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Eastern Soul on Western Soil: Identity Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract

In more ways than one, literature can be viewed as a contributor to transcultural studies inasmuch as it provides a set of new perspectives on perceiving culture and collective identity. In this context, diasporic literature comes to the fore as an increasingly popular and relevant literary genre that discusses such issues in artistic and creative ways. Diaspora is a term broadly attached to the set of fictional works that explore the dilemmas, struggles, and pursuits of misfit characters in foreign cultures. Mohsin Hamid's well-acclaimed novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), is among the best illustrations of this. The latter is a bildungsroman taking place at the highly delicate phase of pre- and post-9/11 attacks. The novel follows a Muslim Pakistani man's journey toward the construction of an identity, and a loss thereof, thereby evoking inquiries about Americanness, fundamentalism, and Otherness. To this end, the present paper seeks to trace the growth of the protagonist's culturally conflicted consciousness, while simultaneously reading it as an allegory to the map of colonialism's collective consciousness. A textual analytical study is conducted from the postcolonial prism to conclude that individual identity aligns with the collective one regardless of the nature of cultural circumstances surrounding the less powerful subject.

Keywords: Americanness; False consciousness; Otherness; September 11th; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

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Introduction

From the dawn of time, humanity has always been inclined to form communities and exist in tribes. Members of a certain tribe are often bound by a common system of belief, chiefship, customs, and the like. Power plays a crucial role within and among tribes insomuch as members of a certain tribe can be exiled for their weakness, lack of resourcefulness, and/or diverging from the common norms, and entire tribes can be exploited, destroyed, or enslaved by other, more powerful ones. Such systems may appear primitive at first glance, but their core remains the same throughout history. The latter alludes to a plethora of examples of such incidents, from the Romans and the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings, the Tatars and the Abbasids, and so forth, to every episode of nineteenth-century colonialism. While weapons have been massively enhanced, warfare techniques have developed, and belief systems are mostly exchanged by ideologies, chiefship by politics, and customs by economics, the essence remains the same. With such occurrences, history books are responsible for offering the overall image of events, while literature comes to the fore in narrowing the prism through which an event is narrated. Literature focuses on people, their actions, reactions, and dilemmas amid global changes.

Among the urging issues of contemporary reality is the cultural clash between the East and the West and the terrorist discourse that can, in multiple ways, be seen as a ramification of the colonial waves of the past century. Edward Said was the first scholar to provide a name to this discussion in his book *Orientalism* (1978), where he identifies two culturally opposed identities termed the Orient and the Oxidant. From this, literary and cultural studies exploded with themes covering similar issues. In terms of fiction, the genre of diasporic literature started to gain increasing popularity and scholarly attention. Among the well-acknowledged pieces that discuss the issue of the intercultural threat of melting identities is Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007).

This piece is a Bildungsroman told from the first-person perspective as part of a one-sided conversation between the protagonist, Changez, and an unnamed, muted listener, who, for the sake of this study, will be referred to as the Stranger. The dramatic monologue of the novel functions as a framing device to reveal the underlying thoughts of Changez about his experience in America at its most delicate phase. The story revolves around a Pakistani man descending from a collapsing affluent family. He narrates the beginning of his journey in America when he was accepted for a scholarship at Princeton University. There, his identity melts within the American glimmer, as he starts building friendships and immersing himself within society. On a trip with friends to Greece, he meets a beautiful American girl and a fellow Princeton graduate called Erica and instantly falls in love with her. Later, in pursuit of a yet-to-be-proven false American Dream, Changez starts a decent job at an American Company called Underwood Samson that grants him the life and status he long wished for. At the climax of this epitome of perfection, things start to fall apart along with the falling of the New York Twin Towers in the shocking event of September 11th, 2001. Grave flaws appear in every aspect of Changez's life starting with the exposure to a racist attitude that becomes bluntly expressed. The lasting effect of the event does not spear any character. Erica, for instance, falls into a robust nostalgia for her deceased boyfriend, who died from lung cancer a year before she met Changez. The latter, in turn, experiences nostalgia for his homeland and falls into deep sorrow for America's retaliation against the Orient. This plethora of mirrored emotions creates a circle of themes around the issue of identity in diasporic literature.

