



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Investigating the Metropolitan Hegemon: A Postcolonial Sociological Reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> January 16, 2019	The current study explores the intricate and interdependent relationship between the modern metropolitan centers and the non-metropolitan peripheries by questioning the discursive modes of hegemony prevalent in the wake of the postcolonial era. With a postcolonial sociological stance, the study employs a framework based on the concepts of Metropolis and Hegemony proposed by Farias & Stemmler (2006), Ashcroft (1998), Gramsci (1971) etc. <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> by Mohsin Hamid is chosen as a text for the study. Contrary to the traditional critiques of postcolonial studies, this study suggests a paradigm shift in the favor of postcolonial sociological perspective to have a comprehensive understanding of the sociological dimensions of postcoloniality of the modern world. The study shows how <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> is suggestive of an interdependent relationship between the metropolitan hegemon and the non-metropolis. Changez's effort to identify with himself with metropolitan hegemon is not successful and ultimately he realizes the dynamic relation between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan identities striving for stability in chaos.
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**Introduction**

To comprehend the complex co-existential connection between the Metropolis and the Non-Metropolis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the topos of Metropolis requires a discussion focused on the postcolonial perspectives. Metropolis always emerge to be the locus modernity and power and they tend to influence the non-metropolises with their hegemonic discourses. The discursive hegemony helps in the construction of the remaining part of the world as the peripheral non-metropolises. The metropolitan centers control the socio-cultural and politico-religious institutions and create a longing for modernity among the non-metropolitans. Ashcroft (1998) writes, "Metropolis is a

term used binaristically in colonial discourse to refer to the 'center' in relation to a colonial "periphery." (Ashcroft, 1998; p. 123)

Antonio Gramsci (1971) puts forward the concept of the hegemony of a particular class with a little difference. Despite he does not undermine the role of the state-controlled coercion, he highlights the role of the implicit discursive forces that come out to be instrumental in the establishment of the hegemony over any spotted territory. Gramsci underscores the factors operating to promote the interests of the ruling class. Ashcroft (1998) manages to separate the hegemony from its popular meaning that is to say 'dominance of one state confederation' to accentuate its 'broader meaning' that declares it to be 'domination by consent'.

Ashcroft (1998) continues that hegemony empowers the ruling class to persuade the others that they share common interests. Consequently, the achieved domination is not forceful rather it proves to be the ramification of persistent persuasion. It does not stand out to be exclusive. It is inclusive and provides with the inclusive power and control over the economic affairs, and certain other social socially operative apparatuses like media and education. They present the vested interests of the small governing group to be the interests of those of the commons.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* underlines the theme of an influential metropolitan hegemon in multiple ways. The metropolitan hegemony of America is ubiquitous in the novel. There are certain implicit and explicit hints of metropolitan influences such as the targeted brain-drain in the third world and the use of the controlled media to propagate and safeguard the geopolitical objectives in the South-Asian region. The postcolonial paradigm aims at identifying the binary opposition existing between the territories of the non-metropolis and the metropolis.

It substantiates their opposite positions of the centers and peripheries (Ashcroft, 1998). Subsequently, the center is the confluence of power and hegemonizes the periphery with the operation of coercion and discursiveness concomitantly (Ashcroft, 1998; Gramsci, 1971). Due to this factor, postcolonial critics find it necessitous to investigate how the metropolitan hegemon marginalize non-metropolitans.

### **Literature Review**

Etymologically, the word - metropolis - finds its traces in the Greek language. It possesses two major components. The first part 'Metro' comes from another root word 'Metera' that means to be 'Mother'. The second part is derived from 'Polity' that means 'City'. Hence, the words metropolis is translated as 'Mother-City'. One can find the first use of the term - metropolis - in the 'Greek-Roman' period. It was used to "designate the capital-cities of the Egyptian provinces." Its first usage was 'juridical' (Farias & Stemmler, 2006).

Although the idea of the metropolis was phenomenal in ancient times, it is almost out of fashion in the Middle Ages. It was revisited and rediscovered in the eighteenth/nineteenth century “with the consolidation of European empires, mainly England and France.” The word ‘metropole’ was used to represent “the center of the British empire” during that period. It was in binary opposition with the ‘periphery’ and it was the periphery that stood “informed and controlled from the metropolitan center.” Besides it, another empire – French – coined and brought the terms “France métropolitaine” and “non métropolitaine” into currency. It represented the “state of France” and “overseas French territories”. (Farias & Stemmler, 2006).

