

## THE IMAGE OF AMERICA IN MOHSIN HAMID'S NOVEL THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

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### **Abstract:**

*This study is valuable as it proposes a new reading of the novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" by the Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid published in 2007. The study presents insights to Occidentalism as expressed in the aforementioned novel, therefore, falls into the postcolonial studies that are actively engaged in the act of decolonizing the mind producing new means of representations as an attempt to challenge the colonial various assumptions, opinions, and value system it cherished and bear witness to colonized communities' sense of cultural differences.*

*Thus, the novel under investigation can be considered what McLeod (2000) calls "Writing Back" as a response to the literature of the imperial center and the prevalent perceptions and attitudes addressing many issues falsely attributed to the Orient and set them right. Hamid here is concerned to present counter-discourse to interrogate West's discourses and represents the continuing process of American imperial suppressions and the subsequent responses to them. The novel is a story of a person who has experienced orientalism in its ugliest faces and ultimately has taken the responsibility of revealing it to the world by taking a reverse trend of Occidentalism that unveils the Occident as it exists. In this novel, Hamid shows the West how they are perceived in the eyes of the East based on their indecorous practices, actions, and policies. Precisely, Hamid reverses the American stereotypical image of the Muslim world, thus portraying the American government and society as conspiratorial and inundated with extremism and fundamentalism.*

**Keywords:** Occidentalism, reluctant fundamentalist, terrorism, imperialism, fundamentalism, extremism, capitalism, racism.

### **Foreword**

The present novel starts when Changez, the protagonist of the novel narrates his story with America to a stranger perceived as an American while at dinner in a teashop in Lahore, Pakistan. Changez, the young Pakistani got a scholarship to the USA, studied at Princeton, and graduated with high grades. Then, he got a promising job as a financial analyst for a prestigious firm in New York namely Underwood Samson. In the beginning, he was proud of his Americanness attracted and excited by American opportunities and success, and happy with his accomplishments but gradually he grew resentful when confronted with American prejudices, arrogance, and injustices post 11,9. Subsequently, he returned to Pakistan as a university lecturer and activist opposing American policies. The novel shows how Changez's experience with Americans has reshaped his perception of America and therefore has taken the decision of exposing it to the world. Changez eventually discovers the artificial glimmering of America and the hidden extremism, terrorism, imperialism, and racism that run the country.

The present novel is studied through the lens of Occidentalism which is founded on the nationalism that grew in Asia in reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism. Buruma (2004) views Occidentalism as the expression of bitter resentment toward an offensive display of superiority by the West, based on the

alleged superiority of reason (53). It is convenient here to borrow Hanafi's (2008) words of Occidentalism as "partly a defense of national character, national culture and national life-style against alienation and disloyalty; a popular option against Orientalism as a minority option; a mass culture against Orientalism as an elite culture; an ideology for the ruled against Orientalism as an ideology of the ruler; a liberating device like liberation theology against Orientalism as a dominating device" (22).

Occidentalism, as expressed in this paper does not mean anti-Americanism for the first place or show closed, prejudiced gloomy unjustified view of the West or the rebellious, irritated rhetoric against the West and its technological innovation, or hatred of its culture, fairly it is an exploration of what Bilgrami (2006) calls the "wrongs committed by the West". It means identifying the threatening power of the West and liberating self (Muslims) from the forged image imposed by the other (the West specifically the U.S.A.) and produce counter-images for the other, with its aspiration to invade and dominate.

It is assumed by the Occident nonetheless, that Islam and Muslims are the sources of many evils such as terrorism, and fundamentalism and takes the 11 September events as a pretense to violate international laws and human rights to achieve dominance. This research hence aims at enlightening the public opinion and overturning the table on those who have such assumptions and prove that the concepts and ideologies of fundamentalism and terrorism, etc. are not invented by the East rather exclusively devised and exported by the West. Buruma, (2004) assures "the idea of the West as a malign force is not some Eastern or Middle Eastern idea, but has deep roots in European soil. European colonialism provoked Occidentalism, and so does global capitalism today".

Many Western countries and America in particular, however, wage war on everything Islamic; religion, culture, civilization, political systems, economy, etc. so it is fair to offer a true reflective image of the West and a response to orientalism and the injustices practiced against the Orient in the post-colonial era with evidence from history and reality and this is what Hamid has successfully done. In specific, the United States of America is the leading country known for its biased, irrational, invasive policies, thus, the study intends to spotlight six pillars of the American system as expressed in the target novel. The researcher views occidentalism in the novel as represented in the following points:

### **1. American Terrorism**

America's war on what it names terror raises tens and tens of questions on America's real intentions. Nevertheless, history and reality verify that America disgracefully has been a dynamic engine of many evils in the world as the target novel reveals. For instance, America's tyranny and paranoia, duplex foreign policies, collusions to ignite and finance conflicts in different countries of the world to disturb these countries' security and stability, in addition to its hysteric and illogic policies on many vital aspects of mankind expose American terrorism at its worst. America's terror is witnessed in its systems; political (imperial), military (colonial), economic (capitalistic, fundamentalist), cultural (extremist), social (racial), media (biased), etc.

As the novel under study exposes, America is a terrorist country whose policies in launching a war on what it calls terror is a new form of colonialism. Commenting on America's war in Afghanistan Changez addressed the American:

I chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post. My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury (p. 100).

Changez was shocked by how Afghanistan, Pakistan's neighbor, a friend, and a Muslim country was considered overnight the hub of terrorism, and a strong and quick attack was waged against it by the American army. Changez recognized at that juncture that the USA has developed new and tricky tactics to

colonize other countries by the name of countering terrorism. The bombing of Afghanistan and the mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty-first-century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen upset Changez who was initially a true lover of America till he discovers the horrible truth. Changez confirms that America never wastes time, shortly after the war in Afghanistan, the USA prepares to start a war in Iraq "*Of course, humanity's respite was brief: six months later the invasion of Iraq would be underway*" (83).

America endeavors to have overall control of the world and its scenarios in Afghanistan and Iraq are just part of it. It does so in an unrivaled manner to serve its wellbeing and schemes in dominating the world even if this requires erroneously accusing countries of embracing terrorism and unjustifiably launching a war against them as happened in Iraq and Afghanistan under the pretexts of fighting terrorism and reducing the rise of weapons of mass destruction. Barnett (2016) declares "Far from reducing terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, present U.S. policies are aggravating both. Not only did US forces invade both Afghanistan and Iraq less than two years after 9/11, but the US military presence worldwide greatly increased under the umbrella of the "War on Terror". Besides, Changez realizes that what the USA calls counterterrorism operations are highly terrorist. The United States forges partnerships with some world countries to counterterrorism but in actuality to achieve its welfare.

