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HammaLakhdar University of El-Oued
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Department of Arts and English Language



A Postcolonial Reading of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

Submitted by:

Derdour messaouda

Serhoud nour

Supervised by:

Dr : DidaNassiredine

Board of Examiners:

Dr. Kaddouri Souad

President

University of El-Oued

Dr. Dida Nassiredine

Supervisor

University of El-Oued

Dr .Mega Afaf

Examiner

University of El-Oued

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Dedication

First and foremost, all praise is due to Allah, who granted me strength, patience, and light throughout this journey.

To my dear parents, for their unconditional love, constant prayers, and unwavering support.

To my family, who stood by me with love and encouragement in every moment of hardship.

*To my wonderful colleague **Nour Serhoud**, whose dedication, positivity, and sincere effort made this journey not only easier, but genuinely joyful. I feel truly blessed to have worked with her, and never once regretted it.*

And to my future self

A gentle reminder that faith and determination will always carve the way, no matter how long the road may seem.

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After Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem

First and last, we thank Allah for bringing us to this day and achieving our dream. We would not have done this without Allah's grace upon us.

To my father, to the one whom Allah has crowned with majesty and dignity, to the one whose name I proudly carry. May Allah have mercy on you and unite me with you in the highest paradise.

To my mother, who fulfilled both roles in his absence, taught me the meaning of love and compassion, and whose prayers were the reason for my continuation and whose presence is the secret of my life.

*To my siblings, who have been my support in good times and bad. I love you more than you Imagine. Finally, to the best colleague “**messaouda derdour**” who has been my third sister and my support in my journey, my feelings and steps, and the well of my secrets and thoughts. Your presence in my life means a lot to me.*

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a postcolonial reading of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, examining how the novel engages with themes of identity, power, and resistance in the aftermath of 9/11. Drawing on key postcolonial theories—including Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the "third space," and Frantz Fanon's psychological analysis of decolonization—the study explores the ways in which Hamid's work challenges Western hegemony and reconfigures narratives of the global South. The analysis is structured in three parts. First, it contextualizes the novel within postcolonial discourse, focusing on the deconstruction of East-West binaries, the role of mimicry and ambivalence, and the psychological dimensions of decolonization. Second, it investigates the post-9/11 ideological shifts that shape the novel's backdrop, particularly the institutionalization of Islamophobia, surveillance, and the marginalization of Muslim identities. Finally, it examines the novel's formal and thematic strategies, including its use of an unreliable narrator, open-ended conclusion, and counter-discursive resistance to dominant narratives. Central to this study is the protagonist Changez, whose transformation from a Princeton-educated capitalist to a "reluctant fundamentalist" embodies the tensions between assimilation and resistance. The title's irony underscores the novel's critique of neoliberal capitalism and reductive stereotypes, reframing "fundamentalism" as a rejection of Western ideological dominance rather than religious extremism. By situating Hamid's work within postcolonial and post-9/11 frameworks, this dissertation argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* not only exposes the fractures in multicultural idealism but also reimagines identity as a fluid, transnational construct shaped by historical and political forces.

Keywords: Decolonization, Hybridity, Islamophobia, Orientalism, Postcolonialism.

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General introduction

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General introduction

1. Background of the Study

The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the cultural, political, and psychological landscapes of formerly colonized nations. In this context, postcolonial literature has emerged not only as a means of creative expression but also as a powerful vehicle for resistance, negotiation, and identity reconstruction. According to Edward Said's (1978) seminal work "Orientalism", Western representations of the East have often been framed through a lens of superiority, reinforcing a dichotomy between the civilized Self and the exotic Other. Postcolonial writers challenge such narratives by offering counter-discourses that highlight the multiplicity of voices and perspectives from the global South. In the contemporary era, especially after the September 11 attacks, literature from Muslim and South Asian writers gained renewed attention. These narratives grapple with issues of racial profiling, Islamophobia, surveillance, and the redefinition of selfhood in increasingly polarized societies. As Homi Bhabha (1994) argues in "The Location of Culture", identity is never fixed but formed in the "third space" of cultural hybridity—a concept particularly relevant in a world marked by migration, diaspora, and transnational tensions. Mohsin Hamid's (2007) "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" encapsulates these postcolonial and global anxieties through the character of Changez, a Princeton-educated Pakistani who seemingly thrives in the heart of American capitalism but undergoes a profound transformation after 9/11. The novel, framed as a dramatic monologue delivered to an unnamed American, destabilizes the reader's assumptions and explores themes of identity, belonging, surveillance, and resistance. Through Changez's internal conflict and eventual disillusionment with the West, Hamid critiques not only American foreign policy but also the commodification of the

immigrant dream. Furthermore, the novel invites multiple interpretations due to its ambiguous narrative and metafictional structure. Scholars like Upstone (2010) argue that Hamid's work reflects the tensions between globalism and nationalism, while Ghosh (2016) emphasizes how the novel exposes the fragility of multiculturalism when faced with fear and crisis. Hamid himself has commented on the term "fundamentalist," explaining that it is often used as a blanket label to demonize dissent. In interviews, he has noted that Changez's fundamentalism is not religious but ideological—a rejection of the uncritical embrace of American hegemony. By reclaiming and redefining the term, Hamid underscores the novel's central concern: the dangers of binary thinking in a world that is inherently interconnected and complex. As such, 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' provides a rich site for postcolonial inquiry, particularly in examining how global politics shape individual and collective identities.

2. Statement of the Problem

The intersection of postcolonial identity and global political conflict poses a complex challenge for literary analysis, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid presents a protagonist who oscillates between admiration for the West and a growing sense of alienation, eventually rejecting the very ideals that once empowered him. This internal conflict raises fundamental questions about cultural belonging, national loyalty, and the psychological toll of being perceived as the Other in a society increasingly dominated by fear and suspicion. Despite the novel's widespread acclaim and its frequent inclusion in postcolonial syllabi, there remains a need for a focused analysis of how Hamid employs literary strategies to represent the fragmented identity of postcolonial subjects in a globalized world. While previous studies have examined the novel's political overtones and narrative ambiguity, fewer have analyzed in detail how themes such as hybridity, resistance, and the illusion of cosmopolitan acceptance are intricately woven into the text. Moreover, the novel's dramatic monologue structure complicates the reader's ability to arrive at a singular interpretation, reinforcing the instability of truth in a polarized world. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the way *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* articulates postcolonial anxieties, particularly those related to identity, marginalization, and resistance in the context of post-9/11 geopolitics. Furthermore, postcolonial concerns about representation, power and belonging have to be analysed in order to find out how they are reflected in the novel.

3. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

Q1: To what extent does *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* question whether Changez or America represents the real face of fundamentalism?

Q2: How does the novel portray post-9/11 America as having compromised its own proclaimed ideals?

Q3: How are concepts like Islamophobia, Orientalism, and subaltern silence represented and problematized in the novel, particularly through Changez's shifting voice and perspective?

4. Research Hypotheses

1. The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests that the real form of fundamentalism lies not in Changez's transformation, but in America's rigid response to perceived threats.
2. . The novel implies that post-9/11 America abandoned its proclaimed ideals, revealing a contradiction between its global image and internal practice
3. The novel exposes and challenges systemic Islamophobia and Orientalist representations by amplifying the subaltern voice and deconstructing dominant Western narratives through Changez's perspective.

5. Aim:

This study aims to :

- 1) Investigate how does Mohsin Hamid's '*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*' employ postcolonial themes and narrative strategies to explore identity dislocation, resistance, and cultural hybridity in the context of post-9/11 global tensions.
- 2) To analyze how the novel problematizes the concept of fundamentalism by contrasting the ideologies of Changez and the United States.
- 3) To explore the ways in which *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques post-9/11 America's departure from its stated ideals.
- 4) To examine the novel's portrayal of institutional Islamophobia and its critique of Western political and cultural dominance

6. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analytical approach grounded in textual analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Drawing on postcolonial theory—particularly the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak—the research examines both the thematic concerns employed in the novel, including issues of hybridity, mimicry, identity crisis, and Islamophobia in the post-9/11 global context. This method is justified by the study's focus on literary representation, symbolic expression, and ideological critique. Textual analysis offers the necessary depth and flexibility to uncover the nuanced intersections between literature, politics, and identity. It also enables the researcher to

interpret how the novel functions as a postcolonial counter-discourse, without the need for empirical data or field research.

7. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it contributes to the growing body of postcolonial literary criticism by offering a focused analysis of Mohsin Hamid's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' through the lens of identity, resistance, and representation. In an era marked by increasing globalization, cultural clashes, and Islamophobic rhetoric, particularly after 9/11, this research highlights the importance of literary texts as platforms for marginalized voices and as tools for critiquing dominant ideologies. The novel's unique narrative structure and its exploration of themes such as hybridity, ambivalence, and transnational dislocation provide fertile ground for academic inquiry. By engaging with the works of Bhabha, Said, and Spivak, the study not only sheds light on the novel's postcolonial depth but also encourages further reflection on how literature can serve as a space for negotiating identity and resisting cultural erasure. Furthermore, this research may offer valuable insights for students, scholars, and educators interested in contemporary South Asian fiction, diaspora studies, and the role of literature in socio-political critique.

8. Structure of the study

The study is organized into three main chapters, each addressing distinct yet interconnected aspects of postcolonial theory and its application in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The structure is designed to provide a comprehensive analysis, beginning with theoretical foundations, moving to historical and contextual frameworks, and

concluding with a detailed examination of the novel through postcolonial lenses. The first chapter establishes the theoretical groundwork for the study by exploring key concepts in postcolonial theory, such as hybridity, mimicry, Orientalism, and decolonization. It examines the works of foundational theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Gayatri Spivak, highlighting their contributions to understanding power dynamics, cultural identity, and resistance in postcolonial contexts. The second chapter situates 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' within the historical and sociopolitical aftermath of the September 11 attacks. It analyzes the rise of institutional Islamophobia, and the global repercussions of the War on Terror. This chapter also explores Mohsin Hamid's personal experiences and the broader historical context that informs the novel. The third chapter applies postcolonial theories to a close reading of the novel, focusing on several key themes. It examines Changez's fluid identity and the tensions between assimilation and cultural reclamation, analyzing how his performance of American identity reflects the psychological fractures of colonial subjectivity. The chapter critiques how the novel subverts Western representations of the East and explores Changez's ideological shift as a form of psychological and narrative resistance. It highlights the systemic discrimination he faces in post-9/11 America and investigates the psychological toll of globalization on migrants. Additionally, it discusses the unreliable narrator trope and the open-ended conclusion as acts of decolonial storytelling. The study concludes by synthesizing these analyses, emphasizing the novel's significance as a critique of neocolonial power structures and its contribution to postcolonial literature. The open-ended structure of the novel mirrors the unresolved tensions of postcolonial identity, inviting readers to engage critically with themes of power, belonging, and resistance.

CHAPTER ONE

Approaches And Concepts

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Introduction

Postcolonialism is a critical theoretical framework that examines the enduring cultural, political, and economic impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized societies. This chapter explores key concepts such as deconstruction, cultural hybridity, Orientalism, and decolonization, highlighting the works of seminal scholars like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Homi Bhabha. By interrogating colonial power dynamics and amplifying marginalized voices, postcolonial theory offers tools to dismantle oppressive structures and rethink identity, resistance, and global inequalities in a postcolonial world.

1.1 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism has emerged as a vital theoretical framework for examining the cultural, political, and economic consequences of colonialism, as well as the enduring legacies of imperial rule. At its core, postcolonialism seeks to deconstruct the power dynamics embedded in colonial relationships and to analyze how formerly colonized societies reconstruct their identities, histories, and knowledge systems in the aftermath of empire (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1989). The field interrogates the ongoing influence of colonialism in contemporary global contexts, including issues of migration, globalization, and the formation of transnational identities (Nayar 2010).

1.1.1 What is Postcolonialism ?

Postcolonialism can be broadly defined as an intellectual movement and critical methodology that interrogates the lasting effects of colonialism on societies, cultures, and subjectivities. It challenges dominant narratives imposed by colonial powers and amplifies

the voices and experiences of those who were historically marginalized (Ashcroft et al 1989). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) describe postcolonialism as “the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized,” emphasizing the importance of analyzing both historical and contemporary consequences of these encounters (p. 2). Similarly, Nayar (2010) defines postcolonialism as “the theoretical wing of postcoloniality,” characterizing it as “a mode of reading, political analysis, and cultural resistance/intervention that deals with the history of colonialism and present neo-colonial structures” (p. 17). For Nayar (2010), postcolonialism is fundamentally “a critique” that “invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation, and democracy to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation” (p. 17). Thus, postcolonialism is not only a historical critique but also a theoretical lens for interrogating the ways in which power, representation, and resistance operate in a globalized world. Central to postcolonial discourse are key concepts such as hybridity, othering, and subalternity. Hybridity refers to the blending and interaction of cultures, which often produces new, syncretic forms of identity (Bhabha, 1994). Othering describes the process by which colonial powers marginalize and devalue non-Western identities, constructing them as inferior or exotic (Said 1978). Subalternity, a concept explored by Spivak (1988), highlights the silencing and marginalization of oppressed voices, particularly those of women and the poor, within both colonial and postcolonial contexts.

