

CHAPTER TWO

An American Tale from the Margins: Decentering 9/11 Narratives

There is a curious body wandering in the post-9/11 public sphere: the hyper-patriotic foreigner. A cover-page cartoon from *The New Yorker* magazine has captured the predicament of being a foreigner in America after 9/11: a wide-eyed and turbaned taxi driver slumps with apprehension in his taxi cab which is decorated with a dozen American flags and a “God Bless America” sticker. This performance of hyper-patriotism marks foreigners as patriotic bodies, rather than potential terrorist suspects. If not to ward off harassment and intimidation from the natives, the patriotic spirit is also an inclusion device that the foreigner must utilize in order to participate in the public sphere and experience possibilities of national belonging. When the prevailing identity categorization is reduced by Bush to “them versus us” and “enemy or friend” binaries that suggest the absence of a neutral ground, where exactly do those with multiple national, religious, and ethnic affinities find themselves?

In Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, the Pakistani protagonist, neither mourns for 9/11 nor waves a flag. As an emigrant living in America after the attacks, he does not mobilize patriotism as a way to deflect his foreignness in order to secure a sense of national belonging; he is an unpatriotic non-mourner. Commencing with the themes of contested post-9/11 identities, community, and audibility, this first case study explores Hamid’s novel in the context of resistance by pursuing its form and content to demonstrate how its non-conforming elements open up spaces of resistance against various manifestations of post-9/11 ideological, thematic, narrative, and sensory constraints. Featuring a protagonist whose life is formed by diaspora, national ideology, American empire, and the terrorist attacks, the novel confounds the certitude of post-9/11 discourse and identities – as articulated by Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis or the “friend or enemy” distinction by Bush – with Changez’s identity-in-progress as an oppositional model.

Although a written text, Hamid’s novel also foregrounds the act of one character (Changez) speaking up and making himself heard, while simultaneously accentuates another character’s inaudibility. This stark contrast between audibility and inaudibility functions as an analogy of a post-9/11 sensory landscape that, too, designated certain voices to be audible while others not, and as a result, prescribing what one can or cannot hear in the public sphere. Hamid’s strategic literary manipulation over whose voice can be heard, and more importantly, how to

respond to that voice, actually raises resistant possibilities, as I will soon argue, against the domination of the post-9/11 sensory realm by specific American bodies and narratives.

The chapter continues first with a detailed overview of the novel's critical and popular success, its "countering" positioning within the canon of 9/11 novels, and its academic reception. My analysis then proceeds with two sections that probe Changez's multiple national identities and affiliations to explore how they might transgress distinct categorizations. This is followed by two more sections that consider Changez's role as the sole speaker of the novel, initially through Rancière's thoughts on speech acts made by subjects who exist outside the community, and also through my own arguments on how Changez's own dominant audibility is reversed and becomes resistant against the broader 9/11 context.

The Oppositional 9/11 Novel

The setting is a café in Lahore, Pakistan; the time is a few years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Two men are sharing a pot of tea: one is a Pakistani and the other is an unidentified and jittery American man. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* opens with this simple premise of what would be a quotidian encounter in less turbulent times of international relations. This moment, however, is marred by a certain disquietude and a latent hostility in a post-9/11 world reverberating with declarations of cultural purity and political demarcation. Confronting this world of clear enemy lines, the novel, says the author himself, plays with shadows or a series of indeterminates – such as the ambiguous identities of Changez and the American character, and the fate of Changez's girlfriend Erica – which actually reflect more accurately a post-9/11 world of uncertainties. Hamid explains:

In their conversation [between Changez and the American], one guy is looking at the other wondering, 'Are you out to get me? Are you a regular guy?' The novel tries to capture the tension that currently exists between the West and the Muslim world. The novel plays with that sense of ambiguity and doubts and suspicion that we have right now.⁴⁶

Hamid's depiction of post-9/11 politics through the ambiguous and the undetermined seems to have resonated with readers and critics alike. Published in 2007 and translated into 31 languages, the novel is a model of border-crossing in itself not only in the sense that its protagonist Changez is a transnational subject, but also in the way the book itself, like so many in the globalized

⁴⁶ The interview is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTW5qtA6hVc, accessed May 3, 2013.

literary industry, traverses linguistic and publication divides. The novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and climbed up to the number four spot on *The New York Times* Best-Seller List. Hamid, as well, shows transnational affinities and shares similarities with his creation Changez: he grew up in Lahore and in California, had an American Ivy League education and has worked in London and New York as a management consultant, according to his own website at mohsinhamid.com. The book was also adapted into a movie with the same title and opened the Venice film festival in August 2012.⁴⁷

The novel contains two simultaneous plotlines: first, the chance encounter between Changez and the unidentified American in Lahore, which serves as the main story. The second plot unfolds as a personal tale that Changez tells his American companion of his young adult life and his relationship with Erica in New York. Both storylines are narrated through Changez's first-person point of view, but the main storyline in Lahore has an extra dimension of being an extended monologue spoken by Changez, with the American listening. These two plots are related to the two temporalities of the present and the past, with Lahore and New York City serving as the two locales respectively. Without exception, each chapter opens with the present storyline in Lahore, then shifts to the past in New York. As the chapter progresses, this organizing boundary remains porous as the past and the present often intersect each other, with the sights and sounds of Lahore and New York triggering quick back-and-forth shifts between the two temporalities. But always, the story line would return to the present again by the chapter's end in a cyclical movement. With every episode, one learns more and more about Changez while the American listener remains an enigma. The one-day encounter between Changez and the American also traverses the boundaries of day/night as the more agreeable afternoon tea and cultural exchange that opens the book extends well into a night of foreboding danger by the book's conclusion.

