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(Mis)Representation of Islam: Postcolonialism and Fear of the Mythic “Orient” in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract:

The cataclysmic event of September 11, 2001 and the numerous terrorist attacks on American soil has ushered in an era of awareness. The ‘Us’ verses ‘Them’ rhetoric is grotesquely attributed to Muslims, where mutual suspicion, hate, bigotry have now become a new way of life. Since Postcolonialism among others is concerned with local cultural practices and political issues in the context of colonialism, new-imperialism and transnationalism, this paper unveils the ramifications of binary oppositions as an attempt to maintain white superiority in a multi-ethnocentric American society. Islam and its associated doctrine is viewed as a religion of terror where Arabs or Muslims are perceived as potential terrorists or suicide bombers. Has Islam now become an alternative definition of terrorism in the wake of 9/11? The clarion call by most white Americans is the eventual banning of Muslims from entering America depicts a seemingly ubiquitous portrait of Arabs as “dangerous” individuals. I argue that Mohsin Hamid’s oeuvre conversely pioneers a new space that transcends nationalism, breakdown and subvert artificial barriers and indeed “*Subjectifies*” the “Other” not through Orientalist stereotypes but with the voice of the protagonist whose experience becomes our own.

Keywords: Terrorism, (mis)representation, Islam, Orientalism and postcolonialism.

Introduction

The notion of ‘Arab’ has become a synonym for Islamic fundamentalism in contemporary culture especially from Western perspectives. The event of September 11, 2001, the wars on Iraq, Syria, Libya and the ‘Palestinian Question’ has aided in linking Islamic fundamentalism with terrorism, and in turn positioning fundamentalism in essence anti-Western. This gruesome misconception regarding a peaceful religion has been perceived and represented in the context of colonial myths such as West/East binary. Perhaps most famously, the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims came with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*¹. Acclaimed critics on Islam as an epicentre of world’s peace such as Samuel Huntington (1996) and Fred Halliday (1995) portray this as a clash between the cultures of the

¹ By publishing *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie disappointed the Muslims in particular who had been subjected to racism and discrimination. They lost him as an ally of the Muslim course. Ruvani Ranasinha writes: “the most vociferous protest was voiced by the British

Muslims anxious to separate themselves from the intellectual hitherto constructed as their representative. Some felt particularly betrayed by the very person they had once admired as an ally” (Ranasinha, 2007:46).

West and the East. They argue against the placing of Islam as a monolithic force poised against the West. They admonish the construction of the West as a homogenous entity in oppositional to a threatening Islam.

The traumatic event of 9/11 has a strong impact on Western (Western means Institutional power and Ideological Eurocentricity) attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. The terrorist attack on American soil that fateful day was not the purveyor for the discrimination against Muslims but it heightened tensions between the Arab minority and white Americans. This small community suddenly became visible and exposed to public glare. Muslims started to be suspected as either terrorists or sympathetic to terrorism by the American society. This marked the beginning of a new era which Muslims became victims of backlash, it paved the way for a period of hate crimes, profiling and discrimination. Muslims are viewed as violent, aggressive and anti-American. Media and Muslim writers were quick to react on the current state of affairs; where Muslims are portrayed as directly associated with terrorist activities. Some Muslim writers like Mohsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Laila Halaby in *Once in a Promised Land*, depict the plight and predicament of Muslims in America. This religious and ethnic discrimination is largely due to the West’s desire for social, cultural and political dominance over the East.