1.1.2 Function: Dismantling Colonial Power

The function of postcolonialism is fundamentally tied to dismantling colonial power structures and reclaiming indigenous knowledge and autonomy. Postcolonialism emerged in response to the political, economic, and cultural domination exerted by European colonialism, especially in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (Ashcroft et al 1989). Colonialism, often

described as “an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak people by a large power” (Sharma 2016, p. 50), frequently resulted in the erasure of native cultures, languages, and epistemologies. For example, the imposition of English in India was part of a broader colonial strategy of cultural domination and “modernization” (Sharma 2016). The Intellectual foundations of postcolonialism are deeply intertwined with anti-colonial movements, which represented a collective resistance to colonial domination. The prefix “anti-” signifies a political and ideological opposition, as seen in the 20th-century struggles of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale, and Gandhi’s leadership in India. These movements sought not only to dismantle European rule but also to reclaim indigenous traditions, knowledge, and cultural autonomy (Fanon 1963). Fanon’s “The Wretched of the Earth” remains a foundational text for understanding the psychological and cultural violence of colonialism, as well as the necessity of decolonization as a transformative and, at times, violent process (Fanon 1963). The rise of postcolonial studies in the late 20th century marked a critical response to the persistent legacies of colonialism and imperialism. As an interdisciplinary field, postcolonial studies aims to deconstruct the cultural, political, and social hierarchies established by colonial rule (Ashcroft et al 1989). Edward Said’s “Orientalism” (1978) exposed how the West constructed the “Orient” as an exotic and inferior Other, demonstrating that knowledge production was complicit in justifying colonial domination. Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” interrogated the representation and agency of marginalized voices within colonial and postcolonial discourses, highlighting the epistemic violence inherent in silencing the subaltern. Homi Bhabha (1994) introduced the concepts of hybridity and mimicry, illustrating how colonized subjects could subvert colonial authority through imitation, ambivalence, and cultural blending. Collectively, these theorists and their foundational works have shaped postcolonialism into a dynamic and

critical field, committed to dismantling colonial power and advancing social justice, emancipation, and the recovery of marginalized histories and identities.

1.1.3 Importance: Balancing Power, Changing Binaries, Restoring Independence

Postcolonialism is crucial for understanding the global relevance of migration, globalization, and transnational identity, offering critical tools to analyze how these interconnected phenomena shape the contemporary world. By examining the legacies of colonialism, postcolonial theory reveals how historical patterns of domination and exploitation continue to influence global movements today. Edward Said's concept of exile and diaspora, as articulated in "Reflections on Exile and Other Essays" (Said 2000), highlights the displacement and fragmentation experienced by migrants as they navigate multiple cultural identities in their search for belonging. Said underscores how migration is deeply tied to colonial histories, as individuals and communities are often uprooted due to economic, political, or social pressures stemming from colonial and neocolonial systems. This sense of "exile" is not merely physical but also psychological, as migrants grapple with the loss of home and the challenge of forging new identities in unfamiliar contexts (Said 2000). Similarly, Arjun Appadurai's notion of "scapes" introduced in "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization" (Appadurai 1996), provides a powerful framework for understanding how globalization creates interconnected yet uneven cultural flows that shape transnational identities. Appadurai argues that global exchanges-such as the movement of people (ethnoscapes), media (mediascapes), and ideas (ideoscapes)-are influenced by power imbalances that trace back to colonial histories. These "scapes" are not neutral; rather, they are shaped by historical and contemporary forces that privilege certain groups and marginalize others, perpetuating global inequalities (Appadurai 1996).

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, as developed in "The Location of Culture" (Bhabha 1994), further underscores the fluidity of identity in a globalized world. Bhabha describes hybridity as emerging from the "third space," where cultural differences intersect to create new, hybrid identities that resist binary oppositions like colonizer/colonized or local/global. This "third space" becomes a site of negotiation, creativity, and resistance, allowing individuals and communities to redefine themselves beyond the confines of colonial categories (Bhabha 1994). Postcolonial literature, such as Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" (Rushdie 1991) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Americanah" (Adichie 2014), reflects these complexities by depicting characters who navigate the ambiguities of transnational existence, negotiating multiple allegiances and cultural influences.

At the same time, postcolonial theory critiques the persistence of neocolonial structures in globalization. Walter D. Mignolo, in "Local Histories/Global Designs" (Mignolo 2000), introduces the concept of "coloniality" to argue that global inequalities remain deeply rooted in colonial histories of exploitation and cultural domination. Mignolo's idea of "border thinking" challenges dominant Western epistemologies, offering alternative perspectives that center subaltern voices and local knowledges. By foregrounding the experiences and epistemologies of those historically marginalized by colonialism, postcolonial theory seeks to restore a sense of independence and agency to formerly colonized peoples (Mignolo 2000).

By engaging with these perspectives, postcolonial theory provides invaluable tools for analyzing the intersections of migration, globalization, and identity. It challenges Eurocentric narratives that dominate global discourse, offering alternative viewpoints that foreground the experiences of those from formerly colonized regions (Bhabha 1994; Said 2000). In doing so, postcolonial theory not only critiques the injustices of globalization but also celebrates the resilience, creativity, and agency of individuals and communities navigating transnational

spaces (Adichie 2014; Rushdie 1991). Its global relevance lies in its ability to illuminate the complexities of identity, power, and resistance in an increasingly interconnected world.

1.2 Deconstruction

Deconstruction is one of the most significant and controversial intellectual movements of the 20th and 21st centuries, developed primarily by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) as a critical method in Western philosophy and literary theory. Rooted in continental philosophy and literary criticism, deconstruction challenges the assumption that language and meaning are stable, instead revealing how texts undermine their own claims to fixed interpretations. It interrogates traditional notions of meaning, language, and truth, emphasizing the inherent instability and ambiguity of language and the complex interplay between text and interpretation. According to deconstruction theory, scholarly texts hold multiple meanings, as interpretations vary among readers (Aprilia and Arianto, 2021), and key concepts such as binary opposition, logocentrism, and *différance* form its core (Hacer, 2022). One of the central concerns of deconstruction is binary opposition—such as presence/absence, speech/writing, and self/other—which traditionally structure language and thought. These oppositions often imply hierarchies that prioritize one term over another, and deconstruction seeks to question and destabilize these structures (Marbun and Wijaya, 2019). Defined as opposing poles that broaden the reader’s perspective, like honesty versus dishonesty (Aprilia and Arianto, 2021), binary oppositions are shown to be interdependent and inherently unstable. Derrida argued that within these binaries lie the seeds of their own deconstruction. Emerging in response to structuralism in the 1980s, his concept of binary opposition underscores that meaning is fluid and open to multiple interpretations, whether derived from the material present in the text or through the breakdown of its structure (Pourmahmoud, 2021).

1.2.1 Influence Beyond Literary Criticism

Deconstruction extends beyond literary criticism and continues to impact a wide range of disciplines, including environmental humanities, feminism, film studies, history, life sciences, philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, queer theory, religious studies, and cultural studies. Its interdisciplinary influence demonstrates its relevance in analyzing structures of thought and uncovering the underlying assumptions that shape various fields of knowledge. By questioning the stability of language, deconstruction offers a profound critique of how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and disseminated. Its ongoing relevance ensures that it remains a vital tool for scholars and theorists across multiple domains.

1.3 Cultural Hybridity and the “Third Space”

Cultural hybridity is a central concept in postcolonial studies, particularly in the work of Homi K. Bhabha. In his seminal text, “The Location of Culture” (1994), Bhabha introduces the idea of the “third space” as a liminal, in-between zone where cultural meanings and identities are negotiated and transformed. This space disrupts binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or self/other, allowing for the emergence of hybrid identities that challenge fixed notions of culture and belonging. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity is not simply a mixing or blending of cultures, but a process that “enables other positions to emerge” (p. 37), producing new cultural meanings that resist the authority of colonial discourse. Bhabha argues that the third space is not a physical location, but a conceptual site of negotiation, where cultural differences intersect and new identities are forged. He writes, “It is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). In this sense, the third space is a site of both struggle and creativity, where the colonized can subvert dominant narratives and assert agency in the face of cultural

domination. This process of hybridity, as Bhabha (1994) explains, is not merely about blending two cultures into a harmonious whole. Instead, it is a site of tension, resistance, and transformation. The colonial authority's attempt to translate the identity of the colonized into a universal framework "produces something familiar but new," a hybrid identity that both reflects and resists the structures of power (Bhabha 1994, p. 121). Bhandari (2022) expands on this, noting that hybridity is "a process of negotiation and resistance, not simply a state of being," and that it "enables the colonized to outwit their oppressors by adopting and adapting cultural elements to their own advantage" (p. 172). The concept of hybridity and the third space is vividly illustrated in Ursula K. Le Guin's novel "Voices" (2006). The protagonist, Memer Galva, is the daughter of an Ansulian mother and an Ald soldier—two groups with a history of violent conflict. Memer's hybrid heritage places her in a liminal position: she is neither fully Ansulian nor fully Ald, and her identity is shaped by the tension between these two worlds. Throughout the novel, Memer struggles to reconcile her dual heritage, often feeling like an outsider in both cultures. She sometimes refers to herself as "the half-breed" (Le Guin 2006, p. 318), highlighting her frustration with her ambiguous status. Bhandari (2022) interprets Memer's experience as an example of Bhabha's theory, arguing that her "in-betweenness" is a source of both pain and power. Memer's anger and resentment stem from her inability to fully belong to either group, yet her hybrid identity also allows her to navigate and ultimately challenge the rigid boundaries imposed by both the Ansulians and the Alds. As Bhandari (2022) observes, "By negotiating various 'spaces' in their respective environments, and in either accepting or rejecting certain cultural values and differences, the colonized can 'hybridize' themselves... Thus, they become more adaptive and empowered, and so they are ultimately able to 'outwit' their oppressors" (p. 130). Bhabha's theory emphasizes the emancipatory potential of hybridity. By occupying the third space, individuals and communities can challenge essentialist notions of identity and culture, creating new

possibilities for cultural expression and collaboration. As Bhabha (1994) asserts, “Hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather... the ‘third space’ enables other positions to emerge” (p. 37). This is particularly relevant in contemporary globalized societies, where cultural boundaries are increasingly fluid and individuals often navigate multiple cultural affiliations. Memer’s journey in “Voices” exemplifies this process. As she learns to accept and integrate her hybrid identity, she gains the confidence to challenge the oppressive structures of both the Ansulians and the Alds. Her story reflects the broader postcolonial struggle to negotiate and redefine identity in the face of cultural domination, illustrating how the third space can serve as a site of transformation and empowerment.

Despite its strengths, Bhabha’s theory has been critiqued for its limited attention to material and economic dimensions of colonial and neocolonial power. Bhandari (2022) argues that “Bhabha’s third space remains silent to the global expansion of capitalism and neocolonial exploitation of the third world countries” (p. 175). While the third space may provide opportunities for cultural negotiation and resistance, it does not necessarily address the structural inequalities that sustain global power dynamics. For instance, Bhandari (2022) points to global institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and social media networks (SMNs) as examples of transnational spaces that, while seemingly open and democratic, often reinforce neocolonial power structures. He explains, “The powerful First World countries often manipulate a negotiation in such economic, cultural and technological third space to create and sustain a new form of neocolonial exploitation of the Third World countries and people” (Bhandari 2022, p. 172). Social media, too, is controlled by a handful of corporations, mostly based in the Global North, who shape the terms of engagement and often perpetuate existing inequalities (Bhandari 2022, p. 178). This critique highlights a significant limitation of Bhabha’s theory: while it offers a powerful lens for understanding cultural and

psychological resistance, it may fall short in addressing the material realities of economic exploitation and structural oppression. As Bhandari (2022) notes, “the negotiation in the intercultural and international contact zone does not voluntarily ensure a resistance to the exploitation of the underprivileged groups and nations” (p. 172). Ultimately, Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity and the third space provide a powerful framework for understanding the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial and globalized contexts. They challenge fixed notions of culture and belonging, offering a way to rethink identity as a dynamic and transformative process. Memer’s journey in “Voices” serves as a compelling literary example of how individuals can navigate the tensions of cultural hybridity and emerge with a stronger, more inclusive sense of self. However, as critics like Bhandari (2022) argue, postcolonial theory must also address the material and economic dimensions of power if it is to offer a truly comprehensive account of resistance and transformation in the contemporary world.

1.3.1 Home and the Nation: Revisiting the Imagined Community

The concept of the nation as an “imagined community,” introduced by Benedict Anderson in his seminal work “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism” (1983), has profoundly shaped the study of nationalism and national identity. Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined political community” that is both inherently limited and sovereign: it is limited because even the largest nations have finite boundaries, and sovereign because it arose in the era when Enlightenment and Revolution undermined the legitimacy of divinely ordained, dynastic realms. The nation is “imagined” because, despite never meeting most of their fellow members, individuals feel a deep sense of belonging and shared identity, a connection fostered by shared symbols, narratives, and institutions such as media, education, and the state. Anderson argues that the nation is a distinctly modern construct, emerging as religious and dynastic communities declined and as print capitalism enabled the standardization of vernacular languages and the mass dissemination of cultural

and political ideas. This process allowed people to imagine themselves as part of a larger, cohesive community, even though they would never interact with most of its members. Anderson's theory emphasizes the role of cultural and technological factors-especially the printing press-in fostering national consciousness. He also draws from Walter Benjamin's concept of "homogeneous, empty time," which allows individuals to conceive of themselves as moving through history together in a synchronized manner (Anderson 1983, pp. 24–26). This framework has been widely influential, but also critiqued and expanded by later scholars. Homi Bhabha (1990) highlights the ambivalence and hybridity of national identities, arguing that nations are not as unified or stable as Anderson suggests. Partha Chatterjee (1993) questions the universal applicability of Anderson's modular nation-form, especially in postcolonial contexts, where local histories and forms of community challenge the Western model of nationalism.

