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“THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST” AND THE INHOSPITABLE  
STATE - ABRAHAMIC HOSPITALITY AND THE LIMITS OF  
MULTICULTURALISM

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”  
(Romans 12:13 NIV)

“he who believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality  
to his guest” (Sahih Muslim hadith, Book 1 Hadith 75)

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, conservative political scientist Samuel Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” earned a brief resurgence in the American press. Huntington posited that there existed eight civilizations across the world that were doomed to battle against each other for supremacy.<sup>1</sup> Edward Said made a devastating rebuttal of the thesis in *The Nation*, arguing that in Huntington:

the personification of enormous entities called “the West” and “Islam” is recklessly affirmed, as if hugely complicated matters like identity and culture existed in a cartoonlike world where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly, with one always more virtuous pugilist getting the upper hand over his adversary. Certainly neither Huntington nor Lewis has much time to spare for the internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization, or for the fact that the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition or interpretation of each culture, or for the unattractive possibility that a great deal of demagoguery and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilization. No, the West is the West, and Islam Islam<sup>2</sup> (n.pag).

Though the response of “Western” countries like the United States to the 9/11 and other bombings has been to often reaffirm the Christian foundations of these countries, Said reminds us of the complicated nature of multicultural countries and regions, and the mixed and sometimes conflicting allegiances to nation, religion, family, race, ethnicity.

Mohsin Hamid’s 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*<sup>3</sup> charts this complex territory through the story of Changez, a Pakistani who had emigrated to the

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<sup>1</sup> Huntington, S. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

<sup>2</sup> Said, E. “The Clash of Ignorance” in *The Nation* (2001).

<sup>3</sup> Hamid, M. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007).

United States to do his degree at Princeton, began a lucrative career with an elite valuation firm called Underwood Samson and a romance with the beautiful Erica, only for the events of September 11 to intervene and his sojourn in the U.S come to an end. On his return to Pakistan he then becomes radicalized and though it is unclear, may in fact be the reluctant fundamentalist of the novel's title. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a very different 9/11 novel than those by many American writers. Literary critic David Holloway has argued that the "9/11 novel" already represents a distinctive genre in and of itself, one largely conglomerated around notable writers like Don DeLillo and Philip Roth.

As Holloway argues, novels like Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, "generalised from contemporary events a working definition of historical experience as trauma [. . .] The early 9/11 novel generally understood history to be governed by random factors [. . .] rather than motivated decision-making, policy initiatives or the working through of vested interests."<sup>4</sup>

The 9/11 novel understood this way is therapeutic, de-historicizing and largely de-politicizing. In contrast, Hamid's novel is politically aware, subtly educating its readers in the ways in which American geo-power is used globally and in the United States itself. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* powerfully suggests that one of the consequences of the 9/11 attacks is the failure of American (post) Christians to take seriously the religious duties of Abrahamic hospitality for their Muslim siblings. When confronted with alterity, the American state proves to be profoundly inhospitable for the Pakistani Muslim immigrant. Arguably, this failure of hospitality is a *religious* failure, which therefore produces a religious response in the form of terrorist violence.

#### *Hospitality*

In all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), hospitality is a religious duty. From Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis (*Bereishit* in Hebrew) to Muhammad and the cave to Mary's Annunciation, each begins with a certain meeting with alterity, and each includes injunctions towards practicing hospitality to strangers. One might consider Christ's commandment in Matthew, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (7:12, NIV), or the teaching of the Prophet that "Islam began as a stranger, and it will become a stranger.

So blessed are those who are strangers" (Sahih Muslim, book 1 Hadith 270). Indeed, injunctions towards treating strangers well can be found not only in the three Abrahamic religions, but in numerous other traditions too. Richard Kearney cites seven faiths – Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and Taoism – that contain instructions towards

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<sup>4</sup> Holloway, D. *Cultures of the War on Terror: Empire, Ideology, and the Remaking of 9/11* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2008), 107.

treating others as one might wish to be treated.<sup>5</sup> How to respond ethically to the stranger has long been a peculiar fixation of religions.

