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The Orient and The Occident

Breaking Stereotypes in The Reluctant Fundamentalist

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Abstract

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a postcolonial novel that, in this essay, is argued to challenge and question the colonial stereotypes which came into greater focus after 9/11 in America. The challenge is carried out via the narrator's identity struggle by displaying the different stereotypes he is subjected to. The quiet listener to the narrator's monologue, together with the reader's part in creating and making sense of the novel also contributes towards challenging these stereotypes. The East and West are set against each other, displaying how both have harsh and generalizing views of the other.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Orientalism, Occidentalism, Stereotypes, Mohsin Hamid

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Introduction

The form of the novel . . . allowed me to mirror the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) look at one another. . . . And this allows the novel to inhabit the interior emotional world much like the exterior political world in which it will be read.¹

This is what Mohsin Hamid writes in the *Mariner Reader's Guide*, featured at the end of the 2008 edition of his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, when asked why he chose the format of a monologue. The narrative structure of the novel is that of a first-person narrator, a Pakistani man named Changez, who tells the story of his life in America, before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks, to a complete stranger. The narrator makes implications that the stranger, who is said to be an American, takes part in the conversation. However, the American's voice is never heard and his identity never truly revealed. These two men meet on a street in Lahore and Changez invites the unknown American to have tea with him at a nearby restaurant. There Changez starts telling the story of how he ended up in America, graduated from Princeton, and got a job at the evaluating firm Underwood Samson. Most importantly he tells how his life was affected by the attacks on the World Trade Center. This style of narration is not only unusual; it lets the reader into the text in an unconventional way, involving him or her in the story itself. Almost unknowingly the reader's own ideas color the narrative and its content. Hamid himself calls it "the interactive nature of fiction," which means that the novel is deliberately written to be interpreted differently depending on the reader, forcing the reader to be a form of co-writer/character (Hamid: "Mohsin Hamid")².

¹ *Mariner Reader's Guide* has no page numbers; therefore there is no page reference. The parenthesis is a part of the quote.

² "Mohsin Hamid" refers to an article written by Hamid. It is one page and therefore there is no page reference.

When looking closer at the novel one sees that the possible interpretations are to some extent controlled through planted details. This control runs contrary to Hamid's statement about how open the novel is. The reader can choose to acknowledge the planted details and decide whether or not they are crucial, but the details are still there and they will most likely affect the reader in one way or another. For instance there are indications that the naratee, the American, is a secret agent, and there are indications of Changez being a terrorist, but nothing is really made explicit. It is a question of what ideas and stereotypes the reader believes in, or secretly believes in, and how strongly he or she believes in them. Hamid's open novel is then not as open as one might think, but is rather written in a way to expose the stereotypes within the reader by feeding him or her with hints about the existence of them. The stereotypes explored in the story have their roots in old colonial ways of thinking, where the white man (the colonizer) is the superior one and the "Other" (the colonized) is the inferior. Today the colonies might not be a reality, but imperialism certainly is. The relationship between the inferior (Muslim world/Pakistan) and superior (America) still exists within imperialism, with or without colonies, and this power relation is what the novel explores. For example, it is explored in the narrative structure where the tables turn and the inferior Pakistan is heard alone instead of the superior America.

This essay will argue that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* creates a discussion where the colonial distinctions between "'us' and 'them', 'civilized' and 'savage'" are exposed (Edwards 17) and challenged. The discussion is argued to be created through the identity struggle of the narrator and the reader's function as co-writer that together explore the concept of colonial stereotypes and distinctions, and their reinforcement after 9/11. Because of the novel's openness the reader is forced to participate in the creation of the story. Therefore the story not only explores the narrator's identity but also the reader's identity and thoughts of the world after 9/11. The novel, via the aspects mentioned above, challenges and explores the old

stereotypes of East and West, and also explores the complexity involved in having to take sides in a global society.

Every change that occurs in the novel is tied to 9/11. The attacks bring up the question that Robert J. Young asks himself in his essay *Terror Effects*: “What is the effect of terror?” and his answer is that “[i]t works as both an individual and a collective emotion” (Boehmer and Morton eds. 307-329). The quotes clearly describe what is going on in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. They show that not only the characters of the novel were affected by the attacks, but that all of America was thrown back into nostalgia of the “old America” (Hamid 115). Changez becomes aware of how his nationalities collide in the world after 9/11, just as everybody else suddenly start noticing his “Otherness,” which they previously almost did not see. Changez’s identity struggle arises when he realizes that he is acting more American than Pakistani. His struggle together with the reader’s own ideas explore the prejudices and stereotypes that reappeared in the world after 9/11. The novel starts a discussion about the perceptions that exist of right and wrong, East and West, terrorist and non-terrorist.