Identity, as explored by Bhabha, Hall, and Appadurai, is a fluid and evolving construct shaped by cultural, social, and political affiliations. Bhabha (1994) describes identity as a "hybrid" process, where individuals negotiate multiple cultural influences and often feel caught "in-between" worlds. Hall (1990) emphasizes that identity is not static but constantly "becoming," shaped by both past heritage and present experiences, which creates tension for transnational individuals navigating dual belonging . Appadurai (1996) highlights how globalization fosters transnational identities but also risks cultural homogenization, which can overshadow local traditions. Ong (1999) notes that transnational individuals face exclusion due to rigid state definitions of citizenship, while Levitt and Waters (2002) observe intergenerational conflicts as younger generations adopt hybrid identities .Sassen (1998) points out that global cities, while hubs for transnational identities, can exacerbate inequalities. Sayyid (1997) underscores cultural and religious tensions, as transnational communities such as Muslim diasporas face pressure to assimilate, complicating their sense of belonging .

Together, these perspectives highlight the complexities and challenges of transnational identity in a globalized world.

1.3.2 Ambivalence and Mimicry :

Ambivalence and mimicry are pivotal concepts in postcolonial theory, especially in the works of Homi K. Bhabha. These concepts illuminate the complex, often contradictory dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, revealing how colonial authority is both asserted and undermined through cultural interaction. Ambivalence, as theorized by Bhabha (1994), describes the simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion that characterize the relationship between colonizer and colonized. This duality destabilizes colonial authority, as it undermines the clear binaries of superiority/inferiority, self/other, and colonizer/colonized. The colonized subject, caught in this ambivalence, is neither fully assimilated into the colonizer's culture nor entirely resistant to it. Instead, they occupy an "in-between" or liminal space that disrupts the colonizer's narrative of dominance (Bhabha, 1994). This structural ambivalence is not merely a psychological state but a persistent feature of colonial discourse, constantly threatening to blur the boundaries that colonial power seeks to enforce.

Mimicry is closely linked to ambivalence. Bhabha (1994) defines mimicry as the process by which the colonized subject imitates the colonizer's culture, language, and values, often as a strategy for survival or social mobility. However, this imitation is always incomplete. Bhabha famously describes mimicry as "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, p. 86), meaning the colonized subject can never perfectly replicate the colonizer. This partial resemblance creates a "blurred copy" that exposes the constructedness and fragility of colonial authority. Mimicry, therefore, is a double-edged sword: while it appears to reinforce colonial power by adopting its norms, it simultaneously undermines that power by revealing

its artificiality and the impossibility of perfect replication. Bhabha (1994) further argues that mimicry is “at once resemblance and menace” (p. 86). The colonizer desires a reformed, recognizable Other, but insists on maintaining a clear sense of difference. The colonized subject’s imperfect imitation becomes a form of subversion, introducing slippage and excess that threaten the authority and authenticity of the colonizer. This process reveals the instability at the heart of colonial discourse.

The dynamics of ambivalence and mimicry are not limited to theoretical abstraction; they are vividly illustrated in both literature and psychological analysis. For example, Fanon (1967) explores how colonized individuals may internalize the colonizer’s culture and language, developing an “inferiority complex” that leads to fractured identities. This psychological toll is a direct result of the pressures to mimic the colonizer while being constantly reminded of one’s difference and exclusion. In literary contexts, characters who embody ambivalence and mimicry often experience a sense of alienation and displacement. Ambivalence and mimicry, rather than simply reinforcing colonial power, can become tools of resistance. By occupying the “third space” between cultures, the colonized subject challenges the colonizer’s hegemony. Mimicry, in particular, becomes a subversive act that questions the very foundations of colonial authority. As Arab (2023) notes, this subversion is central to understanding how hybrid identities emerge and how colonial power is continually negotiated and contested. These concepts remain crucial in postcolonial studies for understanding the lingering effects of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for cultural autonomy and identity in a globalized world. They help explain why postcolonial identities are often hybrid, fractured, and dynamic, rather than fixed or unified. The interplay of ambivalence and mimicry reveals the instability of colonial power and the resilience of those who navigate its legacies.

1.4 Orientalism: The Western Representation of the East

Orientalism is a Western scholarly discipline that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, encompassing the study of Asian societies' languages, literature, religions, philosophies, histories, art, and laws, particularly those of ancient origin. Initially rooted in academic and intellectual curiosity, Orientalism also evolved into a broader cultural and aesthetic movement in Europe and North America, sparking fascination with the so-called "exotic" and "mystical" East (Said 1978) . However, Orientalism was never a neutral or objective field of study. As defined and critiqued by Palestinian-American literary theorist Edward Said in his groundbreaking 1978 work *Orientalism*, the concept reflects the West's effort to assert dominance and control over the Orient by constructing it as the cultural "Other" (Said, 1978, p. 2). Through a binary opposition that casts the West as rational, progressive, and civilized, and the East as irrational, static, and backward, Orientalism reinforces the narrative of Western superiority and legitimizes colonial and imperialist ambitions. This ideological framework shaped not only scholarly discourse but also Western literature, art, academia, and policy, deeply influencing how the East was perceived and treated. Orientalism also played a central role in colonial administration, particularly in British India, where it informed debates between Orientalists—who advocated for governance based on Indian traditions—and Anglicists—who pushed for British laws and systems.

Though the term later shifted toward the more neutral label of "Asian studies" to shed its colonial associations, Orientalism continues to be critically examined in fields like postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and literary criticism for its enduring impact on East-West relations and its role in maintaining systemic power imbalances. Edward Said's *Orientalism* thesis provides a critical framework for understanding how the West has historically depicted the East using essentialist and reductive narratives. Western discourse, as

described by Foucault, has historically functioned as a system of thought that constructs knowledge and meaning while concurrently shaping the East as inferior, uncivilized, and submissive. This dynamic is exemplified by the ideology of the "white man's burden " (Said, 1978, p. 102), a 19th-century concept that justified Western imperialism as a moral duty to civilize less developed nations. Said (1987) highlights that the Orient was a "European invention,"(p. 54), emphasizing that the East was not viewed as an independent entity but rather as something shaped by Western perspectives. This Eurocentric dominance, rooted in superiority, racism, and imperialism, has been perpetuated through narratives that depict the Middle East as chaotic and in need of Western intervention, a classic trope of Third World imagery. Hollywood further reinforces these stereotypes through an "Arab Kit," portraying Arabs as villains and perpetuating the notion of non-Western societies as primitive and dangerous. Said's analysis reveals that the East has been constructed through the lens of Western hegemony, filtered through doctrines of European superiority and imperialism, leading to its exoticization and othering. This process of "othering" is evident in Shakespeare's *Othello*, where the characterization of Othello serves as a contrast against European civility and identity. Henderson (1985) argues that *Othello* is positioned within the discourse of European civility, aligning with Said's assertion that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1978, p.1). Ultimately, Western discourse has long reinforced its superiority by constructing the East as an inferior counterpart, shaping global perceptions through literature, media, and ideological narratives . Orientalist representations, shaped by Western perspectives, have historically portrayed the East as exotic, mysterious, and inferior across literature, media, and academic discourse.

In literature, works like *Heart of Darkness* and *Around the World in Eighty Days* reinforce stereotypes by depicting Eastern societies as backward and dependent, while the

Arab-Islamic world is often reduced to images of violence and extremism. Films such as *Aladdin* exoticize Eastern cultures, using fantasy, exotic animals, and gender stereotypes to portray the East as timeless and regressive. Men are often shown as weak or effeminate, while women are hypersexualized and submissive, reinforcing Western ideals of dominance. In academia, Orientalist scholars like Sir William Jones and Antoine de Sacy studied the East through a Eurocentric lens, producing knowledge that justified colonial rule. These representations persist in modern media and geopolitics, where biased narratives continue to shape public perception, particularly of the Middle East and Asia. Understanding and challenging these portrayals is key to deconstructing long-standing stereotypes.

1.5 Decolonizaion (Frantz fanon psychology) and counter-discourse

Decolonization is the process of undoing the political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological legacies of European imperialism. While it often refers to the formal withdrawal of colonial powers and the achievement of national independence—such as the liberation of Korea (1945), India (1947), and Algeria (1962)—decolonization also involves a deeper transformation: reclaiming identity, language, and cultural expression suppressed under colonial rule. Beyond political change, it is a cultural and psychological revolution aimed at raising awareness and giving a voice to the formerly silenced.

Frantz Fanon, in works like *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon ,2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon , 2004) , emphasized that true decolonization must free the mind and soul of the colonized, breaking down internalized inferiority and colonial ideology. This process includes rewriting history from indigenous perspectives, resisting Western dominance in knowledge production, and promoting cultural revival. While decolonization has achieved tangible political results, its ongoing challenge lies in dismantling lingering imperial

influences, such as the dominance of colonial languages like English, French, and Spanish, and reshaping systems of power that continue to marginalize formerly colonized peoples.

1.5.1 Fanon's Psychological Analysis of Decolonization

1.5.1.1 Violence as a Path to Liberation

Frantz Fanon (1961) argued that violence was a necessary and inevitable part of the decolonization process, viewing it as a response to the inherent violence of colonialism, which was sustained through military force, systemic oppression, and economic exploitation. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, written during the final stages of the Algerian War of Independence, Fanon emphasized that reclaiming political sovereignty and psychological freedom required a radical rupture, not negotiation (Fanon, 2004). He believed that colonial systems could not be dismantled through peaceful dialogue alone, as the colonizer's appeals to reason masked the brutal reality of domination. For the colonized, violent resistance became a form of empowerment and a reclaiming of agency. Fanon also analyzed how colonial regimes maintained control by co-opting local elites and intellectuals, and he warned against internal divisions within native populations. Fanon (2004) argued that true liberation must transcend class and ideological differences within colonized societies to form a unified resistance. While he recognized the risks and complexities of violent revolution, he saw it as a means of asserting selfhood and rejecting assimilation into the colonizer's world. For Fanon, violence was not just a physical act but a symbolic and psychological rupture with colonial oppression.

1.5.1.2 Colonial Alienation and Mental Liberation

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explored the psychological effects of colonialism, particularly how colonized individuals internalize the values and language of their oppressors, leading to feelings of inferiority, cultural alienation, and identity fragmentation. This imposition of colonial norms creates a “double consciousness,” where the colonized are caught between their native heritage and the expectations of the colonial world. Fanon’s analysis of alienation has been interpreted through psychological (McCulloch, 1983; Bulhan, 1985), intellectual (Hansen, 1977), and socio-economic lenses (Zahar, 1974; Onwuanibe, 1983). He argued that decolonization must go beyond political independence to include cultural and psychological emancipation. Reclaiming indigenous languages, traditions, and historical narratives is essential to undoing the deep-rooted psychological damage of colonization. Only through cultural self-assertion and mental liberation can the colonized fully dismantle the legacy of oppression and rebuild a sense of identity rooted in their own history and values.

1.5.2 Decolonization as a Psychological Process

Decolonizing psychology involves challenging Eurocentric assumptions that have dominated psychological science and redefining knowledge production from the perspective of the formerly colonized. Euro-American psychology has historically dictated whose experiences and ideas are deemed legitimate, often marginalizing indigenous perspectives (Bhatia, 2002, 2008; Adams et al., 2015; Bulhan, 2015; Watkins, 2015). A decolonizing perspective seeks to broaden psychology’s scope to better serve marginalized and underserved communities. Movements such as indigenous psychology (Sinha, 1997; Pe-Pua, 2020), critical psychology (Teo, 2011), and liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1983) challenge the universal applicability of Western psychological theories. Instead, they advocate for a contextualized approach that recognizes the socio-cultural and historical experiences of non-Western populations (Kim & Berry, 1993; Yang, 2012). Frantz Fanon's contributions to the

study of decolonization are still tremendously relevant. His concept goes beyond political independence, emphasizing the importance of psychological liberty and cultural reclamation. By calling for both physical and intellectual resistance, Fanon gives a framework for analyzing colonialism's long-term consequences and how to deconstruct its repressive structures. His theories are still relevant in modern postcolonial studies, influencing conversations about neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, and structural oppression. Decolonization is a transformative process that aims to restore dignity, agency, and self-determination to formerly colonial peoples through a combination of political struggle and psychological emancipation.

