Litera: Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi
Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Litera 2022; 32(1): 121-138
DOI: 10.26650/LITERA2021-934873

Research Article

The Confession of the Other: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Mariya SHYMCHYSHYN[1]

[1]Ph.D., Professor, Head of the Department of Literary Theory and World Literature, Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine

ORCID: M.S. 0000-0003-4980-3296

Corresponding author:
Mariya SHYMCHYSHYN,
Head of the Department of Literary Theory and World Literature, Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine
E-mail: mshymchyshyn@yahoo.com

Submitted: 08.05.2021
Revision Requested: 31.08.2021
Last Revision Received: 03.09.2021
Accepted: 06.01.2022

Citation: Shymchyshyn, M. (2022). The confession of the other: Mohsin Hamid's *the Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *Litera, 32*(1), 121-138.
https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2021-934873

ABSTRACT

The September 11th attacks on the U.S. caused unanticipated changes in the global arena. Their depiction in fictional discourse contributed to the broad understanding of the events and their memorialization. In this paper, I analyze Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which presents the perspective of those who were silenced in the dominant rhetoric of the 9/11 tragedy and were single-mindedly blamed as "evil others." Through his monologue, Changez, the homodiegetic narrator of the novel, explicitly demonstrates the intention to present the voice of the Other. The narrator of the novel asks readers to listen to the other side of the conflict and not to judge all Muslims as bloodthirsty fundamentalists. Changez proposes that the American agent consider his view in order not to blame him but to understand the roots of his anger. In addition to his appeal for constructive dialogue between the West and the East, the narrator of the novel brings forward the critical revision of the U.S.' international politics. One of the messages is that after causing so much grief and misfortune abroad, the U.S. cannot play the role of an innocent observer. I conclude that the diegesis of the novel opens new ways for productive dialogue between nations and countries.

Keywords: Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, post-9/11 fiction, dialogue between the West and the East, national identity and globalization

Introduction

The tragic events of 9/11 not only influenced the geopolitical situation in the world, undermined U.S. military power, and divided the American collective consciousness in two (before and after the September 11th), but also caused a radical shift in the existential paradigm of the twenty-first century. This was a shift from the idea of a safe future to a fear of daily instability and a sense of threat from those who were identified by Western civilization as "others." Moreover, this anxiety about the future has been intensified by the advancement of political technologies, the information society, and artificial intelligence. J. Derrida has observed that the tragedy of 9/11 could be the last example "of a link between terror and territory" (Borradori, 2003, p. 14) given that possible future attacks might be silent, invisible, and unimaginable.

The unexpected September 11th attacks seemed to be unreal to the worldwide audience who watched the news coverage. People could not imagine that bombings might take place on U.S. territory. As Richard Gray (2011) remarks, since the 1812 war with Great Britain, there had been nothing which suggested that "the United States itself might become an international battlefield," that "to have war brought home was an unusual experience for America," and that "to have the mainland not only invaded but attacked from the skies and devastated was not only unusual but unique" (Gray, 2011, p. 4). The World Trade Center's Twin Towers not only symbolized advanced technology and global capital, but also, according to DeLillo, embodied the safe future that America had invented (DeLillo, 2001). The tragedy has forced the U.S. as well as other countries to reconsider the order of things around them. Moreover, it drew attention to the "polarization of the world" (Shymchyshyn, 2021, p. 55).

The U.S. broadcasting media contributed to the formation of a particular version of the tragedy, a version formatted in the binary logic of the Western epistemological tradition: Islamic terrorism vs. civilization. According to Stuart Croft,

> Crises often mark the origins of a particular discourse, and a discourse that emerges with credibility in a crisis—in a sense, that which gives the crisis meaning—will soon take on the hallowed status of 'common sense' amongst those concerned with the issues both raised and threatened by that specific crisis. (2006, p. 1)

