

## The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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### Abstract

*This paper examines how Muslims are harshly treated after the backlash of 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid's novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist and how they become victims and legitimate targets of hate crimes, negative media stereotypes, physical beatings, disappearance, racial profiling, interrogations at American airports, and detentions in secret places. It addresses how such treatment sheds light on the questions of Muslim integration in the American society, citizenship, multiculturalism, identity, and alienation, belonging, and national affiliation. It also disrupts the dominant American official discourse, which links Islam with terror and portrays Muslims as potential terrorists and a threat to America and values of Western civilization. I also argue that Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist offers a counter literary response not only to the American public rhetoric but also to the dominant literary discourses that prevailed after 9/11, inflamed the American sentiments, and consolidated stereotypes against Islam and Muslims. The study concludes that Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist renders a stark warning message, through its character (Changez) that the harsh treatment of Muslims, American domineering policies, and the blind War on Terror will force many ordinary Muslims to relinquish the American Dream, like Changez, and turn into radicals. The study also reveals that the American reaction toward Muslims after the tragic attacks on 9/11 have been blind, indiscriminate, and disproportionate to such an extent that the very concept of multiculturalism on which the American society is based is threatened. The American society will be prone to internal fissures and disintegration if they fail to accept the "Other" and fail to stop blaming all Muslims for few isolated tragic incidents that they are not actually responsible for. Finally, the research concludes that the mistreatment of Muslims, promotion of Islamophobia, and the War on Terror that followed 9/11 may lead to the exclusion and alienation of Muslims in America, disintegration of the American multicultural society, and the rise of Islamic radical groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.*

**Keywords:** Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Muslims, post-9/11 fiction, War on Terror

## **Introduction**

The 9/11 attacks<sup>1</sup> in the United States of America arguably mark a turning point in shaping America into pre- and post-9/11 America. There have been many changes following these tragic attacks, which have left their tragic impact on the Muslim world and affected the lives of Muslims and facilitated negative stereotypes about American Muslims, Arabs, and Islam. Hence, Islam and the Islamic world had subsequently become the target of President George Bush's "War on Terror,"<sup>2</sup> launched under the pretext of promoting democracy.

When it comes to the question of terror, terrorism can be coined as "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological purposes" (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.2). Yet, it is hard to pin down a definite definition of terrorism because there are many incidents that can be called terrorist actions, such as bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings. Furthermore, a person who is seen as a terrorist by one group of people may be viewed in the eyes of his own people as a freedom fighter. Therefore, terrorism is arguably an abstract enemy or a worldwide plague that has no definite borders.

The tragedy of September 11, 2001 has arguably fueled and given "the Bush administration an opening to assemble the required authority and public support to subdue the 'evil dictators' of the world" (Fouskas & Gokay, 2005, p.3). It is worthy to note that George Bush's War on Terror is based on exercising fear and directing ultimatums to the world. "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.13). In certain cases, without even a tangible threat, George Bush had reserved the right to use preemptive military force at any place in the world under the pretext of saving American lives and interests. For Bush, the military must be ready to "strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for pre-emptive action when necessary to defend liberty and our lives" (Fouskas & Gokay, 2005, p.3). One may understand that George Bush's policy was centered on fighting terror by military force wherever it exists and there is no immunity for persons and countries that harbor and commit terrorist actions. Since 2002, the U.S. government has officially adopted a neocolonial policy called the Bush Doctrine, "which is based on militarist and imperial values with theocratic overtones" (Fouskas & Gökay, 2005, p.3). Bush's commitment to fight terror includes "the assassination of terrorist and foreign leaders implicated in terrorism against Americans. This new commitment quickly came to fruition with the war in Afghanistan" (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.45). The new American neocolonial policy was also implemented as a justification for "an unprovoked war against Iraq by the neoconservative administration of the U.S. government" (Fouskas & Gökay, 2005, p.3)

Therefore, countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq became the hub of American military operations. Tragically, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not created the proclaimed viable and stable democracies. In contrast, Bush's War on Terror has left behind failed states such as

Afghanistan and Iraq, which divided the Arab world into two camps—moderate and radical. Millions of innocent people have been killed, wounded, disappeared, left homeless, and without a future (Ricks, 2007)