Moreover, the novel presents a clear picture of how America inflames conflicts in different places of the world some of which Washington is involved behind the scene. In many cases, its war on terror is merely a ploy to terrify the target countries and nations and subdue them to America's guardianship. The India-Pakistan Standoff of 2001-2002 opens Changez's eyes to many realities. The conflicts initiated and led by America post 11 September are commented upon by Changez:

A common strand appeared to unite these conflicts, and that was the advancement of a small coterie's concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism, which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers not wearing the uniforms of soldiers. I recognized that if this was to be the single most important priority of our species, then the lives of those of us who lived in lands in which such killers also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage. This, I reasoned, was why America felt justified in bringing so many deaths to Afghanistan and Iraq, and why America felt justified in risking so many more deaths by tacitly using India to pressure Pakistan (203).

The novel tells how America is crafty enough to manage and unite conflicts whenever and wherever it likes giving priority to its interests regardless of the death or the devastation it causes. Besides, reading about the ongoing deterioration of affairs between India and Pakistan Changez is worried about the negative impact the India-Pakistan Standoff has on the economies of both nations which is of course for the economical uplifts of America which lives and expands on inflaming such conflicts.

The novel too displays the American military system as equally terrorist and colonial and America's "war on terrorism" as an ideology of fear and repression. America never hesitates to use its power to attack Afghanistan first, then Iraq causing many deaths and bringing great damage which Changez attributes to America's hysteric policies to achieve its goals. Events and time thus attested that the extensive barbaric war America directs on what it calls the war on terror incarnate American terrorism in its ugliest faces with the evidence of the millions of people it harms and the destruction it causes. Said (2003) comments on America's war ideology "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that ... it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest *mission civilisatrice*" (Preface). Fouskas & Gökay (2005) believe that since 2002, the U.S. government has officially adopted a neocolonial policy called the Bush Doctrine, "which is based on militarist and imperial values with theocratic overtones".

This tough military power and hostility resulted in so much hate and resentment toward America in many world countries.

The undisguised hostility and obvious dislike in the expression of the Filipino driver whom Changez meets incidentally in his business mission with the American team to the Philippines indicate the third world people's sensibility and resentment of Americans. Likewise, when in a teashop in Lahore, the unease and dislike the American senses in the hardness of the waiter's weathered face can readily be accounted for he as Changez puts it openly to the American, "*suffered during offensives conducted by your countrymen*" due to America's invasion of Afghanistan (55). In his discussion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Shihada (2015), remarks "the novel's significance lies in rendering an alternative disruptive literary response to the neocolonial discourse, which has been the driving force behind the mistreatment of Muslims and the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of fighting terrorism".

As the novel exposes, America's foreign policy and practices are forms of terrorism. Changez addressed the American, "*It will perhaps be odd for you-coming, as you do, from a country that has not fought a war on its own soil in living memory, the rare sneak attack or terrorist outrage excepted-to imagine residing within commuting distance of a million or so hostile troops who could, at any moment, attempt a full-scale invasion*" (116). With the war on what America calls terrorism being waged by America, Changez feels he is misused and enslaved to serve a country that has never led war on its own soil and whose primary aim is to spread violence in other peoples' countries to destroy them but keep itself secured. Changez additionally describes the anxieties of his transition between Pakistan and the USA which depict the contradiction America causes in the world. It insists on living in peace and luxury while causing other countries to live in struggle and misery. Changez directs the American's attention "*Given your background, you will doubtless have experienced the peculiar phenomenon that is the return to an environment more or less at peace from one where the prospect of large-scale bloodshed is a distinct possibility*". *It is an odd transition*" (64). In Cakmak's view (2003), "pragmatic American foreign policy attempted to maximize its benefits and pretended to formulate a war against terrorism to derive the most beneficial output for itself".

America's war on what it calls terror represents solely one facet of its terrorism. The terrorism practiced in the American land on innocent Muslims who commit no guilt except migrate to find a peaceful harbor in America when life darkens in their eyes in their countries of origin is another facet. The impacts of America's terror and the backlash of the 11<sup>th</sup> September events are infinite on people's personal and public lives. In Oslon's view (2011) the propagated images and discourse on terrorism and the attacks of 9/11 already had their impact on people, influencing them in such a way that they perceive foreign-looking people with suspicion and presumption of possible terrorist ideas that is why Changez is abused by an unknown person in street. An incident like this ultimately leads to Changez realizes that he remains a doubtful Muslim and cannot belong to American culture even after sacrificing so much for it.

The misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims in American media and literature serve the American purposes of terrifying the Americans and the world from Islam and Muslims and justifying America's terrorist actions against Muslim and Arab countries. Images of Islam have been shaped by the perception that Islamic culture represses women, encourages intolerant fundamentalism, and incites terrorism. It becomes clear to Changez that what America had propagated regarding terrorism and Muslims was a false image and it was resulting in a gap between the insiders and the outsiders. That is to say, Changez ultimately realizes that the image America draws in the mind of its people about Muslims associated with terrorism resulted in misunderstanding, miscommunication, and distrust between people of America and people of Muslim nations as it happens between him and the American agent in Lahore.



The American media has significantly promoted a culture of fear and suspicion equally among its citizens and enemies. Even when back to his home country, Change felt *"I have been plagued by paranoia, by an intermittent sense that I am being observed"*. Likewise, when the American was sitting with Changez in a tea shop in Lahore, Changez realized that the American grew suspicious and turbulent. Trying to calm him down, Changez said: *"Come, relinquish your foreigner's sense of being watched"* (9). This is a shared sense felt by Americans that Changez assures in his speech with the American, *"Affronts were everywhere; the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history-not just from the government, but from the media and supposedly critical journalists as well-provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger"* (86).

Noting America's rhetoric and policies in its war on terror Cherry (2015) says: "This creates a manipulative, undemocratic environment that is detrimental to the lives of Americans and, in this case, the lives of Iraqis, Pakistanis, Afghans, and others abroad who are threatened on daily basis by U.S. aggression. The Bush administration capitalized on the attacks to push forward policies in its own interest, regardless of their ability to combat terrorism". The negative role of the media is admitted by Americans themselves, Jim (a character in the novel) confesses: *"And in America, no matter how poor you are, TV gives you a good View"* (29). Edward Said, however, is concerned with the dominating effect posed by a hegemonic Western media. Such a media, according to Said, can both mask and shape the voice of those who have been colonized (Cited in Sims, 2012).

When wandering with Changez in one of their New York going outs succeeding September attacks, Erica, Changez's American beloved was anxious that Changez interpreted as, *"Like so many others in the city after the attacks, she appeared deeply anxious. Yet her anxieties seemed only indirectly related to the prospect of dying at the hands of terrorists"*. This probably hints at the negative image portrayed by the media that Americans are surrounded by terrorists which enhances their exaggerated fear. Chossudovsky (2005) thinks that the myth of the "outside enemy" and the threat of "Islamic terrorists" was the cornerstone of the Bush administration's military doctrine, used as a pretext to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention the repeal of civil liberties and constitutional government in America.

America exploits the public opinion and its citizens' agony and resentment as well as the international sympathy on the occasion of the eleventh September events to achieve its goals and spread terror under the name of fighting terrorism. In his speech with the American, Changez comments on America's response to the September attacks:

You were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity but also in your own (p.109).

