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Tension Within Immigrant Identity in South Asian and Asian Characters in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Everything I Never Told You*, and *Disgraced*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways American fiction in the past two decades marked a renewal of the study of the immigrant experience. By examining this renewal, I argue that the conversation is no longer focused on the treatment of assimilation but moves into the psychological shock that transpires after assimilation is achieved. This shock is a critical condition of belonging to two opposing identities. Using Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Celeste Ng's novel *Everything I Never Told You* (2014) and Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* (2012), I clarify that these works present protagonists from South Asian and East Asian descent who struggle to find a sense of acceptance in the United States due to their multiple identities. This struggle is sourced from their surrounding milieu and the permanent highlight of their otherness. They become conscious of the alienation cast upon their individuality and as a result, interact in the division of their Eastern and Western self. This issues three reactive possibilities; (1) rejection of Western identity, (2) rejection of one's ethnic identity, and (3) resentment towards the ethnic self. This thesis, therefore, aims to present the embodied strain on the identity of contemporary works centered on the reality of immigrants and children of immigrants.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Tension Within Immigrant Identity in South Asian and Asian Characters in
The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Everything I Never Told You, and Disgraced.

by

Dania Abdelsalam

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

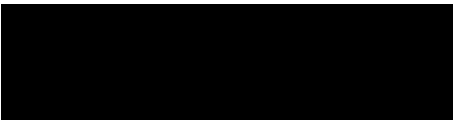
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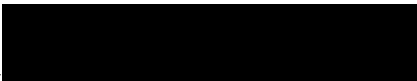
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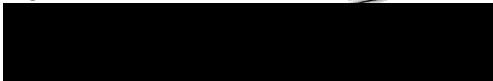
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DANIA ABDELSALAM

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2020

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Finally, to all immigrants and children of immigrants, you are the foundation of greatness in this country.

Dania Abdelsalam – May 2020

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Introduction

Many notable recent works of contemporary fiction published in the US to great acclaim have given voice to immigrants and children of immigrants. Such a phenomenon has seized the literary market and the immigrant experience continues to develop US-American Literature in new directions. As Toni Morrison observes, “such literature rewrites the story of what it means to be American” (Muller IX). This study aims to consider the stability of this definition through the perspective of non-white characters in several recent fictional works, a group incorporating those who migrated to it and those who were born in the United States after their parents migrated. More specifically, I intend to study the cultural influence on identity that many characters experience when attempting to fit into pre-existing hegemonic understanding of Americanness. By focusing on the sociological and psychological climate that pervades these narratives, the trauma of inhabiting a postcolonial hybridity is discovered and explored in accounts that feature protagonists from South Asian and East Asian backgrounds. The cultural influence on the protagonists occurs in three stages, each one emphasized by the environment around them. The first stage occurs when a character feels immigrant guilt, the second when the character feels compelled to reject their ethnicity and the third being that of heightened resentment towards their identity. The three stages see an ascendance of anger due to the pressure to forfeit parts of their multiplicity to fit into their surrounding space. In his monograph, *New Strangers in Paradise*, Gilbert H. Muller discusses that with the arrival of multicultural characters in mainstream literature, we see a commonality of this kind of sacrifice, asking, “what—family, ancestral tradition, religion- should one offer in exchange for the American Dream?” (10). Muller’s argument regarding this sacrifice is dramatized in Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Celeste Ng’s novel *Everything I Never*

Told You (2014) and Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* (2012). These highly-acclaimed works of fiction provide readers with an established male figure as protagonists, two of Pakistani-Muslim descent and one of Chinese descent. The author's focus is no longer solely on the rejection of newly migrated bodies but rather on the complex aftermath their protagonists face in the United States both as immigrants but also as postcolonial subjects. All three authors present characters who grew uncomfortable in their bodies because of the sociopolitical environment that impacted their lives and as a result, develop degrees of either guilt or self-hatred. The estrangement that developed from this environment is illustrated through various reactions and outcomes faced by the different protagonists of the works under discussion.

The novels construct metanarratives of individuals who belong to multiple identities and are in search of belonging in the United States. These metanarratives relate to a larger discussion on the immigrant experience and this affects specifically postcolonial subjects in the US. All three writers present individuals whose success groups them into the model minority stereotype. Hamid's novel follows a young man's journey as he arrives in the United States on a student-visa and discovers a sea of social and economic opportunities. He attends Princeton University and is immediately hired at a high-paying consulting firm in New York upon graduation. The tension within his identity developed as a result of this success and his belief that he is now a part of the capitalistic West. He starts to feel guilty for moving upward as a result of embracing the capitalist system that gave an advantage to the West over the East since colonial times and into the so-called postcolonial present. Ng's novel adds a different, complex challenge to the notion of identity, as her protagonist is the son of Chinese-immigrants. While identified as an American-born individual, James suffered through major racial discrimination in his childhood and adulthood. He attends Harvard University, where he studies American History and becomes

a part of academia. However, as a result of excessive discrimination, James repels his ethnic identity and ambitions to prove himself as one with the elite white world. Lastly, Akhtar's play reveals the resentment that can arise as a product of the postcolonial condition and the model minority myth. Amir is a successful corporate lawyer who comes from a Muslim-Pakistani family. Readers watch as Amir's anger towards Islam unfolds and he thrusts away any ties to his Pakistani origins. However, Amir's resentment is motivated by the perception that the hybridity between being American born and a Muslim-Pakistani will hurt his sense of belonging in the West.

In the same discourse of contemporary American immigrant fiction, David Cowart finds a silver lining to Muller's claim of perceived sacrifice. He asserts, while most characters "struggle with a sense of psychological and cultural doubleness, it seems as though the prejudice and homesickness that is experienced become empowered by a new sense of American identity" (7). However, the three characters of study here join the conversation in more interesting and complicated ways. Rather than following Cowart's linear and somewhat simplistic trajectory that ends in self-acceptance, these characters remain in a zone of fixed discomfort with notions of "self" and "other". They are unable to bring forth two parts of themselves and establish a sense of ease.

The inability to find comfort in their hybridity is due to two factors: the external political/social climate and the internal psychological state of each character. The external environment, one can argue is the white racialized hierarchy, which conditions them to feel a sense of isolation from their ethnicity and religion. Episodes of discrimination because of these factors warrant the separation of their two identities. Changez found himself a Muslim brown-skinned man living in New York during and after 9/11. He realized that the United States culture

endangered his other world, especially as tension between Pakistan and India heightened and the invasion of Afghanistan took place. He grew angry at the West's involvement in invading parts of the East but ignoring the rising conflict in Pakistan. James was constantly reminded of his otherness despite his rightful and legal association with the US. Amir was a part of the capitalist machine of America where he believed identifying as Indian, rather than as a Pakistani Muslim would save him from isolation and discrimination. As a result, their external environment provoked their inner response: to never feel comfortable in their identity. Changez eventually decides to fight any association with the West, mentally compelling himself to believe that he is only, rightly linked with a singular culture and thus drove himself out of New York. James' past encounters condition him to perceive that anything negative that occurs to him is because of his background, even in moments where it was transparent that his background was not related. He approaches every situation with anxiety from the dominant culture and projects it into his method of parenting. Thus, this anxiety results in what Tina Chen defines in, *Double Identity*, as an act of impersonation. Chen explores how Asian American individuals are forced by necessity to impersonate the dominant social order around them to negotiate their Asian Americanness (14). Furthermore, Amir participates in his own acts of impersonation, as he thoroughly resents Islam as a defense mechanism and eventually discovers that his suspicions about being looked down upon by others for his ethnic and religious ties are accurate. Changez, James, and Amir all found themselves at certain points impersonating the world around them through their social interactions: Changez in moments where his job identified him as an American, James's fixation on mastering American pop culture to fit in, and Amir desire to be recognized as a Hindu rather than a Pakistani. These acts of impersonation reveal that the characters cannot simply overcome

Cowart's claim to discovering a unity in their doubleness. Rather, they seek ways to drive the two sides of themselves away from each other.

