Muslim Speaks Back: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a Counter Cultural Narrative

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The first two decades of twenty-first century witnessed an unprecedented surge in the depictions of Islam and Muslims in the literary fiction in English. This renewed interest is understandably part of the changing perception of the Islam and Muslims after the 9/11 incidents. The fictional works that display resurgent curiosity in dealing with Islam are to be treated as intellectual responses to the 9/11 events and the resultant mounting suspicion of the members of the community, particularly in the Western mind. Besides, such portrayals often result from and amount to the growing 'Islamophobia' across the world. Further, the attention gained by the religion and its members in the changing global political climate can also be treated as part of the renegotiations of the discourse of Islam. Although Islam has been talked about and debated over centuries, the discourse of the threat posed by the religion and the consequential enhanced surveillance of Muslims is a post 9/11 development, and it not only created a consciousness of being consistently watched for wrong reasons among the members of the community but also occasioned in their introspective (and often defensive) repositioning of themselves as exemplified by some of their counter-cultural intellectual responses like cultural artefacts. British-Pakistani novelist, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a typical post 9/11 novel that affords an analysis of the aforementioned changes in the discourse of Islam.

ISSN:2582-550X

The novel, while bearing witness to the changes in the perception of the religion by the 'insiders' as well as 'onlookers', arguably attempts to contest the dominant discourse of Islam in the post 9/11 politico-cultural context. This paper is an attempt to read Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with the objective of examining how the novelist challenges the dominant discourses on Islam and the Muslims that emerged in the post 9/11 political and cultural context.

The trajectory of the production of the entire body of the novels on 9/11 shows that fictional responses to the 9/11 were varied and manifested in conflicting ways in terms of thematic concerns, approach and spirit. The initial response to the tragedy was rather a silence arising from the impact of trauma and shock. As the Arab-American poet, Suheir Hammad confessed in her "First Writing Since", "(t)here have been no words/ I have not written one word./no poetry in the ashes south of canal street./ no prose in the refrigerated trucks driving debris and dna./ not one word" (2). Barring the initial media coverage and a few subsequent personal memoirs and poems by victims and witnesses, there were no significant literary responses in the first six months. Immediately after the shock, a discourse of trauma was in the making with the responses of the media, the political leaders and the public rhetoric fuelled by the ideas of American exceptionalism, innocence, and extreme patriotism. As Ann E. Kaplan puts it, "national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived" (13). Later, as a result of the stories telecast in the media, the event assumed the status of a 'historic world event.'

The ensuing years of 9/11 witnessed the surfacing of literary productions, often referred to by scholars like Keeble and Petrovik as '9/11 canon', which "spoke about the events in memorialising and even sacralising ways" (Randall16). Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006*),*Jessy Walters's *The Zero* (2006) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005)*,* were prominent among the fictional works that focused on themes like victimhood, patriotism and sacralisation and "revolved around the private lives of white, upper-middle class Americans who have been traumatized by the 9/11 attacks" (Eikonsalo 80), with a total disregard to the political, economic and social contexts that led to

the tragedy. Besides, these novels often abound in reductive discourses about the 'Muslim Other' which amount to a reiteration of clichéd prejudices and stereotypes in the Orientalist scholarship. That is, Muslims were represented as perpetrators of violence and terror and Muslim countries were depicted as breeding centres of terrorism.

Destabilising the stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in these novels, there appeared a number of works by transnational writers and those with a Middle East background. Keniston and Quinn note that "early works often attempt to directly capture and convey the events of 9/11 and emotional responses to the events; as time has passed, the approach to the attacks has become more nuanced" (3). Supporting this, Véronique Bragard, Christophe Dony, and Warren Rosenberg observed that after the initial shock, many writers presented "counter-narratives" to the official dominant 9/11 discourse (3). Works like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Leila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land,* Amy Waldman's *The Submission* are the major works that challenge the hegemonic narratives of the 9/11 event.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist takes issues with the varied concerns central to the dominant discourses on Islam that surfaced in the aftermath of 9/11 event. The novel relates the story of Changez, a Muslim professional in America, before and after 9/11. In sharp contrast to the novels like John Updike's *Terrorist,* Jess Walter's *The Hero* (2006), Don Delillo *The Falling Man* (2007), and Alexie Sherman's *Flight* (2007) that fictionally responded to the event of 9/11 from the perspective of the traumatised victims, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* looks at the same from the perspective of Muslims whose normal lives were thrown out of gear in the wake of the tragedy owing to their racial and religious identity. That is, as a fallout of the 9/11 event, the Muslims were admittedly made victims of hate crimes, bias incidents, workplace harassment and airline discrimination which rarely figured in the dominant post 9/11 narratives. Here, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* marks a departure by giving voice to the Muslim Other, in an apparent attempt to reverse the general trend.