The new narrative of a security crisis justified antagonism toward Muslims and the "war on terror." Fear of threats emanating from the Muslim world became the dominant worldview after the terrorist acts and legitimated preemptive actions. Every image, picture, or piece of writing that contributed to the intensification of the affect of fear was promoted by mass media discourse. Douglas Kellner (2004) emphasizes that dramatic images and montage techniques were used to capture audience attention and catalyze unanticipated events that spread further terror through domestic populations (Kellner, 2004, p. 12). Kellner argues that U.S. television networks framed the 9/11 attacks to whip up war hysteria, "while failing to provide a coherent account of what happened, why it happened, and what would count as responsible responses" (p. 15). Besides the one-dimensional Western stereotypes of Muslims as bloodthirsty terrorists, the media networks constructed the collective image of Americans as victims. David L. Altheide describes the rhetoric of the mainstream media and points out that "the emphasis of the coverage of 9/11 was on the commonality of the victims rather than the cause or the rationale for the attacks" and that "the popular refrain was that all Americans were victimized by the attacks" (2010, p. 6).

The terrorist attacks of September 11th have found a specific niche in fictional space. Unlike media commentators (journalists, T.V. broadcasters, and photographers), who repeated the casualty figures and victims' names, writers found themselves disoriented about how to write about the mass casualties in New York. Richard Gray summarizes artists' feelings after 9/11: "If there was one thing writers agreed about in response to 9/11, it was the failure of language; the terrorist attacks made the tools of their trade seem absurd" (2011, p. 1). Years passed after the tragedy before writers found ways to write about it. These artists have created more diverse depictions than the mass media versions of September 11th. They have drawn attention to the complexity of the tragedy and have tried to avoid the U.S. official rhetoric of what happened on 9/11. Fiction has helped to extract the tragedy of 9/11 from the past and localize it in the present, as it is remembered and memorialized. Yet no single fictional narrative could ever fully encompass the events that belonged to that day in September. The past is never fully narratable; it cannot be reduced to a single order. In this sense, any story is just a partial, subjective variant of the past, and the more narratives we have about the past, the broader our understanding of what has happened.

The reality of the tragedy and the representations of it were not equivalent. J. Habermas, who was in New York after the terrorists' attacks, acknowledged in his dialogue with

Borradori (Borradori, 2003) the irreducible chasm between fact and representation, first and third-person perspectives. The images he saw on his T.V. screen in Germany were in the "breaking news" format. "By contrast, New Yorkers were left in existential and sensory chaos: not only did a pervasive smell hang over Manhattan for weeks, but the acute scream of sirens, usually lost in acoustic pollution, kept puncturing the silence left by the empty airspace – the great dome of contrails and roars crisscrossing above the city" (Borradori, 2003, p. 49). Discussing the idea of naming the terrorist acts as 9\11, Derrida remarks, "The event is made up of the 'thing' itself (that which happens or comes) and the impression (itself at once 'spontaneous' and 'controlled') that is given, left, or made by the so-called 'thing'" (Borradori, 2003, p. 89). Fictional representations of 9/11 are neither narrowed to mourning those who were monstrously killed, nor are they merely assigning blame to the Islamic extremists, but most fundamentally they offer a more nuanced perspective on the nature of the postmodern world and the reasons for overwhelming aggression, intolerance, and prejudice toward "others." Writers do not try to explain or justify the tragedy; they verbalize their versions of what has happened. In Iain Banks's *Dead Air* (2002), Frederic Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006), Martin Amis's *The Last Day of Muhammad Atta* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011), the authors do not seek to organize the events coherently or to put the characters in a defined niche. Instead, the narratives are ambiguous and nonjudgmental, drawing attention to the complexity of the situation. Fragmentation is the dominant and most effective strategy in these novels as it corresponds with the characters' searching for reasons, meanings, and explanations. The other widely used perspective of telling the story about 9/11 is multiple focalization that helps to narrativize the traumatic event from different views. Fictional works that deal with the attacks and traumas after them utilize the postmodern strategies of writing and do not signify a break with postmodern aesthetics. Michael Frank argues that "the attacks did not cause an abrupt break with twentieth-century narrative forms and styles, let alone a recalibration of the entire system of literature" (Frank, 2020, p. 175).

