

Urban-Induced Radicalization in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract: Drawing upon conceptual frameworks from urban sociology, the socioeconomic inequalities within urban planning, and insights related to grievances and alienation, this interdisciplinary examination aims to provide a holistic perspective on how urban environments play a pivotal role in developing radical ideologies among immigrant populations. An in-depth textual analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is meticulously conducted to accomplish this. The central hypothesis posits that the radicalization experienced by the protagonist, Changez, is a direct outcome of his exposure to urbanism, marked by grievances and alienation. Within this framework, this research particularly centers on the adverse repercussions of urbanism on Changez, suggesting that the city of New York inadvertently catalyzed his path toward radicalization. New York is shown to cultivate conditions of social isolation, detachment from the broader urban tapestry, and the perpetuation of inequality between immigrants and Americans in terms of accessing urban opportunities and services. Consequently, these circumstances may have propelled Changez towards radicalization as he compares his immigrant experience in pre and post-9/11 New York to his perceptions of privilege in urban America vis-à-vis Pakistan's socio-economic landscape. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between urbanism, immigrant experiences, and radicalization.

Keywords: alienation, grievances, Mohsin Hamid, radicalization, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, urbanism

1. Introduction

The correlation between urbanism and the rise in radicalization has been a recognized issue in which the former has substantially impacted the latter. As they expand, cities become more heterogeneous and are often considered as crucibles embracing different ideologies and belief systems. Urban life tends to prioritize individualism and challenges people to find a sense of purpose and belonging. In this sense, the quality of life in urban areas may lead to social isolation and make isolated and alienated individuals more vulnerable to radicalization. Other factors such as social disparities, economic inequalities, and unequal access to resources

can create an environment within urban areas conducive to radicalization. The complex dynamics that (re)shape urban life have a role in both intensifying and mitigating the factors contributing to radicalization.

America witnessed an unavoidable diverse urban sprawl that peaked in the 1950s and continued into the 1970s. Individuals, influenced by a private utilitarian ideology, aimed to achieve personal well-being, especially in large American cities like New York. Yet, one of the potential consequences of urbanism is diversity of all sorts related to individuals, socioeconomic status, perspectives, and ideologies, to mention a few. Lack of cohesion among these diversified entities can be a catalyst for radicalization. Research shows the connection between high crime rates and urban areas compared to rural ones (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942; Christen and Speer 2005). Thrasher (1927) and Wirth (1938), for instance, investigate how urban topography and diversity can foster criminal activity, impact gang formation, and negatively affect community cohesion. Thrasher (1927: 26) claims that “the beginnings of the gang can best be studied in the slums of the city where an inordinately large number of children are crowded into a limited area.” Wirth (1938: 11) aligns with this sentiment since “spatial segregation of individuals according to color, ethnic heritage, economic and social status, tastes and preferences” becomes more visible as cities grow and may lead to the rise of “competition and formal control mechanisms.” Spatial segregation in urban areas breeds social tension and affects social control. Shaw and McKay’s (1942) social disorganization theory echoes this notion as their developed theory links disorganized communities with radicalization and criminality. Cohen (1955) further examines gangs and criminality in urban societies and notes that gangs are likely to be formed when urban lower-class youth are culturally excluded and alienated from the larger society. Based on the above-mentioned researchers’ illustrations, urban density, which is not regulated by mechanisms that promote social integration, could undermine the stability of the community, increase social tension, and promote radicalization, particularly among marginalized groups.

In the late 20th century, research has focused on understanding and combating radicalization of individuals and their eventual involvement in acts of terrorism. It was referred to as the “first wave”, led by “scholars as David Rapoport, Walter Laqueur, Brian Jenkins, Jerrold Post, Ariel Merari, Martin Kramer, Bruce Hoffman, and Martha Crenshaw, some of whom are continuing to make contributions in the present day” (Pape 2009: 643). However, the research has yielded limited breakthroughs because the scholars and research conducted on terrorism, at that time, “tended to separate terrorism from the broader marriage of social science and national security affairs that has been occurring increasingly from the end of World War II onwards” (Pape 2009: 644). The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks has spurred a surge in terrorism research, often termed the “second wave of terrorism research” (Pape 2009: 646). This wave has brought innovative methodologies from various disciplines, including a significant exploration of urban spaces’ role in understanding motifs of radicalization.

