

**9/11 Counter Narratives: Challenging Islamophobia and Defying the Notion of Singular
American Tragedy**

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9/11 Counter Narratives: Challenging Islamophobia and Defying the Notion of Singular

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Dedicated to-
My Beloved Parents
and My Family

Declaration

I hereby declare that this work has been written entirely by me except for the references and quotations which I have acknowledged duly. Additionally, I have preserved all academic ethics and integrity while preparing this research.

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Abstract

My dissertation intends to shed light on one of the most relevant issues of today's world crisis that is Islamophobia: an exaggerated fear and inexplicable distrust toward Islam and Muslims woven into western society. This social aversion of Islam is perpetuated in the Western world especially in America by White supremacy and negative stereotypes and religious profiling of the Muslims that result in marginalization and exclusion of the latter from society, politics and civic life. Though Islamophobia existed in the western premise prior to the September 11 episode, it gained much notoriety in the repercussion of the carnage that is proliferated by popular 9/11 discourse which essentially demonized the race of Muslims. Muslims started to be misconstrued and alleged to be terrorists and fanatics in opposition to the White Americans who are acclaimed to be the sole victims of the catastrophe whereas Muslims are no less sufferers in their personal, social and political domains. During this suppressive period of Islamophobic rhetoric, a group of writers raised their voices by the dint of 9/11 counter narratives to re-present Muslims, deconstruct stereotypes and to clarify the misconstructions of Islam and its doctrines. 9/11 counter narratives such as *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *The Submission* by Amy Waldman are extensively discussed in my dissertation to illustrate how the writers counteracted the accession of Muslims as terrorists by incorporating the Orientalist Theory elaborated by Edward Said. Along with counter- response to challenge Islamophobia, all of the above authors strove to defy the notion that 9/11 is a singular American tragedy and attempted to illuminate the fact that 9/11 equally offended the ordinary Muslims residing in America for the damages and consequences encountered by the innocent Muslims in general. Furthermore, my research investigates the

process of resistance adopted by the victimized Muslims at the face of mounting sentiments of institutionalized Islamophobia and its associated hate crimes.

Introduction

The financial heart of the United States, the world's sole super power was shaken off with an explosion. The explosion is none other than the September 11, 2001 catastrophic ruin of the World Trade Centre in New York. As a consequence of this cataclysmic disaster, the United States formed its new notion of Islam- the religion which until then had been a marginal faith in the U.S. In the aftermath of the September 11 episode, Islam became associated with violence, fanaticism, and anti-Western sentiment. As a result of this association, Islam has become widely understood as a promoter of terrorism and a sense of fear of the religion Islam and the Muslims—the followers of Islam—became rampant in the U.S.A. This terror, namely Islamophobia, is manipulated as a validation of acceptable hatred and racism against Muslims in the aftereffects of 9/11. Islamophobia or Muslim-phobia, has been, in fact, the consequence of how the state, media and literature have constructed and perpetuated the myth of Muslims to be terrorists.

The connection of terrorism with Muslims and hence the presence of fear in the American mind is further strengthened by the mainstream fictional works based on 9/11 catastrophe. In general, post-9/11 era was a crisis for many fiction writers as they had to explain the trauma and the tragedy. Thus numerous works of arts rapidly emerged to mirror the transformed realities of the world. To be specific, a new genre in literary canon emerged which portrayed phobia against Islam and Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. This is because, the Western literary production since the September 11 attacks has remained profoundly prejudiced by the incidents of that single crucial episode. The Twin Towers continued to go up in flames again and again in a superfluity of literary pieces like short stories, novels, and prose analyses. Illustrations of September 11 as a catalyst of global transformation became the ideological prerequisite of the

war on terror, a linguistic creation that sponsored the notion of America as a prey and a guardian of freedom in its rhetorical manifestation. As David Holloway states:

From the very beginning, “9/11” and the “war on terror” were so appropriated by storytelling and mythmaking that the events themselves became more or less indivisible from their representations, or simulations, in political rhetoric, mass media spectacle and the panoply of other representational forms that made the events feel pervasive at the time - films, novels, photographs, paintings, TV drama, specialist academic debates and other forms of public culture. (5)

In this venture, almost all western writers represented America as the sole victim of the disaster and the Muslim characters as religious fundamentalists and terrorists who are alien and despicable. In “Global Terror and the Rise of Xenophobia/ Islamophobia: An Analysis of American Cultural Production since September 11” Muhammad Safeer Awan claims, “The terms like Islamic terrorism and Islamic fascism were deliberately created and frequently repeated in the news media and literature for the single objective of justifying many acts of discrimination against Muslims” (523). Such a vicious image of Islam is not only fortified by the popular media but also by the post-9/11 narratives composed by some renowned American authors like *The Falling Man* by Don DeLillo, *Terrorist* by John Updike, *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta* by Martin Amis and so on.

In the 9/11 literary works, Islam is basically misrepresented through both themes and characters. 9/11 dominant narratives mostly dealt with the private lives of the Whites, upper-middle class Americans who are traumatized by that colossal tragedy. It is mostly ruled by marginalization, silencing, suppression and oppression of the Muslim personas dwelling in the U.S. According to Awan, most of the Muslim characters depicted in the 9/11 novels are

inadaptable in the American society and cannot adjust to the American way of life, thus being baffled from their American identity (537). Besides, those who give the impression of being a Muslim is exposed as contradictory to the citizen's sense of belonging. Moreover, Muslims are illustrated as radical suicide bombers, harsh, hostile, troubled and audacious personalities who constantly harbor animosity for America and the Western civilization. Thus, the Islamic world is negatively portrayed and the East is mythologized to consider as a safe haven for terrorists.

In actuality, this highly influential 9/11 rhetoric is constructed upon stereotyping Muslims which has had, and continues to have grave control on the fashion in which Islam and Muslims are viewed. To define 'Stereotyping' in the post 9/11 era Awan asserts, "Stereotyping is a simplified and standardized conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group or a generalization, most often exaggerated or usually offensive, that is used to distinguish a religious, ethnic or political group" (525). To explain, the most typical demonstration of Muslims since 9/11 has been of a terrifying, suspicious character: an unpleasant, nasty, unbearable foe of the society. In fact, the stereotypical depictions of Muslims as terrorists expose the prevalent conception of the producers of Islamophobic discourse and validate their assertion. At the same time, this stereotyping wounds Muslims making them vulnerable to bigotry and discrepancy and forces them to reside in the liminal space.

During this suppressive period of Islamophobic rhetoric, a number of Muslims and also some American writers raised their voice to clarify the negative representation of Muslims in media and literature. It was indeed a clarification campaign where Muslim writers fought to oppose the negative projection of Muslims and even at times went on to take part in reverse-stereotyping which Edward Said terms as re-representation and a counter-response. In Said's view:

The rhetorical depiction of Islam through the acts of terrorism, wars, deaths, fatwas, jihads or bombings sustains a Western sociological imagination of Islam but at the same token, it thrusts the Ummah, or the global Muslim community, into a constant struggle to re-represent Islam. Inevitably for many Muslims articulations on Islam is a reactive counter-response, for anything said about Islam gets more or less forced into the apologetic form of a statement about Islam's humanism, its contribution to civilization, development and moral righteousness. (47)

Hence, the aim of my dissertation is to illuminate how the writers of the 9/11 counter narratives responded to the mainstream Islamophobic rhetoric by deconstructing stereotypes and eliminating misconceptions about Muslims. Through the extensive discussion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah and *The Submission* by Amy Waldman, I will show how they counteract the accession of Muslims as terrorists. The first two novels are composed by Pakistani immigrant Muslim writers living in the U.S., whereas the third one is by an American writer. All of them endeavored to defy the notion that 9/11 was a singular American tragedy and tried to bring to light the fact that 9/11 equally victimized the ordinary Muslims residing in America. Besides, they revealed the incongruity of the Islamophobic propaganda adopted by Americans after the attacks of 9/11. Moreover, they delineated the damages and the consequences encountered by the innocent Muslims in general. In short, the scars of disgraceful misrepresentation and religious profiling stimulated the writers of counter narrative to be armed with reactive responses against the inappropriate prejudice upheld by the U.S, its media and popular discourse. Thus my dissertation, with the help of the Orientalist Theory by Edward Said, investigates how these three writers attempt to capture the damaging effects of the attacks on the general Muslims of America by responding vehemently to

the Islamophobic treatment instigated by American government, its broadcasting corporations and popular rhetoric to clarify the misjudgments about Muslims. Furthermore, they render the process of resistance adopted by the victimized Muslims at the face of unfounded accusations.

