. In the airport, he is subjected to unfair treatment and becomes a “suspect race” (Hamid, 2008, 178). This is another example of how Orientalism promotes fear and lays the groundwork for Western dominance.

Even Erica (who can be seen as an allegory to America), whom Changez is close to, sees him as an exotic. She says: “Your beard brings out your eyes” (Hamid, 2008, 152). She does find him interesting, but also gazes at him with a certain sadness and distance. Their relationship carries an echo of the way in which the West frequently views the East with “interest,” and also by way of misunderstanding (Said, 1978, p. 3).

Since Changez is in post-9/11 America, he starts to see that people around him regard him not as an individual but as a larger threatening image of the Muslim Other. His identity, formerly fluid and open, begins to tighten, as he understands that people judge him in fear and stereotypes. At one point, he jokes: “I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the others appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking (Hamid, 2008, 33). His jest, seemingly funny, ironically underscores how fast people on the other side perceive him as a threat. Their response reflects exactly Said’s concept of Orientalism where he notes that the Oriental is presented as “irrational, depraved, childlike [and] different” (2003, 40). The joke serves to show how deeply rooted those ideas still are. Despite being highly educated and successful, he is an outcast to most. This moment is crucial in the construction of his identity. He begins to

push back, ironically highlighting the unjust way he is perceived. This is the beginning of his real identity shift- from a person who wants to fit in to someone who resists and questions.

Changez begins to sound American, and then speaks as one: “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine” (Hamid, 2008, 173). “Modern-day janissary” could be a metaphor for someone with a colonized past serving their colonizer. The word “American empire” situates the story within today’s imperial frame. However, Changez understands his place in the system and starts to rebel against complete surrender. But he is torn, knowing that to enter the Western world is to leave his origins behind, a demand Orientalism as a cultural representation often makes. His internal struggle is frankly revealed when taking a journey to the Philippines:

We had flown first class, and I will never forget the feeling of reclining in my seat, clad in my suit, as I was served champagne by an attractive and—yes, I was indeed so brazen as to allow myself to believe—*flirtatious* flight attendant. I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond— only younger, darker, and possibly better paid. (Hamid, 2008, 72-73)

This moment shows how Changez is acting the role of someone who he is not. He has the role of a rich, powerful American businessman, like James Bond [the fictional Western spy], sipping fancy “champagne” and being flirted with by women. But then, when he talks about being “darker,” we realize that deep down, he also knows he cannot really fit into this role. At the beginning, Changez does everything he can to be American. He puts on the “suit,” he plays “confident,” and he likes the luxury. But after 9/11, when Americans begin to regard him with suspicion or seeing him as an “Other,” he understands he was never truly accepted. This causes him to doubt his identity. In other words, this causes his identity to become dynamic.

Another example which Hamid uses in the novel to show how Changez is insulted and seen as “Other” is the dinner time with Erica and her parents. In that evening, Erica’s father makes “negative” comments about Pakistan and says, “corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people . . . You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism” (Hamid, 2008, 62-63). He views Pakistan as a “corrupt” and “dangerous” place. He articulates that there is no hope in the country [East]. However, Pakistan is rich in history. Take Lahore, for instance, a city that has been ruled

“from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British” (Hamid, 2008, 8) while America’s discovery is about five hundred years. This is precisely the kind of crucial history that often remains in the background. This goes along with what Edward Said refers to as Orientalism. It means the West presents the East as weak, shattered and relatively helpless. It allows the West to feel stronger; to feel more powerful. In Said’s words, Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (2003, p. 3).

From the beginning, Changez assumes his Wall Street job is a matter of talent and effort. He claims everyone is judged equally at Underwood Samson, regardless of where they come from. He insists that “even at Underwood Samson I could not entirely escape the growing importance of *tribe*” (Hamid, 2008, 133). After 9/11, Changez begins to sense something different. People start to associate increasingly by nationality and religion, even at work. This is what the word “tribe” stands for in these divisions, such as “Americans” [insiders] in contrast to “foreigners” [outsiders]. Changez understands that his colleagues see him from a new viewpoint, not simply as a brilliant staff member, but as someone who is not one of them. This is the moment that he realizes, no matter how successful he is, some people will always judge him by where he comes from or his original identity. It is the start of his disillusionment with America.

