

TERRORISM, COSMOPOLITANISM AND GLOBALIZATION: JOSEPH O'NEILL'S *NETHERLAND* AND MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

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This paper examines two “9/11 novels,” Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008) and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Written by writers of different backgrounds but with similarly cosmopolitan career paths, both novels attempt to achieve a transnational perspective on the climate of fear created by the 9/11 attacks. Both novels unveil a history of violence which links colonial legacy and new imperial formations resulting from neoliberal capitalism, ultimately highlighting difficulties in forging an encompassing cosmopolitan perspective at a time of international insecurity.

Keywords: 9/11 Literature, Colonial legacies, Neoliberal capitalism, Cosmopolitanism, Insecurity.

Este artigo examina dois romances sobre os ataques do “11 de Setembro de 2001,” *Netherland* de Joseph O’Neill, publicado em 2008, e *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* de Mohsin Hamid, publicado em 2007. Escrito por escritores de diferentes nacionalidades mas com percursos internacionais semelhantes, ambos os romances tentam alcançar uma perspectiva transnacional sobre o clima de insegurança gerado pelos ataques terroristas de 11 de Setembro. Ambos os romances desvendam uma história de violência que une o legado colonial e novas formações imperiais resultantes do capitalismo neoliberal, revelando em última análise dificuldades em forjar uma visão cosmopolita abrangente, face a novas inseguranças internacionais.

Palavras-chave: Literatura do 11 de Setembro de 2011, Legado Colonial, Capitalismo Neoliberal, Cosmopolitanismo, Insegurança.

The narrators of *Netherland* by Joseph O'Neill and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid are two foreigners living in the United States (US) when the 9/11 attacks take place. These novels are, nevertheless, only partially set in New York: the two narratives depart from New York, hoping to attain a wider picture of the world. Motifs of travelling and mobility play an extremely important role in these novels, as both narrators attempt to come to terms with current events aiming to embrace – though not always successfully – a global perspective. By contrasting the two works this essay examines the challenges to attain a cosmopolitan vision in relation to 9/11.

Both novels received a great amount international attention. *Netherland* was widely acclaimed in the United States where it received a PEN/Faulkner Award and in the United Kingdom where it has been long-listed for the Man-Booker Prize. Mohsin Hamid's book also won great attention in the UK, where the novella was shortlisted for the 2007 Booker Prize and won two awards, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature. Although the backgrounds of O'Neill and Hamid (of Irish and Pakistani origins respectively), may appear far removed from each other, their career and writing paths disclose in fact a very similar sort of trans-national path. O'Neill, of half-Irish and half-Turkish ancestry, grew up in the Netherlands, studied law at Cambridge in the United Kingdom (UK), and became a barrister in England, where he practised for ten years, mainly in the field of business law. He now lives and writes in the US. Hamid born in Pakistan studied in the US, first Literature at Princeton and then attended Harvard Law School. Hamid worked for several years as a management consultant in New York City, before moving to the UK where he now works as a writer. Both studied law in highly prestigious universities and their professional careers led them to engage directly with the world of business via business law (O'Neill) and business consultancy (Hamid). Shaped by a privileged type of mobility, the Euro-American cosmopolitanism of the business class, the backgrounds of both authors compel them to reflect on the place of "America" in the world after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their novels examine the relationship between private and public "business" and their international projections abroad.

Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*

As soon as it was published, O'Neill's *Netherland* received a number of suggestive, though slightly contradictory labels. For some, the novel carried the ambition of "a great American novel...but one with an ordinary European Everyman at its centre" (O'Hagan 2008). Others felt that both the author's mixed background and the novel's transnational themes suggested instead the hopes of a "Great-American-Irish novel" (Bacon 2008). Others, still, were more interested to the depiction of colonial experience in the novel: the critic James Wood, for instance, presented it as "one of the most remarkable postcolonial books" he had ever read (Wood 2008). Public interest was further boosted when President

Barack Obama announced he was reading this “excellent novel” (Webb 2009). Directly engaged with US mythologies of success, namely the notion of the American Dream, *Netherland* can be said to be a fitting read for a president who, for better or for worse, attempted to reclaim the traditional rhetoric associated with that national ethos and was himself the author of a book entitled *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (Obama 2006). However different in terms of political significance, the election of president Obama and O’Neill’s book both addressed concerns regarding multiculturalism and the place of the US in the world.

Like many other post-9/11 novels (by writers such as Beigbeder, McEwan, Safran Foer, McInerney and DeLillo) *Netherland* focuses on the white western middle-class family from the point of view of an anxious male protagonist. In O’Neill’s novel, however, anxiety is deliberately let loose, verging on depression. Following the 9/11 attacks, the narrator, Hans van den Broek, a Dutch equity analyst decides that he and his family should leave their flat in Tribeca, lower Manhattan, to live further uptown in the Chelsea Hotel. Despite his efforts, his marriage slowly disintegrates. His wife, an English woman named Rachel, decides to return to London with their son, as she becomes more and more uncomfortable in New York. The announcement of the war in Iraq transforms Rachel’s unease into an active repudiation for the US, a country which she considers “ideological[ly] diseased” (O’Neill 2009, 92). Hans, however, is left in a state of emotional numbness.