The flexibility of the novel in covering the chain of events prior to, during, and after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, along with the reverberation they have on the protagonist, allows for an intelligible yet 'reluctant' transition of the latter's state of mind. As a miniature representation of the Orient, Changez experiences a coming-of-age growth from a pre-colonial innocence, through colonial

devastation, to eventually settling in a post-colonial awareness. Each of these stages chronologically corresponds with his state of mind and vision of his surroundings. In this regard, studies have been made on subjects in subordinate positions to determine the engines that drive their mindsets toward the division of political, economic, and social hegemony in their surroundings.

It is common in literary criticism to adopt concepts from different theories and contextualize them in a particular reading of a text. Postcolonial literary criticism that stems from the broader field of postcolonial studies is among the theories that function according to this approach of adaptability. Many studies, however, focus on a single or a couple of concepts to apply while analyzing a certain literary or artistic work. In the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for instance, light is often shed on the issue of hybrid identity to explore the double-consciousness mindset of the protagonist (Malik et al., 2021, pp. 51–52). The novel has been analyzed regarding other concepts such as metropolitanism (Ahmed & Malik, 2019, p. 223), globalization (Jarandikar & Jarandikar, 2014, p. 52), and hybridity (Khan et al., 2020, p. 35), to state a few. As this study revolves around the issue of identity in multiculturalism, it is important to trace the postcolonial stance regarding the dichotomy of Self/Other. The relationality between contemporary issues and continental philosophy allows the latter to be a reference for comprehending the former. The binary opposition between the self and the other can be traced back to de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). In it, he identifies the signifier and the signified insofar as the presence of one necessitates the presence of the other, "for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified" (Saussure, 2005, p. 68) This system of binaries was hugely relied on in various contexts until Derrida's criticism of logocentrism, which put the fixity of meaning under question. To this end, an increasing degree of flexibility has been added when discussing concepts such as Otherness, colonialism, subaltern, and identity. The current study assumes this flexibility in achieving the intended aim.

The proposed study seeks to dive into such a transition, aiming to reach an overall reflection on the effect of Western propaganda on Eastern identity in diasporic literature. Research questions can be expanded to analyze the protagonist's actions, reactions, and growing hostility to the hosting culture in the three phases of his life that can, in an allegorical sense, be referred to as pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. First, it is important to establish a background of the aspects of the American Dream in the novel and investigate the costs of meeting them. The second question revolves around the underlying effect that befalls the protagonist's consciousness after 9/11 and the ways in which it is deemed positive. Eventually, the paper tackles the anti-colonial references of the text and reflects upon its contribution to a larger intercultural discourse. To reach the fore endeavor, the novel is read from a postcolonial lens with an emphasis on the growth of individual consciousness in accordance with the dismantlement of cultural hegemony to comprehend the dilemma of a Muslim immigrant in literature.

1. The Glimmer of a New Culture

Since Thomas Jefferson's highly idealized claim of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the United States of America has been associated with these notions as the quintessential pillars of the American Dream. However, it is most often dismissed that the latter is meant for the socially and politically accepted 'American citizen.' Notwithstanding its initial broad inclusion, Americanness can be said to have become a means of exclusion more than that of inclusion in the contemporary world. Still, the salad-pot-like nature of American society allows a few of the abstract ideologies of the American Dream to transcend the boundaries of nationality, race, tongue, and religion to echo in the ear of any person seeking to build a life in America. This spawned a repetitive pattern and a unanimous race to reach a standardized goal. In the many cases that are fictionally recorded in literature, the costs of the American Dream outgrow its promises.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist tells such a tale of a foreigner to America whose cost of pursuing the American Dream is his own indigenous identity. This section analyses the various representations of the American Dream and the temptations standing in Changez's path toward the latter.

