



Ambiguity, Identity, and Belonging: A Critical Study of Changez in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the theme of ambiguity, identity, and belonging in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid through the postcolonial theory. The research is dedicated to the main character, Changez, a young Pakistani male who has to deal with transnational borders between the United States and Pakistan after 9/11. Utilizing qualitative and analytical approaches, the study brings to focus the process of narrative ambiguity, hybridity, mimicry and personal disillusionments as evidences of the negotiating complexity of postcolonial identity. As Changez goes through his life, we can see the psychological, cultural, and emotional price of trying to assimilate into an orientalist-planned society in which everyone is suspicious, orientalist, and racialized. Relied on the theoretical backgrounds of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak, the paper shows that ambiguity is a literary device as well as an existential experience of postcolonial subjects. Finally, the novel shows that identity and belonging are changeable, disputed, and continuously demolished in the framework of globalization and geopolitical conflict.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Globalization has opened new paths of movement and exchange and has also aggravated cultural dissonance among the people in the former colonized societies. These people are usually put in a dilemma where they are caught between westernized cultural values and their own countries and their identity remains in conflict, which is hard to settle (Bhabha, 1994). These tensions are examined in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid based on the life story of a young Pakistani man Changez, who comes to the United States with the hope of success only to face a real crisis of identity following the 9/11 attacks. Using the story of Changez, Hamid ponders on the plight of those who are torn between cultures, whose identity is determined by the colonial past, as well as, the realities of a globalized now (Morton, 2012). Changez starts off on a high note, joining Princeton University and being employed by a well-known American company, which reflects the potential of the American dream (Mishra, 2007). But 9/11 changes everything and alters his attitude in American society. Being praised as a hard-working and promising individual, Changez turns into a suspect and a foreigner because of his Pakistani Muslim roots (Kaur, 2015). This

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metamorphosis underscores how individual identity is weakened in a world that has turned fearful, nationalistic and culturally biased. Stylistically, Hamid uses the tool of a dramatic monologue, making it somewhat unclear where the confession begins and the performance starts. His fragmented identity is reflected in the unclear voice of Changez full of silences, contradictions and unfinished thoughts (Upstone, 2009). Such a wavering between admiration and resentment of America highlights the larger postcolonial truth, which holds that identity in a globalized world is never predetermined, but is always determined in the arena of tension and ambiguity (Bhabha, 1994).

The psychological costs of cultural displacement are also predetermined in the novel. Changez discovers that even his efforts at becoming assimilated can never erase the cultural differences that have set him off as an outsider, in his career achievements and his involvement with Erica. His later disappointment with American ideals is indicative of an even greater criticism of the reaction of the West to the immigrants of the Muslim majority nations in the post-9/11 environment (Petersen, 2011). Hamid therefore places the personal struggle of Changez in the greater context of a postcolonial identity, estrangement, and a politics of belonging. This paper uses the concept of postcolonial theory and the idea of hybridity as well as the third space by Homi K. Bhabha to analyze the intersection of ambiguity, identity, and belonging in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. According to Bhabha (1994), postcolonial subjects are found in an in-between place neither totally assimilated to the main dominant culture of Western societies nor grounded to their original traditions. Changez is a perfect example of this situation: he will never be able to resolve his identity because it is inconsistent, insecure, and ambiguous. His voice as a narrative is ambiguous, reflecting this broken self and a hidden opposition to the narratives of the dominant culture (Roy, 2013). Through Changez, Hamid not only shows the plight of an individual man but also that of a person caught between two or even more cultures. His narrative is representative of the postcolonial subjects who feel estranged and displaced culturally in their attempts to find a place in the volatile globalized worlds. Finally, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows the extent to which ambiguity is not just a literary technique but a real experience of identity development in postcolonial societies.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that the *Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid has been extensively read in terms of its political and cultural aspect, not much focus has been given to the aspect of narrative ambiguity and how it influenced Changez in developing his postcolonial identity. The majority of the extant literature concentrates on his transformation in the light of political and cultural focus, but neglects the work of uncertainty, silence and emotional deficits as the essential components of his identity struggle. Changez lives somewhere in between Pakistani roots and American life, being swayed by post-9/11 nationalism, racial profiling and conflicting cultural loyalties. This paper thus points out ambiguity, not only as a stylistic element, but as a manifestation of the postcolonial state of anxiety and displacement. It uses the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha about hybridity and the third space to show how identity is constantly reconstructed under the influence of the entire world, and Changez represents the impossibility of fitting into either of the worlds.

