



RESEARCH PAPER

The Global Imaginary and Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: A Study of Global Capitalist Fundamentalism and Terrorist Ontology in Mohsin Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist"

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ABSTRACT

Pakistani fiction in English, in recent times, has been re-signified and re-contextualized by the forces of the global imaginary, in particular by the authors residing in various parts of the globe, and the national imaginary seems to have been eclipsed or over-shadowed by the global capitalist/imperial forces as well as by the global Islamic discourses. Mohsin Hamid, in "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007), draws parallels between the forces of global capitalist fundamentalism and global religious neofundamentalism to highlight the impact of global imaginary on contemporary Pakistani fiction and also to bring to the fore the fundamentalism inherent in both global discourses. This paper, using Lacanian notion of identification along with Valente's "The Imaginary Symbolic" (2003) and Roy's "Neofundamentalism" (2004), probes the process of protagonist's identification(s) within the framework of global imaginary. Through the study of identificatory relationships, this paper foregrounds the shift in contemporary Pakistani fiction from postcolonial epistemology to terrorist ontology.

Introduction

The shifting and transient nature of fiction produced by the second generation writers of Pakistani origin like Mohsin Hamid essentializes a critical evaluation of the global imaginary in the context of contemporary Pakistani fiction. Such an evaluation as this entails a critical reading of the global imaginary not as a unified, monolith and all-encompassing universal epistemic standpoint that uniformly and unequivocally renders the globe as a perfect "Ivory tower" (Kayatekin & Ruccio, 1998, p. 92), rather such an evaluation as this requires a reading of the global imaginary premised upon the multiple, heterogeneous, and to

some extent, discordant discourses brought to the forefront by the global imaginary. In this context, Mohsin Hamid, in "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007), deals with the hegemonic discordant forces shaping the global imaginary – hegemonic forces made all the more significant by the glaring absence of the nation-state or the national imaginary. In this paper, Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007) has been analyzed as it deals with the impact of a global terrorist event on Muslims and bifurcates the world in two apparently opposing forces of capitalist fundamentalism and religious neofundamentalism.

The Global Imaginary

The term global imaginary, as defined by Manfred Steger (2008) and Himadeep Muppidi (2004), is symptomatically perceived in the context of Althusserian notion of false consciousness and ideology. This research, using Valanté's notion of "The Imaginary Symbolic" (2003), hereby interprets the imaginary as consisting of the Lacanian Imaginary where "the individual misrecognition and collective ideological mystification feed into one another" (p. 165) in the process of subject-formation and also consisting of the Lacanian Symbolic which encompasses the socio-cultural as well as the linguistic structure and determines the subjects' social positioning and regulates their relationships without their being aware of it in specific national, transnational and/or post national contexts. In this context, the global imaginary offers a space to probe critically the process of subject-formation under the influence of over-determined social, ideological, cultural relations of production at the global scale and to examine how "the normality and self-contained coziness of modern nation-state including the deeply engrained notions of community tied to a sovereign and clearly demarcated territory and relatively homogenous populations began to come undone" (Steger, 2008, p. 11).

The global imaginary has usually been perceived by critics from a predominantly Eurocentric perspective that privileges a Eurocentric Symbolic at the cost of the third world countries and their economies and cultures. This capitalist pervasive invasion of economies and cultures can and does result in the imposition of a global consumerist culture which critics like Martell (2007) label as the globalization of the American culture. This paper probes this process of interpellation whereby the protagonist in Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007) goes through the process of Lacanian identification, dis-identification and eventual re-identification within the framework of vertical identification as defined by Freud (1922/1967) and this entire process of identification(s) occurs within the framework of the global imaginary and with global notions/models of identification. Hence, Hamid's fiction can be termed a global narrative rather than a national/ist narrative as it renders insignificant the role of national imaginary in the process of subject-formation and highlights the impact of globally fundamentalist capitalist and religious discourses on the protagonist.

