

# 13 Reluctant Fundamentalist, Eager Host? Cross-Cultural Hospitality and Security Anxieties in Mohsin Hamid's Novel of Uncertainty

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*Inviting, receiving, asylum, lodging, go by way of the language or the address to the other. ... Nevertheless, we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other. Shouldn't we also submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what [his] name is, where he comes from, etc.?*

—Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*

Mohsin Hamid's second novel has been lauded as an exceptional work in the emergent canon of "(post-)9/11 literature" and has been particularly celebrated for interrogating rather than propagating the kind of reductive, binary thinking on which much political, cultural, and indeed literary discourse on 9/11 and its aftermath has often been premised. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) has been described as a novel that "forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, 'Them and Us' and so on—those categories continuously insisted upon in 'war on terror' [*sic*] discourse";<sup>1</sup> as a novel that "manages ... to escape the Manichean tone that has sometimes defined post-9/11 Western political discourse";<sup>2</sup> as "a corrective to constructions of terror that are centralized around 9/11 and sees [*sic*] citizens of the west only as victims on the receiving end of terror."<sup>3</sup> In the place of such binaries, the novel purportedly offers "a unique and alternative discourse to the more commonly found expositions on contemporary terrorism and Islam."<sup>4</sup> The novel was an international bestseller, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, has been adapted for the big screen, is becoming a commonplace title on academic syllabi, and—perhaps most notably—has also been selected by major universities in both the United States and Britain for distribution to all of their incoming undergraduates. As well as taking as its subject matter cross-cultural encounters and cross-cultural (mis)understanding in a world that is (apparently) increasingly globalized yet increasingly polarized, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been deemed a novel that can *facilitate* cross-cultural understanding.

This chapter explores hospitality and security in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, arguing that the act of personal hospitality that frames the novel's

narrative is used as a means of exploring hospitality and (in)security in a much broader, geopolitical context. If, as so many critics have argued, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a novel that encourages greater cross-cultural understanding, it also seems to warn that acts of cross-cultural hospitality often serve to re-trench, rather than challenge, binaries between “self” and “other.” For Gideon Baker, and indeed for Derrida, “we must always think *beyond* hospitality as a pact with certain deserving foreigners toward that unconditional or absolute law of hospitality without which we would lack the concept of hospitality itself and be unable to decide on any laws to condition hospitality” (emphasis in the original).<sup>5</sup> While “think[ing ...] toward” such an unconditional (and impossible) hospitality may be a prerequisite for the existence of hospitality itself, in Hamid’s novel *acts* that seemingly approach such an “unconditional” or “absolute” hospitality are all the more suspicious and threatening. Finally, it is argued that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* portrays securitization in the early twenty-first century as being more likely to lead to violence than to the state of greater safety that is supposedly its aim, and that the novel questions the degree to which cross-cultural hospitality offers an alternative to the violence and threats of violence associated with security anxieties.

### ***The Reluctant Fundamentalist’s* Changez: A Threateningly Impeccable Host?**

Hamid’s novel takes the form of a dramatic monologue spoken by a young, highly articulate Pakistani man called Changez. In the opening words of the novel, he offers his “services” to an unnamed American whom he finds wandering in the Anarkali bazaar in Lahore:

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services.<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

The unnamed American serves throughout the novel as auditor to Changez’s dramatic monologue. The American is described as a “silent and silenced interlocutor,”<sup>7</sup> and his verbal and nonverbal reactions to Changez’s narrative are only registered in the novel at all in the form of Changez’s comments on and responses to them. Changez soon takes the American to his favorite local establishment, and while the two drink tea (and, later, dine) together, Changez recounts the story of his adult life, including his migration to, and return from, America. Changez appears to be at great pains to make the unnamed American feel welcome and relaxed. He repeatedly tells him not to be frightened and not to worry—he does so three times in the first chapter alone (*TRF*, 1, 6, 12–13)—and seems determined to act as the perfect host. He

