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**Representations of Islam, Terrorism, and Religious Extremism: Cosmopolitan  
Identity in Muslim Anglophone Novel**

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in English**

**Presented by**

Fateh BOUNAR

**Supervised by**

Prof. Ilhem MORTAD SERIR

**Board of Examiners**

Mr Ghouti Hadjoui	(Prof) Chairman	University of Tlemcen
Mrs Ilhem Serir	(Prof) Supervisor	University of Tlemcen
Mr Abbas Bahous	(Prof) Examiner	University of Mostaganem
Mr Belabbes Ourrad	(Prof) Examiner	University of Sidi-Bel-Abbes
Mrs Yasmina Djafri	(M.C.A) Examiner	University of Mostaganem
Mr Farid Daoudi	(M.C.A) Examiner	University of Tlemcen

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## Abstract

Human history is rich in evidence of the ideological conflict that has coloured relations between Islam and the West. Since its rise in Arabia, the Judaeo-Christian tradition has regarded Islam with suspicion and has staunchly believed that the new faith was nothing more than the product of the ravings of a heretic. The ideological, religious conflict spilt over into the battlefield during the Crusades, and climaxed in the spread of sundry stereotypes and myths about Islam and Muslims. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues amply that the West has popularised a rather distorted image about Islam through a pseudo-scientific study of the East, subjecting it in the process to a discourse of power, which colours most of the perceptions that the West has had about Islam. Recently, the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York have, in their wake, revived and reinforced many extant, Orientalist myths in a new, perhaps more overwhelming, wave of misrepresentation targeting Islam. In the realm of literature, canonical writers like John Updike and Don DeLillo published works that do but reiterate the media Neo-orientalist discourse, which paints Islam as a religion mired in outmoded practices and incapable of cross-cultural dialogue in the age of Globalisation. In this thesis, however, it is argued that out of the post-9/11 frenzy emerges a counter discourse, which tries to correct these misconceptions and myths. In order to analyse this counter discourse, the three novels analysed here are therefore read through the lens of Anthony Appiah's philosophy of Rooted Cosmopolitanism. Mohsin Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*), Laila Halaby (*Once in a Promised Land*), and Robin Yassin-Kassab (*The Road from Damascus*), it is argued, have captured the symbolism associated with the collapse of the Twin Towers and applied it to their novels' plot structures to signal the change in the world of their characters, whose personal/family relationships collapse almost in tandem with the collapse of the Twin Towers. 9/11 reveals more the Muslim characters' ambivalence and cultural hybridity, to borrow from post-colonial parlance, a hybridity that is empowering rather than disempowering, for it eases their cross-cultural conversation, which is an essential ingredient in Appiah's cosmopolitan model. In an age characterised by deep mistrust, the three novels promote narratives of cross-cultural dialogue in that the main Muslim characters, to evoke Appiah's cosmopolitanism, fulfil fully their "moral oughts," the moral obligations that bind them to fellow human-beings who do not belong to their local culture. Set in self-proclaimed cosmopolitan centres, the host cultures' cosmopolitanism remains a sanctimonious rallying cry if it does not genuinely engage with difference. Such a cosmopolitanism crumbles in times of conflict, giving rise to intolerance and hatred, as evidenced by the characters of Changez's unnamed, American interlocutor (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*), the FBI investigators and Jassim's colleagues (*Once in a Promised Land*), and Gabor Vronk (*The Road from Damascus*). The trend of cosmopolitanism that Appiah proposes and defends may then successfully establish cross cultural dialogue given that the Rooted Cosmopolitan understands well his "ethical oughts" and "moral oughts" and the responsibilities that arise thereof.

**Key Words:** Ambivalence, Anthony Appiah, Cross, Cultural dialogue, Discourse, Identity, Islam, Misrepresentation, Orientalism, Post-colonialism, Religious Extremism, Rooted Cosmopolitanism, Terrorism, 9/11

## **Dedication**

To my parents,

To my wife and children

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## General Introduction

Cyrus Patell has an interesting course posted online by New York University. In the opening lecture, he makes reference to the philosophy of cosmopolitanism and how early American writers, especially Melville in *Moby Dick*, celebrate New York's cosmopolitan character. Patell elucidates a couple of *isms*—Universalism, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, and most importantly Cosmopolitanism—much to the viewer's bewilderment. However bewildering these concepts may be at first, what is worth paying attention to is the call for globalism that these trends of thought make. Cosmopolitanism in particular, Patell eventually explains, defends universal concerns but condemns the sheer universality of, say, Universalism. Patell particularly refers to Anthony Appiah's version of cosmopolitanism, convinced that it is a philosophy worth defending if we—the bulk of humanity—are to co-exist peacefully in a world full of strife despite the dazzling advances in communication technology that humanity has achieved. Patell speaks based on a geopolitical context that sees Barack Obama win the Noble Peace Prize thanks to his unflagging efforts in the fight against terrorism. It goes without saying that America's Global War on Terror has gone hand in hand with a huge wartime propaganda, whose mainstay has unfortunately been Islam.

Islam, Muslims, Islamic, fundamentalists, terrorists, to name a few, are appellations—some of which mere misnomers—that corporate media throw around rather carelessly in an age characterised by deep mistrust, and probably deep misunderstanding. Many observers in the West associate Islam with Arabs maybe because the Middle East has been the world's hot spot since 1948. At the turn of the twenty-first century, 9/11 has placed a dual burden on Muslims worldwide: they have, on the one hand, borne the brunt of media defamation in the aftermath of the attacks,

and they have felt more than ever the need to *re-represent* themselves, on the other. In the literary domain, some Muslim, Anglophone writers have taken upon themselves the task of producing counter narratives to challenge the hitherto extant, Orientalist stereotypes and myths, which have grown in intensity in the post-attacks era.

It is strongly believed that the Global War on Terror has had wide repercussions for Muslims worldwide. Western media have bombarded the public with negative images and messages about Islam, often showing Muslims entrapped by the past and outmoded practices, and incapable of keeping pace with an ever-globalising world. Globalisation as American project has been emerging slowly after the First World War, but with more intensity after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After this collapse, the United States has been openly pushing its unipolar agenda of a New World Order, which thrives on globalising everything, from economy to culture. Rampant globalism, however, has come with serious challenges to identity, be it religious identity, national identity, ethnic identity, and so on. Muslim identity is certainly not immune to the threat posed by Globalisation.

One of the earnest demands of Globalisation has been to subject the world to a unified set of economic, cultural, social standards, so to speak. To achieve this ideal, many philosophies and competing worldviews have emerged over the years. Yet, perhaps this array of competing ideologies has produced an abundance of puzzling *isms*, each proposing a different worldview, and militating perhaps against the aforementioned ideal. Amid this confusion of terms, many—among whom Anthony Appiah is prominent—believe in cosmopolitanism's capacity to remedy the shortcomings of Globalisation. The latter has especially been criticised for several reasons, among which its insistence on discarding local loyalties, and its tendency to overvalue global obligations.

Kwame Anthony Appiah defends a trend of cosmopolitanism he calls Rooted Cosmopolitanism. While the latter values local obligations and particularities, it encourages cross-cultural empathy and conversation. The present thesis engages with Appiah's philosophy and how it gives rise to the formation of a Rooted Cosmopolitan identity, as it were, and deploys it in the context of the Muslim, Anglophone fiction that seeks to subvert the dominant, unipolar, Neo-orientalist discourse that grows in intensity in the wake of 9/11.

Many people have responded differently to the challenges posed by globalisation, but one thing seems to colour their reactions: they earnestly cleave to their local or national ways of life to brace against the ever-changing world around them, and because of this resistance Globalisation faces many challenges as a project. The idea of Rooted Cosmopolitanism has its appeal because it allows the individual to share in universal, human experience without expunging his/her local or national loyalties, heritage, and affiliations.

The present thesis takes on the literary works produced by Muslim, Anglophone writers who are deemed to engage with the misrepresentation of Muslims in the West in the post 9/11 era. Misrepresenting and Othering Muslims date back to centuries ago, but this misrepresentation has intensified in the second half of the twentieth century after the creation of the state of Israel and the constant conflict that ensued. Additionally, 9/11 aggravated the image of Islam and Muslims in the West, and is still generating much debate in the religious, cultural, and literary domains. 9/11 ushered in an era of unmitigated rhetoric that celebrates the American-led Western dominance blatantly couched by George Walker Bush: "you're either with us or against us" (Quoted in Blum and Heymann, XX).

Debate about Globalisation has often involved issues of identity. Huntington's thesis of the Clash of Civilisations categorises Muslims as the threatening Other, incapable of surviving global changes and challenges. The clash that results when Muslim and Western civilisations come into contact is a clash of identities.

Western writers like John Updike have made the events of 9/11 the substance of many of their literary works, more often than not producing skewed and biased representations of Islam. In response to these misrepresentations, Muslim writers writing in English have equally reacted to the events in their own way, generating in the process a counter discourse that seeks to correct many of the misconceptions surrounding Islam and Muslims.

From a post-Colonial perspective, the Muslim novelists whose works are analysed in the present research belong to the periphery. While they maintain and celebrate their local roots, they self-consciously participate in a global dialogue seeking to correct misconceptions about Islam and Muslims alike. The present thesis, therefore, proposes to think of them as Rooted Cosmopolitans: on the one hand, they value their local loyalties and obligations; on the other hand, they are fully aware of their universal obligations, the need to encourage empathy across nations, and the need to promote cross-cultural dialogue.

The research is based on the corpus of three novels written in English by Muslim writers living in the diaspora: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, *The Road from Damascus* (2008) by Robin Yassin Kassab, and *Once in a Promised Land* (2008) by Laila Halaby. The three novels are important because they are set in two self-proclaimed cosmopolitan countries: the United States and Britain. Also, the main characters in the three novels seem to display a sense of cosmopolitan identity ingrained in their Rooted Cosmopolitanism.

The present research is relevant in that it probes into how the three Muslim, Anglophone writers coming from different backgrounds have reacted to all forms of misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims. Their works are, hence, here read as efforts to *re-represent* Islam and Muslim identity. It is after all in this spirit that this thesis was conceived. The thesis also aims to deconstruct some of the negative stereotypes and clear the they-cannot-fit aura that has engulfed Muslims, especially after 9/11.

The thesis postulates that the novels under discussion originate in their writers' efforts to cast Muslim identity in the model of Rooted Cosmopolitanism by raising the following questions: (1) to what extent is Appiah's model of Rooted Cosmopolitanism valid to understand Islam-West relations in times of conflict? (2) Do the Muslim novelists under study promote narratives of conflict or cross-cultural dialogue (3) What if attention is turned to the host culture (the centre rather than the periphery); is it cosmopolitan enough as it claims to be?

In the present thesis, it is argued that the Muslim novelists under study resist and try to correct the stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Islam has often been misrepresented in Western discourse, which portrays Muslims as terrorists and intolerant fanatics incapable of cross-cultural dialogue. Set in the tense climate of 9/11, Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab show the devastating consequences of the event on their Muslim characters through the collapse of their personal/family relationships. It is also argued that, being diasporic writers, living in cosmopolitan centres, Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab could safely be said to have straddled both their native culture and the host one. Hence, their cultural hybridity is reflected in their characters, who are ambivalent in different ways towards the host culture. Finally, and most importantly, this ambivalence and cultural hybridity have enabled these writers to better understand, to evoke Appiah's

cosmopolitanism, their ethical and moral obligations, and to call for cross-cultural dialogue.

A number of books and scholarly articles dealing with Muslim literature in English have been published recently. What is more, the post 9/11 era has increased scholarly interest in the literature in English written by writers of Muslim background. 9/11 seems to have shifted the focus from ethnic delineations as literary markers (such as Arab-American Literature or Pakistani-American Literature) to religious markers, whereby Muslim writers in English are regarded as one entity, as it were.

*Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* published in 1998 by John Erickson looks at narratives produced by four Muslim authors writing in different European languages, mainly French and English. Erickson provides readings of works by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Salman Rushdie, an attempt to bring to light how these authors have deviated from the norm “in their categorical rejection of hegemonic and totalising forces of institutionalised thinking that impinge on human individuals and minorities who deviate from the well worn paths of conformity” (ix).

The only book that I know of written by a Muslim on Muslim fiction in English is *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* published in 2005. In it, Amin Malak argues that his book originated in an effort to give a voice to the hitherto silent East, which has been subordinated in the guise of scientific objectivity. In other words, the book seeks to subvert the dominant, Western discourse about the East as well as the upsurge of misrepresentation and misconception that has thus ensued. Malak’s book is seminal because it analyses a corpus of novels that cross continents and span several decades. In addition, it “studies Muslim narrative writers who produce work in English, the world’s latter-day lingua franca, and who project the

culture and civilization of Islam from *within*” (Malak 2). Working on writers ranging from Ahmad Ali, Fatima Mernissi, Nuruddine Farah to M.G. Vassanji, Adib Khan and Ahdaf Soueif, Malak justifies his choice on the fact that these have “experienced Islam firsthand for an extended, formative period”, and “have been influenced by it to such a degree that it represented a significant inspirational source for them” (2).

In *Defending the Faith: Islam in Post 9/11 Anglophone Fiction* (2009), Mustafa Shakir argues that 9/11 ushered in a new trend in the fiction written by Muslim, Anglophone authors. Shakir points out that Muslim writers prior to 9/11 use the Quran either to discredit it or to critique it for its alleged call to keep women subordinated to men. By the same token, but to achieve a nobler aim, a lot of post 9/11 Muslim Anglophone writers use the Quran to show how it has turned into a source of positive power and inspiration in “an environment that has suddenly become less hospitable” (Mustapha 282).

In her introduction to a forum about migrant Muslim writers held at the university of Notre Dame in 2011, Catherine Perry calls to attention how Muslim writers, who live in the diaspora, and who write in the postcolonial context, are now addressing “more global human issues beyond a colonial/postcolonial dichotomy (122). Among the participants in the forum was Robin Yassin Kassab, whose *The Road from Damascus* is one of the novels analysed in the present thesis.

The works cited above have marked a shift from the traditional, literary markers, as it were, to regarding the body of literature produced by Muslim writers as an entity. This shift may be attributed to 9/11, which has placed a special burden on Muslim writers, who no longer identify themselves with, say, ethnic or national identity markers. Religion, to put it in the words of Amin Malak, is “a key component” of a Muslim’s identity “that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or

ethnic affiliation” (3). The above-cited works, when discussing Muslim fiction written in English, cover a wide spectrum of literary works that are brought together under the common aim of producing a counter narrative.

The three novels that the thesis proposes to analyse are read here as counter narratives in the light of Appiah’s philosophy of Rooted Cosmopolitanism. The latter, the thesis contends, is the most appropriate trend of cosmopolitanism if we are to understand Muslim identity negotiation in an age characterised by distrust of anything Muslim. More importantly, Appiah’s cosmopolitanism allows us to turn attention to the host (Western) societies and weigh their claims of being cosmopolitan. Therefore, to put things into perspective, it is necessary to provide a brief history of the philosophy of cosmopolitanism, and then shed some light on Appiah’s trend of Rooted Cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism literally means citizen of the world. It is the combination of the two Greek words “cosmos”, universe, and “polites”, citizen. Cosmopolitanism is a belief system that claims that every individual, by dint of humanity, has moral commitments and obligations towards all people regardless of sex, nationality, religion, political affiliations, or any other markers and delineations that may influence an individual’s commitment to a universal cause (Brown and Held 1). The present, revived interest in cosmopolitan philosophy and practice finds justification in the fact that cosmopolitanism has been regarded by many as an antidote to fervent nationalism (Fine and Cohen 140).

The philosophy of cosmopolitanism dates back to the fourth century BCE and is ascribed to the Cynics, who often broadly expressed that they were kosmopolites, or citizens of the cosmos. The Cynics’ cosmopolitanism springs from a desire to taunt political conventions that bind the individual to the nation. They longed for freedom



to live according to one's free choice in harmony with nature. This rejection of local loyalties and obligations implied, for the Cynics, that the individual's moral obligations could transcend local and national commitments.

The Stoics, on the other hand, valued cross-national interaction and encounter without negating national and local loyalties and obligations. They deemed all citizens of the world close neighbours bound by humanity and concern for universal welfare. Impartiality for the Stoics entailed being just to all human-beings regardless of distance or boundaries. It would be wrong though to assume that the Stoics had a callous disregard for local loyalties and obligations binding them to fellow citizens. Cross-national encounter could never have been meaningful unless the individual had been aware of his background and roots. Difference in particular fed the Stoics' appreciation of the Other's culture, fostering by so doing tolerance.

Understood in this way, the philosophy of cosmopolitanism was met with some suspicion in that the prevalent belief at the time was that every individual belonged to a community among communities. Those who suspected the cosmopolitans' intentions, according to Malcomson, believed that cosmopolitans, "most of them influenced by Stoicism, took their universal citizenship as a license to either withdraw from the world or to master it. Of those who withdrew, not much more can be said. Those who did not tend to use their citizenship toward one of two purposes: to study the world or to control it" (233). However, it was not until the time of the Enlightenment that the philosophy of cosmopolitanism, with its call for universal empathy, enjoyed renewed currency.

The philosophes inveighed against superstitions and launched into bitter diatribes against the Church, which they believed was the chief instigator of religious strife in the Middle Ages. Ecclesiastical interference in the lives of individuals and

states alike, according to the philosophes, did very little to increase religious tolerance among fellow nationals, let alone to promote a sense of belonging to a global community, which the philosophes sought to sow in the minds of people. Conceiving of individuals as rational beings, Immanuel Kant believed in reason's capacity to free human beings from state-imposed constraints, inducing in them a belief in the moral demands one has towards those living beyond the boundaries of his state.

The philosophes' cosmopolitanism failed to be cosmopolitan enough although it declared that all human beings are equal and should be treated as such. Unfortunately, this ideal applied solely to those of European, or Caucasian descent, or Christians. Non-Europeans, Blacks, and the others that fell outside this categorisation did not fit the paradigm of the cosmopolitanism envisaged by the philosophes. Hence, cosmopolitanism as was conceived by Enlightenment philosophers increased the White Man's sense of superiority and was one of the precursors of colonialism. This strong sense of superiority grew stronger in Britain and France, for the two soon-to-become superpowers perceived of Africa, for instance, as a place where to act out their cosmopolitan projects that stemmed not from a belief in cross-cultural dialogue leading to empathy and toleration but from a belief in globalising the empire's local particularities. The inevitable corollary was the conception of a cosmopolitanism that celebrated the merits of one side only: those of the coloniser in this case. Paul Gilroy points out that cosmopolitan ideals intermingled with imperial ambitions, and thus marred the noble cosmopolitan project that the Cynics and the Stoics had in mind: "We should remember that [cosmopolitan] ideas were entangled with and tested by the expansion of Europeans into new territories and are compromised, if not wholly discredited, by the consolidation and management of the resulting imperial orders" (4).

Ambivalence towards the problematic nature of cosmopolitanism prevailed in the twentieth century. Marx and Engels entertained fears that Capitalism's unfettered, global aspirations, often cast and disguised in a cosmopolitan rhetoric by the Capitalists, concealed imperial intentions in the name of progress and equality for humanity. Capitalism, in fact, has done very little to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor; doubtless it promises free trade for all, yet it inevitably creates two unbalanced social classes, those who own the means of production and those who are part of the means of production (Kleingeld and Brown). Among other globalist agendas that claim to advance cosmopolitan ideals are the Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the creation of international relief organisations such the Red Cross, the creation of the United Nations, the forging of international military alliances such as NATO, to name a few.

Regardless of these conscious efforts to make the world a more cosmopolitan place, technological advances have made means of communication much easier. Distances have shrunk, enabling millions of people to fly in a short time to and from used-to-be distant locations, even exotic ones. Cosmopolitanism as was conceived by the Cynics and the Stoics has become a feasible project at least at a virtual level. Never had the climate been more convenient for cosmopolitan ideals to thrive than in contemporary society. However, constant strife and warfare that characterise our contemporary day-to-day experience have put cosmopolitanism to a gruelling test.

Doubtless many critics question cosmopolitanism because of the reasons explained above. Ambivalence towards cosmopolitan ideals is strongly felt when the individual's identity is brought into question. Does insistence on celebrating our human, universal bonds militate against loyalty to our local particularities? Does overvaluation of local particularities influence how much tolerant of difference and diversity we might become? After all, too much of either, celebration of local

particularities and peculiarities, or appraisal of lofty cosmopolitan ideals are doomed to invite criticism. How is identity negotiated amid the tumult prompted by Globalisation? Amid these questions lies the answer in Kwame Anthony Appiah's trend of Rooted Cosmopolitanism.

Huntington posits that "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (22). His thesis has gained much currency especially with relation to the Muslim civilisation, which he believes produces fundamentalism. All these charges notwithstanding, this thesis contends that Anthony Appiah's trend of Rooted Cosmopolitanism is the best way to understand Muslim identity in the age of globalisation. Rooted Cosmopolitanism—rather than being a trend of cosmopolitanism that emphasises adherence to universal principles at the expense of local loyalties—is a trend of cosmopolitanism that celebrates local loyalties and partialities while at the same time urges the individual to fulfil the universal obligations he owes to his fellow world citizens. Additionally, Appiah's cosmopolitanism encourages conversation across nations, and may hence be the best way to correct miscomprehensions and open channels for dialogue. Thus, of particular interest to the thesis is his concepts of "ethical oughts" and "moral oughts".

Appiah takes to task Liberalism with its insistence on discarding "unreal loyalties". Any form of liberal cosmopolitanism, therefore, according to Appiah, loses appeal. Any unmodified form of cosmopolitanism that renounces and abjures local loyalties, he insists, ". . . is a hard sell. It is a position that has little grip upon our hearts. Yet it may have some purchase on our intellects. If persons are of equal worth, as liberals claim, what could justify favoring members of your particular group over others? (221)

Fervent advocates of Liberalism abjure “unreal” loyalties such as patriotic sentiment, family ties, to name a few, because these have been the root cause of wars and continuous strife. In Appiah’s view, local loyalties are as important as universal obligations. Appiah’s “wishy-washy” cosmopolitanism, as he calls it, “comprises the values of the world traveler, who takes pleasure in exotic conversation with exotic strangers”, a cosmopolitanism that “will add to our understanding only. . .if we care about others who are not part of our political order—others who may have commitments and beliefs that are unlike our own” (222). The cosmopolitanism Appiah defends does not see difference as an obstacle; rather, in his view, a cosmopolitan cannot be a cosmopolitan unless he celebrates and engages with difference.

One other facet of Appiah’s philosophy is his definition of “responsibilities” and “obligations” and the domains in which they fall, namely morality and ethics. The two domains are key component of his philosophy because they are closely linked to the notion of partiality he staunchly defends. Morality, in his view, “has to do with what we owe to others”, while ethics “has to do with what kind of life it is good for us to lead” (230). Appiah’s elaboration on the concepts of morality and ethics is important for the present thesis: “the distinction between the ethical and the moral corresponds to “thick” relations—which invoke a community founded in a shared past or “collective memory”—and “thin” relations, which we have with strangers, and which are stipulatively entailed by a shared humanity” (230).

Ethical obligations (oughts) regulate an individual’s interactions with people with whom they have thick relations. The thicker the relations, the more demanding the obligations become, and the more partial the individual becomes, a partiality that Rooted Cosmopolitanism does not condemn. Moral obligations, on the other hand, should induce the individual in such a way that he engages with difference, which, for the Rooted Cosmopolitan, presents as an opportunity to build dialogue across

cultures. Ethical relations derive their importance from the individual's rootedness in an ethical community, which "gives content to those ethical relations. . .that identity" (236). Put otherwise, ethical obligation "is internal to the identity. Who you are is constituted, in part, by what you care about; to cease to care about those things would be to cease to be the sort of person you are" (236).

Appiah conceives of Rooted Cosmopolitanism as a philosophy that may not only bridge the gap of difference but one that may promote dialogue as well. He believes that problems arise when the individual is consumed by a need to make the Other conform to his worldview. A Rooted Cosmopolitan, he holds, would not cringe if the Other led a life different than his because differences will always remain: "Of course, we can learn from other kinds of people and from other societies, just as they can learn from us. But if we do that, we shall inevitably move toward a world of greater uniformity" (247).

Appiah's philosophy of identity, which is inspired by his belief in Rooted Cosmopolitanism, will somehow run against the model of postmodern identity defended by Stuart Hall. For postmodernists, like Hall, identity is not a fixed construct but is influenced and shaped by historical realities. In other words, the postmodernists hold that an authentic self does not exist. Analysis of the novels under discussion in this thesis will show how the characters ultimately return to their roots, their authentic self, in times of conflict.

Chapter one provides background information on Islam and the position it occupies in the Western collective consciousness. It shows how, from its inception, it has been associated with many negative stereotypes and myths, which were at first spread by the church during the Crusades before the Orientalists added a quasi-legitimacy to these stereotypes through the publication of a vast literature on the Orient. The chapter also shows how these stereotypes have enjoyed renewed currency

after the attacks of 9/11, in which aftermath corporate media have launched a ferocious propaganda against terrorism, which has unfortunately come to be associated with Islam.

Chapter two explores some of the literature in English produced by Muslim writers, and shows how early writers have explored themes of identity, especially in works that were produced when Muslim countries or countries with a large Muslim population were languishing under the British colonial rule. The theme of identity negotiation, the chapter shows, has resurfaced more prominently in the post-9/11 era, during which some Muslim writers, especially the ones under study here, have worked to counter the misrepresentation of Islam by their Western as well as their Eastern counterparts.

Chapter three analyses the three novels under study in the light of the 9/11 context. It argues that Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab have represented the impact of the traumatic attacks on their Muslim characters through the collapse of their personal/family relationships. Indeed, the collapse of the Twin Towers signals the collapse of Changez's relationship with Erica and America, the crumbling of Salwa's and Jassim's marriage, and the deepening rift in Muntaha's and Sami's marriage.

In chapter four, it is argued that the Muslim characters, by dint of their hybridity, feel ambivalent towards their object of fascination/hate. This ambivalence helps in the formation of their identities as they have the chance to sample both the local/native culture and the host culture. As much as this hybrid experience makes them understand the host culture from within, it equally teaches them to go back to their roots.

The closing chapter, analyses the novels in the light of Appiah's philosophy. It argues that failure to properly understand moral and ethical obligations as well as

failure to engage with difference accounts for the dismal breakdown of cross-cultural dialogue, especially in the post-9/11 climate. Most importantly, it concludes that the novels discussed here may correct some of the misconceptions about Islam and promote a narrative of cross-cultural dialogue.



## **Chapter One**

### **Islam: A Long History with Misrepresentation**

## **1.1. Introduction**

The relationship that the West has with Islam dates back to even before the West as a political concept/bloc came into being. Throughout the centuries this relationship has witnessed moments of intense conflict as well as moments of peaceful co-existence. The conflict arose mainly because of Islam's sweeping influence on all aspects of life in Arabia, gradually becoming a dominant, political force to be reckoned with.

The social, the cultural, and mainly the political life in Europe in the Middle Ages was dominated by the church, which saw in Islam a dormant threat to its dominance. Ecclesiastical authority started to be challenged by Muslims, who, for the sake of spreading the word of God, called for the worship of one God. This call contradicted the then teachings of the Bible, which were premised on the concept of the Holy Trinity. The Christians and the Muslims, as a result, began to view each other as heretics, and thus the two parties fought each other long, bloody wars: the Crusades.

The West's history with misrepresenting Islam started with the church's reluctance to recognise the prophet of Islam as a true prophet sent by God. The church spread many tales like the Quran being a corrupt copy of the Bible and the prophet of Islam being an imposter, so as to demonise the new faith. These tales and many other falsehoods have come to form various misconceptions about Islam, misconceptions that have lingered in the West's collective imagination ever since.

Arabia and a large swathe of Muslim territory fell prey to the West's relentless wave of colonisation, which tilted the balance in favour of the West. Languishing under colonial authority, the Muslims strived to keep their identity intact because, like many colonised people, they were stripped of the basic rights to represent

themselves. They were rather represented by Western painters, writers, politicians, and anthropologists in myriad paintings, treatises, and books.

The Skewed representation that these people of influence provided came to be referred to as Orientalism by Edward Said. He was among the first who tried to undo the misrepresentation that the East was subjected to at the hands of the West. His efforts culminated in the publication of *Orientalism*, which is still one of the most influential books in the domain of Post-colonialism. Said's argument goes so far as to accuse the West of having pinned the East down to a discourse, which is very much degrading and racist.

In recent history, the attacks of 9/11 have renewed discussions about Orientalism and the place of Islam in nowadays digital age. In the West, many voices, especially in the realm of literature, have but reiterated the stereotypes that Said inveighs against in his books. In fact, the attacks have in a way endorsed Samuel Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilisations, which he forwarded in the early 1990's. Also, as a result of the attacks, calls for dialogue were issued because the post-attack era has witnessed the resurfacing of heated, ongoing debates about *we* (the West) and *them* (the Muslims) and the crisis of identity.

This chapter throws some light on how the West—the Judeo-Christian tradition—has viewed Islam since its rise in Arabia, and shows how it has misrepresented it throughout the centuries, culminating in the recent, intense media misrepresentations in the post-9/11 attacks.

## **1.2. Islam in the Western Mind**

The history of Islam-West encounter spans centuries, a lengthy history that documents moments of intense conflict, ceaseless wars, as well as brief periods of

peaceful co-existence. The conflict at the core was religious because the church deemed a threat the call of Islam for a universal, religious creed. While Islam derives the force of its universal claims from divine authority, the church saw in these claims a nascent challenge to its hitherto incontestable control. The crusades attest to a long, bloody history that marked periods of shifting dominance between East and West. The advent of modernity, however, has noticeably tilted the balance in favour of the West. Additionally, Islam-West relations deteriorated when large swathes of Muslim lands came under the grip of Western Colonialism. Furthermore, Muslims have fared badly in the post-colonial period, which has increased the animosity between Islam and the West, taking the conflict to different levels in the age of mass media and modern forms of communication.

Islam established itself as a force to be contended with because of its whole approach to life. The prophet of Islam—may peace be upon him—called on the idol-worshipping citizens of Mecca to worship one God and only one God. The nobles of Mecca met his message with disdain, for they knew much more than mere belief was at stake; in effect, their reluctance to embrace the new faith was spurred by fear for their social and economic status. This initial resistance notwithstanding, Islam spread fast over the years reaching Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity, and Europe, its champion. Islam, therefore, became part and parcel of the social and political reality of the time.

The overall image the West holds of Islam is that it is a religion that spread at sword-point. Thus, from the outset, the Western mind associated Islam and Muslims with violence, an association that 9/11 has cemented recently. Frederick Quinn points out how negative images about Islam and Muslims have irrationally anchored themselves in the Western mind, which perceives of Muslims as a strange breed of people having different, irreconcilable values. These unquestioned images, according

to Quinn, “At worst. . .represent gross prejudices, at best they distort the face-to-face realities of the world in which we live” (22).

The Crusades were certainly behind the fast spread of such negative images. Political and economic motivations were cloaked in the fervent, religious rhetoric on which the church capitalised to maintain a “unified political and/or religious front”. The church in fact had been facing internal challenges from growing European nationalism when Pope Urban II declared the Crusades, an attempt to free the Holy Land in 1095. The unstated purpose of the Pope, nonetheless, was “to consolidate political support for the papacy” (23). Therefore, spreading negative images about the Other became a very effective strategy to create a sense of belonging to a religious community—Christian community—that countered growing sentiments of European nationalism, which threatened to challenge the authority of the church. Most importantly, the church pinned the Other (Muslims) down through a discourse, which, in John V. Tolan’s view, showed how “the denigration of the other can be used to define one’s intellectual construction of the world” (Quoted in Quinn 23).

Muslim-dominated Spain from 711 to the fall of Grenada in 1492 witnessed the fully-fledged interaction between the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews. Many then and contemporary scholars marvel at the peaceful, unprecedented co-existence of the three faiths. Christians and Jews were able to co-exist with their fellow Muslims because they retained their traditions and customs at home and were never forced to assimilate. Despite this peaceful co-existence, Spanish bishops and monks continued to portray Muslims as heretics, whose religion was preached by “a false prophet possessed of demonic illusions, a sorcerer who led a lascivious lifestyle” (Quinn 30).

The fall of Grenada in 1492 was the turning point that marked the beginning of a series of setbacks for Islam, especially in Europe. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the

military might of the Ottoman Empire began to wane, a decline that diminished the political influence of Islam. These centuries also witnessed wholesale transformations in the West, whose embrace of capitalist models of economy sparked an insatiable quest for markets. The Other became the Oriental, the African, the Indian, the Native American, and so on.

The West started to be aware of its political and economic superiority. With the creation of nation states, the philosophes, especially in France, called for the separation of state and religion. The latter gradually lost its grip over the lives of individuals and gave way to a secularist outlook on life. Material progress rather than religious creed regulated the conduct of states and nations. The result was that “science and political ideas emerged as new ways of looking at human society”; accordingly, “Islam’s image changed. . .from being the Devil’s handiwork to a complex subject of worthy study in its own right” (57).

The age of exploration produced an array of travel narratives, which formed the substance of much of the sociological and anthropological enquiry of the time. French travellers such as Baptiste Tavernier and Jean de Thévenot were among the first to draw attention to the diversity characterising the Muslim nation. European readers came to learn that the word “Muslim” applied to Arabs, Moors, Egyptians, Persians, Turks, and many others. This early form of travel literature, although it was much less partial, reiterated the stereotypes and myths surrounding Muslims and Islam alike. Montesquieu and Voltaire produced skewed, literary representations of Islam. Voltaire’s play *Fanatisme, ou Mohomet le prophète* is a work that—as its title connotes—shows the prophet of Islam may peace be upon him as a fanatic engaged in an endless, undeterred quest for political power. The play’s themes range from incest, murder, and conspiracy. Muhammed is portrayed as a hypocrite capable of inducing fanaticism in his followers. In England, the Protestants brought the Bible’s

apocalyptic passages to bear on the Catholics and the Muslims. The latter in particular were described as “troops of locusts” and a “brood of vipers”. Additionally, writing from the perspective of a historian, Edward Gibbon, although he showed much of the positive attributes of Islam, held that the Prophet Muhammed may peace be upon him was blinded by the power that prophethood invested him with, making him cruel, fraudulent, and fanatic. Gibbon believed that Islam is far more logical and far less superstitious than Christianity, but he equally believed and posited somehow derisively that the Arabians perceived of the Koran as a divine book because they were so much ignorant as to think of a human-being capable of producing a similar work of genius (59-72).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam had already spread all over the world, boasting nearly a billion of followers, the majority of whom living outside Arabia. To escape the harsh realities of the post-colonial condition of their countries, an influx of Muslim immigrants flooded countries like France, Britain, and the United States looking for better job opportunities. The West began to feel Islam’s global presence; rather than restricting its scope of the study of Islam to the Middle East, the West tried to find new ways to address the complexities global Islam presented. These complexities arose from the growing militant spirit in Muslim countries languishing under Western colonial rule, or from the growing sense of nationalism and antagonism in newly-independent Muslim countries. Moreover, the creation of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict that ensued added to the complexity of the problem.

According to Quinn, the colonisation of the Muslim lands was just another facet of the Crusades. The French commander in Damascus in 1920 echoed the rhetoric of the Crusades when “he marched to Saladin’s tomb in the Great Mosque and announced “Nous revenons Saladin!” (we returned Saladin)” (126). On the other hand, the British humour publication *Punch* published in 1917 an illustration of “The Last

Crusade”, which featured an armour-clad Richard the Lion Hearted looking exultantly over Jerusalem, exclaiming “My dream comes true” (127).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States ascended to world prominence, an ascendancy that brought about a new attitude towards Islam. The latter became an essential ingredient in the American geopolitical vision of the world. The Cold War involved the United States and the Soviet Union in a tug of war over foreign support for their own interests. The United States wanted to pull Muslim countries into its camp, thinking that Islam and Christianity share core beliefs, an attempt to distance the Muslims from atheistic Communism. The United States cast its plans for the Muslim World in promises of economic progress, in the hope that the Muslim countries would espouse democratic models of government (129-130). The American vision became a reality when Saudi Arabia-led Muslim Jihadists waged war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the war that eventually led to the demise and dismantling of the Soviet Union.

Doubtless one of the most important and life-changing inventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the television. The United States soon capitalised on this invention to make it a most powerful propaganda tool. Motion pictures soon proved to be much of an attitude-shaping weapon; what books could have achieved in years, motion pictures could have achieved in hours. Hollywood hastened to produce an array of films about the Middle East to sate the viewers’ yearning for the exotic.

The films that Hollywood produced depicted Islam as a pagan religion practised by backward people in the desert. Films like *The Garden of Allah*, *The Desert Song*, *The Sheikh*, *The Son of the Sheikh*, and many others, reiterate themes such as oversexualised, Arab chiefs, backward Arabs, ruthless Arabs, and hypocrite Arabs. The films seemed to consolidate the negative images of Islam that Orientalist writers



had already circulated widely (149). These early films were, in fact, the beginning of a series of films, in which Hollywood has demonised Islam, Muslims, and the Arabs. To make matters worse, the events of 9/11 have provoked a succession of new, negative images about Islam and Muslims; these images have once again become the substance of Hollywood's vilification of Muslims.

### **1.3. On Stereotypes and Misrepresentation**

Scholars in the West agree that sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century Europe changed socially, economically, and culturally because of the revolutionary philosophy that took root in the continent. Doubtless these changes constitute a cornerstone for understanding modern history because they ushered in modernity.

The Enlightenment valued reason over intuition and encouraged people to understand the universe—along the rules governing it—rationally and scientifically, a philosophy that sought to place man as master of the universe, an ambition to be fed later by imperialist leanings. The project of modernity bred new notions as well as new nations. The new nation states started vying with each other militarily and economically, paving the way for the rise of Capitalism, an economic system based on competitiveness. The creation of nation states widened the gap between peoples: on the one hand, while people began to identify with their newly created small groups, allegiances shifted on the other. Thus, the promise of modernity, it seems, turned out to be a mere mirage in that it distanced people rather than brought them together. These changes were a fertile ground for the creation and the spread of stereotypes and new forms of misrepresentation.

Stereotypes about nations and people abounded in the past, some of which waned with the lapse of time, while others have survived and gained impetus in the present time. Stereotypes create patterns of representation that a certain group of

people associates with another group. Stereotyped and misrepresented groups have always resisted the negative aura thrust upon them either through refuting the stereotypes or through spreading counter stereotypes themselves. Shadid and Koningsveld point that groups of people use stereotypes and prejudice to interpret and observe the behaviour of the Other, and at the same time to “create self-fulfilling prophecies”. Because of the “prejudice towards others, people see in their behaviour what they expect to see on the basis of their prejudice, with the result that they inevitably will make wrong predictions concerning the behaviour of members of the other group” (177).

Development of mass media and modern forms of communication has come with the promise of bridging the divide between nations, creating by so doing a ‘global village’. However bold a claim this might sound, old stereotypes have revived, while new ones come into existence day in, day out. The ‘global village’ that Western modernity prides itself upon has shrunk distances, but has also silenced voices, especially minority voices. Binaries delineating boundaries, physical and moral, have gained currency, changing names over time, yet all resoundingly echoing the much-debated dichotomy of *we* versus *them*, a dichotomy that has assumed different forms over time: civilised versus barbarians, developed versus underdeveloped, North versus South, East versus West, and Coloniser versus Colonised, to name a few. These dichotomies carry inescapable undertones of superiority and inferiority to opposed groups, giving them either dominant roles or subordinate ones. The desire to subdue the Other was the driving force that led the French and the British to colonise half of the world, widening further the divide between opposed groups, and bringing into existence the intricate relationship between colonised and coloniser.

The Age of Exploration produced European chroniclers and historians who marketed images of distant, exotic locations, and related to an ever-increasing

readership experiences far removed from what had hitherto been known to the European collective imagination. These chronicles and histories fed European imagination with erroneous beliefs and misconceptions about the Other because they were not free of bias or prejudice; they were ideology-laden and couched the Other in far less flattering portrayals, often depicting Europeans as bearers of the light of civilisation. The result was after all logical because some of these narratives were written by people who never travelled or experienced first-hand these exotic locations.

The Orient was an object of fascination for European explorers. Nonetheless, many scholars deem problematic the representation of the Orient by European explorers, adventurers, writers, or painters. Edward Said, for instance, shows the attitude of power that the West held and still holds towards its Orient Other:

Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. (7)

The Orient, as much as it provided Western readers with tales of distant, exotic places, offered a perfect foil for the West. Writing about the Orient, Orientalists showed a simmering desire to dominate a people, upon whom they foisted all meanings of backwardness and inferiority. Orientalism, according to Said, thus makes clear how “the possession of knowledge” is a “form of power, derived from the

prestige of the elite universities and their role in the reproduction of social hierarchy” (Yu 23).

In the twentieth century, the United States supplanted France and Britain as the supreme colonial power. The American colonial spirit traces its origins back to the Monroe Doctrine, a policy motivated and nourished by the idea of Manifest Destiny. In fact, the vision that the first colonists entertained about the natives smacks of disdain. Long before the English established their first colony in Jamestown, Cristopher Columbus had already crystallised attitudes about the natives of the New World. A large number of Europeans came to know about the natives through Columbus’ chronicles, which gave rise to and cemented a discourse about the Other.

The end of a devastating Second World War marked the beginning of a long Cold War. Equipped with an arsenal of media outlets, the United States and its allies launched a campaign of Othering the Soviet Union and its allies. This ferocious media campaign bore fruits with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The West, and especially the United States in recent times, has moulded its identity and reinforced its self-awareness by juxtaposing itself with a threatening Other. In the post-communism era, Western-Muslim antagonism gained momentum, and “older ideas about Islam as a predatory civilization threatening the West” resurfaced (Ahmed 21).

The United States emerged as the uncontested watchdog on world politics when President George Herbert Walker Bush announced the New World Order in a speech in the United Nations in 1991. No matter how much promising the prospects of the New World Order<sup>1</sup> were, the attacks of 9/11 ten years later (often described by many

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<sup>1</sup> In his United Nations Address in 1990, George H. W. Bush emphasised that “The United Nations can help bring about a new day, a day when these kinds of terrible weapons and the terrible despots who would use them are both a thing of the past. It is in our hands to leave these dark machines behind, in the Dark Ages where they belong, and to press forward to cap a historic movement towards a new world order and a long era of peace” (Bush).

as a false flag attack) shattered all hopes. After the attacks, the United States launched a global war on terror, which it often associates with Islam and Muslims. The war on terror has deeply affected Muslims, especially those living in the diaspora, in that all forms of media outlets revived the Orientalist discourse along with Orientalist stereotypes and forms of misrepresentation. Gana argues that Muslims and Arab Americans prior to 9/11 were segregated against on ethnic grounds, but “The post-9/11 intensification of racism” against them “reflects the protean forms of and shifts in focus and locus of racism from ethnic and color lines to religious and cultural affiliations or differentials” (1573). In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century “Syrian immigrants (generally those coming from anywhere in the Levant: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, or historical Palestine) were usually classified not as whites but as Asians or Turks and therefore often denied the right to citizenship” (1574). The creation of Israel, nevertheless, was the harbinger of new forms of representation for Muslim immigrants and marked a change of American policy towards its Muslim immigrants in that they “started to face new challenges, which had to do less with their (by then) Official Whiteness than with the nature of their faith and political agendas” (1574).

Discussions about Islam and Muslims perhaps generate most of the news nowadays. It would be partial to deny that these discussions do not paint the faith and its bearers in the most flattering picture. The history of Islam and Muslims with misrepresentation goes back a long way. The prophet of Islam, may peace be upon him, faced much opposition following his declaration of the new faith. Opposition came from his next of kin and tribe before it assumed global proportions. Most of the Jews and the Christians alike refused to endorse the new faith, casting it and its bearers in the traditional mould of heresy. Much of the stigma borne upon Islam and Muslims comes from images that the West has inherited unquestionably:

The term “image” admittedly lacks precision, for the beliefs societies hold represent a cross-stitched network of meanings. By “image,” I mean the mental representations of Islam that were recorded in various times, places, and forms by religious writers, political figures, and creative artists representing aspects of a larger reality. These delineations of Islam were passed on to various academic communities and the public. Some such images were formed in response to a particular event, such as the Ottoman invasion of Vienna or 9/11. Others were held over a much longer term, as in the centuries-old biographies of the prophet Muhammad that made their way through generations of readers. (Quinn 5)

Frederick Quinn sums up Islam’s history with misrepresentation in the Western collective consciousness by putting forward an argument that is tantamount to Edward Said’s notion of discourse. The Orient, or the Other in general, does not “exist as a reality independent of the writers who employed it” (4). Discourse about the Other, in fact, is promoted by people who operate in uncontested spheres of influence: writers, academics, religious figures, and politicians.

The influence of political representation becomes evident in the post 9/11 representation of Muslims in the media, which tend to use terms rather sloppily, something that subconsciously affected the gullible public. For instance, the terms “Islamic” and “Islamist” were, and perhaps are still, used synonymously regardless of the negative connotations that the latter carries, influencing, to put it in the words of Alek Baylee Toumi, “Westerners to perceive all Muslims as extremists” (Quoted in Perry 123). Comic books have also been one form of literary expression that spreads rather distorted images of Muslims and their faith. Comic books are very detrimental

to the image of Muslims because they appeal to and attract a wide readership ranging from children to adults. Dodds argues that comic book heroes such as Captain America “now battle it out with Islamic terrorists who are depicted as assaulting Christian-American values in imaginary towns such as Centerville” (quoted in Gana 1577). On the other hand, Hollywood has assumed its political obligations as a propaganda machine of the American Government. A myriad of TV shows, films, and documentaries inveighing against Islam were produced and marketed worldwide. Hollywood’s shady involvement in shaping public opinion is reminiscent of the Red Scare era, during which America defined its identity in opposition to an external enemy. By the same token, after 9/11 the Neoconservatives tried “to paint American identity politics in radical opposition to Islam, Arabs, and the Muslim-Arab Middle East” (Gana 1577)<sup>2</sup>.