America tried to get the entire world to sympathize with it and share its eleventh September tragedy but kill Muslims with cold blood wherever, whenever, and however it pleases. Changez is no longer able to bear and turn a blind eye to America's national and political hypocrisy *"no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America"* (p.207).

Changez's political activism against the American hegemony and its war against terror has deemed him as an anti-American, *"Such was its impact that I was warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse"* (p.207). There seems to be no end for America's terrorism. It practices pervasive terror almost everywhere causing great damages. This is clear in the allusions expressed in the outset lines, on many occasions, and by the end of the novel that the American came to assassinate the anti-Americanism in his land. Changez tells the

American; *"I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking in fact, you seemed to be on a mission"* (5) which suggests that the person intends to assassinate Changez. *"After all,"* Changez says to the American while eating pudding, *"one reads that the soldiers of your country are sent to battle with chocolate in their rations, so the prospect of sugaring your tongue before undertaking even the bloodiest of tasks cannot be entirely alien to you"* (62). Changez feels the mischief the American intends to cause him, therefore, puts it clear to him *"you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists"* (109).

It is worth noting that Muslims are overloaded with countless distresses to add to the list of amiss accusations of terrorism. It is bizarre; however, that America with all its authority, power, policies, civilization, and technological advancement fails to recognize its real enemy and the cause of its trouble. Americans' experience with terrorism must have taught them to learn from the mistakes of the past and be just, alert, easy going, and thoughtful enough not to take innocent people of the offenses committed by others. Likewise, America needs to revise its philosophy about many issues including its foreign relations, war on terror, and public misconceptions of terrorism which it has been circulating for long. It has first to rectify the policies on its land and among its audiences, repair and rearrange its own home from inside rather than to fight the purported terrorism somewhere else. Logically, if America truly wills to eradicate terrorism it has to know for sure that this cannot be obtained through spreading or supporting terrorism.

## **2-American Imperialism**

Imperialism, as expressed in this study indicates a scheme to expand the influence of the United States and rearrange its foreign policy in such away it controls the world's politics and economy mostly through illegal means. America is engaged in neocolonial and imperial acts for getting wealth and power through the constant economic and political exploitation and control of other nations and its scenarios in Iraq and Afghanistan are witnesses. The novel implies how America's illegal and unsanctioned imperial invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan caused political unrest and economic decline awful to contemplate. America's invasion of Iraq was not to liberate the Iraqi nation of a dictator regime or eradicate the growth of mass destruction weapons in the country as America usually assumes but was rather to pillage its resources and put America's hand on Iraq's oil fields. In this context, Said (2003) assures that "It is surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history that an imperialist war concocted by a small group of unelected US officials (they've been called chicken hawks, since none of them ever served in the military) was waged against a devastated Third World dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control, and scarce resources, but disguised for its true intent, hastened and reasoned for by Orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars" (Preface). In Afghanistan however, America's intention was not to fight terror as it pretended but to have control over this country, expand America's influence and send a message to the rest of the world not dare oppose the American government. Cherry (2015) thinks that the "Westerners were intended to dominate, while Orientals should be dominated. This involved occupying their land, controlling their national affairs, and putting their blood and treasure at the disposal of one or another Western power. It also allowed the Western colonizers to discredit any sort of Oriental resistance...Such falsification of "Oriental" people allowed for the perpetuation of oppressive colonial and imperialist structures in the Middle East" (33).

The United States' expansion overseas has indeed been imperialistic. America continues to pursue imperialistic policies that are marked by constant interventions and even occupation of other countries. Kramatschek (2007) assures that in the novel Hamid takes "a critical look at America's imperial hubris and its posture as the world's police force". In the novel under investigation, Changez says to the American:

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

experience as a Pakistani -of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions- that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power (p.177).

Hamid states it clearly that for a long history, America stood responsible for several wars, conflicts, and anarchies in sundry countries to expand its power. Hamid too is extremely critical of American intervention in other countries on one pretext or the other. Changez tells the American how he resents the American foreign policy and how America conducts itself as the sole supreme power by interfering in every region of the world. He also recalls the unreliability of America as an ally or friend and America's disgraceful role in the conflict between India and Pakistan; Changez says to the American:

I wondered, sir, about your country's role in all this: surely, with American bases already established in Pakistan for the conduct of the Afghanistan campaign, all America would have to do would be to inform India that an attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally and would be responded to by the overwhelming force of America's military. Yet your country was signally failing to do this; indeed, America was maintaining a strict neutrality between the two potential combatants, a position that favored, of course, the larger and -at that moment in history - the more belligerent of them (p.143).

America acts artfully on the stage of the world. Its prevalent military campaign on Afghanistan and its negative role in the 2001-2002 India- Pakistan conflict were outrageous. As a result of the Indian-Pakistani conflict, the situation in Pakistan continues to be precarious as Changez expresses; *"it was rumored that India was acting with America's connivance, both countries seeking through the threat of force to coerce our government into changing its policies"* (125). Hamid is critical of an empire that resorts to double-dealing to suit its global political agenda. America takes advantage of Pakistan in the war against terror but also supports India in the war in Kashmir. Changez notes, *"despite the assistance we had given America in Afghanistan, America would not fight at our side"* (144). This has alienated Changez from his surroundings, although he was the product of the American system; *"I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite"* (56) Changez tells the American.

America uses its influence to cause disorder in weaker countries to increase its political and economic power *"I wondered"* Changez says to the American *"how it was that America was able to wreak such havoc in the world- orchestrating an entire war in Afghanistan, say, and legitimizing through its actions the invasion of weaker states by more powerful ones, which India was now proposing to do to Pakistan-with so few apparent consequences at home"* (118). Changez felt the weakness of his country, *"I worried. I felt powerless; I was angry at our weakness, at our vulnerability"* (62). According to Bilgrami (2006), people of the East must fight back against centuries of colonial subjugation; that they want the military and the corporate presence of the West which continues that subjugation in new and more subtle forms, out of their lands. U.S.A has a long history of colonial subjugation and its *continuing* imperial presence economically (and more recently politically) in various Muslim nations. The U.S. government is imperialist by nature but its actions continued in covert form till the atrocities of September 11 gave the United States the excuse for the more overt action in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the target novel, the hero's speech reflects his dissatisfaction with the American neocolonial policy and towards the wrong notions of cultural superiority on part of America that creates an attitude of arrogance and a sense of superiority among its citizens which ultimately leads to the differences and miscommunication between the Americans and people of other cultures and this perhaps explains the miscommunication between Changez and the American in the novel. The American kept silent throughout the novel except for rare allusions that Changez could hardly understand. On his side, Changez does his best to indulge in American society and culture. He is educated at an American university, gets a

prestigious job in an American company, adores an American girl, and imitates American lifestyle, speech, and manners. Furthermore, on some occasions Changez imitates his American coworkers to gain respect, *"I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American. The Filipinos we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business-and I wanted my share of that respect as well"*. At that time, Changez thinks *"I have subsequently wondered why my mannerisms so appealed to my senior colleagues"*.

