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Expatriatism in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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ABSTRACT

The September 11 attacks were world-changing events. Contemporary historians divide the history of the modern world into pre- and post-9/11. The metropolitan reaction was controversial. The Metropolis united against what is dubbed "the axis of evil." It attacked an array of Islamic nations. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) portrayed two Muslim expatriates from Pakistan and Afghanistan who experienced post-9/11 America firsthand. The protagonists presented two distinct understandings of extremism and fundamentalism. This article employed Said's (2003) theories to analyze the concepts of "the diasporic figure" against the backdrop of "the metropolitan society." It argues that the cultural, political, religious, and social conflicts between the diasporic figure and the metropolitan society are shaped by Orientalist narratives. The novels depict various aspects of the diasporic identity. They try to negotiate between several conflicting narratives. However, Orientalism defines the frameworks of these conflicts because these conflicts and resulting confusions are rooted in the long history of metropolitan Orientalism.

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INTRODUCTION

The September 11th, 2001, attacks in the United States of America, commonly known as 9/11, resulted in unprecedented civilian and urban destruction (Enders & Sandler, 2012). Four commercial airplanes were hijacked by members of the extremist/fundamentalist Islamic group known as al-Qaeda. One collided with the Pentagon building in Arlington, Virginia. Two crashed into the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City. The fourth plummeted into a field in rural Pennsylvania. The destruction of the World Trade Centers gained unequaled international traction and became the most recognizable image of the attacks (Herman, 2020). The attacks on the Twin Towers caused the majority of the casualties. Although attacks occurred in the U.S., they had international ramifications for a large number of countries, i.e., NATO nations and Muslim countries: "The incidents were planned abroad, the terrorists came from outside the United States, support came from abroad, victims were from more than eighty countries, and the incidents had economic and security implications worldwide" (Enders & Sandler, 2012).

Utilizing the increasing international outrage, President George Walker Bush created the concept of "the axis of evil." He borrowed the phrase from the World War II concept of "the Axis powers," which referred to Nazi

Germany and its allies. In his State of the Union Address, President Bush's phrase referred to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea:

> States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic (Bush, 2002).

Questions of conflict between Islam and the Metropolis, the idea of the irredeemability of Islam and its redoubtable animosity towards metropolitan cultural, economic, political, religious, and social interests became the most important issues of the day (Said, 2003). The Coalition-led War on Terror, another phrase popularized by President Bush and his administration, further complicated the situation across the globe, especially in the Middle East. The supposed threat of international Islamic terrorism created a heightened sense of metropolitan racism, guided by the garb of nationalism and patriotism. The Metropolis associated Arabs and Muslims with extremism, fundamentalism, and terrorism. The term "metropolis" refers to the dominant Western powers that construct and perpetuate stereotypical images and representations of the "Orient" or the East (Said, 2003).

This article analyzes two novels which deal with the events of 9/11. It focuses on identity and representation in a culturally, economically, politically, religiously, and socially hostile metropolis. According to Said (2003):

> The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies, and colonial styles (p. 2)

Orientalism shapes this hostile culture (Said, 2003). This article strives to answer whether the protagonists of these novels can rise above this hostility and resolve their identity crises. This article uses Said's (2003) concepts of Democratic Criticism and Orientalism to answer this question.

In the aftermath of the attacks, Orientalism significantly accentuated the ideas of metropolitan (American/ Western) exceptionalism. Accordingly, the Metropolis stood for capitalism, democracy, and freedom. In his State of the Union Speech, President Bush (2002) depicted the civilians who died during the attacks as martyrs on the altar of metropolitan (American/Western) exceptionalism:

> I assure you and all who have lost a loved one that our cause is just, and our country will never forget the debt we owe [them] and all who gave their lives for freedom. Our cause is just, and it continues. Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos where they laugh about the loss of innocent lives. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design. We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world. What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps. And so were tens of thousands of others. Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning. Thanks to the work of our law enforcement officials and coalition partners, hundreds of terrorists have been arrested, yet tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the world as a battlefield; we must pursue them wherever they are (Bush, 2002).

The Metropolis singled out Islam and its followers as its arch-nemesis. The “axis of evil” was expanded to include a wide array of nations, most of them Islamic (Said, 2003). Orientalists and war hawks regularly used the term to belittle Islamic nations. Consequently, these “rogue nations” owned weapons of mass destruction, planned to attack metropolitan nations, and sponsored terrorism across the globe. During the Bush and Blair administrations, the White House and White Hall were filled with area studies academics, Orientalists, self-proclaimed experts, and war hawks. Other metropolitan governments either agreed with the White House and White Hall or remained silent. Similarly, metropolitan citizens wholeheartedly believed what their governments told them.

