

**South Asian Muslim Americans as Model Minorities:
Conflicted Identities in Mohsin Hamid and Ayad Akhtar**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis argues that Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* portray the struggles of South Asian Muslims in light of the model minority myth. The protagonists' struggles for assimilation as model minorities are thwarted due to the collective social suspicion towards Muslim identities. Both of these works of diaspora post-colonial fiction are among the first prominent responses to post-9/11 American social perceptions of the Muslim diaspora. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, written in the contemporary timeline of 9/11, depicts the circumstances of the protagonist Changez in the pre- and the post-9/11 United States. Changez surrenders his efforts to assimilate as a model minority due to internal and external conflicts, including his own introspection over the social and economic disparities between the East and West, and the racial prejudice that leads to his disenchantment with America. In *Disgraced*, the protagonist Amir begins as a successful, assimilated model minority, a status he has achieved through a rejection of his own Muslim identity. He has, for example, changed his last name to appear of Hindu heritage to assimilate years ago and has even passed himself along at his Jewish law firm as a Hindu-American. When his Muslim identity is disclosed, his world unravels. Through the efforts of assimilation on the part of their protagonists, Hamid and Akhtar highlight how South Asian Muslims after 9/11 grapple with suspicion, scrutiny and surveillance in the US. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* present two common options that many "model minority" South Asian Muslims in the US face when confronted with prejudice and hostility. On the one hand, assimilation looks like a retreat from Muslim identity, as epitomized by Amir's self-loathing in *Disgraced*. On the other, embracing Muslim identity—and rejecting the model minority myth—risks looking like

radicalization, as Changez rejects his role as a model minority and returns to his homeland as a perceived fundamentalist. These portrayals resonate with South Asian Muslims' current, ongoing pressures, and capture the dilemmas of a South Asian Muslim identity caught between these two choices, and amid extremism from both sides.

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Chapter 1:

Model Minority Theory and the South Asian Muslim Diaspora

Mohsin Hamid and Ayad Akhtar are two prominent South Asian Muslim diaspora writers of Pakistani heritage whose works address complexities within post-colonial South Asian Muslim hybrid identities in the United States.¹ Through their narratives, they explore how these identities were redefined in the post-9/11 United States. In particular, their works highlight how the atmosphere of scrutiny and suspicion that followed the 9/11 terror attacks complicated the existence of South Asian Muslim populations in America. As a result, they were forced into reworking their positionalities to ensure acceptance and integration within that chaotic environment. In their works, Hamid and Akhtar explore the tensions in South Asian Muslim diaspora identity, including the struggle for assimilation in American society, through three approaches. First, they present the historical context of post-colonial characters grappling with the socio-economic and geo-political challenges inherited after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. This is reflected through their portrayal of discontent and a sense of otherness in their characters with post and neo-colonial identities. This discontent emerged from the historical context reflected through economic and social disparities of the third world citizens seeking their place within the first world. Second, they explored how this struggle for assimilation in America generates an internalized crisis of identity which creates a fracture in their hybrid existence as they are torn between the need to conform to expected Occidental stereotypes for successful assimilation, on the one hand, and towards their South Asian Muslim identities on the other. Third, they highlight how 9/11 affected the cultural and social dynamics

¹ A hybrid identity represents an individual "having access to two or more ethnic identities." See Antony Easthope, *Privileging Difference* 55.

of Muslim South Asian existence in America. Through these approaches, Hamid and Akhtar portray how the struggle for assimilation in America brings about a rupture within these identities.

I propose that Hamid and Akhtar's portrayal of these struggles can best be analyzed within their narratives through a critical application of Model Minority Theory (MMT), which studies the model minority myth that has been used to subjugate racialized identities in America. In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, Varaxy Yi and Samuel D. Museus explain that the model minority myth initially framed Asian Americans "as an embodiment of the ultimate American success story of meritocracy and hard work, and it implied that other minority groups (e.g., blacks and Latinos) could also rise above the challenges of racism in order to succeed" (1).² Bob H. Suzuki, in his article "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the 'Model Minority' Thesis," disagreed with the portrayal of Asian American success and regarded the "model minority thesis" as a myth. It is a myth not only because it portrays Asian Americans monolithically as a single, thriving population, but also because it attempts to create a racial wedge to establish and maintain racial control over the diverse populations in the United States melting pot. Specifically, Yi and Museus write that the myth was used as "an ideological tool [...] to dismiss civil rights activists' claims that racism was responsible for the struggles of people of color and to delegitimize challenges to racial oppression" (1).³

² While the idea of a "model minority" traditionally focused on East Asian communities, is also important to note that due to their high socioeconomic success, that model minority label also routinely includes South Asian communities. The complications that arise from religious minoritization, and especially from Islamophobia, are of central importance to the present study.

³ Museus also criticizes the ongoing use of this stereotype in in his book *Asian American Students in Higher Education*.

I will demonstrate that the model minority myth is a damaging stereotype through an analysis of Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Akhtar's play *Disgraced*, two works that focus on the damage this myth causes its Muslim protagonists. The efforts of assimilation by Hamid's and Akhtar's protagonists are part of what causes them so much trouble. By representing their challenges, I argue, Hamid and Akhtar make visible the effects of model minority stereotypes on South Asian Muslims in American society. They effectively portray the result of those stereotypes, which in both cases is a rupture in the protagonist's identity. An application of MMT to these works, therefore, allows the reader to see how Hamid and Akhtar identify the physical, cultural and psychological impacts of forcing an internalized assimilation on the part of South Asian Muslims in post-9/11 America.

In the United States, South Asian Muslim identities are an amalgamation of Asian and American cultural, social and political identities. This fusion of post-colonial historical and American cultural existences creates hybrid identities. These South Asian Muslim hybrid identities in America, which emerge from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and the colonized, are multifaceted because of their different social, religious and historical contexts. Firstly, South Asian Muslim identity in America is informed by the Orientalist post-colonial perspective of the Occident towards the Orient. Second, it is informed by the resulting hybridity, which becomes central to South Asian Muslim diaspora identities. In order to observe these two factors, the oriental post-colonial perspective and hybridity, it is crucial to take into account the relevance of the colonial historical context of South-Asian Muslim post-colonial and neo-colonial identities in America. Secondly, mainstream media representations of South Asian Muslims in film, television, and on the news tend to misrepresent Muslim identities as threatening Arabs. The depiction of South Asian Muslims often lacks representation in

comparison to their Arab counterparts, creating a binary between South Asian non-Muslims and Muslim Arabs that further complicates the pressure to assimilate as model minorities. Thirdly this study will draw on Model Minority Theory to understand their representation within these two narratives. Finally, this thesis will add to existing scholarship on model minority theory by showing how this resultant rupture of identity affects a quickly growing South Asian Muslim population, and how their narratives are contributing to the making of a new South Asian Muslim meta-narrative in America. In this first introductory chapter, I will first lay out the context for South Asian Muslim Diaspora fiction in post-colonial theory and the political background. I will then explain how MMT builds on that theory; and, finally, will situate Pakistani Diaspora fiction, and specifically Hamid and Akhtar, within that history.

South Asian Identity and Postcolonial Theory

In diaspora literature, the primary theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism and hybridity have their roots in the binaries between the Orient and the Occident. The Orientalist outlook in the aftermath of colonialism has remained the foundation of the Western perception of the East. Works like *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster allude to the mysterious, untamed side of the Orient. As Edward Said writes in *Orientalism*, this stereotypical view holds that "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different;' thus, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal" (48). It is this side that makes the Orient into something exotic yet feared at the same time. These Oriental and Occidental identities were chalked out anew in the aftermath of 9/11 when an Orientalizing outlook was renewed both globally and locally in the form of American Islamophobia. As Khaled A. Beydoun explains in his book *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and*

Rise of Fear, "American Islamophobia is fluidly shaped and impacted by uniquely American stimuli, including [...] legal and political systems, history, racial and religious demographics, and private interests and actors" (19). The rise of Islamophobia and a resultant climate of distrust within the United States changed how South Asian Muslim identities were perceived. These identities were subjected to scrutiny based on their colour and creed. Beydoun attributes this to a "failure to frame Islamophobia as a system of bigotry [that was] not only endorsed and emboldened by law but [was] also carried out by the government actors, [which] severely underestimates the scale of its menace and the process by which it inflicts injury and authorizes popular behaviour" (20). As a result, Muslims in America were subjected to dogmatic scrutiny that Beydoun refers to as "structural Islamophobia," predicated upon "the caricature of Muslims embedded by Orientalism and propagated by Islamophobia" (170). As a result, in the aftermath of 9/11, South Asian Muslims found themselves at a crossroads in their American existence.

Analyzing Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Akhtar's play *Disgraced* through the lens of MMT will provide insights into the effects of American Islamophobia. I have chosen to focus on texts from two different genres for a few reasons. First, juxtaposing these works shows that the model minority myth is a theme that characterizes South Asian diaspora writing broadly, across genres, and which comes to the forefront in two of the most prominent post-9/11 works. Second, addressing two different genres also helps show how writers have made use of each genre's particular features to highlight aspects of minoritization. For example, Hamid and Akhtar both address the issues of the white, American gaze, but their modes of writing let them address it in different ways. Hamid's novel addresses it by making use of a particular style of narration: a first-person narrator who addresses an implied white American auditor. The play, in contrast, highlights issues of the Western, white gaze by making use of the

visual elements of theatre—the audience's gaze, as it relates to the protagonist standing to have his portrait painted on stage. The result is a more comprehensive analysis of the identity dilemma brought about by model minority status and how it shapes diaspora literature.

Postcoloniality is a key context for Hamid and Akhtar's works. It is important to look at the post-colonial context of these works to consider how they address their characters' hybrid identities. Postcolonial theory, in its conventional form, is a way of looking at the global impact of colonization on different cultures. Ashcroft et al. write in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, it encompasses "both the material effects of colonization and the huge diversity of every day and sometimes hidden responses to it" (2-3). The term itself investigates the representation of the colonized within different cultural contexts. As explained by Ashcroft et al.:

Postcolonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and post-independence nations and communities. (169)

These responses include, on the one hand, analyses of the works of colonizers as they recorded their observations of the colonized in nonfiction and literary writings; and on the other hand, writers from ex-colonies “writing back” to empire and drawing on themes of identity, language, culture and hybridity.⁴

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin adopted Rushdie's phrase ‘writing back’ and defined it as post-colonial writers engaged in the power of imperial discourse, not by writing ‘for’ the centre, but ‘against’ the center's assumptions of a prior claim to legitimacy and authority.

Any discussion of postcoloniality cannot be carried out without referencing the important contributions of Edward Said. In *Orientalism*, Said examines the views of the Occident towards the Orient from historical, cultural, and political perspectives. He defines Orientalism as:

A style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. (10)

The source of these idiosyncratic "theories" is what particularly interests Said. He investigates the origin and development of these distinctions by tracing them back to the period of colonial domination by Europe in the East. Said undertakes his investigation from the early eighteenth century with a focus on language and on the inadequate translation of local literary works by the self-proclaimed "superior" western colonial rulers to understand and describe their subaltern "others." He explains that the Orientalist, without distinguishing, lumped together a vast array of cultures and traditions to describe the Near, Middle and the Far East as one Orient. He challenges and refutes the claim of the Occident's supremacy over the Orient, writing that "the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness usually overrid[es] the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter" (15). He insists that politics was predominantly the reason for the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the Orient.

