

The Impact of 9/11 on Changez's Life in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract:

This study explores the impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the protagonist Changez in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Using a qualitative thematic approach, the research examines how 9/11 becomes a turning point that triggers Changez's identity crisis, cultural alienation, and eventual self-redefinition. The analysis draws upon postcolonial theory to reveal how Hamid critiques Western power structures and the persistence of colonial attitudes in the post-9/11 world. Changez's internal conflict—between admiration for Western modernity and loyalty to his Pakistani and Muslim identity—illustrates the tension of the postcolonial subject negotiating belonging in a polarized global society. The novel also reflects the rise of Islamophobia, which reduces Muslim identity to stereotypes and fosters fear and exclusion. Through Changez's transformation from an ambitious professional to a socially conscious critic of Western imperialism, Hamid presents a counter-narrative to Western representations of terrorism and Muslim identity. This study concludes that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* captures the profound psychological, cultural, and political consequences of 9/11, revealing how global events can fracture identity and redefine one's sense of belonging in an age of fear and misunderstanding.

Keywords: 9/11; identity crisis; postcolonialism; Islamophobia; cultural alienation

Abstrak:

Studi ini mengeksplorasi dampak serangan 11 September 2001 terhadap tokoh utama Changez dalam novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* karya Mohsin Hamid. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan tematik kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana peristiwa 9/11 menjadi titik balik yang memicu krisis identitas, alienasi budaya, dan akhirnya redefinisi diri Changez. Analisis ini mengacu pada teori pascakolonial untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana Hamid mengkritik struktur kekuasaan Barat dan persistennya sikap kolonial di dunia pasca-9/11. Konflik internal Changez—antara kekaguman terhadap modernitas Barat dan loyalitas terhadap identitas Pakistan dan Muslimnya—mencerminkan ketegangan subjek pascakolonial yang bernegosiasi tentang rasa milik dalam masyarakat global yang terpolarisasi. Novel ini juga mencerminkan meningkatnya Islamofobia, yang menyederhanakan identitas Muslim menjadi stereotip dan memupuk rasa takut serta eksklusivitas. Melalui transformasi Changez dari seorang profesional ambisius menjadi kritikus yang sadar sosial terhadap imperialisme Barat, Hamid menyajikan narasi alternatif terhadap representasi Barat tentang terorisme dan identitas Muslim. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* menangkap konsekuensi psikologis, budaya, dan politik yang mendalam dari 9/11, mengungkapkan bagaimana peristiwa global dapat memecah belah identitas dan mendefinisikan ulang rasa keterikatan seseorang dalam era ketakutan dan kesalahpahaman.

Kata kunci: 9/11; krisis identitas; postkolonialisme; Islamofobia; alienasi budaya

INTRODUCTION

The September 11, 2001 attacks not only transformed global geopolitics but also left profound psychological, cultural, and social consequences for individuals—particularly those from marginalized communities. In the aftermath of the tragedy, a climate of fear and suspicion emerged, intensifying cultural misunderstandings and reinforcing harmful stereotypes, especially toward Muslims and people of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent. These shifts reshaped public perceptions, national policies, and interpersonal dynamics within American society.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* vividly illustrates how these broader global tensions affect individual lives. The novel follows Changez, a Pakistani immigrant who initially embodies the ideals of the American Dream through academic excellence and professional achievement. However, the events of 9/11 force him to confront new realities: increasing social scrutiny, a sudden questioning of his identity, and the unsettling experience of being viewed with suspicion because of his cultural and religious background. Through his journey, Hamid explores the emotional and psychological weight carried by those caught between admiration for Western modernity and loyalty to their cultural roots.

This tension becomes a central point of conflict for Changez as he navigates shifting expectations, racialized assumptions, and the struggle to belong in a post-9/11 world. His personal transformation mirrors the experiences of many immigrants and Muslim individuals who found themselves negotiating identity in a society growing increasingly polarized. The novel thus functions as a microcosm of the larger post-9/11 landscape, where questions of belonging, cultural hybridity, and identity politics become urgent and unavoidable.