The relationship between the three men and their identity is important when recognizing to return to an earlier point, that these works are not only immigrant but also model minority narratives. Changez, James, and Amir by definition carry an ethnic relation to the category of the model minority. They fit into this model by the measure of their success in the United States, they are Ivy-League educated and white-collar workers. However, their success and placement in the model minority marker plays a significant role in their rising internal crisis, rather than protecting themselves from it. Not only does it signify that levels of success don't guarantee acceptance from elite white society, but it also constrained them into the capitalist system. The discourse of the model minority in this light is then shifted from just means of pure success in the American dream but unconsciously ties them to the capitalism of the West. Tomo Hattori argues this point, stating,

The stereotype of the model minority as the ideal immigrant, often ascribed to Asians in America, predicates social acceptance upon exceptional capitalist achievement. Model minority discourse is the term that describes the Asian American psychic institutions that emerge from this prediction and, to the extent that model minority discourse inhabits Asian American culture and studies, describes the process of minority collaboration in dominant cultural motives within works and institutions allegedly devoted to ethnic and racial emergence, provocation, and resistance (231).

Hattori's theory emphasizes the notion that capital success provides a false sense of social acceptance. However, Changez, James and, Amir suggest that realist writers feel comfortable stating that regardless of achieving components of the capitalist ideology, a person in this

position could clearly continue to feel the illegitimacy of their otherness in society and thus reveal his point.

Furthermore, the concluding chapter of this study will analyze the role of the female white character in all three narratives. James and Amir are married to white American women. Similarly, Changez's love interest and the *only* connection he has to America after he leaves is a White woman. All three female characters support their husband/ love interest's multiple identities—their tolerance is not in question here. However, what is to be questioned—is what is the significance of these white Euromerican females' placements in the midst of an identity struggle? What might make the three writers of these post-9/11 texts include white love interests as a part of the American success these characters experience? Moreover, the main purpose here is not to place the three characters into a category, but rather, to examine the leading cause that pushed all three authors to depict men who climb the social ladder, have sexual relations with white women, and constantly feel their hybridity.

My study aims to evaluate contemporary immigrant narratives and the ways in which identity impacts model minority stories. If all characters constantly feel they must prove themselves to the society around them, what does this reveal about the sociopolitical climate they live in? What can we surmise about the psychosexual effects of the immigrant experience after reading these three works together?

Chapter I: Immigrant Guilt

In this chapter, I will analyze Mohsin Hamid's protagonist, Changez, in terms of what I believe to be postcolonial *immigrant guilt*, which is a major component of his character in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Oxford English Dictionary offers one useful definition of “guilt” in this context, as “a feeling of having done something wrong within an obligation” (Oxford).

Reflecting specifically on “obligation”, the migrant often leaves a life behind to start a new one. This can induce an individual to feel a sense of duty to those he or she left behind. This is especially important in circumstances where one left due to poverty or war. Therefore, immigrant guilt can be deemed as an individual’s tendency to persistently reminisce about what they left behind and feel he/she has failed his/her obligation to the past, despite the present achievements in climbing the socioeconomic ladder in the West—especially if, as in Changez’s case, the character is/becomes aware of how his present success depends on adopting the values and ideology of a western economic system that has and continues to negatively impact other countries and the cultures in the name of a supposed “development”. In Hamid’s assessment of immigrant guilt, it goes beyond what is left behind but also what is achieved in the adopted country. Changez’s guilt becomes overwhelming when he realizes he has become a part of a postcolonial and capitalist order.

Hamid’s creation of a character whose guilt drives him out of the country is noteworthy. For many immigrant fiction writers, as previously mentioned by Cowart, eventually allow comfort in their doubleness and the New World for their characters. What’s interesting about Hamid’s treatment here, however, is that Changez never finds this comfort nor after a certain point, does he seek it. Hamid resists this notion and skips the desire to have his character establish a sense of comfort. Changez struggled with allowing the two constructs to come together, afraid one will completely refute the other. It simply does not matter what his socioeconomic stance is, nor if he fits in the category of the model minority. Further, his profitable American life has little meaning to him because it symbolizes not only the individuals, places, and cultures that he left behind but also his place in the West’s neo-imperial tendencies.

They are awakened when he obtains a corporate job in New York City and steadily recognizes the company's fundamental values.

Moreover, during his time in the United States Changez was continually nostalgic and observed the difference between his past and present that appeared all around him. During his book-long conversation with an American in Pakistan, Changez reflects that he grew resentful when comparing the development in cities in the United States to his homeland. He reflects on the current condition of Pakistan, stating, "Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed" (34). Changez is believed to be speaking to an American spy and this response must be perceived in a post-colonial context. The shame Changez feels is rooted in his observation of the global inequity that emerged in the development of Eastern Cities compared to Western cities as a key component of globalization. This inequity thrives from the neo-imperial globalization that marked the United States as the latest colonial and capitalist world. Changez feels ashamed to be a part of this capitalistic order that pushes the inequality and lack of development in Eastern cities. In the following breakdown, I will analyze Changez's psyche at every stage of his time in the West and how/why he returns to the East.

Princeton and Underwood Samson

When Changez first arrived at Princeton, he was young and driven for success. He was pleased to have an opportunity to receive a scholarship and student visa to study at one of the most prestigious institutions in the United States. He proclaims life at that time felt like a film, with Changez as the star. Essentially, everything he dreamed of was possible because of his ties to Princeton. Amidst this positive component of his reminiscence, Changez points out that during

his time there he held two personas. In front of his fellow students, his public image thrived; he was viewed as a “young prince, generous, and carefree” (11). In private he held multiple jobs, visited the Near Eastern studies program and, spent his nights reading for his courses. It appears that Changez molds his public persona to match the environment. This molding reflects to the public an untroubled and wealthy young college student. However, on the other end, he must work multiple jobs to support himself as he reflects on the fact that his family’s fortune is deteriorating. This becomes the first instances that readers view his hybridity enduring tension, as Changez participates in the creation of two fragments of himself. To Changez, these two parts of him must remain separate and thus he emphasizes their difference.