Changez attempts to mimic the American ways and thoughts for the sake of recognition and acceptance. Yet, later events make him realize that Americans view and treat others with inferiority whatever hard they try to cope with the American norms. This however brings to light Bhabha's theory of mimicry. According to Bhabha (1994), one of the ways in which the subaltern gains agency is through mimicry which serves as a tangible interaction between colonizer and colonized that both emphasizes the displacement of the colonized and affords the colonized voice and agency. In Bhabha's words, mimicry serves to reclaim agency for the colonized by allowing the colonized to expose the oppressiveness of the colonizers.

Still, according to McLeod (2000), colonized people (people of the postcolonial era too) are made subservient to ways of regarding the world which reflect and support colonialist values. Those colonized by American imperialism doomed to hold a traumatic belief in the inferiority of their cultural values and their own. Frantz Fanon (1962) holds that "colonialism is a source of destruction and trauma for colonized peoples who are taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture and themselves" (227). Colonialism involves colonizing the mind in Changez's case he *"decolonized his mind"* from the false conceptions of the West and became himself again. On his part, Khawaja (2007) considers that Changez was tempted by American glory and lifestyle and simultaneously crumpled under its capitalism and imperialism, historical and cultural ideologies constructed on rejecting the other. He feels that America was a place not of liberalism but fundamentalism, not a place of moderation but extremism, not a place of democracy but imperialism. It is obvious that the character rebelled against American imperialism and refused to be part of a mysterious system established on prejudice, discrimination, aggression, and rights violations. Finally, Changez regrets being so misguided and wonders *"how I could ever have been so ungenerous-and so blind-to have thought otherwise, and I was disturbed by what this implied about myself: that I was a man lacking in substance and hence easily influenced by even a short sojourn in the company of others"* (62).

Hamid in the spirit of a postcolonial writer blames America and its society for their failure to accept the people with different cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds with the openness of mind. Bruma (2004) is certain that "More corrosive even than military imperialism is the imperialism of the mind imposed by spreading the Western belief in scientism as the only way to gain knowledge". Buruma and Margalit (2004) correctly perceive: The attack on the West is among other things an attack on the mind of the West. The mind of the West is often portrayed by Occidentalists as a kind of higher idiocy. The mind of the West is capable of great economic success, to be sure, and of developing and promoting advanced technology, but cannot grasp the higher things in life, for it lacks spirituality and understanding of human suffering (75).

An imperialist sees the *Other* as different from the *Self*, and therefore he has to maintain adequate identity with the *Other* to have control over it. American culture is that of hatred established on superiority and idealism rejecting all that is not American. This novel explores how the colonizing culture twists the realities and incises the inferiority of the colonized people who attempt to find a voice, stress their identity, and reclaim their past in the face of inescapable "Otherness". Changez is made to believe in his inferiority and that of his culture. When coming back to Pakistan from the USA he takes a great deal of time to accept the change. He perceives everything unfamiliar and different including his house which appeared shabby



at first *"I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing. I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared....I was saddened to find it in such a state-no, more than saddened, I was shamed"* (61). Only when staring at his reflection in the glass of his bathroom mirror Changez resolved to exorcize the unwelcome sensibility by which he had become possessed *"It was only after so doing that I saw my house properly again, appreciating its enduring grandeur, its unmistakable personality, and idiosyncratic charm"* (62). Changez symbolizes and reflects the feelings of a postcolonial subject who constantly look for a western as a sign of superiority but then face the reality that he has to come back to his origins to understand and find his real self.

To view the topic from another angle, America seems to revive the colonial period that pampered the difference between the colonizer and the colonized, self and the other. Changez addresses the American, 'I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared' (Hamid 178). Edward Said (2003) reveals that Orient is Occident's "cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other" (2). To Said "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). Said further assures the astonishingly direct connection between imperial politics and culture in the United States" Granted that American expansionism is principally economic, it is still highly dependent and moves together with, upon, cultural ideas and ideologies about America itself, ceaselessly reiterated in public".

In this context, Hamid's novel foregrounds the discordant encounter between America and its Muslim other(s). The text seeks to inverse the dominant rhetoric of the West and creates a space that allows the Muslim 'other' a chance to speak. Buruma (2004) clarifies "moderate Muslims everywhere are cowed into silence by aggressive U.S. actions, for fear of being seen as traitors or, worse, barbarous idolators". Spivak (1988), points out that the discourses of the West created the subaltern through continuing construction and historical silencing. Not surprisingly, therefore, "subaltern cannot speak"(pp.308) perhaps never truly can until the world changes. And when the subalterns like Changez rarely get a chance to speak they are either misunderstood or mistrusted. On the contrary, the silence of the stranger observed as an American despite the fact he is flattered and persuaded to speak several times indicates the Americans' ambiguity, reservation, and precaution when dealing with those they consider others.

Additionally, postcolonial Hamid blames America for its persistence to live in the past and its resistance to change. Jim points at his workplace and tells Changez "They try to resist change. Power comes from becoming change" (50). Jim means to say that the true change that brings real power is the change in thinking and the change to make the economic principles stand on humanistic values rather than on materialistic gains. In his comments on Erica's longing for her past with her dead lover, Changez refers to America's search for dominance and past glory that it probably attempts to regain through military interference and waging war:

It seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as duty and honor. 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.

Changez trauma is great "Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War; I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Technicolor but in grainy black and white(58).

Wrathful of the American ways coming back to his homeland, Changez's revolutionary reaction consists of some anti-imperialist thoughts in the Department of Finance of the local university. Hamid conveys to America through Changez, the protagonist of the novel, that everything is not perfect with its culture and policies.

### 3-American Fundamentalism

The term "*fundamentalist*" is introduced in the title of the novel. Fundamentalist is the one who believes in fundamentalism i.e. he understands every word of his sacred book to be the literal truth and "*reluctant*" shows the reluctance in achieving the position of a fundamentalist (Tariq, 2014). Hamid explains the double meaning of the title: "*He (Changez) is a reluctant fundamentalist because his environment sees him as a religious fundamentalist, though he isn't one. He, on the other hand, rejects the economic fundamentalism of the business world to which he belongs -a world-oriented solely around gains and losses. For me, this is what fundamentalism is: looking at the world from a single perspective, thereby excluding all other perspectives*". "*Fundamentalism is not necessarily a religious phenomenon*" Hamid goes on to say. (Cited in Kramatschek, 2007)

Generally, fundamentalism is a term that refers to any religious movement which stresses the literal application of its tenets and core principles. Nevertheless, Hamid reclaims the term "*fundamentalism*" and applies it to economic institutions such as Underwood Samson (the American firm Changez works for which in many cases symbolizes the USA), because of their focus on economic core principles. The firm focuses on the "*fundamentals*"; employees are considered "*assets*" and are rated according to their financial worth to the company; the company values above all else "*maximum productivity*" and there is a constant focus on cost calculations and the economic drivers that determine an asset's value. Contrastingly, Hamid depicts Changez as a Muslim who is deliberately not "*fundamentalist*" in the traditional sense; he accepts alcohol and embraces many Western customs. His resignation from the company was a sign of his rejection of a system that prioritizes economic fundamentalism, a system that is competitively focused on "*meritocracy*", that reduces its employees as well as its clients to business "*assets*" or liabilities. Their creed values "*above all else maximum productivity*" and there is no place for "*second best*" (Minter, 2016). Changez was made and used to share in American fundamentalism until he reached a stage where "*I suspect I was never better at the pursuit of fundamentals than I was at that time, analyzing data as though my life depended on it*" (58). But thereafter he liberates himself from such restraints.