The pernicious fear of the dangerous “Orient” is as a result of the wrong-doings orchestrated by a very few Islamic fanatics who conduct suicide missions for their socio-economic and political motives. As a result, a majority of peace loving and simple minded Muslims endure suspicion, hate crimes, discrimination, and psychological pressure. These discrepant experiences are not only felt in America, but also beyond as evident in Mohsin’s character-Changez who suffers from being a Muslim both in America and in Pakistan. Anny Bakalian and Mehzi Bozorgmehr (2009) in *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond*, corroborate this view:

Although stereotypes and discriminatory actions were nothing new to them, the post-9/11 backlash was relentless, overwhelming and heart breaking. News and Reports were broadcast where Muslims were shown in a negative and derogatory manner and thus the media played a crucial role in shaping non-Muslims’ attitudes towards and perception of Muslim people. They started to be viewed as either terrorists or sympathetic to terrorist actions and agenda...These developments, together with largely negative media coverage of Muslims, various detrimental domestic policies against Muslims which significantly curtailed their civil and legal rights created very unsettling feelings among non-American Muslims towards American Muslims. (11)

It is evident from the above passage that the social marginalization and the representation of Muslims was not merely a problem of rhetoric and public perception but it manifested itself

in physically violent ways. 9/11 ushered in an era of uncertainty where Muslims throughout America became targets of America's fury and revenge. Most Muslim Americans lost their identity as they were now considered as dangerous "Other". This anti/Arab Muslim hatred in the West in general and America in particular have transformed Arabs and Muslims into target acts of 'vicarious retribution'².

September 11th was clearly a politically changed, transformative event for United States. Society in general including American Arabs and Muslims. Given that fateful event was orchestrated by individuals of Arab descent (it should be noted that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs). Before 9/11 and despite experiences of discrimination, their plight was overshadowed by the concerns of other minority groups. After 9/11, Arabs and Muslims were largely depicted as a unified, coherent and threatening group consisting of "foreigners," "extremist," and "terrorists". It is in this spirit I argue that the American society has failed to end religious bias and, Islam, has now falsely become the religion of those referred to as radical Arabs. Tricky concepts such as "extremism" and "fundamentalism" have been used to target all Muslims. In this paper, I apply Postcolonialism with a focus on Said's *Orientalism* to Hamid's novel to show that orientalist discourse is not just restricted to the colonial past, but continues even today. European and American view of the 'Orient' has created a reality that the oriental is forced to live. Hamid shows in his novel how perilous the world can be if people are discriminated because of their ethnic and religious inclinations. Devout Muslim Americans, because of these mistreatments eventually become anti-Americans and this makes the United States and her citizens very much unsafe everywhere they find themselves be it at home or abroad.

Conceptual Definitions

For a better understanding of this paper, Edward Said's discourse on the Western conception of the 'Orient' in his classic book *Orientalism* (1978) will be used as a theoretical base. Said's discourse is useful in understanding the power relations between the 'Orient' and 'Occident'. He looks at the orientalist as a multifaceted discourse characterized by four major principles which he calls 'dogmas of orientalism' (22). First, there is an absolute and systematic difference between the 'Orient' (irrational, underdeveloped, and inferior) and the 'West' (rational, developed superior). The West is not only defined as the diametrical opposite of the East, but also as its protector and its care-giver. Secondly, abstractions about the orient are preferable to direct evidence. Said in *Orientalism* states:

Oriental or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative, much given to fulsome flattery," intrigues cunning and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking), Orientals are invertebrate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious", and in everything oppose clarity, directness and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race...

²‘Vicarious retribution’ defined as an act that “that occurs when a member of a group commits an aggression towards members of an out-group for an assault or provocation that had no personal consequences for him but did harm a fellow member in the group” (Brian Leckel et al 2006:372). They argued that if the event is construed in a way that elicits high in-group identification and negative out-group dispositions, then aggressive behaviour in the form of vicarious distribution is an expected outcome directed against the provoking group.

The crime was that the Oriental was an Oriental, and it is an accurate sign of how commonly acceptable such a tautology was that it could be written without even an appeal to European logic or symmetry of mind. Thus any deviation from what were considered the norms of Oriental behaviour was believed to be unnatural. (38-39)

Orientalism has thus placed the non-West into one large entity, disregarding the vast difference among non-Western cultures in terms of religion, social structure and values, thereby creating a fictional monolithic orient. Thirdly, the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself therefore a generalised Western vocabulary to describe the Orient as “scientifically objective” (301). This is another way in which the West attempts to justify its hegemony over the East. Finally, the Orient is something to be feared or controlled. Said states that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is that of domination and “it is hegemony...that gives orientalism durability and strength” (1978:7).

