

## RENOUNCING ORIENTALISM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MOHSIN HAMID'S THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST IN AN OCCIDENTAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to critically study the theoretical idea of Occidentalism in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to understand the hatred of the fundamentalists for the Western socio-cultural, political, and economic system. The primary focus of the research is to analyze the core causes of extremists' abhorrence, particularly of third world countries, in selected novels toward Western, particularly American, ideologies and policies such as hegemony, exceptionalism, imperialism, colonialism and globalization. This research paper, further, exclusively focuses on the Occidentalism attitude of main characters in the select novel to highlight the Western low moralities and superficial values that seem unacceptable to the deep rooted (extremist) society of the non-West. The purpose of selecting a non-western 9/11 fiction writer for data collection of this research is that it reflects real-life events through the main characters of the novel, and most importantly it explores the reaction of both Oriental and Occidental on 9/11 incident. For the theoretical and methodological approach, the study undergoes Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies (Buruma & Margalit, 2004), as the scholarship of the authors has a potential for analyzing the data of the present study and for decoding the key concepts of occidentalism in the manuscript. The research concludes after the data analysis that Mohsin Hamid's novel seems to not only articulate the vigorous notion of the Occidentalism toward the West but also address the reasons for the hatred of the Orientals. In the light of the conclusion drawn, it is asserted that Mohsin Hamid's selected novel is largely Occidentalism in nature.

**Keywords:** Occidentalism, Western hegemony and Imperialism, Fiction, Socio-cultural, Political, Economic system.

### INTRODUCTION

In the post-9/11 world, literature has increasingly become a site for exploring the tensions between the East and the West, particularly in the context of Islamophobia, global politics, and cultural identity. Through his protagonist, Changez, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a significant novel that questions Western socio-cultural, political, religious, and economic systems through the lens of Occidentalism. The niche of the current study is to highlight Occidentalism's concerns through Changez relating complex issues of identity, belonging, and resistance in the wake of 9/11. This study explores the idea of

Occidentalism as a theoretical framework taken from Buruma and Margalit's *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (2004). Under this prism, the study aims to comprehend the abhorrence of fundamentalists against Western beliefs and moral principles. The study unfolds Occidentalism's main concern about the West for causing the damages to the current world through their immoral conducts in almost all spheres of life and suggest plausible solutions to fix these issues to make the world a better place.

As Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) describes Western images of the East, the term

"Occidentalism" describes a collection of degrading preconceptions about the West. According to Buruma and Margalit, Occidentalism is a counter-ideology born in reaction to the West's alleged imperialism, conceit, and moral degeneration (p. 5). As Edward Said argues in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, the West has historically constructed and perpetuated stereotypical and reductive images of the East to justify its dominance and control. Samuel P. Huntington's thesis in *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) also emphasizes that the fundamental cultural differences between the West and non-Western civilizations will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. These perspectives resonate in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where the protagonist, Changez, becomes increasingly disillusioned with the West, particularly the United States, as he experiences the repercussions of these entrenched ideologies. Changez, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, progressively grows disgusted with the pinnacle of Western power, the United States. Being the part of Western system before 9/11 episode, Changez's experiences the Western politics that changes him from American lover to American hater. This change in his character is a way to criticise Western exceptionalism, hegemony, and cultural imperialism.

Hamid's book captures the animosity between the East and the West that the historical events have highlighted. Changez, a Muslim immigrant from Pakistan, who came to the United States for achieving his American dream which he did before the 9/11 incident. After the twin tower attack, the events unfold against him that turned him from American lover to American hater. He experiences a sense of disappointment with American foreign policy and mindset. He leaves the hard-earned life that he builds over the years in the US and returns to Pakistan. He takes an Occidentalist stance—a rejection of Western principles and values and a return to his roots for his redemption.

"Extreme otherness," articulated by Gheorghiu & Gheorghiu (2018) is mostly what helps one to appreciate the dynamics in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Their research shows that sometimes mistrust and worry have warped Western impressions of Muslims after 9/11. Apart from politics, this "Muslim Menace" narrative links in literature where Muslim characters are

