

Cultural Citizenship and the Arab-Muslim Immigrant Experience in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*



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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of cultural citizenship as it pertains to Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America, as depicted in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Through the protagonist Changez's journey from assimilation to disillusionment, the novel critiques the limitations of multiculturalism and citizenship in addressing the cultural alienation faced by immigrants. By analysing Changez's experiences of discrimination, identity crisis, and eventual rejection of American values, this paper argues that cultural citizenship offers a framework for understanding the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation in a post-9/11 world. The study adopted a qualitative interpretative research method since the data involved is textual. The analysis is framed by Aihwa Ong's theory of cultural citizenship to explore how Hamid's novel challenges dominant narratives of belonging and exclusion.

Keywords: *cultural citizenship, Arab-Muslims, immigrant experience, Mohsin Hamid*

Introduction

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks reshaped the socio-political landscape of the United States, particularly for Arab-Muslim immigrants who found themselves thrust into the spotlight of suspicion and discrimination. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provides a nuanced exploration of this experience through the character of Changez, a Pakistani immigrant whose journey from assimilation to disillusionment mirrors the broader struggles of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America. This paper argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques the limitations of cultural citizenship in post-9/11 America, revealing how systemic discrimination and cultural alienation force immigrants like Changez to reject

assimilation in favour of cultural preservation. By analysing Changez's interactions with American society, his identity crisis, and his eventual rejection of American values, this study highlights the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation in a post-9/11 world. The second novel by the author, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, was published in 2007, six years after the 9/11 terror attacks. Like Changez, the novel's protagonist, Mohsin Hamid was born in Pakistan and educated at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, where he graduated in 1997. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* won the Asian American Literary Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award among several others, and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages.

Literature Review

The discourse on cultural citizenship and the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America has been a focal point in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Scholars have explored the intersection of identity, belonging, and exclusion in the context of the 9/11 attacks, which reshaped the socio-political landscape for Arab-Muslim immigrants in the United States. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has emerged as a significant text in this discourse, offering a nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by Arab-Muslim immigrants in navigating their cultural identities in a hostile environment.

Richard Gray's *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011) provides a foundational analysis of post-9/11 literature, categorising works into those that reinforce binary oppositions of "us versus them" and those that adopt a transformative approach. While Gray's categorisation of Hamid's novel as a transformative narrative is useful, it overlooks the novel's critique of global capitalism, which Mukherjee more explicitly addresses. Similarly, Sharmila Mukherjee's analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights the novel's critique of American capitalism and its portrayal of Changez's transformation from a transnational collaborator to a cultural nationalist. Mukherjee argues that the novel underscores the destructive impact of global capitalism on non-Western cultures, framing Changez's rejection of America as an act of intellectual jihad against Western epistemologies.

Aldalala's exploration of the novel's re-territorialisation of the encounter between America and its Muslim "other(s)" further enriches the discourse. Aldalala emphasises the novel's use of the confessional narrative mode to humanise the Muslim protagonist, challenging the dehumanising stereotypes perpetuated by Western media. Hamid's novel, through its portrayal of Changez's experiences, dismantles these stereotypes, offering a more complex and empathetic representation of Arab-Muslim immigrants.

The theme of identity and identification in the novel has also been explored. Blum examines the role of Changez's beard as a symbol of his cultural identity and its

transformation into a political marker in post-9/11 America. Blum's analysis highlights the novel's critique of the social obsession with outward appearances and its implications for Arab-Muslim immigrants. This theme is further elaborated by Mohammad Jajja, who explores Changez's quest for identity and his eventual rejection of American values. Jajja argues that Changez's disillusionment with America stems from his realisation that his cultural and ethnic identity will always mark him as an outsider, regardless of his achievements.

In summary, the existing literature on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights its significance as a counter-narrative to dominant Western portrayals of Arab-Muslim immigrants. The novel's exploration of identity, cultural citizenship, and the impact of global capitalism offers a powerful critique of the socio-political realities of post-9/11 America. This paper builds on these insights, offering a deeper analysis of the novel's engagement with cultural citizenship and its implications for understanding the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants.