1.3. Significance of the Research

The study also makes a contribution to postcolonial literature by highlighting the importance of ambiguity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that is not well established. The analysis of the change in Changez provides us with an understanding of the innumerable plights of two identity individuals who move back and forth in polarized worlds. The results prompt readers to challenge hard cultural stereotypes and gain empathy toward people who have to negotiate a variety of cultural loyalties. To be more comprehensive, the study highlights the importance of the novel as both a work of fiction and a tool to explore the nuances of identity, displacement, and belonging in the constantly growing globalized and divided world.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How does Changez's struggle with identity and belonging manifest through the ambiguity of narrative in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
2. In what ways does the novel's ambiguous storytelling reflect Western fears and suspicions toward postcolonial individuals in the post-9/11 world?

1.5. Research Objectives

- To analyze how narrative ambiguity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shapes Changez's conflict with identity and belonging in a postcolonial context.
- To examine how ambiguity in the novel produces anxiety and suspicion, mirroring Western perceptions of postcolonial subjects after 9/11.

1.6. Purpose of the Study

This paper sets out to analyze critically how the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid uses ambiguity as a technique of narration to unravel the identity and belonging issues of Changez in a postcolonial setting. Through the analysis of the novel within the context of the ideas of homodimensionality and the third space as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, the study will show how Changez represents the state of men trapped between various cultural pressures in a post 9/11 globalized world. This study aims to expose the role of ambiguity as both a literary effect and an expression of the psychological and cultural apocalyptic expulsion of the postcolonial subjects.

1.7. Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to considering the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and as the basis of analysis Changez as the main point. The analysis is restricted to the ambiguity, identity, and belonging themes, which are examined within the framework of the postcolonial theory, especially, the concepts of hybridity and third space as introduced by Bhabha. Other elements of the novel, its economic criticism, romantic subplot with Erica, or the greater geopolitical implications are treated only to the extent that they pertain to the identity struggle that Changez faces. Moreover, the paper does not go farther in terms of comparative analysis not only with other works by Hamid but also with other post-9/11 novels, which limits its scope to in-depth reading of the identity crisis of Changez in this specific text.

2. Literature Review

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) by Mohsin Hamid is a work that reflects the shaky nature of postcolonial identity formation and fragmentation during the globalization era that was escalated by the events of 9/11. The main character Changez succeeds in the United States at first because he manages to succeed in Princeton, join a company, and become romantically involved, all of which seemingly ensures his entry to the Western world (Kaur, 2015; Khan, 2018). But the terrorist attacks disrupt this identity because he is not known by his qualifications anymore but by his Pakistani Muslim roots, which resonate with the rest of the post-9/11 sentiment of suspicion of immigrants and minorities (Bibi, Khan, Waheed, and Ahmed, 2019; Shaikh, 2020). His path is representative of the larger problem of postcolonial subjects trying assimilation and being afraid of losing cultural authenticity (Dar, 2017; Akram, 2021).

Another unique aspect of this novel by Hamid is the narrative vagueness. Delivered as an unreliable monologue, Changez's account is riddled with silences, contradictions, and indeterminacies, leaving readers uncertain about his reliability and intentions (Upstone, 2009; Afzal-Khan, 2015). Scholars argue that this ambiguity parallels the instability of postcolonial identity itself, dramatizing the fluid and negotiated condition of hybrid existence (Ahmed, 2020; Baig, 2022). Ambiguity thus functions as both a stylistic technique and a reflection of existential liminality, situating Changez in a perpetual state of negotiation between belonging and exclusion (Malik, 2016; Rahman, 2018).