While Said’s work on Orientalism is useful for analyzing Western discourse on the East, one of its pitfalls is that, it denies the Orient’s capability to represent itself and others too. Fred Halliday (1995) complements his critique of Western myths about Islam. Halliday posits that:

Thus, the Orient is constructed as a silent Other, an object that is incapable of defining or representing itself and therefore that is in need of Western subjectivity. Islamic civilisation has been defined as ‘degenerate’ culture by the West and Western values should be universal and be imposed on all other people. This misconception generated by the West may come from a lack of information. (22)

The above citation therefore highlights how Islam and its practitioners are constructed as an artificial entity *vis-à-vis* the ideological construction of Muslims as exhorting beings, who are supposed to be kept abey. This illuminates how the Orient’s participation in distorting ‘Othering’ as a manifestation of power; which is often overlooked in the West’s outlook on the Orient. In Hamid’s novel, the abandonment of capitalist fundamentalism to take up an anti-American course (agenda) by Changez, only shows to a greater extent ‘Othering’ of people in the same nation can have a great effect to the internal and external security of that nation.

The nexus between Islam and Postcolonialism is the next concept that warrants understanding. Islam and Postcolonialism is a combination of two different terms. Islam is a religion based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammed and Postcolonial is the theory used to identify and challenge colonial discourse. Islam, without Postcolonialism would lack an

important cultural theory that was essentially created to help the colonised peoples free themselves from the colonial stereotypical images that justify colonialism. However, due to the variety of Muslims background experiences, geographies and histories, Islam and Postcolonialism cover a variety of issues such as slavery, racism, and Islamophobia. In addition, the complicated relationship between Islam and the West and the vital role that Islam plays in the lives of many contemporary Muslims contribute to making Islam a field of conflict. Geoffrey Nash (2012) in *Writing Muslim Identity* notes that:

Controversial issues like Quran, the veil and fundamentalism show the need for an Islamic postcolonial discourse to present Muslim perspectives and to resist any colonial stereotype that might appear. In contrast to the general Muslim reading, Islamic postcolonial reading focuses on the colonial stereotype about Islam and Muslims...The Africans ought to speak about their own experience and establish their own version of postcolonial discourse; each other people should do the same. In their struggle against Western colonialism, the Africans and Muslims may discuss Postcolonialism, but the Africans are best to speak about African Postcolonialism and Muslims are the best to articulate Muslim Postcolonialism. (26)

Nash is thus re-echoing the Afrocentricity discourse. Muslims have been misrepresented for so long and it is time for Muslims to tell their own stories from their own point of view. Islamic Postcolonialism therefore becomes an integral part of postcolonial studies.

David Thurfjell's article "Is the Islamist Voice Subaltern?" argues that "the core of postcoloniality is the ambition of decentralising 'The West' or the Western modernity. Islamism has successfully managed to provide an alternative centre among its adherents. This arguable makes it one of the most obvious examples of a subaltern postcolonial voice today" (160). Islamism, he continues, is "perhaps the strongest (Subaltern voice) in the world today" (161). Thus, this Islamic postcolonial voice could challenge the Western hegemonic discourse (which is always colonial in its attitude). Hamid in his narrative, gives a Muslim man (Changez) who is considered a subaltern the main voice to speak, hence, making the Islamic voice the 'Center' in which he is supposed to be heard and to be understood. Hamid thus resists the notion that colonialist novel is meant to serve a 'superior culture'. If Muslims are still suffering from the colonial Western perspective today, this means they are still, in one way or another, culturally colonised and in order to gain their full independence, they need to challenge this colonial perspective. One means of doing this, I suggest is letting a Muslim tell his own story.