In order to consider *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a resistant project, it is important to examine briefly how literary works have engaged with 9/11. When seen against some common trends and themes, one can pinpoint the oppositional qualities of Hamid's novel. Although literary fiction's responses to 9/11 have been diverse, similarities are aplenty. First, literary representations of 9/11 focus primarily on the attacks in New York City and not so much on the crashes at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, PA (Keniston and Quinn 1). Second, works that

⁴⁷ For a review of the movie, see www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/aug/29/reliquant-fundamentalist-review, accessed October 6, 2012.

appeared shortly after the disaster often aim to represent the event and the emotional responses to the catastrophe directly (Keniston and Quinn 3). These works, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* in particular, offer a sense of intimacy with and immediacy to a disaster which, despite the unrelenting and unremitting instant replays, still remains a spectacle that is only experienced for most people from a distance through the television set.

These novels have protagonists who are placed inside the collapsing towers (*Falling Man*) and/or within the vicinity of the World Trade Center (*A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*). Some also touch on survivors' experiences as they cope with post-traumatic stress and guilt (*The Good Life*). A handful of works even seek to imagine the minds of terrorists by presenting terrorist-characters as a way to speculate their inner life, motivations, and radicalization.⁴⁸ By living vicariously through these characters, readers gain a sense of participation and a measure of identification, erasing the physical and emotional distance between them, the spectators of the disaster and the victims/survivors of the terror of 9/11. Trauma is unsurprisingly the major theme, with characters, all New Yorkers, struggling to mend their jolted lives amid a post-catastrophe city.

This second trend is closely linked to the third one, which has been described as the domestication of 9/11 (Gray 134). Surveying well-known novels such as *The Emperor's Children*, *The Good Life*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* and *Falling Man*, Richard Gray argues that many 9/11 novels register the cataclysmic effects of the disaster and the vulnerability of life, and even hint at the dawning of a new post-9/11 age, but they never move beyond familiar literary structures. While novelists depict traumatized characters and worlds that have been altered ineradicably by 9/11, they have not generated a new kind of imagination. Instead, they fold the unfamiliar drama of the catastrophe into the all-familiar and popular themes and structures of romance, marriage/marital infidelity, and family trauma. As Gray argues: "The [9/11] crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated ... all life here is personal; cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists" (134).

These fictional works might bear witness and acknowledge 9/11, carefully recording its physical and emotional toll on their characters, but ultimately 9/11 serves merely as a backdrop,

⁴⁸ These works include Martin Amis's short story, "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," which is available at www.martinamisweb.com/excerpts.shtml; John Updike's *Terrorist* (New York: Ballantine, 2006); and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

as the characters, strangely invigorated by the trauma, retreat into the domestic sphere to fall in love and have extramarital affairs, to confront an acrimonious divorce, to heal from past personal traumas, and to tend to the minutiae of everyday life. In effect, by diffusing the political into the personal, they depoliticize the disaster. For Gray this link between the catastrophe and the retreat into the domestic is “tenuous,” for it is reducing “a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education” (134).

When read against these common traits of well-known 9/11 novels, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both conforms to and contests these developments. On the one hand, the book is very similar to other 9/11 fiction in that it centers on Changez’s tumultuous inner life, conflicting identities and the failed love story between him and Erica. It is, in this indirect way, a story about mourning and loss, not about the 9/11 catastrophe, but about the loss arising from unrequited love. Romance and “emotional entanglements,” no doubt, dominate this very personal narrative. But while the book reflects the common patterns of 9/11 novels, it also simultaneously resists the domestication. The novel deviates from other 9/11 fiction by situating the post-9/11 events in a global framework. As Changez documents the effects of the disaster on his own personal life, in particular the breakdown of his American life and success, he also transgresses the bounds of that domestic-personal space to consider the impact of 9/11 as experienced elsewhere in the globe. The novel confronts both the private drama of Changez’s life and the historic public events of 9/11, the subsequent US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, and US foreign policy in general. Changez’s criticisms of America not only go against the grain of fiction that avoids any implication of 9/11 in international relations, they form a counter-narrative in which resistance is expressed as a direct negation of the dominant discourse and its assertions. To put it more simply, the novel is simultaneously private and public, local and global.

The title of the book also goes against a certain post-9/11 presumption of what the word and concept of “fundamentalism” signifies; this presumption often links the word to Islam and the ideologies of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Hamid offers a more ambivalent application, challenging the ubiquitous post-9/11 public discussions that identify religion as the source of extremism and threat by confronting readers’ expectations of the word fundamentalist and its negative connotations. For a novel with the word “fundamentalist” in the title, and given that the jacket cover for one popular edition shows a star and crescent, the symbols of Islam, (and when placed against the green background of the cover is suggestive of the flag of Pakistan) one might

suspect that the word “fundamentalist” in the title is related to Islam.⁴⁹ But the word Islam does not even appear in the book and while the word “Muslim” is mentioned, it appears only a few times and mostly in a cultural context rather than a political one. Religious fundamentalism in Pakistan is noted only once. Despite being a national of a predominately Muslim country and having sported a post-9/11 beard, Changez’s religious convictions are unclear.

The fundamentalism in the title actually has more relevance for Changez’s belief in and practice of a set of financial principles espoused by the elite New York-based financial services firm for which he worked prior to 9/11. It is a rival American capitalistic fundamentalism that mandates a single-minded attention to maximum productivity, ever-increasing profit and progress. While this capitalist fundamentalism will also be contested during the novel, a point which I will discuss in the last section, Hamid has attempted to reconfigure a word that has not only become a key term in contemporary political and popular discourse on terrorism, but also a pejorative word with a labeling function to qualify and position certain political groups as enemies of the West.