is, for instance, careful to ensure that the American is well fed and watered: “Do try these sticky, orange sweets—jalebis—but be careful, they are hot!” (13); “I see you have finished yours [your tea]. Allow me to pour you another cup” (17); “I can assure you, our meal will be anything but tasteless” (122). As well as giving the American recommendations in relation to Pakistani cuisine, Changez also gives him more general recommendations: “You have not been to Rhodes? You must go” (26). Changez is upset when his “guest is [made] uncomfortable” by a power cut (69) and expresses disappointment that he cannot be an even better host than their present circumstances allow: “I would offer you a whiskey to settle your nerves, if only I could” (69). A little less than halfway through the novel, Changez expresses his concern that, by speaking too much, he has been “negligent in [his] duties as a host”; he states his desire to “hear more of *you* [the American]: what brings you to Lahore, what company you work for, et cetera, et cetera” (87, emphasis in the original). The American, however, seems unwilling to “reveal [his] *purpose*” for visiting Lahore to Changez, who says that he “will not insist” (88, emphasis in the original), and therefore continues with his monologue and, indeed, with his (seemingly impeccable) hosting.

Given that Changez is so eager to extend his hospitality to the American despite not knowing who he is, what his job is, or why he is in Lahore, it would appear that Changez’s hospitality toward the American is so great as to approach what Derrida—as indicated in the chapter-opening epigraph—might term an “absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality.”<sup>8</sup> Even if Changez does not quite “submit to a ... holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what [his] name is, where he comes from, etc.,”<sup>9</sup> when he finds his interlocutor reluctant to answer such questions, he continues to extend his hospitality regardless. Baker identifies “hyperbolic hosting” in Ancient Greece as being related to “*theoxeny*, the fear that the guest may be a god, testing the host’s hospitality.”<sup>10</sup> Although Changez certainly does not worry that his American guest may be a god in disguise, his hospitality does somewhat resemble the *theoxeny* of Ancient Greece in its hyperbolicism. Indeed, if Changez’s hospitality is not, in Derrida’s words, an “unconditional hospitality,” its *only* condition seems to be that the auditor is American; apparently, his nationality alone is enough to warrant Changez treating him like the proverbial king. This would, indeed, seem to substantiate Changez’s claim in the first paragraph of the novel that he is very much a “lover of America.” The American’s identity and purpose are uncertain both to the reader and, apparently, to Changez, and yet that uncertainty does *not* seem to preclude the possibility of cross-cultural hospitality. Moreover, as Sarah Iltott notes, Changez’s use of the second person is discomfiting: it “uncomfortably conflates the singular ‘you’ (the American) with the plural ‘you’, which constructs readers of the narrative as sympathetic to the American’s perspective.”<sup>11</sup> The American often “appear[s] impolite and ungrateful,” which means that “the foil created for the reader is an uncomfortable one.”<sup>12</sup> Notably, Changez is *so* hospitable toward his (seemingly

rather rude) American interlocutor as to appear more at ease with him than might we, the readers who are aligned with him through Changez's "you." As we read the opening stages of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we might wonder whether cross-cultural hospitality is to be offered up by Hamid's novel as the key to greater cross-cultural understanding and security.

Unfailing and impeccable though it may be, Changez's hospitality actually does anything but allay the sense of anxiety that pervades the narrative. Rather, as Changez becomes ever-more hospitable—over the course of his encounter with his unnamed guest, Changez provides him with tea and snacks, invites him to dine with him, pays the entire bill himself, and then proceeds to walk the American to his hotel—a sense of impending danger and violence gradually intensifies. Changez thus takes his place in a long literary tradition of impeccable but threatening—or, perhaps, threateningly impeccable—hosts, from Circe in Homer's *The Odyssey* to the eponymous Count in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Like these texts and many others, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests that impeccable hospitality can be used to conceal ulterior motives. However, what distinguishes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and its narrator/protagonist from their literary predecessors is the *uncertainty* that remains at the end of the novel. Much as Homer leaves us in no doubt that Circe is a highly manipulative and dangerous witch, Stoker leaves us in no doubt that Dracula is a murderous, blood-sucking member of the undead. The *revelation* of the true motives of these seemingly impeccable hosts constitutes a major aspect of the respective narratives. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, however, such a revelation is never reached; Changez's true motives—and those of his interlocutor—remain tantalizingly uncertain.