sometimes labelled as "Other" (p.47-56). Hamid criticizes this narrative by presenting Changez as a diverse character embracing and rejecting Western society. His ultimate rejection of the West could have been in reaction to Muslim prejudices of the Occident and Western Orientalist ideals. According to Zafar (2020), labor strikes by South Asian Muslim Americans in Mohsin Hamid and Ayad Akhtar combine protest with integration. Typical is the *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* predicament of Changez. Starting with American customs, he fights the culture he loved as the political surroundings get more hostile post 9/11 event. The protagonist of Occidentalism fights internally to regain his cultural identity and reject Western concepts.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist's trip back to Pakistan and adoption of a more conventional lifestyle question the homogeneity of globalization of the US. Western principles are viewed unethical and culturally imperialist that Occidentals vehemently hate. This book explores the conflicts and power systems maintaining both local and global identities. The main protagonists in all stories feel letdown when they discover it challenging to mix their dreams with their environment. Hamid's story exposes disappointment from the protagonist's rejection of moral and modest norms of the Occident. This study of cultures of both Orient and the Occident help to clarify the viewpoint of Occidentalism and shows how different philosophical and cultural positions depend on contradicting criteria. Under postcolonial theory, the East is usually the victim of Western imperialism while the West is occasionally an oppressor. According to Afridi (2008), modern Islamic writers Naguib Mahfouz and others challenge Western dominance as an outside entity attempting to impose its rules on other civilizations.

Hamid's novel becomes a tool for expressing the concerns and anger of the postcolonial society, where the legacy of Western imperialism still defines the non-Westerners' identities and objectives. Muharram (2014) explores the idea of Occidentalism in reverse, whereby the West is seen via the prism of contemporary Arab intellectuals. For example, Changez articulates in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine..."

(p. 152), however, his idea of American lover converted into American hater after what he encounters at the aftermath of 9/11 incident. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* clearly shows this reverse Orientalism, sometimes known as Occidentalism, because Changez's rejection of the West is not only a personal disappointment but also a part of a larger cultural narrative criticizing Western modernity. The experiences of the protagonist in the United States, where he personally sees the hypocrisies and contradictions of Western civilization, guide this criticism. One could consider his final trip back to Pakistan and his acceptance of a more conventional way of life as a kind of opposition against Western cultural imperialism and the powers of globalization. Furumizo (2005) notes how often Occidentalism and Orientalism are employed to support cultural superiority and exclusion, therefore offering a comparative study of these ideas. Regarding *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Occidentalism challenges the presumptions and preconceptions supporting Orientalist depictions of the East, therefore countering the mainstream Western narrative (Furumizo, 2005). Therefore, the book presents a sophisticated analysis of identity, belonging, and resistance in a globalized society, so confronting the power relations between the East and the West.

Mohsin Hamid's other literary works, such as *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *Exit West* (2017), similarly explore themes of identity, cultural conflict, and the West's influence on the East. In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid delves into the disillusionment of a young Pakistani man who struggles with his place in a society shaped by Western influences and internal corruption. *Exit West* tackles the global refugee crisis, blending magical realism with a critique of Western immigration policies. Across his works, Hamid consistently examines the tensions between the East and West, echoing the themes of Occidentalism and Orientalism prevalent in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is thus a sharp critique of Western ideas and a clever analysis of the challenge of identity in the post-9/11 society. This study intends to find the main reasons of the protagonist's rejection of Western ideals and examine the larger cultural and ideological consequences of this rejection by means of a prism of Occidentalism. Understanding the dynamics of Occidentalism and

the way it moulds the identities and aspirations of people in a globalized society would allow one to know the conflicts between the East and the West as well as the criticism of Western hegemony in the book.

By means of Occidentalism, the current study seeks to offer a thorough study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, therefore augmenting the broader general debate on post-9/11 literary postcolonial identity and cultural resistance. This study aims to reveal the several reasons behind the rejection of Western values by people from non-Western nations by concentrating on the course of the protagonist and the critique of Western conceptions by the book. This book is important since it clarifies how literature challenges and considers the sociopolitical reality of our time. Furthermore, this study provides fresh insights on the cultural and ideological aspects of the East-West divide by using the theoretical framework of Occidentalism, so stressing the need of literature in opposing dominant narratives and so promoting a more complex knowledge of global power dynamics.

This research is particularly relevant in today's context, where the rise of populism, xenophobia, and cultural clashes continues to shape international relations and cultural exchanges.

#### Research Questions:

1. How does *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* portray Occidentalist attitudes toward Western ideologies, particularly in the context of 9/11?
2. What are the primary factors that drive the main characters in the novel to reject Western values, as interpreted through the concept of Occidentalism?

#### Literature Review

The concept of Occidentalism has gained significant traction in the field of postcolonial studies, particularly as a counterpoint to Edward Said's Orientalism. While Orientalism deals with the ways in which the West constructs and stereotypes the East, Occidentalism focuses on the reverse—how the East constructs and often vilifies the West. In the context of post-9/11 literature, these frameworks provide critical lenses for examining the tensions between Western and non-Western societies. This literature review delves

into various scholarly discussions surrounding Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), focusing on its depiction of Occidentalism, identity, and cultural resistance. The authors adopt different styles as a basic element of artistic representation (Ramzan et al., 2023).

The authors adopt different styles in their writings as a core element which varies from place to place under cultural representation.

