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**Dehumanization of Muslim Identity after 9/11: An Orientalist Gaze at Mohsin Hamid's  
Novel and Film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

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**Abstract:**

*Edward Said's Orientalism examines how the West constructs and reinforces a distorted image of the East, shaping perceptions to fit its own ideological and political interests. Said highlights how Western literary and cultural representations perpetuate these biases, influencing global power structures and shaping interactions between the two worlds. Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist weaves elements of Orientalism, offering a metafictional critique of Western hegemony, Islamophobia, and the dehumanization of Muslim identity in a post-9/11 world. The novel challenges dominant Western narratives by presenting an alternative perspective, forcing readers to question the reliability of the Western gaze. This paper examines The Reluctant Fundamentalist in light of Said's theory, analyzing how Hamid subverts Orientalist discourse through two key themes—Orientalism and identity. By exposing stereotypes and the West's desire to define and control the East, the novel critiques the rigid binaries of East and West. Ultimately, this paper argues that Hamid's novel serves as a counter-narrative, reclaiming agency for marginalized voices and illustrating the complexities of identity in a globalized, postcolonial world.*

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**Keywords:** Identity, Orientalism, September 11, 2011, Orient, Dehumanization, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Mohsin Hamid

## **Introduction**

The post-9/11 political scene of the world has changed significantly as a deluge of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, transformed the views and discourses about Muslims, especially in the West. The idea of New Colonialism gave rise to a political worldview that fostered inequality and marginalized the identities of immigrants and emigrants. This period was followed by the unprecedented flourishing of Islamophobic rhetoric with solid grounding in the Orientalism-based historical context. The influential work of Edward Said, *Orientalism*, explains that the West created a flawed vision of the Eastern cultures, and characterized them as inherently inferior, exotic, and a threat, that is, a binary construction known as East and West (Said, 2003, pp. 30–35). Said asserts that such a discourse has justified colonial and imperial projects and has shaped modern power relations, people's identities, and relationships between states.

The origins of Orientalism date back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, particularly through France's early interactions with the Orient. These interactions, shaped by European exploration and the Crusades, left their mark on art and on how cultures were depicted. However, Orientalism was not simply an artistic movement; it was a means by which Europeans interpreted unfamiliar cultures. This allowed them to construct an image of the "Other" based on their own perceptions rather than on objective reality.

The most influential theorist to whom the changing causes of Oriental identity are attributed is Edward Said, who, among others, believes that “the Orient was nearly a European creation, a product of the European imagination and ever since olden times, a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and incredible experiences. The Orient is not merely geographically close to Europe; it is also the locus of its richest and oldest colonies, the origin of its civilizations and languages, its civilizing challenger, and one of its most frequently repeated images of the Other. Moreover, the Orient has assisted in defining Europe (or the West) as its opposite image, concept, character, and experience. But of all this Orient, there is not a single bit that is free from imagination. The European material civilization is inseparable from the Orient. Orientalism conveys and signifies this aspect culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse, with its supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrine, and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial fashions —not to mention colonial governors, mayors, chief constables, and even the colonial sense of the collective noun ‘the masses’ itself. One cannot seriously study or understand ideas, cultures, and histories without simultaneously studying their force, or, rather, their distribution of power. It is one thing to think the Orient was created, or rather, as I like to term it, Orientalized; it is another to think that these things exist because they must exist. The connection between the Occident and the Orient is one of power, dominance, and complex hegemony. The above phenomenon was presented largely as a positive construction (Said, 1982, pp. 30-35)

This Orientalist phenomenon gained further momentum after 9/11, when a climate of suspicion and aggression towards Muslim communities was created. The immigrants encountered challenges in settling in America and achieving economic, political, and social independence. However, the immigrants' identity remained fragile and uncertain despite their attempts at

joining the new society (Alzubairi, 2019, p. 19). Western media portrayed Muslims as terrorists and religious extremists. This led to the development of negative stereotypes and enhanced the environment of fear and isolation (Kumar, 2012, pp. 34-36; Shaheen, 2012, p. 45). Thus, the identity of Muslim immigrants from the Global South remained fragile and precarious, as they faced difficulties in belonging and being accepted in Western society. Hall states that identity is dynamic and constantly changing and that it is affected by various social, cultural, and political factors. It remains a contested space of struggle and negotiation (Hall, 1992, p. 70).