Responding to these issues, this study aims to examine how the events of 9/11 influence Changez's psychological, cultural, and ideological development. Using a qualitative thematic analysis, the research explores the complex interplay between identity crisis, cultural alienation, and postcolonial dynamics depicted in the novel. By focusing on Changez's evolving sense of self, the study seeks to understand the broader implications of global tragedy on individual identity formation.

This article tries to find out, "*How Does the Effect If 9/11 In Changez's Life?*" the purpose of this study is to analyze the text of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through this investigation, the paper aims to shed light on the multifaceted process of identity

negotiation in post-9/11 America and to reveal how Hamid's narrative challenges dominant Western perspectives by presenting a counter-narrative rooted in postcolonial critique and personal introspection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the changing identity of Muslims after the events of 9/11 have been widely discussed by researchers, including in the context of the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Hoineikip Haolai, in his article Post 9/11 Islamic Identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2015), describes how the 9/11 attacks triggered the construction of new stereotypes of Muslims as a potential threat to Western society. He explains that Islamophobia increased rapidly after the tragedy, and this condition shaped the experience of alienation experienced by Muslims, including the character Changez in the novel. Haolai emphasizes that identity in Hamid's novel is depicted as a dynamic concept, shaped by the interaction between personal experience, public perception, and the global socio-cultural context. His view shows that Changez's identity transformation is a direct response to the increased suspicion of Muslims in America after 9/11.

In addition, Haolai also highlights how the change in American attitudes toward Muslims after 9/11 made Changez feel increasingly unsafe and unwelcome. The alienation he experienced drove him to return to his cultural and religious roots, forming a new identity that was more critical of the dominance of Western narratives. This confirms that a character's identity is not only shaped by personal choices, but also by the political and social pressures that surround them.

Other relevant literature comes from research on the film adaptation of this novel. A study by Mira Nair entitled Post 9/11 South Asian Fiction on Screen: Exploring Political Shifts in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2024) discusses how the 2012 film adaptation not only re-presents the novel's story, but also expands its political and ideological context. Nair shows that the film uses a visual approach to depict post-9/11 identity changes, including how Western societies perceive Muslims. The film emphasizes issues such as surveillance, stereotypes, and geopolitical tensions more explicitly than the novel.

Nair's research also highlights that the film's narrative presents a sharper critique of American hegemony in global politics after 9/11. While the novel focuses on Changez's inner journey through dramatic monologues, the film adds political dynamics in the form of depictions of American intervention in Pakistan and other international upheavals.



Thus, this study reinforces the understanding that Changez's identity cannot be separated from global power relations and the ever-changing cultural constructs that emerged after the tragedy of 9/11.

Furthermore, the literature also confirms that the issues of identity and belonging are central to the analysis of this novel. Haolai and Nair both see that changes in society's perception of Muslims create a gap between the characters' desire to be part of the American community and the reality of discrimination they face. In this context, Hamid's novel serves as a social critique of the way the West defines “the Other” in post-9/11 society.

Overall, previous studies show that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an important text in the discourse on Muslim identity after 9/11. The existing literature provides a strong theoretical basis on Islamophobia, identity crisis, and the politics of representation, which then became the basis for analysis in this study. Referring to previous research, this study expands the discussion on how social, political, and psychological pressures shaped Changez's identity transformation after the events of 9/11.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article employs a qualitative analysis of Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, this qualitative analysis a rich exploration of the impact of 9/11 on Changez's life in “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.” Base on Ginocchio by employing a thematic analysis approach and drawing on both primary and secondary sources, the study aimed to uncover the complexities of identity crisis, postcolonialism, and islamophobia in the context of a post-9/11 world (Ginocchio, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are several points discussed by the researcher and explained based on the research results in the novel.

Identity Crisis

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit, with its single vent, and your button-down shirt. True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-ve—are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers

of all nationalities tend to look alike. Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation (Hamid, 2007, p.7).