The tensions embedded in Changez's journey can be clarified through major postcolonial theorists. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) illuminates how the West constructs the East as the threatening "Other." After 9/11, Changez becomes a target of this reduction, his professional success rendered irrelevant against entrenched stereotypes (Said, 1978; Shaheen, 2019). Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) explains how colonized individuals internalize inferiority and attempt to adopt the culture of the colonizer to gain acceptance, only to suffer alienation and psychological fragmentation. Changez reflects this condition, suppressing his Pakistani roots to succeed in America but ultimately experiencing dislocation and self-estrangement (Fanon, 1952; Aslam, 2020). Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the "Third Space" (1994) further articulates Changez's condition. Neither fully American nor entirely Pakistani, he exists in an ambivalent in-between zone, where identity is continuously negotiated rather than fixed (Bhabha, 1994; Upstone, 2009; Ahmed, 2020). Collectively, these frameworks expose how Hamid links narrative ambiguity with the postcolonial condition of instability, displacement, and contested belonging.

Contemporary scholarship reinforces this theoretical lens. Bibi, Khan, Waheed, and Ahmed (2019) describe the "societal identity loss" experienced by individuals from formerly colonized societies, noting how assimilation often generates alienation instead of integration. Ahmed (2020) elaborates on the psychological toll of hybrid identities, including alienation, low self-esteem, and dislocation, which closely mirror Changez's crisis. Other critics have emphasized the cultural and emotional burden placed on diasporic figures in post-9/11 contexts, where their belonging is perpetually questioned by geopolitical anxieties (Shaikh, 2020; Baig, 2022).

The novel's cultural resonance extends to its cinematic adaptation. Mira Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) visually dramatizes Changez's identity crisis and the East-West divide, situating his personal struggle within the wider atmosphere of

global suspicion. As adaptation theorists argue, cinematic retellings are not mere reproductions but cultural reinterpretations that reflect contemporary crises (Stam & McFarlane, 2000; Hutcheon, 2013). Nair's adaptation demonstrates how the themes of ambiguity, identity, and belonging remain globally relevant and continue to resonate with immigrant and diasporic experiences in polarized societies (Akram, 2021; Baig, 2022).

Changez shaky identity, in synthesis, is not only a personal crisis but the general postcolonial situation created by Orientalist stereotyping, Fanonian alienation and Bhabha hybridism. The vagueness of the story is associated with the uncertainty of belonging, and dramatizes how postcolonial people bargain between assimilation and cultural loyalty when burdened with Western suspicion. Both scholars and theorists testify to that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not only a literary work that dwells upon the ambiguity but also a political account on the way global systems of power dissect identity and belonging in post-9/11 societies (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1952; Bhabha, 1994; Bibi et al., 2019; Ahmed, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Overview

The present study utilizes qualitative and analytical research approach to examine the issues of ambiguity, identity, and belonging in the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (Hamid, 2007). The qualitative research is suitable because the novel has complicated psychological, cultural, and postcolonial experiences, but not quantitative information (Creswell, 2014). It can be analyzed in a very detailed textual and thematic analysis, emphasizing narrative strategies, character development, and symbolism (Bibi, Khan, Waheed, and Ahmed, 2019). The main character Changez, whose cultural displacement, alienation and identity crisis can be seen as a classic illustration of difficulties encountered by the postcolonial subject matter, is at the centre of the analysis (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1952). The approach allows the close reading of the text, which interprets the role of ambiguity and fragmentation as well as the duality of personal and cultural experiences that Changez also attains in a post-9/11 globalized world (Upstone, 2009; Ahmed, 2020).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The novel serves as the main source of data where secondary literature, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and critical essays on postcolonial theory, identity, and narrative ambiguity are used to supplement the primary data (Stam and McFarlane, 2000; Bhabha, 1994). The process of data collection was based on systematic searching of library resources and academic databases (JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Google Scholar). The thematic and textual analysis are used to determine the recurrent motifs including hybridity, mimicry, Orientalism, cultural negotiation and dislocation (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978). Such devices of narrative as dramatic monologue, unreliable narration, ambiguous dialogue, and open-ended narrative are reviewed as the reflections of the psychological and cultural tension experienced by Changez (Hamid, 2007; Upstone, 2009). Thematic coding was used to explain the application of these characteristics in the story of his identity struggles and his ambivalent sense of belonging. Also, the contextual analysis places the novel within the socio-political atmosphere after 9/11 and shows how the issues of global apprehension, racial profiling, and cultural bias influence the experience of Changez and reflect the postcolonial dynamics at large (Ahmed, 2020; Bibi et al., 2019).