Said explains that after the Second World War, Orientalist studies shifted from Europe to the United States as part of a social sciences discipline.⁵ Globalization had its impact on the perception of the Orient, thus changing the American perception of the Orient by developing renewed stereotypes. As Said writes:

If the world has become immediately accessible to a Western citizen living in the electronic age, the Orient too has drawn nearer to him, and is now less a myth perhaps than a place crisscrossed by Western, especially American, interests. One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient." (34)

Globalization "intensified" the binary between the Orient and the Occident, which still used the supposed "sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East [to] construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive and so on" (Bertens). This binary is represented in art, literature and media through the portrayal of current and historical events as well as in works of fiction. A post-colonial reading of Orientalist texts can help recognize these subjective Orientalist binaries, and question and challenge them. Ania Loomba, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, insists that the most crucial aspect of the post-colonial lies in the prefix "post," "because it implies an 'aftermath' in two senses—temporal, as in coming after and

⁵ See Said, *Orientalism*, esp. page 11, 12 and 27

ideological, as in supplanting” (Loomba 7).⁶ Hamid and Akhtar present the friction between the binaries of East/West in the wake of globalization, thus making the aspect of “post” colonial positionality central to the narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced*. The selected texts depict how their post-colonial hybrid identities constantly compromise the characters’ efforts for assimilation as model minorities in American society.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K Bhabha investigates the central questions of identity and national affiliations within cultural constructs. He proposes the theory of cultural hybridity along with his concepts of mimicry and third space. Bhabha argues that cultural productivity is proportional to cultural ambivalence. For Bhabha, the location of culture and nationality plays a pivotal role in the discourse between the Occident and the Orient. He claims that the “‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it” (4). These places of interaction, where the Occident meets the Orient and vice versa, are created as a result of migrations. This interactive space, created as a result of migrations, is what Bhabha calls third space. The third space allows a new position of observation and discourse by creating new boundaries that Bhabha calls “Janus-faced”:

[T]he problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. (5)

⁶ Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge explain how the term post-colonial has helped “to destabilize the barriers around ‘English Literature’ that protected the primacy of the canon” (“What is Post(-)colonialism?” 277). The use of the term as a compound word with “post” as its prefix has been explained in different contexts in the book. In terms of language, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back* renders the implication of the prefix ‘post’ problematic, since post-colonial writers write in the language of the colonizer. They also explain how the suffix ‘post’ “reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time” thus subordinating history to a linear Eurocentric approach (293).

Bhabha's third space of interaction "though unrepresentable in itself [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). It is an in-between space that intervenes between colliding cultures, a "liminal space, in-between the designations of Identity, [which] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 5). Through narratives that reflect from and reflect their multiple identities. Bhabha terms these "national narratives" that "represent the diametrically opposed world views of master and slave which, between them, account for the major historical and philosophical dialectic of modern times" (206).

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Akhtar's *Disgraced* are narratives of hybrid identity in this sense. Analyzing them through MMT can open the intermediate space that allows an opportunity for a unique discourse between the Occident and the post-colonial Orient in America. Bhabha conveys a framework for describing cultural structures through the creation of cultures within cultures. He describes them as culture's 'in-between.' For Bhabha, "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (2). Bhabha's approaches to contact between cultures, subsequent hybridity, and the discourse that results provide a platform for the observation of model minorities in America. This approach, when applied to the protagonists of Hamid's novel and Akhtar's play, allows us to analyze the physical, cultural and psychological impacts on South Asian Muslim identities in America.

Diaspora identities of South Asian Muslims in America

Hamid's and Akhtar's works address questions of hybridity in the context of the spatial and cultural dislocations of diaspora. The effects of globalization and technological advancements have rendered the world smaller than it was in the past. It has also brought in its wake large-scale immigration from the Orient to the Occident. In terms of South Asian immigrants, people from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka emigrated abroad in two waves. The first wave was during the late 19th century as indentured servants, and the second was a series of post-1960s emigrations to the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The scholarship links these people through the use of a word with Greek origins: "diaspora," literally meaning scattering or dispersal. Avtar Brah, in her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, defines diaspora as "an interpretive frame for analysing the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy" (11). Diaspora also concerns identity and the construction of identity. In the case of South Asians, diasporic identities unsettle the homogenized categorization between the Asian and the South-Asian. The South Asian Diaspora raises questions concerning culture and identity and their place in the contemporary context of globalization and transnationalism.

Diaspora is studied within a variety of academic disciplines, with a focus on how diaspora culture derives from the historical and geographical ties formed as a result of voluntary or forced migration. Steven Vertovec, in his article "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora' Exemplified among South Asian Religions," lists common traits attributed to a general social category of diaspora. According to him, migrant groups maintain collective identities associated with common origins, geographies, and social ties within communities. Members of such groups also maintain ties with "co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement. There is an inability or

unwillingness [among these groups] to be fully accepted by [their] ‘host society’ – thereby fostering feelings of alienation, or exclusion, or superiority, or other kind of difference [; a] tension of political orientations given that diasporic peoples are often confronted with divided loyalties to homelands and host countries” (Vertovec 279). The South Asian diaspora, however, is quite complex as it has multifaceted diasporic identities in terms of nationality, culture, geography and religion. Therefore, any attempts to study diaspora in narratives about Muslim South Asians must take into account their social, cultural, and historical identities. The diaspora of South Asian communities also includes specific religious groups within South Asia that take the form Vertovec calls “‘triadic relationships’ (‘homeland’ – place of settlement – elsewhere in diaspora,” and which he identifies as common “among South Asian religions” (6). Religion is a key factor in determining differences within broader South Asian and more specific South Asian Muslim diaspora identities. In particular, South Asian Muslim diaspora identities have been greatly influenced by the backlash received based on religious categorization in post 9/11 America. Writers such as Hamid and Akhtar respond to that aspect of the South Asian Muslim diaspora within their works. Their diaspora literature depicts manifestations of discontent, grievance, aggression and alienation among Post-colonial South Asian Muslims, which can only be deciphered in relation to socio-economic and geo-political factors within the historical context.

The construction of separate South Asian Muslim post-colonial identities has a long history. Before the partition in 1947, there were several religious identities in the Indian subcontinent, including Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian.⁷ British colonization started under the veil of trading as the East India company in 1612 and subsequently seized

⁷ I use the term “Indian subcontinent” here strictly as a geographic description.

control of large parts of the subcontinent. It gradually increased its influence until it formally shifted the rule of the Indian subcontinent under the crown in 1858, officially making it a British colony. In terms of demographics, Hindus were the majority, with Muslims as the second largest group. Before British intervention, the Indian subcontinent had been ruled and governed by Muslim rulers, namely the Mughal empire. British colonial discourses of India were based on the assumption that Hindus and Muslims constituted different communities and were essentially opposed to one another. As explained by Francis Robinson in his article “The British Empire and Muslim Identity in South Asia”:

For much of the nineteenth century [...] this tendency to interpret Indian society in terms of religion was reinforced by the committed Christian beliefs of a good number of administrators and the presence of many missionary organisations. In this context the category Muslim became a major part of the discourse of the colonial state, both within itself and with society at large. Much social action, whether it be competition for jobs in government offices or riots in town and countryside, was interpreted in terms of Muslim and Hindu rivalry. (274)

This disparity between religious identities was the primary reason for the partition of 1947, where the South Asian subcontinent, previously called India, was divided into India and Pakistan by the British at the dissolution of colonization. These two countries share a long history of rivalry, which led to numerous wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971. The burden of wars and internal scuffles eventually resulted in the splitting of East Pakistan from West Pakistan to form the independent state of Bangladesh. These three countries--Bangladesh, India and Pakistan—are home to the majority of South Asian Muslim populations. Even though they are independent states, the very fabric of their existence is greatly affected by one another in terms of their

economic, social and psychological existence as nations. As explained by Amita Shastri and A. Jeyaratnam Wilson in their book *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia: Political and Constitutional Problems*, “decades after the end of colonial rule, the states of South Asia are still faced with problems related to democratic governance, social identities, development and welfare, and territorial security.” Shastri and Wilson further explain that “the situation was made worse by another legacy of the post-independence period [...] the existence of rampant patronage and corruption common to all South Asian states [as they are] now identified as having a disproportionate number of the poor in the world” (Shastri and Wilson). This chequered history between India and Pakistan led to “Pakistan’s emphasis on state-led development in favour of private sector growth” (Shastri and Wilson). The decision for the establishment of a strong military over social development, however, was not only based on the long history of Indian and Pakistani rivalry but also had its roots in geopolitical factors associated with American intervention in the South Asian region.

The history of bilateral relationships and US intervention in Pakistan (and the South Asian region more broadly) started in the 1950s. These ties underwent multiple transformations over time, thus developing a tense history between the two countries. The initial geniality on the part of the United States stemmed from its policy for bloc politics within the region to counter the USSR. The disintegration of the USSR was a watershed moment in international politics, which brought an end to the Cold War. As a result, drastic changes within American foreign policies were made as its concerns within the region subsided. These concerns were, to a smaller extent, revisited with the nuclearization of neighbouring states India and Pakistan, given those nations’ long history of hostility. In 2008, Hussain Haqqani, a Pakistani writer and an Ambassador to the United States explained US involvement in the region in his book

Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding.

There, he states:

The US-Pakistan partnership was far from an alliance based on shared values and interests; instead, each of the two partners was always preoccupied with confronting different enemies and pinning different expectations to their association. Pakistan's motive in pursuing an alliance with the United States is driven by its quest for security against its much larger neighbor, India. Pakistan has repeatedly turned to the United States as its most significant source of expensive weapons and economic aid. Although, in the hope of winning US support for Pakistan's regional aims, Pakistani leaders have assured US officials that they share the United States' global security concerns, Pakistan has been repeatedly disappointed because the United States does not share Pakistan's fears of Indian hegemony in South Asia (Haqqani).

He also attempts to shed light on the US perspective towards Pakistani-US relations:

For its part, the United States has also chased a mirage when it has assumed that, over time, its assistance to Pakistan would engender a sense of security among Pakistanis, thereby leading to a change in Pakistan's priorities and objectives. The United States initially poured money and arms into Pakistan in the hope of building a major fighting force that could assist in defending Asia against communism. (Haqqani)

In short, historically, there has been a longstanding US interest in the South Asian region. That interest was renewed in the aftermath of 9/11, and resulted in the US-led "War on Terror."

The War on Terror was mainly focused on three countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan.

