

***Daryoosh Hayati**

Lecturer of English Language,
Lamerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

East meets West: a Study of Dual Identity in Mohsin Hamid's the Reluctant Fundamentalist

Abstract

This essay will present a postcolonial study of how Eastern identity and Western identity clash in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, the Pakistani- American novelist, and make the character of the protagonist a glocal one, (A mixture of global and local), a term newly coined by Postcolonial scholars to show the ever clashing mixture of global and local dualities in immigrants' personalities. The basis for this research paper is the postcolonial theories of Edward Said, Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha. The aim is to question simply and sardonically the human cost of empire building, moreover it is discussed how the people in a totally alien culture are faced with different cultural predicaments, dilemmas as well as contradictions threatening their identity. Identity is supposed to be stable, while as this novel indicates, it is more of glocal identity which is at risk due to the cultural conflicts, as a result of which identity and ethnicity are subjected to change for the benefit of the hegemony. In line with Edward Said's: "the East writes back" it is shown how this novel is a reaction to the discourse of colonization from the Pakistani side (which stands for the East) and welcomes de-colonization. Moreover it reflects the laments of the author for the terrorist label ascribed to Muslims, in terms of globalization, supported by the hegemony, being interpreted as

* Email: dhayati@iaulamerd.ac.ir

essentialism.

Key words: globalization, identity, postcolonial, binary oppositions, otherness, hegemony and hybridity.

Introduction

Post colonialism deals with the aftermath of colonialism. It is about the painstaking struggle of being independent. The society is no longer being oppressed; they are independent, free to be themselves again. However as they have changed, their culture has changed now, so they need to figure out who they really are. After so much change has taken place, they cannot go back to their original culture as it has been dismantled by the colonizers. To provide an answer to the question about their true identity, the postcolonial subjects must refer to either history that cannot be trusted as it is subjective (subjected to change as each government or authority wants it in its own favor), or the Postcolonial theories, because postcolonial literature as earlier said is what 'the East writes back', part of which is related to the rediscovery of a nation's true identity.

Postcolonial literature tends to answer the following question: Should there be an attempt to restore the original culture, conformity to the culture presented by the settlers or the creation of a new culture which combines both.

Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of "otherness" as the result of the complex identity. There are however problems with or complexities to the concept of "otherness". "Otherness" includes duality, both identity and difference, so that every other, every different than and excluded by is dialectically created and includes the values and meaning of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define the concept of "hybridity", an important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures, yet; "Integration" may be too orderly a word to represent the variety of stratagems, desperate or cunning or good-willed, by which people adapt themselves to the necessities and the opportunities of more or less oppressive or invasive cultural impositions, live into alien cultural patterns through their own

structures of understanding, thus producing something familiar but new. The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic, as well as oppressive. "Hybridity" is also a useful concept for helping to break down the false sense that colonized cultures or colonizing cultures are monolithic, or have essential, unchanging features. The growth of "hybridity"—the dissolution of rigid cultural boundaries between groups hitherto perceived as separate, the intermixture of various identities, in effect the dissolution of identities themselves. Much anthropology in this field demonstrates how identities have been and are invented, reinvented and shaped for political and other purposes, out of disparate historical and cultural experiences. Other studies have repeatedly shown that identities are driven with contradictions and are not to be understood as seamlessly unified comprehensive cultural entities, therefore impossible to go back to the original one.

Identities owe their formation and position in society to the operation of social, economic, cultural, and political forces that are inseparable from the forces that create and maintain socioeconomic groups. In this view, rather than being opposed, identity politics and class politics, while distinct, have the potential to be allied actors in a common political process.

The three most influential theorists whose ideas regarding the causes of the oriental identity being changed include: Fanon, Bhabha and especially Edward Said according to whom:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences ... The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of

discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles'.... 'Ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied. To believe that the Orient was created – or, as I call it, “Orientalized” – and to believe that such things happen as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination and of a complex hegemony. (Said,1982, pp. 30-35)

Frantz Fanon stands as the second outstanding critic in the field whose ideas, together with those of Bhabha and Said provide a strong basis for the study of cultural influences in the field. According to Fanon in his essay “The Wretched of the Earth” published in NATC, p.1587:

This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by the new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women ... Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture which has been transformed into instinctive patterns of behaviour, to recognize the unreality of his “nation,” and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure.