This paper has been divided in two parts: the first part critically evaluates Changez's identification with the global capitalist fundamentalist imaginary and for this purpose his identificatory relationships with Erica and Jim have been scrutinized. The second part analyses Changez's identification with the global religious neofundamentalist imaginary and it also takes into consideration his identificatory bond with Juan Bautista that served as a catalyst to usher him in a different domain of identification.

Global Capitalist Fundamentalism

Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007) can be termed a global narrative as it depicts the protagonist going through a process of interpellation(s) to identify, first, with the global capitalist fundamentalist imaginary and later on with the global Islamic/religious neofundamentalist imaginary. Changez—Hamid's protagonist—goes through a process of identification, dis-identification and re-identification to metonymically and allegorically situate not only his own individual fictional self in the global hegemonic power structures but also to situate Pakistani fiction in English in particular and Muslim fiction in general in the post 9/11 scenario. For this purpose, Hamid makes his protagonist Changez, who is a graduate from Princeton and a highly successful analyst at a New York based firm Underwood Samson and also hails from the elite Gulberg class of Lahore—just like the air-conditioned class in "Moth Smoke" (2000)—go through a journey of re-signification; this journey entails a transformation from being an ardent aspirer of the American dream, complicit in furthering American global capitalist hegemony, to his eventual disillusionment with this dream in the aftermath of 9/11 which made "virtually every muslim in sight....a terrorist" (Scanlan, 2010, p. 266).

This study attempts to probe Changez's process of identification(s) which re-signifies the meaning of 'Fundamentalism' by situating it in the domain of American capitalist fundamentalism as the title of the novel signifies. But this process of re-signification also takes into account the terrorist/jihadist ontology which is a significant part of the global imaginary and with which the Pakistani second generation writers are dealing in their fiction. The terrorist/jihadist ontology entails a consideration of what terrorism are—its instrumental possibilities, not necessarily the chronological or temporal categories of evaluation. And Hamid, by making it a part of global imaginary and by making his protagonist identify through vertical identifications, first, with the American capitalist fundamentalism and then with religious neofundamentalism, highlights the "clivages"—the "blend of differences emanating from diverse origins which oversee the subjective and transversal separation of the social body into two opposed categories of individuals" (Duchesne & Scherrer as cited in Waterman, 2015, p. 22)—and hence, he deconstructs the notion of globalization or the global imaginary as a universal, homogeneous and homogenizing epistemic standpoint devoid of ruptures and discord. The global capitalist imaginary with its emphasis on 'hyper' capital mobility that results in 'hyper' human migrations also gets challenged in Hamid's

fiction where Changez goes through this process of metamorphosis to cling to and identify with these conflicting 'clivages'; Hamid challenges this emphasis on global 'hyper' migrations as his protagonist reverts back to his native land as a result of Western capitalist fundamentalism. Hamid takes into consideration the global reactionary counter-forces in response to American capitalist and military hegemony and hence, he appropriates the Western orientation/notion of the global imaginary to centralize the marginalized discordant voices. This metamorphosis from capitalist fundamentalism to religious neofundamentalism re-signifies the meaning of fundamentalism in these Islamophobic times and makes it part of the American capitalist hegemony as well.

Mohsin Hamid, through "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" (2007), has brought to the front the fundamentalism inherent in both the so called 'centralized' global capitalist hegemony and the so-called 'marginalized' global jihadist hegemony. Changez arrives in New York, enamored of and fascinated by the American capitalist dream. This very act of fascination is in itself an act of vertical identification in which the presence of a leader or a leading idea acts as a catalyst to make members of a group identify with each other. Freud in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego" (1922/1967) talks about "the possibility of a leading idea being substituted for a leader" (p. 27). In such a case as this, it is an idea which can be religious or cultural or economic as in Changez's case that acts as a unifying factor in the life of a group. As when Changez is fascinated and awed by the gothic structure of Princeton, he immediately realizes "this is a dream come true" (Hamid, 2007, p. 2). Changez's vertical identification with the American dream prompts desire in Changez which culminates in interpellation. He wants to be desired by and accepted by the American capitalist society. In Althusserian terms, he is hailed into the American society to fulfill a particular role assigned to ambitious students from the third world countries like Pakistan and this hailing is what he desires. "We were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first" (Hamid, 2007, p. 3). He desperately wants to identify with the global capitalist imaginary and be desired by it, and for this, he is willing to subjugate his own history and the history of his land to the will and whims of his capitalist masters as in response to Jim's demand "sell yourself", he trivializes the history of his land and describes Lahore as "layered like a sedimentary plain with the accreted history of invaders from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British" (Hamid, 2007, p. 4). His desire to be identified with and desired by the global capitalist imaginary is made most evident in his relationship with Erica.