Rendered in a framed narrative, the novel provocatively silences the voice of the American listener and provides the Muslim

protagonist an unequivocal space to speak for himself and his community, whose voices were otherwise silenced and rendered inarticulate in the post 9/11 narratives. Asked in an interview why the American is silent in the novel, Mohsin Hamid explains that, "in a world of […] the American media, it's almost always the other way round; representatives of the Islamic world 'mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves'" (Solomon). 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 345).

The novel primarily addresses the meaning of being a Muslim in America in the post 9/11 scenario, which was characterised by public discourses that kept the whole community under suspicion. Subsequent to this tragic event allegedly perpetrated by somebody from the Muslim community, the novel seeks to foreground the fact that the majority of the Muslim community had to encounter varied types of Othering as there was "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 16). A well-orchestrated racial profiling was initiated by the state agency based on the external markers of identity like names, beard, turban and the dress that understandably attempted to present the community as a threat to the national security. For instance, Changez who was working for a reputed company called Underwood Samson in a high post and comfortably leading a happy life of "American dream" began to be perceived with unjustified paranoia and mistrust immediately after the event. Security measures were beefed up by the state in the wake of 9/11 and Changez had his first experience of racial segregation when he was detained at the airport for detailed examination while coming back after a business trip from Manila. He says,

> When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners. 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?"... 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 85-86).

The security checkpoints of the nation were all on alert after the event and Changez felt that "there was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as duty and honor" (130). It was virtually a new America emerging as Changez felt that "Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War" (131). Thereafter, the frequent cases of mysterious disappearances of Muslims were reported and racial profiling became so common in work and public places which didn't spare even the liberal Muslims. Narrating his encounter with two persons at his workplace, he says,

> Once I was walking to my rental car in the parking lot of the cable company when I was approached by a man I did not know. He made a series of unintelligible noises—"akhala-malakhala," perhaps, or "khalapal-kalapala"—and pressed his face alarmingly close to mine. [...]. Just then another man appeared; he, too, glared at me, [...]"Fucking Arab," he said. I am not, of course, an Arab. Nor am I, by nature, a gratuitously belligerent chap... We stood still for a few murderous seconds; then my antagonist was once again pulled at, and he departed muttering a string of obscenities. (133,34)

Alongside the introduction of rampant security measures, the novel unveils how America used a surveillance mechanism as a state apparatus to keep the immigrant Muslims under the watchful eyes of the State. With the help of The Patriot Act, a legislation enacted by the Congress to investigate and prosecute suspected terrorists, the American authorities intensified electronic surveillance on immigrants especially Muslims leaving many people with an "internment of the

psyche", which according to Nadine Naber worked like Foucault's "panopticism". Explaining the "internment of the psyche", Naber tells,

> The ways in which U.S. imperial structures took on local form in U.S. government practices and media discourses contributed to what I term a sense that one might be under scrutiny— by strangers, hidden cameras, wiretaps, and other surveillance mechanisms of the security state, as well as invisible arbiters of the legality and normality of behaviour, rendering them vulnerable to the "truths" contrived by the state—even if they were engaging in lawful activity"(40)[...]The internment of the psyche became a covert and unspoken medium that linked socio-political institutions and the individual psyche together, "making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. (39, 40)

In the novel, Changez was under surveillance like any other Muslim ever since the attack on Twin Towers so much so that he felt estranged from the place he once lived happily. The surveillance continued to haunt him even after he left America.

> Since then, I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow. I have endeavoured to live normally, as though nothing has changed, but I have been plagued by paranoia, by an intermittent sense that I am being observed. I even tried to vary my routines—the times I left for work, for example, and the streets I took—but I have come to realize that all this serves no purpose. I must meet my fate when it confronts me, and in the meantime I must conduct myself without panic. (208)

A well- orchestrated propaganda that racialised Muslims and demonized Islam has been rampant in the post 9/11 context. The media, across various mediums such as news, film, and literature, negatively represented Muslim identities that ultimately contributed to the construction of Islamophobia. These representations of Muslims in the cultural artefacts, apart from legitimising the Othering of the community constructed certain stereotypes of Muslim identity predominantly based on visible markers like beard and dress code. In the novel, Mohsin Hamid questions the politics behind these constructs by depicting the experiences of Changez both in the pre-9/11 and post

