



Transnational Organized Crime, Islamophobia and Globalization in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Contentions and Contestations

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Abstract

9/11 terror strike had wrecked havoc on the cultural, political, economic, religious, to name only a few, configurations in America thereby disconcerting social status quo at large. Before the demolition of twin tower in America, a marker of economic condescension of America upon the rest of the world, America had resorted to a number of politico-economic ploys to invite skilled workers in America intending to chisel the steady prosperity of America in the domains of commerce and education. For instance, America, intently, used to cater scholarships to impoverished yet brilliant students, across the world, to study in premier academic institutions in America inasmuch as they had planned to employ unswerving and unwavering youths to build up the future of America. In addition to it, the emergence of Multinational Companies was triggered into action in 1980s onwards to open up the economy of America so as to make lucrative gains from all over the world. These MNCs tactfully recruit local youths to extract and exact maximum labour possible at the expense of minimum salary. Before 9/11, America began to emerge as mighty economic power in the domain of commerce. 9/11 terror strike unsettled America’s steady rise in the global market, and most importantly, called neoliberal fiscal policies into question. In post-9/11 scenario, non-Muslim native residents of America turned violent against Muslims, for the demolition of twin tower was devised and carried out by Al Qaeda, a Muslim terrorist outfit. Naïve Muslims living in America were made subject to humiliations, tortures, torments, misery, among others, perpetrated by infuriated non-Muslim natives who became intolerant to Muslims particularly after the 9/11 terror strike. Pitted against this political upheaval in America, induced by sudden slumps in economy, Mohsin Hamid, one of the most brilliant novelists of twenty first century of Pakistan, has posited the poignant tale of Changez, the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, against the backdrop of 9/11 terror strike and its concomitant consequences. Debunked and disillusioned, shattered and battered, Changez engages himself in a conversation with an unknown American at Lahore café and unfolds his harrowing experiences of four and a half years stint in America. Hamid is supposed to have penned down this novel to project the contentious intersections and interactions among transnational organized crime, Islamophobia and globalization. This article is devised to investigate the interplay among the trio, taking recourse to pertinent theoretical insights into cognizance, and to interrogate Hamid’s interventions into the problematic overlapping of the trio.

Keywords

Islamophobia, transnational organized crime, globalization; victim; 9/11 terror strike

A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

(U.S. President George W. Bush qtd. in Pearlstein 1)

The collapse of twin tower on 9/11 had certainly brought about drastic alterations in the socio-cultural matrix in America. For instance, the rise of America as a super power in the arena of commerce got disrupted; neoliberal fiscal policies of America had been called into question; non-Muslim native residents of America became infuriated at Muslims at large, for Al Qaeda was involved in decimating twin tower, a marker of America's economic condescension over the rest of the world. Before 9/11 terror strike in America, America opened up its economy intending to disseminate its economic empire across the world. Following the rapid advancement of technology at the turn of the previous century, America introduced Multinational Companies which used to function as trusted agents of America in order to establish America's economic dominance across the world. In addition to dissemination of MNCs, America began to cater hefty scholarships to impoverished yet talented students who were willing to study in different academic institution in America. It hints at that American government intended to employ the merit of outstanding scholars across the world to build up the future of America. But 9/11 terror strike, consciously and conspicuously, challenged the condescension of America in the domain of commerce. On the contrary, American government began to consider terror strike as a potential threat to the internal security, sovereignty and integrity of America. Consequently, one sort of hatred got percolated down the social hierarchy resulting in ethnic clashes. Non-Muslim native residents of America started to find resemblances between terrorism and Islam and to be intolerant to Muslims in particular. Set against the backdrop of post-9/11 terror strike in America, induced by subsequent political, economic, religious, among others, upheavals, Mohsin Hamid, one of the outstanding novelists hailing from Pakistan, has penned down *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to point out the contentious intersections among transnational organized crime, islamophobia and globalization. This article is thus intended to investigate the problematic interface among the trio in the context of post-9/11 and to resort to pertinent theoretical insights to interrogate Hamid's interventions into the interplay among the trio.