For some, it was extremist and fundamentalist Islam that represented the violence of the attacks. However, for the majority, there was no such thing as “extremist and fundamentalist Islam.” There was only Islam and its barbaric followers. Islam was extremist and fundamentalist by nature, and so were its followers. The media repeatedly visualized the ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other parts of the Middle East. The visualization of deaths and destruction, whether fictional, depicted by the gaming industry, Hollywood, and myriad novels about the victims of the attacks, or real, depicted by the news agencies and social media, victimized the Metropolis. For example, movies the release of movies like *American Sniper* (2014), *Fitna* (2008), *Syriana* (2005), *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (2008), and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), which iterated Orientalist views about Islam exponentially increased in the wake of the attacks. This victimization, in turn, served as a mechanism for the reinforcement of metropolitan cultural, lingual, and racial identity. Even the Arabic language, used by millions of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, came to represent death and destruction. Orientalism controlled the discourse through and through. In the novels, this discourse and its portrait of Islam and Muslims clash with the protagonists' troubled identities. The novels serve as a site where the protagonists get involved in this clash to solve their inner battles and decide upon their true identities. In the context of the novels, identity is the result of interactions among the protagonists' colonial heritage, their experiences of displacement, and their ongoing negotiations of cultural, social, and personal belonging. For the protagonists, identity encompasses a sense of loss and dislocation, resilience, and agency in navigating multiple cultural and social contexts.

This article argues that the novels portray 9/11 as a site of engagement between diasporic self-understanding and metropolitan animosity. The novels represent the various aspects of the post-9/11 Metropolis. This allows the protagonists to undertake acts of identity negotiation. Unfortunately for the protagonists, these acts demonstrate how any negotiation with the Metropolis is bound to Orientalism. The juxtaposition of fiction, e.g., the protagonists, and reality, e.g., the event, allows a specific range of freedom. However, neither the fictional nor the real elements can escape the framework Orientalism defines for them. The protagonists suffer from unstable identities. One might argue that this instability, in and of itself, is a sign that the protagonists have the freedom to discover their true selves. However, the protagonists' origins, their current situation (culturally, geographically, politically, and religiously), and the event itself are reiterations of Orientalist narratives. Even defining the event and its aftermath, both of which were categorically recorded by contemporary history, cannot be analyzed without the constant interference of Orientalism:

> Neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has an ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, and partly identification of the Other. That these supreme fictions lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance - much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, "we" Westerners on the other - are very large-scale enterprises (Said, 2003, p. XII).

The metropolitan identity, one of the ontological poles towards which the protagonists are drawn, to a great extent, was produced and evolved by the otherization of the Orient. The Orient acts as an amplifier of "metropolitan

values" and, thus, metropolitan identity. Said (2003) laments the persistent misconceptions and lack of progress in the American understanding of the Middle East, Arab nations, and Islam, contrasting this with a comparatively improved situation in Europe. He criticizes the hardened attitudes in the U.S., characterized by demeaning generalizations and triumphalist clichés, alongside a growing dominance of crude power that dismisses dissenters and others. This attitude finds its parallel in the physical destruction and plundering of the Middle East's libraries and museums. Said (2003) argues against the reduction of the Middle East to a simplistic and mythical construct, emphasizing the rich histories, languages, and cultures that are often disregarded or distorted in Western narratives. He suggests that history is not a blank slate to be rewritten at will but a complex interplay of diverse peoples and experiences that deserve understanding and respect.

Said's (2003) repeated use of the pronoun "I" when he writes or talks about 9/11 and its aftermath gives a personal dimension to his theories. The event disrupts the line between the collectivist-objectivist history of the Metropolis and the individualist-subjectivist experience of the diasporic identity. The event reinforces the metropolitan identity and also plays havoc with the diasporic identity. As an expatriate and literary theorist, Said (2003) reveals how he is disappointed and disillusioned not only by the spread of extremism and fundamentalism but also by the resurgence of metropolitan chauvinism, all of which he considers the result of Orientalism. Similarly, Hamid’s (2007) and Hosseini's (2003) novels disrupt the line between reality and fictionality. They situate their characters in the event and its aftermath. Their fiction reveals how the diasporic figure struggles with this phenomenon. On the one hand, he/she lives in a society that abhors his/her origins, and on the other hand, he/she has to deal with the realities of fundamentalism and extremism that his origins impose upon him/her.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE DIASPORIC IDENTITY

Habermas (2003) defines fundamentalism as:

> Fundamentalism has a pejorative ring to it. We use this adjective to characterize a mindset that stubbornly insists on the political imposition of its convictions and reasons, even when they are far from being generally acceptable. This holds especially true for religious beliefs. […] Orthodoxy only becomes fundamentalist when the guardians and representatives of the true faith ignore the epistemic situation of a pluralistic society and insist – even to the point of violence – on the universal validity and political imposition of their doctrine (p. 10).