### Occidentalism in Postcolonial Discourse

Buruma and Margalit's (2004) notion of Occidentalism—that is, the dehumanizing representations of the West in the perspective of its putative enemies—is based on. This concept has been quite helpful in understanding the reverse dynamic of Orientalism—where non-Western civilizations develop their own images of the West, frequently in opposition to cultural and political predominance. Massad (2015) argues that Occidentalism could also be considered as a response to the pervasive impact of Western modernism and its related concepts. Within Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, this paradigm is critically necessary for comprehending the protagonist's progressive disenchantment with the West and final rejection of its values. Changez's account is a detailed study of how non-Western countries respond to the demands of globalization and Western dominance, so subverting Western exceptionalism and cultural imperialism. Changez reflects on his changing perception of America after the 9/11 attacks. He says:

"I was no longer certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither... I had become a servant of America, with all the unseemliness and ill-fitting nature of such a position for a man of my background" (Hamid, p. 168).

Furumizo (2005) explores how certain beliefs are used as tools to uphold dominance and exclusion in a comparative analysis of Orientalism and Occidentalism. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's rejection of values serves as a form of resistance shedding light on the complexities of post 9/11 sentiments. The novel does not delve into reactions, to historical events but also challenges Western ideologies prompting a broader discussion on Western moral and cultural hegemony. Similar themes can be found in the works of authors who scrutinize the power dynamics, between the East and the West.

### Identity and Cultural Politics in Post-9/11 Literature

Numerous modern literary pieces, such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses on the journey of self-discovery in the aftermath of 9/11. Malik (2000) delves into the origins of identity struggles in literature emphasizing instances where the blending of Eastern and Western influences has led to misunderstandings. In line, with this context Hamid's novel portrays Changez's struggle to reconcile his encounters with his Pakistani heritage. In Zafar (2020) study the focus is, on the conflicting identities stemming from the pressures of fitting in while also resisting in a post-9/11 world as seen through the lens of Muslim American writers. The main character in Changez's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" grapples with the nuances of belonging and exclusion within a community mirroring the internal struggle he faces. Nazirs (2019) explores how works by Hamid and other Pakistani Anglophone writers add to the conversation on representation and identity. These stories present viewpoints that highlight the nuances of Asian identities challenging popular Western representations of Muslims and Pakistanis (p.157-190). Showing Changez's development from respect to disillusionment with the West in "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" exposes a criticism on the globalising trend that would ignore characteristics and identities.

### The Role of Literature in Shaping Postcolonial Discourse

Afridi (2008) looks at how contemporary Islamic writers question Western supremacy, where the West is perceived as an outside force aiming to impose its values on other civilisations, thereby providing a strong tool for communicating the complexities of postcolonial identity and struggle (p.121-140). This idea permeates "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," since Changez's disappointment with the West is seen as a response to American political and cultural supremacy. Changez reflects on how he initially admired the United States but later becomes increasingly disillusioned with its global dominance and the way it imposes its values on others:

"I was pleased at first... but then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased." (Hamid, p. 83).



Focussing on the way Hamid's book, combined with other works of post-9/11 fiction, reveals the tensions between the East and the West, reading (2011) and Kaoudji (2022) both analyse how these stories contradict the prevailing Western narrative. Along that social media expedites it (Ramzan et al., 2023; Ikramullah et al., 2023; Javaid et al., 2023) where technology also plays its role (Akram et al., 2021; 2022). Moral injuries may affect the combat of colonies and different Nations motto (Javaid et al., 2024). Bozatzis (2016) presents the idea of "banal Occidentalism," that daily, accepted belief on the superiority of the West. This idea helps one to see the subtle ways in which modern works support and oppose Western cultural hegemony. Changez's experiences in the United States expose him to these prosaic sorts of Occidentalism in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which assist him to create a growing sense of alienation and finally rejection of Western ideals. The way the book shows this creeping disenchantment offers a strong indictment of the subtle but pervasive means Western cultural primacy is maintained in the post-9/11 society.

Islam and Khatun (2015) highlight how these systems occasionally clash in their interpretations of Islam and its role in the modern society, therefore contrasting the points of view of "Islamic moderation" in Oriental and Occidental studies. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses this issue since Changez's identity is caught between his Pakistani background and the contradictory demands of his American experiences. The way the book examines these tensions reflects the more general challenges Muslim populations in the West face—often compelled to balance the competing needs of religious affiliation and cultural integration.

### Reframing the East-West Dichotomy

The subject of study in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the East-West split is a dynamic and shifting relationship under constant negotiation as much as a binary animosity. Along with other postcolonial writers, Hamid's book questions the oversimplified portrayals of the West as an active oppressor and the East as a helpless victim. Rather, these stories show how non-Western people's agency shapes their own identities and challenges Western cultural hegemony. Emphasising the need of reframing this duality in post-9/11 literature,

Nazir (2019) and Hamid (2024) both think that their works give a more thorough grasp of the worldwide power dynamics shaping present identities.