Pakistan, for its geopolitical location, was a strategic partner to America in the war. Touqir Hussain, in his report titled “U.S.-Pakistan Engagement: The War on Terrorism and Beyond,” described how this war brought about a “U.S.-Pakistan engagement [that was] focused on cooperation in the war on terrorism, especially on building the military-intelligence partnership between the two countries” (6). Pakistan also provided logistical support to America by providing military bases on its territory. The war affected the entire region and resulted in a long and ongoing era of unrest within the regions of Central and South Asia. The biggest cost of the US war on terror is the loss of life, where “between 480,000 and 507,000 people have been killed in the United States’ post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan” (Crawford 1).

In the aftermath of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror, South Asian Muslim populations in America were also affected. As Tindongan writes:

[South Asian Muslim immigrants] enter the Western world carrying the legacy of their countries' often troubled relationship with Europe and the U.S. Coming from nation-states formerly colonized by European powers, the damaged social capital these Muslim immigrants bring makes their entry more problematic and complex than that of many other immigrant populations at this point in time.” (2)

These historical aspects affecting the socio-economic and geo-political standings of the South Asian region are important identity determinants in the narratives of Mohsin Hamid and Ayad Akhtar. These social conditions and forces of colonialism, racism, and Islamophobia shape the experiences of South Asians and Muslims in the West. These dilemmas, which centre on the experience of and subjection to colonialism, racism, and Islamophobia by the South Asian Muslims in their home countries and the diaspora, create a rupture within the identities of Hamid and Akhtar’s protagonists. These factors, when analyzed through the lens of MMT, also

challenge the monolithic perception of Islam in America.

Media Representation of South Asian Muslim Identities:

Keeping in mind the vast range of “diversity of the Islamic diaspora,” In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak writes, “it is altogether appropriate that Comparative Literature should undo the politically monolithized view of Islam that rules the globe today without compromising the strong unifying ideology potentially alive in that particular cultural formation” (87). This unified view of the Islamic Diaspora has often been the cause of oversimplified generalizations about the hybrid identities of Muslims, including South Asian Muslims. Such generalizations have created confusion about the South Asian Muslim identity and its relation to Arab Muslim identity. The two are often confused or conflated in the media, including film and television. There are two aspects to this misrepresentation. First, there is the general representation of Muslims in film and television media. For example, in their article “Muslims and Media: Perceptions, Participation, and Change,” Cemil Aydin and Juliane Hammer argue “that in dramas, Muslims are not recognized on American television as citizens of their own country, but instead are portrayed as dangerous immigrants with a religion that is both alien and wicked” (6). In *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, Amir Hussain also writes that “negative portrayals of American Muslims on television must have some correlation with the ways in which actual American Muslims are perceived. The violent actions of a tiny minority of Muslim terrorists are amplified when they are virtually the only images available on television” (134).⁸

⁸ Amir Hussain, “Islam,” in John Leyden, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* 110-131.

The other misidentification is carried out in terms of attributing a homogeneity to all Muslim identities, thus viewing them collectively and defining them only in terms of their religion. The essence of otherness for Muslims in the West finds its roots in Islamophobia, where representation in film, television, and news media depicts Muslims only as threatening Arabs. As a result, the word “Muslims,” especially in the aftermath of 9/11, is usually synonymous with “Arabs” in contemporary Western film and television. Saif Shahin, in his article “Unveiling the American-Muslim Press: News Agendas, Frames, and Functions,” argues that “the few studies that do look at American-Muslim media conflate ‘Arab/immigrant’ with ‘Muslim’ and thus fail to notice the diversity within the American-Muslim community and the schisms that have been central to its social and political history” (Shahin 890). Some examples include films such as *American Sniper*, *Argo*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, and *Executive Decision*; and television shows including *Homeland* and *Roseanne*. These media are not only misrepresenting Muslim identity but are also excluding an identification with and representation of the majority of South Asian Muslim populations.

These misrepresentations of Muslims, both in their homogenizing and vilifying tendencies, provide an insight into the Western perception of Islam in general and South Asian Muslims in particular. In *South Asian Racialization and Belonging After 9/11: Masks of Threat*, Aparajita De states that “the interpellation of Muslim South Asians or South Asian Americans into subject-positions of threat and terror-mongering within hegemonic spaces disempowers them in the sociocultural and economic domains” (xiv). She further describes how Islamophobia forms the basis of this discrimination and states that “disregarding the heterogeneity in the religious groups called ‘Muslims,’ Islamophobia amplified the alienation and disenfranchisement of entire bodies of immigrant groups based on their appearance or faith” (xiv). De goes on to

interrogate the transformations in racial, socio-political and cultural discourses in the aftermath of 9/11 with South Asian American identities at the core of her investigation. She uses ethnography, media, and literature in a number of genres as sources for her multifaceted account of South Asian racialization. In particular, De utilizes terms such as ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims’ to highlight the magnitude of rupture created by the ruling rhetoric. De thus traces the emerging patterns of South Asian identities in ways that parallel American rhetorics of terror. These racialized binaries between “good” and “bad” Muslims in America create an atmosphere of unrest for Muslim immigrants and force assimilation on them. As a result of this pressure to either assimilate as a ‘good Muslim,’ or else be labelled as a ‘bad Muslim’ that is a threat to American society, South Asian Muslims often struggle to assimilate in ways that model minority theory can illuminate. In my application of MMT to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced*, I will observe how these pressures on the identity of the protagonists result in their efforts to become model minorities. The efforts on the part of characters in these texts can be understood as representations of such efforts for assimilation by South Asian identities in America. This attribution of characteristic adjectives of “good and bad Muslim” to South Asian identities, as mentioned in De’s analysis, is central to the deconstruction of assimilated identity for Hamid and Akhtar’s protagonists in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Disgraced*. In order to show how this plays out in the literary works, I will first need to turn to model minority theory itself.

The concept of a model minority was developed during the US civil rights movement and is strongly associated with American society. In 1966, in his New York Times article “Success Story: Japanese American Style,” William Petersen associated generalized statistics such as higher education achievement levels, high representation in technical and managerial white-

collar jobs, and higher household income, as indicators of success for the ethnic minority of Asian Americans (specifically Japanese Americans). In that controversial article, Petersen proposed that Japanese Americans achieved success and avoided becoming a “problem minority” because of their work ethic and family values. Petersen’s “model minority” thesis is now widely considered a harmful myth that perpetuates unrealistic ideas about social mobility and racial equality. In their book, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism*, Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin describe how “for many white and other Americans, *Asian Americans* has become a term associated with ‘model minority’ success. The Model Minority stereotype serves for many as proof that securing the ‘American dream’ is a real possibility not only for Asian Americans but for all Americans of colour” (x). The theory accordingly received a lot of backlash in the 1970s and 1980s. As already mentioned, Suzuki rejected the term, characterizing it as a myth and a false concept. A set of critical studies of the “model minority” concept followed. Chau and Feagin, for example, explain that “beneath the veneer of praise, the model minority myth subtly ostracizes Asian Americans” (18). The concept is, therefore, best viewed as a tool for perpetuating racial inequality in American society.

As Chau and Feagin go on to write, “the stereotypes and images associated with the model minority notion, though often seemingly positive, are in numerous ways constraining and do create intense pressures on and stress for Asian Americans seeking to live up to such unrealistic and racially stereotyped expectations” (x). Kat Chow, in her article “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks,” argues that “Since the end of World War II, many white people have used Asian-Americans and their perceived collective success as a racial wedge. The effect? Minimizing the role racism plays in the persistent struggles of other racial/ethnic minority groups” (Chow). Chau and Feagin address the

consequences of racial stereotyping by delving into its historical context and contemporary manifestations:

This continuing use of white-named and white-framed perspectives on Asian Americans is highly problematical. We can pinpoint when this model myth was likely first constructed. In the mid-1960s, largely in response to African-American and Latino (especially Mexican American) protests against discrimination, white scholars, political leaders, and journalists developed the model minority myth in order to allege that all Americans of colour could achieve the American dream—and not by protesting discrimination in the stores and streets as African Americans and Mexican Americans were doing, but by working as “hard and quietly” as Japanese and Chinese Americans supposedly did. This model image was created not by Asian Americans but influential whites for their public ideological use. (15)

The damage from myth has taken on new dimensions in the wake of 9/11, as it has reinforced a set of assumed stereotypes about the South Asian population as an alien culture composed of religious minorities: the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and other South Asian populations in America. These stereotypes assigned specific characteristics to these identities, thus creating new binaries. As Neil Gotanda explains in his article “The Racialization of Islam in American Law,” “Corresponding to the Asian American model minority, we can see the emergence of the ‘good Muslim’ and ‘bad Muslim’ stereotypes. While the ‘Muslim terrorist’ is now well established, the scripting of the ‘good Muslim’ is a work in progress” (192). This stereotyping, explained by Gotanda, forces a new subject position for Muslims in post-9/11 America that emerges from religion-based racialization.

In *Race, Religion and Remote Democracy*, John L. Jackson and David K. Kim argue:

For Muslims, the imposed subordination is the stereotype or trope of the "Muslim terrorist." The power of racialization is that the "Muslim terrorist" is imposed upon groups regardless of their subjective wishes [...] The "Muslim terrorist" is associated with brown bodies. The link to the brown body comes through traditional Orientalism centered on the Arab world as well as the origins of most American immigrants who follow the Islamic faith. The focus on the brown body is heightened by manner of dress and specific cultural symbols such as the turban and hijab [...] The religious identity of Muslim overlaps with the racial category of Muslim. The past racial practice for Asian Americans has been to adapt the national label to the racial category. The Muslim category is ancestry-linked, as have been all American racial categories. The difference is that the ancestral link is not through Africa and slavery (for African Americans) or through the national homeland (for Asian Americans) but through religion - the faith of the ancestral homeland. (188)

The addition of this religious dimension to the pre-existing Model Minority myth creates a renewed racialized stereotype for South Asian Muslims. This new stereotype adds a precarious dimension to the pressure to assimilate.

As Tahseen Shams explains in her article "Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth":

Indeed, their education and professional credentials were all the kinds of indicators of immigrant success that help portray South Asian Americans as a model minority. And yet, while their educational and socioeconomic background

gave these immigrants some recognition and privilege, their “Muslim-ness” exposed them to Islamophobic contexts, setting their experiences apart from other Asian model minorities (3-4).

Shams further emphasizes the religious identification associated with South Asian Muslims and their MMT status. She explains that the “Muslim identity category itself has become racialized so that just being ‘brown’ is often associated to one being intrinsically violent, anti-American, and prone to extremism” (3). On the other hand, South Asian Muslims in America also realize their precarious racialized positionalities; thus, they “feel insecure and vulnerable, feeling as if their livelihoods and pathways of upward mobility can be suddenly upended.” Further, “this fear shapes how many South Asian Muslims give meaning to their immigrant experiences and guides their educational and political decisions” (14). As a result, they find themselves in a position where they have to renew their efforts for integration in a post-9/11 America. Accordingly, they may try to present themselves as model minorities following the criteria of education, politics, and being viewed as a “good” rather than a “bad” Muslim. As the final portion of this introduction (and the rest of the thesis) will show, these efforts can be traced within the works of South Asian Muslim diaspora writers.