More recently, studies on hospitality have become a hot topic in continental philosophies of religion, in France and the United States alike. In particular, Jacques Derrida's late work devoted significant amounts of attention to the subject. Derrida rightly argued that hospitality is not one ethics amongst other ethics, but rather the very foundation of culture. In his article "Hostipality," he introduced his idea of absolute or radical hospitality through an analysis of Christian-Islamic relations in the late French writer Louis Massignon's travels throughout the Middle East.

Derrida points out that hospitality by its very nature must be unforced—"if I say to the other, upon announcement of his coming [*sa venue*], 'come in' [*Entrez donc*], without smiling, without sharing with him some signs of joy, it is not hospitality."<sup>6</sup> Derrida goes on further to say that hospitality cannot occur if it is only given to those who one invites, to the already acceptable. Instead, he argues that "radical hospitality consists, would have to consist, in receiving without invitation, beyond or before the invitation."<sup>7</sup> Radical hospitality in this account would demand an unforced welcome to an unexpected arrival, a difficult, perhaps impossible openness to the Other.

Beyond its sources in the canonical texts of the Abrahamic, the post-structuralist analysis of Derrida, Kearney and others resuscitate several perhaps more marginal interpretations of this theme of hospitality. Kearney reminds us of the tradition in Sufi poetry of equating the divine with the stranger or guest in the works of poets like Rumi, Hallah, Hafiz, and Kabir Das.<sup>8</sup> Hafiz asks, "if God had invited you to a party, and said, 'Everyone in the ballroom tonight will be my special Guest, How would you treat them when you arrived?'"<sup>9</sup> To honor the guest is to honor God.

Derrida draws an even more radical conclusion on this theme in *The Gift of Death*, his meditation on the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham in Genesis 22, when he reminds us that the infinite alterity of God differs from the infinite alterity of any other Other (*tout autre*). Derrida suggests that "everyone else [. . .] is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessibility, solitary, transcendent."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, "what can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to every one (one) as every (bit) other" (78). The opacity of the Other—any Other—prevents us from making any firm distinctions between God and any Other. In other words, in a certain sense, the guest *is* God.

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<sup>5</sup> Kearney, R. *An-atheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011), 150.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, J. "Hostipality" in *Acts of Religion*, translated by Gil Anidjar. ed. Gil Anidjar, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 358.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, 360.

<sup>8</sup> Kearney, 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, J. *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 78.

Derrida preempts objections to this theme of absolute openness to the Other, when he acknowledges that the undecidability of openness to the Other is a risky move. There is after all a volatility in the very etymology of the word “hospitality” in Latin, which signals both hostility *and* hospitality. Derrida points out that “for pure hospitality or pure gift to occur there must be absolute surprise [. . .] an opening without horizon of expectation [. . .] to this newcomer whoever he be. The newcomer may be good or evil, but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house, if you wish to control this and exclude this terrible possibility, there is no hospitality.”<sup>11</sup>

In the post 9/11 age of terrorism, immigrants and refugees, this is a hard demand for anyone to make—to expose themselves and others to risk. Kearney makes an interesting critique of Derrida’s theory of hospitality when he asks “what is to prevent us saying yes to a malevolent agent as much as to a transcendent God who comes to save and liberate us?”<sup>12</sup> Nothing indeed. Yet Derrida affirms the necessity of this move, for to begin to make conditions on *which* Others arrive is to cross out the very possibility of the utterly new occurring. Ironically for those on the Christian Right in the United States, the fear of the unexpected incursion of alterity (notably, Muslim and immigrant) may also be considered an attempt to ward off the sacred.

