

The Reluctant Fundamentalist: a Novel

by Mohsin Hamid, Harcourt Inc, 2007, 184 pp.

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I.

Since 9/11, Americans have desperately wanted, or at least have claimed to want, to understand the workings of 'the Islamic fundamentalist mind.' Nothing seems more inscrutable to them than the sense that someone out there could so dislike them as to want to kill them on principle. 'Why do they hate us?' as the old chestnut goes.

One answer points us in the direction of the fundamentalists' grievances, another in the direction of the fanatical dictates of their religion. But are these mutually exclusive options? And are they exhaustive of the options? It's safe to say that no one in American political discourse has answered these questions in a fully satisfactory way, and that on the whole, Americans have given up trying. And so the wars against terrorism continue without resolution against a series of unidentifiable and seemingly incomprehensible enemies.

This combination of despair, incomprehension, and intellectual lassitude explains why Americans are, par excellence, suckers for attempts to 'explain' Islamist fundamentalism by way of intellectual short cuts. And Mohsin Hamid's new novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offers up just the sort of short cut that an American could love: the opportunity to emote one's way to understanding. Hyped to the maximum on both sides of the Atlantic as well as on the Indian subcontinent, the book hit number one on the Barnes and Noble bestseller list soon after its U.S. publication, and has come to be regarded by critics as offering an authoritative account by a self-styled insider of Muslim resentment for America: a 'brief, charming and quietly furious novel'; a 'seething commentary on America's reputation in the non-western world'; an 'act of courage' that tells us 'things that no one wants to hear'; a work 'that gives us an uneasy shift of perspectives, a moral disquiet remembered beyond the last page...'; 'a superb cautionary tale, and a grim reminder of the continuing cost of ethnic profiling, miscommunication and confrontation'; a 'delicate meditation on the nature of perception and prejudice'; 'a deeply provocative, excellent addition to the burgeoning sub-genre of September 11 novels'; 'a delicately thrilling novella that leaves our ears ringing when we close the book'; and so on. [1]

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II.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is, as its subtitle makes clear, a novel, so it makes sense to begin by considering the story it tells. As it happens, the novel is structured as a story within a story, and thus ends up telling two of them.

In the 'outer' story (so to speak), a young Pakistani man named Changez [2] meets an unnamed American in a tea café, or *chai-khanna*, in the old Anarkali section of Lahore, and proceeds to offer up an unsolicited autobiographical monologue, recounting his days a few years back in America. The much-heralded 'tension' of this aspect of the novel consists in the fact that, for the most part, Hamid deprives the reader of information about the identity or intentions of the American listener. The American could with equal plausibility be a tourist wandering through inner city Lahore, or (given certain clues about him) a CIA assassin dispatched to kill Changez. Likewise, we get no information about Changez's intentions for the American listener; Changez might want to chat with the American, or want to behead him. The reader is supposed throughout the novel to be suspended between the most benign and most sinister interpretations of the interaction between the two of them, something that Hamid takes to mirror relations between 'East' and 'West.'

The 'inner' story of the novel consists of Changez's brief autobiography as told in his monologue with the American. In outline at least, the story is fairly straightforward: Changez goes to America in his college years to make a success of himself, and seems at first to become a success. Along comes 9/11, which changes everything. Gradually both 9/11 itself and the American reaction to it awaken Changez's hitherto latent Islamist-nationalist sympathies. After a while he comes to the resentful realisation that life in America has made him a traitor to his identity, and made him a mercenary for American interests. And so he abandons his ostensibly successful American life, returning to Pakistan to use the imperialist's tools to dismantle the house that American imperialism has built. A not-quite-consummated love affair with a pampered Manhattanite named Erica adds some psycho-sexual masala to the tale.

Unfortunately, neither story really works: the outer plot is too implausible to be credible, and the inner plot is too banal to be interesting.

To believe the outer plot, we have to believe one or both of two preposterous things: (a) that Changez is in danger of being killed by the American and/or (b) that the American is in danger of being killed by Changez.