That the novel carries a contrastive force to dominant narratives is also consciously proclaimed by its publisher, Harcourt Books, as exemplified by one of the discussion questions listed at the end of the novel which reads: “Since 9/11, there has been a growing trend in contemporary fiction to write about the tragedy of that day and its aftermath. Compare *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with some of the other ‘9/11 novels’ you have read. What sets it apart or makes it unique?” (191).⁵⁰ Writing a book review for *The Washington Post*, Laila Halaby also claims: “... for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth reading.”⁵¹

Scholars, too, have positioned the novel as a challenge to the familiar post-9/11 novel that generally anchors itself in personal trauma and loss. Anna Hartnell notes the book’s deviation from other 9/11 novels, claiming that it “subjects the insular tendencies of the American 9/11 novel to a postcolonial gaze, and in so doing makes manifest the repressed political content of the genre” (336). Her own analysis assesses the novel through two lines of inquiry: first, within the broader context of ongoing debates on multiculturalism in America, as she positions Changez’s experience in relation to other minority groups; and second, through the relationship

⁴⁹ I am referring to the cover of the 2007 Harcourt paperback edition of the novel.

⁵⁰ These discussion questions are available in my 2007 Harcourt paperback edition.

⁵¹ Her review, dated April 22, 2007, can be accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/19/AR2007041903000.html>

between America and Europe, as marked by the former's current status as imperial power and the latter's colonial legacies. Focusing more on the formal qualities of the novel, Peter Morey raises the issue of readers' experience, arguing that Hamid's usage of hyperbole, allegory and unreliable narration, calls one's attention to the act of fiction-making and defamiliarizes the reading experience and the traditional process of character identification. This opens up the possibility of creating a deterritorialized reader (138). Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen mention the novel in their introduction to the special issue of *Contemporary Literature*, entitled "Contemporary Literature and the State." While the broader theme of the issue focuses on the relations between the collective state and individuated subjectivity and (literary) writers' engagement with or autonomy from politics, the writers also consider the state's value as an analytical paradigm for literary studies in this era of globalization. Hamid's novel, with its explorations of transnational identity and critique of exceptional (violent) power of the state, among other issues, seems an apt example to help anchor such a discussion on the state and the globe. The editors have characterized Changez's story as one that concerns "the resurgence of inter-national politics from within the carapace of globalization and the post-political" (Hart and Hansen 511).

My own analysis now proceeds to engage with this small body of literature in several ways: I deviate from Hartnell's discussion on American multiculturalism by focusing on Changez's "foreignness" both before and after 9/11 and by showing how that foreignness is mobilized politically for economic and national security interests. I also place a heavier accent on Changez's identity formation as an interiorized struggle, rent and forged by both national and global forces. Such a vacillating process undermines post-9/11 claims of totalizing categories and polarized identities, whether they are national, cultural or political. I, too, adopt Morey's emphasis on the novel's form and focus on the monologue, but rather than relating it to readerly expectations, I explore it in the final two sections as a site of multiple resistance in which a foreigner like Changez, as the speaking "I" of the monologue, can be seen as an excluded (but privileged) speaking subject within Rancière's theorization of political participation. This "I" is also related to a broader post-9/11 context in which narrative domination – the ascendancy of certain voices and the inaudibility of others – is contested.

A Shifting Identity

As mentioned previously, Hamid's novel features a story within a story, with the present plotline

in Lahore interlinking a recollection of the past that is devastated by 9/11. My analysis begins with this remembrance of the past by looking at Changez's articulation of an ambivalent tale of both belonging and exclusion. The story that Changez tells the American auditor/tea companion in Lahore is the four and a half years he spent in America. This account is most notably in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education or a novel of formation. The story traces the development of Changez's mind and character from youth to early adulthood, with 9/11 serving as a moment of identity disorientation. The *Bildungsroman* model has, no doubt, undergone many transformations, renegotiations, and contestations in different national literary contexts, but it is worthwhile to explore briefly its original German roots, as they yield helpful insights into Changez's experience of disillusionment and his formation as a resistant model.

Often featuring a linear plot of its protagonist's growth from youth to adulthood, the genre emerged within the framework of the 19th century European nation-state, with the archetype being Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. As Jed Esty explains, the classic model developed within the context of German nationalism, and is one based on "an ideal of organic culture whose temporality and harmony could be reflected in the developing personality at the core of the *Bildungsroman*" (5). Entangling the process of nation-building and self-making, the genre depicts the development from youth to maturity within and against the backdrop of the nation-state. Not only do the protagonists reach maturity by the end of the novel, but this maturity is also marked by some form of integration into the national community. At the same time, the self-formation parallels national development, in what Esty has described as the "soul-nation allegory" (4). He notes the important symbolic function of nationhood, which gives a completed form to modern societies similar to how adulthood rounds off the modern subject, stabilizing the unpredictable aging process of the protagonist by bringing him/her to the stable state of adulthood (4). "Adulthood and nationhood were the twin symbolic termini for the endless and originless processes of self-formation and social transformation," argues Esty (26).

In Changez's case, however, the circumscription of the self within the nation and the synchronization between adulthood and nationhood are impacted by both the enabling and disruptive forces of globalization, as I will soon demonstrate. His resettlement in America forces his identity formation to undergo a far more complex process drawn within the national contexts of both America and Pakistan; moreover, the process also has the newly emerging reference point of empire. The story that Changez tells the American listener is his own self-making in the shadow of US imperial power; a self that ultimately comes of age amid, in Retort's phrase, a

“new round of conquest and colonization” (Retort 11). With such a dual national/empire-situated identity, Changez also possesses a diasporic sensibility in which his whole orientation about national belonging, cultural affiliations, home desiring and homeland are always problematized and ever evolving. This is exactly contrary to the spirit of that post-9/11 moment when notions of identity, nation, homeland, and “ways of life” were articulated as being stable and coherent, whether it is through official discourses such as Bush’s unproblematic political distinction between friend and enemy, or through popular media narratives that had welcomed Huntington’s paradigm of civilizational animosities (the West versus Islam) and cultural distinctness and fault lines (Huntington 25).

