
Reading Reluctance: An Analysis of Mistrust between Adherents of Fundamentalism and Liberalism with a Focus on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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ABSTRACT

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This paper highlights the variant aspects of what we may call the reluctance of fundamentalism and liberalism in post-postcolonial contemporary Pakistani literature in English, analyzing comparatively both exclusive and inclusive elements of its extensive canvas. This research project began with curiosity regarding an element of reluctance between two characters of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The two main characters of the novel, Changez and an unnamed American visitor represent allegiances to two different schools of thought: Changez to fundamentalism and the American to liberalism. They have nothing in common except reluctance, a reluctance that does not allow them to trust each other and that is what plays a key role in the absence of any positive expectations from the other. This study seeks an answer to the questions: What are largely the causes that separate human beings? Why can't we, human beings, trust one another? Why don't we give everyone the basic right of leading his/her life according to their own deliberate choices? It's a project of its own novel kind and the deductive method is used for this qualitative-cum-analytical research to review Hamid's novel. The findings of the research conclude the role of social misrepresentations to be the main cause of mistrust between the followers of two schools of thought.

Keywords: Reluctance, Mistrust, Social Misrepresentations, Fundamentalism, Neo-liberalism

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This research project began with a curiosity regarding an element of reluctance between two characters of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The two main characters of the novel, Changez and an unnamed American visitor represent allegiances to two different schools of thought: Changez to fundamentalism and the American to liberalism. They have nothing in common except 'reluctance', a reluctance that does not allow them to trust each other, something that plays a key role in the evaporation of any positive expectations from the other. So the question arises: Why is this mistrust there between the two? The literary study of Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, helps determine that the element of reluctance found in personal, social and political identities has separated the people with faith in two different philosophies of life (although neither of these philosophies is defined with a clear, impermeable boundary), and thus expanded the communication gap between them. To comprehend the major cause of mistrust as an infection for humanity, reluctance needs to be defined before moving ahead. The abstract state of mind and heart that is known as reluctance generally means hesitation that expresses unwillingness or disinclination to act. It is an internal resistance caused by timidity or fear of something or someone, a lack of trust. The resistance develops in reaction to some action or event that has engendered mistrust, ambiguity and doubt. Corinna Byer, quoted by Waterman, explains the significance of the identity phenomenon and its recognition in the following words:

The recognition and embracing of one's essential, or primary self often leads to a kind of personal salvation ... such realization and acceptance are essential for a person to move forward in his life and discover his true capabilities. His problems may not be magically solved by embracing his primary self, but life will begin to seem less like a confusing struggle and more like a coherent and meaningful whole. (Waterman, 2015, p. 19)

The research began with the hypothesis that the reluctance may be the main cause of mistrust between two people representing two different schools of thought. So, the initial goal is to find the causes of this element of reluctance that has created a distance between human beings, on the basis of their different world views. One philosophy of life is based upon a religious school of thought while the other is based on liberalism. So we need to understand both philosophies as well as their evolutionary shift from peacefulness for humanity and humanism towards radicalized extremist fundamentalism and polarized supremacist neo-liberalism, both equally exploiting peace and harmony through promoting violent ideologies. When I refer to humanity or humanism and whenever I mention it later, I mean the humanity and humanism in larger sense and not only defined and appropriated by, or connected to, liberalism or fundamentalism. Humanity means humanness, goodness, benevolence, and gentleness, a divine virtue to be compassionate towards fellow human beings irrespective of their race, caste, color or creed. Moreover, acclaimed as an essence of the world religions, humanity also recommends love for the creator of the universe, God Almighty, in gratitude. It is

also tenderness for animals and nature too.