To credit the ‘Changez-in-danger’ scenario, the reader has to bring himself to believe that the CIA would send an assassin to the Anarkali bazaar to assassinate an insignificant (if portentously bearded) tea-drinker whose most significant revolutionary activity consists of some anti-imperialist number-crunching in the Finance Department of the local university. This scenario might approach believability if Hamid had prepared us somewhere in the book to think of Changez as the South Asian equivalent of Che Guevara, but he doesn’t. Changez is a Princeton-educated bourgeois financial analyst with precisely the soul of a Princeton-educated bourgeois financial analyst, and Hamid gives us no reason for taking seriously the idea that the American government would want such a person dead. Nor – and I say this as a fairly enthusiastic proponent of targeted killing – can I think of a reason that would do the trick. In any case, on strictly logistical grounds, if the CIA wanted to assassinate Changez, wouldn’t the more plausible scenario be one in which it got a Pakistani quisling to do the job?

To credit the ‘American-in-danger’ scenario, we have to bring ourselves to believe that an insignificant number-crunching tea-drinker in the Anarkali bazaar might well turn out to be an American-murdering terrorist. On this scenario, Changez, wounded late in the book by a comparison of himself to an Ottoman mercenary (p. 151), makes a miraculous overnight transformation from resentful Princeton-educated bourgeois financial analyst to purveyor of revolutionary violence. So a smart guy with an Ivy League degree and a promising career haunts the *chai-khannas* of Anarkali, lying in wait for hapless American tourists, plying them with tea and kebabs in order to behead them on the darker corners of Mall Road. Sorry, I don’t buy it.

I suppose that we’re to be reminded here of the murder of Daniel Pearl, but nothing in the book prepares us to think of the American as a Daniel Pearl figure or of Changez as akin to Pearl’s murderers, Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khaled Sheikh Muhammad. Daniel Pearl was a well-known journalist on the trail of a hot story, but nothing about the unnamed American suggests Pearl’s intelligence or passion. Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khaled Sheikh Muhammad were religious fanatics with lifelong histories of violence, but Changez appears not to have a religious bone in

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his body, and the closest he comes to violence in the novel is an abortive fist fight over a racial slur. This is simply not the material of a credible murder plot.

If the outer plot is preposterous, the inner plot, by contrast, is entirely believable. It isn't hard to imagine a young man's coming to the United States from Lahore to study at Princeton, experiencing a bit of alienation from America while identifying with New York (i.e., Manhattan), falling in love with a lithe but troubled girl named Erica, getting a high-powered job in the financial sector, watching 9/11 on TV, and confronting his ethno-tribal demons as a result. In fact, that could be the story of any of my Pakistani cousins – or, frankly, any foreigner here for the first time on a student visa. [3] But a story that banal can scarcely bear the thematic weight that Hamid places on it.

What's left of the book beyond its rather meager plot is an extended quasi-sociological character-study of Changez. Though he doesn't end up doing very much, Changez is, to Hamid's credit, a coherent and interesting character, at least in terms of what he unwittingly reveals about himself. What makes him interesting, however, is not the frightening glimpse he gives us into the dark soul of the Islamic fundamentalist, but the revulsion he produces as a recognisable instance of the contemporary South Asian elite, clawing its way to the top of the global economic order while trying desperately to pledge allegiance to the delusional pieties of ethno-religious solidarity.

III.

At first glance, perhaps, the character of Changez seems sufficiently reasonable and likeable to qualify as a candidate for the reader's sympathy. He is bright, articulate, cosmopolitan, intelligently hedonistic, and without the slightest tinge of religiosity, fanaticism, or bigotry. But these somewhat superficial traits tend to conceal a set of deeper and more unsavory ones, namely the ones that actually constitute his character.

