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Democratic Radicalism in MohsinHamid's*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Democratic Radicalism in MoshinHamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U, Kirtipur by Raj Kumar Pulami, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.
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Self-Declaration

As the candidate of the degree for the Master of Arts in English, I have dedicatedly worked on the project titled "Democratic Radicalism in MohsinHamid's*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" and prepared this thesis with my efforts under the guidance of Dr. KomalPhuyal. I have neither taken any assistance from Artificial Intelligence (AI) nor plagiarized any content tomy knowledge. This is my original writing, and I have not submitted it to any institution other than the Central Department of English. If the authorities find any breach in the ethical issues of writing the thesis, I--and I--shall be held responsible for the breach. My supervisor or the evaluation committee has guided me only through the academic and administrative process; I understand the meaning, and academic and legal implications of this statement.

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Raj Kumar Pulami

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Democratic Radicalism in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Abstract

This thesis entitled Democratic Radicalism in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist explores, how Changez, the protagonist, embodies the principles of Democratic Radicalism through his evolving identity and critique of American imperialism. This study applies theoretical insights from Hegemony and Socialist Strategy by Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. The main aim of this study is to illustrate Changez's shift from embracing American ideals to opposing hegemonic power. This study concludes that The Reluctant Fundamentalist illustrates how personal and political identities can be reshaped through opposition to prevailing systems, embodying the principles of Democratic Radicalism. By demonstrating that social identities are dynamic and can be transformed through individual experiences and shifting political contexts, the novel advocates a more equitable and thoughtful perspective on socio-political issues. It exemplifies how identities are fluid and can be contested through acts of resistance.

Keywords: Identity articulation, Empty, Open-ended, Critique Imperialism, Democracy

This thesis explores democratic radicalism in Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, arguing that Changez initially seems to admire the USA prima facie, but he eventually denigrates its activities. In other words, Changez sounds democratic in his utterance, but he is illiberal to the American attitude. This study examines issues like articulation of identity, empty signifiers, open-ended narrative structure, and the critique of American imperialism. This study follows the character's admiration, disillusionment, and psychological background in the novel. The need to discuss democratic radicalism centers on the characters and setting in the story. The novelist drafts the conversation and events portraying his opinions toward America. The conflict between two identities leads to radicalism, which appears in characters, dialogue, and setting.

Moshin Hamid, a British Pakistani novelist, was born on July 23, 1971. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Moth Smoke*, and *Exit West* are among his best-known books. He grew up in the United States and Pakistan and studied at Princeton University and Harvard Law School. He works as a consultant in New York City while developing his novels. Hamid has received numerous notable awards, including the Booker Prize Shortlist and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. His writings are about identity and globalization, and they reflect his diverse background. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, published in 2007, explores life in the late 1900s and early 2000s. The complex and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and the United States is the primary focus of this novel, and the September 11 attack is also an important turning point. Changez, the Protagonist, is a Pakistani man, who narrates life to an American stranger in Lahore in a cafe. Through his narration, Changez reflects on his experiences as a successful professional in New York City and how his perceptions of America shifted after 9/11. Having studied at Princeton and Harvard, Hamid's diverse background and global perspective profoundly influence his exploration of identity and globalization in his novel.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the story is told through a dramatic monologue, with Changez narrating his experiences to an American stranger in Lahore in a cafe. He begins his story by expressing admiration for America, stating he is a lover of America. He talks about how he started as a talented student at Princeton University and later found success working at Underwood Samson in New York City. During their conversation, Changez reflects on the significant moments that shaped his life. He compares international and American students at Princeton. He shows pride in his talents, highlighting international students' faces in fitting in. Despite being at an elite University, he feels like an outsider, yet he takes pride in being different while doing the conversation. Through their dialogue, Changez explores his evolving identity and the impact of cultural differences on his journey.

Changez highlights Princeton University's strategy of attracting talented international students to the US with scholarships and visas, intending for them to contribute their skills to American companies. As a finance student, he wants to join Underwood Samson Company, a prestigious firm known for its influential analysts. His selection for a job interview at the firm, along with other Princeton seniors, shows a significant opportunity for career advancement. The given descriptions indicate how international students come to Princeton for their education from the world and aim to do well in American companies. It talks about the good opportunities they have, but also challenges they might face along the way. Changez initially embraces the American dream with enthusiasm even, comparing himself to the perfect breast, symbolizing ideal success. He finds New York City almost home. He works hard and is dedicated, and he succeeds both academically and professionally. Alongside his achievements, he enters into a complex romantic relationship with Erica, an American woman.

However, the tragic event 9/11 marks a significant turning point in Changez's life. While he feels empathy for the victims of the attacks, he also starts to feel disillusioned with American foreign policies and its treatment of Muslims. This situation makes Changez think deeply about his beliefs and values. He starts wondering about his place in America and how he fits there. Additionally, he reflects on how these events are shaping his identity. Changez begins to question where he truly belongs in a country he once admired. As Changez gets promoted at Underwood Samson, starts feeling like he does not belong to America after 9/11. He realizes that he is seen as an outsider in constant surveillance. A crucial moment comes during a business trip to Chile when Juan Batista indirectly compares him to a "janissary" who betrayed his culture. This comparison deeply impacts Changez and makes him reevaluate his role within the company. Besides, he faces humiliation at the airport in Manila

and the airport in New York. These experiences prompt him to question his identity, value, and place in a country dealing with cultural tensions.