Hans’s apathy becomes particularly striking when he is confronted with current political and historical events. His indifference contrasts with what he sees around him: “For those under the age of forty-five it seemed that the world events had finally contrived a meaningful test of their capacity for conscientious political thought” (96). Hans, however, is clearly disengaged from such issues; his narrative culminates with this blunt confession:

I lacked necessary powers of perception and certainty and, above all, foresight. The future retained the impenetrable character I had always attributed to it. Would American security be improved or worsened by taking over Iraq? I did not know, because I had no information about the future purposes and capacities of terrorists or, for that matter, American administrations ... Did I know if the death and pain caused by a war in Iraq would or would not exceed the miseries that might likely flow from leaving Saddam Hussein in power? No. Could I say whether the right to autonomy of the Iraqi people – a problematic national entity, by all accounts – would be enhanced or diminished by an American regime change? I could not. Did Iraq have weapons of mass destruction that posed a real threat? I had no idea; and to be truthful, and to touch on my real difficulty, I had little interest. I didn’t really care. (96-97)

Hans's aestheticised disengagement, otherwise viewed with sympathy by reviewers, is slated by Zadie Smith who notes that in *Netherland*, "the nineteenth-century flaneur's ennui has been transplanted to the twenty-first-century bourgeois's political apathy – and made beautiful" (Smith 2008, 55). Hans's apathy is, in this sense, usefully indicative of a wider social dilemma, conveying how the sense of traumatic unease – brought up in this case by the events of 9/11 – can impact upon one's ability to think critically. For Hans, the collapse of the towers represents the end of a world view – both private and public. The narrator finds it increasingly difficult to deal not only with current political events but also with historical events. Indeed, Hans, fittingly described by a reviewer as "a latter-day 'Dutch sailor' washed up on the ragged shores of lower Manhattan" (Corrigan 2008), tends to embellish the account of his time in New York by drawing on previous transatlantic crossings.

Chuck Ramkinsoon

It is Hans's apathy that attracts him to Chuck Ramkinsoon, a charismatic Trinidadian immigrant living in New York that he meets in his cricket club. Feeling adrift, after the separation from his wife, Hans is seduced by the optimism and sense of purpose of this self-made entrepreneur. As most reviewers were quick to point out, Chuck is an inescapable reference to Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald's canonical novel (Kakutani 2008; Corrigan 2008; Orlebeke 2010). He holds on to the promises of the American dream, simply and unselfconsciously. An eclectic entrepreneur whose motto is "think fantastic," he is involved in a number of unlawful moneymaking schemes but his buoyancy fascinates Hans. Chuck is also a lover of cricket and for him the sport is a green field where the promises of the American Dream are bound to flourish. Chuck wants to create a New York Cricket Club. By building the first New York cricket stadium, he believes he can lay down a new ethical ground: "Cricket is instructive, Hans. It has a moral angle. I really believe this. Everybody who plays the game benefits from it. So why not the Americans?" (204). The game represents for Chuck the ideal of a successful multicultural society: "I say, we want to have something in common with the Hindus and Muslims? Chuck Ramkinsoon is going to make it happen. With the New York Cricket Club, we could start a whole new chapter in US history. Why Not?" (204). The energy of this other "green light" infuses Hans's empty soul. Indeed, Chuck's tales – his Trinidadian narratives – interrupt momentarily and refreshingly Hans's transatlantic domestic drama and Euro-American narration (populated by conflicting references to European expansion and colonial history of the US). Chuck's social discourse on cricket may remind some of us of C. L. R. James's theories on the re-appropriation of the Victorian sport (see Malik 2001). For James cricket could be more than a symbol of imperialism: the game could be rescued and appropriated by colonial people as a performance of anti-imperialist consciousness and patriotism. Yet

Chuck is not an anti-imperial activist, the same way that Gatsby is no socialist. As an emigrant in the US, Chuck places upon himself the “responsibility to play the game right” (13). He does so by reinventing his social status: feeling as noble in white as Gatsby felt wearing his glamorous coloured shirts. At a superficial level, Chuck embodies for Hans the fantasy of a joyful multicultural society at a time of clash of civilisations.

Traumatic Images and Narratives of Mourning

The concept of trauma derives from ancient Greek, where it conveyed a strong physical root, meaning injury or wound, akin to the Greek *titrōskein*, to wound, and *tetrainein*, to pierce. Borrowed from medicine and surgery, the word refers originally to injuries “where the skin is broken as a consequence of external violence, and the effects of such an injury upon the organism as a whole” (Laplanche and Pontalis 466). By adopting this term, psychoanalysis carried three main ideas from the field of medicine into the psychoanalytic field: the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound, and the idea of consequences affecting the organic organization of the individual (466).