The Empire of the Global Period

The mass casualties in New York have received a "massive number of fictional responses" (Däwes, 2011, p. 7) written by U.S.-American novelists as well as by writers from abroad. According to Birgit Däwes,

> As of late June 2011, at least 231 novels from around the world are available in print which can be classified as "9 / 11 novels" – that is, the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington provide the entire or a part of the setting, they feature more or less prominently as a historical context (establishing a particular atmosphere or set of themes), or they have a decisive function for the development of the plot, the characters, or the novel's symbolism. 162 of these fictional responses were written by U.S.-American novelists. (2011, p. 6)

Birgit Däwes (Däwes, 2011) has classified these novels into six categories: metonymic, salvational, diagnostic, appropriative, symbolic, and writerly. She has distinguished two waves in writings about 9 / 11. A first wave of "9 / 11 novels" has had a more American perspective, representing the events as a collective national trauma. A second wave has embraced a more transnational and cross-cultural perspective. As M. Frank (Frank, 2020) remarks, "…since the late 2000s, the body of predominantly American Ground Zero fiction has been complemented by novels that move away from Ground Zero to focus on the effects of the War on Terror both inside and, crucially, outside the US" (p. 178). According to Gray (Gray, 2011), this approach was pioneered by Mohsin Hamid.

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008), while it belongs thematically to the second wave of 9/11 fiction, does not deal directly with the tragic events in New York; instead, it is a reflection from the side of the Other, a young Pakistani businessman, on the reasons for the 9/11 attacks. The author tries to demystify the events of September 11th and put them in a broader context of a globalized world. M. Frank classifies this novel as a postcolonial War on Terror novel. In this context he argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* "… assumes a counter-discursive position by offering different narrative contextualisations of the event" (Frank, 2020, p. 179). The narrator of the novel explains the cause of the attacks from the perspective of those who were silenced in reports about the tragedy, and this helps him to question the use of the term "terrorism." In his long monologue, Changez, the homodiegetic narrator, tells the story of his life to an American stranger at a café table in Lahore. The author flips the conventional strategy when the West speaks about the East. Instead, the American is just a listener; he does not have an opportunity to speak, while the Pakistani discloses to him the reasons for his moving step by step toward Islamic radicalism. The narrative has a somewhat confessional style, but unlike a confession, it does not have a component of penitence. In the words of M. Frank, "Changez' story about his disappointed love for

America is related in the form of a deliberately ambiguous self-narrative which combines a personal, intimate, even confessional mode of storytelling with one that is both allegorical and didactic" (Frank, 2020, p. 177).

Changez combines his personal story with a description of the taste of Eastern delicacies. In this way, he shows the American both his personal feelings and the unforgettable flavor of his country. Ethnic food is the last bastion that globalization has not touched yet. Pakistanis are proud of their traditional food, as it preserves their identity, their flavor of the world:

> Here in Old Anarkali that pride is visible in the purity of the fare on offer; not one of these worthy restaurateurs would consider placing a western dish on his menu. No, we are surrounded instead by kebab of mutton, the tikka of chicken, the stewed foot of goat, the spiced brain of sheep! These, sir, are *predatory* [italics in the original] delicacies, delicacies imbued with a hint of luxury, of wanton abandon. Not for us the vegetarian recipes one finds across the border to the east, nor the sanitized, sterilized, processed meats so common in your home-land! (Hamid, 2008, p. 101)

Through the invitation to taste Eastern cuisine, Changez asks the foreigner to look closer at the Pakistani world and tear away the veil of prejudice and stereotypes about it. The narrator shows the American listener the beauty of the landscape, the unforgettable combination of colors, and the spirit of the place: "Come, relinquish your foreigner's sense of being watched. Observe instead how the shadows have lengthened. Soon they will shut to traffic the gates at either end of this market, transforming Old Anarkali into a pedestrian-only piazza" (Hamid, 2008, p. 31 – 32). He presents his interlocutor with a different vision of Islamic culture and asks him not to be afraid of Muslims. They did not provoke the tragic events in New York, but reacted to the growing political and military intolerance of the U.S. Changez criticizes U.S. capitalism, with its cold logics of profit and of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003), and the American insensitivity to those who suffer from U.S. military and economic invasions.