Model Minority Theory and Pakistani Diaspora Fiction

Pakistani diaspora fiction constitutes an important part of post-9/11 Anglophone postcolonial literature. It shares regional and religious dynamics with other South Asian diaspora postcolonial literature due to a long shared colonial history. It highlights “the themes of the tragedy of partition, nationalism, postcolonial identity, gender, hybridity, Diaspora issues, and indigenous culture” (Malik and Umrani 398). The thematic concerns in these writings had to

adapt post 9/11. In the first decade after 2001, “164 novels, dealing directly or indirectly with 9/11, [had] been published” (Liao 13). Some of the prominent Pakistani writers in the field are Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsi, Ali Sethi, Shaila Abdullah and Ayad Akhtar. As Liao puts it, the diasporic voices of Anglophone Pakistani postcolonial fiction writers “open up spaces for readers to reach beyond the narrow category of the ‘9/11’ fiction and to attend to the diversity of ‘post’-9/11” (Liao 17). Their works, therefore, inquire into the ways in which 9/11 affected the cultural and social dynamics of the Muslim South Asian experience in America.

This thesis will examine two main case studies from this body of work. The first is the Booker prize-nominated novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. The novel was later adapted as a film and released worldwide. In both formats, it has been one of the major, most visible works of South Asian Muslim Diaspora fiction. The second work is Ayad Akhtar’s Pulitzer prize-winning play *Disgraced*. The play served a similar role in representing South Asian Muslim identity, as it was the first depiction of a Pakistani Muslim man on Broadway. Both works make use of their genre in ways that establish a Diasporic narrative and encompass the experiences of the Oriental post-colonial hybrid Other in America.

Akhtar’s *Disgraced* and Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focus on the South Asian Muslim Other’s experiences in America. There is a duality of expression in these works emerging from the hybrid identities of the writers as well as their characters. The *Washington Post* article “Ayad Akhtar: On Muslim identity, and life in America” explains this duality of expression as it states, “Akhtar himself has struggled to come to terms with his heritage, and his deeply personal exploration into his faith and culture have led him to an artistic awakening.” Akhtar and Hamid investigate definitions of identity for South Asian Muslims in America. The

lens of Model Minority Theory will help highlight the crisis of identity emerging from the efforts of assimilation by South Asian Muslims amid a climate of Islamophobia.

In Hamid's 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*—the earlier of the two works here under consideration and the subject of chapter two—the protagonist Changez faces an identity crisis. He is faced with the dilemma of either living the “American Dream” or returning back to his country in the post 9/11 scenario. He explains his conundrum as “being two hemispheres [...] from home” and refers to the age-old “self” and “other” relationship, which turned his almost perfect “American Dream” into a nightmare. Changez adopts a rebellious attitude to assert his identity. As a result, he grows a beard, which is for him a declaration of subaltern rebellion that leads to an altogether new identity. The Princeton graduate and a talented employee of Underwood Samson eventually returns to his homeland, where he becomes an activist. His political involvement against American policies in his home country subsequently labels him as a fundamentalist from the perception of the West (America).

Disgraced by Ayad Akhtar—the subject of chapter three—had its debut on Broadway seven years after the publication of Hamid's novel, and was first performed at the Lyceum Theatre on October 23, 2014. It was the first Broadway play that featured a Pakistani Muslim man grappling with issues of identity after 9/11. The play raised important questions of assimilation, identity and Otherness for Pakistani Muslims as well as for South Asian Muslims more broadly in the US. For Akhtar's protagonist, too, it was a reference to this same Islamophobic climate after 9/11 that turned upside down the life of corporate lawyer Amir Kapoor. Amir had discarded his Pakistani heritage by changing his name from Amir Abdullah to Amir Kapoor. His wife Emily is a white American artist who is inspired by Oriental architecture and themes, and whose paintings depict Islamic architectural and calligraphic designs. Amir,

unlike Changez, has chosen a path for achieving a Western ideal of happiness that involves completely discarding his religious identity. Amir's world also unravels when at a personal party held at their enviable Manhattan apartment, the couple invites Emily's Jewish friend Issac, an art curator, and his African American wife, Jory, who is also Amir's ambitious colleague. The entire setting is making of a combustible evening where the four different cultural representatives' casual conversation soon devolves into a heated debate on religion, identity, terrorism, and nationality.

The play depicts that it is not only Amir who is struggling with issues of identity. His wife Emily's obsession with the Orient as a white artist, Issac's lack of adherence to his own Jewish upbringing, and the clandestine affair between the characters of Issac and Emily add layers of identity dilemmas to each character. Even though Amir constantly criticizes his own religion during the entire play, he still reluctantly admits to feeling a "blush" at the moment when he learned about the 9/11 terrorist attack. He felt a brief and passing sense of elation over the momentarily perceived success of Islam over the West. This conflict of identity is not only visible in Amir's character: it is, in-fact, presented through all the characters who are in one way or another grappling with the issues of their identities and choices of past, present and future. Akhtar's characters are all riddled with symbolic questions regarding ethnic and cultural assimilations. He establishes and then demolishes the stereotypes, thus highlighting the conflicts within and outside of all societal factions.

These works of literature capture important moments in the lives of the immigrants that grant an insight into the conflicted nature of their hybrid identities. These are the moments that can be seen in the light of what Homi K. Bhabha refers to in *The Location of Culture* as "the moment[s] of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and

identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (2). In the context of the post-9/11 United States, I propose that the application of Model Minority Theory to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* can add to our understanding of how such moments of transit work for South Asian Muslims in American society.

MMT offers an analytical lens similar to the one that these works are attempting to fashion for themselves. Like MMT, both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* focus on how South Asian Muslims in North America have to represent themselves as a certain culturally, politically and socially acceptable Model Minority. An analysis of the characters of Changez and Amir will show the consequences of any deviation from acceptable stereotypes, which threatens to undo their precarious assimilation into Western society. The analysis also demonstrates how this stereotyping exists as a duality within the protagonists’ social and immigrant South Asian Muslim existences. These stereotyping approaches include their limited as well as negative representation in media and news that further contribute to what Shams describes as the “homogenization of Muslims as a group that is somehow inherently inclined toward extremist violence” (Shams 3). The negative representation also creates a social environment where Muslims become the target of suspicion and surveillance. Shams refers to this media and news based stereotypes and argues that “this climate of fear and surveillance gives new, political meanings to the speeches and actions of Muslims especially adding risks to their otherwise mundane activities, such as choosing a particular clothing to wear, [or] attending a religious gathering (Shams 3). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced*, Hamid and Akhtar dare to investigate the long-lasting tensions between Muslim immigrants of South Asian origins and the climate in the post-9/11 United States. The South Asian region and the US share a historical neo-colonial background that predates 9/11. Yet the American stereotype for South Asian Muslims

does not take into account these contexts and the grievances associated with it, which are also a part of South Asian Muslim identity. Such grievances are also often perceived as aggression in the post 9/11 context. The works of Hamid and Akhtar address that background and its role in the acculturation and eventual rupture of model minority identities.

In “Acculturation of the Muslims Settled in the West,” Nigar G. Khawaja writes that “Overall, there is limited research on Muslim immigrants settled in the West. Further, there is a dearth of knowledge about the acculturation of these individuals” (5). The tragic events of 9/11 prompted research on Muslim identities in America. However, as Khawaja also states, “the emphasis has been more on factors associated with terrorism, radicalization, Islamophobia (6). The process of integration of specific ethnic groups such as South Asian Muslims in America needs more investigation. As Khawaja explains:

There is some evidence that Muslims tend to use a separation strategy by developing stronger ties with their own ethnic group, heritage, culture, and religion. This strategy emerged as a protective factor as it provided them with social, emotional and instrumental support, which promoted their wellbeing and acted as a buffer [...]. On the other hand, this delayed their engagement with the host society. It seemed that assimilation and integration was difficult due to the religious, cultural, and linguistic differences between some Muslims and the host society. (6)

The stereotype of the model minority presents one possibility for an assimilated identity, at least for individuals who exhibit certain demographic variables, including “being a male, adult, educated, and with a stable employment and income” (6). As Khawaja also explains:

Considering the number of factors that may play a role in acculturation, it is important to explore how factors related to individuals, ethnic groups, and society can interact with each other and lead to negotiations in the form of an adaptive acculturation. [...] Further, the impact of discrimination and the relations between immigrant Muslims and host societies needs consideration. (8-9)

Khawaja emphasizes the importance of further research in regards to assimilation strategies and proposes data collection about South Asian Muslim experiences in America as a solution. My goal in this thesis is to address the same research gap by turning to the voices of South Asian Muslim writers themselves. Their voices are contributing towards a meta-narrative of the South Asian Diaspora that has long been missing--a new way that South Asian Muslim Americans can understand our own histories--and the time to hear and understand these voices is now. To that end, I now turn to the works of Hamid and Akhtar. To that end, I now turn to the works of Hamid and Akhtar.

Chapter 2:

Identity Rupture in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, dealt a death blow to an already weakened the fantasy of the melting pot image of America. The post 9/11 media response brought about a shift within geopolitical and social contexts by replacing the ideas of global collectivity with the dichotomies of “US” and “them” (Liao 11). At the same time, South Asian diaspora literature also renewed its focus on the transcultural existence of transnational identities in America. Mohsin Hamid, a second-generation South Asian diaspora writer, was among the first South Asian Muslim diaspora writers to respond to these dichotomic approaches via his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As Charlie Lee-Potter suggests in *Writing the 9/11 Decade: Reportage and the Evolution of the Novel*, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid “created means by which the strongly held ideologies could be arrested and then reversed” (74).