The necessity of the openness to the Other is noted further by Derrida in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001),<sup>13</sup> where he turns his attention specifically to immigration and the modern nation-state. Derrida traces the concept of hospitality through its Roman, early Christian, Jewish and medieval roots. Against the Kantian linking of the nation-state with unconditional hospitality, Derrida suggests that metropolises become “cities of refuge,”<sup>14</sup> a term he takes from Emmanuel Levinas’s Talmudic readings,<sup>15</sup> saying “whether it be the foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person (the task being as much to distinguish prudently between these categories as is possible), we would ask these new cities of refuge to reorient the politics of the state.”<sup>16</sup>

The city, against the violence of the nation-state, should offer a place of refuge, and in the process change the politics of the state towards the hospitable. It is unsurprising though that in the face of the tragedy of

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida, J. “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida” in *Questioning Ethics*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Kearney, R. *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2001), 76.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, J. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, translated by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Derrida 2001, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Levinas states that “the city of refuge is the city of a civilization or of a humanity which protects subjective innocence and forgives objective guilty and all the denials that acts inflict on intentions” (51). Interestingly, he links the city of refuge with the political project of Zionism, which is “nor one more nationalism or particularism” (52) but is a hope centered on the earthly place of Jerusalem. Levinas, E. “Cities of Refuge,” *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, translated by Gary D. Mole (London and New York: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Derrida 2001, 4.

September 11 that even a city as famously hospitable to the unexpected arrival of the Other as New York would fail that vital task. It is this failure that Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* takes up.

*Multiculturalism's Limited Acceptance*

Narrated in the first person from a cafe in Lahore, Pakistan, Changez takes on the role of the host to his American companion. He offers his largely silent guest local tea and imported soda, having a long extended meal with him whilst regaling him with the story of his failed immigration to the US. He says that, "it is a mark of friendship when someone treats you to a meal – ushering you thereby into a relationship of mutual generosity."<sup>17</sup> This generosity is repeated both in Pakistan and in the US, when Changez's friend Wainwright purchases him a meal.<sup>18</sup>

Through this move, we will see that while there is undoubtedly friendship and generosity between the two, there is far from mutuality of the relationship between Changez and his companion, the United States. In particular, through this portrayal of hospitality, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* stages the antinomies of contemporary American multiculturalism and its relation to terrorism. As literary critic Anna Hartnell points out, while *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* "critiques the melting pot conception of American society in its manifestations both before and after 9/11 – indeed, the novel questions this supposed break – it also insists on a shared vision of society that eludes many accounts of multiculturalism" (2010, 337).<sup>19</sup>

In New York, Changez meets an initial acceptance of the sort proclaimed by the multiculturalist discourse. His classmates at Princeton and workmates at Underwood Samson are accepting, even occasionally celebratory of his cultural difference. Changez has dinner with Erica and her parents, "[taking] advantage of the ethnic exception that is written into every code of etiquette and a starched white kurta of delicately woven cotton over a pair of jeans."<sup>20</sup> Erica states that he "looks great" (50), while her mother notes approvingly to Erica, "very nice."<sup>21</sup>

Changez suggests that it was a "testament to the open-mindedness and – that overused word – cosmopolitan nature of New York that [he] felt completely comfortable in this attire" (48). Changez's work, too, appears similarly accepting, with him quickly rising through the ranks of the firm, granted more and more responsibility. He is, in Homi Bhabha's words, "almost the same, but not quite."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, for Changez, New York is the multicultural city par excellence, for as he states:

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<sup>17</sup> Hamid, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Hamid, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Hartnell, A. "Moving Through America: Race, Place and Resistance in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46, no. 3 (2010), 337.

<sup>20</sup> Hamid, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>22</sup> Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 127.

...moving to New York felt—so unexpectedly—like moving home. But there were other reasons as well: the fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli; the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I had danced at my cousin's wedding.<sup>23</sup>

With the presence of so many diasporic communities, New York has long been one of the most welcoming—hospitable—cities in the United States for immigrants. Changez feels himself to be less an American than a New Yorker. An island of conviviality, New York can be seen to operate as a model of Derrida's cities of refuge.