Fundamentalism is the predisposition to characterize one's interpretation of dogmas, ideologies, religious texts, etc., as the only correct interpretation. Fundamentalists tend to divide the world into cultural, political, religious, and social dichotomies or oppositions. Contemporary fundamentalism observes the world in a constant state of struggle between good and evil. The fundamentalist nation, society, world, etc., need to be purified from heretics, infidels, subhuman races, or undesirable elements (Moaddel, 2020). One can see significant similarities between the above definitions of fundamentalism and Orientalism. In other words, Orientalism, as defined by Said (2003), is a type of fundamentalism. However, it must be noted that there are striking differences between Orientalism and other forms of fundamentalism, e.g., Christian Zionism or Wahhabism. Namely, Orientalism is extremely nuanced, its advocates are highly educated, and most importantly, it cannot be separated from other aspects of metropolitan culture (Said, 2003).

Fundamentalism is an important modern socio-political phenomenon. Hamid (2007) and Hosseini (2003) seemingly deal with it in different ways. However, if one applies Said's (2003) theory of Orientalism to the actions of the protagonists, one can see that the result is the same. It does not matter that the protagonists have different backgrounds. It does not matter that they deal with 9/11 and its aftermath in divergent ways. When

put in the ever-expanding domain of Orientalism, they come from the same place and end up in the same place. That is, they are Muslims and incapable of change and must be treated as such. Orientalism becomes a way of life that incriminates personal identity from one's birth until one's death. Accordingly, the migration to the Metropolis and exposure to the metropolitan culture does not change the Muslims in the least. Said's (2003) analysis of modern Orientalism creates a solid connection between the personal and political identities of the expatriate before and after his/her migration:

> I should say again that I have no "real" Orient to argue for. I do, however, have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the people of that region, who struggle to achieve their vision of what they are and want to be. There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living room. The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no live notion (or any knowledge at all) of the language of what real people speak has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct an ***ersatz*** model of free market "democracy," without even a trace of doubt that such projects do not exist outside of Swift's Academy of Lagado (p. XIV).

Hamid (2007) and Hosseini (2003) endeavor to reveal the link between the personal and the political identity. However, in both novels, Orientalism distorts the protagonists' identity the moment they decide to engage in politics. According to Said (2003), Orientalism adds a third angle to this problem. The Muslim cannot disengage him/herself from politics. The very nature of metropolitan Orientalism prevents him/her from having a personality separate from his/her Islamic origins. From the moment he/she is born, she/he enters a whirlpool of cultural, economic, and social narratives that define his/her character. Take away Islam, and he/she becomes a faceless lump of clay.

Similarly, Orientalism describes Islamic societies as collective hiveminds. Muslims can only be defined as groups, not individuals. An Islamic diaspora functions in the same way. It does not matter that Amir and Changez are individuals with different backgrounds. It does not matter that they respond differently to 9/11. It is not their psyche, their unique experiences, and their mindset that guides their decisions; it is Islam. It is fascinating that a phenomenon that easily lends itself to all manner of chauvinism, fundamentalism, racism, and violence accuses Islam and every single Muslim of extremism and fundamentalism. According to Orientalism, fundamentalism hampers the identity of the individual when he/she moves from the realm of the personal and enters the realm of the political. For the Muslims, this disruption begins from the moment of birth.

Khaled Hosseini writes about the 9/11 attacks in a brief postscript, not in the main plot of *The Kite Runner*. Amir's identity crisis is not the direct result of post-911 events. However, 9/11 itself and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, one of the main hubs of Al-Qaeda, repopularized the novel. At the time of the invasion, Afghanistan was in the midst of civil war, but the Taliban, a close ally of Al-Qaeda, controlled its major civilian centers. The Taliban is currently the most powerful extremist/fundamentalist Islamic group. It has garnered significant global attention since its takeover of Afghanistan after the U.S.-led coalition left the country in 2019-2020. With the help of a myriad of Islamic and non-Islamic nations, the Metropolis managed to greatly curtail al-Qaeda. However, it never managed to curtail the Taliban's influence and power over the Afghan nation during the 17 years that it occupied Afghanistan. The Metropolis did not even put a dent in the power of the Taliban. There are numerous cultural, economic, military, political, and social reasons for this issue, which are not part of this article's purview. However, what is clear is the effects of its rule on the Afghan

people. The novel, set in the early 21st century, becomes even more tragic as the situation in Afghanistan worsens. Since the Soviet Union's invasion, the main reason behind the protagonist's migration to the U.S., the nation's situation has gradually worsened. By early 2009, "the state of Afghanistan was increasingly uncertain. U.S. President Barack Obama called for more troops to be sent there, and the Taliban continued to create havoc and to try to regain control of the country… innocent civilians, including women and children, continue[d] to lose their lives as the country remain[ed] unstable" (Stuhr, 2009, p. 66). According to Hosseini:

> This is a group that for 20 years has systematically brutalized and terrorized Afghans, has blown up hospitals and roads and schools, and has slaughtered countless Afghans, many of them just ordinary villagers, women, and children as well. Now they are back, and they are saying there is nothing to be frightened of, and that is very hard to believe. I am concerned greatly for ordinary Afghans. I am concerned for ethnic minorities, for journalists, for people who worked... But especially, I am concerned about women and girls whose rights stand to be curtailed... So, I am concerned for a large swath of the Afghan population (Hosseini, 2021).

In Hosseini's (2003) *The Kite Runner*, both Afghanistan and the Metropolis (the U.S.) become spaces where the difficulties of the past identity and expatriatism collide with the difficulties of a modern metropolitan identity. Before Hasan Khan's call, Amir had successfully internalized metropolitan values. He is an accomplished author. He tells Hassan: "I have a wife in America, a home, a career, and a family. Kabul is a dangerous place, you know that, and you'd have me risk everything for" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 221). Amir not only struggles with the terrorism that emanates from his original homeland but also with the decisions he made while he lived there. Returning to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab is the first step towards redemption. Adopting Sohrab and bringing him to the Metropolis is the final step towards redemption. One might argue that Amir successfully negotiates between his troubled past and his less-than-ideal presence. He reaches equilibrium:

> Sohrab was handing the string back to me. "Are you sure?" I said, taking it. He took the spool from me. "Okay," I said. "Let's give him a sabagh, teach him a lesson, nay?" I glanced over at him. The glassy, vacant look in his eyes was gone. His gaze flitted between our kite and the green one. His face was a little flushed, his eyes suddenly alert. Awake. Alive. I wondered when I had forgotten that, despite everything, he was still just a child (Hosseini, 2003, p. 369).

However, what Amir and other characters experience throughout the novel becomes insignificant in the grand scheme of the clash of civilizations, Orientalism, and the War on Terror. The novel is steeped in brutal and gut-wrenching historical facts. These are facts that one cannot reject if one wants to understand the plight of the diasporic figure correctly.

Amir escaped Afghanistan because of the Soviet Union's invasion, itself a byproduct of Orientalism. He embraces his new life in the Metropolis. However, does the Metropolis accept Amir? His interactions with almost exclusively diasporic characters say otherwise. He returns to Afghanistan amidst a civil war caused by the Metropolis and once again fueled by Orientalism. He seeks redemption by bringing Sohrab to the Metropolis. One assumes that Sohrab has also had to undergo a period of identity crisis. All of these facts and speculations are surrounded by Orientalism. Amir has no chance of escape. There is a limit to his integration into metropolitan society, and it is Orientalism that defines this limit.

Amir is a successful writer. One can argue that he has a powerful sense of belonging towards metropolitan ideals and American exceptionalism. What he experiences during his sojourn to Afghanistan and Pakistan fuels his enmity towards his birthplace. Amir distances himself from his non-metropolitan origins:

> When the Taliban rolled in and kicked the Alliance out of Kabul, I actually danced on that street," Rahim Khan said. "And, believe me, I wasn't alone. People were celebrating at Chaman, at Deh-Mazang, greeting

> the Taliban in the streets, climbing their tanks, and posing for pictures with them. People were so tired of the constant fighting, tired of the rockets, the gunfire, the explosions, tired of watching Gulbuddin and his cohorts firing on anything that moved (Hosseini, 2003, p. 200).

His decision to raise Sohrab in the Metropolis shows that Amir views the Metropolis as the land of redemption. He might have been born an Afghan and a Muslim. Yet, he no longer feels any loyalty towards or sympathy for Afghanistan or Islam. However, whether the Metropolis accepts Amir or believes that a Muslim is capable of change and supposed redemption is another matter. When President Biden ended the War on Terror, removed the American troops from Afghanistan, and allowed the Taliban to take over the country, he blamed the Afghanis for this turn of events. Hosseini himself also said that, to some extent, the Afghanis were to blame. To conclude, Amir considers himself a metropolitan. Whether the Metropolis does so as well is another matter entirely. According to Said, for the Metropolis, "Islam is a unitary phenomenon, unlike any other religion or civilization, …. [the Muslim is] antihuman, incapable of development, self-knowledge, or objectivity, as well as uncreative, unscientific, and authoritarian" (2003, p. 296). After the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, this narrative became far more powerful. Muslims, regardless of their worldviews, were depicted as extremists and fundamentalists. Amir might think of himself as an American citizen and no longer an Afghan expatriate, but the Metropolis does not accept him as such. If 9/11 is a site of conflict for the diasporic figure, then it is also a site of cultural ossification for the Metropolis:

> from the very same directorate of paid professional scholars enlisted by the Dutch conquerors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the British armies of India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and West Africa, and the French armies of Indochina and North Africa, came the American advisers to the Pentagon and the White House, using the same cliches, the same demeaning stereotypes, the same justifications of power and violence (after all, runs the chorus, power is the only language they understand) in this case as in the earlier ones (Said, 2003, p. XV).

ORIENTALISM AS A MULTI-DIMENTIONAL CONSTRUCT

Changez, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's (2007) *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, stands in stark contrast to Amir. He has different views about the metropolitan culture. The 9/11 attacks act as a tipping point for Changez. He feels cathartic towards the representation of Islam: "Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2007, p. 72). As the story progresses, he forms a strongly negative view of the Metropolis and what it stands for. He considers the metropolis "fundamentalist," not Islam. Hamid's title functions as a double-edged sword. It cuts both ways. At first glance, it seems that Changez is a reluctant fundamentalist. After all, the book is about his transformation from a relatively neutral expatriate into a critic of the Metropolis.

Nevertheless, as the plot progresses, the Metropolis acts like a fundamentalist. Changez seems to be the "reluctant" fundamentalist, advocating a non-violent approach toward the Metropolis. The Metropolis, on the other hand, has no reservations. One is either with the Metropolis or against it. More importantly, the Metropolis openly embraces its fundamentalism. It does not shy away from giving voice to its fringe politics (its clansmen, war hawks, and ultra-nationalists) as legitimate patriotism:

> How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country… Nor was it your dress that gave you away… Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation (Hamid, 2007, p. 1).

Returning to Said's (2003) theories about expatriatism and Orientalism, the reluctance of Changez and the unambiguity of the Metropolis towards their fundamentalisms stems from the fact that both have a false

understanding of the nature of humanity. According to Said (2003), while metropolitan citizens and Muslims alike believe in the essentiality of human existence, in truth, human existence is a construct itself:

> What makes all these fluid and extraordinarily rich actualities difficult to accept is that most people resist the underlying notion: that human identity is not only not natural and stable but constructed and occasionally even invented outright. Part of the resistance and hostility to books like *Orientalism*… stems from the fact that they seem to undermine the naïve belief in the certain positivity and unchanging historicity of a culture, a self, and a national identity (Said, 2003).

If what Changez believes about Islam or the Metropolis is a construct, then this construct begins to unravel the moment 9/11 happens. As mentioned above, Changez's metamorphosis is the exact opposite of Amir's. Changez thinks that capitalism is a form of fundamentalism. Since capitalism is, by definition, the very foundation of the metropolitan culture, then the Metropolis itself is also fundamentalist. A view which Hamid seems to agree with. Said (2003), on the other hand, rejects this view. As mentioned above, Said (2003) demonstrates that the Metropolis is fundamentalist. However, its fundamentalism does not stem from capitalism but Orientalism.

Changez's viewpoint as an expatriate transmogrifies after 9/11. He decides to distance himself from the American dream when he watches the attacks on television. He has a confusingly positive reaction to this representation. 9/11 catalyzes the deconstruction of many of his beliefs about metropolitan life. He criticizes how the Metropolis represents him. He considers himself an outsider:

> But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the… no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees… it is hateful to hear another person gloat over one’s country’s misfortune. But surely you cannot be completely innocent of such feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips – so prevalent these days – of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies? (Hamid, 2007, p. 41).

He argues that complete naturalization into metropolitan life is impossible. Changez is an acute observer, as all these assumptions about the Metropolis are correct. However, what Changez fails to understand is the cause of these observations. They do not emanate from capitalism or the political machinations of the Metropolis. They originate from Orientalism. Instead of recognizing this fact and responding accordingly, he falls into its trap, for if the Metropolis does not accept him, then Islam will. It does not matter that this version of Islam is a construct, and a construct of Orientalism at that. According to Said (2003), extremist, and fundamentalist Islam is the only version of Islam the Metropolis deems possible. A notion Changez seems to agree with. The Muslims are incapable of democracy and freedom:

> *Orientalism* can only be read as a defense of Islam by suppressing half of my argument, in which I say (as I do in a subsequent book, *Covering Islam*) that even the primitive community we belong to natally is not immune from the interpretive contest, and that what appears in the West to be the emergence, return to, or resurgence of Islam is, in fact, a struggle in Islamic societies over the definition of Islam. No person, authority, or institution has total control over that definition; hence, the contest. Fundamentalism's epistemological mistake is to think that "fundamentals" are ahistorical categories, not subject to and therefore outside the critical scrutiny of true believers, who are supposed to accept them on faith (Said, 2003, p. 333).