Identity is about the qualities, traits, relationships, roles, and group affiliations that define who we are (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 69). According to Hall (1992), identity is a flexible, inadequate concept that appears as an open space or a question mark in the face of shifting discourses. Our identities are formed, shaped, and declared within society, under the interrelated impacts of social, economic, cultural, and political factors that cannot be disentangled from what creates and sustains socioeconomic groupings. From this perspective, identity politics and class politics are not necessarily antagonistic, although they operate differently; they can be fellow travelers in the collective struggle over political life.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* appears as a literary rebuttal to these trends, detailing the complexity of Muslim identity in the post-9/11 era. By showing the experiences of Changez, the main character, a Muslim immigrant who struggles in a world dominated by Orientalist images, Hamid explains why the issues of the Muslim world remain extremely multifaceted and contradictory. Having initially symbolized the American dream, Changez's successful integration into American society takes a severe turn after 9/11, and he is progressively sidelined, monitored, judged, and criticized as a result (Hamid, 2007, pp. 65–130). Hamid critiques Western imperialism and simplistic civilizational narratives, in which the otherness of Muslims is framed as the dangerous Other, and he actively challenges Orientalist images and stereotypes through a narrative structure that disrupts the classic Western gaze (Iqbal et al., 2011, pp. 242–244).

The visual and narrative strategies employed by Mira Nair in the film version also enhance these themes and underline the instability and ambiguity that the condition of Muslim identity has assumed in the wake of 9/11. The film presents a powerful image of the inner and outer conflicts of Changez, who struggles to free his own image from the narratives propagated by mainstream media in the West (Ramanathan, 2018, pp. 120–123). In both the novel and film versions, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is critically explored through the lens of Orientalism and identity. Employing Edward Said's theorizations, the study explicates how Hamid's novel subverts Orientalist stereotypes, reclaiming agency for marginalized voices and revealing the complexities of identity formation in a global, postcolonial milieu.

Destabilizing the gaze of the West on the Islamic World in general, and on Pakistan in particular, at the beginning of the novel, we find Changez as an immigrant in the United States, attending Princeton and securing a prestigious and highly coveted entry-level job with a business consulting firm in New York City, Underwood Samson. One might be inclined to believe that he embodied the American Dream, having worked tirelessly to achieve it, and that he had a bright, unlimited future. However, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, his perception of the

United States changed, and he was targeted with racism and high-level surveillance. By the end, it is uncertain whether this conversational partner was a CIA assassin sent to Pakistan to eliminate Changez. Changez, framed as a novel Muslim immigrant and anti-hero, chooses to resist the reductionist discourse that demonizes all Muslims as religious extremists and backward zealots.

### **Thesis Statement**

This paper discusses *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, both the novel and the film, in the light of Edward Said's Orientalism and the theme of identity in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, through the protagonist Changez's narration and his interactions with American society.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore how the novel and the film challenge and subvert traditional Orientalist discourses within the post-9/11 socio-political context.
2. To identify and analyze how and to what extent the narrative and cinematic portrayals of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* represent the constructed Muslim identity, using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenge and undermine traditional Orientalist discourses in the post-9/11 socio-political environment, in both the novel and the film?
2. How and to what extent do the narrative and cinematic portrayals of the novel represent the constructed Muslim identity using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism?

### **Methodology**

The study takes a qualitative approach, combining textual and theoretical analysis to examine *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the lens of Said's Orientalism in the context of post-9/11 events. The study analyzes how the author constructs, challenges, and negotiates Muslim identity, particularly as revealed in Changez's narrative and his interactions with Western characters. It involves a textual analysis of certain elements of the novel to examine Changez's developing self-perception and how he is perceived by Westerners. The study also examines the movie adaptation of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to examine how visual and narrative techniques, cinematography, and dialogue construct Changez's identity in the film. The study employs Said's Orientalism in examining how Muslim identities have been constructed in the post-9/11 context, including how there is still a perceived identity of being "Other" as well as being perceived as exotic, backwards, or even violent. The study is a concise analysis of identity, Orientalism, and media biases in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. By incorporating different postcolonial approaches, the methodology will lay a foundation for a more nuanced and academically rigorous discourse.