Especially in relation to Western images of Muslims in accordance with 9/11, Gheorghiu (2018) looks at the idea of "extreme otherness". They contend that rather than merely fear and mistrust, the way Muslims are portrayed as the "Muslim Menace" captures more underlying concerns about the West's waning cultural supremacy as well (p. 161-249). Changez is a person who examines and reflects these preconceptions simultaneously in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as Changez says, "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and in my mind, I continued to seek her out: I felt myself to be not just a Pakistani, but a New Yorker as well" (p. 145). Apart from his response to outside demands, his rejection of the West is a deliberate attempt to retrieve his cultural identity and challenge the forces of globalisation.

Research on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and related post-9/11 literature highlights at last how closely identity, cultural politics, and global power dynamics interact. The way the book presents Occidentalism offers a critical prism through which one may examine the tensions between the East and the West, therefore offering a complicated assessment of Western ideas and their consequences on non-Western nations. By putting Hamid's writings in the broader context of postcolonial studies, this literature review emphasises the need of books in generating and reflecting the political and cultural reality of our day. As the globe keeps grappling with the problems of globalisation, migration, and cultural conflict, the insights provided by these works of literature will remain essential for understanding the complexities of identity and belonging in the modern society.

### Methodology

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the East and the West are dynamic and fluidly connected under constant negotiation as much as binary animosity. Along with other postcolonial authors, Hamid's book critiques the oversimplified portrayals of the West as an aggressive oppressor and the East as a

helpless victim. Instead, these narratives highlight how the agency of non-Western people forms their own identities and questions Western cultural hegemony. Emphasising the need of reframing this dichotomy in post-9/11 literature, Nazir (2019) and Hamid (2024) both believe that their works provide a more complete comprehension of the international power dynamics forming modern identities. Especially about Western images of Muslims in accordance with 9/11, Gheorghiu and Gheorghiu (2018) look at the idea of “extreme otherness.” They contend that rather than merely fear and mistrust, the way Muslims are portrayed as the “Muslim Menace” captures more underlying concerns about the West’s waning cultural supremacy as well. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* features Changez as a person who both questions and reflects these preconceptions at once. Apart from his answer to outside demands, his rejection of the West is a conscious decision to recover his cultural identity and oppose the globalization trends. The corpus of research on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and comparable post-9/11 fiction emphasizes, at last, how intimately identity, cultural politics, and global power dynamics interact. The way the book portrays Occidentalism provides a critical prism through which one may

see the conflicts between the East and the West, therefore providing a complex evaluation of Western ideas and their effects on non-Western countries. By putting Hamid’s work in the larger context of postcolonial studies, this literature review underlines the need of books in generating and reflecting the political and cultural reality of our day. The insights offered by these works of literature will remain vital for comprehending the complexity of identity and belonging in the modern world as the world keeps struggling with the issues of globalization, migration, and cultural conflict.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses on identifying and interpreting the key themes that emerge from the narrative related to Occidentalism. The thematic analysis reveals several prominent themes, including cultural resistance, identity conflict, anti-imperialism, and critiques of Western ideologies. These themes are integral to understanding how the novel constructs and challenges the dichotomy between the East and the West. Moreover, it articulates the protagonist’s journey of self-discovery and rejection of Western values.

**Table 1**

Textual References for Theme “Cultural Resistance” in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through Occidental lens:

Themes	Sub-Themes	Textual References
Cultural Resistance	Resistance to Western Influence	<b>Changez’s Smile at 9/11 News:</b> "I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2007, p. 72). <b>Changez’s Discomfort at Underwood Samson:</b> "I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2007, p. 72). <b>Changez’s Critique of Western Materialism:</b> "I realized that I had been so focused on the fundamentals... that I had failed to notice the cracks in the foundations" (Hamid, 2007, p. 87).
	Rejection of Western Lifestyle	<b>Changez’s Rejection of American Culture:</b> "I was no longer certain where I belonged, in New York or in Lahore, in the lap of luxury or in the call of my country" (Hamid, 2007, p. 94). <b>Changez’s Decision to Return to Pakistan:</b> "I made my way home to Lahore. I resolved to not stay in America" (Hamid, 2007, p. 159).

Cultural resistance is one of the most significant themes in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, reflecting the protagonist Changez’s growing disillusionment with Western culture and values. Changez’s encounters with his American coworkers, his relationship with Erica, and his changing sense of identity all help to deftly weave this issue throughout the story. Changez is presented from the beginning as someone who values and dreams of the Western way of life. As observed by his first excitement over his degree and American job offer, many from the Global South find appeal in the West. Changez sees the moral bankruptcy and superficiality of the society he once loved as the narrative unfolds. His understanding starts at Princeton, where he performs intellectually but feels under pressure to fit Western standards.