Muslim artistic expression boomed in the post 9/11 era in an attempt to subvert the prevailing, jaundiced narrative overriding Western media. Writing in English, diaspora Muslim writers challenged dominant, biased conceptions about Islam and Muslims. The task of rewriting or re-representing the self became urgent. Muslims were no longer segregated against because of ethnic origins because the post 9/11 counterterrorism policies cast them in a different category: the question now is not “whether Arabs are black, brown, or white but whether blacks, whites, and browns are Arabs and, above all, whether they are Muslims and therefore a terrorist threat to homeland security” (Gana 1575).

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<sup>2</sup> “Narratives of competition between Islamic and Western civilizations derive their subject matter both from geopolitical tensions of the present and from the politicized cultural legacies of the past. For European Christians developing a sense of collective self-consciousness amidst tumultuous internal rivalries, the idea of an Islamic “other”—be it “Saracen,” Moorish,” “Turk,” or “Muslim”—provided a basis for articulating a shared identity, a set of common values and, at times, a common political program. The notion of a struggle between “Islamic civilization” and “the a much older theme” (Funk and Said 5).

## **1.4. On Orientalist Discourse and the Emergence of Re-Orientalism After 9/11**

Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978 constituted a cornerstone approach in Post-Colonial Studies. Said's theory of Orientalism, as the book's title suggests, is about the Orient, which in his book refers to the Arab-Islamic Middle East, formerly subject to the Ottoman Empire. Said puts forward the argument that the Orient is the mere, fictitious creation of the European imagination, which has pinned the Orient down through a discourse since the early nineteenth century. Said argues that the Orientalist's goal, disguised in empty rhetoric, is to pave the way for Britain and France—the then most powerful imperial nations— and later the United States to conquer the Arab/Muslim countries or steal their wealth by providing false, but legitimising and effective, patterns of representation.

To shed further light on his thesis, Said sketches out the West's encounter with and study of the East and the subordinating discourse that the West thereafter weaved in the name of scientific objectivity. It all began in 1798 with Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt. For Said, studies that the Orientalists produced following Bonaparte's expedition fail to amount to objective, scientific observation. In other words, they merely reflected a budding imperialist vision. In fact, the pseudo-scientific study and description of Egypt opened the way for the conquest of Algeria in 1830. Therefore, Said argues that it was no surprise that even nineteenth-century, European Orientalists who were most immersed in the culture of the countries they studied, remained remote, and isolated by their prejudices or their duplicity, and produced false accounts of the East.

European interest in the Orient, in fact, dates back way before the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Orient was the birthplace of all Abrahamic religions. The



emergence of Islam and its fast spread threatened, in the Christians' eyes, to dethrone the church and obscure its dominance over almost all aspects of life. The Crusades lasted for a very long time and claimed a lot of lives on both the Muslim and the Christian sides. The latter contrived to transfer the fight from the battlefield to the intellectual arena. Thus, the church began a campaign of discrediting Islam by showing it as a mere invention of a heretic. Hence, pastors and bishops, albeit out of ignorance of the true reality of Orientals, spread a lot of stereotypes about Muslims, who, in their eyes—the pastors and bishops—should be evangelised to be saved. The church, then, deemed learning Arabic imperative before it embarked on such a holy mission. However, Said contends that the Orientalists learn Arabic only in attempt to lend authenticity to their skewed representations of the Orient.

Said shows how the Occident institutionalised the practice of Orientalism, and how it mobilised an elite mass of intellectuals to carry out such a practice:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. (2-3)

He contends that this mass representation, or rather misrepresentation, engendered a discourse about the Orient that smacked of an imperialist and colonial ideology. Learning about and speaking on behalf of the Orient, Said adds, the Occident not only consigns it to inferiority but also invests itself with unlimited power: "Orientalism

depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7).

Said provides an analysis of how a dominant culture seizes, disfigures, and tries to assimilate the other. In other words, “Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). Orientalism reflects the way the Occident thinks about and studies the East. Orientalism also reflects a set of categories and values based on the political and social needs of the West over the concrete realities of the East, and is therefore “not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment” (7).

Said’s *Orientalism* is a very important work especially in the Post-Colonial context because he added a new dimension, that of literary criticism, to the analysis of the intricate relationship between colonised and coloniser. In 1993, he published *Culture and Imperialism*, a collection of essays that build on his theory in *Orientalism*. The book tries to unravel the connection between imperialism and culture in a number of canonical works of art.

Said lived to see the tragic events of 9/11, but perhaps did not live long enough to respond to the revival of Orientalist discourse in the post-events era. While 9/11 revived and intensified the circulation of Orientalist discourse, the practice of Orientalism by Orientals made bleaker the prospects of improving the image of Orientals in the West.

Writing about contemporary South Asian literature in English, Lisa Lau argues that South Asian writers living in the diaspora practise what she calls Re-Orientalism. Orientalists, she insists, distort “the representation of the Orient,

seizing voice and platform, and once again consigning the oriental within the Orient to a position of the Other.” (571). When Salman Rushdie published his *Satanic Verses* in 1988, he caused an uproar in the Muslim World. Many Muslims charged him with misrepresenting Islam; others wanted him dead for what they deemed a blasphemous transgression.

The post 9/11 climate has been characterised by deep suspicion towards Muslims, who are often associated with terrorism in the public eye. In the wake of the attacks, and as part of its determined war on terror, America and its allies invaded Afghanistan, the alleged hiding place of the masterminds of the attacks. Images of the destituteness and backwardness of Afghanistan were circulated on a large scale. Khaled Hosseini published *The Kite Runner* in 2003, a novel that gives account of Afghan life under the Taliban rule of the country. Despite Hosseini’s attempt to challenge Oriental stereotypes, he ends up reinforcing them (Hunt, *Can the West Read? Western Readers, Orientalist Stereotypes, and the Sensational Response to The Kite Runner* 2). Hunt argues that “the Orient is often used as a cultural backdrop against which to create and celebrate Western identity: a representation that clearly echoes the broad Orientalist stereotypes defined by Edward Said a generation ago” (3).

Hosseini gives a rather distorted image of Islam and its proper teachings. In the Beginning of the novel, he paints a liberal image of Afghanistan, which looks set to change when the Taliban takes control over the country. The Quran is clear with regard to drinking Alcohol, a sin that goes unpunished in the pre-Taliban era: “drinking was fairly common in Kabul. No one gave you a public lashing for it, but those Afghans who did drink did so in private, out of respect” (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 16). When the Taliban take over and start meting punishment out to sinners,

images of the peaceful, sin-is-allowed pre-Taliban Afghanistan are stressed, causing the reader to identify with punished sinners regardless of their transgression.

In the novel, Baba exudes a charisma that shapes his son's religious views: "I mean all of them. Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys. . . They do nothing but thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand. . . God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands" (17). The liberal, perhaps atheist, Baba tells Amir that "There are only three real men in this world. . . America the brash savior, Britain, and Israel" (125). In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini seems to reinforce the old, oriental stereotypes, depicting an Afghanistan that conforms to and confirms the images of backwardness of the East already in circulation.

The practice of Orientalism by Orientals was just one facet of the wave of misrepresentation that ensued the events of 9/11. Many American novelists have dealt with the effects of the traumatic events on individuals; yet, again they seem to repeat the same Oriental stereotypes. John Updike's *Terrorist* published in 2006 became New York Times' bestseller. Given Updike's canonical reputation, the novel appealed to wide readership, and can be read as an attempt to "render the distorted representation with an "aura of authenticity," so that the reader would accept such constructs as a mirror-like representation of reality" (Marandi and Tari 65).

*Terrorist's* significance lies in its attempt to depict Ahmad's identity development and his eventual slide into fundamentalism. Updike quotes heavily from the Quran in an attempt to render his representation of how the Holy Book impacts on the formation of Ahmad's identity, which leads him to negate the Other as the opening of the novel clearly shows: "Devils, Ahmad thinks. These devils seek to take

away my God” (1). Marandi and Tari argue that Updike relies on a mistranslation<sup>3</sup> of the Quran that gives “an undertone of violence to” its “language” (78). Updike shows Ahmad unable to adapt in the age of Globalisation characterised by vying identities, stressing that Muslims are unfit for universal, global challenges. Islam and Muslims are, in effect, portrayed as hostile to reason and science, a hostility that makes them unfit to survive or even interact with a democratic, rational, and scientific world. Ahmad thinks that teachers

. . .are paid to instill virtue and democratic values by the government down in Trenton, and that Satanic government farther down, in Washington, but the values they believe in are Godless: biology and chemistry and physics. On the facts and formulas of these their false voices firmly rest, ringing out into the classroom. (1)

The resurgence of Orientalist stereotypes after the events of 9/11 and the practice of re-Orientalism by Orientals like Hosseini consolidate, in the eyes of the West, the idea that Islam cannot survive in the age of Globalisation because it does not promote an ideology based on dialogue and conversation.

### **1.5. On Post-9/11: Challenges to Cross-Cultural Dialogue**

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of *Terrorist*, “most of the verses that Updike has gathered are about the Divine fury and anger at the infidels and the sinful, thereby contributing to the general perception, as peddled by the American media, that Islam is an other-worldly religion that relies on terror alone to convert people” (Awan 528). As for *Falling Man*, “One of the important aspects of Orientalism is that the Orientalist often considers himself as a somehow omniscient narrator that speaks and represents the Orientals. . .Don DeLillo takes the same approach through his use of narrative mode; he speaks authoritatively and negatively about the Orient in essentialist terms. . .As a result, the narrative of the story does not transmit a set of facts about the real world of the characters, rather it is constructed and produced as a result of writer’s preferences and within the dominant discourse” (Marandi and Ghesmi Tari 69-70)

In recent times, Samuel Huntington posited that the clash between the world's prominent civilisations is inevitable, a thesis that fuelled debate among analysts especially with regard to the Muslim civilisation and Muslims, who are at the centre of this inevitable conflict. Huntington's theory came at a time when the West was basking in the afterglow of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The victory of the West in the cold war consolidated its belief in its core values and superiority. This victory supposedly promised prosperity for humanity, for the collapse of the Soviet Union implied the triumph of the American-dominated New World Order. The latter meant that the world would be brought under the banner of globalisation: universal economics, universal culture, etc. However, the emergence of terrorism—wrongly associated with Muslims—as a major global threat refuelled debate about Huntington's thesis and confirmed for many the incompatibility of Islam and the West.

Afghanistan was the arena where America and its allies began their global retaliatory war on Terror. The country was the hiding place of Osama Bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the terror attacks. He was shown on world media claiming responsibility for the attacks and pledging solemnly similar attacks on Western interests. Many questioned the American-led war on Afghanistan, for it was far-fetched for Osama Bin Laden to have orchestrated such large-scale attacks from a country that was no match to the West's economic and military might. In other words, the war was "totally asymmetrical" in that it involved "two different societies, one highly industrialized and world-dominating, the other still pre-industrial, impoverished and tribal spoke different languages and lived in different cultures" (Akbar 22).

War images that permeated the media stressed the gulf between the East and the West. Western journalists edited a plethora of documentaries on Afghan culture

and traditions. Many of these documentaries portrayed a society stuck in the past and mired in old religious practices, many of which were seen in the West as degrading for women. Hence, it came as no surprise when heated debates about the Hijab or Burqa raged across Western nations, a trend that led many to carry out hate attacks against Muslim women. Western-led media often portrayed American soldiers as liberators of women and harbingers of modernity and progress.

Amid this chaos, voices in the West as well as in the Muslim World called for dialogue. The idea of a dialogue of civilisations dates back to even before 9/11. In 1998, the Iranian president Muhammad Khatami initiated a dialogue-of-civilisations proposal that the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan espoused and supported (Akbar 21), but 9/11 attacks dealt a harsh blow to these initiatives. Footage of the Twin Towers in flames inflamed media coverage all over the world. It was true that the United States and its allies had received several security threats—some of them were carried out—but nobody would have thought Al Qaida capable of such destructive large-scale attacks. The latter sent shockwaves across the world, and reactions ranging from sympathy to jubilation emerged. Of note were the different reactions in the Muslim World, where Muslims split into two camps, each defending a trend of Islam. The difference between moderate Muslims and fundamentalists was the hallmark that coloured many debates in the Arab Media. In the West, the attacks constituted an ego-bruising event that many analysts regarded as an attack on a powerful nation that symbolises everything for which the West stands. The ferocious American media coverage that ensued pigeonholed the world into two camps: America and its friends and America and its enemies.

In many a speech, president Bush Junior reiterated America's steadfast rhetoric to protect the free world and its democratic ideals. A strong sense of nationalism re-emerged amid the United States' dauntless determination for retaliation. Neo-

Conservatives' tumultuous calls for revenge smothered the yet barely audible peaceful voices. The result was that "global ideas lay buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center in New York and in the smoking ruin of the Pentagon in Washington" (Akbar 22). In fact, America expressed repeatedly its uncompromising refusal to negotiate with terrorists, a position that carried over to unsympathetic and biased portrayals of Islam in Western media. Islam was painted as hostile to freedom, democracy, and dialogue. These accusations, in effect, run against the teachings of Islam, for Akbar Ahmed insists that "the idea of a dialogue of civilizations is central to the Muslim perception of the self. By knowing God as compassionate and Merciful—the two most frequently repeated names of God of the 99 names—Muslims know that they must embrace others" (24) regardless of their religion or nation.

Failure of communication and dialogue at an official level has had far-reaching ramifications among ordinary people both in the East and the West. The media have reiterated narratives of conflict and bombarded the public with far less promising prospects for the West-Islam relations. Consequently, Muslims in the diaspora have taken the brunt of these portrayals. By the same token, narratives of conflict have spilt into the domain of literature, an art form that inescapably influences political and cultural discourse. Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said argue that narratives that fail to address "cultural differences—offering instead conventional political and economic variables, usually with particular attention to issues such as hegemony and imperialism—fail to provide an adequate basis for conflict transformation" (2).

Narratives in fact mirror a certain group's identity concerns and help form and shape new perceptions of the self. In modern studies of identity, the prevalent theory is that notions of selfhood become understandable and meaningful only when the "self" is juxtaposed with the "other". In other words, there would be no intense sense of belonging if there were no opposite, and sometimes opposing, "other", whose



differences—be them ethnic or cultural for instance—sharpen and highlight the likeness that unites a certain group. Most importantly, narratives are dynamic in that they change “in response to traumatic events and emergent challenges” (Funk and Said 3). The traumatic events of 9/11 constituted such a challenge. They were traumatic for both America and the West in general as well as Muslims living in or outside the US or in other Western countries.

The sad result was that both conflicting parties began trading accusations, most of which unfounded. Regardless of the growing intensity through which narratives of conflict spread, the weight and the sweeping sway of Western media tilted the balance in favour of one narrative: that of the inadequacy of Islamic religious and cultural heritage in the modern world and the vilification of the people who adhere to such a heritage. It is also worth pointing out that narratives of conflict become more credible if people of influence such as politicians, sociologists, and writers advance them uncritically. John Updike’s *The Terrorist* is a post 9/11 novel that profoundly deals with the tragic events, advancing by so doing a narrative of conflict. The novel’s title, amongst other things, has many negative connotations about Islam and Muslims given that the public has already confirmed that an alleged group of Islamic terrorists were behind the attacks. Funk and Said argue that:

As distasteful as crude enemy images may appear to the moderate and largely apolitical majorities in both cultural regions, the preoccupation of image-makers and sensationalists with instances of confrontation and cultural divergence has fostered widespread attitudes of distrust and resignation to the seeming “inevitability” of conflict stemming from irreconcilable differences. (7)

Many scholars claim that it is hard to overlook the challenge of initiating a dialogue without addressing historical misunderstandings and the continuous mistrust that has marked Muslim-West relations. The rift has not healed yet: the conflict started with the spread of Islam all over the world, the crusades, modern colonialism, post-colonialism, and the launching of a post 9/11 imperialist agenda. Initiatives for dialogue were endorsed in America, Europe, and in the Muslim World. In the Muslim World in particular many still hold that any form of dialogue is doomed, for Europe has always endorsed the military operations of the US, something which has increased the Muslims' mistrust and engendered a lasting suspicion that the world has united against them in an attempt to destroy their faith. Among these initiatives, The Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean stressed the dialogue across civilisations, insisting that humanity is bound by common core values, and that these should be cherished at the expense of differences (Selim 49). Muslim critics think that the problem with dialogue is that it is unipolar because the West is trying to impose its own model of dialogue, in which differences<sup>4</sup> are viewed through the lens of Western models of government, organization, and values. Put otherwise, these critics believe that the arrogance of the West gets in the way of dialogue, an arrogance that smacks of scientific superiority and technological advancement.

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<sup>4</sup> Selim argues that "A dialogue among civilizations should occur between similar entities, religions, governments, non-governmental units, and/or any other units which share more or less the same components. The dialogue between Islam and West is not a dialogue between similar entities, but rather between a religion and a geographical unit. Islam can engage into a dialogue with Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or any other religion, and the West may dialogue with the East. Non- similarity between the dialoguing units turns the dialogue into a one way process whereby only the values of one side is a subject of debate. So we should be talking about dialogue between Western and Muslim worlds. It is true that the dialogue actually occurs between states, but the conceptualization of the dialoguing units as "Western," and "Muslim," has far-reaching conceptual implications for the dialogues" (60).

The Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean revealed two significantly opposed approaches: one that smacks of a Universalist spirit and another that stresses Cosmopolitan ideals:

If one examines the various presentations in the conference, one can identify two approaches, the first was presented by Solana, the High EU Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, who emphasized the need for dialogue among civilizations on the basis of "universal values". In that conference, Islam seemed to be on trial as most European speakers questioned Islamic views on women, and capital punishment. Conversely, Belkeziz, the Secretary General of the OIC emphasized the need to base that dialogue on respect for the specificity of each nation, and religion. (Selim 53)

Al-Bishry holds a similar position:

There is no room for a dialogue between the Islamic civilization and Latin and Anglo-Saxon civilizations because of their strong sense of supremacy and negation of the legitimacy of other civilizations. Such dialogue. . . can only be conducted if the Western civilization acknowledged the legitimacy of other civilizations and the possibility of a genuine interaction with them, and realized that each civilization is entitled to reach human goals through its own cultural norm. (Quoted in Selim 58)

According to these criticisms, the West operates on the assumption that its norms and values are incontestable points of reference along with insistence that they are incompatible with those of Islam. What makes matters worse, Shadid and

Koningsveld argue is that “the search for points of conflict is not carried out in order to understand the behaviour of Muslims but mainly in order to stress differences and distinctiveness, implicitly emphasising the superiority of the Western Culture” (176).

### **1.6. Islam and Identity in the Age of Terror**

Since the 9/11 attacks by Al-Qaeda, the perception of Islam in the West has continued to deteriorate. Immediately after the attacks it was revealed that Muslim fundamentalists were behind the tragic events, adding to the tensions that had already characterised Muslim-American relations. The events enjoyed worldwide coverage, and created a hysteric atmosphere, in which everything Muslim came to be associated with terrorism. It did not take president George Walker Bush long to declare the global war on terror, a venture that he couched rather rhetorically: “you’re with us or against us”. The American government emphasised that the events constituted an attack not only on America but an attack on Western Civilisation and all the values of freedom and democracy it upholds.

In this context of confrontation between a West that defends its values and radical Islam that seeks to annihilate them, the media played an important role in how the world perceived Islam and in how Muslims perceived themselves in settings that gradually grew hostile to them. This hostility could be seen in countries in which the media conveyed negative images of Muslims. France, Britain, Spain, the United States, for example, had experienced a series of more or less recent terrorist acts in which the protagonists were radical Islamists. The media picked these tragedies and made them cover stories for an extended period.

The term Islam has been constantly pronounced alongside the names of the jihadists, gradually forming a growing sense of fear of Islam. Out of fear, the United States and a host of Western countries contemplated enacting new immigration

policies, which imposed more restrictions on Muslim immigrants. In the United States in particular, the Islamophobic atmosphere that reigned after 9/11 led the government to enact policies that further restricted personal freedom in the name of protecting national security. While several observers deemed such policies an onslaught on freedom and democracy, the enacting of such laws looks set to continue especially after the rise of ISIS, which has added insult to injury.

Political Islam became the dominant element for learning about and understanding Muslim societies well before September 2001. In the space of two decades, the Islamic groups using force as a means of political protest have attracted the attention not only of the different, political classes of the Muslim world but also the attention of media and academics in Europe and the United States. Certainly their political force and the use of violence are the reasons for such interest. Hence, images of violent protests, suicide bombings, and the like, have deeply ingrained themselves in the collective consciousness of people not only in the West but in the Muslim World as well. The inevitable corollary was the beginning of a debate about two strands of Islam: moderate and fundamental. This debate sparked controversy because it added to the complexity of understanding Muslim identity.

Robyn Rodriguez believes that the American government's passing of new laws<sup>5</sup> to curb the rise of fundamentalism has in effect cut deep into the social fabric binding the nation. In other words, while America champions freedom and democracy, it has failed to respond to the urgent conditions that emerged after the event. This failure might have arisen from the confusion that characterised the aftermath of the attacks. For him, immigration laws outnumbered any others because the terrorists who were believed to have perpetrated the attacks entered the country legally. Most

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<sup>5</sup> In the Wake of the attacks, the American government passed the Patriot Act, which enables it to keep an eye on the immigrants living in the United States, or deport any suspected of unlawful acts.

importantly, these newly-passed laws affected not only Muslims but also other immigrants like Mexicans:

The terrorist attacks elicited specific governmental responses after 9/11. These actions clearly impacted Arabs and Muslims. But the more aggressive enforcement of bureaucratic immigration policies (e.g., the change of address policy, which requires that immigrants report a change of address to immigration authorities within 10 days of moving), the enlisting of local and state police in workplace raids, and airport security sweeps have also affected the Mexican immigrant community. . . . Consequently, many [immigrants] have been detained and deported en masse across the United States. (383)

The enacting of such laws, according to Rodriguez, have undoubtedly led many immigrants, including Muslims, to reflect on notions like “citizenship and, ultimately, belonging” (386).

Born, raised, and educated in the United States, Americans of Muslim origin did not fare better than their immigrant counterparts. They too have had their share of the emergent, neo-orientalist discourse that coloured media coverage in the wake of the attacks. In the field of education in particular, schools in America, especially in Texas, have not escaped “the rhetoric of good versus evil” in the sense that social studies textbooks have helped diffuse “the tension between the Muslim minority and the hostile majority culture” (Saleem and Thomas 15).

The need to record the events of 9/11 in history textbooks was urgent but problematic. The events have become linked to debates about tolerance, globalisation, and multiculturalism. In the classroom setting, teachers face numerous challenges as

to how to broach topics related to 9/11 lest they insinuate the wrong information or offend their students. Saleem and Thomas point out that efforts have been made to include the teaching of 9/11 and its aftermath in the curriculum. Some of these efforts focus on honing the students' ability to evaluate for themselves the authenticity of the information in mass circulation with regard to the events, while they encourage the teachers to avoid one-sided "presentation of 9/11 in social studies textbooks" (17). Many textbooks, however, have failed to advance these ideals, and have therefore, in a way, added to the mass of neo-Orientalist stereotypes that coloured the mass media's perception of the attacks. Saleem and Thomas have analysed two textbooks<sup>6</sup> that deal with 9/11, and have come up with insightful findings. First, the textbooks explain the background of the attacks in the light of America's previous struggle to preserve integrity in times of conflict<sup>7</sup>, asserting at the same time that foreign others carried out the attacks out of hostility to ideals of democracy and freedom (23). Second, the textbooks, perhaps more dangerously, imply that "Individuals or groups other than Muslims perpetrating acts of violence are identified as extremists, extreme right-wing groups, hate groups, fringe religious groups, while Muslims committing the same type of acts are consistently identified as terrorists" (24). Finally, the textbooks spawn a host of identity-related issues because they tend to contrast what is "American or Un-American" (27).

American or Un-American, French or Un-French, British or Un-British all sum up the binary oppositions-based discourse of the post-9/11 era in the West. The aftermath of the events immediately began to take its toll on the young generation of Muslims living in the diaspora in the sense that they started to grapple with various identity problems. In Britain, for instance, the young generation of Muslims are still

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<sup>6</sup> *Call to Freedom* by Stuckey and Salvucci, and *The American Nation* by Davidson and Stoff

<sup>7</sup> The passing of the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act in 1917 and 1918 respectively

portrayed as “oppositional to British values”, and incapable of assimilating (Thomas and Sanderson 1028).

9/11 and the London Bombings in 2005 thrust British Muslims into the limelight, especially that many Muslims worldwide, particularly in Britain, had opposed American-led war on Afghanistan and later on Iraq. Consequently, political debate across Britain seemed to stress the fact that “the nation’s Muslim population do not identify with, or want to affiliate to, ‘Britishness’, and see themselves as a community apart with a consequent threat to Britain’s security. . .and social cohesion and stability” (1029). Indeed, 9/11 and similar attacks like the London Bombings in 2005 encouraged the resurgence of nationalistic sentiments across Western countries, a revival that put the loyalties of immigrant Muslims to the test. Many Muslims identified with fellow brothers worldwide in the name of faith. Faith identity, according to many Western observers, looked set to rival other identity markers, particularly nationality.

The solace many immigrant Muslims found in their religious identity was sometimes misinterpreted by the communities in which they lived. Having protested against—sometimes rather violently—the war on Afghanistan and Iraq, and the grotesque caricatures of the prophet, may peace be upon him, critics of Islam began to “advance their thesis of Islam being an aggressive faith that encourages recourse to violence, terrorism, and destruction. . .The 7 July bombings in London have also invigorated the debate on Multiculturalism in Britain, with a considerable focus on the position, role, and perceptions of Muslim minorities” (Rehman 834). Indeed, the tensions characterising Muslim-West relations in the post-9/11 era brought the West’s attention to Islam as a primary identity marker, but for Muslims it—Islam as identity—had been there all along.



In *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005), Amin Malak is of the view that:

. . .may Muslims regard religion as a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or ethnic affiliation. Some, like the Egyptian writer and chief ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Sayyid Qutb, go further and deem Islam to be their *sole* source of identity definition. . .Of course, few can deny that after almost a millennium and a half from its emergence, Islam retains an identity-shaping valence that transcends signifiers of race, gender, class, and nationalism. (3)

Today, after fifteen years that witnessed a number of wars on global terrorism, it seems that anti-Muslim speeches are still more easily tolerated in the public sphere. Accordingly, Muslims have increasingly tended to be defensive<sup>8</sup>, and have negotiated multiple identities, especially in the Islamophobic climate that reigned in the United States after 9/11:

Exploring how multiple identities are managed by Muslim youth and perceived by others is crucial because as young first-generation immigrants their identities as Muslims and as American students are sometimes in conflict. Conceptions of identities include: border-crossing identity, transnational

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<sup>8</sup> They have, nonetheless, tried to overcome the difficult realities imposed by the 9/11 era positively: they have particularly contested enthusiastically the overgeneralisations that coloured political or media discourse in the aftermath of 9/11. The message that the Muslims has been sending out is that the West must stop blaming an entire community for the actions of an individual or a single group.

identity, hyphenated identity, hybridity, *double consciousness*, and multiple negotiated identities. (Tindongan 75)

Lori Peek researched the development of religious identity in the Muslim community in the United States immediately after the tragic events of 9/11. He wanted to learn about the reaction of Muslim youth to the events, and how the way they responded to the latter shaped their identities. He regards the participants in his study as highly religious, a religious identification that is based both on his observation and the participants' description of themselves<sup>9</sup>.

Peek's findings are insightful in that they reveal that the formation of a religious identity for Muslims living in the diaspora—in the United States in the case of his research—goes through three stages. Religion as ascribed identity is the first stage, in which participants “viewed religion as an ascribed characteristic of their individual selves and social worlds” (223). At this stage, participants took their religious identity for granted in the sense that they did not develop an awareness of the importance of Islam in their lives. As children, they “adhered to assigned identities” rather than negotiated a host of “social and individual identities” (224). More importantly, as children, most participants could not understand the constraints<sup>10</sup> religion placed on them, barring them from participating in certain activities (such as celebrating Christmas) with their peers. Religion as chosen identity is the stage in which the participants wanted to be identified as Muslims. As they matured, it was natural to “begin to contemplate more important life questions and

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<sup>9</sup> “The participants reported praying five times a day (one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam), fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan (another fundamental pillar of Islam), being active members of religious organisations, having Muslim first and last names, and abstaining for religiously prohibited activities (such as drinking alcohol or eating pork)” (Peek 222).

<sup>10</sup> “. . . practices required by their parents such as dressing modestly or attending religion classes at the mosque” (225).

their religious backgrounds, and hence re-examine that aspect of their identities” (227). Besides, when they entered college or university, their network of Muslim friends<sup>11</sup> expanded, making it easier to “identify as a Muslim simply because they had discovered a larger Muslim peer group to associate with and new friend with whom they could relate” (228). The last stage is the most important one in Peek’s findings. Religion as declared identity is a decision influenced by a crisis. Peek explains that “in the months following September 11, thousands of Muslims and Arabs. . .endured discrimination and harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault”; despite this most Muslims “continued to publically affirm their religious identities”, which “became even stronger during this time” (230-231).

## **1.8. Conclusion**

The idea that Islam is a religion that spread at sword-point has instilled itself in the West’s collective consciousness for several centuries. The West has thus associated Islam with violence and intolerance. The stereotype that Islam is a violent religion has been cemented and consolidated by the church, which did everything in its power to demonise the rising faith, especially during the Crusades.

However, the relationship of Islam with the Judaeo-Christian West witnessed a period of marked improvement during the reign of Muslims in Spain. Impartial western historians such as the like of Frederick Quinn have marvelled at the peaceful co-existence of the three faiths and pointed out the benefits that world civilisation has reaped owing to this epoch of fruitful, cultural, literary, social, and scientific production. Despite the impartiality of Muslims during this period, the church

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<sup>11</sup> Peek found that “peers and friend played a significant role in constructing, reinforcing, and affirming the strong emerging religious identity of almost all participants. . .they began to learn about Islam with their friends since they were going through a similar process of religious exploration” (228).

continued to produce skewed representations of Islam in the hope to distance people from converting to Islam.

The fall of Grenada coincided with the discovery of the New World and the West's insatiable thirst for exploring new territories. This thirst for exploring and conquering new territories was the result of the capitalist economic system that was taking root in the continent thanks to the influential theories of Adam Smith. In their quest for foreign markets, European powers colonised many foreign territories including large swathes of land in the Muslim world.

The colonisation of Muslim lands led many European scholars, politicians, anthropologists, and writers to study the Muslims, their mores, their moral code, and most importantly, their faith. The result of these studies was a biased representation, which Edward Said takes to task in his books, mainly in *Orientalism*. Again, during this period, the image held by the West about Islam is that it is a religion mired in superstitions and myths. Writing during the Enlightenment period, the Orientalists believed that the Muslim world was in dire need for the West's *mission civilisatrice*, and hence tried to justify the West's colonial project on this basis.

The attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 have increased the animosity between the West and Islam owing to a very much biased media coverage, which has subliminally associated Islam with religious extremism and terrorism. In the wake of the attacks in particular, debates about identity issues proliferated, especially debates revolving around the incompatibility of Islam with the demands of globalisation.

In the field of literature, numerous publications by non-Muslims and Muslims have appeared in the post-9/11 era. Canonical writers like Updike and DeLillo soon capitalised on the post-attacks debate and wrote novels that consolidate the view that

Islam is not fit for modern life, novels that portray Muslims as fundamentalists eager to destroy all that is good in the West. On the other hand, writing from a different perspective, Muslim writers writing in English have tried to produce a counter narrative in the hope to re-represent what has been misrepresented.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Muslim Literature in English and the Challenge of Representation**

## **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter deals with the general representation of Islam and Muslims in literature. It first provides an overview of Muslim literature in English, showing how from its inception in India it has strived to subvert the colonial discourse to which the British Empire pinned down the natives in general and the Muslims in particular. This section also shows how Islam and Muslims have been represented through myriad orientalist stereotypes and false images. These stereotypes, the chapter shows, have re-emerged with more intensity in the post-9/11 novels produced by Western writers as well as Muslim writers, who have fallen into the pitfall of practicing re-orientalism. To show how orientalist discourse is renewed and how some Muslim writers have practiced re-orientalism, the chapter lists examples from Updike's *Terrorist*, DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and Hisseini's *The Kite Runner* respectively. Finally, the chapter closes with showing how Hamid, Yassin-Kassab, and Halaby have consciously responded to the wave of misrepresentation of Muslims that ensued the attacks of 9/11.

## **2.2. An Overview of Muslim Literature in English**

The task of early Muslim writers in English was somewhat daunting because they sought ways to re-represent Islam, and indeed to give subaltern voices a chance to be heard, despite the colonial odds at work against them. Indeed, such was the case of Ahmed Ali, who started writing in Urdu before turning to English. By the time Ali began his writing career, India was languishing under the British colonial rule, and many of the literary representations of India—and those of the countries under the aegis of the British Empire—came from colonial writers, who often produced skewed, far-from-reality accounts of the local cultures and peoples they wrote about. Ali's endeavour to write in English can be read as a gesture to subvert the dominant,

colonial discourse that emanated from influential cultural, political, and literary British circles. To borrow from postcolonial parlance, Ali ‘appropriated’<sup>12</sup> the language of the coloniser to express his own identity. In 1939, he travelled to London hoping to find a publisher for his first novel in English, *Twilight in Delhi*. To his disconcertment, many publishers refused to print his manuscript, for they deemed it “too politically subversive to be in circulation” (Malak 20). However, with help from E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, the novel finally saw the light of day in 1940.

Ali graduated from Lucknow University with distinction. His marks particularly in English were outstanding, that is why he was soon offered a position as a lecturer at his Alma Mater. Having started his teaching career, he kept producing more works in Urdu as well as in English. At this point, Ali had met and befriended Sajjad Zaheer and Mahmuduzzafar, who both shared Ali’s passion for writing. The aspiring writers published an anthology, *Angare*, which featured nine short stories and a play.

The works that these young writers produced did not go unnoticed. *Angare* angered many readers because the stories therein broached themes that many saw as inappropriate in then conservative India. Sajjad Zaheer’s *Vision of Paradise* in particular provoked the indignation of Muslim readers for its mingling of carnal desire with religious fervour. The story centres on an old cleric who callously ignores his wife sexually only to have a “nocturnal emission on the holy Koran while dreaming of a houri in paradise” during his night prayer (Coppola 113).

*Twilight in Delhi* features the encounter between and the clash of the indigenous traditions with the invasive foreign English culture. Mir Nihal, the protagonist, is indignant because new colonial realities are eroding local manners and

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<sup>12</sup> “A term used to describe the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture –language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis – that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities” (Ashcroft et al, 19).



the role of the local language<sup>13</sup>, Urdu, is shrinking in the face of English. The protagonist is fearful lest the coloniser contaminates the social, cultural, and linguistic landscape in India. Indeed by incorporating translated poems from Urdu, Ali appropriates the language of the coloniser to celebrate and assert his identity (Alam 347). Urdu becomes very important in the novel because the “idea of a Muslim identity, being joined by umbilical cord with Urdu, is analogous to Indian Muslim imagination” (349), enabling by so doing Ali to “discover and resurrect his cherished cultural past which has been lost in colonial times” (351).

*Twilight in Delhi* and Ali’s second novel *Ocean of night* depict Muslim civilisation in India in its death throes, a concern that shifts in his third novel *Of Rats and Diplomats*. Alamgir Hashmi points out that Ali’s third novel marks a shift of attention to the “general decay in the world, in which representatives of the newly-freed fourth world find analogues of decay and depravity matched to their own and prevalent on a universal scale” (257).

*Twilight in Delhi* has come under criticism for its portrayal of women. Some critics have pointed out that the novel seems to reiterate the stereotypes about Oriental women being submissive and largely marginalised. Zia Ahmad refutes this charge by arguing that

The portrayal of women given by Ali (1940) evidently demonstrates the patriarchal efforts to preserve their indigenous culture by reforming women’s role in society but without undergoing changes in accordance with the cultural patterns of the colonists. They were trying to preserve their culture as much

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<sup>13</sup> Writing about *Twilight in Delhi*, Ali says: “My purpose was to depict a phase of our national life and the decay of a whole culture, a particular mode of thought and living, now dead and gone already right before our eyes. Seldom is one allowed to see a pageant of history whirl past and partake in it too” (Quoted in Malak 20).

as they could and taught their women that, after losing their power to the British, the best way of survival was their success in preserving their Mughal and Islamic culture. (54)

Ali's silent female characters notwithstanding, Muslim women writers did much for the development of an early Muslim literature in English, giving rise to early trends of Muslim feminism.

One writer who protested against the silent role women played in earlier works such as *Twilight in Delhi* was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. She received an English education in then colonised India and set to write against "realistic pictures of exploitation" (Bhattacharya 172). In *Sultana's Dream* (1905)<sup>14</sup>, she deploys the device of Utopia, whereby she reverses gender roles, depicting "a 'ladyland' where men are being dominated by women, exactly in the same way as they dominate women in real life" (173).

Sakhawat invests female characters with what were then deemed male prerogatives in the traditional Indian society. She reverses gender roles upside down: women bossing around men, who do housework. She gives masculine attributes to female characters and vice versa, an attempt "to subvert the very concept of 'masculine' and 'feminine'; and thereby, highlights the fact that these concepts are mere constructions, fabricated by and in favour of the 'powerful' sex" (173). In the novel, female characters cling to their legitimacy to lead a dignified life, eliminating the setbacks and the afflictions imposed by the traditional, Indian code of behaviour. In other words, the women-imposed order bans forced child marriage, guarding girls against marriage before the age of twenty-one; on the other hand, they are not

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<sup>14</sup> Although Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* catapulted Muslim fiction in English into prominence, Sakhawat's *Sultana's Dream* was the first work of fiction in English ever published by a Muslim writer.

stripped of the right to education, which is key to reaching their full potential. The Utopian picture Sakhawat paints plunges the reader in a dreamy world, which only helps reinforce the real situation of women in the then traditional, Indian society (Malak 30).

Early Muslim fiction in English continued to flourish in India. Women writers continued to express through art their rejection of and objection to the lesser role to which they were reduced. In 1944, Iqbalunnisa Hussain published her first novel *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Household*. The novel chronicles the drama of three generations of an upper-class Muslim family in the nineteen thirties. Although it sometimes assumes a didactic tone, it profusely and accurately details domestic, Purdah life. Hussain seems to take to task the practice of polygamy subtly, a practice that only men who have the wherewithal can pursue. Kabeer, meaning 'grand', has four wives, who are plagued by his cantankerous mother throughout the novel and until he dies. However colourful a portrait of a Muslim, Purdah family the novel provides, it, according to critics, fails to denounce or resist British colonialism of India, knowing that it was published in a time when calls for independence were becoming vociferous. Indeed, the British characters "are depicted with sympathy and sensitivity, due perhaps to the author's focus on the wealthy elite of Indian society who relished cozy contacts with the British establishment"<sup>15</sup> (31-32).

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<sup>15</sup> Malak explains that it is "it is instructive to contrast the politics and praxis surrounding the works of Ahmed Ali and Iqbalunnisa Hussain. The fact that Ahmed Ali had to (and could) travel by sea during the Second World War to London, the empire's megalopolis, where he succeeded in getting his novel printed while Iqbalunnisa Hussain published hers at home in then colonized India, can signify many things depending on one's perspective. Gender politics being one such perspective, it is evident here that the Muslim male enjoyed more space and mobility than his female counterpart. On the other hand, while Ali's text suffered initial banning by the censor in Britain because of its angry, anticolonialist discourse, Iqbalunnisa Hussain's must have been regarded by the authorities as a safe text to circulate, since it projected a restrained view of purdah politics and depicted a harmonious relationship between its British and Indian characters" (32).

One of the works written outside the confines of a Muslim or a partly Muslim country was a collection of stories entitled *The Time of the Peacock* (1965) published by Mena Abdullah in collaboration with Ray Mathew. The stories centre on the lives of the Indian Muslims who settled in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. These early immigrants were subjected to many forms of segregation because of their traditional attire and their practice of agriculture. The stereotypes these early immigrants suffered from were mainly faith-related, regardless of their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (37).

Abdullah tells the stories through the voice of a young narrator Nimmi, who reflects on her and her people's situation in a foreign land. Nimmi eventually becomes aware of her having no roots in Australia, a realisation prompted by two identity markers: skin colour and religion. The binary 'us' and 'them' permeates the stories. The Indian Muslims put a premium on leading a properly traditional, Muslim life, and thus resort to imitating their old lifestyle in India. They build family-centred cocoons, living as close to nature as possible. They find solace in their traditional, natural surroundings, which mitigate their sense of alienation (37).

However, the reaction of the immigrants varies when demands for assimilation in a foreign environment increase with the rise of the younger generation of immigrants. In *The Child that Wins*, the immigrants' fears of contamination materialise when a young Indian Muslim expresses his wish to marry an Australian woman. The groom's father opposes the marriage, lest his son loses his identity because he believes that cross-cultural marriages belong to neither tradition, Indian or Australian. Uncle Seyid epitomises the guardian of tradition in the story and advises that Muslims should guard against marrying non-Muslims, for not only is Islam the immigrants' faith, but it is also their distinctive identity marker (38). Indeed, the story "underscores the necessity to change and adapt to the realities and

exigencies of immigration. While the discourse reveals an obvious pride in the characters' sense of their ethnicity. . . a centrifugal tendency emerges among them pointing toward merging with the new culture without necessarily deracinating themselves" (38).

Muslim writers from the Indian subcontinent wrote the earliest fiction in English, which reveals their celebration of their faith, making it their most prominent identity marker. Malak stresses this fact:

The writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, Attia Hosain, Mena Abdullah, and Farhana Sheikh demonstrate that for these five women writers, whose roots are firmly linked to the Indian subcontinent, Islam, whether in the domain of ethics or aesthetics, represents a preoccupying fascination and a telling leitmotif. . . One is often struck by the ardor of the affection shown by the Muslims of the subcontinent toward their religion. Of course, there are complex cultural and historical reasons for such a manifestation of affiliation. However, when one moves from the subcontinent toward the Middle East and Africa, one witnesses in general a less vehement declaration of faith with just as equal commitment to it (except, of course, for the Taliban-like extremists who have a power drama of their own to stage). Perhaps African and Middle Eastern writers feel "so securely ...Muslim" that they do "not need to make an issue of it" (Said, "Anglo-Arab"19). (41)

As Muslim fiction written in English developed, Muslim writers started to focus more and more on immigration in the postcolonial context, knowing that large

swathes of Muslim lands had long languished under colonialism. In *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*, M.G. Vassanji shows how African and Asian immigrants are negotiating their new emerging identities in Canada. Vassanji is of the belief that immigrants should not do away with their origins. In *No New Land*, a Muslim family arrive in Canada from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The sense of uprootedness the family feel is expressed from the perspective of the father, Nurdin Lalani. The latter has a hard time adapting in the new setting, a worry aggravated when he is wrongly accused of sexually assaulting a woman whom he only tries to help (71-72). Going back to one's roots constitutes the main theme of Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994). Having married an Australian and spent eighteen years away from his native country, Iqbal returns to Bangladesh. Faced with his crumbling marriage, his return to Bangladesh in his chance to ponder identity issues although going back home "may never solve the riddles in one's life, yet it makes one, as Iqbal's case graphically illustrates, become acutely aware of the contradictions in one's constituent makeup, experience them, and by the end have a clear sense of their impact" (82-83).

Islam is certainly not the only identity marker that characterises Muslim fiction written in English. Each writer is the product of his/her cultural, social, and political milieu, yet Islam emerges as one unifying motif that permeates almost all these literary productions. Hence, the study of the role of Islam in narrow scopes such as in Arab American Literature yields limited insights, especially in the post 9/11 era, in which not only Arabs but all Muslims have become the object of the West's relentless hostility. Malak underscores the importance of approaching Muslim narratives in English as a whole because "from the cumulative concert" of Muslim voices emanating from different continents "discernible sensibilities, idioms, and motifs emanate pointing unequivocally to an engagement with the world and the values of Islam" (151). Undeniably, the post 9/11 wave of Islamophobia has increased Muslim

literary production in English since artistic expression was one scene for Muslim writers to protest against unfounded hostilities.

### **2.3. Literature of Crisis: Literary Representations of Islam, Terrorism, and Fundamentalism in post 9/11 fiction**

#### **2.3.1. Terror Hits America: John Updike's *Terrorist* and Don DeLillo's**

##### ***Falling Man***

The events of 9/11 have undeniably revived and invigorated orientalist discourse on a large scale. The mass media have painted Islam as the harbinger of terrorism and fundamentalism, threatening to annihilate the West and the ideals it champions—democracy, free speech, etc. By the same token, the media have put the may-turn-terrorists Muslims in the limelight, depicting them as the dormant menace threatening to sweep over the world. The neo-orientalist discourse centred on cultural and religious symbols proper to the civilisation of Islam. These symbols—such as the beard and traditional clothing for men, and the Hijab or the Burqah for women—in particular have been shown as signs of backwardness, insinuating that adherents of Islam are steeped in outmoded traditions, which are incompatible with the demands of the modern era. Consequently, Islam, terrorism, and fundamentalism became bread-and-butter issues for all people, from those operating in serious media outlets to those surfing social media.