Furthermore, feeling disillusioned with his role in supporting Western economic dominance, Changez returns to New York in the middle of an assignment, not completing his responsibilities as requested by his Boss. Thereafter, Jim fires him because Changez does not go through the company mission. He chooses a new life by rejecting everything of American ideals and participates in a peaceful demonstration criticizing American policies and actions in his homeland. These activities demonstrate how Changez's ideas about global issues are evolving. He starts questioning Western influence in the world, settles into his new job as a university lecturer and becomes more involved in Pakistani society. Changez thinks deeply about his identity and reflects on the critical aspects of the American values he once supported. Now he is reconsidering these beliefs, questioning their correctness, and considering whether he should see them differently. He joins peaceful protests against America, unsure about his identity as a Pakistani who has embraced American values. Changez observes how the stranger appears uncomfortable in their interaction. This discomfort symbolizes deeper themes within the story. It illustrates the challenges of feeling culturally alienated and the tension between different cultures. The narrative represents the complexities of identity in a globalized world where individuals like Changez must navigate their sense of belonging in these diverse cultural influences and geopolitical dynamics. The tension between Changez and the stranger reflects broader societal issues as well as the complexities of cultural identity and international relations.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* examines how the events after 9/11 impact an individual's sense of self. Through Changez's story, he makes us think about the moral challenges of fitting into new cultures, patriotism, and the clash between Eastern and Western values. Changez goes from becoming a successful professional in America to feeling

disconnected and uncertain about his Pakistani roots. Hamid's story shows how global events and societal views shape who we are, encouraging readers to think about the difficulties of belonging in today's world.

Many academicians, critics, and writers have attempted to make a descriptive and comparative study of this novel. By applying Tajfel's social identity, Shamim Akhtar et al. explore the identity struggles and challenges faced by Muslim-Pakistani immigrants after 9/11 and also explore how racism and prejudice shape personal identity. They write:

Changez observes such circumstances after 9/11, which takes him to the alternation of his identity. Changez gets his education from Princeton and then finds a lucrative job as an analyst in a reputed firm in the US. The multicultural nature of this city creates in him a sense of belonging to this city, and it is the prolificacy of the culture due to which he takes himself as an American. (346)

They examine the impacts of discrimination on Changez's sense of self. At the beginning part, Changez feels like he fits in, but racism causes him to doubt this. He struggles to fit in while remaining loyal to his culture, attempting to balance his culture and his new surroundings. This demonstrates how immigrants struggle to define themselves in a multicultural society.

Apart from this study, the novel has been approached through the theoretical lens of postcolonial perspective by Hoineikip Haolai, Sobi Kiran, and Isam M. Shihada. Shihada warns about the harmful effects of American policies on Muslims after 9/11 in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, "The American reaction toward Muslims after the 9/11 tragic attacks has been blind, indiscriminate, and disproportionate. By mistreating, targeting, and alienating Muslims, one is hitting hard at the concept of multiculturalism on which American society is based" (462). The novel highlights how mistreating Changez pushes him towards radical views which harms not only Muslims but also American values of plurality and

inclusiveness. This demonstrates an inequality between America's stated values and the reality of discrimination. This highlights the necessity of a more equitable and respectful strategy to stop the tension. It is further supported by Haolai, examining how Western hospitality affects identity and reshapes the concept of the 'Other' in the "post-9/11 Islamic Identity" in the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. After facing profound hostility, he makes the transition from pursuing the American dream to embracing a Muslim and Pakistani. This portrays how stereotyping against Muslims altered Changez's perception of "Other" and his sense of self. According to Sobia, Pakistani's identity crisis has become worse in the post-9/11 era because they are marginalized both within a divided society and in the eyes of the world. This reflects a broader response to historical and contemporary issues of colonialism and terrorism addressing this crisis through critiques of religious and political exploitation, sectarianism, and the evolving sense of identity in an alienated framework (39-40) and emphasizes how societal tensions and militant pressures affect their capacity to claim the identity.

Changez's journey in the novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, reflects the protagonist's struggle to maintain a hybridity in a world divided by cultural and political tensions. Salmeen declares "Changez is a Pakistani who develops a hybrid identity as he immigrates to America in pursuit of the American dream. He fluctuates between one identity and the other, and the fusion of the two identities is shortly lived and finally ends with the 9/11 attack" (32). It is about the fragility of Changez's hybrid identity, demonstrating how the external event, such as 9/11, affects the delicate equilibrium between two opposing identities. When Changez returns to New York City, it becomes clear that his identity conflict has reached a breaking peak: "He is infuriated by the looks and the discrimination he is met with. Changez's struggle to be part of two cultures, two 'opposites', intensifies by the 9/11 attacks. He smiles when he first knows of the attack on the World Trade Centre. Not because he is a

vicious person or enjoys bloodshed but in the back of his mind, he sees it as a victory (34).

Changez ultimately decides to go to Pakistan, where he helps his country by speaking against American policy as a lecturer and protesting against it (36). This presents how Changez's journey in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* emphasizes the challenges of cultural hybridity and identity in a post-9/11 world.