Terrorism is a global menace. It calls for a united, global response. To defeat it, all nations must take counsel together, and act in unison. That is why we have the United Nations.

(Kofi A. Annan qtd. in Jane Boulden and Thomas G. Weiss 3)

In a seminal essay entitled as “Whither Terrorism and the United Nations?”, Jane Boulden and Thomas G. Weiss have pertinently raised a point regarding the vicious impact of post-9/11 terror strike:

First, the attacks of September 11 may be characterized as acts of terrorism and evidence of trends in terrorism, but they are considered separately from the concept of terrorism itself. From the vantage point of the UN, the events of September 11 and terrorism as an international phenomenon have different sets of implications and impacts, so they are treated accordingly.

(4)

This excerpt points out that 9/11 terror strike is ideologically distinct from terrorism in that unlike most of the terror attacks, 9/11 terror strike had been conceived and executed to challenge America which has been advancing in the field of commerce since early 1980s. Usually, terror strikes are carried out to spread an ambience of terror intending to compel the state authority to fulfil the demands of terrorist outfit. But, Al-Qaeda leader Bin Laden had planned 9/11 terror strike not only to intimidate America’s internal security by means of air-strike but also to decimate twin tower, a marker of economic dominance of America over the rest of the world. The decimation of twin tower is implicative of that America’s politico-economic interventions into Muslim nation-states were not welcomed by Muslim state authorities who had to give in America’s interferences because of its invincible might for the time being. What Boulden and Weiss have meant to imply is that 9/11 terror strike was not merely an ordinary terror strike; rather was an open and direct challenge to America which has been enjoining the status of superpower over the decades. In this regard, it needs to be made very clear that the term ‘terror’ is ideologically and politically divergent from what terrorism is. Richard M. Pearlstein in *Fatal future? Transnational Terrorism and the New Global Disorder* has made the distinction between terror and terrorism clear:

Terror, on the other hand, may be defined as a specific form of official, governmental intimidation in which the use or threatened use of violence is inflicted from above, from the governmental level, against certain symbolic victims or objects. Like terrorism, terror is intended to indirectly

coerce a primary target (typically, all or part of some population) to accept a demanded outcome due to the fomenting of intense fear or anxiety. Terror, however, differs from terrorism in that terror is the official act of a governmental body, whereas terrorism is the rebellious act of a discontented nongovernmental organization. (2)

What it implies is that terrorist groups are non-governmental outfits which employ terror to get their demands accepted by state authorities. Here, one may raise a question: should terrorism be considered as a form of transnational organized crime? One may, first, put forward a contrapuntal point of view that terrorism has certain spatial and political affiliations and therefore, should be restricted within certain geopolitical territories. One may further work out this contention in this way that unlike organized crime, terrorism is contingent upon certain political aims. In this regard, one may be reminded of Bruce Hoffman who made the distinction between organized and terrorism clear:

Perhaps most fundamentally, the criminal is not concerned with influencing or affecting public opinion: he simply wants to abscond with his money or accomplish his mercenary task in the quickest and easiest way possible so that he may reap his reward and enjoy the fruits of his labours. By contrast, the fundamental aim of the terrorist's violence is ultimately to change 'the system' – about which the ordinary criminal, of course, couldn't care less. (Hoffman qtd. in Daase 55)

It clearly shows that terrorism differs from organized crime in terms of political and functional grounds. One may refute this contention by arguing that terrorism bears inseparably organizational, ideological, structural, functional proximity with organized crime in that terrorismⁱ works, at praxis, like the way organized criminal groups function. Christopher Daase strongly argued in "Terrorism and Organized Crime: One or Two Challenges?":