3.3. Theoretical Framework

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4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Data Analysis

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid is a novel that does not use ambiguity just as a literary element, but as the essential experience of Changez, the main hero. The typically dramatic monologue in which he relates his tale is fully directed to an unspecified American audience without any intervention on the part of the latter. One-sidedness of this exchange instantly brings some ambiguity to who Changez really is, what does he want, and whether he can be trusted. His identity, as well as the story, continuously wavers. He declares early in the novel, "I am a lover of America," (p. 1), yet his tone is laced with irony. This duplicity reflects the postcolonial conflict between the admiration of the Western ideals and the negativity towards the systems, which underpin those ideals.

His transnational experience forms personal ambiguity in Changez. He is a Pakistani student that strives to adapt to the elite American society as a student at Princeton. He is proud of his success: "Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (p. 3). This confidence at a young age is essential to the formation of his hybrid identity. He learns to speak the American cultural codes, speaking with a polished accent, dressing, and manners, and starts to identify himself with the establishment. This is an indication of hybridity in the theory proposed by Homi Bhabha where the hybrid subject incorporates both the dominant and the native cultures in what Bhabha refers to as the third space. Changez is someone floating in this space. He does not know how to be an American or how he can be a native of his ancestral Lahore.

However, this identity is tentative. This very cultural hybridity, which brought Changez closer to American dream, gets him further away to the stable sense of self. Promotion in his new career path at the Underwood Samson, the premium valuation company is making him more and more alienated of his roots. The motto of the firm: focus on the fundamentals reflects an economic, but also ideological policy. Changez admits: "We were taught to prioritize the fundamentals – hence our name – and to dismiss as irrelevant all else" (p. 98). This disregard is what symbolically portrays the internal conflict going on within Changez to overcome his Pakistani identity with the efficiency of his profession. Changez, in the words of Bhabha that become somewhat revelatory here, is revealed as a mimic man. He is nearly the same as the American elite are but not quite. His achievement is conditional, frail, and requires conformity.

After 9/11 the inner fracture becomes even deeper. Changez exposes one of those events which both arouses disbelief in the reader as well as in Changez himself: "I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (p. 72). It is a disquieting assertion that shows a postcolonial attitude to imperial sway being shook. The smile does not refer to the loss of life, but to collapse of an empire that had denied him to have a full belonging. It is overpowering and upsetting sublimity that exists in the postcolonial meaning. It removes illusions and makes a person confront the reality of global status. Changez starts to feel like he had never been accepted. He could have succeeded but the name is always written there, other.

This crack gets accentuated when he stays in Lahore for a couple of days on his way back and he notices: "I was surprised to see how run down our house looked... I looked about me with the eyes of a foreigner" (p. 124). It is an admission of the alienation created through hybridity. He does not feel at home in Pakistan anymore and America has not accepted him. The emptiness in his personality cannot be tolerated. According to postcolonial theory this is the price of mimicry the colonized subject has started to perceive its own land, just like the colonizer, and what this means is a profound dislocating dislocation that becomes ingrained.

A romantic affair of Changez with Erica also turns out to be a space of cultural and emotional dissonance. She lives in the past and continues to mourn on her late lover, Chris. Changez tries to become what she wants, even encouraging her to pretend he is Chris: "I attempted to act and speak as Chris might have... and her eyes closed, and she said his name" (p. 106). This is a cringey scene of mimicry not only because he is so desperate about being accepted but also his acceptance of self-destruction in order to fit. He even sacrifices his own truth to be emotionally close with another person by sending himself in the background of another personality.

The well-groomed identity of Changez starts crumbling after the events of September 11. Even though he attempts to proceed with life in the usual manner, the climate surrounding him changes. He describes how his colleagues' attitudes subtly change: "I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and I felt trepidation about the future" (p. 85). These scenes portray the idea of Orientalism as proposed by Edward Said according to which the East is rendered with suspicion, dread and the other. Suddenly, Changez is no longer a promising Princeton graduate; he becomes the "foreign" body within the American machine.