At the outset of the novel, the author provides a framed introduction of the protagonist as a devout admirer of the free world both as a student and an employee. He narrates to the Stranger selected incidents from his four years of experience (Hamid, 2008, p. 9). Changez recalls his first impression of the city of New Jersey in the most romanticized descriptions. When he first arrives in the city, his attention is caught by the "Gothic buildings," which he learns later are "younger […] than many of the mosques of this city, but made through acid treatment and ingenious stone masonry to look older" (2008, p. 10). He then immediately admits that

> *This is a dream come true.* Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. *I have access to this beautiful campus,* I thought, *to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making.* (2008, p. 10; emphasis in the original)

Among the remarks that immediately arouse interest in Changez's description is that he uses a defining aspect of his culture as a Muslim, which is the mosque, as a reference in appraising the vintage buildings of the city. He mentions that the buildings went through special treatment to appear older than the mosques, which is a euphemism for the newborn Western civilization that has been polished to appear more rooted in time than the older Eastern one. This touches upon a rooted fundamentalism, which begins to gradually fade, as his Americanness grows. Furthermore, the reference to the American Dream appears in the second half of the passage with a special emphasis on the becoming of the 'people' rather than the being of the 'culture' itself. Put differently, he shows an impression of what Americans could achieve instead of romanticizing what America already is. It is, again, an indicator that the shine of the West does not appeal to Changez as much as devotion and the path to success do. Such comparison recurs on multiple occasions, where he finds a way to link some details in his life in New York to Lahore, Pakistan, or any part of his culture. In a broader sense, due to the culturally inclusive and flexible nature of the Muslim world, "Muslim identity should be seen as open and dynamic, that its essence has to crystallize in constant interaction with the environment" (Rudnicka-Kassem, 2016, p. 262). This explains Changez's smooth fusion in the new multicultural environment.

When narrating his story in America, Changez appears to be a confident character, almost at the edge of vanity. He proudly mentions that, out of a country of a hundred million inhabitants, he was one of the two Pakistanis who managed to pass the "painstakingly customized evaluations—interviews, essays, recommendations—until the best and the brightest of [the applicants] had been identified" (Hamid, 2008, p. 10). Nonetheless, his deserved confidence and the fact that he never received a B are shaken at the job interview of Underwood Samson & Company. The latter is a highly reputed corporation that grants a respectable career future for its employees. Interestingly, the initials of Underwood Samson stand for the U.S., which makes his experience in it a plausible reflection of that in the United States of America. In the job interview, he shies away from the fact that he is on financial aid. He admits later that he used to conduct part-time employment while at Princeton University to be able to fit in with his colleagues' group. Despite Changez's rather appealing exotic appearance and public persona (2008, p. 14), which allows him easy access to their multicultural group of friends, he still hides the financial inconveniences to enjoy "the pleasures of being among [the] wealthy young fellowship" (2008, p. 18). This is the first time

Changez's willingness to conceal aspects of his life for the sake of gaining the highest level of belongingness surfaces.

The author continues to draw the angles of the American Dream for his main character, who ticks the first box by securing his dream job at Underwood Samson. On a trip organized by Princeton graduates to Greece, Changez meets a beautiful American girl named Erica and, impressed by her attractiveness, instantly falls in love with her. It is important to remark that her name rhymes perfectly with the word America, crafting another straightforward reflection on his experience in the latter. Unlike Underwood Samson, which represents financial and social status in America, his relationship with Erica alludes more to the emotional strains he begins to develop toward the free world. Changez soon learns about Erica's boyfriend, Chris, who died from lung cancer a year before their encounter in Greece. As is the case with many deceased characters in literature, Chris is romanticized in Erica's descriptions and perspective. She mentions that he possesses "an *Old World* appeal" (2008, p. 21; emphasis in the original), which is a metaphor that becomes relevant later in the novel.

It can be stated, from the above analysis, that Changez is an intellectual character who falls into a state of false consciousness. His initial remarks regarding America and Americans, and his clear agenda of his staying in America, prove that he is not infatuated with the greatness of the West for its mere sake. Notwithstanding his awareness, he becomes prey to the capitalist system at its finest. The financial and emotional luxuries that surround him through his job and love interest become the capitalist engine that pushes him toward the glimmer of materialism. Despite Changez's seemingly acceptable social position and the advantages that he gains from living in America, he still exemplifies raw material with a temptation for colonial power. He becomes an instrument in the hands of a great power. The fragility of his position soon surfaces at the exact moment of the Twin Towers attack. People's curiosity and interest in him can be interpreted as a reflection of the precolonial connections between conventional colonial powers and roughly the rest of the world. India was seen as the land of wonders, Africa as the 'heart of darkness', and the new world as a mine of gold and riches, to state only a few. Just as such parts of the world, in addition to others, subtended this Western, precolonial amazement with no less dazzle at the technological advancement, Changez's admiration forces him to bow in a few incidents.