Humanism, apart from its focus on the centrality of the human, is a concept that advocates equity as well as equality, welfare as well as justice, brotherhood as well as friendship, sharing as well as caring, harmony as well as tolerance, healthcare as well as security and so on for all human beings without any privilege or immunity. Nelson Mandela said once: “To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity” (McHenry, CNN, 17 July, 2015). Thus, the concept of humanism is neither liberal nor fundamentalist because it is not in possession of any particular ideology; it rather supports everyone who favors to work for the well-being of humanity without any penalty or immunity. Giannini used Dalai Lama’s famous quote as a title of his book to define humanity as compassion: *Love and Compassion Are Necessities, Not Luxuries. Without Them, Humanity Cannot Survive*. (Giannini, 2019, Title page)

Contrary to this, the ideologies familiarize the policies of their inventors to bring them in power politics. On the basis of the issues of identity, a “social common sense” (Punyani, 2015, p. 110) is developed hostile to the other school of thought. That sense helps develop radicalization and polarization with the purpose of increasing communication gap and disliking for and between the followers of the different school of thought. This misrepresented familiarization helps them obtain their political targets by very popular ‘divide and rule’ policy of the neoliberals and revival of caliphate hood policy by the fundamentalists whom we may call them Islamists. The enthusiasts of both the policies serve their masters to bring them in power politics.

These social differences help demolish the mutual harmony of the notions of humanity and humanism. Both sides have reached the extreme point of zero tolerance regarding each other and are, directly, not only in conflict but also at war against each other. One side calls it a ‘war on terror’ for the so-called democratic norms to prevail, and the other side is in a so-called holy war for spreading terror in the name of religion, most often Islam. This research, developed over the past few years around post-9/11 times, through different international conferences and fieldwork conducted in South Asia (Pakistan) and the Gulf region (Iran and Iraq), indicates that this global war game, be it war *on* terror or war *for* terror, has got nothing to do with religion or democracy or humanity or peace in the world. Instead, it is a political game of thrones being played by both fundamentalists and neo-liberals on the bases of misquotations, misinterpretations, and misrepresentations. The different fundamentalists, who I would prefer to refer to as ‘Islamists’ in this context, are radicalizing the public by promoting jihadist ideology by dissimulating the contextual references to fight an obligatory holy war in order to spread or safeguard Islam or at least geographical boundaries of their Islamic State. While in Islam, Jihad indicates, specifically, the struggle of a true believer in the way of Almighty Allah. It refers to the struggle or effort for the righteous objectives against oppression, against evil, and for spreading good in society, for

justice, for equality, for peace, for prosperity, for truth, for harmony, and, in short, for humanity and humanism. S. Manzar Abbas Zaidi defines Jihad in the following words: “The word *jihad* derives from the Arabic root *jhd*, signifying intense struggle or effort” (Zaidi, 2009, n.d.). Ibn Rushd divides Jihad into four kinds: “Jihad by heart; Jihad by tongue; Jihad by hand; and Jihad by the sword.” (Kabbani & Mendricks, ISCA, n.d.). On the other side, neo-liberals are polarizing societies through Islamophobia by validating the same radicalized, extremist version of the Islamists and overlooking the peace-loving majority of the Muslims. What is common in both ideologies is the bloody war, war waged for terrifying people into following their ideologies: (a) the ideology of Islamism and (b) the ideology of liberalism or, perhaps more accurately, neo-liberalism.

The notion of fundamentalism basically refers to the movements that were started to reconnect to the fundamental religious beliefs and faiths by bringing the basic religious practices back in day-to-day life. Later on, the same notion evolved into ideological program to motivate others, to reconnect to the fundamental religious beliefs, faiths and practices, through invitations and awareness initially. The popularity of such motivational invitations and awareness brought the fundamentalists into the limelight and they became powerful stakeholders on the political scene as the power is necessary to rule and a mandate to rule can only be gained through politics. When it comes to politics, especially power politics, it is very important is to be in power. So, the fundamentalists started using religion and religious terms as tools to access power. Henceforth, the role of fabrication and misrepresentations begins to gain more and more currency and attract more manpower to their side. When they radicalize the common masses to fight against the neo-liberal powers, they ensure them that they are serving religion and God.