Other waves of research question the potential interplay between urbanism and radicalization in explaining urban crime rates. According to Doosje et.al (2016:

79) radicalization is used as a “violent means” by people against “an out-group or symbolic targets” aiming for social and political change. People suffering from socioeconomic disparities and living in marginalized communities within urban areas may adopt radical thoughts triggered by perceived feelings of grievance and injustice. Sampson and Wilsons (1995: 42-43) demonstrate that “social deviance” and criminal behavior often occur because of concentrated poverty and lack of access to educational and employment options in metropolitan areas. These conditions can make people turn to extremism and criminal activity to vent their frustrations and give them a sense of inclusion especially if their environment fosters feelings of hopelessness and social alienation. Radical ideologies frequently exploit the grievances and vulnerabilities prevalent in economically disadvantaged urban areas. Other scholars explore how radical organizations promise individuals from these communities a newfound sense of purpose and social change (Horgan 2009, Kruglanski et al. 2014). As many people are recruited, radical and criminal activities increase, resulting in a rise in crime rates and involvement in acts of terrorism.

In postmodern literature, the impact of urban life on the individual has become a prominent theme. Taking this into account, this study attempts to explore the correlation between urbanism and radicalization in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. It aims to foreground grievances and alienation as adverse societal outcomes and how they shape radical behavior. The study’s central focus is immigrants who find themselves living in a more diverse environment and are exposed to the complex and symbiotic atmosphere of urbanism. Drawing on conceptual frameworks from urban sociology, socioeconomic inequalities within urban planning, and insights related to grievances and alienation, this interdisciplinary examination aims to provide a holistic perspective on how urban environments play a pivotal role in fostering radical ideologies among immigrant populations. To accomplish this, an in-depth textual analysis of Mohsin Hamid's literary work, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), is meticulously conducted. The central hypothesis posits that the radicalization experienced by the protagonist, Changez, is a direct outcome of his exposure to urbanism, marked by grievances and alienation. Within this framework, this research particularly centers on the adverse repercussions of urbanism on Changez, suggesting that the city of New York inadvertently catalyzed his path toward radicalization. New York is shown to cultivate conditions of social isolation, detachment from the broader urban tapestry, and the perpetuation of inequality between immigrants and Americans in terms of accessing urban opportunities and services. Consequently, these circumstances may have propelled Changez towards radicalization as he compares his immigrant experience in pre and post-9/11 New York to his perceptions of privilege in urban America vis-à-vis Pakistan's socio-economic landscape. Grievances highlight feelings of injustice and exploitation, while alienation signifies detachment and disconnection from the surrounding environment.

2. Literature review

Since its publication in 2007, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has received much scholarly attention and discussion. The East-West is one of the pervasive themes tackled in the scholarly discussion, employing postcolonial theory. Morey (2011) inspects how the novel challenged the clash of civilizations between the East and West while Kiran (2013) and Zaheer et al. (2024) explore Changez's complex and critical responses to the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath. They highlighted how Pakistanis, epitomized in the character of Changez, become marginalized and suffered from anxieties, prejudices, and an identity crisis after the attacks, which transformed their image into fundamentalists/terrorists. Other scholars, though, debate whether the novel offered insights on hybridity and mutual understanding between both cultures (Gasztold 2015; Ajeesh and Rukmini 2022; Iqbal et al. 2023). Another significant area of research inquiry highlights the novel's critique of capitalism (Mleitat et al. 2023; Hein 2025) and consumerism and American imperialism (Moon 2019; Cavalli 2022).

These scholarly inquiries underscore the novel's importance in presenting diverse critical perspectives that reflect the sociopolitical and psychological zeitgeist. However, as will be presented in the following section, the impact of urbanism on promoting radicalization among foreign dwellers, such as the case with Changez in New York, remains under-explored. Grievance and alienation highlight the conceptual framework the study uses to examine Hamid's novel, especially New York's direct connection with Changez's radicalized intentions.