Changez, during his stay in the US, develops two significant relationships: first, with Erica and, the second one, with Jim. Both relationships represent two different modes of identification within the global imaginary as identification with Erica symbolizes identification with the American capitalist dream and identification with Jim represents identification on the basis of class marginalization and othering. Changez's identification with Erica is an allegory of Pak-US ties so it

needs to be probed in detail. When Erica is first introduced by Hamid, she is wearing "a short T-shirt bearing an image of Chairman Mao" (Hamid, 2007, p. 10). As Erica has pre-dominantly been perceived as an emblematic or metonymic representation of capitalist America by various critics like Kanwal (2015), Morey (2011), and Nash (2012), so her choice of shirt supporting or showcasing the leftist image of Mao Zedong highlights the ambivalence inherent in American Capitalist imaginary. Changez's identification with Erica can also be said to contain a certain duality, an ambivalence, in its very nature. Erica, due to her metonymic significance in Hamid's narrative, occupies a dual space—a space in the American/Eurocentric symbolic as well as in the Lacanian real. Erica, for Changez, is both the ego ideal as well as the gaze. As the ego ideal or rather as the representative of the American capitalist symbolic, she occupies the space of an idealized being, the center, whose validation and approval is essential for Changez. As the representative of the symbolic, Changez's desire to attain validation, approval from her is evident from the moment they first met in Greece. Her "magnetism", her "regality" (Hamid, 2007, p. 13) as Changez describes her, makes her instantly his desire, and he in return wants to be desired by her too. As, while perceiving her strong presence, Changez observes: "Documenting her effect on her habitat, a naturalist would likely have compared her to a lioness: strong, sleek, and invariably surrounded by her pride" (Hamid, 2007, p. 13). He always desires validation from her, be it by becoming "her official escort" which "pleased" him greatly because in New York's "exalted settings" Erica's presence "vouched" for his "worthiness" (Hamid, 2007, p. 50) or be it by apologizing to Erica for supposedly being rude to her father in their first meeting when actually it was the other way round, or be it by thinking to get her validation by showing her Jim's "splendid" house (Hamid, 2007, p. 26). He is able to value his own self, his own subjectivity, only when it gets ratified by the representative of the symbolic order which in this case is Erica. As Zizek (1989) explains the role of gaze in imaginary identification:

"Imaginary identification is always identification on behalf of a certain gaze in the other" (p. 106).

He desperately wants to be looked at by her and her gaze when it lingers on him pleases him immensely as in Greece "she listened *intently*" when he spoke and was frequently "training her green eyes" upon him (Hamid, 2007, p. 11. Emphasis original). But Erica as the metonymical representation of capitalist America is also almost like the Lacanian gaze which is part of the real, not the symbolic order. This gaze represents "an occupiable point which indicates an impossible real" (Lacan as cited in Wyatt, 2004, p. 122). As the gaze hailing from the real, Erica, gradually as the narrative progresses, turns into a void, an absence for Changez. He always feels surrounded by her presence but the myth of gaze, in itself, is an illusion, an impossibility. To please the gaze and to be looked at by it, Changez puts on a "showing" as Lacan (1978) describes it: "I would say it is a question of a sort of desire on the part of the Other, at the end of which is showing" (S XI, p. 115). In Changez's case, it is quite evident from his efforts to please Erica. In fact, when