Changez’s trajectory to becoming a national subject is characterized by convoluted relations with the nation-state; he departs from one, embraces another, then renounces the latter in order to return to the former. When the story begins, Changez is the 18-year-old youth embarking on a journey of expatriation, escaping from the national confines of Pakistan to pursue an elite education at Princeton and, subsequently, a career in finance when he secures a prestigious job as a successful financial analyst at the New York firm of Underwood Samson. At this point, his national affinity is reoriented towards his new adopted country, thus continuing in his development as a national subject, albeit not as a Pakistani but as an American. As the model emigrant, both highly skilled and eager, he comes to embody America’s beloved ideal of securing upward mobility through hard work and dedication. Through his new job, Changez becomes part of the Wall Street elite that helps America sustain its global economic domination. As the capitalist overachiever who is basking in the American Dream, he is more American than native-born Americans themselves; his mastery of English, too, surpasses that of native speakers. When Bush’s post-9/11 speeches always describe the enemy and the terrorist as absolutely external and other, Changez is a potential enemy (a designation he will receive following 9/11) who is actually more “us” than ourselves.

Empowered by an impressive American salary, exemplifying American economic values, and enamored with an American woman, Erica,⁵² Changez’s enfolding of the self in the frame of

⁵² Esty’s “soul-nation” allegory can also be adopted for Changez’s love interest Erica, whose name is echoic of “America.” In the novel, Erica’s interest in Changez and her emotional life often parallel those of America’s own attitudes towards Changez. She embraces him at first as a friend much like America embracing Changez as the hard-working foreigner. When America falls into a deep state of post-9/11 mourning and nostalgia, and becomes suspicious of foreigners, so does Erica. She, too, retreats into the past, pines for her dead boyfriend Chris and starts to lose interest in Changez. Equally, Changez’s frustrated relationship with her serves as a parallel to his troubled relationship with the country. After all, both Erica and America are objects of his desire and unrequited love. During his courtship of Erica, Changez had to pretend to be Chris in order to win her love and secure their first and only

the nation seems to progress unhindered. But the nation-state as a stable reference point is already in doubt, for what he identifies with is not solely America as a nation in itself, but also the American empire. His job has, after all, placed him at the heart of the empire. Changez becomes so captivated by his new employer Underwood Samson that, at one point, he proclaims himself not as a Pakistani national but an Underwood Samson trainee and derives tremendous pride from his firm's offices (34).⁵³ One sees that for Changez, who has passionately identified himself with a company – one with global operations that intertwine it with American international economic power – America's imperial outreach has become a key and commanding reference point for his own self growth. But this smooth assimilation, aided by an embrace of empire, undergoes dramatic disorientation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which abruptly return him back into the fold of the nation-state.

Although before 9/11 Changez had already experienced a certain disquietude, sensing that he had been “play-acting” as an American (67), 9/11 precipitates a definite break. Despite being a New Yorker, Changez – being away on a business trip to Manila – encounters 9/11 through the television. While some of the most common emotions arising from witnessing 9/11, at least as expressed by Americans, had been shock, terror, outrage, sorrow, and grief, Changez experiences, or at least articulates, none of these. As he confesses, his initial reaction of seeing the collapse of the twin towers is one of pleasure and fascination with the image of the catastrophe:

I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased ... my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack ... no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (72 and 73, italics in original)

sexual encounter. Changez eventually relates this pretense to the false identity he had to construct in order to become an American. On a separate note, this association of the female body and the adopted land is actually quite common in ethnic literature. The conquest/possession of the native white (often blonde) woman is seen as a gauge of a male immigrant's successful assimilation into the country.

⁵³ Both Morey and Hartnell have already pointed out that the initials of Underwood Samson are U.S. I would add that the name Underwood Samson is also echoic of Uncle Sam, the figure personifying the American government in old army recruitment posters. Later in the novel, Changez would increasingly view himself as a “soldier” in the American financial empire.

Knowing such a reaction would be unacceptable to his American colleagues, he forces himself to *feign* the same shock and anger that others are experiencing (74). Such a counter-intuitive delight in the terrorist attacks and in America's misfortune contradicts the global outpouring of sympathy for, and solidarity with, not just the victims and their families, but also with America itself. Here, Changez expresses resistance to three popular and intertwined post-9/11 sentiments: a broadly accepted and embraced identification with America, grief, and patriotism.

Encountering a post-9/11 climate of suspicion and hostilities, within which there exists a pervasive discourse that mobilizes the category of foreignness to signify negatively what/who "we" clearly are not, Changez's foreignness now signifies a possible threat to homeland security, rather than the embodiment of ideals. Even Erica begins to lose interest in him. With 9/11 as the catalyst, Changez's usual sense of self-possession is exchanged for self-examination. The attacks mark the beginning of what he calls an "inflective journey," which not only involves the eventual rejection of America and a journey home, but also a new political consciousness. He begins to formulate an overt critique of America by highlighting the global effects of its war on terror, in particular its disruption in Pakistan-India relations. While the US secures its own borders and solidifies national identity, Changez, too, has home and nation on his mind, being concerned for his family in Pakistan now facing a possible war with India. His national identity and orientations begin to shift again from the global and the imperial to the local.

This disorientation has wider implications if one considers the classic *Bildungsroman* model that reflects reciprocal allegories of self-making and nation-building. While Changez's own developmental process destabilizes and undergoes tremendous confusion, so does America's own maturity as a superpower, with its own shaky entry into the new century marred by a domestic catastrophe and two foreign wars. The terrorist attacks have disrupted the developmental trajectories for both soul and nation. While the post-9/11 official nationalistic doctrine disseminates imagery and narratives of American ideals and benevolence that claim to bring democracy and prosperity to troubled places like Afghanistan and Iraq, Changez narrates a counter-national history of the new woes of American imperial power. This narrative act of resistance presents a glimpse of America as seen from the (potential) victims of US military power, directly exposing the fissure between former president Bush's triumphant post-9/11 rhetoric of freedom and democracy and the material consequences of his administration's military activities in far-flung places. Reversing his previous endorsement of the globalization of American economic power, Changez now condemns America's military power. Through

Changez's eyes, one sees that it is America's global war on terror that is increasingly becoming the new disaster that eclipses the 9/11 attacks itself. Expressing an abhorrence for America's dealings abroad, Changez gives the American listener a quick alternative history lesson by reviewing the country's interventionist record: Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East and most recently Afghanistan (156).