A great number of works of fiction that were produced in the wake of the attacks discussed themes that related to Islam, terrorism, and fundamentalism. Non-Muslim writers as well as Muslim ones reacted to the events in their own ways. Three visions emerge from their writings: first, western writers promoting a xenophobic, neo-orientalist discourse; second, a category of Muslim writers reiterating this type of

discourse; third, a category of Muslim writers writing against this type of discourse in an attempt to correct misconceptions about Islam and its civilisation.

### **2.3.1. Terror Hits America: John Updike's *Terrorist* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man***

A text that did less to allay the fears of Americans after the terror attacks was the final report of the 9/11 Commission made public in 2005. Among other concerns, the report did not discount the possibility of further attacks, which could only be prevented through passage of certain acts, notably the Patriot Act. The latter came under fire because many citizens, especially American Muslims, believed that the act invested law enforcement authorities and other bodies with unlimited power to encroach on other people's rights. In general, the report encouraged "an increase in security measures which were often intrusive, anti-Islamic in rhetoric, paranoid suspicion of coloured immigrants, special treatment for Muslims, an aggressive drive to dismantle terrorist networks by going after them, and a discourse of war" (Ramanan 126). A discourse of war, terrorism, and national identity became part and parcel of the American daily experience. Many Americans could not comprehend what could possess anyone to destroy their nation, and started raising questions as to whether Muslim immigrants can fit in the American social fabric. Is America, land of opportunity and the world's largest melting pot, doomed to an identity conflict, in which Islam takes central role? Such and similar questions have been the concern of many works of fiction produced by many American writers in the wake of the terror attacks.

John Updike was among the first to fictionalise the terror attacks when he published *Terrorist* in 2006. The protagonist, Ahmed, is the son of a second generation Irish American mother and an Egyptian immigrant, who abandoned them when Ahmed was three years old after the deterioration of his married life. The young



man sees Islam as his only refuge to compensate for the absence of his father and escape a much deplorable, debased modern life that offers ceaseless, excessive indulgences. Updike's novel has received a lot of critical attention because of his attempt to delve into the workings of the mind of a fledgling terrorist.

When Ahmad entered high school, he started asking questions about his identity, only to eventually find solace in Islam. He asked his mother about his father's personality, his country of origin, the colour of his skin, his eyes, his hair, his height, the shape of his nose, and most importantly asked several questions about his religion. In other words, Ahmad begins to become aware of his being different in a foreign country. What fascinates him more at this age, however, is Islam, a strong identity marker, and his source of pride. His interest in Islam takes him to extreme religiosity, prompting him to change his name from Ahmed Milora to Ahmad Ashmawy.

Unfortunately, Ahmad soon falls into the snares of fundamentalism. He starts frequenting the mosque where Sheikh Rashid, a hard-line Imam who came from Yamen, teaches in New Jersey in the suburbs of New York. Shaikh Rashid was calling for jihad in his sermons, but he, too, was part of a terrorist cell. That is why his interest in Ahmed was twofold: First, to teach him Islam (fundamental in this case); second, to engage him in terrorist acts.

Updike makes many references to the Quran in the novel to show how the sacred text shapes Ahmad's vision. Indeed, Ahmad recites to himself verses from the Quran whenever he faces a difficult situation such as when he is sexually attracted to girls. The Quran serves as a bulwark against worldly pleasures that present themselves in my forms. Nevertheless, the translations of the verses Updike uses are

dubious and inaccurate<sup>16</sup> because he relies on an infamous translation of the Quran, namely that of N.J. Dawood. Marandi and Tari point out that

Updike's use of this infamous translation—and the extent to which he relies on Western sources for his materials about Islam and the fact that he does not quote one single Muslim source on the interpretation of the Qur'an, or Hadith, and Shari'ah—suggests that he may have knowingly misrepresented the reality of Islamic thoughts and teachings. Considering the representation of the Qur'an, Updike takes two approaches for twisting its reality. He uses both the error of translation through using the distorted translations as well as selectivity with extensive use of abrupt quotes, random and incomplete verses. In this way, he often selects verses and chapters of the Qur'an based on his denigrating purposes and without contextualisation . (78)

Awan's argument runs in a similar vein. He maintains that

most of the verses that Updike has gathered are about the Divine fury and anger at the infidels and the sinful, thereby contributing to the general perception, as peddled by the American media, that Islam is an other-worldly religion that relies on terror alone to convert people. (528)

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<sup>16</sup> As an illustration, Mirandi and Tari point out that this "attitude is evident from the beginning of the novel when Sheikh Rashid and Ahmad are practicing a surah of the Holy Book, named "Humazah." This surah is censuring slanderers (and means slanderer) who make fun of the others or dishonor people verbally or through their deeds; it also condemns those who amass wealth without helping others. Updike takes the text out of its context and begins it from the fifth verse (it includes nine verses) naming it "crushing fire," without mentioning the name of the surah that could clarify those addressed in the verses (for example, slanderer), thus creating negative feelings in his reader's mind" (79).

Updike himself says in one of his interviews that “Islam doesn’t have as many shades of gray as the Christian or the Judaic faith does. It’s fairly absolutist, as you know, and you’re either in or not” (qtd. In Pirnajmuddin and Salehnia, 178). This is exactly the kind of one-dimensional vision of Islam he tries to communicate through his novel. Right from the beginning of the novel, Ahmad adopts an exclusionist stance towards anyone leading a typically American life.

Updike reinforces the Orientalist/neo-orientalist discourse of the novel through the use of binary oppositions. The use of supportive binary oppositions reinforces the main binary opposition in the novel: ‘I’ versus ‘them’. Ahmad, acting upon Shaikh Rashid’s advice, decides not to enter college and become a truck driver instead because he thinks secular, materialist education may tarnish his faith. The insinuated message here is that secular, Western civilisation is more logical, more enlightened, seeking more progress, while its Muslim counterpart is irrational, backward, incapable of adapting in the modern age. Shaikh Rashid, on the other hand, believes that Muslims—terrorists in this case—can use technology to their own advantage; that is, harnessing modern technology to harm and target the infidel West. Shaikh Rashid is then established as the disseminator of a dangerous, exclusionist ideology that has been the chief instigator and mainspring of much of fundamentalism in the modern era (Prinajmuddin and Salehnia 181). Shaikh Rashid’s role in the novel is juxtaposed with that of Ahmad’s guidance counsellor, Jack Levy, who manages to dissuade Ahmad from carrying out his assigned act of terrorism. Jack Levy, champion of Judaeo-Christian secularism, thus, becomes the disseminator of peaceful inclusionist ideology. Updike’s Muslim characters hardly represent ordinary Muslims, a view echoed by Awan, “none of the Western writers have created a context large enough to include ordinary Muslims, who are the people who have various political and religious perspectives” (523).

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* published 2007 centres on the lingering trauma of Keith Neudecker, a survivor of the attacks on the twin towers. Perhaps no other novel represents the attacks as the harrowing, inaugural event of the twenty-first century the way *Falling Man* does. The novel shows how the attacks marked a temporal break, simultaneously indicating the end of an era—a period of relative peace since the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a period marked by the incontestable hegemony of the United States, or the myth of its omnipotence and invulnerability—and the beginning of a new period, in which invisible enemies are likely to be anywhere at any time.

The novel opens with an apocalyptic scene: the first tower of the World Trade Centre has collapsed and the streets are full of dust, ashes, smoke, fleeting silhouettes wandering, screaming, not yet capable of figuring out what is going on. A man, briefcase in hand, makes his way into what looks like an infernal landscape. It is Keith, who escaped death and went like a ghost, returning to his ex-wife, Lianne, and their seven-year-old son, Justin. The story focuses on this strangely blended family after the attacks of September 11, sometimes following Keith's, sometimes his wife's, and sometimes their child's daily acts, deeds and thoughts over a period of three years, albeit with many in-between ellipses. In the slow months following the attack, Keith has a brief affair with another survivor, Florence, abandons his job and becomes a professional poker player. Lianne, meanwhile, is investing more and more time in the writing workshop she runs for Alzheimer patients and sinks into the anxiety caused by the recent events, the fragile health of her mother, and the strangely hostile attitude of her son.

The novel is divided into three chapters that follow a broadly chronological order: the novel begins in the interval between the fall of the south tower and the north tower and runs until 2004. However, the story does not progress in a linear

fashion: first, the last chapter makes a critical analepsis, featuring the collision between the first plane and the South Tower; then, even within parts and chapters, there are many flashbacks and prolepses. The beginning of the first chapter of the second part, for example, focuses on Keith's arrival at Lianne's in the wake of the attacks, while the rest of the events take place during the month that followed the attacks.

The novel interweaves two separate stories: the story of the Keith's family spanning a period of three years, and occupying the largest part of the novel; the story of a young Muslim, Hammad, who gradually slides into fundamentalism and is eventually recruited by the terrorist cell that will execute the attacks. The story of Hammad has its own temporality and chronology, located before of the attacks, likely several years earlier, while the rest of the novel is devoted to the post-attacks period. Hence, readers witness both the story of slow reconstruction (the American people slowly recovering from the events) and that of Hammad, whose purpose is inflicting destruction.

Like Updike, Don DeLillo tries to present to the readers the workings of the mind of a terrorist. The novel shows terrorists dedicated to God, carrying such an act in his name. The story ends with the scene of the attack, seen from the point of view of Hammad. As the plane hits the tower, by a clever and remarkable change of perspective and mode of narration, the reader follows Keith in a tumult of confusion in the street, where the novel begins.

It is precisely the novel's narrative mode that Marandi and Tari take to task. Offering a contrapuntal reading of the text, they contend that

One of the important aspects of Orientalism is that the Orientalist often considers himself as a somehow omniscient

narrator that speaks and represents the Orientals. . .Don DeLillo takes the same approach through his use of narrative mode; he speaks authoritatively and negatively about the Orient in essentialist terms. . .As a result, the narrative of the story does not transmit a set of facts about the real world of the characters, rather it is constructed and produced as a result of writer's preferences and within the dominant discourse. (69-70)

Although Martin defends and sympathizes<sup>17</sup> with the Muslim terrorists, many Orientalist stereotypes emerge as the narrative unfolds. DeLillo offers very unflattering depictions of the Muslim characters in the novel. He shows them as having no qualms about the atrocious acts of terror they carry out against innocent civilians. DeLillo, on the other hand, magnifies the gruesome description of the terrorists in the mind of the reader by highlighting the sectarian conflict within Islam, notably the Sunni/Shiite constant strife, and the lives it has claimed on both sides. These descriptions not only create an air of ceaseless violence in the novel, but they also imply that Islam is a religion that devalues human life<sup>18</sup>. By contrast, DeLillo describes aptly the American characters, of different colours and nationalities. The insinuated message is that America is home to millions of people who come from different backgrounds, fending off by so doing any charge of racial

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<sup>17</sup> As a narrative ploy, DeLillo makes Martin the “defender of Muslims. Martin (a false name for Ernest Hechinger) is a leftist German art dealer with a shadowy past who is somewhat sympathetic toward the hijackers. Later the reader learns that he was once a member of a 1960s anti-fascist collective called Kommune, a German terrorist group that set off bombs. . .the fact that a person whose reputation is marred by murder, bombing, and robbery is defending Muslims reveals that those who defends Muslims have some sort of commonality with them in their wrong doings” (Marandi and Tari 70).

<sup>18</sup> The way DeLillo and many other writers such as Updike show Islam is far removed from its reality. In the holy Quran, God warns us all: “You shall not kill yourselves. God is merciful towards you. Anyone who commits these transgressions, maliciously and deliberately, we will condemn him to hell. This is easy for God to do” (4:29).

segregation<sup>19</sup>. In addition to the aura of violence that envelops the Muslim characters, the latter are shown as brimming with sensuality. The only Muslim female character in the novel craves contact with Hammad, who himself fantasizes about other women to the point that he has an affair out of wedlock. These practices, out of line with the teachings of Islam, help emphasise the hypocrisy of the Muslim characters in the novel. Moreover, the novel carries racial undertones based on skin colour. This becomes evident when Lianne, once in Egypt, feels superior to and above the dark-coloured locals.

*Falling Man*, apart from being a novel that tries to pinpoint the post 9/11 trauma, revives the old oppositional binary, namely Occident versus Orient, implying the superiority of the former over the latter in many respects (71-75).

### **2.3.2. Orienting the Orient: Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***

Khaled Hosseini published *The Kite Runner* in 2003, two years after the United States' invasion of his native country, Afghanistan, in its retaliatory war on terror. Indeed, the novel was published in a time during which Americans were steeped in a rhetoric of fear circulated on a large scale by the US government and corporate media. The novel was an instant success, given the grim realities surrounding its publication after the 9/11 events. Why did the book, largely about Afghanistan, spark the interest of American readers? Amazon reviews written by readers from all over the world suggest that the narrative "is about not just Afghanistan but also universal human themes, such as guilt, friendship, fatherhood, and forgiveness, and is therefore

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<sup>19</sup> Marandi and Tari assert that "In addition to Muslim characters who are depicted as brutal terrorists, there are other characters of different nationalities: Russians with their "reassuring accents", the Greek neighbour who plays and listens to Middle-Eastern music, a black woman who suffers from and shares the pain of the event with the rest, a Latino kid that helps Keith walk to the hospital after he has survived the collapse of the towers as a result of the attacks. This diversity suggests that Americans are innocent receptors of all nationalities and that Muslims are enemies of peace and humanity" (72).

a classic” (Aubry 27). Aubry is of the view that “the book has encouraged increased tolerance and sympathy for Muslims”, yet “certain sections of the text, most notably depictions of the Taliban, led tacit support for a neoconservative vision of United States interventionist prerogatives” (27). An Orient in need of humanising, democratisation and modernisation was a recurrent theme of the Bush-led neoconservative administration, which helped reinforce a perception of the world in terms of oppositional binaries. Consequently, old and new Orientalist stereotypes came to define much of the Americans’ perception of the Middle East, an alleged source of perpetual threat to the West. Sarah Hunt contends that “despite its attempts to challenge these stereotypic binaries, the novel only ends up reinforcing them” (Hunt, Scholar.oxy.edu 2). Rekha Chitra, in a similar vein, claims that the significance of the story’s “underlying message in the current geopolitical context cannot be ignored. . . Hosseini occupying a hybrid position, being an Afghan-American only assists the imperial machine” (2), for he fails to avoid the pitfall of reinforcing old stereotypes about the East.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul in 1965. He is the son of a diplomat and thus had the opportunity to travel widely in his childhood. Born to a well-to-do family, he enjoyed the privileges of a good education. He lives in California and works there as a doctor. He speaks Afghan, and is fluent in English and French. His parents decided to settle in California, fleeing the Soviet regime, which was established in Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* is set against a backdrop of war and political unrest, covering three important eras in the history of Afghanistan: the fall of the monarchy, the Soviet military intervention in the country, and the rise of Taliban.

The novel opens with a graphic and nostalgic detailed account of Afghan life in the seventies. Amir is the son of a wealthy merchant living in Kabul. He lives with his father, Baba, in the most beautiful villa on the outskirts of the city. Raised



motherless, Baba's servant, Ali, and his son, Hassan, wait loyally on Baba and Amir. Baba's good behaviour towards his servants blurs the bounds of the master-servant relationship. Amir and Hassan in particular develop an almost brotherly relationship and do not want in any case to part. Nonetheless, their friendship is doomed due to the pressures imposed by a class-conscious community. Amir and Hassan come from two different ethnic groups: the former is Pashtun, often associated with Kabul's elite, while the latter is a Hazara, a people frowned upon by Kaboulians. The opening of the novel also foreshadows the simmering, sectarian conflict that plagues Afghanistan: Amir is Sunni, while Hassan is Shiite.

The affection the two boys have for each other notwithstanding, their relationship grows in complexity as the narrative unfolds. There is a lingering sense of the lopsided relationship they maintain, Amir being dominating, and Hassan dominated. Indeed, Hassan is Amir's servant, a reality that makes their lives far removed. So, instead of waking up at the same time, Hassan must get out of bed at dawn to prepare his friend's school bag and cook breakfast. These small, daily details widen the gap between them. Yet, as amazing as it sounds, Hassan is not in the least jealous of his friend, but the opposite is true; Amir feels threatened by the presence of his servant, whom he sees as a rival for Baba's affection. His fears are compounded by the fact that Baba cares much for Hassan and his father, something he does not understand in the beginning of the novel.

Amir has mixed feelings for his father. He admires his father's physical strength and his impeccable character, but is simultaneously worried about his not overbearing masculinity. Baba, the traditional Eastern archetype of masculinity, is especially loath to express his emotions towards his son, whom, at some point, he fears has started to develop soft manners. Amir does try ceaselessly to please his

father, but the latter values almost nothing his son loves such as reading and reciting poetry. Physical rather than mental activities engage Baba.

The kite running competition becomes Baba's source of pride, a tangible achievement that boosts his confidence in his son. Amir and Hassan win the first prize thanks to the courage and determination of the latter<sup>20</sup>. After this event, Amir basks in Baba's approval although he knows that most credit goes to Hassan, who selflessly insists that it was Amir's victory. Accordingly, Amir starts to develop a love/hate relationship—similar to the one he has towards his father—towards Hassan.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Baba and Amir flee to Pakistan and then to California. In California, Baba works in a gas station, while Amir starts taking classes at university. Amir meets Soraya Taheri and the couple get married shortly before Baba dies of terminal cancer. Unfortunately, the couple learn that they cannot have children, but Amir's spirits are soon uplifted when Rahim Khan, Baba's closest friend, rings Amir to inform him that Hassan and his wife were killed, leaving a son behind.

Meeting Rahim Khan after many years, Amir learns that Taliban militants killed Hassan and his wife, leaving Sohrab orphaned. The trip back to Pakistan and then to Afghanistan reveals a secret that turns Amir's life upside down. Amir learns from Rahim Khan that Baba is in fact Hassan's father, a revelation that places a burden on Amir to go look for and rescue Sohrab from an orphanage in Afghanistan. After a series of painful adventures in Kabul and Pakistan, Amir manages to rescue Sohrab from the Taliban militants, adopts him, and takes him back to America.

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<sup>20</sup> During the competition, Hassan is sexually attacked by Assef. Amir witnesses the incident from a distance but fails to muster the courage to defend his friend. Amir's cowardice compounds his psychological torment, for he deep down feels that he can never be up to Baba's expectations.

Indeed, the novel has piqued the interest of American readers because it outlines the historical evolution of a country that America held accountable for sponsoring and harbouring terrorists. Although Hosseini attempts to challenge some of the Orientalist stereotypes that enjoyed renewed currency after 9/11, he ends up reinforcing them<sup>21</sup>. As much as Afghanistan evolves, historically, throughout the novel, Amir's cultural identity takes a similar course. Afghanistan becomes "the backdrop against which to create and celebrate Western identity: a representation that clearly echoes the broad Orientalist stereotypes defined by Edward Said a generation ago" (Hunt 3). Educated in the West, readers begin to less and less regard Amir as the Other<sup>22</sup>; rather, they come to regard him as "an extension of the imperial self by using the East in all its forms" (4).

Written in the bildungsroman structure, *The Kite Runner* features the development of Amir's and Assef's cultural identities that converged in the beginning of the narrative but diverged towards its end. Like Amir, Assef is born to a well-to-do family that enjoys all the privileges of Kabul's elite:

Assef was the son of one of my father's friends, Mahmood, an airline pilot. His family lived a few streets south of our home, in a posh, high-walled compound with palm trees. If you were a kid living in the Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul, you knew

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<sup>21</sup> It should be pointed out that "since Hosseini as an Afghan-American is occupying a hybrid position of being comprised of both East and West, his work resists being classified as Orientalist. Hosseini only *assists* the imperial machine; he is not the imperial machine itself (to return to the image provided by Cromer). In other words, although *The Kite Runner* may not have been intended to so neatly satisfy the Western structure of the bildungsroman, the Western reader interprets it as such, regardless of the intention of the author" (Hunt 8).

<sup>22</sup> Hunt points out that although Amir retains part of his Afghan identity "readers who are familiar with Rudyard Kipling's 1901 Novel *Kim* may have already begun to recognize similarities between Kipling's novel and *The Kite Runner* when it comes to the use of a foreigner-as-protagonist. This association between the two novels may prove to be a useful point of reference as to how so-called "foreign" protagonists work: their function as internal Orientalists assists the reader by providing a familiar lens through which the East can be seen (4).

about Assef and his famous stainless-steel brass knuckles, hopefully not through personal experience. Born to a German mother and Afghan father, the blond, blue-eyed Assef towered over the other kids. His well-earned reputation for savagery preceded him on the streets. Flanked by his obeying friends, he walked the neighborhood like a Khan strolling through his land with his eager-to-please entourage. His word was law, and if you needed a little legal education, then those brass knuckles were just the right teaching tool. I saw him use those knuckles once on a kid from the Karteh-Char district. I will never forget how Assef's blue eyes glinted with a light not entirely sane and how he grinned, how he grinned, as he pummeled that poor kid unconscious. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 38)

Characterization is paramount because Assef, although he shares much of Amir's background, takes an unexpected course of action. Although his mother is German, and although he has Caucasian features, readers surprisingly learn that he becomes a Taliban leader and a merciless rapist, who takes Sohrab hostage before Amir comes to the latter's rescue. Indeed, the reader, at some point, labours under the impression that Assef is more westernised than Amir, who, apart from being a coward, enjoys relatively less influence than Assef. Hosseini might have used this characterisation ploy to lend authenticity to Amir's historical account of Afghanistan. Hunt argues that "the characterisation of Assef is used as a backdrop for Amir's westernization, and serves as a point of reference as to how far Amir's Western identity progresses and develops throughout the course of the novel" (5-6). Consequently, whereas "Amir becomes a more modern, liberal, Western character

within the structure of the bildungsroman, Assef only develops by becoming an increasingly cartoonish “Oriental” character” (6).

Assef’s acts of bravado take him too far when he rapes Hassan and later Sohrab. He does that because he believes in the racial superiority of the Pashtun over the Hazaras, whom he views as invaders, who pollute Afghanistan. Assef admires Hitler for his racial philosophy, and takes pride in one day ridding Afghanistan of all the Hazaras<sup>23</sup>. The alignment of Assef and Hitler “becomes a particularly powerful image. . .an attempt to underscore the “backwards” mentality that Assef represents, while turning what initially appeared to be a childhood rivalry into an ideological and moral battle between good and evil” (11).

The development of the Assef’s and Amir’s cultural identities is also paralleled by the Amir’s and Hassan’s development of religious identity. From the outset, Hosseini foreshadows Amir’s attitude towards religion: contrary to Ali’s and Hassan’s religious zeal, Amir, like his father, develops a lax outlook on religion. Like young children in Afghanistan, Amir starts to learn about religion in primary school. His mullah at school teaches them about the five pillars of Islam, and one day tells them that drinking is a sin in Islam. Amir finds it difficult to understand why Baba drinks since religion forbids drinking, so when he goes back home, with all the innocence of a

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<sup>23</sup> Hunt contends that “Even though Assef represents a childhood enemy for Amir, the politics of his ethnicity and political beliefs cannot be ignored. His Islamic fundamentalist and pro-Nazi ideologies represent the antithesis of Western liberal ideologies, and are portrayed as being rooted in primitive and outdated thought. In addition, we can read this passage as Amir representing the progressive, modern Pashtun who travels to the West to physically escape the fanaticism of his counterparts. In order to fully come into his own identity, however, he has traveled back into the literal ruins of his past and confronted this archaic mentality of his enemy with Western liberal ideas” (15).

child, he decides to confront his father<sup>24</sup>. The exchange that takes place reveals Baba's attitude towards religion:

"I see you've confused what you're learning in school with actual education," he said in his thick voice.

"But if what he said is true then does it make you a sinner, Baba?"

"Hmm." Baba crushed an ice cube between his teeth. "Do you want to know what your father thinks about sin?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you," Baba said, "but first understand this and understand it now, Amir: You'll never learn anything of value from those bearded idiots."

"You mean Mullah Fatiullah Khan?"

Baba gestured with his glass. The ice clinked. "I mean all of them. Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys."

I began to giggle. The image of Baba pissing on the beard of any monkey, self-righteous or otherwise, was too much.

"They do nothing but thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand." He took a sip.

"God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands."

(Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 16-17)

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<sup>24</sup> When Amir asks Baba about why he drinks, Baba retorts rather blasphemously: "If there's a God out there, then I would hope he has more important things to attend to than my drinking scotch or eating pork" (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 18-19).

Baba disapproves of a classical Islamic education and holds secular views instead. He is also fearful lest Afghanistan falls into the hands of religious-minded individuals, a fear that materialises towards the end of the novel. Hosseini, in effect, distorts the concept of sin and strips it of its Islamic import. While Baba disparages the mullah's teachings, which are based on the true spirit of Islam, he attempts to instil in his son's mind quasi-religious maxims. Interestingly, Baba believes in one sin, and that is theft. Baba believes that "when you kill a man, you steal a life", and that when "you steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father" (18). Baba's definition of sin resonates with one of the most unfortunate episodes in the narrative when the "Talibs" take over Afghanistan. Indeed, they steal lives, they steal women's rights to their husbands, and they rob many children of their fathers. In fact, Baba's views are deeply ingrained in the Western concept of Human Rights, legitimising thus his views, and making it easier for the Western reader to identify with his humanistic and secular outlook. Similarly, Baba's scepticism towards religion and the existence of God colours Amir's attitude. When the winning kite is about to fall into Hassan's hands, Amir could not help but to think to himself: "And may God—if He exists, that is—strike me blind if the kite didn't just drop into his outstretched arms" (55).

Baba gets cancer and eventually dies steadfast in his liberal views. Amir, too, thinks that he has been influenced by his father's liberal views, an influence that, he believes, has played a positive role in his life. The opinion Hosseini holds of Afghanistan, it seems, is that of a liberal, that of Baba. Amir marvels at how Baba is different and at how he himself is different from other Afghans. He concludes that "Maybe it was because Baba had been such an unusual Afghan father, a liberal who had lived by his own rules, a maverick who had disregarded or embraced customs as he had seen fit" (180).

*The Kite Runner* is an important post 9/11 novel because it was published in the frenzy of the rhetoric that coloured the American government's discourse in the aftermath of the attacks. Largely set in Afghanistan, which has become a refuge for the masterminds of the attacks, the novel appealed to American readers because it, as it claims to be, recounts the history of Afghanistan, a country like any other country, which—although engulfed by an aura of mystery— has a story of its own. The novel is also important because Afghanistan was the first country against which the United States and its allies launched their retaliatory war on terror.

However, whether it was Hosseini's intention to counter the resurgent Orientalist discourse of the post 9/11 era, he ended up reinforcing it. The story is told through the eyes of Amir, a character not so much "unhomed", to borrow Bhabha's term, as much as he is westernised. The story tells two stories: that of Baba and Amir, and that of Assef, Ali, and Hassan. Hosseini chronicles the development Amir's Western identity, much fed by Baba's liberal, Western views, and Assef's steep descent into fundamentalism, while Ali and Hassan remain the victims of all the tragedies that unfold in Afghanistan. Following in the footsteps of his father, Amir has a lax attitude towards religion, making him the best candidate in the Western reader's eyes to comment on the plight of Afghanistan, a plight caused by religious extremism. Hosseini makes Assef, whose identity development takes a different course, the stereotypical Oriental character: violent, merciless, and lewd. Assef has Nazi leanings; he loves Hitler and his racial philosophy, an association that aligns him with an archetype of violence that haunts the Western subconscious mind. Hence, to put it in the words of Lisa Lau, Hosseini has fallen into the pitfall of Re-Orientalism, the practice of Orientalism by Orientals.



### **2.3.3. Re-representation: Mohsin Hamid, Robin Yassin-Kassab, Laila Halaby and the Emergence of a Counter Discourse**

The rhetoric of fear employed by the American government after the attacks of 9/11 did very little to allay the concerns of the American citizens as well as those of the *Free World* led by America, which stigmatised likewise, rather blindly, Muslims and their faith. Fundamentalists lurking everywhere, intent on bringing down Western democracy, became a universal theme popularised by cooperate media. The years preceding the attacks had already been marked by increased animosity towards Muslims, an animosity that turned into a deep-seated belief that in order for Western democracy to survive it had fight fundamentalists who fight in the name of Islam. In the wake of the attacks, America and its allies reacted swiftly, invading Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 on the pretext of bringing down Al-Qaeda in the case of the former and dismantling weapons of mass destruction in the case of the latter. Because of the war on terror, unfortunately, Muslims were further stigmatised in official and unofficial discourses alike. Consequently, a wave of Islamophobia swept over the Western world.

A number of Muslim Anglophone writers took it upon themselves to write ‘write back’ to the empire, an attempt to re-represent Islam and Muslims. The result was the emergence of a counter discourse that fictionalised the impact of Islamophobia/xenophobia on Muslim characters and their identity. Writing for the Washington Post about Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Laila Halaby recognises the importance of writing a counter discourse; hearing a different voice: “Extreme times call for extreme reactions, extreme writing. Hamid has done something extraordinary with this novel, and for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth

reading” (Halaby, Washingtonpost). Mohsin Hamid on his part acknowledges in an interview to Harcourt the challenges that put back the publication of his novel. He admits that the “catastrophe” of 9/11 “swamped” the structure of his story (M. Hamid, Harcourt interview with Mohsin Hamid). He also admits that he wrote against America from a critical perspective because the attitude of America towards the Muslim World and vice versa is based on lack of empathy:

I believe that the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel. And I believe that the world is suffering from a deficit of empathy at the moment: the political positions of both Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush are founded on failures of empathy, failures of compassion towards people who seem different. By taking readers inside a man who both loves and is angered by America, and hopefully by allowing readers to feel what that man feels, I hope to show that the world is more complicated than politicians and newspapers usually have time for. We need to stop being so confused by the fear we are fed: a shared humanity unites us with people we are encouraged to think of as our enemies. (Hamid)

Hamid takes to task in particular the superficiality of analysis and coverage that mark much of political and media discourses with regard to the deteriorating relations between America and the Muslim World in the wake of 9/11. He also cautions against those—on both sides of the conflict—who capitalise on the situation to feed people a rhetoric of fear.

Halaby’s call for artistic “extreme reactions, extreme writing” set the framework in which Muslims, especially those living in the diaspora, could retaliate

against all forms of misrepresentations of Muslims/ Islam. she herself recounts how paranoid Americans became in the wake of the attacks. She was the victim of a xenophobic/ Islamophobic reaction in a public store when a woman asked her to stop addressing her children in Arabic. For Halaby, this incident implied many things, among which was that life was going to be different after 9/11. Indeed, after 9/11, Islam/Muslims came to be categorically equated with terrorism, something that made Muslims uncontestedly the most prominent frightening Other. The incident, Halaby says, communicated an important message: “that we’ll accept you, but you can’t really be who you are”. Most importantly, like Hamid, Halaby believes that such indiscriminate incidents arise from lack of empathy because after 9/11 people little realised “how ingrained the sense of ‘otherness’ is a person from the Middle East” (Gale).

Moreover, Halaby maintains that the Middle East has been the object of much of skewed media coverage, which is responsible for the plethora of subliminal messages and negative images about Islam and Muslims. “When you look at the New York Times”, she says furiously, “you always see photos of Palestinians with guns and Israelis grieving. . .Or there’s a photo of an Arab man with a donkey. It’s so maddening” (Gale). These misrepresentations, according to her, lead to misunderstanding, which, in turn, widens the gulf between what people regard as mainstream Americans and those minorities orbiting the fringes of American culture. Striking a cosmopolitan tone, she goes on to insist that “There’s such a need for more understanding. . .If you know my world the way I know my world, there’s no way you can think it’s ridiculous” (Gale).

What does it mean then to *write back*, to write Islam? Salman Rushdie complicates the task by insisting that Islam is not a “narrative civilization”, a claim that Robin Yassin-Kassab refutes:

Salman Rushdie once commented that “Islam,” in contrast to “the West,” is not a narrative civilization. This, in my opinion, is obvious nonsense. Beyond the fact that human beings are narrative animals, whatever civilization they live in, and that Islamic civilization cannot be isolated from, for instance, Christian, Hindu or Arab civilizations, the Muslim world has a history of influential narratives which is second to none. These include Sufi tales, chivalric adventures, fantastical travelogues, romances and spiritual biographies written in several major languages. (Yassin-Kassab 139)

He hints that, as a writer, he could not but feel the burden of 9/11 and the need to represent it. His first novel, *The Road from Damascus*, is set in the summer of 2001 “leading up to and including September 11<sup>th</sup>” (142). Like Halaby and Hamid<sup>25</sup>, he believes that many of the West’s misconceptions about the Muslim World spring from a lack of understanding of, or perhaps an unwillingness to understand Islam. His writing, therefore, gives “a sense of the complexity of Muslims, Islam, and the Muslim world, to show that there are many forms of Islam, even within the same individual” (142). After all, Islam plays a significant role in his writing in that he “was responding to Islamophobia and Orientalist myths, directly or indirectly” (142).

Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*, and Kassab’s *The Road from Damascus* could be classified as novels that were

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<sup>25</sup> One of the novels that promotes a counter discourse, Kassab believes, is Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He likewise believes that his novel, *The Road from Damascus*, was born out of a desire to correct the misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. He writes that “Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is perhaps the most successful recent novel born out of a desire for dialogue post-9/11. It is in fact staged around a dialogue between a Pakistani Muslim and an American tourist, and it efficiently calls into question the notion of “fundamentalism.” I suppose my novel too came from an urge for dialogue against the complacent simplicities of the mainstream media. I was speaking from the Arab world (I wrote the novel in Muscat, Oman), and I did want to send a message to the West (Yassin-Kassab 143).

published within the framework of a retaliatory war of words. Awan tell us that the war on terror “was fought on many fronts, including the ideological war of words and images that rages on the cinema screens across the globe as well as the pages of pop fiction” (522). Writers like Updike, DeLillo, and Amis took almost no pains to sift through the Orientalist myths circulated by mainstream media. Rather, they weaved their narratives around these myths, exacerbating by so doing the already tense relations between the Muslim World and the West. Hamid’s, Halaby’s, and Kassab’s calls for dialogue and understanding contrast with calls for total assimilation advertised by works written from a Western perspective. The latter “present Muslims living in their midst as the ‘orient other’ that poses a danger to the society and therefore has no right to live there until and unless they assimilate themselves culturally into the western way of life” (532). Awan lists Hamid as one writer who engages in “a clarification campaign. . .to counter the negative representation of Islam” (535). Edward Said, in fact, calls this textual retaliatory act “a re-representation”:

The narrative depiction of Islam through the acts of terrorism, wars, deaths, *fatwas*, jihads or bombings sustains a Western sociological imagination of Islam but at the same token, it thrusts the *Ummah*, or the global Muslim community, into a constant struggle to re-represent Islam. Inevitably for many Muslims articulations on Islam is a reactive counter-response, for anything said about Islam’s gets more or less forced into the apologetic form of a statement about Islam’s humanism, its contribution to civilization, development and moral righteousness. (E. Said, *Covering Islam* 55)

After the attacks, discussions on multiculturalism, globalisation and its demands, assimilation, and identity negotiation raged in the West. It comes as no surprise then if much of Muslim writing after 9/11 is writing about identity. Halaby explains that a lot of her “writing goes back to identity and perception”, regretting “the inability of many people to see Arab, Muslim, Palestinian cultures without preconceived notions” (Rogers). Writers living in the diaspora grow up with the sense of Otherness many immigrants feel, a lingering sense of Otherness that sometimes goes back to childhood experiences. Reminiscing on her childhood experiences, Halaby says that she “was always in this purgatory stage of ‘otherness,’ neither here nor there. . . My name never seemed to get pronounced right. And people would make these really strange comments to me”. She goes on to explain that her identity was always associated with stereotypes and myths popularised by mainstream media. In one particular incident, a boy in her first-grade class asked her “how many camels” she had and “how many wives” her “father was married to”. “It was shocking”, she says (Schuman). As she grew up an adult, the complexity of the questions she was asked grew in tandem. The new questions range from why Muslim women put on the head scarf, the difference between the various Muslim sects, whether her husband wears a turban, to questions that carry racist undertones like how one can prove that Islam is not a violent religion. Her constant reply, she goes on, is to always “offer any understanding” she “can to offset American “jahiliyya,” or generalized ignorance of other cultures” (Halaby, *Beacon Broadside: A project of Beacon Press*).

Proponents of Globalisation have often staked the claim that Western Civilisation is universal. After all, the former is closely related to the latter on so many levels, be them economic, cultural, or political. But can a global culture, or else, can a cosmopolitan country—as it claims to be— like The United States encompass

different identities that can co-exist peacefully, as it were? Hamid challenges this claim:

We do not live in a global culture that is shaped by freedom's triumph over tyranny. Rather we live in a global culture where the two have merged. If we are to speak freely, every word must be monitored. If we are to roam freely, every entrance must be locked. (Hamid, *The Great Divide*)

## **2.4. Conclusion**

Early Muslim fiction in English responded to the biased representation of Muslims by the British Empire. Works such as *Twilight in Delhi* depict the constant onslaught that the local traditions and heritage undergo under the British rule, especially with regard to the dwindling influence of Urdu, the local language. As a response to this linguistic onslaught, as it were, Ali peppers his works with words and poems from Urdu in an attempt to appropriate the language of the coloniser.

Early Muslim fiction in English concerned itself with themes of identity and belonging. Mena Abdullah's characters, for instance, grow up to realise that they have no roots in Australia. The realisation comes in tandem with their growing consciousness of their different skin colour and religious belief. Abdullah's characters try to establish a connection with their roots by going back to old traditions like building family-centred cocoons.

As new generations of Muslim immigrants grow up in the diaspora, Muslim writers begin to broach more complicated themes such as the need for assimilation and integration. Accordingly, readers of Vassanji, for instance, encounter many characters, who constantly negotiate their identities in large cosmopolitan settings.

The question of identity becomes all the more important for Muslims after the attacks on the twin towers. In *Terrorist*, Updike delves into the psyche of a Muslim teenager, Ahmad, showing his eventual, tragic slide into fundamentalism. Updike paints a very dark picture of Islam because he uses infamous translations of the Quran, and incorporates many verses, which would be misunderstood if they were clipped from their contexts. Similarly, in *Falling Man*, DeLillo shows Hammad's eventual recruitment by a terrorist cell that is intent on inflicting pain and destruction on America. Published by two canonical writers, *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* do very little to establish cross-cultural dialogue after 9/11 in the sense that they do nothing more than reiterating oriental and readymade stereotypes.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini fails to counter the stereotypes surrounding Muslims after 9/11. The novel is a very important one in that it is largely set in Afghanistan, which, after 9/11, becomes the backdrop against which the war on terror is played out. Cast in the bildungsroman narrative framework, the novel traces, according to critics like Hunt, Amir's identity development along the lines of Western ideals. The novel is replete with scenes in which Baba mocks religious authority, believing that Afghanistan should follow in the footsteps of the West if it is to extract itself from its pitiful backwardness.

Other Muslim writers like Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab have, however, stated clearly that their works constitute a bold reaction to counter the dominant narrative that attempts to show that Muslims are unfit for the challenges posed by the project of globalisation, which plays out in cosmopolitan settings. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, and Kassab's *The Road from Damascus* have plots that revolve around faltering personal relationships that reflect the chaos, the angst, and the disintegration of the Muslim characters' world after the events of 9/11.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Hamid, Halaby, Yassin-Kassab, and the Motif of Collapse**

### **3.1. Introduction**

In the realm of literature, canonical writers in America and elsewhere have fictionalised the traumatic events of 9/11, showing by so doing how the attacks have scarred the collective consciousness of America. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) are two examples that spring to mind instantly. Notwithstanding Updike's and DeLillo's attempts to come to grips with the disillusionment resulting from the tragic events, both writers have been responsible for reviving orientalist stereotypes, which resurged in tandem with anti-Muslim sentiments accompanying America's war on terror<sup>i</sup>. The result was a skewed and a biased representation of Islam and Muslims.

On the other hand, Muslim writers writing in English have tried to show that 9/11 has affected Muslims too. Their writings may thus be deemed to constitute a counter discourse to the dominant discourse emanating from the *centre*. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Once in a promised Land*, and *The Road from Damascus* were published in the post-9/11 era, which is characterised by a resurgence of a neo-orientalist rhetoric and a marked increase in Islamophobic sentiments. While Kassab's novel is set in the tumult of the 9/11 attacks, Hamid's and Halaby's novels deal explicitly with the terror attacks and how they have come to bear on the lives of Muslim characters.

*The Road from Damascus* is about Sami's identity crisis, which manifests itself in the symbolic crumbling of his parents' marriage. Sami keeps oscillating between his father's secular legacy and his mother's newfound faith, entertaining by so doing conflicting ideologies. This ideological conflict is inescapable as it resurfaces again in his own marriage, in which the same tragic scenario plaguing his parents' relationship looks set to destroy his marriage. On the other hand, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land* refer explicitly to the difficulty of living in America and the crumbling of the characters' American Dream after the attacks.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about the pain of unrequited love: a story about Changez's mutual attraction to and repulsion by *(Am)Erica*. Similarly, *Once in a Promised Land* is about Jassim's and Salwa's crumbling marriage and ultimately the crumbling of their American Dream. In this chapter, it is therefore argued that Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab deliberately structured their plots around faltering personal relationships to foreshadow the Muslim characters' broken American Dream and their eventual break with America in the case of the Hamid's and Halaby's novels, and to foreshadow the difficulty of being a Muslim in post-9/11 Britain.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land* have a lot in common. Hence, a textual and a structural analysis of the novels will unravel how the personal—faltering relationships—and the political—the collapse of the characters' American Dream—and the eventual break with America, are entwined in an allegorical nexus of meanings.

Both texts revolve around pursuit, attainment, and eventual loss of a woman/man. To illuminate the relationship between the *personal* and the *political*, the researcher draws on Todorov's narratological model since both novels readily lend themselves to it.

The focus in this chapter is on the novels' narrative "grammar". Using Tzvetan Todorov's schema of propositions, it is thus argued that the novels' structures, which revolve around faltering personal relationships in effect parallel the deteriorating political situation after 9/11, a deterioration that symbolises the end of the characters' American Dream. When analysing the narrative structure of literary works, Todorov draws a parallel between the elements of a literary work and the elements of language. For instance, he suggests that characters be associated with nouns, their attributes with adjectives, and their actions with verbs so as to uncover the

“grammar”, the *langue*, or the formula, which structures these literary works (Tyson 226). The basic plot structure consists of the following sequence: attribution-action-attribution. An example of a sequence may thus be as follows: the “protagonist starts out with an attribute (for example, he is unloved), and by means of an action (he seeks love) that attribute is transformed (he is loved or, at least, has learned something important as a result of his quest)” (Tyson 227).

In the case of the of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land*, the action can be reduced to a seek-find-lose formula, which is the *langue* underlying the structure of both texts, as it were. The thing sought after can be an object, a state, a condition, or a person. This formula, it is suggested, operates on two levels: the personal and the political. Put otherwise, the main characters’ seek-find-lose love journey functions as an allegory for their seek-find-lose American Dream, which is made impossible by the fast changing political landscape in America after 9/11. Towards the end of the novels, an aura of loss and despair still reigns because the characters’ attributes remain unchanged. Incensed by the post-9/11 anti-Muslim rhetoric, Changez quits his lucrative job and returns to Pakistan; *(Am)Erica*, his object of fascination, is lost forever. Jassim becomes a suspect in the wake of 9/11; he eventually loses his job and probably Salwa, who in turn miscarries, has an affair out of wedlock with Jake, who assaults her towards the end of the book, leaving her bathing in a pool of blood, her desire to go back to Jordan crushed.

### **3.2. “In the Foreground Shimmered” *(Am)Erica*: Unrequited Love in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

Changez travels from Lahore to New York, then from the latter to the former before he decides to abandon *(Am)Erica*. Lahore is a typical traditional Eastern centre, while New York is the epitome of Western cosmopolitan progress. Changez’s

to-ing and fro-ing between the two cities gives him a chance to straddle two distinct cultures. Having sampled first-hand both cultures, he therefore becomes the embodiment of the values that they both offer, however contradictory they may be. Owing to a marked decline of his family's social and economic status, Changez delights in the prospects that a university education in America promises to offer. For him, education in a prestigious American university is an opportunity to meet new people and immerse himself in a culture that represents almost everything the West stands for. Changez's American Dream operates on two levels: on the one hand, he is lured by a country that epitomises ample opportunity, presumably based on ideals of equality as well as equity; on the other hand, he meets the woman whom he believes can make his experience more meaningful and worthwhile. However, his to-ing and fro-ing between the two cities reveals to him facts to which he has been hitherto oblivious. He ultimately breaks with the country and the woman he loves, and returns to his native country. In the wake of 9/11, he is drawn to the limelight due to a dramatic rise in Islamophobia; most importantly, he becomes conscious of his background, and indeed his difference. Three actions structure the novel's plot: "to seek", "to find", and "to lose". Changez's quest for *(Am)Erica* is eventually crowned by the fleeting success he achieves on two levels: first, his development of a quasi-intimate relationship with Erica, and, second, his improved economic situation when he becomes an Underwood Samson member. His new-found romance and social status, however, he soon becomes disillusioned after the events of 9/11, and ultimately loses both the woman and the country he supposedly loves.

