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Globalization’s Side-effects in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Thanks to globalization, almost everything travels freely. Technology, goods, culture, and people are included. When we look at globalization from this perspective, it cannot be detrimental to our lives. Everyone can reach everything easily and can go everywhere to study or work. Bhikhu Parekh stated “People travel for employment and as tourists, and both export and import new ideas and influences…Indeed, the external influences are often so subtle and deep that the receiving societies are not even aware of their presence and impact. The idea of natural culture makes little sense, …(8)” Therefore living in a multicultural society is not a challenge for anybody neither for immigrants nor receiving country up until a terrific problem occurs. In Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the problem is Twin Towers fall on September 11, 2001. Karen Shlezinger expressed “his (Changez’s) reaction is one of unsettling pleasure. This initial reaction gives way to confusion – about his identity, about his feelings for the United States…(2)” Thereby this paper will argue that even though the globalization is displayed as an advantage, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals the difficulties that can appear and the multiple and conflicting identities can outcome.

Before starting to analyze Hamid’s paramount work, we will clarify what globalization and multiple identities mean. Roland Robertson asserted globalization as “…the compression of the world into ‘a single place,’… (6)” Mike Featherstone explained the same term with another words “…the theory of globalization developed by Robertson in which nation-states are not seen to simply interact but to constitute a world, a global context in which the world becomes a singular place with its own processes and forms of integration.(5)” We can identify globalization as being one . To lay a bridge between globalization and multiple identities, identity’s mean has to be known. As Anthony Appiah indited “The contemporary use of “identity” to refer to such features of people as their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or sexuality first achieved prominence in the social psychology of the 1950s—particularly in the work of Erik Erikson and Alvin Gouldner. (65)” When we bring globalization and identity together, the idea of multiple identities comes up.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalism,* the narrator of the book is also the main character of the story that can be identified as has multiple identities. Changez is a Pakistani young man who studied in Princeton, worked Underwood Samson, and lived New York. From beginning to end, owing to the main character’s monologue we witness the changing people’s behaviors, thoughts, and prejudice correspondingly the events. There are two stories in the book; first story is visible one which is just a day and Changez and The American accompany each other, the second story is the story which Changez tells The American his life story. Thanks to globalization, Changez had the chance of studying abroad and he was accepted by Princeton University. At first he was attracted by USA and surrendered himself to the country. In the fourth chapter of the book “It was a testament to the open-mindedness and –that overused word-*cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire. (59)” says Changez. He met a dazzling world which he enjoyed very much. He was gaining a new identity and he seemed comfortable with this.

After a while Changez went to Lahore and while he was expressing his feelings the difficulties of multiple identities are shown clearly.

“I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing. I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls. The electricity had gone that afternoon, giving the place a gloomy air, but even in the dim light of the hissing gas heathers our furniture appeared dated and in urgent need of reupholstery and repair. I was saddened to find it in such a state-no, more than saddened, I was shamed. This was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness. ..the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of foreigner… (138)”

He was annoyed and he criticized himself harshly. As we mentioned before living in a multicultural society is not a challenge up until a terrific problem occurs. Both Changez and his social circle were happy; however, the tragedy of September 11 would change the stagnant situation. With the fall of Twin Towers, Changez’s twin identities came face to face; “…it was not fiction but news. I stared as one-and then the other- of 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. (83)”

Shlezinger reported in her article “Changez suffers from the hostility of his workmates and fear of attack: ‘Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten … the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses’ (p.107). Changez’s fears might have been, as he states, mere ‘rumours’, but indeed in America after 2001 there was an increase in suspicion, verbal abuse and attacks against people and institutions believed to be Muslim.” Not long after he is experienced a discrimination at the airport. According to security guards he is a usual suspect. “At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts…I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt quilty. (86)” He feels jammed. As he said when he was under suspicion at the airport, he loved America yet he was deeply angry.

Carol Anderson said that “After his initial efforts to blend in with American society, Changez realises that the colour of his skin will always set him apart, prompting him to grow a beard to emphasise his separation. He is the victim of multiple and conflicting identities.”