These polarities will be explored and questioned in the analysis of the novel, which will be based on postcolonial theory and criticism. A general introduction of postcolonialism, together with a look into the concepts of Orientalism, which is the view the West has of the East, and Occidentalism, the view the East has of the West, will be provided in the theory section. The reason for looking into the concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism is because they are crucial for the analysis of Hamid’s novel where stereotypes between East and West are displayed and questioned. The constant battle between the two sides of the world is personified in Changez and the battle between the two nations represented within him. However, the battle can question to what extent he represents the suppressed voice of the colonies, since his identity is a hybrid between two nationalities. Hamid was confronted with

this issue during an interview with Deborah Solomon for *The New York Times*³, where he was asked why it is only the Pakistani that is being heard. His answer was that he feels that in “particularly American media, it’s almost always the other way around.” Solomon questions him again by saying that he, a Pakistani man, is not being silenced, but rather heard by thousands of people via lectures and interviews. Hamid then says that he is one of the few being heard in America, and that “the ones who are mostly” heard from the Muslim world “seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves” (Solomon). This shows that Changez’s narrative does represent a story that is almost never heard and that he can be seen as the “Other” getting a voice.

Nevertheless, it is not only Changez’s identity that is being questioned. The novel also brings forth the same battle within the reader. He or she is forced to decide who to believe in, in order to make sense of the story. Is Changez a terrorist or not? Is the American a tourist or a secret agent? And why is he in Pakistan? Why is this conversation between these two strangers even taking place? Is there a “bad guy”? And what does being a “bad guy” mean? This thesis will try to answer some of these questions, or at least explore how different readers can answer them depending on their interpretation of the novel. To clarify, this essay is not trying to find a key to the novel. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is trying to expose and discuss the stereotypes present in society, showing what functions they have.

³ The article is found online and consists of one page; therefore there is no page reference.

Defining Postcolonial Theory

In the beginning of the 1980s the concept of postcolonial writing emerged. Postcolonial writing is a way of challenging “the relations between western and non-western people and [how] their worlds are viewed” (Young 2). The goal is to show that the reality of the non-Western world does not necessarily correspond with the image the Western world has of it (2). During Britain’s, and other countries’, time as colonizers the non-Western “Other” was portrayed and presented as “inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves,” which made it legitimate for the West to parent and look after them (2). At the end of the nineteenth century resistance against the colonial powers began, but even when independence was achieved after years, and even decades of fighting, many countries still stayed in indirect inferiority to the old colonial power (3). The colonies were no longer colonies, which meant that a power shift was in progress, but it was, and is, often slow (3). Postcolonialism seeks to continue this resistance by “forcing its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west” (7). The hope is that postcolonial discourse will lead to people thinking differently, which will help build fair relationships between different parts of the world (7). *The Empire Writes Back* is the title of one of the first works in this field (written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin) and the title clearly shows what postcolonial literature and criticism are about—telling the other side of the story, showing the existence of the colonized, and confronting the stereotypes about them, writing back.

Peter Barry has assembled a list of what postcolonial criticism does in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. The list says that postcolonial literature and critique seek to show the limitations of Western canonical literature (in this case also Western media coverage) when it comes to cultural differences, and in doing so also look at how other cultures are represented. Postcolonial literature and criticism

examine how matters of importance are often silenced when it comes to looking at colonialism or imperialism. Postcolonialism encourages hybridity and multiculturalism, and sees “Otherness” as something that can be the root to positive change and development (Barry 192). All of the points mentioned above are applicable to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which then indicates that the novel provides a critique of the colonial worldview using postcolonial criticism. However, even if the novel fits into the description of a postcolonial novel, the concept needs to be slightly altered to fit perfectly. The novel does not specifically deal with old colonial powers and their relations with former colonies. Instead it deals with the “War on Terror,” the world before and after 9/11, and with America’s imperialistic power over the world.

America is most definitely an imperialistic country. John Bellamy Foster says in his book *Naked Imperialism: The U.S Pursuit of Global Dominance* that America is “the nation with the greatest conventional military force and the willingness to use it unilaterally to enlarge its global power” (10). Foster continues his argument of America being a “dominant global power” by saying that it has, since the 1940s, strived to expand and maintain their military as well as political and economical global power (21). Today America has military bases on occupied lands in over 60 countries (35), which means that it does not hold power over entire countries but parts of them, which leads to indirect power in them. The quotes from Foster show that America holds and maintains power over parts of countries, sometimes by violence, which means that America is imperialistic. Foster writes that America’s goal of “global hegemony, are virtually without limits” (38). The “growth of imperialism” creates more terrorism, Foster claims, and continues by saying that the terror America is trying to defeat is in fact its own creation, a consequence of its interference in other countries (37).