Through his narration, Changez describes the U.S. as a new type of global Empire. His observations resemble the ideas of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. In their book *Empire* (2000) they summarize the main features of a new type of Empire that emerged along with the global market and global circuits of production. The first symptom of

the new imperial regime is the weakening of nation-states, in particular, their power to regulate economic and cultural exchanges. The Empire of the global period does not rely on fixed boundaries. In this sense, nowadays, it is different from the imperialism of the prior era that was based on the sovereignty of nation-states. "The boundaries defined by the modern system of nation-states were fundamental to European colonialism and economic expansion: the territorial boundaries of the nation delimited the center of power from which rule was exerted over external foreign territories through a system of channels and barriers that alternately facilitated and obscured the flow of production and circulation" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xii). According to Hardt and Negri (Hardt & Negri, 2000), hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges constitute the main attributes of global Empire.

The authors emphasize that although the U.S. is not yet what they mean by a global Empire, today it occupies a privileged position in the history of Empire. Meanwhile, they underline that the imperial idea "has survived and matures throughout the history of the United States constitution and has emerged now on a global scale in its fully realized form" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xiv). Dwelling further on the concept of a global Empire, Hardt and Negri identify the following features: a lack of boundaries as it rules over the entire "civilized" world; no temporal or historical regime as it presents itself outside of history or at the end of history; and finally, although the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace, its practice is continually bathed in blood. Similarly, David Harvey writes, "From the late nineteenth century onwards, the U.S. gradually learned to mask the explicitness of territorial gains and occupations under the mask of a spaceless universalization of its own values…" (Harvey, 2003, p. 47).

The diegesis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* conveys the idea of the U.S.A. as a contemporary Empire that corresponds with the concept of global Empire described above. After being hired as an analyst by a valuation firm, Underwood Samson & Company, Changez observes his colleagues and remarks upon their similarity, "We were marvelously diverse … and yet we were not: all of us, Sherman included, hailed from the same elite universities – Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale; we all exuded a sense of confident self-satisfaction; and not one of us was either short or overweight" (p. 38). They are even dressed in a similar way, making them virtually indistinguishable. The narrator understands that after being groomed by prestigious universities and completing training programs at the respected firm, young specialists become soldiers of the financial Empire. They are eager to contribute their talents and potential to the

American meritocracy. Changez and the other new hires are trained to prioritize and then to apply themselves single-mindedly to the achievement of that objective.

Young analysts are taught to concentrate on "the fundamentals" and not be emotional. Emphasizing the concept of "the fundamentals," the narrator is playing with the very idea of fundamentalism and redefining it. He also makes vivid that the "fundamentals" American Protestants have formulated differ from the "fundamentals" of the global financial Empire. Changez's "Third World sensibility" (Hamid, 2008, p. 67) often conflicts with the company's tasks. For example, he feels sympathy toward soon-to-be-redundant workers of the company Underwood Samson is evaluating. His colleague reminds him to focus on the fundamentals and not feel pity toward poor workers. The firm's analysts present a distilled embodiment of the U.S. empire that is continually searching for profits and does not consider those who stand in its way.

Changez eagerly integrates into the realities of American life. He behaves and dresses as his colleagues do. The young analyst is happy that nobody remarks about the color of his skin or his Pakistani identity. New York embraces every color and tint, every accent or dialect: "In a subway car, my skin would typically fall in the middle of the color spectrum. On street corners, tourists would ask me for directions. I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was *immediately* [italics in the original] a New Yorker" (p. 33). When asked where he was from, he always answers that he is from New York. Changez enjoys his life, status, new possibilities, and career perspectives. He does not think of himself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Sampson analyst. On his first business trip to Manila, he supposes that his Pakistani nationality is invisible, cloaked by the expensive suit or expense account.

