

## Phases of Decolonization: A Postcolonial Analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009) in the light of Frantz Fanon's theory of decolonization from his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). The paper specifically focuses on the phases of decolonization mentioned in Fanon's essay On National Culture. The research is qualitative in nature, dealing with interpretive practices. Catherine Belsey's Textual Analysis is used to collect and interpret the data. Additionally, closed reading technique outlined by Fisher and Frey (2013) is also utilized. It is found that the colonized intellectual plays a crucial role in decolonization. The protagonist of the selected novel, Changez, goes through three phases to decolonize himself. Initially, he assimilates in the culture of colonizers. After some time, he is shown some indicators due to which he becomes conscious of his status. Finally, he turns against the colonizers by showing some resistance. The study holds significance in the area of post-colonialism, by exploring the role of colonized intellectuals in the process of decolonization.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Neo-colonialism, Decolonization, Colonized Intellectual

### Introduction

Historically, colonialism has not been only the settlement of European settlers in foreign lands. But it has been a deliberate attempt on the part of the colonizers to study, judge and classify the native art, culture, knowledge and religious practices. Additionally, various techniques and tools were employed by the colonizers to justify their subjugation. The most prominent tool was the use of colonial discourses. As Nayar (2010) examines, "Colonial discourse refers to the European representations of colonized peoples often relied on reductive and stereotypical portrayals. These depictions were conveyed through various channels such as literature, visual art, legal systems, scientific narratives, and bureaucratic documentation" (p.2). Through colonial discourses, they tried to show themselves as superior, civilized and developed, while the colonized as inferior, uncivilized and barbaric.

Edward Said and Frantz Fanon are the most prominent theorists of colonial discourses. Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978), argues that how Western colonial masters fabricated and constructed the Orient and how this distortion helped them in sustaining their hold over the colonized people. As he views, "The Orient was almost a European invention" (p. 1). Moreover, it was through the Orient that the Europe tried to define itself.

Frantz Fanon is another notable theorist, psychologist and intellectual who explored the horrible consequences of colonial discourses upon the colonized people. He, too, subscribes to the views of Edward Said. Frantz Fanon believes that, "The identity of the colonized subject is a construct continuously shaped by the colonizer, both historically and in the present. The colonizer's legitimacy—and material wealth—are deeply rooted in the very foundations of the colonial system" (Fanon, 1963, p.2).

Decolonization refers the process of striving for freedom and the withdrawal of colonial masters from their colonies. Nayar (2010) comprehensively defines decolonization as, "Decolonization involves breaking away from colonial modes of thought by rejecting dominant European epistemologies and making space for the recovery and renewal of indigenous, local, and vernacular ways of knowing" (p.3).

Frantz Fanon, in his foundational book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), thoroughly articulates the phenomenon of decolonization. He believes that decolonization is the name of true liberation, "The essence of decolonization lies in the emergence of new human identities. Yet, this transformation does not stem from a divine intervention; rather, the colonized person attains true humanity through the very process of gaining freedom" (Fanon, 1963, p.2). In his essay, On National Culture, Fanon explores the role of colonized intellectuals in decolonization. These are individuals who have been educated in the culture, language and values of the colonizer. He argues that the colonized intellectual, be that a writer, poet, painter or politician, after being completely assimilated in the colonizers, returns to his people and breaks the backbone of colonization. Furthermore, Fanon examines that the colonized intellectuals pass through three phases to reach to decolonization. The first of these phases is assimilation. In this phase, they adopt the culture of the colonizers and embrace their lifestyle. The second phase is called developing consciousness. In this stage, the colonized intellectuals become aware of the fact that they have not been accepted even after completely assimilating in the colonizers. Revolt and fight back is last stage of decolonization. The colonized intellectuals turn against their previous masters.

The current study examines Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009) in the light of Fanon's notion of decolonization. It specifically focuses on the phases of decolonization outlined by Frantz Fanon in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Moreover, the study uses Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009) and Frantz Fanon theory of Decolonization as primary sources, supplemented by relevant scholarly works. In the essence, the study revolves around the phases of decolonization, particularly through Frantz Fanon's theory from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963).

### **Problem Statement**

Decolonization is the process of seeking complete liberation from every kind of colonial oppression. Such independence cannot be achieved without the struggles of colonized intellectuals. The current study aims to explore decolonization in the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009) by focusing on the various stages experienced by colonized intellectuals leading to decolonization.