2. From the Dream to the Nightmare

The collapse of the Twin Towers can be considered among the most defining political twists at the global level. Its cultural impact, which is the focal interest of the novel, was no less tremendous than its political and military repercussions. The media, cinema, and literature have been depicting various aspects of the harm that henceforth befell immigrants in general and the Muslim community in the U.S. in particular. As a diverge from mainstream 9/11 fictional plots, Mohsin Hamid sheds the spotlight on the interior struggle of his protagonist, who is crumbling amid the largest cultural clash that America has known since the Civil Rights Movement (1954 – 1968). In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said foresees the possibility of imposing discrimination based on rather intangible bases:

> [L]iberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective, all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange. From this

> perspective also, one can see "the complete consort dancing together" contrapuntally. (Said, 1994, p. 332)

Such a sense of a cultural clash from an intellectual viewpoint is communicated in the character of Changez. In what follows, an interpretation is offered of the protagonist's gradual transition of consciousness from a state of cultural melting, for want of a better word, to a chain of awakening moments.

Following the 9/11 shock, Changez begins to develop an increasing awareness that drags him out of the false consciousness state he was immersed in. His immediate reaction to watching the fall of the Towers is an effortless smile at "the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (Hamid 45; emphasis in the original). The accompanied description of Changez's reaction to the incident can be interpreted as the point of departure from the previous state of false consciousness to a fundamentally Oriental stand:

> 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. (2008, p. 45; emphasis in the original)

Despite admitting to being "the product of an American university" (2008, p. 45), the impulse that drove Changez to smile indicates a strip away from a cultural hegemony injected by capitalist pleasures. To add to this sudden crack in an assumed Americanness, the airport inspections impose severe and thorough searches on him (2008, p. 46), which separates him from his fellow firm agents both physically and metaphorically in the sense that he is denied the respect he worked hard to earn.

The 9/11 attacks can be labeled a turning point not only for characters in the novel but also for larger entities like the representation of an entire city. Prior to the attacks, Changez admits that "the open-mindedness and—that overused word—cosmopolitan nature of New York" (2008, p. 33) is embracing enough for his ethnically diverse nature. When meeting Erica's parents, for example, he opts for a traditional "starched white kurta," in which he finds himself "completely comfortable on the subway" (2008, p. 33), indicating, hence, the welcoming and accepting pretense of people. Such a façade that enables him to perceive himself as "never an American [but] immediately a New Yorker" (2008, p. 25) soon fades away. His initial comfort on the streets of New York turns into a disturbing feeling of awareness, which he describes: "I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious" (2008, p. 46). He, thus, quite forcefully drops the Americanized comfort he grew used to and is led to behave in a protective attitude.

The roundness of Changez's perspective is not centered merely upon the attacks but extends to observing the status of the world around him. To elaborate, Changez experiences a cultural crisis during one of his corporate missions when he discovers that Manila, the capital of the Philippines is, to his surprise, nothing like Lahore or Karachi, but rather "a place of skyscrapers and superhighways" (2008, p. 41). This incident is relevant in creating a double-consciousness persona insofar as it triggers a sense of inferiority that Changez attempts to both conceal and compensate for by assuming an American character:

> I did something in Manila I had never done before: 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. (2008, p. 41; emphasis in the original)

This behavior communicates two crucial alterations in Changez's character. On the one hand, his voiced pride in the past of his country does not severely shake at the glory of American civilization, which indicates a prior knowledge and a readiness to face it. It does, however, nearly collapse at the sight of a fellow Eastern city managing to compete with the might of the West. This shifts Changez's focus from the past to the present at a time when Erica's focus goes in reverse. On the other hand, his behavior can be interpreted as what Homi Bhabha terms mimicry. The latter, according to him, is an instrument of resisting colonial oppression by assuming the colonizer's aspects. In his words, Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126), to which he adds later, "[a]lmost the same but not white" (1984, p. 132). In the case of Changez, he assumes Americanness to resist the inferiority he feels and gain the respect he envisions. This is the beginning of a chain of behaviors where he abandons aspects of his personality to avoid alienation.