2.1 Urbanism and grievance

Urbanism can strongly entice feelings of grievances and, in some instances, may fuel radicalization among immigrants. Scholars of social movements have investigated this correlation as they seek to understand how and why aggrieved immigrants living in metropolitan areas can adopt radical ideologies. Grievance is a subjective perspective in which the individual experiences resentment, dissatisfaction, and injustice. Grievances are found in various domains such as economic, political, and social contexts (Østby 2008; Justino 2017). Since urbanism is related to the field of knowledge that focuses on people's interaction with the planning, expansion, development, and administration of urban areas and cities (Wiryomartono 2020), complex urban factors, including social and economic inequality, insufficient access to essential services, poor infrastructure, and discriminatory urban policies, may lead to social exclusion and conflicts (Arvin et al. 2025) which can magnify feelings of grievance among certain groups.

Bahgat and Medina (2013: 40) explore the link between geo-spatial urban areas and terrorism and indicate how terrorists "have specific narratives behind their motivations, which are related to cultures, ethnicities, and historical situations of the terrorists and their constituencies. Their choices and strategies may be based on spatial considerations, or attacks may be the result of geographic context." As terrorists consider the geographical location to conduct an impactful attack, "dense cities" are seen as "vulnerable" to these attacks (Swanstrom 2002: 135). Reflecting on what motivates the individual or a certain group to plan a terrorist attack,

Swanston (2002: 135) gives a possible answer to this question: “The main threat to cities comes not from terrorism but from the policy responses to terrorism that could undermine the freedom of thought and movement that are the lifeblood of cities.” Within this context, it is important to examine this correlation between urbanism and radical behavior to mitigate grievances among socially unequal parties which will eventually prevent future radical operations.

Upon reviewing the existing research on the connection between urbanism and radicalization in works of fiction especially after the 9/11 attacks, the researchers of this study have noticed that there is a dearth of research examining the impact of urban states on promoting radical thoughts induced by feelings of grievances and alienation. This knowledge gap has prompted the researchers to embark on this study, aiming to fill this void and contribute new insights to the field. Yet, Karagöz (2020) analyzes Hamid’s novel through the global and local cultures and cities that are inextricably linked to people’s identities and the cities that appear to be the primary transmitters of cultural values. He notes that the protagonist in the novel “deals with the conception of creole culture and dilemma of a Pakistani immigrant in America and also changing milieu of both New York and Lahore in which globalization enters a contesting process with the local structures” (2020: 211). He, then, contends that there is no obvious boundary between global and local components, and the cultural effects of globalization do not always result in the merging or conflict of cultural identities among cities and individuals. Zayed (2016: 67), on the other hand, explores Changez’s return to Pakistan after the “transformation of his adopted home—New York, affects Changez deeply and personally”, leaving him “unable to negotiate his raging anger against American imperialism on the one hand and his ambivalence towards the changed city on the other.” Zayed (2016: 80) questions Changez’s “disengagement” from America and New York and how the last passage of the novel makes the narrator unreliable since the reader is left not knowing whether Changez is a “left-leaning university professor” or an “assassin.” He notes that there is “no determinate answer as to what constitutes Changez’s resistance.” Building upon these insights, this research endeavors to investigate how the diverse urban landscape of New York might have influenced Changez to become radicalized due to his sense of grievances.

2.2 Urbanism and alienation

Urbanism plays a significant role in shaping the phenomenon of alienation within urban populations (Mu and Chen 2021), especially in big cities like New York (Clapp 2005). Alienation is a sense of disconnection, estrangement, or isolation from society or one’s surroundings; it contains multiple forms including spatial, social, psychological, and cultural alienation (Stokols 1975; Øversveen and Kelly 2022), and it has been a subject of concern and research for decades. The current study will only focus on social and cultural alienation as one of the stimulants of radicalization among immigrants in urban areas.

Scholars interested in the impact of urbanism on radicalization think that urban areas intensify social alienation, altering social connections and informal control (Clapp 2005; Chhangani 2023). While urban areas do offer a wide range of

opportunities and social interactions, they can also present challenges related to social alienation. Simmel (1969) explores how urban living can lead to a sense of detachment and anonymity. He notes that people living in cities may acquire “self-preservation in the face of the great city” which he describes as “a no less negative type of social conduct” and that “the mental attitude of the people of the metropolis to one another may be designated formally as one of reserve” (1969: 15). Urban dwellers tend to have a cautious social attitude towards others due to the city’s ethnic and racial diversity. They tend to maintain a reserved interaction with others and keep their distance from people with different backgrounds. Putnam (2000) explores the relationship between living in urban areas, social alienation, and radical ideology. He argues that living in big cities makes people reduce social interactions, establish weaker community ties, and increase feelings of alienation. He further asserts that “people divorced from community, occupation, and association are first and foremost among the supporters of extremism” (2000: 60). In other words, people disconnected from their social milieu may be excluded and marginalized, leading them to be more conducive to extremist tendencies. Building close relationships with others and participating in community activities will establish a sense of belonging among individuals and promote social cohesion. Societies can attempt to combat the factors that can encourage people to hold extremist views or take extreme actions by encouraging community engagement and social integration.