Moreover, this article uses the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' to refer to a "diverse sense of competing political opinions held within the Muslims community" (Stierstorfer, 2015:105). Despite the problematic nature of the term, its use here emanates from the fact that other terms (such as extremists, fanatics etc) are associated to it. Thus, this paper uses 'Islamic fundamentalism' in the political sense, to refer to groups that use Islam as a basis to spread terror.

Islam and Terrorism

The rise of terrorism and violence is unjustifiable traced to the teachings of Islam. This

misconception of associating terrorism in Islam is located on a larger continuum of religious discrimination against 'Others'. Most of the world's Muslims are moderates who see Islamic terrorism as a violation of their sacred texts. It is therefore wrong for a radical minority to use violence and acts of terror to represent authentic Islam. Although the terrorist attack of September 11 ushered in a socio-political backlash against Muslims, this hateful classification to justify the hatred against others who do not belong to a particular religious group has become *en vogue* in America. We cannot even attach "Islam" to those who committed the atrocity in 9/11 because they violated the basic principle of Islam which is the preservation of life. There is a strong conviction among critics that the rise of extremism is a direct consequent of modernity on Islamic culture and civilisation. Klaus Stierstorfer in "Fundamentalism and Postcoloniality: Beyond Westoxification" states:

In many Islamic countries, the kind of modernity that Christian fundamentalists, for their part, have reacted against is not seen as a development originating from within Islamic societies. Here, modernization is primarily perceived as an import from and hence as a foreign subversion of their culture and values. This makes the fundamentalist struggle not only an internal affair, but a fight against "Westernization" or "Westoxification" as it has punningly come to be called. Frequently albeit not exclusively, colonialism is the vehicle through which these tendencies are understood to have been imported and the discussion mainly focuses today on Islamic countries and cultures. Wherever this is considered to be the case, Islamic fundamentalism becomes the struggle not only against secular modernization but also against Western influence within postcolonial society today. (104-105)

The impact of westernization and wars of aggression waged by Western nations in South East Asia and the Middle East is understood to be a war on their religion and culture. This greater sense of discontentment of the invasion of Muslim dominated nations by the West has flared an anti-Western, Anti-American propaganda which is inversely affecting America and the world at large. Fear has blinded the Western world to Islam's genuine dogma and fervent lessons of tolerance and peace.³

Hamid opens his novel, with Changez, describing the cosmopolitan nature of America. Here, we experience an America that takes pride in her multicultural society. Every immigrant irrespective of the country that he hails from looks at America as a promised land that believes in equality of opportunity and can bestow material success if one is willing to put in effort and dedication. This pre-9/11 atmosphere, bring to the fore-front, Changez, who voluntarily travels to America to enjoy the American Dream. Changez tells a stranger:

My suit seemed too formal; my blazer would have been better...but I took advantage of the ethnic exception clause that is written into every code of etiquette and wore a starched white kurta of delicately worked cotton over a pair of jeans. It was a testament to the open-mindedness and the overused word-cosmopolitan nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire. Indeed no one seemed to take much

notice of me at all, save for a gay gentleman who politely offered me an irrational smile. (48)

3 Jackson, Sherman in “Jihad and the Modern World: Religion of Peace” *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*. 2007:11-22. opines that “Religion of peace” does not imply that Islam is a pacifist religion, that it rejects the use of violence altogether as either a moral or a metaphysical evil. Religion of peace connotes, rather, that Islam can countenance a state of permanent, peaceful co-existence with other nations and peoples who are not Muslims.

At this juncture, his Muslim attire and beard is not really a source of attention or discrimination. No one takes note of his physical appearance.

