

Diasporic life in the  
reluctant  
fundamentalist essay  
sample



It is no secret that life for Muslims, not just in America but globally, has gotten more difficult than it already was pre-September 11th. Naber's Arab Americans and U. S Racial Formations as well as Hamid's Reluctant Fundamentalist exemplify the issues dealing with Muslim diasporic life in America. Post September 11th, Muslims and anyone deemed that looks like a Muslim (meaning anyone who has brown skin, a beard, and facial features that the Nazi's deemed Jewish) have had to deal racial profiling, racial stereotypes, hate crimes and other forms of racism. In Hamid's Reluctant Fundamentalist Hamid uses two characters as metaphors for America and each one represents different diasporic issues Muslims have had to deal with before and after 9/11.

One of these characters that represents America is Changez's love interest, Erica; like America she accepts this foreigner, makes him feel like she accepts him, only to reject him. The change she goes through after 9/11 represents the change America had gone through during that time. "The attacks churned up old thoughts in my head.", this change within Erica-America represents two things, America returning to her old ways and that means the return of the issues of race relations in America. Hamid chose to represent America with a woman on purpose; through Erica America is described as prestigious, desirable, and powerful, which is what everyone hopes to be once they've immigrated to the U. S.

The other character that represents America is Underwood Samson, Changez's place of work. Underwood Samson represents America as a corporation meaning that profits are first and foremost what is important.

This also represents how Changez and many other immigrants have to blend

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in and feel the need to wear a mask, just like in the corporate world where there is a dress code, a hierarchy, and lack of diversity. The fact that Changez works at Underwood Samson is symbolic of how Muslims in America are brainwashed into forgetting their origin and heritage in order to fit in and remain under the radar. These representations bring to light issues of belonging and cultural citizenship in the Muslim diasporic life in the U. S. In terms of belonging and cultural citizenship, Hamid paints a very grotesque picture of Muslim Diasporic life in the United States. Changez starts off an outsider, then believes he is an American only to realize that he is not and will never be because America's race relations are always in motion.

" In this sense, the ' invisible citizens' became ' visible subjects.'" (Naber 2) Muslims went from being unseen and not worried about until 9/11 where they then became " visible subjects". As a product of being unseen, Muslims were under the the false impression that the United States had accepted them and that they were Americans. Changez represents the Muslim community's transformation from invisible to visible. This is represented in the novel in many forms, when Changez is rejected by Erica-America during sexual intercourse, when he realizes that he has more in common with the man on the motorcycle than his own colleagues and when he forced to resign from his Underwood Samson. These are all representations of how America marginalized and made the Muslim 2 community feel like outsiders post 9/11. When Changez resigns from Underwood Samson, symbolically, he is resigning from the United States, feeling like outsider in what is suppose to be his home forces him to this decision.

This also representative of the groups of Muslims that have been targeted by hate crimes and discrimination and have been made to feel like outsiders in their own neighborhoods and subsequently have had to leave to ensure safety for themselves and their families. “ U. S. discourses on multiculturalism after 9/11 paralleled the rhetoric of the Bush administration and the corporate media that distinguished between “ good Arabs or Muslims” and “ bad Muslims.”” (Naber 3) With this pathetic attempt to relieve the pressure off Muslim communities the U. S. Government and corporate media only strengthened the idea that Muslims were now not Americans but outsiders because there is no way to tell who is a “ good” or “ bad” Muslim. If the Government really wanted to take the pressure off it would simply be a terrorist attack committed by Al-Qaeda, a terrorist group without the link to Islam because now they have made the word terrorist synonymous with Islam and thus synonymous with Muslims.

As portrayed in the novel, after 9/11, Muslims had agency in the United States as the other, as outsiders. Through an ambiguous enemy and vague definitions and distinctions between Muslims and terrorists confusion of the American public gave them no choice but to group the two together and isolate them. “ In other words, bodily stigmata become signifiers of a spiritual inheritance as opposed to a biological heredity.”(Naber 280) There was no way for the public to distinguish between “ good” and “ bad” Muslims so like the Jews of Nazi Germany stereotypes of the way Muslims look enable the public to cast out, punish, and discriminate against Muslims 3 and those who “ look” Muslim.

Hamid brings forth an interesting concept with the character of Juan Bautista (John the Baptist) and the story of the Janissary. " I was a modern day Janissary a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine."(Hamid) The insertion of this story implies that all Muslims living and working in the United States during the post 9/11 period are Janissaries in a sense. I would have to strongly agree with this concept due to the strong pressure put amongst the Muslim and other immigrant communities to blend in and help America build its profit. Meanwhile after their hard work they are cast aside due to the American Governments flawed foreign policy and mistakes they have made by supplying weapons for their secret agendas. Hamid does characterize this subtle and sneaky side of the American government through the anonymous American that Changez speaks to through out the novel.

Hamid purposely writes this in second person in order to show that America is always up to something and always has multiple agendas but says nothing of them. Hamid includes this also to show that it is near impossible to belong or to American if you're an immigrant because there is always a new marginalized group in America and they are subject to the Governments agenda and also consequences of actions of the Government done in secret across seas in foreign lands. I believe Hamid's novel is claiming that in order to be American you have to sacrifice your culture of origin and embrace American culture of blending in and staying under the radar. But he is also saying that in doing so you allow yourself to be brainwashed and blinded by false ideals of money and power and ultimately to not be taken advantage of

the system you have to be aware of the system just as Changez knows the actions of the anonymous American.