Since then a number of authors have found that terrorism and organized crime are not incompatible in principle. Two ways exist in which terrorism and organized crime might coalesce. First, a terror group may engage in criminal activities to finance its sustenance and activities and be drawn willy-nilly ever deeper into non-political crimes such as robbery, kidnapping, smuggling and the trade of illicit goods. (Daase qtd. in Benedeket al.57)

Daase's contention seems to be tenable in that he has rightly pointed out the criminal tendency with which a terror group functions. Terrorism has attained transnational status in post-globalization scenario in that terror groups, for instance Al Qaeda, aim at distant territory by means of congenial transport and communication systems. In other words, terrorism cannot be restricted within certain geopolitical terrains; rather, the domain of terrorist activity gets delimited in post-globalization scenario and consequently, it becomes transnational. The earlier contention of Daase can be consolidated further by drawing reference to the understanding of terrorism by FBI: "... the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives" (Ronczkowski 18)ⁱⁱ. It means to imply that terrorism like transnational organized crime is an "unlawful" activity and resorts to violence to terrorize people of a nation-state so as to attain certain political goals.

Transnational organized crime poses a formidable threat to America in that it puts at once the home security of the natives living in America at jeopardy and at times pushes America to rethink and revise its economic policies. Terror strike at twin tower had opened the eyes of America which had taken impoverished and underdeveloped nation-states for granted supposing that these nation-states would not be able to take America's economic status away because of their economic constraints. Terror outfits employed this assumption to defy America thereby incurring wrath from natives of America. In post-9/11 scenario, natives started to equate terrorism with Islam and to be critical of Muslims at large. Rage against Muslims, in particular, gets manifested through islamophobia to which non-Muslim native residents of America gave in. In other words, non-Muslim native residents of America spread it among all that Muslims should be detested, for Muslim terror outfit, Al Qaeda razed twin tower into rubbles. Here, one may oppose to non-Muslim natives' prejudiced attitude Muslims on the ground that all Muslims are not terrorists and it is because of the involvement of a group of Muslim people in violent activities, the entire Muslim community cannot be blamed. It can be further argued that terrorism is a violent outburst of a group of radical people who feel themselves totally deprived of economic, political, and cultural, among others, facilities. Arjun Appadurai in the seminal essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" unfolded the operation of globalization, at praxis:

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in

terms of existing centre-periphery models I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctives is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscaples, (b) mediascaples, (c) technoscaples, (d) finanscaples, and (e) ideoscaples. (32-33)

The proposition of Appadurai points to that Globalization has been operating through five ‘-scapes’. The operation of Globalization, since 1980s onwards, is being regulated by America to a large extent. It is, sometimes, supposed that in order to reach out to the people living on the fringes in the world, liberalization of economy had been executed in reality. But, in actuality, liberalization of economy was devised to step into economic frameworks of different nation-states intending to unsettle prevailing economic structures thereby pushing nation-states to reckon on global economy. In other words, global economic force had disrupted socio-cultural matrix so much so that it left pejorative impact on the distribution of national wealth among common masses.

Here, one may ask a pertinent question: how are transnational organized crime, islamophobia and globalization connected with each other? It is supposed that whereas globalization had facilitated transnational organized crime to go across the world thereby inducing islamophobia among non-Muslim natives in America. On the other side, islamophobia regained currency following the fall of twin tower in post-globalization world where transnational organized crime passed through a number of ontological and epistemological alterations thereby making it difficult for common masses to apprehend it. In order to problematize the interface among the trio, one may be reminded of Christopher Allen’s intervention into *Islamophobia*:

. . . ‘what is Islamophobia?’ Firstly, it would seem that the ‘certain identifiable phenomenon’ is neither consistent nor uniform, neither in its products nor in the way that it is conceptualised or defined, possibly even suggesting a plurality of ‘Islamophobias’ – or more so a multiplicity of understandings and interpretations– rather more than a single, all encompassing entity . . . both the nature and products of the phenomenon would appear to be shaped and determined by the national, cultural, geographical and socio-economic conditions within which any such phenomenon is identified . . . Islamophobia would appear to have the possibility of having a historical legacy from which it draws information, relevance, understanding and meaning . . . Islamophobia has significantly

failed to permeate all settings and contexts, and even where it has achieved greater social and public permeability, understanding and meaning remains confused and lacking in clarity. . . . (134)

What it suggests is that islamophobia has to be comprehended in plural terms otherwise the manifold implications of it will remain unnoticed. One must subsume it that islamophobia is nothing new in this world but what is more important is that 9/11 terror strike had triggered it into being thereby inducing non-Muslim natives to shower hatred on naïve Muslims. Plural dimensions of both globalization and islamophobia are intricately entwined with each other in that globalization has widen the gap between rich and poor in reality and has disconcerted politico-economic *status quo* and resultantly, enrages marginal people who avow to disrupt the free and fluid movements of global economy by means of terror. A terror strike at the den of mighty America is quite appalling to the non-Muslim natives of America, who indulge in “islamophobias” to try to withstand terrorism. At this point, one may be reminded of the 9/11 Commission Report which had made an important recommendation:

The U.S. government must identify and prioritize actual or potential terrorist sanctuaries. For each, it should have a realistic strategy to keep possible terrorists insecure and on the run, using all elements of national power. We should reach out, listen to, and work with other countries that can help (9/11 Commission Report qtd. in Perry and Negrin 96)ⁱⁱⁱ

What is striking is that the commission advised American government to resort to “. . . all elements of national power” (9/11 Commission Report qtd. in Perry and Negrin 96) to retaliate terrorism which cannot let be sprouted. In the same report, the commission put forward another recommendation which is contrapuntal the previous recommendation: “A comprehensive U.S. strategy to counter terrorism should include economic policies that encourage development, more open societies, and opportunities for people to improve the lives of their families and to enhance prospects for their children’s future” (9/11 Commission Report qtd. in Perry and Negrin 97). Here, one may argue that terrorism is a direct consequence of the flawed implementation of American fiscal policy. He may extend this argument in that America’s counter-terrorism move can be critiqued in that America has no right to punish naïve and deprived people for the failure of its economic policy. On the contrary, it can be mooted that neither terrorism nor America’s exploitative economic ploys can be upheld and a middle path has to be found out to resolve the

tension. In this regard, a segment of one of the recommendations of 9/11 Commission Report can be cited:

America and Muslim friends can agree on respect for human dignity and opportunity. To Muslim parents, terrorists like Bin Ladin have nothing to offer their children but visions of violence and death. America and its friends have a crucial advantage—we can offer these parents a vision that might give their children a better future. If we heed the views of thoughtful leaders in the Arab and Muslim world, a moderate consensus can be found. (9/11 Commission Report qtd. in Perry and Negrin 96)ⁱⁱⁱ

Mohsin Hamid, one of the emerging Pakistani novelists in contemporary time, has carved out a substantial niche for himself in the arena of World Literature by penning down *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which underscores the haughty and overbearing attitude of American natives to a Muslim immigrant in post-9/11 scenario in America. Changez, the protagonist of the novel, hails from Lahore situated in Pakistan and had migrated in America on a scholarship to study in Princeton University, before 9/11 terror strike took place. Changez narrates how Muslims in America are stereotyped in every respect and how he spends four and half years in America to an unknown stranger at Lahore café. This particular novel is of profound significance in post-9/11 scenario in that this novel critiques the exploitative economic policy of America along with pointing out racist attitude of natives of America to Muslim immigrants. Apart from it, this novel seeks into the interface among the trio in post-9/11 scenario so as to induce readers to explore the problematic interactions among the trio.