Hamid's concerns with post-colonial South Asian Muslim identities have animated his whole career. His themes—colonization, imperialism, exploitation, and the oppression enacted by the West over and against South Asian nations—are consistent with his mission of apprising the world of the discontent that is the legacy of Western imperialism for South Asian peoples. He argues through his novels how globalization has renewed the colonization of these nations within the global capitalist context. He also depicts how the reverberations of this discontent have penetrated into the social, economic and psychological existence of the colonized nations. His very first novel *Moth Smoke* (2000), shows how these socio-political frameworks affect South Asian Muslims within a post-colonial society. The novel captured the pulse of South

Asian post-colonial societies by representing the social unrest and collective discontent that is part and parcel of their cultural history.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Hamid broadened the scope of his work. He addressed the South Asian Muslim diaspora in the wake of globalization, migration, and the war on terror through his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). The novel was an international bestseller and received numerous awards, including the Ambassador Book Award, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Asian American Literary Award. The novel was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, Commonwealth Writers Prize, Arts Council England Decibel Award and Australia-Asia Literary Award. Further, it was also named as the Book of the Decade by the *Guardian* and the Notable Book of the Year by the *New York Times*. This worldwide acclaim established Hamid's stature among the prominent post-colonial South Asian writers in the Anglophone tradition, such as Salman Rushdie, Kamila Shamsie, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri. It also opened a window for a global discourse on the subject of 9/11 and South Asian Muslim identities in America. The novel provides a response not only to American popular rhetoric but also to the prevalent literary discourses after 9/11, which inflamed American emotions and reinforced prejudices toward Islam and Muslims. As Anna Hartnell explains, Hamid "subject[ed] the insular tendencies of the American '9/11 novel' to a postcolonial gaze and in so doing manifest[ed] the repressed political content of the genre" (Hartnell 336). This transition from a localized to a 'glocalized' political representation of South Asian identities is carried out by situating these identities within a global citizenship.⁹

⁹The term "glocalization" suggests that a global outlook should be adapted to local conditions. The word glocal is a combination of the words global" and "local." The term was popularized by the sociologist Roland Robertson. Robertson explains the concept in his book *Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity*. For him "it is around the changing relationships between different emphases upon and often conflicting interpretations of these aspects of human life that the contemporary world as a whole has crystallized. So in my perspective the issue of what is to be included under the notion of global is treated very comprehensively. The global is not in and of itself

Globalization for Hamid is a complex phenomenon that has negative as well as positive impacts for global populations. Speaking of the negatives, he explains in *Discontent and Its Civilization: Dispatches from Lahore, New York and London* that “Globalization is a brutal phenomenon. It brings us mass displacement, wars, terrorism, unchecked financial capitalism, inequality, xenophobia, climate change” (2). In terms of the positive aspect of globalization, he writes about the opportunity globalization provides:

But if globalization is capable of holding out any fundamental promise to us, any temptation to go along with its havoc, then surely that promise ought to be this: we will be more free to invent ourselves. In that country, this city, in Lahore, in New York, in London, that factory, this office, in those clothes, that occupation, in wherever it is we long for, we will be liberated to be what we choose to be. (2)

This opportunity for Hamid not only opens a window for a dialogue between post-9/11 South Asian Muslim and American identities. It also allows him to question the perceived stereotypes associated with model minorities in America. Globalization, on the one hand, has provided a passage for these post-colonial South Asian Muslim identities to cross geographical and cultural boundaries and penetrate among the civilizations that continue to be their colonial masters. Their anguish of subjugation is often carried across borders through migrations and permeates the diaspora. On the other hand, they are subjected to the demand for assimilation in their new world.¹⁰ Hamid explores how contradictory effects of past colonial domination

counterposed to the local. Rather, what is often referred to as the local is essentially included within the global” (35).

¹⁰ The notion of assimilation is contested as it encourages immigrant groups to adapt to dominant cultural values to attain social acceptance and benefits. Immigrant communities are required to shed their culture embedded in their language, rituals, laws, and religion. The idea of assimilation is most commonly understood as cultural assimilation. This includes ethnic groups taking on the host nation's cultural signifiers. The minority groups in cultural assimilation are pressured to adapt through language and behaviour to the daily activities of the dominant society, as well as through more critical socio-economic factors such as integration into the local culture and workforce. While

influence characters that are suspended in the struggle to claim their personal and national identities between assimilation and resistance.

The demand for assimilation is projected, in part, in the form of model minority stereotypes. Such stereotypes may overlap with the process described by Homi K. Bhabha as “mimicry.” In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (122). As South Asian Muslims seek to attain the propagated American dream of success in the socio-economic and cultural spheres, they find themselves at odds with their cultural and religious identities. What Hamid portrays through *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is how this displacement from the world of the colonized, followed by efforts for assimilation in the world of colonizers, results in a rupture within these identities. As Patrick Taylor writes, “diaspora is thus articulated through the experience of temporal and spatial rupture. The traumatic significance of this rupture is condensed into a specific historical point – the diasporic mo(ve)ment – both a moment in time and a movement in space” (Taylor 178). The South Asian Muslim diaspora’s efforts for assimilation in America have renewed in the aftermath of 9/11 where Islamophobia created a clear demarcation of good Muslim and bad Muslim that Mahmood Mamdani points out as problematic:

We are now told to distinguish between good Muslims and bad Muslims. Mind you, not between good and bad persons, nor between criminals and civic citizens, who both happen to be Muslims, but between good Muslims and bad Muslims.

the assimilation of ethnic groups into mainstream culture occurred in other cultures, much of the recent assimilation literature has concentrated on the U.S. population and race relations. In the dominant American paradigm for the first part of the 20th century, new immigrants were encouraged to “Americanize” to seek social and economic stability. See “Assimilation,” in *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*.

We are told that there is a fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called genuine Islam, from extremist political Islam. (767).

Hamid's depiction of this struggle for integration in America in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be interpreted through this stereotypical representation of South Asian Muslim identities emerging from post 9/11 Islamophobia.

In the context of American Islamophobia, what Bhabha terms "hybridity" has been inflected by the particular way the model minority myth influenced ideas of American minority "success." Khaled A. Beydoun, in his book *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*, describes American Islamophobia as "fluidly shaped and impacted by uniquely American stimuli, including [...] legal and political systems, history, racial and religious demographics, and private interests and actors" (19). The result was a renewal of the myth of the Model Minority, which had previously been associated with the Asian diaspora, for South Asian Muslims in America. As Jackson L. John and Kim David describe in *Race, Religion, and Late Democracy*, "corresponding to the Asian American model minority, we can see the emergence of the "good Muslim" and "bad Muslim" stereotypes. While the "Muslim terrorist" is now well established, the scripting of "good Muslim" is a work in progress" (192). An analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the lens of MMT highlights the effects of these stereotypes on the psyche of post-colonial South Asian Muslim identities. Hamid shares his own thoughts on these experiences and explains in *Discontent and Its Civilizations* how "the 9/11 attacks placed great strain on the hyphen bridging that identity called Muslim-American. As a man not known for frequenting mosques, and not possessing a US passport, I should not have felt it. But I did, deeply. It seemed two halves of myself were suddenly at war" (Hamid 44). Hamid, on several occasions, equates his identity with his character, Changez. It is also important to establish that

his narratives of these identities, as he has repeatedly noted, have derived from his own experiences.¹¹

The Reluctant Fundamentalist presents the desire and the resultant dilemma of a young South Asian Muslim youth's efforts of assimilation within a paradigmatically successful American life. The dilemma Changez faces is similar to the one described by Tahseen Shams in her article "Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth." There, Shams describes the indicators of model minority status in America for Asian and South Asian identities. These include "high levels of education and economic attainments," along with being "politically docile, hardworking high achievers" (Shams 2). The model minority stereotype can be seen in the character of Changez: he is a Princeton graduate and an employee of Underwood Samson, a company that provided its employees with "a robust set of skills and an exalted brand name" (5). He also exhibited a "mannerism" that "appealed to [his] senior colleagues" (41). Interestingly, he attributes that mannerism to his South Asian identity, stating:

Perhaps it was my speech: like Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country continue to be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine. Or perhaps it was my ability to function both respectfully and with self-

¹¹ In an interview to Harcourt Books Hamid elaborates on his personal approach to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by stating: "I am not much of a researcher as novelist. I tend to write about what I know. So I have done much of what Changez has done: I have worked in New York and in Lahore; I have spent time in Chile and in the Philippines. His story is not my story, but I certainly have inhabited the geography of his world. I find knowing a milieu intimately very useful as a writer: it frees me from having to prove that I know it and allows me to harness it to the purpose of my story. If I can believe in my characters and in my plot, if I have seen evidence of them in the world and in myself, then I feel a certain power comes to my prose without which it might be insincere."

respect in a hierarchical environment, something American youngsters—unlike their Pakistani counterparts—rarely seem trained to do” (41-42).

This is one way that Changez’s character fits into the mold of what Shams describes as model minority stereotype. Shams, however, in her sociological analysis, emphasizes that this identity is not just empowering, but is formed through racial and cultural stereotyping (Shams 2). Hamid explores both facets of the model minority stereotype, and attempts to offer a comprehensive analysis of the liminal spaces where these different identities come into contact.

In this sense, I suggest that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents a prolegomenon—a comprehensive introduction—in the spirit of *Ibn Khaldun's Prolegomena (Muqaddimah)*. Khuldoon was a Muslim Arab fourteenth-century scholar, historian and a social scientist who contributed to the fields of demography, economics, historiography and sociology. He is considered as one of the greatest philosophers of the Middle ages. His book *Muqaddimah*, written in 1377 and translated into Ancient Greek as *Prolegomena*, aims to present a history of mankind. Khuldoon was an extensive traveller, and through his travels, he observed and recorded the contemporary world. Hamid, like Khuldoon, can be seen as a modern-day social scientist and historiographer trotting the globe, and presenting these contemporary identities in his novels.¹² Nathan King suggests something similar in “Mohsin Hamid as a Social Science Fictionist,” where he argues that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, “Citizenship plays a major role in the social malaise Changez finds himself in. Hamid’s knack for writing literature packed with intense social interactions makes his work particularly applicable to the social scientist” (King 2). Speaking of his extensive travels, Hamid claims to be a “mongrel”: in an interview with *The*

¹² See Madiou article “Mohsin Hamid Engages the World in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: ‘An Island on an Island,’ Worlds in Miniature and ‘Fiction’ in the Making,” esp. page 275.

Progressive Magazine published online, he relates his own hybrid identity and personal history of travel and relocation to his protagonist Changez.¹³ He explains, “I’m very comfortable as a hybridized mongrel. But that said, some of the anger that Changez feels, some of the resentment, especially with the corporate world, did come from experiences and feelings that I also had” (Pal). Hamid’s representation of these identities, therefore, comes from this own observation of international politics while highlighting concerns for his home country.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid makes historical observations through his narratives as he attempts to consolidate the resentful South Asian post-colonial Muslim identities within the American “model minority” context. The protagonist Changez, with whom Hamid identifies, raises the question about the placement of these identities within this global context. Hamid’s narrative also pointedly responds to the Anglophone tradition. This response can be observed in the very opening of the novel, where he creates a contact zone for the narrator Changez and the implied listener, an American at Anarkali Bazar Lahore. The significance of this placement can be observed through comparison with Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*. At the opening of Kipling’s novel, a similar contact zone between the colonizer and the colonized is created by situating Kim at the same location: Mall Road, Anarkali Bazaar, Lahore. Kim and Changez might be seen as foils to each other. Changez, previously being a model minority, is similar to

¹³ Born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1971, Hamid spent a part of his childhood in California while his father attended graduate school at Stanford. Hamid left Lahore at the age of eighteen and went to America for his education and graduated in 1993 as summa cum laude from Princeton University. In Princeton he attended creative writing classes with Joyce Carol Oates in his final year a fiction workshop with Toni Morrison. It was then that He “fell in love with” writing (Vora). He wrote his very first draft as a result of a workshop by Morrison and continued his work after his return to Pakistan. He later attended Harvard Law School and graduated from there in 1997 and later worked as a management consultant for McKinsey & Company, New York for several years. Hamid later moved to UK in 2001 where he worked Wolff Olins, a brand consultancy company. There he divided his time between writing and work and was appointed as the company’s first chief storytelling officer in 2015. His essays and journalism have also appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and numerous other publications. Hamid currently resides in Lahore, Pakistan and divides his time between UK, USA and Pakistan.

the colonizer while being a subaltern, whereas Kim is similar to the colonized while being a colonizer. Hamid thus inverts the structure of Kipling's colonial novel.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist and first-person narrator, Changez, entertains an American he came across in Old Lahore, Pakistan. He offers him his hospitality, which the American reluctantly accepts. The meeting that starts over a cup of tea lasts an entire evening. Changez not only offers his hospitality but also shares his personal narrative with his guest. He speaks of his journey to and within America, his rise and fall (and love and loss) within the personal and professional spheres, and his final return to Pakistan. His narrative also addresses his inner and outer conflicts as a South Asian Muslim in the United States. The narrative creates an element of suspense where it is difficult to assess the intentions of both the characters, who are considerably suspicious towards each other's intentions, in ways that can be interpreted in the broader geo-political and global context of South Asian Muslim identities.