Nonetheless, Changez successfully made it out of Princeton. He then obtained a job at Underwood Samson & Company in New York City. The company offered fresh graduates a base salary of over eighty thousand dollars and guaranteed admission to Harvard Business School. Essentially, this company provides candidates immense opportunities to continue increasing their socioeconomic mobility. Out of hundreds of candidates, he was selected for an interview and hired. Underwood Samson provided him home in New York City, a place that he felt became a key portion of his identity. Changez reflects, “I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker” (33). Changez often identified with New York as his home when asked where he is from. Changez’s integration with New York marks a crucial transnational cosmopolitan moment, as the world around him forwent remarkable globalization. This integration becomes vital in later moments when he feels repelled by the globalized New York in nostalgia of the Third World. However, after incorporating himself in the company and the city, Changez indulged in self-satisfaction. He celebrated the economic freedom his company card granted to him, worked hard and, was honored as the top of his class in Underwood

Samson. All the while his social life flourished, as he attended art shows and dinners with his new love-interest Erica.

Over time, the excitement he felt over his new life faded and nostalgia continued to seep his psyche. He grew increasingly attentive to the cosmopolitan space around him and compared it to Pakistan. While comparing New York to Lahore was a common occurrence in his mind, Changez found himself even reflecting on the difference between Lahore and Manila during a business trip. In Manila, his association with an American firm prompted others to perceive him as an American professional. However, this perception troubled Changez greatly. He noted while sitting in a car with his American associates that he felt more connected to the natives of Manila, stating, "I felt I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the street outside" (67). The feeling of isolation arises because he notices that the identity he grew when he entered New York is not as permanent or deeply felt as he thought. That identity, the one situated in a business suit and wealth, cultivates that loneliness because he believes it can identify him strictly with an American and not with his Pakistaniness. Instead, he finds a sense of peace in identifying with the working Filipino Driver, explaining that they shared a Third-World sensibility. In a way, the guilt that begins in Manila drove him to believe that the successes he gained in the West were a result of capitalist misconduct. Therefore, identifying with this Third-World sensibility gave him peace of mind. The guilt entrenched in him, even as he went back to Pakistan to visit his family. During the visit, his psyche is distressed because he realizes he will have to leave his family again to return to the United States. He identified himself as a coward and traitor when it was time for him to end his visit to Pakistan. He was unable to cope with the fact that he was going to leave his family, or rather "abandon them" to return to New York. These instances are important in understanding the

creation of Changez's internal conflict; his guilt converts all signs of success into neglect. For every success he gains, he imagines it as an increased tie to the colonial and capitalistic order that marked an estrangement from his family and heritage. He feels an imbalance in his identity; on one end he is a direct associate of the capitalistic and imperial system in the United States and the other end he is a Third Worlder who is directly impacted by this imperialism.

Changez's extreme and growing discomfort being a part of both New York and Lahore's society simultaneously further progressed after the events of 9/11. This led him to recognize his new life from a completely new perspective. During his last night in Manila, Changez received news of the event as he watched the collapse of the World Trade center on television. Changez admitted to feeling a hint of satisfaction that someone was able to bring "America to her knees" (73). This leaves readers both shocked and confused because Changez previously recognized New York as a part of his identity. New York to him symbolized economic success but at this point in Manila, it is evident that Changez began to identify in what he calls the "Third World Sensibility." As we recognized earlier, the notion of a new life with mobility causes him to face extreme guilt for being a part of two worlds at once. Therefore, the assumption that specific parts of his identity are "brought down" gives him a sense of ease. He can separate from his first-world identity and therefore, he no longer is attached to it. The point here is that the events of 9/11 mentally symbolize to Changez the destruction of one part of his identity. His satisfaction is not associated with Islam but rather the demonstration that his hybridity no longer has to exist. Although he doesn't leave the United States right away, this moment was the catalyst for him as he began to look at the environment around him with complete alienation and resentment, even more than before. As a result, he found himself relinquishing parts of his multiplicity. Avirup Ghosh's defines these parts as ". . . 'He is, at different times in the novel, a Third Worlder, a

Muslim, a Pakistani, a member of the Indus River Basin Civilization, a New Yorker, and a Princetonian . . .” (59). Considering Ghosh definition during the aftermath of 9/11, Changez only recognizes his Third World and Pakistani self and renounces his relationship with New York and everything in it. His multiple identities are no longer bearable for Changez and he thus begins a subconscious journey to only identify as a Third Worlder.

Mental War and Terror

The Post 9/11 political climate grew extremely tense. Changez observed the behavior of everyone around him, as New Yorkers grew more anxious than ever. Further, he noticed the changed behavior against him, from people on the airplane back from Manila to the security check that he underwent. After arriving in New York, he was separated from the rest of his work team and was held for inspection. This becomes apparent to Changez that he is now not only perceived as an outsider by the United States but subjected to indignities that stereotype him as a potential terrorist. Later, he was approached by two men, one pretending to speak what appeared to be an ethnic language and the other yelling, “Fucking Arab.” Islamophobia and racism, therefore, are predominant in Changez’s changing identity. The change in people’s behavior contributes to his growing rejection of the West. They add to the already apprehensive crisis within his psyche. Furthermore, tension continues to rise for the Muslim community in both U.S. soil and continents away. When news arrived that US troops landed in Afghanistan, Changez grew astonishingly angry. He recognized Afghanistan as his neighboring country and could not fathom that war has reached its home front. When Pakistan was at risk of war with India, Changez becomes even more anxious about matters overseas.

At this point in the analysis, I would like to shift the notion of immigrant guilt further than just partaking in socioeconomic success while others have less privilege. This shift is

pointed towards politics and war, and the notion of living at “peace” while others suffer. As Muller notes, immigrants or refugees often seek security in the United States from sites of terror, leaving behind whatever belonged to them in these sites because they were promised safety elsewhere. However, in Changez’s case, he did not leave behind war, but conflict in his home country transpired during his time away as a result of actions from his adopted country—the United States. It was the rising of the war that made him want to return to his family. Additionally, he is unable to overcome the fact that South Asian countries are in political distress, either at the hands of the United States or the lack of support from the United States. When he receives a bonus from work, he seems to be troubled by it, questioning its value of capital if the countries in the continent of his birthplace are going through conflict. The political climate becomes a component of Changez’s psyche; he can no longer pretend to be a New Yorker living a privileged life.

To symbolize the relinquishing of his performance, Changez was no longer concerned with performing well at work. He neglected his assignments, sitting at his desk while his mind is preoccupied with the increasing tension in Pakistan. Moreover, he decided that he will grow out his beard at work. Ghosh characterizes his beard to signify himself as a Pakistani/ Muslim, “a sign of a collective identity” (50). His desire to physically identify with these two specific parts of his multiplicitious self is a protest. In the context of Underwood Samson, Changez previously was recognized on the team for his hard work and complete compliance with the work ethic of the company. When he grew his beard, it made them uncomfortable as it held signs to his collective ethnic identity. This moment is key, as the company itself was the framework of Changez’s identity in America. While it was the space that provided him home in New York, it also linked him to becoming a part of the capitalist machine he despised. Therefore, not

complying with the company standards of a clean-shaven policy is a major mark in his rejection of the identity that the company both demands and provides. This rejection becomes well-defined in Valparaiso, Chile. Changez was sent there to value a publishing company with the Vice President of Underwood Samson. The chief of the publishing company was an older man who did not want Changez and the VP there. He continued to observe Changez, noticing his demeanor and his silent disassociation with the company. When he approached Changez, he questioned whether he enjoyed making a profit off the destruction of another person's life. Inadvertently, the chief brought forth two accusations that Changez constantly reflects on: gain and destruction. The accusation prompts Changez into realizing he has succumbed to being used as a proxy of the colonizer performing imperialist orders. The chief continues to position Changez a janissary¹ to the United States. He tells him that the janissaries are young men who were kidnapped by their enemy and became extremely loyal to them. Eventually, the janissary participates in the erasure of his civilization, as he accepts his position on the other side. By referring to him as a janissary, the chief unknowingly gave Changez ammunition to feel a responsibility for being on the wrong side of the tension that is occurring in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world after 9/11. Even though he has no political ties to the conflict, his conscience convinced him otherwise. Changez registered everything that the chief said to him as fact and decided he can no longer work for Underwood Samson nor exist in the United States. His identity crumbled as he felt one side outweigh the other. He left the assignment and as a result was fired from the company. His work visa expired and Changez returned to Pakistan. Mohammad Jajja notes, "Changez drifts away from America, therefore, the title of the novel, *The*

¹ Janissaries were young Christian boys captured by the Ottoman Empire. They were converted to Islam and sent by to fight against their own Christian homelands on behalf of the Ottoman Empire.