The term “neo-liberalism” is one of the vaguest and overused terms in journalism and academia. It seems to refer to an ideological movement that is often blamed for a variety of grievances about the world today: inequality, poverty, climate change, deregulation, globalization, and the proliferation of money in politics. According to some specialists of economic history, there are at least seven schools of neo-liberalism. Some of the older schools are like the First Chicago School (Frank Knight, Henry Simons, Jacob Viner), the Second Chicago School (Milton Friedman, Aaron Director, George Stigler), the Italian or Bocconi School (Maffeo Pantaleoni, Luigi Einaudi), and more marginal schools like the Virginia School (James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock), itself influenced by the Italian school. According to certain writers, “neo-liberalism” originates from a small academic conference held in Paris in 1938, now referred to as the Walter Lippmann Colloquium. The term’s current familiarity is mainly derived from the 1978–79 lectures of French philosopher, Michel Foucault, who seemed not to adopt the overwhelmingly derogatory implication of its neo-colonial uses. Foucault did however cite the Walter Lippmann Colloquium as a central moment of its origin. Referring to the French-language transcripts of the 1938 proceedings, Foucault noted that “in the course of this colloquium the specific propositions peculiar to

neo-liberalism are defined. . . . In all the texts of the neo-liberals you find the theme that the government is active, vigilant, and intervening in a liberal regime.” (Magness, 10 December 2018, n.d.). This neo-liberalism with a political agenda is taking the world towards neo-colonialism that is a modern way of occupying the economies for the sake of imperialism or, in Roy’s words, “neo-imperialism”. (Roy, 2016, p. 89)

Contemporary Anglophone Pakistani fiction has accordingly engaged with the neo-liberal and fundamentalist themes. David Waterman says, “The attacks of 9/11 and its far-reaching consequences are a benchmark in contemporary Pakistani fiction” (Waterman, 2015, p. 6). Here, in Hamid’s novel, this internal resistance to trust others is caused by the ideological adhesions of the characters, the ideology of fundamentalism and the ideology of liberalism. Although not necessarily negative all the time, these ideologies have divided humans into binaries: the fundamentalists and the liberals, the brown and the white, the religious and the secular, depriving them of plurality, commonality, and unity, the essentials of a carefree, peaceful society. These divisions, according to Waterman, “are more complex than simple geographic or ethnic differences” (Waterman, p.22). Serge Moscovici and his elaboration of social representation theory and how that works in a normative, prescriptive manner, establishing ‘common sense’ within a particular community, facilitating communication and group identification – yet often at the expense of critical thinking as the unfamiliar is made familiar – provides the analytical tool of social misrepresentation, essential for this paper. Thus, the argument will be constructed under the theoretical framework based on Serge Moscovici’s theories of social representations which are used to familiarise the non-existing unfamiliar or un-familiarize the existing familiar by nuancing them as social misrepresentations from social representations.

The element of reluctance in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

A writer, especially a novelist, writes a piece of writing and leaves upon the readers to interpret according to their reception of ideas. Thus, Hamid is interpreted, referenced and quoted here the way he is perceived by the reader (the author of the paper in this case). The very beginning of the novel introduces Changez’s doubt towards an unknown American who he suspects “to be on a mission” (Hamid, 2007, p.2) ignoring the possibility of his being merely a tourist like many others. But his ‘typical’ American attitude with a stubborn look about him gives Changez a perception of him as an untrustworthy fellow. The American’s suspicion towards Changez is revealed soon after he prefers sitting with his “back so close to the wall” (p. 2). His gesture shows him to be more self-conscious and more careful to deal with any misadventure that may possibly be caused by Changez, an untrustworthy brown man, an apparently fundamentalist fellow with a beard. Sitting with his ‘back so close to the wall’ adds another question to Changez’s list of suspicions, as an ordinary man would have preferred benefitting from the “intermittent breeze” (p. 2) which makes the warm afternoons of Lahore

more pleasant. The American sits without removing jacket, which increases Changez's suspicion, as "that is not typical for Americans," (p.3) according to his experience of them. At the same time, this gesture expresses the American's self-conscious behavior.