After establishing the importance of applying MMT to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I will further analyze the novel through the lens of MMT to explore the role of mimicry, and specifically its effect on the identity of the protagonist Changez. The very first aspect worth focusing on is Hamid's approach to writing the novel in the second person. This approach presents the complexity of identities in Changez's narrative position, as post-colonial subaltern speaking in the language of the colonizers. When observed against the backdrop of American imperialism and global capitalism, this assigns Changez a unique positionality that can be compared to that of a model minority. The positionality Hamid assigns to his narrator can be interpreted through the theme and structure of the novel. The novel encompasses the journey of Changez's identity from post-colonial complexities; to his evolution (or devolution) into a model minority in America; and his eventual return.

Model Minority Theory as Narrative Technique

One of the most striking features of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is Hamid's use of first- and second-person narration. This positionality Hamid assigns to his narrator has a number of effects. Firstly, as first-person testimony, it gives voice to the Other, the Orient, the South Asian, the model minority, and the Pakistani identity of the protagonist Changez. Secondly, Hamid's use of second-person narration simultaneously takes away the voice of his American guest, the addressee, who becomes a stand-in for the Occident, the West, and the United States. Thirdly, the narrator's use of an eloquent English language style to narrate his experiences also assigns a model minority position to the narrator within his linguistic and historical context. This performance of eloquence or mastery of English can be equated with the socio-political performance of the model minority for assimilation in America, as language acquisition is an essential element in the process of cultural assimilation. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid not only performs the mimicry of the language of the colonizer, but he also reverses the roles of the performer and observer through the silence of the addressee. Changez uses this assigned positionality as a second-person narrator to his advantage in the post-colonial and post-9/11 context and prevents a debate, an argument and even a dialogue, thus allowing only the subaltern to speak. As Renee Lee Gardner writes:

This structure subverts the empowered West-versus-subaltern East binary by lending voice to the othered (Pakistani) character while silencing the traditionally empowered (American) ones. For this reason, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an especially enlightening lens through which to consider the American government's aggressive response to 9/11 as well as its consequences. (109)

The attribution of the dominant narrative mode to the subaltern breaks down the binaries of the colonized/colonizer relationship. This approach can be interpreted in the light of what Said described in *Orientalism* as the ‘strategic location’- a way of describing the author’s position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about” (20). Said defines Orientalism as a body of texts that brings about subjugation through “a re-presence, or a representation,” which excludes the Orient from its own presentation (21). Hamid, in an interview with Hamish Hamilton, himself describes his second-person narrative approach, saying, “I decided on a frame that allowed two points of view, two perspectives, to exist with only one narrator, thereby creating a double mirror for the mutual societal suspicion with which Pakistan views America and America views Pakistan” (quoted in Lee-Potter 156). Through second-person narration, Hamid shifts the dominant perspective from the Occident to the Orient.

Hamid’s narrative can thus be interpreted through two different backdrops. One is the narrative of an embittered Pakistani subject position embedded in the long history of geopolitical relations with the United States. As Hamid writes in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* about Pakistan’s current predicament:

Perhaps because we currently lack wealth, power [...] for we were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent (Hamid 101-102).

On the other hand, the elaborate tale of his infatuation and eventual disenchantment with America can also be interpreted as standing in for the broader experience of South Asian Muslim model minorities within America, and for the possibility of breaking free of their assigned model minority subjectivities. An allusion to this model minority status of Changez can be observed throughout the narrative in his experience of moments of privilege and success. At Princeton, he feels he is in “a film in which I was the star, and everything was possible” (3). In his professional sphere, as an employee of Underwood Samson, he is living a life that has made his “concerns about money and status things of the distant past” (14). In his personal life again, his relationship with Erica, an American Caucasian woman, establishes his position as a well-integrated model minority in America. These allusions to a model minority status also serve to highlight the rupture associated with Changez’s model minority positionality as well. The narrative shows how these successes create a need for dissociation from his own cultural identity in order to achieve that model minority status. Changez explains this complicated disconnect during his business trip to Manila: “I was the only non-American in our group, but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and—most of all—by my companions (Hamid 71). This desire for disassociation, however, is followed in the narrative by the realization of a lack of belonging. During a business visit to Manila, on his way back to the hotel in a cab with a colleague, he is perplexed due to a Jeepney driver’s undisguised hostile stare. However, as soon as he turns his head to address his Caucasian American colleague, a moment of realization dawns on him, as he explains:

I looked at him—at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work—and thought, you are so foreign. I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him; 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)

Changez's experience in Manila furthers the rupture in the identity of Changez and leaves him torn between his Pakistani identity and his Americanized model minority identity. Hamid again upsets this positionality in the post 9/11 American context, which allows the narrative to present the perspective of South Asian model minorities and their subjective and precarious position in post-9/11 America. Changez reflects:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly, I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream. (93)

This passage demonstrates how first-person narration allows insight into the change in Changez's model minority status, as the result of uncontrollable external factors affected his psyche. He explains that although his initial warmth for "New York felt—so unexpectedly—like coming home," it was soon replaced by hostility (32). In the aftermath of 9/11, he explains that "I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson, I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares" (130). He draws a vivid picture of the scrutiny and the suspicion that became a part of his life as a South Asian Muslim minority in America. As he explains on his return from Santiago to New York, "I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race, I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection" (157). This

renewed post-9/11 othered racial position of Changez takes away his previous model minority status, simply because of his South Asian “Muslim” identity.

Gotanda helps clarify this renewal in positionalities and the racialization associated with it: “there is a simplistic duality. On one side is the bad Muslim, the ‘Muslim terrorist,’ useful to further American foreign policy goals. On the other side is the good Muslim, assimilating to conventional American secular ideals” (Gotanda 194). Although Changez’s character is more secular than religious, the divide nevertheless is still there, and stems from his perceived association with Islam. This eventually becomes the cause for his return to Pakistan. His narrative, however, also foreshadows how 9/11 created a renewed but highly unstable model minority identity for Muslims in America, by assigning them new possible positionalities. As Gotanda writes:

For those Americans who are collected into the Muslim category, the disciplinary function of the "good Muslim" corresponding to the "model minority" is available for use against Muslims or those with Asiatic brown bodies who protest or disagree with American domestic or foreign policy. (194)

Hamid’s use of a second-person narrative style is one of the ways he occupies a position of protest or dissent. It is also central to his response to the Anglophone literary tradition, and can be interpreted on a larger scale as criticism directed toward his silent but listening America(n) guest about this new racialized stereotype ascribed to South Asian Muslims. Changez’s narrative does not embody the religious context, but does embody the assigned stereotypical attributes. He speaks of protests and demonstrations carried out against American foreign policies towards Pakistan. His stand challenges the ascribed model minority positionality that Bloch et. al. describe as “not just a convenient differentiation between various ‘others’ but [...] also a

disciplining technique ascribing stereotypic behaviors such as hard work, passivity and obedience” (64). The lack of these subjective traits renders Changez as troublesome not only in America, where his only sign of rebellion was merely wearing a beard, but in his homeland as well. The implied subjectivity of the model minority, therefore, can be compared with the subaltern positioning of post-colonial identity. For this purpose, the narrative is also situated outside the American domain. This interchanging of positions, therefore, is carried out by Hamid not only in terms of narration but also in terms of setting, as he has situated the characters in the world of the Orient. These two strategies, the narrative style and the location of his narrative, set against an Oriental backdrop, take away the dominant positionality of the Occidental world and of America in particular. This change in power dynamics puts the American listener in an attentive position, thus ensuring the subaltern is heard.

The silent captivation of the unnamed American and his recurring suspicion of Changez (and vice versa), depicted solely through Changez’s monologue, creates a destabilizing effect within and outside the text. It brings about the deconstruction of established binaries of Occidental supremacy within the text. Moreover, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* captivates the reader and encourages careful analysis of their own projected suspicion. From the perspective of the reader, Lee-Potter explains the importance of using second-person narration:

By accompanying him [Changez] on this retrocessive path, the reader’s own reservations about the strangeness, the alien quality of his final reactions and motivations are rendered less acute. Changez starts as a known quantity and even through his responses become unfamiliar to a Western audience, the ultimate threat he poses is no more alarming than the one represented by the unnamed and unknown American with whom he shares a restaurant table. (74-75).

When Lee-Potter calls Changez a “known quantity,” it marks the same qualities I am relating to his model minority status. Hamid achieves this effect through the use of Changez’s extended monologue. James Lasdun admires Hamid’s extensive monologous approach in *The Guardian*, as he writes that the novel is Hamid’s “monologue: a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous faultlines of current east/west relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual - but especially American - prejudice and misrepresentation” (Lasdun). Majeed U. Jadwe even compares the monologue of Changez to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and argues that its single narrator technique, as well as “the liminal space of the narrator,” can be seen as “Hamid’s textual fashioning of Changez as a post-colonial ancient mariner” (242). However, the portrayal of a captivated trance-like state—which is the American addressee’s, but also the reader’s—can also be interpreted in additional ways. One is on the part of the reader engrossed within the narrative; a second is the character of the America(n) who, though a reluctant audience, is nevertheless unable to leave; a third interpretation can be made in terms of all the characters that are only represented through Changez’s narrative and do not have the authority to present their own narratives. Lastly, this trance-like state applies to Changez’s own character, where he is captivated by the American dream and aspires to become a model minority. It is his eventual awakening and return home that allows him to reiterate the tale of his voyage to America. It is through his eventual escape (though at the loss of his model minority identity) and his compulsion for reiteration that Changez can be perceived as the post-colonial ancient mariner.