Changez's relationship with Erica exemplifies his cultural rejection. Changez first finds appeal in Erica, who embodies Western wealth, freedom, and beauty. As Erica disappears into her past, which represents the West's incapacity to transcend its historical tragedies, their relationship deteriorates. Changez's discontent with Erica's emotional inaccessibility reflects Western society's incapacity to interact with and comprehend the

world. Changez's cultural protest shifts following 9/11. Being mistrusted and despised for his appearance and heritage drives him to reject Western principles. Changez's chuckle following the fall of the Twin Towers reveals his covert inclination to anti-Western forces. Although unexpected, this reaction highlights Changez's increasing estrangement from the West. His smile condemns Western imperialism expressed by skyscrapers, not celebrating hope at the catastrophe. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez questions globalisation from both personal and cultural angles. Changez starts to doubt that Western interests propel globalisation to uphold exploitation and injustice. Working at Underwood Samson, a valuation company that embodies the capitalist spirit, he is forced to face the brutal facts of the economic empire. As Changez begins to see the destructive impact of his work on the economies and cultures of developing nations, his resistance to Western capitalism grows. This culminates in his decision to abandon his career and return to Pakistan, symbolizing his complete rejection of the Western world and its values.

**Table 2**

Textual References for Theme “Identity Conflict” in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through Occidental perspective:

Themes	Sub-Themes	Textual References
Identity Conflict	Dual Identities	<b>Changez’s Struggle with Dual Identities:</b> "I was struggling with my identity... was I the product of Princeton, the Americanized professional, or was I still fundamentally a Pakistani?" (Hamid, 2007, p. 88). <b>Changez’s Reflection on Erica’s Unattainability:</b> "She was a symbol of America itself... I could never really possess her" (Hamid, 2007, p. 89).
	Alienation and Displacement	<b>Changez’s Realization of American Perception:</b> "I was a modern-day Janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine" (Hamid, 2007, p. 103). <b>Changez’s Disillusionment with Western Success:</b> "I had returned to Pakistan, but the fact that I had lived in the United States... was enough to make me suspect" (Hamid, 2007, p. 158). <b>Changez’s Final Realization:</b> "I was, in four and a half years, transformed from a man who admired America to one who deeply resented it" (Hamid, 2007, p. 163).

Identity conflict is another central theme in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, reflecting Changez’s struggle to reconcile his Pakistani heritage with his adopted Western identity. His cultural opposition is based on this idea, which also motivated his decision to leave the West. Changez presents himself at the beginning of the story as a proud Pakistani mixed Westerner. Though he still feels his local culture, his Princeton degree and New York job demonstrate his effective absorption into Western civilisation. Changez suffers internal conflict trying to keep his cultural integrity while satisfying Western standards.

The events of 9/11 aggravate Changez’s identity dilemma. Muslim-majority country immigrants are suddenly wary and terrified. He understands that his colleagues and outsiders will never accept him even if he is successful in America because of their hostility. Changez then questions his devotion and his purpose in the world.

Changez’s identity issue comes up in his relationship with Erica. Though he thinks their

relationship is doomed as Erica cannot move on after Chris’s death, he is attracted to her. Erica’s American identity is embodied by Chris, who inhibits her from totally embracing Changez, the "Other." Changez’s cultural and identity conundrum in America is that he is naturally different and cannot be totally embraced. The book highlights Changez’s identity struggle as he relates his story to an unidentified American reader. With the storytelling technique, Changez can consider his past and present from far away. Changez’s identity mobility and self-discovery throughout the work are underlined in this narrative approach. Ultimately, Changez’s identity conflict is resolved through his rejection of the West and his return to Pakistan. This decision represents his embrace of his cultural roots and his rejection of the Western identity he had once aspired to. However, the novel leaves open the question of whether Changez’s identity conflict is truly resolved or whether he remains trapped between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either.

**Table 3**

Textual References for Theme “Anti-Imperialism” in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through Occidental perspective:

Themes	Sub-Themes	Textual References
Anti-Imperialism	Critique of American Foreign Policy	<b>Changez’s Critique of American Foreign Policy:</b> "I was increasingly aware of the hypocrisy of the American empire" (Hamid, 2007, p. 95).
	Exploitation of Developing Countries	<b>Changez’s Discomfort with Valuation Work:</b> "We were shaping the future of developing countries, and I did not like the way we were doing it" (Hamid, 2007, p. 108).
	Rejection of Corporate Practices	<b>Changez’s Rejection of Underwood Samson’s Methods:</b> "Focus on the fundamentals. This was the creed of the empire’s new corporate warriors" (Hamid, 2007, p. 117).
	Impact of Globalization	<b>Changez’s Realization of the Impact of Globalization:</b> "I could not bring myself to watch America... bulldozing through the world, enforcing its will" (Hamid, 2007, p. 139). <b>Changez’s Decision to Resist:</b> "I resolved to resist the temptation to conform, to shape my life on the model of the American dream" (Hamid, 2007, p. 159).