#### *The Failure of Hospitality*

Yet even in the first bloom of his success in New York, it is clear that Changez's acceptance is conditioned largely on his assimilation to the norms of the American ruling class. At Underwood Samson, "we were marvelously diverse...and yet we were not: all of us, Sherman included, hailed from the same elite universities—Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale; we all exuded a sense of confident self-satisfaction; and not one of us was either short or overweight."<sup>24</sup> Certain kinds of alterity have been excluded, foreclosed from the start.

Here, hospitality is only offered to those who appear not to need it, something noted by Changez's boss Jim who approves of him precisely *because* of his ability to mask financial need.<sup>25</sup> The social norms at Underwood Samson (that is, US) mirror the broader thematics of the multicultural state, in particular the ways in which "immigration control" only offers refuge to "those who cannot expect the slightest economic benefit upon immigration."<sup>26</sup> As Hartnell puts it, "the firm of Underwood Samson embodies a utilitarian version of the melting pot, thus highlighting a national culture determined to assimilate difference only as past, as history."<sup>27</sup>

After September 11, however, Changez is made crucially aware that New York is a part of the United States. He notes the rapid and ubiquitous appearance of flags everywhere:

Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields and windows; large flags fluttered from buildings. They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America*—not New York, which in my opinion means something quite different—*we are the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath.*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hamid, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Hamid, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Derrida 2001, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Hartnell, 342.

<sup>28</sup> Hamid, 39; italics original.

Hamid keenly uses the word “civilization” here, which has its corollary the falsely homogenizing “Islamic” in Huntington’s theory. As Paul Gilroy shows in *Postcolonial Melancholia*,<sup>29</sup> the idea of the civilization works as a moral injunction, proclaiming a homogeneity that *ought* to be, and working to foreclose the kinds of pre-existing difference that already exist within the modern state, requiring “any cosmopolitan consciousness or commitment to be ridiculed.”

Indeed, this defensive show of patriotism and pain quickly turned into hate. The climate of the United States becomes (and remains) decidedly unfriendly for many people from the Middle East and the subcontinent. The “American” wrath Changez describes is scattershot, applied to those believed to “look” Muslim. This is indeed a nebulous idea, a slide between religion and race that can attach to many forms of alterity – Lebanese restaurants were held to be suspicious if not flying American flags in their windows in the aftermath of 9/11,<sup>30</sup> whilst Sikhs ran an advertising campaign “a turban is not a hat.”<sup>31</sup>

Queer theorist Jasbir Puar suggests that the phenomenon of “misrecognition” in the racist backlash against Sikhs involves a return of the repressed, a re-emergence of racial scapegoating against the community in a time of crisis.<sup>32</sup> Gilroy puts the situation acerbically but not inaccurately when he says that “the [multicultural] corpse is now being laid to rest amid the multiple anxieties of the war on terror” (2004, 1) – a situation which is only been exacerbated by the recent turns toward protectionist nationalism in Trump’s America. Wendy Brown has noted the increased “tensions between national interests and the global market, hence between the nation and the state, and between the security of the subject and the movements of capital”<sup>33</sup> arguing that these have become incarnated in the walls springing up in and between nations. Multiculturalism has become increasingly constituted as threatening to the imagined-white nation, with the term “globalist” has sprung up as a new insult from the anti-immigration right wing in the US.

Changez’s turn towards true alterity begins at the level of the visual. After coming home to Pakistan as war with India threatens to break out, Changez returns to the United States with a full beard, a sign of silent protest at the United States’ complicity with India’s aggression. He says, “it is remarkable, given its insignificance – it is only a hairstyle, after all – the impact a man of my complexion has on your fellow countrymen.”<sup>34</sup> At work, Changez becomes “overnight a subject of whispers and stares.”<sup>35</sup> Wainwright, his Jamaican friend and colleague at Underwood Samson, suggests that Changez shave the beard off, because despite the firm’s multiracial appearance, “you

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<sup>29</sup> Gilroy, P. *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Butler, J. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Puar, J. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2007), 166.