### (Un)certainty, (In)security, and Risk Calculation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* uses narrative uncertainty both to create a sense of insecurity that it never resolves and to explore what we might mean by "security." Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion—expounded in his 1978 lectures—of the "space of security" as referring "to the temporal and the uncertain" (emphasis added),<sup>13</sup> J. Peter Burgess argues that the concept of security "mediates, structures and regulates forms of uncertainty that we consider increasingly inescapable, unavoidable, or inevitable in our lives" and that, paradoxically, the "discourse of security makes uncertainty an incessant certainty."<sup>14</sup> In something of a reversal of this configuration, and in strikingly similar language, Burgess later asserts that "it is *uncertainty* that enables, structures and regulates security" (emphasis in the original).<sup>15</sup> For Burgess, then, security and uncertainty exist interdependently, each one shaping, structuring, and regulating the other. Commenting on the relationship between the apparent opposites security and insecurity, Burgess conceives of these categories as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive. He

describes security itself as “the fluctuation of the experience of insecurity/security,” and the relationship between security and insecurity as dialectical:

Through a kind of dialectical logic, security is the absence of insecurity, which is nonetheless present in its absence. Security is only possible through the thought of insecurity, through the preparation for what is not yet the case, but rather what *could* be the case. ... Security has far less to do with what is *known* than with what is *unknown*.<sup>16</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Uncertainty, insecurity, and the unknown, then, are central to and constitutive of “security.” Commenting on contemporary security practices and discourse, Burgess identifies a “rise in the concept of *risk*” (emphasis in the original) and argues that risk itself “*is* the new culture of security” (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup> Louise Amoore analyzes what Burgess terms the “rise in the concept of risk” in more detail, identifying “derivative” forms of risk calculation in contemporary security practices that bear strong (and troubling) resemblances to financial derivatives:

The derivative forms of risk calculation that are emerging in contemporary security practice share important affinities with the financial derivative. ... Indifferent to the contingent biographies that actually make up the underlying data, risk in its derivative form is not centred on who we are, nor even what our data say about us, but on what can be imagined and inferred about who we might be—on our very proclivities and potentialities.<sup>18</sup>

For Amoore, this is one of the most alarming developments in contemporary security practice and discourse.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is open in its portrayal of such practices. Flying from Manila (where he has been on a business trip) to his home in New York shortly after 9/11, Changez finds that he is treated very differently from his white colleagues. In the airport in Manila, he is “escorted by armed guards into a room where [he is] made to strip to his boxer shorts” (*TRF*, 85). On the plane itself, he is “aware of being under suspicion” (85), and upon arrival in New York he is swiftly detained by the immigration authorities. When asked about the purpose of his “trip” to the United States, Changez replies that he lives there, to which the immigration official offers the following retort: “That is *not* what I asked you, sir. ... What is the *purpose* of your trip to the United States?” (86, emphasis in the original). His biography—his living in New York, for instance—suddenly “contingent,” Changez is perceived not as a human being but as a series of data points from which it might be *inferred* (wrongly) that he *may* represent a *potential* threat.

However, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* it is not only immigration authorities and airport security guards who are engaged in the kinds of practices

described by Amoores. Rather, Changez and his American interlocutor both seem to be engaged in an attempt to use a series of data points about the other to infer the degree to which he (the other) represents a potential risk. Despite ostensibly being strangers, they seem to have prior knowledge of each other; the American, for instance, is able to “guess” that Changez went to Princeton (*TRF*, 3), and at one point Changez tells him “we have not met before, and yet you seem to know at least something about me” (86). In turn, Changez seems able to infer a great deal about the American from very few prompts. Judging by the frequency with which Changez has to reassure him, the American is clearly ill at ease (not least because of their waiter, who seems to trouble him greatly; on no fewer than five occasions, Changez registers the American’s sense of anxiety about their waiter as an ominous, threatening presence (6, 123, 175, 193, 208–209)). Changez makes ominous references to predators, prey, and hunting (35, 69, 72, 115, 140), to the poisoning of food (13, 139), and even to carrying out “the bloodiest of tasks” (157). Changez also comments more than once on his companion’s unusual mobile phone—which, he suspects, is “capable of communicating via satellite” (34)—and, as well as establishing that the American has been involved in armed conflict in the past (147), suggests that he looks as if he might even be armed at present (158).

Somewhat paradoxically, although the sense of uncertainty that pervades the encounter between the two men intensifies, what becomes particularly disconcerting is the sense that, in fact, one or even both of the men may feel *certain* that they know who the other is, what their “purpose” is, and what must be done with them. Although the novel builds to a satisfying climax, its ending is far from conclusive and readers are left to make significant interpretive decisions. Indeed, readers must decide for themselves—based on limited, insufficient data—whether or not the American with whom they have been conflated is in fact an assassin sent to kill Changez, and whether Changez intends to kill the American because he believes him to be an assassin. Thus, the novel not only portrays but also *stages* the kinds of risk calculations described by Amoores.

