

RESEARCH ARTICLE



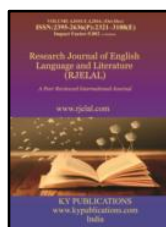
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

IDENTITY AND NATION-STATES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: A CRITICAL READING OF THE 'THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST'

SARASWATI

Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, Central University of Haryana, India
saraswatiashokkumar@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

The novel 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' by Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid traces the journey of a Pakistani immigrant to the United States and his experiences in a post 9/11 world. He encounters racial stereotypes in this journey of self-discovery which is similar to the journey of many immigrants in this globalized world. In this context, this paper attempts to read this novel from a historical and societal perspective by placing it in its proper setting that includes time and space. The article first traces the emergence of nation-states from a historical point of view to show how identity plays an important role in the formation of nation-states and thus are critical to their stability. It then proceeds to show how globalization, especially the manner in which it has been happening for the last few decades is creating multicultural societies where people live with conflicted identities and thereby unsure of their loyalties. This development, the paper argues is problematic for nation-states and is creating duress for both the state structures as well as for individual migrants. Nation-states thus have to revisit their identities and reform or restructure them such that they are suited for the changed circumstances of today. The article concludes by saying that Mohsin Hamid's novel highlights the dire needs for this to happen.

Keywords - Globalization, Identity, Immigration, Multiculturalism, Nation-States

1. Introduction

Globalization has been ongoing since the dawn of human societies and it has always influenced identities. Be it the Silk Road or other ancient routes, they did not just enable trade but also exported and imported identities, thereby shaping and reshaping cultures. The spread of Buddhism from India to South East Asia was along such trade routes which indicates how economic links can export and import not just products but also identities and culture. However, while globalization is not new, there has been a definite shift in the pace and manner of globalization in recent times. It is undeniable that the pace of

globalization has accelerated in the last few decades due to a combination of political and technological factors. The scale of this acceleration is so immense that this quantitative change has to be considered akin to a qualitative shift. In this context, to understand how this age of accelerated globalization is impacting identities across the world is of both academic and practical importance. While some argue that globalization will flatten identities and lead to a cosmopolitan global identity, this article argues that the experience of the last few decades indicates a somewhat more complicated trend. It is definitely true that a global culture and a common global identity is emerging in some quarters but that

trend is neither universal nor dominant. This article argues that this phase of Globalization has resulted in deterritorialization of culture which has enabled identities to become entrenched even if geographically displaced. The emergence of several factors like the availability of technological tools for instant global communication and cheaper travel has made it possible for even dislocated identities to retain aspects of their identity unlike previous migrants who invariably got assimilated. This unprecedented development is a challenge not only for nation states but for the Westphalian system itself. Using the book 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' written by Mohsin Hamid which documents the life of a Pakistani man in the United States.

The article is divided into four sections apart from introduction and conclusion. The first section discusses the relationship between nation states and identity, giving a historical and conceptual perspective. The second section explores the complicated impact globalization is having on nation states and the third section discusses how globalization impacts the identity of people of different countries, especially migrants. The fourth section discusses these conceptual formulations in the context of the book 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' by Mohsin Hamid.

2. Nation states and Identity

Nation states emerged fairly recently – after the peace of Westphalia of 1648 CE that ended the Thirty Years War in Europe [1]. Before the 1500s, in Europe or elsewhere in the world, the nation-state as we know today did not exist. Most people of those times did not consider themselves as part of a nation and as a matter of fact, most of them rarely left the village of their birth and did not associate with any broader identities, apart from their kin or clan identities. If anything, people were more likely to identify themselves with their particular region or local feudal lord. This also meant that kings and rulers of states frequently had very little control over their countries and had to rule in a decentralized manner and thus it was the local feudal lords who had a great deal of practical power, and even kings often had to continuously depend on the goodwill of their subordinates to rule. In times of war, they had to rely on the local feudal lords

marshalling their own armies to their support as states as such had no single standing army. There were no centralized laws and all kinds of bureaucratic practices varied a great deal from one part of the country to another. This was the nature of the feudal state [2].

However, starting with the early modern era, a number of rulers started the process of consolidating power by weakening the feudal lords and allying themselves with the emerging commercial classes who were a product of European exploration across the world that eventually resulted in colonialism fueled by the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution created new classes in society who challenged the power of the landed feudal aristocrats [3]. The kings and other rulers allied with these new classes and sought to centralize their power. This difficult process was often met with resistance from the feudal classes and sometimes required violence. The consolidation of power also took a very long time. This was hard work as Kings and queens had to work hard and imaginatively to bring all the people of their territories under unified rule. In this process, nationalism was born as monarchs intending to unite their subjects under one flag encouraged their subjects to feel loyalty toward the newly established nations through nationalist bonds. These endeavors were facilitated by spread of books due to prevalence of the printing press and increased travel due to invention of new modes of transport like the steam ship and others. Thus, the modern, centralized nation-state became clearly established in most of Europe during the nineteenth century and from there due to the colonial success of European states spread across the world, including to countries like India which came under British colonialism. Sovereignty and Centralization were key aspects of modern nation-states [4].