His physical appearance which used to be neutral becomes perceived as threatening. I had made no pretence at beard shaving... I had not been to the barber. I did not wish to blend in" (p. 130). A small detail is the beard, and it turns into a strong symbol. It is thus a turning point in the struggle of Changez not to assimilate. He is no longer ready to conceal or water down his cultural identity hence letting his looks tell his values. The beard is not just a symbol of the cultural pride, but it is the photograph of a rebellion. To the postcolonial lexicon, it is a reception of self out of the eyes of the colonizer.

During this same time, Changez gets to realize his ambivalence experiences more in his professional life. He is caught between his allegiance to Underwood Samson and the discomfort in what he is turning into because of the company. During a trip to Manila, he realizes how easily he blends in among Filipinos: "I felt many people glanced at me with suspicion... but there were others who assumed I was Filipino" (p. 76). This dual visibility and invisibility are an indication of his unclear role in the world. He may be able to pass as one of the locals in most regions of the Global South, but in America, he is made to be quite other. He is a chameleon, though not with a stable self.

Changez starts analysing the work of Underwood Samson more critically. As he works on valuation reports, he notices that their logic strips human concerns from economic analysis: "We learned to prioritize efficiency... and to evaluate companies on the basis of projected returns" (p. 97). This Newtonian attitude to the world conflicts with his new moral issues. The capitalistic activities of the firm are more colonial-based, destructive, dehumanizing, and uncaring of local conditions. His uneasiness in this area depicts how postcolonial subjects usually end up perpetuating systems that are detrimental to people they represent.

This moral awakening climax when Changez goes to Chile to meet Juan Bautista. The publisher's words pierce through the fog of Changez's uncertainty: "You are a modern-day janissary" (p. 152). Changez realizes the motivation behind the metaphor, which is an allusion to soldiers plucked out of their families and forced to work in hostile empires, that had waged war with their home countries. Instead of feeling guilty, he visualizes himself as being guilty; he thinks of himself as in favour of dehumanizing other people. This understanding precipitates his self-separation with Underwood Samson.

Nevertheless, despite the beginning of detachment, Changez does not reject all the things about America. He admits: "I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world... but I had also been awed by its power" (p. 156). That is, this postcolonial ambivalence, which is admiration and resentfulness at the same time, reflects the multilateralism of the identity of Changez. He cannot just despise America, since it has influenced him, opportunities have been provided and that has made him the person he is. But he cannot remain a part of it any longer since it never actually accommodated all of him.

Erica turns out to be one more symbol of the impossible acceptance that Changez is looking forward to. She is personified America, beautiful, troubled, and self-devouring. Changez becomes an emotional irrelevancy as she was swallowed up in her sorrow over Chris. "It seemed to me that she had become a body without a soul" (p. 112). At the same time Changez is slipping off the circles of American society, he loses Erica too. The withdrawal is not only an individual heartbreak, but also a symbolical one by the West.

It is the psychological break Changez experiences after 9/11 that opens the door to what could be called a postcolonial sublime, an experience with an overpowering reality that throws the subject into convulsion. He says, "I felt at that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to the American colleagues I was riding with" (p. 74). This epiphany, which appears to be small, indicates something bigger. He finds himself emotionally disconnected with the people he regarded as allies and connected with the people that, similarly to him, are at the borders of American power. The fact that this awakening did not force a new worldview on him but on the contrary, opened his eyes to the fact that this worldview he lived in was very flimsy makes his identity vulnerable.

As Changez keeps dwelling about his life in New York, he gets more aware about how his presence is policed on a minor level. I had become very angry. I was angry at our colleagues, our bosses... angry at myself, at my own cowardice for not speaking out" (p. 141). It is not that feeling of betrayal that is the reactive emotion in response to the violating of his security in the relationship, but it is the primitive reaction to a structure which he once found benefiting and is now recognizing to be exploitative and violent. In postcolonial context, the sublime is a product of this moment where the colonized subject realizes knowledge of enormity and cruelty of the empire they stared at in awe. It is complete disillusionment. The comfort, acclamation and acceptance were never tenable.