*AmErica* is a *double entendre*, which symbolises Changez's unrequited love for both a country and a woman. The fusion of the two love stories constitutes a framework that enables Mohsin Hamid to allegorise the gradual disintegration of Changez's world, and indeed the disintegration of his American Dream. Like *Gatsby*,

whose American Dream—paralleled by his love and quest for Daisy—streams in green light on the opposite shore of a bay, Erica shimmers in Changez’s world. The following passage captures Changez’s fascination with the girl, a fascination that marks the beginning of his quest, the “seek” part of the *langue* governing the structure of the text:

. . .in the foreground shimmered Erica, and observing her gave me enormous satisfaction. She had told me that she hated to be alone, and I came to notice that she rarely was. She attracted people to her; she had presence, an uncommon magnetism. Documenting her effect on her habitat, a naturalist would likely have compared her to a lioness: strong, sleek, and invariably surrounded by her pride (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 21-22).

From an onomastic point of view, the meaning of the name “Eric/Erica”, along its various spellings in other languages, reveals much about the magnetism that the girl exudes in the novel. Originally an old Nordic name—*Eiríkr*—it means, among other things, “honoured ruler” (Eric). Erica is an allegory for America; they both seduce and snare those who seek their courtship. The name “Erica”, then, resonates powerfully with America’s unipolar rule over the world. Its domination is uncontested and is set to continue that way, or so it seems. Hamid employs an animalistic diction to describe this predatory and domineering nature of *(Am)Erica*: she is “strong, sleek”, and, “invariably surrounded by her pride”; like “a lioness”, she commands respect and fear.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, America emerged as the world’s watchdog over international politics. The economic, military, and cultural influence that America exercises over the world is almost indisputable.

Interestingly, if the unipolarity that currently characterises world politics does anything, it militates against the supposedly democratic rhetoric that America seems to have always championed. The New World Order has only confirmed its superiority and autocracy, “documenting”, to borrow Hamid’s words, “her effect on her habitat” (22). Modern history still documents America’s parenting role, providing “security and garrison troops” in Japan and Germany, “the world’s second and largest economies” (Ikenberry 609). The same thing holds true for Russia, which is in “a quasi-formal security partnership with the United States”, and China, which “has accommodated itself to US dominance” (Ikenberry 609). On the back of this incontestable influence and domination, America has forced the world into its “unipolar age” (Ikenberry 609).

America was catapulted into prominence and influence in world affairs following the two world wars. It has become an example of economic development and relentless progress, and indeed a land of ceaseless opportunities and dreams. The American Dream has, however, provoked deep ambivalence. Optimists still laud America for providing economic freedom and limitless opportunities for all, and for embodying democratic ideals like freedom of speech and human rights. Critics, like Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck, by contrast, have exposed the dark side of the American Dream, which, for many, has turned out to be a mere mirage shimmering in the distance, just like Erica.

Notwithstanding the charm she exerts on those surrounding her, especially on Changez, Erica is incapable of living peacefully. She is wounded at heart, a wound that leaves Changez languishing in the shackles of unrequited love:

. . . it was clear Erica needed something that I— even by consenting to play the part of a man not myself—was unable to give her. In all likelihood she longed for her adolescence with



Chris, for a time before his cancer made her aware of impermanence and mortality. Perhaps the reality of their time together was as wonderful as she had, on more than one occasion, described to me. Or perhaps theirs was a past all the more potent for its being imaginary. I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love; it was, after all, a religion that would not accept me as a convert. But I knew that she believed in it, and I felt small for being able to offer her nothing of comparable splendor instead (M. Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 113-114).

From the beginning of the novel, Hamid foreshadows Changez's doomed relationship with *(Am)Erica*. Erica shimmers "in the foreground" only to dim in the background, as it were. Their relationship is doomed, for Erica's inner light can no longer show her the way. Chris, her dead ex-boyfriend, still haunts her whole being. The meaning of the name 'Chris' reveals interesting associations that may throw more light on their doomed relationship. Onomastically, 'Chris', which is short for Christopher, of Greek origin, means "bearer of Christ" (Christopher), referring to legends about a saint Christopher, who carried the young Jesus across a river. Metaphorically, it symbolises somebody who bears Christ in his heart. Chris' death foreshadows Erica's spiritual and physical death, making an intimate union between her and Changez a remote possibility. Changez knows deep down that he is chasing a mere mirage and competing with an invisible, dead rival:

I did not say that the same could be said of her when she spoke of Chris; I did not say it because this fact elicited in me mixed emotions. On the one hand it pleased me as her friend to see her so animated, and I knew, moreover, that it was a mark of

affection that she took me into her confidence in this way—I had never heard her discuss Chris when speaking to someone else; on the other hand, I was desirous of embarking upon a relationship with her that amounted to more than friendship, and I felt in the strength of her ongoing attachment to Chris the presence of a rival—albeit a dead one—with whom I feared I could never compete (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 81-82).

Metaphorically, Chris' death can be read as the demise of religion in America. While *(Am)Erica* cannot reconcile with her past following Chris' death, she similarly cannot maintain her relationship with Changez. This said, at this point, Changez is still seeking a stronger relationship with her in that he harbours an optimism—although the latter borders on a pious hope—that it might just work out for him against all the odds imposed by her being haunted by Chris' memory.

Read in the context of the post-9/11 Islamophobic/xenophobic atmosphere, the relationship between Changez and Erica is based on the clash of civilisations thesis and the incompatibility of Islam and the secular West, which appears to be lost after having expunged all forms of divine authority. Without Chris, Erica is lost and needs to stay in a mental institution to recover. It is accordingly suggested that *(Am)Erica* cannot embrace Changez, a Muslim fundamentalist in the making, because the love between Chris and Erica is, “after all, a religion” that will not “accept” him “as a convert” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 114). Erica's nostalgia for Chris acts as a bulwark against her loving Changez back. Her life orbits the haunting memory of a dead person, who left her stranded in limbo, incapable of looking forward.

Changez's American Dream begins in his Princeton years. Following an unexpected scene on the beach in Greece, where he holidays with his fellow Princetonians, he begins to contemplate rosy prospects for him and Erica. He is gradually ushered into the ranks of the powerful, of the generation that will shape the future of America. In Greece particularly, he begins to experience a more intimate relationship with Erica. In the scene on the beach, Erica bares her "breasts to the sun" (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 23), increasing Changez's craving for physical intimacy. He reads the gesture as a special invitation for him to become more intimate with her because out of all his classmates she singled him out for such an exclusive spectacle. He believes that she has started warming to him, especially that none of their female companions has dared to do the same. Besides this quasi-intimacy he feels, Changez starts to live his American Dream when he starts sharing personal dreams with Erica. Now, he believes that his quest is about to be crowned with a glorious conquest:

Erica said that she wanted to be a novelist. Her creative thesis had been a work of long fiction that had won an award at Princeton; she intended to revise it for submission to literary agents and would see how they responded. Normally, Erica spoke little of herself, and tonight, when she did so, it was in a slightly lowered voice and with her eyes often on me. I felt—despite the presence of our companions, whose attention, as always, she managed to capture—that she was sharing with me an intimacy, and this feeling grew stronger when, after observing me struggle, she helped me separate the flesh from the bones of my fish without my having to ask (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 29).

This public nudity act is forbidden in Islam, but Changez appears to support it wholeheartedly in that at this stage he wants to “submerge his identity into Western identity” (Humaira). Oblivious to her severe emotional state, Changez’s hopes for a union with her border on the delusional, for he continues to labour under illusion when they go back to New York. Nothing physical happens in Greece, but she now occupies much of his thoughts. Back in New York, she gives him her phone number, a gesture that makes him feel happy because he has “struck up an acquaintance with a woman” with whom he “was well and truly smitten” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 29-30). Changez’s life is turned upside down. He feels the excitement of a new life coursing through his veins: “my excitement about the adventures my new life held for me had never been more pronounced” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 30).

Being the economic hub of United States, New York functions as the prototype cosmopolitan centre where Changez can fulfil his American Dream, which has thus far manifested itself in his Princeton education and in his relationship with Erica. Being a Princeton graduate, he is recruited as an analyst by Underwood Samson, a consultancy firm, which offers him a very high salary. The firm then becomes his gateway to success. Put otherwise, Princeton gives him the opportunity to be part of the select elite again, but this opportunity materialises when he is hired by Underwood Samson, the firm that helps him cement his newfound rise on the social ladder. Although he often muses with marked acrimony and disparagement over his family’s waning prestige and influence in his native country, having become an influential member of Underwood Samson, he grows more self-confident and starts integrating into the American way of life. There are striking similarities between Changez and Gatsby in that both chase their American Dreams in much the same way: wealth and a beautiful woman. Both begin to play the social role that befits their

new-found economic comfort. At this point, Changez is really pleased: “I was presumptuous enough to think that this was how my life was meant to be, that it had in some way been inevitable that I should end up rubbing shoulders with the truly wealthy in such exalted settings” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 85). In such exalted settings, he derives his satisfaction from being with Erica, who “vouched” for his “worthiness”; as for those who doubt his credentials, he says, “my Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card were invariably sufficient to earn me a respectful nod of approval” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 85). Erica seems to give Changez the social life he desperately needs in America. Going to galleries “with clean lines and minimalist fixtures” and many other places ushers him into “an insider’s world—the chic heart of the city—to which” he “would otherwise have had no access” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 56). At this point, Changez seems to have carved for himself a niche in America; he seems to have found and embraced his American Dream embodied in *(Am)Erica*.

Hamid started writing his novel before the events of 9/11, and had already included many of the themes that came to form its core. The attacks, he admits, came to serve as a good backdrop to his novel, casting his manuscript a significant historical moment, which helps consolidate the novel’s themes.

The attacks on the Twin Towers constitute a landmark in the history of the twenty-first century. Images broadcast by channels all over the world were so powerful they defied belief. The collapse of the Twin Towers had a special dimension because it was pregnant with symbolism and because it was the first dramatic event shared in real time with disbelief, fascination, horror or joy on all continents and in all countries. After the attacks, Muslims, be them living in Muslim countries or in the diaspora, fared badly, for they came to be wrongly associated with terrorism and all sorts of unfounded stereotypes and myths. The attacks bred suspicion towards

everything Muslim, a phenomenon carefully represented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In the wake of the attacks, Changez begins to be aware of his distinctiveness, of his *Muslimness*, as it were, leading to an identity crisis, which eventually leads to his denunciation of America. Changez, in fact, goes through a period of psychological torment because his sense of his foreignness is heightened.

For her part, Erica is disconcerted by the attacks. Like every other American, she cannot help but be touched by the tragedy:

. . . she had been tense at the start of the evening, careworn and riddled with worry. Like so many others in the city after the attacks, she appeared deeply anxious. Yet her anxieties seemed only indirectly related to the prospect of dying at the hands of terrorists. The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. I did not know if the same was true of me (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 82-83).

The destruction of America's economic symbol marks the beginning of an unexpected change in *(Am)Erica's* relationship with Changez. Repressed thoughts that have allowed such unlikely bedfellows to cultivate a relationship of quasi-intimacy have begun to ooze out of Erica's wounded pride. She naturally begins to sympathise with the families of the victims, trying in so doing to nurse *(Am)Erica's* pride. Changez starts to accompany her to fundraisers and similar events held for the families of the victims, becoming, "in effect, her official escort at the events of New York society" (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 85). Accompanying her to such events

represents his last-ditch attempt to salvage his relationship with *(Am)Erica*, and thus his potentially collapsing American Dream.

The spectacular attacks against New York and Washington are indeed against the heart of American capitalism and against the centre of the American political and military power. Yet, America—Changez believes—has capitalised on the tragedy to use it as a propaganda tool to wage the so-called war on terror. America and its allies reacted swiftly by invading Afghanistan and then Iraq, provoking by so doing mixed reactions in the Muslim world and the rest of the world alike. In the Muslim world, America's megalomaniac military crackdown on what it viewed as radical Islamists was seen by many Muslims as an indirect attack on Islam, a new episode of the crusades. Likewise, many sceptics in the West believed firmly that America and its allies were not chasing terrorists, but were instead after oil reserves.

The destruction of the World Trade Center compounds Erica's troubles in that she becomes more distant: a faint light fading into the horizon. Changez steps in to help her through her ordeal. This time he wants physical intimacy, something of which he has been deprived up till now. The scene that takes place in his flat captures the symbolic significance of their relationship. He is denied entry physically and symbolically:

She did not respond; she did not resist; she merely acceded as I undressed her. At times I would feel her hold onto me, or I would hear from her the faintest of gasps. Mainly she was silent and un-moving, but such was my desire that I overlooked the growing wound this inflicted on my pride and continued. I found it difficult to enter her; it was as though she was not aroused. She said nothing while I was inside her, but I could see her

discomfort, and so I forced myself to stop (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 89-90).

After this sad episode, Changez learns that Erica cannot be with anyone other than Chris. Her identity seems to be entwined with his. He is finally convinced that she has no place for him in her heart, for she and Chris had “an unusual love, with such a degree of commingling of identities that when Chris died, Erica felt she had lost herself” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 91). The impossibility of being with Erica, whose allegorical association with America is inescapable, makes his American Dream impossible to realise.

9/11 displaces Changez from the ranks of the elite in New York. After the attacks, he becomes so self-conscious and fragile to the extent that his work productivity begins to dwindle. His fear of becoming the object of indiscriminate labelling turns into a quasi-neurosis with him. Jim is quick to see through Changez’s inner conflicts; accordingly, he advises him to mend his ways lest he attracts more attention to himself. Nevertheless, Changez has already attracted attention to himself by deciding to grow a beard, a change in appearance that makes Jim think that he is looking shabby. In the hope to get Changez’s productivity back on track, Jim offers him “a new project, valuing a book publisher in Valparasio, Chile” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 137). Changez accepts.

In Chile, Changez continues his series of realisations, especially when he meets Juan-Bautista, who invites him over for lunch. By this time, Changez is going through an intense inner conflict, which has been compounded by looming international strife after 9/11. Juan-Bautista too can see through Changez, thus far still reluctant to intimate to his colleagues that he has been going through a severe identity crisis because of 9/11. Bautista asks Changez a question that alludes to the



predatory nature of Underwood Samson: “Does it trouble you. . .to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 151) Like America, which conducts herself rather haughtily on the international scene, Underwood Samson undertakes a more or less similar mission by deciding the fate of people in different continents. Juan-Bautista likens Changez to a janissary, who slaves himself away for the American empire. The similarities that Bautista makes between Changez and the janissaries make Changez more aware of the conspiratorial support he gives to Underwood Samson and America. The historical allusion is significant because the janissaries were mainly Christian boys kidnapped at a young age by the Ottoman Empire. They were then groomed and taught the craft of war in order to become ferocious warriors and loyal defenders of the empire. Likewise, Changez is groomed at Princeton and taught to put the “fundamentals” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 116) into practice at Underwood Samson. The novel is about Changez’s slide into fundamentalism, “but in a neat reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue here is that of US capitalism” (Sharma) practised by Underwood Samson. The conversation with Bautista signals a turning-point in Changez’s decision to quit his job and go back home despite Jim’s imploration not to take a rash decision he will regret later. Changez feels “torn” because he “had thrown” his “lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the Empire, when all along” he “was predisposed to feel compassion for those like Juan-bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain” (M. Hamid, *The reluctant Fundamentalist* 152). Despite Jim’s persuasions, Changez decides to leave the firm and go back home, more disillusioned than ever, his American Dream splintering in front of his eyes.

Hamid uses an unrequited love story framework to convey the loss that Changez feels after the attacks. He fuses the two love stories, so that the narrative

assumes symbolic dimensions. In his interview with Hamish Hamilton, Hamid makes an interesting comment: “In the case of Changez, his political situation as a Pakistani immigrant fuels his love for Erica, and his abandonment by Erica fuels his political break with America” (Hamilton). Not only has Changez’s political/romantic break with *(Am)Erica* shattered his American Dream, but it has also opened his eyes to its elusiveness:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream. The power of my blinders shocks me, looking back—so stark in retrospect were the portents of coming disaster in the news, on the streets, and in the state of the woman with whom I had become enamored (M. Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 93).

### **3.3. Living a Lie: Disconnected Dreams *in Once in a Promised Land***

Like Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Halaby portrays the loss that Muslim characters feel after the crisis of 9/11 by throwing them into the turmoil of a troubled love story. *Once in a Promised land* is about a Jordanian couple, whose lives are disrupted by the events of 9/11. Salwa, a Palestinian-Jordanian, was born in the United States, but raised in Jordan because her parents could not eke out a proper living in the United States. Although she grows up in Jordan, she often feels an attachment to America, an attachment that stems from a curse that keeps hounding

her. Growing up with Hassan, who is infatuated with her, their relationship is expected to be crowned by marriage. Alas, when Jassim visits Jordan, his native country, to lecture on the importance of water, Salwa succumbs to the rosy prospects of going back to America, her birthplace. She jilts Hassan and marries Jassim to make her American Dream come true. While a seek-don't-find formula applies to Hassan, the seek-find-lose formula structures Jassim's and Salwa's American Dream. Jilted by Salwa, Hassan gradually gets married to another woman after years of wistful nostalgia and self-pity. Much to Hassan's dismay and disappointment, Salwa marries Jassim and secures a life in America. Salwa's and Jassim's tragedy unfolds in the wake of 9/11. The couple's failure at reproduction—owing to Jassim's reluctance—opens a Pandora's box of problems. Salwa induces pregnancy without telling her husband, beginning thus a series of lies that drives them apart. Jassim, for his part, marries Salwa because her American citizenship will allow them to stay in America for as long as they wish. His childless marriage is almost loveless; Therefore, he and his wife are gradually led to have affairs with Penny and Jake respectively. Jassim hits and kills a boy on his way back home from his swimming routine. He becomes a suspect, a conspirator, and is constantly hounded by the FBI. He only tells Salwa about the accident when it is too late, when their world has fallen apart.

Salwa's early fascination with America stems from her yearning to live a life of luxury. As a child, Salwa earns the nickname of "Miss Pajamas" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 3) after her aunt brings her a pair of silk pyjamas from Thailand. Silk is a symbol of luxury and comfort; it makes Salwa feel like a "queen" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 47).

In America, besides her bank job, she starts working as an estate agent, a job that promises a lot of money. She sometimes indulges in massive buying sprees, prompting Jassim to condemn these "extravagant lapses" (Halaby, *Once in a*

promised Land 23). However, her quest for an ideal life in America turns out to be a mere lie because “the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood, and the Malboro man, and therefore impossible to find” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 49).

We learn about Salwa’s childhood in flashbacks. She and Hassan grow up together. Very few people doubt that they will one day part ways, except Hassan, who wakes up to Salwa’s yearning for America the moment he sees how she reacts before and after Jassim has given his lecture. Jassim represents the opportunity for a better life that Salwa has been seeking. It is a matter of days before Jassim and Salwa decide to get married, a marriage whose promising prospects lie in the fact that “Salwa’s American citizenship” will “enable them both to stay” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 70) in America for good. Salwa breaks Hassan’s heart, little knowing that America will eventually break hers, waking her up thus from her trance.

Hassam, who is much attached to home, meant home for Salwa before she was taken away from him. Growing up together, Hassan’s presence and love gave Salwa a sense of stability and purpose. He would have never ventured outside Jordan to study in Romania had Salwa decided to stay. He would have “focused too much energy” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 37) on her. Salwa is displaced twice: first from Palestine to Jordan, then from the latter to United States. In Jordan, she and her family find a safe refuge, and a sense of belonging that is severed physically, but never spiritually, from Palestine. Hassan, for Salwa, symbolises her lost motherland: she “was appreciative of Hassan’s handsome face, sense of humor, and political activism, saw him as a symbol of Palestine” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 240). Hassan on his own part was “smitten with Salwa, who in his eyes was the definition of perfection” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 240). Siham is aware of the sense of

belonging and rootedness, with which Hassan engulfs Salwa. She has always thought that Hassan “grounded” and “reminded” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 240) her of who she is.

Nevertheless, Hassan has to contend with two forces, internal and external, which exert a powerful influence on Salwa. On the one hand, her father constantly reminds her that Hassan has no professional career yet, which makes him incapable of supporting a family. On the other hand, deep down, Salwa is torn between her love for Hassan and the yearning for a better life, perhaps the life that her parents could not secure in America when her father decided to take his family back to Jordan. Salwa likes Hassan, but “Beneath liking and the tiniest part of desire in which liking was wrapped, however, was her greed for a certain kind of life, and when she floated out those fantasies, Hassan was not part of them” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 240). What Salwa is keenly seeking cannot be found with Hassan.

Halaby’s main characters are caught up in triangle of faltering love relationships, spanning almost a decade, and crossing two continents. Hassan for his part grapples with his loss of Salwa to Jassim. When the latter came back to Jordan to lecture on the importance of water, that day Hassan “knew Salwa would leave him” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 37) because Jassim, “a stiff, well-to-do scientist. . .promised her America” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 37). When Salwa realises that Jassim does not want a baby, and when their relationship worsens in the wake of 9/11, she begins to muse about what has gone wrong. she is occasionally gnawed by guilt for not marrying Hassan, for choosing America over Jordan. While Jassim’s and Salwa’s world is turned upside down, Hassan begins to recover from a nine-year reverie, during which he has been chasing his dream: “*Salwa, Salwa, Salwa. My hopes and dreams. My one first love. My perfect beauty. My purest Salwa*” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 328). The moment he decides to call her to tell her about his

marriage, he does not know that Salwa is “lying in an American hospital bed” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 328), her American Dream shattered to pieces. Because he cannot reach her on the phone, he leaves her a message: “Intizar and I have gotten married. . .Salwa I am calling to say goodbye, to tell you that I wish you well. . .I am now going to try to forget you. . .God willing, you will be happy in your life” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 328). Hassan moves on with his life, leaving Salwa and Jassim grappling with their imbalances in America.

By American standards, Salwa and Jassim are highly successful, “a couple of upwardly mobile over-achievers living the American Dream” (Banita 246). Both of them have embraced the American way of life in that “both have succumbed to the seductive lure of American Consumerism” (Motyl 229). However, Salwa’s American Dream is incomplete because her husband, Jassim, does not want to have children. She is eventually tempted to induce pregnancy when she deliberately skips taking her contraceptives. She consequently becomes pregnant, yet, alas, miscarries to her dismay. Afraid of Jassim’s reaction, she only tells him of her miscarriage after their world has started falling apart. Jassim, on the other hand, knocks down a boy on his way back from his swimming pool routine. He becomes the object of growing suspicion because the accident coincides with the deep-seated distrust of Muslims, indiscriminately labelled as terrorists, in the wake of 9/11. He too refrains from telling his wife about the accident until it is too late. Salwa and Jassim become trapped in a vicious circle of lies, especially when they both start having affairs out of wedlock. Their American Dream splinters ultimately, and turns out to be a lie which mirrors the lie they have been living.

Uncertainty characterises Salwa’s life in America because Jassim is loath to have children. Jassim’s and Salwa’s failure to reproduce themselves in a country that has offered them success, however fleeting it may be, foreshadows their downfall

towards the end of the novel. Being a hydrologist of a high calibre, Jassim strives to save rainwater, a priceless commodity, for future generations. "I'm afraid it is true", he says, "water is my first love" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 243). Jassim's fascination with water stems from the fact that it has such a healing and invigorating power: "when you have been sick and you take your first sip of spring water after not eating for a day or two, is there anything tastier?" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 243) Jassim's success at saving a symbol of life and continuity is juxtaposed with his failure at reproduction. He fails to resuscitate, as it were, his faltering relationship with his wife, who desperately wants a baby, an equally powerful symbol of life and regeneration, making his and Salwa's American Dream an unattainable ideal. It is failure at reproduction that causes a series of related problems. Salwa eventually convinces herself that skipping taking her birth-control pills a couple of days will not impregnate her: she "glided back to bed, lighter and more honest now. . .the Lie was deflated. Her emptiness has been filled" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 11). She leads a troubled inward existence because "she had thought of nothing else and had not fought the evolutionary mandate to reproduce, just indulged it while she contoured her Lie" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 11). Ironically, water, Jassim's first love, cleanses Salwa's lie about her miscarriage, but at the same time washes away their not-yet-born baby, their reason—at least Salwa's—to try to salvage their American Dream: "That was another lie to the self, she realized. The distance grew from her Lie, the one that had spilled out from between her legs and been carried away by his precious water" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 190).

Although Salwa's desire to have a baby is too strong, her husband's lack of empathy leads her to frustration. The feeling of being incomplete, of Jassim not being around to induce balance in her life causes her emotional pain. Jassim in fact finds that same balance in his morning ritual, which borders on a religious belief:

Jassim delighted in the stillness the morning offered, a time before emotions were awake, a time for contemplation. This day was no exception as he got up, washed his face, brushed his teeth, and relieved himself, the beginning of a morning ritual as close to prayer as he could allow. His thoughts hovered over the internal elements of self and world rather than the external. Jassim did not believe in God, but he did believe in Balance. At five o'clock, with the day still veiled, Jassim found Balance (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 3).

Part of his morning ritual is to go to the swimming pool. Swimming reinvigorates him, and renews his love for water. Nonetheless, he is too self-centred in that “His thoughts hovered over the internal elements of self and world rather than the external” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 3). Salwa is undoubtedly part of that external world. Jassim fails to find, or rather to sustain, in his marital life the same balance he strives to create inwardly. Salwa, by contrast, believes that a baby will cement their relationship and make it more balanced. Although she has fulfilled her dream of living in America by marrying Jassim, she still feels that her life is empty:

Salwa's Lie covered a glorious underbelly. It was not *I didn't take my birth control pill* but instead a much more colorful *For a few years now I've felt that I've been missing something in my life. That's why I got a real estate license. It wasn't enough, though. I think having a child will fill that void. I am going to try to get pregnant, even though Jassim says he doesn't want a child* (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 10).



Salwa feels a thirst, a desire and an intense need to be recognized, to be gratified, to acquire the only thing that will fill that void. Material possessions and professional success, she eventually learns, provide fleeting gratification.

By a curious paradox, Salwa blames Jassim for what she herself seeks earnestly. Jassim's commitment to his successful career is paralleled by his attachment to his swimming routine, which, once disrupted after the accident, disrupts Jassim's life. After her miscarriage and lie to Jassim, Salwa spends a considerable amount of time brooding over her predicament, and blaming in the process Jassim for not being wholly open to the idea of having children. Nevertheless, she too, like Jassim, is strongly committed to a successful career, chasing lucrative opportunities whenever they present themselves. She immerses herself in work, and widens unconsciously the gulf between her and her husband. Jassim who believes that their relationship will improve after Salwa has become an estate agent is now at a loss as to why things "got worse" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 23). After having secured her license as an estate agent, Salwa, often working on weekends, begins to devote a significant amount of her time to her clients. The result is that she is now "rushed to the point of destruction" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 23). For Jassim, Salwa's business means that "the times they used to share together. . .now find Salwa busy, preoccupied, or gone", and "with the exception of the mornings, Jassim found himself alone quite a bit" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 23).

Salwa's and Jassim's deteriorating relationship, in reality, exposes the two polar facets of their American Dream: a seemingly balanced external reality, and a troubled inward existence. Jassim is a very successful hydrologist; he has secured for himself all the comforts of life: he lives in a beautiful house, drives an expensive car, and most importantly, he is held in high regard by his employer, Marcus, who sees him as an equal, not as a subordinate. When Salwa tells Jassim about the

miscarriage, he starts going out with Penny, “who had done nothing more than to awaken a coiled desire in him” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 158). He wants to be with her because perhaps he is “trying to hurt” Salwa for “lying about the miscarriage” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 158). When he starts going out with Penny, Jassim becomes aware of the luxurious life he can afford, a life that many Americans cannot afford themselves:

When they entered the store, walking closer together than strangers, Jassim realized that in this place he would never have gone to on his own, an establishment with rolled-back prices and rolled-up hope, were all the people from all those neighborhoods. Only here he didn't need to peek in windows, to slow down and try to guess what was going on. Here, at Penny's side, he was welcome and could listen to comments (mostly grouchy, mostly focused on how expensive an item was) and phone conversations (“Hey, babe, I know, I want you too. I've got to pick up some light bulbs and brake fluid now. I'll call you later”) as he watched large bodies bursting out of tight clothes, children stuffed into shopping carts, screamed at, slapped, and loved too loudly. The ways of the poor were new to him, and yes, he assumed that the people shopping in Wal-Mart were poor, all of them. Because why would anyone who could afford not to shop at WalMart come here? (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 276).

Penny ushers Jassim into a world hitherto unknown to him. The passage is significant in that it sheds light on the privileges that Jassim will lose when his American Dream crushes. On the other hand, Salwa leads a seemingly successful life because thus far she works two jobs, which enable her to send money back home to

help her family. Notwithstanding all material success, America will soon become a barren land, with barren dreams.

From the outset, Halaby suggests that 9/11 has thrust Muslims into the limelight. They have become the object of public scrutiny and blind discrimination. Indiscriminate labelling, Halaby alludes, is dangerous because it associates Muslims with acts of terror perpetrated by few radicals who—albeit Muslim—do not represent all Muslims:

Our main characters are Salwa and Jassim. We really come to know them only after the World Trade Center buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs, by Muslims. Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center. Nothing and everything (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* VII).

Apart from some occasional flashbacks, most of the novel is set in the post-9/11 tense atmosphere. After Salwa's miscarriage, Jassim accidentally knocks down a boy, who is skateboarding with his friends. The boy happens to be someone who plays exact-revenge-on-terrorists games with his peers, and who has openly expressed his hatred towards Arabs. By dint of this coincidence, Jassim becomes a suspect followed and harassed by the FBI. After the accident, Jassim begins to see his world falling apart because he "could not, at the moment, fully accept the idea that his lack of balance with Salwa had in some way tipped over and affected another's life. Taken another's life. It was too huge at the moment" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 144). At work, his colleagues begin to regard him with suspicion following the investigation by the FBI agents. Added to his troubles, clients are now loath to deal with him, a reluctance that eventually prompts Marcus to dismiss him, albeit convinced that

Jassim did not knock the boy down on purpose. 9/11 serves as a wake-up call for Jassim, for it awakens him to his and Salwa's false American Dream:

In leaving out what was most on his mind, Jassim realized that they had spent their lives together not saying what mattered most, dancing around the peripheries instead of participating. He had seen in her a passion and excitement for life that had become dulled almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States. What he wanted in her could not exist in America. Could not exist with him, perhaps. And he feared that he could no longer exist in Jordan (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 303).

Indeed, what Salwa wants does not exist with Jassim. Nor does it exist in America. Jassim's lack of empathy and warmth drives Salwa into Jake's arms. Jake, who suffers from serious psychological disorders, toys with Salwa's feelings, giving her the impression that he is really infatuated with her. Once Salwa has fallen into the snares of his pretensions and succumbs to his whims, he talks behind her back, describing her as "an older woman" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 318). When Salwa finally decides to go back to Jordan, she goes to Jake's flat to say goodbye. On her way, she sees three immigrant workers, Mexican she assumes, clipping branches off a tree. The scene close to Jake's flat captures Salwa's attitude towards her and Jassim's American Dream:

saw that all three workers were watching her. Just beyond her irritation, she imagined the miles of desert they must have crossed for the opportunity to trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the

American Dream. "It's all a lie!" she wanted to shout. "A huge lie." A lie her parents believed in enough that they had paved her future with the hope of glass slippers and fancy balls, not understanding that her beginning was not humble enough, nor was her heart pure enough, for her to be the princess in any of these stories. That she did not come from a culture of happy endings. That she would have been much better off munching on fava beans from her ceiling basket. She looked at those dark men looking at her and from a distance she could see their sacrifices, the partial loss of self that they too must have agreed to in coming to America, the signing over of the soul (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 316).

Jake loses his temper when Salwa tells him that she has finally decided to go back to Jordan to let the dust settle. He assaults her and causes her serious injuries, which could have been lethal had it not been for the immigrant workers, who helped her out and called the police on Jake. Meanwhile, Jassim was with Penny when his wife was lying unconscious, bathing in a pool of blood. With Penny, he "refused to think beyond this moment. He did not think he should stop because he might be *leading her on*," just like he has done with Salwa, "letting her believe something would be that would not be" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 325). Jassim wakes up to a harsh reality only to find out that his dream has splintered.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center, Salwa realises that her lie to her husband constitutes a small part of the big lie they have been living. She realises that "wishes don't come true for Arabs in America" (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 184), and most importantly she recognises that it is not "just her Lie that had brought distance between her and her husband and surrounded them with tension, it was the

patriotic breathing of those around them. American flags waving, pale hands willing them to go home or agree” (Halaby, *Once in a Promised Land* 184-185). Jassim loses his job, his faith in his wife, who, in turn, loses her purity to Jake, and is now seriously battered, her attempt to go back to Jordan to sort things out nipped in the bud.

America gives false and illusive promises, a reality captured by Halaby’s book cover. The latter depicts a swimmer, supposedly Jassim, swimming leisurely across azure water, whose clarity is tainted by the shadow of a plane hovering above him. The image on the book cover reflects the significance of the historical moment in which the novel was published in the sense that “it superbly capture[s] the ways in which the events of 9/11, suggested by the shadow of the looming airplane, haunt the lives the Arab characters, whose aspirations and ambitions are reflected through the cool brilliance of the water” (Vinson). The symbolic significance of the image on the book cover is enhanced by the biblical allusions of the novel’s title, which refers to the “Israelites’ exodus out of Egypt and to the promised land,. . . a cue to the novel’s central theme of disillusionment of Arab-Americans in the US (C).

Halaby mingles a faltering marriage with a splintering American Dream to capture the chaotic, confusing reality, in which the Muslim characters find themselves in the wake of 9/11. Nonplussed by the changing political landscape in America, Salwa and Jassim, rather ironically, kill their dreams themselves. Salwa flushes down the toilet her not-yet-born baby, bringing about her eventual downfall. Her miscarriage symbolises “the depletion of Arab-American security and happiness on American soil” (C). By the same token, Jassim accidentally kills a boy and is eventually caught up in an intricate web of false accusations and unfounded stereotypes. Their lies to each other connect their individual tragedies; these lies in

effect mirror the “Big Lie” (Halaby, *Once in a promised Land* 27)—the American Dream—they have been living.

### **3.4. “Everything Decentred and Flattened into Meaninglessness”: Crumbling Family Relationships and Sami’s Identity Crisis**

*The Road from Damascus* is an important post 9/11 novel because it is set in the background of the Second Gulf War of 1991 and the turmoil of 9/11, two international crises, which have complicated the relationship between the Muslim World and the West in general, and United States in particular. The novel is a work in which politics and history intersect to reveal the complexities of the Muslim World. Kassab’s aim, it seems, is to debunk the dominant view in the West that narrows down Islam to a unified belief system, along with stereotypical portrayals that show women as submissive and passive participants in their communities. Mustafa Traifi, Sami’s father, and Al Haj Marwan, Muntaha’s father, are haunted with their past memories from Syria and Iraq respectively, a legacy they bequeath to their children. They were both staunch secularists in their countries, envisioning progress in the pursuit of Western models of government. Mustafa Traifi, a well renowned academic, has written extensively about secularism, calling for a heavy-handed crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Hence, he had no qualms dobbing his wife’s brother in to the Syrian intelligence services, a move that created a rift between him and Nur and a similar rift between his teachings and Sami when the latter finds out what his father did. Mustafa dies in England convinced that religion is the root cause of all evil in Muslim societies. By contrast, Marwan’s exile to England transforms him from a dedicated secularist and political activist to a fervent practicing Muslim. His stay in England helps him dig into his inner self, so he eventually begins to see that secularism is incongruous in Muslim countries. While Sami grows up with his father’s

disdain for religion, Muntaha finds peace in becoming a regular, practicing Muslim. Like Hamid and Halaby, Kassab structures his narrative around Sami's and Muntaha's faltering marriage, but unlike Hamid's and Halaby's characters, Sami and Muntaha are reconciled towards in the end of the novel.

Reconciliation comes after Sami goes through a severe identity crisis that pits the convictions he inherited from his father against Muntaha's newly found faith. Growing up in London, Sami straddles two cultures, with convictions rooted in neither culture. As it is the case with all people living in the diaspora, Sami's identity crisis germinates in early childhood only to surface more prominently in adulthood. History plays an important role in the novel in that it weighs down on Sami as much as it weighed down on his father, who remained faithful to his secularism, even though his party's experimentation with a secularist agenda in Syria proved to be a fiasco. Not only did it turn out to be a failure for Syria, but it also turned to be a catalytic event for the Traifis. Mustafa's secret involvement with the detainment and torture of Nur's brother dealt a sharp blow to the couple's marriage. The rift between Mustafa and his wife widened over the years, leading ultimately to a complete communication breakdown. Although Nur was a declared secularist herself, she begins leading a more religious life, wearing the Hijab, in response to her husband's shady involvement with the Baath Party. After Mustafa's death, Sami severs almost all sorts of contact with his mother, whom he accuses of giving up on his father in trying times such as the latter went through during his illness. When Sami begins to work on his dissertation, he goes back to Syria, back to his roots, looking for inspiration. Muntaha entertains high hopes for Sami's journey back home, for she is partly convinced that making a breakthrough with his research will help heal the rift in their relationship. Unfortunately, Sami comes back burdened with the secret—long hidden from him by his mother—that prompts him to start questioning his father's



legacy that became his (Sami's). Most importantly, Sami's reconciliation with his mother towards the end of the book symbolises his reconciliation with his past, an improvement that parallels his reconciliation with Muntaha.

Sami embodies the conflict between religion and secularism. His conflict, then, is indeed a conflict between the East and the West. This inner conflict is so confusing for Sami: "The mountains crowded and loomed and threatened to shake with the shaking earth and crush him. He was blinded, unable to distinguish between the Straight Path and all the intercrossing goat trails. Or between fathers and Gods. Between reason and religion" (50). The West has always prided itself on having freed itself from the shackles of superstition, which, according to Mustafa, are still chaining Muslims to outmoded beliefs, incompatible with the demands of modern life. Secularism is one of the products of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, which is the cornerstone of Western modernity. The Enlightenment philosophes believed that reason, not religion and superstition, led to human progress. Reason, according to them, could lead Man to discover his surroundings through both rational thinking and the Scientific Method. Therefore, anything that belongs to the realm of the unseen should be consigned to oblivion. Mustafa believes "the Arabs had no need of religion to make them great. He saw the Islamic period as a falling off from previous glory" (64). He wants to give Sami an education along the lines of the enlightened, secularist West:

'What,' asked Mustafa rhetorically, 'has kept us backward for a thousand years? What makes us think we're starting the fifteenth century, according to the moon, and not ending the sunny twentieth? What has subjected us, the fathers of civilization, to thickheaded Turks and Albanian slaves and bloody Frenchmen?' The answer followed with an exasperated

waving of hands. 'All this false consciousness. All this focus on the unseen. All this superstition and bloody otherworldly stuff. It's out of character for us. We should be a people of worldly power. We should be contributing to material culture, as we did before.' (64-65)

The ideology that Mustafa holds and envisions for Sami, however, conflicts with the newly found faith espoused by both Nur and Muntaha.

Nur represents the other polarity in Sami's upbringing. Having herself embarked on a spiritual change, she teaches Sami a different "mythology" (65). She is often than not at loggerheads with her husband, who disparages her superstitious beliefs, which, he believes, cannot produce material progress to parallel Western modernity. Being a brilliant academic, Nur is aware that Mustapha exerts a marked influence on Sami, but she tries to counter this influence when her husband is out. She tells Sami "the adventures of God's messengers. Of Khidr the Green Man. The tales of the Rightly Guided Caliphs" (65). The teachings of his mother stand in stark contrast with those of his father because his mother tells him about the "history of the not-yet-happened. The signs of the end of the world, the day of Standing, the final judgment" (66). Accordingly, Sami grows up with "two narratives" (66), that of his father and that of his mother.

Notwithstanding the two "narratives" with which Sami grows up, he is not swayed by his mother's "superstition" as much as he is by his father's secular outlook. Nur has a cowering attitude towards her husband; "all she had was a copy of the Qur'an, which she hid on the top bookshelf behind other volumes" (66). When her husband dies, she becomes a practicing Muslim, selling halal meat, wearing the Hijab, and praying five times a day.

As a child Sami muses on what could possibly “had brought his parents together” (67). Unlikely bedfellows as they are, they represent the irreconcilable polarities of secularism/religion in Muslim countries. As much distant as these ideologies might be, Nur and Mustafa are gradually distanced from each other because Nur becomes “more religious. At first she’d innocently mixed Islamic language with that of nationalism and modernity, not understanding how they could exclude each other. When she did belatedly understand, she chose Islam. In silence. With immovable determination” (68). Sami’s sense of divided self comes from the competing ideologies within him, a sense that lingers long after his father’s death and his break with his mother thereafter. Following his father’s death, Sami wants a break with his past because “all kinds of trauma nestled in that event, all kinds of scar tissue” (105). Nonetheless, Sami marries Muntaha little knowing that the same warring ideologies that distanced his parents will threaten his marriage in much the same way.

Sami’s relationship with Muntaha begins to deteriorate after some happy few years of marriage. Mustapha’s towering quasi-presence and intimidating voice keep haunting Sami, especially because he wants to have a career as successful as that of his father:

In truth, Sami was an academic only because his father had been. Professor Mustafa Traifi, renowned (to an unheard-of coterie) author of *The Secular Arab Consciousness*, the great formulator and compartmentalist of Sami’s youth. Sami following a map that had been drawn for him years before, but not arriving anywhere, floundering in libraries and lecture halls, failing to produce a doctoral thesis. Making him, in his own eyes, not much of a man –unsettled, out of place, unexplained. And he

had the feeling that there was a core of truth and direction nearly visible yet decisively hidden, frustratingly, something only noticed in its absence, a purpose for him, somewhere out of reach. And he thought it was his failing, his lack of clear sight, that stopped him from grasping it. He began to despise himself, and his behaviour degenerated. (46-47)

Sami has been imprisoned by his father's ideology, so he unconsciously begins to live his father's dream. When his father was alive, Sami had a sense of direction, "a map" (47) drawn for him, but with his father's death, he is left stranded in ideological uncertainty. The gateway to emulate his father's success, completing a PhD, is suddenly shut, following several fruitless attempts to come up with a topic with which he can identify.

His quest for a topic for his thesis parallels his quest for his identity. After all, he goes back to Damascus in search of inspiration for his topic, but comes back disappointed. In fact, "his doctorate made him as emotionally overworked as the worried and fretted spines of his academic books. A high frequency of Re and Post among the titles: Re-presenting, Re-interpreting, Rethinking, and Post-colonialism, Post-modernism, Post-structuralism" (44). His later attempts are also met with reservations on the part of his supervisor, who eventually advises Sami to try something else other than chasing a doctorate degree. Sami's failure to pursue his doctoral studies symbolises his failure to follow in his father's footsteps, a failure that leads to his gradual break with his father's ideology, which is oppressively hovering over him. His professional failure begins to affect his personal life. He takes out on his wife his intellectual infertility, as it were, casting a shadow over their marriage.

While Sami is thoroughly engrossed with his thesis, Muntaha, who works as a teacher, provides for them both, something that makes Sami unfit for responsibility in the eyes of his father-in-law. Marwan resents his son-in-law for several reasons, including the absence of a clear vision for him (Sami) and Muntaha: “And what was this boy who refused to work? Who’d pranced around the university for over a decade, and probably would forever after. . .Who was always too young to have children, to take responsibility. . .He was a boy, a mere boy” (136). Sami is aware of his deepening financial troubles that stem from chasing a professional ambition that does not seem to be fruitful. In “an iconoclastic he hurled Qabbani books at his study wall” (115), and “limped around the university campus like a wounded animal” (48). His realisation that he “lived off his wife’s labour” (49) angers him. Marwan abhors Sami’s pretentious behaviour and is aware of his identity crisis. He often thinks to himself that he allowed his daughter to marry “this failed Syrian, this fake Englishman, neither fish nor fowl” (137). To counter the chaotic situation in which he finds himself, Sami smokes spliff and launches into diatribes against his much-hated belief system: religion.

Sami’s attitude towards religion parallels that of his father, so when his wife decides to suddenly become religious, his identity crisis deepens. Muntaha decides to wear the Hijab, and is gradually becoming a practicing Muslim. Sami argues with her over and over again but fails to dissuade her. Interestingly, Muntaha decides to wear the Hijab in 2001, the same year that witnesses the attacks on the World Trade Center. Muntaha’s decision, then, coincides with the anti-Islam rhetoric emanating from the West. Much of this rhetoric centres on the status of women in Islam, and one of the symbols of oppression that becomes wrongly ingrained in the Western mind is the Hijab. It comes as no surprise then that Sami, a pronounced secularist, opposes staunchly his wife’s decision. Sami is in fact aware that Muntaha wears the Hijab to

assert her identity. After all, “his directions turned out to be dead ends” (111), so “he resented Muntaha finding her own” (111). The Hijab becomes a divisive issue, “the catalyst” (111), yet Muntaha cannot “understand what it represented for him” (111).

As much as his father disparaged his mother’s sudden turn to religion, Sami taunts Muntaha because she, like Nur, has turned to the unseen, to the spiritual to find solace. Solace for Mustapha can be found in secular literature: “Qabbani versus Qur’an” (69). Sami grows up with this confusing dialectic, which constitutes “opposing camps” (70) of his childhood. He gradually becomes a staunch secularist by dint of his father’s influence. Therefore, the people in his life come to be categorised in the light of the “opposing camps” of his childhood. He and his father join the camp of Qabbani, of secularism, while his mother and Muntaha join the camp of the Qur’an, of religion. The mutual mistrust between the two camps is prompted by misunderstanding and intolerance. Sami, for instance, narrows down his wife’s decision to stereotypical signs and symbols: “What were they symbols of? What did it all mean? Where would he fit Muntaha into this? And what did it mean for him, being the husband of such a sign? What was he now? What was he a symbol of?” (122). He fails to fathom out the significance of Muntaha wearing the Hijab, and resorts instead to conceptualising her move in the light of a Western mode of thinking, which views the Hijab as a symbol of oppression and marginalisation.