Reluctant Fundamentalist. He finally frees himself from the dual situation of love-hate for American culture and society” (90). He not only frees himself from a love-hate relationship with the US but also frees himself from crippling guilt that subsisted inside of him. Furthermore, Claudia Nordinger asserts Changez’s departure situates the novel as an “emigrant novel,” “a story of leaving America, which I think is as much the immigrant novel of today as a story of going to the United States (qtd in Yaqin 2008:47)” (62). In this emigrant novel, it is apparent that the immigrant guilt was the driving force in all of Changez’s performance throughout the narrative after a certain point.

Changez is the only character in this study to emigrate out of the United States. When he arrived years earlier, he was young and filled with ambition. He wanted to assimilate into the culture around him and become one with the socioeconomic climate that pervades his adopted country. However, as time progressed, he began to observe himself and his hybridity in a conflicting outlook. He observed his association with the capitalist system that put his country of origin at a disadvantage. Such observations translated into guilt and that cannot be a part of the imperialistic West. Changez not only pushes against Cowart’s notion of comfort in a hybrid identity but also pushes against comfort *within* specifically an American identity. While this identity initially symbolized prosperity in the New World, it eventually became a symbol of loss for Changez.

Chapter II: Rejection of Ethnic Self

The previous chapter showed how Hamid’s novel depicted the push against Cowart’s notion of comfort within a multiplicity, especially in the cosmopolitan sphere of New York. Using Hamid’s protagonist as the representation, I argue that Changez’s lack of comfort is generated by immigrant guilt. Moving forward, the study continues to explore individuals who

like Changez, feel utter distress in their doubleness. This section analyzes how doubleness pushes individuals to reject their ethnic self. This is primarily a result of the desire to be accepted in the elite racial hierarchy that was primarily white-dominated. The strength of the desire to be a part of this social world supersedes any sense of guilt. Furthermore, this section highlights a text that reflects the ways the hybridity we have seen comes with being nonwhite in the US and impacts not only immigrants but also children of immigrants.

This model of desired acceptance is depicted in Celeste Ng's novel, *Everything I Never Told You*. While Hamid sets his novel the era in which the United States underwent globalization, Ng's novel depicts the previous era, where rural America more openly participates in racial bias. Ng's male protagonist, James, is born in the United States to Chinese immigrant parents. His parents migrated to California at a time when the Chinese Exclusion Act was in place. James notes that while European immigrants were welcomed at Ellis Island, Asian immigrants like his parents had to bargain their way in through false names because the United States Congress banned all Chinese immigrants from entering the country (40). The struggle James's parents endured depicts the conventional immigrant parent experience— something that readers don't see in Changez and Amir's narratives. By situating James's parents in the conversation, we can view the way that contemporary American fiction can voice not only identity conflicts of immigrants but also the impact it can have on their children.

James's parents, like many other immigrant parents, searched for socioeconomic opportunities. When considering their American-born son, it can be assumed that their search was successful as James was able to achieve what many immigrants desire. James grew to achieve academic excellence and started a multi-racial family with his wife Marilyn, a White American woman and his one-time student. James attended Harvard University and received his

Ph.D. The University granted him a position to provisionally teach a class on American culture. He later became employed at Middlewood College and his family moved to Ohio. Further, Marilyn and James had three children together. James, the textbook depiction of what members of the model minority should be like, was Ivy-League educated, obtained a celebrated career, and created a family. James and Changez embodied the image of young successful men of color in the United States. They are individuals who climbed up the social and economic ladder, regardless of the economic hardships their parents faced. However, *like* Changez, despite all his achievements: James constantly felt his otherness emphasized. James's political and social environment exposed him to various episodes that disrupted his status as a U.S. born citizen. These episodes sparked an inner rejection of his Chineseness. The following sections will break down the episodes in which his Americanness was challenged and how that led to the rejection of his ethnic self.

External Influence on Identity

James's denial of his Chinese heritage began during his early childhood, predominantly taking place in the classroom. After his parents acquired employment at an elite primary school in Iowa, James was able to attend with a scholarship after passing a mandatory entrance exam. While the exam was deliberately made difficult for children of immigrants to fail, James held an advantage from reading newspapers and passed it. Although he was placed in a classroom with predominately white students, the young James did not fixate on his identity nor feel the notion of otherness until this feeling is disrupted when a classmate pointed out his eyes. Initially, James was unbothered by the reference to his features. Yet, Ng writes, "It wasn't until he heard the horror in the teacher's voice—'Shirley Byron'—that he realized he was supposed to be embarrassed. The next time it happened, he had learned his lesson and turned red right away"

(43). As Louis Althusser expresses in his theory of interpellation, James now understood himself as the “other.” Althusser examines the ways interpellation impacts the way an individual perceives their identity. He refers to this process as hailing—which he defines as the power that turns individuals into subjects. This subjection can influence one to believe that their entire identity is whatever the authoritative individual tells them it is (Althusser 45). A young classmate’s fixation on his physical differences plus the authority’s acknowledgment of this statement provokes James to believe that he must be ashamed of his hybridity. The tone in his teacher’s voice indicated that what the young girl said was meant to be understood as offensive, implicating that what she said was not meaningless. The horrified yell by his teacher boxed him into a category of a student who is *different* from the rest around him. It was this exact yell that eventually made James conscious that in a classroom of white students with ties to Anglo-Saxon families, James is socially secluded from all his other classmates. The hailing of his identity as a complex problem initiates his alienation. James then battles with this alienation from his days as a young schoolboy into adulthood.