Another important aspect of postcolonial theory is the encouragement of hybridity. Because of Changez’s place in between two nationalities hybridity is a very important aspect,

especially since he in the beginning of the novel relates to multiculturalism in New York. The aspect of being caught in the middle of two nationalities, that not always see each other eye to eye, is a very common problem for people in postcolonial societies (Edwards 139). The problem becomes even more evident when postcolonial writers and societies want to return to the traditions and experiences of the pre-colonial society when the colonial power has changed the culture so much. The question is if it is possible to return to how it used to be and “would this yield to an authentic identity?” (140). To return to what was before is a protest against the colonial power, and many authors choose to write in their native tongues instead of the colonizer’s language to show their true nationality. Nevertheless, embracing hybridity, the mixing of the past with the changes of the colonial power, can also be a “resistance to colonial discourse” (140). Hybridity dissolves the concepts of “purity” and “authenticity” of nations, which is the root of colonial discourse (140). In *The Empire Writes Back* the authors say that colonization and conquests of others are based on “the myth of group ‘purity’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 36). What the authors mean is that the myth is based upon the idea of nationalities not mixing but staying pure. Further, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say that “cross-culturality” is the possible end to these constant reappearing behaviors and that “the post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounters is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms” (36). This means that within the postcolonial world what was before seen as negative differences, “them”/“us” etc. changes into differences that are “recognized but challenged” (37). Hybridity can, as mentioned, be found in Changez and his position in between America and Pakistan. He has been brought up, and lived, in a society where globalization is a fact but after 9/11 the once so embracing multiculturalism of New York shifts into nationalism, forcing Changez to take sides.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist criticizes America and the colonial stereotypes that reemerged after 9/11. This is further confirmed in the “Other” speaking back (or rather the

“hybrid-Other”) telling his side of the story, shaking up the perceptions of the stereotypical “Muslim terrorist” portrayed in mass media. Via the identity struggle of Changez the story of a man that was not born into the Orientalistic stereotype, but instead was shaped into it by prejudice and stereotypes, emerges.

Looking to the East

Orientalism, simply put, is the perception the West has of the East. The concept was mapped out by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, where he explores the concept, its origin, and how it functions. Said states that Orientalism is “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, [and] ruling over it” (3). However, Said points out that even if Orientalism from the beginning was not “a creation with no corresponding reality” the concept he studies in the book is that of “the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence” with the “real” Orient (5). What Said is saying is that the characteristics drawn up about the Orient within Orientalism are not necessarily compatible with reality. The Western eagerness to characterize the Oriental came from the desire to put a face to the unknown, becoming “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between” East and West, them and us, “the familiar and the strange” (43). Orientalism became a dictionary displaying the characteristics of the Oriental subject, characteristics that were fixed and unchangeable (42, 70).

The attributes given to the Oriental helped strengthen the image of Western superiority and justified colonialism. The West was seen as superior to the East, meaning that it had the right to dominate the “subject race”, since it did not know what was good for it (Said 35).

“Irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, [and] different”⁴ (40) were words used to describe Orientals. Europeans then became “rational, virtuous, mature, [and] normal” (40), and the line between the two parts of the world was set; Europe (or the West) as the strong one and Asia (or the East) as the weak one (57). The Orientals were given the role of the “Other,” ruled by their emotions rather than sense, which made them crueller than the enlightened Western man (Barry 186). The role of the “Other” made ruling over them justified. The same method is still used by Orientalists today (Said 60), so the hegemony that makes the West believe itself to be superior to the East stays alive in both Western and Eastern cultures.

Orientalism is written to explore how and why these ideas have such a central and fixed part in the mentality of the West (and East). In the preface to the 2003 issue of the book Said writes about 9/11 and the following “War on Terror” in this way: “Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like ‘us’ and didn’t appreciate ‘our’ values – the very core of Orientalism . . . there would have been no war” (xv). In this quote it is evident that the Oriental stereotype is still very much present in today’s society and is affecting events in the world; Said even argues that the war in Afghanistan and Iraq would not be a fact if it was not for this stereotype.

Although the role of the suppressed was given to the East, it was still, and is still, surrounded by mystery and exoticism because it was/is something so different from the West. Its exoticism made it hard to grasp and understand for Western society (Barry 186). It could be suggest that the contrasting images of the exotic Orient and the dangerous Orient are both images that exist in an attempt to make the ungraspable graspable. Even if these images are different they are sticking around because they provide an explanation. Said also points out that Orientalism is a “three-way force” that affects both “the Orient, the Orientalists and the Western ‘consumer’ of Orientalism” (Said 67). Since the ideas of the Orient within

⁴ The parenthesis is a part of the quote

Orientalism affect all three stages it makes it almost impossible to erase the stereotype that has been erected. The only way would be to embrace hybridity, which means accepting each other's differences and looking beyond the "man-made" distinction between East and West (Said 5). After the 9/11 attacks it became even more evident that the stereotype evoked in Orientalism was not about to disappear, despite the new global society.

Said gives an example of how an Arab is typically portrayed as a bloodthirsty, deceiving slave trader, who is a sadist and so on, in movies and on television (287). This image was not far away when the media, and politicians for that matter, started portraying all Easterners as bloodthirsty terrorists driven by non-rational thoughts (Scanlan 274). The fear of the unknown, of the suppressed rising and gaining power, of the "Other" speaking up, is as scary today as it was hundreds of years ago. These images of the East are what *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores, showing how deeply rooted they are in society and how they blossomed after 9/11. The novel tries to make the reader reflect upon this stereotype, how it might be wrong and why it exists.