At Princeton University, he is top of his class as a result of America’s open policy of affordable education for the less privileged around the world. “Students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society... And for the most part, we were happy to do so” (4). Due to his brilliant results, he is immediately recruited by the American firm-Underwood Samson Company which gives him an opportunity to transform his life: “making my concerns about money and status things of the distant past” (14). Even his American friend and companion-Erica, is happy to have Changez (Pakistani origin) with her. He is fond of Erica as he frequently visits her and her family welcomes him. Changez says:

I was telling you of my first meal with Erica’s family. It was a warm evening, like this one summer in New York being like spring here in Lahore. A breeze was blowing then, again as it is now, and it carried a smell of flame-cooked meat not dissimilar to that coming to us from the many open air restaurants in this market that are beginning their preparations for dinner. The setting was superb, the wine was delicious, the burgers were succulent, and our conversation was for the most part rather pleasant. Erica seemed happy that I was there, and her happiness infected me as well. (54)

New York eventually becomes a ‘Home’ for Changez. To be ‘at home’ is to occupy a location where in we are welcome, where we can be with people who treat us very much like themselves. Will America still be a ‘home’ after 9/11?

Changez, immediately reaps the benefits of his hard work and his prestigious American education. He is frequently sent abroad to handle business deals. In one of such trips to Manilla (Philippines), Changez enjoys first class air tickets and he is already absorbed in the American life style of pump and fare with sophisticated whiskeys. Changez is so delighted of his first class treatment. “I was terribly excited. We had flown first class and I will never forget the feeling of reclining in my seat clad in my suit, as I was served champagne” (63). Changez is living the American Dream and his Pakistani identity at this moment is no longer a concern for him. This is attenuated by the fact that, while in Manilla, a Filipino gives him an unsettled gaze and he believes that the spiteful look is because he is envious of his flamboyant American life style: “...perhaps, he resents me for the privileges implied by my

suit and expensive car, perhaps he simply does not like Americans" (67). Here, his American identity takes priority over his Pakistani roots. He is so proud being an American to the extent that he compared American buildings to Manilla's which are by far better. He reveals to his American companion that whenever he is asked where he is from, his replies were certain "I am from New York" (65) and he felt proud of it. Changez is so dedicated to his business deals to the extent that he is praised and nicknamed "Shark" by Jim-his business companion. His 'business fundamentalism' makes him a true American.

The September 11th attack happened while Changez was still in Philippines. The disastrous event is undoubtedly traumatic for Americans but the consequences of this event are even worse for the Muslim community. Changez initial reaction to the event is that of indifference but his shocking reaction marks a significantly turning point in America's relationship with Islam/ Muslim.

I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realised that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one- and then the other- of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased...Please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath, I am not indifferent to the sufferings of others...so when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity... I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had visibly brought America to her knees. (72-73)

The attack leads to a total change not only in Changez's identity but that of Muslims in America. Since the attackers pledged allegiance to Islam, all those associated with Islam are now viewed as terrorists or sympathisers of terrorism. Changez offers no apology for his reactions, only conveys that he felt satisfied for the humiliation of America's greatness.

The attack heightened the discrimination and suspicion towards Muslims. Immediately Changez arrives Manilla *enroute* to New York, he quickly realises that his identity has altered; he is no longer treated as an 'American' but as a 'Muslim American'. He is strip searched: "At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts" (74). The situation is even made worse when he arrives New York he is made to join the queue for 'Arabs'. The treatment by the airport guard brings into question his identity as an educated American. His 'Americanness' dissipates suddenly as he is treated very much like the 'Other' (Muslim) who is considered 'dangerous' and unwelcome in America. The repetition of the question by the guard "What is the purpose of your trip to the United states?" (75) and the secondary search in a room only portray a new way of life where there is fear of the mythic 'Orient' who understands no other language than to spread terror.