9/11 contexts. As a Princeton graduate with a clean shaven face, Changez's life was comfortable whereas his identity with a beard in the post 9/11 period was perceived with a lot of mistrust which made him extremely conscious of his ethnic and religious identity. "It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part," he recalls, "a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind" (130). Changez's beard provokes unease among his colleagues at Underwood Samson, who see it not as a "form of protest" but as an incendiary gesture. The author seems to present Changez's sporting beard as an act of resistance for the innocent Muslims across the world who are marginalised on the grounds of their physical appearance. Endorsing this, Joseph Darda writes,

> The beard is a sign of global solidarity with Muslims in Asia and the United States, the latter being monitored and detained under the newly ratified PATRIOT Act. That the beard is for Changez is a symbol of identity, a reminder, and a form of protest emphasizes how an international coalition might emerge from the struggle against state violence. Changez does not characterize himself as a devout Muslim and yet he sees this identity as a critical site of resistance in the months after 9/11. (116)

The post 9/11 scenario witnessed the emergence of a binary of 'Islam' and 'America'. Parallel to this binary, there emerged yet another division of 'innocent victim' and 'fanatical enemy' in the dominant narratives and media campaigns where the former term referred to the Americans and the latter, Muslims. This was only the re-emergence of what Edward Said discussed in his *Orientalism* (1978). In fact, in the post 9/11 context, the emergence of neo-Orientalist discourses equated Islam with terror and violence which, in turn, helped America validate its foreign policies and permitted "the intermittent deportation of Muslim migrants and lent inevitability to the invasion not only of Afghanistan but also of Iraq" (Scanlan 22).While most of the post 9/11 writings attempted to endorse these dominant narratives, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a disruptive alternative by heavily coming down on America'a way of treating the rest of the world. In the novel, Changez unequivocally says that America was equally on par with the terrorists while waging war

with the rest of the world and such an America needs to be stopped in the interest of the rest of humanity.

> It seemed to me then—and to be honest, sir, seems to me still—that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own. (190)

Similarly, the novel unveils the fact that the construction of this binary and the persistence of the sense of suspicion and paranoia on the Muslim Others made the community embrace an apologetic stand in their public life especially after 9/11. Muslims were arguably left with choices of being either a 'good Muslim' or a 'bad Muslim' as Mahmood Mamdani has elaborated in his *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror.*

> President Bush moved to distinguish between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'. From this point of view, "bad Muslims" were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that "good Muslims" were anxious to clear their names and conscience of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support "us" in a war against "them." But this could not hide the central message of such discourse: unless proved to be "good," every Muslim was presumed to be "bad." All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against "bad Muslims." (7)

Symbolically representing the predicament of Muslims in the newly emerged cultural context, Hamid has his protagonist Changez reiterating his innocence, confirming his allegiance to America and disowning his affiliation to the terrorists in the beginning in his narration to the American stranger. For instance, we read in the very beginning of the novel:

> Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a mission, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services. Ah, our tea has arrived! Do not look so suspicious. I assure you, sir, nothing untoward will happen to you, not even a runny stomach. After all, it is not as if it has been poisoned. Come, if it makes you more comfortable, let me switch my cup with ours. Just so. (1)

Another fixed stereotype that Mohsin Hamid puts on trial is the representation of Muslim countries in the mainstream discourses as violent, uncivilized and impoverished. In the age of terror, attempts were presumably made to trace the roots of terrorism in the ideological foundations of Islam and the cultural background of Muslim countries. Erica's father's prejudice about Pakistan comes out in his conversation with Changez about Pakistan's condition after the 9/11 attack: "(e)conomy's falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people don't get me wrong. I like Pakistanis. But the elite have raped that place well and good, right? And, fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism" (64). Hamid seeks to subvert this dominant Orientalist discourse by making an eloquent defence of Pakistan in the novel. In the midst of his monologues, Changez gives an alternative picture of his nation, Pakistan. For instance, he complains that the centuries of invasion initiated by the European countries have devastated his country. He says,'I said I was from Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan, ancient capital of the Punjab, home to nearly as many people as New York, layered like a sedimentary plain with the accreted history of invaders from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British'' (8). Challenging the clichéd Western notions on the economic conditions of countries like Pakistan Changez says to the American stranger,

> I am not poor; far from it: my great-grandfather, for example, was a barrister with the means to endow a school for the Muslims of the Punjab. Like him, my grandfather and father both attended

