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Changez/Cengiz's Changing Beliefs in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Introduction

Discussing the problems of liberal democracy and more specifically the problem of nationalism, Slavoj Žižek argues: “The Western gaze upon the East encounters here its own uncanny reversal, usually qualified (and by the same token disqualified) as ‘fundamentalism’: the end of cosmopolitanism, liberal democracy’s impotence in the face of this return to tribalism, and so on” (“Eastern” 19). The statement might be taken as an apt summary of the complex relations between belief, contemporary global capitalism, and subjectivity as they are dramatized in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), because which it applies to several of the most important dimensions of the novel. The first of these is the *Bildungsroman* element of the plot, that is, Changez’s development from a believer in and proponent of a neoliberal capitalist version of the American Dream in the early parts of the novel to an activist and a critic of global capitalism and US-American economic and political foreign policy in its later parts. The second dimension, which is clarified by Žižek’s statement and especially by his reference to two of the symptoms of fundamentalism—“the end of cosmopolitanism” and “liberal democracy’s impotence in the face of this return to tribalism,” is the way in which Changez’s life is transformed after the events of 9/11/2001, when the security of his cosmopolitan identity as “a young New Yorker” is destroyed as he becomes aware of “the growing importance of *tribe*” in post 9/11 America (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 51; 133). The third dimension of the text that is illustrated by Žižek’s comment about the Western gaze is the mutual suspicion and hostility in the relationships between Americans and Easterners like Changez. On many occasions in the novel, Changez draws the attention of his silent American interlocutor and the reader precisely to the mutual suspicion both engendered and expressed by “the Western gaze upon the East” and its opposite, the Eastern gaze upon the West.

In what follows I will analyze these three dimensions of the novel. In relation to the first and the second—Changez’s change of allegiance, beliefs and his life after 9/11—I shall examine the multiple meanings of the word, “fundamentalist,” and the ambiguities of the novel’s title; then I shall discuss the significance of Changez’s name, his development from a proponent of the American Dream to a critic of global capitalism and of US-American imperialism, and the two conflicting belief systems between which he is torn. These two systems might be characterized, briefly, as the neoliberal US-American politico-economic system and a more traditional humanist vision of the individual as defined by national and familial traditions and culture. In relation to the third dimension of the novel—the mutual suspicion and hostility between Easterners and Westerners—I shall discuss the way in which the clash between East and West is dramatized through the use and critique of Orientalist discourse and the metaphor of Changez as “janissary,” as well as his failure to protest against class and wealth differentials in Pakistan, despite his critique of global capitalism. All of these elements clarify the ways in which Changez’s subjectivity evolves in some but not all ways in the course of the novel, a point to which I shall return in the Conclusion.

Varieties of Fundamentalism and the Ambiguities of the Title

The question arises as to how and why Changez comes to be (or to be seen as) a fundamentalist. Hamid's own comments on the issue are interesting if also at times disingenuous and confusing. He explains to Claudia Kramatschek in 2007 that Changez "is a reluctant fundamentalist because his environment sees him as a religious fundamentalist [presumably because of the racist backlash in the USA after the events of 9/11 and his decision to keep the beard he has grown in Pakistan when he returns to the USA], though he isn't one. He, on the other hand, rejects the economic fundamentalism of the business world to which he belongs – a world oriented solely around gains and losses. For me, this is what fundamentalism is: looking at the world from a single perspective, thereby excluding other perspectives." What fundamentalism is not, for Hamid, is "necessarily a religious phenomenon" (Kramatschek <[http://...>](#)).