Fundamentalism is usually assigned to religion, the novel raises no such view. Though fundamentalism is a term the West usually associates with Islam and Muslims, this piece of work proves that it is originated, developed, and practiced in the West. This novel has surprisingly little if at all to say on the subject of religion. Changez seems to have no devoted faith or deity worship yet he is called fundamentalist. He appears to have a very liberal attitude towards Islamic religion as he says, "*European women nearby were, as usual, sunbathing topless -a practice I wholeheartedly supported*" (13). The act mentioned here is that of public nudity and thus strictly prohibited in Islam but Changez does not appear to have any objection to it. His entire affair with the American woman, Erica, shows his liberalism and his loose principles regarding religion. He relates his experience with Western women in these words, "*I had by the summer of my trip to Greece spent four years in America already-and had experienced all the intimacies college students commonly experience*" (16). In this way, he is introduced in the novel as a non-practicing Muslim (a Muslim only by name).

Saeed-ur- Rehman's article, (2007) 'Success of Understatement' declares the text to be free of any religious motif or intention; "*Changez does not withdraw from his Western life because he has found religion as a zone of ultimate comfort but because he is not happily serving a civilization which does not respect his culture of origin and because the USA is a shallow country*". According to Ghosh (2016), "*Changez's critique of American corporate fundamentalism stems from his lack of a sense of belonging and from a feeling of problematized identity*". So his return to Pakistan is a decision concerned with the sense of identity instead of religious fundamentalism. "*I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged*" (168) Changez says.

Fundamentalism then cannot be associated with Islamic extremism, but with American capitalism. Put differently, fundamentalism is not reserved solely for extreme religious dogma but includes other ideologies such as *"the neo-liberalism that characterized the Bush administration"*. Both fundamentalism and capitalism nurture greed, domination, hegemony, and violence (Shihada, 2015). For example, in terms of the fundamental form of capitalism, Changez's employer, Jim, exhorts his employees mercilessly to *"focus on the fundamentals"*(46). This term is used as Underwood Samson's guiding economic principle which means *"single-minded attention to financial details, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value"*(p.98).

The novel, hence, exposes the ugly face of the American society with its fundamentalist institutions and extricates the narratives of fundamentalism as a Muslim monopoly, and inverts the myths and discourses on identity to produce a counter-narrative. It offers a fascinating narrative of infatuation and repulsion towards America. In the novel, an identity narrative could be seen as a cultural write back that tries to invert certain stereotypical narratives and discourses of hegemony. Hamid has been successful in subverting the meaning of the word '*Fundamentalism*'. He is critical of the American financial institutions that show no regard for human values. Their sole motto *"focus on the fundamentals"* is to build their economic empire regardless of the impact it can have on the lives of the individuals (Bhatt, 2015). Changez feels bitter about his boss's insistence on him to concentrate on work ignoring the trouble he and his country are in *"I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe"*(70).

While working at Underwood Samson, Changez gains appreciation and is generally loved. But he seems to be alienated gradually by the way the firm functioned and the fundamentals upon which its philosophy stood. He begins to find latent traits of imperialism in Underwood Samson (or U.S.A) and tries to disengage himself from it (Ghosh, 2016). Hamid attracts attention to American society which is breeding financial fundamentalism through such institutions. Later, Changez comes to know the true meaning of strict adherence to the economic fundamentals of his company, which is simply suggestive of the American economic control and domination all over the world: *"It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision"*(p.177).

Besides, Changez's going to Manila has taught him the rootlessness of fundamentalism in the American system. This is further boosted by the American *"invasion"* of Afghanistan. All these made him feel *"remarkably pleased"* when he saw New York's World Trade Center collapsed (72). After this event, Changez becomes more determined in his opposition to the creed of economic fundamentalism. The reason beyond his pleasure as he clarifies is not because he is indifferent to the suffering of others or is pleased with the slaughter of thousands of innocents harmed in the attack but rather because *"someone had so visibly brought America to her knees"* (73) and in consequence, the United States has felt some of the pain that he believes has been inflicted on Muslims. Afterward, thinking of the people lost in the attacks *"allowed me to share in the anxiety of my colleagues and ignore for a time my initial sense of pleasure"* and further rose in him *"a constant murmur of reproach"* Changez declared (76).

Changez's ironic smile on the downfall of the New York twin towers though accompanied by a profound sense of perplexity shows his realization of the *"symbolism"* of the attack. Ironically, America is suffering from the very destruction that it inflicts upon its enemies. The places attacked on 9/11 are icons of the American empire, its sovereignty, and hegemony all over the world. Changez assures *"I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman"*. But America's irrational policies and its brutal war on what it names terrorism open his eyes to the faults of the American system and in due course make him *"desire to see America harmed"*(36). Recollecting America's bloody scenarios in Iraq and Afghanistan and

the conflict between India and Pakistan it promotes behind the scene and the flags spread everywhere in New York after the attacks, Changez expresses his discontent with the world mightiest civilization telling the American; *"you have slighted us; beware our wrath. Gazing up at the soaring towers of the city, I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle"* (78).

From the increasingly tense atmosphere arising between Changez and his American listener, the expectation is that Changez is moving towards the revelation that he has gone, however *"reluctantly"*, all the way over to the dark side of Islamic fundamentalism. But in a neat reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue here is that of US capitalism, specifically that practiced by Changez's former employer, Underwood Samson, whose motto, as they do their pitiless bit for globalization, is *"Focus on the fundamentals"*. In his work in Underwood Samson Changez discovers how the American regime is oppressive. The Americans are ready to sacrifice everyone or everything for their own interest (Sharma, 2008).

#### 4- American Capitalism

America's declaration of war on terror represents the most salient symbol of American-dominated global capitalism and the most visible symbol of American military domination. Changez confronted many incidents that opened his eyes to the follies and faults in America. In the beginning, Changez's situation was ironic he was adopted by the American system and involved to serve its schemes. He comments to the Stranger that he now sees that Princeton is indoctrinating him into a pro-American mindset-teaching him to use his skills to help American companies. Changez elaborates on how the U.S. dictates its policy and agenda through exercising its financial and military influence. It is the American stick and carrot policy, which means either financial aid in return for domination or financial and military sanctions in return for disobedience.