Along a similar vein, affected, as he is, by the rumors of random and severe arrests that befell his fellow Pakistanis in America, Changez still separates himself from them by believing that "those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect [him] because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year" (Hamid, 2008, pp. 56–57). Here, the capitalist deceit resurfaces insomuch as he believed his salary and academic background are preventing an arrest that his skin color and religious origins may cause. This shows that Changez places himself on a neutral ground amid Americans and Pakistanis. It also shows, however, that he pleads for the traits that he acquired from living in the West to protect him from the ones he was born with. Such an unconscious and unadmitted mindset is yet another sign of his conflicted cultural persona at this stage of the narrative.

The repercussion of 9/11 is demonstrated in a profound change of perspectives on the two aforementioned pillars of his established life in America, which are his work and love interest. On the one hand, Changez's idealization of his work begins to crumble and an increased feeling of being a server to the wrong party starts to consume him. This starts when he, after a while of avoiding the news, accidentally learns of America invading Afghanistan:

> My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury […]. The next morning I was, for the first time, late for work. I had overslept and woken with a cracking headache. My fury had ebbed, but much though I wished to pretend I had imagined it entirely […] and that day I found it difficult to concentrate on the pursuit—at which I was normally so capable—of fundamentals. (2008, p. 59)

This immediate instinctive reaction is followed by a rationalization similar to that he had regarding the arrests. He convinces himself that he is powerless against global-level events, and that such political plays are "of no relevance to [his] personal life" (2008, p. 59).

On the other hand, his perspective regarding the relationship with Erica starts to lose its romanticized glare and assume a rather bleak theme. Erica's nostalgia for her dead boyfriend, Chris, symbolically grows in parallel with America's hardship. This causes the past to become increasingly dominant in Changez's present. As an attempt to ease Erica's pain, Changez proposes that she pretends he is Chris during intercourse (2008, pp. 61–62). Names are supposed to be the preliminary marker of identity; they determine gender, ethnicity, religious belief, and the like. By assuming Chris's name and allowing Erica to pretend his body is that of her ex-boyfriend, Changez realizes that he, quite literally, gave away his identity for the sole reason of having physical intimacy with her. While elevating to her love initially seems to him as the ultimate realization of happiness and, subconsciously, the shortest path to maintaining and affirming social acceptance, his endeavor later becomes a desperate pursuit of an unattainable goal.

To sum up, Changez's jump from Americanness to fundamentalism, which is straightforwardly and accurately forecasted in the novel's title, corresponds with a state of double consciousness. The latter –initially applied in an African-American context– is defined by W.E.B. Du Bois as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tap of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois & Edwards, 2007, p. xiii). This definition has been adopted in various situations representing a common state of mind experienced by minority groups within intercultural communities largely dominated by a more powerful and utterly diverse group. To this end, Changez's actions, reactions, and attitudes represent that of typical colonized peoples at their awakening stage. Such reading of the way he handles his work and love relation corresponds with the infamous agenda of the 'civilizing mission.' That is, the colonizer promotes the glimmer of an imaginary final line, for the sake of which the identity of the subaltern is dismantled and distorted only to find out that the final line was never meant to be met. During this particular stage of his life, the protagonist becomes tormented by his fundamental being and Americanized becoming.

3. Toward Escaping Americanness

A bildungsroman is often constructed in such a way that offers a beginning, journey, and destination for one or more characters' mental and/or physical growth, though the focus is more commonly on the former. Usually, the final stage the character reaches noticeably diverges from the initial one. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* however, presents a circle traveled by the protagonist and a set of unavoidable challenges that eventually bring him back to assert an already acknowledged fact about Americanness. This preliminary knowledge, which is analyzed in the first section of the paper, is gradually compromised as the glimmer of the new culture overwhelms him. Changez experiences both cultures in parallel but is affected by the extreme versions of both due to the political upheavals of that era (Salmeen, 2019, p. 36). Eventually, the cultural crisis that takes place in the setting of the novel pushes him to question both the entirety of his past and present identity. This final section traces the conclusions of such questioning and interprets their repercussion as a reemergence of cultural consciousness.