The Two-Nation Theory asserts that because Muslims and Hindus are different from one another in terms of religion, culture, society, and daily life, a separate Muslim country where

Muslims are free to express who they are must be established. The idea originated with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Later, this thought was refined by the efforts of Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Chaudhry Rahmat Ali, who gave it defined limits and a "name" in the context of the prospective Muslim state (Shahbaz, 2020). The individual who brought the Two-Nation Theory to the levels of a defined plan and filled its gaps with his efforts was Muhammad Ali Jinnah. As a result of this theoretical and practical effort, the "Two-Nation Theory brought forth the emergence of the new force of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, in the shape of a new country.

### **Literature Review**

In the wake of the catastrophic post September 11 tragedy, the discourse encompassing the representation of Muslim identity has been a critical topic for scholarly researchers, especially in relation to Western literature, film, and media. The review of academic perspectives explores the major academic contributions that investigate the themes of Orientalism, post-9/11 identity fabrication, and Western media representation, with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and its film as a focal point. Through these resources, this review examines the discussions on how the 9/11 attacks arguably transformed America into pre- and post- 9/11 America and left a tragic impact on the lives of Muslims and facilitated the derogatory perceptions of Islam and Muslims. Edward Said's pioneering project, *Orientalism* (1978), provides a conceptual framework for understanding Western perceptions of the Muslim "Other". Said asserts that the West views the East as an extraneous, subservient, and often hazardous entity, an impression perpetuated in literature, politics, and the media. Philosophers such as Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Robert J.C. Young, in *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), have elaborated on Said's perception, analyzing the influence of colonial narratives on identity politics.

Jeff Raynor, in his thesis, critiques the predominance of the notion that there is a deeply rooted and irreconcilable hostility between the cultures of Eastern and Western civilizations, particularly after the 9/11 events. He criticizes the idea of a clash of civilizations promoted by theorists such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, claiming that it simplifies a complicated history and promotes dangerous stereotypes. Relying on scholars such as Edward Said and Mahmood Mamdani, Raynor criticizes how academic, political, and media discourse has helped solidify the East and West as monolithic, opposing entities. Notably, Raynor unravels the idea that Islamic extremism is an inherent, unalterable phenomenon of Muslim cultures. He, however, provides historical evidence that most of these groups, now regarded as threats, were in fact created and equipped by the then Western powers, particularly during the Cold War, just to serve geopolitical interests (Raynor, 2006, pp. 21–25).

Conceptual discourses on post-9/11 literature underline how Muslim identity has been jeopardized in Western discourse. The literary pieces such as *Terror and the Postcolonial* (Dawes, 2010) and *The Muslim Other in Western Imagination* (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018) highlight how the Muslim representation has deteriorated, and the Islamophobia intensified after 9/11. These researchers have examined how literature, including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, challenges these portrayals by presenting subtle depictions of Muslim protagonists struggling with self-identity in a severely dichotomized global society. Muslims

and Islam are often misrepresented as impending dangers to the stability and civil liberties of American society. *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Kumar, 2012) discusses the different ways in which Western media portrays Muslims as potential threats to national security. *Covering Islam* (Said, 1981) also highlights the negative representation of Muslims and Islam by Western media. These references are particularly relevant to investigating Changez's interactions with Western media and how his identity is scrutinized and transformed through the Western lens in both the novel and the film.

At the intersection of political theory and postcolonial politics, Muhammad Javed Iqbal, Rashid Mahmood, and Muhammad Asim Mahmood analyze *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as Political Discourse to contextualize questions of identity, otherness, and belonging within the post-Cold War unipolar world shaped by the United States. The article argues that the novel engages with political discourse in ways that articulate the socio-political realities and anxieties experienced by the colonized peoples, particularly following the events of 9/11. The authors appeal to post-structuralist theory to highlight how the novel questions the very notions of subjectivity, democracy, and universality, demonstrating how political language is embedded in the narrative. They also comment on why the economic policies of the West, the fallout from 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, the unstable political situation in Pakistan, and the tensions with India can all be reflected in and satirized in the novel, the fictional world being part of a politically sensitive reality. (Iqbal et al., 2011, pp. 242–244).