### **“I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle”: Changez as Guest**

As he hosts his unnamed American guest, Changez tells him the story of how he was “hosted” by America itself. After graduating from Princeton and securing a job at an elite Manhattan valuations firm called Underwood Samson, Changez began to make a life for himself as a New Yorker; crucially, at this point he did *not* perceive himself as a “guest” who was being “hosted.” While he stresses that in his “four and a half years” in America—nearly four of which were spent at Princeton—he was “never an American,” he claims that he “was *immediately* a New Yorker” (*TRF*, 37, emphasis in the original). Changez not only felt but, apparently, also appeared very much at home in New York. He tells us that on public transport his skin tone “would typically fall in the middle of the color spectrum” and that on “street corners,

tourists would ask [him] for directions.” Even now, he comments, New York “still occupies a place of great fondness in [his] heart” (37).

Significantly, Changez’s apparent integration into New York—that is, his supposedly becoming a resident there as opposed to only a guest—occurs simultaneously with, and largely corresponds to, his being taught to think and to evaluate according to a single, unifying principle. Describing his training at Underwood Samson, Changez states that “[m]aximum return was the maxim to which we returned, time and time again. We learned to ... apply ourselves single-mindedly to the achievement of that objective” (*TRF*, 41). Later in the novel, Changez reveals that “focus on the fundamentals” was “Underwood Samson’s guiding principle” (112). Apparently very adept at applying himself single-mindedly to the pursuit of maximum return, Changez comments that he “stood out from the pack” (46) during his training and that he was even conscious of some “advantage conferred upon [him] by [his] foreignness” (47), an advantage that he still cannot explain but on which he sought to capitalize.

Changez also seeks to capitalize on his “foreignness” in his pursuit of Erica, an American girl who possesses, in Changez’s words, “an uncommon *magnetism*” (24, emphasis in the original), and yet “some part” of her is “out of reach” (24–25). It transpires that Erica is still mourning the death of her former boyfriend Chris. She tells Changez when they first meet that he “give[s] off this strong sense of home” (22), and he is conscious of factors that mark him as different from his American peers—such as the “ease with which they parted with money” (23), their “self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service” (23), and their “conducting themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class” (24)—making Erica notice him. Changez’s foreignness thus seems to give him an advantage in his romantic, as well as his professional, pursuits. Preparing to meet Erica’s wealthy parents for the first time, he agonizes over what to wear before finally settling on jeans and a kurta, and claims that it was “a testament to the open-mindedness and—that overused word—*cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that [he] felt comfortable on the subway in this attire” (55, emphasis in the original). Changez wryly implies here that the city is, in the moment of the novel’s dramatic present, *less* cosmopolitan than it once was. Indeed, Changez fondly recalls the only reaction to his wearing a kurta on the subway being an “invitational smile” (55) from a man who he assumes is gay. Notably, Changez choosing to emphasize his “South Asianness” here through his attire results not in his encountering rejection or hostility but, on the contrary, in a kind of *invitation* being extended to him (albeit one that he is not, as it happens, interested in taking up). A “young New Yorker with the city at [his] feet” (51), Changez senses that his ethnic identity makes him all the more desirable in New York (indeed, to his employers, to Erica, and to complete strangers). Understandably, then, during his time in pre-9/11 New York, Changez comes to feel that he is not being *hosted* by the city, but that he has succeeded in making it his home.

There are moments when Changez questions his sense of New York as his home. In Manila, where he spends just under two months valuing a music business, a Filipino driver stares at Changez with “undisguised hostility” (TRF, 76) while their respective vehicles are stuck in traffic. Changez confusedly wonders why, but then looks at his colleague:

I looked at him—at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work—and thought, you are so *foreign*. I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him; I felt I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the street outside. (TRF, 77, emphasis in the original.)

Away from New York, Changez has the sense here—brought about, notably, by an inhospitable look—of himself as “play-acting,” and the notion of bringing this play-acting to an end by “making [his] way home” seems to suggest that he feels he should be returning to Pakistan. In turn, the implication is that—for all his declarations of being “*immediately* a New Yorker”—on some level Changez already senses that New York is not in fact his “home.”