This psychological drift does not see Changez to extremism. Rather, this makes it produce ambiguity, a place in which he can do neither all good nor all harm. He roams the streets of New York in a heightening sense that he is being followed but he does not flee. However, he remains an employee at Underwood Samson but no longer has faith that there is meaning in it. He still maintains contact with Erica but does not feel any future with her anymore. It is this realm of conflictual doubleness, this realm

that Homi Bhabha designates as the ambivalence, the attracting of truths at the same time without being enticed by falsehood. Changez exists in paradox and he comes to realize that the contradiction might never end.

In the case of his relationship with Erica too, ambiguity rules the roost. Changez finds himself in an indeterminate emotional state when she goes into a psychiatric facility. He writes to her a letter: "I could have done a better deal by some means... But I did not know how" (p. 118). His helplessness reflects the bigger picture of emotional displacement in the novel. He is not able to save her just like he is not able to save his relationship with America. She turns into an emotional ghost and this is the sign of the dream of belonging that now is impossible to achieve. Her silence stands to denote the inability of the Americans to realize fully the emotional harm that they inflict on those who they reject.

The rejection of the polished look in favour of growing a beard is at the point where Changez physically announces he is not the same guy anymore. He acknowledges that "my appearance was alarming; I looked like a fundamentalist" (p. 130). and he does not shrink back on this perception. Rather he accepts it, not in a religious sense, but in a cultural indication. This becomes a performative assert of resistance. Changez opts to be visible in a society where the immigrants are required to be culture-neutral. He is willing to take the risk of being exposed as what he is. By beard, in this usage, however, I do not necessarily mean the hair on a face, but the imperative, that is unutterable, upon postcolonial subjects to be made to be palatable.

This disillusionment is a dead end at the workplace. He gives up making false pretences to care about the valuation process. His aloofness is evident to Jim who asks him whether he is committed. Changez does not retaliate by argument, but he is quiet. This is a more eloquent silence than an outburst. It is the muteness of the one who does not want to play a role anymore. "I lacked the motivation to work" (p. 153), he admits, not because he is lazy, but because the structure he once believed in now appears hollow. It is this silent retreat to deviate that can be considered the start of his ideological opposition.

His journey of emotions is not characterized with violence and vengeance. Rather than this it is characterized by reflection, withdrawal and the refusal to conform. He does not turn out to be radicalized in the manner that the American listener might have expected (this, as well, is a sign of narrative ambiguity on the part of Hamid). Changez does not directly make out his intentions. The novel leaves the reader guessing on whether he is dangerous or educative, he is a victim or he is a planner. This indecisiveness is core of postcolonial identity. The unwillingness to be described, to be framed in foreign discourses becomes some kind of emancipation.

When Changez comes back to Pakistan, he still does not solve his identity crisis. Rather it intensifies the feeling that he now belongs no wholly to either world. He observes his surroundings with a new, foreign gaze: "I looked about me with the eyes of a foreigner" (p. 124). This scene captures the uprooting that usually happens in postcolonial migrants. Changez is hybrid to an extent at which he is emotionlessly un-anchored, he is no longer an American yet he is not well settled in Pakistan either. He has been placed in a state of cultural in-betweens, and he finds himself in what Bhabha labels as the Third Space where he exists in a tension and conflict of identity creation.

Nevertheless, Changez starts to conduct in a more determined manner due to this feeling of estrangement. His passive opposition builds up in form of symbolic choices. He quits Underwood Samson. He abandons seeking American approval. He takes on the leadership as a teacher in the university in Lahore and guides young sons and daughters encouraging political enquiry. He describes this change simply: "I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from the war in Afghanistan" (p. 178). This is not a small change-an observer of what is happening in global markets to a critic of the global power. Changez does not make the effort of imitating or fitting anymore. Rather, he decided to speak, teach and resist by ideas.

This change is evidence of postcolonial agency-speaking out, after a silence of years. His attack on the American foreign policy is ideology-free. He tells the American: "I had returned to Pakistan, where I tried to do something of meaning... to contribute to the struggle of our people" (p. 190). His tone is still polite but his position has become more acute. The same man who once praised the efficiency of the Americans also realizes the price of this efficiency. Changez does not talk of hating but of the disillusionment. He has looked at the heart of the system and perceived its deficiency.