Reviewing the Gramscian concept of hegemony, Simon asserts, “Coercion and consent. The starting-point for Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, is that a class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by means of a combination of coercion and persuasion” (Simon, 1991, p. 24). The viewpoint uncovers that through this process the discourses and forces are actuated to materialize the already set goals and objectives of the ruling class. He continues to consider it to be “consent by means of political and ideological leadership”, therefore, it is the “organization of consent” (Simon, 1991, p. 24).

Hegemony also refers to, “how dominant groups in society could intellectually and culturally dominate others” (Share, Corcoran & Conway, 2012, p. 292). In the Gramscian world, the umbrella term of “culture” expresses “a variety of relationships between people, objects and meanings” (Share, Corcoran & Conway, p. 158). O’Donnell (2001) suggests that Gramsci stressed the “explanatory power, with respect to cultural and legal (political) institutions”. He goes on to say that despite being a Marxist in approach, instead of emphasizing the economic factors, Gramsci aimed at highlighting the political-institutional hegemony (O’ Donnell, 2001).

Bates (1975) finds that the “basic premise of the hegemony” is that “the man is not ruled by force alone, but also ideas”. He authenticates his argument by bringing it in the Gramscian parlance, “The foundation of a ruling class,” Gramsci writes, “is equivalent to the creation of a *weltan-schauung*.” (Bates 1975; Gramsci, 1966). He also concludes that in the Gramscian world, “hegemony and dictatorship are mutually dependent phenomena.” (Bates, 1975). Stoddart (2007) argues that Gramscian theory has made a certain advance and among them “is the attention to hegemonic power as an often-implicit “common sense” rather than a coherent body of thought... It is the embodiment of hegemony in every day common sense, through the mundane activities connected with work, school, the family and the church, that secures the consent of capital’s subaltern.” (Stoddart, 2007).

## Discussion

To underscore the hegemonic discursiveness of metropolis in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it is quite pertinent to start it from the beginning right away. The

opening lines of the novels introduce the character of Changez who is preoccupied with the superiority of his interlocutor - an American. The preoccupation with the superiority of the metropolitan/American is, in fact, the preoccupation with the superiority of the metropolis/America. This sense of inferiority to the American is the sense of inferiority found in all the non-metropolitans across the globe.

After commenting on the physical appearance of the American, Changez realizes his mistake and apologizes, "I do not mean that an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation." (Hamid, 2008, p.1). This also validates the narrative of inequality and the forebodes that the relationship between the non-metropolitan and metropolitan will be of slave and master and there will not be any fair deal of equality. Changez is not the one who determines the course of action for he represents the periphery and the American represents the metropolitan hegemon. All readers are well-placed to analogize the mindsets and the behaviors of these characters with the territories of their origin.

The protagonist of the novel gives voice to his thoughts as he accepts that he is a "lover of America" (Hamid, 2008, p. 1). Changez, by saying so, shows his love and desire metropolis. No doubt it is the result of the hegemony of the influential metropolitan hegemon. Along with that, he talks about the modern city of "Des Moines" (Hamid, 2008, p. 1) which could be an ideal shopping resort for a modern dress worn by the American. This again shows Changez's extraordinary knowledge and love for metropolis and the ways of living in it.

When the foreigner is reluctant to have a cup of tea from him then he offers him to exchange their cups of tea with each other as he says, "Do not look so suspicious. I assure you, sir, nothing untoward will happen to you," (Hamid, 2008, p. 7) he, further, carries on, "Come, if it makes you more comfortable, let me switch my cup with yours" (Hamid, 2008, p. 7). This depicts the highest level of the obedience of the periphery for the center. The people from the periphery cease to resist the hegemony when they are made to believe that resistance will bear no fruits. This is the success of the ruling class.

On the other hand, the foreigner, who, as already mentioned stands for a metropolis has a pure attitude of the center. He is suspicious about the activities of the periphery and having a close eye on the activities of the periphery. This is a symbolic representation of the relationship between Pakistan and America. America is always suspicious about the activities of Pakistan and it is always dubious about Pakistan.