Changez complains of being parted from his team at immigration and 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” (Hamid, 2008, 85). Despite living and working in America, Changez is alienated. His team, likely American or at least white, is waved into the citizen line, whilst Changez is directed towards the foreign line. This proves how even though he tries his utmost to blend in, he is still seen as “Other.” This is indicative of how Changez’s identity is constructed through his marginalization on the basis of his background and appearance.

After 9/11, Changez’s feelings begin to change, so do people’s impressions of him. He is treated as hostile and the object of mistrust: “I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers” (Hamid, 2008, 148). Through a narration process, he demonstrates the way Islamophobia is increasingly rising in the United States, where brown bodies came to be seen as threats.

1.3. Islamophobia and the post-9/11 Context

Hamid's novel takes place in a political-emotional wake of the 9/11 attacks. It demonstrates how fear, surveillance and skepticism in the aftermath of the attacks birthed an Islamophobia where Muslims, or even people who looked like Muslims, were viewed as potential threats to the West. Through the character of Changez, "a young New Yorker with the city at my feet" (Hamid, 2008, 51), Hamid reveals how a nation, which had celebrated diversity, could turn on a dime to fear and racial profiling. It is not just a narrative about Changez's individual disillusionment but a story about a civilization that projects its fear onto racialized bodies in order to access its own repressed racism and repressed imperialism in the post-9/11 world.

Muslim people are sites of suspicion after 9/11. At the airport, Changez is thoroughly checked, where the officer asks him: "What is the purpose of your trip to the United States? . . . I was dispatched for a secondary inspection in a room" (Hamid, 2008, 86). Changez's Muslim background or identity means the "inspection" is a part of Islamophobic activities. Hamid condemns the racial profiling and violence that occurred following 9/11. As Arun Kundnani has observed in his book *The Muslims Are Coming!* (2014), Islamophobia functions as a form of control over Muslims, as "suspect communities" (117), no matter what they do. Similarly, Humaira Riaz, in *Racism and Islamophobia: A Critique of Selected American Literary Texts*, argues that "phobia of Islam and Muslims in America named as Islamophobia in the contemporary discourse where American think tanks organize their writings around the false assumptions that equate Muslims and Islam with terrorism" (2017, 96). Riaz critiques American think tanks, where Western thinking is produced, for linking Muslims to "terrorism," wrongly. Through a postcolonial lens, Changez's experiences like being stopped in airports and regarded with suspicion, demonstrate the real-world impact of official policy on ordinary acts of discrimination.

After the 9/11 attacks, which irreversibly reoriented global politics, Muslim individuals were placed in the global spotlight. Deepa Kumar in *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (2012) argues that "September 11, however, precipitated unanimous agreement in the foreign policy establishment that the War on Terror would henceforth frame US foreign policy... that 'Islamic terrorists' represented existential threats to the United States began to echo in the public sphere" (Kumar, 2012, 113). This shift placed Muslims in permanent suspect status within the global imagination and hardened Islamophobia as a state-

sanctioned discourse. Additionally, Changez is no exception when he narrates an experience he had while he returned to America from a trip and says, “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious” (Hamid, 2008, 85). His distress demonstrates how quickly appearance and nationality became grounds for mistrust. Without actually doing anything wrong, Changez feels ashamed by the exact look of him, which now forms the image of the new enemy [to Americans]. Anxiety about being watched alters his behavior, reflecting how profoundly Islamophobia flooded Muslims’ lives after the attacks. This could be interpreted as a point from which his identity shifted.

The Islamophobia displayed in the novel is not merely a personal prejudice. It is systemic, as part of colonial continuities. In the aftermath of the September 11 era, discriminatory policies are perpetuated by the U.S. government against Muslims and Arabs. Changez watches as people “disappeared” or were “detained without charge.” According to him, “Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten . . . the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse” (Hamid, 2008, 107). In this context, Hamid presents that what the FBI does illustrates how Islamophobia is institutionalized, making whole communities suspect under the cover of national security.