### **Significance of the Study**

While most decolonization studies focus on traditional colonialism, this study explores neocolonialism and cultural imperialism in a modern, globalized context. It challenges readers to consider how economic and ideological domination replaces physical colonization, thus broadening the understanding of decolonization in the 21st century. Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of colonized intellectuals in decolonization. By tracking Changez's transformation, the research sheds light on Frantz Fanon's theory of the colonized intellectual and offers a modern-day literary representation of his decolonizing trajectory. Additionally, the study is significant because it exposes the Western shallow standards set to get acceptance in their culture.

### **Review of Literature**

This brief review tries to evaluate selected studies from the body of knowledge on

postcolonialism, decolonization, and the selected novel, looking at their scope and providing a context to the current study.

### **Literature on Decolonization**

For Fanon, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. He, in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), argues that violent struggle is the only way out of this pit of subjugation. But this violent struggle should be characterized by “clear set of objectives, a well-defined methodology” (Fanon, 1963, p.86). Without proper planning, decolonization often eclipses behind neo-colonization. Fanon (1963) in the chapter of “On National Culture” contends that national culture cannot be detached from national liberation, “one cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation” (p.168). This national culture can only be revived by colonized intellectuals, “Rather than being accountable solely to their particular national culture, the colonized intellectual holds responsibility toward the whole nation, for culture is only one dimension of it” (p.168).

Khan et al. (2022) explore the novels *The Weary Generations* and *Basti* based on the notions of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities and Frantz Fanon’s Pitfalls of National Consciousness and assert that the movements of liberation depicted in both the novels show that there was a very weak bondage among various ethnic communities which do not maintain their status of collectivity and leads to regionalism after decolonization. Thus, decolonization led into another form of colonization.

Ullah et al. (2020) in their article titled “Colonization and Decolonization of the Indian Subcontinent: A Colonial Discourse Analysis of *A God in Every Stone*” investigate the role colonial discourses played in the establishment of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. The study argues that the Empire’s entrenchment owed more to these discourses than to sheer military strength. Utilizing Homi K. Bhaba’s ideas from ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,’ the analysis shows that colonial discourse was crucial not only in securing but also in challenging the British Raj’s presence in India.

### **Literature on the Selected Text *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

Ahmed (2024) in his article titled “Hybridity and Resistance: Exploring Cultural Identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” analyzes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The author examines that Changez faces a profound identity crisis, torn between his attachment to America and his roots in Pakistan. This study adopts a postcolonial perspective to examine how the novel depicts the rebuilding of native identity following colonization. By probing Changez’s personal turmoil alongside the wider cultural and political forces at play, the research uncovers the layered complexities of identity formation in a postcolonial world, emphasizing the novel’s critique of Western dominance pervasive in postcolonial literature.

In their paper titled “The Misrepresentation of Muslim Community in Post 9/11 English Fiction: A Political Analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Terrorist*”, Javed et al. (2024) analyze Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. They demonstrate how Muslims are frequently painted in negative colors, with Islam depicted as a violent religion in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. It highlights the misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam in John Updike’s *Terrorist* and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Following 9/11, Muslims have often been stereotyped as fundamentalists, fanatics, and terrorists. This research explores the politics embedded in Western fiction post-9/11, employing a qualitative methodology through textual analysis of selected passages of the novel. The findings suggest that neo-colonial attitudes, imperialistic agendas, and the vested interests of global superpowers foster widespread resentment, ultimately harming both the nation and its people.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

This research analyzes Mohsin Hamid’s (2009) novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from the perspective of Frantz Fanon (2009) theory of Decolonization. The research is delimited specifically to Mohsin Hamid and explores the stages experienced by the colonized intellectual, Changez,