Before going deeper into the analysis, I would like to explain the key term of my topic that is 'Islamophobia'. The widespread neologism 'Islamophobia' refers to, according to Awan, an irrational terror or disgust of the less familiar religion, Islam (526). However, in the repercussion of the 9/11 attacks, for the myth-making skills of the American authors and the popular media, a new version of "fears of the other" or the Muslims have been methodically injected into the psyche of the American mass people. Many of the American authors have intentionally demonized Islam and Muslims to validate this fear. At this point, Awan also acclaims:

In the post 9/11, America attacking Islam and Muslims became the fashionable sport for the literary scholars. Unfortunately, the events of 9/11 were used as an excuse to greatly magnify the hostility toward Muslims and cloak it in pseudo-patriotism. Muslim-bashing has become socially acceptable in the United States. Is Islamophobia, a de facto state policy? (526)

As a result of such myth-made animosity, many Muslim religious and cultural centers were under attack which included vandalism, material damage and even death threats and bombings.

There are several misconceptions that cause Islamophobia; it is, in fact, due to sheer ignorance about the true nature of Islam which is a religion of peace. In "The Inescapable Presence of "Non-existent" Islamophobia" Christopher D. Stonebanks illustrates the vital discernments about Islamoprejudice which are:

1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.
2. Islam is seen as separate and “other”. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them, and does not influence them.
3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist.
4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, and engaged in a “clash of civilizations”.
5. Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal. (39)

These fallacies about the East or particularly, the Islamic culture, are held as highly problematic. Since the 9/11 attacks, these circumstances have only surged up. Every Muslim is regarded as a latent terrorist, fanatic and ferocious, intensifying to what is regarded today as “Islamophobia”. Thus, all these fabricated conceptions and premeditated generalizations seem to legalize the Islamophobic rhetoric.

However, this very popular coinage ‘Islamophobia’ is rather a new phase of a very old phenomenon that is racism. This word was already a part of the Western academic and societal scene that may be regarded as an exhibition of the Western distortion of Islam and the Islamic world. Though Islamophobia was officially fashioned during the 1980s, American Muslims

before 9/11 were essentially able to practise their religion relatively liberally and were less threatened in their regular activities. Moreover, the extent of xenophobia and bigotry though present even at that time, was comparatively less acute. But the era of 9/11 is best defined as “unconscious positivity” – a term devised by Said (48). Nonetheless, this watershed incident triggered the foundation of a melodramatic alterations in American domestic and foreign policy.

In the aftermath of 9/11, shockingly, in not as much of twenty-four hours, the events of the catastrophe stripped Muslims off their ethical uprightness and projected them as violent people. Fourteen hundred years’ legacy of Islamic influences to science, culture, art, literature, and history were tarnished with the devastation of the twin towers. It highlighted Islam as a religion of the sword, and the Muslims as a gang of imperialist savages. As a consequence, American Muslims began suffering in different sectors of life. They not only encountered adversities in terms of hate crimes but also in areas of education, employment, and law enforcement. The Muslim women who wore hijab (headscarf) were also targets to incite violence. They were deprived of any scope of mourning for their personal loss caused in the 9/11 catastrophe. Besides, the prejudices of racial dislike and religious intolerance became validated in the guise of counteracting terrorism. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 fueled up and gave “the Bush administration an opening to assemble the required authority and public support to subdue the ‘evil dictators’ of the world” (Fouskas & Gokay, 3). In the view of Lansford et. al., “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with [America] or you are with the terrorists” (13). Such declarations deprived Muslims of the assurance to express logical and unbiased views. Furthermore, Islamophobia turned to be an established reality that held Muslims and immigrants responsible for all the socio-political and economic malady of the West. Nevertheless, punishment of the innocent Muslim majority for the offences of a few

Muslim criminals who in reality attacked the twin towers became rational. This indignation is manifested in “Lessons of 9/11” by Mihri Niknam where she asserts, “Those God-denying, God-forsaken perpetrators of the savage acts of 9/11 , did not just murder, maim and injure innocent humans, but they remain directly responsible for the most disastrous downward spiraling perception of Islam and Muslims in the West in recent history” (33). Thus, a few number of criminals who proclaimed themselves Muslims disgraced the original nature and heritage of the holy religion of Islam. Concurrently, it made numerous Muslims subject to Islamophobic stereotypes and religious profiling in the wake of 9/11.

Theoretically, the association of terrorism with Muslims gives vent to the Orientalist discourse where the revulsive fear of the “Other” is deeply rooted in the European society for centuries. Christopher Allen adds in “Justifying Islamophobia” that:

The atavistic stereotypes of historical enemies - the historical “Others” that much of Europe and European society had defined itself in opposition to Muslims - deeply embedded in the experience and culture of various races, nationalities, and communities being reinvigorated, and possibly rejustified, by Orientalism. (16)

In other words, Orientalist discourse laid the theoretical keystones for the progress of Islamophobia. The most significant works to define this practice of Muslim racialization were *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam* by Edward Said. Said debated that the motive Westerners had biased philosophies about Muslims was a product of a psychological process assisted by substantial material venture. Said argued:

The “Orient”, was constructed by the West, in relation to the West, and existed solely for the West. In a Freudian sense, the West was established as the standard of measurement,

and Orientalism was, “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” It represented the collective dichotomy of “us” (i.e., Europeans), juxtaposed against “them” (i.e., non-Europeans). (300-301)

Moreover, Orientalism described them as a lesser class that was “manifestly inferior” to the West (Said 301). Thus, Said meticulously explained how literature and media discourse simulated these theories and standards to such an extent that they could legitimize fundamental ferocity against groups that seemed to intimidate Western security.

Therefore, in the first chapter, I am going to talk about how the protagonist, Arissa, in *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah, falls victim of unprecedented hate violence in the repercussion of 9/11. Though she herself loses her dearest husband in the catastrophic ruins of the World Trade Centers, she was accused of being associated with terrorism due to her Muslim and Pakistani identity. Abdullah illustrates that, the 9/11 calamity can never be a singular American tragedy because the tragedy of 9/11 was equally tragic for Arissa because she too lost her husband in this terrorist attack. Moreover, she was faced with myriads of obstacles as she continues living in America with her mentally and physically charged son. She was bombarded with stereotypical misrepresentations and was constructed as the inferior other in the American society. But, despite all these challenges, she chose to resist Islamophobia by staying behind in America and fighting back. She determined to accept all of America’s faults and assimilate into the society. However, for this assimilation scheme, she had to take her veil off from her head. In fact, this removal of veil signifies the beginning of moving forward in life in America in the aftermath of 9/11. Thus, by not succumbing to Islamophobia, Arissa does not revert to the role of the other in American society rather she resolves to integrate into American life for a better future of her son.

The 2nd chapter explores how the irreligious protagonists of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, in the wake of Islamophobic bigotry, reclaim their Muslim identity by becoming more religious. The atrocities turn the American lovers Changez, the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Mohammad Khan (Mo), the central character of *The Submission* into obvious anti-Americans. The Pakistani immigrant Changez assumes the Muslim sign of beard, while Mo, not only keeps beard but also starts to pray and fast. Furthermore, as a consequence of Islamophobia, they become the other in the American society where they reject America for their Muslim identity. Thus, the Pakistani immigrant Changez returns to Pakistan to dissociate from America and Mo, the American citizen of Indian origin goes to settle in Mumbai, Qatar and other Arab countries in order to resist Islamophobia.

Chapter One

Saffron Dreams: Resistance by Staying Behind

This chapter discusses one of the most dominant 9/11 counter narratives, *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah. Abdullah is an extremely talented Pakistani writer residing in America. Her novel portrays the character of Arissa Illahi, the Pakistani immigrant in America whose life revolves around the poignant event of losing her husband in the horrific attacks of 9/11. By delineating the character of a Muslim widow, Arissa, Abdullah captures the tragic lived experiences of the Muslim women immigrants in America after the collapse of the World Trade Centers. Abdullah illustrates the miseries, pain, challenges, and difficulties that Arissa encounters as a Muslim woman even though she herself has been an equal or even more distressed victim of the attacks. Hence, Abdullah defies the notion that 9/11 is a singular American tragedy as Deborah Hall puts, “*Saffron Dreams* reminds us that 9/11 hurt Muslims in more devastating ways because it stole their innocence and reputation” (94). Through this novel the writer also counteracts the mainstream 9/11 literature where all Muslims are associated with terrorism just because they share the same religion. But, despite all the hatred and prejudices against Muslim Americans, Arissa does not succumb to Islamophobia, rather she resists the bigotry by staying behind and fighting back. For such resistance and to survive in America, she had to take her veil off keeping her religious faith intact.

The novel is written in a memoir style which penetrates deeply into Arissa’s heartbreak and inner struggles. The story revolves around Faizan and Arissa who come to the United States after their marriage in 1998 with brimming dreams “to lead a freer, safer life, to live among a civilization” (Abdullah 60). They chose to live in New York because it is a city which “held so much promise, opportunities bursting at the seams” (Abdullah 35). They were filled with hopes

that every dream of theirs would be fulfilled in America. Faizan had a Master's degree in English literature from Karachi University and thought that he would easily become a lecturer in the American educational institutions which they thought would be adequate for bearing their living cost in the States. But their dreams start to fade when Faizan, not getting his desired job, eventually had to wait tables in the "Windows" in the World Trade Center. Arissa was extremely disappointed with this profession as she considers this a degradation of their status and regards it foolish, but ultimately accepts her husband's job as Faizan convinces her that in America it is more money to wait tables if one can keep holding honesty, hard work and dedication. Nevertheless, they had an utmost perfect marriage which was full of love and compassion. Their life got even more ecstatic when Arissa becomes pregnant and like all other would be parents were expecting a healthy and adorable baby.