Later, in his 2013 essay, "Islam is Not a Monolith" (2013), Hamid returns to the issue of the novel's title, declaring that he often hears it said, in both Pakistan and the USA, that his novel "is about a man who becomes an Islamic fundamentalist" ("Islam" 185). Claiming, perhaps somewhat disingenuously, not to know what the words mean "exactly," he continues by stating (somewhat incorrectly) that the only time Changez mentions religion in any form is when, on getting the job at Underwood Samson, "he exclaims: 'Thank you, God!'" (185). Hamid's statement is partially incorrect because although Changez does not invoke the name of the deity elsewhere, he does invoke the idea of Islam. Very early in the novel, on the trip to Greece where Changez first meets Erica, when he and the others (all wealthy Princeton alumnae and members of the prestigious and expensive Ivy eating club) reveal their "dream for what [they] would most like to be," Changez declares that he "hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 33), a joke which only Erica understands to be a joke. In the 2013 essay, Hamid continues by listing the characteristics of Changez that suggest that he is not an Islamic fundamentalist, and notes: "His beliefs could quite plausibly be those of a secular humanist. And yet he calls himself a Muslim, and is angry with US foreign policy, and grows a beard – and that seems to be enough [to make readers believe he is an Islamic fundamentalist]" ("Islam" 185). While it is quite true that, as Hamid goes on to claim, his novel "carefully separates the politics of self-identification from any underlying religious faith or spirituality" and that it "sets out to show that the former can exist in the absence of the latter" ("Islam" 185), the work's title might well cause some of these readers to feel that they have some reason for their interpretation. In the essay, however, Hamid uses this example to complain about the tendency in the West to see "Islam" as a "monolith" ("Islam" 181-85). Several critics comment on the misleading aspects of the title. Leroom Medovoi provocatively notes that Changez (reversing the janissaries' experience) might be seen as a "Christian fundamentalis[t]" in embracing the role of Erica's dead lover, Chris, because of the association between the name, "Chris" and "Christ" ("Terminal Crisis?" 656). Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen, Peter Morey, Claudia Perner, and Margaret Scanlan all note the title's misleading suggestion of Islamic fundamentalism in relation to Changez (Hart and Hansen, "Introduction" 509; Morey, "The Rules" 138-39; Perner, "Tracing" 27, 29-30; Scanlan, "Migrating" 275), and both Morey and

Scanlan comment very briefly on the relevant financial meaning of “fundamentalist” (Morey, “The Rules” 143; Scanlan, “Migrating” 275). Indeed, Morey argues, correctly, that “the use of ‘fundamentalism’ in Hamid’s text points out that an obsessive addiction to non-negotiable (fundamental) principles also animates the forces of global capitalism” (“The Rules” 143).

But what of the other characters in the novel? And the reader? How do they/we decide what kind of fundamentalist Changez is? Here it is necessary, first, to examine the contrasting meanings of the word, “fundamentalist.” In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in relation to Christianity or more specifically Protestantism, meaning A.1.a. defines the word as referring to “A person who believes in strict adherence to doctrines and practices held to be fundamental to Christianity” (“Fundamentalist” <[http://...>](#)). In meaning A.1.b. with reference to “other religions, esp. Islam,” the word is defined as meaning “a person who believes in strict adherence to traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines” (“Fundamentalist” <[http://...>](#)). This seems to be how figures like Erica’s father and Changez’s silent American interlocutor understand the word. The former, assuming in typical Orientalist fashion that he knows all about Pakistan from what he has read in newspapers like *The Wall Street Journal*, first asserts that he “‘like[s] Pakistanis’” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 63). Nonetheless he goes on to tell Genghis “‘But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism’” (63). Similarly, the anonymous American in Lahore reacts with alarm to Changez’s initial approach, largely, Changez implies, because of his beard, causing Changez to attempt to reassure him. “‘Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America’” (1), he says, insincerely and at least partially ironically, as the reader realizes on a second reading of the novel.

But the word, “fundamental,” has another financial meaning, and in this context, in meaning A.2., again according to the *OED*, it refers to “A person who relies on fundamental . . . analysis to identify market trends and forecast developments in the value of an investment” (“Fundamentalist” <[http://...>](#)). Under “Special uses,” meaning S.2., the *OED* also glosses “fundamental analysis” in finance as the “analysis of factors such as underlying economic and industry conditions and company-specific data as a means of identifying trends and forecasting developments in the value of an investment” (“Fundamental” <[http://...>](#)). Indeed, the company Changez works for, Underwood Samson—whose initials, surely not coincidentally, might also stand for the “United States” of America and whose second word suggests the Biblical Samson whose strength is shown to be at times or in part, illusory or very vulnerable—does focus precisely on “fundamental analysis” in this financial sense. Changez describes Underwood Samson’s “guiding principle” as “*Focus on the fundamentals*,” explaining that this means “a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 112). Earlier Changez has described the process of fundamental financial analysis at work in his evaluation of the international CD distribution business that he evaluates on the trip to Manila. He explains: “To determine how much it was actually worth. . . . We interviewed suppliers, employees, and experts of all kinds; we passed hours in closed rooms with accountants and lawyers; we gathered gigabytes of data; we compared indicators of performance to benchmarks; and, in the end, we built a complex financial model with innumerable permutations” (75). Ironically, this description of Changez’s work for Underwood Samson immediately precedes his account of experiencing a sense of