Changez's preoccupation with the hegemony of the metropolis is iterative. It is visible throughout the pages of the novel. For instance, he is envious as he believes that all the masters of various fields are in America. He also is an alumnus of an American University and always becomes nostalgic whenever he revisits the wishful thinking of the past. Just see how he remembers the "*professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students philosophers-kings in the making.*" (Hamid, 2008, p. 2).

Here, it is also noteworthy that Changez exhibits his desire for the metropolis. When he recalls his spent days in America, it is worth highlighting that he portrays the phantasmagoric images of a colonial metropolis that has always remained to be the dream world of the non-metropolitans. To Changez, to enter a metropolis is a dream-come-true situation for a non-metropolis. This authenticates the victory of the metropolitan hegemon for it has successfully inculcated its ideology in the minds of the youth of the non-metropolitans, for example, Changez.

As the metropolitan hegemon instills an inferiority complex in the peripheral minds, they desire to leave the non-metropolis for the metropolis. This dislocation is charged with a dream i.e. the dream of development. To achieve this objective, a metropolis employs different strategies. The award of the scholarship is one of them. Students like Changez become the aspirants to pursue their studies abroad but they forget that they have to payback this act of generosity by contributing to the metropolitan society and ignoring their native lands. There is a specific hidden price. This is a well-planned and well-executed process of brain-drain. In this way, the center drains the brains of the periphery and they end up contributing to the consolidation of the metropolitan hegemon.

Metropolitan hegemon commands and regulates the education and economy to strengthen its hegemony over the non-metropolis. First, it entices the non-metropolitans in the name of scholarships, then gives them high wages for the jobs and ultimately they are convinced to consent that when they safeguard the interests of the metropolis, they safeguard their interests. This is another way how the metropolitan establishes its hegemony over the non-metropolitans through consent. Changez reflects in the same way as he says, "Princeton made everything possible for me." (Hamid, 2008, p.9). Here, the metropolitan hegemon once again occupies the victory stand for Changez does not discredit the metropolis for the predicaments caused by it but he credits it for making everything possible. This again is an instance of the establishment of the hegemony.

The emotional attachment of Changez with the modern New York is surfaced when he exhibits his excitement upon its mention. He admits, "to become sentimental" while recalling the city of New York. (Hamid, 2008, p.20). While comparing and contrasting the metropolis and the non-metropolis he finds America to be, "another world from Pakistan" (Hamid, 2008, p.20). Changez does not stop here and dares to compare the budgets of American and Pakistani Universities. At this point, he indulges in self-pity and shame to have drawn such a huge and dichotomous comparison. He informs that many American universities had a greater yearly budget than the total budget of Pakistani education.

It must be highlighted that behind the envy and shame of Changez, there is the investment of time and money that the metropolis has gradually and stealthily invested. The efforts buttress the narrative of metropolitan hegemony in terms of the educational economy. The character of Changez reveals that if a non-metropolitan wants to seek higher education and better standards of life, he must

dislocate and migrate to a metropolis. It validates the hegemonic character of the metropolis and metropolitans.

The reference of Gwyenth "Paltrow" (Hamid, 2008, p. 13) and Britney "Spears" (Hamid, 2008, p. 13) by Changez is his acceptance of the ascendancy of the culture of the metropolitan. He is accepting the superiority of the center and shows his desire to be a part of that culture. Mentioning the name of Italo Calvino's novel titled "Mr. Palomar" (Hamid, 2008, p. 14) is again his acceptance of the aforementioned characteristic of the cultural hegemony.

When Changez mentions the names of the Hollywood movies like "Top Gun" (Hamid, 2008, p. 21), "Maverick" (Hamid, 2008, p. 21), "Ice Man" (Hamid, 2008, p. 21) and "The Great Gatsby" (Hamid, 2008, p. 26), his love for American culture is revealed to all. Once again, this is the cultural hegemony that the metropolis has established and maintained over a non-metropolis. Changez, who by birth is a Pakistani is never seen throughout the novel, talking about a Pakistani movie but he at many times gives the references of the Hollywood movies, its actors and singers. This is the cultural hegemony attained by the center over the minds of the periphery as non-metropolitans show their tilt towards metropolitan culture invariably.

Changez asks the foreigner to be at ease when there is a power failure and the stranger takes his hand in his pocket. He assures him, "no one will attempt to steal your wallet." He also guarantees that Lahore is not a city in which he is susceptible to mugging. (Hamid, 2008, p. 36). These lines tell about the uncertainty of the relationship between Changez and the stranger. This atmosphere of suspicion is also present on a broader level between Pakistan and America as Pakistan, consistently, seems to be assuring the American that their interests would be safeguarded in the region.