Thus, beginning from the 19th century, nationalism became a powerful force that bonded nation-states based on sentiments that were forged by elites through propaganda and reinterpretations of cultural history. In Europe, unifications of Italy and Germany are prime examples of this and later post-colonial states like India and many other African and Asian states emulated the same model.

Thus, the manner of emergence of nation-states shows why they came to signify not just a political entity but also a socio-cultural identity that is based on imagined or real cultural and historical bonds [5]. Identity has been thus a significant element of socio-political organization from time immemorial and this is especially true of nation states. Societies and also States, especially in the modern era, are nothing but a assembly of individuals and groups who are united by common threads of identity which are based on common history, culture and sometimes even language. The history of humankind has to be thus seen as the emergence of broader societal associations driven by emergent or expanding identities. Without the strong glue offered by social identities, one cannot imagine the present nation-state system and these identities continue to play a critical role in the state system. Nations which have a stronger internal identity are usually much more stable than nations which are not bound strongly by elements of identity. This is the reason nations which are relatively homogeneous like Japan and South Korea, comprising predominantly of people who possess Japanese and Korean national identities respectively are more stable internally than binational or multi-national states like Sri Lanka (Tamils and Sinhalese) and South Africa respectively [6].

3. Globalization and nation states

It is in this context of identity based nation-state system that globalization has to be located and understood. As noted earlier, globalization is not new but it has gained unprecedented acceleration in the past few decades due to chiefly political and social changes. The emergence of this phase of globalization can be traced back to the mid to late 1970s. This period marked a period of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union which allowed economic growth to spur. It also was the period when the Welfare State model of the West collapsed, leading to election of neo-liberal leaders like Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. These leaders, with the support of a group of economists promoted neo-liberal economic policies which included dismantling the welfare state, free market policies and deregulation. These economic policies encouraged free movement

of labour and capital across national borders and thereby fostering global economic integration. International economic institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund were enlisted to support and propagate this endeavor and thereby creating a global economic governance mechanism. These economic policies received a great fillip with political changes in the ensuing years which included the end of the Cold War with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Soviet Union's ideological stance of Communism was the only serious global alternative but with its fall, the neo-liberal capitalist economic and political order propagated by the Western countries became the undisputed choice for most countries of the world. Thus emergence of a Liberal International Consensus on trade and liberalization has broken barriers of travel, trade and culture. Social changes include increased migration and the emergence of multicultural societies facilitated by technological changes that have enabled cheaper travel and communication. Anthony McGrew defines the process of globalization as '*multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have a significant consequence for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe*' [7]. Philip Cerny's definition encapsulates the economic and political structures underpinning globalization - '*Globalization is defined here as a set of economic and political structures and processes deriving from the changing character of the goods and assets that comprise the base of the international political economy—in particular, the increasing structural differentiation of those goods and assets*' [8].

The acceleration of globalization in the last four decades has meant that the traditional role of nation states have been changed. Ann Marie Slaughter writes that '*A new world order is emerging, with less fanfare but more substance than either the liberal internationalist or new medievalist visions. The state is not disappearing, it is disaggregating into its separate, functionally distinct parts. These parts—courts, regulatory agencies, executives, and*

even legislatures—are networking with their counterparts abroad, creating a dense web of relations that constitutes a new, transgovernmental order... Transgovernmentalism offers its own world order ideal, less dramatic but more compelling than either liberal internationalism or the new medievalism. It harnesses the state's power to find and implement solutions to global problems' [9].

Globalization has thus weakened nation-states and has led to growth of international organizations, linkages and multilateral mechanisms which have taken away aspects of sovereignty traditionally held by nation-states. For instance the linkages of the international economic system now means that an economic crisis in the US or some other part of the world can impact the entire globe and nation states have no power to stop such impacts. Transnational threats like Terrorism & Climate change are also beyond the scope of nation-states and thus states have to engage with multilateral institutions. However, nation-states have retained their power or even increased them in certain areas like security but here as well new challenges like security in the cyber sphere etc., remain as challenges to national states and their power to regulate the lives of its citizens.