Negotiating Suspicions: Islamic Identity and Post-9/11 Politics in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist tells the story of Changez Khan, a Pakistani university lecturer who used to be an immigrant in the United States of America. Set in a Lahore cafe, the novel takes the form of a conversational monologue between the narrator, Changez, and an anonymous American with military aspect and background (159). In the novel, Changez, the central character, narrates the experience of his encounter with America while he lives there in pre and post-9/11, and how his decision to leave America for Pakistan was made for him by the shift in social dynamics that the occurrence of 9/11 ushered into what used to be his erstwhile - i.e. pre-9/11 – settled, normal, and an enjoyable life in the US. After 9/11, however, his cultural-ethnic background as an (Arab) Muslim is thrown into a negative social prominence. This shift leads him into a series of unsavoury awareness regarding the socio-political realities of his society, prompting him to leave America for Pakistan.

According to Changez, the protagonist narrator, he immigrated to the US in his teenage years to study at the prestigious Princeton University. Coming from a genteel background that has fallen into poverty in Pakistan, he is a young, highly-driven and cultured boy who does everything in his power to be his best and attain success based on the culture of merit for which America is famous. Remarking on how his impeccable academic records and excellent personal attributes place him in good ground to succeed in America after his school year, he describes himself as “a perfect breast” (7). And success he does achieve in school, graduating top of his class and getting a highly-competed job as a financial analyst at a top corporate financial services firm known as Underwood Samson in New York's famous Wall Street.

His life immediately begins to take on the character of his dreams, as the prestigious job affords him the money to live comfortably and even send back home to help out his relations. The job also gives him access into the circles of highly successful people in the US, further enhancing his sense of accomplishment and acceptance in the American society. He begins to make friends in the city, eating out with his friends on the company's account and falling in love with a white American girl by the name of Erica – a member of the upper middle-class from the city's Upper East Side. This harmonious phase of his life terminates unexpectedly, as the occurrence of the 9/11 terror attacks in the US – perpetrated by people of socio-cultural backgrounds that are not dissimilar to Changez's – upsets the carefully balanced apple-cart of his life. After the failure of his initial attempts to use overwork to tune out the overbearing reality of the negative shift that becomes apparent in New York's post 9/11 social atmosphere, Changez comes to the stark realization fact that his erstwhile positive invisibility as an Arab-Muslim immigrant is gone. Welter of personal negative treatment on the basis of his culture follows. A naturally non-religious person, he finds himself being regarded and treated as a potential terror suspect in the places where he used to be welcomed in pre-9/11 realities. This experience leads to his disillusionment with America as a place of freedom, equality, and justice.

In the midst of this incipient disillusionment with his adopted home (America), he is sent on an assignment to Chile to evaluate a publishing firm about to be downsized. It is during this assignment that he makes the acquaintance of Juan-Bautista, whose influence on Changez causes him to make the decision to leave America for his native Pakistan. Juan-Bautista is an old employee of the publishing firm to be evaluated, and it is through him that Changez becomes able to put his relationship with America in perspective. Through his guided remarks, Juan-Bautista awakens Changez's awareness to the destructive impacts of American capitalism as it threatens the chances of survival of people with non-American ways-of-life and traditions. He likens Changez's job at Underwood Samson to that of the janissaries, a band of young Christian boys trained by the Islamic Ottoman Empire to wipe out their own civilisation. Through this analogy, Juan-Bautista succeeds in making Changez see himself in the armour of a modern-day Janissary of the Western empire, being used to wipe out every ideal, epistemology and civilisation (his own inclusive), that stands in the path of America's manic drive to Westernise the world in pursuit of its cold, soulless military and economic expansion.

This analogy, which Changez finds chillingly accurate in its application to the state of his cultural standing in the US, jolts him into his decision to reject America. His resolve becomes even more ardent when he considers the state of cultural tension that 9/11 has thrown up in his life in America, and the precarious situation of his native Pakistan that is about to go to war with India due to America's power-play. With the coming off of his "blindness" (106), and he abandons his post of assignment

in defiance of a job he now sees as a *janissarial* trap. On his return to the US, he is sacked by the company and prepares to leave the US for Pakistan. However before leaving, he experiences another unravelling of his dream of having a romantic relationship with Erica – his white American girlfriend who could never love him. She ends up irretrievably losing her touch with reality because of the love she has for a former white dead boyfriend by the name of Chris. By the end of the narrative, Changez leaves America thoroughly exasperated, and very angry. A traditionally polite, courteous, irreligious and transnational person in mindset and outlook, he becomes a radical political activist, educating the students he now teaches at a Pakistan university on “the imperative of disrupting and deconstructing the dominant epistemologies of Western capitalism” (Mukherjee, 4).