Changez’s lingering doubts over his position and status in New York—that is, over whether he has succeeded in transcending the category of “guest” there—are brought into sharp relief following the events of 9/11. Changez confesses to his interlocutor that, on watching the destruction of the World Trade Center on television in his hotel room, his first reaction was to smile (TRF, 83). Changez himself notes that his American interlocutor’s “disgust is evident” (83) and hastens to point out that, while he watched the events of 9/11 unfold, his initial thoughts “were not with the *victims* of the attack,” but that he was “caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (83, emphasis in the original); he later refers to his initial response to the attacks as “inhumane” (90). While on the plane on the way to Manila—that is, before 9/11—Changez felt like “a veritable James Bond” (72), on his journey back to New York he is, as above, detained and humiliated in the airport in Manila, treated with suspicion on the flight itself, and rudely interrogated upon arriving in New York (where he is once again detained for “inspection” (86)). This journey makes Changez aware that he is very much perceived, and expected to perceive himself, as a guest.

Changez attempts to continue with his life in New York unchanged but is increasingly conscious of his status as a guest there. He even imagines a “host” emerging from New York’s skyscrapers: “Gazing up at the soaring towers of the city, I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle” (TRF, 90). While a “grand ... castle” metonymically evokes a monarch demanding loyalty and homage from subjects, “sally forth” is—with its military etymology—suggestive of a “host” emerging from the skyscrapers



only to *attack*. There is a slippage here between “host” as in one who offers hospitality and “host” in a *military* sense. Tellingly, Changez later uses the term “host” again: “the mighty host I had expected from your country was duly raised and dispatched—but homeward, towards my family in Pakistan” (106–107). Here, it would seem that America has ceased to be a “host” in the sense of one who offers hospitality to guests; instead, it has unleashed a “mighty host” of *attacks*, with the term “host” being ironically associated with hostility rather than hospitality. Indeed, the words “mighty host” often refer to angels, and the religious inflection here perhaps offers a wry allusion to the religious rhetoric frequently employed in the “War on Terror”. When America invades Afghanistan—Pakistan’s “neighbor” and “friend” and a “fellow Muslim nation” (113)—Changez’s response is to “tremble with fury” (114). Previously able to immerse himself in his work, the next day he finds that he cannot do so: “I found it difficult to concentrate on the pursuit—at which I was normally so capable—of fundamentals” (114).

While Erica “disappear[s] into a powerful *nostalgia*” (*TRF*, 129, emphasis in the original), so too does America. Having “always thought of America as a nation that looked forward,” Changez is suddenly “struck by its determination to look *back*” (130–131, emphasis in the original). Expressing confusion over what it was that Americans were longing for during this period, Changez is left wondering if this seemingly “fictitious” America “contained a part for someone like [him]” (131). While, on the surface, Changez seems to imply that America underwent significant changes in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Anna Hartnell rightly observes that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “questions th[e] supposed break” between pre- and post-9/11 conceptions of ethnic diversity in America.<sup>19</sup> Hartnell argues persuasively that the “novel’s implication seems to be that the chauvinistic and racially charged atmosphere it describes after 9/11 is merely an intensification of something that was already there before.”<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, in the wake of 9/11, Changez is suddenly hyper-aware of being perceived as “other,” as suspicious, as a potential threat; he is conscious of standing out where he previously seemed to blend in. In one particularly disconcerting episode, a stranger refers to him as “Fucking Arab” (*TRF*, 134).

Changez characterizes his final months in New York as “a period of great uncertainty” but also questions whether “a sort of *classical* period ... had ever existed at all” (*TRF*, 133, emphasis in the original). Characteristically, he tries to manage this “uncertainty” by immersing himself in his work with a greater ferocity than ever, and yet he finds that “even at Underwood Samson [he] could not entirely escape the growing importance of *tribe*” (133, emphasis in the original). As well as coming to realize that he is very much perceived as a guest rather than a resident, Changez also comes to understand that the hospitality that is being extended to him by America is entirely contingent on his agreeing to dedicate himself to ensuring his host nation’s financial security and, in a sense, to his becoming a fundamentalist.