4. Globalization and Identity

With the advent of this wave of accelerated globalization, many scholars theorized that there will be a flattening of identities. 'Americanisation' or 'Westernisation' of global culture was predicted by many owing to the socio-political dominance of the West. A Cosmopolitan global identity was expected to emerge. It was expected that globalization will result in the loss of cultural diversity and consolidation of a dominant identity or a group of dominant identities. Thomas Friedman put it in this manner - 'Globalization has a distinctly American face: It wears Mickey Mouse ears, it eats Big Macs, it drinks Coke or Pepsi and it does its computing on an IBM or Apple laptop, using Windows... In most societies, people cannot distinguish any more between American power, American exports, American cultural assaults, American cultural exports and plain vanilla globalization. They are now all wrapped into one. Many societies around the world can't get enough of it' [10]. This remains a

huge concern for many who see it as paving the way to cultural imperialism. However, scholars like Tomlinson have challenged this view strongly. Evidence of last two decades indicate that there is no unidimensional consolidation of identity. The reverse is also happening. Globalisation has caused an amplification of identities, thus resulting in increased cultural consciousness among different groups. Identity formation has become chaotic according to Appadorai- 'United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscape' [11]. Francis Fukuyama agrees - 'I think that there is a global consumer culture that is spread by companies like McDonald's and Coca Cola. However, if you look beneath the surface and ask people in different countries where their loyalties lie, how they regard their families, and how they regard authority, there will be enormous differences. When people examine a culture, they pay too much attention to aspects like the kinds of consumer goods that people buy. That's the most superficial aspect of culture. A culture really consists of deeper moral norms that affect how people link together... What bothers me about the recent discussions of globalization is that people seem to think globalization is going to be much more homogenizing than it really is. In fact, I think that it will have the opposite effect' [12].

There has been a 'deterritorialization' of culture which is fueling the formation of transnational identities that are not tied to or by any geographical location. Globalization has thus enabled smaller cultural identities to persist and even thrive. Since culture has become deterritorialized, people of the same culture living in different geographical places are able to maintain their cultural identities and thus preserve their identities. Technological tools like social networking sites have enabled people to reinforce their identities, even if they were living thousands of miles away from their cultural homeland. One scholar, Bauman, puts this decentralized nature of globalization succinctly - 'the deepest meaning conveyed by the idea of globalization is that of the indeterminate, unruly and self-propelled character of world affairs, the absence of a centre, of a

controlling desk, of a board of directors or of a managerial office' [13]. In this decentralized cultural sphere, local identities which were traditionally tied to geographical spaces have become deterritorialized due to 'complex connectivity'. Cultural notions have become 'untethered' from spatial constraints and thereby making them 'mobile'. Deterritorialization of identities is hugely impacting Nation-States.

In earlier times, even if a minority group existed within a particular state, they remained largely isolated from their cultural homeland and as a result developed a resident state centric distinct identity. For e.g. European immigrants to North America in the 19th century. Yet, in recent times, because of deterritorialization, minority groups within states have been able to bond with people whom they perceive as having similar identity, even if separated by space and time, and thus are able to develop a transnational identity. Some call this phenomenon as transnational belonging. Even inside their resident countries, migrants are now able to organise better with people of their own kind and lobby for their interests in a consolidated manner. Also, owing to new forms of communication, translational media has emerged enabling people to nurture their transnational bonds. One scholar, Portes, aptly describes this phenomenon – *'dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries'* [14]. This 'multiculturalisation' of the world is only accelerating because today's international economy is so interconnected that it aids and enables global migration.

The emergence of such multicultural states, more precisely multicultural pockets within states is something states everywhere, especially in Europe are not used to. In these multicultural pockets, people with varied identities exist and thus their understanding of the world and 'who they are' tend to be vastly different from the dominant political discourse in a particular state. Since modern

communication enables these minority groups to remain in touch with their socio-ethnic-religious groups in other parts of the world, they are affected by events that affect their particular identity in any part of the world even if they are not geographically present there. Since, these extra territorial events cannot be controlled by nation-states, states are increasingly helpless. This has become increasingly problematic for nation-states. It is critical to understand how identity plays out among these extra-territorial citizens of nation-states. They are not only affected by the issues of the domestic nation-state level but also the events of transnational level. As one scholar, Jacquemet, puts it – *'The most important social implication of deterritorialisation is not the dissolution of identities, cultures, or nation states in a global environment... but the interplay between global and local processes, and the reconstitution of local social positioning within global cultural flows'* [15].