So opposed to his once beloved American host country, Changez tells how he provocatively grows a beard, which he calls "a symbol of his identity" (130). Although one might see the beard as a sign of radicalization, Changez does not experience a conversion to Islam. This change in appearance remains an uncertain gesture, as he said it is perhaps partly out of protest or as a way to identify with Pakistan. It is, however, a determined distancing from his American colleagues. Increasingly viewing himself as "a soldier and servant" of America's financial system, and thus its global financial empire, Changez dissociates himself further from what he sees as America's "project of domination" (156). Changez's counter-history, thus, also includes a revision of his own quintessential American story. Rather than viewing it through that American gaze of financial success and cultural assimilation, he reassesses it through the lenses of the Janissaries – Christians serving in a Muslim army back in the 14th century – and considers himself a reversed Janissary, a Muslim serving in a Christian (American financial) empire. He tells the American listener:

I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country [Afghanistan] with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country [Pakistan] faced the treat of war ... I had thrown my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those ... whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (152)

One sees here how Changez begins to link America's war activities to the capitalist state. Given that finance, as Changez believes, is a primary means by which the American empire exerts its influence and power, he quits his job and refuses to participate any longer in American global domination and imperialism. Having solidified his political and ethical convictions, Changez exchanges his once globally-oriented future with infinite international career possibilities and travels, for a limited national one as he returns back to Pakistan. In a dilatory way, Changez seems to be completing his own developmental process as an adult and reassimilates into the

confines of the national community, albeit Pakistan's and not America's, by restoring kinship, language, and identity. His own uncertain arrival at adulthood is related to Pakistan's own lack of national maturity, as he calls on Pakistan to exercise greater independence in its domestic and international affairs and to resist American interference. But if both soul and nation are destabilized by 9/11, adulthood and nationhood can no longer serve as the terminal points, thus propelling Changez's process of self-evolution and social transformation rather than allowing both to reach any final resolutions.

In the post-9/11 world of "them/us" and "with/against us" paradigms as prescribed by Bush, this shift in Changez might be seen as a crossover from the category of "us" – as testified by his former American education, job, and success – to the category of "them," namely those who refuse to be with America and have become, by default, the enemy. But, ultimately, his loyalties remain unclear. The fact that he can cross various divides and then re-cross them underscores the instability of these lines and puts them in jeopardy. As Changez's formation testifies, affinities, identities, and identification – be they national, economic or cultural – shift constantly. His name, after all, summons the word "change" itself, which aptly characterizes his evolving life. He is able to position and reposition himself strategically – if not somewhat thoughtlessly – as he puts on a business suit and grows a beard. The burden of a diasporic identity is having to remain agile in negotiating different positionalities. He is able (and has) to shuttle between the borders, exploring American spaces and customs from his foreigner vantage point, but also recalibrating his own native Pakistani culture (negatively at first) through American lenses.

What is even more difficult to determine is Changez's identity within Bush's binary of enemy or friend. Is he an enemy or a friend of the US and of his accidental American companion? Although clearly anti-American in his rhetoric, Changez nevertheless also describes himself as a "lover of America." After returning to Pakistan, he becomes a university lecturer, and as such, has been publically denouncing America's military activities and its war on terror. He has also persuaded his students to participate in anti-American protests. Furthermore, one of his students has been arrested for allegedly planning to assassinate a development aid official. Against the backdrop of America's global hunt for terrorists and Pakistan's ill reputation as a safe haven for al-Qaeda leaders and Taliban fighters, Changez's political activities have gained potency. As a result, he has become a target of possible American retribution. While Changez once exemplified "our way of life," he can just as easily mutate into a threat to that life. The

novel's title takes on another possibility as the word "fundamentalist" might be joined once again with Islam. As Hartnell has pointed out, Changez does still show stereotypical traits of an Islamist terrorist: a well-educated young man from the Muslim world, and one who is disaffected by a sense of rejection from the West (345). There are plenty of hints that the American listener might be an undercover secret agent sent to intimidate, or even worse, to assassinate Changez for his anti-American activities, and yet, this American accepts Changez's invitation for tea and listens to his tale.

The American listener, too, has an indeterminate status. Their relationship becomes one of an accidental friendship, as the sharing of their afternoon tea is extended when Changez treats the American to the evening meal. As Changez tells the American: "It is a mark of friendship when someone treats you to a meal—ushering you thereby into a relationship of mutual generosity ..." (40). Their casual friendship actually surpasses normal bounds as Changez divulges more and more intimate details of his love relationship with Erica. In the tone of a confession, Changez details his somewhat manipulated sexual encounter with Erica and acknowledges a sense of shame to the American auditor who takes on the role of a surrogate priest. As Changez explains, with the sharing of such private thoughts, he and the American man are, by the end of their encounter, "bound by a certain shared intimacy" (184). This emotional entanglement complicates any simple friend/enemy designations and underscores the complexity of political relations, which are always difficult to disentangle.

Even when the novel reaches its final scene, this enigmatic relationship remains unresolved. Changez extends his hand for a handshake in a gesture of goodwill, as a group of Pakistani men are closing in on them, perhaps to do the American harm. Meanwhile, the American's own response is also indeterminate as he reaches into his jacket, either for a pistol or the metal holder of his business cards. It remains unclear whether the two men are to do each other good or harm. Indeed, both characters elude the readers' grasp. Their fictional world of instability, ambiguity, and duality both reflects a similar real-world mistrust between Pakistan and the US, and also unsettles the post-9/11 political climate that privileges rhetorical certainty and disallows ambiguity. Contra Bush's "us and them" and "friend and enemy" distinctions, the encounter between Changez and the American, which oscillates precariously between amity and enmity, challenges this very possibility and certainty of distinguishing, knowing and identifying one's enemy and friend.