Looking to the West

Occidentalism is the East's image of the West and it is basically Orientalism turned upside down. As previously explained, Orientalism sees the East and the Orient as people driven by emotions, which makes them irrational; they are a mass of people with the minds of children that cannot think for themselves. In Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's book *Occidentalism* the view the East has of the West is described; the West is seen as a society filled with soulless, greedy, decadent, faithless, unemotional people that are more like machines than humans (10). Comparing the two views show that they are more or less each other's

opposites. What the West sees as a fault in the East the East sees as lacking in the West and vice versa.

What makes the West seem soulless and unfeeling for the East is its worship of material things (Buruma and Margalit 106). The image of “the soulless whore as a greedy automaton,” Buruma and Margalit explain, is the image the Occidental has of the city, of capitalism, and of the Western civilization as a machine (19). Comparing the West to a whore builds upon the image of a civilization where “everything and everyone is for sale” (18). The consequence of this lifestyle, all revolving around money, is soullessness (19). Another image representing the Western way of life, which is equally feared, is the one of “the sinful City of Man” where “hubris, empire building, secularism, individualism, and the power and attraction for money” rule (16). Therefore Buruma and Margalit discuss how a large number of people around the globe felt “a feeling of deep satisfaction” when watching the destruction of the Twin Towers on television (14). The feeling did not, however, come from seeing innocent people getting killed. It came from seeing the “symbols of imperial, global, and capitalist dominance” (14) of the United States and of “the sinful city” of New York being destroyed. This is depicted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* when Changez describes how he felt satisfied when seeing the attacks on television and how he was “caught up in the symbolism of it all” (Hamid 73). The Occidental inside him, the Pakistani man who dislikes the behavior of the West, came out and liked seeing America brought to its knees (Hamid 73). Just like many other people around the globe.

Another thing brought up by Buruma and Margalit is how Occidentalism today is not only focused on Europe but equally so on America, because of its rise in power. They go on by saying that “anti-Americanism is sometimes the result of specific American policies” (8). Some people do not like America simply because of the enormous power it holds. Others do not like America interfering, thinking it is important to help and protect others, as if they are

the whole world's father. Whilst others do not like America because it turns away when help is needed, wanted, and sometimes even expected (8). Buruma and Margalit point out that anti-Americanism is not the same as Occidentalism since the latter "is not about policies, but about an idea, almost a vision, of a machinelike society without a human soul" (9). Once again, just as in Orientalism, the idea of the other side does not have to correspond with reality. The ideas are there because of the great need to make a distinction between "them" and "us" and to say that "we are better than them." However, the Occidental's ideas of America are of course influenced by anti-Americanism, and vice versa.

The Battle between Orient and Occident

An analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* must start at the beginning of the novel, because it throws the reader into a very peculiar situation. Without any explanation of what is going on, or how the story will be built up, the reader already here needs to decipher the situation. The reader immediately has decided what is going on and who these people are.

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by 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 services.

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country . . . True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest . . . 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 1-2).

In these first two paragraphs a lot of small details are planted to make the reader think and reflect over who these two characters are. Is the narrator as polite as he sounds in the opening line? Why does he offer his help to a total stranger? And who is this stranger? Is he an American secret agent, as is implied, or just a tourist? Why does he comment upon Changez's beard? Is there a reason for the beard to frighten him? These are all questions that are brought up just out of these two paragraphs, and they stay present during the rest of the novel. There are hints planted about the American that could suggest him being a soldier "on a mission," or it could suggest him being a sportsman. None of these assumptions are really confirmed

though. The only thing that is almost certain is that he is an American which Changez figures out by his behavior, even if the behavior is never explained. Changez also says that “sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike,” which makes his previous statement about the stranger being an American uncertain. Either way this is what Changez sticks with throughout the novel. Another thing to notice when it comes to behavior is that Changez is portrayed as extremely polite in this first scene, which is one of the qualities often assigned to the stereotypical Eastern man. Since he later in the novel is portrayed as someone that might possibly be a terrorist, this could be another way to excavate and explore the Oriental stereotype.

These planted indications suggest that already here the reader has to contemplate if Changez is the stereotypical Eastern man or not. In this context that would be an “evil terrorist with a beard” trying to be polite. At the same time he/she has to reflect upon if the American is a stereotypical Western man, as portrayed above (Hartnell 337). These stereotypes, and the choice to not believe in them, continue throughout the novel. For instance there are indications of the American carrying a gun (Hamid 139) and having protection from someone unknown via his mobile phone (115). When it comes to Changez there are hints of him having been to some sort of training camp (46) and being involved in violent protests (181). Even though these indications are never confirmed they are still useful, since they feed the stereotypes that already exist within the reader. There are different ways of interpreting these indications, which is also the point. The hints construct the novel so that it brings out the stereotypes of East and West to start a discussion. The hostile “atmosphere of mutual suspicion and impending violence, [is] an atmosphere that challenges and implicates the reader's own process of identification” (337) Anna Hartnell writes in her essay, and I agree. The conclusion the reader makes will most probably be based on the ideas he/she had of these stereotypes before since they will control who he/she identifies with.