5. The Reluctant Fundamentalist [16]

It is this context, one of accelerated globalization and cultural identities getting entrenched, one has to understand the novel 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'. It is the experience of a migrant whose transnational belonging makes him go against his country of residence. The story of this novel begins on the streets of Lahore and the whole plot is narrated in first person by a Pakistani man called Changez who meets an American who is possibly a tourist and offers to direct this American visitor to a place where he can find a good cup of tea. They reach their destination and they wait for their tea when Changez begins to tell the long story about his life to this stranger, especially about his time living in the United States. The narration is interspersed in between with insightful remarks about the history, landmarks and society of Lahore, showing how he is grounded culturally in his native city which he loves greatly and of which he is very proud. This bearded Pakistani man's interest in a stranger and him going out of his way to help an American looks a bit suspicious in the eyes of the unnamed American who is restless but he remains to listen, enthralled either by the story or just because of nervous anticipation.

Changez tells the American that he was an outstanding student at college and after completing his bachelor's degree in Finance with good credits, he joined Underwood Samson, a consultancy firm, as an analyst. He also graduated from Princeton University and while he was vacationing in Greece with fellow Princetonians, he met Erica, who was an aspiring writer. He gets instantly smitten by her, but his feelings remained almost unreciprocated because she was still grieving over the death of her childhood sweetheart Chris, who died due to lung cancer. After a couple of dates, he convinces her to have a physical relationship with him, imagining him to be Chris for the time being to help her get over her mental blocks which she attempts. Though Changez is pleased at this growth in their relationship, this irrevocably damages their relationship as it affects her mental stability and soon she gets admitted in a mental institution for treatment. She loses herself and becomes increasingly unstable. After this, he travels to Chile on an assignment and when he returns to meet her, she has by then left the institution and her clothes were found near the Hudson River. She was most likely dead. This brief interlude the character has with an American/Western girl seems to indicate his cultural association with the West metaphorically, which starts off with great enthusiasm but ultimately is short lived and tragic. This is a poignant story which highlights the cultural complexities especially when Changez interacts with other people in Erica's lives who are shown to express casual racism and hold stereotypical views Muslims.

Changez comes as a foreigner to Princeton, yet his discipline and hard work gives him an advantage in the new corporate world and thus he makes progress in the career front. Yet, this world changes his identity and starts to give him a sense of belonging in America. At his firm, Underwood Samson, he sees himself as a trainee in the company, not a Pakistani. Thus he gets symbolically accepted by the nation. He is assimilating into its culture through love and financial pursuits. Thus, Changez, for a time, becomes, a typical New Yorker. However, at this juncture, 9/11 happens and it is not until 9/11 that he realises that America is acting against the interests of Pakistan and his people.

Changez begins to see his colleagues as resembling an elite, corporate crowd. Slowly, he grows to realize that he must choose between national loyalties, but we watch him become a 'reluctant' traitor to his homeland and in the end he clearly chooses Pakistan. This is a lesson he learns in his time spent in Chile where he learns he cannot have dual citizenship in terms of loyalties. Just as America's actions was destroying the livelihood of Chileans, the same will happen because of their military actions in Afghanistan which was also destabilizing Pakistan.

In the end, one can say that Changez never really fitted into the USA and 9/11 exacerbated his sense of not belonging. The character Changez is surprised by his own reaction to the September 11th attacks. *"Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased"*, he tells the American at one point. This pervasive sense of alienation sends Changez back to Pakistan for a visit to the old homestead. As a Pakistani, Changez also feels an innate sense of suspicion and hatred toward the U.S. for what he views as supporting the aggressive policies of India toward his homeland. And yet Changez is not entirely at home in Pakistan either as he had seen and somewhat enjoyed the cultural different offered by the West. This feeling of a lack of belonging remains vague and formless until he meets Juan Batista who views Changez as a janissary. The janissary were an elite warrior force that ultimately became the most influential political entity in the whole Ottoman Empire. As per historical record, they were also literally abducted from their own culture and reconstructed into a force trained to fight against their very own culture. It all comes home for Changez upon the realization that by working for the American corporate firm Underwood Samson, he is actually a warrior in the battle against Pakistani interests. He was in effect fight against his own people and society.