The novel has been examined through the ideas of Edward Said to scrutinize the conflict between self and other. Bibi et al. reveal how cultural conflicts and power dynamics impact Changez's identity and psyche, highlighting the psychological effects of these struggles for cultural acceptance. They assert: "Changez's reaction to the 9/11 attacks and his subsequent disillusionment with America highlights his struggle with cultural acceptance. He feels ashamed and uneasy about accepting the fact that his new home is no longer willing to accept him" (1385). They illustrate Changez's disillusionment after 9/11, as he faces rejection in America due to the Pakistani culture. This compels him to confront his struggle for acceptance, resulting in a deep sense of shame and unease about his place in both American society and his cultural roots. Nitya Raj Bhattarai emphasizes the Protagonist's struggles in America, highlighting how cultural trauma impacted his sense of inferiority in terms of economics, power, race, and ethnicity when compared to America. The individual trauma extended to become a collective experience for both the Muslim community and America as a whole. He states "it is the collective trauma of those Non-Western Muslim immigrants who are treated as inferior in their race, religion, status, culture, and civilization in comparison to American...symbol of the traumatic condition of Third World Muslims, in the aftermath of the Twin Tower Attack, in America" (56). This highlights the deep trauma felt by Muslim immigrants after 9/11, as they were unfairly treated as inferior because of their race, religion, and culture. This collective experience of discrimination reflects how the attacks created lasting prejudice, making many Muslims feel alienated in America.

The novel has also been analyzed from a sociopolitical perspective. Changez's transformation from a supporter of neoliberal capitalism to a critic of global capitalism and American policy is depicted in the bildungsroman plot in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Valerie Kennedy reveals how the novel presents issues related to political, social, and economic systems. Kennedy states: "The bildungsroman element of the plot, that is, Changez's development from a believer in and proponent of a neoliberal capitalist version of the American Dream in the early parts of the novel to an activist and critic of global capitalism and American economic and political of foreign policy" (np). Changez evolved from supporting neoliberal capitalism to questioning it, which reflects the novel's response to American policy and global capitalism.

Even though there is a lot of research on the novel, there is still a lack of studies on how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents the idea of democratic radicalism. All these reviewers have explored the cultural clashes, identity crisis, cultural trauma, and the impact of post-9/11 Western hostility, cultural traumas, the problem of identity and the troubles of immigrants, and identity sociocultural dimensions of the novel, less attention has been paid to its implications for political ideology and democratic ideals and practices. This study explores democratic radicalism, which is the key idea of the research in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

This study analyzes the perspectives and the writings of various scholars. The researchers gather the information from secondary sources, including books, journals, articles, and electronic resources. A qualitative textual analysis facilitates a detailed examination of key sections, revealing how the protagonist's identity evolves and how he actively engages with democratic ideals throughout the story. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how Changez's perceptions and involvement with democratic values shift throughout the narrative. The primary authors of this study are Ernesto Laclau and

Chantal Mouffe, whose essay *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* serves as the theoretical foundation. It explores how many aspects of democratic radicalism are presented in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, emphasizing the story's relationship between identity, power, and resistance. Using the perspective of radical democracy, I have thoroughly examined Mohsin Hamid's novel, paying attention to its ideas, characters, and plot. Radical democracy is the concept of Marxism which aims to decentralize power and bring it to the people at the grassroots. The major strategy of Marxism is a social movement that involves collective actions. This is evident in the novel, where Changez initially adopts American idealism. However, he returns to Pakistan, becomes a political activist, and starts actively participating in social and political movements. As a university lecturer, he encourages students to participate in demonstrations against American influence.

Additionally, the main areas of focus in this study are the articulation of identity, the function of the empty signifier, the open-ended narrative structure, and the critique of American imperialism. Laclau and Mouffe's idea presents how powerful beliefs are created and challenged. I have applied their concept to examine how the protagonist's radical shift reflects wider struggles about identity and power. The idea of Laclau and Mouffe's provides a crucial strategy to examine how Hamid challenges the dominant beliefs. It also supports the explanation of how the theme of democracy is shown through the character, Changez. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe explain radical democracy as a new way of thinking about left-wing politics. It moves away from the strict and fixed idea of traditional Marxism. This idea is essential because modern social issues are complex and diverse. Radical democracy values democratic principles and active participation, which are necessary for any successful socialist approach today. It values open discussion and participation from all parts of society. Concerning radical democracy, Laclau and Mouffe state:

The rejection of privileged points of rupture and the confluence of struggles into a unified political space, and the acceptance, on the contrary, of the plurality and indeterminacy of the social, seem to us that two fundamental bases from which a new political imagery can be constructed, radically libertarian and infinitely more ambitious in its objectives than that of the classic left. (152)

This approach encourages one to move beyond rigid categories in understanding society. Instead of seeing social issues as separate and unchanging, radical democracy recognizes that various struggles and identities overlap and shift. The objective of this perspective is to construct a political system that is flexible and inclusive reflecting the ever-evolving nature of social circumstances.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the concept of radical democracy drew attention to the difficulties faced by certain groups, especially Muslims, in assimilating into American society. As identities are created and modified by hegemonic actions, it promotes an investigation of identity articulation. According to Laulac and Moufee, "The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points that partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity" (113). As social and discursive settings change, they propose that articulation is the process of redefining and negotiating identities. This dynamic process highlights how identities are continually transformed through interactions with changing power structures and discourses. Further, they state: "Hence, the area of articulatory practices is immensely broadened. The conditions and the possibility of pure fixing differences recede; every social identity becomes the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic" (138). This relates to the notion that no identity is set in stone; rather, it is influenced by a multitude of factors, some of which may be contradictory. As a result,

identities are neither fixed nor stable. Similarly, the concept presented by Laulac and Mouffe offers a vital framework for understanding how dominant identities are created and challenged as well as how power structures are formed. They argue that "every form of power is constructed in a pragmatic way and internally to the social, through the opposed logics of equivalence and differences; power is never foundational" (142). Therefore, power is not a natural attribute but rather a social construct. It is impacted by the dynamics of similarity and difference and molded by real-world social processes. Power is always being generated and redefined in social circumstances; it is neither fundamental nor static.