Anti-imperialism is a prominent theme in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, reflecting the novel’s critique of Western hegemony and its impact on the

Global South. Growing knowledge of and hostility to Western imperialism supports Changez’s more general rejection of the West, which is connected



to cultural resistance and identity conflict. Underwood Samson's Underwood work captures Western imperialism. The company's catchphrase, "Focus on the fundamentals," captures the profit and efficiency underneath Western capitalism. Changez thrives in this environment, but he becomes disenchanted when he realises his job hurts underdeveloped countries. His character drives to become Occidental in his approach when he experiences American Immoral conducts. He notes how Western corporate interests wipe out indigenous economies and customs in countries like the Philippines. Changez studies American foreign policy and anti-imperialism. Particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, he becomes more and more sceptical of the US's involvement in foreign crises. His comments on American military operations and support of autocratic governments expose Western hypocrisy in claims to democracy and human

rights. Changez's criticism of American imperialism is informed by his own experiences as well as the background of Western rule of the East. The book looks at how the psychological consequences of imperialism affect colonial people. Changez's political and economic dominance as well as its cultural imperialism meant to eradicate non-Western identities drive her animosity of the West. His defied imperial forces seeking to define his identity by rejecting Western concepts and returning to Pakistan. The anti-imperialist thread of the book depends on Changez's change from a conformingly Western capitalist to a loud imperialist critic. By choosing to quit his affluent career and go back to Pakistan, he is rejecting Western imperialism. This act of resistance presents Changez as a militant against Western hegemony and links him to Global South anti-imperialist groups.

**Table 4**

Textual References for Theme "Critique of Western Ideologies" in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through Occidental standpoint:

Themes	Sub-Themes	Textual References
Critique of Western Ideologies	American Exceptionalism	<b>Critique of American Exceptionalism:</b> "I found it ironic that America, so self-righteous and powerful, could also be so insecure" (Hamid, 2007, p. 78).
	Capitalism and Materialism	<b>Disillusionment with Capitalism:</b> "I was unsettled by the fact that my job was to play a part in the destruction of another economy" (Hamid, 2007, p. 110).
		<b>Critique of American Individualism:</b> "In that moment, I resolved to stop playing the game of individual achievement that I had been so good at" (Hamid, 2007, p. 125).
		<b>Observation on Materialism:</b> "The pursuit of wealth and power had led me to neglect the more important things in life, like my family and my country" (Hamid, 2007, p. 148).
		<b>Rejection of Western Ideals:</b> "I chose instead to turn my back on the Western world and all it stood for" (Hamid, 2007, p. 160).

By means of a critique of Western philosophy, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* investigates cultural opposition, identity struggle, and anti-imperialism. By means of Changez's experiences and views, the book questions Western ideas such exceptionalism, individualism, and capitalism from the lens of

Occidentalism. This criticism highlights how brilliantly American exceptionalism is portrayed in the work. Changez first loved the US because it presented unparalleled chances for success and personal development. Growing disappointed with American society, he

discovers the dark side of exceptionalism—arrogance, entitlement, and contempt of other civilisations. Changez's criticism of American exceptionalism is seen in his developing awareness of the differences between America's idealised image and its worldwide actions.

Furthermore, attacked in the story is conventional Western individualism. Changez's experience at Underwood Samson, where individual accomplishment and competitiveness take front stage over all else, reveals how this mindset dehumanises. Changez is concerned the morality of his work since the company gives efficiency and profit first priority over social responsibility and empathy. His mounting discontent with the company's actions reflects his rejection of Western ideas that give personal success top priority over

social welfare. The story also attacks capitalism, which fuels Western imperialism and selfishness. Changez challenges the morality of capitalism after learning his work exploits developing countries that cause poverty. Changez's discontent with American consumption and materialism exposes a more general criticism of Western capitalism's principles. Changez's return to Pakistan and choice of a simpler, more communal way of life mark his rejection of Western ideas. He decided to live more closely to his values and reconnect with his culture. However, the novel's ambiguous ending leaves open the question of whether Changez's rejection of Western ideologies is truly complete, or whether he remains entangled in the very structures he seeks to escape.