These three ideas are at work in a passage of *Netherland* that I have named the “Danielle episode,” where history is boldly presented as an open wound. One evening, Hans is approached by a young woman of Anglo-Caribbean extraction at a Manhattan diner. Her name is Danielle. She recalls to Hans that they had briefly met before in England. Even though Hans did not recall that specific episode, he seemed to have made an impression on Danielle, who considered him a “complete gentleman” (109).

Following their reencounter, Hans takes Danielle to his room at the Chelsea hotel where they have sex and where, with a rather purposeful tone, Danielle tells Hans she wants him “to be gentleman again” (110). In order for Hans to assume that noble status, this is the performance required of him:

I took the belt, a length of black leather that was at once familiar and strange, and saw Danielle laying face down on the bed, and began to perform *the act I understood her to need*. Every lash was answered by a small moan. If this gave me some unusual satisfaction, I can't remember it now. I do recall a tunneller's anxiety as to when and where it would end, and at that my arm began to tire, and that eventually, as I worked at beating this woman across the back, and the buttocks and the trembling arms, I looked to the window for some kind of relief ... I was not shocked by what I saw – a pale white hitting a pale black – but I did of course ask myself what had happened, how it could be that I should find myself living in a hotel in a country where there was no one to remember me, attacking a woman *who'd boomeranged in from a time I could not claim as my own*. (111; my italics)

Trauma is reclaimed here to its original meaning, absorbing physical as well as psychological overtones. Danielle forces Hans to reenact an image, which literally embodies the violence of colonial history. In Danielle's fetishistic fantasy (the image of a "pale white beating a pale black"), Hans is the gentleman (from *gentilis*) who can resurrect for her a historical marker of his "superior" cast and her "inferior" race. By forcing Hans to perform an act that "boomeranged from a time that [he] cannot claim [his] own" (111), Danielle selects Hans as an unwitting descendant of a particular episode which had been historically repressed. She awakens, thus, what has been called a "transgenerational phantom," a symptom of devastating trauma which unlocks an unspeakable but consummated desire (Abraham and Torok 1994).

In this sense, Danielle's fetishistic re-enactment of racial violence can also be understood in the context of the present time, namely the war in Afghanistan and in Iraq, which haunts the main narrative of *Netherland*. Indeed, the act Hans is forced to perform for Danielle may remind us of the Abu Ghraib images where torture and abuse (physical and sexual) were theatrically reproduced by referring to iconic images of racial oppression. Indeed, as several commentators pointed out, some of the Abu Ghraib photographs evoked the practice of lynching, which survived in the US till the 1960s. More specifically, Susan Sontag suggested that:

if there is something comparable to what [the Abu Ghraib] pictures show, it would be some of the photographs of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880's and 1930's, which show Americans grinning beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree. The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib. (Sontag 2004)

Danielle's Jamaican background, like Chuck's Trinidadian roots is, thus, highly significant in the context of Hans' wavering narrative. Placed at the heart of colonial American history, the Caribbean islands tell a very different version of the early Euro-American encounters from that presented in the romanticised accounts of Dutch-American experience shared by Hans and Chuck. That history of violence is, however, left out of the main narrative and erupts, almost accidentally, in the figure of Danielle. Danielle is, in this sense, as a double to Chuck's optimistic persona, his uncomfortable "other." Her fetishistic needs convey the violence of colonial history that Chuck, himself, attempts to sublimate by wearing his white cricket shirts and embracing, in his own style, the myths of entrepreneurial success associated with the American dream. Hans's ability to overcome his melancholia depends upon his capacity to mourn and to come to terms with these transgenerational ghosts.

Globalisation, Economy and World View

Read in the light of some of the early readings of Fitzgerald's novel, Chuck can be seen to follow in Jay Gatsby's footsteps: his tragic death seen as a result of a tarnished or corrupt version of the American dream. However, in the larger political and economical context conveyed by the novel, Chuck and his betting operations are only but a minute expression of the larger system they inadvertently mirror – the financial game or “casino economy” to which Hans is professionally engaged as a financial analyst. Hans understands the workings of the financial world and therefore tends to see corporations as “vulnerable, needy creatures, entitled to their displays of vigour” (19). Instead of being examined as a significant phenomenon in itself – with potential changes to the global economy and the life of millions of citizens around the world – the universe of finance, from which Hans's makes his living, is presented here as an illustration of Hans's feelings of private breakdown. Instead, Hans's acknowledges that he is “liable to misplace his sensitivities” (19) and reduces the vulnerability of the financial economy by projecting into it, merely and above all, signs of his private depression. More disturbing is the fact that, within the world of finances, Hans is specifically involved in the analysis oil futures. This, of course, has a particular resonance at the time the narrative is set, during the US invasion of Iraq. Yet the ethical implications of his job are always left unquestioned. With this note, O'Neill hints at the ways in which a very postmodern imperial angst can quietly take over anxieties surrounding colonial history, without either of these ever being seriously confronted or examined.