The reaction of Changez to the 9/11 attacks unveils the inside of a man with postcolonial identity, especially in this scene of the novel: “The twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (Hamid, 2008, 83). Changez might not be excited about the violence, but he responds to what the attacks symbolize, which is in a very short moment an empire felt the ground shake beneath it. This is not the moment of joy, but disruptive joy. Hamid requires readers to feel the discomfort in seeing the world from the Other’s perspective. As Frantz Fanon argues, the colonized often experience both desire for and resentment of their colonizer (2021, 73). Changez’s smile reflects that turmoil, and he himself seems to know it. He even challenges his own emotions here, just a subtle reminder that all of this is only contributing to his continued identity crisis.

This crisis of identity also intersects with Islamophobia, as Changez’s divided identity is intensified by the post-9/11 racial climate. Changez’s romance with Erica is also a way to

demonstrate the emotional aspect of Islamophobia. After the 9/11 attacks happened, Erica inclines even further into grief over her ex, Chris [Christ or Christianity which is the largest religion in the US]. Changez's identity is "so fragile" and he is "unable to offer her an alternative to the chronic nostalgia inside her" (Hamid, 2008, 168). [Am]Erica, in this context, represents a wounded America, one that clings to an idealized past and retreats from people who are different. As Erica is moving away from Changez, she is also a personification of America moving away from people like him. Her disappearance, possibly her suicide, represents the death of the notion that America is open to every culture. Likewise, Erica can only look at Changez in terms of him potentially being the next Chris, and in the same way, America can only look at Muslims with fear and loss following 9/11.

Changez's post-9/11 experience in America illustrates the increased rise of Islamophobia and racialized suspicion towards people who look like Muslims. Through the attacks, Changez begins to receive an identity that was a visible marker of his otherness; Changez also became the target of people's fears, anger, and isolation. The insult "Fucking Arab" (Hamid, 2008, 134) demonstrates how Islamophobia shuts down endless ethnicities and identities (South Asian, Arab, Persian, etc.) into one offensive stereotype. It reduces innumerable complex cultures into one threatening image of the so-called Muslim enemy. As another example, Changez writes, "I was approached by a man I did not know. He made a series of unintelligible noises— 'akhala-malakhala,' perhaps, or 'khalapal-khalapala'—and pressed his face alarmingly close to mine" (Hamid, 2008, 133). While this incoherent mockery of an Arab person does not reference identity, it presents a logic of disdain that demonstrates the contempt and dehumanization that is directed towards people who appear to be Muslim. Those public actions are not random; they are informed by a post-9/11 cultural environment that has been adapted to make every racialized body suspect, hostile, and the object of ridicule. Changez's encounters provide examples of how Islamophobia operates not only through state surveillance and foreign policy, but also through ordinary ways of marginalization, humiliation, and objects of ridicule and contempt that transform ordinary people (like Changez) into objects of scorn.

The dynamicity of Changez's identity is not just in himself, he begins to associate his feelings of alienation with the world's power relations. He is questioning the military operations of America in countries like Afghanistan: "I wondered how it was that America

was able to wreak such havoc in the world—orchestrating an entire war in Afghanistan” (Hamid, 2008, 149). He begins to view the “war against terror” as being part of a broader imperial project. Moreover, he speaks to the unnamed American and says, “your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable . . . It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination” (Hamid, 2008, 177). In this context, Hamid demonstrates how Islamophobia reinforces Western empire. By making Muslims appear to be threats, the United States has an excuse to wage war in Muslim-majority countries. Changez’s decision to leave America and take a teaching job in Lahore represents a more profound dismissal, not of all Western values, but of the hypocrisy and injustice behind them.