The article by Catherine Morley addresses how the 2001 9/11 incident changed both world politics and the literary imagination. She describes how the attacks brought about drastic changes in the American governance system, resulting in the emergence of new security agencies, the policy of preemptive and anticipatory actions, and a climate of fear created by both the government and the media. She examines the ideas of surveillance, suspicion, and identity that writers have explored in this new world through three novels, namely: *The Unknown Terrorist* (Richard Flanagan), *Terrorist* (John Updike), and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Mohsin Hamid). Morley (2007) concludes that the post-9/11 novel frequently veers from conventional realism into a surreal mode of narrative in response to trauma, paranoia, and loss of meaning that emerged after the events of 9/11.

In Valerie Kennedy's analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a novel by Mohsin Hamid, the work is introduced as an inquisitive exploration of identity, belief, and the dissimilarities between East and West after 9/11. Kennedy examines how Changez, who at the beginning of the novel was a true believer in the American Dream and neoliberal capitalism, becomes a critic of global capitalism and U.S. foreign policy, pointing to the fall of his cosmopolitan identity after the shock of 9/11, which reveals the revival of archaic notions of tribalism in the post-9/11 United States (Kennedy, 2018, p. 2). Kennedy notes the shortcomings of Changez's ideological shift, as he still embraces opportunities for class and wealth in both the U.S and Pakistan, and at times falls into Orientalist or nostalgic views of his country. The literature, therefore, positions *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a complex critique of global capitalism, the insecurity of identity, and the persistence of East-West binaries, demonstrating how belief and subjectivity remain unsettled following the events of 9/11 (Kennedy, 2018, p. 12).

Numerous researchers have conducted comparative studies of Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Mira Nair's film adaptation, spotlighting their characteristic narrative devices and interpretation of themes. Geetha Ramanathan's *Feminist Auteurs: Theory and Practice* (2016) examine the way in which Nair positions her film adaptation, bringing the complex motifs of the novel to an audio-visual medium and helping to clarify Changez's complex personality. Ramanathan indicates that Nair's film adaptation adopts a more natural and sympathetic form of Muslim identity, moving away from the novel's complex yet more negotiable form. Similarly, Jack Shaheen's *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11* (2008) identifies the way in which Hollywood has portrayed Muslims, placing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* within the history of digital stereotypes. His review highlights the various ways in which the adaptation engages with and resists the dominant views of terrorism and identity. It thus situates Nair's film as both a critique of, and a step away from the dominant media representation of Muslims after the devastating September 11 incident.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the theme of identity is profoundly interwoven with the politics of belonging and acceptance, as Changez navigates his transforming conception of self, shaped by social and political dynamics and his personal approaches. Sarah Ahmed's *Strange Encounters* (2000) examines the formation of identity through encounters with marginalization, feelings of otherness, social detachment, and longing for identification. Changez's experience can be further contextualized by Ahmed's presentation of "stranger" as a racially classified individual, as he transformed from a culturally adapted expatriate to a foreigner perceived as a threat. To highlight the disenchantment of Changez's American dream, Judith Butler's concept of precarity in *Precarious Life* (2004) provides a framework for showing how certain identities are depicted as more susceptible within the world's power structures. These analytical approaches provide insight into how Changez's self-identification transforms not only through his personal experiences but also through the lens of Western society's position and perception of his identity. Changez's journey poses questions about the dynamic, contested essence of identity in the post-9/11 global structure by reflecting an intense tension between a person's strong desire for belonging and the rigid classifications imposed by socio-political narratives.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenges the negative portrayal of Islam and its believers as threats. Dominant discourses about 9/11 often relate Muslim characters to evil activities that result in generalized accusations against all Muslims. By contrast, Changez, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel, exemplifies another aspect of life in which Muslims strive to be on par with other religious and social communities. Changez is a Pakistani immigrant who comes to America with aspirations of achieving the American Dream, a common goal for most immigrants. He is brilliant academically, receives a scholarship at the prestigious Princeton University, and later gets a job at Underwood Samson, considered to be one of the most reputable financial firms. He is portrayed as a successful Muslim immigrant who earns a handsome salary and is in love with a beautiful American girl, Erica. However, his partial integration and adjustment into the American culture came to a standstill after the tragic events of 9/11. The traumatic episode turned his once-promising American dream upside down and changed the fate of a lot of Muslim immigrants like him. Changez finds himself being