Unfortunately, September 11, 2001 altered her life turning it upside down. She learned no matter how one plans one's life, life has its own fashion. Her dreams, plans and hopes are all shattered in a blink of an eye as the twin towers are crashed by the terrible terrorist attacks. In other words, precisely at 8.55 a.m. on 11 September, 2001, "the bleak shadow entered [her] life and threw the cloak of darkness over [her] and tried to suffocate [her]" (Abdullah 70). Faizan who was at work when the attack was being carried out gets killed in the attacks. He was: "a loving family member, an innocent civilian, a hard-working citizen, gone never to return. His struggle, his tenure in life cut short, his dreams unrealized ... He was vanished, like he never existed. Snatched away like he was never hers. He left this world without a trace" (Abdullah 84-87). With Faizan's death, Arissa's life turned into living death and she loses all hopes of living. In this regard, Rabiya Ashraf comments that, "The very day Faizan becomes a pitiful victim of World Trade Center attacks, Arissa undergoes a psychological shift ... Her emotional pain,

depression and dominantly passive views about life shows “Depressive Realism” (105, 106). But the excruciating pangs of her agonies intensifies as soon as the attackers of the twin towers are identified.

The attackers of the 9/11 catastrophe were identified as radical Islamists. Since the revelation of their identity, over the course of only few hours, America rigidly recasts its assimilation policy of the Muslim immigrants into the society. The rage towards the invaders are directed to those ordinary Muslims who share the same race and religion. Abdullah also points out the transformation of America, “In the aftermath of 9/11 ... New York, a melting pot bubbled over, was now a boiling pot of lost innocence” (87). After September 11, 2001, the general Muslims who came to the U. S. with the purpose of leading an honest life by the dint of hard work start to get viewed, as Kinnvall et. al. asserts, “Guilty by association even when being separated in both time and space from the actual attacks” (317). Muslims in general were held responsible for the terrorist attacks since they belong to the same race and were lumped together with the few misguided fundamentalists. The racial marginalization was at its peak which can be traced back to Orientalism as well. The Orientalists discourse gives vent to the dialectic relation between the East and the West where Edward Said asserts, “The Orient or the East is at the bottom, something either to be feared or to be controlled” (300-301). Thus every Muslim and every action linked with Islam was considered terrifying and suspicious and was subject to surveillance.

This association, accusation and misjudgment are further strengthened by the mainstream 9/11 literature. Novels like *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta* by Martin Amis and *Terrorist* by John Updike portray the issue of terrorism from a western view point and essentially delineate

the issue to be associated with the doctrines of Islam. This phenomenon is deftly discussed by Muhammad Safeer Awan where he alleges:

The ultimate goal that post-9/11 narratives written from a western perspective seek to achieve is that they present Muslims living in their midst as the “orient other” that poses a danger to the society and therefore has no right to live there until and unless they assimilate themselves culturally into the western way of life. (532)

In fact, this is the basic message of the mainstream Islamophobic rhetoric where all Muslims in general are represented to be suspicious and guilty. All this is strengthened by the repeated misquotations from the Holy Qur’an to convince the readers to accept the fact that the whole malaise of “terror” stems from the doctrines of Islam. For instance, Updike’s paranoid suspicion and misrepresentation is portrayed in the *Terrorist* where he depicts a conversation between the protagonist Ahmed and his religious teacher who is the Imam of the mosque. There the Imam asks him to translate the fourteenth verse of the sixty-fourth surah and the conversation approaches like this:

“Good, I mean good enough... Can you tell me, Ahmad, quickly, what it means?” “Uh, it says that in your wives and children you have an enemy. Beware of them.” “But your wives and children! What is “enemy” about them?”

“Well, may be because they distract you from jihad, from the struggle to become holy and closer to God.”

“Perfect! What a beautiful tutee you are, Ahmad! I could not have put it better myself”.
(Updike 108)

Therefore, by the trick of misquoting the Qur'anic verses repeatedly throughout the text, the western writer serves his purpose to render Islam as a promoter of radicalism and terrorism. Besides, caricaturing Muslim symbols like beard, veil, the writers associate these bodily markers with extremism. Updike's protagonist Ahmad, the would be suicide-bomber insists his mother to wear veil in his graduation ceremony or else she would look like a whore (65). Thus, this Islamophobic discourses warp Muslims to be prone to violence and fanaticism.

Such misrepresentation and irrational accusations from the western perspective are counteracted by Abdullah in *Saffron Dreams*. She refutes the misconstructions from the view point of an ordinary Muslim through the character of Arissa whose husband was killed in the 9/11 attacks. But ironically, instead of receiving any sympathy from the people around her, she becomes an outcast immediately. The moment the attackers' identities are revealed as Muslims, Arissa begins to be eyed with suspicion. This becomes apparent when after the attack Arissa visits Ground Zero and gazes at the pictures of the victims of 9/11. When she was looking at the pictures and thinking of Faizan, "She stops, mesmerized until she realizes a white man is staring with hostility at her. The man frowned and looked away. There was again, judgment by association" (Abdullah 87). She further demonstrates Americans' transformed outlooks towards her as a veiled woman in the aftermath of the terror attacks, "I, too, had witnessed all sorts of looks in the past few days, the gazes from familiar friends who had turned unfamiliar, the silent blank stares of strangers, the angry, wounded looks wanting to hurt, the accusatory side-long glances screaming silently, you did it, your people brought the towers down" (Abdullah 60). In fact, similar to man's beard, veil also serves as a crucial symbol of Islamic identity. Zalipour et. al. claims, "The veil, real or imagined, functions like race, a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape" (412). Moreover, the veil is symbolized as the marker of

women's oppression both in the western sphere and the Muslim world. Hence, the veil becomes a means of marginalizing Muslim women from the mainstream U. S. society. Therefore, in the wake of 9/11, veil also represents the symbol of enemy to the U. S. as the veil-wearing narrator of the story affirms, "Now [the veil] marks the wearer's association with the terrorists" (Abdullah 106). Veil being the visual sign of Arissa's Muslim identity thus becomes the subject of suspicion and surveillance and therefore issue of hostilities in the aftermath of 9/11.

The outcome of the cruel association, the ferocious hate crimes and the indescribable anguishes of Arissa are heartrendingly portrayed by the novelist in several occasions. As an expatriate and expecting widow, Arissa's contacts with conservative American society after the death of Faizan, are an account of such experiences. For instance, while at a subway station in the aftershock of 9/11, she was confronted by four frightened and angry teenagers. Seeing her veil, they started to come closer towards her with fake frantic attitude for the purpose of avenging the attack of 9/11, for punishing her for the terror attack where she had also lost her husband. Because of her veil, they immediately associate her with the race of the murderers and aiming at her veil, the blond guy, "pulling out his knife and aiming the point at [her] hijab" commented that "The veil that you wear is all façade. You try to look pure, but you are evil inside. You are the nonbelievers, not us" (Abdullah 62). Even though she was pregnant, they did not spare her, rather the blond guy moved forward to attack her and tried several times to stab her with the knife. But the moment they notice a man approaching to the spot, they leave her crumpling onto her knees and screaming out, "You're a moron. My religion does not preach terror. They are using it to fulfill their own objectives" (Abdullah 62). Afterwards, the group returned to stab her again but failed to do so because of the presence of the passer by. Instead, they picked her up and threw her down to the ground but sadly enough, no one came to rescue

her. And due to this violent hate crime, her unborn child was critically harmed as the medical tests afterwards showed that the baby would be born retarded, suffering from “heart defect, urinary tract malformations, kidney abnormalities, cleft lip” (Abdullah 67). Thus, Ashraf acclaims, “The consequential attitude of Americans hit by the attacks of 9/11 is hostility towards the “yellow race”. There is a high degree of hatred nurtured by members of this society with those of other. Arissa, therefore, becomes a victim of “Ethnocentrism”” (106). Hence, Arissa turns into a devastated target of bigotry, intolerance and aggression because of preserving her Muslim identity.