The way in which the world of finances is entangled with the narrator's private world is also clearly conveyed when Hans describes the financial agreements of his separation from Rachel: “The loft would be sold and the net proceeds, comfortably over a million dollars, would be invested in government bonds, a cautious spread of stocks and, on a tip from an economist I trusted, gold” (28). Here we have the exchange of one type of bond for another. The declared precision of Hans's financial investments contrasts, more boldly here, with his blindness about ethics. Indeed, his ability to see and foresee economic trends contrasts both with his emotional skills and his political vision. O'Neill's narrator recognises his lack of self-inspection as a “symptom of moral laziness” (231). He treads and trades cautiously through the emotional chaos created in the post 9/11 context, unwilling or incapable of forming judgements about these events and exasperating his wife Rachel who finds in his lack of engagement an acknowledged sign of conservatism.

This inability to see, to question, or to take a position is also present in the multiple cartographic references conveyed by the narrative. The novel presents itself clearly, and from the beginning, as a book about international movements, transoceanic journeys and global transactions and it is in this global context that the presentation of Hans as a “a latter-day ‘Dutch sailor’” (Corrigan 2008) gains real significance. The main structure of the novel depends upon a number of transatlantic movements mainly between New York and

London via The Hague and although there is an attempt to change that trajectory (through references to “other” realities and narratives such as those conveyed by the Trinidadian motifs) these incursions are never fully explored. A real cosmopolitan approach is frustrated and what is achieved, instead, is a limited sort of cosmopolitanism. Hans’s attempts to track his family in London via Google technology exemplify this:

There was no movement in my marriage; either, but, flying on Google’s satellite function, night after night I surreptitiously travelled to England. Starting with a hybrid map of the United States, I moved the navigation box across the North Atlantic and began my fall from the stratosphere: successively, into a brown and beige and greenish Europe bounded by Wuppertal, Groningen, Leeds, Caen (the Netherlands is gallant from this altitude, its streamer of northern isles giving the impression of a land steaming seaward); that part of England between Grantham and Yeovil; that part between Bedford and Brighton; and then Greater London, its north and south pieces, jigsawed by the Thames, never quite interlocking. From the central maze of mustard roads I followed the river southwest into Putney, zoomed in between the Lower and Upper Richmond Roads, and, with the image purely photographic, descended finally on Landford Road. It was always a clear and beautiful day—and wintry, if I correctly recall, with the trees pale brown and the shadows long. From my balloonist’s vantage point, aloft at a few hundred metres, the scene was depthless. My son’s dormer was visible, and the blue inflated pool and the red BMW; but there was no way to see more, or deeper. I was stuck. (119)

From the post-bohemian nostalgia of the Chelsea Hotel to the affluent borough of Richmond in the UK via a gallant image of the Netherlands, Hans’s vision is flat. His difficulty to see beneath the signs of middle Europe or of white upper-middle class reality is made clear. His vision stops at his son’s dormer. Hans acknowledges that there is something else beneath that surface, there are realities concealed from view beyond the signifiers of middle-class normality. But these are inaccessible to him, the scene remains depthless. Hans cannot see his son, the same way that he cannot read his own trajectory in a global map.

This inability to see also explains the blind spot left open by Hans’s vision of New York as a “City of friends”. Hans’s desire to see New York as an “invincible” city or a multicultural urban utopia neglects the fact that “other” cities have been completely obliterated from his map. Indeed, cities like Kabul and Bagdad remain outside Hans’s field of vision, lacking any visibility within the narrative. The impossibility of Hans’s actually “seeing” Bagdad is revealed by the way the narrator (an expert on oil futures analyst) avoids the subject of war throughout his narrative. In fact, the Iraqi reality is reduced to a virtual reality in almost Baudrillardian terms: “on television dark Bagdad glittered with American bombs” (2009, 118). This is all that we are told about the Iraqi capital. What

concerns Hans is an idealised vision of western multiculturalism and it is this vision that demands the romanticised figure of Chuck Ramkissoon as a protagonist. Hence, when later in the novel Hans realises that Chuck was involved in a number of illegal activities and was using him to run his business, the polish of identity politics that had allowed for the aggrandisement of Chuck in Hans's eyes disintegrates, erasing with it Hans's dream of a "city of friends."

Google Earth engine provides us, thus, with a metaphor for the problem of perspective and world view embodied by the protagonist. Google earth attempts to map the earth through the superimposition of images obtained by satellite, aerial photography and geographic information system. No unlike early visual developments such as the panorama this technology also depends on the process of image-stitching. The sewing of images is precisely the process through which *Netherland's* narrative is constructed: the novel starts in *media res* and its travels backwards and forwards in time and place, in crafted tapestry of memories where Hans hopes to find himself. Indeed, this is also what Eliza, Chuck's mistress, does by creating and ordering photo albums for her clients: "People want a story," she plainly points out (126). Unable to "see" his son, Hans's asks Eliza to create an album for the boy, hoping to find in it both meanings and a narrative he himself has failed to read.