Changez's emergence of consciousness begins with a sudden overwhelming realization that he is exposed to and surrounded by the makings of the American culture. The best illustration of this is when he notices that America is wearing its flag to scream its oneness:

> Possibly this was due to my state of mind, but it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time, I was struck by its determination to look *back*. Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War. (Hamid, 2008, p. 67; emphasis in the original)

The other face of this American inclusion that is communicated through the flag as the most powerful cultural sign is an Othering of all that is not and who is not American. Such a backward-looking attitude, as described by the protagonist in the literal sense, is paralleled by Erica's nostalgia for Chris. Eventually, Changez finds himself drained by the two beloveds that once symbolized success and happiness to him, which are New York and Erica. As his sense of alienation grows, he starts to pay less attention to his work and relationships. Erica's admission into a mental institute and her eventual disappearance –of which signs allude to suicide– do not help him to keep a balanced emotional life. Moreover, his work, which used to be an environment for growing self-esteem, becomes a place where he "[can] not entirely escape the growing importance of *tribe*" (2008, p. 68; emphasis in the original). This, on top of the political tension between India and Pakistan and the military intervention in Afghanistan, is attributed to an urgent need for him to visit his homeland to escape the pressure of Othering toward the comfort of the self.

Changez's short visit to Pakistan turns into a considerable shift in his newly constructed identity:

> But as I reacclimatized and my surroundings once again became familiar, it occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I was looking at me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any **foreigner**, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite. This realization angered me; staring at my reflection in the speckled glass of my bathroom mirror I resolved to exorcise the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed. (2008, p. 72; emphasis added)

It is important to note that Changez refers to himself as a 'foreigner' in two opposing contexts to indicate similarly opposing meanings of the term. In New York (2008, p. 67), he gets overwhelmed by the quintessential alienation that a Muslim was exposed to in post-9/11 America. In Pakistan (2008, p. 72), conversely, Changez realizes that the extent to which he becomes distant from his native culture is unfathomable. He, thus, realizes that he stands on an unidentified middle ground between Americanness and fundamentalism, unable to belong to either. This showcases a typical state of ambivalence, around which the discourse of mimicry is constructed (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126). That is, the protagonist unconsciously attempts to mimic the Other only to end up with a confused image of the self that makes him, retrospectively, a foreigner in both cultures.

After returning to New York, he starts to generate aggressive behavior toward all that is American. To give an instance, aware of the social gravity of the act and disregarding the possible consequences and his mother's advice, Changez decides to grow a beard. He mentions his mother's attempts to dissuade him from it as well as his awareness of "difficulties it could well present [him] at immigration," yet he opts for keeping his "two-week-old beard" (Hamid, 2008, p. 75). Changez admits that this might be "a form of protest" and "a symbol of [his] identity" (2008, p. 75). His inner struggle continues when he wonders whether it is none of this but rather a reminder for

himself of the life he is leaving. He ends his chain of thoughts by admitting that "for multiple reasons, [he] was deeply angry" (2008, p. 75). This anger may be interpreted as resentment toward the West, pity toward the East, or self-hatred stemming from his inability to make a change or at least assume a single identity.

The beard is a cultural and religious symbol, which adds to his exotic appearance in a city with growing resentment and hatred for all that is alien. He tries to rationalize the beard by asserting that "it is only a hairstyle, after all" (2008, p. 75). Having a beard alters people's perspective of Changez, which was granted by his "complexion" (2008, p. 75), and the aforementioned open-mindedness of New Yorkers turns into aggressiveness and unhidden rejection. The reference to the beard appears in the second line of the novel, foreshadowing a decision that the protagonist only makes at the climax of the plot. Changez's immediate vindication when he utters, "Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (2008, p. 9) denotes that his beard imposes an unconscious yet noticeable threat to the American Stranger. This also foreshadows a huge part of the conflict between Changez's passion and identity. His tongue expresses love for America, whilst his appearance, from the initial stereotypical perspective, begs to differ. The narrative that follows this phrase can be read as a mere elaboration on such conflict, which asserts the heaviness of culture in expressing one's identity.