From the very opening of the novel, we confront in Changez a man whose articulate cosmopolitanism masks an overwhelming narcissism, obsession with status, and sense of superiority to almost everyone around him. By page 3, we learn that Changez came to the U.S. to attend university at Princeton; his first moments at Princeton inspire in him 'the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible.' This narcissistic admission, revealing both for its

pomposity as well as for its detachment from reality, sets the stage for the obsessively invidious comparisons that follow. Whenever Changez compares himself to the people around him in America – and he can't stop – he comes invariably to the conclusion that he is in some way superior to them: more intelligent, harder working, thriftier, pluckier, and better at working in a hierarchical setting; also, more gracious, more reserved, more polite. It's an incongruous set of traits, at once bourgeois and aristocratic: the cosmopolitan gentleman as go-getter. But Changez conveys it best: Princeton students were 'clever,' he says, but he was 'something special,' like 'a perfect breast, if you will – tan, succulent, seemingly defiant of gravity' (p. 5).

Changez is candid about the class origins of his self-image, which he puts as follows:

Our situation is, perhaps, not so different from that of the old European aristocracy in the nineteenth 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 chose both. (pp. 10-11)

The key to this choice, I think, and to Changez's character generally is his tacit understanding of the *point* of his efforts. Fundamentally (so to speak), hard work is for him neither a means of promoting one's own hedonistic pleasures, nor an end in itself. It's a redemptive exercise – a way of restoring 'things to what they were.'

The 'things that were' are as unreal as their time and location. What Changez seems to have in mind by 'the way things were' is a very rosy, hazy, and protean conception of a collective past – implicitly, one gathers, a cross between the Mughal Empire and the Muslim caliphate. So it is that Changez feels mortification when it's discovered that he needs a menial part-time job at Princeton to make ends meet (pp. 8-9), preferring to comport himself in public like a 'young prince, generous and carefree' (p. 11). And so it is that he conceives of Lahore, the easternmost city in Pakistan, as 'the last major city in a contiguous swath of Muslim lands stretching west as far as Morocco,' and as standing at the eastern edge of the Muslim 'frontier' (p. 127). This is a conception that might make sense to a caliph, but makes no sense today: its conception of 'contiguity' makes a unity out of things fractured; its conception of 'frontier' relegates Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta to the status of wilderness.

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Unsurprisingly, Changez's desire to return to an imagined past is facilitated by the resolution to *pretend* to accept the realities of the present. The pretense produces disorientation, and the disorientation in turn produces resentment and shame. Thus on his first day of work at Underwood Samson, a New York-based financial firm, Changez begins by describing his 'sense of wonder' at his new workplace. The sense of wonder quickly gives way to an invidious comparison that strikes down his ethnic pride: 'Their offices were perched on the forty-first and forty-second floors of a building in midtown – higher than any two structures here in Lahore would be if they were stacked one atop the other ...' (pp. 33-4). What might otherwise be a neutral architectural fact (wouldn't the *broadest* structures in Lahore be broader than the broadest two structures in midtown Manhattan?) becomes an occasion for envy, shame, and the reflexive assertion of collective identity:

Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me: they made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed. (p. 36)

The resentment and shame Changez feels is on behalf of an entirely notional, indeed preposterous sense of affinity with a civilization to which he could not possibly have any real connection. There is no sane sense in which the contemporary denizens of Lahore are the *same* 'people of the Indus River basin' as those to whom Changez refers, hence no sane way of making sense of the 'we' that facilitates Changez's resentment. Nor is there any coherent way of thinking of oneself as a member of the civilization of the 'Indus River basin' *and* thinking of Lahore as the boundary of a 'frontier': Lahore (sort of) marks the eastern boundary of Pakistan, but the Indus River basin proceeds well past that boundary into India.

Changez, then, is not just the victim of a notional identity, but of multiple and conflicting ones. As he moves through life, when he does move, he cannot help but think of himself as a member of some 'we' – but he cannot, for that, seem to settle on one 'we' to adopt, or even a consistent set of them. He is, at different times in the novel, a Third Worlder, a Muslim, a Pakistani, a member of the Indus River Basin Civilization, a New Yorker, and a Princetonian. Even his acts of rebellion and

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assertion (e.g., growing a beard) are expressions of collective identity – Changez-as-Muslim rebelling against America. What he cannot seem to be is an individual sans collective descriptor: Changez.