Avtar Brah once argued that: "processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars

par excellence of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process” (197, italics in original). Not only is Changez’s passage to adulthood complicated by migration, it is also beset by forces of altering post-9/11 national attitudes, politics, as well as empire-building. Recall that this turbulent identity formation is divulged as a recollection of a past now being related to the present and told to the American auditor. Even as Changez speaks in the autobiographical mode of the “I,” which infers a certain stable identity from which one can narrate one’s life, his own is conspicuously marked by an absence of a fixed identity. Instead, one sees an identity unfolding, drifting, and maneuvering, allowing it to serve as a counter and resistant model that fractures supposedly distinct and delineated positions and identities. The next section examines how this memory of the past and its peculiar “I” narration might open other ways of resistance against post-9/11 boundaries.

Excluded Body as Speaking Subject

Changez’s relationship with a post-catastrophe New York is one of estrangement, detachment and, finally, disavowal. While he had enjoyed a sense of inclusion before 9/11 as an insider to the city, he is quickly banished to the outside by the post-9/11 climate of suspicion. Upon returning to the city for the first time following the attacks, he is separated from his American-citizen colleagues and asked to join the queue for foreigners at immigration, which subjected him to questioning and inspections. Once, he is mistaken as an Arab and verbally assaulted as a result. When the whole city retreats in mourning, he himself confronts this public ritual of communal mourning only as a spectator and not as a participant. This can be seen in the scene when he encounters the impromptu shrines to the 9/11 victims that had sprung up in the city. These walls or public spaces with posters and flyers with the names and pictures of the missing and the dead had emerged not only as one of the most iconic and gut-wrenching images of post-disaster suffering and despondency, but had become for so many New Yorkers informal sites for collective mourning and affirmation of communal belonging/solidarity. No such possibilities, however, existed for Changez. As he explains:

I would often glance at them [shrines] as I walked by: photos, bouquets, words of condolence – nestled into street corners and between shops and along the railings of public squares. They reminded me of my own uncharitable – indeed, inhumane – response to the tragedy, and I felt from them a constant murmur of reproach.

(79)

While locating himself at scenes of grief, Changez distances himself from its effects. Changez's sense of alienation from the scene might also work on a meta-level to defamiliarize readers from what has become a significant image in the collective American national memory. Along with photographs of the blazing and collapsing twin towers, ash-smearing firefighters, and fleeing citizens, images of these homemade posters of the missing and the dead have appeared in newspapers, special 9/11 commemorative editions of magazines, books and art exhibitions; they have become part of the standard visual illustrations of the catastrophe. When descriptions of these posters and impromptu shrines appear in 9/11 novels, such as in *The Good Life* and *The Writing on the Wall*, they receive longer treatment and are usually invested with great pathos. Hamid's alternative, and by comparison very brief, treatment of this emblematic scene of collective mourning defamiliarizes a very familiar and poignant moment in contemporary American history that usually awakens a tremendous sense of sorrow and sympathy. His interpretation becomes a counterpoint to the pervasive national mood of mourning.

As he walks through the city, Changez confronts the ubiquity of the American flag and senses a nationalization of the terrorist attacks and the emergence of national unity and vengeance (79). A nostalgia, says Changez, grips the country, but one that is unsure of what or which past it must return to. And if such a going-back was possible, he wonders whether this return "contained a part written for someone like me" (115). What role or form of participation, indeed, is possible for a foreigner like Changez after 9/11? If mourning, patriotism, and anti-terrorism discourses, as I argued earlier in the introduction, are the primary qualifications for belonging and togetherness and function as the main coordinates that have structured the field of visibility and audibility, what is his part? What forms of speech does he utter and what does he make possible to be heard?

As an excluded body from this post-9/11 scene of belonging and mourning, Changez claims a part for himself by assertively speaking up and telling his own counter memories of the catastrophe and its aftermath. One sees from page one of the novel how Changez approaches the American visitor in Lahore some years after the disaster, initiates contact, and proceeds intriguingly to tell his own revisionist version of 9/11. Equally important of the resistant content of the stories he tells is the formal structure of the dramatic monologue through which Hamid allows Changez to communicate, foregrounding this character as the single speaking subject, as exemplified in these opening lines: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America ... Come, tell me, what

were you looking for?” (1). It is this connection between Changez’s excluded body and his status as a *speaking* “I,” that opens up immense potential for resistance both on the level of content (his story as a counter narrative) and the act of speaking itself (as a disruptive speech act). Thus, even when Changez has no (emotional and affective) qualifications to speak, being outside the sphere of appearance, he speaks nevertheless and claims a part.

To solidify further this relationship between excluded bodies and their potential status as speaking beings, I now return briefly to Rancière’s thoughts on the emancipatory possibilities of speech acts. Recall Rancière’s well-known and paradoxical designation of “the part of those who have no part,” or those who have no part in the community’s sensible order. Rancière’s politics centers on this polemical emergence of the non-part, a process known as dissensus (see my previous chapter), in which those who are not fully included in a system of rights – those who do not count or those who have no presumed qualifications to part-take – challenge their exclusion through speech acts by demonstrating their linguistic capacity. In discussing this issue of speech and legitimacy, Rancière returns to the deduction Aristotle made in Book I of *Politics*: what marks the political nature of humans is their possession of the *logos*, that capacity to express what is useful, harmful, just and unjust. In contrast, an animal is only in possession of *phôné* and capable of only signaling pleasure and pain (*DS* 37). But what this distinction overlooks is a third category, for in political life there are those endowed with *logos* but are still excluded from political participation (Sonderegger 63-64). As Rancière has argued, the rejection of certain categories of people as political participants often begins by a refusal to see them as bearers of politicalness and to hear and acknowledge their words as valid speech and discourse (*DS* 38). As he claims:

Politics exists because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt. (*D* 22-23, italics in original)

Politics for Rancière, however, occurs when the uncounted, those who have no speech to be heard, speak up, seize their yet-to-exist rights rather than wait to be granted those rights, and intervene in the sayable as speaking subjects demonstrating their possession of *logos*. By doing so, they also reconfigure the distribution of the sensible in that, as those who have no speech to be had within the existing framework, they nevertheless do just that: they speak when they are

not to speak and partake in what they have no part in, therefore disrupting the established distribution of the sensible and what can be heard. What arises is a new visibility or audibility of something (or someone) that is previously non-visible or non-audible. This is why politics is aesthetic for Rancière: it, like the arts, produces a new way of seeing and hearing something and something new being seen and heard (May, “South Carolina” 115).

With Rancière’s theoretical assistance, one can conceptualize Changez as an excluded-but-still-speaking subject by seeing him as a non-part that makes claims to equality and inclusion, and therefore reconfigures the established sensory order. But as I stipulated previously, post-9/11 exclusions have a different dimension than the forms of political exclusions and inequalities that interest Rancière. Within his arguments, the non-parts (the *demos*) refer to a collective and not an individual like Changez. What I see, however, is a similar association in terms of the capacity for enunciation for those who are not previously identifiable within an established field of appearance and how their disruptive appearance can then reconfigure the field itself. In the case of Changez, his post-9/11 exclusion is not one from political participation per se, but an exclusion from national pathos, the collective experience of catastrophe, narratives, memories, social spaces, and his recognition as a legitimate and valid participant of the post-trauma American society. He stands outside the spaces of mourning and patriotism, which are precisely spaces that are politicized following 9/11 and are now contested. His resistance through the act of speaking up, in this sense, is not aimed at emancipation by demonstrating the equality of all speaking beings; he is not staging and seizing non-existent political rights. He does, however, disrupt the sphere of audibility, in which the lines of separation are drawn to accord specific bodies the possibility to speak specific narratives, while silencing others. Such a disruption reconfigures the existing sensory limits of what can be heard after 9/11. Here lies the book’s politics; in that it recasts given perceptual limits by allowing Changez to speak and forcing the American to be inaudible.

When the sphere of appearance is one peopled by mourners, patriotic natives, and catastrophe victims, and as a result, makes audible their narratives of hope and heroism, Changez serves as the previously missing voice. Thus, amid post-9/11 flag-waving patriots and grieving bodies, he as a different figure emerges and speaks. He tells a defamiliarizing counter-narrative of exclusion, rejection and repatriation, re-narrating 9/11 to impart his own experiences and insights in an account that is un-American and unsympathetic to the disaster itself. This articulation from a marginal and illegitimate figure is a resistant act as it inserts the previously

overlooked memory of a life, experience, and pathos that contrasts with the prevailing national normalizing one. While Changez, as an excluded body, tells an alternative story that creates possibilities of modifying post-9/11 audibility, his act of speaking up actually goes even further by staging a double act of miming and subverting. Indeed, Rancière foregrounds the role of excluded speaking subjects and their disruptive presence, but Changez actually introduces a second layer of intervention by destabilizing his own position as a speaking subject.

The Speaking Subject in Doubt

Changez might be the outsider poised to transform the established sensory sphere but while he speaks, he does so with a covert aim; the nature of Changez as a speaking “I” is both problematic and precarious. As mentioned previously, the novel’s two storylines are narrated through Changez’s first-person point of view, but the main storyline in Lahore has the extra dimension of being a dramatic monologue spoken by Changez. It is helpful to examine the form of the monologue and highlight some of its generic conventions before I argue how they affect Changez’s positioning as a speaking subject.

A poetic form, the dramatic monologue is most often linked to the works of Victorian poets such as Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning, with Browning’s “My Last Duchess” seen by many as the best-known model (Byron 3). While scholars often disagree on the form’s properties, it does exhibit some essential qualities: a first-person speaker who alone speaks in response to a silent auditor, in a specific setting, on a particular occasion (Sinfield 3-4; Byron 8-29).⁵⁴ Vital to the form is the feature of dramatic irony where the sole speaker reveals his own character and temperament unwittingly (Sinfield 7), creating a disjunction between the speaker’s own self-disclosure and self-understanding and the keener awareness and judgment of the poet and the reader. Here lies an invitation for the reader to scrutinize the speaker’s authenticity and integrity.

Equally important to my analysis is this unstable position of the speaking subject, which is undermined in two specific ways by the form. Scholars exploring the Victorian origins of the dramatic monologue have suggested that the form emerged in reaction to the Romantic lyric, which centers on the poet’s own personal subjective experience and inner emotions. Instead,

⁵⁴ While the dramatic monologue’s form is significant to my argument, I do not wish to engage in the complex debate that aims to solidify or deconstruct the form itself. For a comprehensive discussion of the form’s history, definitions and functions, see Glennis Byron’s *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003).

practitioners of the dramatic monologue explore a more objectively perceived world and experiences external to the poet's own (Byron 35). While the lyric associates the speaking "I" in the poem to the poet, the speaker of the dramatic monologue has been distinguished from the poet (Byron 11). But more important than the speaking "I" being severed from the poet's own voice, is its nature in relation to the representation of the self. Whilst the lyric voice presents itself as "autonomous, self-conscious, atemporal, and male" (Slinn 309), the speaking "I" of the dramatic monologue, in contrast, constructs "a self that is not autonomous, unified or stable, but rather the unfixed, fragmented product of various social and historical forces," according to Glennis Byron (42-43). As she comments on the form's strategy: "... dramatic monologue can be said to begin as a poem of contestation, a ruthless taking apart and exposure of the illusion of both the supposedly autonomous, authoritative and unified Romantic subject and the possibility of transcendence, of attaining a universal position untouched by context" (42). Relatedly, looking at the contemporary use of dramatic monologues, Byron has also associated the form to social critique (6, 129-145). On the whole, the form's strategic function seems to question and disrupt rather than confirm and consolidate authority.