The American mainstream media's response to 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror is largely "simplistic and invidious" (Tolan, Valassopoulos & Spencer, 2013, p.330) and has left its disastrous impact on Muslims. Launching the War on Terror, accompanied by a negative American media campaign of misrepresentation and stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, has terribly affected the lives, safety, and future of millions of American Muslims living in the U.S. The American media has significantly promoted the culture of fear and suspicion among the Americans. It facilitates creating a phenomenon of an invisible and abstract enemy called terror. This means that once America is attacked, it will be hit again by terrorists (Boehmer & Morton 2010).

Islam and Muslims are negatively represented as potential threats to the stability and democratic values of the American society. The U.S. media has "stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century" (Alsultany, 2012, p.2). For example, American media outfits such as Fox News and CNN have always been a reliable source that has inflamed the feelings of antagonism of Americans against Islam and Muslims. They continuously air programs that portray Muslims as terrorist threats and simultaneously show the American government's heroic deeds that save the American lives and nation (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). Therefore, Muslims are portrayed as fundamentals until they prove otherwise or till they order our beer or their girls show up in miniskirts (Reese, 2007).

In regard to the discourse of blame and scapegoating of Muslims, Lori Peek writes that the 9/11 tragic attacks "left those who shared a common ethnic or religious identity with the hijackers—who, it would quickly be discovered, were all Arab Muslim men—feeling fearful and isolated"(2011). Consequently, Arabs and Muslim Americans have become the targets of violence, harassment, racism, stringent government surveillance, and racial profiling, and hate crimes. In a post-9/11 America, Muslims not only become alienated but also concerned about their safety at home and that of their relatives abroad. Yet, it seems ironic to demonize and render as "Other" Muslims in a country such as the U.S., which always boasts of being a democratic country and insists that all its citizens are equal before law. On the contrary, democracy is exclusively seen as the American way of life while Islam is associated with terrorism and violence. In this regard, Jane Mummery and Debbie Rodon write that democracy is like a magic word with which America will be ready to go to war as a part of her globalized humanitarianism (2003). Muslims' feelings of fear, alienation, loss, identity crisis, and citizenship in post-9/11 America have become the focus of Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

### **The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

This paper examines how in Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Muslims are treated after the backlash of 9/11 and how they become victims and legitimate targets of hate crimes,

negative media stereotypes, physical beatings, disappearances, racial profiling, interrogations at American airports, and detentions in secret places. Furthermore, it addresses how such treatment sheds light on the questions of Muslim integration in American society, citizenship, multiculturalism, identity, and alienation, belonging, and national affiliation. It also disrupts the dominant discourse, which links Islam with terror and shows how Muslims are portrayed by the American official discourse and the media as potential terrorists and threats to America and the values of Western civilization. Within this context, my argument is how Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offers a counter literary response not only to the public rhetoric, but also to the dominant literary discourses that prevailed after 9/11. It also marks a departure in 9/11 fiction, and carries "a sharp critical edge and offers one of the first meaningful representations of 'otherness' in the canon of 9/11 fiction" (Keeble, 2014, p.115).

Post-9/11 public rhetoric has equated Islam with terror and this equation has permitted "the intermittent deportation of Muslim migrants and lent inevitability to the invasion not only of Afghanistan but also of Iraq" (Scanlan, 2013, p.22). In regard to fiction, there are several fictional narratives such as John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DE Lillo's *The Falling Man* (2007), and Alexie Sherman's *Flight* (2007), which have reinforced the dominant post-9/11 rhetoric. We find that these novels focus, from an American perspective, on themes such as loss, insecurity, American identity, trauma, fear, anger, suspicion, terror, and Islam. These narratives have also contributed to inflaming the American sentiments and consolidating stereotypes against Islam and Muslims, facilitating the creation of a state of Islamophobia.<sup>3</sup> Post-9/11 literature portrays Muslims from the East as either radical suicide bombers who hate America and the West or confused disturbed personalities. The Islamic world is negatively represented and the East is constructed to look as a safe haven for terrorists (Lanker, 2013).