Last but not the least, attention must be directed toward the theories Homi K. Bhabha known as Hybridity and the “Third Space”:

It is that Third Space, though un-representable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew'. 'The Western metro pole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity; “The trouble with the English is that their, his, history

happened overseas, so they do not know what it means. (Bhabha, 1998, p, 15).

Discussion

The reluctant fundamentalist is in line with the above mentioned views. The Reluctant Fundamentalist immediately de-stabilizes the “gaze” of the West upon the Islamic World, especially the one related to Pakistan. The novel’s opening sees Changez immigrating to the United States, attending Princeton, and receiving a high-stakes and much coveted entry-level position in a New York City business consulting firm, Underwood Samson. It would seem that he is the living embodiment of the American Dream, having toiled endless hours for these opportunities and possessing a bright, unbounded future. However, after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, his attitude toward the United States changes, especially as he becomes the target of racism and enhanced surveillance. By the conclusion, one is unsure whether or not this conversation partner is actually a CIA assassin dispatched to Pakistan to terminate Changez. Changez, constructed as a “modern” Muslim immigrant and anti-hero, sees fit to challenge the reductive lens that casts all Muslims as religious fanatics and backwards zealots.

The novel ultimately poses the interesting stance that neo-liberalism exists as its own form of fundamentalism; the West’s utter devotion to the precepts of a laissez-faire economic policy has generated a totalizing view of the globe as a terrain to be mined and exploited. Those who do not follow this mantra can necessarily be considered a “threat,” and in this novel’s case, very much a terrorist threat. This intervention places into relief the ways in which the West might not necessarily view its own economic activities critically enough. Underwood Samson, in Changez’s view, is the clear example of the soullessness of the West. The company does not generate a purchasable product, but is yet extremely sought after for its ability to “evaluate” other companies. That is, their job epitomizes capitalism to its very core through the ability to place “value” on objects, structures, bodies or processes. Where Changez finds root is in a Pakistani culture that does not subscribe to this same system of “beliefs.” Although Changez’s Underwood Samson advisor, Jim, appeals to him through the sentiment that Underwood Samson cannot be conflated with

American economic policies at large, the novel concludes with Changez retreating into the confines of nationalisms and discrete boundary points. For him, Underwood Samson merely operates as an appendage of American “fundamentalism,” one that must be combated through Pakistani economic independence.

Moreover the Reluctant Fundamentalist is the story of a man who is surprised by the intensity of his reactions when he perceives a threat to his cultural identity. “Beware the Dark Side, young Skywalker,” (67) a colleague tells Changez at the induction party. This is said in jest, but the Star Wars legend of a youngster who betrays his own kind for an evil Empire, in the process losing his soul and turning into a mechanical man, will uncomfortably resonate with Changez’s own integration into American life. Later in the narrative, he will hear about the Janissaries,

The Christian boys who were captured and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world...they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to. (78).

These analogies will tap into his deep-rooted fears: the fear of contributing to the wealth-generation of the most powerful empire in the world even while his own country languishes in poverty and he feels like a stranger on each successive visit to Lahore. The fear of a shrinking, the “global world” where “global” (126), is defined in terms of the US model. The fear of becoming, inadvertently, a foot-soldier in America’s march of progress, as a result his identity resembles that of Janissaries.

And yet this young man, who would certainly at some point have thought of himself as a citizen of the world, unconfined by narrow domestic walls, slowly becomes defensive about his identity. Early on, he has already been discomfited by little things: watching his colleagues’ part with large sums of money, for instance, reminds him of the poverty in his country, and on a business trip to Manila he is mortified to discover that even this (Eastern) city is so much wealthier than Lahore:

I felt like a distance runner who thinks he is not doing too badly until he glances over his shoulder and sees that the fellow who is lapping him is not the leader of the pack but one of the laggards. (p. 176)

But after the 9/11 attacks and the racial profiling that accompanies it, he becomes ever more conscious of the need to define himself, and this leads to disaffection with his adopted country. Changez's dilemmas are complicated by his feelings for a girl named Erica, a fellow from Princeton; they become close but she is haunted by her memories of a deceased boyfriend, and an awkward lovemaking scene shows us that Changez's relationship with her mirrors his relationship with the US – he can possess her only by pretending to be someone he is not, by relinquishing his own sense of self.