In *Orientalism*, Said reveals that the Orient is Occident's "cultural contestant, and one of the deepest and most recurring images of the 'Other'" (22). The (9/11) attack confirmed the negative image of the 'Orient'. The Muslim world is looked at as the hub of terrorism. The already gulf of differences widened as the Occident is civilized and pure while 'Orient' is

uncivilized and corrupt. This notion of superiority paves the way for domination and negation as “The relation between Occident and Orient is relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said:5). This is seen in Erica’s father’s remark about Pakistan when Changez visits them. His allusions to political instability in Pakistan, fundamentalism and obsession with religion: “I like Pakistanis. But the elite have raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism” (55). This paper is thus against this vilifying ignorance and ethnocentric view of the “Other”. Changez’s response of: “a summary with some knowledge much like the short news items on the front page of the wall street journal. Yes there are challenges, sir, but my family is there and I can assure you it is not as bad as that” (55) reveals the limited knowledge Americans have about Islam and Islamic states in the world.

The difficulties that Changez goes through as a result of 9/11 vary from discrimination at the airport to the impact of the relationship with Erica. When Changez comes back to the United States, he suddenly finds Erica unattractive and her sadness inexplicably becomes pathological. The attack has awakened the past affection for her ex-boyfriend-Chris: “The destruction of the World Trade Centre had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond, now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored” (83). Erica looks suddenly pale and Changez is suddenly gripped with fear for competing over Erica’s love with a dead Chris-that exists only in the figment of her imagination. When Changez later visits Erica, Erica’s mother is not appreciative of an ‘unholy’ relationship between a Muslim and her daughter. The discussion between Changez and Erica’s mother is a succinct portrayal of the mutual suspicion and hate orchestrated by the 9/11 attack between Muslims and non-Muslims in America:

“Well”, she went on, “her condition has come back, it’s serious. What she needs right now is stability. No emotional upheavals you get me? I can see you’re a nice young man. And I know she cares about you. But you have to understand that she’s a sick girl at the moment. She doesn’t need a boyfriend. She needs a friend.” (110)

Through the gaze of Erica’s mother, Changez is a Muslim and not an American. He is therefore not modern, not civilized and not much a better human being like her daughter. It becomes very difficult for some Western people to accept Muslims to befriend or marry their children, since they believe they are tainted with bloodshed and violence. Erica’s strangeness is symbolic of America’s strangeness to those she considers as foreigners after the attack. As the months go on and winter arrives, he forces himself to give up calling Erica. It seems to Changez that America, like Erica, is falling into a dangerous nostalgia: “I knew even then that she was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return” (113). Just as Muslims upset non-Muslims in America, that is how Changez upsets Erica in her presence. Changez constantly wants to strike a relation with Erica as Muslims incessantly portray themselves as patriotic Americans to the dissatisfaction of non-Muslim Americans. The nurse reveals to Changez: “but right now you’re the hardest person for her to see you’re the one who upsets her most. Because you’re the most real, and you make her to lose her balance” (133).

The attack on the twin towers in America released racist sentiments towards Muslim. Changez is embittered by the social discrimination, racial and religious profiling. He feels that his status in America will not be the same anymore; he feels looked down upon and his pride is hurt. Islamophobia and Xenophobic reaction towards Muslims increased. In the novel, Changez recounts an awful incident while he is in a parking lot. A man approaches him and begins mocking him with nonsense words which sounds like Arabic. Changez does not realise that he is experiencing ethnic prejudice until the man shouts "fucking Arab" (117). The bitter irony results from the fact that Changez is not an Arab: "I am not, of course an Arab. Nor am I, by nature a gratuitously belligerent chap" (117). But Islam, Arabs and territories are closely associated with one another. The man keeps cussing until his friend takes him away. In the colonial period "White men considered themselves superior to black men and it was their right to dominate them" (Fanon, 1986:12). Today, some of them continue to think themselves superior to Muslims on grounds of colour and culture. Fanon confirms that in the past: "the Antilles Negro was more civilized than the African, that is, he was closer to the white man" (Fanon, 1986:26). Muslims are not given any better treatment to blacks in America. This is evident with the American military occupation of Muslim-dominated nations in South East Asia. Jim realises that Changez is worried about the bombing of Afghanistan (a Muslim dominated state). Jim reminds Changez "I know what it's like to be an outsider. If you ever want to talk, give me a shout" (120). America's military aggression of Muslim dominated nations in Asia unsettles Changez and affects him psychologically.