disorientation and dissociation vis-à-vis his identity as an Underwood Samson executive (and therefore as an honorary American) when his encounter of “the Eastern gaze upon the West” in the form of the hostile looks of the jeepney driver makes him realize that they “shared a sort of Third World sensibility,” that his Samson Underwood colleagues are “*foreign*” to him, and that he feels he is “play-acting when in reality [he] ought be to making [his] way home, like the people on the street outside” (77). This incident with the jeepney driver and its consequences is identified as a key point in Changez’s move away from the financial fundamentalism of Underwood Samson by Joseph Darda (“Precarious” 112), Medovoi (“Terminal” 647-48), and Morey (“The Rules” 144).

The novel’s title is thus ambiguous in multiple ways. According to the religious meaning of fundamentalist and in relation to Changez, it is ironic in terms of the novel as a whole. Changez is reluctant to be seen as a religious fundamentalist because he is not one, although he is perceived as such by ignorant Westerners who judge him according to his appearance (his skin colour, and, later, his beard), and to the Orientalist or Islamophobic assumptions they make about Pakistanis or Muslims more generally. However, according to the financial meaning of fundamentalist and the OED meaning 2.a. of reluctant as “unwilling” (“Reluctant” <<http://...>>), the title is ironic in relation to the early parts of the novel, because Changez is the opposite of reluctant in his adoption of the role of fundamentalist financial analyst—indeed he identifies himself at one point as an “Underwood Samson trainee” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 38) rather than as a Muslim, a Pakistani, or even a New Yorker. Of course, this irony disappears later because, as Changez says after he resigns from Underwood Samson and rejects the whole ethos of the company and the country, his “days of focusing on fundamentals were done” (175). However, if, like Slavoj Žižek, we ask: “are ‘international terrorist organizations’ not the obscene double of large multinational corporations – the ultimate rhizomic machine, all-present, and yet with no clear territorial base?” (“Welcome” 276-77), the ambiguities and ironies of the title come to seem easily explicable. Žižek’s parallel between international terror and global multinationals is underscored by Hart and Hansen who argue that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, “The true fundamentalists are the employees of Underwood Samson, whose relentless focus on the global bottom line is the secular complement to Al-Qaeda’s dreams of a new caliphate” (“Introduction” 509).

From Committed Financial Fundamentalist to Critical Secular Humanist

But to return to the questions: what does Changez believe in the novel, how do his beliefs relate to his subjectivity, and how/how far do they (and Changez) change? How do we define “belief”? Some points from Žižek’s arguments about belief and modernity are of great relevance here. In many of his works he argues that, in our post-ideological era, one feature of modernity is that many people claim not to believe, but in fact do so. As he claims in *How to Read Lacan* (2006): “If, once upon a time, we publicly pretended to believe, while deep inside us we were sceptics or even engaged in obscene mocking of our public beliefs, today we tend publicly to profess our sceptical/hedonist/relaxed attitude, while inside us we remain haunted by beliefs and severe prohibitions” (95 and see 91-92; Žižek makes a very similar point in *Violence* 76). In a later work, *Less than Nothing* (2012) he argues that we also tend to see earlier eras as times when people “really believed”—but, as he concludes by the end of the paragraph, this is false. “In reality,” he says, “people never ‘really believed’: in premodern times, belief was not ‘literal,’ it

included a distance which was lost with the passage to modernity” (Žižek, *Less than Nothing* 952-53). Žižek also makes paradoxical claims about the difference between liberal humanists and (religious) fundamentalists, arguing that “it is the humanists who stand for belief, while fundamentalists stand for knowledge” (*How* 118), and that “At its most fundamental, authentic belief does not concern facts, but gives expression to an unconditional ethical commitment” (*How* 117). From this perspective, by the end of the novel, Changez is indeed a believer—in the need to oppose US-American interference in affairs in Pakistan and Asia more generally by any (legal) means in his power.