And though the book ends on an ambiguous note, refusing to divulge the extent to which Changez has traded one fundamentalism for another, we understand how an unbridgeable divide, an atmosphere of mutual distrust, can be created between cultures of the East and the West.

In other words, Bhabha argues that cultural identities cannot be ascribed to pre-given, irreducible, scripted, ahistorical cultural traits that define the conventions of ethnicity. Nor can the "colonizer" and "colonized" be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently. Instead, Bhabha suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performances that in turn produce a mutual and mutable recognition (or representation) of cultural difference. As Bhabha argues, this "liminal" space is a "hybrid"(Bhabha, 1998, p.59) site which witnesses the production, rather than just the reflection, of cultural meaning.

The novel's central point is the hubris (pride) of the American empire which is built on the guts of finance: "Finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" (p. 168). Like a mirror

reflecting the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan or the East and West view each other. "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."(p.123) So begins Changez's

monologue that charts the rise and fall of this man, from Princeton University, to employment in a prestigious firm, his love for a fellow New Yorker named Erica, to the increasing suspicion he feels after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, and the escalating conflict in his home country, Pakistan, which he watches from across the Atlantic, powerless to help.

What distinguishes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is its monologue form. Changez is relating his tale to an American who may or may not be a CIA agent and Changez may or may not be a terrorist. The duality that this text invokes is mirrored through the possibly radicalisation Changez undergoes and the loss of mind that befalls Erica. In the end of this superbly powerful narrative every character is left hanging off metaphorical and literal cliffs and reminded that this is simply not a story of a rise and fall, but concerned with events that happened after the fall, for falling is only but the beginning of a story.

In order to study identity, one has to consider what causes change. Colonies go through many changes throughout their existence. When looking at pre-colonialism, one sees the original culture of the colonized area, though exposed to some superficial changes; the deep structure upon which a culture has laid its foundations can be still identified. Colonialism aims at changing everything, but the gradual nature of cultural changes makes it impossible to change the deep structures quickly, thus as earlier pointed out, even after centuries the original culture can be identified and revived. In almost all cases of colonialism, the norms, beliefs and cultural values of the larger power are forced upon all of the colonies natives. This is because the colonizer believes that the natives are as Bhabha puts it “savages” and they need to be civilized. The natives have no choice but to accept these new life styles. The settlers' technology is more advanced and they could easily wipe out all natives who resist or refuse to conform to the new culture. This is where the depletion of the colonizers' culture begins. Natives react passively or negatively to the colonizers' culture and show negative resistance as in the case of Indians with the British colonizers, the natives stopped practicing Christianity. In most cases they convert to Christianity, mainly because it is forced onto them. In order to

communicate with the colonizers or settlers, they start speaking the settlers' language. Soon enough their own is lost.

After so many years of colonialism, the natives become similar to their colonizers. The colonizers control education, therefore they control the thoughts and ideas absorbed by the youth. Natives' children absorb the new culture and ideas at a young age. Because of this, the original culture is lost in new generations. The colonizer is a brute force which oppresses the natives. In the fight of this oppression, independence is fought for and a culture that has almost been forgotten is once again sought after.

The representation of these uneven and often hybrid, polyglot, multivalent cultural sites reclaimed or discovered colonized cultures searching for identity and meaning in a complex and partially alien past may not look very much like the representations of bourgeois culture in western art, ideologically shaped as western art is to represent its own truths (that is, guiding fictions) about itself.

To quote Homi Bhabha on the complex issue of representation and meaning from the *Location of Culture*:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the middle passage of slaver and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement -- now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies -- make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences -- literature, art, music, ritual, life, death -- and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation -- migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation -- makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of

signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition. (Bhabha, 1998 p. 158)

Inasmuch as Changez can see that the United States turns to a reductive patriotism in the light of the “age of terror,” his equally resistant and myopic gaze constrains him into a perspective where the very few American individuals can be seen beyond their economic ferocity or racist jingoism. In addition, Changez’s Pakistani nationalism seems to subvert any possibility for a larger Third World sensibility that he had espoused earlier in the novel. Whereas Pakistan and Afghanistan are both likened to victims in America’s “war on terror,” it seems particularly problematic that Changez does not expand his scope to include the various other “Third World” nations that have been targeted by America’s economic or military fundamentalisms.

