Globalization and New Instances of Strangeness[1]

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Abstract: *Globalization significantly alters the individual's perception of the world by erasing borders, overlapping spaces and inducing a constant need for movement. In this context, notions like home, center, identity, otherness or estrangement are deconstructed in the process of creating a new paradigm of existence. Therefore, globalization introduces a new type of individual, characterized by a constant need for movement between spaces. The negative attributes of deracination become necessary for coping with the changes of the world as such. Literature, as an expression of how we relate to the world, bears the signs of this mutation in advancing a new type of character, situated at the center of the global discourse. In this paper, I will tackle this issue by analyzing two works which exemplify this new type of character:* Lunetistul [The Sniper] *by Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari and* The Reluctant Fundamentalist *by Mohsin Hamid.*

Keywords: *literature, globalization, identity, conflict, strangeness*

Résumé : *La globalisation modifie d'une façon importante la perception individuelle du monde par l'effacement des frontières, par la superposition des espaces et par l'induction d'un besoin constant pour le mouvement. Dans ce contexte, des notions comme le foyer, le centre, l'identité, l'altérité ou l'éloignement sont déconstruites dans le processus de créer un nouveau paradigme de l'existence. Par conséquent, la globalisation introduit un nouveau type d'individu, caractérisé par un besoin de mouvement constant entre les espaces. Les attributs négatifs du déracinement deviennent nécessaires pour l'adaptation aux changements du monde en tant que tel. La littérature, une expression de la manière de nous rapporter au monde, porte les signes de cette mutation en avançant un nouveau type de personnage, situé au centre du discours global. Dans cet article, nous allons aborder la question en analysant deux œuvres qui exemplifient ce nouveau type de personnage :* Lunetistul [Le tireur d'élite] *par Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari et* The Reluctant Fundamentalist [L'intégriste malgré lui] *par Mohsin Hamid.*

Mots-clés : *littérature, globalisation, identité, conflit, étrangeté*

The socio-economic phenomenon of globalization, characterized by the increasing interdependence of world economies and the international flow of information, dislocates not only people, but concepts and realities alike. Despite the fact that extensive talks regarding the issue of the global, understood both as a cultural concept and as an economic reality, have failed to put together a unitary view on the subject, the world is characterized by continuous motion, an instability of landmarks and technological developments that

seem to alter the perception of time and space. In this context of interconnectedness and interdependence maintained by the reality of unprecedented mobility, the very issue of identity is at stake, as the individual is no longer defined in relation to a stable paradigm of belonging, but caught between the local and the global (Hall 41). In this context, identity needs to be enlarged and reframed beyond conventional structures, according to the new global-scale realities. More and more attributes related to exile, deracination and displacement are presented as characterizing life in a globalized world. In exchange, whatever is related to the stable structures of existence (home, nationality, center, etc.) is either redefined, or considered negative by comparison. As a result, a new vocabulary of belonging was imposed through various theories, all generated by the acknowledgement of the fact that previous paradigms had proved insufficient. From Adjurn Appadurai's "ethnoscape" (33) to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," Stuart Hall's new definition of ethnicity (47) and Imre Szeman's "national belonging" (201), all researchers focus on constructing a new vocabulary meant to characterize the contemporary status of the individual in the globalized world, perceived not as a mosaic of separate spaces, but as an interconnected whole.

Therefore, it comes only natural that the individual has to be referred to as situated between cultures, beyond nationalities and always on the move. But this movement is not isolated from context, as the individual moves on routes generated in relation to economic and social realities. In Aihwa Ong's words, this type of "flexible subject," "the multiple passport holder (...) embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets" (2). The deracination of the individual is the result of social and economic upheavals taking place in the world around him, where the control moves from national to economic agents. Movement is a newly gained freedom, oblivious of borders other than individual ones, and yet conditioned by external factors, in constant relation to one another. The other, therefore, is no longer separated from the self by clear-cut borders, as he/she is no longer placed outside, comfortably out of reach, but moves closer to the self, in the immediate proximity of a constant here and now. As a result, the unprecedented movement of people and the new technological developments that shorten distances and save time also generate anxieties, which translate into an awareness of fluid landmarks.