The Crisis of Identity after 9/11

Everything changes after 9/11: the American dream of the young analyst has been shattered, the firmness of the foundation of his new life in New York has been shaken. If, before the tragic events, nobody paid attention to his foreignness, after them, his Pakistani identity becomes visible and cause for suspicion. Changez feels this first when boarding an aircraft from Manila to New York. He is selected for a secondary screening at the airport. The world around him has changed instantly. Pakistani cab drivers are being beaten; the F.B.I. is raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses. Although Changez is a Princeton graduate earning eighty thousand dollars a year, his Pakistani

identity plays a crucial role when the world is falling apart. Louis A. Cainkar, in his book *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*, writes that, "The Council on American-Islamic Relations (2002) reported 1,062 incidents of violence, threat, or harassment during the initial onslaught of the post-9/11 backlash" (2009, p. 192).

Further, Cainkar argues that "the negative treatment of Arabs and Muslims in the United States after 9/11 was caused not by the 9/11 attacks themselves, but by preexisting social constructions that configured them as people who would readily conduct and approve of such attacks. These social constructions did not emerge on 9/11 but were the culmination of processes of labeling and interpretation transmitted by interested actors through major American social institutions over the latter decades of the twentieth century" (p. 2). Cainkar summarizes by writing that Arabs and Muslims have been constructed in American culture as a monolithic group that has an inherent proclivity to violence and a morally deviant religion that sanctions killing (Cainkar, 2009, p. 2). The racialization of Arabs and Muslims as groups that threaten American cultural values and personal liberties played its role in the process of identifying "evil others" after the deaths of innocent New Yorkers on 9/11.

The crucial changes in American society not only shift Americans' attitudes toward Changez but also elicit unexpected emotions in him. The narrator's reaction to the attack in New York is the result of a latent persistence of his true feelings toward the Empire. "I stared as one—and then the other—of twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled* [italics in the original]. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2008, p. 72). The narrator admits that he was moved by the death of the victims of the attack, but at that moment, he did not think about them. He was attracted by the symbolism of it all, "the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (p. 73). The center of his narrative is thus relocated from the innocent people killed to the symbolism of 9/11. This shift has been unexpected in post 9/11 fictional discourse, as prior writers have mostly concentrated on the feelings of victims, their relatives, or their friends, relying chiefly on the rhetoric of victimization. Frank has noted that American Ground Zero novels have contributed to the master narrative of 9/11 as a cultural trauma, while postcolonial War on Terror writings have proposed a counter narrative (Frank, 2020, p. 179). This counter narrative of mass casualties in New York has been "marginalized by the discourse of loss, recovery, victimization, patriotism, nationalism, and American

exceptionalism that has prevailed since 9/11" (Wersching, 2012, p. 414). Hamid is proposing the perspective of those who considered the tragic event in symbolic terms. Initially, Changez does not understand why he wants to see America harmed. It is just his unconscious reaction to the tragedy. The narrator needs some time to understand his emotions. Derrida observes, "Whether we are talking about a psychological, political, police, or military response or reaction, we must acknowledge the obvious – at once qualitative and quantitative: for Europe, for the United States, for their media and their public opinion, quantitatively comparable killings, or even those greater in number, whether immediate or indirect, never produce such an intense upheaval when they occur outside European or American space (Cambodia, Rwanda, Palestine, Iraq, and so on)" (Borradori, 2003, p. 92). Changez's reaction responds to the realization that these deaths cause upheaval precisely because they are in the US.

The young Pakistani could not have the same feelings as Americans. He feels for the sufferings of his own region that was invaded by the US after the September 11 attacks:

> I chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post. My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury. (pp. 99 – 100)

In this crucial moment, he decides to return to Pakistan. At home, Changez suddenly realizes how far away he has moved from his family, native traditions, and ethnic roots. First, he feels uncomfortable and sad because he has lost his connection with his land. "I had changed. I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite" (p. 124). The understanding that he lacks something very substantial angers him. The narrator is trying to recover his Pakistani self. Mughal miniatures, ancient carpets, a rich library collection, the family house — all this help him to find his former self, to feel almost childlike, "rather than the permanent middle-age that attaches itself to the man who lives alone and supports himself by wearing a suit in a city not of his birth" (p. 125). The moment of Changez's encounter with his native place resembles Yi Fu Tuan's

writings: "Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years. Every piece of heirloom furniture, or even a stain on the wall, tells a story" (Tuan, 2001, p. 33). Changez thoroughly and eagerly immerses himself in his native milieu, rich with history. Every detail helps him to recover his lost self.