The prejudices or ideas the reader has before reading the novel will color which of the planted indications he/she will choose to believe in. This is why it is not only the characters of that are being considered but also the reader, since his/her ideas are also shown when interpreting the story. The “interactive nature” (Hamid: “Moshin Hamid”) of the novel wants the reader to notice and question the stereotypes that are evident in society. The stereotypes are exposed through the reader’s response to the text, the indications of the characters’ nature and the novel itself. During a discussion about stereotypes Hartnell writes that “arguably *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* itself fails to escape the stereotypes it erects and attempts to challenge” (337). Even if she says that this is not so important, and goes on to discuss other aspects of the novel, the quote in itself brings up a lot of thoughts. The reason for bringing forth these stereotypes is not to shatter them or escape them. The novel merely shows the stereotypes that exist and challenges them by not having a “happy” ending where they are dissolved. The stereotypes are not escaped because their very existence is exactly what makes the novel challenging. They are there to be exposed and start a discussion. It is important to notice the difficulty in trying to escape stereotypes that exist in the real world. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, in the book *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11*, write that “the buzzwords of contemporary political life do little more than obscure a chronically one-sided dialogue that Muslims are invited to join but not to change, or forever remain outside the boundaries of civil debate, doomed to be spoken for and represented, but never to speak themselves” (2). Morey and Yaqin are talking about words such as “integration,” “preventing terrorism,” “multiculturalism,” and “national security” that are frequently used in political debates (2) in the West. Morey and Yaqin mean that for Muslims to be a part of the political discussion they need to stick to the rules given and not try to change them. Changez is never said to be Muslim, and religion in general does not play a big part in the novel (except from the possible input the reader provides of religion to the story).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist does not escape the stereotypes; it actually provides ample opportunity for them to prosper. The novel lets them grow to show how influenced society is by these “buzzwords.” It shows that being a Pakistani man, writing this kind of novel, one needs to stay within certain stereotypes to be accepted. However, that does not mean to simply give in to the stereotypes. It rather means to challenge them by presenting the reader with a choice and wrapping those in a different format. By throwing the stereotypes in the reader’s face, showing how very present they are, Hamid creates a situation where the reader has to take a stand.

Questioning and challenging stereotypes is a big part of postcolonial literature since its goal is to show what colonial societies are really like and how they are affected by the colonial power. The challenge is done “by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2). This is exactly what *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does; it shows the tension between America and the Muslim world, both through Changez’s life story and through his conversation with the American naratee. However, the postcolonial view of the attacks was rather rare in literature when Hamid’s novel was published. Peter Morey writes in his essay “*The Rules Have Changed*”: *Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Post-9/11 Fiction* that the first novels about 9/11 were either “trauma narratives,” of people who survived the attacks, or confessional “Muslim misery memoirs,” where Muslims would confess, or semi-confess, to how unfair Islamic rules were and support “neoconservative interventionism” (136). Basically, few novels would display or explore the other side of the story—it was not within the rules to give a voice to the other side. Morey goes on by saying that “in employing the hoax confessional and dramatic monologue forms” *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenges and “parodies the cultural certainties encouraged by those ‘true confessions’” and that this is “destabilizing the reader’s identification” (136). What he means

is that by breaking the rules, brought up before, the novel does something unexpected which leads to the reader's identification being shifted. The stereotypes the reader may have adopted before reading it will perhaps change, since the story does not follow the typical confessional novel Morey talks about. Hamid therefore challenges the reader to explore, perhaps, a previously unknown side to things.

Arguably, the monologue format puts the postcolonial concept on its edge by forcing the imperial power to be silent and listen, since "in the world of . . . the American media, it's almost always the other way around" (Hamid qtd. in Solomon). Since it is the oppressed that speaks, the novel is evidently postcolonial. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the stereotype is challenged by painting the image of the "bearded, dangerous Muslim" (Morey and Yaqin 2), but providing him with a background that could be used to combat the stereotype.

Changez's story starts off as a tale about an honor student who wants to live the American dream (Hamid 3). He makes it happen rather easily since America wants him on its team (4). However, after 9/11 he becomes more and more alienated and is forced to take a stand between the two countries he loves. Already here the stereotype falls apart; he is not "born bad," as the Orientalist stereotype suggests, and it is not until after the attacks that he is seen as a threat at all. After 9/11 he goes from being a "well-liked . . . exotic acquaintance" (17) to being someone that makes his fellow passengers worry when being on a plane with him (74). Therefore Changez is not compatible with the stereotypical Easterner that is "born bad" and cannot change (Morey and Yaqin 1), since he does have a mind and a will of his own.