Furthermore, both public rhetoric and literary fictional narratives have fueled George Bush's War on Terror. In this regard, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton write that the corpus of literature that has emerged after 9/11 is arguably complicit with the global War on Terror agenda led by the U.S., which is heavily based on Orientalist discourse (2010). Furthermore, terror, which is, in fact, a manifestation of a long history of Western colonization, subordination, and oppression of the Muslim world, is strangely presented as a cause rather than an effect. Having said this, the significance of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is manifested in its aim to challenge negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims by painting a personalized, insightful portrait of a "potential" Muslim terrorist (Shlezinger, 2010). It also lies in rendering an alternative disruptive literary response to the neocolonial discourse, which has been the driving force behind the mistreatment of Muslims and the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of fighting terror.

From a Muslim perspective, Hamid portrays the psychological, emotional, moral, and physical impact of 9/11 on Muslims through his character, Changez, a Muslim Pakistani immigrant who lived in America for a few years before leaving for Pakistan after the backlash of 9/11. The structure and form of *the Reluctant Fundamentalist* is heavily influenced by the *Fall* by Albert Camus—a modern narrative that includes one man's speech to a anonymous listener (Shlezinger, 2010). The narrative

begins in the form of a monologue between Changez and an unnamed American visitor in Lahore's old Anarakali bazar in Pakistan. It is worthy of note that the American tourist, or who is believed to be a CIA agent, is silent throughout the entire novel except for facial expressions and physical gestures. In his interview with Deborah Solomon, Mohsin Hamid explains that the fact why the American is silent in most of the novel, "in a world of [...] the American media, it's almost always the other way around; representatives of the Islamic world 'mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves'" (2007, p.1). Hamid says that he has carefully chosen his literary device as "a necessary reaction to the dominance of U.S. interests, media coverage and perspectives in the global war on terrorism. It was time to give the stage to some other perspective" (Lee, 2014, p.345). By making his character, Changez, narrate his whole story to the silent American visitor, Mohsin Hamid wants symbolically to tell that it is time for Muslims to speak about themselves and their experiences since they are always misrepresented, underrepresented, and misunderstood in the Western world.

Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, tackles how the backlash of 9/11 has affected the lives of Muslim immigrants who have left their home countries to work, get educated, integrate, and embrace the American Dream. For Changez, 9/11 has dealt a fatal blow to the American Dream he embraced. This may also reflect that the status of immigrant Muslims has irreparably changed. Changez stands as an example of a successful American Pakistani who has integrated into American society. He is educated at a prestigious university, Princeton, works in one of the most influential financial companies in Manhattan, Samson Underwood, and has a beautiful American girlfriend, Erica.

Changez narrates how international students in the U.S., like him, are selected through a rigorous testing system and interviews from around every corner of the world and "sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations interviews, essays, recommendations until the best and the brightest of us had been identified" (Hamid, 2008, p.178).<sup>4</sup> Being one of the best and brilliant students in his class, Changez is selected through a painstaking testing system to work in Samson Underwood. International students, such as Changez, are awarded scholarships, issued visas, and financial assistance. They are expected, in return, to contribute to the American society. "In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first" (p.178).

However, the 9/11 attacks put the concept of American multiculturalism and the so-called melting pot to test and whether post-9/11 America is tolerant towards minorities like Muslims people who have embraced the American dream and cultural values ." (Khan 2011). According to Anna Hartnell, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* questions the sacrifices needed to be made if one really belongs to America, its system of values, and analyzes how one can be American following the tragic events of 9/11 (2013).\_These attacks have also shed light on the questions of identity, citizenship, and loyalty. For instance, what are you, either Muslim or American, and to whom you owe your loyalty? They also pose contentious questions to American Muslims, such as will you act passive when the American government of your new adoptive home attacks your country of origin or a neighboring Muslim country such as Afghanistan and Iraq? What is your attitude toward the hate