By introducing these aporias, Hamid does seem to suggest that Changez’s story acts as its own polemic toward the ways that the West can produce the so-called “terrorist” through and by the false oppositions that construct the unequivocal Muslims as outsiders to the nation.

The novel imagines the possibility that fundamentalism has many guises, both religiously grounded and secular. The questions it thus provokes are inherently some of the most valuable elements to the current issues related to international security. Regarding the “war on terror,” Jean Baudrillard has written,

It is therefore a clash neither of civilizations nor of religions and this goes far beyond Islam and America, upon which one attempts to focus the conflict in order to give oneself the illusion of a visible confrontation, and solution, by the use of force (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 406).

Baudrillard disrupts the binary that Changez seems most fervent to posit and in doing so, perhaps unveils a different root source for an existing conflict:

But the fourth world war is elsewhere. It is what haunts all world order, all hegemonic domination. If Islam dominated the world, terrorism would rise against Islam. It is the very world itself that resists globalization. (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 407).

Born in Pakistan, educated at Princeton and currently the hottest new employee at a New York firm specializing in ruthless appraisals of ailing companies being targeted for takeover, Changez recognizes himself in the description. "I was a modern-day janissary," he observes, "a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine ..." (p.120)

The recognition empire is doomed to failure, as the world itself is against hegemony completes a process of inward transformation that began when he realized he was half-gladdened by the World Trade Center attacks, and it now prompts him to sabotage his own high-flying career, to give up his pursuit of the beautiful, troubled Wasp princess Erica and go back to Lahore. There, bearded and generally re-aculturated, he meets an American in a restaurant in the Old Anarkali district, and buttonholes him with his life story. The novel is his monologue: a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous faultiness of current East and West relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual - but especially American - prejudice and misrepresentation.

The richest instance of the latter is in the way it plays with the idea of fundamentalism itself. From the title, and 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, and is possibly, even as he speaks, orchestrating some Daniel Pearl-like execution of his perhaps literally captive audience. But in a neat - arguably too neat - reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue here is that of US capitalism, specifically that practised by Changez's former employer, Underwood Samson, whose motto, as they do their pitiless bit for globalisation, is "Focus on the fundamentals" (p.89). The subverted expectation very efficiently forces one to reconsider one's

preconceptions about such words and their meanings, and a point is duly scored for relativism.

Changez pithily summarizes, for instance, the experience of every happy Manhattan transplant when he declares: "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker." (p.56) And his figure for that city in its ominously flag-bedecked state following the 9/11 attacks - "I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle" (p.179) is perfect both as a visual image and as a deepening of the book's running theme in which the triumphalism military manner of the US is repeatedly mapped over the ruined glory of the old Mughal empire.

To be fair, the allegory isn't as glibly intrusive as that makes it sound, but it has a stiffening effect on the narrative, shifting it from the dramatic to the essayistic. It's no great surprise to hear Changez drop his sinuously self-deprecating manner towards the end, in favor of something more finger-wagging polemical: "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" (p. 159).

Assimilation is another aspect of Changez's identity, but as earlier discussed his identity is subjected to inevitable dichotomies. In fact assimilation is a process that presupposes contradictions.

But surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you – an American – will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details. (p.118)

When Changez talks of his attempt to assimilate, the reader is struck by the dishonesty of that attempt:

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. (p. 65)

Later, Changez seems to recognize, for the first time, how ineffectual his efforts are:

Then one of my colleagues asked me a question, and when I turned to answer him, something rather strange took place. I looked at him – at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work – and thought, you are so foreign. (p. 67)

The book is about Changez's change or realization, which transforms him from an American financial analyst from Princeton to an individual reintroduced to his cultural identity and family. The book begins when Changez accepts a job at a valuation firm and begins a relationship with an American girl named Erica. During the story, 9-11 occurs and the Indian-Pakistani conflict arises. Changez sees America's global role as one of self-interest and he feels as though he is leaving behind his natural culture and identity.

The Reluctant Fundamentalism does not delve into religious fundamentalism much at all, nor does it go into any detail about criticism of the United State's foreign policy. It focuses around Changez inner struggle, his relationship with Erica, his relationship with his work, and his continuing desire for resolution in his sense of identity. After all, it seemed to be one of the several post 9/11 novels that seem to be sprouting up around the themes of immigrant identity and allegiance in the context of America's changing international relations.