Observing him being self-conscious and uneasy, Changez tries to build a friendly environment by sharing the accounts of his life when he was in the USA. At the arrival of the waiter, the American seems worried and tries to reach under his jacket. Changez, noticing his unusual movement, ensures him "this burly fellow is merely our waiter" (p.5), a fundamentalist reassuring the liberal who becomes "ill at ease" (p. 108) at the appearance of the waiter who belongs to the tribe that lives on the Pak-Afghan border and which has suffered from American military offensives. While Changez doesn't overtly express other suspicions about the American, he nevertheless thinks to himself that he looked like "undercover security agents" with an "armpit holster" (p. 139) under his jacket. Instead, he reassures himself by assuming that the American may simply be trying to reach for his wallet to pay bill, another expression by the fundamentalist to comfort the liberal. Later, in their conversation, Changez says, "I believe we have passed through too much together to begin to raise questions of this nature [the questions that show mistrust] at so late a stage" (p. 152).

The causes of reluctance

Being uncomfortable is the major cause of reluctance. And the reluctant fundamentalist was uncomfortable with his being poor, subordinate, less privileged, and needy, having an inferiority complex and, most of all, his being lost. He feels uncomfortable for what he calls his "complexities." The complexities of every Muslim losing status in the world: from being rich in the past to being poor in the present, being self-dependent in the history to becoming dependent and needy, being ruler of the world to being colonized, being in a higher rank to being in a lower rank, being learned to being ignorant, being humble to being aggressive, being tolerant to being violent, being moderate to being extremist, and, thus, being a peace-loving man to being a terrorist.

These complexities cause "a temper" (Hamid, 2007, p. 9) and Changez's joke about his dream, "one day to be the dictator of Islamic republic with nuclear capability" (p.29) shocks his fellows. It is a joke, of course, that has to be explained by a fundamentalist to his liberal friends. But is it really a joke? Or perhaps, as Hamid puts it, some internal "sense of longing" (p.71), a desire to regain "what we had had and lost", the status that the Muslims enjoyed before being colonized. The difference is between civilizations. Civilizations rise and fall and, of course, technologically advanced civilization of the powerful "troubles" (p. 34) the colonized when a comparison of two civilizations is made.

The Western colonizers have universities with budgets greater than the national budgets for the education of the colonized nations. The postcolonial era,

having left poverty in its wake, kept the former colonies busy struggling for basic necessities of life, with no thought of rebuilding the planned cities with proper sanitation systems. Such comparison brings embarrassment as well as resentfulness to those who are now in this position: “Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians” (p. 34). Moreover, the typical American tone of condescension strikes “negative chords” (p. 55) even if it points out the real problems of Pakistan and the Pakistani people, particularly when it comes to fundamentalism. But now this problem is of Muslims and Pakistanis, Changez asserts, to deal with, as they are told. They are “touchy” (p.56). They are touchy about where they come from and where they belong. Everyone is. It’s natural. Because it makes them “so alive” (p. 81). And it hurts when they are told about their fundamentalism, particularly by the ones who played a recurring role in entangling them in the complexities of the current extremist “wahhabi brand” of fundamentalism (Chossudovsky, 2018). This is what Hamid calls “Third World sensibility” (p. 67). The sensibility that makes us, Pakistanis, feel “disoriented” (p. 66) in the company of *goras*, the people of the developed West, making them closer to the people of color, the people of the Third World. And, maybe, it was this sense of disorientation that led many protagonists to feel pleased, initially, at the collapse of New York’s World Trade Centre. This pleasure was not at the loss of so many lives, instead, it was for watching America, visibly, brought to her knees (p. 73).

Changez has to reassure the American several times that “there is nothing to fear” (p. 122). He even tastes the food from every plate. To assure him that the tea is not “poisoned” (p.11), Changez exchanges the cups to make him more comfortable; to make him “not look so suspicious” (p. 11) as the stiffness appears in his body language when the waiter brings tea and *jalebi* (a sub-continental dessert) for them. The American looks “distracted” (p. 22) at the appearance of a man with a beard. Beard, an identity marker of many religions, is suspected because of its being connected to the extremists and, hence, potentially harmful for the liberal.