But how is Changez transformed from capitalist, pro-US-American fundamentalist to ethical, secular humanist, activist, and critic of US-American foreign policy and of global capitalism? Early on, as noted above, the book seems to dramatize an opposition between two belief systems. The first is the US-American capitalist, neoliberal belief system supposedly based on the idea of meritocracy and the individual as a rationally self-interested, globally mobile, economic unit that one might argue is one of the consequences of the politico-economic theory that endorses free trade, privatization, laissez-faire in business, and very limited public support for social services/welfare, and so on. The second seems to be based on a more traditional humanist definition of the individual as defined by national and familial tradition and culture and their values. A brief examination of the significance of Changez’s name and of the *Bildungsroman* elements of the novel will reveal how the transformation comes about.

Changez’s name situates him at the intersection of these two different belief and value systems: on the one hand, it contains the word, “change,” and it is the second-person plural imperative form of the French verb, to change, “*changer*,” that is, “*changez*,” thus suggesting the ideas of progression and development that have long been part of the self-definition of the USA and of the West more generally. In a specifically financial context, as Medovoi suggests, Changez’s name may associate him with the change represented by “the economic law of capital’s movement from less to more profitable global spaces” (“Terminal” 650). As Changez says when he first sees the view from the lobby of Samson Underwood in New York (on either the forty-first or forty-second floor), “the ‘power’” of that view reminds him that “supporting my feet were the achievements of ‘the most technologically advanced civilization’ our species had ever known” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 38, my emphasis), thus endorsing the neoliberal belief system of which he is at this point a willing part. Also, in stressing the technological development and power of America (and thus the West), Changez seems to be unwittingly accepting the Orientalist vision of the West as progressive versus the East as backward and static (Said, *Orientalism* 206; see below for a discussion of Orientalism in the novel). But the name, Changez, as some of my Turkish students immediately recognized, also suggests the non-European name Cenghis or Genghis, which brings to mind the figure of the twelfth-century Mongol leader, Genghis Khan. As Hamid himself suggests, Changez “is Urdu for Genghis Khan,” and so Changez can be identified with the “invader who attacks and destroys the Caliphate, the largest and most successful Muslim empire of its time” (Medovoi “Terminal” 653-54; see also Munos, “Possessed” 403). Even in its “Eastern” version, then, Changez’s name differentiates him from any Islamic belief. In the course of the novel, Changez does indeed become a version of Cenghis:

that is, his earlier endorsement of the American-dominated neoliberal belief system withers away under the influence of the events of 9/11 and their aftermath, as well as Juan-Bautista's comparison of him to the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 171-72). Together, these lead to his self-identification as "a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire" (173), and his rejection of any further service to that empire.

Changez's final "prise de position" is that post 9/11 America "had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in [its] own" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 190). This results in the actions he undertakes to "stop" America: that is, his lectures to his students that use his "ex-janissary's skills" (203) to reveal the workings of the global American-dominated capitalist system, the anti-American demonstrations in which he participates in Lahore, the interview he gives to an international TV channel criticizing US-American policies, and so on. But this change of position has been at least partially prepared for much earlier in the novel, indeed, as early as the second chapter (see the next paragraph). At Princeton, he seems to have completely brought into the "system, pragmatic and effective, like so much else in America," that allows students like him to be "invited into the ranks of the meritocracy" (4). This allows them to get jobs which pay \$80,000 a year, to have an expense account—an experience that Changez describes as "empower[ing]" and "exhilarating" (42)—to travel first class, feeling like James Bond (72), and so on. At Underwood Samson, during the new employees' initial training program, one of the company vice presidents, Sherman, lays out "the ethos" of the company. Repeating the claim, "'We're a meritocracy,'" he continues: "'We believe in being the best. You were the best candidates at the best schools in the country. . . . But meritocracy doesn't stop with recruiting. We'll rank you every six months. You'll know your rankings. Your bonuses and staffing will depend on them. If you do well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't, you'll be out the door'" (39). At the end of the training program, Changez is ranked first, and initially he seems to enjoy the material and psychological benefits (the feeling of power, and so on) of his new profession naively and without reservations.