Changez is also found expressing his love for metropolis by appreciating the American expression of the American. Changez says, "Creepy, you say? What a delightfully American expression---" (Hamid, 2008, p. 37). The line also tells about the cultural hegemony of the metropolis as even at the negative word of "creepy" non-metropolitan is appreciating it (Hamid, 2008, p. 37). This is the cultural superiority of the metropolis which it has instilled in the minds of the non-metropolitans as they appreciate the language of the metropolis irrespective of whether it is appropriate or inappropriate.

"What I would not give for a bucket of American popcorn shrimp" (Hamid, 2008, p. 50). Changez utters these lines when he addresses the American to discuss the delicacies found in the metropolis. He is prepared to do anything to get this delicacy. The metropolis had infused a love of modern food in him. It is not included in the checklist of any non-metropolitan largely even if it happens to be so, he cannot make it his priority due to his incapacity to develop taste for it. Changez not only knows develops a liking for it but also knows how to eat it to get

maximum pleasure out of it. Here, Changez accepts the cultural hegemony of metropolitan cuisine.

Also, the metropolitan hegemon seems to be authenticating the narrative of uprightness and merit through certain characters. Among them, Underwood Samson's vice president supersedes the rest when he pronounces, "If you do well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't, you'll be out of the door." (Hamid, 2008, p.21). He also reiterates the rhetoric of the master/slave relationship as he guarantees a reward only for good performance, otherwise, he will have to walk out. It can be said that a metropolis is threatening the non-metropolis to be ready for a strict action as non-compliance is highly intolerable in such a relationship and a slave is owned as long as he is of financial assistance to the master. It is also reflected through the character of Sherman when he adds, "'We're a meritocracy,'" (Hamid, 2008, p.21) and "We believe in being the best" (Hamid, 2008, p.21).

In an interview, Jim asks him to "Sell Yourself" (Hamid, 2008, p. 4). Here, Jim who is a metropolitan man is talking to a non-metropolitan and realizing him that he is a sellable object on the premises of the metropolis. The metropolis by establishing its hegemony over the economy of the non-metropolis has become successful in inculcating a sense of being sellable associated with the non-metropolis and that too by assuring its domination by consent. Again, the metropolis is in a controlling position wherein non-metropolis is being controlled through consent in the pursuit of a bright future.

The character of the father of Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is another metropolitan who is also a flag-bearer of the metropolitan hegemon. His views about Pakistan are the views of any metropolitan about the land and men of the periphery. He overviews that Pakistan's "economy" is deteriorating, in "dictatorship" the "corruption" is rampant and the rich are at the helm of affairs. He also does not forget to mention "fundamentalism". He also blames the rich elite class to "rape" the country. This discourse has become popular among the Western populace; however, it overshadows the other side wherein behind these all problems the hidden hands of metropolitan hegemon can be identified upon critical investigation invariably. (Hamid, 2008, p. 33).

Erica, too, acts as a representative of the metropolis when she asks Changez, "Do people have picnics in Lahore?" (Hamid, 2008, p. 35), and when the answer is, "not so much in summer" (Hamid, 2008, p. 35) then she says, "'So, this must seem very foreign to you, then,'" (Hamid, 2008, p. 35). This comment of Erica, speaks of the American narrative in which America thinks Pakistan to be a fundamentalist country where people do not have any sort of picnic. This represents the metropolitan attitude towards a peripheral territory where the metropolis considers the non-metropolis to be equivalent to a barbaric place.

The coercive element of metropolitan hegemon comes into limelight with America's decision to go into war with a backward third world non-metropolis i.e.

Afghanistan. Pakistan was also alarmed and came under the shadows of war. Here, the interference of America in the interior and foreign policy of Pakistan is also noteworthy as America continued to pressurize Pakistan to achieve its targets. Changez's conversation with Wainwright is reminiscent of the prevalence of the narrative of the metropolitan hegemon where Changez recalls Pakistan's assurance of her "support to the United States" (Hamid, 2008, p.56). In the given scenario, Pakistan had to support the metropolitan hegemon against a country in its neighborhood and practicing the same religion through coercion.