But the exchange is not one-sided; the fundamentalist is suspicious in the same way. The mobile phone with its capability of “communicating via satellite” reveals the fear of new western technology as well as its potential use against them as has been practiced by the colonial liberals. Often “a few words are more than sufficient” to understand the concerns of the liberals why they opt “to write a text message” (p. 30) instead of calling, in the presence of the fundamentalist and being in “unfamiliar surroundings” (p.31) favorable for ‘fundamentalism’. These nervous gestures with an “unusual telephone” and the constant checking with the “company” (p. 115) alert the fundamentalist too and he considers that the liberal is there on a particular mission. Both are uncertain, uncertain about being “predator or prey”. Both notice “the frequency and purposefulness” (p.31) in the other’s glance moving from one point to the next. Suspicion is in their heads, enhances the sense of reluctance and, thus, they extend mistrust towards each other under the

influence of ‘situated knowledge’ through misrepresentations that help in familiarizing and fixing a meaning. This is in line with Serge Moscovici’s theory of social representation that has been explained earlier and is affirmed by Duveen to see things “this way rather than that way” (Duveen qtd. in Waterman, 2015, p.27).

The American recoils when a beggar approaches him. At his refusal to help the beggar, Changez appreciates his wisdom of discouraging begging, but the appreciation sounds sarcastic when he says: “it is far better to donate to charities that address the causes of poverty than to him, a creature who is merely its symptom” (Hamid, 2007, p.40). This sarcasm finds an echo in Marence’s research about charity organizations that serve the propaganda of the West, according to her point of view (Bart-Williams, 2015).

Trust needs a level playing field before it begins to build up. The “scar on [a fundamentalist’s] forearm” (Hamid, 2007, p. 46) could be suspected for his involvement in some training camp. Even the momentary electric blackout is alarming enough for the liberal to ‘jump’ out of the seat, with the hands in ‘jacket’, as though he gets ready to respond to any possible threat. Reluctance is visible. The fundamentalist is curious too, and asks the liberal a couple of times “to reveal” the “*business*” (p. 64) and purpose of his presence there in Lahore, but in vain.

The reluctance of an inferiority-complex identity

Hamid highlights Changez’s complexity regarding his national identity during his visit to Manila, the Philippines, where he suspects his Pakistani-ness was not visible because of his expensive dress, expense account, and—most of all—his American colleagues. He attempts “to act and speak . . . like an American”, compromising his dignity to share the respect for status “as members of the officer class of global business”, and is reluctant to reveal his nationality; instead, he prefers to relate himself to America by saying “I was from New York” (Hamid, 2007, p. 65) in reply to the question about his origins. And it is embarrassing for him since he has many achievements, despite his young age, to be proud of. His ‘genuine aptitude’ is like a ‘shark’ for his work and ‘glowing reviews’ for his ‘performance’. That was what had ‘ashamed’ him while acting like an American. It was easy for him to recognize that New York was wealthier than the city of his birth but harder “to swallow” was the fact of being behind the “laggard” (p. 64, 65), that is, Manila. It was this inferiority complex that made him smile on seeing the collapse of the World Trade Centre.

It was not that he was pleased with the killing of thousands of people but it was the “symbolism” of bringing America, “the leader of the pack” (pp.73, 65), to his knees. It was not to ‘gloat over’ the misfortune of other countries but to feel joy over “munition laying waste the structures” (p.73) of the enemies during war. This clearly shows that: 1. the fundamentalists consider the liberals their enemies whether they are formally at war with them or not, 2. the US as neo-colonizer with its supremacist approach—“We are America . . .the mightiest civilization the world

has ever known; you have slighted us; beware of our wrath” (p.79)—is disliked by the postcolonial nations who had experienced the traumas of colonization, 3. The mutual suspicions will forever keep them “separated”. A “respectful nod of approval” (p.85) from the dominant civilization is sufficient for the survivors of colonization. Through Changez, Hamid reminds us and the neoliberals in particular, about the glorious history of the Muslims:

We were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aids and handouts... We were not the crazed and destitute radicals. . . . But rather saints and poets and - yes - conquering kings. We [the Muslims] built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city [Lahore] and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramps for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country [America] was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent. (pp.101-102)