Wirth (1938:12) illustrates that urbanism weakens place-related bonds and informal control and explains the “‘schizoid’ character of urban personality” which fosters alienation. Urban environments expose individuals to strangers and reduce informal social control, enabling deviance and crime. Sampson and Wilson (1995) align with Wirth when they address the social components of alienation. They underline how concentrated poverty in urban districts can foster a sense of alienation from mainstream society. Urban residents maintain fewer neighbor ties than non-urban counterparts. Urban density bombards residents with negative stimuli, from crowds to crime, undermining mental well-being. Fischer (1973: 311) explains how urban areas stimulate “social isolation” and feelings of “powerlessness.” Residents learn that their efforts yield futile results, deepening the sense of powerlessness. Metropolitan areas amplify these effects due to their complex and challenging nature.

Due to the effects of urban living, cultural alienation may cause people to be disconnected from their cultural heritage or identity. Culturally diverse people, especially immigrants, may experience cultural alienation due to feelings of dislocation, displacement, and immigration. They often leave behind their familiar surroundings, including their home country, community, and cultural traditions, and live in the host country. This physical separation can lead to feelings of “devaluing [...] one’s own culture” and “hunger for that of imposed colonizing nation (Krishnappa 2020: 1262). Feelings of alienation may be intensified when individuals struggle to comprehend the host community’s customs, differences, and values, especially when they significantly conflict with their own cultural norms. Through the process of acculturation, immigrants seek to absorb the new cultural

differences in order not to feel alienated. However, this process of adaptation and integration can be challenging and may impact people's psychological well-being and lead to, for instance, mental disorders (Bhugra 2004). Heterogeneous urban areas stimulate cultural differences and drive those who are perceived as others to become alienated. It is important to consider factors that promote alienation, such as immigration status, age, and the urban milieu, when analyzing the impact of urbanism on the individual's behavior.

There is a dearth of research connecting urbanism with radicalization stemming from feelings of alienation in works of fiction. However, Ghosh (2013) examines Changez's impulses of alienation and integration in the novel. He argues that Changez's dilemma is generated from more than just the prejudice and cultural alienation he encounters in America, especially in the wake of 9/11. Ghosh (2013: 49) reveals that "there is a cool detachment in how [Changez] describes America, with the possible exception of New York perhaps – a city with which he seems to be still sentimentally connected." In contrast to his general detachment from America, Changez's connection to New York suggests that he may have favorable feelings, memories, or experiences connected to the city. Ghosh may also suggest that Changez's feelings of alienation do not appear to be as pronounced the bustling urban environment of New York. To the contrary, Changez's feelings of alienation result from his futile efforts to assimilate into the Pakistani way of life (Ghosh 2013). Ghosh seeks to show that Changez's criticism of American corporate fundamentalism is rooted in his lack of a sense of belonging and a confused sense of identity by identifying specific difficulties in his ideological stance. This current study extends Ghosh's study scope and explores how the dense urban landscapes often entice feelings of grievance and alienation, particularly among marginalized immigrants like Changez. Immigrants, seeking a sense of belonging and purpose, may find themselves drawn towards radical ideologies as a means of addressing these grievances and perceived injustices. Hamid's novel attempts to portray the protagonist's journey through this urban environment, highlighting how the complexities of urbanism can create fertile ground for the development and promotion of radical ideologies in him and how he strives to find his place in America's diverse and often tumultuous urban landscape.