Hamid’s monologue involves a frame narrative and several temporal shifts. This narrative style can also more pointedly be seen as a parallel with the narrative style of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, a paradigmatic example of the Anglophone colonial novel against which

much postcolonial theory has been deployed. In Conrad's novel, Homi Bhabha argues, the narrator "Marlow seeks Kurtz's Voice, his words, 'a stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness' and in that search, he loses 'what is in the work – the chance to find yourself.' He is left with those two unworkable words, 'the Horror, the Horror!'" (Bhabha 176). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, overcome with paranoia, narrates his *own* horrors. One of these horrors is stemming from his resolute stance against America in Pakistan. In fact, it is in this light that he makes a direct reference to Conrad's classic work as he calls himself "a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow" (Hamid 183). It was, however, the character of Marlowe who narrated "the horror" experienced by Kurtz. Hamid's use of a monologue in the first and second person complicates this re/presentation. It offers a dual positionality as Changez himself is narrating "the horror" experienced by himself as a post-colonial South Asian Muslim in post-9/11 America.

Curiously, this also allows Changez to "represent" himself as subaltern from the unique position of the colonizer as "presenter." As explained earlier in the chapter, Said insisted that Oriental identity was established through the re-presence or representation by the Occident. This uniquely acquired position between Marlowe and Kurtz, between the objective and subjective as the narrator of his own post-colonial tale, assigns Changez an unstable model minority positionality, even within his own narrative. It can be argued that as this representation stands at the margin of Orient and Occident, it occupies a hybrid positionality as described by Bhabha. However, it must be noted that model minority stereotypes are associated with successful assimilation in the dominant culture. Changez's monologue is a mimicry of the colonizer's subjective position as he not only presents but also represents his identity throughout the text. This sole narrator status adds a unique complexity to his hybrid identity, equating his approach

with the colonial style of writing. Hamid's style performs mimicry of texts in the colonial tradition, which allows him to create the double vision that Bhabha refers to as the "menace of mimicry." In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explains that "the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126). He is also creating a re-presence where the Occident is the subject of a colonizer's discourse. The falsely polyphonic nature of the novel—where although we hear the voices of the other characters, they "are all ventriloquized by Changez"—also suggests a model minority status (Lau 82). Although he is not the colonizer, Changez attempts to play the role in some ways. Also, when observed through the lens of MMT, the narrative that "navigates the liminal space between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse" opens space for a discourse about the model minority positionalities of South Asian Muslims in America (Woltmann 104). Further, Lau insists that "the confessional form [also] leaves Hamid with this difficult ball to play: not wanting to alienate the audience, while all but needing to do precisely that to perform his otherness" (82). However, the confessional form of narrative attempts to give voice to the South Asian Muslim Others in America while keeping in hindsight the complexities even prior to 9/11. Hence it can be argued that the subjective discourse was only possible through a muting of the oppressor's narrative. Hamid's works, therefore, have wider implications for post-colonial diaspora identities as well as American social constructs contributing to the evolution or devolution of these identities.

Changez carries out an elaborate mimesis of the colonial discourse. His approach can be described as what Bhabha calls "a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha 125). This approach allows the post-colonial subaltern to carry out an extended monologue with the West in the language of the West. As Bhabha

explains, “Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents” (Bhabha 125). This mimicry of writing in the language of a colonizer while not being one can also be ascribed to Changez’s model minority status. Wu and Chen draw a comparison between mimicry and model minority status in the context of Asian minorities in America:

If we conceptualize the model minority myth as a privileged stereotype through which Asian Americans appear as subjects in the contemporary social domain, then we gain a more refined understanding of how mimicry specifically functions as a material practice in racial melancholia. That is, Asian Americans are forced to mimic the model minority stereotype in order to be recognized by mainstream society—in order to be at all. (61)

In *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, David L. Eng and Shinhee Han write that “the process of assimilation is a negotiation between mourning and melancholia” (47). They further explain that “if we conceptualize the model minority myth as a privileged stereotype through which Asian Americans appear as subjects in the contemporary social domain, then we gain a better understanding of how mimicry specifically functions as a material practice in racial melancholia” (51). Bhabha also asserts that “what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model” (*Location of Culture* 125). This process of mimicry adopted by Hamid in the text of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* thus allows him to capture an ambivalent model minority perspective.

Hybridity and Identity

An analysis of Hamid's narrative provides insight into the complexities of the model minority myth for South Asian Muslim Americans. These complexities can be observed through the analysis of the splintered identity in *Changez*. As Quratulain Shirazi writes, "In order to gauge the transitory moment and the shifting identities, he thinks beyond the narratives of fixed identities and subjectivities. When he moves beyond the fixed identities, there is an opening up of the interstitial spaces" (16). The question of identity and placement for *Changez* arises within these interstitial spaces whose cultural identity collides with his model minority representation in America. He is constantly caught between his nostalgia for his homeland and his desire for achieving his American dream. Hamid's presentation of the resultant rupture in his protagonist's identity is twofold. It is due firstly to displacement from his homeland and secondly from failing to assimilate in America. These approaches inform the thematic concerns of the novel and can be interpreted as different forms of mimicry.

Changez refers to this rupture in identity, caused through the failure in assimilation, as "the absurdity of my situation, being two hemispheres—if such a thing is possible—from home at a time when my family was in need" (149). He is caught between his love for his family and homeland and with his life in America. An application of MMT to *Changez*'s struggle for assimilation and the resultant rupture of his identity can be analyzed through different identity paradigms presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: firstly, by highlighting the discontent of the post-colonial subject, the permeation of which is depicted by Hamid within the psyche of South Asian Muslims; secondly, by framing their quest for model minority status as a means of making up for these perceived losses; thirdly, in terms of how 9/11 adds further complexities to their efforts for integration as model minorities in American society; and finally, in terms of how

an established model minority status still does not offer any safety blanket in a post-9/11 Islamophobic America. In the post-9/11 context, the rupture of identity established a new dilemma for Hamid's protagonist. He was faced with the choice to either assimilate within American society as a model minority or to return home as an alleged fundamentalist. Changez's monologue provides insight into these approaches as he hosts his American guest in his own homeland. These paradigms in the text of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, incorporating the above-mentioned four stages of Changez's changing identities, are marked by his voyage and return journey. These changing identities—before, during, and after the attainment of a model minority status—can be explored through an analysis of the frame narratives provided within the novel.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist opens both in the East and the West, and both in the past and the present. Hamid uses the technique of story within a story to observe different identities of Changez. In the most contemporary timeline, Changez offers his generous hospitality to an American stranger he comes across in the Old Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore. This hospitality, when seen through the approach of mimicry, can be equated with his own initial reception in America, when Changez becomes the Princeton graduate, the star employee of Underwood Samson, and the model minority in America. The transition of the plot from Pakistan to America, via flashback, allows the oscillation between the worlds of colonized and the colonizer and presents the voyage and return in two dimensions. In terms of geography, it allows for the liminal spaces to expand geographically between these two opposite worlds. Post-colonial identity is taken over by model minority identity, and then completing a full circle, reverts to its original positionality, though now with the different identity due to his experiences.

The narrative of the journey undertaken by Changez also enables Hamid to highlight the dyadic relationship between Pakistan and America, which is characterized by similar irregularities. Both countries, as described in my previous chapter, are allies in the “War on Terror” after 9/11. This partnership has, however, done little in mitigating the mutual mistrust on the part of both the partners. Hamid endeavours to paint the picture for both sides. In his article published in *The Guardian*, he explains how through this approach, he is able to address the precariousness of racialization as he endeavours “to show, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, how feelings already present inside a reader — fear, anger, suspicion, loyalty — can actually color a narrative so that the reader, as much as or even more than the writer, is the one who decides what is really going on.”¹⁴ Hamid goes on to explain, “I wanted the novel to be a kind of mirror, to let readers see how they are reading, and, therefore, how they are living and how they are deciding their politics” (Hamid). The novel thus explains the effect the journey to the West has on the identity of the Orient, and interrogates the neocolonial perspectives of its reader.

Hamid makes use of a frame narrative technique to highlight the shifting identities of his protagonist. This use of a frame narrative also allows him to capture the inner conflict faced by the protagonist as Changez finds himself torn between different positionalities. His first positionality is the disgruntled Pakistani post-colonial youth leaving his country in the hopes of a better life. Changez hails from an upper-middle-class family in Pakistan with a declining financial situation. He is looking for an opportunity to revive the financial status of his family. Changez, during his interactions with his coworker Jim, is most torn about his financial concerns. Jim is an executive vice president at Underwood Samson, the firm where Changez gets his first job in America. Jim is a mentor to Changez during his time in the organization. Jim

¹⁴ See Hamid, “Mohsin Hamid on his enduring love of the second-person narrative”

identifies with Changez's financial condition as he too has worked his way up from an impoverished family, and he frequently expresses this to Changez. In his first interaction with Jim, Changez is reminded of his own status. Jim compares his own humble background with Changez's, referring to his earlier life as being "outside the candy store looking in" (70).

Changez himself explains his complicated situation:

Our situation is, perhaps, not so different from that of the old European aristocracy in the nineteenth century, confronted by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie. Except, of course, that we are part of a broader malaise afflicting not only the formerly rich but much of the formerly middle-class as well: a growing inability to purchase what we previously could. Confronted with this reality, one has two choices: pretend all is well or work hard to restore things to what they were. I chose both. At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. But I also, as quietly as I could, held down three on-campus jobs—in infrequently visited locations, such as the library of the Program in Near Eastern Studies—and prepared for my classes throughout the night. Most people I met were taken in by my public persona. Jim was not. But fortunately, where I saw shame, he saw opportunity. (10-11)

It is this shame that drives Changez's desire to mimic the second identity presentation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the model minority in America, and to become an accomplished young man living his American Dream. During his trip to Manila, he expresses this desire to attain that positionality as he explains that "The Filipinos we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business—and I wanted my share of that respect as well (32). It can be observed that

Changez uses mimicry as an approach for the attainment of this model minority status. For this purpose, he attempts to discard his own cultural identity and mimics an American persona: “I learned to tell executives my father’s age, ‘I need it now’; I learned to cut to the front of lines with an extraterritorial smile; and I learned to answer, when asked where I was from, that I was from New York” (65). Another factor that contributes to his easy assimilation is his lack of strict religious adherence. Changez’s character, as portrayed by Hamid, is more secular than Islamic. He consumes alcohol and pork. In *Discontent and Its Civilizations*, Hamid describes Changez’s character, explaining his approach to religion: “His beliefs could quite plausibly be those of a secular humanist. And yet he calls himself a Muslim, and is angry with US foreign policy, and grows a beard—and that seems to be enough. Changez may well be an agnostic, or even an atheist” (224). This secular approach facilitates his mimicry of the colonial culture, which paves the way for his assimilation as a model minority within that culture. However, Hamid’s point is not *just* that even a secular, relatively assimilated Muslim will still be liable to be stereotyped as the “bad Muslim.” He is also interested in the fact that, regardless of his lack of religious adherence, Changez still exhibits strong cultural ties with his homeland throughout the text.