Sami’s fragmented self, which traces back to childhood influences, becomes a more serious crisis when an imminent clash with Muntaha looms on the horizon. Out of utter confusion, Sami asks his wife: “Mooney, I thought we stood for something else” (130), to which she replies rather innocently: “We don’t stand for anything, Sami. Don’t be silly” (130). Finally, not only is Sami’s identity crisis caused by his parents’ faltering relationship—exacerbated by the two opposing camps in his childhood— but it is also deepened by his crumbling marriage, by the sudden

disruption, which Muntaha has caused, heightening by so doing hostilities between the old “opposing camps” in Sami’s life:

Poor Sami felt very sick. Such guilt couldn’t be swallowed immediately, not in his nauseated state. So mistaking Muntaha for himself, he tried to blame her, reasoning that it must have been her fault, at least in part. Oh they’d had love all right, and no major crisis until latterly, until the religion thing. Her failing. Changing on him after all these years, wrapping herself up in a scarf, saying prayers, mumbling mumbo-jumbo. She was supposed to be a support. What he wanted was for her to see things as he saw them. A natural enough desire. Not much to ask. Only that his wife would continue in their secularist consensus, and not disrupt their life plan. But she was all set on disruption. (203-204)

### **3.5. Conclusion**

Kassab, Hamid, and Halaby structured the plots of their novels around faltering personal relationships to simultaneously depict the crumbling of their Muslim characters’ world after the tragedy of 9/11.

In *The Road from Damascus*, Kassab weaves his narrative around the heated debate with regard to the compatibility of religion in the age of globalisation and the claims of secularism being a better replacement. The clash between secularism and religious faith takes place against the background of faltering family relationships, which appear to be irredeemable.

In Hamid's and Halaby's novels, the eventual break that the main characters have with their loved ones happens in tandem with their break with America to signal the collapse of their American Dream. A seek-find-lose *langue* structures their personal as well as their political relationships. After 9/11, Changez's break with Erica and his abandonment of Underwood Samson signals his break with America and the end of his American Dream. By the same token, Salwa's and Jassim's personal problems are compounded by the changing politics of America in the wake of 9/11. The lies they tell each other expose the "Big Lie" they have been living. When their marriage crumbles, their American Dream comes to a dismal end. Jake assaults Salwa, and leaves her soaked in blood, nursing her injuries, physical and moral, unable to escape her American nightmare to Jordan. Jassim, still under investigation, loses his job and his friends, and is only left with the sad spectacle of a bloodied Salwa. Hamid and Halaby structure their plots around a seek-find-lose formula to emphasise the powerful appeal, the fleeting gratification, and more importantly the sheer elusiveness of their characters' American Dream.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Ambivalence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Once in a Promised Land*, and *The Road from Damascus***

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter is an attempt to read *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Once in a Promised Land*, and *The Road from Damascus* in light of the postcolonial concept of ambivalence. The aim is to show how Hamid's, Halaby's, and Kassab's characters are products of the diverse influences that emanate from their native culture as well as from the host culture. As much as the characters feel attracted to the host culture, they also feel repulsed by it, and thus they try to find solace in their roots, their native culture. According to Homi Bhabha, ambivalence is "fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject." (Bill Ashcroft 13). Ambivalence, therefore, poses a threat to colonial dominance by producing "a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse." (13). Changez's strong attraction to Erica and America wanes at last when he loses Erica and leaves America. Salwa leaves Jordan and jilts Hassan only to find out that the promised land—America—she has been dreaming about is nothing more than a "ghula" waiting to feast upon her dreams. Sami grows up with the legacy of his father, who believes that Arabs can only progress if they follow in the footsteps of Western modernity, which prides itself on its secularism. Yet, the values his father defends clash with those of his mother and later those of his wife, who both believe that a return to the teachings of Islam is the solution.

#### **4.2. Lahore Meets New York: "I am a Lover of America"**

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez travels from Lahore to New York, then from the latter to the former when he decides to abandon (*Am*)Erica. Lahore is a typical traditional Eastern centre, while New York is the epitome of Western cosmopolitan progress. Changez's to-ing and fro-ing between the two cities gives him a chance to straddle two distinct ideologies. Having sampled first-hand both cultures,

he therefore becomes the embodiment of the values that they both offer, however contradictory they may be. Owing to a marked decline of his family's social and economic status, Changez delights in the prospects that a university education in America promises to offer. For him, education abroad is an opportunity to meet new people and immerse himself in a culture that represents almost everything the West stands for. Changez's American dream operates on two levels: on the one hand, he is lured by a country that epitomises ample opportunity based on ideals of equality as well as equity; on the other hand, he meets the woman whom he believes can make his experience more meaningful and worthwhile. However, Changez's to-ing and fro-ing between Lahore and New York reveals to him facts to which he has been hitherto oblivious. He ultimately breaks with the country and the woman he loves, and returns to his native country. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center, he has divided loyalties because he is drawn to the limelight due to a rise in Islamophobia, and most importantly because he becomes conscious of his background, and indeed his difference. In the opening scene of the novel, Changez reassures his American interlocutor that he is "a lover of America" (1) (This of course happens after his abandonment of the same object of his love. His declaration then contradicts the course of action he decides to take when *(Am)Erica* rejects him. His ambivalence, to borrow from post-colonial parlance, rests on a fascination with the same country he condemns.

Here, it is argued that the text's most pervasive and overt ideological project is the condemnation of America, and indeed the West, a condemnation that stems from how America conducted itself megalomaniacally in the post 9/11 era. This ideological project is nonetheless unstable because it is deconstructed by the text's ambivalence towards the main binary opposition on which it rests: East's economic powerlessness/

West's economic power. This ambivalence finds its powerful expression in the characterisation of Changez.

Very few people, perhaps none, would have imagined the attacks on the World Trade Center. Images broadcast by channels all over the world were so powerful they defied belief. The collapse of the Twin Towers had a special dimension because it was pregnant with symbolism and because it was the first dramatic event, shared in real time with disbelief, fascination, horror or joy on all continents and in all countries.

The spectacular attacks against New York and Washington are indeed against the heart of capitalism and the centre of the political and military power of the United States. The latter has capitalised on the tragedy to use it as a propaganda tool to wage the so-called war on terror. America and its allies reacted swiftly by invading Afghanistan and then Iraq, provoking by so doing mixed reactions in the Muslim world and the rest of the world alike. In the Muslim world, America's megalomaniac military crackdown on what it viewed as radical Islamists was held by many Muslims to be an indirect attack on Islam, a new episode of the crusades. Likewise, many sceptics in the West believed firmly that America and its allies were not chasing terrorists, but were instead after oil reserves.

After the attacks, and following America's tightening of security measures, Changez decides to quit his job at the very prestigious Underwood Samson. The following passage captures his disappointment and dissatisfaction with how things have turned out to be for him:

Although the atmosphere that surrounded me on my flight from Santiago to New York was precisely the opposite—the cabin was bright and close to full—my thoughts belonged to a setting like that which you and I occupy at this moment. Yes, my musings

were bleak indeed. I reflected that 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 mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. 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. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision. (156)

Changez uses a dry diction to reflect his state of mind when he decides to quit Underwood Samson. He informs his American interlocutor that his thoughts belonged to “a setting like that which” they “occupy at this moment”. The current setting is pregnant with the “aroma of dust on the warm breeze” (156), heralding the “the smell of the desert to the south” (156). In America, this smell, Changez goes on, “would in all likelihood foreshadow the passage through this dimly lit stage of a desolate ball of tumbleweed” (156). These images evoke the aridness to which Changez's experience in America has come. Words like “aroma” and “dust” are unlikely bedfellows but are combined to capture Changez's failed project in America. His initially sweet American Dream lies buried in the dust and rubble of the World Trade Centre, and just like “a desolate tumbleweed” his dreams are wafted away by the breeze of change.

The passage also shows that Changez is now more than ever dissatisfied with America's colonialist agenda that has seen her establish herself as the official

watchdog on world politics. He is well aware that America's likely involvement in Muslim countries after the attacks is not without precedent. After all, its history attests to her harbouring a colonialist agenda nourished and nurtured by economic greed. Ironically, by working for Underwood Samson, Changez finds himself satisfying this greed, little realising so until recently. Hence, his decision to quit Underwood Samson is an attempt to hurt America's political economy, the backbone of its imperial machine. Nevertheless, the above passage misspeaks, showing that Changez's condemnation of America and Underwood Samson is juxtaposed with his fascination with the luxury offered by them. In fact, he points out to his interlocutor that the atmosphere in the cabin was "bright", an adjective that connotes, among other things, that which is shiny, or that which augurs happy prospects. In other words, "bright" stands in stark contrast to "bleak", which connotes that which augurs uncertain prospects. The binary bright/bleak reveals Changez's ambivalent feelings towards America and Underwood Samson.

Changez's acceptance by Princeton University is a monumental achievement in that it "is a dream come true" (3). Princeton fills Changez with hope and makes him feel that it will change his life forever. Everything is to his liking from "the beautiful campus. . . professors who are titans in their fields" (3) to students who are "philosopher-kings in the making" (3). With his family status at a low ebb, Princeton gives Changez the opportunity to be part of the select elite again. This opportunity materialises when he is hired by Underwood Samson, which is Changez's gateway to cement his newfound rise on the social ladder. He muses with marked acrimony and disparagement over his family's waning prestige and influence in his native country. Underwood Samson then opens up for him doors that are otherwise shutting in his face in Lahore:

But status, as in any traditional, class-conscious society, declines more slowly than wealth. So we retain our Punjab Club membership. We continue to be invited to the functions and weddings and parties of the city's elite. And we look with a mixture of disdain and envy upon the rising class of entrepreneurs—owners of businesses legal and illegal—who power through the streets in their BMW SUVs. (10)

The rising class thwarts Changez's aspirations to be part of the ruling elite in Lahore. Likewise, 9/11 thwarts his attempts to enter the ranks of the elite in New York. He becomes self-conscious after the attacks on the World Trade Center, showing symptoms of dwindling work productivity. His fear of becoming the object of indiscriminate labelling turns into a quasi-neurosis with him. Jim is quick to see through Changez's inner conflicts; accordingly, he advises him to mend his ways lest he attracts more attention to himself. Changez has already attracted attention to himself by deciding to grow a beard, a sign that makes Jim think that he is "looking kind of shabby" (48). In the hope to get Changez's productivity back on track, Jim offers him "a new project, valuing a book publisher in Valparasio, Chile" (95). Changez accepts.

Flying to Chile, Changez is no longer entertained by the "relative comfort of first class" (140) because his thoughts are "caught up in the affairs of continents other than the one" (140) below him. Apart from 9/11, other geopolitical concerns start to occupy Changez's mind. Rising hostilities between India and Pakistan threaten to unsettle peace in the region. His attitude towards the conflict is interesting:

I wondered, sir, about your country's role in all this: surely, with American bases already established in Pakistan for the conduct

of the Afghanistan campaign, all America would have to do would be to inform India that an attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally and would be responded to by the overwhelming force of America's military. Yet your country was signally failing to do this. (143)

The passage above shows once again Changez's ambivalence towards America. On the one hand, with its constant interference in world affairs, he resents "the manner in which America conducted itself in the world" (156); on the other hand, he hopes that America will play its role as the watchdog on global politics and security to prevent India from invading Pakistan.

In Chile, Changez continues his series of realisations, especially when he meets Juan-Bautista, who invites him over for lunch. By this time, Changez is going through an intense inner conflict, which has been compounded by looming international conflicts after 9/11. Juan-Bautista too can see through Changez, who is thus far still reluctant to intimate to his colleagues that he has been going through a severe identity crisis because of 9/11. Bautista asks Changez a question that implies the predatory nature of Underwood Samson: "Does it trouble you. . .to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?" (151). Like America, which conducts herself rather haughtily on the international scene, Underwood Samson performs a more or less similar mission by deciding the fate of people in different continents. The rest of the exchange between them illuminates the predatory role that Bautista thinks Changez performs for Underwood Samson:

"We just value," I replied. "We do not decide whether to buy or to sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it." He nodded; he lit a cigarette and took a sip from his glass of



wine. Then he asked, “Have you heard of the janissaries?” “No,” I said. “They were Christian boys,” he explained, “captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to.” (151)

The similarities that Bautista makes between Changez and the janissaries make Changez more aware of the auxiliary help and support he gives to Underwood Samson and America. The historical allusion is significant because the janissaries were mainly Christian boys kidnapped at a young age by the Ottoman Empire. They were then groomed and taught the craft of war to become ferocious warriors and loyal defenders of the empire. Likewise, Changez is groomed at Princeton and taught to put “the fundamentals” (98) into practice at Underwood Samson. The conversation with Bautista signals a turning-point in Changez’s decision to quit his job and go back home despite Jim’s imploration not to take a rash decision, which he will regret. The inner conflict that Changez experiences is so intense that he feels “torn” because he “had thrown” his “lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the Empire, when all along” he “was predisposed to feel compassion for those like Juan-bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain” (152). However, the text misspeaks on several occasions to contradict Changez’s desire to curb Underwood Samson’s capitalist greed.

Even when he is contemplating the possibility of quitting Underwood Samson, Changez is worried about his family’s financial situation, and hence keeps sending money back home, with little regard as to how his decision may affect his family. After 9/11, Changez begins to condemn the firm and the country that made possible a life of luxury, which was well-nigh impossible in Pakistan owing to his family’s

diminishing glory. When Jim offers him the job at Underwood Samson, Changez for a moment thinks that the firm has the “potential to transform my life as surely as it had transformed his [Jim’s], making my concerns about money and status things of the distant past” (14). As much as he condemns America’s and Underwood Samson’s greed, he wants to partake in the luxuries that they make available. Integrating into the fancy world of Princeton can only be achieved on a firm financial footing. The job at Underwood Samson can surely help him mimic, as it were, the social life of his classmates. After all, “the ease with which they parted with money” annoys Changez because of his “finite and depleting reserve of cash”. Working for Underwood Samson means power. Changez asserts that he

felt empowered, and besides, all manner of new possibilities were opening up to [him]. . .at the age of twenty-two, this experience was a revelation. . .[he] could, if [he] desired, take [his] colleagues out for an after work drink. . .and with impunity spend in an hour more than [his] father earned in a day. (37)

The above passage shows clearly Changez’s ambivalence towards America and Underwood Samson, and illuminates how the text deconstructs itself. Changez ends up doing the very same thing for which he condemns his classmates. He too indulges himself in miscalculated spending bouts once he has had secured the wherewithal to do so. In other words, he is as much fascinated by the power of money as his classmates at Princeton. Out with Wainright at the Pak-Punjab Deli, Changez basks in the prestige derived from the financial benefits, which his job at Underwood Samson makes possible. In a brotherly celebratory gesture, the man behind the counter at the restaurant had previously given Changez a free meal when he got the job. Changez takes great pride in his improved financial situation, “**unsh**eathing [his] credit card and leaning forward—both conspiratorially and drunkenly—to add” (39)

that he has “an expense account” (39). The man reacts to Changez’s slightly condescending act by saying that he only accepts cash, much to “the amusement of the exhausted cabdrivers present”.

After the 9/11 attacks, Changez turns on Underwood Samson, as it were, as an act of defiance. Thanks to his exchange with Juan-Bautista, he has an epiphany: it dawns on him that he is himself “a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence” (157) of his employer. However full Changez’s realisation seems, it equally seems shaken by his torn self. He becomes “an incoherent and emotional madman, flying off into rages and sinking into depressions” (167). His East/West loyalties are at war and his ambivalence towards America and Underwood Samson reaches its peak.

Changez’s ambivalence towards America is heightened when he travels to Manila. Being an Eastern cosmopolitan centre, Manila fascinates Changez because it seems that the city has been able to keep pace with the rapid changes taking place globally, something that Lahore has failed to do. Now, Changez begins to assess his experience through Eastern eyes, as it were, discovering in the process that Lahore is still lagging behind. He is mesmerised by Manila’s development because it is cast in the Western conception of modernity. It is a place of “skyscrapers and superhighways” (64). For Changez then, “Manila’s glittering skyline and walled enclaves for the ultra-rich were unlike anything” (64) he had come across in his native country. The comparison becomes so irksome to the extent that Changez begins to mimic his American colleagues:

Perhaps it was for this reason that I did something in Manila I had never done before: I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American. The Filipinos

we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business—and I wanted my share of that respect as well. (65)

The different treatment that Changez and his American colleagues receive in Manila pushes Changez to mimic both in speech and action a superior model that commands respect for the mere reason that it emanates from a mighty imperial country. Although Changez is aware of his double-consciousness, double standard approach as it were, he too wants to pass off as a member of “the officer class of global business” (65), of which he is and he is not part because of his ‘Pakistaniness’. Changez’s mimicry gives him access to that same power that his American colleagues have, so he resorts to issuing orders to executives his “father’s age”, to cutting “to the front lines with an extraterritorial smile” (65) and to saying that he is from New York when asked about where he comes from. The result is that Changez feels “enormously powerful” because he feels that he and his team are “shaping the future” (65), deciding whether workers will be fired, or whether the products they are evaluating will be made elsewhere. Nevertheless, Changez’s mimicry does not come without a cost. Once stuck in traffic with his colleagues in a limousine in Manila, he is aggressed with the piercing glower of the driver of a jeepney, an incident that leaves him perplexed as to the driver’s motive, only to initially deduce that the driver is envious of “the privileges implied” by Changez’s suit. But Changez’s discomfort lingers:

I remained preoccupied with this matter far longer than I should have, pursuing several possibilities that all assumed—as their unconscious starting point—that he and I shared a sort of Third World sensibility. Then one of my colleagues asked me a question, and when I turned to answer him, something rather

strange took place. 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. (67)

The incident serves as a wakeup call for Changez, for he hitherto believes that he can hide his true self and that he is immune to rude awakenings such as this one. In effect, he initially derives his fleeting sense of self-confidence from having acquired the status of being Jim’s protégé. He feels that Jim has taken him “under his wing” (71), indulging him in his mentoring advice, and leaving him labouring under the illusion that his “Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by [his] suit, by [his] expense account, and—most of all—by [his] companions” (71).

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* condemns the conduct of America after 9/11, but the text deconstructs itself, undermining this ideological project, revealing at the same time Changez’s mixed feelings towards America and its economic imperial machine symbolised by Underwood Samson. Although Changez decides ultimately to leave America, the first scene with his American interlocutor in Lahore speaks volumes to insinuate that he is after all still “a lover of America”.

### **4.3. Once in a Cursed Land: Attraction and Repulsion in *Once in a Promised Land***

#### **4.3.1. Hassan or Jassim, Home or America? Salwa’s Ambivalent Affiliations**

As seen in chapter three, Salwa and Jassim cannot force their American Dream “to fit into an American tale” (159). After all, there may be no such thing as an American tale. Tales by nature blend fancy and reality, and sometimes blur the lines between the two. Salwa and Jassim are lured to America because they too want to weave their personal tale into the fabric of tales concocted in a promised land that is America. However, America gives false and illusive promises, a reality captured by Halaby’s book cover. The latter depicts a swimmer, supposedly Jassim, swimming leisurely across azure water, whose clarity is tainted by the shadow of a plane hovering above him. The image on the book cover reflects the significance of the historical moment in which the novel was published in the sense that “it superbly capture[s] the ways in which the events of 9/11, suggested by the shadow of the looming airplane, haunt the lives the Arab characters, whose aspirations and ambitions are reflected through the cool brilliance of the water” (Vinson).

Jassim’s love for water takes him to the United States to further his education. Armed with sheer willpower to make the world a better place through improving its water policies, he comes back home brimming with enthusiasm and energy, ready to put into practice what he has learnt in America. Nevertheless, the reception he gets in Jordan does not amount to his expectations, so he decides to go back to America on the pretext of doing a PhD. When he comes back to Jordan again to lecture about the importance of water, he meets Salwa, who instantly takes an interest in him maybe because he works and lives in America, her place of birth, which still exercises a gravitational pull on her.

Salwa and Hassan grow up together. Very few people doubt that Hassan and Salwa will one day part ways, except Hassan, who wakes up to Salwa’s yearning for America the moment he sees how she reacts before and after Jassim has given his lecture. It is a matter of days before Jassim and Salwa decide to get married, a

marriage whose promising prospects lie in the fact that “Salwa’s American citizenship” (70) will “enable them both to stay” (70). Salwa breaks Hassan’s heart, little knowing that America will eventually break hers, waking her up thus from her trance. Like Changez, Salwa has mixed feelings towards America, an ambivalence that is heightened by the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Hassam, who is much attached to home, meant home for Salwa before she was snatched away by Jassim. Growing up together, Hassan’s presence and love gave Salwa a sense of stability and a sense of purpose. He would have never ventured outside Jordan to study in Romania had Salwa decided to stay. He would have “focussed too much energy” (37) on her. Salwa is displaced twice: first from Palestine to Jordan, then from the latter to United States. In Jordan, she and her family find a safe refuge, and a sense of belonging that is severed physically, but never spiritually, from Palestine. Hassan, for Salwa, symbolises her lost motherland: “she was appreciative of Hassan’s handsome face, sense of humor, and political activism, saw him as a symbol of Palestine” (240). Hassan on his own part was “smitten with Salwa, who in his eyes was the definition of perfection” (240). Siham is aware of the sense of belonging and rootedness, with which Hassan invests Salwa. She has always thought that Hassan “grounded” and “reminded” (240) Salwa of who she is.

Division comes from within her and from her family. Her father constantly reminds her that Hassan has no professional career yet, which makes him incapable of supporting a family. Deep down, Salwa is torn between her love for Hassan and the yearning for a better life, perhaps the life that her parents could not secure in America when her father decided to come back to Jordan. Salwa likes Hassan, but “Beneath liking and the tiniest part of desire in which liking was wrapped, however, was her greed for a certain kind of life, and when she floated out those fantasies,

Hassan was not part of them” (240). Her greed is the result of a curse, which has been hounding her since the day she was born:

What Jassim didn't know and what Salwa hadn't fully realized yet was that in breathing her first breath on American soil, she had been cursed. Because while place of birth does not alter genetic material, it does stitch itself under the skin and stay attached by virtue of invisible threads, so that if a person leaves that place for somewhere else (whether because she's been kicked out and forcibly sent away or because she is simply returning to the home of her parents), there is always an uncomfortable tugging as the silken (in her case) threads are pulled taut. (49)

Salwa shows the same symptoms from which displaced or dislocated people suffer. She comes under the spell of a hidden force that distorts her sense of belonging. Her divided self results from the gravitational force emanating from the centre, provoking an intense inner conflict, a lasting angst that gives rise to ambivalent feelings towards both the centre (America) and the margin (Palestine/Jordan). Whether a deliberate act or a matter of choice, whether physical or psychological, dislocation produces individuals who are involved in an endless process of attraction to and repulsion by the centre/margin.

Shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center, Jassim knocks down a boy, an accident that throws him into a chain of unfounded accusations, which lead him to lose his job. Change is looming large, and life for Muslims in America is becoming difficult due to the anti-Muslim rhetoric diffused by official and unofficial sources alike. Indiscriminate labelling becomes rampant, but Jassim initially believes



that the terrorist act perpetrated by a handful of extremists will not affect the Arabs living in America. The seriousness of the situation notwithstanding, Jassim is slow to wake up to the change taking place around him. When he does wake up, he has lost almost everything. By contrast, Salwa realises the seriousness of the situation the moment she hears of the attacks. Indiscriminate retaliatory attacks on Muslims begin to take their toll her psychological state already deteriorating because of her miscarriage and her lie to Jassim about it. As a last resort, going back home for Salwa becomes a daunting challenge because

. . . if the person returns to her place of birth, especially after a great deal of time has elapsed, quite often the threads have knotted or tangled somewhere between here and there, there and here, causing the person countless awkward moments. Sometimes the knot of crossed threads becomes so thick that it creates a painful and constant yanking no matter where the person finds herself. At that point the best thing to do may be to snip off the threads completely, but that is a last resort, as it is painful and traumatic. (49)

Salwa's early fascination with America stems from her yearning to live a life of luxury. In America, besides her bank job, she starts working as an estate agent, a job that promises a lot of money. She sometimes indulges in massive buying sprees, prompting Jassim to condemn these "extravagant lapses" (23). As a child, Salwa earns the nickname of "Miss Pajamas" (3) after her aunt brings her a pair of silk pyjamas from Thailand. Silk is a symbol of luxury and comfort; it makes Salwa feel like a "queen". However, her quest for an ideal life in America turns out to be a mere lie because "the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth, it was

the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood, and the Malboro man, and therefore impossible to find” (49).

Salwa embodies a strange paradox that brings about the collapse of her relationship with Jassim. Their relationship crumbles because they both fail to maintain balance in their lives. Salwa envisages this balance in the conception of a baby, while Jassim conceives of balance as having a successful career, which he secures over the years. His attachment to this successful career is paralleled by his attachment to his swimming routine, which, once disrupted after the accident, disrupts Jassim’s life. After her miscarriage and lie to Jassim, Salwa spends a considerable amount of time brooding over her predicament, and blaming in the process Jassim for not being wholly open to the idea of having children. Nevertheless, she too, like Jassim, is attached to a successful career, chasing lucrative opportunities whenever they present themselves. Pursuing a career as an estate agent embodies such opportunities. She immerses herself in work, and widens unconsciously the gulf between her and her husband. Jassim who believed that their relationship would improve after Salwa had become an estate agent is now at a loss as to why things “got worse”. After having secured her license as an estate agent, Salwa begins to devote a significant amount of her time to her clients, often working on weekends. The result is that she is now “rushed to the point of distraction” (23). For Jassim, Salwa’s business means that “the times they used to share together. . .now find Salwa busy, preoccupied, or gone”, and “with the exception of the mornings, Jassim found himself alone quite a bit” (23).

#### **4.3.2. A Tale within a Tale: Salwa and the “Ghula” Gnawing Within**

Halaby weaves Salwa’s ambivalent relationship with America into the framework of a tale imported from the Arabic folklore. The significance of such an

allusion lies in the fact that the demonic figure of “El ghoul”, now part of the English lexicon, is believed to be associated with both enchantment and manipulation. The ghoul is taken to be an ugly female figure, who can transform herself into a beautiful woman that enchants and leads astray whomever falls prey to her manipulations. Stories about ghouls were common among Arabs because by dint of their living in the desert they often entertained themselves with various such stories, which, albeit slightly different from one region to another, reflect a similar pattern. There is no consensus as to the exact meaning of the word “ghoul”, but the multitude of suggestions available associate the word with attraction, manipulation, and sometimes murder. Some scholars have pointed out that the word derives from the Arabic verb “ghal” or “ighal”, which both mean to kill. “Ghoul” stems from these words precisely because these demonic figures are thought to lead astray their preys, often men, to secluded places before killing them (Al-Rawi 292). The “ghula” figure in Halaby’s story is then an allegory for America. Understood in this way, the characteristics of the mythical figure are then made to fit the way America attracts and, leads astray, and then repulses its admirers. Like the ghoul, whose true intentions are at first unknown to her victims, America’s true face is not revealed to her victims until they have been lured to her snares.

Halaby draws on a famous Palestinian folktale whose events and characters highlight the plight of Salwa and Jassim. The tale is pregnant with symbolism, and adds a flavour of traditional Arab storytelling to the novel. It typically begins with the famous opening line of “*Kan ya ma kan fee qadeem az-zamaan*” (93), which characterises the openings of many Arabic folktales, and conjures up indelible images of grandmothers entertaining their grandchildren with fantastic yet didactic stories.

Halaby chooses to tell the story of Nus Nus Nsays after most of Jassim’s and Salwa’s drama has unfolded, especially when the reader begins to feel that Salwa is

no longer capable of living in America. The story is about a woman who desperately wants to get pregnant and is willing thus to pursue any means available to do so. Her much-awaited opportunity finally presents itself when a merchant comes to her village selling pregnancy apples. She rushes out of the house and buys one, but in her frenzied state of mind she puts the apple on the counter and goes out to resume her daily chores. Unaware of the magical effect of the apple, her husband, on his arrival, eats half of it and leaves her the other half. She eats the remaining half and she eventually gives birth to a tiny child she names Nus Nsays, "*half of a halving*" (93). Everything about Nus Nsays is small except his determination and sense of adventure.

One day, Nus Nsays learns that the neighbours have bought a horse for their son so that he can go hunting. When Nus Nsays expresses his desire to go hunting too, the neighbour's son mocks him, telling him that he cannot go hunting for someone his size. The disdain with which he is met strengthens Nus Nsays' resolve rather than weakens it. He goes back home and implores his mother to buy him a horse so that he can go hunting too. He gets a black goat instead.

As the two children prepare for their hunting trip, the townspeople gather to mock Nus Nsays and to advise him derisively to guard against the mischievous contrivances of the ghula. Their ignoble slight notwithstanding, he sets out to rival the neighbour's son in a hunting spree.

Out of the sight of the townspeople, Nus Nsays urges his goat to "fly like an eagle" (94). When they reach the fields, the two boys chase gazelles, a chase that attests to the failure of the neighbour's son, and sees Nus Nsays round up three gazelles, which he takes back to the village and puts on the neighbour's son's horse. Although he was met with further derisory queries on his arrival at the village, this

altruistic act spares Nus Nsays the trouble of the townspeople getting to know his secret. During their second expedition, the boys meet an old woman, who invites them to spend the night at her house. While the neighbour's son has no misgivings about the old woman's intentions, Nus Nsays wakes up to her evil intrigue as soon as they are settled inside the house, believing that the old woman cannot be anyone but the ghula.

The ghula poisons the neighbour's son's horse beforehand to foil any of the boy's potential plans to escape the house. She offers them food, and, concealing her true intent behind a mask of affected, matronly care, she does her best to get the boys to sleep so that she feasts on them. Nonetheless, Nus Nsays keeps thwarting her plans through a series of deliberate, childish antics to protect himself and the neighbour's son. When the ghula's patience finally runs out, she decides to eat the boys, but, much to her dismay, they escape on the black goat, with her chasing them to no avail. Upon arrival to the village, the townspeople learn of Nus Nsays's bravery and correct their misconceptions about the boys' hunting expedition. Emboldened by his latest heroic exploits, Nus Nsays sets out on another expedition to catch and imprison the ghula despite the townspeople's protestations not to.

When he meets the ghula once more, Nus Nsays cajoles her into eating a box of sweets. Eventually, he convinces her to eat more and more by plunging herself into the box, which he closes as soon as she is inside, imprisoning her and ridding the townspeople forever of her mischief. The ghula tries imploringly to trade her freedom for her silver and money, but Nus Nsays wants peace for his village more than anything else. Upon his return to the village, the villagers can hardly believe what the tiny boy has been able to achieve; they now "looked at him with surprise. He was standing across from them, and the sun shone on him with his shadow behind him.

Even though he was so tiny, his shadow was tall, tall, taller than all of their shadows”. (98)

Towards the end of the novel, Halaby uses the framework of the ghula tale to blend the supernatural with the real in Jassim’s and Salwa’s tale:

They say that once upon a time a peasant girl was born far from olive trees and falafel stands in a land where fathers—and often mothers too—labored so that their children could change their fates. She was born to parents who were refugees from their real home, a land snatched away and reworked, a story taken and rewritten. What these doting parents didn’t know was that when the mother gave birth out of place to her youngest moon-faced child, a ghula visited her. The hairy hideous ghula saw the beauty in the child’s face and grew madly jealous, wanted the baby for her own, but knew she wouldn’t get past security, so she took out her wild ghula threads and began to stitch them under the baby’s skin in all sorts of places—between finger joints, next to her nipples, under her eyes, at the base of her neck. When the ghula was done, the baby lay asleep with a thousand and one red threads hanging from her. The ghula held the ends of the threads together and pulled a skein from under one of her large, dangling breasts. After she secured them, threads to skein, she said some magic ghula words and the threads became invisible. And so the baby lived as was expected of her. Periodically the ghula would tug at one strand or another and the little girl would feel a pang, a prick, an ache for something else. These

pangs and pricks always came at particular times—when an auntie brought gifts of silk pajamas, for example. (331)

Through the Ghula tale, Halaby highlights the paradoxical nature of Jassim's and Salwa's plight precisely to show the crumbling of their American Dream. The paradox lies in the fact that the American Dream by definition is supposed to bring about happiness for the Arab couple, whose experience in America comes to a dismal end. Arab fairy tales, such as that of the ghula and Nus Nsays, however, come to happy endings, with goodness defeating the forces of evil. As much as Salwa reminisces about the time her grandmother used to tell them these tales, she also retrospectively ponders her confusing, current plight, trying in so doing to draw lessons from it. For Salwa, it is a moment in which "yesterday mixed with today. There with here. (But Salwa wasn't anywhere.)" (98).

Salwa becomes aware of her acute identity crisis that stems from her oscillating between two spheres of existence, as it were: home versus America. Her ambivalence towards America is as much stitched to her psyche as the ghula (symbol for America) threads are to her body. The invisible threads symbolise the hidden magnetic pull that America exercises over Salwa, who jilts Hassan foolishly only to go to America. In fact, Salwa does not seem capable of escaping the snares set by the ghula (America), and when she does try to escape, she is left bloodied and battered.

The second tale that Halaby tells involves the characters of Salwa, Clever Hassan, and the ghula. Again, the tale, which parallels the plot of the novel, is pregnant with symbolism in the sense that it makes clear and lucid the dichotomy of home (Clever Hassan) versus America (the ghula). The following passage captures the symbolism in Salwa's inner conflict:

It was not long before she saw a figure sneak into the girl's room. She guessed that it was Clever Hassan, assumed that he and the girl had been plotting all along. Raging mad that he would dare to come back after all this time and take away what had become rightfully hers, the ghula stormed into the room, ready for a fight. "Thief! Get out of my house!" she screamed, still in her old woman disguise. (334)

Unfortunately for Salwa, her ambivalent affiliations and her identity crisis remain unresolved, for when Clever Hassan is about to kill the ghula, the latter, shields herself using Salwa, who receives the blow instead. The novel does not make it clear whether Salwa is left dead after Jake's assault, and so does the fairy tale. Who wins the struggle: Clever Hassan or the ghula; Home or America? The question remains unanswered.

#### **4.4. Competing Ideologies: Ambivalence in *The Road from Damascus***

One feature that characterises post-colonial discourse is hybridity. As one of its fervent proponents, Homi Bhabha, is of the opinion that no such pure, homogeneous culture exists: that cultures are in a state of flux, ever miscegenating and interacting, creating new forms and structures. Even within a pure culture, if such a culture existed, there would be conflicting ideologies. The state of affair in post-colonial spaces in general allows for ideological conflict to arise in all forms owing to the two cultures, the native versus the invading, with which the post-colonial subject finds himself negotiating. In *The Road from Damascus*, this cultural/ideological dilemma manifests itself in the duality of secularism and religiosity. The presence of this duality in Sami's upbringing carries over into his adulthood when Muntaha decides to



follow the path of righteousness, a decision that reminds Sami of his mother's sudden turn to religion. In Sami's view, his mother's decision to transform herself from a self-proclaimed secularist to a practising believer is what caused the rift in his parents' relationship. It is perhaps due to this sad chapter in his life that he initially rejects Muntaha's decision to wear the Hijab. Sami, in fact, like many post-colonial subjects, is ambivalent about the two modes of belief, the "two narratives," that shape his upbringing. He is therefore simultaneously attracted and repelled by either. In Sami's case, family in its broad and narrow meanings alike plays a crucial role in shaping his ambivalence. Not only was his childhood coloured by the irreconcilable modes of belief his parents held, but his adulthood is also coloured by similar conflicting attitudes, emanating from Muntaha, Ammar, and Merwan, who have all found their true selves.

The ambivalent post-colonial subject is inevitably steeped in his native culture as well as the invading one, yet he is by no means irredeemably rooted in either. The state of in-betweenness he occupies becomes all the more important not only in his dealings with his fellow group members but also with regard to his concept of land. In the case of those living in the diaspora, the sense of belonging to certain community and the pride of being attached to a homeland are somehow disrupted. On a foreign land, the circle of interaction with fellow nationals—or those who have similar affiliations—is much narrowed. This narrow circle of interaction is furthermore taking place on a foreign soil with its intrusive/invasive historical, religious, political, social, and cultural burden. It comes as no surprise then if the post-colonial subject harbours contradictory sentiments, which materialize in a simultaneous fascination and repulsion by his native culture and the foreign culture alike. This ambivalence amounts almost to a neurosis, which places a weighty burden on the post-colonial subject in his continuous quest for a true identity.

Robin Yassin-Kassab captures Sami's ambivalent attitude in vivid imagery: "The mountains crowded and loomed and threatened to shake with the shaking earth and crush him. He was blinded, unable to distinguish between the Straight Path and all the intercrossing goat trails. Or between fathers and gods. Between reason and religion" (50). It is particularly the dichotomy "reason and religion" (50) that prompts Sami to have ambivalent affiliations towards his native Islamic culture and that of the West. Kassab's portrayal of his characters with regard to the aforementioned dichotomy is interesting. The towering and rather intimidating presence and quasi-presence (after his death) of Mustafa is juxtaposed to the timid and yet soft voices of Nur and Muntaha. While Mustapha hammers a secularist worldview into Sami, Nur and Muntaha act out their newfound convictions through their sudden turn to religion, a move that perplexes Sami, who scolds Muntaha for not having forewarned him.

Two different cultures define Sami's identity: one that flaunts its materialism and another that prides itself on its spiritualism. Mustafa views the West as the epitome of material development that has enough room for everybody in its social fabric. For him, the Western culture is fit to survive the pressures and demands of modern life, a challenge that Islam as a belief system cannot live up to. He does not negate the contributions of the Arabs to world, but he insists that these contributions ceased once the Arabs decided to cleave to the unseen, the intangible, and the immeasurable. On the other hand, Nur, Muntaha, Ammar, and Merwan (once a staunch secularist) all believe in the falsity of the Western culture, which has severed all ties with the Creator, plunging itself into an abyss of uncertainty. They rather believe that in order for them to stress their existence they must show their difference. The latter gives them spiritual solace, and instead of losing themselves in

false Englishness, as it were, they emphasize their individuality and boldly show their Muslimness.

Urban setting is the arena where the narrative of Western modernity has unfolded, marking by so doing a shift from traditional rural settings. The city, not the countryside, has become the locus of economic, social, and cultural progress. Europe in the Middle Ages was mired in all sorts of conflicts: economic, social, political, and religious, to mention a few. The wars that were fought in the name of religion not only had dire consequences in terms of human life but they also brought about endless economic crises. The economic system that was in place—Mercantilism—impoverished large sections of the population in favour of the ruling class and their cronies. The status quo was buttressed for long owing to an ecclesiastical authority, which, for many, was an accomplice in the degradation of cultural life. The advent of modernity with its philosophical, economic, and political upheavals taught people new ways to conduct business, new forms of government, and, above all, engendered new attitudes, however revolutionary, towards religion. The building of new factories and the mechanisation of economy encouraged many to forsake their traditional country dwellings and move to the city, which then gradually became the hub of cultural creation and a model for the rest of the world to adopt. Now, the West prides itself on these civilizational achievements, which could not have been attained without doing away with the intrusive role that Christianity played in all aspects of life. It is the very same model and system of thought to which Mustapha subscribes, that is why he interprets his wife's turn to religion as a step backward towards a mode of life steeped in backwardness.

Mustapha wants Sami to appreciate and espouse two aspects of Western culture: its secularism and materialism, which he links to relentless progress. Contrary to the model he wants his son to adopt, the Islamic civilisation is stuck in

history: “All this false consciousness. All this focus on the unseen. All this superstition and bloody otherworldly stuff. It’s out of character for us. We should be a people of worldly power. We should be contributing to material culture, as we did before” (65). What is more, Mustafa believes that poetry can fill the gap once religion has been done away with in that he firmly believes that “voices like Qabbani’s were leading the Arabs to a better future. If the Arabs felt a lack where there had been religion, then poetry, and freedom, could compensate” (65).

Following in his father’s footsteps, Sami seems to see human progress in the light of his father’s philosophy. He eventually begins to believe that Islam as a holistic way of life can never co-exist with the Western way of life because each one cancels the other one out. In other words, a religion that flourished in “deserts and villages” (70) cannot survive in the contemporary “cosmopolitan city” (70). Thus, adhering to his father’s secular worldview empowers him, however fleeting and elusive this power can be. Put otherwise, the more religious he professes to be, the more he is pulled away from the centre towards the periphery. For instance, Sami’s opinion of his mother’s and wife’s decision to wear the Hijab does not transcend viewing the latter as a mere symbol, which is abstract, and meaningless. This opinion stands in stark contrast to his opinion of a culture that prides itself on its materialism, which is visible, and luring:

Wonder soon hardened into resentment. He cast bitter glances at the imperial centre, at Buckingham Palace and Whitehall, the great museums and opera houses, at banks, theatres, department stores. Why don’t we live like this? he asked the emptiness. Do we not qualify? Are we a different species? Are we not human beings? Or are we human beings and these the gods? (90)

Sami's resentment stems from his being ambivalent towards the lustre engulfing this erstwhile colonial power, which, albeit ceased to be as such, still upholds visible symbols of its magnitude. England, it seems, has embraced blacks and Jews except Muslims:

His origin was nothing to be proud of, at least not before his student days, when he refigured Mustafa's Arabism as his own. From a schoolyard perspective all origins except his had something going for them. Some credibility. White English through strength of numbers, and because it was the normal standard. Black was stronger still. It even made converts: many whites adopted black speech, tastes and hairstyles, as far as was possible for them, at least while in school. There was a mutual fascination between the whites and the blacks, watching and imitating each other, fighting and fucking each other, while the Muslims tiptoed in the gloomy spaces around the beds and dance floors where the drama was played out. The Muslims got in the way. They ruined the whiteness of the city, and the blackness too. (74)

The drama certainly plays out in the centre, not the periphery, to which Sami feels ever consigned and chained. Notwithstanding his efforts to emulate the manners of the mainstream white-dominated culture, he feels excluded from reaping the fruits of contributing to it, of being recognised as one of the group, as it were. What is more, he feels alienated because he has realised that the Blacks and the Jews have become active participants in the mainstream culture. Therefore, he feels distanced twice in the sense that not only have the once-similarly-marginalised groups earned recognition but they are also being copied and emulated. The Jews in particular

impress Sami in that they have helped shape and reshape Western science, philosophy, and politics. Their influence has spread beyond the Middle East, transcending space/time boundaries: “They owned the culture as much as the English did. They were neither insiders nor outsiders” (75). The Muslims, by contrast, although more diverse and greater in number, are barely noticeable. In fact, in Britain “Muslims meant Pakis, which meant crumbling mills and corner shops. Which meant anoraks and miserable accents and curry houses. Dismal northern towns where day never truly dawned” (75). The Muslims have a “proletarian role” (75) in the economy, which is the driving force behind the capitalist West. Playing such a marginal role dwindles their influence, intensifies their cultural inertia, and consigns them to oblivion. Sami puts down their impotency to ignorance, which he blatantly in turn puts down to “Islam’s cobwebs in their eyelashes, and its mould on their tongues” (75). It comes as no surprise then that Sami subscribes to his father’s secularism, in which he sees a solution to the plight of Muslims in the West. Hence, to a question about him being an Arab or not, Sami replies rather undecidedly: ‘So you’re an Arab, then?’ ‘I’m a kind of Arab, yeah. But not like the Arabs you see on TV’ (76).

Sami also wants Muntaha to immerse herself into the English way of life in order for them not to be categorised as stereotypical Arabs. One recurrent motif in the novel is smoking spliff, which Sami associates with being cool, being in a sense English in manners, if not in blood. She smokes drugs every now and then, although she never becomes addicted like her husband. In addition to taking drugs, Sami wants his wife to become “properly English” by taking her to underground nightclubs to drink and partake in the mainstream culture. Alas, to Sami’s dismay, his wife, like his mother, grows tired of pretending to be what she is not. Her decision to wear the Hijab and become a practising Muslim casts a shadow on their relationship.

Sami seems to be reiterating the Western discourse with regard to the Hijab because the latter emphasises Muntaha's identity as a Muslim at the detriment of the quasi-Englishness he strives to radiate. He cannot fathom out the religious significance of her decision, which stems from her desire to please God, not fellow human-beings. The dominant stereotype in the West is that of covered Muslim women covered into submissiveness in largely male-dominated communities. In effect, Sami is afraid that Muntaha's wearing of the Hijab may strip him of his right to Englishness. The following heated exchange between Sami and his wife reveals much about his apprehensions: 'Women shouldn't have their dress code dictated to them.' 'Well, exactly, habibi. Please listen to yourself.' 'What will people think of me? They'll think I make you wear it.' 'What do I care about people?' (119). Despite her constant efforts to explain to him that wearing the Hijab is not "a step backwards," Sami persists in his stubbornness. In a fit of anger, Muntaha spell outs Sami's ambivalence: 'You aren't a man. You're a contradiction' (120).