The format of a dramatic monologue increases the sense of terror and alienation. Changez speaks to an American man who never says anything, but his silent moves, he glances around, he reaches into his jacket, infuse a sense of hidden threat into the scene. Changez frequently mentions such endeavors: “I see from your expression that you do not believe me” (Hamid, 2008, 206). It shows that the American listener does not trust him, and Changez knows this. The stillness and slight movements set an atmosphere of suspicion, expressing how after 9/11 Muslims were frequently received with fear. This arrangement reflects the inescapable surveillance and suspicion of the post-9/11 world. What was threatening about Changez’s speech, about his body language, was that it could be read in that way.

Changez’s response to 9/11 indicates that his feelings toward America are beginning to change. He watches the towers fall on TV and does not think about the people who died. Rather, he thinks about the symbolic meaning of the situation in which “someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (Hamid, 2008, 83). Changez thinks about how strongly America had been attacked. He is not happy about the deaths, but he senses that something important has occurred. This is a moment in which he is signaling that he is beginning to feel more detached from America. This is another instance of the dynamicity of Changez’s identity. It is the start of his decision to abandon the life he had there. It is powerful to find his voice at a time when Muslims are usually spoken about, as threats or as victims. Hamid demonstrates the cost of allowing them to speak for themselves. Changez is a voice against the Western narrative as it exists. He does not provide easy answers or clear sides; instead, he forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths.

The novel is not just about exposing Islamophobia, it is about analyzing it. Hamid's novel suggests that suspicion, fear, and racial violence are not just accidents but central parts of how national identity is forged in post-9/11 America. Additionally, it challenges the reader, particularly the Western reader, to question his or her own presumptions. By asking them to consider whether Changez is a menace, Hamid forces the reader to ask themselves why the question would cross their minds at all.

1.4. Double Consciousness and Psychological Rupture

Hamid tries to imagine a protagonist with a divided self, a man who is not quite at home in any world. Fanon claims in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the colonized are forced to experience a "suffocating reification" (Fanon, 2021, 89), which means they are stuck in a fixed role that does not reveal who they are, and it often makes them feel trapped, misunderstood or crushed inside. The only means of understanding their personal lives is in reference to the colonizer and this creates a kind of person who is psychologically split. This conflict corresponds to Fanon's idea of double consciousness, the idea that the colonized subject internalizes the psychology of his colonizer creating a psychological division and dislocation. Changez, a Pakistani trying to navigate elite American institutions, is a postcolonial everyman of sorts. Through his journeys, Hamid considers the psychological cost of assimilation and the alienating effects of global capitalism.

Double consciousness is a concept coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963). Du Bois wrote about African Americans: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (1989, xxiii). Fanon would later elaborate on the concept in *Black Skin, White Masks* and claims that colonial subjects absorb values of their colonizers, leading to a psychic conflict. For Changez, he is always conscious of being different.

In a special moment with Erica, Changez allows her to fantasize that he is her late American boyfriend, Chris, because he wants a sense of connection to her. This put them in the same space, but it leaves Changez feeling as though he is disappearing, or losing his original identity when he says, "I felt something I have not felt before or since; I remember it well: 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" (Hamid, 2008, 121). This indicates that he is split inside. He is also glad to be near Erica but ashamed that he had to lie about his identity. This ties in with Frantz Fanon's double

consciousness: how individuals from colonized countries feel a split when trying to assimilate into a Western culture. What Changez feels is the kind of “shame” that should be suppressed to fit in.

In the beginning, Changez wholeheartedly participates in America’s capitalist system. He works for Underwood Samson, a firm that values achievement and competition. As one manager says, “we’re a meritocracy . . . We believe in being the best . . . We’ll rank you every six months. You’ll know your rankings. Your bonuses and staffing will depend on them” (Hamid, 2008, 39). The West gains control of everything and everyone, from deciding what bonuses a team gets to staffing it. Changez wins by embracing those, working hard and standing out. His potential is recognized by his boss, Jim, who says to him, “your instructors say you’ve got a bit of the warrior in you . . . It can take you a long way” (Hamid, 2008, 50). The term “warrior” indicates that Changez’s aggression and toughness, traits that help him to succeed in a system that prioritizes profit, are celebrated. But that also means he is supporting a system that exploits weaker countries, including his own. Moreover, the degree to which he is successful is, in turn, linked with how useful he is to this system, which demonstrates the extent to which he is now the very thing Fanon describes as a “colonized intellectual,” someone who works on behalf of the colonizer and is against his own people.