1.6 Abrogation, Assimilation, and Counter-Discourse in Postcolonial Resistance

Abrogation and assimilation represent two fundamentally opposed responses to colonial domination within postcolonial resistance. Abrogation is a conscious act of cultural and linguistic resistance in which colonized peoples deliberately reject the imposed values, languages, and systems of the colonizer in order to reclaim and reassert their indigenous identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2002). This concept is powerfully exemplified by the Négritude movement, which arose in the mid-20th century as a literary and ideological affirmation of African cultures and values against the backdrop of European colonial oppression (Senghor 1965). A pivotal figure in the practice of abrogation is Ngũgĩ waThiong'o, who famously renounced writing in English in 1977, choosing instead to write in his native Gikuyu. Ngũgĩ argued that African literature should center African traditions and experiences rather than function as an "extension of the West," a position he articulated in his influential essay "On the Abolition of the English Department" (Ngũgĩ waThiong'o 1986). In his novel "A Grain of Wheat", Ngũgĩ dramatizes the tension between resistance and collaboration, portraying characters like Karanja, who internalizes British values and is thus

depicted as a traitor, in contrast to those who resist colonial influence and are celebrated as heroes (Ngũgĩ waThiong'o 1967). Abrogation, therefore, extends beyond the rejection of language; it challenges the ideological hierarchies of colonialism, advocating for cultural autonomy, decolonized epistemologies, and the revalidation of indigenous knowledge systems (Ashcroft et al 2002; Ngũgĩ waThiong'o 1986). In stark contrast, assimilation reflects the colonizer's effort to suppress and overwrite indigenous cultures by enforcing the adoption of dominant colonial norms and values. This process typically involves the marginalization or outright replacement of native languages and traditions, as seen in the British colonial policy of replacing Indian languages with English in both administration and education—a phenomenon vividly depicted in Kipling's "Kim" (Kipling 1901/2002; Ashcroft et al 2002). Assimilation is further institutionalized through the imposition of colonial education systems, legal codes, and cultural standards, such as the British curricula in colonial India, which codified and perpetuated colonial values while sidelining indigenous knowledge (Ashcroft et al 2002). These mechanisms of assimilation often result in profound identity loss, as colonized individuals internalize the oppressor's values and worldview, leading to psychological alienation and self-doubt—a dynamic Frantz Fanon explores in "Black Skin, White Masks" (Fanon 1967). Fanon describes how the colonized subject, compelled to adopt the colonizer's language and cultural codes, experiences an inferiority complex and a fractured sense of self. Postcolonial theorists critique assimilation as a form of cultural violence, arguing that it not only erases indigenous identity but also legitimizes and perpetuates imperial dominance (Said, 1978; Fanon 1967). Edward Said's "Orientalism" demonstrates how entrenched stereotypes and representations in Western discourse support colonial authority by constructing the "Orient" as inferior, exotic, and in need of domination (Said 1978). Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry further complicates the process of assimilation, highlighting how the colonized, though compelled to imitate the colonizer,

become “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). This state of mimicry produces ambivalence, simultaneously reinforcing and destabilizing colonial authority, and reveals the contradictions and instabilities inherent in the colonial project (Bhabha, 1994). Together, the strategies of abrogation and the critique of assimilation are central to postcolonial resistance, as they expose the mechanisms of cultural control and open up spaces for the reclamation and affirmation of indigenous identities and epistemologies (Ashcroft et al 2002; Ngũgĩ waThiong’o 1986; Fanon 1967; Said 1978; Bhabha 1994).

1.6.1 Counter-Discourse: Rewriting Colonial Narratives

Counter-discourse in postcolonial theory and literature functions as a strategic and creative challenge to colonial hegemony, employing a range of literary and theoretical tools to destabilize, subvert, and reconfigure dominant narratives imposed by imperial powers (Terdiman 1985). As Terdiman (1985) explains, counter-discourse represents a form of “symbolic resistance,” a deliberate effort to “displace and annihilate a dominant depiction of the world” (p. 12), and is realized through the contestation of colonial binaries such as civilized/savage, superior/inferior, and center/periphery. One of the most prominent strategies is linguistic hybridity, where postcolonial writers blend the colonizer’s language with indigenous languages and idioms, thereby disrupting the authority of the colonial language and asserting cultural plurality; Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* exemplifies this through its “chutnified” English, which incorporates Hindi and Urdu terms and expressions to create a hybrid narrative voice that resists linguistic assimilation (Rushdie 1981). This practice aligns with Homi Bhabha’s (1994) theory of hybridity and the “third space,” which conceptualizes cultural identity as fluid and negotiated, rather than fixed, thereby undermining the rigid hierarchies established by colonial discourse (Bhabha 1994).

Another crucial aspect of counter-discourse is the reclamation and re-centering of marginalized histories and voices, a process Gayatri Spivak (1988) foregrounds in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” where she argues that colonial and even postcolonial intellectual frameworks often silence or appropriate subaltern agency, necessitating new forms of representation that allow the oppressed to speak on their own terms (Spivak 1988). Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is a paradigmatic example, as it employs structural irony and narrative reversal to challenge colonial stereotypes of African “primitivism” and to portray the complexity and dignity of Igbo society prior to colonial intervention; Achebe’s depiction of the locusts’ arrival, initially seen as a blessing but ultimately symbolizing destructive colonial forces, subverts Eurocentric historical narratives and exposes the violence of imperial “civilizing” missions (Achebe 1994). Parody, irony, and intertextuality are also key counter-discursive techniques, as seen in Achebe’s direct engagement with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*; by reworking and critiquing canonical colonial texts, postcolonial writers expose the contradictions and racist assumptions embedded within them (Achebe 1994; Conrad 2007). Ngũgĩ waThiong’o’s (1986) concept of abrogation, which involves rejecting the colonial language in favor of indigenous languages, further exemplifies the political and cultural stakes of counter-discourse, as language itself becomes a site of resistance and self-definition (Ngũgĩ waThiong’o 1986). Bhabha (1994) extends this by theorizing that mimicry and hybridity do not simply reproduce colonial forms but rather transform and destabilize them, creating new possibilities for postcolonial subjectivity. Frantz Fanon’s (1963) insistence on the necessity of both ideological and material decolonization, including the potential for violent resistance, adds a sense of urgency and highlights that counter-discourse is not merely a literary or symbolic gesture but is intimately connected to real struggles for liberation and self-determination (Fanon, 1963). Collectively, these frameworks and practices demonstrate that postcolonial counter-discourse confronts the erasures and assimilative pressures of

colonialism through both rejection and creative reappropriation, enabling formerly marginalized peoples to reclaim their histories, languages, and identities while exposing the instability and contradictions of colonial power (Achebe 1994; Bhabha 1994; Fanon 1963; Ngũgĩ waThiong'o 1986; Rushdie 1981; Spivak 1988; Terdiman 1985).

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the transformative potential of postcolonial theory in challenging colonial legacies and reshaping contemporary discourses. From deconstructing binary oppositions to advocating for psychological and cultural liberation, postcolonialism provides a lens to critique power imbalances and celebrate hybrid identities. As globalization and migration continue to redefine borders, the insights of postcolonial scholars remain vital for understanding the complexities of identity, resistance, and justice in an interconnected yet uneven world. The journey of decolonization, both material and ideological, remains an ongoing struggle for equity and self-determination.

CHAPTER TWO

Power dynamics and Resistance

CHAPTER TWO : POWER DYNAMICS AND RESISTENCE

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Introduction

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, irrevocably altered the global political, social, and cultural landscape, ushering in an era defined by heightened security measures, ideological polarization, and institutionalized discrimination. This chapter, *Power Dynamics and Resistance*, explores the multifaceted repercussions of 9/11, focusing on the rise of Islamophobia, the legal and media frameworks that perpetuated anti-Muslim bias, and the resulting resistance both violent and ideological to Western hegemony. Through the lens of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the chapter also examines how literature captures the tensions of identity, belonging, and marginalization in a post-9/11 world. By analyzing policies like the USA PATRIOT Act, media portrayals of Muslims, and the global spread of Islamophobia, this chapter underscores the enduring consequences of 9/11 on civil liberties, international relations, and individual lives. Ultimately, it interrogates the power structures that emerged after the attacks and the diverse forms of resistance they provoked, offering a critical reflection on the intersection of security, identity, and narrative in contemporary society.

Section 1 : POST 9/11 CONTEXT AND IDEOLOGICAL SHIFTS

1.2.1 Post-9/11 America: Political, Social, and Cultural Transformations in Literature and Society

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, marked a watershed moment in American history, triggering major political, social, and cultural changes that continue to shape the United States. Politically, the U.S. launched the War on Terror, framing it as a global conflict between freedom and Islamic extremism (Gershkoff & Kushner 2005). The invasion of

Afghanistan in 2001 targeted al-Qaeda, while the 2003 Iraq War, justified by later-discredited claims of weapons of mass destruction, deeply polarized public opinion and devastated Iraq (Brill 2003; Gershkoff & Kushner 2005). Domestically, the USA PATRIOT Act expanded government surveillance and detention powers, sparking significant civil liberties concerns (Rohde 2003). The creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the TSA institutionalized a new era of security measures, such as airport body scans and public vigilance campaigns (Ridge & United States Dept. of Homeland Security 2003). Internationally, revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib and the use of “enhanced interrogation” at Guantánamo Bay damaged America’s moral reputation (The New Yorker 2004). Socially, the post-9/11 period saw a dramatic rise in xenophobia, especially targeting Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities; FBI data showed anti-Muslim hate crimes surged by over 1,600% in 2001, and policies like the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) required men from predominantly Muslim countries to register with authorities (FBI, 2002). Media coverage often conflated Islam with terrorism, fueling stereotypes and Islamophobic attitudes (Sikorski et al 2021). This environment fostered a culture of hyper-patriotism, where dissent was frequently labeled un-American (Brill 2003). Culturally, 9/11 trauma permeated literature, film, and art, with novels such as “*Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*” by Jonathan Safran Foer and “*Falling Man*” by Don DeLillo exploring themes of loss, survivor’s guilt, and the search for meaning in a fractured world (Foer 2005). Poetry and theater, including Amiri Baraka’s “*Somebody Blew Up America*” and Anne Nelson’s “*The Guys*”, documented collective grief and the complexities of mourning (Brill 2003). Film and television reflected public anxieties, with shows like “24” depicting torture as a necessary evil and movies like “*The Dark Knight*” reimagining heroes in a post-9/11 context (Brill 2003). Conspiracy documentaries such as “*Loose Change*” gained traction, reflecting widespread skepticism toward official narratives (Brill 2003). These patterns fundamentally altered

American identity, embedding a sense of perpetual war, heightened surveillance, and trauma into the nation's cultural narrative, with fiction and art becoming crucial spaces for negotiating these changes and blending personal and political suffering into a distinctive post-9/11 literary genre (Foer 2005).

1.2.2 The institutionalization of Islamophobia after 9/11

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a significant shift not only in global security policies but also in how Muslim identities are perceived and formed in Western societies. Following these attacks, Islamophobia evolved from primarily social and cultural biases to a more institutionalized and systematic issue rooted in laws, state apparatus, and official practices. This surge has had deep and enduring impacts on civil liberties, social cohesion, and the everyday experiences of Muslim individuals worldwide. Institutional Islamophobia represents a foundational and structural form of discrimination against Muslims by governmental agencies, the judiciary, educational systems, law enforcement, and the media. Rather than being confined to individual acts of bigotry or isolated incidents, it reflects the ongoing marginalization and discrediting of Muslim political expression and agency by these institutions. Sayyid places institutional Islamophobia within the context of post-racial discussions, suggesting that in societies claiming to be post-racial, Islamophobia emerges as a covert type of racial discrimination. This can be seen in the excessive monitoring of Muslim populations, counter-terrorism measures that disproportionately affect Muslims, political rhetoric framing Muslims as threats, and obstacles to their civic participation and representation. This form of Islamophobia may not be overtly expressed but is woven into bureaucratic processes that institutionalize bias and hinder equal Muslim participation in society.

1.2.2.1 Post-9/11 Policies and the Legalization of Anti-Muslim Bias in the West

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Western nations have increasingly enacted security, legal, and immigration policies that have unfairly targeted Muslim communities, thus embedding Islamophobia within state and legal frameworks. In the United States, the USA PATRIOT Act greatly widened the scope of government monitoring activities in the name of national security. This legislation allowed for the secret surveillance of Muslim groups, including mosques, student associations, and Islamic charities, often without substantial evidence or the safeguards of due process (Akbar, 2015). Many Muslim organizations faced excessive scrutiny, and individuals were arrested based on indistinct terrorism accusations, creating a fearful environment filled with systematic distrust. A notable instance is the New York Police Department's Demographics Unit (2003–2014), which engaged in surveillance of Muslim communities solely based on their religious and ethnic backgrounds, without any legitimate criminal justification (Apuzzo and Goldman, 2013). In the United Kingdom, the Prevent strategy a component of the broader anti-terrorism framework has faced criticism for pressuring educational and public institutions to identify and report people suspected of radicalization. This initiative has resulted in an increase in the profiling and reporting of Muslim students, professionals, and activists, fostering an atmosphere of distrust, surveillance, and censorship (Kundnani, 2014; Qureshi, 2016). Rather than being impartial, these measures are frequently viewed as state surveillance tactics that marginalize Muslims and equate religious practices with extremist behaviors. Beyond anti-terrorism initiatives, the immigration and legal systems in the West have fueled Islamophobic narratives through restrictive laws and biased practices. The Trump administration's 2017 "Muslim Ban" placed limitations on travel and immigration from various Muslim-majority countries, portraying Muslims as principal threats to national safety and igniting xenophobic sentiments (Abdelkader, 2018). Furthermore, more than 230 proposed bills in multiple U. S. states aimed at banning Sharia

law most of which were passed represented political stances rather than genuine legal necessities, inciting fear and stripping Muslims of their religious freedoms (CAIR, 2019). Collectively, these actions have undermined religious liberty and heightened societal stigmatization of Muslims. In the United Kingdom, similar patterns can be seen in immigration legislation. Laws like the 2014 Immigration Act and the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act have disproportionately affected Muslim migrants, as these laws focused on enforcement, border management, and the revocation of citizenship, particularly targeting individuals from predominantly Muslim countries. Critics argue that such legislation racializes immigration and casts Muslim immigrants as threats to social and national cohesion (Younis and Jadhav, 2020). This demonstrates how Islamophobic rhetoric influences policymaking, framing immigration control within a national security context in a dehumanizing manner that marginalizes Muslim communities. Overall, this reflects a broader trend of embedded Islamophobia within Western democracies. Governments have introduced policies under the guise of national security that infringe on civil liberties, deepen suspicion toward Muslim communities, and compromise core principles such as due process, equality, and the freedom of religion. As scholars like Akbar (2015) and Kundnani (2014) suggest, the legal acceptance of these actions represents a perilous intersection of security and identity politics, whereby being Muslim alone is perceived as a potential risk factor.

