

ENGLISH: *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

How does Hamid suggest that matters of cultural difference result in brutality?

The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid seeks to educate readers about the violence and hostility that sparks from cultural and political diversity. Representing America's antagonistic foreign policy with the symbolic Underwood Samson in his novel, Hamid portrays the idea that cultural differences can often give rise to brutality and aggression. Expressing his idea that if a society seeks to dominate those around it is likely to encounter an austere fate, Hamid foreshadows the events of 9/11 that are driven by political resentment and bitterness. Furthermore, Hamid depicts acts of physical aggression to illuminate the idea that physical acts of violence and war do not necessarily solve cultural and political disputes.

Hamid highlights the notion that enmity can stem from culturally diverse people through the symbolism of Underwood Samson. Hamid explores the idea of economic fundamentalism in his novel and the ramifications it perpetrates on societies around the world. Underwood Samson, which shares its initials with the United States, is symbolic of America's aggressive corporatism and foreign policy. Its guiding principle "focus on the fundamentals" is used by Hamid to symbolically epitomize America's "constant interference in the affairs of others". Revealing that "America played a central role...in each major conflict and standoff" around the world, Hamid implies that it is America's political difference and economic fundamentalism that sparks global tensions. Describing Underwood Samson as a "project of domination", Hamid asserts that its rigid and exploitative principles act as a metaphor for the United States' foreign policy. Furthermore, Hamid uses Juan-Bautista as a mouthpiece to voice his concerns of America's focus on economic progress and its impact on the world. Portrayed as a powerful company that earns money "by disrupting the lives of others", Hamid's characterisation of Juan-Bautista demonstrates to readers that America's focus on economic progress results in individuals directing feelings of resentment and hostility towards the United States. Indicating that America's aggressive foreign policy creates "undisguised hostility" between American's and people of alternative cultural and ethnic backgrounds, Hamid elucidates to readers that cultural differences can ultimately create conflict and tension between individuals and their societies. Hamid furthers this idea through the racial confrontation Changez experiences in an American car park. With the dialogue "fucking Arab" and the "muttering of a string of obscenities", Hamid indicates to readers that political differences can result in antagonism and verbal abuse. What's more, Hamid makes reference to hunting and war to inform readers of the bleak destiny of a nation who interferes with the concerns of others.

Hamid sends an ominous warning to readers of the exasperation that can arise from cultural differences, through references to hunting and battle. By comparing the American's behaviour with that of "an animal that has ventured too far from its lair", Hamid not only adds suspense and mystery to the novel, but also seems to presage the collapse of the twin towers. Hamid symbolically implies, through this contrast, that America has been interfering with the affairs of too many countries and is about to face repercussions. The references to the American hunting "in unfamiliar surroundings, uncertain of whether it is predator or prey" is used by Hamid to highlight the idea that an oppressor will inevitably experience the same treatment that it inflicts on others. What's more, Hamid makes many references to battle and war in his conversations between the American and Changez to further illuminate the idea that cultural differences can often result in brutality. The dialogue "your fingers are tearing the flesh of that kebab with considerable determination" conjures images of predatory hunting and alludes to the idea that one of the men is being hunted by the other. Hamid depicts the American as the predator in some instances with the dialogue "you have detected a scent" and you are like "a fox in the wild", however he contradicts this a moment later with the monologue "smell of roasting meat" and "charred carcasses". Through these contradictions, Hamid possibly suggests to readers that they both take on the predator role at different moments and that the role of predator and prey can ultimately swap at any time. Possibly symbolic of America and countries around the world – in particular the Middle East – Hamid suggests to readers that

societies which are arrogant and disrespectful will ultimately suffer the same fate as it creates for others. Hamid also draws readers' attention to the idea that silenced societies can only speak through violence and force.

Hamid depicts physical acts of violence throughout his novel to highlight to readers that violence does not solve cultural conflicts. Suggesting to readers that cultural differences may cause physical violence, Hamid characterises Changez as feeling "fully capable of wielding [the tire iron] with sufficient violence to shatter the bones of his skull" after being called a "fucking Arab" in a parking lot. This forceful imagery of violence is used by Hamid to insinuate to readers the destruction and ferocity that can grow from resentment and cultural differences. Similarly, with the dialogue "one of the tires of my rental car was punctured – far too often for it to be a mere coincidence", Hamid portrays the violence that Changez must endure merely because of his shared identity with the terrorists. Revealing that individuals from both societies feel similar emotions of anger and resentment, Hamid elucidates to readers that violence does not help resolve matters of cultural difference, but in fact ignites them. Hamid's construction of dialogue "shorn of hair and dressed in battle fatigues, we would have been virtually indistinguishable" seeks to highlight to readers the idea that when in battle we are all killing and doing the same thing. Hamid perhaps seeks to demonstrate to readers that violence doesn't actually resolve cultural or political conflicts.

Hamid explores issues of cultural discrepancy and conflict in his novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Seeking to educate readers about the violence and brutality that so regularly stems from cultural and political diversity, Hamid uses his depiction of Underwood Samson to communicate his criticisms of the United States' destructive foreign policy. He emphasises through references to battle and hunting that the oppressed are left with no choice but to assert their opinions through outlets of violence and destruction. Critical of America's interference with the affairs of countries around the globe, Hamid works to show readers that violence doesn't solve matters of cultural difference but instead just aggravates them.