Another haunting character in the book is Erica, Changez's frail American girl friend. A typical privileged American girl, Erica is different in that she has suffered a tragedy and is unable to pull herself out of it enough to let Changez in her life. Again, Erica remains somewhat of an unbelievable character until you suddenly realize that the author probably meant Erica as an allegorical representation for America "(I) Am Erica" (p.28) and then it all falls into place. America, caught up in its own past and struggling with its own nostalgia, is unable to accept Changez.

This prompts a deepening examination of his identity, his allegiances, and his relationship with America. Parallels are implied between Muslim countries and the doomed employees of the companies Changez evaluates. The key here is not religion, but corporate capitalism and traumatic economic change. Changez's boss Jim says, "We came from places that were wasting away." (p.81) He means, on the one hand, Pakistan, and on the other, old industrial America. There's plenty of on-target comment about American reaction to September 11th. Like this:

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. 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. What your fellow countrymen longed for was unclear to me – a time of unquestioned dominance? Of safety? Of moral certainty? I did not know – but that they were scrambling to don the costumes of another era was apparent. I felt treacherous for wondering whether that era was fictitious, and whether – if it could indeed be animated – it contained a part written for someone like me. (p.173)

The attack on the empire makes Changez aware of America as an empire, responsible for his identity crisis. The final straw for him is when he hears someone describing the Janissaries, the Christian slaves taken as boys from their parents by the Ottoman Empire and turned into an elite warrior class to defend the sultan. Is Changez a latter-day reversed Janissary?

In an effective subplot, Changez has an almost-girlfriend who is obsessed by the memory of her dead boyfriend. In her depression, "She glowed with something not unlike the fervour of the devout." Themes of nostalgia and commingled, confused identities seep into other parts of the novel, where they are relevant to Changez, Pakistan, and America. Several other parts of the novel discuss the causes of his hybrid identity as well as his contradictory actions and reactions to the Western culture.

Changez' multiple identities, proving him neither belonging to the East, nor to the West, is a complex item, several reasons of which are discussed below:

Changez' irritation with American cultural insensitivity Changez holidays in Greece with a group of Princeton friends, where he first becomes enamored with Erica. He describes behaviour he observed which irritated him:

The ease with which they parted with money... thinking nothing of the occasional – but not altogether infrequent– meal costing perhaps fifty dollars a head. Or their self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service. “But you told us,” they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way. 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 (p.142).

The disturbance Changez experienced when he compared America and Pakistan looking down on New York from his office 41-42 stories high Changez realizes he is standing in a different world from Pakistan with his feet supported by the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known. He reflects to the quiet American:

Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me; they made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed (p.110).

Changez' experiences of American condescension Erica's father asks Changez how things were back in Pakistan and Changez answers that they are quite good. Erica's father then comments, 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 Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism. Changez reflects:

I felt myself bridle. There was nothing overtly objectionable in what he had said; indeed, his was a summary with some knowledge, much like the short news items on the front page of The Wall Street Journal... But his tone – with, if you will forgive me, its typically American undercurrent of condescension – struck a negative chord with me, and it was out of politeness I limited my response to ‘Yes, there are challenges, sir, but my family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that.(p.63)

Changez' pleasure at seeing the destruction of the twin towers Changez' sense of unease with America has already been well and truly simmering away, as the above points, all made early in the novel, make clear. This is how Changez recalls what happened as he realized what he was watching was not fiction but news:

“I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased (p.73). Changez sees the evident disgust in the face of his American listener and notices his large hand clenching into a fist. He then hastens to assure him that he is no sociopath, who is indifferent to the suffering of others. He admits his own sense of perplexity at his sense of pleasure at the slaughter of thousands of innocents. He reflects:

But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack – death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over

multiple episodes – no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.(p.157)

These words only serve to intensify the displeasure of his American listeners whom Changez challenges. But surely he cannot be completely innocent of such feelings. “Do you feel no joy at the video clips so prevalent these days?(p.185) Regarding the American munitions laying waste the structures of their enemies that still continually appears in TV programs or on games designed for children.

