

# A Story in Search of a Voice: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Sayed Youssef

Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**—*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* often falls under the umbrella of post-9/11 narrative fiction. It has largely been given extensive analytic treatment by postcolonial scholars, particularly in relation to identity, nationalism, and the global impact of the 9/11 terror attacks. However, it has rarely been analyzed through the lens of postcolonial feminism. This is a notable omission, as a critical reading of the text shows some examples that intertwine gender dynamics with cultural identity, postcolonialism, and power issues. Furthermore, the novel touches on cultural differences between the West and the East, and these contrasts inevitably affect gender dynamics. At its core, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a male-centered narrative in which women are not fully realized individuals: they are peripheral, erased, and *othered*. Apart from Erica, women, especially the Pakistani Muslim ones, are totally absent, nameless, and are not seen as fully realized agents. Even Erica is depicted as passive, vulnerable, lacking agency, and psychologically disordered.

**Index Terms**—Changez, Erica, postcolonial feminism, post-9/11 narrative, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *Methodology:*

As a key post-9/11 narrative, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* attempts to bring together two dichotomizing discourses of two dissimilar cultures—the West and the East. This is manifested through the protagonist's efforts to assimilate into American society by establishing a liaison with a white American girl, Erica by name, who epitomizes the injured America in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Although their relationship is very intimate and goes beyond the scope of pure friendship, all of Changez's attempts to make Erica forget her past lover turn into a complete debacle. Chris, Erica's dead boyfriend, too, is himself a symbol that represents the past and the glory that still haunts Erica, whose very name evokes Am-Erica in Arabic. This is the reason why she cannot forget him quite easily. Not surprisingly, the closer Changez comes to Erica, the farther away she is. This is illustrated in Erica's insistence on stigmatizing Changez as a foreigner: she and other Princetonians describe him as “an exotic acquaintance” (Hamid, 2007, p. 19).

As manifested from the very title given to this paper, it is a postcolonial feminist reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a narrative that amalgamates both postcolonialism and feminism together. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) notions, Changez has a hybrid identity: though he is Pakistani, he gets his education at one of America's high-ranking universities (Princeton), speaks English fluently like a native, and works at a prestigious valuation firm—i.e., Underwood Samson. Furthermore, Bhabha's mimicry and resistance also fit here, specifically when Changez adopts Western mannerisms. Nevertheless, mimicry abruptly turns into resistance when the protagonist combats Western values and ideals and insists on resisting American imperialism through its military intervention in a neighboring country to his homeland, i.e., Afghanistan. Despite Changez's incessant attempts to assimilate into the American community at the beginning, towards the end of the book, he willingly leaves America, participates in political activities and demonstrations against its foreign policies in his homeland and beyond, and grows his beard.

The whole story is a frame narrative: it is a dramatic monologue in which this time the colonized is the one who talks digressively to the colonizer and critiques their dominance. This conjures up Edward Said's *Orientalism*, whose notions also fit here as the West, represented here through America and the character of Erica, still vehemently rejects the East (Changez), insisting on stereotyping it as the exotic, the inferior, and the other. This is represented through different examples in the novel. For example, in post-9/11 America, Changez is described as a potential threat to the American community: he is simply the “other” or the source of suspicion in the book. He is subjected to different forms of *othering*. At airports, he is questioned and scrutinized by the airport security for both his Muslim background and brown skin. On different occasions, he is bullied by xenophobic American people who regard him as an enemy to the stability of their community; though Erica is involved in a romantic relationship with him, she still prefers Chris, her deceased boyfriend, to him. Erica's rejection of Changez metaphorically embodies the West's rejection of the East.