Therefore, the claim that identity cannot be formed in the absence of the other is reconsidered in the context of the global, where exclusion, separation from a foreign other is no longer possible. In fact, in outlining the portrait of a global self, the emphasis is placed on the relational structures of identity. As Christian Moraru argues when defining cosmodernism, "relation is a new *sui generis ratio mundi*" (29). He explains the phenomenon in the following terms:

> We are living, or so we hear, asserts the researcher, in a "network society" where the "production of identity and meaning" individually and collectively, in "our" culture, involves, indeed necessitates recurring references to other cultures. (Moraru 35)

Due to the free movement of people as part of a mobile workforce, the other, the foreigner, comes closer, in a transnational environment, bringing with him/her an entire cultural inheritance. At an individual level, cultures are brought together in a constant dialogue and negotiation of differences. The individual is therefore no longer defined by a clear spatial relation between sameness and difference, since difference itself, understood as distance between self and other, diminishes until it disappears altogether. Difference is now near us, within us, as a constitutive part of our identity, setting the world in motion, as Stuart Hall asserts (49). This means that identity incorporates difference, and the self is perceived as an interface of influences and interactions, oppositions and contradictions, and, most importantly, the base for dialogue.

This reshaping of the self puts emphasis on the need of a dialogical perspective on identity, based on difference and the acknowledgement that the other is closer than ever to the self. In this context, Humbert J.M. Hermans and Giancarlo Dimaggio advance the model of a "dialogical self," "involved in internal and external interchanges and that never reaches a final destination. This self is conceived of as open to an ambiguous other and is in flux toward a future that is largely unknown" (35).

This definition presupposes the outlining of the self in permanent relation to another, in constant movement, and characterized by instability. Accordingly, the self cannot be but fluid, nomadic, equal only to itself at a given moment in time. Otherness is, therefore, equally exterior and interior, because, as the two researchers assert,

> the increasing interconnectedness of nations and cultures does not only lead to an increasing contact between different cultural groups but also to an increasing contact between cultures within the individual person. Different cultures come together and meet each other within the self of one and the same individual. (Hermas and Dimaggio 35)

For that matter, there is a recurrent need of distancing oneself from oneself, of periodically becoming the other, in order to make sense of the self. Therefore, the acknowledgement and acceptance of differences (both internal and external) enable dialogue and relations with the other.

There has been much talk about the multiplicity of the self; it is by no means a new subject. Suffice it to say that postmodernism does not accept the idea that the self can be otherwise than multiple and embodying otherness. Thinking back to Lacan's theories, one can easily observe that otherness and instability are essential factors in defining identity, even if not in connection to the contemporary global realities (271). In fact, Hall argues that we can no longer talk of a unitary logic of identity after Marx (43). We should also mention exiled and diasporic writers, who understood early on that constructing identity according to stable national and cultural landmarks can only lead to crisis. Edward Said, for example, penned a genuine manifesto of the deracinated individual, in which he posits that the self is situated obliquely between cultures, a privileged position which enables a different perspective on things (117). Globalization reinforces these kinds of perspectives as necessary for adapting to the social and economic context. All in all, it encourages a

reconsideration of the self, perceived in a continuous dialogue with his own embodied differences. The outcome of globalization is that a borderless world raises new questions regarding the limits of movement as slippage from one instance of identity to the other, from sameness to incorporating difference.

Therefore, the present paper discusses two such stories of the self, focusing on outlining the portrait of an individual able to function within the globalized world: *Lunetistul* by the Romanian writer Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari, and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by the Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid. The comparison of the two novels will prove the aforementioned interconnectedness of spaces, as, despite the fact that the two writers come from opposite corners of the world, they both show in their works that people, when faced with the new realities of globalization, are prone to the same anxieties over the instability of landmarks.

Contrary to Romanian culture, which embraced capitalism after 1989 as an idealized alternative to the Communist autarchy, Pakistani culture defines itself in relation to Islam, which rejects globalization as a menace to national identity. Hence, if in the Romanian novel, global realities redesign the world in a borderless territory that enables the individual to take a personal stand on his cultural and national inheritance, the Pakistani novel points to a deeper conflict between worlds, a conflict which takes place within the individual. Despite these differences, both protagonists reflect various instantiations of the globalized self and define identity in relation to a constantly shifting otherness.