interrogated more and is made to believe that he was the 'other' who could be a threat. He could not cope with the new distressing reality, and to begin with, he decided to quit America to go back to Pakistan and eventually ended up becoming a professor. By incorporating Changez, Mohsin Hamid brings forth the emotional, social, moral, psychological, and physical effects of 9/11 on the lives of Muslims, particularly those coming from the immigrant community. The narrative structure and form, therefore, indicate that it is a challenge to the overwhelming stories surrounding 9/11, in which Muslims and the movement are often presented negatively. The story is told in a monologue in which Changez speaks to an unnamed American visitor at the old Anarkali Bazaar in Lahore, Pakistan. It is believed that this character is a silent CIA agent, although he never says a single word throughout the narrative. He only brings across facial expressions and gestures throughout. Probably, Mohsin Hamid, the author, has muzzled this character not to engage an American in a narration about Muslims after 9/11, as this would mean that the portrayal of stereotypes was not being avoided.

During an interview with Deborah Solomon, Hamid clarifies that “in a world of [...] the American media, it’s almost always the other way around; representatives of the Islamic world mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves” (Solomon, 2007, p. 1). This image of a Muslim character is used to comment on the leading perception that Muslims only speak threats from concealed places. Lee supports this point of expression by mentioning that it is “a necessary reaction to the dominance of U.S. interests, media coverage, and perspectives in the global war on terrorism. It was time to give the stage to some other perspective” (Lee, 2010, p. 345). Hence, Muslims are usually misrepresented, underrepresented, and misunderstood in media and literature, more so in Western countries. Perhaps Hamid would have wanted to narrate genuine stories based on his experiences while silencing other voices. This is an effort to provide a better representation and reduce the usual misconceptions. The novel examines the power dynamics between East and West, drawing on Edward Said's idea of Orientalism, which posits that the West is seen as superior and the East as inferior. Traditionally, the "West" refers to Western countries, mainly America, while the "East" encompasses all Asian nations, especially the Muslim world. This story challenges the negative portrayals of South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan, that the American media often shares. While colonialism and imperialism are less visible today, their effects remain through ongoing negative stereotypes about the East, especially regarding Muslims. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* analyses how Americans and the West view Muslims after the events of 9/11. It gives a voice to the 'Other,' allowing them to share their experiences and challenge the stereotype of Muslims as 'terrorists' in Western media.

Through his struggle with identity, Changez tells the story of a man who does not naturally fit the Orientalist stereotype but is instead shaped by the labels and prejudices placed on him. Changez was born into a wealthy, educated, and cultured Pakistani family. He had several servants at home due to his aristocratic lifestyle. Impressed by their luxury, Americans “would imply that we were a family of great wealth” (Hamid, 2007, p. 10). Speaking about his achievements, he says that he could secure any scholarship in the world with the assurance of a job: “Students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid... and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy” (Hamid, 2007, p. 5). He also notes, “I knew in my senior

year that I was something special. . . I was confident of getting any job I wanted” (Hamid, 2007, p. 5). Changez was one of only eight students among hundreds of American and international students in his batch to be selected for an interview. Later, Jim's interviewer told him, “You are number one in your class” (Hamid, 2007, p. 44). Changez’s intelligence and proficiency challenge the prejudice and Orientalist assumptions about the ‘uncivilized’ East. His success, achieved in competition alongside both white and non-white peers, provides a gratifying counter-narrative to these stereotypes.

Hamid investigates the West's supremacy and the East's subordinated state through the narratives of Changez. Westerners believe that they have conquered the largest share of the world and have civilized every corner of the planet. The people and places they have not reached are often perceived as primitive and uncivilized. However, juxtaposing the histories of America and Pakistan/Eastern countries, Changez points out that the illiterate and barbaric ancestors of Americans were taught civilization by the Asians. He says, “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 invested in and colonized America were illiterate barbarians” (Hamid, 2007, p. 34). Over time, the socio-political conditions of both regions changed.