## Financial Securities and Financial Fundamentalism

While the United States' attacks on Afghanistan mark the beginning of Changez's inability to focus adequately on his work, two trips overseas radically change his understanding of that work and his relationship to it. The first is a visit to his family home in Pakistan. Changez tells his American interlocutor that, upon returning to Lahore, he initially felt "shamed" (*TRF*, 141) when he saw his family's house, but that he soon became conscious of (and, indeed, felt shamed by) "the Americanness of [his] own gaze" (140). As Joseph Darda observes, Changez "consider[s] his childhood home as an American valuator might" and "cannot see it as one of many conditions sustaining his parents' lives, only a building lacking in market value."<sup>21</sup> Realizing that his family home is "far from impoverished" and is, in fact, "rich with history," Changez wonders how he "could ever have been so ungenerous—and so blind—to have thought otherwise" (*TRF*, 142). Here Changez becomes conscious of the degree to which, during his time in New York, he has been taught to evaluate things solely in financial terms, and it is of course no coincidence that he works for a valuation firm. The American "gaze" that Changez has acquired is defined precisely by its lack of generosity; indeed, he has been taught to look upon the world inhospitably. Moreover, in the sense that it is interested exclusively in profit, this "gaze" is that of a fundamentalist.

The second overseas trip that alters Changez's view of his work is a professional assignment in Valparaíso in Chile, where he is to help value a book publisher. Changez experiences something of an epiphany:

I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present. In other words, my blinders were coming off, and I was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision. (*TRF*, 165)

In realizing that he is involved in a "constant striving to realize a financial future"—one that seeks endlessly to calculate risk and maximize profit—Changez comes to understand that the sole purpose of his job is to ensure future financial security for an already-existing elite. Interestingly, the short section of the novel that is set in Chile is the only one in which we might consider Changez himself to be the subject of the novel's playfully paradoxical title (paradoxical in the sense that, if "fundamentalist" is taken as a synonym for "zealot" or "fanatic"—as it commonly is in reductive, post-9/11 rhetoric—then one can hardly be a "reluctant fundamentalist"). Peter Morey argues that Changez "is never a religious fundamentalist."<sup>22</sup> Changez does, however, work for a company whose mantra is "focus on the fundamentals," and for whom "the fundamentals" means, specifically, the pursuit of maximum profit (even the pluralization here is somewhat misleading, eliding the *singularity* of the company's fundamentalism). Although Changez is certainly never a religious fundamentalist (he does not even seem to be a practicing

Muslim), when he takes a job at Underwood Samson he is indoctrinated into a form of fundamentalist free market capitalism in which everything is ceded to the pursuit of maximum profit. Having previously been enthusiastic about his professional task of “focusing on the fundamentals,” in Chile, Changez finds himself reluctant about it. It is at this specific stage in the novel, then, that we might consider Changez to be “the reluctant fundamentalist.”

Amoore argues that “forms of economy offer forms of sovereignty a means to harness the productivity of possible futures and the capacity to reconcile openness, freedom, and mobility with the pursuit of security.”<sup>23</sup> She later argues that new forms of securitization—such as the derivative risk form—are “concerned not with the pursuit of security per se, nor with finding a safer place, but rather with the capacity to keep things moving, to guarantee the securability of circulations of people, money, things, and ideas.”<sup>24</sup> Arguably, there is an ironic correspondence between the discriminatory practices to which Changez is subjected in the name of (supposed) securitization—being detained, being interrogated, being viewed with suspicion, and so on—and the work that he does for a living, with each aspiring to secure the continued circulation of capital, commodities, and people. Moreover, in such “security”-oriented systems, people become almost indistinguishable from commodities. Changez himself is, he realizes, a commodity; he is valued precisely according to his ability to value. Changez openly repudiates the attacks on the World Trade Center, an event that is often perceived as a catastrophic failure or collapse of security, and as having ushered in a new age of securitization. However, he seems to be sympathetic—as does the novel itself—to the notion that 9/11 did *not* mark a new age of securitization; that securitization practices and discourse are now, just as they were before the Towers fell, geared not toward ensuring greater human safety but, rather, toward ensuring the continued security of the very free trade of which the towers themselves were symbolic.

