

Postcolonizing Bildungsroman, Erziehungsroman and Zeitroman: Reexamining the (Anti) Colonial Tropes in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract The paper examines a monumental shift in identity—colonial to anti-colonial—of the principal character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, within the literary and theoretical tradition of postcolonial bildungsroman. The tradition of Western bildungsroman is appropriated and reconfigured by Postcolonial Bildungsroman: a new genre that radically dismantles Western nexus of power and knowledge. The postcolonial bildungsroman offers a liminal space between the colonial and the postcolonial experience -one that leads to decolonization, the recovery of indigenous and the subversion of the colonial apparatus. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* would be investigated as an erziehungsroman and zeitroman novel: two variations within bildungsroman. Postcolonizing Bildungs/Erziehungs/Zeir(Roman) focuses on the examination of central character's development of character, enlargement of vision and socio-historical factors that shape his anti-colonial consciousness. The anticolonial narrative structure and tropes decenter West from the position of authority and project (ex)colonized at the center- a major goal of postcolonial studies. The hero sheds his Eurocentric vision of the world and move towards indigenous selfhood in the quest of finding his true identity. This investigation challenges the reader's presuppositions/biases/theoretical baggage about a Pakistani hero's inability to grapple with the colonial machinery in the post 9/11 phase. It impels a reengagement of all colonial-colonized relationships in a postcolonized world.

Keywords Bildungsroman; Erziehungsroman; Zeitroman; Identity Crisis/shift and anticolonial tropes

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Introduction

Postcolonizing the bildungsroman reconfigures the traditional Western bildungsroman. "A Western-based genre, the Bildungsroman, has been appropriated and reconfigured by postcolonial writers around the world, creating a new genre as the "postcolonial bildungsroman" (Hoagland iv). Postcolonial bildungsroman is a new genre that stresses on reclaiming of identity, retrieving one's sovereignty, subversion of Western colonial machinery and decolonization of values. "The political and cultural ramifications of postcolonial appropriations of the Bildungsroman" (Hoagland 5) include coming up with "resistance literature" (6). So, postcolonial bildungsroman implies resistance to dominant ideologies of the West that undermine the colonized subjects through their system of monopolization. It is dismantling of Western narratives that reinforce supremacy of the oppressor. The colonized employ "linguistic, theoretical and ideological tools" (Hoagland 7) of the West to de-authorize West from the controlling position.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a classical example of Erziehungsroman and Zeitroman: two variations of Bildungsroman. Zeitroman chronicles the historical developments of the age that impinge on the central character. "This [Zeitroman] type of novel provides an interesting study of the effects of historical context on character" (Milne 72). 9/11 throws Pakistan-America relationship to an emotional rollercoaster. Similarly, Changez's relationship with [AM]erica hovers on two extremes: intimacy to oblivion. The [mis]trust between Pakistan and America in the post 9/11 phase is reflected in the relationship of Changez-[Am]erica. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is (a)n [postcolonial] Erziehungsroman novel, because the hero, Changez, evolves into an enlightened figure. "It [Erziehungsroman] is more concerned with the formal education and training of the protagonist" (Milne 72). Changez's development of character, evolution into maturity and shattering

of the American dream make *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a typical postcolonial bildungs/erziehungs/Zeit(roman) novel.

Struggle to find one's true self lies at the center of postcolonial bildungsroman. "The quest for identity is also always a quest for authenticity: what is the 'real', 'true' I" (Ansari 8)? The protagonist continuously investigates his role in the society and the ways in which he could come into his own. "[postcolonial] Bildungsroman is. . . a form of diasporic text" (Ansari 2), it highlights the struggle of a character that is ideologically in two words. "Narratives that deal with diasporic, immigrant, or transnational identities, by virtue of occupying the fringes, or the spaces in between" (Ansari 3) highlight the mental turmoil that a protagonist is confronting. The protagonist in postcolonial bildungsroman is under the influence of colonial power, but he constantly tries to cling on to a new identity.