ORIENTALISM AND THE UNALTERABLE NATURE OF THE METROPOLIS

Amir and Changez come from the same background. They come from neighboring countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively. Both nations were former colonies of the British Empire. Both gained their independence

when the British Empire collapsed. Both nations are postcolonial, with whatever problems this state affairs entails. Afghanistan is a failed nation-state, with warring factions supported by the Metropolis ripping the country apart. However, most importantly, both nations are Islamic. These statements are historical facts and are undisputable.

Amir and Changez live in the United States of America. The United States of America is the leading metropolitan power. It is considered the protector of the metropolitan interests. Its military might far exceed any other nation in the world. Its cultural dominance is absolute. Cultural trends live or die, according to American public opinion. Its universities define the theoretical and practical frameworks of academic disciplines. Its movie industry is singlehandedly responsible for 95 percent of cinema and theatre ticket sales across the globe. Its numerous news agencies are the primary source of information (regardless of whether the information is true or false) about political events. When one speaks about the Metropolis, he/she usually has the United States of America in mind. These are also indisputable facts:

> The theme that unites the [history] of the United States of America during…its history is expansion and ascent. Over the course of those two and one-half centuries, the American Republic rose in the ranks of independent countries from an obscure, unimportant collection of small European settlements…to a continent-spanning colossus with a global presence that towered over all other sovereign states. It achieved this status through the expansion of its power, of its wealth, which is the foundation of power, and of its influence, which is the shadow that power casts (Mandelbaum, 2022, p. 1).

The third point of similarity between Amir and Changez is the fact that they experience fundamentalism firsthand. The event is life-changing and traumatic. Amir and Changez are forced to adapt to the reality of a fundamentalist world. This is where Amir and Changez diverge. While Amir condemns Islamic fundamentalism, distances himself from his origins, and adopts the culture and mannerisms of the Metropolis, which is itself plagued by Orientalism, Changez becomes disillusioned with the Metropolis. He views the metropolitan culture as fundamentalist. Changez decides to leave America and return to his birthplace. Their response could not be more different. Yet, as mentioned above, the actions of the protagonists, as well as their outcome, are controlled by Orientalism. The Metropolis believes Islam to be an unchangeable construct, undemocratic and violent:

> Yet Orientalism is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. I emphasize in it accordingly that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the other. That these supreme fictions lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance – much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, “we” Westerners on the other – are very large-scale enterprises (Said, 2003, p. XII).

The 9/11 attacks and their aftermaths did not change the Metropolis. It only reinforced its misconceptions about Islam and its adherents. For the Metropolis, the attacks were further proof that Islam was an immutable and monolithic belief system. It needs control now, as much as it needed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Metropolis did not consider, nor did it care, that the attacks were as much of a shock and tragedy for Muslims around the world as they were for metropolitan citizens. The entire Islamic community, regardless of language, race, or political affiliations, was swept aside in an uncontrollable storm of metropolitan chauvinism and patriotism. If the 19th-century Imperialist administrator argued that:

> The Crusades were not only about the deliverance of the Holy Sepulcher but more about knowing which would win on the earth, a cult that was civilization's enemy, systematically favorable to ignorance [this was Islam, of course], to despotism, to slavery, or a cult that had caused to reawaken in modern people

> the genius of sage antiquity, and had abolished base servitude… Of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father (Said, 2003, p. 172).

A 21st-century metropolitan intellectual would regurgitate the same idea. The only difference would be that due to the nature of the political discourse of the 21st century, the metropolitan intellectual would conceal his/her Orientalism in the professional jargon of academicism and politicism:

> The principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest form today in studies of the Arabs and Islam. Let us recapitulate them here: one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a "classical" Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore, it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically "objective." A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at the bottom, something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible) (Said, 2003, p. 301).

If Orientalism's representation of Islam is a construct, then it follows that the metropolitan culture is a construct as well. A construct that has been under the influence of Orientalism since the early Modern Age. If Orientalism has not changed, then the nature of its influence on the metropolitan culture has not changed either. This is the issue that this article wants to shed light on. The 9/11 and its aftermaths, its representation in media, its depiction in novels, and even Amir and Changez's response to expatriatism and their identity crisis are subject to Orientalist narratives. It does not matter that Amir and Changez respond differently to what the world throws at them. The result of their mental and spiritual transformation is the same.