Changez's experiences are consistent with this viewpoint, which challenges the idea that American imperialism is a single, unchanging force and shows how different social and political circumstances shape American dominance. According to Laulac and Mouffe, hegemony is established through the formation of antagonistic interactions in which social groups define their identities in opposition to others. They assert that "it is only through negativity, division, and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalizing horizon" (144). This viewpoint provides an essential insight into how dominant identities are created, sustained, and challenged or reinterpreted.

Furthermore, Ernesto Laulac and Chantal Mouffe argue that "it must, therefore, be the exteriority existing between subject positions located within certain discursive formations and elements that have no precise discursive articulation" (135). This demonstrates how empty signifiers generate ambiguity, enabling the articulation of new meanings and critiques within current discourses. Laulac and Mouffe's definition of democratic radicalism emphasizes that political and social identities are constantly created by the interplay between equivalence and diversity. This demonstrates how empty signifiers produce ambiguity, enabling the expression of new meanings and critiques inside current discourses. Laulac and Mouffe's

definition of democratic radicalism emphasizes that political and social identities are not set but are constantly changed by the interplay between equivalence and diversity.

The American Dream serves as an empty signifier in Changez's story and the American ideal post 9/11. While Changez initially admires American Principles, his understanding of the American Dream becomes vague and doubtful. This shift connects with Laulac and Mouffe's idea "It is this ambiguity that makes possible articulation as a practice instituting nodal points which partially fix the meaning of the social in an organized system of differences" (135). This remark emphasizes how ambiguity shapes meaning in society. Ambiguity is necessary for the articulation process, which links concepts and creates social meaning. It allows meaning to be created, rather than predetermined.

Additionally, the open-ended structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* mirrors the idea that meanings and identities are never fixed as Laulac and Mouffe's explain. The open-ended framework of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects that meanings and identities are never completely absolute. This narration decision provides space for several viewpoints and allows readers to interact with the story and its interpretations. Radical democracy values the coexistence of various voices and meanings, guaranteeing that no single viewpoint takes precedence. According to Laulac and Mouffe, social orders are inherently flexible, incomplete, and subject to revision and discussion. This ongoing process is central to their concept of hegemony. They argue that hegemony involves the continuous negotiation of meaning, where different social forces struggle to establish their perspective as dominant within a society. They assert that, "it is because hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the society, that it can take place only in a field dominated by articulatory Practices (Laulac and Mouffe 134). In the same way that the novel's open-ended framework allows various interpretations. This quote refers to the idea that social meanings are contested and changeable. The novel's unresolved conclusion, which follows multiple interpretations,

embodies the fluidity and contestability of social meanings central to Laclau and Mouffe's idea of hegemony. By leaving Changez's journey open-ended, the novel emphasizes the ongoing struggle over identity and meaning, reflecting the principles of radical democracy. This perspective emphasizes that no single interpretation or identity holds absolute dominance, mirroring the continuous negotiation and redefinition that characterized the formation of hegemony.

Apart from that, the researcher has examined the text, linking them to their social and cultural backgrounds. This research involves thoroughly reading the novel and using biographical and theoretical techniques. By using these methodological approaches, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of democratic radicalism in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's identity is fluid, shaped by the social and political forces around him, especially in post-9/11 America. This relates to Laclau and Mouffe's theory of articulation, which explains how ideas are not fixed but constantly redefined by power structures and changing situations. Changez's journey in the novel reflects this process, as his sense of self shifts and evolves throughout the story.

Changez comes to America and quickly becomes part of the American Lifestyle. He studies at Princeton and lands a prestigious job at the consulting firm Underwood Samson. He feels successful and connected to America, as he describes his initial enthusiasm for his new life in America. He acknowledges: "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (33). This illustrates that while Changez feels comfortable in New York's diverse culture, his identity as an American is not established. He fits into certain aspects of society but remains on the margins of fully becoming American, reflecting a partially fixed identity. In the same way, Changez reflects on his experiences in Manila, stating, "I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an

American" (65). This moment depicts how the process of identity is constructed. His mannerisms with the Philippines exemplify the fluid nature of identity and also highlight the resistance to imposed identities.

After the 9/11 attacks, Changez's experiences in America become increasingly disillusioning. His identity begins to shift. As he reflects, "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where belonged— in New York, in a Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid 148). This change in perspective marks a crucial moment of articulation, where Changez's identity begins to differentiate from his earlier connections with American Values. His Growing sense of alienation and critique challenges the dominant belief in American superiority. Also, the given quote illustrates Jens Zimmerman's idea showing how so-called secular reason fails to provide a stable sense of self that belongs to the protagonist in the novel. Zimmerman establishes a proposition, that "uncertainties about the essence of human nature, the loss of cultural identity, and the purpose of knowledge are all rooted in one basic problem: the exhaustion of secular reason" (797). He means that the secular reason is no longer sufficient in providing meaning. It suggests a need for new ways to construct identity which belongs with the idea of identity constructed through articulation because identity is not formed in a void. Therefore, Changez returns to his roots to know who he is. Slowly and gradually, Changez's relationship with America begins to fracture. As a Muslim, he faces increasing suspicion and hostility. His reaction to the attacks, when he admits to smiling upon hearing the news, is a turning point in his identity crisis "And I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (72). This moment portrays the unraveling of his attachment to America. Changez's identity starts moving away from the American Dream, revealing that his sense of belonging was never fully secure. This shifting identity connects with Laclau and Mouffe's view that identities are never completely fixed. They overflow and change as new challenges arise.