3. Discussion

The novel opens with Changez, a Pakistani man, having a conversation with an unidentified American at a café in Lahore. Changez recounts his prosperous immigrant life in the United States, sharing his experiences in New York. This narrative dichotomy between Lahore's fixed setting and real-time storytelling, as opposed to the cosmopolitan American lifestyle characterized by memories, underscores the stark contrast between Pakistani and American worlds and their temporal dimensions. This shift in the power dynamic positions Changez as the dominant speaker while the American remains mostly silent, rendering the conversation more of a monologue. It serves as both a political and personal reflection on Changez's life journey, spanning from his early days in Pakistan to his time in New York and at Princeton, a successful stint at Underwood Samson, a

complex romance with Erica, a fellow Princeton graduate, and ultimately, his disillusionment, which steers him towards radicalization.

Changez's relationship with New York is first depicted as deeply connected to the city's urban character. With his conversation with the American Changez declares:

Lahore is more democratically urban. Indeed, in these places it is the man with four wheels who is forced to dismount and become part of the crowd. Like Manhattan? Yes, precisely! And that was one of the reasons why for me moving to New York felt—so unexpectedly—like coming home (Hamid 2003: 36).

He finds comfort and familiarity in the bustling, crowded, and democratic nature of Lahore's older districts, where pedestrians are the dominant presence and cars are forced to navigate through the throngs of people. Adopting Bahgat and Medina's (2013) notion on the relationship between geospatial urban areas and terrorists' motivations related to cultural ethnicities, we can notice that Changez draws a parallel between these congested parts of Lahore and Manhattan, highlighting how they share a similar urban quality. However, at the beginning of his life and career in New York, "Changez does not feel alienated and strange," a point that "does not seem surprising" (Karagöz 2020: 214). For Changez, moving to New York is a surprisingly welcoming experience because he relishes the multicultural environment, the presence of his native language Urdu, and the small reminders of his home country, such as the Pak-Punjab Deli.

The relationship between New York, as a city space, and Changez's fulfilled immigrant dream echoes Harvey's (2008: 23) statement that "the question of what kind of city we want is not divorced from what kind of social ties, relationships to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire." An individual's desired city is intricately tied to various aspects of their life, influenced by social connections and physical and material surroundings. Essentially, these interconnected elements both mold and are molded by the urban environment. As Changez desires New York to become his city, he quickly assimilates into its urban culture and considers himself "immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid 2007: 37), emphasizing his feelings of belonging in the city. Changez's affection for New York is evident in his sentimental recollections thrown in his narrative, despite the eventual circumstances that lead to his departure after only eight months of residence.

Changez's immigrant dream is realized in New York, suggesting that the city plays a significant role in his personal journey and sense of achievement. However, the complexity of New York City, as presented in the novel, is heightened as the narrator's mental perception of the city clashes with his traumatic experiences within the metropolis (Zayed 2016: 67). The novel effectively delves into the gap that exists between the city's portrayal – a city of vivid images and imagination, elevated to a legendary status in the popular imagination – and the real-life encounters that are in stark contrast to this mythologized depiction. New York, to Changez, is habitable, full of opportunities, and not discriminatory because of his

successful achievement in joining Princeton and then Underwood Samson as a data analyst. Changez's view of New York has been profoundly impacted by the events of 9/11. The tragic attack reshapes the status of immigrants and made New York turn from habitable to inhabitable, "narcissistic, acutely nationalist, and inhospitable" (Zayed 2016: 69). New York and its residents have become self-absorbed and hostile. This is evident when Changez is the only one separated from his team and is interrogated in the airport after he returns back from a work trip; Changez declares, "my team did not wait for me; by the time I entered the customs hall they had already collected their suitcases and left. As a consequence, I rode to Manhattan that evening very much alone" (Hamid 2007: 46). After being cut off from the team, the narrator rides to Manhattan alone, which can be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of the city's heightened atmosphere that may lead to exclusion and discrimination against people who are seen as different. This separation and detachment from his team, may also reflect Changez's emotional state. It implies a feeling of grievances and alienation, both personally and emotionally, as well as physically. It is worth noting that when dealing with 9/11, the grievances and the alienation the character goes through was a continuation of a previously experienced feeling; the feeling was enhanced and intensified following the attacks (but it was not new). The image Hamid presents here of Changez's feelings and the 9/11 attacks resonates Swanston's (2002) argument that the real danger lies in the consequences of policies which unintentionally endanger the physical and intellectual liberties essential to urban growth.