He becomes a Muslim radical, jettisons his transnational verve for a nationalistic jingoism, and embraces a historical narrative that runs along the line of purposeful comparison of Pakistan with America as regards social development and cultural accomplishment. Changez gives voice to this mindset when he makes the following assertion to his silent American listener: “And we did these things (building some architectural edifices) when your country (America) was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing at the edge of a continent” (117). The importance of this statement inheres not in its historical accuracy but rather in what it discloses about the internal working of Changez’s mind after abandoning America to live in Pakistan. It shows how far he has gone in discarding his liberal, transnational outlook to becoming a person that now takes pride in his ethnic identity.

All through the novel, the voice of the person Changez converses with is never heard directly, but the novel is filled with dramatic and suspenseful references, and purposeful omissions that are open to diverse conclusions loaded with important implications on the thematic object of the novel. An exploration of the issues thrown up in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals the novel to be a masterpiece indeed. True to Gray’s (2012) categorisation, 9/11 is imagined in a “deterritorialised manner” in that it reflects the views of different cultures and “provide[s] an intercultural connection and... the possibility of social transformation” (83).

Hamid provides a more global hypostasising of the nuances and symbolic realities of the event, taking care to represent views and voices that are often outlawed in 9/11 narratives that adopt the binary us-versus-them stereotypical viewpoint. The novel is also unique in the way it re-territorialises the geography and nationality of the main narration, thus providing a counter-outlook to the ones available on official hegemonic centres of information about the event. By far, one of the most unique achievements of Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the way it represents the issue of cultural citizenship and Arab-Muslim immigrant’s identity in the novel. The representation of this issue is explored below.

Changez and the Challenges of Cultural Citizenship in Post-9/11 America

“East is East, and West is West, and ne’er the twain shall meet”

Rudyard Kipling

Prevalent dispositions to the recounting and narrations of/about 9/11 and its aftermath have for far too often tended to focus, rather lopsidedly, on the throes that it occasioned in the lives the people *directly impacted* by the collapse of the twin towers and the psychological *damage* it visited on the American national psyche (Kaplan, 35). From the point of this essentially American narrative, the consequences of 9/11 are often formulated to be *realised* around events that are deemed to be catastrophic to America – such as the crash of “its global stock-market” occasioned by the collapse of the Towers, the loss of over 3,000 lives in Ground Zero, and the panic it caused in people’s everyday life and schedules.

The people who are implicated as masterminding the attacks, regarded from America’s viewpoint as “perpetrators” are rarely discussed except in terms laden with unconcealed hostility, animosity, and retributive fantasies. All of the people that fall in this category have Arab-Muslim backgrounds who state the Islamic religion as their motivation for the attacks. The direct victims are continually remembered as national heroes, saints, or martyrs while the Arab-Muslim perpetrators are cast in the garb of evil – routinely portrayed as psychopaths and similar pejorative terms.

Thus, because of the high emotional toll of 9/11 on America, and because of its matchless power in the media (electronic and print), the dominant narrative of the era-defining horror has been decidedly American - with the perpetrators cast as no-good, atavistic residues of a civilisation that is not only antediluvian and destructive, but unbearably primitive and violent. Such a civilisation, the logic of the narrative goes, merits no other response but that an urgent intervention for *modernisation* (Westernisation?) preceded by unpretentious destruction. Perpetrators of the attacks, in narratives from Western vomitories are taken to be “terrorists”. In the same breath, the virtues and qualities of the victims of the attacks are amplified or even over-invented in a way that excites the sympathy of the audience for them and anger at their fate (Furedi, 2015).

Through this narrative strategy, the American media has succeeded in arousing the most dreadful contemplation of everything nearly or remotely associated with the perpetrators (relationships, culture, lifestyles, and human beings) in the world. It has also helped post 9/11 American government to achieve a legitimisation of its overwhelmingly belligerent counter-response on the perceived “terrorists” (or their culture?) in their locales – mainly in the Middle East. Also, through the power of this dominant American narrative, the facts of the lives (culture, practices, lifestyle) of those implicated in the cause of 9/11 and the peoples associated with them not only became appropriated by a powerful American media, the chance of their history

being discovered with non-vested colouration of terrorism has become seriously jeopardised (Kaplan, 35).

Thus, America has succeeded in making not only a military counter-response to the people perceived to be linked to the perpetrators of the terror attacks but also a *cultural* one. This has been achieved by placing a huge question mark on the humanity of this group. Among the groups that most felt the rising tone of this question mark are immigrants of Arab-Muslim origins in the US, whose identity became swamped in contestations arising from the 9/11 terror attacks (Bilici, 17). As war raged with the Taliban on the mountains in far-off places in Fallujah and Kandahar, Afghan-Pakistan borders in late 2001, so were people of this ethno-tribal extraction on the *homeland* of the US were made to witness undiplomatic reminders of their new status as suspects and cultural outcasts on the grounds of their cultural linkage to the terror suspects. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* confronts us with a way of (re)reading 9/11 that departs from the American version that has been explicated so far.