<sup>32</sup> Puar, 194.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, W. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone, 2010), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Hamid, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Hamid, 130.

need to be careful. The whole corporate collegiality veneer goes so deep. Believe me."<sup>36</sup> Simply through a change in hairstyle Changez becomes suspect to his colleagues because of the semiotic function of the beard on a Pakistani man—a sign of visual Muslimness. In a parking lot, Changez has a confrontation with a stranger who calls him a “fucking Arab.”<sup>37</sup>

A liberal reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* might suggest that what Changez experiences after September 11 is the failure of “tolerance.” Brown has shown us the problems with “tolerance” discourse, which naturalizes and represses a presumed inherent antagonism to difference. She suggests, with regard to racial, sexual, ethnic and religious minorities, “these are ascriptive identities of a very particular sort: they harbor orders of belief, practices, or desires cast as significant enough to provoke the rejection or hostility that makes tolerance necessary.”<sup>38</sup> For Brown, the “object of tolerance is not the group but rather individual marked subjects who carry the group identity.”<sup>39</sup>

As these metaphors of writing (ascriptive, marked) suggest, the object of tolerance is a person whose difference is somehow legible, somehow readable. In a broader sense, Brown suggests that tolerance forms part of a post 9/11 civilizational discourse of Western superiority that holds out openness and “freedom” as unique characteristics of the West.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, it masks the continued aggression of the West pursued in domestic politics against the perceived “foreign agents” inside the nation—immigrants, refugees, Muslims, LGBT communities. It is for this reason that instead of engaging in the problematic tolerance discourse, Gilroy prefers to speak of cosmopolitanism and conviviality as modes of “living with” difference.

Hamid paints a contrast between the “tolerated” subject of multiculturalism and the entitlement of privileged Americans abroad. Changez travels to group with some friends from Princeton to Greece in the summer after they have finished their undergraduate degrees. Changez notes their self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service. “

But you *told* us,” they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way. I [. . .] found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions [. . .] were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, for the rest of the world, hospitality with this ruling class brings with it not only self-righteousness, but considerable danger. Changez’s hospitality for the American in Lahore ends with the chilling suggestion that the man, a potential CIA agent, has killed him (“I detect a glint of metal”<sup>42</sup>). Yet this is as Derrida points out, a necessary risk of radical hospitality.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, W. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2006), 45.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, 145.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Hamid, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Hamid, 184.

The relation between the multiculturalist state and the immigrant/terrorist in *The Reluctant Terrorist* has the ambivalent vacillation between love and hate described in Homi Bhabha's psychoanalysis of the postcolonial subject. Bhabha states that for the colonialist, "the frustrated wish 'I want him to love me' turns into its opposite 'I hate him' and then through projection, and the exclusion of the first person, 'he hates me.'"<sup>43</sup> Arguably the colonialist wish for love is the desire for the same – the native subject who is the same or wishes to be the same, the almost the same but not quite.

The apprehension of the Other's difference – in the form of a Muslim man's beard, say – then causes the rejection and then projection of hate onto the Other. Hamad raises the possibility of Changez having truly been a terrorist in his radicalization after leaving America, however it remains solely at the level of conjecture, a fantastic projection which may or may not be true.

Arguably however, Changez mimics back this same affective structure to the multiculturalist State, albeit in a modified order (I want him to love me-he hates me-I hate him). It is for *this* reason that Hamid's immigrant is not the subaltern migrant to the United States ala undocumented cook Biju in Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*, who is not desired by the State.<sup>44</sup> Changez is the very embodiment of the American Dream – a scholarship student to one of the country's elite universities, hired by an select firm, friend of old money. Changez does, by his own telling, love America (at least in the form of New York), yet he also begins to hate it, so much so that he begins to organize students in Lahore to demonstrate against American foreign policy interventions. Yet if there is a third stage of "he hates me" it is drawn with the curious ambivalence of a failed love affair.