1.2.2.2. Media Representation and Cultural Framing

Post-9/11 media portrayals have influenced the public's perception of Islam drastically, the most prevalent being associating the religion with violence and incompatibility with Western values. Mainstream news media and entertainment media tend to depict Muslims as terrorists, fostering negative stereotypes and causing suspicion in society. As Shaheen (2008) illustrates, such a depiction of Muslims as irrational or threats has become standard and facilitated Islamophobic viewpoints becoming mainstream. Media sources preferred to use

terms such as "Islamic terrorism," blurring the lines between radical movements and the broader Muslim population. Visual metaphors e.g., hijabs, Arabic script, mosques—were pervasive in reporting related to war or terror, silently linking Islamic identity with danger. These depictions cemented Muslims' image as "others " deepening social cleavages and substantiating discriminatory policies and interventions.

1.2.2.3 The Globalization of Islamophobia: From the West to the World

After 9/11, Islamophobia extended beyond the West, becoming a globalized phenomenon driven by counter-terror strategies, political rhetoric, and media narratives from the U.S. and Europe. This model of suspicion and exclusion has been adopted by countries like France, India, and Australia under the banners of secularism and national security. France's ban on face coverings and other laws limiting religious expression restrict Muslim visibility in public life. In India, the ruling government under Modi has embraced global Islamophobic tropes to enforce discriminatory citizenship laws and state-sponsored violence. Australia has echoed similar practices with heightened surveillance and cultural suspicion of Muslims. Across the world, legal systems, media discourses, and political strategies have aligned to promote a shared, institutional Islamophobia where visible Muslim identity is increasingly viewed as synonymous with threat or extremism.

1.2.3 Resistance and Rejection of the West: America in the Post-9/11 Era

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, represented a turning point in the world's political, ideological, and cultural landscape. In the name of the "War on Terror " the US responded to the strikes by taking quick action to reestablish military, political, and ideological control. The invasion of Afghanistan signaled the start of the campaign, which later expanded to Iraq and was portrayed as a vital step in eradicating terrorism and

establishing democracy in the Muslim world. But the majority of the international community, academics, and political analysts (Chomsky, 2011) saw these actions not as protection but as neo-imperialist, unilateral interventions aimed at strengthening U.S. dominance. The impression of the United States seeking to establish a unipolar order was fueled by the Bush White House's doctrine of preemptive attacks and disregard for international consensus. By doing this, it unwittingly placed the Islamic world in the role of the political and cultural "other" which led to alienation, animosity, and, ultimately, opposition. Amidst almost widespread disapproval and opposition, especially in the Middle East, South Asia, and even in Western countries themselves, this reaffirmation of Western dominance took place. With the US military expanding its presence in the area, anti-Americanism grew more pronounced throughout the Muslim world. Many felt that the American presence was more of an occupation than a liberation, which fueled the idea of Western dominance. Such sentiments were exploited by extremist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda, who portrayed themselves as protectors against foreign invasion and cultural imperialism (Gerges, 2005). In addition to rebuffing Western political sway, these movements also refuted its secular values, consumerism, and perceived moral decadence, proposing in its place a radicalized, militant option founded on a notion of religious and cultural purity. In addition to violent resistance, a more widespread, peaceful ideological and cultural opposition arose. Intellectuals, priests, and commoners throughout the Muslim world became increasingly critical of Western liberalism, secularism, and materialism, claiming that these ideals endangered traditional identities and social cohesion. Said (1997) reported that Western media, fashion, and lifestyle were frequently perceived as posing a threat to native moral orders, which led to a resurgence in national cultural identities and traditional religious beliefs. Additionally, in an effort to seize power, the authoritarian governments of Iran and Syria used anti-Western language, portraying themselves as protectors of national sovereignty and cultural legitimacy against

what they saw as Western invasion. At the same time, opposition to Western and particularly American power originated inside the West itself. The 2003 Iraq War, which was started on the basis of disputed assertions of weapons of mass destruction, sparked widespread anti-war demonstrations around the world, including in the United States, Europe, and Asia. The U.S. was condemned by critics for violating international law and fostering global instability in the name of national security (Pew Research Center, 2006). Furthermore, revelations of human rights violations at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay eroded America's moral standing and called into question its image as a global advocate for justice and democracy. There was also a strong sense of discontent with the War on Terrorism in the United States. Islamophobia, racial profiling, and increased monitoring, all of which contributed to marginalization and isolation, were among the challenges faced by Muslim Americans. Although said to be promoting national security, the Patriot Act was charged with eroding civil liberties and constitutional protections. On the other hand, American authors, artists, and filmmakers started to question the moral ramifications of American foreign policy.

The ethical ambiguities of America's global hegemony and notions of American exceptionalism were dramatized in novels like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and films like *Syriana* and *Zero Dark Thirty*. Eventually, this widespread opposition shifted the course of the world. Emerging nations like China and Russia established themselves as alternatives to Western dominance as American soft power declined. Organizations like BRICS were created to provide counterbalances to the World Bank, IMF, and other institutions that are dominated by the West. Additionally, anti-Western ideologies gained traction in well-liked movements throughout the Global South, not simply in official statements. These reflected a change in the balance of ideological and geopolitical power, which ended the West's dominance over international norms and government.

The United States tried to assert leadership via military and ideological hegemony, but this only caused opposition instead of support. This rejection came from the people of the United States as well as from the immediate victims of American actions, demonstrating a widespread legitimacy crisis for the Western-led global order. Therefore, the events surrounding and following 9/11 not only changed American foreign policy but also brought about a fundamental reconsideration of the West's role in the world.

Section 2 :Hamid’s contextual experience

2.2.1 Hamid’s own experience of marginalization

The Pakistan-born internationally bestselling author of *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* takes on ethnic identity, class disparity, and mass-urbanization in his bold, inventive work. Winner of the Betty Trask Award, a Pen/Hemingway finalist, and shortlisted for the Man Booker twice, most recently for *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid has quickly emerged as a clarion voice of his generation.

2.2.1.1 Early Life and Education

Mohsin Hamid was born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1971, to an academic family that prioritized education and intellectual exploration. During his childhood, he frequently crossed cultural boundaries, especially when his father pursued a doctorate at Stanford University in the United States. When Hamid was just three, his family relocated to California, where he spent several formative years. This period exposed him to American suburban life, distancing him from his Pakistani roots, which significantly influenced his worldview. He reflects on this

experience in his essay *"Once Upon a Life"* noting, "I learned to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' years before I could sing the Pakistani national anthem. I was an American kid, through and through. "(Hamid ,2011). The impact of this upbringing enabled him to deeply engage with American culture, fostering a sense of belonging in a place that felt foreign. However, Hamid's family returned to Pakistan when he was nine, prompting him to navigate the challenges of reintegrating into his homeland. Despite this transition, the memories of his early life in America remained influential, leaving a lasting mark on his character. This bicultural upbringing significantly influenced Hamid's subsequent writings, as he frequently explored themes of cultural conflict, identity, and the struggle between two worlds. Hamid's education resumed in Lahore, where he finished high school. He later enrolled in undergraduate studies at Princeton University, one of the top universities in the United States. At Princeton, he was mentored by some of the most celebrated writers of the era, such as Toni Morrison and Joyce Carol Oates. Their mentorship, combined with Princeton's stimulating academic atmosphere, fueled Hamid's enthusiasm for writing and literature. His experiences there intensified his fascination with the intricacies of identity, race, and culture, subjects that would later become central to his novels. After earning his undergraduate degree from Princeton, Hamid proceeded to Harvard Law School. While law was not his passion, the challenging education he received there helped him develop critical analytical skills that would serve him in his career. Following his time in law school, he opted for a position as a management consultant, working at McKinsey and Company in both New York and London. This professional experience offered him insight into the global business mindset and the interplay between personal ambition and broader societal issues, topics that eventually appeared in his writing. Despite his success as a consultant, Hamid's true calling was writing, and it was through this medium that he ultimately achieved international recognition.

2.2.1.2 Transition to Writing

During his time as a management consultant at McKinsey and Company, Mohsin Hamid developed a profound and lasting love for writing. Even with the demands of corporate life, he prioritized his literary endeavors and frequently used fiction to explore complex social and personal dilemmas. This balancing act between the logical world of business and the creative realm of writing ultimately prepared him for the publication of his first novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000). The book presents a raw and candid depiction of contemporary Lahore, centered around Daru Shezad, a disenchanted ex-banker who spirals into drug addiction and moral decline. Through Daru's story, Hamid uncovers the underlying themes of corruption, social class, and existential despair within a society undergoing rapid political and economic changes. The narrative highlights the increasing divide between the wealthy and the disadvantaged, reflecting the disillusionment of a generation caught between old customs and modern influences. Upon its release, *Moth Smoke* received significant critical praise and brought Hamid numerous accolades, including the Betty Trask Award and a nomination for the PEN/Hemingway Award. Its melancholic themes and authentic representation resonated with readers internationally, resulting in its publication in 14 different languages. In Pakistan, the novel became immensely popular, especially among younger audiences who saw their own challenges and heartaches mirrored in its content. Its adaptation into a telefilm further broadened its audience, reinforcing Hamid's status as a courageous and perceptive voice in modern literature. The triumph of *Moth Smoke* represented a pivotal moment in Hamid's career, confirming his ability to intertwine personal storytelling with sharp social critique. This narrative approach continued to influence his subsequent works, such as his globally acclaimed novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), which similarly examines themes of identity, alienation, and the landscape of the world following 9/11. In addition to the depth of

his storyline, Hamid has received significant acclaim for his creative storytelling techniques, which challenge traditional literature and captivate readers in unique manners. A prime example is his 2013 work, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. In this novel, Hamid employs a second-person point of view, a rare choice that immerses readers in the journey of the main character as he transitions from rural hardship to urban success. By directly referring to the reader as "you," Hamid dismantles the separation between the audience and the narrative, engendering an immediate sense of urgency that blurs the distinction between fiction and reality. This literary method not only facilitates deeper emotional engagement but also highlights the common yearning for upward mobility in a world governed by globalization and economic logic. The novel takes on the characteristics of self-help literature, critiquing its assurances while subtly exposing the emotional and ethical toll associated with achieving financial success. Through this clever structure, Hamid critiques the exploitative schemes that perpetuate inequality and spotlights the personal sacrifices often linked to economic advancement. His willingness to experiment with narrative voice and structure sets him apart as a writer who is not just aware of social issues but is also boldly innovative in his art.

2.2.1.3 Creative Storytelling Techniques

Alongside the rich themes present in his works, Mohsin Hamid has garnered acclaim for his unique storytelling techniques that set his novels apart from traditional literary works. A prime illustration of this creativity can be found in his 2013 book *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. In this novel, Hamid takes the bold step of using second-person narration, immersing readers in the protagonist's experiences. By directly addressing the reader with the word "you," he fosters a sense of closeness and connection, guiding them through the

character's journey from poverty to wealth while navigating ambition, success, and social mobility. This unconventional narrative approach not only emphasizes the protagonist's struggles but also highlights the personal sacrifices linked to achieving success, especially in the context of contemporary capitalism. By presenting this singular perspective, Hamid captivates readers and critiques the economic structures that perpetuate inequality and reveal the human costs of globalization.

2.2.1.4 The Reluctant Fundamentalist: A Turning Point

Mohsin Hamid's second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), marks a significant shift in his thematic exploration, drawing from his own experiences as a Pakistani Muslim man residing in New York during the September 11, 2001 attacks. The narrative, which began months prior to that tragic day, follows Changez, a young Pakistani professional immersed in corporate America. As he grows disillusioned with the American corporate landscape and his part in it, he longs to reconnect with his roots in Pakistan. Having written most of the book before the attacks, Hamid recognized that 9/11 changed the narrative's backdrop immensely. Witnessing the aftermath from London, he revised much of the story to capture the dramatic shifts that followed, including the racial profiling of Muslims, the growth of the security apparatus, and the emotional toll on diasporic communities. Thus, the novel evolved into a reflection on cultural dislocation, identity struggles, and the strains between Eastern and Western perspectives. The monologue format employed in the novel allowed Hamid to delve deeper into these themes, contemplating issues of autonomy, estrangement, and the altered views of Muslim immigrants in America after 9/11. Hamid's experiences, having studied at Princeton and worked within corporate America while witnessing the post-9/11 reality,

provided him with unique insights into Changez's internal battles. The book quickly became a bestseller within a month, translated into over thirty languages, and garnered numerous prestigious accolades, including the Ambassador Book Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. It was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and recognized by The Guardian as one of the defining books of the decade. In 2013, it was adapted into a film directed by Mira Nair, featuring actors Riz Ahmed, Liev Schreiber, and Kate Hudson. Ultimately, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* serves as Hamid's effort to give voice to those caught in the crossfire of international politics and cultural misunderstandings, presenting a fresh perspective on the post-9/11 landscape.

2.2.2 The historical context of the novel

The context of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects the seismic shifts in global politics following the 9/11 attacks, the American occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, which, according to Hamid's argument, were justified by "myths of American difference" (Gasztold, p7). Globally, legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act and NSEERS targeted Muslim communities, making ordinary citizens suspicious, as Changez comes to realize firsthand through the novel. Portrayals in the media, following the script of Edward Said's "Orientalist" stereotypes, persisted in heightening tensions, being perceived in how Changez's beard is deemed a threat (Gasztold). Meanwhile, Pakistan's unstable position as America's ally during the War on Terror and the military dictatorship of Pervez Musharraf left society with widespread fear and insecurity, which Changez's family reflects as preparing for war (Tetek,p5). Against this charged backdrop, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a subdued postcolonial novel that questions the West's approach to the East after 9/11. Through Changez's narration of his sojourn in America to a reserved American listener in Lahore, the

novel examines the increasing isolation that he felt as both Erica and American society rejected him. Hamid astutely inverts the rule of tales with the Muslim heroine in command, 'Othering' the American and forcing readers to question assumptions and biases. The Orientalism-Occidentalism dialectic is the crucial one here, with Hamid providing no decisive answers but evocative suggestion, forcing readers to acknowledge the ways stereotypes operate on their perceptions. Through the use of allegorical naming and narrative ambiguity, Hamid also critiques economic fundamentalism alongside religious fundamentalism, highlighting Changez's revelation that he had compromised his heritage for the sake of American capitalism. Lastly, Hamid's own border-crossing experience as an author provides a license for the novel to transcend facile 9/11 trauma narratives and instead provide a cosmopolitan dialectic wherein violence is confronted by additional violence, fundamentalisms dehumanize, and identity polarization threatens an interdependent world. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a reflective, queasy interlude before fiction could grapple in full strength on the long tail of 9/11, offering no answers but urgent questions about power, belonging, and perception.