Part of Said's (2003) disillusionment with the establishment was the realization that there was no hope of weakening Orientalism. Not only did Orientalism not decline, but it also gained in strength. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the resumption of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Orientalism recaptured the minds of metropolitan citizens. 9/11 and its aftermath provided another reason for Orientalism to fully reassert itself. 9/11 supposedly was the conclusive proof that Islam is incapable of progress. It was violent, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future. Islam was the religion of force, and war was the only language it understood. The entire metropolitan culture, especially the media, made a united front against what it dubbed the "Axis of Evil:"

> Invidious commentary about the world of Islam after 9/11 has made it popular wisdom that Islam is by nature a violent, intolerant religion, much given to raving fundamentalism and suicidal terrorism. There has been no end of "experts" and evangelists repeating the same rubbish, aided and abetted by discredited Orientalists... It is a sign of the intellectual and humanistic poverty of the times that such patent propaganda (in the literal sense of the word) has gained such currency and, even more disastrously, that it is carried on without the slightest reference to Christian, Jewish, and Hindu fundamentalism (Said, 2004, p. 51)

Hamid and Hosseini's novels are the juxtaposition of fiction and reality. 9/11 and its aftermath are the reality of these novels, and the characters and the plot are fiction. Yet they perfectly describe the situation of many an expatriate like Said (2003) or the authors themselves. Amir and Changez suffer from the same disillusionment. The root of disillusionment rests in Orientalism. Their identity crisis, what they go through and suffer from, is because of Orientalism. Their eventual mental transformation is also based on Orientalism.

9/11 was the result of Orientalism. In its desperation to halt the advance of the Soviet Union into Afghanistan and later the Middle East, the Metropolis armed and trained extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the birthplaces of Amir and Changez. These extremists were called the Mujahedin in remembrance of the warriors of early Islam. The Metropolis veiled its military and political maneuvers in the guise of a holy war. The Mujahedin later became the Al-Qaeda and Taliban, the first based in Pakistan and the second in Afghanistan. The Metropolis could not envision the Islamic world dominated by the "red terror." Islam was dangerous, and so was the Soviet Union. Their union would have been a militarily and politically fatal combination. The Metropolis succeeded, and the Mujahedin defeated the Soviets. Still, in the process of slowing down the Soviet advance into the Islamic world, they significantly destabilized and weakened the social structure in Islamic nations. After the retreat of the Soviet army, the same extremists, which up to this point were allies of the metropolitan powers, returned to their nations and wreaked havoc everywhere, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They endangered metropolitan interests across the globe. Later, the most notorious of these extremists, the Al-Qaeda, plotted and executed 9/11.

The first cultural and social victims of the attacks were expatriates and refugees, especially Muslims. The Metropolis, and more specifically, resurgent metropolitan Orientalism, directly and indirectly blamed the entire Islamic world. If Muslims supposedly wanted a jihad, the metropolitan war hawks were more than happy to respond with a modern-day holy crusade that spanned all of the world.

Any analysis of Hamid, Hosseini, and Said for that matter, must place them in this environment of outright cultural, economic, military, political, and religious hostility:

> [Chuck] went around the table and asked each of us to reveal our dream for what we would most like to be. When my turn came, I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the others appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking (Hamid, 2007, p. 21).

This sense of hostility greatly affects Amir and Changez. For example, throughout the novel Changez is conflicted about how to deal with what he dubs the “host.” Accordingly, Changez is conflicted about his identity. Several times he tries to accept the metropolitan identity, only to refuse it in favor of his Islamic/Pakistani origin. Changez sees himself as an outsider and does not find the Metropolis appealing. As a result, he consciously refuses inclusion into metropolitan society. He views the Metropolis as culturally fortified and politically militant. If Changez is reluctantly a "fundamentalist," the Metropolis is actively and consciously fundamentalist. Changez sees the U.S., especially after 9/11, as a monolithic construct.

> 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 – not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different – *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath*. Gazing up at the soaring towers of the city, I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle" (Hamid, 2007, p. 90).

When he arrives at Underwood Samson's reception room, he observes that it is "reminiscent of the gleaming façade of some exalted and exclusive temple" (Hamid, 2007, p. 180). The fortress-like nature of the metropolitan society is shown in many ways: through symbolic gatekeepers, e.g., immigration officers; through ethnocultural narratives of the metropolitan identity, which, according to the Metropolis, stands in opposition to Islam and whatever it stands for; through national ideas such as the myth the American dream or the supremacy of capitalism.