It is also worth mentioning that, alike their characters, the writers themselves have a firsthand experience with the globalized world: Marin Mălaicu Hondrari is a Romanian-born writer who travelled all around the world, switching countries and jobs in a continuous search for identity, based on experiencing the economic forces of globalization. Therefore, all his characters are contaminated with this same nomadic view on life and all his works deal with the deep-seated instability of the world, in a back-and-forth movement between postmodern literary theory and the context of the global. Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistani writer educated in the US. Focusing more on the economic aspects of contemporaneity, Hamid's novels address anxieties related to the failure of the neoliberal narrative of globalization, which generate the deracination of people in search for a better life. Both writers tell their stories through their (somewhat autobiographical) characters, who become, in this context, fragmentary alternatives of the self. Both protagonists—Constantin from Mălaicu-Hondrari's novel (a hired killer travelling all around the world with secret identities) and Changez from Mohsin Hamid's book (a financial analyst working for one of the best consultancy firms in the United States)—are in constant motion, going from one place to another, changing one identity for another.

Although this understanding of travelling as a means of exploring the world as well as the self is by no means new, this particular type of nomadic character distinguishes itself from previous types of travelers by incorporating certain anxieties as a response to the contemporary social and economic realities of globalization. This type of traveler is conditioned not by a need of discovering the world, but by the economic routes generated

by globalization. The individual moves from one place to the other not for heroic deeds or because he is running away from the past, but in order to ensure his economic survival and to attain a certain lifestyle, itself generated by globalization. Moreover, intercultural references and travelling between places scattered all over the world blur distances and play an important part in constructing the profile of a self always placed between worlds. Therefore, it is not movement itself that is new, but the reason behind it. This translates into easily deracinated, adaptable characters who understand the fluidity of all landmarks and who are not driven by the deracinating forces of history (like exiled or diasporic writers), but rather by an inner need for finding something particular, be it a place of belonging (Changez's case) or a certain structure of identity (Constantin's case). Both characters are instantiations of a sort of movement that would not be possible in a different social context and could only exist in a world without traditional borders. This movement translates into their professional patterns, themselves a consequence of the globalized world: Constantin moves around to kill targets, from one job to the other, and Changez moves in order to audit various companies, wherever he is sent by his multi-national employer. Displaced from their native spaces, the characters do not suffer from the traumas of separation; they do have anxieties related to what they leave behind, but these anxieties do not incapacitate them in adapting to a new social context or keep them prisoners in an idealized paradigm of belonging. In fact their cultural inheritance contains the very essence of the nomadic existence. For example, Constantin's father is characterized by the inability to grow roots, and this is the reason why he fails at being a good parent: because he cannot provide stability for his children. He is the embodiment of the Deleuzo-Guattarian nomad (Deleuze and Guattari 44), disturbing the lives of those around him. Constantin inherits this instability, acting himself as a destabilizing factor in the lives of others.

The same goes for Changez. Differing from Constantin in that he is in search for a place of belonging (defined by the materialization of an idealized lifestyle), he is an expression of the economical gap between worlds, reinforced by globalization. His motivation for displacement, though more mercantile, is equally grounded in his family's past. In fact, he asserts that what he is looking for in America is the same social status that his family has lost in Pakistan (Hamid 71). An example of this focus on the economic is his mother's gesture of wiping a bill against his forehead, for good luck (Hamid 126).

If Changez is situated within a dominant cultural paradigm for which the grand narrative of American culture functions as a counterpart, Constantin has little to do with any stable structure whatsoever. His Romanian inheritance, although present and asserted throughout the novel, is not vital in outlining the character. As a result, belonging is defined in relation to family, personal traits (formed halfway between cultures), and a personal set of values, generating a particular attitude towards life. Constantin has little or no anxieties related to national or cultural landmarks, coining his identity as a puzzle of inner worlds, none of which gives him a sense of belonging. His travels from one place to another resonate in shifting from one identity to another, without the possibility of any stability other than movement itself. In opposition,