One may initiate discussion by voicing an unsettling question: Is globalization a boon or bane for humanity? One may be tempted to rejoin to this question by making the following textual reference:

We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations—interviews, essays, recommendations—until the best and the brightest of us had been identified. I myself had among the top exam results in Pakistan (Hamid 4)

It shows that the impact of globalization has reached the margins of the world and it is because of the economic assistance, in the form of scholarship, catered to exceptionally brilliant students hailing from the margins, who crave for studying in premier American

institutions, it has become possible for Changez to set off to America for higher studies. On the contrary, it can be contended that globalization has extended the gap between rich and poor so much so that impoverished students cannot afford to study in America on their own. The following textual instance can be drawn to underscore the pejorative impact of globalization on the margin:

I am not poor; far from it: my great grandfather, for example, was a barrister with the means to endow a school for the Muslims of the Punjab Our family home sits on an acre of land in the middle of Gulberg, one of the most expensive districts of this city. We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener— which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth.

But we are not rich . . . since my great-grandfather's death has not been a prosperous one for professionals in Pakistan. Salaries have not risen in line with inflation, the rupee has declined steadily against the dollar, and those of us who once had substantial family estates have seen them divided and subdivided by each—larger—subsequent generation. (Hamid 10)

This excerpt brings out the fact that globalization has failed to ameliorate the poignant pangs of living in Pakistan because the impact of globalization has permeated down the social strata and therefore, the income of Pakistani people has not escalated in commensurate with economic inflation conditioned by globalization. It also points to the fact that marginal people become more cornered in the society than ever before in the era of economic globalization. The novel attests to the argument that Changez and his family, in Pakistan, had to face both the steady rise of bourgeoisie and the struggles of middle class and Changez had to find a way out of it. The following excerpt can be drawn to substantiate that globalization has impacted upon national politics:

Our situation is, perhaps, not so different from that of the old European aristocracy in the nine-teenth century, confronted by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie. Except, of course, that we are part of a broader malaise afflicting not only the formerly rich but much of the formerly middle-class as well: a growing inability to purchase what we previously could.

Confronted with this reality, one has two choices: pretend all is well or work hard to restore things to what they were. I choose both. (Hamid 10-11)

It also lays bare the inflexible tension that lies beneath faceoff between homogenization of global economic framework and heterogenization of territorial economic configuration.

On the other side, having laded down in America, Changez realizes that this world “was another world from Pakistan. . .” (Hamid 14), natives’ indulgence in stereotyping Changez for being a national of Pakistan deflates his earlier assumption. The following textual instances can be dragged to attest to this argument:

Economy’s falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else sufferes, Solid people, don’t get me wrong. I like Pakistani. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got sme serious problems with fundamentalism . . . and it was only out of politeness that I limited my response to, “yes, there are challenges, sir, but my family is there, and I can you it is not as bad as that. (Hamid 54-55)

This excerpt is a conversation between Changez and Erica’s father and it shows that natives of America strongly believe that Pakistani people have got stuck in a deadlock conditioned by fundamentalism. On the contrary, it can be argued that Changez is able to get rid of the fundamentalist assumptions and could thus easily get into the lifestyle of America: “I was immediately a New Yorker. What? My voice is rising? You are right; I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city. It still occupies a place of great fondness in my heart, which is quite something . . .” (Hamid 33). Here, one may argue that in post-9/11 scenario, islamophobia gets currency once again because of the involvement of Al Qaeda in that terror strike. In support of this contention, one may be reminded of the following excerpt which exposes how naïve Changez is detained at the airport on suspicion of being a terrorist:

At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to stripe down to my boxer shorts—I had, rather embarrassingly, chosen to wear a pink pair patterned with teddy bears, but their revelation had no impact on the severe expressions of my inspectors—and I was, as a consequence, the last person to board our aircraft I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion (Hamid 74)