By providing this alternative view of events, Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* helps the reader to see and access the 9/11 tragedy from a new, and less-vested point of view. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* achieves this by taking this historical event from the realm of mere personal tragedies of people's deaths and collapse of monuments into a realm of culture, to reveal a more nuanced and systematic paradigm of assessment of 9/11 from the viewpoint of cultural competition, domination, and clash of perspectives (Aldalala, 16).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist encodes 9/11 with a richer semantic potential, as it strips away the shallow, narrow, constricted, personal and reductionist logic it is burdened with through American anchorage to a deeper, more purposeful, clear-eyed, global, and impersonal (re)readings of the event. Rather than engage in the emotional template already laid out through the America's dominant media, Hamid explores a space, time, and voice that affords the reader to make up his own mind on what view to take as regards 9/11.

While the narrator does not deny the awful tragedy that the event represents, he digs deeper into the dynamics of America's cultural encounter with the Arab-Muslim peoples for possible explanations and understandings of the tragic event, and what could constitute the motivations for it. This approach, when compared to the one already discussed, affords the reader a more layered and mature look into the contexts that prepared the ground for the cataclysmic event and the socio-political realities its occurrence has given vent to in the world.

In most representations of 9/11 in Western media and authorship, e.g. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* or Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*, the beginning of the story is often September 11, 2001, when Islamic militants or terrorists hijacked two aeroplanes and rammed into the World Trade Centre and Pentagon (for no apparent reason other than that they are terrorists), and killed over three thousand *American*

people. In works such as these, America is always the provoked – the innocent, virtuous superpower that is wronged by Islamic militants.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provides another side of this story, creating possible contexts that bring a complexity into the understanding the event. The novel locates 9/11 far from being an outgrowth of the sudden action of some bearded fanatical fundamentalists, but as an expression of a crystallised, long accreted anger at the high-handed way that America's economic and foreign policies have earned it from peoples of Arab-Muslim origin all over the world: "America *had* to be stopped" (125, italics in original). Providing this important context alone is one of the critical ways in which Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* enriches the discourse of 9/11 with regard to cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in the US.

In Pakistan's history, the name of the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is no ordinary name. "Changez Khan" harks back to the historical founder of the people who today constitute a significant part Arab-Muslims, by the name of Genghis Khan. In his time, Genghis Khan ruled as one of the greatest Mongolian emperor who expanded the Mongol empire to cover the land area that is home to such countries as (Southern) Russia, Mongolia, including countries with Arab-Muslim populations like Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.

That the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* thus shares name with such a great historical personality is no accident, but can be interpreted as an attempt on the part of the author to give the narration in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a historical dimension. Hamid's choice of this highly consequential name reveals that the author intends to tell more than a personal tale in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, but rather, a history of the genuflections of peoples, countries, continents and civilisations of the Orient s it touches the Occident.

This is even grounded in another telling marker, as the name of the girl that Changez, the symbol of the Orient seeks in vain to befriend in his stay in the Occident is named "Erica". An examination of the name "Erica" shows that it is formed by clipping "Am" from "America" – the central setting of the novel, the location of the 9/11 terror attacks, and the host nation of the Arab-Muslim immigrants. And it is also from this America that the silent guest at the Lahore cafe, to whom Changez's speaks all through the novel, comes.

In the light of this reality, the lines of the Nobel Prize-winning Kipling come back to mind. Long before the occurrence of 9/11 begins to foment tensions between the East and West, the poet, himself an officer of the empire had penned these prophetic lines in which the poet-persona forecloses the possibility of mutual respect and equality between the two continents. And in this he foretells the futility that Changez's dream of mutual acceptances among the people of America comes to at the of his stay in the US. Perhaps Changez and Erica's fate is an accident. Perhaps Changez is too hopeful or audacious for the expectations that have been assigned the

people of his race from the East/Orient by the superior Occident. Or perhaps, it is just the way things are meant to be between the scions of the Centre and that of the Periphery ambitious enough to dare to alter their histories.