Changez's growing disillusionment with America's role in global politics leads to a significant shift in his identity. He realizes that his earlier success in America was built on supporting a system. The system went against his beliefs. Changez contemplates his realization: "There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary" (152). This statement marks Changez's acknowledgment of his role in America. He renames a "a modern janissary" himself recognizing his roles. His identity is now firmly opposed to the system he once embraced. It reflects how identities are shaped by evolving social and political realities.

Laclau and Mouffe's concept of articulation outlines how identities are constantly reinvented by changing discourses and power structures. Initially, Changez identifies strongly with American values and capitalist success, but his experiences in America become disillusionment. Over time, his identity begins to shift. He reflects on this inner conflict marking a moment of re-articulation. Changez separates from his earlier connection to American culture and moves towards reclaiming his cultural heritage. By the end of the novel, he rejects the American dream and redefines his identity in opposition to the dominant American narrative. His return to Pakistan symbolizes this shift as he reconnects with his roots and critiques the system, he once sought to succeed. This process of re-articulation connects with Laclau Mouffe's theory, presenting how external factors actively shape identities. Emerging discourses actively reshape and redefine identities.

Ultimately, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects how shifting political and social realities shape, challenge, and redefine personal identities. Changez's evolving identity demonstrates individuals resisting dominant narratives and reshaping their identities in opposition to hegemonic power. Through his journey, the novel illustrates Laclau Mouffe's concept of articulation and shows how identities are constantly in flux, shaped by the ever-changing dynamics of power and belonging.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the dynamics of power, identity, and belonging play a crucial role in shaping Changez's journey. He is aware of how his success gives him access to a world of privilege, reflecting, "I myself had among the top exam results in Pakistan and was besides a soccer player good enough to compute on the varsity team, students like me were given visas and scholarship, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of meritocracy" (Hamid4). His sense of identity at this point is shaped by his achievements within the framework of American success.

However, the attacks on September 11, 2001, caused a significant shift in Changez's experience in America. While he once felt welcomed, he begins to encounter. As America faces the effects of 9/11, he starts to notice how much power America has both in the country and around the world. His disappointment with America expresses a critique of the country when he reflects on its foreign policy: "Your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan (156). This emphasizes how America affects the world, particularly in Asia. His early admiration for American success unravels as he sees the darker side of this power, especially in its treatment of countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. This critique of American global domination mirrors what Ralph describes: while much recent work in transitional and especially hemispheric American studies begins with a critique of the legacy of American exceptionalism" (242). He emphasizes how the current research has been questioning the notion of American exceptionalism, which holds that America is distinct from other countries. His study challenges the conventional belief that America is solely a force for good. Thus, Hamid's novel reflects the scholarly critiques of American exceptionalism. Hamid challenges the notion of America being a unique country by showing its imperialistic actions, especially in its treatment of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

A key turning point in the novel comes when Changez begins to identify more with his Pakistani roots and less with the American way of life. His internal conflict becomes evident when Juan Batista invites Changez to his favorite restaurant for lunch. Batista is the chief of a publishing company in Valparaiso. Batista explains about janissaries, stating that they were Christian boys captured by the Ottomans. They were taken in childhood and trained to be soldiers in the Muslim army and forced to fight their people. Through the discussion, he acknowledges himself as a "modern janissary" (Hamid 152). This explanation reflects the image of soldiers who once fought for an empire but eventually turned against it. This comparison illustrates how Changez's feelings of loyalty and identity have shifted. What he once perceived as an opportunity for growth and success, now feels like a betrayal of his true self. It connects to his homeland. His growing critique of American actions, particularly its military interventions, reflects a broader rejection of the ideals that once defined his identity. Changez continues to question his role in American society. He becomes more and more uneasy with his position in the system that upholds American supremacy. His job at Underwood Samson only focuses on maximizing corporate profits. This position represents the American strategy to influence other countries economically. This internal conflict becomes personal when Changez expresses that he has become "a servant of the American empire" (152), revealing his growing disillusionment with the values that once drew him to the United States. He realizes that his role supports a system that exploits. This realization makes him question his identity and where he belongs.

Changez learns more about the foundations of American power. He sees its impact in the form of economic control and military intervention. His reflections on the American empire extend beyond his personal experiences and connect to a larger critique of how the U.S. maintains global dominance. This highlights how the country uses its financial system to control other nations. Changez reflects on his experiences, stating that, "finance was a

primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" (156). He acknowledges how this financial power has an international impact. He moves away from the ideals of the American system, adopting an identity that resonates with his Pakistani heritage. He experiences a transformation that challenges how power shapes and defines personal identities. He challenges the notion of success. He seems totally against American imperialism by critiquing how America has played a role in controlling the world.

The novel ultimately demonstrates that identity is not fixed and can change, particularly under the influence of external forces. Changez's early acceptance of the American dream leads to a deeper understanding of power structure and inequalities. His journey from a hopeful immigrant to a critic of U.S. imperialism highlights the complex ways in which personal and political identities are interconnected. By the novel's end, Changez's rejection of American values and his return to Pakistan highlight his desire to redefine his sense of self in a way that resists the dominance of American power.

