

## Changez's Fractured Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I argue that Hamid's character Changez represents those immigrants who are frustrated due to their fractured identity on foreign soil. Moreover, Changez, who initially embraces new cultures but later falls into a big ditch located between native cultures and foreign cultures. This paper examines *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the postcolonial lens. In this era of globalization, emigration has become a normal phenomenon, indicating a possibility of cultural harmony and multiculturalism. The technological advancements have shrunk the world, resulting in a "global village." The world is becoming smaller and interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds is getting stronger. Yet, there are occasions when multiculturalism proves to be an obstacle to cultural harmony, which exactly is reflected in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Upon examining the novel, the paper claims that failure to reconcile two identities on foreign soil leads to isolation from native and foreign cultures, leading individuals to confront massive psychological turbulence such as frustration and depression.

**Keywords:** Immigration, Globalization, Postcolonialism, Ideology, Isolation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which he characterizes as a "love story" about America, offers a layered and critical reflection on American identity, nationalism, and spatial politics in the wake of 9/11. Rather than conforming to the inward-looking tendencies of many American 9/11 novels, Hamid's narrative reframes these dynamics through a postcolonial lens, exposing the hidden imperial ideologies that slowly engulf them in a controlled way. The novel subtly critiques how U.S. global dominance after 9/11 mirrors earlier European colonial ambitions, revealing a continuity of the same rhetoric of indirect cultural hegemony. However, Hamid's exploration is far from a one-dimensional indictment. His Pakistani protagonist, though increasingly pushed to the margins of American society, is not portrayed as wholly disillusioned. Instead, he grapples with an ambivalent attachment to the very ideals—such as American exceptionalism and self-reliance—that sustain the national mythos. This tension between critique and attraction becomes the novel's central contradiction. It is precisely this ambivalence that underlies the novel's challenge to the racial exclusion and patriotic fervor that shaped the Bush-era response to terrorism. The result is a complex, unresolved meditation on belonging, identity, and the costs of empire (Hartnell, 2010).

I want to argue in this paper that globalization and migration has impacted Changez's life so much so that he feels his identity fractured, and belongingness questioned. Changez, the main protagonist with the influence of globalization migrates to America in pursuit of the American dream of better life and future. It was quite possible for him to develop multiple identities since he was part of both America and Pakistan, yet he feels his identity fractured and fragmented. With the fall of the Twin Towers, he felt his identity crumbling and his belongingness questioned. So Changez, despite his attempt to integrate in a new culture, acknowledging that in a new land he cannot adjust following his particular culture he feels his identity fractured and fragmented. In spite of being part of two countries and cultures he could not call none of them home. His identity neither remained of America nor of Pakistan. Instead of gaining mixed and multiple identities, his authentic and adopted both identities were fractured and fragmented. I will use post colonialism as a theoretical lens to prove my argument.

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With the emergence of globalization, the world has become a global village. Roland Robertson asserted globalization as “the compression of the world into ‘a single place,’ ....” (p. 6). and it has witnessed the development in technology, communication, cultural exchanges and movement of the people have not been limited to nation only. It has become transnational. Steven H. Shane in his article writes, “We see that no culture-and no individual-belongs to any particular group or exists in any pure form in the modern world” (Shane, 2013). Similarly, Bhikhu Parekh stated: “People travel for employment and as tourists, and both export and import new ideas and influences . . . Indeed the external influences are so subtle and deep that receiving societies are not even aware of their presence and impact. The idea of natural culture makes little sense,” (Parekh, 2002, p. 8).

Here both the writers state that there cannot be natural culture and no individual in this globalized modern world can be of single identity and pure form because people travel and migrate to different places for the purpose of business, employment, study and settlement. They also see better life perspectives and migrate to different places in the hope of fulfilling one’s dreams and making a secure future for oneself and family. Similarly, Changez also migrates to his dreamland and assimilates and integrates well in American culture. He was the lover of America and was living his American dream perfectly until the 9/11 incident. To reiterate my claim with the 9/11 incident and America’s changed attitude towards Changez, he was compelled to question his identity and belongingness.

## 2. POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND IDENTITY DISRUPTION

The post colonialism theory is a term that refers to and rethinks about the concepts of nation, history, class, ethnicity, gender and so on. It deals with cultural identity in colonized societies. It examines the culture and literature of the former colonies of European empire and their connectivity. It also studies what happens when two cultures clash and one of them looks like superior and assumes to be dominant and controls over the other. It studies hybridity and identity as a resistance of colonization by questioning and analyzing. Critics like Homi Bhaba said: “The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (p. 150).

“The post colonial is a term which is employed to unfold all the culture affected by the process of imperialism. Simply it can be said that post colonialism shows the end of colonialization by releasing the native population from the culture and politics of imperialism and by giving them significant independence” (Akhtar *et al.*, 2021, p. 343). Even if the people of colonized countries are said to be independent, they are not as original as before they were colonized. Their life during the post-colonial stage is confusing and complex. Many struggle to navigate their path to their original cultures. I would rather say they are sandwiched between two warring ideas. Their later lives nearly resemble Du Bois’ theory of “double-consciousness,” which means “psychologically disturbing and confusing experience of ‘twoness’ especially in the lives of African-Americans” (Sherma, 2025, p. 3). Postcolonialism leaves people sandwiched between their native cultures and the imposed cultures.