campaign, which sinisterly targets Islam and portrays it as a religion of terror? What is your next move when you feel alienated, discriminated against, stripped, humiliated at the American airports and treated with disgust and suspicion? What is your response when you see your fellow Muslim colleagues are beaten, humiliated, and sent to unknown detention centers all over the world? What is your answer when you see that the world is divided by the American Empire along the malicious lines of either with “us” or “them” in their War against Terror? Besides these questions, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* examines the psychological, cultural, social, moral, and ethical intricacies confronted by Muslims in post-9/11 America, who have inhabited two hybrid cultures. For example, Changez’s hybrid position as a Pakistani migrant in America after 9/11 invites a host of questions, such as: has Changez’s integration into the American society been adequate enough to turn a blind eye to American foreign policies toward his home country, Pakistan? Does Changez’s prestigious education and work position leave any space for national affiliation and patriotism?

To elaborate, if we examine the title of the novel, we find the word “fundamentalist,” though there is neither any reference to religion nor to the main character, Changez, who is not a religious man. He is, in fact, a man who has embraced the American Dream without any qualms. In regard to fundamentalism, Robert Spencer and Anastasia Valassopoulos write that it imposes a dogmatic attitude to the inviolability of a particular attitude (2013). But fundamentalism can take different forms since there are economic and political fundamentalisms as well (Morss, 2003). Therefore, fundamentalism cannot only be associated with Islamic extremism, but also with American capitalism. Put differently, fundamentalism is not reserved solely for extreme religious dogma, but includes other ideologies such as “the neo-liberalism that characterized the Bush administration” (Randall, 2011, p.16). Both fundamentalism and capitalism nurture greed, domination, hegemony, and violence (Young, 2001). For example, in terms of the fundamental form of capitalism, Changez’s employer, Jim, exhorts his employees mercilessly to “focus on the fundamentals.” This term is used as Underwood Samson’s guiding economic principle which means “single-minded attention to financial details, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value” (p. 98). Later, Changez comes to know the true meaning of strict adherence to the economic fundamentals of his company, Underwood Samson, which is simply suggestive of the American economic control and domination all over the world. Changez is even surprised that it has taken him this long to understand and reach such a conclusion that he cannot be part of project of domination. “It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision”(p.177). Changez does not want to be part of the American Empire and its policy of domination, which controls the lives of poor people in developing countries.

In another incident, we find Changez rejoicing while watching the 9/11 attacks on television when on a business trip in Manila. Though his reaction is unacceptable, it forces us to examine the real motive behind it.

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I

continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one and then the other of 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. (p.83)

Changez's unconscious reaction seems to be contradictory to his commitment to the American Dream, which has been clearly manifested. Changez does not know himself "why part of him desired harm to a country that had educated and employed him" (Scanlan, 2013, p.32). For example, Changez has never been personally at war with America. He has been educated at Princeton, works at a successful financial company, and is in love with an American girl, Erica. Therefore, what pleases Changez is not the slaughter of innocent civilians where "citizens from many more than ninety nations perished as a consequence of 9/11" (Peek, 2011, p.18). But it seems what amuses him is the paradox that he discovers in himself—part of him is completely integrated and the other unconscious part awakens suddenly, at this particular moment, and realizes that "someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (p.83). It is also important to note that the places attacked on 9/11 are icons of the American Empire, its sovereignty, and hegemony all over the world. For Lori Peek, "The violent assaults were designed to be spectacular in their destruction of symbols of U.S. economic, military, and political power" (2011, p.22). Choosing these symbols for an attack was also meant to convey a psychological and figurative message that the Empire can be penetrated at home, attacked and hit in the belly.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also reflects on Changez's initial infatuation, and later disillusionment, with America (Lasdon, 2007). For Changez, it is a love-hate relationship with America or a kind of "a reluctant animosity" attributed to the impact of 9/11 on Muslims and how they are badly treated. The 9/11 attacks had fully served the George Bush administration, which was looking for demons to pursue its political and economic interests. Within this context, Fouskas and Gökay argue that "Islamic terrorism is seen as a demon, which America is looking for to use it as a cover up slogan to advance its political and economic hegemony over all the world" (2005, p.233). Bush's War on Terror is, therefore, viewed with skepticism and seen as a manufactured device to serve U.S. political and economic interests in Asia and the Middle East. The 9/11 attacks have, undoubtedly, left a deep impact on the lives of the American Muslims and the way they are seen by the American public. In the aftermath of the tragic attacks, Muslims have experienced "a dramatic increase in the frequency and intensity of these hostile encounters such as verbal harassment; violent threats and intimidation; physical assault; religious profiling; and employment, educational, and housing discrimination" (Peek, 2011, p.16). There are also certain official policies adopted by George W. Bush's administration, such as racial profiling, the Patriot Act,<sup>5</sup> detention, investigation at American airports, wiretapping, monitoring the movement and activities of Muslim American groups, such as charity associations and assemblies. For example, once Changez returns, along with his work team, after his business trip in Manila, to America, he surprisingly encounters a new post-9/11 America. At the airport, Changez has felt humiliated and degraded when he is interrogated and asked to strip down to his boxer shorts while his American colleagues are asked to leave decently—an action that makes Changez feel that he is less than an American. The conversation that Changez has