Erica is haunted by Chris' memories in the wake of 9/11 attacks, then his willingness to put on the persona of Chris "to help her, to hold on to her" (Hamid, 2007, p. 62) is an act of "showing" (Lacan, 1978, p. 115) to lure the elusive gaze and keep it with him. "Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes and her shut eyes watched *him*" (Hamid, 2007, p. 63. Emphasis original). But gaze is always elusive; it is something which is a presence but it also is an absence, which looks at the subject but is difficult to be looked at in return, which defines and shapes the subject but is impossible to be shaped by the subject in return. She is part of the American/Eurocentric socio-symbolic order but her abstract elusiveness and ultimate rejection of Changez also make her part of something which is unattainable and elusive, an absence in the very act of presence. At the collective level, she symbolically represents the American socio-symbolic order but at the individual level, she symbolizes a haunted existence, the real, which gives meaning to the symbolic and sustains it; she is negation in the very act of affirmation. This duality in her existence makes her at once the ego ideal as well the gaze for Changez. At the microstructure level of personhood, her presence and subsequent disappearance from Changez's life allegorizes the traumatic Pak-US relation in the aftermath of 9/11 as she was "utterly detached....struggling against a current that pulled her within herself, and her smile contained the fear that she might slip into her own depths" (Hamid, 2007, p.86). Through her disappearance, Hamid also emphasizes the futility and eventual failure of capitalist American dream for subjects like Changez hailing from the domain of the third world countries.

Changez's identification with Jim, on the other hand, is based symbolically on a shared realization of othering on the basis of class. It represents the possibility of cross-race class-based solidarity premised upon identification. This identification is significant because in the global capitalist imaginary, it eulogizes the possibility of class transformation by clinging to the notion of American dream. As it is evident from the fact that although both belong to quite different symbolic orders, Changez hailing from the third world socio-symbolic and Jim from the American/Eurocentric symbolic, yet, despite the differences, both attempt to form a bond premised on a process of class-based partial identification. Partial identification as the "unalloyed fellow-feeling which is genuine out-reaching and entry into the other person and his individual situations" (Scheler, 1970, p. 46) makes Changez and Jim attempt to identify with each other on class basis despite their differences in race and nationality. When Jim and Changez meet for the first time during Changez's interview, Jim highlights this shared similarity in their background:

"I went to Princeton, too....So I get where you're coming from, Changez. You're hungry, and that's a good thing in my book" (Hamid, 2007, p. 5).

But Jim's willingness to identify with Changez without acknowledging or taking into account their differences harbors the possibility of assimilation—the possibility of assimilating the other into self and devouring his/her individuality to project the other as a mirror image to reflect the perfect wholeness of the self. This

possibility also entails the probability of converting the process of partial identification into the process of imaginary identification which colonizes the other as part of the self, which is "the ultimate violence...appropriation in the guise of an embrace" (Fuss, 1995, p. 5). Jim attempts to assert his own subjectivity through his identification with Changez; he attempts to project and feed his own ego by taking an other, which in this case is Changez—and using him through appropriation to sustain and project his own image as a unified complete being who has successfully fulfilled the American capitalist dream sustained by the global imaginary. Again and again, Jim attempts to highlight their shared similarity based on class marginalization as he says: "You're a watchful guy. You know where that comes from?...It comes from feeling out of place....Believe me. I know", (Hamid, 2007, p. 25) and "I never let on that I felt like I didn't belong to this world. Just like you" (Hamid, 2007, p.41). But this imaginary identification fails to take into consideration or acknowledge the differences that separate them. Jim's inability to comprehend the strength or hold of race or religion, his bewildered incapacity to take into consideration the role of religious affiliations rather than of only class affiliations makes this identificatory bond extremely fragile and prone to disruption. The failure of their identificatory bond also allegorizes the failure of global capitalist imaginary which fails to take into account or rather downplays the strength of cultural, religious, racial affiliations. It also signifies the looming failure of capitalist individualistic discourse that eulogizes the dream of class transformation/metamorphosis based upon the notion of "focus on the fundamentals" (Hamid, 2007, p. 59) that attempts to make the subject's every other affiliation or ideological underpinning irrelevant.