Changez’s experience of being treated as a possible terrorist As soon as the team was able to Manila, Changez finds himself escorted by armed guards into a room where he is made to strip down to his boxer shorts. He is the last person to board the plane and says: “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty...this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious” (p.112). Upon arriving back in New York he is again separated from his team at immigration and ends up being subjected to another inspection. His team didn’t wait for him and he so he was forced to travel to Manhattan that evening very much alone.

Changez’s anger at America’s shrewd reflections of Eastern or Muslim nations For two weeks after America began to bomb Afghanistan Changez avoids the evening news. Then one evening he chances 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. Changez recalls “ Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation” Changez also bristles at the stereotypical and imperialistic manner in which American television cast Pakistanis, without any respect shown for their proud history:

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 conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these

things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent (p. 60).

Changez' growing need to assert his own identity. Returning to America, following his trip back to Lahore, Changez, despite knowing the difficulties it might pose at immigration, resolves to keep his beard:

It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my precise motivations. I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my co-workers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry (p. 154).

Back in America he finds that his beard does make him an object of verbal abuse by complete strangers and an object of suspicion in the workplace, but refuses to shave it off.

Changez' disgruntlement at the seeming impunity with which America caused damage in other nations. He comments:

I wondered 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 (p. 178).

As a result of the discovery of the America's true intentions and ill-natured cultural identity, he decides to distance himself from the imperialism. Moreover; he feels responsible to inform people, even the ignorant ones in America, of the true driving forces behind their policies and the US led wars and campaigns against the third world countries. Changez sees America's post 9/11 actions as an engagement only in posturing. He confronts his American listener:

As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of

your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own (p. 138).

Changez becomes active in stirring up anti-American sentiment as another reflection of his identity. Now having secured a position as a university lecturer he makes it his mission on campus “to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine.” He discovers that it was not difficult to persuade his students to participate in demonstrations for greater independence in Pakistan’s domestic and international affairs. He observes that such demonstrations were labeled by the foreign press as anti-American.

Changez claims no inside knowledge of an alleged attempt on the part of one of his students to assassinate a coordinator of an American effort to provide development assistance to Pakistan’s rural poor.

Conclusion

To conclude attention must be paid to the fact that globalization is a myth and what is actually taking place is the spread of American values, power and products across the globe. Or in other words the American hegemony. It is further suggested that this will lead to a backlash against American hegemony as those people and states without participation in this system will come to resent American influence. Globalization is not a myth and that far from a backlash against American hegemony, many other people, states and businesses are modeling themselves on America.

Most people, for whom Changez stands as an example, especially those who examine the effects of globalization will come to recognize that it is having both cultural and economic impacts everywhere its forces are manifested. While no one denies the significance of economic globalization impacts, it may well be that the cultural influences of this process ultimately exert a far greater impact on the world.

Skillfully, the novel has played out the fear, suspicion and hatred that now characterizes American-Muslim relations. It does this particularly by building up the tension between the quiet American and a hostile, intimidating waiter who comes from a tribe with spans both sides of the border with neighboring Pakistan. The novel will finish with this hostility being brought to an undisclosed conclusion, just as the end of the story of American-Muslim conflict remains to be written.

As the book moves to this open ending, Changez realizes that not all Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as it should not be imagined that Americans are all undercover assassins.

The important thing about this book is not so much whether the reader agrees with this critique of America or not. What this novel does show is how anti-America feeling might develop and indicates various key factors that may shape such perspectives and identities. In particular, it is crucial to avoid stereotypes that simplistically presume that anti-Americanism on the part of a Muslim must be produced by Islamic indoctrination. This novel demonstrates that it is possible for a Muslim to develop contempt for America on substantially non-religious grounds.

Not long before 9/11, Changez considered New York the seat of the American empire, a civilization whose awe-inspiring achievements surpassed even the greatness of Mt. Everest. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the World Trade Centre, Changez sees New York as separate from America, because America has taken on a new meaning. It is no longer a great, cutting-edge of civilization, but a dangerously powerful and reactive beast.

Once Changez realizes that the American empire is like any other, he also understands that his supposed privileges: his job, his apartment and his expense account are really the chains that bind him in service to America. Quite opposite from “the most technologically advanced civilization” in history, it is no better for him than the British Empire was for those of low caste.

Hamid uses the predator and prey dichotomy to cultivate a relationship of mutual suspicion between Changez and the American.

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