Changez begins to feel anxious with the American identity he has attempted to acquire. During a visit to Manila, Changez realizes that he does not really belong with his coworkers: “I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him” (Hamid, 2008, 77). This indicates that Changez is acting like he is not himself. He has more in common with the local driver [East] than the American one [West]. This scene marks the start of his internal battle and foreshadows his eventual transformation.

The following excerpt exemplifies Changez’s sense of disconnection and disorientation from America: “I waited for a sign from Erica—an email, a phone call, a ring on my buzzer—but none ever came” (Hamid, 2008, 186-187). This is illustrating how pathetic and solitary he feels. He is in that middle of both hope and reality, where he can find his place. This is a version of Fanon’s notion of double consciousness, when a person is torn between who he is and how the world sees him. Changez recalls, “I remembered Erica in September, at what was still the start of our relationship, just after the attacks on the World Trade Center . . . I was diving into my life in New York in September, full of optimism at what was to

come” (Hamid, 2008, 187). This demonstrates how eager he was once to construct a new life in America. But now, that hope is gone. This transformation or dynamicity represents a psychological rupture in his character, perhaps even brought about by being turned down and feeling like the outsider.

At a critical moment in the story, Changez protests and criticizes America’s violent behavior. This act of “criticizing” shows a fundamental break in the way he sees America [West] and himself [East], and it relates to Fanon’s notion of double consciousness. He thinks that “America was engaged only in posturing” and was “unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united [it] with those who attacked [it]” (Hamid 2008, 190). Changez describes how America turned inward into “myths of [its] own difference,” with consequences felt on the more global stage, as “the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of [its] tantrums” and “my family, now facing war thousands of miles away” (Hamid, 2008, 190). Changez’s demand for America “to be stopped” can be connected to Fanon’s notion of fighting back against unjust systems (Fanon, 2001, 18). These lines demonstrate how Changez exists both within and outside the empire [or the system], and exposes the colonizing power’s profound influence on the mind.

As life in America gets tougher for Changez after 9/11, he begins to feel thrown, even conflicted. People start to suspect him and he discovers that he is no longer welcome. However, he tries his best not to think of how things are getting worse or falling apart. He says, “I prevented myself as much as possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream” (Hamid, 2008, 106). Changez does not want to admit that his dream in America was coming apart. He was trying to guard against the pain of losing what he had built. This sort of inner conflict is related to his double consciousness, in the language of Fanon, and it results in a profound emotional break.

Changez realizes that he is changed, this makes him feel a dynamic inner conflict, the sensation that he has two conflicting identities, particularly under the colonial or imperial power when he says, “I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner” (Hamid, 2008, 141). Changez’s confession of being “changed” could be regarded as the sign of disconnection or a moment of disunion from America. Though he had once willingly embraced life in America, he now views it through different eyes, not as a place where he fits in so much as a place, he no longer calls home. This change demonstrates how his

identity has started to fracture. He continues: “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” (Hamid, 2008, 141). It is the revelation of how deeply self-divide goes. Changez comes to understand that he has become like the people he hated, an ugly psychological snap through trying to make a mark in a society that never fully embraced him. He has been brainwashed to think like the majority culture, but at the expense of his own identity. This is the start of his refusal to be in that world and for him to find himself again.