Global Religious Neofundamentalism

In this part, the impact of global religious discourses on Hamid's protagonist will be discussed. Olivier Roy, in his work "Globalized Islam" (2004), talks about the impact globalization had on Islamic discourses and finds patterns of similarity between the spread of capitalist globalization with its emphasis on the fundamentals of individualization, deculturation and deterritorialization and the spread of a particular form of religiosity/Islamization with its emphasis on decontextualization of individuals from their immediate cultural, national, regional contexts for the sake of identification with the global notion of ummah. Roy (2004) draws parallels between global religious/Islamic discourses and global capitalist neoliberal discourses as both, Roy believes, exhibit same patterns of thinking and modes of existence which may differ at the surface but underneath employ the same approach. He terms this turn in global religious discourses as "Neofundamentalism".

"It is a trend, a state of mind, a dogmatic relation to the fundamentals of religion" (Roy, 2004, p. 234).

Neofundamentalist approach, Roy (2004) believes, is perfectly adapted to globalization as it has also transformed the concept of ummah from the geographical terrain to a more global abstract notion that can be employed in any context, anywhere in the world. Rather than labeling it as a 'fundamentalist' approach as in the case of other traditional Islamic schools of thought, the use of 'neo' as a suffix emphasizes its global nature, its internalization of changing forms of religious discourses and, basically, the shift from the territorial geographical and sociological domains to supranational deterritorialized domains of global audiences. This comparison/parallel can be insightful in the study of Changez's character and can help in comprehending his shift in identification from global capitalist imaginary to global religious/Islamic imaginary.

Neofundamentalism as a "religious corporate establishment" (Roy, 2004, p. 238) emphasizes the fundamentals of individualization, deculturation and deterritorialization and hence, promotes "homogenization of patterns of conduct" (Roy, 2004, p.270). Hamid, through Changez's multiple identifications, has created interesting parallels between global capitalist fundamentalism and global religious neofundamentalism. Neofundamentalism, just like global capitalist fundamentalism, promotes individualism and deculturation. Changez's transformation in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks bears the hallmarks of individualistic deculturation. Interestingly, Changez was first introduced to deculturation in a capitalist setting when he joined Underwood Samson where all the new recruits, despite their diverse gender and racial backgrounds, were decontextualized from their specific national or racial contexts and made part of a homogenized capitalist community as he muses:

"All of us hailed from the same elite universities....we all exuded a sense of confident self-satisfaction; and not one of us was either short or overweight....shorn of hair and dressed in battle fatigues, we would have been virtually indistinguishable" (Hamid, 2007, p. 23).

Deculturation leads to participation in performative acts to establish one's identification with a certain notion. As later, when Changez decides to wear a beard after his trip to Pakistan, his action can also be deemed as an act of identification with the neofundamentalist imaginary by choosing to delink from capitalist cultural milieu surrounding him. This attempt at deculturation on his part is also an individualistic performative act, an attempt at dis-identification with the capitalist imaginary and an act of re-identification with the global religious imaginary. This individualization also makes clear that "neofundamentalism does not target communities...but is aimed at individuals who have doubts about their faith and identity. In the West it appeals to an uprooted, often young and well-educated but frustrated and already disgruntled youth" (Roy, 2004, p. 269). Changez's disillusionment with regard to his relationship with Erica and the Islamophobic abuse he had to sustain in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks hasten and expedite this process of re-identification. Hamid, in his narrative, has taken into account the external circumstances that contribute to this shift in Changez's character: the

Islamophobic discourse and behaviors prevalent in the West, the way America lashed out in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, the forms of alienation Changez faced at the airport and in New York, the way US threatened his homeland Pakistan, the invasion of a Muslim neighboring country Afghanistan, stories of racial discrimination, and Islamophobic instances. All this makes him venture into the doubtful fields of introspection to get emancipated from and dis-identify with the global capitalist hegemony.