with the American immigration officer is effectively suggestive that life in America, for him and other Muslims, has drastically changed:

When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners. The officer who inspected my passport was a solidly built woman with a pistol at her hip and a mastery of English inferior to mine; I attempted to disarm her with a smile. What is the purpose of your trip to the United States? she asked me. I live here, I replied. That is not what I asked you, sir, she said. What is the purpose of your trip to the United States? Our exchange continued in much this fashion for several minutes. In the end I was dispatched for a secondary inspection in a room where I sat on a metal bench next to a tattooed man in handcuffs. (p.86)

Changez's American colleagues had not even waited for him and had left. "My team did not wait for me; by the time I entered the customs hall they had already collected their suitcases and left. As a consequence, I rode to Manhattan that evening very much alone" (Hamid, 2008, p.86). While riding to Manhattan alone, Changez notices the first signs of the new post-9/11 America and the overwhelming symbols of American nationalism and patriotism everywhere. According to Mohan Ramanan, "9/11 also manufactured a new American nationalism, which enabled the US to see itself as innocent in relation to the demonic other, but this was after all only a variation of the old theme of American exceptionalism" (2010, p.126).

New York is suddenly adorned with American flags and symbols of "duty" and "honor." An atmosphere which makes Changez feel strangely that he is no longer living in modern New York but at a place which belongs to the Second World War. It "was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War." (pp.130–131)

Such experiences make Changez realize that many Americans have lost their sense of empathy and understanding for innocent Muslims. His disappointment stems from the fact that Americans' hostile reaction toward Muslims puts them equally at the same level with the radical ones who committed the attacks of 9/11. It is the post-9/11 America that makes Changez feel disappointed and frustrated with the American people he "has grown to admire over the process of his cultural assimilation (Khan, 2011, p.94). Changez tells the American visitor that,

As a society you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you [...] the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away (p.109)

Changez's words are a critique of the American official blind policy of War on Terror, which has inflicted an unnecessary pain on millions of Muslim people in Afghanistan and Iraq. They also refer to the fact that the Americans can only see their own sufferings and pain while turning a blind eye to the endless sufferings of others.

Furthermore, Hamid's novel, "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," conveys a message that the personal is political and the political is personal and it is hard to separate them since both are



intertwined. For instance, while riding home, Changez sees America shrouded with American flags, mourning, pain, fear, and anger. He has simultaneously felt “the crumbling of the world around [him] and the including destruction of [his] personal American dream” (p.106). It reflects on the fear felt by Muslims and their concerns about their safety since they become relentlessly targeted.<sup>6</sup> Even though Changez tries hard to separate what happened on 9/11 from his personal American Dream, the reality of the post-9/11 America is rapidly changing. We notice that Changez does not even want to believe that his American Dream starts crumbling as the world collapses around him. “I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream” (p.106). But the changing reality of the post-9/11 America can explicitly be seen in the unexplained and sudden disappearance of Muslim Pakistani drivers from places such as the Pak-Punjab Deli in New York. The Pakistani drivers’ mysterious absence has left the door open for speculation about their fate.

Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. (p.107)

Muslim men are targeted and sometimes disappear without any trace.<sup>7</sup> This may be attributed to the Patriot Act, which is a legislation enacted by the Congress to investigate and prosecute suspected terrorists. It has authorized the American authorities to intensify electronic surveillance on means of communication, disclose emails, tap wire phone calls, monitor and search suspects’ homes without any prior notification or court permission (Hafetz, 2011).

Later, Changez finds out that he is mistaken to think that American counter violence and anger against Muslims is only reserved for extremist Muslims, but not for moderates like himself. Actually, he sees himself as a successful Princeton graduate, culturally assimilated to the American society, and immune to American counter violence. But it is a moment of epiphany for Changez when he is attacked by Americans due to his Muslim identity. He realizes that what he thinks of himself as a guarded person is merely an illusion. Changez experiences a series of hate crimes such as verbal abuse, finding his cars car’s tires punctured, telephone lines disrupted, and physically threatened.

I was approached by a man I did not know [...] just then another man appeared; he, too, glared at me, but took his friend by the arm and tugged at him, saying it was not worth it. Reluctantly, the first allowed himself to be led away. ‘Fucking Arab,’ he said. My blood throbbed in my temples, and I called out, ‘Say it to my face coward, not as you run and hide.’ (p.134)

For the first time, Changez loses his usual decent composure and feels wrath raging inside him at this particular moment of challenge. Changez is seen to “unplug a tire iron from his boot and capable of wielding it with sufficient force to shatter the bones of his American abuser’s skull. The men remain in this position for a ‘few murderous seconds’ ” (p.134). These incidents have accelerated Changez’s emotional and psychological alienation in his relationship with his American colleagues at work. They, in fact, pave the way for his process of transformation from being a lover of the

American culture and values to an activist who is critical of the American policy and its blind campaign of War on Terror waged against Islam and Muslims in the name of democracy and civilization.

After 9/11, Changez finds himself trapped in a place where Muslims are treated with suspicion and Islam is increasingly linked to terrorism and evil. The rapid changes in American society have made Changez, as an American Muslim, feel alienated and unwanted. He experiences inner psychological struggles to find out where he belongs exactly—to either the American society, which treats him as a potential threat, or to his home country, Pakistan. It is also worthy of note that Pakistan, a Muslim country, is traditionally portrayed by the American foreign policy as a safe haven for terrorists and a launching pad for terrorist attacks against American interests. Consequently, Changez loathes himself for being disloyal to his home country, Pakistan, to the extent of comparing himself to a Muslim “Janissary.” Metaphorically speaking, he compares himself to the Christian boys who served the Ottoman Empire to fight against their own people. Changez similarly considers himself as a servant who serves the American Empire against his own Muslim people and fellow brothers. Changez “had thrown in his lot [...] with the officers of the empire, when all along I was disposed to feel compassion for those [...] whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain”(p.152). A comparison, infused by a sense of betrayal, has served as a turning point in Changez’s life and a moment of revelation too. For example, during Changez’s business trip to close an unprofitable company, Valparaiso, Chile, the manager of the company, Juan Bautista, compares him to Janissaries. He refers to Janissaries who served the Ottomans to erase their own civilization.

He tipped the ash of his cigarette onto a plate. How old were you when you went to America? he asked. I went for college, I said. I was eighteen. Ah, much older, he said. The janissaries were always taken in childhood. It would have been far more difficult to devote themselves to their adopted empire, you see, if they had memories they could not forget. (p.173).

Bautista’s words make Changez feel degraded that he is merely a servant, serving and facilitating the American Empire to dominate and control the world financially. Sudden feelings of infuriation, shame, and betrayal, toward his own Muslim people and home country, have gripped and made make him realize that he is no longer “capable of so through a self-deception” (p.114). Changez’s transformed personality is manifested through venting his suppressed political opinions and feelings toward post-9/11 America. He tells the American visitor how he resents the American foreign policy and how America conducts itself as the lone supreme power by interfering in every zone of the world and dictating its own terms:

I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. Moreover, I knew from my experience as a Pakistani of alternating periods of American

aid and sanctions that fi knew was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. (p.177)