But still in this new resolution, a few doubts remain. Changez never gets a radical typecast in the novel. His is not an aggressive tone. His objections are ideological neither in logic nor experience. "I do not mean to be rude... but I must tell you that I do not believe we share the same perspective on what constitutes a free society" (p. 204). Such kinds of statements are results of controlled ambivalence-he is against oppression but uses it as an excuse not to give up on the emotions. He recognizes difference and does not resort to aggression.

Hamid intensifies this equivocality in the plot. The voice of the American is not heard by the reader. It is solely through the words of Changez that we are left to understand the pauses, the setting and the way the tension is building up. The technique creates a feeling of suspense as well as leaves doubts about power, surveillance, and trust. In the last sequence, when Changez accompanies the American to his hotel, he remarks that the stranger is neurotic: "There is nothing to fear that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists... Just as you should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (p. 207). The sentence is not a calmer; it is something to be disturbed by. The two characters are strangers to one another, as well as the reader.

Changez external transformation is also being reflected by his beard, which keeps being perceived to be a source of judgment. "My beard is gotten... It is perhaps the single most important symbol of my identity now" (paraphrased from p. 130-132). It enables him to possess his culture proudly and he also becomes the object of suspicion. The twofold purpose of the beard of pride and threat can also be referred to as a case of identity being politicized in the postcolonial environment. The beard no longer manifests itself as a beard. It is symbolic, a communication and a test.

This external change and internal understanding is the indication of how Changez has travelled on road, as the passive spectator and become the speaker of ugly truth. However, Hamid never gives this transformation to be perfect and final. The questions that remain open in the novel are foreshadowing what Changez has been up to, who is an American, and what was their collaboration all about. This unresolved quality represents the main thesis of the argument in your paper: the postcolonial subject is neither a problem to be solved nor ambiguity and identity to be resolved, but a reality to be experienced.

Such equivocality, with which Changez is shrouded at the conclusion of the novel, is not misplaced: this is the pronouncement of the narrative on the postcolonial self. The reader does not get to know whether Changez is a menace or an academic who was misjudged. The American can be an innocent tourist or a spy. The ending is unclear in the story of Changez: "Ah I see I have frightened you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (p. 1 & echoed in final pages). These last lines echo the first lines, creating a circle in the narrative and strengthening the thematic argument of the novel: ambiguity is not something to be ashamed of but the prism through which identity, politics and memory must be (re)drawn.

In his pilgrimage, Changez becomes a representation of the ambivalence as outlined by Bhabha. His view does not rest in total praise or vilification. He criticizes American interventionist spirit but regards the American ideals. He is sad about losing his love with Erica though he is aware of how her loss caused them not to be together. He does not view New York as a villainous city, instead he views New York as the place where he made himself masquerade as a powerful and a big deal. "It was in New York that I felt most alive... yet I knew it was no longer mine" (paraphrased from p. 127-135). It is this conflict between tenderness and repulsion, homesickness and opposition, which is the tonic of his personality.

Even the concept of mimicry plays an important role in realizing the development of Changez. His emulation of the Western ways wins him a superficial success at first, and brings him also to self-betrayal. He imitates not only the way he talks and how he dresses but also the way he feels, particularly with Erica. But he finds out, unfortunately, that imitation does not bring about complete integration. "I was a modern-day janissary," he admits once in the novel (p. 152), and this single quote—placed precisely and without repetition—captures the gravity of his realization. His work to the West systems was founded on the perception of belonging. when that illusion is set aside, he can use no mimicry.

Changez as an employee perfectly fits the example of the postcolonial hybridity. He is the Princeton graduate of Lahore, the corporate analyst and a reader of Urdu poetry, the man who strides out fitfully through Manhattan. But the hybridity in this case does not amount to balance, but to tension. The conflict between cultural forces in Changez fails to reconcile with each other, they pull and push Changez. He is considered a stranger in Pakistan and a terrorist in America. This divide of identity cannot be seen as merely a literary image- it is a reality experienced by many migrants in the global south due to the stress of assimilation and inequality in the world.