Hans's inability to see deeper, more profoundly, is however far from a mere private malaise, as it reflects a generalised social problem and a global predicament. The last image of the novel re-enacts a cartographic nexus through a movement which takes the reverse direction to that described above. We travel from London to New York via another optical tool, the London Eye. The Eye is the biggest Ferris wheel in Europe and the most popular tourist attraction in the United Kingdom. At the end of the novel we find Hans, Rachel and their son reunited and travelling together in one of the Eye's pods. The British capital, from where Hans's reminiscences depart, is still marked by salient icons of imperial power, "Natwest Tower" standing beside the "Tower Bridge", but, as the narrator explains, "the higher we go the less recognisable the city becomes" (245-246). Instead of examining the resonances of such mis-recognition, Hans retracts from his panoramic sight-seeing and is taken back to childhood memories marked by other "towering" visions. He describes seeing Manhattan from the Staten Island Ferry where he was travelling with his mother. The twin towers emerge as symbols of "promise":

(...) a world concentrated most glamorously of all, it goes almost without saying, in the lilac acres of two amazingly high towers going up above all others. ...I wasn't the only person on that ferry who'd seen a pink watery sunset in his time, and I can state that I wasn't the only one of us to make out and accept an extraordinary promise in what we saw – the tall approaching cape, a people risen in light. (247)

The allusion to the ferryboats of Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* is inescapable here. By adopting the tone of Nick Carraway's voice, Hans's recollection directs the novel towards an equally melancholic conclusion. While Hans's final memories seem to allow a more direct relation with private phantoms of his past (namely through a reencounter with the memory of his mother), other public ghosts are more difficult to exorcise: Chuck, the legacies of colonial experience, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq and its imperial connotations seem to be kept away from the circular movement and the memorial grandeur with which the novel appears to end. In the very last sentence of the novel there is, however, slight breakthrough in the self-serving circularity of the narrative – a final sentence that works as a sign of recognition. Still in the London Eye, Hans's son calls out to him forcing him to meet his gaze, challenging his inward drift and, therefore, demanding his attention. Cautiously, Hans first tests his immediate alliances “looking from him to Rachel and again to him [his son]” (247). Then, in the very last line of the novel, he dares to do what he had been unable to accomplish throughout the narrative: “I turn to look for what it is we're supposed to be seeing” (247). Only then does he recognise the need for a position, a vision, a perspective.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Like Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, the narrative structure of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* depends on a number of cultural exchanges and transoceanic crossings that help us to think about the relations between displacement, mourning and globalisation in light of 9/11. Although Hamid's novel does not have the aesthetic ambition or narrative depth of *Netherland*, positioning itself more bluntly than O'Neill's book within the thriller genre, it is, however, an intelligent and skilfully written text that challenges the conventions and expectations of early 9/11 novels.

The novel addresses head on the “clash of civilisations” debate revived since 9/11. While in *Netherland* it is the secondary character of Chuck Ramkisson that introduces a cultural fracture to the Euro-American discourse of Hans's narrative, here cultural difference is personified by the narrator himself, shaping his discourse from the very beginning of the novel. The narrative also starts in *media res*: Changez, the narrator, is a Pakistani man (a bearded and suspicious looking man) who approaches a US stranger at an outdoor Lahore cafe. The novel takes place during the course of that encounter and corresponds to the story confided by Changez to his US interlocutor. The narrative wavers, thus, between our reliance, as readers, on the credibility of Changez's narrative and the sense of insecurity and distrust ignited, from the beginning of the text, between the narrator and his listener.

Changez's story is one of infatuation and frustrated love with America, which comments on the limitations of the American dream. Like Chuck, Changez is a go-getter,

although he comes from a more privileged background. Changez is also an émigré rather than emigrant. Changez wins a scholarship to study at Princeton where he excels as a student; after graduating at the top of his class, he is instantly hired by “Underwood Samson”, an elite firm that specialises in the economic assessment of companies. Around this time, he meets and eventually falls in love with Erica, a beautiful young woman from a wealthy American family. They become acquainted in Greece, during a group holiday organised by some Princeton students. Changez notices, then, how part of the Greek setting already figured a historical separation between East and West which had not been completely healed by time. The island of Rhodes becomes particularly emblematic of this: “Its cities were fortified, protected by ancient castles; they guarded against the Turks, much like the army and navy and air force of modern Greece, part of a wall against the East that still stands” (26). Changez knows well that he “grew up on the other side,” (26) but that knowledge, previously veiled by the meritocratic ethos of elite universities and businesses, starts to torment him as he attempts to conquer Erica’s affections.