Sami is a contradiction exactly because he is, to put it in Merwan's words, a "fake Englishman, neither fish nor fowl" (137). In his attempt to mimic the English, Sami undermines his true identity, which owes much to his Muslim background. Yet, as much as he cannot resist the magnetism of pretending to be a proper English, he deep down feels the futility of his aspirations. Perhaps he has sucked in much of his father's poisonous secularism, which widened the gulf between his parents until his father passed away. Sami continues to drink, smoke spliff, and hurl hurtful remarks at his wife and her family until one day he realises that it he should admit that "superstition wouldn't help. Nothing was left of Mustafa Traifi, it was time to admit that. Time to stop behaving as if his father was still here. And time, therefore, to examine all the superstitions he'd built around his father's ghost" (210). In fact, he does not want to see his parents' scenario play out again in front of his eyes. He thus

starts to pray, frequent the mosque; he even grows a beard. One day he glances from the window and thinks to himself that he

. . . he had betrayed everybody, in various ways. Mustafa. Marwan. His mother, of course. Now Muntaha. Not just now, but for a decade. He'd let down Mustafa by failing as an academic, even as an atheist. For Marwan, the betrayal was not being a Muslim, or a father. For his mother, he was not a son. For his wife, not a man. The pattern of his relations with the world was to betray its trust. (229)

Sami sees the “fort” of secularism crumbling in front of his eyes, expelling in its wake his father’s oppressive omnipresence. However, what is surprising for Sami is that Western secular tradition per se has not ceased to exist, but has simply managed to weave itself into the fabric of many novel trends of thoughts. What is left of the traditional secularism—itsself a product of the Enlightenment—“had been thoroughly mulched in the jaws of various modernisms” (277). In other words, “like an imploding star,” (277) the Western secular tradition has not simply vanished; “Instead, the old material was sucked in and spat out into a new dimension,” (277) and produced mere “parodies to previous generations: the bump ’n’ grind pop stars tangled in Kabbala string, the London Sufi groups made up entirely of ageing white hippies, the smack-addicted trans-vestites chanting mantras, the counterculturalists battling the ego with LSD” (277-278). Sami realises that the world is ever changing around him and that, like his father, he has been ensnared into the traps of a mode of thinking—which had its appeal in its original envisioning—that is slowly passing into oblivion. It is now “clear to him now that secular humanism was a late nineteenth-century hiccup, an antiquated European gentleman’s daydream. And Mustafa’s daydream too, of course” (277).



#### 4.5. Conclusion

Studying the three novels through the lens of the concept of ambivalence reveals many similarities between them. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land* in particular show the main characters' early, irresistible attraction to America, which repulses them rather violently after the collapse of the Twin Towers. Changez's and Salwa's immersion in the American way of life culminates in a short-lived belief in their American Dream, which proves to be illusory, prompting them to go back in a sense to their roots and to their culture's values to find solace and meaning. In *The Road from Damascus*, Sami oscillates between conflicting worldviews whose main champions are his parents. His father sees no hope for Arabs in general and Muslims in particular in their adherence to what he deems outdated modes of belief. This ideological conflict soon carries itself over to his marriage, which almost crumbles because of his initial, staunch resistance to his wife's newfound self, as it were.

What is noteworthy about the three novels is that the main characters' (Changez, Salwa, and Sami) ambivalence grows stronger after the collapse of the Twin Towers, which symbolises, so to speak, the collapse of their object of fascination, be it a woman, a place, a philosophy, and so forth. Having ambivalent feelings about this object of fascination is not after all unhealthy in that the "effect of this ambivalence (the simultaneous attraction and repulsion) is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse." (Bill Ashcroft 13). Indeed, disturbance of colonial discourse is what really happens owing to the frenzy that ensues the attacks of 9/11. For Changez, Salwa, and Sami, the events of 9/11 expose the neo-colonial, neo-orientalist, exclusionary discourse, which emanates from supposedly cosmopolitan centres.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Engaging with Difference: Ethical and Moral Obligations**

## **5.1. Introduction**

In this final chapter, Anthony Appiah's concepts of "ethical oughts" and "moral oughts" are deployed in an attempt to understand when cross-cultural dialogue succeeds and when it breaks down. The cultural hybridity of the Muslim characters discussed in the previous chapter is empowering in the sense that it increases their empathy towards and their understanding of the host culture. In other words, although the Muslim characters live up to their ethical obligations, they fulfil their moral ones even when the world around them grows more and more hostile. Cross-cultural dialogue fails particularly because characters belonging to the host culture fail to seriously engage with difference maybe because they believe in the superiority of their ideological grounding.

## **5.2. Cosmopolitanism and the Struggle for Recognition**

### **5.2.1. Changez's Engagement with Difference**

Not only does *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* present an exchange between a Pakistani and an American stranger but it also pits two cosmopolitan cities against each other. The meeting of two people—two strange bedfellows, as it were—and indeed the meeting of two cities, two distinct cultures, present the novel as a cosmopolitan one par excellence. At the level of people, the novel shows how an encounter between an American and its Other(s) unfolds in an age characterised by tension and extreme suspicion. By the same token, the novel also engages in the politics that shape American/Pakistani—and indeed East/West—relations after the catastrophe of 9/11.

Cosmopolitanism as a doctrine prompts Changez to regard his fellow-creatures of all nations as brothers. He identifies with them in a vast communion of ideas,

feelings, and interests, and tends initially to transcend the limits of country and mitigate the links of local affiliations. The cosmopolitan professes to be a citizen of the whole world, and to have in view only the interests of mankind. Changez begins his cosmopolitan journey by travelling to New York, which undoubtedly epitomises par excellence America's self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism. Besides the vibes of New York, Princeton University offers him a much more enriching cosmopolitan experience, which is eventually crowned by his being hired by Underwood Samson. An alluring salary coupled with a newly-acquired prestigious social status, Changez experiences cosmopolitanism at its utmost manifestation. He develops a special relationship with America, which grooms and educates him at one of its best universities, and he develops an equally special relationship with Erica, who ushers him into a diverse world, a cosmopolitan atmosphere, much to his contentment. Changez wholeheartedly embraces the cosmopolitan experience that Am(Erica) offers, an experience that is tantamount to a reverie, an American Dream, albeit transient and elusive.

It would be misleading to say that philosophers have construed cosmopolitanism in much the same. The view that citizens should abjure all sorts of local affiliations and obligations has been taken to task. It is an extreme trend of cosmopolitanism that attempts to deracinate the individual and to undermine the role that the local culture plays in the making of his identity. Proponents of such extreme a trend of cosmopolitanism have excused their calls on the destructive consequences that belief in fervent nationalism and patriotism can bring about. In other words, almost all conflicts, be them cultural, political, or religious—these proponents claim—have sprung from blind belief in the power of religion, fervent nationalism and patriotism, and adherence to local codes of behaviour and modes of thinking. These local particularities/peculiarities, a fund of local heritage, according to this view, exercise a negative influence on the individual, making him an unfit candidate for

cross-cultural encounters. And since the latter take place between individuals who hail from different backgrounds, conflict seems to be unavoidable. Other proponents of cosmopolitanism have tried to season the negative connotations that the term has accumulated over the years by proposing more or less revised versions of cosmopolitanism.

Anthony Appiah proposes such a revised version of cosmopolitanism: Rooted Cosmopolitanism, which does not entirely do away with local affiliations, but at the same time does not entirely expunge the common threads that hold us as human-beings. Of interest to Appiah is the rooted cosmopolitan's readiness to engage with difference. He insists that he defends a "form of cosmopolitanism" that "need not reflexively celebrate human difference," but a form that "cannot be indifferent to the challenge of engaging with it." (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 222). Changez does the very same thing: he embraces difference wholeheartedly. When he joins Underwood Samson, he immediately recognises the importance of the role he is supposed to play in such a diverse cosmopolitan context. He intimates to his American interlocutor that in return for joining Underwood Samson they "were expected to contribute" their "talents to your society [his interlocutor's], the society [they] were joining. And for the most part, [they] were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first" (4). By way of answer to where he comes from, Changez proudly tells his Underwood Samson interviewer that he comes from "Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan, 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" (7). Not only does Changez elevate Lahore's status to equal that of New York, but he also stresses its long history, which has given it its cosmopolitan character. If this historical allusion does anything, it puts Changez on an equal footing with his interviewer, who might, Changez fears, be repelled by his

interviewee's foreignness, for he is to play a very sensitive role for the company—and indeed the empire—once he has been selected.

Engaging with difference for the cosmopolitan demands by definition that he be tolerant to the Other's different beliefs, lifestyle, or modes of thinking. Changez strikes us as a very tolerant person indeed, a tolerance that stems from an understanding of the Other's difference without harbouring a desire to change that difference. In a friendly tone, he asks his American interlocutor:

Do you see those girls, walking there, in jeans speckled with paint? Yes, they are attractive. And how different they look from the women of that family sitting at the table beside ours, in their traditional dress. The National College of Arts is not far—it is, as a matter of fact, only around the corner—and its students often come here for a cup of tea, just as we are doing now. I see one in particular has caught your eye; she is indeed a beauty. Tell me, sir, have you left behind a love—male or female, I do not presume to know your preference, although the intensity of your gaze suggests the latter—in your homeland? (16)

The passage above speaks volumes in the sense that it shows Changez's cosmopolitanism at its best. He emphasises the cosmopolitan character of Lahore, which, for him, is now home to different ideologies summed up in the co-existence of completely distinct styles of attire: traditional versus modern, which is by definition Western. Additionally, he engages his American interlocutor in a conversation about the latter's sexual orientation, a topic classified as taboo in Muslim countries, insisting in so doing that broaching such a topic does not after all act as a bulwark against their cross-cultural exchange. Changez's tolerance towards diversity strikes a

chord with Appiah's conviction that difference and diversity should be prized because they allow "free people the best chance to make their own lives." (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* 105).

Whichever degree of difference and diversity America seems to offer, Changez nonetheless recognises swiftly the local particularities of New York, which, it seems, serves as the epitome of America's cosmopolitanism, at least before the catastrophe of 9/11. He begins to identify himself as a New Yorker:

Like Manhattan? Yes, precisely! And that was one of the reasons why for me moving to New York felt—so unexpectedly—like coming home. But there were other reasons as well: the fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence, only two blocks from my East Village apartment, of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli; the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue during a parade and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I had danced at my cousin's wedding. (32-33)

Changez's fascination with New York stems from its highly cosmopolitan character. In New York, he can see his own home, his local particularities being celebrated on the streets, and most importantly he can see his fellow countrymen leading a normal life without doing away with their language, which is regarded as a defining feature of their rooted cosmopolitanism. Moreover, before 9/11, skin colour has not yet become an identity marker, that is why Changez chirps to his American interlocutor: "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 a New Yorker” (33). Alas, 9/11 changes this seemingly cosmopolitan character of New York—indeed that of America as a whole. The attacks render America unwelcoming, suspicious, and ruthless.

### **5.2.2. America's Ruthless Cosmopolitanism**

If New York becomes the cosmopolitan hub where Changez exercises his right as a citizen of the world, it also becomes, much to his dismay, the target of indiscriminate terrorist attacks that change his life forever. The attacks are aimed at the Twin Towers, two potent symbols of America's economic might. In the wake of the attacks, corporate media direct attention towards Muslims, accusing them indiscriminately of terrorism and extremism. The once-cosmopolitan New York becomes a living hell for people hailing from Muslim backgrounds. Muslim traditional attire, physical identity markers such as beards, or religious sites such as mosques all become repulsive symbols that have no place in the diverse mainstream American society. America's reaction, according to Changez, is rather extreme in itself, one that is not subdued by the voice of reason: “Your country's flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields and windows; large flags fluttered from buildings. They all seemed to proclaim: We are America” (79).

The crimes were described as acts of terrorism and religious extremism, two labels that have eventually become attached to Muslims. Extremist voices in the West began to describe Islam as a religion that calls for violence in the name of Jihad, an often misunderstood concept in the West. The East/West dichotomy surfaced once again and started to play a significant role in America's political discourse. As an inevitable corollary to the wave of fervent nationalism ensuing the attacks, America



embraced a retaliatory policy, which materialised in waging wars abroad in the name of spreading democracy.

America's military mission abroad is not very much different than the *mission civilisatrice*, which was used as a smokescreen by erstwhile European superpowers to conquer the world. The fact that a handful of terrorists attacked American interests does not entitle America to impose its political or cultural values upon those it deems non-conformist, as it were. Many Muslims, in effect, have protested against the attacks and condemned those responsible, insisting vociferously that Islam qua religion does not encourage the killing of innocent civilians. Changez shows that he holds a similar view when he takes to the streets with Erica to console the victims of the terror attacks:

Where was I? Yes, I was telling you of Erica and my return to New York. After she had slept at my flat, Erica took to inviting me out with pleasing regularity. I accompanied her to fundraisers for the victims of the World Trade Center, dinners at the houses—for they were houses, brownstones preserved as islands of single-family accommodation amidst Manhattan's sea of apartments—of her friends, openings and private viewings for patrons of the arts. I became, in effect, her official escort at the events of New York society. (84-85)

Owing to his cosmopolitan spirits, Changez sympathises with his fellow Americans, little knowing that America will eventually pigeonhole Muslims as terrorists. Pigeonholing Muslims as extremists, as we have seen in chapters one and two, has been done through many forms of misrepresentation, which after the attacks intensified in an unprecedented way. Corporate media in particular have depicted

Muslims as outcasts incapable of assimilating into the American mainstream society. Non-conformity has become an almost permanent label applied to all symbols that designate Muslimness, as it were, and thus the Muslim way of dressing, physical markers such as growing a beard, or holy sites such as mosques have all come to be stigmatised, ridiculed, or, worse, insulted. By way of analogy, America has fallen into the snares of uniformitarianism, which militates against its self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism. Anthony Appiah cautions: “. . . strains of uniformitarianism, such as Victorian mission Christianity or the colonial *mission civilisatrice*, that manifest love for other by attempting to impose their own purportedly superior ways, often by the sword. . . The phenomenon of toxic cosmopolitanism, should, at the very least, help us resist this temptation.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 220-221).

In retaliation to the attacks, America waged two economically costly wars. The first was against the Taliban in Afghanistan in October 2001, and the second was against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in March 2003. Besides these two major wars, America conducted military operations against the Taliban in Pakistan in a bid to put in place security and intelligence programmes to protect US territory from any new terrorist attacks.

Changez finds himself caught between showing support for his country, which is already under the threat of a US military invasion, and sympathising with America, which has shown an unprecedented degree of intolerance. While he strives to grow numb to the paranoia around him by cavorting with Erica, America has become “gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage in those weeks of September and October” (94). Difference per se has become tantamount to non-conformity; instead of bridging the gulf and engaging in constructive dialogue, America has opted for violent measures to ward off imminent threats: fighting fire with fire, usually at

the expense of innocent lives. Ironically, America begins to export the terror it has suffered from. Back in Pakistan, Changez's family members feel perplexed as to how to react to the frenzied craziness taking place around them: "When I spoke to them on the telephone, my mother was frightened, my brother was angry, and my father was stoical—this would all pass, he said" (94). Changez initially shares his father's optimism, so he explains to Wain-Wright that Pakistan "had pledged to support the United States", that the "Taliban's threats of retaliation" are "meaningless," and that his family will be "just fine" (94).

Changez's optimism notwithstanding, at a national level America has already started to put in place strict security measures. On the pretext of avoiding a similar wave of attacks, the American government launches different campaigns of intimidation, questioning, and arrest. These campaigns at an official level are paralleled by similar ones encouraged by ordinary citizens who absorbed much of the skewed media misrepresentation of Islam. Despite the fast spreading frenzy, Changez retains his calmness, and, with the understanding of a true cosmopolitan, he dismisses some of the incidents taking place as mere exaggeration of facts:

I ignored as best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. I reasoned that these stories were mostly untrue; the few with some basis in fact were almost certainly being exaggerated; and besides, 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.  
(94-95)

America's reaction to the attacks of 9/11 is so extreme that it triggers in Changez a disbelief of what is going on around him. America begins to fight extremism with extremism, which whether religious or political remains destructive and militates against any wise move to solve the conflict. Changez cannot fathom the mass hysteria—be it political or popular—which ensues the attacks, and dismisses it as mere rumours or unworthy exaggerations. The passage above shows how the American government fails to differentiate between the culprits and the victims. Indeed, among the victims of such an atrocity there are Muslims. To attach the label of extremism to every Muslim is also a form of extremism, which does not by any means warrant any form of indiscriminate retaliation.

If Changez initially dismisses America's swift and unwise reaction as mere exaggerated media accounts, he later comes to realise that his American Dream is on the brink of destruction. In other words, neither his Princeton degree nor his position at Underwood Samson will make him survive the growing suspicious attitude towards Muslims. In fact, he himself grows suspicious of being categorised as an extremist despite the respectable position he occupies in Underwood Samson. One particular incident that fans his fears is when he is held at the airport for questioning when he comes back from Manilla. Not only does this incident make him self-conscious, but it also instils in him the grains of rebellion. A rebellion against the American Empire is what prompts him to quit his much enviable job at Underwood Samson and go back to Pakistan because, it seems, America has failed to establish a meaningful form of dialogue after 9/11. After all, Muslims, wherever they are, cannot be held responsible for what a handful of terrorists have done.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a dramatic monologue, in which Changez interestingly asks his American interlocutor several questions and then hastens to answer them. His American interlocutor, in other words, remains silent, or voiceless, as it were. Hamid, it seems, has done this on purpose to achieve two aims: on the one hand, he wants to counter the dominant Islamophobic discourse of the post-9/11 era through a silent American character; on the other hand, by using the technique of dramatic monologue, he empowers Changez, making his voice heard. As much as Changez reminisces about his American experience with rueful, sometimes bitter, nostalgia, he nevertheless tries to engage in a cross-cultural dialogue with his interlocutor in an attempt to understand their differences and become more tolerant towards each other. After all, Appiah reminds us, tolerance is one of the fruits of cosmopolitanism: “Cosmopolitanism of this sort begins by urging that we should know others, with their differences, and believes that this will lead us to toleration.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 247).

### **5.2.3. Bridging the Gap: Changez and Cross-Cultural Dialogue**

Not only does the cosmopolitan have to deal with the challenge of engaging with difference, but he/she also has to find a way to speak about it without it becoming an obstacle to cross-cultural communication. Debate about globalisation has engendered novel outlooks and worldviews that attempt to explain and theorise about cross-cultural encounter, which usually occurs beyond the traditional boundaries of the nation state. Universalism, although it tries to ease cross-cultural encounter and dialogue, has been taken to task because it overemphasises the universal, what people have in common as citizens of the world. However, as much as people may have in common, differences abound. By way of example, almost all people have a hard time turning a blind eye to traditions, customs, attire, or practices different than

their own. By the same token, they have a hard time turning a deaf ear to the stereotypes circulating about, say, a certain group of people. Naturally, people have prejudices, biases, and expectations that derive from their local experiences, and thus insisting on a universalist agenda does more harm than good, for differences may outweigh and outnumber what people have in common. Rooted cosmopolitanism then strives to strike a balance between blind nationalism and chauvinism and the somewhat unrealistic universalism. Anthony Appiah cautions that imposing universalist standards will in all likelihood fail because to undermine local traditions and practices means, to put it blatantly, to undermine in a sense one's identity:

Thinking about these debates can help us to distinguish two ways in which we might justify tolerance for illiberal practices that are grounded in local traditions. Most people feel very differently about male and female "circumcision." The circumcision of male infants has, so far as I know, very little to be said for it as a medical procedure; and even if it did, it is a form of irreversible bodily alteration that might, on general liberal grounds, best be left to men to decide on for themselves. Something similar might be said for the piercing of the earlobes of infant girls. Yet, surely, attempts to impose this view on the billions of people who practice one or the other would be an unjustified invasion of societies where these practices are tied to a sense of "identity." (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 248).

Changez's exchange with the American stranger in the beginning of the novel is reminiscent of the tone of a world traveller, a true cosmopolitan, who has sampled first-hand different climes and befriended different people. More

importantly, what Changez tries to do in this first encounter is ease cross-cultural dialogue by insisting on the universal rather than on the local:

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit, with its single vent, and your button-down shirt. True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-five—are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike. (1-2)

This very first exchange is of paramount importance because it puts Changez and the stranger on an equal footing, and mitigates the initial reluctance with which the stranger answers Changez. Hamid, in fact, keeps the tension simmering throughout the novel. From the very first page to the last, the reader is fed a heightened sense of anticipation, which is the product of a carefully chosen setting and characters. A Pakistani speaking to an American stranger in post-9/11 Lahore is surely bound to a political conversation par excellence. The quoted passage above contains coded information and gives rise to the tension that characterises the whole novel. Changez hastens to debunk two myths that may colour his interlocutor's judgement: the first relates to racial superiority based on skin colour, and the second has to do with Pakistani traditional attire, which usually connotes, for the Westerners, a marked symbol of difference. Changez insists that "sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike" perhaps to debunk the myth of American exceptionalism and

situate the conversation in an international/cosmopolitan context where all local contexts become equally important.

When reading *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, one also gets the impression on several occasions that the American stranger is highly suspicious of Changez's and the townspeople's intentions. It is this insinuated suspicion that keeps the novel intense from beginning to end. Hamid, it seems, has devised a pattern to maintain the tension: Changez assumes or predicts what his American interlocutor is about to do or say before he hastens to relieve the tension by dexterously eliminating any confusion that his interlocutor might take for a threat. The moments in which Changez tries to relieve the tension and explain the reason why something is the way it is transport his interlocutor from his local context to his counterpart's local context. This of course does not happen without Changez showing appreciation and understanding of his interlocutor's local context given his (Changez's) familiarity with it because of his sojourn in America. By showing appreciation of his interlocutor's local context, Changez hopes his American counterpart does the same thing regarding Changez's, and this is what accounts for the rooted cosmopolitan dialogue that Appiah calls for.

Changez is aware that without establishing a mutual understanding based on respect of each other's local peculiarities, cross-cultural dialogue breaks down dismally. After all, his somehow long experience in America plunged him into its local context, that is why on many an occasion he boasts to his interlocutor about his understanding of this context such as when he sympathises with Americans in the wake of 9/11.

A scene that shows how the pattern mentioned-above works occurs in the beginning of the novel in the coffee shop. The American sits his back close to the wall,



an act that Changez takes for a preventive measure against a potential threat. Instead of being offended by this move, Changez cleverly cautions his interlocutor that he “will benefit less from the intermittent breeze, which, when it does blow, makes these warm afternoons more pleasant” (2). Cleaver remarks such as this one aim to relieve the tense, post-9/11 cross-cultural encounter. The American happens to be in a foreign country, which America accuses of harbouring terrorists, and thus the encounter between Changez and the American cannot but be coloured and determined by the myths, stereotypes, and rhetoric of the era. The American also decides not to remove his jacket, a decision that confuses Changez, for that is not what a typical American would do: “And will you not remove your jacket? So formal! Now that is not typical of Americans, at least not in my experience. And my experience is substantial: I spent four and a half years in your country” (2-3). Changez wants his interlocutor to understand that he is familiar with his counterpart’s locale along with its mores. Therefore, when the American fails to behave as a typical American, Changez assumes he does not feel at ease in this remote locale. Changez’s substantial experience in America is here juxtaposed with the American’s inexperience with Pakistan. Again, upon the coming of the waiter, the American reaches under his jacket, an ambiguous move that springs from his sensing of potential danger, or so the reader as well and Changez assume. Changez here also hastens to appease the fears of his interlocutor, pointing out that the waiter is “irreproachably polite: you would have been surprised by the sweetness of his speech, if only you understood Urdu” (6). It becomes clear that understanding the Other’s local peculiarities is a sine qua non for proper cross-cultural communication. Having no knowledge of Urdu, the local language, the American misinterprets the waiter’s gestures and moves, a misinterpretation that rooted cosmopolitanism tries to counter. One cannot help but notice how the scene in the coffee shop epitomises the failure of

harbouring universal principles and standards. Rooted cosmopolitanism does not deny the importance of appreciating the universal—what we have in common—but it also does not devalue understanding the local, which accounts for one's roots, and more importantly one's identity.

The scene in the coffee shop illustrates two opposing views to what constitutes a proper international, cosmopolitan encounter. Changez is a rooted cosmopolitan in the sense that as much as he has had a rich experience in America the experience has not uprooted entirely his local identity. He has successfully combined both experiences—local and international—to form a more tolerant self, a more understanding character, and a more open-minded attitude. His American interlocutor, by contrast, fails at this cosmopolitan encounter because he fails to understand and appreciate Changez's local context. This failure is paralleled by America's failure to understand that American values are not by definition universal values shared by everybody else. In a sense, America's cosmopolitanism is only a slightly modified version of Americanism. In the wake of 9/11, Changez is left bewildered by America's hostile rhetoric, which culminates in entertaining prospects to wage war against Pakistan on flimsy excuses. America excuses its invasion of remote sovereign countries on its fight of terrorism and religious extremism, little knowing that such a policy may give rise to a new form of fundamentalism, as it were, namely cultural fundamentalism.

Changez eventually becomes a cultural fundamentalist, who rejects the American imperial project because it is a project that seeks to erase all forms of local affiliations. It is a project that departs from a perverse ideology that is self-centred and exclusionary. The American stranger reflects this self-centredness through his over-exaggerated, paranoid behaviour, that is why Changez at some point urges him, albeit to no avail, to "relinquish" his "foreigner's sense of being watched" (31-32).

However, it is not all doom and gloom for America, for Hamid showcases instances of successful cross-cultural dialogue based on the tenets of rooted cosmopolitanism.

The following passage captures the essence of Rooted Cosmopolitanism, and shows how appreciation of the Other's local affiliations at such a cosmopolitan context may yield fruitful insights:

Although we were speaking in Urdu, Wainwright seemed to understand. "I have cash," he said. "This stuff looks delicious." I was pleased he thought so; our food, as you have surely gathered in your time here, is something we Lahoris take great pride in. Moreover, it is a mark of friendship when someone treats you to a meal—ushering you thereby into a relationship of mutual generosity— and by the time fifteen minutes later that I saw Wainwright licking his fingers, having dispatched the last crumb on his plate, I knew I had found a kindred spirit at the office.  
(39-40)

The effect of Wainwright's appreciation of the Other's food is evidently tremendous on Changez, who derives great pleasure from such a friendly gesture.

The novel ends with the tense atmosphere with which it begins. The open-ended plot leaves much room for speculation as to what happens to Changez after the frenzied moment in which the waiter fast approaches the American, who in turn reaches for his pocket to get out what looks like a metal object, in all likelihood a gun to shoot Changez. The scene captures the symbolic failure of the attempt at cross-cultural dialogue, a failure that stems, it seems, from the American interlocutor's insistence on carrying out the mission he came for. Changez's hope that he and his American interlocutor are "now bound by a certain shared intimacy" (184) is illusive,

for, however hard Changez has tried to justify what America deems an unforgivable slide into fundamentalism, America persists in its equally harmful sin: fundamentalist Americanism.

### **5.3. The Rhetoric of Fear: Fundamentalist Americanism**

#### **5.3.1. Moral and Ethical Obligations in *Once in a Promised Land***

Debate about the philosophy of cosmopolitanism has always revolved around the juxtaposition of the local—local particularities—and the universal—universal commonalities—and the various obligations that arise thereof. Cosmopolitanism understood in the traditional sense of the word has been taken to task due to its insistence on discarding local obligations and its well-nigh abandonment of allegiance to any form of thick relations. By the same token, fervent nationalism has been condemned by critics for its being insensitive in many ways to moral relations that bind us together as human-beings. In Appiah’s view, it is this balance between the ethical and the moral that forms the backbone of his philosophy of rooted cosmopolitanism.

Building on Roland Dworkin’s distinction between morality and ethics, Appiah believes that striking a balance between the two domains is imperative if we are to envisage a philosophy of cosmopolitanism that may appeal to all of us in an age characterised by growing suspicion and fear. Morality seen from this balanced perspective “has to do with what we owe to others” while ethics “has to do with what kind of life it is good for us to lead.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 230). Appiah goes on to elaborate on the two concepts:

Ethical considerations are responsive to what Williams calls our “ground projects,” our individual conception of what kind of

person we seek to be. This is a broad bundle, and it subsumes a variant definition of the ethical that Avishai Margalit (building on Michael Walzer and others) offers, one whose tighter focus will be especially useful here. Here, the distinction between the ethical and the moral corresponds to “thick” relations—which invoke a community founded in a shared past or “collective memory”—and “thin” relations, which we have with strangers, and which are stipulatively entailed by a shared humanity. (230)

Jassim’s fascination with water materialises in his becoming a very successful hydrologist, who, due to bleak prospects of success in his native country, decides to settle in America to pursue his professional dream. Jassim’s fascination sees him establish a regular swimming-pool routine, which induces balance in his life. More importantly, his fascination also translates into a successful professional career, which earns him much respect and recognition abroad before it does at home.

Water, an essential element of life, assumes various symbolic meanings in humanity’s shared consciousness. It connotes, amongst other things, purity, cleansing power, and a fountain of existence. After a short family visit to Abu Jalal’s farm, Jassim comes to learn that water is in likelihood going to be the number one source of conflict, and that “it will decide things, not just for us but for every citizen of the world as well” (40). In effect, Jassim’s concern for water, one of humanity’s shared resources, stems from his encounter with Abu Jalal, who also insists that if “we humans were smart, if we were truly as evolved as they say we are, we would all work together to figure out how to turn saltwater into drinkable water” (40).

The interest that Jassim takes in preserving humanity’s water resources corresponds with Appiah’s definition of thin relations, which govern our interactions

with fellow human-beings. Although the latter may not share with us the same geographical space, we still nevertheless feel bound to them by certain obligations. There is certainly no aim loftier than devoting one's life to devising novel methods to preserve rainwater, an aim whose burden Jassim is willing to shoulder wholeheartedly. Jassim's act of generosity is expressed by Halaby through the vehicle of the symbolic power of water. She dexterously juxtaposes the aridness of Arizona and Jassim's passion for water to emphasise the noble mission he has embarked on. In other words, the symbolism of geographical space and the symbolism of a natural resource, which is vital for this space, should underpin our understanding of the moral relation Jassim has with the others—his fellow Americans. After all, he has decided to settle in America to “expand his knowledge so that he could improve life for others” (299).

In the wake of 9/11, the American public starts to feed on the rhetoric of fear that the government feeds daily in hefty doses. Media propaganda instils in the American public's consciousness the idea that terrorists may be lurking everywhere in calculated readiness to inflict more pain. Jassim immediately becomes an object of growing suspicion given his job as an important hydrologist, who has access to the city's water system. These reactions from the public are not backed by any evidence given Jassim's reaction to the attacks on the twin towers. Like any other American citizen, he sympathises with the families of the victims and wonders as to why such extremists wanted to hurt innocent people. At a meeting with the city supervisors, he cannot fathom the public's irrational fear of a potential attack on their water system despite his continuous reassurance that an advanced system is in place to detect the slightest of water poisoning. Sadly, he afterwards suspects that he might be the reason fanning their fears:

“Should we put security guards at certain places, put in more elaborate alarm systems? What are our most vulnerable spots?”

“It is impossible and self-defeating to physically guard the hundreds of miles of fenced but otherwise open canals,” he replied. Part of the problem, he recognized, was that he and his colleagues were meeting with people whose jobs had nothing to do with water; for them, the possibility of tampering was tangible, as it was based on the stretches their imaginations could take . . . He watched staff members, their faces solemn, jot notes to themselves. The gaggle of office girls at the far end of the table from him stared and scribbled notes to each other. It was clear that he was the subject of these notes, and he had been tempted to tell them he knew that, to point out that this was a serious meeting and not a time for whispers and comments. (24-25)

As much as our interactions with others are shaped with moral obligations, ethical obligations also play an equally significant role. For a proper cosmopolitan exchange to take place, both parties must differentiate between one’s thin relations and thick ones, between, to put it differently, one’s moral obligations and ethical ones. Dialogue seems to splinter if one party confuses the two domains and fails to see the difference. What results from this failure is a somewhat biased attitude towards the Other’s culture, belief system, attitudes, you name it. Appiah emphasises the distinction between the moral domain and the ethical one, for it informs very much the trend of cosmopolitanism which he defends. Appiah elaborates that “Ethical concerns and constraints arise from my individuality; moral ones arise from my personhood. Ethical ones govern how I behave toward people with whom I have a

thick relationship—and tend to be more demanding the thicker that relationship is.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 232).

The frenzy that ensues the attacks of 9/11 results from the government’s and the public’s failure to distinguish the moral domain and the ethical one. Jassim becomes a suspect and a potential threat after he accidentally kills a skater, who happens to harbour anti-Arab, anti-Muslim sentiments because he believes they are all responsible for the tragedy. As part of their ongoing investigation, the FBI agents investigating the accident ask Marcus a several questions about Jassim. These questions in fact fall into the scope of ethical obligations, that is why Marcus hastens to eliminate any erroneous conclusion that the FBI agents may draw. The agents ask Marcus about Jassim’s religious and political views because the alleged perpetrators of the attacks are claimed to have departed from an extremist religious ideology and a hostile political stance. Marcus tells the agents that Jassim is “apolitical” and “unreligious,” (224) but this does very little to dispel their suspicions and doubts. It is very interesting to read the agents’ attitude in light of Appiah’s view of individuality—individual identity—which pertains to the domain of ethics. Individuality, according to him, refers to some “brand-new collective identities and some are anything but: Male, Methodist, Scrabble Enthusiast, Aramaic Scholar, son of this man and this woman.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 232). To ascribe terrorism to a certain religion or a political dogma is itself a form of extremism because not only is it an act of pigeonholing but it is also an onslaught on the Other’s identity. As a self-proclaimed cosmopolitan country, the United States in the post-9/11 era does not respect difference as much as it seeks to enforce conformation to a form of Americanism that excludes those who do not fit into its fabric. Appiah cautions that “Moral obligations must discipline ethical ones. Yet this is not to say that obligations of universal morality must *always* get priority to ethical obligations—



to others or to ourselves” (233). Ironically, although Jassim does not do anything wrong based on any sort of ethical obligations, the latter become the vehicle through which he comes to be classified as a suspect and potential threat.

The FBI agents turn a blind eye to Jassim’s moral relations and how he is fulfilling them fully. They also, to Jassim’s dismay, come to categorise him as a potential terrorist, capable of poisoning the city’s water supplies, based on ethical obligations he does not subscribe to in the first place. In response to the Agents’ grilling, Jassim comes into his own defence:

I have spent my entire life trying to find ways to make water safe and accessible for everyone. Just because I am an Arab, because I was raised a Muslim, you want to believe that I am capable of doing evil. It is sometimes best to look within before casting such a broad net. (232)

Jassim is not a believer and thus from an Islamic perspective he is not a Muslim. The agents, and a large segment of the American public, believe that almost all Muslims will surely sympathise with the attackers since they share more or less the same ethical obligations—at least from a religious point of view in this case. The passage above evokes this belief and highlights the irony of the situation. The irony engulfing the somehow comical framing of Jassim also manifests itself glaringly when the agents ask him why his wife sent fourteen thousand dollars to Jordan on the day ensuing the attacks. Again, Salwa’s act stems from an ethical obligation to help her family and has nothing to do with terrorism.

In fact, even if Jassim were a practicing Muslim and subscribed to a certain political dogma, that would not militate against his being a good American citizen in very much the same way being a Catholic or a Protestant does not militate against

fitting into the American social fabric. Categorising all Catholics as terrorists because a handful of Catholics orchestrated a terror attack would constitute an onslaught on an ethical obligation—identifying oneself as a Catholic—shared by all Catholics.

Understanding the difference between moral obligations and ethical obligations will surely lift some of the confusion and correct some of the misconceptions that were the result of the 9/11 events. Any form of cosmopolitanism that seeks to do away with the distinction between the two kinds of obligation is bound to yield a tyrannical form of blind categorisation and pigeonholing. In *Once in a Promised Land*, cosmopolitanism splinters ultimately because the FBI agents and the public fail to make this distinction.

### **5.3.2. Mass Hysteria and Jassim's Illusive Rationality**

The tense atmosphere that characterises *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from beginning to end does also characterise *Once in a Promised Land*. While the tense exchange between Changez and the American stranger takes place after the events of 9/11, the build-up to Salwa's and Jassim's plight begins prior to the events. In many an exchange, one may detect between the lines the seeds of stereotyping as a means of painting a picture of the Other. Tragically for Jassim and Salwa, these stereotypes soon turn into blind hysteria in the wake of the attacks, leaving Jassim perplexed, lost, and framed for a crime he did not commit.

As has been discussed earlier, water conveys many symbolic meanings in the novel. Among such meanings, it functions as an inducer of balance, which finds expression in Jassim's swimming-pool routine. The latter assumes an importance that borders on a sacred ritual, which reflects Jassim's fascination with this vital natural element. Jassim prefers to go on about his ritual uninterrupted, plunging himself in

meditative silence. Breaking the silence, for him, amounts to offsetting the balance he strives to achieve every morning:

A hot five-minute shower after swimming was one of the few excesses that Jassim allowed himself, giving his muscles a chance to relax and his mind a chance to ready itself for the day. Not for the first time, Jassim wished that the gym offered outdoor shower closets that were open at the top so that he could bathe in silence and semidarkness, complete his morning routine, his meditation, his time for being in touch with the elements of the world, in peace, with no other stimulus. (6)

One morning, Jassim meets somebody that begins to encroach on his peace. He has never been “*buttonholed*” (8) in his entire life in the manner he has been by Jack Franks because people “rarely tried to have conversations at this time of day, and certainly not people who ran into each other for the first time” (8). Jassim’s encounter with Jack Franks sets the tone for the rest of the tense episodes that unsettle Jassim’s and Salwa’s American Dream. Jack Franks asks Jassim whether he is Iranian to which Jassim replies that he is Jordanian. Upon Jassim’s revelation, Jack Franks relates to Jassim how his daughter (Frank’s) eloped with a Jordanian to Jordan and disappeared forever, to her father’s dismay. What is intriguing about their brief exchange is that Frank Norris begins to ask questions about Jassim’s wife, questions relating to whether she is veiled, concluding in the process that no wonder Arabs cover their women up because they are extremely beautiful. Jack’s opinion of Arab women seems to stem from the Orientalist portrayals of Arab beauty: “I’m just amazed by the beauty of the women there. Incredible. The hair, the eyes. No wonder you fellas cover them up” (7). Also, his opinion shows a blatant ignorance of Arab culture, for he is not aware that women wear the veil out of deference to their religion

and not to cover their beauty. This encounter with a stranger in the beginning of the novel, therefore, reveals much about the usually erroneous attitudes non-Muslims have about Muslims and Islam in general and foreshadows the hysterical reaction—sometimes irrational—of the American public after the attacks of 9/11.

Halaby does a brilliant job contrasting Jassim's and the American public's reaction to the attacks of 9/11. Contrary to Salwa and Randa, Jassim does not seem to worry much about the repercussions of the attacks because he deems them the product of an extremist ideology to which only the irrational subscribe. In other words, Jassim looks at the events from a somewhat scientific perspective, and reiterates to Salwa on so many occasions that the American public would not go so far as to categorise all Muslims/Arabs as potential threats to national security. Two days after the attacks, in the swimming pool, Jassim's mind boggles not only at the audacity but also at the irrationality of the perpetrators:

wrapped around the pictures of those two massive buildings collapsing to the ground so neatly beneath the columns of smoke, that he returned to the impossibility of what he had seen. What entered into someone's mind to make him (them!) want to do such a thing? It was incomprehensible. And unnatural—human beings fought to survive, not to die. And had they, those many people who seemed to join together in crazy suicide, had any idea that they would cause such devastation? (20)

Jassim holds this attitude until the end of the novel. To his wife's surprise, he fails to react rationally to the mass hysteria around him. His rationality sometimes borders on a quasi-nonchalance and results in his failure to sympathise with his wife's and Randa's concerns. Randa in particular is very fearful lest somebody kidnaps her kids

in retaliation. What she takes as a serious threat is nothing more than an exaggeration for Jassim, who still has much faith in the rationality of Americans. “why would anyone hurt Randa’s kids? People are not so ignorant as to take revenge on a Lebanese family for the act of a few extremist Saudis who destroyed those buildings” (21) is Jassim’s reply to his wife’s and Randa’s concerns. In effect, the thought that runs at the back of Jassim’s mind in the post-attacks frenzy is that “He had as little connection to those men as they did, and there was no way he could accept that anyone would be able to believe him capable of sharing in their extremist philosophy” (22).

Halaby, it seems, contrasts Jassim’s rationality and the American public’s/government’s frenzy on purpose. Having Jassim reacting otherwise may in fact dwindle the reader’s sympathy with his and his wife’s plight. It is true that his rationality becomes irrational in the face of the growing suspicions around him and his wife, but at the same time the frenzied irrationality of groundless suspicions directed towards him is what keeps the novel tense until the last scene, which sees Salwa bathing in her blood following Jake’s assault.

On the other hand, Jassim’s irritating lack of a defence mechanism may be read in light of the unequal media war that ensues the attacks. The hefty propaganda arsenal directed against Muslims is so overwhelming to the extent that they become powerless, impotent, and emasculated. This utter emasculation manifests itself in the shopping mall scene where Jassim becomes a suspect just because he is an Arab. To the reader’s frustration, Jassim remains silent during the heated exchange that takes place between his wife and Amber, the female security guard:

“Is there a problem?” Salwa asked in English over her husband’s shoulder.

“No, ma’am.”

“Then why are you following my husband?”

“I’m doing my job, ma’am.”

“Which is what exactly?” asked Salwa with open scissors in her voice.

“To protect the security of this establishment.”

“And how are you doing that by following my husband?”

The woman said nothing, just stared at Salwa with a halfsmile.

“Ma’am, someone called security. There must have been a misunderstanding. I’m sorry for any inconvenience. You folks have a good day.” She swung her gaze to the clerks in the back, turned, and walked out of the store.

Salwa’s eyes followed her, iced and angry, and then rolled back to the clerks, two teenage girls who looked barely old enough to work, standing by the cash register, one tall, with soft skin and large eyes, and the other broomstick skinny, trying to appear busy. “Salwa, I’m going out of the store. Please let it go.”

Jassim walked toward the door.

Snake anger crept through Salwa’s body. “Excuse me, young lady,” she said, walking over to the counter and standing in front of the busy broomstick girl. “Why did you call that security guard on my husband?”. . . “He just stood there and stared for a really long time, like he was high or something. And then I remembered all the stuff that’s been going on.” Here the girl stopped and looked at her as though she were checking to make sure her reference was understood. . . Amber’s face changed in

blotches. Something seemed to be building up in her, and she blurted, “My uncle died in the Twin Towers.”

Salwa knew something like this was coming, had been waiting for the moment when it became spoken. “I am sorry to hear that. Are you planning to have every Arab arrested now?” She paused for just a second. “Do you not use your brains? This country has more than fifty million people in it, and you’re worried about your tacky little store. But now you’ll have a lot to talk about in school. You can say you saw a real live Arab and had to call security on him.” (29-30)

The somehow comical situation in which the couple find themselves reflects, albeit at a microscopic level, the unfathomable frenzied reaction of the American public/government after the attacks. Calling security on Jassim just because he happens to be an Arab staring at some products is an immature act done by two immature clerks. The two young clerks deal with the situation whimsically with an utter disregard for the unwelcome repercussions of their action, which is very much reminiscent of the way the mass media portrayed Muslims in the wake of the attacks.

After this particular incident, Salwa fears that she and her husband may become the target of hate campaigns. At some point, she cautions Jassim to stick “American flag decals” (57) to their cars in order to show that they resent what the terrorists have done. As a false sense of bombastic nationalism as it sounds, Salwa now realises the seriousness of the situation, while Jassim once again tries to debunk her theories about Arabs becoming an object of indiscriminate targeting:

“Do you think people who might intend to blow things up are putting those same decals on their cars for disguise?”

“Jassim!” Salwa couldn’t tolerate his analysis at this moment, as though in looking at the details he had missed the entire point.

“Who do you think wants to blow things up? This is all made up, *hocus pocus*. It’s a big fat excuse to cause more problems back home.” Salwa was standing but found she couldn’t be still, needed purpose to her movements. “Did something beside the decals happen?” Salwa reviewed her day, her life, and the word *happen*, and in fact nothing had happened. It just *was*. “I accidentally landed on a radio station that was rooting out Arab terrorists. *They’re living among us*,’ you know.” The words that sat under her tongue were wrapped in fear and anger and so she kept them there, because she was scared that Jassim would counter her outrage with calm and reason. (58)

Salwa does not understand why Americans are reacting the way they are. She knows that after all America is proud of its cosmopolitan character, and is supposedly ready to fit anyone into its social fabric. Jassim’s remark to his wife’s concerns is ironical—although it is not intended as such—in that what the Americans are now doing contradicts their supposed respect for diversity and difference: “This is new for Americans. They don’t know what to do, and they are unexposed to the rest of the world. The real world, as you would say. Just be patient, Habibti. This will pass” (58).

It is not all doom and gloom for Jassim as Marcus comes to his defence when the FBI investigation intensifies. Marcus represents the voice of reason, which Jassim’s co-workers seem to have stifled owing to their reiteration of a hateful discourse that is not based on logical reasoning. The FBI investigation is reminiscent



of the Red Scare epoch as the investigators bombard Marcus with questions about Jassim: “They asked me what your reaction was to September 11. They asked what sort of internet sites you look at. . .They asked me about your reaction to the war in Afghanistan. What you thought about Jordan’s leadership” (224). Much of the novel’s plot is driven by the intense events that befall Jassim, who surprisingly does very little to fight the odds. His inertia in the face of these odds does reflect the sheer powerlessness with which Arabs and Muslims dealt with the post-9/11 frenzy.

Throughout the novel, seldom are Jassim’s protests heard against the crippling injustice that seems to be destroying his American dream. The very few instances in which he speaks against this injustice do not amount to more than a sad sigh of smothered pain: “Good God, Marcus. This is very serious” (224). Marcus’ testimony to the FBI agents that Jassim is one of his most trusted employees does not allay their fears that he might have wilfully run down the boy and that he might have other plots in place to inflict more pain. The investigation is very hurtful for Jassim in that many of his clients begin to eschew working with him on the grounds that he may be a potential threat. The novel is in fact a portrayal of how a society turns on an innocent Arab couple, who happen to identify with their Arabness. Sadly, it only takes a terrorist attack for America’s cosmopolitanism to fall on its head.