The colonized subject consciously drifts away from the colonial doctrines to seek authenticity in his native culture. "The most important component, however, is that the growth defined is not just anti-colonial but is towards indigenesness in language, style, religious roots and belonging" (Jussawalla 25). The chief character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, stops examining the world from his Eurocentric optics. His intellectual enlightenment is brought about as a result of being a victim of ethnic marginalization and cultural subjugation in America. Marginalization culminates in his awakening and empowers him to structurally disempower the colonial setup. He makes an inward journey towards self-examination, so that he can unlearn the American educational influences. He resolves to work for social welfare and oppressed women in Pakistan.

An inward journey towards self-knowledge marks a watershed in the life of the colonized subject. "The child (adult) ... turns away from westernization or modernization and turns towards an introspective knowledge of who he or she is within the parent culture. This is the basis postcolonial bildungsroman" (Jussawalla 31). The self-realization of being blind to the onslaught of the colonial apparatus sets Changez on a rebellious path against America. His "turning away from the colonizing culture towards authentic indigenesness" (37) to attain selfhood is a defining moment. Changez is no longer an agent of colonization; he has parted with American doctrines taught at Princeton University that shaped his consciousness. The postcolonial coming into being of Changez is a conscious rejection of Westernization; a signal of intellectual rebirth. A series of setbacks in America lead to the postcolonial bildungsroman of Changez. He cottons on the painful reality that American machinery of oppression can culturally disempower anyone, so, he puts to shame the imperial agenda of the hypocritical setup.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a slippery novel that centers on the paradigm shift in the life of Changez. The desire of living out the American dream at the cost of losing one's identity defines the turmoil of Changez. He turns his back on Pakistan to get social acceptance in America. He lives the romanticized life of an idealist: consummates his love with his girlfriend, Erica, gets a fairly decent salary from Underwood Samson, and attracts the attention of American colleagues by his business acumen. Recurrent instances of racial provocation in America turn him against the American empire that he once idealized. He decides to switch his ideological leanings toward his homeland, Pakistan, as a mark of protest against the bellicosity of Americans. The postcolonial bildungsroman of Changez fosters his anti-colonial self that prompts him to be in quest of his real self. In order to settle scores with America for keeping him under a colonial spell, Changez preaches anti-Americanism to his students back in Pakistan. He actively starts working as an activist to restore the psychological health of the people of Pakistan who are betrayed by colonial machinations.

Literature Review

The postcolonial bildungsroman of Changez stems from his Erziehungsroman. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* chronicles Changez's disillusionment with the capitalist camp and evolution into an anti-capitalist force. In the article, "Precarious World: Rethinking Global Fiction in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*", Changez realizes that he belittles the surroundings of his home due to his Americanized self. "It occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American" (Darda 114). This is a light bulb moment in the life of Changez. His Americanized self has completely taken over his Pakistani self, as a result of which, he looks at his own home from a foreigner's gaze. In the wake of having Erziehungsroman, Changez demeans America: "We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this [Lahore] city. ... And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies" (Hamid 61). Changez takes a dig at America's colonial past and highlights the rich cultural heritage of Pakistan. The Royal Mosque and The Shalimar Garden symbolize the cultural richness of Pakistan.

The slipperiness of the novel's title leaves the postcolonial reader flustered. In the article: "I Pledge Allegiance", Olsson investigates the slippery meaning of the word fundamentalist in relation to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist's* enigmatic title. "We are prodded to question whether every critic of America in a Muslim country

should be labeled a fundamentalist, or whether the term more accurately describes the capitalists of the American upper class” (Olsson 8). Changez strictly adheres to the capitalist norms: “Focus on the fundamentals. This was Underwood Sampson’s guiding principle” (Hamid 59). He sides with the capitalist camp to live out his American dream, but he abandoned the capitalist camp following his *Zeitroman*. “I found it difficult to concentrate on the pursuit ... of fundamentals” (Hamid 60). Changez’s journey from a fundamentalist of business to a fundamentalist of ideology is the result of socio-cultural factors. He is never reluctant to change his identity, in fact, he is a hardened ideological fundamentalist who sets out on a new course in his life.