leading to decolonization. The study does not include a broader range of postcolonial or post-9/11 novels, even though they may share similar themes. The analysis primarily draws upon the theory of decolonization, particularly phases outlined by Frantz Fanon (1963) in his *The Wretched of the Earth*. Other critical lenses (e.g., Feminist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic) are not the focus. Additionally, the research mainly centers on the character of Changez as a representation of the postcolonial intellectual. Secondary characters or narrative techniques may be discussed, but only insofar as they support this central focus.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs qualitative methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Holloway and Galvin (2023) in their book, *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare*, view qualitative research as, “the organized and systematic process of collecting, structuring, and interpreting textual material sourced from speech or observation” (p. 3). The data is systematically collected, organized and interpreted from the selected text. Moreover, it deals with interpretive practices which require close reading and interpretation of the text. The data is picked in the form of quotations from the selected novels. The researcher studies the selected quotations through the lens of decolonization. Catherine Belsey’s “Textual Analysis” is employed for the collection and interpretation of data. Based on her notion, the researchers survey the text and identifies the passages in the light of the defined theoretical markers. The researchers then interpret, through close reading, the implicit and explicit conscious of the text, to the answer the target questions and achieve the desired objectives. Moreover, the technique of close reading, as outlined by Fisher and Frey (2013) in “Close Reading as Part of a Comprehensive Literacy Framework”, is also utilized for the critical analysis of the novel.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study uses Frantz Fanon’s theory of decolonization as a theoretical framework from his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). The aim of the researchers is to explore the various stages of decolonization in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

As already mentioned, Frantz Fanon (1963) examines the vital role of colonized intellectuals in the process of decolonization. He argues that the colonized intellectual passes through three stages of decolonization. In the first phase, the colonized intellectual assimilates in the colonizers by imitating them, “the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power” (p.158). This is the phase in which the colonized intellectual tries to look like his masters. He learns their language, adapts their lifestyle and culture, “This is the period of unqualified assimilation” (p.159). The reason is that, a gap, through colonial discourses, has been created between the colonizers and the colonized. The colonized is labeled as uncivilized, and inferior to colonizers. Therefore, if he wants to become superior and civilized, he must look like the colonizers.

#### **Assimilation**

Keeping this view in mind, the selected novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the story of a Pakistani youngster, Changez, who can be termed as the colonized intellectual. He is the protagonist of the novel and the whole story revolves around him. He is the one who passes through these three stages to reach to decolonization.

First of all, the very name of the character, Changez, suggests change and transformation. The name indicates that the character ‘changes’. The point of view of the novel is first person dramatic monologue. Changez is both the narrating self and the experiencing self.

When the novel starts, Changez starts narrating his story about his American experience to a silent American. He tells him that how he goes to America by securing a scholarship in the Princeton University. Initially, when he lands on the American soil he experiences the first phase of decolonization, i.e., assimilation. He observes that number of possibilities and opportunities are at his disposal, "At Princeton, life unfolded like a film with me at its center, where every moment

shimmered with possibility and the dream came vividly to life" (p.3). After securing a job in Underwood Samson as an economist, he tries every possible way to look like the Americans. He attends their parties and eats all those things which the locals are eating, "we ate grilled octopus and drank sparkling water and red wine" (p.23). This is because he does not want to be identified as non-American, "I let myself enjoy the easy pleasures of being part of this rich and lively group of young people" (p.23). When he reports for work on his first day, he considers himself as a New Yorker and tries to eclipse his Pakistani identity behind his American identity, "That day, my identity felt less tied to being Pakistani and more rooted in my role as an Underwood Samson trainee; standing in the firm's impressive offices, I felt a strong sense of pride" (p.38). When he is asked about his identity, he responds that he is from New York, "and I learned to answer, when asked where I was from, that I was from New York" (p.74).

This journey of absolute assimilation continues. Changez does not want to miss a single opportunity of imitating the Americans. This is because he does not want to be labeled as misfit. After spending some time in America, he falls in love with an American girl named, Erica. She invites him to her house for dinner. When he enters in to her house, Erica's father offers him red wine and he accepts the offer presently. As he, himself, says:

Just as we settled in for the meal, he raised a bottle of red and asked, "Do you drink?"

Erica's mother answered before I could, noting, "He's twenty-two," with a tone that made the rest clear — naturally, he does.

"I had a Pakistani employee once," her father remarked. "He didn't drink." "I do, sir," I replied calmly. (p.61)

This passage clearly shows Changez's desire to assimilate into American culture. This is particularly apparent in his interactions with Erica's parents, where he readily accepts their offer of wine, despite the common perception that Pakistanis abstain from alcohol due to religious reasons. Changez's prompt response, "I do, sir," challenges this stereotype and underscores his intent to integrate into American society.