This ad hoc appropriation of collective identities produces an unstable mix of superiority and inferiority complexes, as well as power and powerlessness. On the one hand, it mitigates Changez's sense of inferiority by making him part of something larger than himself; he draws power from the fact that he is not merely an individual making his way in the world but a member of something larger and more significant – an ethnicity, a nation, a religion, a culture. On the other hand, this very conception of power enervates him because it is the source of his obsession with invidious comparison-making. He feels resentment at American achievement to the extent that he insists on viewing that achievement from the perspective of some anti-American collective whose identity he tries on. But he feels self-contempt when he realizes that he is not in fact a genuine member of the entities, like Pakistan, to which he professes attachment (pp. 128-9).

The ugliest (and by intention the most dramatic) manifestation of Changez's character is his expression, on watching the 9/11 attacks on television, of a profound sense of *schadenfreude* at the spectacle:

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... I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (pp. 72-3)

Hamid eventually has Changez try to rationalize his reaction to 9/11 by way of a juvenile set of political 'grievances.'

Yes, my musings were bleak indeed. I reflected that I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. (p. 156)

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If there is a consistent principle behind this set of grievances, it is the propensity to individuate events by reference to specifically American involvement, subtracting all other agents and factors from the description. For Changez, the troubles in Vietnam, Korea, the Taiwan Strait, the Middle East, and Afghanistan all began with American involvement there; nothing pre-existed that involvement and no other historical fact is relevant. It does not occur to Changez to imagine that anyone *but* America could have ‘ringed my mother continent of Asia’ (any more than it occurs to him to question the compatibility of simultaneous allegiance to Pakistani, Muslim, Indus River, and Asian identities): a solid ring of *communist* regimes around Mother Asia is simply to be taken for granted, like jasmine in the night air. There was, in other words, no communist insurgency in Vietnam, no communist invasion of South Korea, no Chinese aggression against Taiwan, no Soviet instigation of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and no Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In this universe, American action takes place in a vacuum that effaces all other agents.

This attitude becomes particularly poignant where Pakistani actions are involved, as it is in Changez’s comments about the U.S. attack on Afghanistan after 9/11. ‘Afghanistan,’ Changez complains to the American, ‘was our friend, a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury’ (p. 100). Changez’s ‘fury’ wipes out the preceding sixty years of Afghan-Pakistani relations, and with it, the preceding decade of Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan. It allows him to forget that it was Pakistan that supported the Taliban, Pakistan that secured al-Qaeda’s military base there, and Pakistan that was thereby complicit in al-Qaeda’s actions there. It also allows him to forget that it was al-Qaeda that declared war against the U.S. from Afghanistan as early as 1996, and allows him to ignore the American negotiations between 1998 and 2001 intended to resolve the al-Qaeda problem and avert military action. [4]

Changez’s denial of Pakistani agency takes on a particular intensity in his hostility for India (so much for his solidarity with the ‘people of the Indus River basin’). Readers will perhaps remember the India-Pakistan hostilities of late 2001 and 2002, initiated by an Islamist terrorist attack in December 2001 on the Indian parliament (the Lok Sabha). While refusing even to stop and think about the possibility of Pakistani complicity in the Lok Sabha attack (p. 126), Changez manages to construe the hostilities in paranoid fashion as an Indo-American conspiracy against Pakistan, with India as the aggressor and America as accessory.

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I wondered, sir, about your country's role in all this: surely, with American bases already established in Pakistan for the conduct of the Afghanistan campaign, all America would have to do would be to inform India that an attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally and would be responded to by the overwhelming force of America's military. Yet your country was signally failing to do this; indeed, America was maintaining a strict neutrality between the two potential combatants, a position that favored, of course, the larger and – at that moment in history – the more belligerent of them. (p. 143).

Changez engages here in what we might call *self-removal*: having identified himself with Pakistan and with Pakistani victimization, he subtracts Pakistan's actions from his narrative, thereby absolving it of responsibility for anything it could have done, and absolving himself of the need for a bit of intellectual honesty. *Pakistani* actions simply drop out of his narrative as though they had never happened. That act of dropping-out ends up, in a perverse way, of being a kind of self-effacement: having identified his own self with 'Pakistan,' Changez ends up having to preserve Pakistan's innocence and its sense of grievance by effacing its history, and in a sense, effacing his own identity.