The drastic *Erziehungs/Zeit(roman)* of Changez unlocks his defiant self. In the Phd thesis titled, “To enter the Skin of another: The body in 9/11 Literature”, Brandt stresses on Changez’s unwillingness to fully conform to the American fundamentals of capitalism. “The story chronicles Changez’s hesitant evolution into a radical Muslim. The reality, that Changez is reluctant in his conversion to the fundamentals of capitalism focused on by Underwood Sampson, draws attention to the militancy of both ideologies”. (Brandt 182). The cultural outrages of America leave Changez outraged. “Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War” (Hamid 69). In the post 9/11 phase, America assumed Hitler-like contempt for everyone, including the lovers of America of the likes of Changez. Changez held a position of influence in the U.S.: “I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet” (Hamid 27). But he was subjected to discriminatory attitude in the post 9/11 America. “My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. ... I was aware of being under suspicion” (Hamid 44). The cultural stereotyping of Changez culminated in his *Erziehungsroman* and postcolonial *bildungsroman*. Changez becomes a business-fundamentalist-turned-ideological-fundamentalist.

The dynamic self of Changez accentuates the multi-faceted nature of a postcolonial being. In the article “I’m Very Comfortable as a Hybridized Mongrel”, Mohsin Hamid gives a new insight about Changez’s unfolding of character in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. “Changez feels the need to be one thing: just Pakistani or just a Muslim. I’m very comfortable as a hybridized mongrel” (Pal 33). Changez loses his Pakistaniness in the process of becoming an American; he loses his Americaness in the process of becoming a new being. He has a new self that is a combination of multiple selves: “We cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us” (Hamid 105). Changez

cannot fully divorce himself from past selves; he becomes a new being that combines the attributes of Pakistaniness, Americanness and rebelliousness towards the end of the novel.

In the article “The Reluctant Fundamentalist”, Changez examines American ethnocentrism and its implications for the world. “America’s great sin is hubris—a profound conviction of its superiority and of its right to control the rest of the world” (Bush 38). In an exaggerated display of patriotism, America assumes the role of a suzerain state. “We are America... the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath” (Hamid 47). The U.S. displays a hawkish attitude to settle scores with the terrorists. Changez has a well-founded apprehension that the colonial machinery might get him killed. “I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe ... I must meet my fate when it confronts me” (Hamid 110-111). He actively preached anti-Americanism to his pupils “I [Changez] made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine” (Hamid 108).

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The ideological indoctrination through the weapon of education hijacks Changez’s vision. He examines the world from Eurocentric optics, but he has a moment of truth that makes him realize the dark side of American education. “I wondered how I could have been so ungenerous—and so blind—I was a man lacking in substance and hence easily influenced by even a short sojourn in the company of others” (Hamid 75). American-tinted spectacles make Changez scoff at the interior of his home. “I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore ... *This* was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness” (74). Changez’s engages in self-loathing for being intellectually susceptible. Awakening to the dangers of foreign education, he embarks on a journey of intellectual decolonization to find his true self. He voluntary disengagement from American empire paves way for his postcolonial coming into being.

It comes to Changez in an epiphany that he is fully aligned with the American camp. Bautista implicitly unpacks the postcolonial identity riddle of the principal character, Changez. Changez is an active agent of American colonization betraying his own country at a crucial moment in history. “‘Have you ever heard of the janissaries?’ ‘No,’ I said. ‘They were Christian boys,’ he explained, ‘captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army. . . they had fought to erase their own civilizations’” (Hamid 91). Changez is an ideological soldier of the

American empire that has split his loyalties. He decides to cast off Americanism: “There really could be no doubt; I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire ... of course I felt torn” (Hamid 92)! to forge an independent identity for himself.