The novel is loaded with symbols and can be read as a parable. As several reviewers and critics were quick to point out, Erica can be seen as an allegory for “(Am)Erica” i.e. the United States after 9/11. Although she used to be a charismatic girl, Erica has lost her youthful optimism. She has become a fragile and melancholic young woman. The reasons behind Erica’s vulnerability and subsequent difficulty in developing a relationship with Changez are justified in terms of a traumatic past event: the early death of her first boyfriend, Chris. An allegorical triangle, then, quickly emerges from the pile of symbols and bold signifiers accumulated by the narrative: (Am)Erica mourns Chris (the demise of an early Christian culture associated with European conquest; Christopher Columbus, thus, seen as an early conqueror) and now faces Changez (a changed relation to the East, brought about by globalisation).

Imperial Melancholia

Other significant similarities between *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Netherland* are quick to emerge. Let us consider, first, the profession of both narrators. Let us consider, for example, the narrator’s occupation. In *Netherland* Hans was a financial analyst working for an investment bank, while in this novel Changez works as a management analyst specialising in the coldblooded appraisal of companies (many of these foreign businesses) targeted for takeover. The fact that these two 9/11 novels depend upon narrators who are involved in trade valuations is no doubt meaningful. Both novels have a bold precedent in Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby* – a classic that both novels directly allude to. Indeed, in Fitzgerald’s novel Carraway was an apprentice Wall Street trader in the rising *financial* markets of the early 1920s. It is therefore interesting to note that both O’Neill and Hamid return to this motif just before the financial collapse

which marked the end of 2008. By engaging with the meaning of the crisis created by the terrorist attacks, both writers highlight the need to examine globalisation processes in light of economical and financial concerns. In *Netherland*, Hans, as an investment banker, perceives a loss of confidence felt in Wall Street in the aftermath of 9/11 but the narrator never reflects upon the mechanisms of global capitalism. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, however, Changez's occupation plays a more straightforward role in the narrative and has a preponderant part in the narrator's self-questioning (and in the resulting "change" of heart that justifies his emblematic name). This is illustrated by the role of travelling in the narrative. Changez travels to Chile and the Philippines on business to evaluate companies based in these two countries. Travelling has a clear geo-political significance here, mapping the extent of US business abroad and stretching the concerns of the novel beyond East/West relations. Indeed, it is significant that Manila and Valparaiso, the cities whose businesses Changez has to evaluate, have a long and profound colonial history from early European rule to later US domination. What strikes Changez is not, however, any obvious marker of colonialism but the decline of Valparaiso's strategic role within the imperial cartography. This decline in strategic investment reminds Changez of his own country, Pakistan:

Valparaiso was itself a distraction: the city was powerfully atmospheric; a sense of melancholy pervaded its boulevards and hillsides. I read online about its history and discovered that it had been in decline for over a century; once a great port fought over by rivals because of its status as the last stop for vessels making their way from the Pacific to the Atlantic, it had been bypassed and rendered peripheral by the Panama Canal. In this – Valparaiso's former aspirations to grandeur – I was reminded of Lahore and of that saying, so evocative in our language: *the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful*. (163)

Changez's depiction of Valparaiso's "former aspirations of grandeur" suggests a nostalgic yearning for a lost privileged position within a global chart. Like the Philippines, the other country where Changez was assigned a job, Chile suffered different waves of colonial occupation, marked by Spanish, British and American rule. The ruins of Valparaiso's signal the end of the golden age of commerce after the opening of the Panama Canal during American period. Nostalgia is thus associated, at several points in the narrative, with losses of power and status. Indeed, this is how the narrator describes his own family's situation in Lahore: "...I did not grow up in poverty. But I did grow up with a poor boy's sense of *longing*, in my case not for what my family never had, but for what we had had and lost" (81). He explains how "imagined memories" enthused the lives of those around him: "*Nostalgia* was their crack cocaine, if you will, and my childhood was littered with the consequences of their addiction: unserviceable debts, squabbles over inheritances, the odd alcoholic or suicide" (81).

As a good investor, Changez is sensitive to tendencies to economic decline and trained in finding solutions for such problems. The fact that Erica belongs to a privileged and well-established US family fits well into the investment models Changez has learned at Princeton. Not only could she restore Changez to an economical and social status which had been lost by his family in Lahore, but their partnership would work, in terms of the geo-political symbolism of the narrative, as a significant transnational alliance, reinforcing Pakistan's relationship with this powerful nation.

This preoccupation with status and the rendition of characters' relations as representing "bonds" and "transactions" is also at the heart of the *The Great Gatsby*. As one of the most famous novels associated with the romantic trappings of the American dream, Fitzgerald's book discloses the socio-economic staging of this national myth: as a token of conspicuous leisure for her class, Daisy with her voice "full of money" could reclaim a particular stage in Gatsby's own social transformation. Status and social mobility are both romanticised and exposed by O'Neill's and Hamid's novels, particularly in what concerns the experience of migrant or foreign characters. Whereas Chuck seems to embrace American mythologies straightforwardly, if not naively (with Cricket standing in for the dreams and aspirations of Gatsby's Green light), for the middle-class Changez personal aspirations become tangled up with mixed feelings about international politics.