Conclusion

The post-9/11 era has been marked by a paradoxical interplay of power and resistance, where state-sanctioned security measures and institutionalized Islamophobia have clashed with global and local acts of defiance. This chapter has traced the ideological shifts that followed the attacks, from the legal entrenchment of anti-Muslim bias to the cultural narratives that framed Muslims as perpetual "others." Through Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we see how literature serves as a powerful medium to critique these dynamics, giving voice to the alienation and disillusionment experienced by marginalized communities. The resistance to Western dominance whether through political

movements, cultural reassertion, or artistic expression reveals a world grappling with the legacies of trauma and inequality. As the chapter demonstrates, the events of 9/11 did not merely reshape foreign policy or security protocols; they redefined the very fabric of identity, belonging, and global power relations. In confronting these complexities, we are compelled to question the narratives of fear and division that continue to shape our world and to imagine alternatives rooted in justice and mutual understanding.

CHAPTER THREE

The Reluctant Fundamentalist as Postcolonial Critique: Identity, Ideology, and Institutional Islamophobia

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Introduction

This chapter explores *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid through the lens of postcolonial theory, focusing on themes of hybridity, mimicry, Orientalism, and psychological decolonization. The novel's protagonist, Changez, embodies the complexities of transnational identity in a post-9/11 world, navigating the tensions between cultural assimilation and resistance. By applying frameworks from Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon, this analysis examines how the novel critiques Western hegemony, institutional Islamophobia, and the psychological toll of globalization. Through its narrative form a dramatic monologue from a Pakistani narrator to a silent American listener the novel subverts traditional power dynamics, offering a counter-discourse to dominant postcolonial narratives. This chapter highlights Changez's journey as a metaphor for broader struggles of identity, belonging, and resistance in a neocolonial world.

3.1 Synopsis of the plot

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the main character Changez lives a joyful life in the U.S. before the catastrophic event of 9/11 occurs. After the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, everything turns upside down for him, as well as for all his fellow Eastern Muslims residing in America. They face harsh and disdainful treatment. Muslims are branded as terrorists and labeled as outsiders. In this regard, individuals like Changez, who deeply admire America, are profoundly wounded. Since the novel's plot is rooted in the protagonist's past experiences, with occasional glimpses into the present, he

reflects on and revisits those sweet and painful memories that have left him psychologically scarred. Just as he reaches the height of his success, the 9/11 attacks occur, crushing his aspirations. Alongside this tragedy, his failed romance with Erica drives him to abandon America and New York—the city he once idealized. The novel focuses on Changez’s journey in America, contrasting his life before and after 9/11 within U.S. society. Initially, he is completely content with his achievements and strives wholeheartedly to contribute to America’s economy. He is a proud and optimistic young man. However, as the story progresses, factors like religious, cultural, and racial differences emerge, leading to his decline. The aftermath of 9/11 and his growing despair over his broken relationship ultimately push him to leave the country he once cherished. The novel underscores the emotional and psychological turmoil endured by Changez, who symbolizes Eastern Muslims, due to these circumstances. Additionally, it explores the reactions of those affected by the 9/11 tragedy. Using a storytelling technique that weaves past experiences with present reflections, the narrator and protagonist, Changez, revisits those bittersweet memories of America that still haunt his mind, tormenting him mentally.

3.2 Theoretical Framework Applied

3.2.1 Hybridity and the “Third Space” (Bhabha):

The concept of the “*third space*” introduced by Homi Bhabha, refers to the transitional zone where cultures intersect, interact, and negotiate meaning. It is a space of liminality and transformation, where fixed identities become fluid, and something new—hybridity—emerges (Bhabha, 2012, pp. 37–38). Rather than belonging wholly to one cultural framework, hybrid

individuals exist in-between, navigating the tensions and contradictions of multiple cultural affiliations. This hybridity is not merely a mix of two identities, but a dynamic, evolving condition shaped by historical power relations, displacement, and the ongoing search for belonging. In this space, meaning and identity are constantly redefined, often marked by ambivalence, negotiation, and resistance. This theoretical framework finds a vivid embodiment in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where the protagonist Changez navigates between cultural identities, revealing the psychological and social challenges of hybridity. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid crafts a nuanced exploration of cultural identity and resistance through the character of Changez, who embodies the complexities of a hybrid identity. Changez's experience as a native Pakistani educated in American schools places him at a crossroads between two conflicting cultural realms, reflecting Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "*Third Space*" where new identities emerge from colonial and postcolonial interactions. The narrative reveals the superficiality of Changez's American identity and the deep-seated prejudices he faces, especially after the September 11 attacks, which symbolize the cultural and political boundaries between East and West. This event catalyzes Changez's realization of his outsider status and his decision to return to Pakistan, signifying a conscious act of cultural reclamation and resistance. As a lecturer in Pakistan, Changez aims to foster a new generation aware of and resistant to Western hegemony, redefining his identity in the process. The novel contributes to postcolonial discourse by showing that hybrid identities are not just products of cultural exchange but also of resistance and critique. In the analysis of Changez's hybrid identity, neither Pakistani nor American culture appears to completely dominate his character. Bhabha (2004, p. 52) argues that any culture is a constellation of social and cultural elements shared with others at any given point, challenging the notion of cultural 'purity'. His concept of 'social collectives' does not refer merely to a blend of cultural traits or a superficial syncretism; rather,

it implies the emergence of new and distinct cultural forms when shared elements converge (Bhabha, 2004, p. 162). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, both Pakistani and American cultures are presented as hybrid rather than pure. The novel depicts cultural intersections, such as 'Urdu-speaking drivers' and 'samosa and chana-serving establishments' in Manhattan, and 'girls in jeans', 'Royal Marquee', and 'Company Punjab Club' in Lahore. These overlapping cultural symbols reflect how cultural collectives from both societies coexist and blend within Changez's identity. As he states, "I am both a native of this city (Lahore) and a speaker of your language" (Hamid, 2007, p. 1), affirming his dual affiliation. Moreover, the narrative structure itself mirrors this hybridity, as the plot shifts between overlapping temporal and spatial settings, reinforcing hybridity at both psychological and narrative levels. Changez's hybrid identity is portrayed as fluid and evolving, particularly after the events of 9/11. Although his outward transformation, growing a beard, quitting his job, and returning to Pakistan, may suggest a shift toward a singular national or religious identity, this transformation actually highlights his negotiation of identity within the third space. The decentralization of both his American and Pakistani affiliations intensifies his awareness of cultural dislocation. For instance, when he observes, "Do you see those girls, walking there, in jeans speckled with paint? ... And how different they look from the women ... in their traditional dresses" (Hamid, 2007, p. 3), the commentary reflects a detached awareness of cultural contrast without allegiance to either side. His refusal to align entirely with one cultural identity prevents essentialist readings and instead reinforces a transcultural perspective. Changez cannot be viewed as a fundamentalist character. This is particularly evident in Erica's observation: "You give people their space. I really like that. It's unusual." Her remark highlights Changez's emotional maturity and openness to others, qualities that contrast sharply with any rigid or extremist mindset. However, despite his tolerance, he is not granted the same openness within American society. In one instance, he sarcastically states, "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. Erica alone smiled.” This moment is telling—not only of how humor is misinterpreted through the lens of cultural bias, but also of how deeply embedded Islamophobic assumptions are in his social environment. The need to clarify his joke reveals the hyper-sensitivity surrounding Muslim identity, particularly in a post-9/11 context. Furthermore, Changez’s return to Pakistan does not indicate an embrace of fundamentalism, but rather a heightened awareness of the performative nature of such identities. His observation in Anarkali—“That bearded man... himself unable to stop glancing over his shoulder at those girls, fifty yards away from him”, is a subtle yet sharp critique of societal hypocrisy. This ability to perceive contradictions within outward expressions of religiosity suggests a discerning, critical consciousness rather than a dogmatic or prejudiced worldview. To conclude, the theme of hybridity and the third space in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights the fluid and changing nature of identity. Through Changez’s experience, Hamid illustrates how living between cultures leads to inner conflict, but also creates space for selfreflection and transformation.

3.2.2 Mimicry and Ambivalence

The concepts of mimicry and ambivalence, as theorized by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), are central to understanding the protagonist Changez’s identity crisis in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Bhabha defines mimicry as the colonized subject’s imitation of the colonizer’s culture, which produces a “partial presence” that is “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86). This dynamic is evident in Changez’s initial assimilation into American society—his adoption of corporate professionalism, accent, and lifestyle at Underwood Samson embodies the mimicry of Western economic and cultural

norms, as he admits: "I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American" (Hamid 74). However, as Bhabha argues, such mimicry is inherently ambivalent; it simultaneously reinforces and destabilizes colonial authority. This ambivalence erupts after 9/11, when Changez confesses: "But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack... I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (Hamid 83). His unconscious pride in America's vulnerability clashes with his conscious identity as an American insider, exposing the psychological fractures of colonial subjectivity. Changez's polished demeanor and success in the U.S. exemplify his desire to belong, yet his racial and cultural difference ensures he remains perpetually "in-between," never fully accepted (Bhabha 122). The novel's *dramatic monologue structure* amplifies this ambivalence, leaving Changez's reliability and motives open to interpretation. As Byron (2003) notes, the absence of an authorial voice in dramatic monologue forces readers to question the speaker's perspective (Byron 20–21). Changez's insistence, "I am not in the habit of inventing untruths!" (Hamid 173)—betrays his awareness of the American listener's (and reader's) skepticism, mirroring the instability of his hybrid identity. His gradual disillusionment culminates in the realization that he is a "modern-day janissary" complicit in America's economic imperialism (Hamid 152), yet his earlier admission—"I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged – in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid 168), reveals the *unhomeliness* (Bhabha 9) that defines his existential limbo. This epiphany, inspired by Juan-Bautista's analogy in Chile, underscores Bhabha's claim that mimicry can become a site of resistance when the colonized subject recognizes their coerced role (Bhabha 89). Symbols of resistance and ambivalence further complicate Changez's identity. His decision to grow a beard, "a form of protest... a symbol of my identity" (Hamid 130)—signals a rejection of assimilation, yet his critique of America remains entangled with the very system he condemns. As Baudrillard argues in *The Spirit of*

Terrorism (2002), globalization's homogenizing forces provoke violent singularities (Baudrillard 9); Changez's rebellion mirrors this tension, as he weaponizes his hybridity to challenge U.S. hegemony without fully escaping its logic. The novel's unresolved ending—where the American's potential violence mirrors the ambiguity of Changez's transformation, reflects Bhabha's notion that ambivalence resists closure, exposing the "third space" of enunciation where identity is perpetually negotiated (Bhabha 37). Ultimately, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques the economic fundamentalism of globalization (embodied by Underwood Samson's mantra, "focus on the fundamentals" (Hamid 14) while exposing the psychological fractures of postcolonial subjectivity. Changez's journey from mimicry to reluctant resistance exemplifies what Baudrillard calls the "revenge of the excluded" (Baudrillard 32), where the system's overprotection breeds its own destabilization. By weaving Bhabha's theories with Hamid's narrative, the novel reveals how mimicry and ambivalence dismantle colonial binaries, offering a nuanced portrayal of identity in a polarized world.

3.3 Orientalism in Form and Content

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a robust literary critique of Orientalism, both in terms of theme and form, through examining the construction of the "Other" in post-9/11 geopolitics and through formally inverting the East-West narrative hierarchy. Drawing on the pathbreaking work of Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), the novel oversteps Western epistemological privilege heretofore over the East and challenges racialized categories through which Muslim and South Asian identities are imagined to come into being, particularly in the wake of terrorism. Through the tale of its own narrator, Changez,

and the novel's self-reflexive narrative form, a dramatic monologue to an American stranger. Hamid restores representational power to the Eastern subject and dislocates the authority of the Orientalist gaze. Said's Orientalism theory reveals the way in which the West constitutes the East as exotic, inferior, and threatening, a discourse which justifies political hegemony by denying the East the possibility of representing itself. Hamid illustrates this disequilibrium of power by staging Changez's own transformation from the adoration of America to a realization about the way that the West caricatures him. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Changez is subjected to the complete force of Orientalist suspicion: "I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at the airport I was pulled aside for special screening" (Hamid, 2007, p. 85). His beard, once culturally neutral, becomes a sign of suspicion—so much so that he has to reassure the American stranger in the first line itself: "Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (p. 1). This ironic statement captures the essence of the Orientalist predicament: The East is only loved when it does loyalty to the West. But *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not only thematically a denunciation of Orientalism, it is also structurally a reversal of Orientalist narrative traditions. Instead of being spoken about, as in Western travel writing and colonial fiction, the Eastern subject here gets to do all the speaking. The novel is framed as a single monologue by Changez to a nameless American at a Lahore coffee shop. This framing device matters. It turns the normal narrative power relation around and places the Western subject in the position of the passive, watched one. According to Priya Kumar, "Hamid's novel turns the imperial gaze around and gives a textual site where the Other speaks and the empire listens, if uncomfortably" (Kumar 2012, p. 465). The American's silence is not neutral; it becomes a space of narrative tension and symbolic discomfort, and the reader, especially the Western reader, must sit with their assumptions and complicity. Throughout the novel, Changez teasingly toys with the American's fears and expectations. His hospitality is ironic, as he remarks at one point, "You

seem puzzled. Let us see if we can illuminate the matter together” (p. 79). The “we” in this instance is performative: it suggests dialogue while masking a more profound imbalance—Changez propels the action, while the American is speechless, even perhaps dangerous. The structure mimics and exposes the dialectics of surveillance, suspicion, and stereotyping that characterize the post-9/11 world. In Orientalist discourse, the East is framed by the West's gaze; in this work, Hamid reverses that formula, and the Westerner is watched back. The novel also uses its narrative ambiguity to further subvert Orientalist paranoia. The reader is never quite sure whether Changez is dangerous or whether the American is armed and dangerous. The final line, “But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards” (Hamid 2007, p. 121)—caps this unease. The ambiguity unsettles old oppositions of good and evil, civilized and barbaric, West and East. By doing so, Hamid forces the reader to ask themselves whether the internalized Orientalism that drives these responses is justified, or reflective of our own biases. In addition, the structure of the novel allows Hamid to explore the psychological and emotional underpinnings of postcolonial identity. Changez's disillusionment is not only in the geopolitics context but also in his doomed affair with Erica, a character whose name and emotional distance are themselves a metaphor for America. “I did not wish to share her with history... but she was not hers alone” (p. 33), Changez reflects, aware that he stands no chance against Erica's bond with the past—her dead boyfriend Chris, symbol of pre-9/11 American naivety. His romance with Erica is a microcosm of the larger colonial relationship: romantic, exploitative, and ultimately dismissive. Just as with his professional persona, Changez realizes that he is only worth as much as he is valuable to a Western narrative of economic and cultural supremacy. It is this which leads him to draw parallels with a janissary: “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” (p.