Marcus alludes to the way politics—through propaganda—shapes public opinion in the desired direction. The freedom to make one’s choice is after all an illusion because a large number of the population does but reiterate the ready-made rhetoric concocted by policy-makers. When the situation heats up, Marcus admits to Jassim:

I got to thinking about who would say such a thing, and I bet you it’s Corey. He’s so right-wing, such an extreme Republican. He’s

eating up this terrorist crap that Bush dishes out. I've heard him a couple of times talking to his old cronies next door, and he's loaded with hate. Jassim, I don't know if I'm being paranoid, but if I were you, I would get a lawyer. Look, you do good work, and everyone knows that. All of our clients know it. Corey is the only one who concerns me. He is right-wing, he's active, and he hates everyone who has an education or an opinion. He is chums with Lisa and Bella, who are both unthinkingly flag-waving patriotic. They will stand up for a war and ignore human rights in the name of peace and freedom. What a load of crap. Peace and freedom for whom? (225)

Unfortunately for Jassim, the rationality with which he dissects the events of 9/11 falls on its head. The events do not pass without a tragic aftermath, whose repercussions start to take their toll on him and his wife and certainly on every Muslim/Arab in America. What begins as a rosy American Dream turns into a terrifying nightmare as the couple struggle not only to keep intact their marriage but also their professional relationships. Through Jassim's and Salwa's plight, Halaby shows post-9/11 Arabo-phobic/Islamo-phobic behaviour at its worst, a phobia that materialises in a well-nigh collective framing of an innocent couple.

#### **5.4. Testing Cosmopolitanism: Countering Political and Religious Extremism**

##### **5.4.1. The Media and the Politics of Confrontation**

*The Road from Damascus* is rife with images of violence and gore, which the main characters see regularly in news reports. Being a journalist, Robin Yassin-

Kassab in many instances opts for a diction that is very similar to the one used by news reporters. Sometimes, we, as readers, get the impression that we are watching a news report, and thus we inevitably react emotionally to what is being reported. Our immediate reaction, however, hinges largely on our political stance and identification. So, for instance, different readers would react differently to these quasi-news reports depending on their political views.

The idea that the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion is amply stressed by the many instances in which the main characters are sitting in front of the TV set to interact with the images of violence, which seem to be the defining feature of political conflicts. The Arab/Israeli conflict is constantly referred to in the novel, a conflict that looks set to continue that way because it smacks of a callous disregard for cosmopolitan dialogue. The following passage is one of many similar news reports, which shows how Sami reacts on his own way to the conflict, interpreting it thus based on a set of criteria that do not apply to, say, a westerner's interpretation of the same event:

The documentary focused on the bombing of the Dolphinarium nightclub in Tel Aviv at the start of the previous month. Twenty-one Israelis killed. Tony Blair expressed personal sorrow at the deaths of people who looked and behaved like his own sons. Not so much sorrow over more numerous Palestinian deaths. Palestinians were people who didn't go to nightclubs. People who threw stones at jeeps in the open spaces of their refugee camps. People who didn't look like little Blairs. (135-136)

The passage shows how biased news reporting may shape and reshape public opinion to match political agendas. Tony Blair's speech, in Sami's view, does not do justice to

the plight of the Palestinians. The speech then is a sheer form of orientalism practised using modern means of communication. Blair's political stance is deconstructed by Sami; it is stripped of its rhetorical lustre to reveal its outrageous hypocrisy. What is interesting about Sami's deconstruction of this speech is that it shows how the British Prime Minister fails to engage with difference, to evoke Appiah's theory of cosmopolitanism. Tony Blair condemns the attacks because they targeted a nightclub, a place frequented usually by youths. In the collective consciousness of the British, a nightclub is a place for fun, dance, and banter, and this is the same symbolic importance the place occupies in the minds of these victims. Sympathising with the victims based on this shared symbolic significance does not endorse the crimes of the Israelis against the Palestinians.

The difference then is that of principle. The interpretation of the events provided by the media contradicts Sami's, and to a large degree, Ammar's. Sadly, instead of trying to promote narratives of dialogue, the media promote narratives of conflict and confrontation. The difference in principle manifests itself glaringly in the post-1991 Gulf War:

Iraq had been the most developed Arab country. After the war it was in the Stone Age again, worse than the Stone Age, the Depleted Uranium Age, children born deformed or dying of cancer, people wading through sewage to go to the market. Muntaha loses her sense of wonder when she thinks about Iraq in the decade since, or she experiences the wonder as horror. For Iraqis, for all Arabs, history started to run backwards in 1991. Contrary to the stuff about progress that we learn, explicitly or not, in British as well as Iraqi schools. (109-110)

On her own part, Muntaha comes to realise the bombastic, empty media rhetoric, which was used to promote the aggression against Iraq. If in the West a war of aggression is couched in false promises of progress, the Muslim characters in the novel do not fail to see how much Iraq has regressed since the end of the war. If we do not depart from the same principle, Appiah cautions, the “result is that if we in fact take up dialogue across substantial gaps of belief, experience, imagination, or desire, we will end up unable to find real agreements at the level of principle.” As a corollary to this failure, “we shall often end up failing to agree not just about principle. . .but about what is to be done. . .Practically speaking, we need to resolve disagreements of principle about why we should save this child from drowning if, in fact, we agree that the child must be saved.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 253).

In *The Road from Damascus*, Kassab shows that the West still looks at the East from an Orientalist perspective. It still consigns the East to a lesser position, and is still marketing attitudes and images about it. The means is now different, but the purpose is still the same. Orientalism as a political and an intellectual undertaking, according to Edward Said, operates based on the *we* versus *them* dichotomy, and runs therefore against the philosophy of cosmopolitanism that Anthony Appiah defends. Instead of understanding the East and engaging in constructive dialogue with it, the West still sees it through the eyes of the coloniser, the harbinger of progress and modernity. In the novel, Gabor Vronk embodies the philosophy of Orientalism and shows how it eventually fails to bridge the gulf that is ever widening because of political strife.

#### **5.4.2. Gabor Vronk and the Fascination with the Exotic**

When Muntaha’s problems with her husband reach an unbearable complexity, she turns to her colleague Gabor Vronk, who shows a deep interest in

Islam. Contrary to Sami, Gabor seems to respect and appreciate her sudden turn to religion in an attempt to find her true self. In fact, Muntaha is so impressed by the amount of knowledge that Gabor has about Islam that she harbours an untold hope that he may one day convert. Yet, to her dismay, she later finds out that his interest in Islam amounts to nothing more than the appeal it exudes because of its exoticity. Gabor embodies the very ideals of Orientalism in that he fails to understand Islam per se, and wants to impose on it new modes of interpretation, disregarding callously its peculiarities.

Edward Said insists that the problem of understanding the Orient dates back to the Renaissance period. Western historians approached the Orient with a sense of detachment and spared almost no efforts to understand its particularities. Said explains that while Renaissance historians “judged the Orient inflexibly as an enemy, those of the eighteenth century confronted the Orient’s peculiarities with some detachment and with some attempt at dealing directly with Oriental source material, perhaps because such a technique helped a European to know himself better.” (E. Said, *Orientalism* 117). The detachment with which the West studies the Orient, in Said’s view, is in accordance with Appiah’s call to engage with difference if we are to be successful at cross-cultural dialogue. In other words, the Orientalists have failed to really engage with difference due to the detachment with which they have studied the Orient.

At Marwan’s funeral, Gabor attempts an interpretation of the Quran and angers Ammar, who dismisses it as mere heresy:

‘That God uses any image or symbol He likes to get His point across. He tells you that the fire and the gardens and the fruit in the gardens are not really fire or fruit like we have here, but

imagery to describe what we can't understand.' 'I see.' Gabor nodded, eyebrows raised. 'That opens it up to interpretation. A different book to what the media presents.' 'Not just the media. The Muslims too. The first word Muhammad heard was "read". The Muslims should read better. They should be less literal about everything. It was that verse that made me read the Qur'an again. It warns us not to take ourselves too seriously when we interpret. We only have images for what's incomprehensible.' 'Imagery. I see.' 'So I don't know what happens after we die. I don't know if dreaming of heaven is the same as being in heaven. Only God knows.' (169)

What angers Ammar most is Gabor's failure to engage with difference, to understand that difference, and to understand the verses the way they are understood by the majority of Muslims. Ammar resents the way Gabor tries to understand the Quran in artistic or philosophical terms because the word of God, in his view, cannot be subjected to philosophical musings, which are the product of human fallibility.

For Muslims, religion—Islam—is first and foremost submission to God, a submission that foregrounds the spiritual side of it. Belief in the Oneness of God is one of the basic requirements to earn salvation, and it is for this very reason that God sent messengers and holy books. Gabor does not seem to value the spiritual side of Islam as much as he values its material miracles, which serve his own science and art. For Gabor, the Quran is only interesting because there is "something very seductive in" it, which "inspires" (164) his art.

The common thread between Muntaha and Gabor is their supposed interest in the true essence of Islam. Yet, for Gabor, Muntaha becomes his true object of

study. “He’d contracted a disease from the East. A disease called Muntaha,” who becomes the object of his paintings, of his art, his “holy faith” (218). He only learns and memorises the Quran to impress her. He recites Surat al-Fajr over and over again to himself so that he repeats it in front of her when he shows her his painting of her. Gabor, in effect, epitomises the Orientalist who studies Islam not for the sake of engaging with difference to reach an unbiased understanding of it, but for the sake of satisfying his fantasies. In other words, just like the Orientalists, he subjects Islam to the workings his artistic imagination at the expense of its true essence. He unleashes his sexual fantasies with regard to Muntaha, and when they finally meet to show her the painting, his true motives lift the veil on his masqueraded hypocrisy.

. . . being greatly disturbed, greatly exercised, by the leg of flesh in front of him and on his tongue, by an extending metonymy of legs, of shanks and thighs, and of the area where they meet. . . . Except that covering draws your attention to what is covered. The imagination comes into play, and an imagined uncovering becomes the first stage of foreplay. Those covered nipples. The fabric of the bra meeting them, hard against soft. Then in the gap of the thighs, in the centre point, the wonder of the intermediate zone, part skin and part internal organ, that boundary of known and occult, both dry and moist, the texture of it. And what is its texture? Gabor wanted to know. Is it true that Arab women shave there, not shave but – so much more feminine – wax? Does she? (273)

While Muntaha is explaining a Hadeeth to him, Gabor is fantasising about what lies under the veil. This covering with a deep religious meaning is sexualised by Gabor, who fails, to evoke Appiah again, to engage with difference in order to understand its



true significance. He rather imposes his pervert interpretation on it, and thus unknowingly distances himself from Muntaha, who still lives in hope that he may convert to Islam.

Muntaha wants Gabor to engage with difference when she invites him to contemplate the forgiveness and leniency of Islam. She goes on and on explaining the punishment meted out to adulterers, and how before establishing one as a true adulterer one must at least summon four witnesses who have seen the act. The moment she realises that he wants more out of their relationship than learning about Islam, Muntaha declares annoyingly: “These are compliments I don’t want to hear. . . I think you misunderstood our relationship. I’m married. . . I’m not interested in you like that, as a husband or boyfriend. . . I thought you were interested in Islam” (323).

As explained in earlier sections in this chapter, rooted cosmopolitanism, for Appiah, does not do away at all with local peculiarities, and in order to understand the latter one should engage with difference. It is true that we are bound to others by what he calls “moral oughts,” which relate to what we all have in common as human-beings, but mutual respect can only be reached if we come to understand the other’s “ethical oughts.” The latter relate to what binds local communities, bonds that, if not understood properly, may lead to a breakdown in cross-cultural dialogue. This is precisely what when Muntaha comes to realise Gabor’s true motives: “She said no, and so prevented the story from moving into the universal territory we can all relate to. She said no, choosing to remain in her particularity. In her own ethnic group, in her religio-cultural space, in what they call a ‘community’. She said no, and made the story a local one” (330). In fact, Muntaha is just articulating boldly her identity, which, according to Appiah, “is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available to you by religion, society, school, and state, mediated by family, peers, and friends.” (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 231). Religion is one of these

concepts that defines what she is, a concept that Gabor Vronk fails to understand properly, breaking down thus cross-cultural communication. At the end, “It was just him. Gabor and his imaginings” (330).

#### **5.4.3. Confrontation and Conversation: Muntaha and Ammar’s Religious Extremism**

Growing up conscious of his Arabness, Ammar adopts and adapts the behaviour of other more outspoken minorities like black Jamaicans. He listens to rebellious hip-hop music, openly flouts authority, and speaks in the manner of hip-hop gangsters. Sami thinks Ammar is not immune to external influences because he is aware of the pressures exerted on one’s identity in a foreign environment. In other words, it is the “adaptive strength of the stranger” (247) that makes Ammar behave the way he does. Ammar’s turn to a way of expressing oneself that is foreign to his native culture is only fleeting because defining himself in such a manner will only make him more disillusioned as to who he truly is. After all, “When you’re uprooted you get to plant yourself in a new location. You have a kind of choice. And yes, you might choose shallow soil, if only it looks like the sun shines on it. How can you know how deep the soil is, anyway, until you grow roots?” (249). Ammar’s transformation continues over the years until he becomes a practicing Muslim, a more outspoken way to assert his identity. Becoming a practicing Muslim then signals his going back to his roots. In Muntaha’s eyes, however, her brother’s version of Islam borders on extremism, for he opts for a more confrontational policy when he deals with non-Muslims. She believes that conversation, dialogue, and tolerance are more viable options if any form of peaceful co-existence is to be envisaged.

One is political conflict that is often referred to in *The Road from Damascus* is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ammar’s attitude towards the conflict is sometimes

comical in the sense that he lets out streams of invective without having thought out the consequences. Ammar fails to channel his religious zeal into meaningful cross-cultural dialogue:

‘Yeah. I’m making a start. I’m strengthening my Islam. Islam’s coming. I don’t know how yet. But we’re going to do things. The time’s getting nearer. I tell you, I’ve got two burning towers of anger – Iraq and Palestine – and I’ve got the rule of Allah coming up BOOM! between them. We’ll get rid of the traitor governments for a start. And then we’ll sort out the Jews.’ (257-258)

Muntaha nonetheless does her level best to temper his extremist outlook, an attempt that often leads to a clash of opinions. She corrects his misconceptions pointing out that not all Jews are the same, that not all of them believe in the Zionist project that is being carried out in Palestine. Ammar’s hard-line opinion that “Jews is Jews” (258) militates against the very principle of respect for difference that Appiah calls for. Muntaha, who is aware of this principle, again corrects Ammar’s misconception: “There’s different kinds of Jews like there’s different kinds of Muslims” (258).

The collapse of the Twin Towers brings more joy to Ammar, who sees in the attacks the fulfilment of apocalyptic prophesies. “It serves them right. It’s payback time,” he says triumphantly, to which Muntaha replies by evoking a verse from the Quran: “My mercy is greater than My wrath” (356). The heated exchange between Muntaha and Ammar culminates in a scene that sums up the difference between the version of Islam that she espouses and the version she deems extremist:

Muntaha rolled her eyes. ‘It’ll be a relief for you when the Hour comes, won’t it?’ ‘Can’t stand in the way of reality, sister.’ A

strong strain of Jamaica in Ammar's voice. 'Ya cyaan stand in the way of jihad.' 'Jihad?' Muntaha rose, half straight, twisting her body towards him, not giving up her chair. 'Islamic rules say you can't kill women or children. You can't kill civilians. You have to fight on the battlefield, not in the middle of the city.' Ammar made his hands into scales, explanatory. 'They attack our cities. We attack theirs.' 'So call it politics, then. Or straightforward war. Don't call it jihad.' She sat down, addressed the screen again. (357-358)

The kind of discourse that Ammar endorses is exclusionist, one that does not promote any form of cross-cultural dialogue. In fact, his discourse is not very much different than that of Rashid Iqbal, supposedly "one of this country's leading cosmopolitan intellectuals" (334).

However, In Appiah's terms, Rashid Iqbal's self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism falls on its face because it borders on intellectual extremism, so to speak. He has campaigned vociferously for the banishment of the Islamic headscarf from British educational institutions. He believes that religion is the source of all evil, and he refers to religious people by the degrading appellation, "Homo Religiens" (335). His discourse and that of Ammar share many similarities, among which callous disregard for difference is prominent.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The Muslim characters' cultural hybridity has immersed them in the host culture, but certainly without detriment to their roots. Although they feel ambivalent towards the host culture in many ways, they have cultivated an empathy, which enables them to establish cross-cultural dialogue. The latter is based on a genuine

engagement with difference, which is key to understanding the Other's ethical obligations. Failure to differentiate between the domain of ethics and the domain of morality results in a dismal breakdown in cross-cultural communication. Unfortunately, this is what happens in the three novels, exposing the weakness of America's and Britain's self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism.

## General Conclusion

Islam has haunted the collective consciousness of the West for centuries. The obsession with the new faith dates back to its rise in Arabia, and its subsequent extension to the Byzantine Empire and then to the European continent after its conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and its threat to extend its influence over southern Europe. The perception of a danger emerging slowly in the East prompted the Christian church to popularise the idea that the new faith was the conception of a heretic, who had merely corrupted the teachings of the Bible to advertise the new religion. The church, especially during the Crusades, played a prominent role in distancing the Christians from and keeping them ignorant of Islam and its teachings, and worked to feed the European imagination—on the psychological level—a large amount of false images, myths, and stereotypes.

One of these stereotypes was that Islam spread at sword-point. Perhaps this idea is still rooted in the western mind-set, and has created a general attitude that is hostile to Islam and Muslims, who are considered an enemy that cannot be dealt with because they belong to a religion that promotes violence, brutality and bloodshed. Historians like Frederick Quinn have drawn attention amply to how, from the beginning, the impact of historical accumulations has shaped the nature of the relationship between Muslims and Christians based on stereotypes, which reached unprecedented levels during the Crusades.

The decline of the Muslim civilization in Spain, however, and the deviation of the path of civilizational development tilted the balance in favour of the West. With the advent of modernity and the heat of the Age of Exploration, European Orientalists published an abundance of travel narratives about the East. Alas, these Orientalists, according to Edward Said, published very much skewed representations

of the East, and especially of Islam, and generated a discourse about the East that studies all the cultural structures of the East from a Western point of view.

The vision and analysis presented by Edward Said came as a result of a realistic reading of human history. He presents precise scientific knowledge of the causes and effects that influenced the formation of a consciousness of the East in the West at a time when the latter started to have a marked advantage over the former. The depth, originality, and boldness of his argument expose the complex process through which the Western culture has devised a methodology of controlling the Other based on the power invested by knowledge.

The resurgence of Orientalist stereotypes and myths after the traumatic events of 9/11 comes as no surprise, as the advantage of knowledge and power is still in favour of the West. So, it just took one catalytic event like 9/11 to reactivate extant myths about Islam. After all, in 1993, Samuel Huntington predicted that the next war would be cultural and ideological, yet the problem with his prediction is that it neglects utterly the possibility of dialogue.

It follows then that the Muslims living in the diaspora in the post-9/11 era find themselves entrapped by a ready-made discourse, which rejuvenates itself almost daily in all media platforms. This neo-Orientalist discourse is perhaps more harmful because it can now reach any quarter on the earth at the push of a button. It is an extremely crippling situation for the Muslims, who find themselves fighting against almost impossible odds. Accordingly, in an attempt to re-represent Islam, some Muslim writers like Khaled Hosseini ended up reinforcing the old stereotypes and myths, a process that Lisa Lau calls re-Orientalism.

The identity crisis prompted by 9/11 is so pervasive and Hosseini—among perhaps many others—is certainly not immune to its ramifications. In *The Kite*

*Runner*, for instance, he ends up re-Orientalising his native country Afghanistan, which undoubtedly occupies a powerful, symbolic significance in the consciousness of Americans, as it is the setting associated with the alleged masterminds of 9/11. The timing of the publication of the novel could not have been more suitable, but the picture it paints of Afghanistan could have been much better.

Indeed, the novel constitutes an attempt to go back to one's roots in that Hosseini transports the reader back to the time before Afghanistan fell under the Soviet rule. We come to learn how Amir's childhood and identity formation is largely shaped and coloured by Baba's Western-style upbringing methods. Baba worships the West's material progress and often disdains religion because he strongly believes that it stands in the way of progress and development. Hosseini's character unfortunately ends up reiterating Orientalist myths, which Amir, growing up, takes for granted thanks to Baba's unquestionable, forceful personality.

Appiah's Rooted Cosmopolitanism differentiates between ethical obligations and moral ones. Hosseini, it seems, fails to paint a positive picture of Afghanistan because his main characters try to foist upon their local culture a reality that finds its interpretation in the Western mode of thinking. So, for instance, instead of presenting a correct image of Islam, the reader ends the novel with as much the distorted image in mind he had when he started reading. Religion is after all one of the many ethical obligations tying Hosseini to his local culture, and must therefore be one of the defining features of his identity. Consequently, having misrepresented this ethical obligation, he has deprived his Western reader of the opportunity to engage with difference in the positive sense of the word. A biased Western reader, after all, may come out with the same conclusions he started with about Islam—as a religion of violence, brutality, and bloodshed. This is the subliminal message communicated in the novel, for Baba yearns for the pre-Soviet, secular Afghanistan, which he thinks is



a golden era never to be seen again, that is why he leaves Afghanistan forever to die in America.

The practice of Orientalism by Western writers such as Updike and DeLillo or the practice of Orientalism by Oriental writers such as Hosseini and Salman Rushdi are among the many facets to Islam's history with misrepresentation. The practice of Orientalism by Orientals does not promote any form of serious cross-cultural dialogue because it only provides a unilateral view of the East, a view that is in accordance with what the Western mindset has been programmed to believe. It follows then that a counter discourse is very much needed, one that genuinely seeks to promote cross-cultural dialogue based on a proper understanding of one's ethical and moral obligations, one that seeks to engage the individual with difference, not so much to change it but to understand it.

Mohsin Hamid, Laila Halaby, and Robin Yassin-Kassab, it has been argued in this thesis, have successfully created narratives that promote cross-cultural dialogue and challenge some of the misconceptions about Islam. The three novels were published in the post-9/11 era and make explicit reference to the traumatic attacks. Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab all admit that their novels try to respond to the resurgence of Orientalist stereotypes after 9/11, and were thus conceived in the spirit of generating a counter discourse.

Watching again and again the Twin Towers collapse, the whole world was caught in the symbolism of the attacks. It was a serious blow to America's pride: its economic Tower of Babel shattered to pieces. The suffering was great and George Bush Junior pledged to hunt down the terrorists and bring them to justice. For the Muslims, life would not be the same again.

The symbolism associated with the collapse of the Twin Towers carries over to the three novels' plot structures. Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab mark the change in their characters' world through the collapse of their personal/family relationships, a collapse that parallels the symbolism associated with the Twin Towers. The novels' plot structures may then be interpreted as Hamid's, Halaby's, and Kassab's way of saying that Muslims too have been scarred by the trauma of the attacks. It is certainly not self-victimisation, but an attempt to counter the prevalent discourse, which neglects the fact that Muslims may have been victims too. After all, the attacks end Changez's, Salwa's, and Jassim's American Dream. Changez, Jassim, and Muntaha sympathise with the families of the victims and marvel at how some individuals are capable of hurting innocent people in cold blood. Their cultural hybridity allows them to exercise properly their ethical obligations as well as their moral ones, albeit their ambivalent attitude to the host culture.

Orientalist discourse is by definition a colonial discourse par excellence, which bears the seeds of its own destruction. In Bhaba's view, "the very engagement of colonial discourse with . . . colonized cultures over which it has domination, inevitably leads to an ambivalence that disables its monolithic dominance." (Ashcroft et al, 14). The dismantling of colonial discourse occurs when the hybrid subject tries to immerse himself in the colonial culture only to be repulsed by it eventually because the colonial culture "never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers." (13). Repulsion is what eventually happens to the Muslim characters in the novels: Changez's America does not tolerate his beard; Salwa's America turns to be a "ghula," that feasts upon her dreams; Sami's inherited secularism is not compatible with his mother's and wife's newfound faith, and more importantly their newfound selves. These characters' ambivalence, however, has increased their tolerance to the host culture, and indeed their tolerance to difference.

The three novels promote narratives of cross-cultural dialogue that is based on mutual respect and understanding. Changez identifies himself as a New Yorker, and he even accompanies Erica in her visits to console the families of the victims in the days ensuing the attacks. Jassim puts his love of water and expertise to work for the interest of humanity. Muntaha tempers Ammar's religious extremism in the hope to raise his attention to the thin relations, the "moral oughts," he must fulfil towards his fellow human-beings. From the perspective of Appiah's Rooted Cosmopolitanism, these Muslim characters are fully committed to their moral obligations, which they do not forsake even during the tense climate of the post-9/11 period.

The last scene of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* speaks volumes. Although we do not know for sure whether the American stranger shoots Changez, all textual clues allude to that. Changez becomes an alleged terrorist, is hunted down, and probably finished. This is the perfect scenario of America's global war on terror. However, before Changez's probable murder, cross-cultural communication breaks down because the American stranger—probably an agent—fails or is reluctant to understand Changez's local context. Put otherwise, he fails to fulfil his moral obligations. He comes armed with an arsenal of stereotypes, so he fails to communicate cross-culturally. He does not speak the local language, nor does he have any idea about the local mores, and yet he suspects every move made by the waiter, who intends to do him no harm at all. This is probably the problem with colonial discourse: it departs from a haughty assurance in its own superiority. The American stranger assumes he comes from the *centre*, whose values he perhaps wants to impose on the *periphery*, that is why he does not go through the trouble of listening to Changez, whom he follows and very likely kills.

Jassim becomes the target of an ongoing FBI investigation and loses his job eventually. All this happens because the investigators misconstrue the meaning of

thick relations, or “ethical oughts.” The investigators depart from the misconception that all Muslims think in the same way just because they are Muslim. In other words, in their eyes, the mind-set of a terrorist is a carbon copy of that of, say, a regular Muslim because they share the same religion. The investigators’ charges highlight the situational irony in Jassim’s plight in that he is an atheist, meaning that, from a religious point of view, he is not a Muslim. One’s local culture provides an array of ethical obligations to which an individual can cleave, and Jassim has chosen not to make religion one of these obligations. By way of example, a Ku Klux Klan member has chosen to fulfil an ethical obligation that binds him to this racist group. Of course, the crushing majority of Americans condemn the acts of this organisation, so it would be ridiculous if, say, a Muslim accused almost all Americans of being KKK members or of supporting it. It would be utterly irrational to throw around unfounded accusations. It is the same irrationality with which the general public—whose opinions are largely shaped by the media—deals with the trauma of 9/11, losing composure, which Jassim strangely and ironically maintains almost to the end of the novel, yet to no avail.

The discussion comes full circle now that the practice of Orientalism, which forms the backbone of the West’s misconceptions about Islam finds embodiment in the character of Gabor Vronk. He, much like the Orientalists, makes Islam and Muntaha the subject of his art. He fantasises about her, and it later turns out that he is not interested in Islam per se, but he is rather interested in the way concepts like Tawheed can serve his philosophical musings. Again, what Kassab is perhaps saying is that the Orientalists did not have a genuine interest in studying Islam to understand it properly, otherwise they would have genuinely engaged with difference. This engagement, in Appiah’s view, is undertaken not to change what we do not like about the Other, but rather to genuinely understand the difference and establish

cross-cultural dialogue. Gabor Vronk continues to labour under the illusion that Muntaha is wearing the veil because Arab women must hide their exotic beauty, so to speak. While Muslim women wear the veil in deference to God's commands, Gabor Vronk fails to understand this deep meaning, and is consequently repulsed by Muntaha, who rejects his advances after she wakes up to his hypocrisy.

The West's self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism remains a sanctimonious rallying cry if it does not genuinely engage with difference because it easily crumbles in times of conflict, giving way to intolerance and hatred. In the novels, the motif of collapse is crucial: the Twin Towers collapse, personal/family relationships collapse, and ultimately meaningful dialogue collapses. The trend of cosmopolitanism that Appiah proposes and defends may then successfully establish cross-cultural dialogue given that the rooted cosmopolitan understands well his "ethical oughts" and "moral oughts" and the responsibilities that arise thereof.

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## Abstract

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues amply that the West has popularised a rather distorted image about Islam through a pseudo-scientific study of the East, subjecting it in the process to a discourse of power, which colours most of the perceptions that the West has had about Islam. Recently, the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York have, in their wake, revived and reinforced many extant, Orientalist myths in a new, perhaps more overwhelming, wave of misrepresentation targeting Islam. In the realm of literature, canonical writers like John Updike and Don DeLillo published works that do but reiterate the media Neo-orientalist discourse, which paints Islam as a religion mired in outmoded practices and incapable of cross-cultural dialogue in the age of Globalisation. In this thesis, however, it is argued that out of the post-9/11 frenzy emerges a counter discourse, which tries to correct these misconceptions and myths. In order to analyse this counter discourse, the three novels analysed here are therefore read through the lens of Anthony Appiah's philosophy of Rooted Cosmopolitanism. The three novels promote narratives of cross-cultural dialogue in that the main Muslim characters, to evoke Appiah's cosmopolitanism, fulfil fully their "moral oughts," the moral obligations that bind them to their fellow human-beings who do not belong to their local culture.

**Key Words:** Ambivalence, Anthony Appiah, Cross-cultural dialogue, Discourse, Identity, Islam, Misrepresentation, Orientalism, Post-colonialism, Religious Extremism, Rooted Cosmopolitanism, Terrorism, 9/11

## Résumé

Dans *Orientalism*, Edward Said argumente amplement sur la façon dont l'Occident a popularisé une mauvaise image de l'Islam à travers une étude pseudo-scientifique de l'Est, l'assujettissant de la sorte à un discours de pouvoir qui sied confortablement à la perception que l'Occident a de l'Islam. Récemment, les attaques sur les Tours Jumelles à New York ont ravivé, voire renforcé beaucoup de réminiscences et mythes orientalistes, dans une nouvelle vague de fausses représentations, potentiellement plus accablantes que ne furent les précédentes, visant l'Islam. Dans le domaine de la littérature, des écrivains canoniques tels John Updike et Don DeLillo, ont publié des travaux qui réitèrent le discours Néo-orientaliste. Ce dernier dépeint l'Islam comme une religion embourbée dans des pratiques archaïques et incapable de dialogue interculturel dans l'ère de la globalisation. Dans cette optique, toutefois, il est établi qu'à côté de la frénésie post 09.11, émerge un contre discours qui tente d'apporter des rectifications à ces mythes et fausses conceptions. Dans le but d'étudier ce contre discours, les trois romans analysés ici sont de ce fait lus à la lumière de la philosophie du cosmopolitisme enraciné d'Anthony Appiah. Les trois romans promeuvent des récits de dialogues interculturels dans lesquels les personnages principaux musulmans, pour évoquer le cosmopolitisme d'Appiah, remplissent parfaitement leur « rôle moral », des obligations morales qui les lient à leur concitoyens et cela malgré une différence dans l'appartenance culturelle.

**Mots Clés :** Ambivalence, Anthony Appiah, Dialogue interculturel, Discours, Identité, Islam, Fausse Représentation, Orientalisme, Post-colonialisme, Extrémisme Religieux, Cosmopolitisme Enraciné, Terrorisme, 9/11

## ملخص

يوضح إدوارد سعيد في كتابه "الاستشراق" بقوله أن الغرب عمل على نشر صورة مشوهة عن الإسلام من خلال شبه دراسة علمية كاذبة عن المشرق، خاضعة لخطاب السلطة (أو القوة)، و الذي أثر سلبا على معظم التصورات التي يحملها الغرب عن الإسلام. حيث أدت، في الآونة الأخيرة، الهجمات التي استهدفت البرجين التوأمين في نيويورك إلى إحياء العديد من الخرافات الاستشراقية القائمة وتعزيزها في موجة جديدة من التحريف ضد الإسلام. إذ نشر كتاب كنسيون، على غرار جون أوبديك ودون ديليلو أعمالا أدبية هدفها التأكيد على الخطاب الإعلامي الجديد، الذي يرسم الإسلام كدين غارق في ممارسات عفا عليها الزمن وعاجز عن الحوار بين الثقافات في عصر العولمة. وقد حاولنا، في هذه الأطروحة، تسليط الضوء على ظهور خطاب مضاد (أو معاكس) للخطاب الأول عقب تفجيرات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، والذي يحاول تصحيح هذه المفاهيم الخاطئة والخرافات. كما عملنا أيضا على تحليل هذا الخطاب بالاستناد إلى فلسفة أنطوني أيبيا في كتابه الكونية المتحدرة. هذا، و تعزز الروايات الثلاث لغة الحوار بين الثقافات في عصر يتسم بانعدام الثقة، وذلك من خلال التزام الشخصيات الإسلامية الرئيسية في الروايات بأداء "واجباتهم الأخلاقية"، هذه الواجبات التي من شأنها أن تربطهم ارتباطا أعمى بالغرب الذين لا يمتّ لتقافتهم الأصلية بصلة.

## الكلمات المفتاحية:

الازدواجية، أنتوني أيبيا، الحوار ما بين الثقافات، الخطاب، الهوية، الإسلام، التحريف، الاستشراق، ما بعد الاستعمار، التطرف الديني، الكونية المتحدرة، الإرهاب، أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر

## Summary

Islam, Muslims, Islamic, fundamentalists, terrorists, to name a few, are appellations—some of which mere misnomers—that corporate media throw around rather carelessly in an age characterised by deep mistrust, and probably deep misunderstanding. Many observers in the West associate Islam with Arabs maybe because the Middle East has been the world's hot spot since 1948. At the turn of the twenty-first century, 9/11 has placed a dual burden on Muslims worldwide: they have, on the one hand, borne the brunt of media defamation in the aftermath of the attacks, and they have felt more than ever the need to *re-represent* themselves, on the other. In the literary domain, some Muslim, Anglophone writers have taken upon themselves the task of producing counter narratives to challenge the hitherto extant, Orientalist stereotypes and myths, which have grown in intensity in the post-attacks era.

It is strongly believed that the Global War on Terror has had wide repercussions for Muslims worldwide. Western media have bombarded the public with negative images and messages about Islam, often showing Muslims entrapped by the past and outmoded practices, and incapable of keeping pace with an ever-globalising world. Globalisation as American project has been emerging slowly after the First World War, but with more intensity after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After this collapse, the United States has been openly pushing its unipolar agenda of a New World Order, which thrives on globalising everything, from economy to culture. Rampant globalism, however, has come with serious challenges to identity, be it religious identity, national identity, ethnic identity,

and so on. Muslim identity is certainly not immune to the threat posed by Globalisation.

One of the earnest demands of Globalisation has been to subject the world to a unified set of economic, cultural, social standards, so to speak. To achieve this ideal, many philosophies and competing worldviews have emerged over the years. Yet, perhaps this array of competing ideologies has produced an abundance of puzzling *isms*, each proposing a different worldview, and militating perhaps against the aforementioned ideal. Amid this confusion of terms, many—among whom Anthony Appiah is prominent—believe in cosmopolitanism's capacity to remedy the shortcomings of Globalisation. The latter has especially been criticised for several reasons, among which its insistence on discarding local loyalties, and its tendency to overvalue global obligations.

Kwame Anthony Appiah defends a trend of cosmopolitanism he calls Rooted Cosmopolitanism. While the latter values local obligations and particularities, it encourages cross-cultural empathy and conversation. The present thesis engages with Appiah's philosophy and how it gives rise to the formation of a Rooted Cosmopolitan identity, as it were, and deploys it in the context of the Muslim, Anglophone fiction that seeks to subvert the dominant, unipolar, Neo-orientalist discourse that grows in intensity in the wake of 9/11.

Many people have responded differently to the challenges posed by globalisation, but one thing seems to colour their reactions: they earnestly cleave to their local or national ways of life to brace against the ever-changing world around them, and because of this resistance Globalisation faces many challenges

as a project. The idea of Rooted Cosmopolitanism has its appeal because it allows the individual to share in universal, human experience without expunging his/her local or national loyalties, heritage, and affiliations.

The present thesis takes on the literary works produced by Muslim, Anglophone writers who are deemed to engage with the misrepresentation of Muslims in the West in the post 9/11 era. Misrepresenting and Othering Muslims date back to centuries ago, but this misrepresentation has intensified in the second half of the twentieth century after the creation of the state of Israel and the constant conflict that ensued. Additionally, 9/11 aggravated the image of Islam and Muslims in the West, and is still generating much debate in the religious, cultural, and literary domains. 9/11 ushered in an era of unmitigated rhetoric that celebrates the American-led Western dominance blatantly couched by George Walker Bush: “you’re either with us or against us” (Quoted in Blum and Heymann, XX).

Debate about Globalisation has often involved issues of identity. Huntington’s thesis of the Clash of Civilisations categorises Muslims as the threatening Other, incapable of surviving global changes and challenges. The clash that results when Muslim and Western civilisations come into contact is a clash of identities.

Western writers like John Updike have made the events of 9/11 the substance of many of their literary works, more often than not producing skewed and biased representations of Islam. In response to these misrepresentations, Muslim writers writing in English have equally reacted to the events in their own way, generating

in the process a counter discourse that seeks to correct many of the misconceptions surrounding Islam and Muslims.

From a post-Colonial perspective, the Muslim novelists whose works are analysed in the present research belong to the periphery. While they maintain and celebrate their local roots, they self-consciously participate in a global dialogue seeking to correct misconceptions about Islam and Muslims alike. The present thesis, therefore, proposes to think of them as Rooted Cosmopolitans: on the one hand, they value their local loyalties and obligations; on the other hand, they are fully aware of their universal obligations, the need to encourage empathy across nations, and the need to promote cross-cultural dialogue.

The research is based on the corpus of three novels written in English by Muslim writers living in the diaspora: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, *The Road from Damascus* (2008) by Robin Yassin Kassab, and *Once in a Promised Land* (2008) by Laila Halaby. The three novels are important because they are set in two self-proclaimed cosmopolitan countries: the United States and Britain. Also, the main characters in the three novels seem to display a sense of cosmopolitan identity ingrained in their Rooted Cosmopolitanism.

The present research is relevant in that it probes into how the three Muslim, Anglophone writers coming from different backgrounds have reacted to all forms of misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims. Their works are, hence, here read as efforts to *re-represent* Islam and Muslim identity. It is after all in this spirit that this thesis was conceived. The thesis also aims to deconstruct some of the negative



stereotypes and clear the they-cannot-fit aura that has engulfed Muslims, especially after 9/11.

The thesis postulates that the novels under discussion originate in their writers' efforts to cast Muslim identity in the model of Rooted Cosmopolitanism by raising the following questions: (1) to what extent is Appiah's model of Rooted Cosmopolitanism valid to understand Islam-West relations in times of conflict? (2) Do the Muslim novelists under study promote narratives of conflict or cross-cultural dialogue (3) What if attention is turned to the host culture (the centre rather than the periphery); is it cosmopolitan enough as it claims to be?

In the present thesis, it is argued that the Muslim novelists under study resist and try to correct the stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Islam has often been misrepresented in Western discourse, which portrays Muslims as terrorists and intolerant fanatics incapable of cross-cultural dialogue. Set in the tense climate of 9/11, Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab show the devastating consequences of the event on their Muslim characters through the collapse of their personal/family relationships. It is also argued that, being diasporic writers, living in cosmopolitan centres, Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab could safely be said to have straddled both their native culture and the host one. Hence, their cultural hybridity is reflected in their characters, who are ambivalent in different ways towards the host culture. Finally, and most importantly, this ambivalence and cultural hybridity have enabled these writers to better understand, to evoke Appiah's cosmopolitanism, their ethical and moral obligations, and to call for cross-cultural dialogue.

The practice of Orientalism by Western writers such as Updike and DeLillo or the practice of Orientalism by Oriental writers such as Hosseini and Salman Rushdi are among the many facets to Islam's history with misrepresentation. The practice of Orientalism by Orientals does not promote any form of serious cross-cultural dialogue because it only provides a unilateral view of the East, a view that is in accordance with what the Western mindset has been programmed to believe. It follows then that a counter discourse is very much needed, one that genuinely seeks to promote cross-cultural dialogue based on a proper understanding of one's ethical and moral obligations, one that seeks to engage the individual with difference, not so much to change it but to understand it.

The symbolism associated with the collapse of the Twin Towers carries over to the three novels' plot structures. Hamid, Halaby, and Kassab mark the change in their characters' world through the collapse of their personal/family relationships, a collapse that parallels the symbolism associated with the Twin Towers. The novels' plot structures may then be interpreted as Hamid's, Halaby's, and Kassab's way of saying that Muslims too have been scarred by the trauma of the attacks. It is certainly not self-victimisation, but an attempt to counter the prevalent discourse, which neglects the fact that Muslims may have been victims too. After all, the attacks end Changez's, Salwa's, and Jassim's American Dream. Changez, Jassim, and Muntaha sympathise with the families of the victims and marvel at how some individuals are capable of hurting innocent people in cold blood. Their cultural hybridity allows them to exercise properly their ethical obligations as well as their moral ones, albeit their ambivalent attitude to the host culture.

Orientalist discourse is by definition a colonial discourse par excellence, which bears the seeds of its own destruction. In Bhaba's view, "the very engagement of colonial discourse with. . .colonized cultures over which it has domination, inevitably leads to an ambivalence that disables its monolithic dominance." (Ashcroft et al, 14). The dismantling of colonial discourse occurs when the hybrid subject tries to immerse himself in the colonial culture only to be repulsed by it eventually because the colonial culture "never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers." (13). Repulsion is what eventually happens to the Muslim characters in the novels: Changez's America does not tolerate his beard; Salwa's America turns to be a "ghula," that feasts upon her dreams; Sami's inherited secularism is not compatible with his mother's and wife's newfound faith, and more importantly their newfound selves. These characters' ambivalence, however, has increased their tolerance to the host culture, and indeed their tolerance to difference.

The three novels promote narratives of cross-cultural dialogue that is based on mutual respect and understanding. Changez identifies himself as a New Yorker, and he even accompanies Erica in her visits to console the families of the victims in the days ensuing the attacks. Jassim puts his love of water and expertise to work for the interest of humanity. Muntaha tempers Ammar's religious extremism in the hope to raise his attention to the thin relations, the "moral oughts," he must fulfil towards his fellow human-beings. From the perspective of Appiah's Rooted Cosmopolitanism, these Muslim characters are fully committed to their moral obligations, which they do not forsake even during the tense climate of the post-9/11 period.

The last scene of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* speaks volumes. Although we do not know for sure whether the American stranger shoots Changez, all textual clues allude to that. Changez becomes an alleged terrorist, is hunted down, and probably finished. This is the perfect scenario of America's global war on terror. However, before Changez's probable murder, cross-cultural communication breaks down because the American stranger—probably an agent—fails or is reluctant to understand Changez's local context. Put otherwise, he fails to fulfil his moral obligations. He comes armed with an arsenal of stereotypes, so he fails to communicate cross-culturally. He does not speak the local language, nor does he have any idea about the local mores, and yet he suspects every move made by the waiter, who intends to do him no harm at all. This is probably the problem with colonial discourse: it departs from a haughty assurance in its own superiority. The American stranger assumes he comes from the *centre*, whose values he perhaps wants to impose on the *periphery*, that is why he does not go through the trouble of listening to Changez, whom he follows and very likely kills.

Jassim becomes the target of an ongoing FBI investigation and loses his job eventually. All this happens because the investigators misconstrue the meaning of thick relations, or "ethical oughts." The investigators depart from the misconception that all Muslims think in the same way just because they are Muslim. In other words, in their eyes, the mind-set of a terrorist is a carbon copy of that of, say, a regular Muslim because they share the same religion. The investigators' charges highlight the situational irony in Jassim's plight in that he is an atheist, meaning that, from a religious point of view, he is not a Muslim. One's local culture provides an array of ethical obligations to which an individual

can cleave, and Jassim has chosen not to make religion one of these obligations. By way of example, a Ku Klux Klan member has chosen to fulfil an ethical obligation that binds him to this racist group. Of course, the crushing majority of Americans condemn the acts of this organisation, so it would be ridiculous if, say, a Muslim accused almost all Americans of being KKK members or of supporting it. It would be utterly irrational to throw around unfounded accusations. It is the same irrationality with which the general public—whose opinions are largely shaped by the media—deals with the trauma of 9/11, losing composure, which Jassim strangely and ironically maintains almost to the end of the novel, yet to no avail.

The discussion comes full circle now that the practice of Orientalism, which forms the backbone of the West's misconceptions about Islam finds embodiment in the character of Gabor Vronk. He, much like the Orientalists, makes Islam and Muntaha the subject of his art. He fantasises about her, and it later turns out that he is not interested in Islam per se, but he is rather interested in the way concepts like Tawheed can serve his philosophical musings. Again, what Kassab is perhaps saying is that the Orientalists did not have a genuine interest in studying Islam to understand it properly, otherwise they would have genuinely engaged with difference. This engagement, in Appiah's view, is undertaken not to change what we do not like about the Other, but rather to genuinely understand the difference and establish cross-cultural dialogue. Gabor Vronk continues to labour under the illusion that Muntaha is wearing the veil because Arab women must hide their exotic beauty, so to speak. While Muslim women wear the veil in deference to God's commands, Gabor Vronk fails to understand this deep meaning, and is

consequently repulsed by Muntaha, who rejects his advances after she wakes up to his hypocrisy.