Missing persons as universal phenomenon

Hamid touches the sensitive issue of missing persons as a universal phenomenon. The neo-colonizer’s “self-righteous rage” led it to set up “shadowy detention centers”. The “armor of denial” by a well-established Princeton graduate for the disappearance of Muslims was an attempt to ignore “the FBI raiding mosques, shops and even people’s houses” (Hamid, 2007, pp.94, 95). It could not happen to him, he presumes, as it only happens to the helpless poor. But the reality was different. “Things always change” (p.96), and “Power comes from becoming change” (pp.96, 97). Thus, he decides to stop selling himself and his skills anymore to contribute to a nation that discriminates against his community for being Muslims. That is because he heard the “tales of discriminations Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world” (p.120). Moreover, he is agonized by the thought that the country he belongs to “was condemned to atrophy” (p.97) with a repetitive demand to do more. America’s perpetual intrusion and intervention in the affairs of other states is oppressive. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, African countries, Afghanistan, and now Iran: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed Asia and Africa, “America played a central role”; and to implement American imperialism, the US uses “finance” (p.156) as a primary level of influence. Thus, Changez’s refusal “to participate any longer in facilitating American designs of domination is justifiable. It is a No to exploitation and a No to capitalism; it is a No to imperialism and a No to neocolonialism.

Effects of colonial disillusionment

Changez feels shamed at the poor condition of his provenance. Actually, he is looking at himself and the condition of his home and homeland with the eyes of “a foreigner”, like the particular type of “unsympathetic American” (Hamid, 2007, p.124). In spite of the assistance Pakistan had provided America in Afghanistan, “America would not fight at our side” (p.127). Between India and Pakistan, the US

was maintaining “a strict neutrality” (p.143), a position that favors the larger. Waterman elaborates this sense of complexity in US-Pak relations in which the US exploits “Pakistan to accomplish strategic goals [and] then abandon[s] the Pakistanis when those goals are achieved, with no consideration of long-term consequences.” (Waterman, 2015, p.6). This is humiliating and humility breeds mistrust. Mistrust causes reluctance and reluctance creates distance, the distance between the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, the colonists and the colonized. This supports the arguments regarding colonization (again)of the postcolonial countries in that there is no ‘post-’ in postcolonial ideology. The colonization never ended; it is the same. We may call it re-colonization. Transitional forms of colonialism occurred during the Cold War period. While some see it as the period of decolonization, neo-global-colonization may be a better term for this era because the first colonization is not yet over; it still exists with a new mask (of imperialism); the mask of globalization or we may refer to it as economic colonization or neo-global-colonization. Secondly, even if the process of decolonization takes place, everything cannot possibly be completely decolonized, and it is because “Humanity’s respite [i]s brief” (Hamid, 2007, p.178).

Coming back to the idea of disillusionment, America is respected for its “progress” (Mansoor, 2007) and development in technology. Changez expresses his appreciation for the US because he “had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward” but, after 9/11, it was determined to focus on the past for the first time. And the world was disillusioned by its “determination to look back” (Hamid, 2007, p.115), to fight a so-called war on terror, the war to terrorize the terrorists. The war has terrorized and killed more civilians than terrorists, exposing “American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism”. According to a neo-colonial definition of terrorism, it refers only to the politically motivated killings of civilians by killers “not wearing the uniform of soldiers”. And neo-colonialism is in uniform, the well-tailored suits of business and administration. The killers in neo-colonial uniforms are “justified in bringing so many deaths” (p.178) to the world. No country wreaks death so promptly upon the dwellers of other countries as America does. The calamity of this so-called war on terror is that it may target any individual, organization, or nation that is weak and hostile to American interests. For their part, the powerful rivals and competitors are dealt with through diplomacy, the Cold War policy against Russia in the past, and China in the present, for example. As Hamid suggests, “[s]uch an America had to be stopped in the interest not only of the rest of humanity, but also in [their] own” (p.168).

Cultural reluctance of fundamentalism

Changez’s “focus on the fundamentals” (Hamid, 2007, p.168) upsets his tranquility when he sees American soldiers landing in Afghanistan, “a fellow Muslim nation” (p.98). His ‘focus on fundamentals’ has been an asset for the company he was working for. Then how could he remain calm when confronted with the invasion of a country with which he has a threefold connection? The friend,

the neighbor, and the Muslim. All three relations are very important to us Pakistanis. The neighborhood means a lot to us. Friendship within the neighborhood is even more important. And Islam binds us far closer to each other than ever before. So, it is harder to remain untroubled if a neighbor who is both a close friend and a Muslim is in trouble. Changez is reluctant to share his feelings with Jim because “at the level of human beings [their] connection was nil” (p.144) because Jim was the boss. Changez’s “financial future” cannot take precedence over “the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present” (p.145).