American policies are governed by rampant materialism and shallow commercialism. Tsumura views the war against the West as a war against the "poisonous materialist civilization" (cited in Buruma). Underwood Samson, the valuation firm Changez works for is a micro model for American capitalism and economic fundamentalism. As its initials suggest it symbolizes the U.S. in all of its power and under the surface racism. At first, Underwood Samson seems like a perfect meritocracy, feeding its employees a version of the American dream: if they work hard, they'll be rewarded. Sherman (one of Underwood Samson's vice presidents) says: *"We're a meritocracy,"* he adds, *"But meritocracy doesn't stop with recruiting. We'll rank you every six months. You'll know your rankings. Your bonuses and staffing will depend on them. If you do well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't, you'll be out the door"* (8). Changez realizes then that there is no point for second place or second chance and this is the way the system works.

As Changez grows critical of America's foreign policy, he begins to see the flaws in the *"help"* Underwood Samson provides for its clients-to restructure a company, it has to fire employees, some of whom will never hold a job again *"I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was pre-disposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain"* (152). When conversing with Changez as a member of the American team project, Juan-Bautista (the Chilean publishing chief) inquired *"Does it trouble you to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?"* (68) which indicates American companies' perseverance to increase their profits at the expense of others. Changez sees that Underwood Samson's extreme meritocracy harms the less powerful and less privileged. Changez begins to notice also that Underwood Samson isn't as meritocratic as Sherman promised, *"the Americans faced much less daunting odds in the selection"* (3).

It is perhaps no coincidence that Underwood Samson might be abbreviated the US, representing a violent capitalist space. On his first evening out for a drink with the group of new recruits, Changez is initially struck by the diversity among its members, a diversity which he later realizes is only superficial



among the graduates of Ivy League universities; Huma Ibrahim calls such diversity simply "another marketing device" for US universities, focusing on appearances (Cited in Waterman 2009, 38). Changez reflects, *"It struck me then - no, I must be honest, it strikes me now - that shorn of hair and dressed in battle fatigues, we would have been virtually indistinguishable"*. Underwood Samson seems a meritocracy and had young 'guns' trained (almost like an army) and working for it- teams trained by Sherman in the arts of economic fundamentalism-how to make as much money as possible and as quickly as possible, *"Maximum return was the maxim to which we returned, time and again. We learned to prioritize-to determine the axis on which advancement would be most beneficial-and then to apply ourselves single-mindedly to the achievement of that objective"* (Hamid, 40).

Changez's conflicted relationship with America is further demonstrated by the episode when he meets Juan-Bautista. In a subsequent conversation between Juan-Bautista and Changez, the old man reminds him of the janissaries-the Christian boys recruited by the Ottomans to fight against their civilizations. At this moment Changez questions the fundamentals of aggressive capitalism in which he participates. His conversation with Juan Bautista suggests a broader critique of America can be discerned from the nature of its conflict with the Muslim world (Aldalala'a, 2012). Changez's exposure of his standing as a modern-day janissary ultimately drives him to leave everything associated with what he perceived as American fundamentalism: *"There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war"* (68). Such institutions, he realizes adhere to principles of greed, materialism, and ruthless asset management. Changez lastly realizes that he was serving the American empire to dominate and control the world financially serving the economic interests of a country to subdue and edict the other weaker countries of the world. Changez declares *"I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain (in the US) was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer"* (75).

Hamid shows that American capitalism, with its focus upon the so-called *"fundamentals"*, is a cruel and inhuman system and the driving force behind American culture is capitalism and the only concern of capitalism is *"to determine how much fat could be cut"* (88). Changez admits: *"I too had previously derived comfort from my firm's exhortations to focus intensely on work, but now I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present"* (57). When valuing the cable company in New Jersey, Changez observed that the American system was so rigid that it leaves no space for showing deference or sympathy towards the elder or the poor and little if any consideration for human interaction which led his coworker, Wainwright to instruct him, *"You're working for the man, buddy. Didn't anyone tell you that at orientation?"* Then he gave Changez a tired smile and added, *"Just remember your deals would go ahead whether you worked on them or not. And focus on the fundamentals"* (52).

Changez admits the power of the system and narrates how international students in the U.S., like him, are *"sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations interviews, essays, recommendations until the best and the brightest of us had been identified"* (Hamid, p.18). International students like Changez as he tells the American *"were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you and invited to the ranks of meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so"* (3). Changez thinks that America uses its vast power to manipulate non-Western countries, and, as Changez realizes, finance is one of its most important weapons. Jim puts it to Changez frankly that though most people don't recognize it, it is for the sake of American economy evolution that America never hesitates to attract and make use of the world intellectuals to serve its purposes, *"The economy's an animal"* Jim continues *"It evolves. First, it needed muscle. Now all the blood it could spare was rushing to its brain."*

*That's where I wanted to be. In finance. In the coordination business. And that's where you are. You're blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need anymore. The tailbone. Like me. We came from places that were wasting away"* (51). Consequently, Changez confirms *"I found myself better equipped to regard as misguided-or at least myopic-the resentment which seethed around us as we went about our business"* (51).

Accordingly, the novel reveals American capitalism through Jim (the managing director at Underwood Samson) *"Jim made one feel he could hear one's thoughts"* (44). Jim inspects Changez *"like a jeweler's when he inspects out of curiosity a diamond he intends neither to buy nor to sell"* (12). Further, he makes allusions that Changez suffer from a financial crisis and is in international aid, *"And isn't it harder,"* he asks, *"for international students to get in if they apply for aid?... you must have really needed the money", "Do your friends here know,"* Jim goes on, *"that your family couldn't afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship?"* (14) This reflects Americans' materialistic mindset and showing off their supremacy to create an inferiority complex in others.

Changez hints that Western imperialism and American capitalism are responsible for the decline in Changez's family's fortunes and the decline of the Pakistani economy *"the rupee has declined steadily against the dollar"* (14). Earlier in the novel, Changez describes the economic and social dislocations that have taken place in Pakistan since the time of Independence (4). He draws comparisons between the pragmatic efficiency of America and the social structures of traditional cultures. It is while musing on this he sees beyond the inflexible boundaries of capitalist fundamentals to the wider implications of its hard-nosed ideology. The author's (Hamid's) perceptive insights into American society, and its embrace of aggressive capitalism, position him to evaluate the imbalances in the encounter (Aldalala'a, 2012).

Annoyed by Erica's indifference to his love and America's indifference to what was happening in Pakistan, Changez felt indifferent to the business world he was part of. This led him gradually to lose interest in his work as he started thinking he was participating in serving the American economy that was a sort of danger to the world and betrayal to his homeland that was negatively affected by American capitalism and haughtiness. When on a project in Chile Changez was clearly on the threshold of great change, *"I was eager to seize any pretext to avoid returning to the poisonous atmosphere of our team room"* (67).

## 5-American Racism

Succeeding the September attacks, American citizens develop xenophobia from Arabs, Muslims, and people of the Middle East resulting in a wave of racist incidents. Muslim Americans though named Americans and promised equal rights of American citizens are treated with inferiority, subjected to racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Like other Muslims, Changez experiences harassment: He is profiled at the airport, abused in the company parking lot, and encounters prejudice at work. In the company parking lot, Changez is insulted and approached by an unknown person who intends to attack and hit him if not led away by another man. On another occasion, Changez complains with great frustration *"Often I would emerge into the car park to find that one of the tires of my rental car was punctured-far too often for it to be mere coincidence"* (50). When on vacation in Greece, Changez bears a grudge of his American companions' extravagance and maltreatment with elderly people and those at their service *"I, with my finite and depleting reserve of cash and my traditional sense of deference to one's seniors, found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions-many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they-were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class"* (18). These incidents and others pave the way for his process of transformation from being a lover of the American culture and values to an activist who is critical of the American policy and its blind campaign of War on Terror waged against Islam and Muslims in the name of democracy and civilization.