Changez decides that his “days of focusing on the fundamentals [are] done” (*TRF*, 175); he refuses to continue his work with Underwood Samson in the knowledge that he will lose not only his job but also his visa. At this point in the novel, it is clearer than ever that Changez has only ever been a guest in New York/America, and that the hospitality that has been extended to him was always conditional. Ironically, at this point in the novel Changez *ceases* to be, rather than becomes, a/the “reluctant fundamentalist” (even if, paradoxically, he is now *more* likely to be viewed as a religious fundamentalist by those around him). Changez also finds that he is suddenly “struck by how traditional [an] empire” America is:

Armed sentries manned the check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and [who was] forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer. (*TRF*, 178)

Crucially, Changez comes to realize that the hospitality extended to him by America is entirely dependent on his agreeing to act as its “indentured servant.” He is only able to reside in “the empire” at all as long as he devotes himself to the furtherance of that empire’s financial security (indeed, to its “fundamentalism”). The hospitality that America extends to Changez is not indicative of its benevolence toward him—a term that Changez uses sardonically in the quote above—or of a commitment to fostering any kind of diversity. Rather, the hospitality that Changez has enjoyed in America—and his very enjoyment of it—ultimately demonstrates America’s sovereignty over him, as well as its ability to further exercise that sovereignty by excluding him at any time. Changez’s final evaluation of America is that the only value it places on him is in accordance with his ability and willingness to serve its needs as an “empire.”

### **The Ending of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Hosts, Fundamentalists, Guns, and Business Cards**

After Underwood Samson promptly (and unsurprisingly) fires Changez, he discovers that Erica has disappeared “into a powerful *nostalgia*” (*TRF*, 129, emphasis in the original). She had, he says, made the decision “not to be part of [his] story; her own had proven too compelling” (189). However, one might rephrase this and say that Erica found no place for Changez in *her* story. As numerous critics have noted, Underwood Samson (the United States) and Erica (Am/Erica) serve in the novel as opposing symbols of the nation; while the former seems to represent corporate America’s endless pursuit of ever-increasing profit, the latter “seemingly represents a romantic strain in American nationalism that looks back to a European past.”<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, Chris—who is described as having “an *Old World* appeal” (*TRF*, 30, emphasis in the original)—represents Europe as well as the Christianity that European immigrants brought to America (Changez even describes the love that Erica believes she shared with Chris as “a religion that would not accept me [Changez] as a convert” (129)). Erica’s self-destructive obsession with Chris, therefore, may serve as an allegory for the self-destructiveness of America’s nostalgic myths of its own exceptionalism.<sup>26</sup> Having been unable to save Erica from her retreat into a romanticized, semi-mythical past, and unwilling to submit to Underwood Samson’s ruthlessly future-oriented free market principles, Changez is suddenly and definitively excluded from both of the novel’s symbolic manifestations of nation.

After his symbolic exclusion comes his physical exclusion, and Changez tells his American interlocutor that, as he left the United States, he resolved to “stop” it:

It seemed to me then—and to be honest, sir, seems to me still—that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference,

assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own.

I resolved to do so, as best as I could. (*TRF*, 190)

Changez tells his interlocutor that he took a job as a university lecturer in Lahore and immediately became popular with his students, whom he encouraged to take part in protests against aggressive American foreign policy. When one of his students was arrested for “planning to assassinate a coordinator of your country’s effort to deliver development assistance to our [Pakistan’s] rural poor” (*TRF*, 206)—a plot that Changez insists he had no knowledge of—television news networks descended on his campus, and Changez became internationally infamous after “stat[ing] to them among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (207). Since then, he says, he has been warned that “America might react to [his] admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate [him] or worse” (207–208). As Changez walks his American guest to his hotel, the American becomes convinced that they are being followed by a number of men, one of whom is their waiter; reassuring the American that these men “mean [him] no harm” (208), Changez then warns him against making assumptions: “you should not imagine that all we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins” (208–209). The novel ends with the men continuing to close in on Changez and the American, and with the American reaching into his jacket. Noticing a “glint of metal” as he does so, Changez tells him—in the final words of the novel—“I trust it [the glint] is from the holder of your business cards” (209). Here symbols of violence (a gun) and of finance (business cards) are presented as if they are simple, binary alternatives to each other, and yet what makes the ending of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* particularly disquieting is not the “choice” between the two so much as the falsity of the binary that they represent; the novel has already suggested that violence is a function of, rather than an alternative to, financial securitization.