**Table 5**

Textual References for Theme “The East-West Dichotomy” in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through Occidental lens:

Themes	Sub-Themes	Textual References
The East-West Dichotomy	Cultural Clash	<b>Changez’s Dual Perspective:</b> "I was, in essence, a hybrid; I was Pakistani by birth but had spent my formative years in America" (Hamid, 2007, p. 97).
	Westernization of the East	<b>Changez’s Reflections on the American Dream:</b> "I was not willing to be a participant in this undignified contest of who could out-consume the other" (Hamid, 2007, p. 116).
	Dialogue and Division	<b>Observation on Westernization:</b> "The city [Lahore] I had once known was becoming a shadow of its former self, a victim of Westernization" (Hamid, 2007, p. 145).
		<b>The Silent American Listener:</b> "Your silence says much, and so does the fact that you have not denied any of my allegations" (Hamid, 2007, p. 176).
		<b>Final Confrontation:</b> "I must ask you, sir, what do you think of my story? Do you see the common ground between us, or are we as divided as ever?" (Hamid, 2007, p. 184).

The East-West dichotomy is a recurring theme in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, reflecting the novel’s exploration of the cultural and ideological tensions between the two regions. It reinforces the novel's critique of Western imperialism, identity struggle, and cultural resistance, linking it to the study's other concerns. Changez's narrative depicts

East-West conflict. The East-West connection has experienced adulation, rivalry, and hostility, like his initial acceptance of Western values and later rejection. The art thoughtfully reflects the East-West divide, acknowledging its complexity and condemning power imbalances. Changez's interactions with Erica and his Underwood Samson

coworkers show the story's East-West split. Erica embodies the West's appeal but inaccessibility, Changez can never truly possess her because she is attached to her history, just as he cannot fully blend into Western society due to his Eastern ancestry. However, his Underwood Samson colleagues reflect the cold, calculating West that values business and efficiency over relationships and culture.

The story examines East-West division through American foreign policy. Changez feels disillusioned with the US owing to its global actions, especially in the Muslim world. The book criticises Western foreign policy's hypocrisy and double standards, highlighting how they damage the East. The narrative highlights the East-West split as Changez tells his story to an unknown American listener. The narrative style makes the two characters aloof and tense, symbolising East-West cultural and ideological differences. The listener's silence during the story symbolises the West's inability to truly connect with Eastern ideas and experiences, preserving power inequalities. Thematic analysis demonstrates that “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” discusses cultural resistance, identity conflict, anti-imperialism, and Western ideologies. The tale explores East-West tensions, disagreements, and misunderstandings through Changez. The novel criticises Western hegemony and examines how individuals and cultures resist and adapt to globalisation and imperialism. The research shows how “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” handles Occidentalism, cultural and ideological elements that shape the protagonist's path and the post-9/11 world. The East-West division in the novel reveals how essential these concerns are in global politics and society. “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” is a powerful critique of Western values and a sympathetic look at East-West identity and culture. The novel's themes illuminate postcolonial identity and cultural resistance in a globalised society.

### **Discussion and Findings**

Thematic study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* promotes scholarly debate on Occidentalism, identity struggle, and cultural resistance. The papers you referenced clarify these issues, and the study might be matched to them to help one understand Mohsin Hamid's position in post-9/11 literature.

Particularly Kaoudji's (2022) Orientalist critique of Hamid's work) issue of cultural resistance—the literature supports the viewpoint of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Kaoudji (2022) claims that Hamid's narrative features Eastern characters against Western ideas and cultural standards. Changez's response to 9/11 and rejection of the American ideal Kaoudji (2022) sees as resistance to Western hegemony and cultural assimilation showcases this. Kaoudji's (2022) findings so are supported by the thematic study of the book, which shows how Changez depicts non-Western resistance to Western cultural imperialism. Smail (2018) juxtaposes Changez's narrative with those of other identities and opposition. According to Smail, Hamid's book's cultural resistance questions Western modernism and its shortcomings. The results of this study on Changez's evolving perspective of the West and his return to Pakistan help Smail's understanding of the book as a critique of Western cultural dominance and its consequences on identity. Changez's identity dilemma in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is under much discussion in the literature. In 2018, Gheorghiu and Gheorghiu look at how Muslims identify following 9/11. They claim Hamid's book captures Muslims' struggle to balance their identities with Western society. Reflecting Western Muslims' social pressures, this argument centres on Changez's Princeton and Underwood Samson experiences and his relationship with Erica.

Zafar's (2020) thesis on South Asian Muslim Americans as “model minorities” digs more on this identity conflict. According to Zafar, Changez's early success in the United States and ultimate disenchantment highlight the tension between assimilation and cultural preservation. The thematic study reveals how Changez's identity conflict develops as he understands he must compromise in order fit into American society. His disdain of Western society reflects the difficulty many immigrants have combining their two identities.