Whilst not a poem, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does for the most part adhere to the main formal features of the dramatic monologue. The scenes in Lahore are a dramatization of Changez's singular voice and point of view, focusing on his primacy as the sole dominating and all-knowing speaking subject. As the authoritative speaker, he is the one in possession of knowledge. In every chapter, he launches knowingly into his tales; he is fully and completely in control. Even though the presence of the American auditor suggests the possibility of a perspective deviating from Changez's point of view, that perspective is unfavorably mediated. While the American does speak, and many interactions occur between him and Changez, he remains unheard by the reader and his interventions and responses are only implied from Changez's words: "What has so startled you? Was it that sound in the distance? I assure you, it was not the report of a pistol ... but rather the misfiring exhaust of a passing rickshaw ... It is most disturbing, I agree. What? Is somebody following us?" (176). This monologue technique has effectively rendered the American inaudible. His objections, interjections, and characteristics – jittery, suspicious, and disrespectful – can only be gathered and inferred through Changez's speech. The reader accesses this American only through Changez who controls the domain of audibility, or what can be heard. The constructed inaudibility of the American's voice and the totality of Changez's point of view make distinct the power relationship at stake; the novel

makes no pretense of Changez's own account of 9/11 as a domination of speech over the American's inaudibility and perspectives.

Changez's narrative domination is actually a reversal of the power relations that have influenced how the catastrophe has been explained, understood, and remembered. When commenting on 9/11 in *Precarious Life*, Butler identifies the narrative dimension of an explanatory framework that seeks to understand the catastrophe: "In the United States, we begin the story by invoking a first-person narrative point of view, and telling what happened on September 11. It is that date and the unexpected and fully terrible experience of violence that propels the narrative" (5). This narrative structure does not encourage an understanding of the prehistory to the attacks and serves to preclude accounts that might de-center America's narrative "I" within the international political sphere. Seeking an alternative, Butler says: "The ability to narrate ourselves not from the first person alone, but from, say, the position of the third, or to receive an account delivered in the second, can actually work to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken" (8).

Mimicking America's narrative "I" and the linguistic authority and autonomy that come with the first-person point of view, Changez protrusively and bluntly speaks to the unidentified American auditor through the second-person pronoun "you," thus delivering his story exactly through the second-person address to the American listener who is forced to receive such a de-centering narrative. This direct address of "you" also places an extra responsibility on readers, who are partitioned vicariously to the same receiving addressee position as the American stranger. Much like *Le Monde's* post-9/11 proclamation that "We are all Americans," the novel, via the monologue, also offers readers this same possibility to adopt the subject position of the American character. They can, of course, choose not to do so but they, nevertheless, must assess their own positioning.

But while Changez reverses America's post-9/11 rhetorical domination and the narrative "I" and mimics it for his own purpose of disrupting the sphere of audibility, the monologue form simultaneously asks one to be distrustful of Changez and to question and scrutinize his narratorial authenticity and credibility, and by extension, America's own post-9/11 narrative domination and self-preoccupation. At stake is not so much the unwitting revelation of Changez's hidden character and temperament, as in the case of classic dramatic monologue models, but his ominous domination and the narrative precarity of the American auditor in the novel. The monologue invites a closer epistemological investigation into how Changez's self-

knowledge is produced, since the form has already suggested a speaker who is not necessarily stable and authoritative. Changez's own narrative supremacy and the absence of competing perspectives as a result of the American's inaudibility are signals to examine and judge, reversely, America's own narrative authority for reliability and the post-9/11 sphere of appearance which is overpowered by themes of trauma, mourning, and patriotism at the expense of other deviating narratives.

In this sense, Changez is articulating a double resistance: as an excluded foreigner, he constitutes himself as a valid speaking being and mimes the rhetorical and narrative power of America itself, demonstrating his own legitimate possession of *logos* and resisting by disrupting the existing sensible (audible) fabric. Concurrently, his monologue invites a critique and investigation into that exact power of speech domination, opening another channel of resistance. Multiple aims are embedded within Changez's utterances. In sum, his story-telling functions to mimic speech domination, to intrude and disrupt established audible orders and, finally, to undermine speech and auditory mastery.

Conclusion

In the post-9/11 world of religious and political boundaries, Changez demonstrates an uprooted and fluctuating identity, as well as multiple affinities and allegiances that are difficult to disjoin. Although "different" and "deviating" are the two qualities that commonly characterize Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, my analysis has examined its non-conforming elements and has suggested how they have generated possibilities of resistance in relation to the post-9/11 sensible/audible experience, memory, and identity. Changez's own personal formation is shown as a site of resistance, with his *Bildung* – bearing national, global and diasporic inscriptions – as an oppositional model; just like his uncertain political status as both enemy and foe. His role as the sole speaker of the novel is linked to his status as an excluded body outside a mourning and patriotic American community.

While previously he had no part in this community's memory-formation process, he now does have a part to play by inserting his own alternative memory of alienation and estrangement. As an outsider, he polemically makes claims to inclusion through a virtuoso act of story-telling that can transform the established audible boundaries. But by reigning over this audibility, his domination is also subjected to scrutiny via the formal structure of the monologue, with his speech mastery and totalizing point of view undercut by doubt. This possibility of being heard, a

sign of agency and transformation under Rancière's theorization, is now also contested. Nonetheless, the post-9/11 audible order is beginning to be reconfigured with Changez, and even more possibilities of alteration lie ahead for auditory resistance when considering my next case study in which a sonic assault will articulate no such ambivalence over its own auditory ferocity and domination.