He questions his feelings toward America. He feels as a betrayer because he leaves his family and his land. He questionizes himself, “…this made me a kind of coward in my own eyes, a traitor. What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances? And what was I abandoning them for? A well-paying job and a woman… (142)” He goes back to America with his beard. He is full of anger and he sees his beard as a symbol of his identity, an evidence of the reality which he left behind in Lahore. He averred that “I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind… (144)”

Nath Aldalala’a affirmed in her article “The encounter between America and its Muslim-Pakistani ’other’ was initiated immediately after 11 September 2001. At the political level Pakistan found itself in a position that has some parallels with the discursive positioning of Changez.” After September 11, Changez is confused about where he belongs to. In those days he met Juan Bautista who would mention him the janissaries. Interestingly he was impressed enough to declare himself as a modern-day janissary. His acceptance of being a janissary shows his situation clearer, “They were Christion boys, captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army… They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to. (164)”

Changez is frustrated because of the misrepresentation of Muslims as they are dangerous religious fanatics in the American society and media. He is angry but at the same time he has too many questions in his mind; “Where else could I- without money and family contacts, and at so young an age- hope to attain such an impressive income? Would I not miss this city of possibility, with its magical vibrancy and sense of excitement? (171)” At the end his loyalty to his homeland in the process of war and his doubts about his identity encourages him to return to Lahore. Anderson states in her article,

“Yet, although Changez is a Muslim, there is no reference in the novel to religion. What The Reluctant Fundamentalist highlights is another type of fundamentalism, linked to capitalism. When the new recruits at Underwood Samson are encouraged to ‘focus on the fundamentals’ (p.112), they are being convinced to concentrate only on determining an asset’s value with little regard for the human cost that may result from their valuations. Parallels are implied between Muslim extremists and corporate warriors in their complete and utter devotion to principles which have little regard for traditional moral codes. After Changez becomes politically active in Pakistan, uncertainty lingers in the closing stages of the novel as to whether he may have exchanged capitalist fundamentalism for Islamic fundamentalism.”

Changez’s tides come to an end. He was a successful student, gogetter businessman, congenial colleague, understanding and polite lover, concerned son, and the most important one; he was quite beloved person in his social circle. The tragedy of 11 September is a turning point for both America and American citizens; Changez feels as a citizen of America at that time. Tony Judt notes that “But in the aftermath of September 11th 2001 the limitations of a post-national prescription for a better European future became clear. The traditional European state, after all, not only made war abroad but enforced the peace at home. (797)” This enforcement shakes Changez and he starts to search his identity’s parts like making a puzzle. He finds the parts and completes the puzzle at the end.

There is not any distinctive feature of Changez about whether he practices Islamic duties or not however his anger is against the people who misquote Muslims and Islam. Furthermore as Leila Ahmed testifies that,

“A poll taken in 2007 reported that 72 percent of American Muslims said that religion was “very important” to them, and 18 percent said that it was “somewhat important.” Only 40 percent, however, reported attending mosque regularly or even occasionally. Yet this figure represents an enormous increase in attendance over scholars’ estimates of mosque attendance for the 1980s and 1990s, which ranged from 5 percent to 15 percent. Evidently a dramatic increase in attendance occurred after 9/11 and in the wake of the problems that many Muslim Americans began to experience after that tragedy. (169)”

We can understand from Changez’s defense of Muslims as a protection of his national culture and identity. Since with globalization, national culture and identity seem under threat of extinction. Communication between communities and nations can easily ensure this makes intercultural interaction and communication possible which may affect national culture.

The intercultural communication and interaction provides the basis for social change as we see Changez. Culture is a phenomenon based on a solid infrastructure and a continuous transmission to new generations. It performs with the institution of the family. The existance of the institution of the family appreciated by nations is already prevention the disappearance of national culture. Changez loved Erica and wanted to marry with her but he could not mention her to his mother so it is maybe not just because Erica did not accept Changez’s love but he had already known that she was not heartily accepted by his family. Although communities and individuals seem to keep pace with globalization, they want to protect and support the essence of their national culture and their national identity. Changez experienced a clash of identities in his mind. He survived. He returned to self. He did not lose in the globalized world.

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