One may interpret the above cited excerpt in this way that American authority is apprehensive of further terror strike in America, and which explains why, passengers, at the airport, are being thoroughly checked as a part of precautionary measure. Therefore,

the detention of Changez should not be a matter of critical concern. Opposed to this view, one may be reminded of the following textual instances to refute the previous argument:

America was gripping by a growing and self-righteous rage in those weeks of September and October as I cavorted about with Erica; the mighty host I had expected of your country was duly raised and dispatched—but homeward, towards my family in Pakistan. (Hamid 94)

I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world—stories of rescinded jobs offers and groundless dismissals—and I did not wish to have my position at Underwood Samson compromised. (Hamid 120)

It is suggestive of that Changez is quite apprehensive of his position at Underwood Samson. He is worried that he might get dismissed out of no ground. It is also implicative of that non-Muslim natives of America are completely overwhelmed by islamophobia so much so that they gear up for eradicating Muslim immigrants including Changez to help America get rid of any terror threat. At this point, counter-terrorist coup of America cannot be upheld on rational grounds in that the making of America until 9/11 terror strike was quite predicated upon the ceaseless efforts of immigrants from all over the world irrespective of any religion. Thus, instead of rectifying the flawed economic strategies, the dismissal of Muslims from jobs, on the part of America, cannot resolve the deep-rooted and manifold phenomenon, i.e., terrorism. Stereotypical assumptions regarding Muslims have to be altered along with effacing islamophobic attitude. Towards, the end of the novel, Changez makes an irrefutable argument that all Muslims are not inborn terrorists; thus Muslims cannot be homogenized under the label ‘terrorists’ by Americans and, at the same time, prejudiced perceptions pertaining to America, too, need to be changed: “It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all under cover assassins” (Hamid 183).

Thus, at the close of this article, it can be contended that transnational organized crime, islamophobia and globalization share contentious proximity with each other in post-9/11 scenario. Hamid’s intervention into the interface deserves critical acclaim in that he has painstakingly narrativised the interface to undercut both islamophobia and fundamentalist attitude. But, one may turn critical of Hamid’s intervention on the ground that Hamid has only concentrated on the disillusionment and disenchantment of the

protagonist of the novel, that is, Changez and is, mysteriously, silent on whether America is keen to ponder over their economic policies afresh. In other words, Hamid has deftly evaded the question of America's role in proliferation of transnational organized crime across the globe. The silence of Hamid indicates that America is in dire straits, for government officials fail to arrive at what sort of counter-terrorism measures would be conducive to withstand terror strikes in future.

End Notes

i. Christopher Daase in an influential article “Terrorism and Organized Crime: One or Two Challenges?” has pertinently observed:

Criminals, the argument went, are motivated by economic gain and greed, while terrorists act in the name of ideology and political grievance. Although both act in secrecy and develop clandestine networks, only terrorist groups seek media attention and claim legitimacy for their action while organized crime groups shun publicity, but aspire to the protection of corrupt state officials. (Daase qtd. in Benedeket al.55)

ii. In an outstanding work *Terrorism and Organized Hate Crime: Intelligence Gathering, Analysis and Investigations*, Michael R. Ronczkowski refers to a legal understanding of terrorism, which is held official in America: “. . .according to U.S. Code 22 USC Sec. 2656f (d), the term “international terrorism” means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country” (19).

iii. Vigorous efforts to track terrorist financing must remain front and center in U.S. counterterrorism efforts. The government has recognized that information about terrorist money helps us to understand their networks, search them out, and disrupt their operations. Intelligence and law enforcement have targeted the relatively small number of financial facilitators—individuals al Qaeda relied on for their ability to raise and deliver money—at the core of al Qaeda’s revenue stream. These efforts have worked. The death or capture of several important facilitators has decreased the amount of money available to al Qaeda and has increased its costs and difficulty in raising and moving that money. Captures have additionally provided a windfall of intelligence that can be used to continue the cycle of disruption. (9/11 Commission Report qtd. in Perry and Negrin 99)

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