Moreover, her personal agonies continue to rise as the collective Islamophobia of the U. S. society was on soar. The media portrayals were becoming uglier as the days passed and Muslim stereotypes were more abhorrently fed in the western minds. Arissa states, “I looked on as day after day the media tried, sentenced, and hung my faith. Day after day analysts applied new interpretations to the religion, broke the backs of bridges, and erected barriers too sturdy to take down or overcome” (Abdullah 155). Her personal encounter with the media reporters give a clearer idea of this phenomenon as they mockingly criticized the fact of her being attacked by her own people. When Mr. Cloomin from the *Observer* interviews her, “How does it feel to be attacked by your own people? They have the same religion as you”, then with a scorn, Arissa retorts, “No they don’t. They don’t have a religion” and finally she bursts out:

You have not been on all your fours at Ground Zero, looking through debris for a sign of your loved one ... examining fingers? Toes? Listen, when you put all your potatoes in a sack, you should know they all have unique flavors. Some are rotten, some are fresh. Just because they are clumped together doesn’t make them all the same. (Abdullah 124)

This notion is highlighted by Mansour Mohammed Ali Faraj in his article, "*Saffron Dreams: America as a nation of lies*" where he opines, "If Muslims and radical Islamists share the name of religion or even pray the same way, this does not mean that the former should share the same ideology of the latter. However, because of the daily false input they received from the media, the American public learned to live in fear" (166). Arissa also acknowledges media's misconstructions vehemently, "I wanted to take the drenched fabric of elucidation in the media and wring it dry of the false analysis presented daily on channels across the country ... the world with its unjust notions, its constant stereotyping" (Abdullah 155). Thus Abdullah counteracts the Islamophobic treatment and the dominant 9/11 rhetoric adopted by the larger U. S. social scene by bringing to light the unbearable distresses experienced by Arissa.

Abdullah also portrays the ordinary Muslims' sufferings and trauma from the Muslim perspective. After the attacks, many Arab and Asian immigrants were subject to humiliation. Many of the Muslim cab drivers were spat on, ridiculed, and attacked. Muslim professionals lost their jobs. Moreover, lot of Muslim restaurants were vandalized and to avoid such vandalization, many ethnic restaurants put up signs like "God Bless America" (Abdullah 59). With every horn or commotion on the street, "they jumped, then withdrew a little more within themselves, guilt-ridden with sins they didn't commit" (Abdullah 60). At the same time, Muslim immigrants became desperate to show loyalty to their adopted homeland as Arissa states, "Arab and Asian immigrants put up signs of solidarity with the hope of evading discrimination ... We were homesick individuals in an adopted homeland. We couldn't break free from our religion, and yet we wanted to soar" (Abdullah 60). This excruciating dilemma led many Muslims to give up their Muslim signs as a survival strategy. A lot number of Muslim men shaved off their beards, Muslim women took off their hijab and adopted a conservative yet western style of dressing

(Abdullah 60) just to avoid being target of hate violence. Even many of them changed their names to hide their identity and religion. For instance, Salim turned Sam, Ali transformed to Alan. Therefore, the extent of discrimination, mockery and hate crimes increased so much that the American Muslims had no alternative other than adopting some assimilation scheme to survive in the midst of the post 9/11 Islamophobic propaganda in the U. S. society.

Likewise, the varied levels of difficulties intensify Arissa's ability to fight the hardships off. This notion is further strengthened by Ashraf where she states, "Abdullah considers tragedy an essential ingredient for the realization of Arissa's potential to stand hardships" (104). Thus Abdullah highlights the bombardment of challenges that cause Arissa's philosophy of life to undergo a radical transformation:

The people of our adopted land had lost faith in us, and we couldn't trust our own. The line between allies and enemies was growing thinner by the day. Watching our backs had become a habit, a necessity of the strange times we lived in. We struggled to know ourselves only to lose ourselves in the interpretation of others, in the hyphenation of our worlds. (Abdullah 154)

Feeling uprooted and lacking self-identification, Arissa undergoes a psychological change which directs her to integrate into the adopted country to fight the challenges off. In this case, her veil was the chief Muslim icon which would draw unwanted attention thereby making her more prone to attacks of prejudiced people. Thus, she had to force herself to remove the veil which symbolized her womanly dignity as a Muslim. Moreover, she felt taking off the veil would make her feel naked (Abdullah 116). But despite all of these reasons, she decides to stop wearing the veil to survive in America and to provide a sound future for her disabled and completely dependent son as she says, "My world was not mine any more ... his comfort came first of all.

My decision to let go of an integral part of my life would only offer him an opportunity to fit in better ... Assimilate and accept it all, I decided. Only this society can give my child what my own can't- a chance for a better life and abundant opportunities" (Abdullah 106). Arissa consoles herself thinking that her veil is "merely shifted from [her] head to [her] heart" (Abdullah 3). Therefore, Arissa's resolution to assimilate turns out to be the removal of her veil and moving on in America.

Through the character of Arissa, Abdullah endeavors to make the American readers aware that the Muslims are also the victims of the 9/11 tragedy and the colossal terrorist attacks of 9/11 are never motivated by the doctrines of Islam as media and mainstream literature misconstrued. It was rather solely an outcome of some misled radical Islamists' ideologies who employed the name of Islam to justify their objectives since Islam is a religion of peace, humility, forbearance and equality. Abdullah clarifies with determination, "Terrorism has no religion ... No religion preaches terror ... the whole concept of Islam is based on tolerance, peace and bridge- building" (Abdullah 120, 155). This message is further strengthened by Faraj, "Islam commands Muslims to behave toward and treat non-Muslims kindly and justly and forbids any form of terrorism, brutality and barbarism to be committed against them as the Quran affirms that "Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity"" (186). Therefore, based on these values of Islam, Shaila Abdullah negates the misrepresentations of Muslims pervasive in the U. S. media and rhetoric.

To conclude, being a distressed widow and a devastated Muslim woman who was assaulted to be an associate of terrorists in the wake of 9/11, Arissa never remained silent. Rather she always let her voice be heard and stood ever active in counteracting cruelty, falsehood and defamations advocated by America against her religion. But in spite of all these setbacks and challenges, with self- actualization and determination, she reconciles with America and accepts

all its faults, wins her challenges and achieves her objectives to resist Islamophobia by staying behind and fighting back. In fact, Arissa's removal of veil symbolizes a new beginning as she becomes aware of the requirement to be accepted in society and for that she structures and devices her own life plan (Ashraf 106). Lastly, she emerges as a winner by fighting off all her challenges which is aptly affirmed by Arissa, "I has survived, I realized with a degree of pride. I had not succumbed to the pain of my loss and challenges" (Abdullah 162). Thus, as a resistance scheme to Islamophobic bigotry, Arissa decides to stay behind in America and frames her preferences in life for which she had to take her veil off from her head but kept the love of her religion fresh in her heart.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist and *The Submission*: Resistance through Reclaiming
Muslim Identity

In the second chapter, through extensive discussion of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, I will show how in the repercussion of 9/11, the ordinary Muslims, being the scapegoats of hate crimes, show resistance to America's Islamophobia by deciding to leave America. In both the novels, by the portrayal of the protagonists, Changez and Mo, Hamid and Waldman re-represent those American Muslims who are stigmatized, generalized and are alleged to be a part of deviant religious fundamentalists. Even though they do not embody any Muslim trait or ethic, they are constantly stereotyped and blamed to be radical Islamists. Thus, being singled out by the U. S.'s uncritical Islamoprejudice, Changez, the irreligious Muslim starts to counteract the tragedy of victimization by assuming some Muslim signs such as keeping beard whereas the American citizen, Mo not only keeps beard but also starts to pray and fast which are two of the fundamental requirements of Islam. As a consequence of being subject to discriminatory strategies of American national security policy, both of them convert from a devout American to bold Anti-Americans. Therefore, by deconstructing stereotypes and negating the notion that 9/11 was a singular American tragedy, Hamid and Waldman resist the U. S.'s Islamophobic bigotry. Hamid shows the act of resistance by making his nonreligious character, Changez leave America and move back to Pakistan, while Waldman resists Islamophobia by making Mo leave his home country America and settle in the greater Arab world.

From a Muslim viewpoint, Hamid sketches both the physical and psychological effects of 9/11 on Muslims through his protagonist Changez, a Muslim Pakistani migrant who lived in America for several years before leaving for Pakistan after the backlash of 9/11. The novel

begins in the dramatic monologue form between the protagonist Changez and an anonymous American visitor at Lahore's old Anarakali bazar in Pakistan. It is noteworthy that the American tourist, who is suspected to be a CIA agent, hardly says anything throughout the whole novel except making some facial expressions and gestures. The introductory lines of the novel stated by Changez instantly sets a vibe of distrust and suspicion that lingers throughout the text entirely— "Excuse me sir but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened of my beard. I am a lover of America" (Hamid 1). The very opening line of the novel denotes that the American listener was "alarmed" and "frightened" by the bearded speaker. In an interview with Deborah Solomon, Hamid details the fact why the American is mute throughout the novel. In Solomon's view, the American remains mostly quiet "because it's almost always the other way around" (Solomon). Hamid also asserts that he has selected his literary method as "a necessary reaction to the dominance of U.S.'s interests, media coverage and perspectives in the global war on terrorism". He further asserted that, "It was time to give the stage to the other perspective" (Lee 345). Thus, by making his central character, Changez, relay his entire story to the silent American visitor, Hamid metaphorically claims that it is the turn for Muslims to speak out their inner turmoil and humiliating experiences, which so far have been distorted and overshadowed by the dominant group's experiences of pain and suffering.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist mirrors the cruel reality of the immigrant Muslims whose lives have altered forever after the backlash of 9/11 attacks. In the novel, Changez represents the example of a successful Pakistani who has assimilated into American society. He studied in a very prominent and famous university Princeton, worked in one of the most prestigious financial companies in Manhattan, Samson Underwood and also had an American girlfriend named Erica. Moreover, Changez was highly accredited and valued by his employer for his loyal adherence to

the capital fundamentalisms of American economy. Additionally, for his extra-ordinary performances as financial analyst Changez received multiple “Best Employee” awards from his company (Hamid 138). All these achievements made Changez exclaim in utter ecstasy, “This is a dream come true ... my life was a film in which I was the star and everything is possible ... I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet” (Hamid 3, 51). In fact, Changez struggled to embrace America as his own country and devoted his best efforts to make America embrace him in return. He tried his best to fulfil his dream of assimilating into the mainstream American society by adopting Americanness in his attires and attitudes as it is evident in many of his business assignments to different countries where he tried to speak and act like an American as much as possible (Hamid 74). Such occasions reveal Changez’s view of himself as an American.