Changez elaborates on how the U.S. dictates its own policy and agenda through exercising its financial and military influence. It is the American stick and carrot policy, which means either financial aid in return for domination or financial and military sanctions in return for disobedience. Mohsin Hamid makes it clear that it is the neocolonial policy of America around the world that has fostered tensions between Americans and the Muslim world. He also shows how the American culture is based on a sense of superiority among the Americans and their arrogant attitude toward the “Other” and how post-9/11 America becomes increasingly intolerant toward the Other people of different races, cultures, and religions. Changez’s personal experience, combined with his political consciousness, makes him rightly believe that, “it was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision” (p.177)

In post-9/11 America, Changez has considerably lost his national and cultural bonds with America while he becomes drawn toward reaffirming his national and cultural bond with his native country, Pakistan. His strong desire to leave post-9/11 America and its insufferable treatment toward Muslims makes him purchase his first-class ticket and leave home. Changez is not simply alienated, but his isolation suggests that America fails to live up to its “self- understanding as a post-colonial nation, while still acknowledging its potential to be an ‘exceptional’ melting-pot” (Hartnell, 2010, p.346). The process of Changez’s reassimilation has been hard since he initially sees everything in Pakistan through his American eyes. For example, he has felt sad and ashamed seeing the miserable and poor condition of his parents’ home. “I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flby ho off where dampness had entered its walls” (p.141). But with time, he comes to understand that such comparison is unfair and one requires a different way of looking, taking into account the political, economic, cultural, and religious, social, and historical differences between the two countries. “a re-visitation of ‘home’ after a prolonged period of time requires a ‘different way of *observing*’—I recall the American ness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing” (p.140). Changez’s initial feelings of shame are quickly replaced by his deep appreciation that his house remained largely unchanged during his stay in the U.S. “It occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed” (p. 141). He comes to appreciate the rich cultural history that his home symbolizes, a sensation which makes him feel proud of being a Pakistani. “It was far from impoverished; indeed it was rich with history” (p.142).

Changez’s leaving New York to settle in Lahore and work as radical lecturer at a university arguably marks Changez’s complete transformation. We find him advocate the disengagement of Pakistan from America and criticize the American foreign policy toward Pakistan in particular, and the Muslim world in general. For instance, Changez is even vocal at the mysterious disappearance of one of his students who is believed to be mistaken for being a terrorist and taken away to “a secret detention facility, no doubt, in some lawless limbo between our country and mine” (p.206).

Changez is resentful and critical of governments such as those of America, which behave as if they are above the international laws, accountability, and can violate laws and human rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism (Carasik, 2015) He is no longer able to bear and turn a blind eye to America's national and political hypocrisy. He is courageous enough to say on a news channel that "no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, fighters, so many people so far away, as America" (p.207). Besides his critique of America's biased and hypocritical policies, Changez has led demonstrations demanding autonomous Pakistani politics far away from the American imposing policies. Changez's political activism against the American hegemony and its war against terror, which has left millions of people killed, injured, and homeless in Afghanistan and Iraq, has deemed him as an anti-American.

At the end of the novel, Changez notices that there is a "glint of metal in the American's jacket pocket," (p.209) while shaking his hand. It is unclear whether the American visitor is a tourist or a CIA agent tracking Changez as a potential threat to the security of America and its interests. But Changez is quick to assure him that he does not believe in violence and spilling blood. He is simply a university teacher who speaks the truth to power and enlighten his own students about the reality of this world. "I am a believer in non-violence; 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 or less" (p. 206). Changez uses nonviolent means in his critique of America, relying on the same logic and reason used in the Western nations that pride themselves on democracy and civilization.