In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, empty signifiers provide a strong framework to explore Changez's shifts. This idea examines the understanding of Changez's transforming relationship with identity, cultural dislocation, and political critique. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's identity turns into a meaningless symbol, reflecting both his psychological struggle and his criticisms of broader sociopolitical issues. Changez's initial engagement with American culture is marked by his desire to assimilate and succeed in his role at Underwood Samson, a prestigious valuation firm. This role symbolizes the success of the American capitalists. Changez reflects, "when I first arrived, _younger,_ and thought, this is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (Hamid3) and "students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy" (4). The American Dream is an empty signifier, representing the potential for

personal success and broader ideals of meritocracy. However, this signifier's meaning becomes ambiguous as Changez's experiences progressively clash with the values he once appreciated. The hollow nature of the American Dream becomes clear when it does not fulfill its promises. His shifting perspective on the American Dream illustrates that such ambitions are not constant. Instead, their meanings are subject to redefinition based on shifting socio-political contexts. Changez remains struggling with his divided identity and grows gradually troubled by American policies, especially those affecting his home country of Pakistan. Even after returning to Pakistan, he struggles with his past life in America, acknowledging, "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased" (172). He remains mentally caught between two worlds. His identity is divided; he cannot completely belong to either place or understand who he is. This tension further demonstrates how various forces shape identities.

The turning point in Changez's perception occurs as he witnesses the impact of 9/11 on his life and his growing disillusionment with American policy. The American Dream, once a symbol of hope and opportunity, now reflects an unfulfilled reality. In this novel, Changez reflects on Jim's assertion that "power comes from becoming change" (97). Jim's assertion highlights the importance of adaptability which belongs to the American ideal but the word "change" acts as an empty signifier for Changez's experience in American culture. However, it also raises concerns about loss of identity as Changez struggles to confirm while trying to know his sense of self. Thus, "change" carries multiple interpretations for Changez, which demonstrates the lack of absolute meanings. Along with this, Changez reflects on his choice not to shave his beard after returning to America, stating: "it was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity" (130). It indicates his complicated feelings about identity because the beard acts here as an empty signifier. The growing beard represents his cultural identity and personal choice. On the other hand, it exemplifies a form of

resistance. The ambiguity of this symbol mirrors the fluidity of meaning. His growing critique of American capitalism and its global implications reveals how the American Dream can embody contrasting meanings depending on one's experiences. Through examination of globalization and economic inequality, the novel uses the idea of empty signifier to demonstrate how words like "America", "Dream" are often used superficially, serving as empty promises rather than actual responses. He draws attention to the reality that, despite its favorable image, globalization brings discrimination and financial hardship to many individuals.

Moreover, Changez criticizes the dominant beliefs of American superiority and intervention. This is evident when Changez states, "It seemed to me then and to be honest, sir seems to me still- that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your difference, assumptions of your superiority" (Hamid 167-68). He critiques, which aims to destroy and reinterpret the prevailing narratives imposed by American hegemony. This represents a radical democratic position.

The concept of the empty signifier relates to the beliefs of democratic radicalism by emphasizing the need to question and reinterpret dominant social and political narratives. Changez's rejection of American values and his critique of economic and political systems are consistent with Laclau and Mouffe's theory that democratic radicalism involves challenging and altering preexisting established hegemonic system. Changez redefines his identity and critiques the dominant discourses. He participates in a process of radical democratic articulation that seeks to address and identify the injustice within the narrative.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist employs the concept of empty signifiers to examine the complexities of identity, political critique, and globalization. Changez's shifting perspective highlights the dynamic nature of empty signifiers and their role in challenging and reshaping

socio-political discourses. Through his journey, the novel demonstrates the principles of democratic radicalism, highlighting the need to question and transform dominant narratives to solve underlying contradictions and injustice.

The open-ended narrative structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a crucial element in understanding the novel's exploration of identity, and resistance, particularly when examined within the framework of democratic radicalism. Theorists, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that social orders are fundamentally incomplete, flexible, and always open to re-articulation and contestation, a process central to their concept of hegemony. According to their argument, hegemony involves the continuous negotiation of meaning in which various social forces struggle for dominance within a society. This viewpoint supports the open-ended narrative structure in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which represents the contested and open nature of social identities and power structures not having a clear conclusion. The novel's refusal to propose a concrete solution, particularly in its conclusion, resonates with Laclau and Mouffe's argument that any hegemonic order is only for a while and subject to challenge.

Because of the purposeful ambiguity of the plot, readers are left to remain unsure about what happens to the protagonist and American stranger. This strategy emphasizes the novel's focus on the fluidity and complexity of identity, which is a central concern of democratic radicalism. The open-endedness of the story is explicitly seen in the novel's final lines: "But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards" (Hamid 184). This highlights how the novel's refusal to provide a clear resolution is illustrated by the ambiguity in this situation, which allows the readers to consider several meanings, regardless of whether the American is reaching for a gun or anything else harmless. This open-endedness isn't only a literary device, it is closely related to the

theoretical foundation of democratic radicalism that as Laulac and Mouffe argue, involves creating spaces where diverse voices and identities can coexist and where meaning is continually challenged. By leaving the narrative unclear, Hamid invites readers to participate in the ongoing process of interpretation, reflecting the democratic radicalism's commitment to inclusiveness and discussion. Similarly, Changez offers the company this way: "But first let us leave this market; the shutters are coming down, and unsavory characters are lurking around. Where are staying? The pearl Continent, you say? I will walk you" (169). Changez's offer to walk American stranger to the hotel The Pearl Continent illustrates hospitality. However, "unsavory characters lurking around" create an atmosphere of approaching upheaval. This contributes to the overall atmosphere of unresolved problems and ambiguity in the novel's narrative.