When Changez goes back to Lahore, he leaves behind his double consciousness. At first, he looks through an American lens at his home: “I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared . . . and it smacked of lowliness” (Hamid, 2008, 140–141). This is the colonized “mentality” that Fanon describes (2001, 114). However, as he reconnects himself to Lahore’s history, “Mughal miniatures and ancient carpets” (Hamid, 2008, 142), he begins to adjust his perspective and says “I resolved to exorcize the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed” (Hamid, 2008, 141). There is perhaps no greater example of this recovery than his choice to grow a beard: “I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind” (Hamid, 2008, 147–148). While it accumulates hostility in America, the beard becomes an act of confrontation, it comes in line with Fanon’s argument that colonial subjects possess “two dimensions: one with his fellow [the colonized], the other with [the colonizer]” (2001, p. 1).

Changez continues to wrestle with division within himself, but he is no longer trying to hide who he is. Instead, he embraces who he really is and speaks sure of himself. In Fanon’s words, he turns into an aggressive thinker who connects his experience to resist unfairness, and to dream of another future. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* makes clear how living under empire and racism can fracture an individual’s sense of self. However, the road that Changez takes from aspiring to belong to America, to turning his back on it, is not one of radicalization as much as it is a slow realization about just how unfair the system really is. From Fanon’s understanding, it is too simplistic to say that Changez is “torn” as if it is his fault that he cannot make a choice. It is what happens when someone from a colonized country tries to become part of a world that, in some sense, can never accept

them. The story does not end with a neat resolution. Changez is not turned into a villain or a victim or a hero, he remains complex.

1.5. Resistance and Decolonization

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is not only about Changez's identity; it is about his silent resistance as a signal for his dynamic identity. As his opinions shift, he becomes increasingly cautious about Western support and begins to look at things from a decolonial standpoint. His resistance is emotional, political and cultural. He decides to stop trying to fully assimilate into the Western world. Changez's narrative is a sort of decolonization in what happens to him and in the way the story is narrated.

At the beginning of the novel, Changez is formed by global capitalism. He goes to study in Princeton [American] University, works at a big company firm and has dreams of success in America: "I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an *American*" (Hamid, 2008, 74). Changez tries to be like Americans and the word "attempted" indicates that he is not quite comfortable pretending to be someone he is not. Changez's struggle is representative of a more widespread problem encountered by countless people from former colonies who feel the need to change in order to be accepted, but in doing so feel as though they have lost themselves. This is key, because it shows that Changez is starting to doubt whether he really belongs in America.

Changez's decolonization journey is further demonstrated by the fact that he is rejecting the ideological ideas of American imperialism. After 9/11, he becomes increasingly unsettled and disturbed by the West's provocative rhetoric against Muslim countries, and the way it dehumanizes those countries in terms of basic human rights, military, and security forms of intervention. Changez's emotional response sets off a series of political realizations. As Changez states, "the rhetoric emerging from your country [America] at that moment in history— not just from the government, but from the media and supposedly critical journalists as well—provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger" (Hamid, 2008, 190). Changez's anger is not merely emotional, it is resistance against the dominant colonial narrative that aims to authenticate and erase voices like Changez's. This latter part of Changez's emotional unrest matches Frantz Fanon's theory of how emotion is a critical step for decolonization and a core rupture from the colonizer's ideology. Changez's disillusionment causes him to question his rightful place in this colonial system that he once so idolized. This internal rebellion pushes Changez to not only resign from his role in the

empire, but also to courageously advocate against a political system to enable political independence and freedom for Pakistan. In addition, Jennifer Marie Mogannam in *Revolution Until Victory?: Decolonizing Land, Nation and the People through Palestinian-Lebanese Transnational Resistance Praxis*, argues “that the struggle to decolonize is a struggle to become human” (Mogannam, 2019, 139). Based on this argument, Changez’s endeavor to resist the Western political system and empire can be analyzed as his efforts to escape from the dehumanization machine system of the [West] and once more feel his human being in Pakistan [East].