Moreover, Changez also suffers from identity crisis due to the wake of 9/11. His beard is often presented as an outer factor of Islamic fundamentalism. Most often, the beard, burka, and turban are associated with terrorists. This stereotypical external feature of a religious group contributes to their exclusion in all spheres of American life. Daniel Winchester (2008) reveals the significance of the beard in Islamic culture:

However, the beard can be worn in Islam in emulation of the prophet, to demonstrate masculinity or wisdom and authority and therefore by no means exclusively expresses resistance to the West or religious fundamentalism. Individual Arab Americans are associated with or blamed for the acts of small groups of extremists who share their ethnicity or religion. These thugs have nothing to do with Islam. (177)

The beard plays a central role in Changez's identity crisis. At the beginning of the novel, one of the first words to his nameless companion is: "Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (1). He believes in the notion that Americans view bearded, dark-haired men as threatening. Even at the job side, his colleagues are quite uncomfortable with his beard. His journey to Pakistan and back to America must have changed his identity as an American. Even before leaving Pakistan his mother tells him "Do not forget to shave before you go" (128). Changez's mother, while in Pakistan is aware of the gruesome experiences of Muslims in America and while on the flight he feels a sense of guilt, that of participating in making America a great nation but America still does not protect Muslims: "I was filled with contempt

for myself to converse or to eat. I shut my eyes and waited, and the hours took from me the responsibility even to flee” (129).

Changez’s beard does not only incommode his co-workers as Jim tells him: “Some people around here think you’re looking kind of shabby. The beard and all” (137), but since returning from Pakistan and entering the United States with the beard, Changez’s identity is suddenly interpreted as that which resembles a potential terrorist: “More than once travelling on the subway-where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in,-I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares” (148). As if this is not enough, Changez is quarantined at the airport in New York from Chile because he is considered to be from a ‘suspect race’ that promotes terrorism and his beard which has become a mark of identification makes him susceptible to be treated as a perilous ‘Other’. This made him realize that no matter how he works for America, his identity as a Muslim will always come to the forefront and he will always be considered a non-American who does not deserve a place in America. This urged him to thank Juan-Bautista-his Chilean friend for “helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed” (157). But the only regrets is the fact that: “I had required so much time to arrive at my decision” (156). Since, he has lost his identity the only option is to return back to Pakistan as a way to reunite with his roots and enjoy a sense of cultural belonging which is very much absent in America. Given the fact that his beard has become a form of protest against those who hate his colour and race, “I would find myself walking the streets, flaunting my beard as a provocation, craving conflict with anyone foolhardy enough to antagonise me” (167) Changez could not still find a ‘home’ in America. His unhomeliness makes him to become a devout anti-American in Pakistan. Although Changez struggles to oscillate between too different cultures and values, he finally ends up a complete disturbed being. The feeling of alienation is so strong as to push him back to Pakistan as Americans look at him as an outcast and a dangerous being.

Conclusion

Hamid’s postcolonial image of Islam is significant because it resists the distorted image of Islam which has prevented the West from searching out a common ground upon which to address the diverse cultural issues about this religion. America, as a nation-state is still not aware of her cultural diversity where there is always a fetish for the stranger and an active resistance to change the status of the stranger from “them” to “us”. This paper has posited that Islam is neither inferior nor a threat to modernity and Western values, although for the West it stands in a position of difference and ‘Otherness’. However, while the distorted image of Islam in postcolonial discourse complicates the difference between Islam and the West and creates misunderstanding, Hamid’s oeuvre provides Islam with an image that has the potential to contribute to harmonization of this relationship and to opening the door to greater understanding. With the help of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, I have argued that America continues to be the epicentre of globalized terror as it strips off a Muslim of his human rights to freedom of worship and belonging. However, this paper has proven that Hamid’s novel marginalizes the stereotypes of the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ and provides Muslims a space to speak out through works of art.

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