152). The analogy is cutting. Just as with the Christian boys conscripted into the Ottoman Empire to fight against their own, Changez comes to the understanding that his role at Underwood Samson—a US valuation firm—is that of betrayal. He is disconnected from his origins, serving to dismantle businesses in the Global South for the purposes of Western gain. His ultimate rejection of this role and going back to Pakistan, symbolized by his rejection of shaving his beard—“I had not shaved... because I had ceased to be ashamed of my origins” (p. 130)—is a cultural and political coming to life, an act of rebellion against Orientalist representation and economic imperialism. Generally, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is opposed to Orientalism not only in its thematic engagement with identity, suspicion, and imperialism but also through its stylistic experimentation. In placing narrative control in the hands of an Eastern subject and silencing the Western listener, Hamid reverses the colonial narration's logic. The novel thus serves as a form of narrative decolonization, reclaiming the right of the Other to speak, to question, and to define himself on his own terms. Both in content and form, Hamid resists the longstanding paradigms of Orientalism and invites the reader to re-read the presuppositions underlying international power relations and literary representation. This realization leads him to liken himself to a Janissary: “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” (p. 152). The metaphor is pointed. Like the Christian boys conscripted by the Ottoman Empire and turned against their own people, Changez comes to see his role at Underwood Samson, an American valuation firm, as one of betrayal. He is alienated from his origins, employed to dismantle companies in the Global South for the profit of the West. His eventual rejection of this role and return to Pakistan, symbolized by his decision to keep his beard, “I had not shaved... because I had ceased to be ashamed of my origins” (p. 130)—marks a political and cultural awakening, an act of resistance against both Orientalist representation and economic imperialism. In sum, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques

Orientalism not only through its thematic focus on identity, suspicion, and imperialism but also through its formal innovation. By placing narrative authority in the hands of an Eastern subject and rendering the Western listener silent, Hamid reverses the logic of colonial storytelling. The novel thus operates as a form of narrative decolonization, reclaiming the right of the Other to speak, to question, and to define himself on his own terms. Through both content and form, Hamid challenges the enduring structures of Orientalism and invites the reader to reexamine the assumptions that underlie global power relations and literary representation.

3.4 Decolonization and Counter-Discourse

3.4.1 Psychological Decolonization:

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid constructs Changez's ideological transformation as a **psychological act of existential decolonization**, where the protagonist's denial of **neoliberal capitalism** itself functions as a metaphor for the more universal denial of **colonial modernity**. Initially, Changez appears to be the perfect neoliberal subject: a Pakistani national who excels at Princeton, secures a coveted job at the vaunted valuation firm Underwood Samson, and is quickly integrated into New York's cosmopolitan elite. He notes, "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid 2008, p. 33), reflective of his initial identification with Western capitalist culture and the American Dream. This is the time that corresponds to Frantz Fanon's (1967) account of the colonized subject's internalization of the values of the colonizer, a psychological condition where success is measured in proportion to conformity with Western ideals. Underwood Samson's advertisement, "focus on the fundamentals," encapsulates the reductionist essence of neoliberal capitalism: a rationality that prioritizes efficiency and profit over emotional

nuance, ethical responsibility, and cultural specificity. David Harvey (2005) argues that this ideology of capitalism sustains modern imperialism by enveloping economic control over the world in the language of market rationality and meritocracy. The tragedy of 9/11 brings a crisis to Changez's ideological affiliations. Observing the collapse of the World Trade Center, he confesses, "I stared at one, and then the other, of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled" (Hamid 2008, p72). This unsettling response reflects his growing disillusionment with American dominance and the revealing symbols of its imperial roots. After returning to Manila, Changez faces racial profiling at the airport and undergoes intrusive searches, "I was made to strip down to my undergarments" (Hamid 2008, p. 74), which lead him to confront the complexity of his own identity in America after 9/11. These experiences align with Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of "the unhomely," where the postcolonial individual understands the impossibility of complete integration and starts to navigate the conflicts within their hybridity. Changez increasingly resists his involvement in empire, acknowledging that "finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" (Hamid 2008, p.94), and compares himself to a contemporary janissary, a servant of empire who betrays his own people. His psychological decolonization is finished when he returns to Lahore, where he deliberately distances himself from Western norms and affirms his cultural identity. Growing a beard, "a symbol of my identity... to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind" (Hamid, 2008, p. 80), serves as a symbolic gesture of resistance and self-assertion. His clear condemnation of American foreign policy, "I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world" (Hamid, 2008, p. 96)—represents a conclusive ideological separation. This aligns with Ngũgĩ waThiong'o's (1986) viewpoint that decolonization involves not just structural opposition but also the **decolonization of the mind**, reclaiming agency by rejecting colonial ways of thinking. By taking on the role of a university educator and aligning himself with anti-globalization

initiatives, Changez evolves into what Gayatri Spivak (1988) would call **a counter-discursive agent**, someone who "speaks back" to the imperial mechanisms from the periphery. Through Changez's transformation, Hamid presents a powerful metaphor for postcolonial resistance, indicating that the critique of neoliberal capitalism entails not only personal disillusionment but also a widespread reaction to global systems that sustain economic disparity, racial surveillance, and cultural obliteration. Ultimately, the novel demystifies the illusion of Western meritocracy and reveals the links between contemporary capitalism and imperial authority. In this manner, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* illustrates psychological decolonization as both an act of political emancipation and a journey of personal enlightenment.

3.4.2 Subaltern voice

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* examined through the theoretical framework of Decolonization and Counter-Discourse, and particularly through the perspective of the subaltern, offers a compelling critique of the historical silencing of marginalized voices. The monologic structure of the novel, presented entirely as Changez's speech to a silent American audience, positions the postcolonial figure not as an object within Western discourse or as a reflection of it, but rather as an individual expressing his own frustrations regarding American imperialism. This stands as a decolonial narrative in its purest form, transforming the clichéd immigrant success narrative into a form of resistance against hegemonic authority, as exemplified by Changez's own words: "I am a lover of America... But as I grew older, that love got diluted." (Hamid 2007, p 1). Through this method, Changez asserts discursive resistance by taking charge of his own story. Gayatri Spivak's influential critique in *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* complicates this empowerment. Spivak contends that the subaltern, even when seemingly vocal, is often mediated or appropriated by dominant

structures (Spivak 1988, p271–313). In the narrative, Changez's speech is directed towards a potentially armed American whose silence symbolizes the ever-present Western scrutiny, implying that despite his speech, Changez remains under the watchful gaze of hegemonic power. His words, “I detect from your accent that you are American... It is not often that one sees an American in Old Anarkali.” (Hamid 2007, p 1)”. It is rare to meet an American in Old Anarkali, subverting the traditional ethnographic emphasis, yet the disparity in power still exists. The Western reader, likely empathizing with the quiet American, may question Changez's reliability and interpret his story with skepticism. This reinforces Spivak's assertion that subaltern expressions are frequently undermined or doubted. Additionally, Changez's statement, “I was never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker. (Hamid 2007, p33) highlights his fragmented identity and the temporary nature of his assimilation. Even though he seems to reclaim his voice, the uncertainty surrounding his narrative—specifically regarding whether Changez poses a threat ,urges the reader to distrust or pause to reconsider his words, aligning with Spivak's notion that subalterns only express themselves once their voices align with the requirements of dominant discourse. Remarks such as, “You should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins.” (Hamid 2007, p183) reveal the ongoing imbalance of voice and suspicion that exists. Therefore, while Changez does indeed speak, his voice is both empowered and constrained, demonstrating the paradox that while the subaltern may voice resistance, their speech can still be integrated into or regulated by dominant systems, validating Spivak’s core argument.

3.5 Institutional Islamophobia

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critically examines institutional Islamophobia in post-9/11 America through the protagonist Changez's experiences, highlighting systemic discrimination embedded in workplaces, law enforcement, and societal power structures. **Post9/11 workplace surveillance** is evident when Changez, despite his professional success at Underwood Samson, becomes a target of suspicion among colleagues. His beard, a symbol of cultural identity, triggers whispers and stares, reflecting how Muslim employees were scrutinized as potential threats (Hamid 130; Rehman et al. 210). This aligns with Lori Peek's observation of post-9/11 workplace discrimination, where Muslim Americans faced "religious profiling" and "employmentdiscrimination" (Peek 16). Racial profiling and interrogation are starkly depicted when Changez is detained at U.S. airports, forced to undergo humiliating searches, and questioned repeatedly about his residency despite being a legal worker (Hamid 86; Maqableh 180). This mirrors real-world policies like the Patriot Act, which institutionalized racialized surveillance (Peek 17). The novel further critiques systemic violence through scenes like the FBI's raids: "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" (Hamid 94). These lines evoke Guantánamo Bay and extraordinary renditions, underscoring the dehumanizing impact of state policies (Hai p94). The "stranger" an unnamed American whose silence and potential CIA affiliation loom over the narrative, embodies state power and the pervasive distrust of Muslim voices. His concealed weapon—"I detect a glint of metal... I trust it is from the holder of your business

cards"(Hamid p184)—mirrors the covert violence of U.S. operations (e.g., drone strikes, the Raymond Davis incident), framing suspicion as justification for aggression (Hai 184; Adami 2010). His presence frames the novel as a "counter-narrative" to dominant Western discourse, where Muslims are "voiceless" or stereotyped as terrorists (Khusbu 95; Maqableh 180). Hamid subverts this by centering Changez's perspective, exposing how institutional Islamophobia—fueled by media and state rhetoric—alienates even assimilated Muslims. Changez's conflicted reaction to 9/11—"And then I smiled... at the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (Hamid p72–73)—demonstrates how mundane emotions were weaponized to label Muslims as disloyal (Hai p72–73; Naydan 2016). This pushes Changez to reclaim his Pakistani identity (Hamid p148; Rehman et al. p213), critiquing how post-9/11 policies weaponized fear to justify systemic oppression, transforming everyday spaces into sites of racialized control. Through Changez's shifting position, Hamid not only critiques American policy but invites readers to reconsider how power defines identity, silence, and suspicion in the post-9/11 world.

3.6 Transnational Identity and Dislocation

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a profound exploration of the complexities of "transnational identity, dislocation, and the psychological toll of globalization "on migrants who navigate conflicting cultural loyalties. The novel's protagonist, Changez, embodies the crisis of identity faced by many in a post-9/11 world, where geopolitical tensions and cultural suspicions render assimilation both a personal and political battleground. Through Changez's journey—from ambitious immigrant to disillusioned dissenter—Hamid critiques the myth of seamless globalization, exposing how economic integration often exacerbates cultural alienation. Changez's experience epitomizes the "deterritorialization" of

identity in a globalized world (Saraswati 2017, p588). Initially, he embraces the American Dream, excelling at Princeton and securing a high-status job at Underwood Samson, a firm that symbolizes capitalist meritocracy. However, his identity fractures when he realizes that his success depends on suppressing his Pakistani heritage. This internal conflict mirrors what scholars describe as the "*transnational paradox*"—where economic mobility demands cultural erasure (Bhabha 2004, p178). A pivotal moment occurs when Changez, during a business trip to Chile, recognizes himself as a "*modern-day janissary*" (Hamid 2007, p152). Historically, janissaries were conscripted soldiers forced to serve empires against their homelands. This metaphor underscores Changez's complicity in American economic imperialism, which destabilizes countries like Pakistan. His Chilean colleague, Juan-Bautista, explicitly warns him: "a servant of the American empire ... " (Hamid 2007, p151). This confrontation forces Changez to acknowledge his "split self"—an identity torn between capitalist ambition and postcolonial resistance (Saraswati 2017, p590). The novel's climax, Changez's return to Pakistan and his anti-American activism—reveals the impossibility of reconciling transnational loyalties. As Saraswati (2017, p591) argues, globalization has created "multicultural pockets within states" where migrants remain emotionally tied to their homelands despite physical relocation. Changez's disillusionment reflects a broader crisis among diasporic communities who, as Bauman (2013) notes, exist in "indeterminate, unruly" spaces where belonging is perpetually deferred (Saraswati 2017, p589).