Or almost. Because even in the early stages of his American dream or, perhaps better, his infatuation with America/ERICA, Changez has reservations about the belief system that he appears both to endorse and embody. These reservations have been suggested earlier in the Underwood Samson interview, when Jim's question, "'Do your friends here know . . . that your family couldn't afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship?'" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 9), provokes Changez's annoyance, then, temporarily, a loss of poise, and finally "a minor digression" where he expatiates to his American interlocutor on his family's financial situation as "not poor; far from it" but also "not rich" (10-11). In fact his family's financial status (although not their social status) in Pakistan has declined because of inflation, the fall of the rupee, and the break up of their "substantial family [estate]" (11). Even before he begins to work for Underwood Samson, during the trip to Greece, the issue of money provokes Changez into some criticisms of his fellow travellers, wealthy Princeton alumnae, and the realization of his difference from them (19). He minimizes these criticisms by referring to the things that disturb him as "*details*," like his fellow travellers' extravagance or "their self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service" (23). He explains that his limited cash and his "traditional sense of

deference to one's seniors" make him wonder "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" (24). Indeed, periodically, throughout the novel, Changez is shocked by the failure or the inability of privileged young Americans "to function both respectfully and with self-respect in a hierarchical environment" (47). Just as he is horrified by the lack of respect shown to older Greeks by his fellow Princetonians, he is uncomfortable when he forces himself to show the same disrespect to his elders, whether it is in the Philippines or in New Jersey (23-24; 74; 111). It takes Changez several months to realize that that his fellow Princeton alumnae and others like them are precisely the new ruling class of the American imperium, or, as he later characterizes the employees of Underwood Samson, "the officers of the empire" (173).

Despite the reservations Changez expresses from time to time, notably during the trips to Greece or to Manila, most of the time his interiorization of the neoliberal belief system and its values is so complete that when he returns to Pakistan after receiving a financial bonus for once again being ranked first by Underwood Samson, he initially evaluates his family home with a Western and specifically an US-American gaze. When he first contemplates his parents' house, what he first sees is "how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls," the "gloomy air" of the building being reinforced by the afternoon power cuts (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 140-41). But he quickly realizes that he is looking at things "with the eyes of . . . that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed [him] when [he] encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of [his American interlocutor's] country's elite," and he resolves "to exorcize the unwelcome sensibility by which [he] had become possessed" (141). As he explains, in Lahore, "a different way of *observing* is required" (140). When he adopts this different way of observing, he is able to focus on the "Mughal miniatures and ancient carpets" of his parents' house, as well as its "excellent library," all of which enable him to realize that his home "was far from impoverished; indeed, it was rich with history" (142). As in the jeepney driver incident, "the Western gaze upon the East" is revealed to be problematic.

Finally, Changez definitively rejects this "Western gaze" when he realizes that the capitalist global domination represented by his business trips to Manila and to Santiago also entails political, economic, and military domination of or interventions in the affairs of other countries, including his own, Pakistan, and its neighbors. Changez is in Manila when he first hears of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, and his first reaction is "to be remarkably pleased" because of "the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought American to its knees" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 83). After this Changez gradually becomes more and more aware of US-American interventions—or posturing as he calls it much later (190)—in the affairs of Asian countries: the US-American bombing of Afghanistan after 9/11, its failure to intervene to lower tensions between India and Pakistan in 2001-2003, and the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003 (112-13; 144; 149; 162-63; 177). This awareness leads Changez to articulate the connections between US-American cultural and political imperialism and capitalist neocolonialism. Towards the end of the novel, he rejects America's "constant

interference in the affairs of others” as “insufferable”; he also declares that his “experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions”—has allowed him to realize that “finance [is] a primary means by which the American empire exercise[s] its power” (177), and he refuses to continue to enable it to do so.