“Changez” and the Complicity of Innocence: Post-9/11 America and Feats of Paranoia

“But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath...” (83)

The appeal in the quotation above comes at a critical point in the confessional narration of the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It is made immediately after Changez, the protagonist, admits to the strange way *he found himself* to have reacted as he beholds the terror attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre. The part is quoted below to situate this statement in a more enlightening context:

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one and then the other of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist. But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others. When I hear of an acquaintance who has been diagnosed with a serious illness, I feel almost without fail a sympathetic pain, a twinge in my kidneys strong enough to elicit a wince. When I am approached for a donation to charity, I tend to be forthcoming, at least insofar as my modest means will permit. So when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity. (82-83)

In many ways, this passage is the most critical to the narration in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the most pivotal in the discussion of cultural citizenship and Arab Muslim immigrants in the context of 9/11 in the novel, for the urgency that is noticeable in this plea points to a crisis that is well-beyond the atmosphere of the Lahore café where the conversation takes place. Rather, it speaks to a desire to reverse the label of terrorism Arab-Muslim immigrants have become stamped with by the power of America's hegemonic media.

In the passage quoted above, we witness a conflict between the personal and social ideals of a person. Changez, an Arab-Muslim immigrant who is personally enthralled with the idea America's greatness as a place notices a crack in his socio-cultural attitude to the country. On seeing the destruction of the Twin Towers on television, he catches himself react gleefully at the expense of his “beloved” America.

The strangeness of this reaction – his being “remarkably pleased” (82) with the terror attacks is perhaps underscored by the way it elicited in him a “profound sense of perplexity” (83). The apparent contradiction between these two responses – between being a person “profoundly perplexed” and “remarkably pleased” by the same event points to a conflict at the character’s *id* (Freud, 28). In psychoanalytic theory, the *id* corresponds to the unconscious constituent of the human mind that serves as the reservoir of a person’s instinctual drives, biological urges, and affective modes (Freud, 28). Thus, Changez’s instinctual reaction of pleasure at seeing America hurt by the terror attacks reveals the deeper working of his mind to be a person who is at war with the idea of American culture even while he desires its economic fruits. This insight is important because instances abound in the novel where this sort of conflicting ambivalent attitude to America is manifested by the narrator.

A case in point is at the beginning of the novel where the narrator tauntingly announces to his listener: “Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America” (1). This statement raises a lot of question for the critical reader, as one may want to question why Changez supposes his wearing a beard would equate him to a hater of America in the mind of his listener. The explanation of this lies in no other fact than that the narrator has come to perceive America as a place where cultural intolerance to people with Arab-Muslim habits, like keeping one’s beard, has become the norm. Thus he expects his listener to be afraid of him *because* of his beard.

Despite his “I am a lover of America” announcement, however, one notices an undisguised intent in the narrator to emphasise his ethnic alliance over that which links him to America. An examination of the logic behind the possessive pronouns employed by the protagonist in describing Pakistan and America reveals this tension. Two separate sentences of Changez are analysed below for this observation: “A thousand of *your* compatriots were enrolled, five hundred times as many, even though *your* country’s population was only twice that of *mine*” (4, Italics ours).

A consideration of these quoted parts reveals, if only one thing, a deep chasm between Changez as a person and Changez as an immigrant in the United States. The workings of the mind that makes this sentence betrays a person who perceives himself as an outsider in America even while he tries to live the promise of unquestioned acceptance into the society he has immigrated; his is the mind of a person who never escapes a clear message of his own foreignness in the country that hosts him. This sense of outsidership is even more painful when one perceives that he indeed desires to belong to America, only that his *difference* from the landscape is amplified rather than minimised in the host society.

A testament to this truth can be found in the way he seeks to distance himself from America by his use of pronouns in the quoted part above. After living for four and a half years in a country, attending one of its best and most prestigious schools, finding employment in one of its most elite workplaces and even sharing an emotional attachment with one of its high-class citizens, one would expect some

choice of word from such an immigrant that signposts intimacy for such a country rather than an aversion for it.

This is not the case, however, with Changez, as his use of the pronouns “your” and “mine” in the quoted passage reflect. Instead, one sees an undisguised attempt by the protagonist to show that he never was under the illusion of belonging to America: “*Your compatriots*” reinforces the notion that the speaker does not consider the people he lives among during his stay in the US as those he feels close to or accepted by. In the same breath, he talks about people of his own country/cultural affiliation – appropriating them as *mine*. These revelations disclose in Changez a sense of being an outsider.