The feelings of loss are mixed with deep melancholia and yearning for his country's former glory and power. Changez is continually comparing his country's past with present-day U.S.A. realities. Complaints, despair, and anger overwhelm him when he observes the remains of the former greatness of Pakistan and the present miserable state of his beloved country. Revenge and frustration dominate his inner world and supply the motive for his transformation into a reluctant fundamentalist. Habermas explains the roots of Islamic fundamentalism through the changing of the epistemological situation of the contemporary world. In particular, he interprets fundamentalist trends as "a defensive reaction against the fear of a violent uprooting of traditional ways of life" (Borradori, 2003, p. 32).

Further, the philosopher adds that the world today is split into beneficiary and loser countries. "To the Arab world, the U.S.A. appears as an insult to their self-confidence while simultaneously providing the secretly admired model. The West, in its entirety serves as a scapegoat for the Arab's world's own, very real experiences of loss, suffered by populations torn out of their cultural traditions during processes of accelerated modernization" (Borradori, 2003, p. 32). The situation described by Mohsin Hamid corresponds with the logic of Habermas' thinking. It is painful for Changez to encounter his country in the state of destruction and the disintegration of customary ways of life. He understands that the ancient glory of Pakistan belongs to history; his country now belongs to the fallen empires. It makes him resentful to acknowledge that "four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians" (p. 34). It is worth mentioning that such melancholic reminiscences do not provoke destructive aggression in the narrator. Instead, he begins reconsidering the situation around him, trying to figure out how he could help his country.

Changez sees that old traditions, values, national cuisine, and a way of life are being transformed to conform to the American pattern. The food he is enjoying with his interlocutor can rarely be found. Resistance to homogenization and globalization now

dominates his previous desire to integrate into American society. National cultures are granted little autonomy in the Empire. According to Hardt and Negri, "Traditional cultures and social organizations are destroyed in capital's tireless march through the world to create the networks and pathways of a single cultural and economic system of production and circulation" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 326).

The other factors that provoke this change of the narrator's position are the aggressive U.S. strategy in the world arena and the absence of war on its own territory. These factors accelerate the cognitive dissonance between Americans and the nations engaged in military conflicts on their own soil. From time to time, the narrator reminds his listener that it is difficult for an American to understand the feelings and emotional state of people who reside within commuting distance of hostile troops. Changez directs the attention of his interlocutor to the fact that the U.S.A. "has not fought a war on its soil in living memory" (p. 127). Further, he reflects: "I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my continent of Asia, America played a central role" (p. 156). In another context, the narrator observes: "I wondered how it was that America was able to wreak such havoc in the world—orchestrating an entire war in Afghanistan, say, and legitimizing through its actions the invasion of weaker states by more powerful ones, which India was now proposing to do to Pakistan—with so few apparent consequences at home" (p. 131). America is insensitive to the sufferings of other nations as it lacks their experience of impoverishment and powerlessness. Changez remarks: "As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you" (p. 168). Douglass Kellner, discussing the September 11th events, concludes, "Suddenly, the vulnerability and anxiety suffered by many people throughout the world was also experienced deeply by U.S. citizens, in some cases for the first time. The terror attacks thus had material effects, attempting to harm the U.S. and global economy, and psychic effects, traumatizing a nation with fear" (Kellner, 2004, p. 44).

The narrator's re-initiation in his homeland and reconfiguring of his worldview are registered through his refusal to shave his beard. It is a symbolic act through which Changez tries to show his belonging to and unity with his native land. A two-week-old beard was "a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind" (p. 130). It is the marker of the

narrator's transition from his identity as a New Yorker to a Pakistani identity. He refuses "to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers" (p. 130). At the same time, the beard changes the attitude of Changez: if before the events of 9/11, he had the feeling of blending in, after them, he was subjected to verbal abuse by strangers. At Underwood Samson, he becomes a subject of whispers and stares. Nevertheless, Changez stoically endures all misfortunes and searches for the way out of his existential crisis.