This quotation from Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* captures a moment of acute cultural and psychological observation by the protagonist, Changez. In this part, Changez's look at the American stranger shows how clearly he understands identity as something that comes from inside and also shaped by society. At first, he really likes Western ideas like education, being professional, and thinking logically. But over time, he starts to feel confused because these ideas don't match up with his own culture and region. The attacks on 9/11 change everything for him, making him question who he really is. Looking at the American stranger represents his split feelings – like W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about, “double consciousness” – the struggle between being Pakistani and trying to act like someone from the West.

His confusion gets worse when he sees that his identity is seen through suspicion and fear. Even though he is smart and behaves in a worldly way, he can't escape being judged based on race. This makes him rethink where he fits in the West. His struggle is both about himself and about bigger issues. It shows how people from former colonies feel torn between liking Western achievements and being upset about its history of ruling over others (S, 1994).

Postcolonial Disillusionment and Resistance

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 about 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. (Hamid, 2007, p.81)

The quotation suggests a moment shows Changez realizing he's had a change in his thinking about identity and power. He now sees that he has taken on the same kind of pride and superiority he used to hate, which shows how deeply colonial influences have affected him. His time at Princeton and his job at an American company show how people from his background try to prove themselves by joining Western systems. But after 9/11, the hostility he faces makes him realize how weak that acceptance really is, pushing him to rethink who he is and where he belongs.

The story also criticizes how modern global systems still favor Western ideas, pretending they're about fairness and opportunity. Changez leaving his job and going back



to Lahore is a sign of him rejecting those systems and trying to take back of his own life and culture. Through his journey, the author explores how people from former colonies struggle to find their own voice in a world that bot includes and pushes them aside. (Said, 2023)

Islamophobia

And will you not remove your jacket? So formal! Now that is not typical of Americans, at least not in my experience. (Hamid, 2007, p.8).

In this part, there's a small example of a cultural mistake that points to a bigger problem called Islamophobia. After September 11th, differences between cultures that were once unimportant started to be seen with suspicion and distrust. Changez's identity as a Muslim made him noticeable in a society that was scared and doubtful. He dealt with quiet exclusion and direct hostility, which is how many Muslims were treated after 9/11 because of their connection to terrorism.

Hamid shows that Islamophobia isn't just about unfair treatment – it's part of a bigger systems that started during the colonial times and supports the belief that Western countries are better than others. Changez's feeling of being left out mirrors the experience of many Muslims in the West – where their identity is reduced to simple stereotypes and their religion is seen as dangerous. His choice to accept his Muslim and Pakistani roots is both a way to protect himself and a political act, showing pride and refusing to be judged based on fear and suspicion.

CONCLUSION(S)

Mohsin Hamid's *"The Reluctant Fundamentalist"* is a powerful story that explores the mental and political effects of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The novel follows the life of Changez, a character who shows how a major global event can shake someone's sense of self, change how they see their place in the world, and highlight the ongoing differences between the West and countries that were once colonized. Changez's journey shows the struggle of many immigrants who try to fit into Western culture but end up feeling rejected by it. His story reflects the idea of "double consciousness" introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois, where someone feels split between their original culture and the culture they have adopted. The 9/11 attacks break this balance, making him realize how racism and prejudice against Muslims have changed how he is seen in society. From a postcolonial point of view, Changez's growing dislike for America

represents a bigger issue with the power structures that still control the world. When he goes back to Lahore, it shows he is reclaiming his cultural roots and rejecting Western ideas of superiority. Hamid uses this to show how people in postcolonial countries are stuck between admiring Western success and being upset about its history of control. The book also shows how Islamophobia became a big part of the conversation after 9/11. Through Changez's experiences with prejudice, Hamid criticizes the way Muslims are often seen as a single group full of threats. By letting Changez tell his own story, Hamid challenges the usual Western media view and lets a Muslim character explain what it's like to be treated as an outsider. In the end, "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" is a deep look at how identity, loss of faith in the West, and fear of Muslims connect in the years after 9/11. Changez's move from fitting in to standing up for himself mirrors the experiences of many others who face barriers to belonging, faith, and national identity. Hamid wants readers to think about how fear and prejudice keep people apart and to take a closer look at how identity politics work in a world still full of misunderstanding and inequality.

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