3.6.1 Global Flows and Hybrid Belonging

The novel critiques the illusion that globalization fosters "cosmopolitan harmony. "Instead, it depicts a world where economic integration masks cultural hierarchies. Changez's relationship with Erica, an American woman haunted by her late lover Chris, symbolizes his "failed assimilation". Erica's inability to love Changez for himself," "Pretend I am him"...and

her shut eyes watched him".(Hamid 2007, p98), mirrors how Western societies demand that migrants "mimic" dominant cultures without ever fully accepting them (Bhabha 2004, p122). Underwood Samson, where Changez works, embodies the "neo-liberal world order" (Saraswati 2017, p587). The firm's mantra—"Focus on the fundamentals"—is a euphemism for ruthless profit-seeking, often at the expense of developing nations. Changez's assignment in Chile exposes this exploitation: his team evaluates a publishing house for liquidation, disregarding its cultural value (Hamid 2007, p130–135). This episode illustrates what Philip Cerny (1997) calls the "paradox of the competition state", where globalization weakens national sovereignty (Saraswati 2017, p587). Technological advancements, while enabling transnational connections, also deepen alienation. Changez's ability to video-call his family in Lahore (Hamid 2007, p85) exemplifies "complex connectivity" (Tomlinson 1999)—yet this virtual proximity cannot substitute for physical belonging. As Appadurai (1996) argues, globalization creates "imagined landscapes" where identities are "untethered" from geography (Saraswati 2017, p588). Changez's liminal existence—neither fully American nor Pakistani—reflects this destabilization.

3.6.2 Imagined Home and National Nostalgia

Changez's nostalgia for Lahore underscores the "psychological toll of displacement" His memories, "What a contrast: the paleness of those buds, strung with needle and thread into a fluff ybracelet.... sweating in the summer sun" (Hamid 2007, p 116)—construct an "imagined home"(Anderson 1983), a sanctuary from American hostility. Yet, this nostalgia is fraught with contradictions. His return to Pakistan does not bring peace; instead, he becomes a *"reluctant fundamentalist"*, "critiquing U.S. imperialism while remaining culturally hybrid (Saraswati 2017: 590). The novel's setting—a Lahore café where Changez narrates his story to an unnamed American— frames his identity as "performative". His monologue,

oscillating between charm and menace, reflects what Jacquemet (2005) terms "transidiomatic practices" (Saraswati 2017: 591), where migrants code-switch to navigate power dynamics. The American's suspicion—"But why do you recoil? he offers us his prayers for our well-being; Now he is on his way" (Hamid 2007, p184)—highlights how post-9/11 discourse reduces Muslim identity to "terrorist" or "traitor."

3.6.3 America as a Fractured Community

Post-9/11 America is depicted as a "fractured community" "where xenophobia overrides multicultural ideals. Changez's beard becomes "a flag of [his] own," symbolizing his post-9/11 alienation "I had not shaved my two-week-old Beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part..., a symbol of my Identity", (Hamid 2007, p148). marking him as a threat. This racialization mirrors real-world policies like the Patriot Act, which institutionalized Islamophobia (Shirazi 2017, p 17). The novel's ambiguous ending—where the American may reach for a gun—critiques the "*culture of fear*" (Bauman 2013) that pervades globalization. As Banerjee and Linstead (2001) argue, "transnational processes produce clashes between nation-state ideologies and migrant identities" (Saraswati 2017, p 591). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* dismantles the myth of globalization as a unifying force, revealing its role in perpetuating "cultural dislocation, economic inequality, and systemic racism". Changez's journey reflects the broader migrant experience—caught between assimilation and resistance, belonging and exclusion. The novel urges a reimagining of "pluralistic identities" "in an era where as Saraswati (2017, p 591) note, "nation-states must adapt to multicultural realities."

3.7 Resistance and Narrative Form

3.7.1 The Unreliable Narrator Trope

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid develops a narrative that serves as a **counter-discourse** to prevalent Western ideologies through **decolonization theory** and the trop of the **unreliable narrator**. Changez is the narrator whose monologue is aimed at an unnamed American, reclaiming agency through storytelling. His questionable identity undermines fixed representations of the East and West, as well as resistance and collaboration. Changez's apparently contradictory position, being both anti-American imperialist and emotionally affected by its culture, reveals a postcolonial subjectivity fragmented by marginalization. His narrative challenges straightforward interpretations, posing the question: is Changez a radical, or simply a victim of Western fear? One of the most frequently cited instances of this tension is his response to 9/11: "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" (Hamid 2007, p. 72). Although this moment may be interpreted as an act of radicalism, it more accurately represents the psychological fracture of the postcolonial subject preceding the onset of Western imperialism. Changez himself articulates the smile as based on symbolism rather than ideology: "I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (p. 73). Hamid's employment of the unreliable narrator challenges the Western reader's expectation for moral clarity and positions the story within what Homi Bhabha calls a "third space"—a realm of hybrid identity that contests and reconceptualizes colonial narratives. As the story unfolds, Changez grows more alienated rather than radicalized; his beard, for instance, is seen as menacing by Americans,

representing the fear placed upon the racialized other. In the novel's concluding scene, Changez questions the American's motives: "Surely you are not going to shoot me" (p. 183). This final statement leaves the reader with an open-ended conclusion, compelling them to reflect on their own assumptions amid global discussions of distrust and safety. In the end, Hamid utilizes Changez's unreliable narration as a form of resistance, reclaiming narrative control for the non-Western perspective and presenting a nuanced, decolonized view of global politics and identity.

3.7.2 The open-ended conclusion

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid purposefully utilizes a decolonial and counter-discursive framework to complicate dominant Western narratives regarding identity, power, and resistance in the post-9/11 era. The storytelling style of the novel, a dramatic monologue delivered by an unnamed Pakistani man, Changez, to an unnamed American in Lahore, interrupts the conventional, Western-centered narrative structure, granting narrative authority to a perspective from the previously colonized world. This method of storytelling itself serves as an act of resistance, aligning with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" where hybrid identities challenge essentialized dichotomies such as East/West or terrorist/patriot. Changez's ideological journey also counters such binary classifications that are often used to describe the postcolonial individual, the expectation to either conform to the dominant (Western) culture or completely reject it. Rather, he forges an alternative form of opposition: critical disengagement and narrative resistance. Reflecting on America's self-image, he remarks, "I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time, I was struck by its determination to look back" (Hamid 2007, p.70). This remark highlights his awareness of American global dominance as anchored not in progress, but in aspirations for a grand, imperial history. His comment turns sarcastic when he

states, “We Pakistanis are all too keen to adopt foreign ways of thinking, and, in the process, we lose touch with those aspects of ourselves that we should value most” (Hamid 2007, p. 112). This assertion represents a decolonial awakening, a call to resist epistemic colonization and reclaim cultural identity. Perhaps most significantly, Hamid denies narrative closure at the conclusion of the book, maintaining an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. The opening line, “Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?” “Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?”, is laden with unresolved tension (Hamid 2007, p 1). Is Changez offering help or preparing for conflict? Is the American listener reaching for a weapon or something less threatening? This ambiguous ending critiques binary resistance theories by challenging the Western presumption that the postcolonial individual must resist either through assimilation or violence. Instead, Hamid strips away the comfort of certainty or moralism. In this manner, the novel serves as a form of counter-discursive resistance, recapturing narrative space for the subaltern and probing imperial modes of interpretation. Thus, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* stands as a literary act of decolonization, defying closure, reclaiming voice, and unsettling the very definitions of power and resistance.

Conclusion

The Reluctant Fundamentalist serves as a powerful exploration of postcolonial identity, and the enduring legacies of colonialism in a globalized era. Through Changez’s transformation, from an assimilated neoliberal subject to a disillusioned critic of American imperialism, Hamid exposes the fractures in narratives of multicultural harmony and economic meritocracy. The novel’s unreliable narration and open-ended conclusion challenge binary oppositions, forcing readers to confront their own biases and the ambiguities of power. By reclaiming narrative agency for the subaltern and deconstructing Orientalist stereotypes, the novel enacts

a form of literary decolonization. Ultimately, this chapter underscores the novel's relevance in contemporary discussions about Islamophobia, transnational identity, and the psychological costs of displacement, urging a reimagining of identity beyond colonial frameworks.

General conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a nuanced postcolonial critique of identity, power, and resistance in the aftermath of 9/11, revealing the complex psychological and sociopolitical struggles faced by postcolonial subjects in a globalized world. Through the protagonist Changez, a Princeton-educated Pakistani who initially embraces American capitalism and culture, the novel traces a profound transformation that challenges simplistic binaries of East versus West, self versus other. Changez's journey from admiration and assimilation to disillusionment and ideological resistance highlights how the real face of fundamentalism is not his personal shift but rather the rigid, exclusionary, and often violent response of post-9/11 America toward perceived threats. This response, characterized by institutionalized Islamophobia, racial profiling, and cultural paranoia, contradicts America's proclaimed ideals of freedom, democracy, and multiculturalism, exposing a deep hypocrisy in its global image and domestic practices. The novel situates Changez's identity crisis within the framework of cultural hybridity and the "third space," as theorized by Homi Bhabha, illustrating how his hybrid identity is fractured by the pressures of assimilation and the alienation wrought by post-9/11 suspicion. Changez's narrative voice, marked by ambivalence and unreliability, problematizes dominant Western discourses shaped by Orientalism and Islamophobia, giving voice to a subaltern perspective that resists marginalization and challenges reductive stereotypes. This narrative strategy destabilizes fixed representations of Muslim and Eastern identities, revealing their fluidity and complexity in a world shaped by neocolonial power dynamics. The psychological dimensions of Changez's transformation, drawing on Frantz Fanon's analysis of decolonization, underscore the internal conflicts

engendered by colonial legacies and contemporary geopolitical tensions. Moreover, the novel's open-ended conclusion and metafictional structure invite readers to question received truths and engage critically with the ongoing struggles over identity, belonging, and power in the post-9/11 era. Hamid's work not only critiques the failures of multicultural idealism in America but also reimagines identity as a dynamic, transnational construct shaped by historical, political, and cultural forces. It foregrounds the tensions between globalism and nationalism, assimilation and resistance, and challenges the simplistic labeling of dissent as "fundamentalism," instead framing Changez's ideological stance as a rejection of Western neoliberal capitalism and cultural imperialism. In conclusion, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* exposes the fractures in post-9/11 American society and its departure from its own stated ideals, while amplifying marginalized voices silenced by Islamophobic and Orientalist narratives. The novel's postcolonial critique reveals how identity is negotiated within the "third space" of cultural hybridity, and how resistance can take the form of reclaiming narrative agency and challenging hegemonic discourses.

Hamid's work stands as a significant contribution to postcolonial literature, offering a balanced yet confrontational perspective that calls for political, cultural, and socio-economic engagement rather than conflict. It encourages a rethinking of fundamentalism, identity, and belonging in a world marked by fear, mistrust, and the legacies of colonialism, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness and complexity of contemporary global identities.

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الملخص

تقدم هذه المذكرة

قراءة ما بعد الاستعمار لرواية الأصولي المتردد لمحسن حامد، وتبحث في كيفية تعامل الرواية مع موضوعات الهوية والسلطة

والمقاومة عقب أحداث 11 سبتمبر. بالاعتماد على نظريات ما بعد الاستعمار الرئيسية،

بما في ذلك الاستشراق لإدوارد سعيد، ومفاهيمه وميها بها عن التهجين والفضاء الثالث،

والتحليل للنفسيلفرانتز فانونا لإنهاء الاستعمار،

تستكشف الأدوار التي يتحد بها عمل حامد الهيمنة الغربية ويعيد تشكيل روايات الجنوب العالمي. وينقسم التحليل إلى ثلاث

أجزاء.

أولاً، يضع الرواية في سياقها بعد الاستعمار، مع التركيز على تفكيك الثنائيات بين الشرق والغرب، ودور التقليد والتناقض،

والأبعاد النفسية لإنهاء الاستعمار. ثانياً، يبحث في التحولات الأيديولوجية التي أعقبت أحداث 11

سبتمبر والتي تشكل خلفية الرواية، ولا سيما إضفاء الطابع المؤسسي على كراهية الإسلام والمواقف التي تهميش الهوية الإسلامية

ية.

وأخيراً، يدرس الاستراتيجيات الشكلية والموضوعية للرواية، بما في ذلك استخدامها للرواية غير موثوقة، وخاتمة مفتوحة،

ومقاومة خطابية مضادة للسرديات السائدة. محور هذا الدراسة هو بطل الرواية تشانجيز، الذي جسدت تحولها من أسمايتها

قن تعليم هيبيرينستون إلى "أصولي متردد" التوترات بين الاستيعاب والمقاومة.

تؤكد سخرية العنوان على نقد الرواية للرواية النيوليبرالية والقوة بالنمطية الاختزالية، وإعادة صياغة "الأصولية"

على أنها فضل الهيمنة الأيديولوجية الغربية على بقاياها الناطقة بالدين.

من خلال وضع عمل حامد ضمن إطار ما بعد الاستعمار وما بعد 11 سبتمبر، تزعج هذه الأطروحة أن "الأصولي المتردد"

لا يكشف فقط عن الانقسامات في المثالية المتعددة الثقافات، بل يعيد أيضاً تصور الهوية باعتبارها بناءً سائلاً وعابراً للحدود والو

طنية تشكله وتاريخية وسياسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تصفية الاستعمار ، التهجين ، الاسلاموفوبيا ، الاستشراق ، ما بعد الاستعمار .