The accuracy of this observation is substantiated when one considers the semantic-consequence of the word “compatriot” employed by Changez in this passage. “Compatriot” is formed through the addition of the prefix “com” to the root-item “patriot”, which, as defined by Microsoft Encarta Dictionary 2009, means “a proud supporter or defender of his or her country and its way of life.” In this definition, the cultural implication of Changez’s reproach is uncovered. Had he merely said “A thousand of *your citizens* were enrolled...”, these pronouns could have been argued to be semantically neutral, but in the light of the cultural intent behind the use of *compatriot*, one senses that the narrator experienced cultural alienation in the post 9/11 America he discusses.

In the second sentence, Changez remarks: “...In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to *your society*, the society *we* were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so *I certainly was, at least at first*” (4-5, Italics ours). Again, the use of pronouns italicised in this statement betrays, not the view of an immigrant that is actively participating in his host society, but an observer with a fine mental separation of him *self* from the-goings on in his society. What makes this second quote even more interesting is the appearance of the pronoun “we”, which is representative of the immigrant population in the novel. The occurrence of “*your society*”, as does “*your compatriots*” in the first quote, lays bare the unvoiced unconsciousness of “*my [own] society*” and “*my [own] compatriots*” as different from “*your society*” and “*your compatriots*” (4-5).

So, also “society”, like “compatriots”, speaks of ethos, rules, peoples, conventions, and lifestyles – all elements of culture that must have reminded the narrator of “his own society”. It is thus clear that Changez manifests a tinge of cultural essentialism – a gigantic reversal from his hybridic ideals of pre-9/11 consciousness when his view of America as a perfect place still subsists.

The significance of these explorations to the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America lays in the way the findings signpost the sense of loss, betrayal, loneliness, and discrimination that these immigrants experience in America. This is even more pathetic when one considers that they suffer these treatments in a nation that makes a claim to diversity and plurality of peoples.

Changez's smile as he watches the 9/11 attacks can be interpreted as a manifestation of his unconscious *id* overpowering his super-ego – the location where his unvoiced and unexpressed grievances at the unwelcoming post 9/11 America are harboured and tightly lidded.

One other angle through which the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America could be explored is in the consideration of the symbolic potentials of the names of the important characters in the novel, especially Changez and Erica. All through the novel, Changez Khan – a name crafted from the anglicised pronunciation of “Genghis Khan” - the progenitor of a vast majority of the peoples on the Asian continent where most Arab-Muslim immigrants in the US hail from, experiences frustration in his desire to be loved by “Erica” - the white, upper-class American girl he is besotted to.

The name “Erica” is reminiscent of “America”. In fact, the name is formed by clipping “Am” from “America” to yield the name “Erica.” The implication of this finding is that Erica, like Changez, is not intended by the author to be seen as a mere individual character. Rather, she is designed to be related with and appreciated on the symbolic level of analysis. Erica, like America, is rich, white, Anglo-Saxon, irreverent, superficial, and powerful – the qualities of host nation to which the immigrants raise their imploring hands.

Despite the superficial acceptance between them, Changez, all through the novel, seeks Erica's love in vain. The reason for this is put down to the fact there exists no mixture of emotions or soul between the two. This is even made worse by the fact that the reason for this failure owes nothing to Changez's state of mind but rather to Erica's. Changez's many overtures to her are turned down, not because of the existence of another competing lover, but because of a sickly, dead, figment of a lover by the name of “Chris”. It must be stated that the name “Chris” is itself used with a symbolic aim in mind. According to Jajja (2013), “Chris stands for the American determination to stick to its cultural, historical and ideological past” (88). Without doubt, this reading of “Chris” as a symbol of Western cultural, historical and ideological past draws up the images either “Christ”/Christian religion or “Christopher Columbus” – the discoverer of America. Whichever among these two personages Chris is meant to symbolise makes the experience of the symbolic Changez unfavourable in his effort to woo Erica. If Chris indeed symbolises Christ/Christianity, then this symbolic potential acquires more significance as this religion constitutes the arch-enemy of the Islamic religion and worldview shared by the immigrant group that Changez represents in the novel.

Evidence of the deeper, symbolic conflict in the personalities and destinies of these characters can be found in the nuances of the shriveled intimacies between them. An instance is when the two of them attempt to make love after a night-out at Changez's place. This intimate act, symbolic of the ultimate expression of closeness and mutual, reciprocated affection between two people, does not become successful.

Changez confesses the frustration he experiences in trying to be loved by Erica at a point in the narrative: "...I was desirous of embarking upon a relationship with her that amounted to more than friendship, and *I felt in the strength of her ongoing attachment to Chris the presence of a rival--albeit a dead one--with whom I feared I could never compete*" (93, Italics ours). The eventual frustration that Changez feels at the end of his stay in America is presciently foreshadowed by the failure of this romantic dream with Erica – the two major characters that symbolise the two different cultures of the Orient and the Occident in the novel.