It is important to emphasize that the stereotype was not applied to him until after 9/11, which means that he was not seen as a threat before the attacks. After 9/11 the stereotype of the "dangerous Muslim," who was now also considered being a terrorist, received renewed force. The stereotype also started including everyone looking like an Arab or Muslim (Morey

and Yaqin 2), even if they were not (Hamid 117). Suddenly Changez finds himself left out of the community that he just some days before was a part of. This alienation makes him start seeking for his own identity, it becomes “a powerful motivation of the need to define [himself] as [an] individual” (Hearn 113). The search for his identity, once again, shows that he is not born into the Orientalistic stereotype of the American hating Muslim. As a matter of fact it is never spoken out in the novel that he is Muslim, and he actually states to love America (Hamid 1). Changez says that the label “anti-American” is something the media assigned to him after a protest he joined in Pakistan (179). Of course anti-Americanism and Occidentalism are not the same thing, but even if Changez is not anti-American he is somewhat caught in the Occidental’s ideas of the West, which are affected by anti-Americanism.

Changez’s resentment and anger towards America is obvious, especially at the end of the novel when he speaks about America’s interference in other countries (Hamid 156, 178). The resentment emerges when Changez realizes that he has to take a stand for his own opinions. He has to decide if he wants to be loyal to Pakistan or to the world power America (168). This process of change and realization has three stages. First Changez tries to find himself by becoming a New Yorker. Being a New Yorker, and not an American, allows him to hold on to his multicultural persona (33). Soon this changes. Because as time goes by Changez starts acting more and more like an American to be accepted and to get more respect (65). He sees pride in being a part of the American dream, and to be so he puts away his history. Hartnell argues that the key to a successful integration in America is to leave your past behind; if you do not surrender to the new country and become an American wholeheartedly, you will be seen as the “Other,” the threat (342), and the integration will fail. This is what happens in the second stage of Changez’s search for his identity; he becomes aware of his history on a journey back to Pakistan, where he realizes just how Americanized he has become and it

frightens him (124). Changez realizes that he has become a part of the Western machine driven by money, which means he has fallen for the Occidental lifestyle that he disliked in the beginning (21, 145). His realization becomes especially strong since Pakistan is under the threat of war because of how America uses its power to put pressure on neighbor countries of Pakistan, and Changez starts to question where his loyalties should be (127). Clearly Changez is here moving more and more over to the Occidental's ideas of the world, identifying with his Eastern origin.

While in Pakistan Changez grows a beard and, despite his mother's comment on that he should shave it off before going back, he keeps it (Hamid 128). The beard leads to reactions both at work and elsewhere. All of a sudden he goes from being popular to being the person everyone stares and points at (130). One of his colleagues even suggests that he should shave it off, but Changez answers that "[t]hey are common where I come from" (130), which he thinks should justify it, but perhaps only makes the situation worse. The beard reminds his surroundings of his origin, which makes him one of the "Others," one who does not apply to the rules of America and therefore works against integration (Hartnell 342). The last and ultimate change in Changez's transformation takes place when he meets Juan-Bautista, the publisher of a company he is to value. Juan-Bautista tells Changez the story of the Janissaries; the Christian boys who were captured by the Ottomans and brought up to be Muslim soldiers, fighting their own (Christians) in the name of another (the Muslims) (Hamid 151). This was possible since they had no memories left of their origin (151). Changez immediately identifies with the story, feeling that he is "a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire in a time when it [is] invading a country with kinship to [his]" (152).

This transformation story, going from Easterner to Westerner and back to Easterner, makes the Western stereotype of the East shift. Suddenly there is a reason for this man having a beard and there is a reason for his actions: Changez is questioning the world power

America. Simultaneously the reader is challenged to look beyond the stereotype and into the actual story that shaped Changez, and decide whether or not it is valid. The novel protests against the Oriental stereotype by painting the image of a bearded foreign man, coming from a Muslim country, but filling his character with features that are almost the opposite of what one expects to find. Maybe most importantly, it shows that he was not like this from the start. Said describes cartoons showing Muslims with “hooked noses, [and] . . . evil mustachioed leer[s] on their faces” (286), that puts in mind the cartoons drawn during World War II of Jews, or the pictures drawn of Africans before that. By pointing out the “bad guys,” that will harm the country, a stand has to be made for whether one is with “them” (the terrorists) or with “us,” as former President George W. Bush said after 9/11 (Tracy 88). Said says that politicians and people are “re-cycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up ‘America’ against the foreign devil” (xv). The same phenomenon has taken place many times in history. America has used these fictions both to warn for communists and, after the bombings of Pearl Harbor, to warn for the Japanese (Tracy 87). This is what Orientalism is about, portraying the one-sided image of the East, “the enemy,” as a way to stay in power and be in control (Said 3). Said says that it makes one wonder if “modern imperialism ever ended” (xvi) and these colonial stereotypes, so strongly renewed after 9/11, and America’s power in the world points to the fact that it has not. The old power structure is repeated once again (Edwards 165). Even if it is not colonizing per se, it is a greater nation using its power to suppress less fortunate ones. This leads the analysis to look closer at how the oppressed look at the suppressors, which leads to the other stereotype presented in the novel, namely Occidentalism, the East’s view of the West. Occidentalism is equally generalizing and harsh, and the novel depicts this stereotype as strongly as the Orientalist one.