Hamid clearly writes Changez and Erica's relationship as an allegory for the relation of Muslim immigrants to the United States. Erica is attracted to Changez, yet is deeply in thrall to her own lost love Chris – a childhood sweetheart who had died of leukemia. Changez and Erica are unable to make love because of this, except for one time in which Erica fantasizes that Changez is Chris, resulting in her becoming trapped even further in her own attachment to loss. Erica ultimately fails to love Changez for himself, just as the multiculturalist state assimilates and then fails to embrace anyway. As Erica is attached to her lost love object, so to the nation-state remains stubbornly attached to its own lost imagined past (that is, as a white nation).

Hartnell points out that Chris's name recalls Christopher Columbus, the agent of European colonialism who "discovered" America *and* Christ. She suggests, problematically I think, that Chris represents "Europe's Christian roots,"<sup>45</sup> foreclosing the presence of Christianity from this examination of the present-day American state. In contrast, I would like to suggest that the United States remains Christian in a substantial sense, and that it is an

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<sup>43</sup> Bhabha, 142.

<sup>44</sup> Desai, K. *The Inheritance of Loss* (New York: Grove, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Hartnell, 343.

insufficient attention to the ethical demands of Abrahamic religion which prevents it from embracing the ecumenical radical form of hospitality which Derrida argues for.

While the unholy mixture of evangelical Protestantism and right-wing politics has produced a country which undoubtedly does not practice openness to the stranger, the textual traditions which found the Abrahamic religions are clear on the ethical demands of hospitality. A truly Christian United States would not merely be the limited acceptance of the multicultural state, but rather which signals further back to the city of refuge whose trace can still be found in New York.

### *Conclusion*

If it is true that the *Reluctant Fundamentalist* charts the United States' *failure* at accepting true alterity, the possibility nevertheless remains inherent in the Abrahamic (it is, after all, the pre-condition of culture itself). Hartnell makes the intriguing suggestion that Erica represents the survival of American exceptionalism and innocence, an attachment that mutes the novel's otherwise unrelenting explosion of the two. For Erica, her inward eye is incapable of embracing Changez's narrative, just as the wider political culture is incapable of valuing Muslim lives on a par with those of Americans.

Yet Erica's isolation is not only sympathetically drawn but curiously alluring. She remains completely impervious to Changez's non-violent – and indeed very gentle – protestations, for her own notably self-destructive narrative wields far more power. In following her trail Changez himself reluctantly participates in the compelling drama of American innocence (345). Hartnell points to the melancholic last meeting of the two at an institution where Erica is being treated. A nurse tells Changez that “right now you're the hardest person for her to see. You're the one who upsets her the most.

Because you're the most real and you make her lose her balance.”<sup>46</sup> Hartnell argues that that that this exchange can be read as suggesting that “Changez is the ideal vehicle by which Erica might be wrested away from Chris and thus made more truly American.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, (Amer) Erica might be returned to herself by the reality of the Muslim migrant. Hartnell suggests that this recalls the narratives by which the country has historically legitimated itself as exceptional, which has “has historically collaborated with notions of superiority and racial chauvinism.”<sup>48</sup>

Yet perhaps we can also see this as the briefest flare of Abrahamic hospitality. Erica tells Changez “you look cute [. . .] your beard brings out your eyes.”<sup>49</sup> Changez's beard, the very sign of his alterity and rejection by the multiculturalist state, is also capable of being appreciated by the United States. By implication, Muslims too are capable of being appreciated by the US, and indeed not merely because of desire, but an Abrahamic form that

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<sup>46</sup> Hamid, 133.

<sup>47</sup> Hartnell, 345.

<sup>48</sup> Hartnell, 356.

<sup>49</sup> Hamid, 134.

gives by receiving. Rather than conditional acceptance, Erica's comment that Changez's beard "brings out your eyes" suggests that it is the signs of alterity itself that add to his attractiveness, that bring out his best features as well as returning Erica to herself. In this briefest of exchanges, we see the ways in which "bringing out" may be a coming in [*Entrez donc*], and tarrying with alterity may be an Abrahamic "here I am."

If we follow Derrida's arguments about hospitality, we may see how a cosmopolitan living *with* difference may also be a living with the divine in our midst.