Moreover, Changez's love-making scene with Erica, in which he pretends to be Chris, also shows his desire to assimilate in their culture. As he says, "Do you miss Chris?" I asked. She gave a small nod, and tears started to well up in her eyes. "Then let's pretend," I said gently. "Pretend that I'm him" (p.119). This clearly implies that Changez is even ready to erase his own identity for the sake of acceptance. And as a result, he gets what he wants as he says, "No longer did her body resist mine" (p. 120).

### **Developing Consciousness**

The second phase of decolonization is called developing consciousness stage. This is the stage in which the colonized intellectual becomes conscious of his status. He realizes that even after complete assimilation, which is usually considered a prerequisite for acceptance, he has not been accepted. As Frantz Fanon (1963) says, "In a second stage, the colonized writer has his convictions shaken and decides to cast his mind back" (p. 159). Changez, being a colonized intellectual, after assimilating in the American culture, becomes conscious of the fact that he cannot be accepted however hard he tries. But this consciousness is not developed all of a sudden. Rather, there are certain events and indications in the novel which compel him to open his eyes.

The first of these events is Changez's meeting with Erica's father. Erica invites him for a dinner. He is well received there but after some time Erica's father asks him about the situation back in Pakistan. To which he responds that things are quite good. Then Erica's father says:

The economy's in shambles, isn't it? Corruption everywhere, dictatorship, the wealthy living in luxury while the rest struggle to survive. Don't get me wrong — the people themselves are solid. I've got nothing against Pakistanis. But the elite? They've bled that country dry. And then there's the fundamentalism — you've got a serious issue with that, too. (p.62)

The passage clearly portrays Erica's father's perception about Pakistan. He is, in a way, telling

Changez that no matter how hard you try to look like the Americans, you belong to a part of the world which is uncivilized, underdeveloped, raped by corruption, dictatorship and fundamentalism. In other words, he reminds Changez of his Pakistani identity. Later on, when Erica asks him, he tells her that I was not offended by his words but by his sarcastic tone.

Similarly, the discrimination he faces when he is returning from Manila after the event of 9/11 is another incident which makes him conscious. He is stopped at the immigration. There are two rows. One is for the natives and the other for the foreigners, "While they queued with the American citizens, I found myself waiting in the line for foreigners" (p.85). Then a woman inspector comes and asks him certain strange kind of questions. As he himself says:

She inquired, "What brings you to the United States?" "I live here," I said. "That's not the question, sir," she insisted. "I asked about the purpose of your trip."

Our exchange dragged on like this for several minutes before I was led to secondary inspection.

There, on a metal bench, I found myself sitting next to a tattooed man in handcuffs. (p.86)

This exchange between Changez and the woman inspector hints at the underlying American prejudice against Pakistani people. Moreover, Changez is reminded of his foreignness here again. Firstly, he is forced to join the row of the foreigners. It means that he is considered a foreigner after all his assimilation in their culture. Otherwise, he would have joined the row of the natives. Secondly, the woman inspector asks him the purpose of his stay in the United States, despite the fact that he assures her that he lives there. So, she is, in a way, telling him that you are just staying in the United States. You are an outsider here. You cannot be accepted. He senses an intimidating change in the surrounding environment. He overhears rumors that several Pakistanis were taken into detention centers after this event, "Muslim men were vanishing, likely taken to secret detention centers for interrogation or something more sinister" (p.107). Changez tries to ignore such stories as much as he can. And, he thinks that since he belongs to one of the prestigious firms in the US, that is why, he is safe. But somehow this fear of being an outsider lingers into his mind. And these events disturb him way too much, "Though I said nothing, the peculiar unfolding of events stirred a deep unease within me" (p. 77).

He comes to Pakistan on vacation and visits his hometown. Upon returning, he observes that there are so many Pakistani youngsters, leaving their home country:

It struck me as ironic that while children and the elderly were supposed to be evacuated from impending battles, it was actually the brightest and smartest among us who were leaving, the very ones who would have once been counted on to stay. (p.146)

Changez feels sorry for them and for his country. Because this was the time Pakistan and India were on the brink of war. He, particularly, feels ashamed of himself thinking that he, too, is part of this brain drain. He cannot sleep at night because he knows that youth is a valuable asset for a country in such times.