In the early days, Changez built his identity in America on the principles of the American Dream, and, through his dedication and passion, his friends considered him an insider rather than an outsider. For Changez, moving from Manhattan to New York is “like coming home” (Hamid, 2007, p. 32). He becomes ‘immediately a New Yorker’ and admits that he “tends to become sentimental when he thinks about that city” (Hamid, 2007, p. 33). He experienced almost all the privileges that Americans enjoy, except being labeled a migrant, which he considered a negative experience because of his identity. While in Manila, Philippines, for a business assignment, he notes, “I attempted to act and speak as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American” (Hamid, 2007, p. 65). He would often say that he was from New York whenever someone asked, but he did not fully introduce himself as purely American, which clearly indicates the identity crisis he experienced in America—a hybrid identity, situated between the “Third World” and the West—up to the events of 9/11. The September 11 attacks occurred while he was in Manila, which delivered a major blow to him and the entire Muslim World. When he was in Manila, the 9/11 attacks occurred, shattering the status quo for the entire Muslim world. America changed drastically in just one day. On his return from Manila, during a business trip, Changez was stopped at the airport, interrogated by American authorities, and held with a criminal. He was treated brutally, while all his colleagues were allowed to pass without issue. This incident itself confirmed that Changez was considered less American and perceived as an outsider.

Changez had always been clear about his identity, but he still held affection for America and resisted the idea that many Pakistanis hate the country. He tells the American visitor, “Excuse me, sir, but I may be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be afraid of my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact, you seem to be on a mission, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my service.” (Hamid, 2007, pp. 1–2). The opening

lines illustrate that Muslims are often ready to help Americans and are not inherently against them. Because of his beard, Changez was perceived by visitors as someone on a mission, arousing suspicion. He explains that it is only the media and other dominant narratives that have marked the beard as a symbol of terrorism. Anna Hartnell remarks on this stereotype, referring to the “evil terrorist with a beard” (Hartnell, 2010, p. 337). After 9/11, people with beards and turbans faced widespread hatred, reinforcing the stereotype that anyone with a beard or turban is a terrorist. The Sikh community also suffered, as they too wear beards and turbans; some Sikhs were even brutally attacked. Changez is portrayed as polite toward Americans, which aligns with an Orientalist stereotype, but he resists this portrayal by asserting his own identity. His civility does not indicate subservience; rather, it highlights how he negotiates and asserts his identity while challenging dominant Western perceptions.

At several points in the novel, Changez rejects the Americans’ incorrect assumptions and asserts his identity through rebellious acts after the 9/11 attacks. When preparing to depart from Pakistan after a short break in Lahore, he informed his parents that he wanted to stay longer. His mother said, “Do not forget to shave before you go” (Hamid, 2007, p. 128). Changez chose not to shave his beard and continued with his activities in New York. He explains, “For despite my mother’s request, and my knowledge of the difficulties it could well present me at immigration, I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity” (Hamid, 2007, p. 130). People around him stared and whispered behind his back, but this brave act served as a powerful symbol of his identity. This act of defiance represents both a resistance to the misconception that beards signify terrorism and a personal assertion of selfhood.

## **Conclusion**

This study has critically analyzed Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Mira Nair’s film adaptation of the book, explicating how both have successfully challenged and deconstructed the presuppositions underpinning Orientalism and the stereotypes associated with Muslim identity in the post-9/11 period. Both authors have employed subtle literary and cinematic devices that have challenged some of the most common prejudices and Islamophobia that Western society has promoted against the Muslim community, providing strong counter-narratives that focus on the issues and troubles of the marginalized Muslim community in the unfavorable socio-political environment. Changez, the main character of the book, represents the dynamic, fluid nature of identity and the interplay between the self’s external and internal relations in a globalized society. This paper has demonstrated how ambiguity and cinematography contribute to the overall effect of challenging the binary oppositions of East and West and engaging in a complex, problem-oriented dialogue with the forces behind the scenes of cultural politics and the construction of cultural identity.

Conclusively, it is worth saying that the findings of the current research reinforce the importance of the use of literary and cinematographic means as instruments in social critique and discourse. While protesting against the Orientalist structures and presenting new points of view, the novel by Hamid and the film by Nair can assist people in providing global cultures with cultural awareness and understanding, as well as evoking feelings of compassion that

would lead to reflections on the ways in which the person can view, read, and interpret the reality of the existing cultural exclusions and Othering. It is clear that the need to challenge stereotypical and prejudiced ideas and notions remains, but the benefits of presenting new, inclusive discussions and approaches to embracing the multidimensional, complex processes of identity-building in our post-colonial and globalized world should be reflected throughout the text.

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