Changez's propensity for self-removal in the political context parallels the same propensity in his personal life. This comes out vividly in one of the least-commented on but most revealing scenes in the book, involving Changez's relationship with his girlfriend Erica, herself still grieving the loss to cancer a year earlier of a previous boyfriend, Chris.

In my bed she asked me to put my arms around her, and I did so, speaking quietly in her ear. I knew she enjoyed my stories of Pakistan, so I rambled about my family and Lahore. When I tried to kiss her, she did not move her lips or shut her eyes. So I shut them for her and asked 'Are you missing Chris?' She nodded, and I saw tears begin to force themselves between her lashes. 'Then pretend,' I said, 'pretend I am him.' I do not know why I said it; I felt overcome and it seemed, suddenly, a possible way forward. 'What?' she said, but she did not open her eyes. 'Pretend I am him,' I said again. And slowly, in darkness and in silence, we did. (p. 105)

The 'way forward' comes to Changez, characteristically, through an act of pretence allied to one of self-removal. If the 9/11 *schadenfreude* scene is (supposedly)

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motivated by a perverse sense of political grievance, this scene seems to be motivated by Changez's Zelig-like desire to be anyone and anything for someone who, as far as characterization is concerned, is herself a non-entity. For the romance that Changez has with Erica is at once puzzling and vacuous: nothing much happens in it, and the reader gets no sense of what Changez sees in Erica or vice versa.

Later on, Changez tells the American listener that his relationship with Erica 'convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be' (pp. 173-4). But the trouble with Changez is precisely his consistent refusal throughout the novel to *be* an autonomous agent. What autonomy he had is, like so much of his life, merely a pretence. If there is any point of contact between Hamid's 'reluctant fundamentalist' and the insanities of Islamic fundamentalism, that failure is the sum of it.

IV.

I've offered an account of Changez's character that is, I hope, faithful to the book, but also conveys how repulsive an individual he is. One of the puzzles of this novel, however, is Hamid's verdict on Changez. Hamid has insisted in interviews that (superficial similarities aside), [5] Changez is not an autobiographical character and not one with whose views he entirely sympathises. He can (Hamid says) 'understand' Changez without being or agreeing with him. Fair enough. But having said that, I can't quite imagine that Hamid created Changez simply to be an object of revulsion. He has said in interviews that he wrote the book to 'provoke' readers and give them a worthy 'interlocutor.' He's also suggested that that the novel might represent 'a divided man's conversation with himself.' But I am not sure how worthy an interlocutor Changez is, and if the novel represents 'a divided man's conversation with himself,' it might be nice, when Hamid sounds off in non-fiction contexts, to tell us which man is doing the talking.

For an example of what I have in mind, consider Hamid's remarks about the book in a recent newspaper interview:

To a certain extent, America feels it lacks an interlocutor. Who the hell do you speak to on that side? I suppose you could say there are narratives of people who have left that world. Well, but the ones we do read, the people who out of

their personal history should have some Muslim sensibility, are now almost solely people who have chosen – often through the result of very unfortunate circumstances – to utterly reject that aspect of themselves. Ayaan Hirsi Ali or Salman Rushdie stories – it's the We-Hate-Islam-Muslims... They're loved. Because wow, now we can get the real view: We don't just hate them, they hate themselves! And I think that's the problem, that's the challenge. [6]

Is this Hamid-as-Hamid or Hamid-as-Changez? The breathtaking malice, ignorance, and self-importance of this assertion could as easily have come from the fictional character as from the real-life author. Indeed, it could with ease have come from the quasi-racist asseverations of fundamentalist authors like Mawdudi. [7] Hamid's claim here is identical to the one at the centre of Changez's collective-identity delusion: the sheer fact of being born to Pakistani and/or Muslim parents, he implies, saddles one with a quasi-genetic Muslim identity, and this identity confers moral obligations to one's ethno-national Significant Others. To reject this identity is thus pathology, tantamount to self-rejection and self-hatred; presumably mental health requires us to trade in our autonomy for a collective ethno-religious identity, however ill-defined, irrational, or envy-ridden. This conception leads seamlessly to Hamid's degrading self-description of his task as a writer: to slander those who disagree with him as 'self-hating Muslims,' thereby convincing the non-Muslim 'world' to ignore them and take him to be the Authentic Voice of the East. There is, to put it bluntly, something nauseating about Hamid's success at this task.