According to Sawant (2012), post-colonialism, sometimes spelled postcolonialism, explores the lasting impact of colonization on societies and cultures. Initially, historians after World War II used the term primarily in a chronological sense to refer to the period following a nation's independence—terms like “post-colonial state” simply marked a shift in political status. However, by the late 1970s, literary scholars began to adopt the term to analyze the deeper cultural, psychological, and representational consequences of colonization. Although earlier works, particularly Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, had already started interrogating how imperial powers constructed and controlled knowledge about colonized peoples, the specific term “post-colonial” was not yet widely applied to these critiques. Scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha further developed what became known as Colonial Discourse Theory, which would analyze how colonial stories impacted the identities of both the ruler and the ruled, their ideologies and their social living conditions. The theory clearly demonstrated that colonial power damaged social, political and cultural attributes of the colonized. Over the years, the word “postcolonialism” became a broad term to apply for studies.

Changez was a liberal person and America for him was a multicultural country. So he tries to integrate and assimilate in American culture following its mannerism and mimics various other attributes. When asked where he belongs from he replies as New York to be his home. While visiting Manila he says, “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 and American.....and I learned to answer, when asked where I was from, that I was from New York” (Hamid, 2008, p. 74)

He wears kurtha with jeans when he goes to meet his American girlfriend Erica’s parents which shows though he integrated and assimilated in new culture he hasn’t forgotten his roots and wants to preserve them. Changez states:

“In the end I took advantage of the exception clause that is written into every code of etiquette and wore a starched white kurtha of delicately worked cotton over a pair of jeans. It was a testament to the open mindedness and that overused word-cosmopolitan nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire” (Hamid, 2008, p. 55).

He even tries to impress his colleagues and white friends. This shows what he felt about his dreamland America. He felt he was living in a multicultural country where everyone is welcomed and accepted with all the commonalities and differences.

But after the 9/11 incident when he is treated as an outsider, as a criminal just because he is Muslim he feels his identity fractured. He feels his belongingness questioned. He says, "I lacked stable core. I was not sure where I belonged, in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither.....," (Hamid, 2008, p.168). His American dream was shattered with the fall of Twin towers. He felt the home is no longer home. Changez says: "I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. It was just like revival of the colonial period that pampered difference between the colonizer and colonized, self and the other" (Hamid, 2008, p. 178).

He felt like himself as the other and could not comprehend where he belonged. The once warm and welcoming home he realizes to be just an illusion. Therefore, to restate my claim Changez feels his identity to be fractured and gets the feeling of in betweenness in his own dreamland after the 9/11 incident takes place.

Even after the 9/11 incident, he shows his love and loyalty towards America as a true American since he feels his identity associated with it. He feels it at home. When he hears the rumors about how badly cabdrivers are beaten, he tries to console himself saying it could be misunderstanding. He could not believe how someone like him, a Princeton graduate, could be looked at suspiciously. He says:

"I ignored as best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy because such things in America as in all countries happen to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year" (Hamid, 2008, pp.107-108).

### 3. THE PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION

America, his so called multicultural and melting pot of various cultures and religions became dubious of its own Muslim people. America's treatment towards him as other was quite unexpected since he had been serving the country. And therefore, he leaves America, who fails to accept him just because of his Muslimness and treats him as other despite his love and loyalty towards the country. He then grows beard as a cultural resistance and protests on his part. But even after he returns Pakistan to ensure his identity isn't fractured, he could not feel at home there too because he could not forget his love for Erica and America.

Not only that, but his identity is also not just fractured with America's ill treatment towards him. While being with his love of life Erica, also his identity could not remain intact. He had to act as her deceased lover, Chris, which also shows his fragmented identity. He could not remain himself, act as himself while being with her too. He was so fascinated by Erica and America both that he was chasing something that could never be achieved. This narration also shows how much he desired Erica:

"I did not say that the same could be said of her when she spoke of Chris; I did not say it because this fact elicited in me mixed emotions . . . I was desirous of embarking upon a relationship with her that amounted to more than friendship, and I felt 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" (Hamid, 2008, pp. 81-82).

Despite the fact, he could never be accepted as one of them he kept calling himself a New Yorker. He called it home. He kept chasing Erica though she could not accept him as he is. But despite the fact that his family may not be able to accept her he accepted her with all her flaws and beauty, still she could not see him more than a replacement for her dead lover Chris.