Changez is now on the brink of change. He just needs a slight push. Juan Bautista is the person who provides this push and proves to be the last catalyst in his transformation, "Juan-Bautista significantly accelerated my infectious path, a path that, even now, shows no sign of ending" (p.166). Juan Bautista is the president of a Chilean publishing company. Changez's meeting with Juan Bautista is a significant point in Changez's journey. He is the one who shows him a mirror to see himself. He asks him if he knows anything about janissaries. Then he tells Changez that janissaries were Christian boys captured and trained by the Ottomans in such a way that they would erase their own civilization. Juan Bautista is, indirectly, telling Changez that he is similar to those janissaries. Later on, Changez ponders over it and realizes that he, indeed, is a modern day janissary. As he says: All through the night, I wrestled with the truth of who I had become. There was no escaping it: I was a janissary of the modern age, doing the bidding of an American empire at war with a nation tied to my own and possibly plotting against my homeland as well. (p.173)

He realizes that he is working for a country which is bent upon erasing his very civilization. This is because he knows that America is waging an economic crusade against the Third World countries and Pakistan is one of them. Additionally, it was the time when America was invading Afghanistan. And he is worried about Afghanistan, "I hadn't expected to feel the way I did; Afghanistan was more than a distant place. It was our neighbor, our companion, bound to us by faith and friendship" (p.114). Afghanistan is not only the neighbor of Pakistan but also a fellow Muslim country. So, working for America, in such times, means fighting against and erasing one's own civilization.

### **Fight Back/Revolt**

This is the third and final stage of decolonization. The colonized intellectual, after developing his consciousness, turns against his former masters. As Fanon (1963) puts it, "In the third and final phase, known as the fighting phase, the native, rather than dissolving into the masses, ultimately rallies and stirs the people instead" (p.222). This is the stage in which the colonized intellectual shakes the very foundation of colonization. Thus, he becomes the weapon which, though manufactured by the colonizers, fires back.

In the case of Changez, this revolt starts when he comes to Pakistan on vacations. On his way back, he grows beard, despite his mother insistence, "My mother reminded me, "Make sure you shave before you leave" (p.146). This growing of the beard is the first sign of protest on the part of Changez. It symbolizes various things. It can be seen as a way of reclaiming his former identity, "It could have been an act of defiance, a marker of who I was, or a reminder to myself of the world I had just left" (pp.147-148). In addition to it, it can also be seen as a silent protest on the part of Changez against the American policies.

Along with that, Changez refuses to take champagne, "I declined the numerous champagne offers from our flight attendant" (p.159). Previously, he was ready to do everything to make him look like a New Yorker. But now he dissociates himself from American identity completely. Initially, he was fighting for America and was focusing on their fundamentals. But now he is done with that, "What I knew for sure was that my period of prioritizing fundamentals was over" (p.175).

As a result, he quits his job at Underwood Samson, bids farewell to America and returns to Pakistan. He starts working as a university lecturer. He tries to create awareness among the students and teaches them all the American policies. Because this is the least he could do to stop America, "That kind of America needed to be halted, not just for the sake of the rest of humanity, but for your own as well. I made up my mind to do everything in my power to stop it" (p.190). Moreover, as a university lecturer, he not only mobilizes the students but participates in the protests too, "In the meantime I became a university lecturer, and I devoted myself at the university to campaigning for my country to sever ties with yours" (p.203). Because he is the one who knows everything America and its policies. After working as an economist at Underwood Samson, he has now understood its fundamentals. This is what tells the international media, "I explained, among other things, that America is unmatched in how readily it inflicts death on foreign populations and spreads fear across great distances" (p.207).

So, this is how the journey of Changez comes to an end. The journey of from pro-America to anti-America.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the current study revolves around the journey of protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez as a colonized intellectual. It is found out that Changez passes through three stages to decolonize himself. Initially, he tries to assimilate in the American culture. He tries to behave and look like the Americans. But in the course of time, his consciousness is developed and he is reminded of his foreignness. Consequently, he turns against America and revolts against it. In the essence, the paper investigates the crucial role of colonized intellectuals in decolonization. Moreover, the study also unveils the hypocrisies and Western shallow standards of acceptance. It

is often argued that cultural hybridity and assimilation is a solution to most of the problems. But Changez is not accepted after all his efforts. He is considered an outsider.

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