One other marker of cultural citizenship expressed in this novel inheres in the pain that [Arab]-Muslim immigrants in the novel suffered due to America's foreign policy. Changez catalogues what he perceives as the violent and high-handed way America relates with the world's weaker and smaller nations in the novel; nations that often turn out to be the hearth and home of these immigrants themselves. The out-working of this observation is the reason Changez decides to refuse working while on official assignment in Chile, where he accuses America of using India to browbeat his weaker Pakistan into subjection.

The first indication of this in the novel is encapsulated in Jim's carefree word of advice to Changez while they are on assignment for Underwood Samson in New Jersey. Despite Jim's good-naturedness and perceptiveness – qualities that make him perhaps one of the most likable characters in the novel, he displays an uncanny insensitivity when he refers to the part of the world where Changez hails from. Not only does he assume that everyone from the third world is "poor" (80-81), he views the entirety of the third world as a place doomed for atrophy and irrelevance:

The economy's an animal," Jim continued. "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. (110, italics in original)

Such a completely offensive remark made so sanguinely betrays not an insensitivity that could be blamed on the character, but rather the one that implicates the prevalent cultural ethos obtainable in the society that produced the speaker. Reading this quote, one could get the sense that the speaker must have been raised in a culture that has instructed itself to consider every other culture apart from itself as inferior and poor. It could thus be argued that Jim's insensitivity here is an insensitivity that is not aware of its own insensitivity. In this chilling realisation then we are offered a look into the imperiousness that America exhibits towards immigrants of Arab-Muslim nations in the novel.

This mindset acquires even more significance when one realises its falsity in relation to the protagonist: “As I have already told you, I did not grow up in poverty” (81). While reflecting on Jim’s words – quoted above, Changez notes his resentment: “... but I was uncomfortable with the idea that the place I came from was condemned to atrophy” (110-111). From this understanding, one could thus forgive Changez for losing his temper when he declares to his American listener:

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 destructive radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and yes-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 at the edge of a continent.* (115 -16, italics in original).

On many grounds, the passage above brings many points related to the fictional representation of the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America home, as it reveals the tortured splits in Changez’s sensibilities with respect to his host society. Just as the earlier consideration of the use of pronouns in this study reveals an intentional desire of the protagonist to distance his affection from America, the italicised pronouns in this quotation point to the same and more.

The semantic contexts of their occurrence reveal more than just a distancing of affection, but a stance-taking and an embracing of comparative historiography which degrades America’s cultural history and elevates that of people of Arab-Muslim origins and civilisation of the Indus River basin in Pakistan, and by implication, the Orient.

He rejects the prevalent knack of caricaturing people of Muslim lands as “crazed and destructive radicals” – a reference to the role of American media which are reflected as overly complicit in fuelling the hatred with which immigrants of Arab-Muslim origins experience in post-9/11 America. Changez challenges this caricaturing by stating that they are the exact opposite – “saints and poets and yes-conquering kings”. He outlines the historical achievements of his land of birth – the constructing of the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens at a time when America as a land was still engrossed with the first fitful breath of life as a nation. While reflecting on the technological advancements he notices in America, he again voices this thought:

Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. (38)

Concerning the wars that have resulted from America's high-handedness in its relation to weaker states, Changez lists the lands that have suffered as a consequence of America's might. These include Vietnam and lands of Islamic civilisation like the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He also details the tension and war that almost began between India and Pakistan – a war he suspects is being orchestrated by America to force Pakistan to accede to its demands of using Pakistan as the base to fight the Taliban. Changez deems these power-plays of America as too humiliating and destructive to the peace of the world. Thus he states: "America has to be stopped... in the interest of humanity" (191). This important function seems accomplished in his *id* when the terrorists strike:

It seemed to me then-and to be honest, sir, seems to me still-that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own. (190-191)

It is thus little wonder the reason why he smiles in his hotel room as he beholds the attacks on the TV screen in his Manila hotel room, remarking later: "...I was caught in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (83, italics in original).

The discussion of cultural citizenship and Arab-Muslim immigrants in the political atmosphere of 9/11 reflected in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* would be incomplete without the mention of the character by the name of Juan-Bautista – the chief of the Valparaiso publishing company that Changez is sent to value in Chile. In many important ways, Juan-Bautista serves as the final glue in making the architecture of Changez's disturbed consciousness form into a radical whole, as his calculated and insightful remarks helped in catalysing the resolve of the already disenchanted protagonist, thereby lending both agency and urgency to his unfurling fundamentalism.