Therefore, globalization and migration are both blessings and a threat. Globalization has been both welcomed and criticized because it disregards borders, national infrastructures, local bureaucracies, internet sensors, tariff, laws and languages. Hence, in today's world it can neither be stopped nor can it be avoided. It is quite possible for one to have multiple identities due to movement and migration. However, with this globalization our identity and authenticity are erased slowly. Similarly, our protagonist, despite having lived in two countries, cannot consider any of them to be home, feels himself fragmented, and remains inbetweeners of the countries. To rephrase my claim, Changez, rather than building multiple identities being associated with two different countries and culture, finds his existing identity too fractured and fragmented and feels himself belonging to neither of the countries.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist, whose reliability remains questionable, shapes how we, as readers, interpret the truth. The tension and unease that pervade the narrative create an atmosphere of suspicion. Although Changez consistently offers warmth, hospitality, and cultural insight to the unnamed American guest, the latter remains guarded, especially around local figures like the bearded waiter. Changez encourages the guest to let go of his outsider's

paranoia—“Come, relinquish your foreigner’s sense of being watched” (pp. 31–32). Nonetheless, the guest’s wariness continues to persist. There is no peace within his mind.

According to Monica Chiu, the structure of the frame narrative flips the usual dynamic: rather than scrutinizing Changez, it is the American—and by extension, the reader—who becomes the object of observation. Changez, once positioned as “the Other,” now holds narrative power, compelling us to reflect on our own biases and perspectives. Monica describes Changez as a “cultural ambassador,” reminding readers that they are the ones in unfamiliar territory and possibly unaware of the dangers only he can perceive (2014, p. 122). Ironically, Changez, who fails to assimilate into Western cultures, finds himself an isolated entity in a familiar world when he returns to Lahore. This happens because he fails to take off the foreign glasses and put on his native glasses to view his native soil. Shockingly, when he is funneled into the immigration line marked “foreigners” rather than “citizens” (p. 75).

Changez’s experience of displacement clearly demonstrates that to avoid identity crisis individuals must construct a bridge between two opposite worlds—the Eastern part and the Western part (Hartnell, 2010). The novel’s narratives compel readers to analyze how individual political ideologies, cultural recognitions, and assumptions affect a person’s sense of belonging and homeliness. This directly challenges post-9/11 ideologies that immediately enforce rigid boundaries between nations and communities (Tayeb and Ahmed-Sami, 2021).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Changez’s fractured identity in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* remains deeply relevant in today’s globalized and politically charged world, where questions of belonging, loyalty, and identity continue to affect immigrants and diasporic communities. “Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a fictional narrative that attempts to explicate extreme forms of political violence against civilian populations in an era dominated by a global support of open markets, free flow of finance and labor, and liberal ideas of good governance and dynamic expansion of human rights” (Haider, 2012, p. 229). Trapped between his success in America and his emotional pull toward Pakistan, Changez embodies the tension many immigrants face when navigating multiple cultural affiliations. His disillusionment after 9/11, when he is viewed with suspicion despite his assimilation, mirrors ongoing struggles with racial profiling, nationalism, and exclusion experienced by many immigrants today. The novel’s exploration of how global events reshape personal identity underscores the persistence of cultural alienation and the instability of belonging in an era marked by migration, political polarization, and contested borders. Through Changez, Hamid reveals the emotional cost of living between worlds—a theme that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions around identity and citizenship.

Immigration is becoming a common phenomenon across the world. Due to globalization, colonization and imperialism, Asians and Africans are emigrating to Europe, America, and Australia for better opportunities. Lancaster (2022) puts it herself: “For decades, increasing numbers of Muslim migrants have settled in Western Europe as the result of guest-worker programs (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands), post-colonial immigration (e.g., France, Britain) and asylum programs for those fleeing conflict zones” (p. 546). Regardless of the reasons of immigration, Muslims are still facing challenges in the destination nations. “These immigrants are at the centre of the conflict over immigration, largely due to concerns about cultural incompatibility” (Lancaster, 2022, p. 546). Therefore, immigrants have three choices: keep trying to assimilate into the Western cultures even if they are treated as aliens, find positive ways to deal with two conflicting cultures and return to the native soil and live as before. Needless to say, it is not easy to accomplish all of these goals. Once someone leaves his or her native country and spends a great deal of time outside, he or she may confront warring feelings in the brain and finds difficulty picking a specific culture at once.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* beautifully shares a narrative of a Muslim boy who is destined to grapple with numerous psychological hurdles owing to some components such as globalization, dislocation, cultural clashes, and identity crisis on foreign soil. A happy man like Changez suddenly finds his identity fractured in the wake of 9/11. Being impressed by the American lifestyle, he prepares himself mentally to succumb to the new culture in America. Yet, he, later, belongs in neither place. Globalization cannot be assumed to always foster multiple identities in harmony. Some may succeed in maintaining multiple identities or hyphenated identities “such as Asian-American, Muslim-American, Irish-American, Filipino-American, etc. (Sherma, 2025, p. 12). On the other hand, some immigrants cannot strike a balance between two identities. They are rather trapped in a state of in-betweenness and cultural clashes. Through a postcolonial lens, Changez’s story becomes emblematic of a larger struggle faced by immigrants—where rigid national ideologies and cultural exclusions complicate the pursuit of home and selfhood. In a world increasingly marked by mobility, suspicion, and contested borders, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* remains a poignant reflection on the cost of experiencing multiple worlds without ever fully belonging to either.

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