Changez breaks free from American colonial influences to signal his awakening. “Changez has, in Chile, broken from the American frames of life that had earlier constrained his ‘arc of vision’” (Darda 118). Changez sets on a confrontational course with America in the wake of his interaction with the financial analyst, Bautista. He expresses his gratitude to Bautista for rousing him to the existing reality. “*Thank you, Juan-Bautista, I thought as I lay myself down in my bed, for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed*” (95). The deliberate identity flux: colonial to anti-colonial is subversion of the colonial apparatus and a turn towards authenticity. “The protagonist must experience some form of “identity flux,” which may be connected to severed ties ... exclusion from the dominant culture, or the conflict between individual desire and familial and cultural expectations” (Hoagland 10). Changez’s desire of living out his American dream has dashed to the ground. The unsettling truth about America’s role in manufacturing his colonial identity leaves him devastated. He abandons the American camp to construct his own identity that would be free from colonial taint.

The fall of the twin towers symbolizes the fall of the colonial hubris and fall of Changez’s American self. The American assumption of imperviousness comes to an end. “I prevented myself as much as possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream ... America was gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage” (56). The provocative smile of Changez highlights his anti-American leanings. “He (Changez) appears to have been something of a cipher, until his reaction to the attacks—that sudden smile—pierces the shell” (Olsson 8). Instead of feeling saddened at the loss of life, Changez feels an inward delight. “I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (Hamid 43). Changez gloats over at the misfortune of America because her assumption of invulnerability is destroyed. It is a changed anti-colonial self of Changez that feels thrilled at American helplessness. “The thematic possibilities of the bildungsroman were largely focused around adolescent flux and change” (Jussawalla 29).

Changez gives projection to his anti-colonial self through his beard. “I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a

symbol of my identity” (78). Flouting all the American conventions, Changez keeps beard to show his new self. “The beard is a sign of global solidarity with Muslims in Asia and the United States” (Darda 116). Following the attacks on the twin towers, America assumes hawkish attitude to fight the alleged perpetrators of the attack. Changez’s anti-colonial hatred is triggered by American war rhetoric. “Affronts were everywhere; the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history . . . provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger” (101). Changez betrays the fundamentals of capitalism drummed into him by the American empire. He disconnects from the American way of life, his constraining company, Underwood Samsung and the whole capitalistic machinery. “But I remained aware of the embers glowing within me, and that day I found it difficult to concentrate on my pursuit—at which I was normally so capable—of fundamentals” (60). Changez exercises his individuality by turning his back on America doctrines that constrained his vision.

Changez unsettles America through her own ideological, theoretical and linguistic tools. He believes that American ideas of ethnocentrism have caused tremendous suffering to the world: “America was engaged only in posturing . . . You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority” (101). The metanarrative of Changez undermines the grand narrative of American hegemony. The ideological and theoretical tools of America were to systematically otherize Changez from the position of influence and to make him feel a foreigner in America. After returning to Pakistan, Changez systematically otherizes America from the position of power by bringing to surface her delusional ambitions about the destruction of the world. He assumes colonial attitude to express his anticolonial hatred: something he acquired from his ex(master). The structural othering of America from the cultural other, Changez, shows the new order in the postcolonial world.

American imperialism disguised as a civilizing mission stands exposed. Changez’s development of character leads to his postcolonial bildungsroman, which fashions him as an anti-American force. “[postcolonial bildungsroman includes] a rejection of westernization and colonizers’ values as expressed in the growth of the hero or heroine’s point of view” (Jussawalla 31). Changez makes a blistering attack on the U.S. for assuming the role of an invader. “Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role” (94). Changez constructs his own self that has “the capacity for rational thought, language and self-representation, self-reflection, and the ability to think objectively to discover the truth” (Klages 74). Changez undergoes a complete ideological shift;

he considers America blameworthy for the political crimes taking place in the Asian countries.

