

# The symbol of bruises in reluctant fundamentalist

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Bruises are a physical result of trauma where dark marks form on the skin that last for a while before they're healed. Similarly, trauma due to physical attacks, such as 9/11, or prejudices, resulting from 9/11, can cause injuries and dark feelings that can either take some time to heal or can be worsened as time goes on. Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel explains that not just one, but two groups of people were hurt on that tragic day of 9/11. 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' uses bruises to materialize the feelings inflicted on Americans, and equally so on Muslims, after the terror attacks on the New York twin towers on September 11th, 2001.

Erica's bruise under her armpit, near the beginning of the story, is a visual representation of how Americans felt after the 9/11 attack. This terrorist attack being deliberately carried out on their soil put a permanent sense of fear and anger in all Americans which lasted for a long time, just like a bruise does. The bruise being 'dark and angry' (89) explains the severity and prominence of her mark. This same emotion of darkness and anger can be seen in the actions and feelings of all Americans after the attack.

Coworkers of Changez changed their views on him after 9/11 and were reminded to be feared and enraged at the sight of his bearded face: 'I don't think [the beard] is making you Mister popular around here' (130). The fact that Erica was open and excited in a way to show Changez her bruise is also seen in that Americans were very open about their injuries during this time and used this openness as a way to impose fear and rage against all Muslims which we see when Changez is stripped searched at the airport. Unlike a broken leg, a bruise is something that can be covered up, especially if it's under the armpit, and can heal rather quickly if desired. However, this is the

opposite of what American's consciously tried to do with their feelings. They made everyone around them aware of how they felt towards people of Middle Eastern descent and weren't afraid to show the consequences of hurting them. With this bruise being shown at the beginning of the novel, we know that Erica and the rest of America have lots of time to heal and recover from their injuries and newly arisen sensitivities brought up by this attack.

An indistinguishable bruise was later found on Changez showing us that the Americans weren't the only ones hurt that day and that Muslims were equally affected. Having this bruise show up after we see Erica's represents that at first, it wasn't known that Muslims were also hurt by this attack because American's viewed all Muslims as terrorists and none were seen as victims. Additionally, the slow formation of a bruise can be a reflection of how the additive feelings and actions towards Muslims eventually took a toll on them and marked them up as well. His bruise was in the same location as Erica's, but how it got there was different. Throughout the novel, Hamid is constantly describing scenarios where American's are imposing a prejudice on Changez due to his looks and background: '...I was separated from my team at immigration' (75). This build-up of experiences left him and all Muslims around the world with an emotional injury and feeling of hatred towards Americans. One can see this bruise as mirrored pain between America and Muslim countries after 9/11, an idea that is explained by having the bruise in an identical location to Erica's: 'to see a livid bruise...where hers had once been' (173). A bruise isn't contagious, just like how feelings aren't contagious, however, one with an injury can easily give a non-injured person some bruises. This idea of pain being inflicted on all Muslims by

American's, after some Muslims inflicted pain on them, is what Hamid really tries to get through with this novel by explaining that most people have only been able to show sympathy for the injured American's, such as Changez showing concern for Erica's bruise, but yet haven't been able to empathize with the non terrorist Muslims, for example, no one there to empathize with Changez's bruise.

Lastly, the bruises on Changez's knuckles are there to show how Muslims have been continuously hurt, emotionally and physically, every day since that tragic attack and it's something that no Muslim has been able to escape even as the years go by. The bruised knuckles come up towards the end of the novel after he tries to intervene in a fight during an 'Anti-American' (179) demonstration. After Muslims were initially and constantly being bruised and hurt by American's, they tried to separate themselves from America and their people in any way possible but were ironically hurt for it. Having several bruises, one on each knuckle, represents the infinite number of times Muslims got hurt after their decision to disengage. They tried to stand up for what was right and to America as a country but got bruised in the process. Having these bruises come up at the end of the novel, Hamid tried to represent that America got the last hit in a way by having the Muslims being the ones hurt in the end. America was seen as being untouched with no injuries, bruises healed and all, and Muslim countries marked up with no chance of healing. Having all Muslims ultimately being the ones bruised for life and continuously being hurt since that day is another repeated idea that comes up in the novel.

Using the idea of being bruised to visualize the feelings of being hurt after the attacks on September 11th is a way to explain that the injuries caused by 9/11 on Americans and Muslims were the exact same, however, the reason for their injuries was different. A bruise was chosen because it looks the same on no matter whose skin, whether they're a cleanly shaven white male or a bearded brown-skinned male, but the way in which they each got their bruises was very different. A small group of individuals injured America and its' people, but an entire country bruised all Muslims in retaliation, and this idea was one of the main goals of Hamid's novel as most people didn't and still don't seem to comprehend the latter.