The Western Orientalist Gaze: Critique and Endorsement in the Novel

The mutual distrust and suspicion between Easterners and Westerners in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is articulated through the deployment of Orientalist stereotypes and references to near-contemporary history and to the past history of Pakistan and the Ottoman Empire. Changez criticizes the Orientalizing vision of many Westerners vis-à-vis Pakistan and the non-Western world more generally, and he compares America and Pakistan in ways that favor the latter or that seek to find similarities between various aspects of the two worlds. He also asserts the past glories of Pakistan, although, ironically, this can also be seen as a common Orientalist stereotype. Indeed, even when Changez attacks Western views of Pakistan, he uses images which echo the Orientalist descriptions of the East as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The most relevant of these stereotypes of the Orient are those of Western superiority over the Orient, Western progress and development versus Oriental stasis or backwardness, and Oriental difference/exoticism, as Said argues: “Western Orientalism drew attention to the debased position of the Orient” and it assumed “an unchanging Orient, absolutely different . . . from the West” (*Orientalism* 96). The Orient is also associated with “the freedom of licentious sex” (*Orientalism* 190), and thus with sensuality and exoticism. Moreover, Orientalism further defines the East as “backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded” (*Orientalism* 207): any glory it might have had is in the past, not the present.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez both endorses and criticizes Orientalist stereotypes of his country, Pakistan, and of the East more generally. As noted earlier, his first response to the view from the lobby of Underwood Samson endorses the Orientalist view of the East as backward, static, and undeveloped by comparison with the West. More often, however, Changez is likely to compare America and Pakistan or New York and Lahore in ways that reveal similarities between them, thus implicitly undermining the view of East and West as essentially different or of the West as superior. For example, he compares the doorman of Erica’s family’s apartment building to “the gatekeeper of one of Lahore’s larger mansions” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 56). He also asserts that Erica’s “spacious bedroom” in the apartment is “the socioeconomic equivalent of a spacious bedroom in a prestigious house in Gulberg, such as the one in which I had grown up” (58), a comparison that shows that he is attempting, *pace* Orientalism, to assert parity between America and Pakistan. His later realization that he felt he “was entering in New York the very same social class that [his] family was falling out of in Lahore” in his relationship with Erica works in much the same way, as does his statement that his family’s current situation “is, perhaps, not so different from that of the old European aristocracy in the nineteenth century, confronted by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie” (97; 12), because of the continuing high social status of both his family and the European aristocracy despite their declining economic power. Other (more minor) comparisons of this type are Changez’s

references to the two cultures' shared taste for excessive sweetness in desserts (167), or his identification of Manhattan and the Old Anarkali district of Lahore as pedestrian-friendly spaces (36).

Ironically, however, when Changez attempts to assert his pride in being a Pakistani, or to compare the cultural achievements of America and Pakistan, he sometimes falls into another Orientalist stereotype, the tendency to associate the Orient with glory in the past, but decline and degeneration and possibly terrorism in the present. Thus when he attempts to counter the current stereotypes of Pakistan as “burdened by debt, [and] dependent on foreign aid and handouts” or its people as “the crazed and destitute radicals you see on [US-American] television channels,” he refers to the past when Pakistanis were “saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 115-16). He continues: “We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent” (116). But this statement with its verbs in the past tense simply confirms Pakistan’s decline from former glory and the rise of US-American power from its own insignificant colonial beginnings. Similarly, the Urdu saying that Changez quotes in Valparaiso, a city that reminds him of Lahore—“*the ruins proclaim that the building was beautiful*” (163)—suggests that the power and beauty of Chile or Pakistan existed only in the past. Some of Changez’s descriptions of Lahore also seem to confirm other Orientalist stereotypes. He explains that the Old Anarkali district is named “after a courtesan immured for loving a prince” (2), thus confirming the stereotypes of Oriental lasciviousness, exoticism, and barbarity. Moreover, he describes the city as the “ancient capital of the Punjab, home to nearly as many people as New York, layered like a sedimentary plain with the accreted history of invaders from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British” (8), where the emphasis on “invaders” emphasizes Pakistan’s past powerlessness and weakness. Moreover, Changez seems to come to at least partially accept an Orientalist definition of his own identity. Early in the novel he is seen by the other students at Princeton as “an exotic acquaintance” (19), and much later he describes himself to Erica (admittedly half-jokingly) as “an exotic foreigner given to role-playing” (153), thus seeming to accept this exoticist Orientalizing image of himself. As Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes argue: “In Changez, Hamid presents a protagonist who subverts orientalism, but while he attempts to seize voice and representation from the West *about* the West, the representation of Pakistan in the novel remains troublingly orientalist” (“Post-9/11” 7). Lau and Mendes argue elsewhere in the essay that Hamid “re-orientalize[s]” East/West relations (3), and that Changez’s “re-orientalist voice” is that of “a character who has been Western-educated and is now performing an identity for a Western audience” (6).