When he returns against to his homeland, he becomes a faculty in an university and he begins to give lectures against American interests and support anti-American demonstrations. Even so, he makes the claim that he never engages in or encourages violence. However, because of his anti-American lectures and people associated with him

indulging in acts of violence, he comes to be viewed as a fundamentalist in the eyes of some. As he nears the end of his narration, Changez notices that the Stranger does not seem to be paying full attention and is instead cautiously looking over his shoulder at a set of people who seemingly were following them. Changez tries to calm his restlessness by trying to convince the American that those people could be just innocent bystanders and there really is no reason to suspect harm might be coming his way without any cause just because it was Pakistan. He counsels the American Stranger that he should no more assume that all foreigners are likely to be terrorists than he himself should suspect that all Americans in Pakistan are spies who are there to undermine Pakistan. Just then the American puts his hand into his jacket, as if to take out a gun. This makes Changez to remind the man that they have become somewhat closely associated over the course of his conversation that day and then goes on to add that he very much hopes that what he is reaching for is a business card. The ending leaves it to the imagination of audience what happens next, whether the American reached for his gun, implying he was a spy sent to take out an anti-American ideologue, i.e. Changez or he was just reaching into his jacket to take out something more innocent like a business card. This poignant ending highlights how cultural stereotypes serves to exacerbate tensions in inter-cultural dialogues and the lack of trust is sometimes overwhelming, such that even people with good intentions often end up imagining the worst about others. The open ending leaves the audience to form their own judgments on what could have happened next based on their cultural biases and values. It is an invitation for the readers to engage their own inner cultural consciousness about others.

The plot of this novel and the character arc of Changez beautifully captures the travails of a migrant in today's world. His dislocation from his host country, in this case, Pakistan is never really complete, as events happening back home and to the larger international community, keeps influencing him and preventing him from fully assimilating into his new country, in this case the United States. His global exposure, which includes

travel to Chile and Philippines, also reinforces his cultural isolation and inhibits his inability to fit it with American culture. In the end, he finds himself as neither American, nor fully Pakistani. While the novel places very pertinent criticisms of American foreign policy, ultimately it remains as a human story, a journey of self-discovery of a young migrant who struggles to find meaning and purpose in a world that has become too small but at the same too divided. This is a journey many immigrants undergo and some of them get lost in this search and become radicalized to violent ideologies.

6. Conclusion

Banerjee and Linstead note that immigrants identities often clash with that of nation-states – *'transnational processes produce the globalisation of culture where a multitude of cultural flows, not always consistent with dominant nation-state ideologies emerge'* [17]. Hence, nation-states no longer can dominate the cultural and identity discourse within their boundaries. So, a country like the United States can no longer dictate what or how its citizens feel about its policies outside it. Foreign policy now creates as much impact as domestic policies within one country's territory. State apparatus need to be sensitized to the multicultural realities. Pluralistic national identities need to be developed rather than parochial ones. Existing consensus on issues like tolerance and limits of free speech need to be revisited. A globalized world is emerging but it is also creating polarization and discord with nation states because of lack of inter cultural engagement, inequalities of the global power system and prejudices that hold sway over millions of people, both in the West and outside. 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' is an attempt to capture this contradictions playing out in the life of one immigrant whose fate in the end is left hanging, just like the fate of millions of immigrants who find themselves at the crossroads of globalizations and rising nationalism in recent times.

Acknowledgements

This article is a critical reading of the 2007 novel 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' by Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid. His novel is thus acknowledged to be integral to this paper.

References

- Keith Suter (2003), *Global Order and Global Disorder: Globalization and the Nation-state*.
- Rodney Hilton (2006), *The Transition From Feudalism to Capitalism*.
- Jennifer L. Goloboy (2008) *Industrial Revolution: People and Perspectives*.
- George W. White (2007), *Nation, State, and Territory: Origins, Evolutions, and Relationships*.
- Sinisa Malesevic and Siniša Malešević (2013), *Nation-States and Nationalisms: Organization, Ideology and Solidarity*.
- Michael Burgess and John Pinder (2007), *Multinational Federations*.
- Anthony McGrew (1990), "A Global Society" in Stuart Hall, David Held, and Anthony McGrew (ed) *Modernity and Its Futures*.
- Philip G. Cerny (1997), "Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalization" in *Government and Opposition*.
- Anne-Marie Slaughter (1997), "The Real New World Order" in *Foreign Affairs*.
- Thomas Friedman (1998), "Foreign Affairs: Angry, Wired and Deadly" in *New York Times*.
- Arjun Appadurai (1996), *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*.
- Francis Fukuyama (1995), *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*.
- Zygmunt Bauman (2013), *Globalization: The Human Consequences*.
- Alejandro Portes (1997), "Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some problems and opportunities" in *International Migration Review*.
- Marco Jacquemet (2005), "Transidiomatic Practices: Language and Power in the Age of Globalisation" in *Language & Communication*.
- Mohsin Hamid (2007), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.
- Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee and Stephen Linstead (2001), "Globalization, Multiculturalism and Other Fictions: Colonialism for the New Millennium?" in *Organization*.