This isolation is felt despite the legitimacy of his American identity and the way it is perceived by those around him. James was born in the United States, and therefore legally has the right to claim himself as an American. However, others often mistake him for someone born in a foreign country. During his first day as a Harvard professor, his students were in shock that their American history professor was a man who doesn’t resemble an “*American*” (Ng 31). This incident in the classroom was not an isolated incident. It occurred in both his professional and personal interactions. This is particularly noted in the way James grasps on to the bigoted opinions of his mother in law. After meeting Marilyn in his class, the couple quickly fell in love and got married. Marilyn’s mother, however, did not approve of their marriage. Her initial

reaction was to question whether James was using Marilyn for a green card, which is impossible as he is a naturalized citizen. On their wedding day, she informed her daughter that the marriage was simply not “right.” While her mother never used a slur against James’s Chinese-American identity, the implication in her statement pointed directly to their difference in ethnicity. Years later, the words were long forgotten in Marilyn’s mind but continued to haunt James. Ng reflects that those words went through a process of “binding tighter over the years, slicing into the flesh” (213). The metaphor of the flesh here is extremely vital, for the words structured his entire psychological being into a state of internal torment, “slicing” a permanent imprint. Ng’s metaphor of “flesh” and “binding” indicate that moments of racial bias stayed with James and continued to hold a negative impact on his mental health. The same words that Marilyn was able to forget were the same ones that held James physically and emotionally captive for years. This then predicts that many moments in his family dynamic translate differently in James’s mind than it did for his wife and children.

This is the case when his wife decides to leave him with no prior notice. Growing up, Marilyn’s dream was to become a doctor. When she met James, they had children and, her role as a mother took her focus away from her dreams. After their second child Lydia is born, she decided to leave behind her domestic life and go back to medical school. James believed she left because she can no longer be with a Chinese man and their mixed-race children. While this is *not* the case, James’s trauma determined his identity was the cause of her departure. Furthermore, the novel is centered around the death and suspected murder of Lydia, their daughter. It begins with her disappearance and as the narrative develops, their personal and family matters are revealed. When police officers update James and Marilyn that a suicide (by drowning) may have caused their daughter’s death, Marilyn exclaims that the investigation would be treated differently if

Lydia was white. While her comment was strictly a critique of the way law enforcement works, James's psyche immediately translated it to blame on himself for his daughter's death.

These episodes influence James to question his place in the West, which is marked by a society that is racialized and predominately occupied by an elite whiteness. James consistently doubts his placement in this racialized hierarchy even as an accomplished doctoral candidate and professor. Min Song-Hyoung suggests that this trope is a reoccurring theme, asserting, "narratives about Asian Americans frequently acts as a reflection of a person's relative worth" (6). He notes that Asian American literature often positions its characters in a series of reflections about their place in their surrounding environment. Ng's novel stages these reflections through James, who considered his personhood and worth in terms of the way Western gaze was going to judge him. It becomes his motivation to reject his ethnic self, whereas, for Changez, the gaze made him want to rebel against the white gaze. This depicts the two diverse reactions individuals have to their multiple identities; some rebel against the West by attaching themselves to their ethnicity, while others push against it because it highlights their otherness. Changez grew his beard in rebellion to the expectations the gaze had on him, while James tried to step out of the boundaries that his Chineseness produced.

Rejection of Ethnic Self

Consequently, the social discrimination that he endures forces him to believe that to be accepted as an American, he must rid himself of his Chineseness. As a child, this begins with the refusal to speak Chinese in fear of it obstructing his American accent. Eventually, it progressed to training himself to memorize anything associated with American pop culture. Ng writes, "He set himself a curriculum of studying American culture—listening to the radio, reading comics, saving his pocket money for double features, learning the rules of new board games—in case

anyone ever said, *Hey, didya hear Red Skelton yesterday? Or Wanna play Monopoly?*” (44)

James supposes that to fit the part of the “American” you must act and speak like one. Tara Fickle reflects on this reoccurring theme of hiding one’s Chineseness in narratives, such as Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*. Fickle writes, “the key to becoming a convincing American is to lose her ‘Chinese face’” (79). The notion of “losing [a] Chinese face” is extremely crucial in understanding the way that these characters are conditioned to hide their ethnic background in fear of it deterring their recognition in America. James’s motivation to “lose his ‘Chinese face’” evolves all the way to even his academic studies at Harvard, as he decides that he must study and specialize in arguably the most American subject in academia, “The Cowboy in American Culture.” Studying cowboys, he believes, is going to give him creditability. This credibility is centered around what he believes to be the power to defeat inferiority. Yet when questioned what his favorite subject growing up was, he notes that it’s paleontology. American studies were not his niche nor interest, it was a means of passing to him. He assumed that the only way to integrate is by learning the dominant culture around him. James's fixation on learning the culture, through social and educational means places him to feel distant from his identity. This denial in many ways fuels the process of ethnic rejection. Thus, James is participating in what Chen believes to be the inauthentic act of impersonation. She writes, “. . . many Asian American acts of impersonation begin in a context of necessity—they are not undertaken for pleasurable reasons but because livelihood, citizenship, identity, and survival are dependent upon their careful enactment. . .” (14). In viewpoint, James believes that to socially subsist, he must impersonate the dominant white culture. As Chen states, this act begins as a means of necessity but soon converts into playing a major role in his rejection of his Chineseness. He practices this notion not only on himself but also on his children. James drives his daughter Lydia to aim for

popularity from her peers, even if that's not what she wants. He gets her books that advise young children on how to make friends. He truly believes that while his identity suffered in adolescence, her identity can be saved if she received the social acceptance he desired. If she is popular and accepted by everyone, she can no longer be signified as the "other". By constructing James to push his daughter for popularity, Ng' also participates in stepping outside the boundaries of stereotypes placed upon Asian American parents. This stereotype is built around the Asian parent's desire for their children to succeed academically. While James still pushes his children to do better, his focus is not on school but ensuring they seek American forms of acceptance, so they don't experience the same social isolation he felt. His identity becomes the driving force in all his behavior, including the way his desire for his children pushes them toward the selfhood he wishes he had.

James suffers greatly throughout the entire narrative. It isn't until it's final moments until he realized that perhaps might have been wrong about aspects of his life, such as his wife's resentment of his Chineseness. His reflection on whether he had been wrong or not raises a very crucial point. The tension that convinced him otherwise resulted from the fact that he was greatly discriminated against. The trauma of isolation rooted its way into every aspect of his life and influenced him to believe that his difference situates him in a permanently inferior position in the racialized white society. He began to understand his identity as a hindrance; to pass in your environment, you must prove your Americanness. In doing that, James understood his Chineseness as a barrier and needed to consistently overcome that. Both James and Hamid's protagonist Changez experience tension so harsh to their identity, that they feel the need to discredit one aspect of it. Changez feared that Western ideology would refute his Third-World sensibility, while James fears the exact opposite. These two very successful characters suffered

through an extensive identity crisis, that impacted their ability to truly be content in their positions of success.

Chapter III: Resentment

Following a similar template to the previous chapters, Ayad Akhtar's play, *Disgraced*, depicts an identity crisis within a South Asian-American individual. Interestingly, Akhtar's protagonist in comparison to Changez and James goes the furthest in pushing away his multiplicity and indulges in extreme self-hate. For Amir, his experience as an immigrant transforms into his involvement in Franz Fanon's discourse of the postcolonial response. Amir's experience reflects Fanon's sense of the postcolonial, which Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Jamil Khoury, and Neilesh Bose say reflects a "split self" which reveals a colonized subjectivity" (15). Following this notion of the Fanonian discourse, I would argue that Amir's response is part of the postcolonial condition; he lost a sense of his identity and elected to mimic the behavior of the elite white space around him. As a product of the colonized condition, he questioned his humanity within his adopted sphere—New York.