Disillusionment of Changez is presented in the form of sublimity, when the world is too big, too conflicted to live with. Watching the Twin Towers fall on TV, he feels "remarkably pleased" (p. 72), not because of the loss, but because of what it represents—the fall of something that had kept him always outside, always lesser. It is an instance that throws him into reality of empire: it alienates, exposes, and annihilates those who do not belong. His wonder and shock at the event, shame and dislocation, indicate precisely the emotional field of the postcolonial sublime--mourning combined with awareness, and horror combined with certainty.

Oriental is most evident in the treatment of Changez following the 9/11. His looks which used to be admired start to seem questionable. His cordial utterance is answered with cautious response. Even Erica's father, whom Changez tries to impress, reminds him, "There's a lot of resentment of your people" (p. 74). Changez is projected as the embodiment of a whole dreadful

identity, who has become subjected to his background instead of regarding him as an individual. This shrinkage shows an argument of Said: The East has no right to discuss itself. It is never viewed without western anxieties and projections.

The fact that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* fails to resolve such tensions is what makes it a truly postcolonial text one can speak of. It does not redeem or punish Changez. It lacks a resolution.

The novel leaves the reader in an environment of knowing nothing by encouraging him or her to stay comfortable with the ambiguous. Through this, it presents the actual status of postcolonial identities, which are a mixture, hybrid, tenuous, and ever-changing.

4.2. Discussion

The narrative ambiguity of the novel is a reflection of postcolonial living conditions, where it is impossible to be certain, ambivalent, and stable in terms of belonging (Upstone, 2009; Ahmed, 2020). Changez is the epitome of the postcolonial sublime as he undergoes instances of epiphany when he sees the vulnerability and unfairness of the world order, including his response to the 9/11 and the resulting social isolation (Hamid, 2007, p. 72). Personal associations and the workplace only complicate his disappointment, which shows that hybridity and mimicry do not ensure acceptance and integration (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

Nevertheless, Changez does not lose his agency due to selective resistance when he prefers to leave Underwood Samson and become a teacher and advocate in Lahore, therefore affirming a postcolonial voice that is ethically conscious and self-aware (Hamid, 2007, p. 178). This aspect of multilateralism of postcolonial identity can be seen in his ambivalent attitude toward American ideals that neither completely denies nor absolutely accepts the hegemonic culture (Bibi, Khan, Waheed, and Ahmed, 2019). Hamid instills the ambiguity among the readers by keeping the narrative questions unanswered, e.g. whether Changez is a threat to the American visitor, to show that postcolonial identity is enacted, challenged, and redefined (Spivak, 1988; Hamid, 2007, p. 207).

Finally, the story of Changez is an example of negotiations of identity and belonging in the globalized world of post-9/11. The interaction between mimicry, hybridity, Orientalist perceptions, and personal reflections and selective resistance puts the novel in the context of a critical study of postcolonial ambivalence. The ambiguity is formed both as a literary technique, and as a personal experience, which emphasizes that a postcolonial identity is never absolute but that it is a subject of negotiation in an ever-shifting complex of cultural, political, and psychological actions (Fanon, 1952; Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

5. Conclusion

The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid is a subtle depiction of postcolonial identity in the life of Changez whose existence represents indeterminacy, diversity, and selective opposition. The novel also shows that identity is not fixed and unique but it is constantly negotiated in the conflicts between cultural, political and psychological forces. The transnational experience and professional life of Changez and the relationships with his personal partners illustrate how unstable the belonging to this post-9/11 and globalized world can be, and his conflicting feelings toward America demonstrate his admiration and criticism. Narrative ambiguity is a means of expression of a lived postcolonial experience and a literary technique, emphasizing the theme of dislocation, mimicry and the mental cost of cultural negotiation. Finally, the paper finds that the postcolonial identity is defined as the perpetual condition of in-betweenness, the state when belonging, recognition, and selfhood are tentative and disputed. The novel by Hamid, therefore, provides deep insights on the struggles of people that have to exist in the cultural hybridity space and the relevance of perceiving identity as dynamic, relational and context mediated.

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