Just as Changez sometimes seems to accept or even endorse Orientalist stereotypes in relation to both Pakistan and himself, despite his frequent criticisms of them, so he usually fails to criticize the inequalities, exploitation, and injustice that result from class and wealth differentials in America and Pakistan, although he notes them. In New York, the parallel Changez draws between the doorman of Erica’s Upper East Side apartment block and the gatekeeper of a luxurious Lahore home (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 56) registers the class difference without

protesting against it. Similarly, after 9/11, Changez is at first unconcerned by the racial discrimination, hostility, and violence experienced by Muslims in America (including New York), arguing that most of the stories he has heard are probably untrue and, moreover, that “those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year” (107-08). The emphasis is on Changez’s self-congratulation on belonging to the privileged class rather than on sympathy or fellow feeling for those who do not share the protection afforded by education and (relative) wealth. It takes the verbal abuse directed at Changez himself (133-34; 148), the rumours of anti-Muslim discrimination in the business world (137), and the fact that he becomes an object of suspicion, unease, and fear at Underwood Samson (148; 181), to make him aware that racial and religious discrimination sometimes supersedes class. It is only after Juan-Bautista, the publisher in Valparaiso, has provided “the final catalyst” (170) for Changez’s change of perspective and belief that he protests against the stratified and hierarchical nature of US-American society. It is when he returns to New York from Valparaiso that he finally criticizes the “traditional” post-9/11 US-American empire, identifying himself as “a form of indentured servant, whose right to remain was dependent on the continued benevolence of my employer,” and describing the taxi-driver who takes him home from the airport as “a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay” (178).

Similarly, in Pakistan, although many details of Changez’s descriptions of his country and its society evoke class and economic differences, class inequalities and exploitation are registered rather than criticized, and the focus remains primarily on the situation of Changez’s family and himself, as well as on American-Pakistani relations at a national level. For example, Changez simply notes that his family employs “several servants,” that they have retained their privileged elite status despite their economic decline, that they look down on nouveau riche Pakistani entrepreneurs with “disdain and envy,” and that they own a house in the Himalayan foothills as well as one in Lahore (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 11; 67): there is no comment on the privilege that all these details indicate. On other occasions Changez explains the difference between the urban geography of Lahore, and specifically between the more modern areas of the city, “poorly suited to the needs to those who must walk” (that is, the poor, probably the majority of the city’s inhabitants) and the “more democratically *urban*” areas like Old Anarkali, with reference to the past, and specifically to the “ancient hierarchy that comes to us from the countryside: the superiority of the mounted man over the man on foot” (36), and not to the class difference in the present between those who inhabit these different types of area. Again, Changez refers to the beggar who approaches him and his American interlocutor who has been intentionally disfigured as “a particularly unfortunate fellow,” and gives him money, as he admits, “misguidedly, of course, and out of habit” (45), thus apparently accepting the inevitability of the beggar’s existence and not suggesting any criticism of the lack of social security or provision for the poor. References to villagers dying or being blinded after consuming poor-quality illegal alcohol (61-62), to the difficult life of the people in the mountainous northwest region of the country (123), or

to the “rural poor” of Pakistan being assisted by US-American aid programs (206), show a similar lack of concern for the class inequalities and injustices of Changez’s own country.

Conclusion

Changez’s subjectivity changes in the course of the novel: he is transformed from a financial fundamentalist into an anti-American analyst and activist. As the analysis of the *Bildungsroman* element of the novel above shows, Changez moves from being at least a partial believer in a system which serves global capitalism—Underwood Samson’s meritocracy and its belief in financial fundamentals—to believing in values which run counter to it. It is in pursuit of these values that Changez uses the skills he learned at Underwood Samson to enable his university students to understand this economy, to advocate an end to US-American interventions in Pakistan, and to demonstrate against them (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 203).

Yet there is no suggestion that these actions will have any impact on global capitalism. This is perhaps partly because of the relative impossibility of any individual’s beliefs and actions to challenge global capitalism’s disciplinary power. But *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also suggests several other reasons, due to aspects of Changez’s beliefs that do not change in the course of the novel: his tendency to resort to Orientalist stereotyping despite his criticism of it, his traditional deference to his elders, and his failure to protest against the effects of the obvious class and wealth differences in Pakistani society, all discussed above. Changez never answers Erica’s father’s criticism of the situation in Pakistan—“Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 62-63)—merely stating, “my family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that” (63). This inability to envisage change might suggest that Changez himself cannot escape from Oriental(ist) immobility: he simply fails to register the need for change in his own society in terms of the inequalities, injustices, and exploitation deriving from the disparities in class and wealth. Like imperialism before it, global capitalism thrives on such unawareness: thus Changez’s new counter-capitalist doctrine will pose no threat to capitalism’s continued disciplinary power.

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