In a four-act play, readers are presented with Amir, a very successful and wealthy corporate lawyer. Amir participates in the structure of the "Good vs. Bad Muslim" stereotype created by the West. Junaid Rana describes this structure, "The good Muslim is crafted in a representational strategy that aspires to whiteness and the possibility of civil rights and says nothing of intentional wars and the global distribution of violence organized by the U.S. empire-state" (514). But following this representational strategy, Amir's position as a successful ethnic individual becomes the key crucible of his striking rupture at the end of the play. This rupture showcases that Amir's placement in his hybridity is marked by a very visible *resentment* of his ethnic and religious background. This resentment is partially a product of his intense desire to be

accepted by his co-workers and superiors at work. Amir believes that his relationship with both Pakistan and Islam will hinder their acceptance of him. Changing his name to reflect his anticipated marginalization, we see Amir engage in the Muller-type of sacrifice we saw earlier. Amir and James are similar in their understanding that they must sacrifice parts of their background to guarantee a place in the American Dream. Moreover, Amir and Changez live in a space and time where their identity is more of an area of focus in the US imaginary.

Amir was born to Pakistani-Muslim immigrant parents. After growing up, Amir withdrew himself from both the religion of Islam and his Pakistani identity. Unlike Changez, he feels no regret for alienating himself from the past. Amir's lack of guilt derives from his internalized self-hatred, one that is infused throughout the play. Afzal-Khan theorizes this self-hatred to be sourced from Islamist ideology. She states, "Akhtar's work contributes to this need to move beyond the politics of representation by focusing on examining and exposing the self-delusions and self-hatreds of Muslims that is linked/has allowed Islamist ideology to arise in traumatized postcolonial Muslim nations as well as within marginalized Muslim immigrant communities in the West" (33). Such ideologies push Muslim immigrant communities, such as Amir, to endure in episodes antagonizing themselves. This ideology furthered the self-delusion and self-hatred that we see him experience.

The play's opening scene commences with Amir positioned in front of his wife, Emily, wearing an Italian suit jacket with a collared shirt. She is painting an image of him, inspired by Diego Velazquez's painting of his slave, Juan de Pareja. Her inspiration to sketch her husband emerged after they encountered a racist waiter. She felt compelled to make Amir feel better by painting a picture that is inspired by a scenario where being the *other* was a compliment because he was the subject of the painting. She believed the original model not to show a master and his

slave but rather an individual painting a loved one. Despite her intentions, however, she and the waiter both contributed to pointing out Amir's *otherness*. This marker of otherness is undoubtedly uncomfortable for Amir. This discomfort derives from the *principle* of the original painting, one where the hierarchical power between the painter and the painted is insinuated. Alyssa Syahmina Putri and Herlin Putri Indah Destari explore the significance of the power structure the painting reflects, stating that his discomfort emerges because of the way that the painting situates Emily as the superior and Amir as the other (284). They state, "Here, the consistent binary opposition of Edward Said's Orientalism (1979) theory is present with Emily dominating the way Amir's identity is enunciated within the representation of him by assigning the label of 'muse', objectifying him as an exotic artistic inspiration, and connecting his image to Juan de Pareja, the slave-assistant" (285). Following this point, I argue that his resentment towards his ethnic and religious identity emerges as a defense mechanism that shows his awareness that his otherness will always be pointed out without his consent, an otherness that is especially highlighted by his wife and her painting. To be accepted by his milieu is the ultimate motivation for his subsequent actions. While Ng's James subconsciously rejected his ethnic self, he was never vocal about it. Amir's psychic struggle, on the other hand, often emerges through his proclamation of the distance he placed between him and Islam.

Resentment of Otherness

Amir instigates his separation from being a Pakistani-Muslim by changing his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor. Kapoor suggests an individual whose background is from India. The difference between being identified with India rather than Pakistan is the prevention of religious judgment that Muslim individuals were under in New York after 9/11. Therefore, his co-workers assume that Amir is of the Hindu faith. He never corrects their misrecognition; he even plays

along with it by accepting gifts like the Hindu statue of Shiva. Pretending that he is associated with Hinduism, he imagines, gives him credibility that he believes being Muslim will not. His sociopolitical environment mistrusted Muslim individuals; they were scrutinized and doubted in airports, corporations, and law enforcement. Therefore, Amir is conditioned to believe that to become a trusted partner at his law firm, he must disassociate any relation to being Muslim.

This desire for legitimacy is the driving force to all his actions, including his initial refusal to help a local Imam accused of collecting money to aid terrorism. The Imam asks Amir for legal assistance during his trial because of their shared experience as Muslim men, irrespective of Amir's participation in the faith. Amir's nephew Abe and his wife urged him to attend the hearing and focus on the greater good of helping out a vulnerable Imam. Amir argues against this, predicting that if he attends the hearing his associates and superiors at work will mistrust him for helping the suspect. He also argues that corporate law cannot offer any substantial aid to the Imam. Eventually, Abe and Emily convince him, and he attends the hearing. While Amir did not represent the Imam, merely just attended the hearing, his presence there resulted in his predicted outcome and became a leading catalyst to his greatest anxieties coming true. A *New York Times* article includes a story about the Imams hearing, featuring a statement from Amir in support of the defense. The headline, therefore, marks Amir as a possible counsel for the defense as he asserts that there is no real case against the Imam. This infuriates Amir and he grows extremely nervous about the response from the public, especially those at his firm. When his wife tries to tell him that he did the right thing and not to worry, he states, "Let me get this straight: Some waiter is a dick to me in a restaurant and you want to make a painting. But if it's something that actually might affect my livelihood, you don't even want to believe there could be a problem" (26). The use of *livelihood* is key here, for it imposes an implication

that Amir's entire being and success are molded by his job as a corporate lawyer. It grants him a New York City apartment, Charvet shirts that cost \$600, and an upscale lifestyle. Fearful of the way others will view him now, Amir realizes that his position at the firm is now in jeopardy. Moreover, it's vital to note that his statement in the courtroom also discloses that underneath his resentment, Amir holds sympathetic ties to the truth and a potential frustration with Islamophobia. He believes in the Imam's innocence. However, what he believes doesn't matter to him, it's his exterior persona that is his focus. His genuine sympathy is instantly hidden now that the New York Times publicizes it. The case itself is not what Amir fears but rather the consequences he is going to face beyond it. His socioeconomic stance is at the forefront of his mind, injustice occupying a minor part of it.

Following the headline, Amir reacts by intensifying his stated resentment towards Islam. This is prominent at a dinner he and his wife host for his colleague Jory and her husband Isaac. Jory is an African American lawyer and her husband is a Jewish American art curator. Isaac comes to announce Emily's acceptance into one of his shows and the couples dine together in celebration. During the dinner, talk of religion and identity occupies the conversations. Isaac questions Amir on his experience at the airport, saying, "What's it like for you? I mean, you hear stories . . ." (49). Amir reacts by saying he doesn't experience any trouble because he willingly offers himself to be searched. Amir believes that going along with Islamophobia is simpler, rather than being a subject of suspicion by airport security (Akhtar 49). Amir and Jory, two people of color, believe that compliance is easier for everyone all around. Akhtar's choice in writing the characters like these depicts desire for acceptance or resigned going along with racial profiling as common across races but within colors. If Amir offers himself to the security and in doing so participates in what Isaac calls compliance, he believes it will make matters easier and

therefore less likely to encounter trouble. These actions shift Amir's identity to meet a perceived survival need, beyond simple survival at work. Putri and Destari further analyze his tactics as reflective of Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry, where the colonized imitates the colonizer to appear alike to them. By indicating his otherness directly, Amir believes he will be treated differently than the 'noncompliant other.' With growing discrimination against Muslims after September 11, Amir attempts to avoid the loss of his credibility by imitating the dominant society.