Once again it is Changez that gets to represent a stereotype, this time the stereotype of the “greedy, Western man.” Of course the American listener is also provided with features of

the stereotypical Western/American man, but to a lesser extent since he is not as present in the story. Changez's reflections over the American's appearance and behavior do display a stereotypical image of who an American man, who mysteriously is in Pakistan, should or could be. However, attention will first be given to Changez and his time in America. When attending to Princeton Changez goes to Greece with a couple of acquaintances from school during one summer. He is rather annoyed with their behavior, their way of spending great amounts of money without thinking, and talking, in his eye, rudely to older people (Hamid 21). At this point Changez is still very much influenced by his Pakistani background, still sticking to the rules of how to speak to certain people and knowing the value of things. He also says that he found it strange how his friends "were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class" (21). These three things that Changez comments upon are actually the cornerstones of the stereotypical Westerner: someone that lives for money (Buruma and Margalit 70), has a "flashy Western way" (Buruma and Margalit 27), and does not really care for other people; a soulless machine. Even if Changez in the beginning is skeptical about these behaviors he soon falls for them himself.

When getting the job at Underwood Samson the American ways of acting soon follows for Changez. The first big change for him is the expense account that he receives from the company (Hamid 39). Suddenly he does not need to care about how to spend his money. The second change is that he starts acting American, starts talking like an American (65), and attends parties with the elite in New York (57). Changez notices his change when he realizes that he feels superior to the people he just months ago would have felt equal to. The first time he realizes this is when he returns to Pakistan and looks at his former home with the eyes of a foreigner, judging what he sees (124). The second time is when he is in Manila and meets the eyes of a Filipino driving a car next to his limousine. The driver looks angry and hostile, and Changez cannot understand why he looks at him that way—saying "perhaps he simply does

not like Americans,” not even reflecting on the fact that he calls himself an American (67). When turning around to talk to his co-worker he sees his light skin and light hair, and suddenly feels “much closer to the Filipino driver than to him” (67). Changez here realizes that he is becoming detached; he is starting to feel like an American, and therefore feels like someone standing above the “others”. He is indulging in the flashy ways of many Americans and it is not as important to be polite and respectful anymore.

It does not take long before Changez breaks away from this stereotype, turning over to the one that is discussed previously namely the Orientalist one, which is the one evident in the first two paragraphs of the novel and the examples shown of his behavior after 9/11. Interestingly, by becoming the Orientalist stereotype he embraces the Occidental’s ways of thinking, and vice versa. Evidently, the two stereotypes feed off each other and need one another to exist. Although Changez has changed, the American naratee is there to provide a contrast to Changez while he tells the story. The three stereotypical features of a Western man, mentioned above, can be applied to the American. Firstly, Changez mentions that it is the bearing that reveals the stranger’s nationality, which can be understood as his American manners. The second indication is when a beggar comes up to the table asking for money. The American will not give him anything and defends himself by saying that it is better to give money to charity. Changez on the other hand gives the beggar money saying that it is a habit, but that the American of course is right (40). It could be suggested that Changez here mocks the American and his unkindness to the needy, but also that he is playing with the stereotype of the kindly Eastern man. The American’s way of handling money is never described, but we do know that he has a fancy cell phone (115) and most probably a gun (139), which indicates power and a possible job as some sort of military agent. Despite this he is described as nervous in some scenes (31), wondering about the waiter (110), wanting to sit with his back against the wall (2) —which suggests him being out of his comfort zone (Morey 141).

Possibly this means that he is in danger but it also looks like he has had training in how to avoid danger. If that then means that Changez is dangerous, or if he is the one in danger, is up to the reader to decide.

When Changez tells the story of how he smiled when he heard the news of the attacks, the American listener shows great disgust and anger towards his reaction (Hamid 72). Changez himself says that he had a hard time fully understanding why he smiled when he saw the planes flying into the towers. He says that it was not because thousands of innocent people being killed; instead he “was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all,” the thought of someone managing to hurt America (73). Tracy says in his essay that the war America had been engaged in overseas since 1947 had suddenly struck at home, the unthinkable had happened where it was least expected (87). Maybe this is the root of Changez’s reaction. Tying it to Buruma and Margalit, and their discussion of the satisfaction in seeing the powerful America harmed, gives another dimension to it. Changez is not born American; he is one of the other people, coming from the other side of the sea. The suppressed got to see the oppressor brought to its knees. Once again, as Changez said, it had nothing to do with being unsympathetic towards the people who died, but rather looking at the symbolism, even if the act itself was inhuman.