> university in England. Our family home sits on an acre of land in the middle of Gulberg, one of the most expensive districts of this city. We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener—which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth. (10-11)

Further, Hamid undermines the dominant discourse that America is the only nation in the world where democratic and secular ideas prevail while Muslim countries are essentially autocratic and tyrannical, leaving no space for freedom of expression. Changez says, "Lahore is more democratically urban. Indeed, in these places it is the man with four wheels who is forced to dismount and become part of the crowd. Yes, Like Manhattan? Yes, precisely!" (36). He maintained that his country was one which can legitimately be proud of its great legacy and rich heritage, unlike America which was a country of recent origin with no glorious background. He adds, "(f)our thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians" (38). Toward the end of the novel, Changez wants the silent American to stop branding Pakistanis as terrorists: "I assure you. It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (209).

The writer also interrogates the prevailing notions that point fingers at Islam for allegedly being the breeding ground of terrorism, and the resultant justification of violence initiated by America as counter-terrorism. In fact, he turns the tables on America and seeks to argue that the institutionalised racism, military expansionism and the indiscriminate foreign interventions sponsored by America have made people resort to acts of terror. For Changez, "no country inflicts death so readily on the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America" (207). He attacks the bossy nature of America in its treatment of foreign countries,

> 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 finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. (177)

While the dominant post-9/11 narratives equate Islam with terrorism and fundamentalism, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* seeks to reverse the trend by finding the presence of the same fundamentalism lying embedded in the ideological kernel of America in different subtle forms. Extending the definition of fundamentalism beyond religious extremism to embrace economic fundamentalism, Changez argues that America's neoliberal economic policies render the lives of the people in developing countries precarious and unsafe and the resultant disillusionment and sense of insecurity make them resort to acts of terror. He recognises the ruthless nature of economic fundamentalism in the instruction of his employer Jim when he directs his subordinates frequently to "focus on the fundamentals". Surprisingly, the very term is Underwood Samson's guiding principle which for it means "single-minded attention to financial details, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value" (98). In fact, Underwood Samson's strict commitment to the 'fundamentals' is presented to symbolically represent the economic fundamentalism that governed American foreign policies. The discourse of Islamic terrorism was only a means to cover up this. As Fouskas and Gökay puts it, "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 the entire world". (233)

The novel dismantles the established ways of approaching the post 9/11 era by unmasking how people are pushed to the state of "precarity and vulnerability" thanks to the neoliberal economic policies of America**.** Travelling from New York to Manila to Lahore and later to Chile when Changez was assigned to evaluate an unprofitable publishing company in Valparaiso where he came into contact with Juan-Bautista, the company's charismatic CEO and came to his full

awakening of the "precariousness and vulnerability" indiscriminately distributed in the third world leaving many lives differentially endangered by the economic and social conditions arising from war, globalization, and the legacy of colonialism. Drawing on the 'theory of precarity' of Judith Butler, Ami Rogalski Raggio in his article on Mohsin Hamid's novels argues that,

> Many Western authors continue to adhere to the Western model that 9/11 occurred, and the War on Terror continues, only because of Islamic religious extremism and fundamentalism. Mohsin Hamid writes back against these Western allegations and claims that nationalism combined with the after-effects of neoliberal economic fundamentalism—not religious fundamentalism—creates the discontented and disgruntled peoples of the developing world. They become aware of their precarity and are angered by continued imperial-like neoliberal policies. Hamid writes back against the image the western media perpetuates about West Asia, and in doing so, he re-educates the western reader to the political and economic side-effects, which manifests as increased precarity, caused by Western neoliberal practice. (5)

To put it in a clearer perspective, for Mohsin Hamid, America's neo-liberal economic policies are more disastrous than religious extremism, and hence America is was more dangerous than the so-called Islamic terrorists.

The emerging discourse of Islam does not recognise reactionary activism as arising from the basic democratic right to protest authoritarianism; rather, all protests are stigmatized as terrorism. For instance, after reaching Pakistan Changez turns a moderate activist and attempts to mobilise people against the policies of America using legitimate ways. But shockingly enough, it was an act of terror as far as the American empire was concerned and even while teaching at a University in Pakistan, he was under the watchful eyes of America's surveillance mechanism. Explaining his experience after he left America, Changez says,

> But my brief interview appeared to resonate: it was replayed for days, and even now an excerpt of it can be seen in the occasional

> war-on-terror montage. Such was its impact that I was warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse. (207-08)

The novel upsets the widely acknowledged notion that America is an ideal space where people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds meet and live together. This popular perception of inclusiveness of American multicultural society is often showcased in the dominant discourses by pitting it against the Islamic world which would more often than not be presented as an exclusivist and gruesome social structure governed by a monolithic religion. The novel presents Changez's early pre 9/11 identification with America where Changez, "moving to New York felt – so unexpectedly – like coming home" (36) and became "immediately a New Yorker" (37). Making the American dream more enchanting to him, he was happy to see that "Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence, only two blocks from my East Village apartment, of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli; the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue during a parade and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I had danced at my cousin's wedding" (36-37).