Changez begins to experience an internal conflict after 9/11 attacks, despite his strong connections to America and says, “I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?” (Hamid, 2008, 84). It makes sense that, despite having studied in America, finding a great job and even loving an American woman, something in him still wished the country suffered. To a great extent, that emotion is driven by deep anger and frustration. Even though he does not yet fully comprehend it, he has started to fight back against the power that America symbolizes. Changez starts to suspect the system that once delivered him success and has some very deep decay at its core and says, “I knew merely that my feelings would be unacceptable to my colleagues, and I undertook to hide them as well as I could” (Hamid, 2008, 84). It suggests that Changez understands if he reveals his true emotions, he becomes a suspect or an enemy. Consequently, he hides how he really feels as he pretends to be as shocked and sad as all the rest. The pretending indicates how compelled he feels to belong. However, at the same time, keeping his true thoughts to himself is a form of quiet resistance and decolonization.

After 9/11, it became easy for Westerners [Americans] to be suspicious of men who looked like Changez, especially if they had beards. Rather than rushing to assimilate or adapt, Changez chooses to stand out. He says, “I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry” (Hamid, 2008, 148). Not shaving off his beard simply indicates that he is unwilling to please anybody anymore, or to pretend to be who he is not. The beard symbolizes his defiance and his disrespect for American values. It is also a sign that he is proud of where he comes from. Where his colleagues attempt to look the same,

Changez uses his appearance to manifest his difference. His decision represents a shift, he is no longer striving to fit into America, but instead asserting his own identity and beliefs. Hamid takes issue with the Orientalist notion of the East as something fixed and dangerous requiring control. The beard turns out to be a metaphor for this shift, it makes him visibly different and frightening. Such fear amounts to paranoia and lust, and reflects all the West's deep-seated fears where the East is concerned. After the September 11 attacks, Changez's identity no longer fits within what is understood as American, he is forever Other.

Changez starts to see the world including America through new eyes following the attacks of 9/11. When most Americans are mourning, he begins to pay attention to what he notices as their double standards in foreign policy. Changez understands that America does not simply use its power to protect itself but rather to dominate and punish others, especially those in Muslim-majority nations and says, "why America felt justified in bringing so many deaths to Afghanistan and Iraq, why America felt justified in risking so many more deaths by tacitly using India to pressure Pakistan" (Hamid, 2008, 203). These questions illustrate the lens through which Changez views America as a country that seizes weak countries under its influence and presents itself as a victim. He feels increasingly angry and betrayed, especially when he sees the war on TV. Watching the violence unfold so near his own home country makes everything more personal: "Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbor . . . a fellow Muslim nation . . . and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen [Americans] caused me to tremble with fury" (Hamid, 2008, 113–114). The emotional response becomes an identity formation point for Changez. According to Fanon, these moments, when colonized people see injustice, can be a deeply profound kind of awakening. Fanon describes this as part of "decolonization," which is more than just releasing oneself physically from colonization but also releasing the ways in which colonized peoples are taught to see themselves in the world.

Changez's resistance adopts a more serious face when he quits working at Underwood Samson, the influential American company in which he was once employed. He is a true believer in the beginning of the novel in their philosophy of "fundamentals" and "margins." Conversely, in the end, Changez decides he can no longer maintain such a system: "All I knew was that my days of focusing on fundamentals were done" (Hamid, 2008, 175). This act of stepping away from his job is an obvious rebellion against the

corporate values of America that he sees that these values are about more than money; they are also about global hegemony. He refuses to be part of a world system in which economic power determines the fate of weaker countries (and he is a product of one such country, Pakistan). In other words; this act is his form of resistance.

Meanwhile, Changez grows more politically active as he returns to Lahore. He becomes a university teacher, gives speeches to students about the need to resist American influence and confesses, "I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine . . . our gatherings grew to newsworthy size, come to label anti-American" (Hamid, 2008, 203). This guidance is designed to train young minds to think critically about Pakistan's relations with America. He also participates in demonstrations and advises students, all part of what Fanon calls the increase of "national consciousness," when people band together to struggle for their own destiny. Then one of the protests turns violent, and Changez says: "Effigies were burned and stones were thrown, and then we were charged at by large numbers of uniformed and plain-clothed police. Scuffles broke out, I intervened in one, and as a result I spent the night in prison, nursing a bloody lip and bruised knuckles" (Hamid, 2008, 204). This is a moment that here illustrates the fact that resistance is not always a clean or noble business, that it is full of mess and suffering. Hamid puts forth this complexity to remind readers that there are no simple responses to the struggle against oppression.