Likewise, Gayatri Spivak's theory concerning the subaltern, especially her argument that “The subaltern cannot speak,” also applies to Changez, as he can be interpreted as the embodiment of the oppressed, colonized subaltern whose voice is silenced (Spivak, 1988, p. 271). Nevertheless, the case right here seems somewhat different at first glance, as the colonized

is the one who speaks at great length. On his part, the colonizer, represented also through the American auditor whom Changez meets at a café in the Anarkali Bazaar in Lahore, seems indifferent: he is always silent and inscrutable. He does not interfere in or object to what is said to him, which gives the immediate impression that what is already said is either unimportant or nonsensical to him. This consolidates Spivak's argument regarding the discourse of the postcolonial subaltern: the subaltern is always marginalized, unheard, and silenced. Furthermore, when they do speak, the colonizer seems uninterested and unresponsive. However, in the words of Roberta Wolfson, this whole talk may seem unreliable since it is Changez alone who talks and the other is just listening: "Because Changez's perspective is the only one offered, there is no reliable way to assess the legitimacy of his claims" (Wolfson, 2023, p. 256). This is stressed by John Macintosh, who sees Changez to have "sole narrative control" (Macintosh, 2022, p. 52). Likewise, Annelise Hein opines that, "Because the novel is structured as a monologue, Changez's voice dominates the story, but internal contradictions engender suspicion about the reader's ability to trust what Changez says about himself" (Hein, 2025, p. 78).

Hamid's protagonist is portrayed as a postcolonial subject, as he falls between two different cultural worlds—America and Pakistan—without fully belonging to either. As he puts it, "I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid, 2007, p. 168). Once again, this conjures up Bhabha's (1994) theories, especially his concept of the Third Space, because Changez cannot assimilate into American culture or maintain his Pakistani identity. Instead, he occupies what Bhabha describes as the Third Space: his cultural identity is not fixed but fluctuates between two dichotomized cultural worlds.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. *The Irony Behind the Title*

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has received plaudits from critics since its publication in 2007. In the words of John Macintosh, "It is perhaps the best-known post-9/11 novel by an author from a predominately Muslim country" (Macintosh, 2022, p. 52). It has often been analyzed as a postcolonial novel dealing with such issues as identity, hybridity, and globalization. In the form of a dramatic monologue, it portrays the protagonist, Changez Khan by name, as a hyphenated personality split between two cultures without fully assimilating into any of them. What exacerbates this division is the terror attacks of 9/11. Nevertheless, the present paper analyzes the novel from a postcolonial feminist lens. Although this novel cannot be categorized as a feminist novel, a thorough critical analysis reveals some feminist aspects that permeate the text.

The society depicted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a traditional patriarchal community in which women, along with the minorities, are marginalized, silenced, and not fully accepted as peers. Erica is the central female figure in the book. She is represented as a typical Manhattanite girl who is idealized and desired but entirely "out of reach," especially for Changez, the young Pakistani man (Hamid, 2007, p. 25). Furthermore, she cannot forget her deceased boyfriend, Chris, and still prefers him to Changez. Even during their most intimate moments together, Erica is still haunted by the white Chris, whose very name also evokes Christ and allegorically stands for the Christian West. This is translated into more emotional withdrawal from the brown-skinned Changez.

As illustrated from the very title given to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it is a novel of terror and fundamentalism. Nevertheless, Hamid's fundamentalist depicted here differs somewhat from that tackled in other terror narratives. Though he wears a beard, overtly critiques American policies, and meets the collapse of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center with an unprompted *smile*, he is not an extremist or terrorist, as the title of the novel assumes: "And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (p. 83; emphasis original). As he goes on to digress, his initial sense of *pleasure* and nonchalance towards the attacks at that very moment has nothing to do with his being a sociopath or his gloat over the slaughter of the thousands of innocents who were killed or injured during the attacks. However, it is attributed to the fact that at last "someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (p. 83). In the words of Elena Ortells Montón, "Traditionally, 9/11 narrative fiction has featured the figure of the other as a Muslim *terrorist*. However, interestingly enough, in...Hamid's novel, the individual other is not a terrorist but an innocent victim of the powerful imperialistic system, a target of the irrational abhorrence of their race and provenance" (p. 19). Therefore, the protagonist's fundamentalism cited here lies in his profound rejection of Western values such as capitalism and imperialism. Surbhi Malik points out, "[T]he novel challenges our deep-seated expectations about fundamentalism by presenting us with a 'suspect' who is modern and educated, not illiterate or religious" (Malik, 2019, p. 238). As Hamid portrays him, Changez belongs to an elite Pakistani family, erudite, well-traveled, and financially well-off. Furthermore, as early as the very opening lines of the book, he introduces himself as "a lover of America", "a New Yorker", and cordially offers him his services (Hamid, 2007, pp. 1, 37).