Multiple dimensions of the term – Fundamentalist, are explored in the novel and delves into exchanged racial identification factors between Changez, the city, its residents or Americans in general, based on appearances and attire. At the beginning of the story, Hamid establishes criteria for identifying individuals based on racial and cultural factors, including skin color, clothing style, and physique. Changez addresses the American by saying:

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin [...] Nor was it your dress that gave you away [...] True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-five—are typical of a certain type of American [...] Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult (Hamid 2007:1).

These criteria highlight a contrast between the Pakistani speaker's perspective and the cosmopolitanism of Americans. Additionally, the mention of a beard, later, symbolizes cultural differences between the two nationalities; "do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (Hamid 2007: 1). Still talking to the strange American, Changez continues discussing the challenges he faces as an immigrant in the city, particularly in the educational system, where distinctions are made between local and international students. He points out the unequal standards for preparation, testing, and admission, which create significant obstacles for immigrant students: "I was one of only two Pakistanis in my entering class—two from a population of over a hundred million souls, mind you—the Americans

faced much less daunting odds in the selection process” (Hamid 2007: 2). These contradictions reflect feelings of grievance and alienation in Changez, ultimately leading him to shift from being a supporter of America and its capitalist system to becoming an anti-American fundamentalist.

Changez exemplifies the detrimental impact of the urban materialistic surroundings. Despite his significant accomplishments, the interviewer, Jim, at Underwood Samson, regards him as an outsider of lower status. Jim subtly brings up the fact that Changez has received financial aid to attend Princeton, implying that his peers may not be aware of this information: “do your friends here know, he went on, —that your family couldn’t afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship?” (Hamid 2007: 5). In his strong desire to seek acceptance, Changez has begun concealing his Asian/Pakistani identity. He now presents himself as a native New Yorker and adopts the mannerisms and speech patterns of an American. Changez’s feelings of alienation have intensified, and he has come to understand that New York often fosters materialism, with a strong emphasis on material possessions, luxury, and status symbols. This leads Changez to focus on material representations like his achievements at work, his salary, and his prestigious position over his personal well-being. This realization brings him distress, as he struggles to gain acceptance from others, leading to frustration and a sense of injustice.

Despite his efforts to assimilate into American culture, Changez often feels ashamed. At the beginning of his time in New York, his “early excitement about New York was wrapped up in [his] excitement about Underwood Samson (Hamid 2007: 25); Changez is excited and awed by the city’s modernity and technological advancements. However, as he spends more time in the city and the United States, this initial excitement gradually gives way to disillusionment and feelings of grievance. Folger (1986) posits that feelings of relative deprivation stem from individuals comparing their circumstances against various benchmarks, including their own past experiences, the situations of others, or cognitive standards like notions of equity and justice. Changez, in this sense, compares the advanced, technologically superior infrastructure and achievements of New York to the state of Pakistan. He mentions the ancient cities of the Indus River basin, which once boasted impressive planning and infrastructure, and laments the stark contrast with the current unplanned and unsanitary state of cities in Pakistan. He declares that “to be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed” (Hamid 2007: 23); this shows how his feelings of grievance intensify as he dwells on these comparisons.

Although he adopts American mannerisms, attends an Ivy League university (Princeton), and secures a position at a prestigious firm (Underwood Samson), he still feels unaccepted. He professes, “when asked where I was from, that I was from New York. Did these things trouble me, you ask? Certainly, sir; I was often ashamed. But outwardly I gave no sign of this” (Hamid 2007: 36). His shame is rooted in the perception that his ethnicity makes him stand out as different. On the other hand, Changez’s romantic involvement with Erica, a fellow Princeton graduate, also amplifies his sense of shame and deepens his grievances, particularly

when Erica sleeps with Changez following his request to assume the role of her deceased boyfriend. Erica's emotional detachment and fixation on her deceased boyfriend leave him feeling unfulfilled and isolated in his personal life, exacerbating his overall discontent. This sensation of not being completely accepted intensifies his grievances.