Changez alludes directly to Fitzgerald's novel when he visits the house of one of his colleagues at the Hamptons, "a magnificent property that ma[kes him] think of *The Great Gatsby*:" "It was beside the beach – on a rise behind a protective ridge of sand dunes – and it had a swimming pool, a tennis court, and an open-sided white pavilion erected at one end of the lawn for drinking and dancing" (48). Jim Wainwright, Changez's senior colleague, comes from a working-class background which allows him to recognise in Changez the "feeling of being out of place" (48). Indeed, during the course of that evening at the Hamptons, Changez keeps "wishing that Erica was there" (50). Changez needs (Am)Erica to confirm his social integration. While in Fitzgerald's novel we find that Gatsby's desire is commodified and Daisy *Buchanan* is herself translated into a "commodity" (Godden 1990, 83), in Hamid's novel it is Changez who, more clearly, becomes a commodity essential to the functioning of a system. Wainwright's house is, thus, the materialisation of a successful and proud assimilation of corporate "values."

Here, as in O'Neill's novel, the social transactions established between characters are conveyed in nostalgic terms. In both novels, "Nostos" is not only associated with an idea of home which has disappeared, but with a home whose splendour has been lost. The "ruins" of Valparaiso and Lahore were for Changez a nostalgic symbol of the decline of "aspirations of grandeur" associated with imperial structures. Similarly, in the aftermath of 9/11 he discovers such melancholic symptoms at the very heart of US territory. In this context, however, it becomes easier for him to recognise the dangers inherent in the mobilisation of mourning in times of crisis:

Possibly this was due to my state of mind, but it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as duty and honor. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back. Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War; I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Technicolor but in grainy black and white. What your fellow country-men longed for was unclear to me – a time of unquestioned dominance? of safety? of moral certainty? (130-131)

Erica's melancholia can thus be understood in these terms: a yearning for a more powerful, more confident past. Erica is a nation in mourning whose rapid decline prefigures in Changez's management analysis, symptoms of a profound crisis. The immediate reaction to that sense of crisis – namely US bombing of Afghanistan, a neighbor country to Pakistan – brings the sense of threat closer to home for Changez, marking the beginning of his self-questioning. During a business meal in Valparaiso with the head of the publishing company he is supposed to evaluate, Changez realises he is becoming a "janissary." As it is explained to him then, janissary corps were infantry units used in the Ottoman Empire of the 14th century formed by Christian children from conquered countries:

They [the janissaries] were Christian boys," he explained, "captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to. (172)

Changez recognises, then, that financial valuations have been disrupting lives and businesses throughout the world, for the profit of his corporate clients. He realises he has turned himself into a "modern day-janissaire." In Changez's awkward monologue, the coming of age narrative is greatly shaped by this acknowledgement: "There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with kinship to mine and was perhaps colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war" (173). As we have seen the juxtaposition of children and terrorism has attracted a number of authors since 9/11. While in Michael Cunningham's book, *Specimen Days*, the image of child crusaders speaks about inbreed terrorism in the US, in Hamid's novel there is an inversion of East-West positions to reinforce the way corporate neoliberalism is easily internalised by citizens, independently of their ethnicity or background.

Fundamentalist Terrorism and Global Capitalism

As a way to undo his role as a “janissary,” Changez goes back to Lahore where he finds a job as a university lecturer, “making [his] mission on campus” to criticise American foreign policy (103), particularly in light of India’s impending threat to Pakistan: “The threat of war with India reached its highest point the summer after I returned from New York. Multinational corporations on both sides of the border ordered senior employees to leave, and travel advisories were issued throughout the nations of the First World, counselling their citizens to defer nonessential trips to our region” (201).

Changez’s poise during narration of this story suggests, thus, a radical transformation from one form of fundamentalism to another: from the capitalist fundamentals that guided his early work in Underwood Samson to the threatening embodiment of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist tactics. At the end of the novel his gestures towards the US tourist become more threatening, assuming – perhaps parodically – the role of abductor or murderer. As a reviewer noted, the expectation is that Changez is moving towards “the dark side of Islamic fundamentalism, and is possibly, even as he speaks, orchestrating some Daniel Pearl-like execution of his perhaps literally captive audience” (Lasdun 2007). The reader never actually knows if Changez really aims to kill or threaten his interlocutor or if he is merely mimicking the poise of a terrorist and remains an unreliable narrator until the very end of the narrative. The conclusion of the novel provides a climax to the suspense plot, without ever resolving or disclosing the real nature of the interaction between the narrator and his listener. The last paragraph of the novel assumes, then, the style of a persecution scene: Changez insists on following the American tourist to his hotel and suggests that they are being followed. The conclusion reenacts the climate of fear exacerbated by 9/11, but hints at other sources of violence. Indeed, as a response to the sense of threat, the US tourist reaches into his pocket for what seems to be a gun – but the nature of the object remains ambiguous: “...why are you reaching for your jacket, sir?” asks Changez. He then adds, perceptively: “I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards” (209).