But, at the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Changez and other Muslim immigrants’ dream and perception of America shatter as their lives turn upside down. In the blink of an eye, Changez along with all other American Muslims start to be viewed as traitors and terrorists instead of loyal citizens. Muslims begin to suffer as L. Peek states, “a dramatic increase in the frequency and intensity of these hostile encounters such as verbal harassment; violent threats and intimidation; physical assault; religious profiling; and employment, educational, and housing discrimination” (16). Moreover, George W. Bush’s administration adopts several official policies, like- the Patriot Act. 5 imprisonment, interrogation at American airports, surveillance, observing the movement and actions of Muslim American groups etc. (Peek 17). These antagonistic policies caused Muslims like Changez immeasurable harm in various ways. For example, right after the attacks of 9/11 when Changez arrives at the American airport after the business trip from Manila, he is taken aback to see a changed America. At the airport, Changez feels utterly embarrassed and humiliated when he is inquired about the purpose of his visit to America and is

ordered to strip down to his boxers. While he is held for further query, his American colleagues are courteously requested to leave. This discrimination instantly makes Changez realize how he is considered a foreigner and not an American despite his contribution to American economy and his efforts to assimilate into American way of life. Moreover, Changez's American colleagues leave him at the airport without waiting for him. Thus begins Changez's ostracisation which he very aptly articulates, "My team did not wait for me; by the time I entered the customs hall they had already collected their suitcases and left. As a consequence, I rode to Manhattan that evening very much alone" (Hamid 86). Many American Muslims like Changez start to be ostracized, oppressed and antagonized for the crime they literally had no connection to. Therefore, it can be said that the tragedy and victimization that Muslim Americans had to suffer after the 9/11 catastrophe is no less than the White Americans.

In the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attack, Changez's position changes drastically. From his colleagues to acquaintances, every American starts to cast an eye of suspicion upon him. He is bewildered at the baseless association that the Americans make of him with the criminals of the attacks. He is accused of being a Muslim fundamentalist, but in reality, Changez is far from being religious let alone being a fundamentalist. A Muslim fundamentalist is a hardline believer of Islam who strictly follows the basic Islamic principles that include praying, fasting, maintaining Islamic appearance bodily, abstaining from alcohol, refraining from physical relationship before marriage and so forth. Moreover, a Muslim fanatic is believed to be hostile to America and incompatible with Western civilization (Stonebanks 10); he abhors to acclimatize the Western style of living. Now, if we Analyze Changez from these perspectives, we will see that he did not adhere to any of these basic Muslim principles; rather his lifestyle and way of living were absolutely different from a staunch Muslim. He never prayed nor fasted. He went to

the nude beach, used to drink alcohol, and even had physical relationship before marriage; all these are a sharp contrast to Islamic doctrines. Moreover, he was a lover of America who happily dedicated himself to serve America's economy. Furthermore, in his attempt to be accepted as an American, he even went to the extent of sacrificing his identity for American Chris while making love with his girlfriend Erica. Therefore, due to these core dissimilarities with a religious extremist and Changez's endeavors to adopt America as his own country, the accusations become extremely intolerable to him.

America starts to implement a new set of discriminating agendas against the Muslim immigrants who are perceived as "threats" to America's national security. According to Yaser Ali, Muslim-looking immigrants were racialized as an entity who should be feared and guarded against (1049). At these deplorable circumstances, Changez realizes America merely embraces the immigrants as long as they seem beneficial to the interests of the country. No matter how dearly the immigrants devote themselves for the welfare of the country and uphold their American dream, they will remain as outsiders in their adopted land. Thus, Changez aptly feels the crumbling of the world around him and the impending destruction of his personal American dream (Hamid 106). This collapsing of world and the transforming reality of the post-9/11 America can also be seen in the case of other innocent Muslim immigrants. Muslim Pakistani cab drivers were mysteriously and abruptly disappearing from areas such as the Pak-Punjab Deli in New York. This hostility is appropriately illustrated by Hamid, "Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse" (107). In fact, American government detained countless Muslims for being "material witness" of suspected terrorists (Ali 1046). Also, this sudden disappearance can be

attributed to the Congress policy of prosecution of the alleged terrorists. According to Jonathan Hafetz: “The Congress policy has authorized the American authorities to intensify electronic surveillance on means of communication, disclose emails, tap wire phone calls, monitor and search suspects’ homes without any prior notification or court permission and prosecute wherever necessary” (11). In truth, it is without evidence that the individuals who were detained in such initiatives had any link to terrorism; rather their imprisonment and execution were merely based on the hegemonic groups’ suspicion and their perception of the Muslims as the “other”. Hence, the exasperation with surveillance and detention and prosecution policy against the Muslim immigrants were increasing Changez’s disillusionment of America.

In addition to the victimization of American Muslims in private sphere, American government started to launch costly wars in Muslim counties like Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of preventing further terrorist attacks on America. Ali claims that, this “war on terror” was launched under the umbrella of “national security policy” as these Muslim countries were constructed and represented to be the safe haven for terrorists (1045). Besides, Changez becomes highly concerned about the impending invasion of Afghanistan by America as it also signaled a subsequent invasion of its neighboring Muslim country Pakistan (Hamid 113). Finding his place of origin, Pakistan to be mercilessly vulnerable by the agenda of America’s “war on terror”, Changez suddenly feels betrayed. He realizes that regardless of his devotion to serve America’s economy, America does not hesitate to wage war against his home country and its neighboring ones in the guise of battling terrorism. Moreover, with America’s invasion of Afghanistan, the existing tensions between India and Pakistan start to deteriorate where America denies to stand by Pakistan. At this crucial point, Changez realizes that if America refuses to back his country of origin at the time of emergency, then promoting America’s economy to achieve its financial

fundamentals at that time would be an injustice to his origin. Henceforth, worries start to preoccupy Changez's conscience which is aptly asserted by his American boss Jim, "Changez, you haven't been yourself lately, you're preoccupied. Something's eating at you. I'd say it's your Pakistani side. You're worried about what's going on in the world" (Hamid 136). Thus, America's "war on terror" policies upon Muslim nations and its denial to support Pakistan in the impending crisis between India and Pakistan, serve a sharp turning point in Changez's perception of America's loyalty towards him. Therefore, he starts to feel more of an outcast in his adopted land and strongly drawn to his native culture.

Subsequently, no longer able to maintain dual identity of being a Pakistani and an outcast in America who is devalued, objectified and stereotyped, Changez prioritizes his Pakistani identity and resolves to keep his beard. The beard, as the narrating voice claims, signifies not only his identity, but also a form of counteraction of what Changez disapproves of— his disapproval of the allegation that all Muslims are radicals and terrorists. Changez thus claims, "My two-week old beard is a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, I sought to remind myself of the reality I just left behind in Pakistan ... I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters for multiple reasons ... I was deeply angry" (Hamid 147- 148). Because of his beard which has made him easily identifiable as a Muslim, Changez becomes a subject of whispers and stares overnight (Hamid 148). He is constantly stigmatized with religious profiling and verbal abuse by complete strangers. Thereby Changez resentfully states:

I was approached by a man I did not know ... just then another man appeared; he, too, glared at me, but took his friend by the arm and tugged at him, saying it was not worth it. Reluctantly, the first allowed himself to be led away. 'Fucking Arab,' he said. My blood

throbbled in my temples, and I called out, ‘Say it to my face coward, not as you run and hide.’ (Hamid 134)

Likewise, Changez suffers series of hostility such as discovering his car’s tires punctured, telephone lines interrupted and so forth. He even feels vulnerable physically. Adding to it, the pervasive media discourse of distorted representations about Muslims aggravated Changez’s fury as he rightly expresses, “Affronts were everywhere; the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment of history- not just from the government, but from the media- provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger” (Hamid 190). In this regard, Ali emphasizes, “Islamophobic discourse after 9/11 construed the stereotypical Muslim male- personifying all the Orientalist tropes and characteristics as the primary threat to American security. As a consequence, the Muslim others get restricted” (1043). Hence, antagonism between American racial doctrines and Changez’s Muslim appearance prompts his resistance towards America’s bigoted conducts.