This process of deculturation is further intensified by his identification with Juan Bautista. This identification is also quite significant because it added an anti-imperialistic stance to Changez's dis-identification with capitalist fundamentalism and his re-identification with religious neofundamentalism. Roy believes that neofundamentalism can take multiple diverse forms including "anti-US rhetoric (anti-imperialism)" (Roy, 2004, p. 288). Before meeting Juan Bautista, Changez was already passing through a phase of self-questioning as a result of 9/11 attacks. His reaction to the collapse of the twin towers as "and then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2007, p. 43) metonymically symbolizes the realization of ambivalence in subjects from the third world countries like Pakistan, the dawning of understanding of the hegemonic imperial American dominance based upon its capitalist ventures around the globe and the resistance to it. Baudrillard (2002) also termed the twin towers as an embodiment of the ruthless capitalist globalization "as the two towers are both a physical, architectural object, and a symbolic object (symbol of financial power and global economic liberalism)" (pp. 43-44). The very act of destroying the twin towers was an attempt at annihilating the symbolic object behind the physical object—the idea of monolith, merciless capitalist globalization and artificial conditioning. In this context, when Changez is sent to evaluate a firm in Chile, the process of individualistic deculturation which results in breaking free of the capitalist artificial conditioning gets expedited by his partial identification with Jaun Bautista which, unlike his imaginary identification with Jim, is based upon a mutual understanding of differences as well as the shared similarities in positioning of both subjects. Bautista, despite belonging to a different religion and a different nation and race, shares a strong third world sensibility with Changez which makes him re-define and re-cast Islamic history with reference to Janissaries in imperialistic terms.

"Have you heard of janissaries? They were Christian boys, captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (Hamid, 2007, p. 91).

This act of recuperation and re-memory on Juan Bautista's part makes Changez realize that he was serving a mercenary empire only to hasten the undoing or fall of his own community. "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine....Of course

I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire” (Hamid, 2007, pp. 91-92).

But Changez’s identification with religious neofundamentalism is as ‘reluctant’ as his identification with capitalist fundamentalism. Even during his intense identification with capitalist hegemony, he did have his moments of doubt and reluctance where a sense of belonging to his roots did make him question his identification. These questions arise on the basis of class binaries and divisions, in particular during his holiday in Greece where he wonders about his group of Princetonians: “By what quirk of human history my companions – many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they – were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class?” (Hamid, 2007, p. 13) Although parallels can be drawn between the global capitalist fundamentalism and global religious neofundamentalism in Hamid’s narrative, yet, as Scanlan (2010) observes, Hamid never, in the course of the narrative, uses the term fundamentalism to describe Changez’s shift in identification towards religious neofundamentalism. He reserves the use of the term fundamentalism only to highlight the ruthless working of capitalist machinery as in “focus on the fundamentals” (Hamid, 2007, p. 59). But Changez’s identification and/or dis-identification with neither imaginary are complete or whole; his identifications contain traces of fragmentation and schism which neither imaginary is able to repair or heal. The desire for fulfillment which made him yearn, first, for the American dream and, then, made him indulge in anti-imperialist Islamic activities, remains unfulfilled. As he says:

“Such journeys have convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one’s boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship.... Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us” (Hamid, 2007, p.105).

Conclusion

Thus, Mohsin Hamid, in “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” (2007), presents a global narrative dealing with the global capitalist and religious fundamentalist voices. Through a process of identification(s), Hamid attempts to re-signify the global imaginary by making the marginalized discordant voices part of this epistemology. And by making the global imaginary along with its capitalist imperial hegemony as well as its religious anti-imperialist voices the main focus of his narrative, his narrative also questions the relevance of nationalism or nationalist discourses in shaping the fiction of second generation Pakistani writers. Thus, the very absence of nationalism as a meta/grand narrative in the process of Changez’s metamorphosis clearly signals the new shift and global orientation of Pakistani fiction in English.

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