During his last few days in America, Changez demonstrates a strong awareness of his identity and purpose. This begins on the plane back to New York, where he comments on the youngsters traveling from Pakistan to America with a tone of pity and anger. He finds it "ironic" that "children and the elderly were meant to be sent away from impending battles, but in [this] case, it was the fittest and brightest who were leaving, those who in the past would have been most expected to remain" (2008, p. 72). Soon afterward, he criticizes himself for the same reasons stated above:

> [T]his made me a kind of coward in my own eyes, a traitor. What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances? And what was I abandoning them for? A well-paying job and a woman whom I longed for but who refused even to see me? I grappled with these questions again and again. (2008, p. 74)

This showcases a fighting spirit and a notable alteration in the meaning of purpose. Whilst he used to nourish his individual success, he, now, voices and vouches for collective and communal interest. Adding to this self-doubt that precedes the final emergence of consciousness is an incident in Chile, where the chief of a publishing company makes a similarity between him and the janissaries, which are "Christian boys […] captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army" (2008, p. 85). The fact that "they had fought to erase their own civilizations" (2008, p. 85) appeals to Changez's sense of fault. This can be read as the moment he finally strips away from the remnants of the American Dream he has blindly and mostly unconsciously aimed for.

Eventually, Changez decides to cut his strings with all that is American. He leaves the U.S. and partially accepts that Erica is no longer a part of his life. In Pakistan, he accepts the job of a university professor, where he lectures about anti-Americanness. Changez can be said to have experienced a sense of the emergence of an Oriental consciousness. He realizes that his conscious efforts to become an American were a mere illusion and a bubble that was ruptured the moment the slightest inconvenience among cultures and religions occurred. Resultantly, the analysis affirms the postcolonial stance of binary opposition in the sense that "[d]ifference makes character just as it makes value and the unit" (Saussure, 2005, p. 121). Changez's difference both in America

and in Pakistan, hence, provides value to his character and merit to his stands. He emerges as the quintessential product of multiculturalism.

Conclusion

Culture and identity can be labeled the most defining pillar of any civilization and the spine that holds communities together. As much as it is difficult to penetrate the core cultural norms of people through force, it is dangerously easy to shake their basics through means of riches and glimmer. The Age of Imperialism stands as evidence of this fact for having an unfathomable role in redefining the cultural map of the entire globe. What precedes and follows the waves of colonialism are no less significant phases in tracing the reproductions of such massive cultural clashes in contemporary reality. To this end, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* comes as a synopsis of such reproductions. It can be read, as this paper endeavored to achieve, as a miniature of a larger repetitive cultural plot of the three common phases of impression, subordination, and then resistance –with a middle phase that varies in accordance with other factors. Such a reading of Hamid's novel from a postcolonial lens, thus, concludes that the glimmer of Americanness and the American Dream in the novel, which is represented in the financial stability offered by Underwood Samson and the emotional one by Erica, stands for the technological advancement and the easy ways of living brought by imperialists during the Age of Exploitation that proceeded that of colonialism. Such glimmer, in both cases, eases the job of compromising the identity of the individual or community –depending on the context– which functions closely to reach the same end. Next, there comes the immediate cultural clash, which is triggered in the novel by the fall of the Twin Towers, as it was triggered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by direct means of military occupations and exploitations. This is deemed, through the analysis, as a positive change inasmuch as it works to erase the previous state of oblivious and false consciousness. It also creates a shift toward double consciousness by creating a fragile identity tormented between cultural hegemony and an imposed inferiority. The rage and anger generated from this phase lead to the final stage of the emergence of consciousness. This appears in various facets, among which is, in the case of Hamid's character, a strong return to state fundamentalism and a radical rejection of any sort of cultural hegemony or influence accompanied, as hinted by the closing passages, by a continuous resistance. It can, therefore, be said that this novel is read as a manuscript of cultural clash and its repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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