The next step in his reconsideration of the U.S.A. and its role on the world scene happens during his stay in Valparaiso. Together with his boss, Jim, they go to Chile to determine the value of the assets of a publishing company. Mohsin Hamid underlines the global nature of American capital. Territorial and capitalist logics intertwine as territorial control is a necessary means to the accumulation of capital. The Empire needs geographical expansion for its economic growth. Hardt and Negri underline the idea of open space as the immanent feature of this new form of sovereignty:

> The space of Empire is constantly reterritorialized and reconstituted. Perhaps the fundamental characteristic of imperial sovereignty is that its space is always open. As we saw in earlier sections, the modern sovereignty that developed in Europe from the sixteenth century onward conceived space as bounded, and its boundaries were always policed by the sovereign administration. Modern sovereignty resides precisely on the limit. In the imperial conception, by contrast, power finds the logic of its order always renewed and always re-created in expansion. (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 167)

This tendency toward an open project operating on an unbounded space goes back to the first phase of American constitutional history, Hardt and Negri argue. "The North American terrain can be imagined as empty only by willfully ignoring the existence of the Native Americans – or really conceiving them as a different order of human being, as subhuman, part of the natural environment" (pp. 169 – 170). This expansive tendency differs from the colonial extensions of the modern nations-states. Hardt and Negri summarize that the idea of nowadays Empire was "born through the global expansion of the internal U.S. constitutional project" (pp. 182). Hardt and Negri further explain that when the great open American spaces eventually ran out there emerged another option: "to return to the project of imperial sovereignty and articulate it in a way consistent with the original 'Roman' mission of the United States" (p. 172).

Because of the global expansion of the internal U.S. constitutional project, the financial analysts of Underwood Samson feel comfortable and sure of themselves in any part of the world. They are using their economic strategies and values as universal ones. When an older man who loves books and tries to save the publishing company asks the American professionals what they know about books, Jim sincerely answers that he has evaluated similar companies before. He is not aware that the question was actually about books.

Valparaiso's former grandeur reminds Changez of Lahore. The Panama Canal transformed what was once a great port into a deep periphery. During the meeting, the old publisher, Juan-Bautista, tells Changez a story about the janissaries, "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 civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (p. 151). Changez vividly sees that America is an example of today's Empire, and he is its janissary. "Moreover I knew from my experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" (p. 156). After the conversation with the older man, he refuses to facilitate the project of American domination. Accordingly, Hardt and Negri state: "The networks of agreements and associations, the channels of mediation and conflict resolution, and the coordination of the various dynamics of states are all institutionalized within Empire. We are experiencing a first phase of the transformation of the global frontier into an open space of imperial sovereignty" (p. 200). During the trip to Valparaiso, the narrator awakens from the American Dream that has overshadowed his national inner self.

Changez comes back to Pakistan to teach at the university. His mission is to raise the national consciousness of young Pakistani students and "to stop America" (Hamid, 2008, p. 168). He organizes students to participate in demonstrations for the greater independence of Pakistan. Their protests are labeled anti-American, although they use the Empire's ideological strategy. "I can assure you that I am a believer in non-violence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense […] I am not an ally of killers; I am simply a university lecturer, nothing more or less" (p. 181). His appeal to nationhood and the dignity of his people and culture serves as an ideological weapon to repel the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, the idea of liberation from foreign domination implies subordination to domestic structures of dominance.