Changez grapples with a complex and divided perspective in the wake of 9/11. He finds himself torn between his immigrant background, which shapes his worldview, and the strong influence of American finance, a theme he frequently emphasizes over his Islamic or Pakistani identity. Changez effectively employs the skills he acquired during his time at Underwood Samson, resulting in an articulate yet unsettling discourse. Within the narrative, a struggle emerges between rationality and hysteria, belief and denial of the stories, or what he believed them to be “rumors” (Hamid 2007: 107), about the mistreatment of Muslims in New York by the FBI. Such incidents, he believes, will not affect someone like him, a “Princeton graduate earning eighty thousand dollars a year” (Hamid 2007: 46). Yet, when he has been attacked by two Americans, labeled a “fucking Arab” (Hamid 2007: 60), or is referred to by Jim as “an outsider” (Hamid 2007: 64), Changez's confidence in his New Yorker's self is seen shaken. It becomes unclear whether this confidence stems from America's military operations in Pakistan's neighboring countries, his growing fundamentalism, or the corporate financial influence he has been exposed to. Consequently, Changez's rigid worldview emerges as a product of both American capitalist hierarchies and the radicalizing effects of anti-urbanism, causing a blurred boundary between fundamentalist and capitalist ideologies.

Changez's remark on the 9/11 attacks is complex and reveals his evolving perspective and emotions during this tragic event:

I gazed as one—and then the other—of New York's World Trade Center's twin buildings collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees (Hamid 2007: 72–73).

At first glance, his reaction to the collapse of the Twin Towers seems shocking and disturbing, as he admits to smiling and feeling pleased. However, when analyzed in the context of the novel, it becomes clear that this statement is a crucial part of Changez's character development and the overarching theme of the impact of urbanization on his grievance and alienation. Changez describes his emotions upon seeing New York in a vulnerable state after a crisis. He expresses a sense of justice or at least he is not upset by what has actually occurred, as he views this metropolitan city as no different from other third-world cities, susceptible to attacks with his sense of revenge. His belief in New York's none presence of historical vision and rich culture, as indicated by Karagöz (2020), and his observation of its accelerated modernity and urbanism may have led to feelings of grievance, and alienation.

Changez's life in New York, before and after 9/11 attacks, reflects threefold notions of origin, challenging the conventional definitions of the native, immigrant,

or cosmopolitan. Ultimately, the focus is on understanding why and how Changez came to be labeled as a fundamentalist in the first place. Boehmer (2010: 143) proposes that what might appear as “anti-Western fundamentalism” can be seen as a response to an imposed Western modernity. For some individuals and communities, like Changez and immigrant communities, in colonized or postcolonial settings, this imposition of Western modernity may lead to feelings of grievances, cultural alienation, identity crisis, and the loss of traditional values and practices. Boehmer’s claim implies that Changez’s anti-Western fundamentalism is not solely related to his hostile feelings toward the West but is, in part, a response to colonialism and its historical legacy along with Western modernity. Changez’s dissatisfaction with America, symbolized in his failed relationship with Erica, is strained by its adopted politics and the financial crisis following the attacks.

The moment Erica invites Changez to her home, Changez experiences a complex of negative emotions caused by cultural clash, social division, and identity crisis. His initial reaction to seeing her spacious, well-furnished bedroom, which he compares to his “small studio flat” (Hamid 2007: 30), provokes feelings of vulnerability and alienation. The ultimate contrast between the two spaces highlights the so many disparities related to their cultural lifestyles and socioeconomic backgrounds. Yet, we see Changez oscillates between resistance and assimilation. This is evident when he, later, admits sensing “a peculiar feeling, I felt at home” (Hamid 2007: 30). Changez’s paradoxical feeling of being “at home” in Erica’s bedroom reveals the psychological turmoil he goes through. From feeling aggrieved and alienated to sensing a deep longing for stability and belonging, Changez struggles to reconcile with these contradictory emotions. Patterns of residential movement, moving from dorm room to dorm room, make Changez yearn for the familiarity of his past, including his family home in Pakistan and familial bonds. This feeling is set in contrast with what he experiences in America as an immigrant which focuses on individualism and a segregated lifestyle. Moreover, the socioeconomic comparison between Erica’s Upper East Side apartment and the prestigious houses in his hometown of Gulberg underscores the economic disparities he encounters in the U.S., intensifying his feelings of grievance and alienation.