America was thrown into defense mode after 9/11, turning its head backwards instead of forward (Hamid 115). The media and politicians fed the fear and confusion with ideas of “nationalism and revenge,” comparing the attacks to the Pearl Harbor attack (Tracy 86). America was “giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia” (Hamid 114-5), as Changez puts it, and a big part of the nationalism at this point was finding the “bad guy,” pointing him out, and eliminating him. Here the stereotypes come in again. The Orientalist stereotype was brought back with full force because of its close relation to imperialism. Rowe says that “patriotism . . . has been crucial for the success of nationalism and thus for imperialism” (1). This quote

pinpoints the importance for America to invoke the imperial stereotype to be able to stay in power, in control, and be superior to the Orient (Said 3). Peter Morey says in his essay that the novel “forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West” (138). The novel questions the Oriental stereotype as well as the Occidental one and shows that they might not be as firm as people want them to be. The reader is forced to reevaluate him/herself and consider if the things he/she believed before reading the novel were true. Is the picture the media has depicted of the East true? Is one simply a terrorist? What is a terrorist? Can terrorism be a reaction to something and not just pure evil? And why does the Eastern world think the way it does about the West?

One could say that the story truly argues against the “good/evil framework” implemented by American politicians and the media after 9/11 (Tracy 98). The novel speaks against the world being black or white, good or bad, terrorist or non-terrorist. It does so by making the reader a part of the novel so he/she has to make up his/her own mind, instead of once again just being fed with information saying “this is the way it is.” *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows that there are more than two sides to everything and that a novel can be just as complex as the world—not giving clear answers and not telling one what to think. The novel also shows the difficulty in having to take sides in a hybrid society, where cultures are mixed, but where differences are still not accepted or understood.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to argue that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, via the identity struggle of the narrator together with the reader's function as co-writer, explores the concepts of colonial stereotypes and their reinforcement after 9/11. The novel's structure of a monologue, where the narrator tells his life story to a silent, unknown American, puts the postcolonial novel on its edge, emphasizing the voice of the suppressed.

Further, the essay explores the concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism by looking at the narrator and the American narratee and how they conform with, and question, the stereotypes they are assigned. The American is portrayed as a "stereotypical Western man," with a possible military background. Changez goes through several stages of change; first he turns to multiculturalism in New York, but soon turns more and more into an American until he does not recognize himself. After 9/11 he becomes alienated, starts to question his loyalties, and revolts against American society and behaviors. Both characters are pushed into stereotypes they do not completely fit into and this is where the reader comes in, because he or she has to decide who these characters are. The reader's decision will most probably be based upon his or her previous ideas and thoughts about the attacks and the stereotypes. The goal of Hamid's novel is to shift these stereotypes and show that there is more behind a person's actions than one might think. Changez might look like the "stereotypical Muslim man" with a beard, which according to the stereotype in this context should make him a terrorist. However, when reading his story there are things that do not fit; he is not born into this role, he is not someone that cannot change his mind, in fact he does change his mind, and he does it for his own sake.

Also discussed is how 9/11 throws America backwards in time, into nostalgia. The nationalism of the imperialistic America becomes important for the country to appear in

control over the “dangerous Orient.” Suddenly it is about “them” and “us,” and this is where Changez gets caught up in the middle, having to take sides. At the same time people, colleagues first and foremost, around him start to notice his “Otherness” and has to take a stand for whether he is one of the “good ones” or the “bad ones”, whatever that might mean. Here the postcolonial encouragement of hybridity comes into discussion. Changez is a hybrid since he stands between two countries and is influenced by both. It is the two sides’ difficulties in accepting the other’s differences that creates the problem. In a global society hybridity has to be seen as something positive. Differences should be on “equal terms,” and “acknowledge but challenged,” as Edwards wrote. The novel shows that hybridity, the mixing of cultures, is the only way out of the colonial ways of thinking, but that it is far from understood or practiced.

Hamid’s novel forces the reader to participate in the creation of the story by feeding the stereotypes within him or her. Since details are vague, and can be seen in different ways, the perception the reader gets will reflect what he or she thought before. The novel will help question why he or she thinks that way and question not only the stereotypes themselves but also the media coverage of the attacks, and the novels that followed. Hamid questions these novels and the media by using the format of a confession but making the content different, mocking the idea of semi-confessional stories published by Muslims after 9/11. Also, by shutting the otherwise so present America out of the narration the reader is forced to read a first-person narrative from the “other side.”

This essay concludes that Hamid uses the monologue format, the narrator’s struggle, and the reader’s role as interpreter to explore and open up a discussion. The discussion is about the Orient, the Occident, and the colonial thoughts that are still present in a world where America is an imperialistic power.

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