Unfortunately, later in the wake of 9/11, Changez's vision of a pluralistic America, an integral part of his personal American dream, suffers setback as he sees the country shrouded with national flags, mourning, pain, fear, and anger. Though he tried hard to separate what happened in the aftermath of 9/11 from his vision of an American dream, the reality loomed large in front of 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"(106). The collapse of his American dream was buttressed by the sudden disappearance of Muslim Pakistani drivers from places such as the Pak-Punjab Deli in New York. Besides, "Pakistani cab drivers 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 centres for questioning or worse" (107). His later days in

New York reinforced the other side of the reality and he found the less permeable nature of New York looming large in front of him. Complete integration with America, Changez realised, was elusive.

The novel symbolically represents the impenetrable nature of America's social structure in spite of its seeming inclusiveness through Changez's initial infatuation and the later disillusionment with Erica. Hartnell links her name, composed of the last three syllables of the word America, to her symbolic function of representing American nationalism in the novel (337). According to Andrews, "the progression of Changez's relationship with Erica follows the trajectory of his relationship with and representation of American society through their initial romance, their difficulty to sexually connect, and her eventual mental collapse and obsession with her deceased boyfriend"(41). Erica's mental breakdown after the attack and her distancing from Changez is symbolic of her union with the myth of personal American national identity.

> Like so many others in the city after the attacks, she appeared deeply anxious. Yet her anxieties seemed only indirectly related to the prospect of dying at the hands of terrorists. The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. I did not know if the same was true of me. (94)

This breakdown took her all the more forcefully back to the thought of her deceased boyfriend Chris who parted her leaving a strong inviolable emotional bond that stands as a symbol of American heritage. Changez explains that "[Erica] was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return" (129). Referring to this, Hartnell says, "Erica seemingly represents a romantic strain in American nationalism that looks back to a European past, a past that only partially captures the nation's roots and the make-up of contemporary America" (343). Changez eventually could sexually relate with Erica despite her initial resistance only when she imagines Changez to be Chris and then they"[make]

love with a physical intimacy that [they] had never [before] enjoyed" (120). So, it was quite impossible for Erica to accept the actual identity of Changez which symbolically shows that inclusion into American society will be feasible provided one prepares to give away one's identity. Even though this act of playing the part of Chris was virtually a violation of identity for Changez, this act, on the other hand, deeply upsets Erica's relation with Changez. Hartnell explains: "Changez and Erica's lovemaking alludes to the violent penetration of American space as represented by the 9/11 attacks" (344). In the end, Erica sought refuge in a nursing station and was presumed to have killed herself leaving Changez to disillusionment.

Mohsin Hamid makes his protagonist an example to the readers around the world by taking a principled stand in resigning from his job when he realised that his work for Underwood Samson would make him complicit in spreading injustice around the world. Seeing the signs of precarity in Valparaiso which was once a bustling but outmoded port city like Manila and Lahore, Changez was unable to carry out his valuation for Underwood Samson any further. He did not want to assist the empire by being a modern-day janissary. He says, "There really could be no doubt: 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 and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war" (173). Hence, he parted with his company without a qualm when he was fired from it. "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" (177). Looking at another valuator hard at work on their assignment, Changez realizes, "I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe. Yes, I too had previously derived comfort from my firm's exhortations to focus intensely on work, but I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present. In other words, my blinders were coming off, and I was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision". (145)

In a nutshell, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* contests the discursive practices central to the dominant narratives of the post 9/11 context. Speaking in defence of the misrepresented Muslim Other and the demonised Islam, the novel offers a radical alternative to the stereotypical representations of Islam and Muslims that proliferated in the aftermath of the 9/11 event. Undermining the varied nuances of the representation of Muslim identity, demonization of the religion, surveillance mechanism of the State, stereotyped depiction of the Muslim countries and the fixing of terrorists, the novel marks a departure from the general trend of 9/11 writings.

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