It is observable that Changez is cognizant of the power of the narrative as he notes, "it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details." (Hamid, 2008, p.71). It is the presentation of the narrative that counts and the facts become relegated and secondary. Changez feels the thrust of the narrative in his life also as he experiences a change in his gaze. The "Americanness" of the gaze caused a change in the *weltanschauung* of Changez (Hamid, 2008, p. 74). Upon his return to the native land, the Americanness of his gaze made him sneer at the indigenous locale with contempt. He felt ashamed of himself due to the unclean outlook of his house and wanted to renovate it immediately.

Changez did not take too long to realize that consistent hammering of the hegemonic narrative of the metropolis had caused a major change in his worldview. His love for West made him look down upon the East. Sooner, this self-realization transformed into self-actualization and he resolved to change his gaze. It is a truth that under the pretext of reformation, metropolis always wants to hegemonize the non-metropolis.

The constant surveillance is another key factor that helps the metropolis maintain its hegemony. In the given circumstances, the non-metropolis is always sure of the omnipresence of the non-metropolis and threatened by it simultaneously. Changez is also suspicious about the American and suspects him to be armed. This also refers to an atmosphere of mistrust present between the two entities.

Media is another tool that plays a key role in the formation and dissemination of the hegemonic narrative of a metropolis. Changez pinpoints the negative role of media against Afghanistan and Islam after the 9/11 debacle. Western media popularized the rhetoric of fundamentalism and paved the way for the march of the troops in Afghanistan. Changez also thinks that it was the coercive and discursive hegemony of America that convinced and allied the global forces against a nearly armless enemy. Metropolis does not hesitate to declare war against its non-metropolis without anticipating the "repercussions of" its tantrums.

When Changez is disillusioned and he can point out the impact of metropolitan hegemony on his life, he does not hesitate to admit that he serves to be a "modern day janissary" wasting his energies to strengthening the "American Empire". He parallels him to the janissaries after the old man Juan-Bautista narrates



him the event of the janissaries who fought the battles to “erase their civilizations”. (Hamid, 2008, p. 91). This advancement is very pivotal in the novel as it determines the next line of action of the protagonist. He parts his ways with the metropolis to go to the non-metropolis. Jim’s is insistent to convince him to carry on reminds of the constant hammering of the metropolis to extend the cooperation.

When Changez returns from Chile to New York, he reflects that he had invariably felt distressed about the way “in which America conducted itself in the world”. He also begrudges the “constant interference in the affairs” concerning the rest of the world. (Hamid, 2008, p. 94). He also feels bitter at the role played by America in Taiwan, Korea, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. Changez also disfavors the American policy of “aid and sanctions” designated for his homeland i.e. Pakistan. (Hamid, 2008, p. 94).

Soon Changez turns his focus towards the impact of the economic hegemony of the metropolis. He does not hesitate to admit that “...finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power.” When he is enlightened with the hegemonic character of the metropolis he refuses to be a participant to facilitate the “project of domination” of America. (Hamid, 2008, pp. 94-95).

The ending of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is also suggestive of the interdependent relationship between the metropolitan hegemon and the non-metropolis. Changez’s effort to shake hands with his interlocutor resembles Pakistan’s efforts to befriend America and the uncertain response of the foreigner reminds of the unclear policies of the United States of America towards Pakistan. The American approaches his pocket with his hand and Changez can only see a metal that is glinting; however, he cannot make out whether it is a shining metal gun or of the case of a visiting card.

The ambiguous response of the American to the goodwill gesture of Changez of shaking hands refers to the symbiotic relationship between the powerful metropolitan hegemon and the compromised non-metropolis. In such a relationship the former is always at a vantage point to obfuscate the latter’s faculties of anticipation and comprehension through its discursive superiority.

## Conclusion

Changez’s attitude towards the American tends to become less friendly for he has become disillusioned and can foresee, “Such an America had to be stopped in the interest not only of the rest of humanity” (Hamid, 2008 p. 101). He also identifies that the war on terror is not the war of humanity but a small group of Americans. It is the power of the metropolitan hegemon that has made the majority of the other nations its accomplice in the war aiming at its gains. Metropolis has spotted the soft targets like Afghanistan and Iraq and coerced the hegemonized non-metropolises like Pakistan and India to help her. The locale of the novel reveals

an open secret that the powerful metropolitan hegemon is well-prepared to activate all the devices available to it to establish and maintains its authority over the rest of the world.

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