Conclusion

Changez's monologue enlarges the context of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 through introducing into the conventional discourse of 9\11 the voices of those who were simply blamed as terrorists because they came from the East. Verbalizing the alternative vision of the September events in New York, drawing attention to their complexity, the novel's narrator does not justify the mass killings; he proposes a symptomatic reading of the tragedy that tries to fill in the lacunas left by the dominant discourse. Changez's narrative is a possible way of figuring out what has gone wrong in the "communicative action" (Habermas) between the West and the East. As Jürgen Habermas concludes, "conflicts arise from *distortion in communication* [italics in the original], from misunderstanding and incomprehension, from insincerity and deception" (Borradori, 2003, p. 35). Nations have become alienated from each other because of distorted communication and the biased perception of their citizens, and this fact is often used by political forces and regimes. "The so-called 'clash of civilizations' [Kampf der Kulturen] is often the veil masking the vital material interests of the West (accessible oilfields and secured energy supply, for example)" (Borradori, 2003, p. 35). According to D. Harvey (Harvey, 2003) and B. Massumi (Massumi, 2010), the 9/11 events were used by the U.S.A. to justify entering Iraq. Fear tactics became the dominant strategy for advancing a specific political agenda. David Harvey, after a deep analysis of the economic and social situation in the U.S. before the events of 9/11, concludes: "But it was, of course, 9/11 that provided the impetus to break with the dissolute ways of the 1990s. It provided the political opening not only to assert a national purpose and to proclaim national solidarity but also to impose order and stability on civil society at home. It was the war on terror, swiftly followed by the prospect of war with Iraq, which allowed the state to accumulate more power" (Harvey, 2003, p. 15).

The narrator of the novel asks readers to listen to the other side of the conflict and not to judge all Muslims as bloodthirsty fundamentalists. People must widen their perspectives of the world and "take up the roles of 'speaker' and 'hearer'. Taking up these roles in a dialogue, they engage in a fundamental symmetry, which, at the bottom, all speech situations require" (Borradori, 2003, p. 37). Changez invites the American agent to adopt his perspective in order not to blame him but to understand the roots of his anger. Mohsin Hamid leaves the ending of the novel open, so the readers do not know whether the American listener has changed his perspective or simply completed his mission.

In addition to calling for constructive dialogue between the West and East, the author of the novel considers the critical revision of U.S. international politics. One of the messages is that after causing so much grief and misfortune abroad, America cannot play the role of an innocent observer. In this context, it is worth mentioning Derrida's position towards the tragedy in New York: "Anyone in the world who either organized or tried to justify this attack saw it as a response to the state terrorism of the United States and its allies" (Borradori, 2003, p. 107).

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

References

Altheide, D. (2010). Fear, Terrorism, and Popular Culture. In J. Birkenstein, A. Froula, & K. Randell (Eds.), *Reframing 9/11 Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror"* (pp.11 – 23). New York: Continuum.

Borradori, G. (Ed.). (2003). *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Cainkar L. (2009). *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Croft St. (2006). *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Däwes B. (2011). *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel.* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH.

DeLillo, D. (2001). In the Ruins of the Future. *Harper's Magazine*, December. Retrieved August 2, 2019, from https://harpers.org/archive/2001/12/in-the-ruins-of-the-future/.

Frank, M. (2020). The Novel After 9/11: From Ground Zero to the "War on Terror". In S. Baumbach & B. Newmann (Eds.), *New Approaches to the Twenty-First Century Anglophone Novel* (pp. 175 – 94). Palgrave Macmillan.

Gray R. (2011). *After the Fall. American Literature since 9\11*. Wiley- Blackwell.

Hamid M. (2008). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.* Boston, New York: A Mariner Book.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire.* Harvard University Press.

Harvey D. (2003). *The New Imperialism.* Oxford University Press.

Kellner, D. (2004). 9/11, spectacles of terror, and media manipulation. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 41-64.

Massumi, B. (2010). The Political Ontology of Threat. In M. Gregg & Gr. Seigworth (Eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp.52 – 70). Duke University Press.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. (2001). *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shymchyshyn, M. (2020). The Janissaries of the 20th century: Mohsin Hamid's Novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist. *Literary Process: Methodology, Names, Trends, 14, 54-61*. Retrieved from https://litp.kubg.edu.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/485.

Wersching Gr. (2012). Rev. of *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9 / 11Novel,* by Birgit Däwes. *Journal of American Studies.* 46, 414.