Capitalist colonizer’s mindset

Hamid’s critique of the US for its neocolonial imperialism, accompanied by a popular narrative of freeing the masses from their dictatorial regimes as self-appointed liberators, is not an alien prospect to the world. Just like sugaring one’s tongue before undertaking the bloodiest of tasks, neo-colonialism is there in the garb of liberation and democracy. The psychological resemblance between the supremacist neoliberals and extremist fundamentalists’ inferiority complexes, according to Hamid, is that both are reluctant to share the agony of which they are victims. The fundamentalists’ agony is that of decline, losing their glory and rule at the hand of neo-liberals while neo-liberals’ agony is the challenged glory (epitomized by the 9/11 attacks) of current imperialists at the hands of weak factions of ex-subjects. Changez, as Hamid’s mouthpiece, points out Americans’ unwillingness “to reflect upon the shared pain that united [them] with those who attacked [them]” (p.168). Uncertain and undefined goals of the Afghanistan’s invasion baffle every human soul, like Hamid’s, that carries even a minimum measure of empathy for human suffering caused by wars. What are the neoliberals concerned more about: “A time of unquestioned dominance? Of safety? Of moral certainty” (p.115)? Like Hamid’s doubts about America’s unclear goals, Amna Mufti, an Urdu writer, and journalist, also questions the undefined “*ahdaaf*, (targets)” of the Afghanistan invasion, calling the war “*zyada be maqsad*, (more pointless)” than the Vietnam War:

Amreeki sar zameen par Al Qaeda kay hamlon ko rokna? Osama bin Laden ko girftar kar kay marna? Mulla Umer ki hakoomat ka khatema? Roos kay paros main jang jari rakhna ya duniya main yun he apni dada geeri qa'im rakhna?

My Translation:

Was it for halting Al Qaeda’s further attacks on American soil? Capturing and killing Osama Bin Laden? Ending Mullah Umar’s Government? Setting up an environment of war in Russia’s neighborhood? Or reaffirming consistency of its dominance to the world?” (Mufti, 2019, BBC)

Mufti analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of ‘Afghan Jihad’ for the US in her column for BBC Urdu. She sarcastically notes that the US has achieved its defined or undefined goals as it is ready to quit Afghanistan. First of all, if the US goal was

to ensure the security of its soil, Zalmay Khalilzad is pleading with the Taliban during US-Taliban negotiations to ensure that there will be no attack on US soil in the future after the US exits Afghanistan. While Haibatullah Akhundzada, a Taliban representative's response made it clear that the Taliban will neither forget the sufferings of the war caused by the US nor abandon its so-called Jihad. Moreover, there is a noticeable rise in Islamist extremism and militancy from 2001 to the present day. If a goal is achieved by "Orchestrating an entire war in Afghanistan . . . legitimizing through [the US's] actions the invasion of weaker states by more powerful ones" (Hamid, 2007, p.131), one wonders if it was worth the heavy price. Since the US "has not been involved in fighting a war "on its own soil" (p.127) in the living memory, it is no longer aware of the monstrosity of war in its close-to-home sense.

Secondly, if one understands that the eighteen-year-long war was fought to capture and kill Osama Bin Laden, he was indeed killed in 2007 and, according to "hearsay" (Mufti, 2019, BBC), his dead body was thrown into the ocean. Perhaps the objective was to 'drown' Osama Bin Laden's dead body in revenge. A third possible goal could be ending Mullah Umar's or the Taliban's rule, but the most predictable outcome is that the Taliban would be in a position of setting up its government as a result of successful US-Taliban negotiations. Is accepting the Taliban as a major stakeholder of the country's political system really a "mission accomplished"? And what about goals that are further down the line, such as establishing unrest in Russia's neighborhood? If negotiation was the only real solution, then, why in 2019 and not in 2001? Why not before the horror of Apache helicopters, daisy-cutter bombs, and drones making innocent Afghans' lives miserable?