Though he is bearded, which some may regard as an emblem of fundamentalism, Changez is a secular Muslim who heartily drinks alcohol and is involved in sexual intercourse beyond the scope of marriage. His overt critique of America is due to his being despondent about the way things are going there in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, along with his deep anger at America's military intervention during the War on Terror in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, which resulted in millions of deaths and casualties—scenes that caused him to "tremble with fury" (p. 114). In the words of Brygida Gasztold, despite his being "an intermediary between two cultures: his native Pakistani and adopted America...the protagonist enumerates accusations against America: indifference to the rest of the world, lack of concern for the expense the war of revenge costs others, and the assumed and disseminated position of the righteous superpower,

which is in fact an imperialistic dominator of the globe” (Gasztold, 2015, p. 19). This way, Elena Ortells Montón may not be mistaken when she asserts that at the end “*Changez changes...* the “American” fundamentalist believer in the Western capitalist system turns into the Pakistani fundamentalist defender of the basic rights of oppressed nations” (Montón, 2017, p. 28; emphasis original). This is the very reason he willingly returns to Pakistan and wears a beard, which he himself sees as “a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity” (Hamid, 2007, p. 148). According to Mohiodin Farhan and Junwu Tian, this metamorphosis in Changez’s character from an outstanding Princeton graduate working as an analyst for a respected American corporate firm to a man embracing nationalistic fundamentalism in his homeland is attributed to his incessant attempt to regain agency in a world that simply ‘others’ him. To quote their very words, “This shift is not just a response to the injustices he faces; rather, it is a reflection of his attempt to regain agency, pride and belonging in a world that relentlessly labels him “other”” (Farhan & Tian, 2025, p. 3).

Likewise, according to Albert Braz, the title *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is ironic, as the fundamentalism cited right here is economic fundamentalism. Hence, it is not about religion as some may assume, but rather about economics—American capitalism, to be more specific, represented through Underwood Samson, where the protagonist has served for a while. To quote his very words, “[O]ne of the great ironies in Hamid’s novel is that the fundamentalism that permeates the narrative does not refer to religion but to economics, particularly the raw capitalism of Wall Street high finance” (as cited in Macintosh, 2022, p. 53). No wonder “*Focus on the fundamentals*” is the “guiding principle” of Underwood Samson, where Changez has worked (Hamid, 2007, p. 112; emphasis original).

### B. *Changez—A Gendered Postcolonial Subject*

As this paper aims to probe *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from the lens of postcolonial feminism, Changez, the protagonist, exemplifies the figure of a gendered postcolonial subject—a citizen of a former British colony whose identity and experience are shaped by colonial power structures and gender norms. He is simply one among millions of immigrants residing in the West whose story is in search of a voice. As Elena Ortells Montón puts it, “Hamid allow[s] us to listen to the voices of those Arab-American citizens, those transnational diasporic subjects who suffered the effects of the senseless hatred against the other and the impact of the United States government’s vindictive procedures in the wake of the attacks” (Montón, 2017, p. 21). At the very beginning of his sojourn in America, Changez is valued for his intellectual capacities, which drive him to be enamored with America and the American Dream. He gets his education at a high-ranking American university, Princeton, and graduates *summa cum laude*; he works at a prestigious valuation firm, Underwood Samson; and he dates an American white girl from an aristocratic family in New York. As he points out, his graduation from a prestigious American university like Princeton “without having received a single B” testifies to his academic achievement and enables him to apply for high-ranking positions in America and beyond (Hamid, 2007, p. 4). Once again, he goes further to add about this experience, “*This is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making*” (p. 3; emphasis original).