## Conclusion

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* renders a warning message through his character, Changez, that the American domestic and international policies toward Muslims and the Islamic world after 9/11, if not changed, will turn ordinary Muslims such as Changez into radicals, and violence will breed violence. It also finds out that the American domineering policies and its blind War on Terror will force many ordinary Muslims to relinquish the American Dream, like Changez, and convert them into radicals. Furthermore, the American reaction toward Muslims after the 9/11 tragic attacks has been blind, indiscriminate, and disproportionate to such an extent that even the people of different nationalities were killed because they resembled Muslims. The study also finds out that by mistreating, targeting, and alienating Muslims, one is hitting hard at the concept of multiculturalism on which the American society is based. Hence, American society will be prone to internal fissures and disintegration if they fail to accept the "Other" and fail to stop blaming all Muslims for a few isolated tragic incidents that they are not actually responsible for. It is also the right time to stop targeting Muslims after the backlash of 9/11, taking into account that Muslims constitute an important component of the American society, particularly, and Europe, in general. This paper concludes that the mistreatment of Muslims, promotion of Islamophobia, and the War on Terror that followed 9/11 may lead to the exclusion and alienation of Muslims in America and explain the rise of ISIS.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Hamid renders a message that many Muslims, like Changez, want to live in peace,

dignity, and prosperity like all other human beings in the world and it is the right time to facilitate such a healthy environment for them before it is too late.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more details on September attacks on the United States, see, Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (2003). *In the wake of 9/11: Rising above the terror*. Washington: American Psychological Association; B. Lambert, J. (2002). *9-11 America under Attack*. Bloomington: Author House; Gunaratna, R. (2002). *Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the War on Terror, please see Acharya, A. (2013). *Ten Years After 9/11: Rethinking the Jihadist Threat*. London: Routledge; Ahmed, A. S. (2013). *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press; Holland, J. (2012). *Selling the war on terror: Foreign policy discourses after 9/11*. London: Routledge; Herman, S. N. (2011). *Taking liberties: The war on terror and the erosion of American democracy*. Oxford University Press; Owens, J. E., & Pelizzo, R. (Eds.). (2010). *The War on Terror" and the Growth of Executive Power?": A Comparative Analysis*. London: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Islamophobia, please see Ernst, C. W. (Ed.). (2013). *Islamophobia in America: the anatomy of intolerance*. Palgrave Macmillan; Helbling, M. (2012). *Islamophobia in Western Europe and North America: Measuring and Explaining Individual Attitudes*. London: Taylor & Francis; Sheehi, S. (2011). *Islamophobia: the ideological campaign against Muslims*. CA: SCB Distributors ;Nimer, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies*. Beltsville: Amana publications.

<sup>4</sup> All references will be henceforth taken from Hamid, M. (2008). *The reluctant fundamentalist*. London: Penguin.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on the Patriot Act, please see Etzioni, A. (2005). *How patriotic is the Patriot Act?: freedom versus security in the age of terrorism*. London: Routledge; Kerr, O. S. (2003). Internet surveillance law after the USA Patriot Act: The big brother that isn't. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 97; Evans, J. C. (2001). Hijacking Civil Liberties: The USA Patriot Act of 2001. *Loy. U. Chi. LJ*, 33, 933.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on hate crimes committed against Muslims and who look like Muslims after 9/11, please see, Disha, I., Cavendish, J. C., & King, R. D. (2011). Historical events and spaces of hate: Hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 America. *Social problems*, 58(1), 21-46; Singh, A. (2002). *"We are Not the Enemy": Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims, and Those Perceived to be Arab Or Muslim After September 11* (Vol. 14, No. 6). Human Rights Watch; Perry, B.



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<sup>7</sup> For more information on secret places of detention and black sites, see Jenkins, D., Jacobsen, A., & Henriksen, A. (Eds.). (2014). *The Long Decade: How 9/11 Changed the Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Bakir, V. (2013). *Torture, Intelligence and Sousveillance in the War on Terror: Agenda-building Struggles*. London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd; Clarke, A. (2012). *Rendition to Torture*. Rutgers University Press; Hafetz, J. (2011). *Habeas Corpus after 9/11: Confronting America's New Global Detention System*. New York:NYU Press; Forsythe, D. P. (2011). *The politics of prisoner abuse: The United States and enemy prisoners after 9/11*. Cambridge: Cambridge. Woodward, B. (2007) *State of Denial: Bush at War III*. New York: Simon &Schuster.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on ISIS, The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, please see Sekulow, J. (2014). *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore*. New York: Simon and Schuster; Cockburn, P. (2015). *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. London: Verso Books; Hesterman, J. (2014). *Soft Target Hardening: Protecting People from Attack*. Florida: CRC Press.

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