In a recent interview with Deborah Solomon of *The New York Times* Hamid says, 'The novel is not supposed to have a correct answer. It's a mirror. It really is just a conversation, and different people will read it in different ways' (Solomon, 2007). Unfortunately, so far, the book's readers seem to have read it in remarkably similar ways – as a 'cautionary' tale about how 'we' create 'their' rage. I suggest that it be read differently: as an exploration of how 'they' produce their *own* rage, often out of the commonplace disappointments of ordinary life. I suggest that it also be read for how mindless attachments to such confected identities as 'Muslim sensibility,' 'Pakistani nation' and 'People of the Indus River Basin' serve to distort history, deny agency, and produce self-deception, envy, and self-contempt. On this reading, the novel is less a mirror than it is a window, and what it shows the reader is depressing, but decidedly not the reader's problem. It is instead the problem of those who regard collective identity as an ineradicable 'aspect of themselves.'

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That may not have been the reading intended by the author, but it is, I'd wager, as good a reading as any he did intend. It is, in any case, what I personally would describe as 'the real view.' [8]

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Notes

- [1] For reviews of the book, visit Hamid's website, accessed online at: <<http://www.mohsinhamid.com/trfreviews.html>>.
- [2] Hamid's decision to use the name 'Changez' represents a minor mystery of the novel. 'Changez' is the Urdu pronunciation of the name 'Genghis,' as in Genghis Khan. Given the historical associations of Genghis Khan with the catastrophic destruction of Baghdad, one might have thought that Muslim parents would shy away from naming their children after him, but that's not so: though a relatively uncommon name (as compared, say, with 'Irfan' or 'Mohsin') there are ordinary Pakistanis named 'Changez' and even 'Changez Khan.' In interviews, Hamid seems to have denied that his use of the name has any significance, but given its relative atypicality, that's hard to take at face value.
- [3] This is probably the place to note some significant similarities between Hamid's background and my own. Hamid was born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, studied at Princeton (graduating in 1993), worked in the financial sector in New York City, and now lives in London. Though I was born and raised in the United States, my extended family is from Lahore; I studied at Princeton (graduating in 1991), now work at the City University of New York, and live just outside of

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Manhattan. Evidently Hamid and I overlapped at Princeton for two years without having met one another.

- [4] For the standard account of Pakistan-Afghan relations in the past decade, see Rashid 2000, ch. 14, and Jaffrelot 2002, ch. 6.
- [5] Both were born in Lahore, both went to Princeton, and both worked in the financial sector in New York City.
- [6] Foley 2007. It's worth noting that the topic of Muslim *schadenfreude* at 9/11 has been discussed in detail prior to and independently of Hamid; see Al Azm 2004 and 2005. Hamid appears unaware of the fact that his book bears a striking resemblance in structure and theme to Tayeb Salih's classic novel *Season of Migration to the North* (Salih 1997), first published in Sudan in 1966.
- [7] Thus Mawdudi 1986, p. 6 (*italics in original*): 'The Arabic word for disbelief is *kufr*, which literally means 'to cover' or 'to conceal.' The man who rejects God is called a concealer (*kafir*) because he conceals by his disbelief what is inherently in his nature and what is embalmed within his soul. For indeed, his nature is instinctively imbued with 'Islam.' His whole body, every cell and each atom, functions in obedience to that instinct.... But the vision of this man has been blurred, his common sense has been befogged, and he is unable to see the obvious. His own nature has become hidden from his eyes and he thinks and acts in complete disregard of it. The real truth has become separated from him and he gropes in the dark – such is the nature of disbelief.'
- [8] Thanks to Carrie-Ann Biondi and Alan Johnson for helpful editorial suggestions.