

The reluctant fundamentalist narrative



**ASSIGN
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Pakistani man and his journey after moving to America in search of the American dream. Changez is in a minority group when moving to America and is a clear outsider however he is accepted into American meritocracy and given the opportunity to become ' a successful American'. Though he tries to fit into what he believes a successful American should be, through changing his identity according to the standards of society, he is never truly accepted as an American.

This questioning of identity leads him to also lose sight of who he was as a Pakistani, causing him to feel like a foreigner when going back to his homeland. After the 9/11 bombings Changez makes a decision to stop attempting to fit in as an American and instead proudly stands out as an outsider. The two conflicting identities, Pakistani and American, are not able to work cohesively together leading to Changez becoming an outsider in both America and his homeland Pakistan. Despite the extent to which Changez attempted to change himself in order to fit in as an American, he was always an outsider.

As only one out of the “ two non-Americans in the entering class at Princeton”, Changez was immediately part of a minority group. After visiting Manila Changez makes a conscious decision to “ speak and act like an American, as much as [his] dignity [would] allow him. ” Though he did this to become more of a typical American he still feels a stronger connection to a Filipino taxi driver in Manila than the American’s he was associating with noting “ his fair hair” and thinking “ He was so foreign and [he] felt much closer to the Filipino driver than to him.

Much like his first sexual encounter with Erica, Changez is rejected by America. Even after telling Erica to “pretend he is Chris” their sexual encounter still has “violent undertones” and though he’s attempted to change his identity to fit what is wanted by Erica he is still not able to be fully accepted. No matter what Changez changes makes in the way he speaks, dresses and acts Changez is never truly an American. After spending so long trying to fit into American society, Changez comes back to Pakistan and finds that he looks at it with the “eyes of a foreigner”.

His confusion in identity causes him to lose the sense of belonging he once had. Erica once told him that he seemed “solid” and “gave off a strong sense of home” however going back to Pakistan he realises that he’s now “lacking in substance” and has become the sort of “entitled, unsympathetic American which once annoyed him.” By trying so hard to fit in as an American Changez has lost sight of whom he was a Pakistani, causing him to feel like a foreigner in his own homeland.

Though there is always an underlying sense of not belonging in America, Changez does not make the conscious decision to become an outsider until the tragedy of 9/11. Changez has a reaction atypical of the one a true American would presumably have. His initial reaction is to smile and become “caught up in the symbolism that someone had so visibly bought America to her knees.” This was a turning point after which he decided to grow a beard which was “a form of protest”. He goes back to America with his beard and becomes subject to racial profiling, being yelled by a man in a car park due to his appearance.

Despite the racism that he encounters and being told by his friend Wainright that he should get rid of the beard Changez decides that not to shave it, it is a symbol of defiance and he now recognises the inescapability of his foreignness. Changez makes a decision not to fit in as an American but rather make a statement against it and declare himself as a proud outsider. Changez has two conflicting identities which are not able to work together. It is this confliction that prevents Changez from feeling a sense of belonging in both Pakistani and America.

When Changez goes to a Pakistani deli in New York he attempts to pay with an American Express corporate charge card. An American Express card is a sign of success and wealth however the cashier will not accept it. The deli may symbolise Changez' life in Pakistan whereas the American express is the life he's found in America, both of which are not able to work together. It is not until Changez meets Juan Bautisa that he realises he is not able to be loyal to both America and Pakistan.

He becomes an “ ex janissary’ and returns to Pakistan where he is able to feel a sense of belonging as he no longer possess conflicting identities. Changez begins his journey as a hardworking young man doing his best to fit in in America and willing to change himself in order to fit in. His change in identity does not lead to him becoming accepted as an American but does cause him to lose his sense of belonging in his homeland Pakistan. Changez' conflicting loyalties to America and Pakistan make him feel out of place in both lands.