Later in the conversation, Amir shifts to reflect on his resentment towards the Islamic faith announcing his separation from "the Muslim psyche" (53). He believes this psyche is composed of intolerable traits and morals. He notes all the negative contributions of Islam, constantly referring to its practices as "people of the desert" (55). He stresses that many people know his relationship with Islam is a complicated one, and it's no secret he doesn't see eye to eye with people who sympathize with the religion. He scolds the Muslim desire to submit to the faith, the Quran, and the Hijab. His argument becomes more aggressive at dinner, as he desperately pushes the notion of his separation from the essential beliefs of Islam. Amir's argument showed desperation. The presence of Jory, a fellow associate at work, sets him in a completely chaotic psychological state. When he realizes she and others at work are aware of his previous sympathy towards a public Muslim figure, he utilizes the dinner to disabuse them of that notion. His desire for acceptance structures a resentment of the fact that he feels like he must prove to those around him and even to himself. He announces that he is an Apostate, a person who leaves organized religion. His identity as an Apostate is notable because despite his effort to detach his theoretical ties to religion, he still experiences discrimination. He rejects Islam for many reasons but still isn't granted acceptance by his environment.

Ironically, as Amir continues with anti-Muslim rhetoric throughout the dinner, his thoughts become disordered and he no longer knows what he's arguing for. At one point, he is fighting against Islam and the next, he reveals 9/11 brought him a blush of pride to see "we are winning" (63). This notion is introduced earlier in the study, with Hamid's Changez. Both Amir and Changez feel a sense of pride when they comprehend what the event of 9/11 symbolized for themselves and those who relate to their identity. This moment deconstructed Changez's Americanness and gave him the pull to disassociate himself from it. Conversely, the sense of pride also deconstructs Amir's Americanness. The use of "we" categorizes him in the group of people that desperately wanted to part from. His thoughts become distracted as he drives to prove he is *anything* but a Pakistani Muslim even though he still aligned, externally and internally, with that identity. While he mentally conditions himself to do whatever it takes for acceptance, the Islamophobia that takes place during New York at that time makes him into a subject that is concentrated on consistently.

External Intolerance Towards Amir

Amir's push against Islam goes beyond the desire to no longer be a part of organized religion. The play itself begins with Amir's experience of prejudice from the waiter. Therefore, his anger seems sensible by his environment. During the dinner, Jory tells Amir that she was made partner at the firm, a position that they were both up for. The decision to make her partner wasn't simply because she was more qualified than Amir. Rather, the play suggests it was a result of Amir's appearance at the hearing and his name change that drove his bosses to disassociate and reject him. This moment releases every suspicion that Amir's psyche faced; the fear of alienation from his environment because of his ethnic and religious identity. His dearest friends at the firm show their true beliefs about him, calling him "duplicitous." Moreover, Isaac,

who has had an affair with Amir's wife, insults their relationship, "The slave finally has the master's wife" (70) and "There's a reason they call you people animals" (73). The intolerance towards him exposed itself, proving that his external environment was ready to bring him down. At this point, Amir's psyche suffers many tremendous losses. He comes to terms with the fact that no matter how conscientious he was, his firm only tolerates him when his identity fits into Western ideology. His wealth and success mean little to them; he is an 'other.' Further, his wife, who has been the primarily supportive individual in his life, has an affair with another man. Thus, all events lead to the rupture at the end, when Amir acts out violently and strikes Emily. Through this act of domestic violence, Amir conclusively loses everything that ever granted him acceptance. Putri and Destari define this moment as Akhtar's decision to incorporate, "Neo-Orientalist concepts which are the hierarchical binary opposition of 'barbaric brown man' . . . (291). Therefore, Akhtar presents the image of the Eastern man that hierarchal ideology pushes for. Amir appearing as the post 9/11 representation of the barbaric Eastern Man reveals that there's already a preconceived exception about him. These behaviors were the projected beliefs that the West believed all Brown men shared. In a roundtable discussion regarding Akhtar's play, Jamil Khoury states, "In juxtaposing the 'righteous liberalism' of the West with the 'vulgar illiberalism' of Islam, and then sealing the deal with misogynistic violence, audiences are fed something all too familiar and expected" (17). For a White man like Isaac, it was an expected behavior from Muslims, for he states, "you people [are] animals" (73, emphasis added). Moreover, Amir's rupture not only ends as his marriage and job but also marked the being he would never become and therefore, impacted the theoretical buildup of his identity. Unlike Changez, Amir had no place to return to after his rupture. Changez's ties to his multiplicity gave him a space to return to when one part of his identity is released. Amir feels colonial alienation,

he is withdrawn from the space around him and the space across the globe that occupies the other half of his identity. Akhtar thus reveals how ideology damages Amir's image of himself and presents him with a series of moments in which his self-hatred is heightened.

In many ways, to perceive a character who argues for a version of Islamophobia when he is of Muslim origin disrupts conventional approaches to the discourse of identity. However, in doing so, Akhtar depicts a startling reality that many immigrants and children of immigrants face. The severe need for acceptance leads them to willingly participate in the marginalizing of half of their identity for the other half to fit in. Nordinger reflects on this climax in terms of his, stating, "The play's eruptive climax demonstrates the disorientation and psychological pain caused by Amir's predicament of being cast out of one culture while having learnt to hate the other" (63). The perceived condition to distinguish between oneself and their background places individuals in a state of mental crisis. His rejection of Islam becomes a part of the performance that he believes he must act in. Amir's performance of mimicry crumbles away, and he is left to face the consequences of his reality.

Changez, James, and Amir diversely react to their multiple identities, ranging from inner conflict to outer rage. Changez's guilt ends his placement in New York, James's lack of guilt pushes him to partake in imitation, and Amir translates the need to be accepted into resentment towards his ethnicity and religion. Political and social implications shape the way these men react to their construction as beings in the West. The framework of these pressures reveals that reaction to these implications cannot be formed from a single dimension. It is infused by a bodily instinct, a fight or flight tactic. Politically, Amir and Changez admit that Western politics are a key issue to their identity, and they can no longer hold themselves captive to them.

Chapter IV: White Savior

Changez, James, and Amir are all romantically involved with white American women. James and Amir are married, while Changez's relationship begins and ends after college. The presence of the female white figure in all three narratives is thought-provoking. Why is it important that all three men of color, who struggle severely with their identity and placement in Western society, are sexually involved with a white woman? To expand on Putri and Destari's concept; I believe that Changez's lover Erica, James's wife Marilyn and Amir's, wife Emily are meant to signify the "White Savior." They define this as the white character that helps people of color and makes their life better (286). Putri and Destari argue that Emily's interest in Islamic art centers her to be this figure, the one who symbolizes the superior voice of reason, allowing wide liberal acceptance. However, I believe this notion extends to the other characters' romantic experience. In James and Amir's case, however, not only their wives are their White Saviors but also the primary source that reminds them of their otherness.