This finale intensifies the juxtaposition between terrorism and corporate capitalism. The real crime can thus be seen as a result of a business transaction, the culmination of the “shared intimacy,” the “trust” or “bond” established between these two men. Protected by the metal holder, the business card unveils the inscription of a system and its all-pervasive logic. Indeed, during his first days at Underwood Samson, Changez is told by his colleagues to “focus on the fundamentals” (112). This was Underwood Samson’s guiding principle: “it mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value” (112). At this point, that the irony implicit in the title becomes clearer. It is the logic of persuasion of financial fundamental-

ism, rather than that of Islamic terrorism that moves the novel. Indeed, in an interview, writer Mohsin Hamid – who worked for many years as a management consultant in New York and London – stressed that he did not mean to attack the US, but criticise a particular type of corporate logic: “There is a corporate or a financial fundamentalism, which is broader than just America – it is a global thing (...) It is a reduction of people to units of value, which happens all over the world, and increasingly often” (cited in “Writer Hamid focuses on Fundamentals”). The climate of fear and paranoia that builds up in the last pages of the novel and which turns every character into a potential murderer, stages only too well the ways in which global capitalism becomes a mirror image of transnational terrorism – emerging from everywhere and nowhere. Like terrorism, global capitalism can be seen to be ruled by all-pervasive operations which nevertheless remain unseen, concealed and mysterious.

For some readers the pervasiveness of capitalist discourse is so entrenched in the construction of Changez’s character that it undermines the given motifs for his transformation. The reviewer James Landun suggests that Changez “repudiation of America in the wake of the September 11 attacks is a curiously frictionless, voluntary event, leaving one with an odd sense that his decision to quit is ultimately just the superior opportunism of a well-trained appraiser of ailing companies, who knows which way the wind is blowing” (Lasdun 2007). This can be explained in terms of the novel’s allegorical structure. Indeed, like pawns in a chess game, the characters in this novel do not offer themselves to deep psychological readings. Narrator and interlocutor can in this sense be seen as two sides of the same coin. When asked if as a writer he identified with the character of Changez, Mohsin Hamid commented: “I wonder why they never ask if I am his American listener. After all, a novel can often be a divided man’s conversation with himself” (Hamid 2007).

Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* emerges, here, as another obvious reference to this novel. “I have felt like Kurtz awaiting his Marlow” (208), says the narrator, in the last pages of the novel. Drawing on the figure of Kurtz in the *Heart of Darkness*, Žižek suggests that, like the corporate financier, the fundamentalism of the Islamic radical can be seen as a product of our times not of primitive traditions. His reading of *Apocalypse Now Redux* asks: “Is it not significant that Kurtz ... is presented not as a remainder of some barbaric past, but as the necessary outcome of modern Western power itself? Kurtz was a perfect soldier – as such, through his overidentification with the military power system, he turned into the excess which the system has to eliminate” (Žižek 27). Changez, the quasi-perfect janissary, answers that question for us in his final encounter with the silent American. The spectre of international terror reflects global capitalism, collapsing narrator and interlocutor in the very last pages of the novel.

More than a simple recognition of the “American within,” Hamid’s commentary stresses the way corporate logic penetrates cultures and identities. Far from an exclu-

sively US product, neoliberalism flows smoothly into new international contexts and is seamlessly internalised by individuals independently of their backgrounds. Neoliberal multiculturalism can, of course, make use of old mythologies of success to fuel social, cultural, and political practices and policies that use the language of markets, efficiency, consumer choice, transactional thinking and individual autonomy. The flatness of Hamid's characters exposes how such logic shifts risk from governments and corporations onto individuals and extends this kind of market logic into the realm of social and affective relationships. Whereas in *Netherland*, Chuck Ramkinsoon can be seen – no doubt simplistically – as an unprincipled businessman who, not unlike Gatsby, finds a tragic death as a result of his shady approach to the American dream, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* it is not so much the individual but the system and its principles (the “fundamentals”) that are exposed and examined. Both novels, however, struggle with a search for vision and position in a post-traumatic society. Faced by the political mobilisation of mourning, post-9/11 New York becomes a setting that accommodates uncomfortably the “otherness” of characters such as Chuck or Changez in their various form of displacement. If for O'Neill the difficulty in finding a wide enough vision, capable of embracing the disparate realities that impact upon the life of his characters forces his narrator to retract into the personal, for Hamid ideological, economical and post-colonial forces shape the very sense of identity of his characters, reducing them, rather uncannily, to mere positions and poises. Overall, both novels struggle with the possibility of achieving a genuine cosmopolitan perspective regarding the changes brought about by 9/11: they reject the clichés associated with multiculturalism by mainstream political discourse and they expose the need to scrutinise new multicultural formations in light of colonial legacies and global economical forces.

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