Later on, especially when the protagonist leaves for Chile on a mission for Underwood Samson, he describes himself as “a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire” (p. 173). Through his allusion to the historical janissaries, who were initially male children taken from their Christian families in the Balkans at an early age and were forced later to serve as soldiers in the Ottoman Empire, Changez stresses his coerced loyalty to a foreign land and his readiness to do anything for its interests. This is the reason why he applies for a job at Underwood Samson, whose very initials are the same as those of the US or Uncle Sam, and agrees to serve as their corporate analyst or economic mercenary in countries in the Global South, such as the Philippines and Chile. He himself informs his anonymous interlocutor that America has been too generous with people with the most ability like him conditioned that they serve its interests and are loyal to its flag: “In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first” (pp. 4-5). This way, Mandala White may not be mistaken when she describes him as “a malleable figure” (White, 2019, p. 445). Nevertheless, this is ironic here: since irony lies in the fact that Changez, the citizen of a once-colonized country, agrees to be a mere tool manipulated by the new empire of America not through force and military coercion as was the case of the British empire with a former colony like Pakistan, but through his ambition, opportunity, and professional success. He is *malleable* in the sense that he is a pragmatic person who is ready to do anything for the sake of the American empire, to serve himself and his personal interests, even at the cost of his identity and nationalism.

Returning to the metaphor of the janissaries, some of those boys serving in the Ottoman empire were emasculated, especially those assigned to serve at the imperial harem. Thus, this metaphor has its own implications here for masculinity, too. In the same way as the janissaries who were educated, trained, and had the opportunity to rise to some high-ranking positions in the Ottoman empire, Changez is generously given money and education, and is recruited as a mere cog in the wheel of the American empire at the cost of his identity, and is stripped of his dignity. While not literal, Changez is subtly emasculated in the sense that he loses his sense of control, dignity, and cultural belonging. Of course, he is highly educated, confident, and booming, but deep down, he is fragile and impotent. Even during his most intimate moments with Erica, he is exoticized, rejected, and taken as a stand-in for Chris, whose memory still heavily possesses Erica. Once, he asks Erica while having sex together to think of him as Chris, which adds to his feelings of emotional isolation and subtle emasculation as well: “Probably this was why I had been willing to try to take on the persona of Chris, because my own identity was so fragile” (Hamid, 2007, p. 168).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, because of his brown skin and Muslim background, Changez is politically marginalized, emotionally disempowered, and sexually sidelined by a xenophobic society: the same society that once has made him a rising star turns its back on him and judges him as a potential threat. On different occasions, he is pestered, if not terrorized, by extremist Americans or even ordinary Americans on the streets who see him warily. He is alienated and spurned in a country he loves and idealizes as a land of freedom and meritocracy. As a brown-skinned person from a Muslim-majority country, he is increasingly harassed and becomes a source of suspicion at airports. Right at the outset, he seems to some extent unaffected by such matters around him, seeking shelter in his Princeton degree and prestigious job at Underwood Samson. As Stuti Khanna puts it, “[D]espite his Pakistani Muslim identity, he is shielded by his Princeton degree and his eighty thousand dollars a year salary” (Khanna, 2024, p. 195). Even at the New York-based Underwood Samson, he is deeply bothered by his elite colleagues’ gaze at him, who look at him differently as a Muslim foreigner, which adds to his exclusion and eventual disillusionment and despondency. As he puts it, “[A]t Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares” (Hamid, 2007, p. 148). He hears of many stories of the unprecedented crackdown launched by the American authorities on Muslim people: “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” (p. 107). All these make him undergo profound internal and external transformations from “a lover of America”, as he puts it in the very opening lines, to a scathing critic of Western values as a whole (p. 1). This is the reason why he voluntarily grows his beard, which he sees as an expression of his Muslim identity, and begins to look askance at the American Dream, which he now sees as a fragile and flimsy myth. Not only has the American Dream fallen apart in the eyes of Changez, but Western values about coexistence, inclusion, and acceptance of the other are now void and stripped of meaning. It is then that he reaches a drastic ideological shift and decides to return to his homeland. Changez’s journey from innocence into experience is simply a personal and political awakening that Hamid uses to critique the hypocrisy of Western ideals of freedom and equality, which seem to be restricted only to Western people.