From the way Changez describes him, Juan-Bautista is an old, well-read man with a set-of-values that deeply contrast with the superficial pragmatism that fuels the energy behind America's "military-financial complex" (Mukherjee, 2) and which in turn fuels the soulless efficiency behind Underwood Samson's tenet of "focus[ing] on the fundamentals" (90). Thus, the first question he poses to Changez is whether it troubles him or not, to make his living by disrupting the lives of others as his job at Underwood Samson invariably forces him to do (171). Perceiving his troubled mind, Juan-Bautista invites the protagonist to a dinner where he educates him on the

destructive consequences of American capitalism on other worldviews. He tells him about the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire – Christian boys raised by the rival civilisation of the Ottoman empire, and trained to wipe out their own homestead in wars.

By telling Changez about the janissaries, Juan-Bautista helps him to see the aim of American capitalism on his own Islamic civilisation in Pakistan. By the virtue of his work at Underwood Samson, Changez sees how he is being made into a modern-day janissary to become “an officer of the [Western] empire” (179) to destroy the life-forms and civilisation of his native land, culture, and lifestyle. He loses his equanimity, and his decision to resign from his job and leave America becomes made for him at this point:

...Yes, my musings were bleak indeed. I reflected that 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. 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.

I resolved to look about me with an ex-janissary’s gaze--with, that is to say, the analytical eyes of a product of Princeton and Underwood Samson, but unconstrained by the academic’s and the professional’s various compulsions to focus primarily on parts, and free therefore to consider also the whole of your society---upon my return to New York. Seen in this fashion I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer. Thank you, Juan-Bautista, I thought as I lay myself down in my bed, *for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed!* (177-178, italics in original)

As a consequence of this awakening, Changez becomes instantly changed, as he embarks on a re-definition of what he considers valuable or not. Where his highest dream used to have a high-flying career in one of Wall Street’s cathedrals of finance, flaunting his expense account, and probably going to Harvard Business School (5), he begins to think less of financial reward and to dwell more on issues of his cultural identity.

It is perhaps then no surprise the revealing expression he used in the quoted part above, where he refers to his land of origin as “my mother continent of Asia” (177). The emotional expression contained in the orthographic item “mother” shows a new stage of maturity in Changez’s worldview. Here, Changez becomes a man who sheds his rationalistic armour for the gentle pulls of the heart to his emotional filiations and roots.

The result of such a transition from a man dominated by ambition – the result of logic - to a man that sets financial gains and power at naught in order to stand for the cause of defending the dignity of his demesne becomes underlined by the “unreasonable” choice he ends up making: provoking a sacking from his lucrative job, and thus having to leave his acclaimed city of possibilities – New York (179) to relocate to Pakistan, and take up a less financially-rewarding career.

In his bid to show his rejection of his erstwhile love for America, he begins to sport a beard - the identifying mark of a terrorist in America’s book of cultural intolerance. The reasons for this compete volte-face in Changez’s ideals can be located in the pains he suffers as an [Arab]-Muslim immigrant in America. Despite his willingness to be seen and thought of as a lover of America, he is rejected by the host nation, discriminated against, looked down upon, and ridiculed on account of his difference. And it is in this futility to be accepted into the ethos and *weltanschauung* of his host nation that the painful realities Arab-Muslim immigrants in America is underscored.

As a representative of the Arab-Muslim immigrants, the plights of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* typify the pains that members of this immigrant community still face in America as a consequence of 9/11. In Post-colonial criticism, the experience of Changez mirrors the discrimination that citizens from the Periphery experience in relating with the Centre: a kind of imperialistic superiority adopted by global powers in interacting with weaker nations.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a powerful critique of the limitations of cultural citizenship in addressing the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America. Through Changez’s journey, the novel highlights the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation, challenging the dominant narratives of belonging and exclusion. By employing symbolism and a nuanced exploration of identity, Hamid underscores the need for a more inclusive understanding of cultural citizenship that recognises the complexities of immigrant experiences. By exposing the limitations of cultural citizenship in addressing the alienation of Arab-Muslim immigrants, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* calls for a reimagining of multiculturalism that acknowledges the complexities of identity in a globalised world. Future research could explore how other post-9/11 narratives similarly challenge or reinforce these dynamics.

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