Hamid and Naz (2024) cast Changez and other post-9/11 heroes from Pakistani literature. These personalities, they claim, reflect cultural authenticity against globalisation. Mirroring Hamid and Naz's conclusions that these conflicts are anchored in East-West history and politics, the thematic analysis reveals that Changez's identity

conflict is a microcosm of the greater difficulties experienced by people who belong to two cultures. Western imperialism criticism adds still another component to the story. Like other postcolonial books, Hamid's works turn the emphasis on the West to interact with Orientalist rhetoric (2015). Changez grows disillusioned with American foreign policy and knows of Underwood Samson's imperialist roots in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Massad's investigation supports the core conclusions of this study—that Changez's opposition of American imperialism links his critique of Western ideas. Muharram (2014) also tackles Occidentalism as a reaction to Western hegemony, implying Hamid's book is a part of a tsunami of literary subversion of Western superiority. According to the thematic study, Changez's path is symbolic against Western imperialism as well as a personal rejection of Western values.

Islam and Khatun (2015) contrast Oriental and Occidental forms of Islamic moderation, pointing out that Hamid's presentation of Changez subverts Western notions of Muslims as extremists. According to the theme study, Changez's anti-imperialism stems from justice and equity rather than from a straightforward rejection of the West. The subtle way the book depicts anti-imperialism helps to comprehend Western power opposition. Writings on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* routinely challenge Western ideas including capitalism, exceptionalism, and individualism. According to Bozatzis (2016), Hamid's book questions the bland Occidentalism of global media and political debate, which presents the West as superior. The theme study reveals how Changez questions the American dream via dissatisfaction with Western values—especially the chase of riches and power. Reading (2011) examines the criticism of Western philosophy made by post-9/11 concerns and civilisational conflicts. According to reading, Hamid's book exposes the moral and ethical shortcomings of the West via the eyes of a disillusioned outsider, therefore subverting Western debate. As the topic analysis reveals, the piece questions American exceptionalism and materialism. Nazir (2019) looks at how Pakistani Anglophone fiction—particularly *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*—fits with Western modernity and progress narratives. According to the thematic study, which highlights Eastern culture and morals

and questions the universality of Western ideas, Nazir's conclusions coincide. At last, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* examines the recurrent literary motif of East-West division. Malik (2000) investigates East-West contacts in history to help one understand the cultural tensions of the book. Malik's conclusions are supported by the thematic study of Changez's encounters with American characters, which reveals how historical power disparities and cultural misinterpretation generate these tensions. According to Furumizo (2005), orientationalism and occidentalism are products of the East-West dichotomy and support cultural stereotypes. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* thematic study reveals how East-West ideological and cultural variances affect Changez's path." Changez emphasises this division in the book and supports Furumizo's assertion that cultural binaries survive by addressing an unidentified American reader. Afridi (2008) looks at how East-West relationships shape present Islamic identity. Afridi's results confirm the thematic study showing how strongly Eastern and Western cultures impact Changez's viewpoint and identity. The way the book explores the East-West divide reveals the tensions between these two worlds and the nuanced ways identities are created at their junction. Thematic analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* promotes the investigation of cultural resistance, identity struggle, anti-imperialism, criticism of Western philosophy, and East-West dichotomy by the novel. These ideas support the criticism of post-9/11 Western superiority and Occidentalism included throughout the book. Combining thematic analysis with literature, this discussion emphasises the importance of the novel as a commentary on worldwide cultural and ideological conflicts.

### Conclusion

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid explores the intricacy of identity, cultural resistance, and how Western ideas affected Eastern civilisation. The protagonist, Changez, first embraces the opportunities America offers and starts using American Dream concepts and beliefs. But it is clear from the story that this fantasy is not as practical or searched for as it initially appears. Changez's confrontation of the moral challenges and dilemmas of his American life starts with the events of 9/11. Since Changez's reaction to the



news of the 9/11 attacks shows a deep-seated animosity against a system that has excluded and abused his people rather than a pure hatred, a significant focus of the book is cultural resistance. His road from respect to anger of the West is marked by growing knowledge of the consequences of American foreign policy and capitalism on developing countries, especially Pakistan. Changez's relationship with Erica captures the unreachable American ideal, and his inability to genuinely connect with her symbolises his greater difficulty adjusting into American society. Changez cannot fully absorb or be embraced since Erica's residual relationship to her dead boyfriend, Chris, shows America's respect of its past. This link underlines the challenges of real cultural integration for Changez and many immigrants in similar conditions. The book centres on the problem of identity conflict since Changez is always torn between his Pakistani background and his acquired American identity. 9/11 events intensify the hostility and mistrust Muslims in the West experience. By returning to Pakistan, Changez is embracing his cultural inheritance and rejecting the Western image he has so painstakingly created. Apart from a strong critique of Western ideals, particularly capitalism, imperialism, and exceptionalism, the book Changez regards the American way of life as empty and morally defective, therefore undermining the materialism and individualism that constitute the American Dream. This critique also concerns the wider Western world, which Changez regards as imposing its ideals and systems on other countries.

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