Changez joins lectureship to guard his countrymen against the onslaught of American colonialism. “I made it my mission campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine” (Hamid 108). Changez wants to assuage his guilt by working for the welfare of Pakistan. The disillusionment with America provides Changez an opportunity to betray the fundamentals that he acquired in America and desert his (ex)colonizer. “Answering to his own conscience, he could not remain in the U.S. By the pull of his true personal identity, he must return to Pakistan” (Hooper 50). In the wake of intellectual awakening, Changez actively works for the oppressed women and downtrodden class of Pakistan. It is a typical feature of Zeitroman novel, because history influences the decision-making power of the central character considerably. The strained relationship between Pakistan and America directly parallels the strained relationship between Changez and (AM)Erica. Consequently, Changez assails America for making him abandon his Pakistaniness.

The hero of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, fulminates against America for launching a colonizing mission in Asian countries. “No country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (110). Changez exposes the destructive ambitions of America in the world. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* assumes the characteristics of an Erziehungsroman novel here as the central character’s arc of vision expands during his journey. His development of character is anti-colonial owing to his obnoxious experiences in America. Changez is a reluctant fundamentalist, because he reluctantly abandons the fundamentals that he acquired at Princeton University and Underwood Samsung. But his fundamentalism does not assume religious overtones, because he has political reasons to harbour anti-America emotions. The nameless anti-America poses a grave threat to Changez’s life.

The colonial machinery issues death threats to Changez due to the murder of an American official. “I have received official warnings on more than one occasion, but such is the demand for my courses that I have until now escaped suspension” (109). Changez deserts the American empire for making him a slave to their imperialistic ambitions. He could be the author of his own death for taking such an extreme step: betraying the superpower’s camp is an act of rebellion. His newly acquired anti-colonial self is asserted: “However, I would like to show that postcolonial literary works share certain characteristics, such as those of linguistic experimentation and assertion of an indigenous selfhood” (Jussawalla 30). Changez’s life is jeopardized

for preaching anti-Americanism as a university lecturer. The only factor that saves Changez is his popularity with the University students; His death could potentially damage Pakistan-America relationship to a point of no return.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist virtually subverts America's position of subjectivity by making the nameless American mute. The narrative structure of the novel is anti-colonial and a monologue; it is Changez who drives the plot forward and the nameless American's voice is stripped by the author to signal the rise of the marginalized. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* practically undoes Eurocentrism, because the reader examines all the events from the perspective of Changez. "I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you—an American—will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details" (71). After launching a fierce polemic against America, Mohsin Hamid waters down the offensive comments by implicitly asking the reader to look at the novel as a historical account. History invites clashing interpretations of a single event; it is the reader's job to determine the accuracy of the narrative. Changez acts as the author's fictional mouthpiece in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He puts to shame the whole colonial machinery by deserting the capitalist camp and takes revenge by enlightening Pakistanis about the dangers of becoming a modern-day janissary.

Conclusion

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a slippery novel that challenges reader's presuppositions about Pakistan-America relationship in post 9/11 phase. Examining *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a postcolonial bildungs/erziehungs/zeit/(ROMAN) novel accentuates the socio-historical factors that play a key role in shaping the consciousness of Changez. He starts his journey with abandoning the Pakistani camp to wholeheartedly embrace his Americanized self. His development of character, anti-colonial self and enlargement of vision is fostered by his horrific encounters with American racism. The structural othering of America from the (ex) cultural other, Changez, highlights a reversal of roles in the new postcolonial order. He breaks the stranglehold of America, constructs his own identity and rips into the colonial machinery for making him an instrument of colonization. The postcolonial coming into being is a turning point in the life of Changez, because he reluctantly sheds the American fundamentals to initiate a decolonization drive. The deliberately muted unnamed American signals the fall of the colonizer from the position of dominance. Changez's monologue establishes the systematic rise to prominence of the marginalized and tilt of power towards the ex-colonized. America stands decentered in the narrative structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: a major anti-

colonial trope that is a masterstroke of the author to complement Changez's anti-colonial narrative.

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