Changez’s disillusionment about his experience in America, contrasted with his deep affection for Pakistan, is manifested in his choice of words and tone when talking about each of them. Erica comments, “I love it when you talk about where you come from...you become so alive” (p. 93). He uses nostalgic, friendly, and poetic language when discussing his homeland, and is proud of the culture of his ancestors, which is thousands of years older than that of America: “Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me: they made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians” (p. 38). Brygida Gasztold observes, “Hamid’s protagonist uses different registers to highlight differences between Pakistani and American parts of his experience. A sensual and affectionate language is used when he talks about his home in Lahore... Dry language, on the other hand, is used when the protagonist recounts his experiences in America” (Gasztold, 2015, p. 21). He tells the anonymous American tourist that though he has visited and lived in many countries worldwide, including America, he still covets the cup of tea served at Lahore cafés: “Princeton made everything possible for me. But it did not, *could* not, make me forget such things as how much I enjoy the tea in this, the city of my birth, steeped long enough to acquire a rich, dark color, and made creamy with fresh, full-fat milk” (Hamid, 2007, pp. 16-17; emphasis original). In the very opening lines of the novel, he says that he can identify his silent interlocutor as American not only by his fair complexion or Western clothes, but by his “*bearing*” or haughtiness (p. 2; emphasis original). For him, the Americans are self-righteous and overconfident, which he can see through their *bearing*. He still remembers the arrogant attitude of his colleagues from Princeton towards old Greek people on a trip to Greece: “The ease with which they parted with money...Or their self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they paid for a service. “But you *told* us,” they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way. I, with my finite and depleting reserve of cash and my traditional sense of deference to one’s seniors, found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions—many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they—were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class” (pp. 23-24). Likewise, he still remembers the tone and language of Erica’s father to him about Pakistan during his first visit to their house, which he describes as “typically American undercurrent of condescension” (p. 63).

### C. Erica as a Silenced Abstract Symbol

As stated earlier, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is dominated by a male narrative voice which fluctuates between both America and Pakistan—two settings or cultures that still operate within the same patriarchal logics. In both cultures, women are marginalized, silenced, and most notably *othered* since they function more as fully commoditized characters than as fully fleshed-out people. The central female character portrayed in the book is Erica, whose very name (*Am-Erica*), is a near homophone for America in both English and Arabic contexts. Like America in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Erica is depicted as beautiful and cultured, but down below, entirely damaged and fragile. Her loss of her boyfriend and life-long friend, Chris, still tremendously impacts her and shatters her both physically and mentally. Chris, too, has an allegorical significance, as he stands for pre-9/11 America with its self-image and dominance.

From an allegorical perspective, the momentary romantic intimacy between Erica and Changez represents the relationship between the West and the East, which is seen as seemingly strained and flimsy: the West’s seeming openness to the East and vice versa is questioned here simply because the West still thinks of the East as a subordinate; and, in turn,

the East cannot forget the imperialistic past of the West. Hamid wants to convey the latent acrimony between the two sides. This is why Erica and Changez's intimacy is just evanescent. What aggravates this bond is the outbreak of the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent War on Terror led by America. Thus, Erica's unavailability represents the West's ideological closure towards immigrants post-9/11. Erica rejects Changez and fails to accept him as a surrogate for Chris, precisely like the West that refuses to consider immigrants as individuals. Biling Chen stresses,

Changez's romance with Erica has been, by and large, read as an allegory of the troubled relationships between Pakistan and America, between the Muslim world and the Christian world, and between the Third World and the First World. The symbolic meanings of such names as Erica being America, Chris being Christ or Christopher Columbus, and Underwood Samson being Uncle Sam, buttressed by Changez's constant comparison of his failed romance with Erica to his ambivalence toward the US, simply make allegorical readings inevitable, to the point of becoming orthodox, and perhaps rightly so, because they have generated many great insights and arguably seemed to correspond to the authorial intentions. (Chen, 2021, p. 522)