Nationalism gives rise not only to the affirmative mischief of exceptionalism and the various paranoid doctrines of "un-Americanism" by which our modern history is so unfortunately disfigured but also to narratives of

patriotic sovereignty and separateness that are inordinately bellicose about enemies, the clash of civilizations, manifest destiny, "our" natural superiority, and, inevitably (as now), to policies of arrogant interventionism in politics the world over, so that, alas, in places like Iraq, the United States today is synonymous with very harsh inhumanity and with policies whose results are particularly and, I would say, even perniciously destructive. This sort of American nationalism would be comic if it were not so utterly devastating and even tragic in its consequences (Said, 2004).

Changez's name also emphasizes this identity crisis. The name is the Urdu pronunciation of the first name of the often-demonized Mongolian conqueror Genghis Khan. Genghis Khan has always been one of the most important symbols of Eastern conquering power. As such, the name is related to Changez's act of taking joy and pride in his Pakistani and postcolonial identity. An identity that he hopes to show the mysterious American agent at the beginning of the novel by pointing out his beard. In the case of Changez, Orientalism shapes his identity by forcing him to believe in the East versus West/ Islam versus Christianity and postcolonial versus metropolis dichotomies. Changez has the ability, at least at the superficial level, to become a successful member of the metropolitan society. He can have a relatively comfortable life in the Metropolis compared to his life in a third-world nation like Pakistan. Still, he chooses to leave these opportunities behind and become an Islamic fundamentalist in the country of his birth. Changez conforms to the Orientalist narrative that any Muslim who believes in democracy and humanism is an aberration. Based on Orientalism, Changez is the true Muslim as he decides to leave the materiality and worldliness of the Metropolis of the supposed backward and rigid spirituality of Islam:

> Orientals are the way they are. [Orientalists] do not doubt that *any* knowledge of the Oriental will confirm their views, which, to judge from [their] description of the [Muslims] breaking under cross-examination, find the Oriental to be guilty. The crime [is] that the Oriental [is] an Oriental, and it is an accurate sign of how commonly acceptable such a tautology [is] that it can be written without even an appeal to [metropolitan] logic or symmetry of mind. Thus, any deviation from what [is] considered the norms of Oriental behavior [is] believed to be unnatural (Said, 2003, p. 39).

Compare Amir to Changez from an Orientalist standpoint. Amir is the deviant. Amir's relatively easy transition into the fabric of the metropolitan society. His final conciliation with Baba (his father), his marriage, and his success as a writer are not easily accepted by an Orientalist mindset. Even within the novel, there seems to be an uneasy presence that constantly reminds the reader that Amir is not a real metropolitan citizen. This presence is symbolized by Baba's unwillingness to be integrated into the metropolitan society, e.g., his rejection of food stamps, and more importantly, by Amir's almost exclusive interaction with migrants.

Amir idolizes the Metropolis. Amir wants to be part of the Metropolis. He becomes a citizen of the Metropolis. But, like Changez, they cannot define the boundaries Orientalism defines for him. Orientalism has always maintained that a Muslim. Biologically, culturally, mentally, politically, and religiously is incapable of change. It does not matter that Amir sees the American dream as his redemption. It does not matter that he praises the Metropolis to the high heavens. According to Orientalism, he is an outsider. Moreover, since it is Orientalism that controls and spreads the narratives regarding the "outsiders" in the Metropolis, the Metropolis does not accept Amir. For the Metropolis, there is no discernable difference between Changez, who is critical of the West, and Amir, who admires it.

Said (2003) recognizes the realities of Orientalism and metropolitan culture and laments this state of affairs and the fact that since 9/11 and its aftermath, Orientalism has gained strength. A myriad of academics, experts, and intellectuals have spread the narratives of Orientalism. As such, even though Amir and Changez go through different types of identity crises and end up with different views about the Metropolis, the Metropolis itself

does not care about these crises. Nor does it care about their beliefs. Because they are Muslims, they are not citizens or even humans. They are problems to be solved.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to compare two novels that take two different approaches to 9/11 and its aftermaths, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. The protagonists of these novels, Changez and Amir, receptively, are two expatriates who experience the events of 9/11 firsthand. They go through a series of identity crises. Changez becomes disillusioned with the Metropolis and returns to his home country. Amir becomes disillusioned with his Islamic culture and, at least at an external level, integrates himself into the metropolitan society. Applying Edward Said's (2003) theory of Orientalism to these novels, this article argues that the Metropolis does not accept either Amir or Changez as its citizens regardless of their inward and outward transformations. Orientalism became more widespread and stronger after 9/11. Its narratives about Islam and its adherents became more mainstream. As such, this article argues that Orientalism controls the framework of acceptance and change, and it does not matter how Amir or Changez feel about the Metropolis. It is the Metropolis that will reject them.

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