The Russian army left Afghanistan, just as Britain left India. The American army invaded Afghanistan just as the Russian army did. (Mufti, 2019, BBC). The colonizers need to realize the fact that nothing is eternal in this world. The imperial powers of yesterday are mourning today for their lost glory. The imperial powers of today are going to mourn tomorrow. Communism or capitalism, extremist fundamentalism or neo-colonialism, no imperial ideology of dominance is going to last forever against human liberty.

Neo-colonial imperialism develops the economy as an animal that evolves. For its evolution, it needs the brain, muscles, blood, and sweat. And the cheapest blood and sweat of the people come from "colonial, semi-colonial or dependent countries" (Guevara, 1961). The neo-colonizers exploit the blood and sweat of the weak until their needs are met, and when their treasures start overflowing, they imposes travel bans and Brexits to keep the unnecessary extras away. Hamid explains the same in the following words: "The economy's an animal. . . . It evolves. First it needed a muscle. Now all the blood it could spare was rushing to its brain. . . . You're blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need any more" (Hamid, 2007, pp.96-97). The imperialists are trained to recognize others' style of thought, harness their agenda, and redirect it to achieve their desired

outcome; indeed one might describe it as a form of mental judo for the business of politics. It is the thirst of one's narrative, as Hamid suggests, that determines the significance, not the precision of one's details (p. 118).

Changez's psychological shift

Changez becomes disillusioned observing the humiliation imposed by the US through the use of drones. He returns to America leaving his country and people behind in the time of need for something less worthy, a big salary and a woman who does not love him. He is disgusted with himself for being a coward, escaping from the situation when the sovereignty of his country was being violated in the name of a war on terror by a neo-colonial power. In this state of disillusionment, he decides to keep his beard, not wanting "to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters" (p.130), the Americans, who were violating the sovereignty of his nation. The disillusionment doubles after facing 'verbal abuse' and becoming unpopular among his colleagues for having a beard. In addition, "Fucking Arab" types of racist behavior are enough to elicit reactionary responses, with "sufficient violence to shatter the bones" (p.118). All this makes him uncertain of "where [he] belong[s]", and he comes to know that lost identities are fragile. Changez's psychologically "Inflective journey" (p.146) leads him to return to Pakistan to rejoin his original identity, disassociating "himself with the American dream" (Chamberline & Piestrak).²

To conclude, socio-cultural complexities, particularly in societies which have been designated as fundamentalist societies, and the imperial supremacist approach leaving humiliation to the imperial subjects, have created a cleavage that is increasing day by day, dividing humanity into 'ours' and 'theirs,' declaring 'us' as human while placing 'others' in a "zone of exception" (Fradinger, 2010, p.17). This kind of attitude blurs even the borders of legality and illegality (Waterman, 2015, p.139). It is this blurred view that does not let people see each other as humans, whether speaking of fundamentalism or liberalism. This view has led people to extremist ideologies of white supremacy, radicalization, and Islamophobia versus humiliated 'primary selves' with displaced identities, radicalization, and Islamism. Islamist fundamentalism, neo-colonialism, and their misrepresentations are all around in the twenty-first century, accompanied by zero levels of trust for each other. All the necessary components are available on both sides, ready to defeat peace through violence. Consequently, they cannot keep goodness or badness exclusively to themselves. The world is like the human body with its various organs;

²This phenomenon of psychological shift may be explored in detail here: Naqvi, S.S. (2020). 'Displaced Identities and Construction of Borders' in V. Mariet, M. Chandra, L. Taufani, M. Raibaud & D. Waterman (Eds), *Changing Societies: Cultures in Movement in Coastal Cities* (pp. 106-127), UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-5275-5452-8>

if one part of body is in pain, it is felt in the whole body. This paper, which has perhaps raised questions more than it answers, hopefully provides the groundwork for further research to highlight the role of social misrepresentations of fundamentalism and neo-colonialism through the euphemisms of Islamism, democracy, and liberalism. Blinded by power, we don't learn from history and, therefore, mistrust between the powerful and the oppressed stays intact.

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The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

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