Though relatively much is said about Erica, she makes her debut through the eyes of a male narrator. As cited above, her very name is phonetically a near-homophone for *America*, which makes her an entire geopolitical entity rather than a real or realized character. The idea that the central female character of the book is reduced to a mere abstract symbol is significant here, as it manifests how women are stripped of their identity and agency in the setting of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. What reinforces this idea is that Erica is portrayed as cultured, affluent, and open to love—things that attract the protagonist towards her. For the protagonist, “She attracted people to her; she had presence, an uncommon *magnetism*” (Hamid, p. 24; emphasis original). Nevertheless, despite her being alluring, Erica is still distant, troubled, and broken from within. Changez is drawn to her because she will be his visa into America, his “entry into high society”, along with his other qualifications (Gasztold, 2015, p. 24). As for Erica's mental deterioration, it symbolizes America's inability to overcome the trauma of 9/11, its failure to accept immigrants on its land, especially those belonging to Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan. At the end, Erica commits suicide, which also stands symbolically for the collapse of the protagonist's American Dream: he is no longer wanted or welcomed in America and has no other choice but to pack his bags and leave for his homeland for good. And this is the decision he eventually takes. Gasztold observes, “Changez's love for Erica ends like his love for America—both remain unrequited. Erica falls into madness just like post-9/11 America falls into a terrorist psychosis – they are presented as equally unable to come to terms with the tragedy” (Gasztold, 2015, p. 24).

#### *D. Absence of Female Agency*

As for Hamid's portrayal of the other female characters in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it is intertwined with the novel's central themes of cultural identity and belonging. They are secondary, lack narrative agency, and come scores of miles after their male counterparts. All of them, without exception, do pale in comparison to the character of Erica, who herself is reduced to a mere metaphor. Furthermore, they serve as background characters rather than fully fleshed-out or autonomous individuals. This is represented through the protagonist's mother and other female relatives, who are also reduced to mere symbols of tradition and familial values.

Though the room given to Changez's mother is minor and brief, it is crucial and significant for a better understanding of the novel. Like the other female characters in the family, she is not given a first name. She is portrayed more as a symbol than an autonomous character, as she stands for the voice of Pakistani traditional values and familial ties. Hamid describes her as a traditional and doting mother who tries to live up to the expectations of the patriarchal society in which she lives: She is worried about her son's future and social standing, and urges him to marry a traditional Pakistani woman from their clan. As a member of a deep-rooted patriarchy, she does not want her son to deviate from the constraints of the community of his ancestors. And this makes her a guardian of the tradition established by the patriarchal society. The protagonist is sure that his mother and the other female relatives will not approve of his contact with a Western girl like Erica and will do their utmost to end this relationship. He is fully aware of the big difference between the two realms they represent, since each of them acts as a perfect foil to the other. Whereas Erica represents the West and its concepts of individualism and liberated feminism, Changez's mother, aunts, and cousins stand for the East, its deep-seated customs, and traditions. A point to be stressed here is that women in Western and Eastern societies are voiceless and peripheral is significant, as Hamid wants to convey the message that the two worlds, though seemingly different, are both male-dominated.

One of Changez's female relations is his maternal aunt, whom he describes as still much faithful to her deceased husband. Though their marriage lasted for just three months, this aunt never married again and turned away many suitors. This allusion has its significance since it shows part of the legacy of Pakistani or Eastern culture that, euphemistically put, encourages widowed women to devote their lives to the memory of their dead spouses even after a very short marriage. The protagonist's aunt mirrors the values of loyalty and familial duty, which are deeply inculcated into the minds of women in such patriarchies. By coincidence, what applies to this aunt applies to Erica, too, whose unwavering commitment to the deceased Chris still haunts her to the core. Although both women belong to very different worlds, the values of loyalty are deeply entrenched in the male-dominated societies in which they live. No wonder, both undergo psychological breakdowns: The aunt goes “mad as a March hare, and Erica ends her life by committing suicide (Hamid, 2007, p. 92).

## III. CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has rarely been analyzed from the perspective of postcolonial feminism, though its narrative has some examples that inextricably entwine postcolonialism with gender dynamics. This paper aims to explore how gender relations are shaped by colonial legacies and patriarchy. Though the book overtly critiques Western imperialism, it buttresses patriarchal practices by neglecting the full depiction of women. All the female characters represented in this text are *othered*, marginalized, and lack narrative agency: they are not as complex and deep as their male counterparts, and are portrayed as more symbols than independent or fleshed-out characters.

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**Sayed Youssef** is a staff member at the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.