Changez's intricate relationship with his identity further offers evidence of the novel's connection with hegemony and democratic radicalism. In the story, Changez fights with his sense of belonging, torn between his American being and his culture. This internal struggle mirrors the lines: "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate to the city of my birth" (172). This demonstrates the unresolved nature of Changez's identity, as he remains emotionally and mentally connected to New York, even after returning to Pakistan. Changez's identity crisis and its fluid nature reflect Laulac and Mouffe's assertion that social formations are never completely fixed. They assert, "The openness and indeterminacy of the social, which gives a primary and founding character to negativity and antagonism and assures the existence of articulatory and hegemonic practice" (144-45). The idea that societies are constantly changing due to disagreement and power struggles is reflected in this quote. Therefore, the novel's rejection of

a clear narrative conclusion echoes democratic radicalism's emphasis on the continuous negotiation of identities of identities, suggesting that Changez's identity, like other social identities, is always changing and subject to redefinition. The novel's an open-ended narrative structure that acts as a broader critique of the dominant systems. It particularly tackles Western imperialism and also criticizes the oversimplification of identities. These identities are frequently reduced to binary oppositions. By refusing to present a conclusion, Hamid's narrative structure challenges these binaries. Changez's journey from a modal immigrant who embraces the American dream to a disillusioned person who also starts to see himself as an outsider is particularly well portrayed in the novel as evidence. The novel's structure reflects this change by avoiding an exact conclusion which embodies to Laulac and Mouffe's idea that hegemonic systems are always open to challenge and rearticulation. They note that:

It is only to the extent that the positive differential character of the subordinated subject position is subverted that the antagonism can emerge...there is no relation of oppression without the presence of a discursive 'exterior' from which the discourse of subordination can be interpreted. The logic of equivalence in this sense displaces the effects of some discourses towards others. (154)

They emphasize the necessity for external viewpoints to challenge the dominant narrative by emphasizing how marginalized identities confront their marginalization. This relates to the dynamic structures of the novel that show Changez's evolving identity and challenge the repressive structure in the mind of readers. The open-ended nature of the story makes this possible. It challenges readers to think critically, question the dominant narrative, and consider alternative perspectives.

Eventually, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* open-ended narrative structure is a meaningful strategy that relates to and reinforces the ideas of democratic radicalism, which is a democratic device, not simply a stylistic choice. In the novel, the ambiguity arises from

Changez's stance on non-violence and self-defense, asserting: "I can assure that I am a believer in nonviolence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense" (181). This assertion reveals a defense against the accusation, believing in nonviolence. Yet "save in self-defense" raises questions about his beliefs such: what does self-defense mean to him? This uncertainty exemplifies how the narrative structure invites continuous interpretations. The novel's rejection to offer concrete answers provides an atmosphere in which identities and meanings are constantly renegotiated, disrupting the open social structures that Laulac and Mouffe describe. The story's unresolved conflict and ambiguities reflect democratic radicalism's commitment to inclusivity and the acceptance of identities by encouraging readers to participate in the ongoing process of interpretation. The novel's open-ended narrative is left unclear Changez's which emphasizes the uncertainty of social formations. By refusing to show resolution, Changez's story highlights the continuous nature of the power struggle and identity, suggesting that the boundaries of social formations are never completely established or stable. Therefore, Laulac and Mouffe's argue that, "society never manages fully to be a society because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevents it from constituting itself as an objective reality" (127). They strongly claim that societal limits and ongoing negotiations prevent any fixes or objective realization of social order.

Towards the end of the novel, Changez expresses his hope for a peaceful conclusion, stating: "I hope you will not resist my attempt to shake you by the hand" (184). Despite the tension between them, Changez articulates his desire for mutual understanding. However, it also highlights a state of tension and resolved nature of their relationship. Whether An American stranger accepts Changez's gesture or not is left ambiguous. That remains the novel's unsolved problem. The discussion on democratic radicalism can take a long route based on variations such as scholars, theorists, philosophers, experiencers, and the rest who

are concerned with this subject matter. Changez embraces the American identity as admiration which turns to disillusionment. Identity is carried out through multiple external and internal factors of life. Regarding to the democratic radicalism about identity, Smith and Waston, theorists in the field of autobiography writing argue that, "Identity is socially constructed in gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, class, family genealogy, and religious and political ideologies to cite the most obvious" (33). This argument links to radicalism in identity to Hamid's novel. Changez's identity follows a significant transformation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a result of his experiences and the shifting political landscape. At first American dream energizes him, and feels a connection to American opportunities and success. However, after 9/11, he loses hope and feels alienated from America, realizing that his sense of belonging was never entirely secure. As he returns to his cultural roots in Pakistan and rejects American values, his identity transforms. According to theorists, this transition illustrates how identities are dynamic and redefined through individual experiences and discourses.

Mohsin Hamid challenges American imperialism. Changez is optimistic about his success in America. However, after 9/11, he began to see the contradictions and injustices arising from American imperialism. He becomes disappointed with American capitalism and its hegemony over the world, which inspires him to adopt a new identity that opposes American dominance. The novel's exploration of democratic radicalism and struggle for a more equitable world is demonstrated by this transformation, which mirrors the ideas of Laulac and Mouffe about how identities and power are created and can be redefined through resistance.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist, reveals critiques of American idealism and changes in his interpretation of himself, which are also made easier by the concept of empty signifier. For Changez, the American Dream shows success and hope. However, this ideal represents

his internal conflict and critique as he becomes frustrated with American capitalism. This novel depicts how changing social norms and personal circumstances can influence what the American Dream represents. Changez's critique of American imperialism and globalization exemplifies their problematic nature. Through his journey, he promotes a more critical and equitable understanding of sociopolitical issues, emphasizing the notion of democratic radicalism.