Ilott suggests that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* ends with “the possibility of four different outcomes: either Changez is a terrorist set to kill the American; the American is an undercover assassin contracted to kill Changez; both of the above; or neither.”<sup>27</sup> Whether Changez’s possible intention of killing the American would deem him a “terrorist” is questionable, but if the American is indeed an assassin who has been detailed to kill Changez because of the (supposedly anti-American) comments that he made to the international media after the disappearance of his student, then we might consider the American himself to be in the service of a kind of fundamentalism (one that conflates critics of America’s actions with threats to America’s

security). Given that, as above, Changez's "you" conflates his American interlocutor with the reader, and given that many readers of Hamid's novel are—as Ilott points out—likely to find their "foil" in the narrative to be an "uncomfortable one,"<sup>28</sup> we might even consider the novel's title as referring to the *reader* who is "reluctant" to be aligned with the American and with the fundamentalism for which he arguably stands.

As above, numerous critics have explored the seeming correspondence between individuals and nations in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. However, what has not thus far been widely noted is the degree to which the hospitality that Changez extends to his American guest corresponds to the hospitality that America extends toward him. There are times that Hamid actively draws attention to this correspondence. For instance, Changez's exchange with the immigration official in New York, during which he is repeatedly asked to state the purpose of his visit, occurs just one page before Changez tells his American interlocutor "I wish now to hear more of *you*: what brings you to Lahore, what company you work for, et cetera, et cetera" (*TRF*, 87, emphasis in the original). Changez asks his interlocutor his purpose for visiting Pakistan, then, immediately after recounting how the immigration authorities in New York demanded to know his (Changez's) "purpose" for "visiting" New York.

Both Changez and America initially seem to offer a warm welcome to their foreign guest, picking them out from a crowd to be the beneficiaries of their munificence, and yet it seems that each of them performs the role of benevolent host only as a means of maintaining their own security (personal security in the case of Changez and financial security in the case of America). Moreover, each deems their foreign guest a potential security threat. It would seem that, at the beginning of the novel, Changez did not offer his hospitality to the unnamed American despite not knowing his identity or his purpose for visiting Lahore, but rather—having, he believes, "developed the ability to take quick stock of a person" (*TRF*, 205)—because he felt that he knew exactly what the American's "purpose" was. Changez's frequent references to predators and prey, and his repeated intimations that his interlocutor looks and acts like a soldier of some kind—Changez even compares him to Pakistan's own "undercover security agents" (158)—all suggest that he (Changez) is convinced that his interlocutor is, in fact, the would-be assassin that he has been expecting. Somewhat similarly, America seems to be convinced that Changez is a would-be terrorist. Crucially, the novel ends with violence seemingly about to erupt *even if* neither of these things is in fact true. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* therefore portrays the advancement of securitization in the early twenty-first century as being more likely to lead to violence than to the state of greater security that is supposedly its aim. Moreover, it suggests that—in what Changez terms our current "period of great uncertainty"—cross-cultural hospitality has not so much come to offer a means of allaying the distrust and the anxieties associated with ever-increasing concerns over security but, rather, has come to serve as a function of those very concerns.

## Notes

1. Morey, "The Rules of the Game," 138.
2. Girardin, "In the Heat of Combat," 63.
3. Ilott, "Generic Frameworks," 571.
4. Khan, "The Treatment of '9/11,'" 85.
5. Baker, "Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality," 123–124.
6. Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 1. Hereafter cited as *TRF* in the text.
7. Girardin, "In the Heat of Combat," 62.
8. Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 135.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Baker, "Introduction," 2.
11. Ilott, "Generic Frameworks," 574.
12. *Ibid.*, 575.
13. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 20.
14. Burgess, *The Ethical Subject of Security*, 1.
15. *Ibid.*, 9.
16. *Ibid.*, 95; 131.
17. *Ibid.*, 131; 132.
18. Amoores, *The Politics of Possibility*, 61.
19. Hartnell, "Race, Place and Resistance," 337.
20. *Ibid.*, 339.
21. Darda, "Precarious World," 114.
22. Morey, "The Rules of the Game," 139.
23. Amoores, *The Politics of Possibility*, 5.
24. *Ibid.*, 76.
25. Hartnell, "Race, Place and Resistance," 343.
26. While many critics have noted the apparent heavy-handedness of the novel's symbolism, in some cases those same critics have suggested that such overt, transparent symbolism may in fact be part of rather more subtle and provocative textual strategies. See Morey, "The Rules of the Game," 140–141; Ilott, "Generic Frameworks," 578–581.
27. Ilott, "Generic Frameworks," 573.
28. *Ibid.*, 575.

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