However, Changez’s social exile is accelerated as he decides to develop his exterior to equal the Western stereotype of an Islamist though he was not at all an orthodox religious practitioner before. Being alienated, he refuses to be part of a society he no longer idolizes. Pei-Chen Liao in his article, “The Post-9/11 ‘Return Home’ Novel: Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” asserts that, “a man’s temperament is driven by his inner emotional turmoil and insolences of the people towards him” (130). Moreover, the changed relationship with his American colleagues paved the way of his consequent transformation from the lover of America to an activist who condemns the American policy and its blind operation of War on Terror against Islam and innocent Muslims in the excuse of democracy and advancement. Hence, Changez’s reclamation of Muslim identity is a sign of his resistance towards America’s Islamoprejudice.

Moreover, the story that Changez hears in Chile about janissaries persuades him of his beliefs about America and reinforces his desire to be apart from the U.S. Janissaries, as Changez was told, were “Christian boys captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army... Always taken in childhood and indoctrinated to devote themselves to their adopted empire, these boys were ferocious and utterly loyal... They had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to return to” (Hamid 151). To his utter shock, Changez realizes that getting educated and having worked in the U.S for more than four years, he feels like a ‘modern-day janissary’ who has eventually adapted to elite Americanness. Looking at the U.S with an ex-janissary’s eyes, he perceives that, as a present-day empire, the U.S symbolizes not only ruthless capitalism but exultant militarism. At such a point, Changez realizes that if he carries on to serve Underwood Samson, he will be assisting American capitalism that has wreaked destruction upon the Third World Muslim countries and hence he will be operating as a “servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to [him] and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that [his] own country faced the threat of war” (Hamid 152). Changez also realizes how America behaves as the sole super power by intervening in every corner of the world and automating its own terms:

I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. Moreover, I knew from my experience as a Pakistani of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions that finance was the primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. (Hamid 177)

Eventually, Changez is on the verge of rejecting America and its biased fundamentals towards the East with firm belief that, “It was right for [him] to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that [he] had required so much time to arrive at [his] decision” (Hamid 177). Thus Changez counteracts the Islamophobic conduct by refusing to be part of such atrocities.

Changez therefore, resolves to depart from the U.S. and return to his home country, Pakistan forever. Changez’s decision to leave New York and settle down in Lahore as a radical lecturer at a university indicates Changez’s complete conversion. There he advocates Pakistan’s disengagement from America in its domestic and international affairs and condemns the American foreign policy toward Pakistan particularly and the Muslim world broadly. Moreover, he states on a news channel boldly that “no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (Hamid 207). Along with his condemnation of America’s judgmental and shrewd strategies, Changez commands protests against America’s hypocritical foreign policies. When his protests start to be construed as threat to America’s interests and considered as terrorist acts, Changez guarantees that he is a disbeliever of violence and is no ally of killers that he is solely a university lecturer and nothing more or less (Hamid 206). Hence, Hamid counteracts the dominant 9/11 rhetoric and resists American Islamophobic conducts by making Changez leave America for Pakistan and reclaim his true identity as a Muslim. It is noteworthy that the outcome of Changez’s rejection of America does not make him a religious fundamentalist, as the paradoxical title *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests, rather a Muslim nationalist.

Another salient counter narrative that raises voice against the dominant 9/11 discourse is Amy Waldman’s *The Submission*. Waldman’s novel turns upside down many tropes, themes and

patterns of the already canonized American 9/11 literary works such as *Falling Man*, *Terrorist* and *Extremely Loud*. Thus it characterizes a sharp new period in 9/11 literary genre. Writing in meticulous prose, Waldman has produced a novel with a historic background and emotions that gives the readers an instinctual understanding of how New York City and the country as a whole responded to 9/11. The novel also highlights how that colossal tragedy affected some Americans' attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants and how it made many non-practicing Muslims revert to practicing Muslims. Hence, the novel unwraps the paranoid air of distrust and terror and exposes the reality that the white Americans were not the only sufferers of 9/11 thereby defying the notion of singular American tragedy. Waldman's novel also shows resistance to the Islamophobic treatments by making the protagonist, who despite being an American citizen, leave his home country, America and settle in the Muslim world.

The Submission set in 2003 New York, commences with a simple plot as the champion of an anonymous competition to design the 9/11 memorial is disclosed to be a Muslim. With the revelation of the winner's identity, political discord arises all over New York as reporters fuel panic in the media accusing the winner to be associated with terrorism since he is a Muslim. Moreover, family members of the 9/11 victims show grievances at the revelation of the winner's identity, and community protestors begin organizing protests because they think the memorial would be turned into an "Islamic garden" that would "venerate[s] Jihadis" as it is going to be designed by a Muslim (Waldman 19). Furthermore, the discord in media and in public sphere of New York is aggravated when the garden's planner, Mohammad Khan who is an accomplished architect, declines to clarify whether his design is an Islamic garden or not. Even questions like, "Should a Muslim, even if he is irreligious and an American of Indian origin, plan the memorial?" (Waldman 18) challenge his rights and eligibility of joining the competition. In fact,

as Yasser Ali asserts, in the post 9-11, American Muslims began to be “thrust outside of the protective ambit of citizenship” which effectively served as the moral justification for the deprivation of their rights (1032). Additionally, committees like the Memorial Defense Committee and Save America From Islam were created for and against the memorial project which also fueled the panic. Various marches and public hearings were held to oppose the winner of the memorial. Beside the Muslim winner who is secular in religious views, the story also portrays Claire Burwell, an affluent 9/11 widow and a leader of the victims’ families in the memorial panel, who chooses to support Mo initially but later gives way to suspicions. Another 9/11 widow, Asma Anwar, an unauthorized immigrant from Bangladesh, resolves also to support Mo. However, *The Submission* hardly scans foreign policy the way *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does. Rather, the novel emphasizes on how American Islamophobic rhetoric associates Islam with terrorism and savagery under the guise of national security policy. Moreover, it is not a Pakistani immigrant this time but an American born Muslim of Indian descent who, being a victim of infuriating Islamophobic propaganda, eventually leaves his own country America and goes to reside in the Muslim world as an act of resistance to bigotry. Through reclaiming his Muslim identity, Mohammad Khan shows resistance to the Islamophobic treatments of the U.S and its media.

In fact, in the aftermath of 9/11, Islamophobia is manifested both consciously and subconsciously, through the infusion of stereotyped portrayals of those who appear perceptibly “Muslims”. This Islamophobic discourse initiates at the beginning of the story when the jury discovers that the winner behind the selected design, “the Garden”, is a person called Mohammad. Bob Wilner, the Governor’s representative, reacted in a manner which is far from decent, “Jesus fucking Christ! It’s a goddamn Muslim!” (Waldman 17). Other juries follow him

in crude suspicion asking questions like, “Is he even American?”, or is he “one of the problematic ones” (Waldman 18); they even indicate to the likelihood of Mo being a terrorist and hence unsuitable for winning the contest in spite of being an American citizen. Ali thus aptly states, “In the post 9/11, the Muslims in America were presumptively considered disloyal and a threat, irrespective of their formal citizenship status” (1050). Therefore, Islamophobia is employed to identify Muslims as entities outside of and contradictory to the American identity.

In the wake of 9/11 catastrophe, the American national identity happens to be consolidated against those who appeared Muslims. Consequently, they suffered numerous civil rights violations. Mo, likewise, falls victim to myriads of humiliating security policies adopted by the American government. He is awe-struck when, right after a week of the 9/11 attacks, he is held up for questioning just before boarding the plane on his way back to New York from Los Angeles. At the opening of the inquiry, he recollects how just within a week of the attack, his life has enormously changed. Since the attack, Mo tried to behave in a more submissive way as he had been anxious about how the terrorist attacks would influence people’s views about Muslims. The questions in the interrogation cell were absolutely humiliating and intolerable. The questions also exemplify the absurdity of the allegations of Mo being associated with terrorism:

“Do you love this country, Mohammad?”

“As much as you do.”

“What are your thoughts on jihad?”

“I don’t have any”

“Aren’t you a practicing Muslim?”

“Practicing? No.”

“Do you believe you’d go to your heaven if you blow yourself up?”

“I would never blow myself up.” (Waldman 28)

The irrelevance of suspicion and Mo’s secularism are again confirmed when Waldman asserts, “You have just not the wrong man but the wrong kind of man. The wrong kind of Muslim: he’d barely been to a mosque in his life” (30). Therefore, Mo’s responses highlight the absurdity of the doubts and lead the readers to consider the entire query as vain and offensive. The irrationality of the accusations is further emphasized when Mo recalls how he truly has always been a decent, law-abiding citizen. Afterwards, when Mo gets back home, he shockingly discovers that his suitcase is a clutter because the agents had searched it as well. However, his anguish over the whole experience vanishes instantly as he witnesses the volatile condition his city is in: “His bitterness was overwhelmed by the magnitude of mourning around him” (Waldman 35). Hence, the fact that Mo’s empathy is greater than his rage actually proves him to be a good, loving and kind person who cannot be linked to the heinous actions that he is accused of.