The West's self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism remains a sanctimonious rallying cry if it does not genuinely engage with difference because it easily crumbles in times of conflict, giving way to intolerance and hatred. In the novels, the motif of collapse is crucial: the Twin Towers collapse, personal/family relationships collapse, and ultimately meaningful dialogue collapses. The trend of cosmopolitanism that Appiah proposes and defends may then successfully establish cross-cultural dialogue given that the rooted cosmopolitan understands well his "ethical oughts" and "moral oughts" and the responsibilities that arise thereof.

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## THE AMERICAN DREAM REVISITED: THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL IN THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST AND ONCE IN A PROMISED LAND

**BOUNAR Fateh**  
Abu Bakr Belkaid University  
Tlemcen, ALGERIA

**SERIR MORTAD Ilhem**  
Abu Bakr Belkaid University  
Tlemcen, ALGERIA

### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how Mohsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Laila Halaby in *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) debunk the myth of the American Dream in their post-9/11 novels. Set in the tumultuous political landscape of the post-9/11 era, both novels try to capture the loss and the angst felt by Muslim characters owing to a sudden emergence of Islamophobic/xenophobic rhetoric and indiscriminate labelling emanating from official and unofficial discourses alike. Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov's theory of narratology, the paper sheds light on the close affinity between the novels' plot structures. Although the paper does not illustrate a strict application of Todorov's theory, Hamid and Halaby, it is argued, cast their plots in the framework of unrequited love or faltering personal relationships to simultaneously depict the Muslim characters' deteriorating relationship with America, and ultimately the crumbling of their American Dream in post-9/11 America.

**Keywords:** American Dream, Islamophobia, narratology, 9/11.

### INTRODUCTION

Who would have imagined anyone capable of hurting America at the zenith of its economic and military might? Few, if not none, would be the answer.

America emerged as the number one uncontested superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a change in the geopolitical map of the world that heralded the rise of a New World Order led unchallengedly by the United States. President Bush the father celebrated this looming change in his speech to the United Nations in 1990<sup>1</sup>. Delivering his speech on the threshold of a new century, the United States dreamt about prosperity and relentless progress for all humanity. Eleven years later, just at the turn of the twenty-first century, such dreams turned into a terrifying nightmare. The attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 constitute a watershed in recent history because the United States found itself entangled in yet another war: the so-called war on terror. The latter has now assumed global proportions, supplanting the Red Scare of the post-Second World War by the fear of the rise of radical Islam. The attack on America was regarded by many as an attack on the Free World and the democratic values it champions.

In the realm of literature, canonical writers in America and elsewhere have fictionalised the traumatic events of 9/11, showing by so doing how the attacks have scarred the collective

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<sup>1</sup> In his United Nations Address in 1990, George H. W. Bush emphasised that "The United Nations can help bring about a new day, a day when these kinds of terrible weapons and the terrible despots who would use them are both a thing of the past. It is in our hands to leave these dark machines behind, in the Dark Ages where they belong, and to press forward to cap a historic movement towards a new world order and a long era of peace" (Bush, 1990).

consciousness of America. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) are two examples that spring to mind instantly. Notwithstanding Updike's and DeLillo's attempts to come to grips with the disillusionment resulting from the tragic events, both writers have been responsible for reviving orientalist stereotypes, which resurged in tandem with anti-Muslim sentiments accompanying America's war on terror<sup>2</sup>. The result was a skewed and a biased representation of Islam and Muslims.

On the other hand, Muslim writers writing in English have tried to show that 9/11 has affected Muslims too. Their writings may thus be deemed to constitute a counter discourse to the dominant discourse emanating from the *centre*. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land* were published in the post-9/11 era, which is characterised by a resurgence of a neo-orientalist rhetoric and a marked increase in Islamophobic sentiments. Both novels deal explicitly with the terror attacks and how they have come to bear on the lives of Muslim characters. More importantly, they likewise refer explicitly to the difficulty of living in America and the crumbling of the characters' American Dream in the wake of the attacks. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about the pain of unrequited love: a story about Changez's mutual attraction to and repulsion by (Am)Erica. Similarly, *Once in a Promised Land* is about Jassim's and Salwa's crumbling marriage and ultimately the crumbling of their American Dream. In this paper, it is therefore argued that Hamid and Halaby deliberately structured their plots around faltering personal relationships to foreshadow the Muslim characters' broken American Dream and their eventual break with America. Hence, a textual and a structural analysis of the novels will unravel how the personal—faltering relationships—and the political—the collapse of the characters' American Dream—and the eventual break with America, are entwined in an allegorical nexus of meanings.

Both texts revolve around pursuit, attainment, and eventual loss of a woman/man. To illuminate the relationship between the *personal* and the *political*, the paper draws on Todorov's narratological model since both novels readily lend themselves to it.

The focus in this paper is on the novels' narrative "grammar". Using Tzvetan Todorov's schema of propositions, it is thus argued that the novels' structures, which revolve around faltering personal relationships in effect parallel the deteriorating political situation after 9/11, a deterioration that symbolises the end of the characters' American Dream. When analysing the narrative structure of literary works, Todorov draws a parallel between the elements of a literary work and the elements of language. For instance, he suggests that characters be associated with nouns, their attributes with adjectives, and their actions with verbs so as to uncover the "grammar", the *langue*, or the formula, which structures these literary works

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of *Terrorist*, "most of the verses that Updike has gathered are about the Divine fury and anger at the infidels and the sinful, thereby contributing to the general perception, as peddled by the American media, that Islam is an other-worldly religion that relies on terror alone to convert people" (Awan, 2010, p. 528). As for *Falling Man*, "One of the important aspects of Orientalism is that the Orientalist often considers himself as a somehow omniscient narrator that speaks and represents the Orientals. . . Don DeLillo takes the same approach through his use of narrative mode; he speaks authoritatively and negatively about the Orient in essentialist terms. . . As a result, the narrative of the story does not transmit a set of facts about the real world of the characters, rather it is constructed and produced as a result of writer's preferences and within the dominant discourse" (Seyed Mohammad Marandi, 2012, pp. 69-70).

(Tyson, 2006, p. 226). The basic plot structure consists of the following sequence: attribution-action-attribution. An example of a sequence may thus be as follows: the “protagonist starts out with an attribute (for example, he is unloved), and by means of an action (he seeks love) that attribute is transformed (he is loved or, at least, has learned something important as a result of his quest)” (Tyson, 2006, p. 227).

In the case of the of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Once in a Promised Land*, the action can be reduced to a seek-find-lose formula, which is the *langue* underlying the structure of both texts, as it were. The thing sought after can be an object, a state, a condition, or a person. This formula, it is suggested, operates on two levels: the personal and the political. Put otherwise, the main characters’ seek-find-lose love journey functions as an allegory for their seek-find-lose American Dream, which is made impossible by the fast changing political landscape in America after 9/11. Towards the end of the novels, an aura of loss and despair still reigns because the characters’ attributes remain unchanged. Incensed by the post-9/11 anti-Muslim rhetoric, Changez quits his lucrative job and returns to Pakistan; (*Am*)*Erica*, his object of fascination, is lost forever. Jassim becomes a suspect in the wake of 9/11; he eventually loses his job and probably Salwa, who in turn miscarries, has an affair out of wedlock with Jake, who assaults her towards the end of the book, leaving her bathing in a pool of blood, her desire to go back to Jordan crushed.

### **“IN THE FOREGROUND SHIMMERED” (*AM*)*ERICA*: UNREQUITED LOVE IN *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST***

Changez travels from Lahore to New York, then from the latter to the former before he decides to abandon (*Am*)*Erica*. Lahore is a typical traditional Eastern centre, while New York is the epitome of Western cosmopolitan progress. Changez’s to-ing and fro-ing between the two cities gives him a chance to straddle two distinct cultures. Having sampled first-hand both cultures, he therefore becomes the embodiment of the values that they both offer, however contradictory they may be. Owing to a marked decline of his family’s social and economic status, Changez delights in the prospects that a university education in America promises to offer. For him, education in a prestigious American university is an opportunity to meet new people and immerse himself in a culture that represents almost everything the West stands for. Changez’s American Dream operates on two levels: on the one hand, he is lured by a country that epitomises ample opportunity, presumably based on ideals of equality as well as equity; on the other hand, he meets the woman whom he believes can make his experience more meaningful and worthwhile. However, his to-ing and fro-ing between the two cities reveals to him facts to which he has been hitherto oblivious. He ultimately breaks with the country and the woman he loves, and returns to his native country. In the wake of 9/11, he is drawn to the limelight due to a dramatic rise in Islamophobia; most importantly, he becomes conscious of his background, and indeed his difference. Three actions structure the novel’s plot: “to seek”, “to find”, and “to lose”. Changez’s quest for (*Am*) *Erica* is eventually crowned by the fleeting success he achieves on two levels: first, his development of a quasi-intimate relationship with Erica, and, second, his improved economic situation when he becomes an Underwood Samson agent. Despite his new-found romance and social status, he soon becomes disillusioned after the events of 9/11, and ultimately loses both the woman and the country he supposedly loves.

*AmErica* is a *double entendre*, which symbolises Changez’s unrequited love for both a country and a woman. The fusion of the two love stories constitutes a framework that enables Mohsin Hamid to allegorise the gradual disintegration of Changez’s world, and indeed the

disintegration of his American Dream. Like Gatsby, whose American Dream—paralleled by his love and quest for Daisy—streams in green light on the opposite shore of a bay, Erica shimmers in Changez's world. The following passage captures Changez's fascination with the girl, a fascination that marks the beginning of his quest, the "seek" part of the *langue* governing the structure of the text:

. . . in the foreground shimmered Erica, and observing her gave me enormous satisfaction. She had told me that she hated to be alone, and I came to notice that she rarely was. She attracted people to her; she had presence, an uncommon magnetism. Documenting her effect on her habitat, a naturalist would likely have compared her to a lioness: strong, sleek, and invariably surrounded by her pride (Hamid, 2007, pp. 21-22).

From an onomastic point of view, the meaning of the name "Eric/Erica", along its various spellings in other languages, reveals much about the magnetism that the girl exudes in the novel. Originally an old Nordic name—*Eirikr*—it means, among other things, "honoured ruler" (Eric, s.d.). Erica is an allegory for America; they both seduce and snare those who seek their courtship. The name "Erica", then, resonates powerfully with America's unipolar rule over the world. Its domination is uncontested and is set to continue that way, or so it seems. Hamid employs an animalistic diction to describe this predatory and domineering nature of (*Am*)Erica: she is "strong, sleek", and, "invariably surrounded by her pride"; like "a lioness", she commands respect and fear.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, America emerged as the world's watchdog over international politics. The economic, military, and cultural influence that America exercises over the world is almost indisputable. Interestingly, if the unipolarity that currently characterises world politics does anything, it militates against the supposedly democratic rhetoric that America seems to have always championed. The New World Order has only confirmed its superiority and autocracy, "documenting", to borrow Hamid's words, "her effect on her habitat". Modern history still documents America's parenting role, providing "security and garrison troops" in Japan and Germany, "the world's second and largest economies" (Ikenberry, 2004, p. 609). The same thing holds true for Russia, which is in "a quasi-formal security partnership with the United States", and China, which "has accommodated itself to US dominance" (Ikenberry, 2004, p. 609). On the back of this incontestable influence and domination, America has forced the world into its "unipolar age" (Ikenberry, 2004, p. 609).

America was catapulted into prominence and influence in world affairs following the two world wars. It has become an example of economic development and relentless progress, and indeed a land of ceaseless opportunities and dreams. The American Dream has, however, provoked deep ambivalence. Optimists still laud America for providing economic freedom and limitless opportunities for all, and for embodying democratic ideals like freedom of speech and human rights. Critics, like Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck, by contrast, have exposed the dark side of the American Dream, which, for many, has turned out to be a mere mirage shimmering in the distance, just like Erica.

Notwithstanding the charm she exerts on those surrounding her, especially on Changez, Erica is incapable of living peacefully. She is wounded at heart, a wound that leaves Changez languishing in the shackles of unrequited love:

. . . it was clear Erica needed something that I— even by consenting to play the part of a man not myself—was unable to give her. In all likelihood she longed for her

adolescence with Chris, for a time before his cancer made her aware of impermanence and mortality. Perhaps the reality of their time together was as wonderful as she had, on more than one occasion, described to me. Or perhaps theirs was a past all the more potent for its being imaginary. I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love; it was, after all, a religion that would not accept me as a convert. But I knew that she believed in it, and I felt small for being able to offer her nothing of comparable splendor instead (Hamid, 2007, pp. 113-114).

From the beginning of the novel, Hamid foreshadows Changez's doomed relationship with (*Am*)*Erica*. Erica shimmers "in the foreground" only to dim in the background, as it were. Their relationship is doomed, for Erica's inner light can no longer show her the way. Chris, her dead ex-boyfriend, still haunts her whole being. The meaning of the name 'Chris' reveals interesting associations that may throw more light on their doomed relationship. Onomastically, 'Chris', which is short for Christopher, of Greek origin, means "bearer of Christ" (Christopher, s.d.), referring to legends about a saint Christopher, who carried the young Jesus across a river. Metaphorically, it symbolises somebody who bears Christ in his heart. Chris' death foreshadows Erica's spiritual and physical death, making an intimate union between her and Changez a remote possibility. Changez knows deep down that he is chasing a mere mirage and competing with an invisible, dead rival:

I did not say that the same could be said of her when she spoke of Chris; I did not say it because this fact elicited in me mixed emotions. On the one hand it pleased me as her friend to see her so animated, and I knew, moreover, that it was a mark of affection that she took me into her confidence in this way—I had never heard her discuss Chris when speaking to someone else; on the other hand, I was desirous of embarking upon a relationship with her that amounted to more than friendship, and I felt in the strength of her ongoing attachment to Chris the presence of a rival—albeit a dead one—with whom I feared I could never compete (Hamid, 2007, pp. 81-82).

Metaphorically, Chris' death can be read as the demise of religion in America. While (*Am*)*Erica* cannot reconcile with her past following Chris' death, she similarly cannot maintain her relationship with Changez. This said, at this point, Changez is still seeking a stronger relationship with her in that he harbours an optimism—although the latter borders on a pious hope—that it might just work out for him against all the odds imposed by her being haunted by Chris' memory.

Read in the context of the post-9/11 Islamophobic/xenophobic atmosphere, the relationship between Changez and Erica is based on the clash of civilisations thesis and the incompatibility of Islam and the secular West, which appears to be lost after having expunged all forms of divine authority. Without Chris, Erica is lost and needs to stay in a mental institution to recover. It is accordingly suggested that (*Am*)*Erica* cannot embrace Changez, a Muslim fundamentalist in the making, because the love between Chris and Erica is, "after all, a religion" that will not "accept" him "as a convert" (Hamid, 2007, p. 114). Erica's nostalgia for Chris acts as a bulwark against her loving Changez back. Her life orbits the haunting memory of a dead person, who left her stranded in limbo, incapable of looking towards the future.

Changez's American Dream begins in his Princeton years. Following an unexpected scene on the beach in Greece, where he holidays with his fellow Princetonians, he begins to contemplate rosy prospects for him and Erica. He is gradually ushered into the ranks of the powerful, of the generation that will shape the future of America. In Greece particularly, he

begins to experience a more intimate relationship with Erica. In the scene on the beach, Erica bares her “breasts to the sun” (Hamid, 2007, p. 23), increasing Changez’s craving for physical intimacy. He reads the gesture as a special invitation for him to become more intimate with her because out of all his classmates she singled him out for such an exclusive spectacle. He believes that she has started warming to him, especially that none of their female companions has dared to do the same. Besides this quasi-intimacy he feels, Changez begins to live his American Dream when he begins sharing personal dreams with Erica. Now, he believes that his quest is about to be crowned with a glorious conquest:

Erica said that she wanted to be a novelist. Her creative thesis had been a work of long fiction that had won an award at Princeton; she intended to revise it for submission to literary agents and would see how they responded. Normally, Erica spoke little of herself, and tonight, when she did so, it was in a slightly lowered voice and with her eyes often on me. I felt—despite the presence of our companions, whose attention, as always, she managed to capture—that she was sharing with me an intimacy, and this feeling grew stronger when, after observing me struggle, she helped me separate the flesh from the bones of my fish without my having to ask (Hamid, 2007, p. 29).

This public nudity act is forbidden in Islam, but Changez appears to support it wholeheartedly in that at this stage he wants to “submerge his identity into Western identity” (Tariq, 2014). Oblivious to her severe emotional state, Changez’s hopes for a union with her border on the delusional, for he continues to labour under illusion when they go back to New York. Nothing physical happens in Greece, but she now occupies much of his thoughts. Back in New York, she gives him her phone number, a gesture that makes him feel happy because he has “struck up an acquaintance with a woman” with whom he “was well and truly smitten” (Hamid, 2007, pp. 29-30). Changez’s life is consequently turned upside down because he feels the excitement of a new life coursing through his veins: “my excitement about the adventures my new life held for me had never been more pronounced” (Hamid, 2007, p. 30).

Being the economic hub of United States, New York functions as the prototype cosmopolitan centre where Changez can fulfil his American Dream, which has thus far manifested itself in his Princeton education and in his relationship with Erica. Being a Princeton graduate, he is recruited as an analyst by Underwood Samson, a consultancy firm, which offers him a very high salary. The firm then becomes his gateway to success. Put otherwise, Princeton gives him the opportunity to be part of the select elite again, an opportunity that truly materialises when he is hired by Underwood Samson, the firm that helps him cement his newfound rise on the social ladder. Although he often muses with marked acrimony and disparagement over his family’s waning prestige and influence in his native country, having become an influential member of Underwood Samson, he grows more self-confident and starts integrating into the American way of life. There are striking similarities between Changez and Gatsby in that both chase their American Dreams in much the same way: wealth and a beautiful woman. Both begin to play the social role that befits their new-found economic comfort. At this point, Changez is really pleased: “I was presumptuous enough to think that this was how my life was meant to be, that it had in some way been inevitable that I should end up rubbing shoulders with the truly wealthy in such exalted settings” (Hamid, 2007, p. 85). In such exalted settings, he derives his satisfaction from being with Erica, who “vouched” for his “worthiness”; as for those who doubt his credentials, he says, “my Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card were invariably sufficient to earn me a respectful nod of approval” (Hamid, 2007, p. 85). Erica seems to give Changez the social life he desperately needs in America. Going to galleries “with clean lines and minimalist fixtures” and many other places ushers him into “an insider’s world—the chic heart of the city—to which” he

“would otherwise have had no access” (Hamid, 2007, p. 56). At this point, Changez seems to have carved for himself a niche in America; he seems to have found and embraced his American Dream embodied in *(Am)Erica*.

Hamid started writing his novel before the events of 9/11, and had already included many of the themes that came to form its core. The attacks, he admits, came to serve as a good backdrop to his novel, casting his manuscript in a significant historical moment, which helps consolidate the novel’s themes.

The attacks on the Twin Towers constitute a landmark in the history of the twenty-first century. Images broadcast by channels all over the world were so powerful they defied belief. The collapse of the Twin Towers had a special dimension because it was pregnant with symbolism and because it was the first dramatic event shared in real time with disbelief, fascination, horror or joy on all continents and in all countries. After the attacks, Muslims, be them living in Muslim countries or in the diaspora, fared badly, for they came to be wrongly associated with terrorism and all sorts of unfounded stereotypes and myths. The attacks bred suspicion towards everything Muslim, a phenomenon carefully represented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In the wake of the attacks, Changez begins to be aware of his distinctiveness, of his *Muslimness*, as it were, leading to an identity crisis, which eventually leads to his denunciation of America. Changez, in fact, goes through a period of psychological torment because his sense of his foreignness is heightened.

For her part, Erica is disconcerted by the attacks. Like every other American, she cannot help but be touched by the tragedy:

. . . she had been tense at the start of the evening, careworn and riddled with worry. Like so many others in the city after the attacks, she appeared deeply anxious. Yet her anxieties seemed only indirectly related to the prospect of dying at the hands of terrorists. The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. I did not know if the same was true of me (Hamid, 2007, pp. 82-83).

The destruction of America’s economic symbol marks the beginning of an unexpected change in *(Am)Erica*’s relationship with Changez. Repressed thoughts that have allowed such unlikely bedfellows to cultivate a relationship of quasi-intimacy have begun to ooze out of Erica’s wounded pride. She naturally begins to sympathise with the families of the victims, trying in so doing to nurse *(Am)Erica*’s pride. Changez starts to accompany her to fundraisers and similar events held for the families of the victims, becoming, “in effect, her official escort at the events of New York society” (Hamid, 2007, p. 85). Accompanying her to such events represents his last-ditch attempt to salvage his relationship with *(Am)Erica*, and thus his potentially collapsing American Dream.

The spectacular attacks against New York and Washington are indeed against the heart of American capitalism and against the centre of the American political and military power. Yet, America—Changez believes—has capitalised on the tragedy to use it as a propaganda tool to wage the so-called war on terror. America and its allies reacted swiftly by invading Afghanistan and then Iraq, provoking by so doing mixed reactions in the Muslim world and the rest of the world alike. In the Muslim world, America’s megalomaniac military crackdown on what it viewed as radical Islamists was seen by many Muslims as an indirect attack on Islam, a new episode of the crusades. Likewise, many sceptics in the West believed



firmly that America and its allies were not chasing terrorists, but were instead after oil reserves.

The destruction of the World Trade Center compounds Erica's troubles in that she becomes more distant: a faint light fading into the horizon. Changez steps in to help her through her ordeal. This time he wants physical intimacy, something of which he has been deprived up till now. The scene that takes place in his flat captures the symbolic significance of their relationship. He is denied entry physically and symbolically:

She did not respond; she did not resist; she merely acceded as I undressed her. At times I would feel her hold onto me, or I would hear from her the faintest of gasps. Mainly she was silent and un-moving, but such was my desire that I overlooked the growing wound this inflicted on my pride and continued. I found it difficult to enter her; it was as though she was not aroused. She said nothing while I was inside her, but I could see her discomfort, and so I forced myself to stop (Hamid, 2007, pp. 89-90).

After this sad episode, Changez learns that Erica cannot be with anyone other than Chris. Her identity seems to be entwined with his. He is finally convinced that she has no place for him in her heart, for she and Chris had "an unusual love, with such a degree of commingling of identities that when Chris died, Erica felt she had lost herself" (Hamid, 2007, p. 91). The impossibility of being with Erica, whose allegorical association with America is inescapable, makes his American Dream impossible to realise.

9/11 displaces Changez from the ranks of the elite in New York. After the attacks, he becomes so self-conscious and fragile to the extent that his work productivity begins to dwindle. His fear of becoming the object of indiscriminate labelling turns into a quasi-neurosis with him. Jim is quick to see through Changez's inner conflicts; accordingly, he advises him to mend his ways lest he attracts more attention to himself. Nevertheless, Changez has already attracted attention to himself by deciding to grow a beard, a change in appearance that makes Jim think that he is looking shabby. In the hope to get Changez's productivity back on track, Jim offers him "a new project, valuing a book publisher in Valparasio, Chile" (Hamid, 2007, p. 137). Changez accepts.

In Chile, Changez continues his series of realisations, especially when he meets Juan-Bautista, who invites him over for lunch. By this time, Changez is going through an intense inner conflict, which has been compounded by looming international strife after 9/11. Juan-Bautista too can see through Changez, thus far still reluctant to intimate to his colleagues that he has been going through a severe identity crisis because of 9/11. Bautista asks Changez a question that alludes to the predatory nature of Underwood Samson: "Does it trouble you. . .to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?" (Hamid, 2007, p. 151) Like America, which conducts herself rather haughtily on the international scene, Underwood Samson undertakes a more or less similar mission by deciding the fate of people in different continents. Juan-Bautista likens Changez to a janissary, who slaves himself away for the American empire. The similarities that Bautista makes between Changez and the janissaries make Changez more aware of the conspiratorial support he gives to Underwood Samson and America. The historical allusion is significant because the janissaries were mainly Christian boys kidnapped at a young age by the Ottoman Empire. They were then groomed and taught the craft of war in order to become ferocious warriors and loyal defenders of the empire. Likewise, Changez is groomed at Princeton and taught to put the "fundamentals" (Hamid, 2007, p. 116) into practice at Underwood Samson. The novel is about Changez's slide into fundamentalism, "but in a neat reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue

here is that of US capitalism” (Sharma, 2015) practised by Underwood Samson. The conversation with Bautista signals a turning-point in Changez’s decision to quit his job and go back home despite Jim’s imploration not to take a rash decision he may regret later. Changez feels “torn” because he “had thrown” his “lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the Empire, when all along” he “was predisposed to feel compassion for those like Juan-bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain” (Hamid, 2007, p. 152). Despite Jim’s persuasions, Changez decides to leave the firm and go back home, more disillusioned than ever, his American Dream splintering in front of his eyes.

Hamid uses an unrequited love story framework to convey the loss that Changez feels after the attacks. He fuses the two love stories, so that the narrative assumes symbolic dimensions. In his interview with Hamish Hamilton, Hamid makes an interesting comment: “In the case of Changez, his political situation as a Pakistani immigrant fuels his love for Erica, and his abandonment by Erica fuels his political break with America” (Hamilton, 2007). Not only has Changez’s political/romantic break with (*Am*)*Erica* shattered his American Dream, but it has also opened his eyes to its elusiveness:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream. The power of my blinders shocks me, looking back—so stark in retrospect were the portents of coming disaster in the news, on the streets, and in the state of the woman with whom I had become enamored (Hamid, 2007, p. 93).

### **LIVING A LIE: DISCONNECTED DREAMS IN *ONCE IN A PROMISED LAND***

Like Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Halaby portrays the loss that Muslim characters feel after the crisis of 9/11 by throwing them into the turmoil of a troubled love story. *Once in a Promised land* is about a Jordanian couple, whose lives are disrupted by the events of 9/11. Salwa, a Palestinian-Jordanian, was born in the United States, but raised in Jordan because her parents could not eke out a proper living in the United States. Although she grows up in Jordan, she often feels an attachment to America, an attachment that stems from a curse that keeps hounding her. Growing up with Hassan, who is infatuated with her, their relationship is expected to be crowned by marriage. Alas, when Jassim visits Jordan, his native country, to lecture on the importance of water, Salwa succumbs to the rosy prospects of going back to America, her birthplace. She jilts Hassan and marries Jassim to make her American Dream come true. While a seek-don’t-find formula applies to Hassan, the seek-find-lose formula structures Jassim’s and Salwa’s American Dream. Jilted by Salwa, Hassan gradually gets married to another woman after years of wistful nostalgia and self-pity. Much to Hassan’s dismay and disappointment, Salwa marries Jassim and secures a life in America. Salwa’s and Jassim’s tragedy unfolds in the wake of 9/11. The couple’s failure at reproduction—owing to Jassim’s reluctance—opens a Pandora’s box of problems. Salwa induces pregnancy without telling her husband, beginning thus a series of lies that drives them apart. Jassim, for his part, marries Salwa because her American citizenship will allow them to stay in America for as long as they wish. His childless marriage is almost loveless; Therefore, he and his wife are gradually led to have affairs with Penny and Jake respectively. Jassim hits and kills a boy on his way back home from his swimming routine. He becomes a

suspect, a conspirator, and is constantly hounded by the FBI. He only tells Salwa about the accident when it is too late, when their world has fallen apart.

Salwa's early fascination with America stems from her yearning to live a life of luxury. As a child, Salwa earns the nickname of "Miss Pajamas" (Halaby, 2007, p. 3) after her aunt brings her a pair of silk pyjamas from Thailand. Silk is a symbol of luxury and comfort; it makes Salwa feel like a "queen" (Halaby, 2007, p. 47).

In America, besides her bank job, she starts working as an estate agent, a job that promises a lot of money. She sometimes indulges in massive buying sprees, prompting Jassim to condemn these "extravagant lapses" (Halaby, 2007, p. 23). However, her quest for an ideal life in America turns out to be a mere lie because "the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood, and the Malboro man, and therefore impossible to find" (Halaby, 2007, p. 49).

We learn about Salwa's childhood in flashbacks. She and Hassan grow up together. Very few people doubt that they will one day part ways, except Hassan, who wakes up to Salwa's yearning for America the moment he sees how she reacts before and after Jassim has given his lecture. Jassim represents the opportunity for a better life that Salwa has been seeking. It is a matter of days before Jassim and Salwa decide to get married, a marriage whose promising prospects lie in the fact that "Salwa's American citizenship" will "enable them both to stay" (Halaby, 2007, p. 70) in America for good. Salwa breaks Hassan's heart, little knowing that America will eventually break hers, waking her up thus from her trance.

Hassam, who is much attached to home, meant home for Salwa before she was taken away from him. Growing up together, Hassan's presence and love gave Salwa a sense of stability and purpose. He would have never ventured outside Jordan to study in Romania had Salwa decided to stay. He would have "focused too much energy" (Halaby, 2007, p. 37) on her. Salwa is displaced twice: first from Palestine to Jordan, then from the latter to United States. In Jordan, she and her family find a safe refuge, and a sense of belonging that is severed physically, but never spiritually, from Palestine. Hassan, for Salwa, symbolises her lost motherland: she "was appreciative of Hassan's handsome face, sense of humor, and political activism, saw him as a symbol of Palestine" (Halaby, 2007, p. 240). Hassan on his own part was "smitten with Salwa, who in his eyes was the definition of perfection" (Halaby, 2007, p. 240). Siham is aware of the sense of belonging and rootedness, with which Hassan engulfs Salwa. She has always thought that Hassan "grounded" and "reminded" (Halaby, 2007, p. 240) her of who she is.

Nevertheless, Hassan has to contend with two forces, internal and external, which exert a powerful influence on Salwa. On the one hand, her father constantly reminds her that Hassan has no professional career yet, which makes him incapable of supporting a family. On the other hand, deep down, Salwa is torn between her love for Hassan and the yearning for a better life, perhaps the life that her parents could not secure in America when her father decided to take his family back to Jordan. Salwa likes Hassan, but "Beneath liking and the tiniest part of desire in which liking was wrapped, however, was her greed for a certain kind of life, and when she floated out those fantasies, Hassan was not part of them" (Halaby, 2007, p. 240). What Salwa is keenly seeking cannot be found with Hassan.

Halaby's main characters are caught up in a triangle of faltering love relationships, spanning almost a decade, and crossing two continents. Hassan for his part keeps grappling with his

loss of Salwa to Jassim. When the latter came back to Jordan to lecture on the importance of water, that day Hassan “knew Salwa would leave him” (Halaby, 2007, p. 37) because Jassim, “a stiff, well-to-do scientist. . .promised her America” (Halaby, 2007, p. 37). When Salwa realises that Jassim does not want a baby, and when their relationship worsens in the wake of 9/11, she begins to muse about what has gone wrong. she is occasionally gnawed by guilt for not marrying Hassan, for choosing America over Jordan. While Jassim’s and Salwa’s world is turned upside down, Hassan begins to recover from a nine-year reverie, during which he has been chasing his dream: “*Salwa, Salwa, Salwa. My hopes and dreams. My one first love. My perfect beauty. My purest Salwa*” (Halaby, 2007, p. 328). The moment he decides to call her to tell her about his marriage, he does not know that Salwa is “lying in an American hospital bed” (Halaby, 2007, p. 328), her American Dream shattered to pieces. Because he cannot reach her on the phone, he leaves her a message: “Intizar and I have gotten married. . .Salwa I am calling to say goodbye, to tell you that I wish you well. . .I am now going to try to forget you. . .God willing, you will be happy in your life” (Halaby, 2007, p. 328). Hassan moves on with his life, leaving Salwa and Jassim grappling with their imbalances in America. By American standards, Salwa and Jassim are highly successful, “a couple of upwardly mobile over-achievers living the American Dream” (Banita, 2010, p. 246). Both of them have embraced the American way of life in that “both have succumbed to the seductive lure of American Consumerism” (Motyl, 2011, p. 229). However, Salwa’s American Dream is incomplete because her husband, Jassim, does not want to have children. She is eventually tempted to induce pregnancy when she deliberately skips taking her contraceptives. She consequently becomes pregnant, yet, alas, miscarries to her dismay. Afraid of Jassim’s reaction, she only tells him of her miscarriage after their world has started falling apart. Jassim, on the other hand, knocks down a boy on his way back from his swimming pool routine. He becomes the object of growing suspicion because the accident coincides with the deep-seated distrust of Muslims, indiscriminately labelled as terrorists, in the wake of 9/11. He too refrains from telling his wife about the accident until it is too late. Salwa and Jassim become trapped in a vicious circle of lies, especially when they both start having affairs out of wedlock. Their American Dream splinters ultimately, and turns out to be a lie which mirrors the lie they have been living.

Uncertainty characterises Salwa’s life in America because Jassim is loath to have children. Jassim’s and Salwa’s failure to reproduce themselves in a country that has offered them success, however fleeting it may be, foreshadows their downfall towards the end of the novel. Being a hydrologist of a high calibre, Jassim strives to save rainwater, a priceless commodity, for future generations. “I’m afraid it is true”, he says, “water is my first love” (Halaby, 2007, p. 243). Jassim’s fascination with water stems from the fact that it has such a healing and invigorating power: “when you have been sick and you take your first sip of spring water after not eating for a day or two, is there anything tastier?” (Halaby, 2007, p. 243) Jassim’s success at saving a symbol of life and continuity is juxtaposed with his failure at reproduction. He fails to resuscitate, as it were, his faltering relationship with his wife, who desperately wants a baby, an equally powerful symbol of life and regeneration, making his and Salwa’s American Dream an unattainable ideal. It is failure at reproduction that causes a series of related problems. Salwa eventually convinces herself that skipping taking her birth-control pills a couple of days will not impregnate her: she “glided back to bed, lighter and more honest now. . .the Lie was deflated. Her emptiness has been filled” (Halaby, 2007, p. 11). She leads a troubled inward existence because “she had thought of nothing else and had not fought the evolutionary mandate to reproduce, just indulged it while she contoured her Lie” (Halaby, 2007, p. 11). Ironically, water, Jassim’s first love, cleanses Salwa’s lie about her miscarriage, but at the same time washes away their not-yet-born baby, their reason—at

least Salwa's—to try to salvage their American Dream: “That was another lie to the self, she realized. The distance grew from her Lie, the one that had spilled out from between her legs and been carried away by his precious water” (Halaby, 2007, p. 190).

Although Salwa's desire to have a baby is too strong, her husband's lack of empathy leads her to frustration. The feeling of being incomplete, of Jassim not being around to induce balance in her life causes her emotional pain. Jassim in fact finds that same balance in his morning ritual, which borders on a religious belief:

Jassim delighted in the stillness the morning offered, a time before emotions were awake, a time for contemplation. This day was no exception as he got up, washed his face, brushed his teeth, and relieved himself, the beginning of a morning ritual as close to prayer as he could allow. His thoughts hovered over the internal elements of self and world rather than the external. Jassim did not believe in God, but he did believe in Balance. At five o'clock, with the day still veiled, Jassim found Balance (Halaby, 2007, p. 3).

Swimming reinvigorates him, and renews his love for water. Nonetheless, he is too self-centred in that “His thoughts hovered over the internal elements of self and world rather than the external” (Halaby, 2007, p. 3). Salwa is undoubtedly part of that external world. Jassim fails to find, or rather to sustain, in his marital life the same balance he strives to create inwardly. Salwa, by contrast, believes that a baby will cement their relationship and make it more balanced. Although she has fulfilled her dream of living in America by marrying Jassim, she still feels that her life is empty:

Salwa's Lie covered a glorious underbelly. It was not *I didn't take my birth control pill* but instead a much more colorful *For a few years now I've felt that I've been missing something in my life. That's why I got a real estate license. It wasn't enough, though. I think having a child will fill that void. I am going to try to get pregnant, even though Jassim says he doesn't want a child* (Halaby, 2007, p. 10).

Salwa feels a thirst, a desire and an intense need to be recognized, to be gratified, to acquire the only thing that will fill that void. Material possessions and professional success, she eventually learns, provide fleeting gratification.

By a curious paradox, Salwa blames Jassim for what she herself seeks earnestly. Jassim's commitment to his successful career is paralleled by his attachment to his swimming routine, which, once disrupted after the accident, disrupts Jassim's life. After her miscarriage and lie to Jassim, Salwa spends a considerable amount of time brooding over her predicament, and blaming in the process Jassim for not being wholly open to the idea of having children. Nevertheless, she too, like Jassim, is strongly committed to a successful career, chasing lucrative opportunities whenever they present themselves. She immerses herself in work, and widens unconsciously the gulf between her and her husband. Jassim who believes that their relationship will improve after Salwa has become an estate agent is now at a loss as to why things “got worse” (Halaby, 2007, p. 23). After having secured her license as an estate agent, Salwa, often working on weekends, begins to devote a significant amount of her time to her clients. The result is that she is now “rushed to the point of destruction” (Halaby, 2007, p. 23). For Jassim, Salwa's business means that “the times they used to share together. . .now find Salwa busy, preoccupied, or gone”, and “with the exception of the mornings, Jassim found himself alone quite a bit” (Halaby, 2007, p. 23).

Salwa's and Jassim's deteriorating relationship, in reality, exposes the two polar facets of their American Dream: a seemingly balanced external reality, and a troubled inward existence. Jassim is a very successful hydrologist; he has secured for himself all the comforts of life: he lives in a beautiful house, drives an expensive car, and most importantly, he is held in high regard by his employer, Marcus, who sees him as an equal, not as a subordinate. When Salwa tells Jassim about the miscarriage, he starts going out with Penny, "who had done nothing more than to awaken a coiled desire in him" (Halaby, 2007, p. 158). He wants to be with her because perhaps he is "trying to hurt" Salwa for "lying about the miscarriage" (Halaby, 2007, p. 158). When he starts going out with Penny, Jassim becomes aware of the luxurious life he can afford, a life that many Americans cannot afford themselves:

When they entered the store, walking closer together than strangers, Jassim realized that in this place he would never have gone to on his own, an establishment with rolled-back prices and rolled-up hope, were all the people from all those neighborhoods. Only here he didn't need to peek in windows, to slow down and try to guess what was going on. Here, at Penny's side, he was welcome and could listen to comments (mostly grouchy, mostly focused on how expensive an item was) and phone conversations ("Hey, babe, I know, I want you too. I've got to pick up some light bulbs and brake fluid now. I'll call you later") as he watched large bodies bursting out of tight clothes, children stuffed into shopping carts, screamed at, slapped, and loved too loudly. The ways of the poor were new to him, and yes, he assumed that the people shopping in Wal-Mart were poor, all of them. Because why would anyone who could afford not to shop at WalMart come here? (Halaby, 2007, p. 276).

Penny ushers Jassim into a world hitherto unknown to him. The passage is significant in that it sheds light on the privileges that Jassim will lose when his American Dream crushes. On the other hand, Salwa leads a seemingly successful life because thus far she works two jobs, which enable her to send money back home to help her family. Notwithstanding all material success, America will soon become a barren land, with barren dreams.

From the outset, Halaby suggests that 9/11 has thrust Muslims into the limelight. They have become the object of public scrutiny and blind discrimination. Indiscriminate labelling, Halaby alludes, is dangerous because it associates Muslims with acts of terror perpetrated by few radicals who—albeit Muslim—do not represent all Muslims:

Our main characters are Salwa and Jassim. We really come to know them only after the World Trade Center buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs, by Muslims. Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center. Nothing and everything (Halaby, 2007, p. VII).

Apart from some occasional flashbacks, most of the novel is set in the post-9/11 tense atmosphere. After Salwa's miscarriage, Jassim accidentally knocks down a boy, who is skateboarding with his friends. The boy happens to be someone who plays exact-revenge-on-terrorists games with his peers, and who has openly expressed his hatred towards Arabs. By dint of this coincidence, Jassim becomes a suspect followed and harassed by the FBI. After the accident, Jassim begins to see his world falling apart because he "could not, at the moment, fully accept the idea that his lack of balance with Salwa had in some way tipped over and affected another's life. Taken another's life. It was too huge at the moment" (Halaby, 2007, p. 144). At work, his colleagues begin to regard him with suspicion following the investigation by the FBI agents. Added to his troubles, clients are now loath to deal with

him, a reluctance that eventually prompts Marcus to dismiss him, albeit convinced that Jassim did not knock the boy down on purpose. 9/11 serves as a wake-up call for Jassim, for it awakens him to his and Salwa's false American Dream:

In leaving out what was most on his mind, Jassim realized that they had spent their lives together not saying what mattered most, dancing around the peripheries instead of participating. He had seen in her a passion and excitement for life that had become dulled almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States. What he wanted in her could not exist in America. Could not exist with him, perhaps. And he feared that he could no longer exist in Jordan (Halaby, 2007, p. 303).

Indeed, what Salwa wants does not exist with Jassim. Nor does it exist in America. Jassim's lack of empathy and warmth drives Salwa into Jake's arms. Jake, who suffers from serious psychological disorders, toys with Salwa's feelings, giving her the impression that he is really infatuated with her. Once Salwa has fallen into the snares of his pretensions and succumbs to his whims, he talks behind her back, describing her as "an older woman" (Halaby, 2007, p. 318). When Salwa finally decides to go back to Jordan, she goes to Jake's flat to say goodbye. On her way, she sees three immigrant workers, Mexican she assumes, clipping branches off a tree. The scene close to Jake's flat captures Salwa's attitude towards her and Jassim's American Dream:

saw that all three workers were watching her. Just beyond her irritation, she imagined the miles of desert they must have crossed for the opportunity to trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the American Dream. "It's all a lie!" she wanted to shout. "A huge lie." A lie her parents believed in enough that they had paved her future with the hope of glass slippers and fancy balls, not understanding that her beginning was not humble enough, nor was her heart pure enough, for her to be the princess in any of these stories. That she did not come from a culture of happy endings. That she would have been much better off munching on fava beans from her ceiling basket. She looked at those dark men looking at her and from a distance she could see their sacrifices, the partial loss of self that they too must have agreed to in coming to America, the signing over of the soul (Halaby, 2007, p. 316).

Jake loses his temper when Salwa tells him that she has finally decided to go back to Jordan to let the dust settle. He assaults her and causes her serious injuries, which could have been lethal had it not been for the immigrant workers, who helped her out and called the police on Jake. Meanwhile, Jassim was with Penny when his wife was lying unconscious, bathing in a pool of blood. With Penny, he "refused to think beyond this moment. He did not think he should stop because he might be *leading her on*," just like he has done with Salwa, "letting her believe something would be that would not be" (Halaby, 2007, p. 325). Jassim wakes up to a harsh reality only to find out that his dream has splintered.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center, Salwa realises that her lie to her husband constitutes a small part of the big lie they have been living. She ultimately realises that "wishes don't come true for Arabs in America" (Halaby, 2007, p. 184), and most importantly she recognises that it is not "just her Lie that had brought distance between her and her husband and surrounded them with tension, it was the patriotic breathing of those around them. American flags waving, pale hands willing them to go home or agree" (Halaby, 2007, pp. 184-185). Jassim loses his job, his faith in his wife, who, in turn, loses her purity to Jake, and is now seriously battered, her attempt to go back to Jordan to sort things out nipped in the bud.

America gives false and illusive promises, a reality captured by Halaby's book cover. The latter depicts a swimmer, supposedly Jassim, swimming leisurely across azure water, whose clarity is tainted by the shadow of a plane hovering above him. The image on the book cover reflects the significance of the historical moment in which the novel was published in the sense that "it superbly capture[s] the ways in which the events of 9/11, suggested by the shadow of the looming airplane, haunt the lives the Arab characters, whose aspirations and ambitions are reflected through the cool brilliance of the water" (Vinson, 2006). The symbolic significance of the image on the book cover is enhanced by the biblical allusions of the novel's title, which refers to the "Israelites' exodus out of Egypt and to the promised land, . . . a cue to the novel's central theme of disillusionment of Arab-Americans in the US (C, 2015).

Halaby mingles a faltering marriage with a splintering American Dream to capture the chaotic, confusing reality, in which the Muslim characters find themselves in the wake of 9/11. Nonplussed by the changing political landscape in America, Salwa and Jassim, rather ironically, kill their dreams themselves. Salwa flushes down the toilet her not-yet-born baby, bringing about her eventual downfall. Her miscarriage symbolises "the depletion of Arab-American security and happiness on American soil" (C, 2015). By the same token, Jassim accidentally kills a boy and is eventually caught up in an intricate web of false accusations and unfounded stereotypes. Their lies to each other connect their individual tragedies; these lies in effect mirror the "Big Lie" (Halaby, 2007, p. 27)—the American Dream—they have been living.

## CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid and Laila Halaby structured the plots of their novels around faltering personal relationships to simultaneously depict the crumbling of their Muslim characters' world after the tragedy of 9/11. The eventual break that the main characters have with their loved ones happens in tandem with their break with America to signal the collapse of their American Dream. A seek-find-lose *langue* structures their personal as well as their political relationships. After 9/11, Changez's break with Erica and his abandonment of Underwood Samson signals his break with America and the end of his American Dream. By the same token, Salwa's and Jassim's personal problems are compounded by the changing politics of America in the wake of 9/11. The lies they tell each other expose the "Big Lie" they have been living. When their marriage crumbles, their American Dream comes to a dismal end. Jake assaults Salwa, and leaves her soaked in blood, nursing her injuries, physical and moral, unable to escape her American nightmare to Jordan. Jassim, still under investigation, loses his job and his friends, and is only left with the sad spectacle of a bloodied Salwa. Hamid and Halaby structure their plots around a seek-find-lose formula to emphasise the powerful appeal, the fleeting gratification, and more importantly the sheer elusiveness of their characters' American Dream.

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