Changez is constantly caught in a relation of comparison between native and adoptive cultures. In fact, for Changez, cultural belonging gradually becomes essential in defining himself as an individual. If at first he is seduced by America, he eventually grows aware of the differences between the two worlds. He is forced to reconsider his sense of belonging when his status is altered from being a member of a certain community to being the stranger, an outsider, of that same community. Changez oscillates from one world to another, each representing the other's otherness. As a young and successful American professional, he distances himself from his home culture, and this generates contradictory feelings of both deracination (from his family, since he feels displaced when he visits home) and belonging (he feels absorbed by the American lifestyle and work environment). Still, the tragic events of 9/11 generate a paradigm shift. Although fully integrated in the American professional environment, Changez is suddenly perceived by Americans as the other and comes to feel more connected to his home culture. But the perception of his partly abandoned home culture is altered as well, being regarded as a victim of the neoliberal politics of globalization. The protagonist ultimately quits his job and moves back to Pakistan, where he becomes a college professor, allegedly teaching students about finance. His inner conflict is an expression of a conflict between worlds, in a constant redefinition of the status of the stranger. Changez oscillates between two worlds, never actually giving up on any of them. Otherness is indeed integrated within the self, because, if American culture and Pakistani culture are each other's counterpart, Changez situates himself in the middle, in a personal post-cultural puzzle. He tries to unite both worlds within the self, to bridge and connect them in an inner dialogue. However, he ultimately fails and is forced to choose sides. Therefore, despite the fact that he seems equal to himself throughout the novel, there are elements that cast a shadow over this alleged stability. He hides an alternative self, constantly shifting between real and assumed identities. And this becomes manifest in the recurrent innuendoes and in the inconclusive ending of the novel. There is a constant reminder that appearances may be misleading and the inner conflict between self and other is far from being settled, as long as the exterior conflict between worlds is still strong. Therefore, Changez changes drastically as a character, turning from an advocate of globalization to a suspect in a terrorist attack. The story he tells to an American journalist (whose identity remains unclear) functions as a narrative meant to outline a coherent self, but fails to do so, as it becomes the very proof that the narrator himself is the embodiment of conflict. Even the character's name points out this instability of the identity structures and, furthermore, a deep inner conflict in the form of oscillations between worlds. The other, in this case the American reporter who listens to Changez's story, represents not only an expression of the other system of reference (the story is told as the protagonist comes back to Pakistan and embraces his native culture), but also a factor for pointing out identity conflicts: the narrative told by the protagonist is built as a series of discrepancies brought to light by the listener.

Whereas Changez's identity struggle is prompted by external factors (social and economic conflicts, brought about by globalization), Constantin's inner conflict reverberates on the outside. His identity seems fragmentary, formed of contradictory

instances of the self. He is the stranger *par excellence*, defining himself in opposition to all the people he meets. He assumes this status as a way to justify instability. He even has a set of rules about how to live a secluded life. Therefore, he appropriates a fictional identity that offers shelter from the others and defines himself as "alone, but never lonely" (Mălaicu-Hondrari 35). This personal manifesto implies a sort of self-sufficiency and a constant feeling of deracination. Still, despite this assumed independence, there is a constant need for the other, in a search for self-definition. However, the relation to the other is always severed by a lack of communication: secrets are only half spoken, and the other proves to be a constant source of sorrow and conflict. This points to an inner conflict between different instances of incorporated strangeness, characteristic to the others, as well. That is why all characters in Mălaicu-Hondrari's novel are unable to connect to the other: because they have their own inner battles to fight between various conflicting instances of the self. They fight their past, their inheritance, and even their contradictory feelings, all of which generate anxieties about the others. Therefore, their embodied strangeness is visible in their constant movement from one instance of identity to another, in order to keep a true self hidden. But the essence of identity, this secluded true self, proves to be nomadic by definition. Therefore, despite their apparent instability, which generates contradictory behaviors, characters are coherent in their actions, because they construct themselves according to a unitary principle that dictates their outer actions. This proves that the assumed seclusion of the characters does not erase the relational structures of the self, because there is a constant need for the other—not for an exterior other, as the dialogue is formed between different instantiations of the self and only reverberates in the exterior, which serves as a wider context for this relation.

Both Constantin and Changez are instances of the globalized self, as defined at the beginning of this paper. They define themselves relationally, seeking to establish a dialogue between self and other, even if otherness is a constitutive part of the self. Moreover, they redefine the status of the stranger. Changez moves from one culture to another, as a stranger who is absorbed by the foster culture. Historical events emphasize his strangeness, ultimately excluding Changez from the community and forcing him to reconsider his sense of belonging. Constantin, on the other hand, chooses this status as an expression of interior conflicts, defining himself as the outsider to any fixed contexts of belonging. Both of them are instances of the individual dealing with personal anxieties over the rapidly shifting realities of the globalized world. They tell the story of the individual forced to redefine his identity and sense of belonging in a constant struggle with his own self, in the borderless reality of the globalized world.

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