Illogicality of U.S.’s Islamophobic propaganda deepens as Waldman reveals more about Mo. This thirty-seven years old man belongs to an Indian family who migrated to the United States in 1966. Mo got his education at the University of Virginia and the Yale School of Art and Architecture. His family never practiced Islam though they are Muslim. Waldman writes, “His parents ... made modernity their religion ... as a boy he had no religious education ... he ate pork ... he dated Jews ... he was, if not an atheist himself, certainly agnostic, which perhaps made him not a Muslim at all ... He seemed all American, even in his ambition” (Waldman 30,

54). Thus, Mo's views regarding religion made all the stereotypical profiling about him baseless. The cruel bigotry shown by the Islamophobic U.S reaches its highest when Mo is denied his long desired and deserved promotion as the Project Director of Roi's firm without any valid reason other than being a Muslim. The denunciation of his years of hard work enrages him so much that "Outside his body shivered out of proportion to the temperature, and there was no plane above to account for the roar in his ears" (Waldman 44). Thus, because of being a Muslim, Mo is deprived not only from his highly deserved promotion, but also from most of his civil rights including winning of the 9/11 memorial design competition.

When Mo is hurled with disgrace after winning the memorial design competition and is denied the winning position because of being misconstrued as terrorist, one of the Islamic groups comes ahead to assist him. They voice their indignation towards America's ruthless crimes against the Muslim world in the post 9/11 under the pretention of securing national safety. The executive director of the Muslim American Coordinating Council (MACC) thus states the violence committed on the Muslim world by the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11:

But does America want to live in peace with Muslims? Since we're talking about memorials, where is the memorial to the half-million Iraqi children killed by U.S. sanctions? To the thousands of innocent Afghans killed in response to this attack? ... To all the Muslims slaughtered in Chechnya, or Kashmir, or Palestine, while the U.S. stood by? We keep hearing that it takes three hours to read the names of the dead from this attack. Do you know how long it would take to read the names of half a million dead Iraqi children? Twenty-one days! (Waldman 88)

This discourse spurs up agitation in Manhattan and its neighborhood to halt the selection of Mo's memorial design. It is further aggravated by 24/7 media coverage propagating loathsome

accusations against Islam. Famous channels like Fox News begins to air report such as, “In a potentially explosive development, the memorial design may actually be a martyrs’ paradise ... He’s trying to encourage new martyrs- here’s a taste of where you’ll get if you blow yourself up” (Waldman 130). Another media discourse published in the *Wall Street Journal* stated, “We’ve invited the enemy into our home to decorate. They’ve come up with something sneakier: an Islamic garden, this martyrs’ paradise, it’s like a code to jihadists- it’s the Trojan horse” (Waldman 130). All these lies and rumors fueled the already heated situations pervasive in the country. Moreover, the jury and an anti-Islam organization named “Save America from Islam” (SAFI) start to force Mo to accept the accusations against his garden by revising the pattern of his memorial design which in turn makes Mo even more obstinate to clarify himself.

With Mo’s refusal to explain and modify his design comes real death threats from his own countrymen. They threaten to stab him in the heart the way he is now stabbing America. Even worse, FBI starts to monitor his movements. Picketers with banners like “NO MECCA IN MANHATTAN” (Waldman 138) surround his apartment demanding him to leave his apartment and go to exile. He was constantly analyzed, judged and even reinvented as a criminal of different nationality. To his utter shock, Mo came to know from the allegations that, “He was Pakistani, Saudi, Qatari ... not an American citizen even ... donated to organizations backing terrorism ... He was called decadent, abstinent, deviant, violent, insolent, abhorrent, aberrant and typical” (Waldman 140-141). These allegations also give vent to the Orientalist discourse where the dialectic of the Muslim other is always manifested under, “the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior” (Said 300-301). Degradations and humiliations turn Mo completely numb. Ali rightly states , “While citizens enjoy some fundamental respect for their

beliefs and practices, this is no longer the case with regard to Muslims after 9/11 which even resulted in ultimate nervous breakdown” (1050). In such awful situations, a group of counter protesters consisting of Muslim and non-Muslim Americans show up in rallies with placards which upheld, “We are also Americans and Islam is not a threat and Muslims died that day too and Bigots=Idiots” (Waldman 171). This protest causes riot to spread to the general Muslim class. Numerous incidents of headscarf pulling start to take place within a week after that rally. Such abusive violence intimidated the hijabi (women wearing headscarves) Muslim women to leave their residence. Victims of these headscarf abuses even had to be hospitalized because of panic and anxiety. As a consequence of all these appalling occurrences here and there, entire America came to a standstill. At that point, the then President of the U.S., who was taciturn up to this minute, finally voices out his concerns and asks for civility and respect. He was ashamed of what was happening in his country and termed the situation as “a plague” (Waldman 200). The insurgence of U. S.’s special- interest groups and inflammatory portrayals of media were forcing Mo to counteract the incongruity of associating every Muslim with terrorism.

Moreover, the novel functions as a counteractive narration by highlighting that the tragedy of 9/11 is not limited to White non-Muslims only; rather the tragedy encompasses the general Muslims as well irrespective of nationality, class or education. Asma Anwar, a Bangladeshi Muslim woman, is one such character who is afflicted by the 9/11 tragedy. Asma lost her husband who was a janitor in the World Trade Center during the attacks. But unfortunately, her husband was not acknowledged as a victim because of his illegal immigrant status in America. Asma is infuriated when she watches on television how a famous right-wing talk show host, Lou Sarge, an Islam assailer, comments on the topic: “If we put illegals on the memorial, we will be spitting in the face of the law-abiding Americans. The illegal immigrants

who died came here seeking opportunity, but if they had stayed home they would still be alive. Isn't that the greatest opportunity of all?" (Waldman 85). Hearing this, Asma gets furious as she finds no one to fight on behalf of her husband who belonged to the army of workers who cleaned and cooked, and died; it was as if their death was just another way to please the employers. The TV anchor's cruel remark and people's determinations to erase Asma's husband from history validate her anguish. In fact, Asma's thoughts, not only condemn the mainstream's treatment towards the immigrants but also points out how the working class people are seen as unimportant and petty victims. The undocumented workers of the twin towers were not recognized as victims because the social class of the victims seemed to determine their importance (Gauthier 192–193, 214). Through Asma's sufferings Waldman negates America's claim that 9/11 is a singular white American tragedy.

Hence, a very potent and timely counter discourse against America's Islamophobia is voiced by Asma when Mo was put before the public hearing for and against the 9/11 memorial. Asma was among the victims' family members and was already raging with fury that her husband was not being acknowledged as a victim of 9/11 tragedy. No longer being able to tolerate the degradation of Islam, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) and Muslims, Asma finally declares:

My husband was from Bangladesh ... he worked ... he paid taxes ... my husband was a man of peace because he was a Muslim. That is our tradition. That is what our Prophet, peace be upon him, taught. You care for widows and orphans as Mr. Nasruddin has done for me and my child. You have mixed up these bad Muslims, these bad people and Islam. Millions of people all over the world have done good things because Islam tells them to. The gardens of paradise are for men like my husband, who never hurt anyone ... How

can you pretend we and our traditions are not part of this place? Does my husband matter less than all of your relatives? (Waldman 260-261)

With this very speech Asma deconstructs, in one way, the archetypal Islamophobic discourse projected by the West against Islam and the Muslims in general, and in another way the stereotypical views about Muslim women. Asma steps outside the stereotype by standing up in the memorial hearing and speaking her mind the way Islam allows women's individualism to speak their mind (Keeble 172). Nonetheless, Asma finds her freedom in the "West", and this pattern is, according to Ahmad, actually a part of the oppressed Muslim woman stereotype. Ahmad indicates that in popular literature, the oppressed woman is always "in need of rescue from an enlightened West" (106). However, in Waldman's novel, while Asma discovers the strength of her voice in the United States, she employs this voice to express her frustration and disenchantment to the country itself. In her speech at the memorial hearing, she articulates to the American mass what she thinks of the discrimination and hostility towards Muslims and immigrants in the country. She expresses her abhorrence to the country that she had previously assumed to be a generous, accepting utopia by asserting, "[America] should be ashamed!" (Waldman 261). Thus Waldman voices a valiant counter response to America's Islamophobic propaganda in the form of Asma's compelling speech.