Hamid makes a quite different claim about the resistance of the colonized to the colonizer than does Frantz Fanon. Whereas Fanon believes in violent resistance for decolonization (Fanon, 2001, 27–28), Hamid, in the language of Changez, suggests an alternative approach that is intellectual, personal, and non-violent: "I am a believer in nonviolence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense . . . I am no ally of killers; I am simply a university lecturer, nothing more nor less" (Hamid, 2008, 206). Changez says that he does not disregard acts of violence or terrorism. Instead of acts of violence or terrorism, Changez's method of resistance is education and ideas. In identifying himself as being a university lecturer, he stands out as a man who battles with knowledge and not with arms. This is a powerful form of resistance, especially in a postcolonial context. He is daring to challenge the power of the West and dominations not as a war dealer but as a truth teller, as an educator. This is connected to decolonization, too. For Changez, using his voice and his place to challenge Western dominance and "superiority"

and to assist others to think critically, without becoming violent himself, is crucial. The Iranian-American scholar Hamid Dabashi (1951-), in *Brown Skin, White Masks*, writes: "Home is where you hold your horses, hang your hat and above all raise your voice in defiance and say no to oppression" (Dabashi, 2011, 23). This concept that "home" should be a source of resistance, not comfort, is echoed in Changez's path. At first, he embraces the American Dream, doing well at Princeton and getting a fashionable job. In the wake of 9/11, he struggles with increasing racism and alienation, however. Changez's transformation enacts Dabashi's postcolonial paradigm of identity, the idea that it is in resistance against domination and injustice that genuine belonging can be felt.

The act of narrating his story to an American listener is a kind of resistance in itself. Changez is very much in charge of the narrative throughout, and in doing so has managed to confront the listener with something to think about rather than just something to listen to. He speaks to the American listener: "Your ears must be exhausted; the time has come to employ your tongue" (Hamid, 2008, 87). This statement inverts the normal power relationship. No longer the one being interrogated, Changez demands that the American answer his questions. This is a trick that, for Said, derived from his notion of the "contrapuntal" approach; it lets the marginalized voices answer back to and contest overarching narratives (Said, 1994, 66).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist concludes in an intentionally ambiguous way. We do not know if the American is an assassin, or even just paranoid. Yet this cognitive conflict is itself a kind of resistance. It confronts the Western desire for tidy conclusions, particularly when Changez says, "we are about to arrive at the gates of your hotel. It is here that you and I shall at last part company. Perhaps our waiter wants to say goodbye as well, for he is rapidly closing in. Yes, he is waving at me to detain you" (Hamid, 2008, 209). The novel's ending is not only suspenseful; it is symbolic. It is a reflection of the ambiguous relationship between the East and the West, colonizer and colonized, in which fear, communication breakdown and distrust dominate. This is a kind of resistance that Changez exhibits throughout the novel.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid dramatizes Changez's transformation from a supporter of the Western system to someone who doubts and resists it. His dynamic identity is a postcolonial act of resistance. The analysis comes to the conclusion that Changez finds his true self in

articulating a way to free himself from how the West has colonized his mind and he turns his gaze inward and sheds the identity he once wore with pride. Additionally, the modes of storytelling, a one-sided conversation and an open ending indicate that the process of liberation is continuing. Changez never provides answers, only provocations for the American listener [Western people] to question his country's attitudes in his opinion. Through Changez, Mohsin Hamid suggests that true freedom is not in finding one stable identity, but in combining and transcending them which is a characteristic of globalization in the postmodern era. Eventually, the novel urges resistance, to stereotypes, to empire, to any force that dehumanizes people. Hamid uses Changez's journey to get readers to think about the binaries of "us" and "them," and he wants a world where identities are fluid and people are not dehumanized by stereotypes and empire. The study finds that the protagonist of the novel is certain about his ideological stance, but he remains unsettled on a personal level.

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