Low (2003) notices "The Reluctant Fundamentalist breaks the stereotypes and misconceptions that promote prejudiced and biased view against the people who are considered as 'Others'. Changez proclaims" *being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection*" (157). He is not comfortable with the American ways of life, "For to be an American is to view the world in a certain way". After 9/11, Changez begins initially subconsciously, to realize that he is a puppet on the string. This is actually the way non-Europeans are made to be (Bhatt, 2015). Stereotypical imagery was applied to the East as an attempt to justify the colonial enterprise as "colonizing" and "necessary," since the Orient was defined as the "contrasting image" to the West. Said (2003) however puts it this way, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1-2). The images that the Orient is either to be feared or to be controlled became pervasive in Western accounts of the East and allowed a rationalization of colonialism (and, later on, neocolonialism).

Throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we witness different forms of racism that shape Changez's impressions of the United States. He tells the American "It is remarkable, given its physical insignificance-it is only a hairstyle, after all-the impact a beard worn by a man of my complexion has on your fellow countrymen" (118). Americans grow wary of people with beards considering them terrorists. From the first moment the stranger identified as American meets Changez he looks at Changez with great suspicion since he is bearded but Changez instantly relieves him saying, "Excuse me, Sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America", even though the American himself is bearded "it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you" Changez tells the American (1). However, despite Changez mother's request to her son to shave his beard before going back to America fearing prejudice and despite his colleague Wainwright's advice to him to be careful of the backlash of such a look, Changez continues to stand still and fight what he believes to be American shallowness, hollowness, and racism.

Furthermore, Jim, Changez's manager summons him and says "some people around here think you're looking kind of shabby. The beard and all" which represents the way non-Americans are perceived by Americans (62). Eventually, Changez's beard which he simply considers a form of protest on his part, a symbol of his identity or a remembrance of the reality he has just left behind (in Pakistan) brings him difficulties and suspicion in New York "My colleagues greeted with considerable-although often partially suppressed-consternation my reappearance in our offices" which results in him not wishing to blend in with what he calls "the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry" (59).

Once Changez returns, along with his American work team, after his business trip from Manila to America, at the airport, he has felt humiliated and degraded when he is interrogated, inspected, and asked to strip down to his shorts while his American colleagues are asked to leave decently-an action that makes Changez feel that he is less than an American. He is treated like a criminal and is separated from his team as an Other due to racial and cultural differences "My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious" (112).

The conversation that Changez has with the American immigration officer is effectively suggestive that life in America for Muslims has drastically changed. This however brings to mind Fanon's depiction of the marginalization and inferiority with which the Negro is treated and his anger at the tone and manner whites speak to him at the airport which reflects their absence of wish, lack of interest, indifference, automatic manner of classifying him, imprisoning him, primitivizing him, and decivilizing him (Fanon, 1986, 59). Immediately after the September attacks, Changez has an internal conflict but he attempts not to show it to the world and dismiss any possibility that his loyalties could be divided to obtain



his job for he knows the surrounding world is materialistic and discriminatory *"I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world-stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals-and I did not wish to have my position at Underwood Samson compromised"* (60). All these events add to his growing resentment of American racism. When Changez is fired, *"I felt as though a world had ended"* he adds:

*I realized how deep was the suspicion I had engendered in my colleagues over these past few-bearded and resentful-weeks; only Wain-wright came over to shake my hand and say farewell; the others, if they bothered to look at me at all, did so with evident unease and, in some cases, a fear which would not have been inappropriate had I been convicted of plotting to kill them rather than of abandoning my post in mid-assignment* (142).

Changez notices that America is not the paradise he once thought of. He feels pushed from center to periphery as a terrorist -*"I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in-I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson, I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares"* (130).

The novel quite correctly points to the themes of fear and suffering of the Muslims and the institutionalization of racism in the era of globalization: where nations and races are still made subaltern by the superior and the mighty (Sharma, 2008). The images of the boss inspecting Changez when enquiring him are metaphors for the colonizer's attempt to dehumanize, despise and show authority over the colonized and absorb the colonized, with the familiar post-colonial image of the penetration into the interior. The novel reveals the American imperial regime rejected by a man of conscience who has obvious insight into how colorization is practiced in modern America. McLeod (2000) perceives that colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonizing nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other people, and by getting colonized people to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things (34). When reaching such passive perception of self and blind acceptance of the other no doubt a colonized will surrender to all temptations or pressures that will not ultimately lead him to believe himself inferior but also ready to be moved with the remote control.

The novel exposes how America was obsessed by rising wrath after 9/11, *"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, 118). Changez thought at the beginning that he was secured by his Princeton certificate and Underwood Samson's important job and was quite sure that the abuse he heard to be practiced against cabdrivers and others was because they were haplessly poor *"not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year"*. Shortly thereafter, he suffered abuse himself, and only then he discovered that Americans grew suspicious and offensive of all foreigners perceived as Arabs or Muslims with no exception.

Hamid portrays the racial discrimination to which non-Europeans are subjected to by the American culture and society to oppose oppression and injustice on an international basis. Changez finds the attitude of the father of his American beloved Erica offensive and insulting. Erica's father allusions to Changez against Pakistan symbolize the micro prototype of the general attitude of the American government and nation that view them as others, inferior and backward. When Erica's father was talking with Changez about the situation in Pakistan he revealed his view; *"Economy's falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people, don't get me wrong. I like the Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism"*. Changez describes Erica's father tone as *"typically American undercurrent of Condescension -struck a negative chord with me"* (28). Erica's father speech depicts American stereotypes and misconceptions of Muslims and their countries which ultimately led



Changez to offer his defense; *"Yes, there are challenges, sir, but my family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that"* (28).

Likewise, the relationship between Changez and Erica does not grow, as their racial origins and cultural identities pull them apart. Their mutual relationship remains superficial and emotionless. Hamid shows Changez compromising his identity, to be accepted by his beloved belonging to the better culture of the neo-colonial superpower. When he gives up his name, his identity, his values, and culture, and offers to become Chris (Erica's ex-boyfriend) the beloved accepts him. The hidden message is that the non-Europeans are good enough for America only when they give up their identity and culture and *"marry"* the American dominant culture (Khalid, 2014, 40).

The novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents a postcolonial study of the clash between the Eastern and Western identities. Erica, for the most part, determines the fate of this relationship like a typical westerner who continues his or her hegemony on an eastern subject. Changez fails as a lover, not because he doesn't qualify as a lover but because he cannot find that cultural link which could put them together in a congenial relationship (Bhatt, 2015). Suspicion and discrimination arouse Changez's disliking and distancing as he releases himself from the influence of the West. Hartnell, (2010) detects that Changez is not simply alienated, but his isolation suggests that America fails to live up to its promises and *"self-understanding as a post-colonial nation, while still acknowledging its potential to be an 'exceptional' melting-pot"* (p.346)

In short, Erica and America cause Changez great damage. His obsession with Erica's love goes unnoticed, ungratified, and unreturned which ultimately leads to his catastrophe *"there were in me at least some elements of the anger and hurt vanity that characterize a spurned lover, and these unworthy sentiments helped me to keep my distance"*. Similarly, his love of America causes him a loss of his big dreams of happiness and success, and eventually pays the cost heavily for such a love. He is confronted with American racism, fundamentalism, and extremism.

## 6- American Extremism

It has become apparent that extremism is not restricted to religious extremism that America is artful in inflaming and incorrectly attribute to Islam. Extremism is rooted in America's policies, rules, regulations, and actions taken into excess with slight if any consideration to human rights. America's extremism is radicalized in most of its regimes, practices, and schemes, and its inhuman and brutal war on terror is evidence.

The novel shows that extremism is rooted in the American system with the evidence of the political and economic extremism that run the country. American government exaggerates the danger of the outside enemy and the threat of Islamic terrorists to invade Afghanistan and Iraq to achieve its political and economic goals. Likewise, America's foreign policy is extremist. It has left its duty of building good relations with the world countries away and concentrates on building new alliances with certain political regimes to execute America's policies of political expansion and economic advances. Lamis Andoni is alarmed that *"the United States fails to realize that a foreign policy based solely on such principles of power and domination leaves no room for legitimate political opposition, driving all discontent into the camp of extremists and terrorists"* (Cited in Garfinkle, 2004).

Hamid shows that the American culture is extremist and intolerant of the racial, cultural, and ideological differences. Hamid (2007) says *"Post 9/11 scenario demanded peace and end of extremism, but the strategy to secure peace by America was equally extremist i.e. war on terror, aggravating the anxiety and antagonism"* (113). Thurfjell (2008) suggests that Islamism is *"one of many responses to the colonial and post-colonial situations in the so-called Muslim world"* today and that the radical Islamist movement, although perhaps not the most obvious, might be the most challenging example of a 'subaltern' voice in the postcolonial world, and that the Islamist movement has succeeded in 'provincializing' Europe

by "providing an alternative center of moral, political and ontological focus among its adherents" (159).

Mulloy (2005) assures "as we move into the new millennium there are growing signs that extremism even in the West is far from dead-that we celebrated prematurely the universal victory of democracy. More generally across the West, new forms of green politics, often linked by growing hostility to globalization-Americanization, are taking on more violent forms". Hamid rejects the contention that only the so-called developing cultures produce and breed extremism. He points his finger at America and its culture for producing extremism, hatred, and global tensions and confrontations. He shows that disrespect and lack of acceptance by the American culture of the people from other cultures is the biggest barrier in the way of natural and mutually beneficial interaction among various cultures and countries. Changez discards America because he is not content serving a civilization that does not respect his culture and background and when he becomes a target of racism. Changez clarifies the Pakistani state for the American "*For we were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories, we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and-yes-conquering kings*" (102).

Hamid too has portrayed that American extremism and interference in the internal affairs of other countries is neither in the interest of America nor in the interest of international peace and cooperation because it breeds ill will and encourages people from developing nations to embrace extremist ideologies in return. Shihada (2015) declares; "*Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist renders a stark warning message, through its character (Changez) that the harsh treatment of Muslims, American domineering policies, and the blind War on Terror will force many ordinary Muslims to relinquish the American Dream, like Changez, and turn into radicals*".

In the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid inverts the Western gaze upon the Muslim world; in doing so, he represents an America that is conspiratorial and inundated with fanaticism. He exposes American extremism, offering an indictment of American society as rife with conspiracy and religious fundamentalism. In this setting, the novel has been highly persuasive in pulling the Western religious bias against the Muslims apart, and thereby reminds us of Edward Said's (2003) statement: "*To demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the grounds that it is 'enraged' at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of therapeutic, punitive attention*". Hamid illustrates that America and its society are responsible for stimulating the monster of abhorrence, extremism, and intolerance against non-Americans. Minter (2016) demonstrates that Changez finds out that he is mistaken to think that he is a guarded person and American counter violence and anger against Muslims is only reserved for extremist Muslims, but not for moderates like himself. Changez was shocked at the extremist actions by Americans when he is attacked by Americans due to his Muslim identity.

### **Conclusion**

Mohsin Hamid, a Pakistani writer successfully reflected in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the post-colonial works of literature that depict the continuous and ongoing suffering of nations and individuals under the hegemony and imperialism of the world powers. Even after independence, Pakistan and its people like many other so-called developing countries are still living in the shadows of American neo-colonialism, which has a direct impact upon people, their culture, and identities. America's conspiracies and irrational War on Terror and its illogical policies result in many average Muslims and those targeted by the American regime feeling injustices, humiliated, and victimized gradually leading them to great resentment, and ultimately become like a temporary bomb that warns to explode at anytime. As it is obvious, the protagonist of the novel is loyal performing his duties as the best American citizen can do until he feels rejected and doubted mainly post 11,9,2001. Constantly his loyalty to America remains under the microscope. He is put under difficult tests to examine his Americanness. Hamid sends a message that Muslims, like Changez, want to live in peace, dignity, contentment, and

affluence like all other human beings and it is time to offer a convenient environment for them before it is too late.

Henceforth, America needs to revise its plans since they prove to be harmful to others and its own will. The novel reveals that if Changez has an anti-American sentiment it is a natural result of the terrible experiences and challenges he passed through in America. He is pushed from all directions to develop resentment and hatred of American ways and systems due to American injustices and evils. He is a victim of American terrorism, extremism, racism, imperialism, capitalism, fundamentalism, and many more. The novel is exact evidence that the United States creates its enemies out of people who love it.

Nevertheless, it is a mistake to believe that the Orientals have enmity towards the Occident's democracy, civilization, and freedom with no justifications and the present novel is a proof. That is to say, discussing the issues handled in this study does not at all mean to show prejudice or envy towards the West (represented here by the U.S.A.) as it is often said but rather uncovering the ugly face of the West civilization. No one can deny Western civilization but it is shallow and baseless. It builds itself on the destruction of others, grows at the expense of the poor and weak, and feeds on terrorism, capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism.

It is convenient here perhaps to conclude with Edward Said's (2003) statement that "history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow" (Preface). The above discussion of Occidentalism hence tends towards illuminating the disadvantages of eliminating and belittling others. Throughout the novel, the two main characters: (Changez who represents the East and the stranger who represents the West) are surrounded by suspicion towards one another. They never come to a clear understanding or trust and at times mutual respect. Hamid's message is significant for the whole world that unless the East and West accept each other truly away from the overestimation of self and conspiracies and machination and the misconceptions of the other they will never come to compromise and coexistence.

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