It becomes evident that he holds negative views of America when Erika’s father reminded him of the political turmoil in Pakistan, alluding that Pakistanis have “serious problems with fundamentalism” (Hamid 2007: 55). This leads Changez to resent the “American undercurrents of condescension” and haughtiness (Hamid 2007: 55). Changez realizes that immigrants are often unfairly labeled as fundamentalists. When he expresses these thoughts to the news networks, his strong belief in being targeted as an immigrant in America’s urban landscape compels him to speak out: “I state to them among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (Hamid 2007: 101). Srikanth (2012:72) implies that Changez’s transformation from a loving of American urbanism, embodied in New York, to an aggrieved person provoked him to become a fundamentalist:

In Changez, we have an individual who moves voluntarily from being enthralled with economic culture of the United States to adopting position of dissatisfaction. Only when he assumes these perspectives does he become aware of the seduction that have overcome him and prevented him from recognizing the depredations of the lives of others. His empathy is now channeled toward those countries that are caught in the web of imperialist and capitalist ambitions of the United States.

Changez's transformation involves a growing dissatisfaction with the American lifestyle and values. As he becomes more aware of the consequences of American policies and actions, especially in relation to his home country, he starts to question the choices he has made and the values he has embraced. Srikanth (2012) also suggests that Changez becomes conscious of the seductive nature of American culture. He realizes that he has been blinded by the allure of materialism and success, which prevented him from recognizing the suffering and hardships faced by others, particularly those in countries affected by American imperialism and capitalism. This realization intensifies his sense of alienation as he grapples with his complicity in a system that he now finds morally objectionable. These feelings of grievance and alienation are pivotal points in his character arc.

After his return to Pakistan, Changez acknowledges that in his country, the deterioration of social status occurs at a slower pace compared to the decline in wealth, as is typical in traditional, class-conscious societies. This realization makes him feel inferior even within his own society, leading him to draw comparisons among members of his own social class. He observes with a mix of disdain and envy as a rising class of entrepreneurs, both legal and illegal, flaunt their BMW SUVs on the streets: "We look with a mixture of contempt and envy at the rising class of entrepreneurs - legitimate and illegal business owners - cruising the streets in their BMW SUVs" (Hamid 2007: 6). This reminds him of the U.S. imperialism that he has escaped from. Changez doesn't want his nation to imitate America in this way since he has recognized financial capital as the primary driving force behind American imperialism. Changez, according to Zayed (2016 :80), "has no other alternative but to recede back to the nationalist quasi-religious struggle. [...] having understood it all, he has to channel his resistance through the nation/religion space because the existing reality conceals the other alternatives." The impact of urbanism on Changez's life as a middle-class individual is evident, exacerbated by the existence of a class system that restricts his ability to afford what he once could. Then, he becomes an activist. Klandermans (1997) shows that people are more likely to participate in movement activities when they believe this will help to redress their grievances at affordable costs. Klandermans' assertion that individuals are more inclined to engage in movement activities when they perceive that it will address their grievances at manageable costs can be connected to Changez's transformation into an activist. Changez's evolving sense of grievance is a pivotal factor that motivates him to take action. As he witnesses the depredations caused by American policies and actions, he begins to believe that participating in activism is a means to address these grievances. The emotional and personal costs of his

activism may be high, including his strained relationships and his internal conflicts. However, the perceived moral imperative of addressing the grievances he identifies makes these costs more acceptable to him.

Considering this reality, he is compelled to choose between pretending that nothing is wrong or working diligently to gain his previous state. Yet, Changez realizes that a pervasive deterioration is happening despite the outward appearance of normalcy. Consequently, the comparisons he makes between his new status as an activist embracing radical ideologies and his life conditions in New York and then Lahore lead him to criticize urbanism and blame cities for fueling his grievances and alienation.

5. Conclusion

This study aligns with diverse recent studies that explore the relationship between immigration and radical ideologies. It reveals that diversity among immigrants allows them to experience immigration differently. Broader racial, educational, and socioeconomic dynamics, especially among the newly arrived immigrants, shape these experiences in urban spaces, such as New York, and create tension with the locals, specifically through the lens of grievances and alienation. Hamid challenges and subverts the notion that cultures like Pakistan are responsible for the spread of extremism and intolerance. This is evident in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in which its narrative underscores how radical ideologies can be fostered within urban environments due to certain factors. Cities are seen as hubs of diverse populations, cultural differences, economic disparities, and social isolation, which operate as grounds for radicalization. Changez, who finds himself socially isolated and marginalized, can be susceptible to extremist influences and New York fuels his feelings of grievance and frustration. Therefore, adopting radical behavior, to him, becomes a means to address injustice and promote change.

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