But ironically, Asma's bravery turned out to be too costly for her survival in America. Besides becoming a "hero" overnight to her empathetic Muslim and non-Muslim community, she starts to receive repulsive letters containing vile languages such as "we'll burn you", "terrorist bitch" (Waldman 275) etc. Yet, the press initiates to avenge the antagonizing response she has hurled to America's Islamophobic and chauvinistic conduct. The most tragic thing happens to her when Alyssa Spier, the notorious journalist reveals Asma's credentials as an

immigrant and discloses her “illegal” status to the whole world in a newspaper post. As a consequence, American immigration authority orders her quick departure from the country denying to recognize any sympathetic ground as a 9/11 victim family. Hence, her disillusionment was inevitable as she “thought her freedom here was limitless but in truth it was bounded- by a larger circle than at home” (Waldman 285). Most horribly, on the day of her flight to Bangladesh, another heart rending incident occurs as she is stabbed by an anonymous assassin. The whole crowd turned thunderstruck at such a sight and alleged the press for this horrible episode as they exposed Asma’s secrets. As a reaction, Issam Malik of MACC insists, “Asma had been slain by an Islamophobe” (Waldman 293). No wonder what Asma encountered was a usual response of an Islamophobic surrounding where the counteraction of the “other” is always silenced with a mortal blow.

Mo, on the other hand, is on the verge of nervous breakdown with numerous objections from every possible corner. To his utter dismay, the speech that he presented at the public hearing of the 9/11 memorial is now misinterpreted by the American Muslim community and eventually by the greater Muslim world. Thus, he is ousted as a non-believer and labelled as a “Godless blasphemer” since a group of Muslims somehow misunderstood that he suggested, “A man wrote the Quran, not God” (Waldman 270). Besides, the whole country is stunned as the non-Muslims start vandalizing mosques in different states. The internet was full of multi-lingual news with suggestions to penalize Mo with a death sentence. Being in the cross-chairs of nation and religion, Mo is baffled and says, “I’m like a child in a custody battle ... whichever way I turn, I’ll have my back to somebody and so they’ll be offended ... I’m stressed and I’m pissed off and I’m probably on the edge of a fucking nervous breakdown” (Waldman 271). Not only this, he is now blamed for each and every mishap that takes place here and there. He is held responsible for

Asma's killing as well. Hence, the institutionalized bigotry makes Mo disillusioned with America and forces him to rethink his views about America.

Consequently, the allegations and prejudice force Mo to move toward Islam and to disassociate from America. Gradually he starts to adopt the basic Islamic principles, though unknowingly, as a form of counteraction and self-revolt. When his beard starts growing, he is reluctant to shave; to his surprise, he finds himself fasting during the month of Ramadan as well. Most startlingly, he resorts to the mosques for praying which he has never done before. It seemed as an unconscious activity as Waldman portrays, "Mo felt a pull, more passive than volition, to follow them ... they together formed a line, a wall, a mosque ... deep in his prostrations ... he had forgotten himself and this was the truest submission" (318). But the most obvious disassociation of Mo from America is the withdrawal of his memorial design. In actuality, he was forced to retreat in the face of heated political antagonisms which in turn brought his talent to the international arena. As an act of resistance, he finally leaves behind his home country America and chooses to live in India, China, and Qatar for more than two decades. Waldman writes, "For nearly two decades now, he had been a global citizen, American only in name" (322). Thus, by making Mo renounce America, Waldman, in fact, resists America's Islamophobic treatment towards the Muslims in general.

In fact, the most explicit clarification to America's misconstrued Islamophobic discriminations appears towards the end of the novel where Claire Burwell, the upper-class, White American 9/11 widow, representative of Islamophobic America holds Mo responsible for not pacifying the fears that he didn't even create. There Claire exasperates, "Followers of your religion have caused enormous pain ... And it's very difficult to sort out what Islam actually means or encourage. What Muslims believe ... that was upsetting ... this isn't about you. It's

about the religion” (Waldman 304-306). Here, Mo being the representative of Muslims in general resentfully responds:

How would you feel if I justified what happened to your husband by saying it wasn't about him but about his nationality- his country's policies- damn shame he got caught up in it ... he got what he deserved because he paid taxes to the American government and I got what I deserved because I happen to share a religion with a few crazies” (Waldman 306).

Thus an apt response against the Islamoprejudice of America is articulated by Mo. The irrational rhetoric is countered in a befitting manner. Furthermore, the final estrangement with America comes in such form when Mo contemplates, “The memorial experience opened the world to me. I began to learn about Islamic architecture, and it became what would seem to be a lifelong interest. And I figured I might as well work somewhere where the name Mohammad wouldn't be a liability” (Waldman 330). By this final speech, Waldman, through Mo, illustrates the tragedy that Mo and other ordinary Muslims had to encounter in the aftermath of 9/11 only because of their Muslim identity. Waldman also shows how Mo and other ordinary Muslims learned to counteract and resist the Islamophobic backlash through retreating to the Muslim world and reclaiming their Muslim identity.

Therefore, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Submission* delineate a well-oriented narratives of American Muslims who suffer immensely in America in the repercussion of 9/11 catastrophe. Changez and Mo counteract the Islamophobic bigotry by reinforcing their Muslim identity and resisting Islamophobia altogether by leaving America. Their latent Muslim identity comes to the surface because of the mistreatment meted out to them for their religion. The accusations and blaming, on the contrary, make them conscious of their religion and their

Muslim identity. Said has rightly said , “The construction of identity– while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction which involves establishing opposites and “others” whose actuality is always a subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us”” (332). Hence, Changez and Mo confidently reclaim their “otherness” as Hoineikip Haolai states, “The latent Muslim-ness in them surfaces as a result of the aftershocks of 9/11 and they develop a confident sense of identity, embracing their own “Otherness” (30). In fact, Changez and Mo’s transformation from dedicated Americans to anti-Americans and firm Muslims prove rather a boomerang for America’s Islamophobia.

Conclusion

“They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak” –Pastor Niemoller.

In the recent years, Islamophobia has pierced its claws into Muslim world so much so that it has stained “the prism through which Muslims are viewed” (Ali 1066). It has generated a social milieu in America and elsewhere in the world, where Muslims are regarded as second-class citizens whose rights are neither secured nor valued in the society. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 episode, the discourse that proliferates the social aversion of Islam is infused into all other subjects of Muslims. Muhammad Safeer Awan feels the same in his assertion, “Today 9/11 carries so many burdens of interpretation, of politics, of the discourse of war. It has become a continuing present for most of the Muslims” (537). Hence, as the above mentioned quote by Niemoller suggests, it is high time that Islamophobia is counteracted effectually since the history has recurrently exposed us the costs of being silent against such discrimination and bigotry. In this regard, Yaser Ali also opines, “Muslims need a better voice in discourse—one that humanizes them and allows them to define their own narratives” (1068). Thus my dissertation demonstrates how the authors of the 9/11 counter narratives attempted at reversing the stereotyping of the Islamophobe White supremists who claimed 9/11 to be the singular American tragedy and endeavored to depict Muslim Americans honestly and positively which are crucial in dispelling the “otherness” attached to them.

By an elaborated study of the selected 9/11 counter narratives, my thesis illustrates that, apart from the few deviant religious fundamentalists who are responsible for the 9/11 catastrophe,

it is not the general Muslim class, but the White supremists who sustain extremism and intolerance to the racial, cultural and ideological differences of the Muslim race. Thus Dr. Mohammad Ayub Jajja affirms, “Disrespect and lack of acceptance by American culture of the people from other cultures is the biggest barrier in the way of natural and mutually beneficial interaction among various cultures and countries” (94). The intolerant American culture breeds contempt and resistance in its Muslim citizens against America’s judgmental and shrewd policies. This collective resentment ultimately fuels global tensions and confrontations. This very fact is reflected in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Submission* where the liberal minded protagonists, being victims of Islamophobia, ultimately succumb to it. They eventually embrace their otherness, dissociate from America and turn into anti- America as a result of uncritical bigotry. Therefore, the biased and offensive attitude of America and its policies can turn even the most Americanized Meritocrats like Changez and Mo into reactionary and extremists. Being the scapegoats of hate violence and bigoted schemes, Changez and Mo who harbored profound devotion towards America, eventually reject all their associations with American culture and reclaim their Muslim identity. On the other hand, an opposite scenario is seen in *Saffron Dreams*, where Arissa, the so called conservative Pakistani woman does not succumb to Islamophobia; rather she accepts and stays back in America to fight against it. She introspects her challenges and overcomes her obstacles by deciding to take her veil off from head but retain her faith in her heart. To resist the mounting Islamophobic sentiments and the hate crimes and degradation associated with it, some conservatives are bound to turn into liberals whereas simultaneously some liberals are compelled to convert into extremists.

Therefore, my dissertation is an attempt to demonstrate how the authors of the 9/11 counter narratives responded to the dominant 9/11 rhetoric and counteracted the accusation of

Muslims as terrorists by challenging systemic Islamophobia. It also deconstructed the archetypal misconstructions of Muslim race and re-represented the Muslim counterparts as the equal victims of the 9/11 tragedy along with the white Americans. My thesis is expected to dispel the notion that Islam is violent to the core and debunk the myth that terrorism is interweaved with the doctrines of Islamic faith. I hope my thesis will also contribute to avert the demeaning depiction of the East in assertion of the Western cultural and political supremacy over the inferior Muslim others. It is aspired to lessen the extremity of Islamoprejudice where the surrounding is facilitated and perpetuated with discrimination and intolerance to turn the adversity into positive opportunity for a peaceful future.

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