By emphasizing the fluidity and evolution of social identities and ideas, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* open-ended narrative supports democratic radicalism and hegemony theory. The novel's refusal to provide clear answers or a meaningful conclusion reflects how the social orders are never fully fixed and are continuously negotiated. The story's ambiguity as well as Changez's unresolved identity, reflect the ongoing struggle for power and identity. This narrative approach includes simplistic points of view and encourages readers to engage in dialogue and rethink dominant narratives, embodying democratic radicalism principles such as inclusivity and questioning established power dynamics.

Furthermore, radical democracy emphasizes an ongoing struggle against domination and inclusion of diverse voices in political processes. It denies the concept of absolute solutions in politics. The Marxism's idea of radical democracy seeks to decentralize power and distribute it to the local levels. It states that democracy is a continuous process of debate and negotiation, rejecting the notion of a final solution. It also implies that power is constantly questioned and no one group or viewpoint should be in control. Thus, Radical democracy values pluralism because it acknowledges that society is composed of several opposing identities and interests. Marxism's central technique is to create social movements and encourage collective action to challenge existing power structures and promote social transformation.

A person's sense of self is dynamic and changeable, based on several factors, including personal experiences, social context, cultural influences, and societal shifts. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez offers an excellent representation of shifting identities. He initially welcomes the US, capitalist society. The 9/11 event had a significant impact on his change. He begins to question his role in American culture as a result of increasing surveillance and humiliation. As a result of the external social pressure, he fights with his split identity. He becomes more aware of the cultural differences and discrimination he experiences. Eventually, he reestablishes his connection to his Pakistani culture.

The open-ended framework emphasizes the fluidity of identity as it develops from Changez's point of view. The ambiguity also draws attention to identities that are fluid and always changing, enabling readers to consider his final position. The novel allows for multiple interpretations, highlighting the complexities of identity formation and the various ways people perceive their position in society. Changez encourages diversity by sharing his experiences and providing an alternate narrative that opposes the dominant U.S. attitude. It exemplifies the factor of radical democracy. The conversation between Changez and the American stranger is an important part of democratic participation because it fosters respect for variety and the examination of alternative identities. His journey demonstrates how personal identity is influenced by larger cultural and political circumstances. His experiences, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, illustrate how external events drastically alter one's sense of self in the world. The open-ended framework enables continuous dialogue, which is necessary for resolving identity issues and embracing radical democratic ideas. It promotes multiple perspectives and collaborative exploration in the pursuit of understanding and solutions. Radical democracy emphasizes the transformative power of collective action, reflecting how crises can redefine an individual's identity. A character in the story often finds difficult situations that contrast his principles and beliefs. These circumstances force Changez

to make the decisions. As a result, he gains a deeper understanding of who he is. On the other hand, radical democracy emphasizes the value of every voice during difficult times. It encourages people to share experiences and speak up when they face a social and political crisis. This collective discussion assists people in reevaluating their positions. In this way, such a crisis prompts deep social and personal reflection, helping individuals redefine their identities. Thus, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the open-ended narrative, shifting identity, and radical democracy are interconnected. The novel's unresolved ending demonstrates the indeterminacy of Changez's experiences. It invites multiple interpretations which mirrors the ideas of radical democracy, where Changez constantly renegotiates identity. Changez's shifting identity, from admiration of America to a critic of American imperialism, embodies its fluidity. It highlights how identity is not fixed but reshaped by various factors, such as individual experiences, political, and social contexts. This evolving identity connects with radical democracy. Similarly, open-ended narrative structure emphasizes the democratic process of contestation and resistance to hegemonic power.

In the end, this research study focuses on Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It concludes that the novel presents the idea of democratic radicalism that is explored through the lens of radical democracy. Changez is a liberal as well as an illiberal. He embraces the American dream but he attacks American imperialism and takes a more active stand against the Western ideals. Changez's journey from accepting the American dream to rejection highlights how identities are dynamic and ever-changing. After 9/11, his early admiration for American achievement gives way to disillusionment as he discovers the darker side of American imperialism and power. This transformation exemplifies how changing political contexts can be influenced by personal experiences and political situations. Changez demonstrates a critical approach towards dominant narratives and power systems by rejecting American norms and returning to his Pakistani roots. Thus, Laulac and Mouffe's

theory states that resistance is an essential tool for challenging and reshaping identities and a power structure. Alongside, the novel's open-ended narrative further supports democratic radicalism by refusing easy and simplistic answers or resolutions, mirroring those social orders and identities that are always in flux. Changez's unresolved identity and the story's ambiguity encourage readers to question established power dynamics and engage in a more inclusive and critical dialogue. By showing how personal and political identities can be redefined through resistance to dominant systems, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* exemplifies democratic radicalism's principles, advocating for more equitable and thoughtful comprehension of socio-political issues. Besides, the research on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows that identities constantly change based on personal experiences and social changes. This means we should view identities as flexible and evolving, not fixed. The study also highlights the need to critically examine American imperialism and its global effects, calling for better public discussion about American foreign policies and their impacts. The idea of empty signifiers, like the American Dream, reminds us to rethink symbols and ideas, recognizing that their meanings can change over time. Hence, Hamid in the novel attempts to depict the different strategies that support radical democracy, addressing the tensions arising from hegemonic pressure, and the cultural clash between America and Pakistan, emphasizing power struggles in contemporary political societies.

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