After Changez arrives in the United States, the first and only female he formed a relationship with is Erica. While Changez suffered through his own conflicted identity, Erica spent the majority of the novel grieving her boyfriend that had died before she met Changez. However, despite her suffering, she is the only person in the West that provided Changez with a sense of home. She asked him questions about Pakistan and would give him the space to voice his nostalgia. As his "White Savior," she was the safe space that provided him with the comfort to inhabit in his past. The ability to provide him with nostalgia was because Erica herself lived in the past, unable to move on in her life after she experienced death when her boyfriend passed from cancer in college. In the background of Changez's psychological breakdown, Erica had her own and was entered into a health facility. After spending time there, it was hinted that she had

committed suicide. Changez realized that he was never really a part of her story and that there is nothing left for him to stay in America for. He reflects, " I had begun to understand that she had chosen not to be part of my story; her own had proven too compelling, and she was—at that moment and in her own way— following it to its conclusion, passing through places I could not reach. I saw I had no option but to pursue my own preparations to leave" (166). Ultimately, along with all the other factors in his life, she played a major role in his decision to leave. While Changez and James share the commonality of having a "White Savior" as their companion, James's relationship with his wife moves in a different direction. Marilyn for James symbolizes the acceptance he always desired. The first time they were sexually intimate, he thinks, "It was as if America herself was taking him in" (45). Marrying Marilyn and having children with her marks a portion of his desired acceptance in dominant white society. This quickly changes, however, when that very body that once made him feel accepted turned into the source of his anxiety. James considers his background as the reason for his marital problems. He perceives their relationship in terms of race; she is white, and I am not. She is a representation of the culture that marginalizes him and therefore, becomes a constant reminder of his otherness. Her acceptance of him is never established as full acceptance. Marilyn doesn't do this intentionally, but as established earlier, this way of thinking was conditioned by his previous experiences.

Amir's relationship with Emily is particularly interesting because she is the constant reminder of his Islamic roots. She pushes him to see the Imam and to be more sympathetic towards Islamic traditions. Her and Marilyn play the role of the "White Savior" but in doing so, misses the essence of the marginalization placed around his ethnic identity. Her refusal to see the painting as a sign of power hierarchy reveals that she would rather focus on the romanticism of religious and ethnic ideologies rather than a subjected reality. Putri and Destari state, "As an

educated, middle-class white woman, she has overlooked the significance of minority control of their own representation, proving her to be another White Saviour figure” (288). To perceive the painting in a sentimentalized manner hints a certain privilege, one that Amir simply cannot afford because of his experiences. Beyond the painting, Emily’s reading of Amir’s identity conflict is also sentimentalized. He stressed that if he contributed to the Imam’s hearing, he would face dire repercussions from his associates. She ignored his pleas and did not realize that Islamophobia is not always a crude waiter or being racially targeted at airport security. Rather, Islamophobia can be a silent agent that disguises itself with other justifications. Rana describes the presentation of silent islamophobia in various novels. He states, “Rather than placing racism at the center of a system of social structure and hierarchy, these novels present it as accidental and tangential” (505). That is not to say that Emily cannot speak on nor sympathize with the Islamic struggle. However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theorizes, one must study and understand the full history to earn the right to critique (597). Emily and Marilyn must understand that there are layers to Amir’s resentment that were molded by his environment. These layers distract him from being able to partake in viewing his experience in a sentimental stance.

The application of the White Savior is interesting in how each character handles this position. When considering Emily’s interest in the East, she is privileged to hold an active voice of critique against the West. She is viewed as a tolerant person who is accepting of all, which is not the case for Amir. Her ability to voice her opinion does not affect her social relationships and career opportunities. This is problematic as for Amir, any sympathy with the East makes others mistrust him. However, while Emily is extremely vocal about Amir’s identity, Marilyn never calls attention to James’s ethnicity. Her silence results in constant self-doubt from James. Lastly,

Erica is an object of fantasy, her presences infuse a major nostalgia and focus on the past. Each author, therefore, diversely presents the influence stemming from the White Savior.

In each case, Changez, Amir, and James's relationship with a white woman was still not able to provide them with their desired acceptance. While they may have subconsciously associated the desire in these relationships as a sign of fitting into the ideology around them, the tension with their identity did not permit that. Changez and Erica's relationship was centered around the nostalgia for their pasts and he was not able to assimilate into his adopted country because of this nostalgia. James and Amir's marriage deteriorated as their relationships put them in internal hardships as they constantly reflected on their ethnic difference from their wives. While all three men envisioned that they would feel assimilation or success from their relationships, they were unsuccessful in finding this sense.

Conclusion

The three characters here enter into the canon of immigrant characters in contemporary fiction in quite an interesting way. Changez, James, and Amir embody Muller's concept of sacrifice. Each one of them finds themselves in a situation where they feel like they must give up a part of themselves to seek ease in their body and psyche. Unfortunately, they never discover the ease and therefore cannot support Cowart's claim of an expected comfort in doubleness. Their role in the discourse also introduces a new fraction of representation. The characters in question as illuminated are individuals who are grouped into the category of the model minority. They are the key representation of successful men of color in society. Measurements of success are noteworthy because, like the genre itself, the bodies represented are evolving and thriving in some ways. They are no longer newly arrived immigrants who are perceived as a site of cheap labor. They are a part of different societal components in the United States, they are in business,

academia, and law. While they climb up the social ladder and achieve acculturation, their *otherness* is still pointed out. Despite their best efforts to just be present in the society, they are psychologically marginalized by expectations set upon them. Their psyche, therefore, perceives that they can only be a part of *one* world, *one* identity. Their environment transforms hybridity as a suggestion of repression. If they belong to one culture, they simply cannot thrive in the other. For Changez, this enforces immense guilt. For James and Amir, it projects a series of resentment and rejection.

The new lens that is presented for readers in the immigrant experience reveals a series of psychological and sociological findings. The authors place characters who have overcome the initial struggles that emerge from immigrating. They overcome financial and physical issues and build themselves a home in the New World. What our authors do however is showcase the follow up of this, the search for emotional comfort within. This is unable to be granted simply because fictional New York and Ohio are unable to give smooth acceptance to Changez, James, and Amir. Their search for this acceptance places them in moments of self-hatred and extreme discomfort in their bodies. To combat this distress, the characters indulge in forms of sacrifice. For Changez, he no longer participates in the immigrant experience because it links him with an imperialist and capitalist order. Rather he endures in an emigrant narrative that initiates his decision to recall his arrival and departure from the West. In the end, Changez steps out of the immigrant framework and settles into a new form of migration, the individual who refutes the postcolonial condition by returning to his homeland. For James and Amir, it infuses a rejection of the East, and they decide they must fit into the pre-existing hegemonic standard of “Americanness.” Moreover, Amir’s rejection endures the worst outcome: he suffers from colonial alienation, he feels distant from his own land and does not have a Pakistan to go back to

like *Changez*. Our characters and their writers challenge the issue with the dominant understanding of what it means to be American. The three narratives do not uphold the traditional understanding that to become American one must assimilate. In *Changez*, James, and Amir's case, to assimilate means submerging the many critiques and complexities of belonging, it leads to self-hatred and each of these protagonists in their own way struggle against such conformity with varying degrees of success.

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