Changez is enamoured with Am(Erica), his love interest with a symbolically loaded name. He is similarly excited and overwhelmed by the greatness of American civilization. On his first day at Underwood and Samson, he looks down at the high rise building and explains his feelings: “I realized, [this] was another world from Pakistan; supporting my feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known” (34). Hamid’s choice of name for the love interest of Changez is deliberate. As Liliana M. Naydan explains in her book *Rhetorics of Religion in American Fiction: Faith, Fundamentalism, and Fanaticism in the Age of Terror*, “Erica might be read as an allegorical representation of

America, a privileged daughter who has little to worry about financially because she is so well off” (30). Another allegorical parallel that Naydan draws is with the company that provides Changez with the opportunity to integrate as a model minority in America. As Naydan states, “no allegory resonates quite as poignantly as that of the fictional Underwood Samson company, which has the initials that mirror those of the United States, as representative of the United States in its exclusive and quite narrow capitalist fundamentalist focus on money” (30). Both Erica and Underwood Samson help pave the path for the realization of Changez’s model minority status. In his professional relation, as explained earlier, he is eager to perform mimicry of Americanness by discarding his Pakistaniness. In his personal relations also, he is willing to be positioned as mimicking Chris, Erica’s deceased boyfriend. This form of mimicry, however, further complicates their relation resulting in a falling out, and eventually in Erica’s death. Hamid positions this collapse in his protagonist’s professional and personal spheres in the aftermath of 9/11. This falling out with Am(E)rica and (U)nderwood (S)amson also results in the loss of his model minority positionality.

Naydan also situates this phase of Changez’s life within the novel’s socio-economic and geo-political context, writing that “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be [also be] read as religiously infused political allegory—as commentary on the interplay between American economic markets and the political realities they produce in America as a historically Christian nation and beyond America’s border via globalization” (30). Changez character is consistently seen struggling between different identities as a result of these political realities. This brings us to another complex identity presentation in Changez’s character: the identity of a young man conflicted due to the nostalgic pull he feels for his homeland both in pre- and post-9/11 America. Changez feels an equal affinity for New York and Lahore, as he informs his guest that “New

York felt—so unexpectedly—like coming home” (Hamid 32). This kinship he claims to have with New York is depicted by Hamid as genuine, and it is shown through Changez’s enthusiasm when he describes New York to his unnamed listener: “I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker. What? My voice is rising? You are right; I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city. It still occupies a place of great fondness in my heart” (33). This dual affinity complicates the narrative as it highlights the complexity within Changez’s hybrid positionality as a South Asian Muslim and model. It also establishes that his efforts to assimilate as a model minority were genuine as well, but the rupture caused in identity did not allow him to completely embrace it.

Changez’s strong familial ties also contribute to the identity dilemma he faces as a result of his efforts for assimilation as a model minority in America. Family plays a major role in Changez’s constant identification or lack thereof with America. He is conflicted, but his conflict is not constructed out of dissidence toward either of the cultures he is navigating in the course of his narrative. Throughout his narrative, he uses the word “home” for his parental home in Pakistan and never once alludes to his own apartment in New York as home. Though New York reminds him of home, his description of what home means is closely intertwined with his cultural background. New York feels like home because of “the fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence, only two blocks from my East Village apartment, of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli” (33). These echoes of home make for an easy identification with and integration within New York, blended with local differences. For example, he notes “the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue during a parade and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I

had danced at my cousin's wedding" (33). This blend of diversity offered by the city, allowing the integration of multicultural identities, also allowed Changez to feel a sense of coming home.

On the other hand, he also speaks of his American gaze, acquired through his time spent in America, with which he looked at his own home during a brief visit back to his homeland. He explains:

There are adjustments one must make if one comes here from America; a different way of observing is required. I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing. I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls. The electricity had gone that afternoon, giving the place a gloomy air, but even in the dim light of the hissing gas heaters our furniture appeared dated and in urgent need of reupholstery and repair. I was saddened to find it in such a state—no, more than saddened, I was shamed. This was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness. (124)

When he returns home, Changez's model minority status allows him to perform the mimicry of the Occidental gaze upon the Orient. Bhabha explains this gaze as "colonial imitation" that originates "from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (Bhabha, *Location* 123). Changez, however, is soon able to identify the reason for this changed gaze and carries out a dispassionate self-analysis:

But as I reacclimatized and my surroundings once again became familiar, it occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I

was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite. This realization angered me; staring at my reflection in the speckled glass of my bathroom mirror I resolved to exorcize the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed. (124)

The particular setting of his house, closely intertwined with his cultural heritage, also lends to his re-acclimatization as he explains to his guest:

It was only after so doing that I saw my house properly again, appreciating its enduring grandeur, its unmistakable personality and idiosyncratic charm. Mughal miniatures and ancient carpets graced its reception rooms; an excellent library abutted its veranda. It was far from impoverished; indeed, it was rich with history. I wondered how I could ever have been so ungenerous—and so blind—to have thought otherwise, and I was disturbed by what this implied about myself: that I was a man lacking in substance and hence easily influenced by even a short sojourn in the company of others. (125)

Changez's identity is constantly exposed to an array of stimuli in multiple frame narratives. These multiple narratives also speak to the diversity of postcolonial and model minority identities of South Asian Muslims. Apart from being a post-colonial South Asian Muslim and part of an aspiring model minority, Changez is also a son, a student, a professional, a friend and a lover. These multiple identities create further complications for Changez's dilemma, where he is nostalgic for past glory and also desires assimilation into the current world of grandeur.

He sums up this conflicting pull between his post-colonial and model minority identities on his first day at Underwood Samson:

Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. 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.

But not on that day. On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm's impressive offices made me proud. I wished I could show my parents and my brother! (34)

This sense of belonging in New York is, however, short-lived for Changez as his world unravels with the devastating terrorist attacks of September eleventh. The acceptance of diversity, as a result, is replaced with uncompromising jingoistic notions, and this creates a spiralling disillusionment towards America. Hamid uses this as an opportunity to raise the question of identity in post-9/11 America. South Asian Muslim American identity is a complex mixture of South Asian, Muslim and American identities. As Bhabha explains, “the margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups” (Bhabha 296). What the novel frames as a pre-9/11 melting pot—a home to a number of individuals representing a wide array of nations—was a space in which South Asian Muslims or any other American could add to the diversity of the country and incorporate just as much from American culture as they incorporated from their own cultural heritage. The climax of the novel,

with the 9/11 attacks, brings about a disruption of these integrated diverse communities, or rather reveals them as precarious, transitory, or illusory.

Such a conflicted identity—a diversity that is at constant conflict with itself in Changez—is reflected in perhaps the most controversial aspect of the novel: Changez’s surprising reaction to 9/11. At the climax of the novel, he writes, “I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled” (Hamid 72). This horrible reaction, which Changez himself calls despicable, emerges not as a retrenchment to some pre-existing anti-American sentiment, but as a reflection of American society itself and of the oppositions it has ingrained in spite of its previous veneer of inclusivity and diversity. As he later explains in the novel:

As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. (168)

As the next chapter will show, a similar reaction to the 9/11 attacks is also echoed in Ayad Akhtar’s play *Disgraced* some years later. In Hamid’s novel, then, we might say that Changez begins a literary tradition of depicting a post-9/11 America with a different perspective, where a facade of diversity fell away to reveal more overtly hostile, nationalistic notions. Slavoj Žižek offers an insight into the reverberations these notions may offer, as he explains that after 9/11, nationalism “disturb[ed] the idyllic image of pluralist democracy” and “opened up the space to the emergence of nationalist obsessions, provincialism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ideologies about national security” (31). The manifestation of this new nationalistic American identity, delineated by Hamid

through the narrative of Changez, matches Žižek's description: it “epitomizes the principle of fanaticism in politics” (Žižek 38). On the other hand, Hamid portrays how it furthered an already-existing fracture in the psyche of the South Asian post-colonial Muslim subject who was already bewildered at his reaction to 9/11. He explains that “despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (72). Changez explains his internal conflicts by stating, “when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity” (73). While his bewildering pleasure to some degree speaks to antagonisms American society had engendered (but which he had previously denied), it might be most appropriate to read his “perplexity” as the other side of nationalistic notions built within the psyche of the post-colonial subject, as a result of their centuries of subjugation. Hamid, therefore, attempts to identify the cyclical complexities that are part and parcel of afflicted nations.

Hamid depicts this sense of insecurity, thus revealing through Changez the dyad at the core of nationalistic notions. The Princeton graduate, the star employee of Underwood Samson and the Model Minority in America is suddenly alienated. The colour of his skin that “in a subway car [...] would typically fall in the middle of the color spectrum” becomes a source of identification as the Other. His interactions “on street corners,” where “tourists would ask [him] for directions,” are unexpectedly replaced with “verbal abuse by complete strangers” (33, 130). In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, on his way back from the Philippines, “at the airport, [he] was escorted by armed guards into a room where [he] was made to strip down to my boxer shorts.” On the plane, his “entrance elicited looks of concern from many of [his] fellow passengers” and he constantly felt “under suspicion,” “guilty,” and “self-conscious” (74). The process of alienation that started at Manila was complete as soon as he arrived back to New York, a city he until this point referred to as “home.” Here again, he “was separated from [his]

team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; [he] joined the one for foreigners” (Hamid 75). He was questioned, “what is the purpose of your trip to the United States?” and as he explained that he lived there, he was subjected to further suspicion and “dispatched for a secondary inspection” (75).

This immediate alienation and the derogatory treatment meted out to him, reinforces his feeling of being “never an American” in the first place (33). The other defining moment in the novel is his interaction with Juan-Bautista, the chief of the publishing company that Changez is sent to evaluate, which is detrimental to his already conflicted psyche. Bautista reminds Changez of “his grandfather.” Bautista takes an interest in Changez when he responds to Bautista’s question about what Changez knew of books: “‘My father’s uncle was a poet,’ I found myself saying. ‘He was well-known in the Punjab. Books are loved in my family’” (142). Perhaps it is this shared love for books and poetry, or perhaps it is that Bautista finds him “very unlike [his] colleagues [...] somewhat lost” that leads him to invite Changez for lunch at a local restaurant. He also suggests that Changez should visit the home of Pablo Neruda in Valparaíso (146). During the course of the lunch, Bautista inquires about Changez’s role as he asks, “Does it trouble you [...] to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?” (151). The question has a deeper meaning, which Changez is only able to understand later, once Bautista explains to him the concept of the Janissaries, young Christian boys captured by the Ottoman Empire and trained for fighting against their own “civilization.” Although Bautista does not directly imply this positionality, it plunges Changez into what he calls:

A deep bout of introspection. I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine

and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain.

This interaction with Bautista comes as “the final catalyst” for Changez, who was already “on the threshold of great change” (150). Bautista’s suggestive image of Janissary for Changez furthers his inner dilemmas, where he already perceived himself as a puppet furthering American capitalist designs. This brings about an epiphany, as he identifies America as a country whose economic sanctions and political interference in the South Asian region had been a cause of social and economic deterioration for his country. He sees his alliance with America in tandem with a slavery of sorts, an extension of post-colonial subjugation. This change is further orchestrated within Changez’s identity through his symbolic visit to the revolutionary poet Pablo Neruda’s home. He says that Neruda’s home “did not feel as removed from Lahore as it actually was [as] in spirit it seemed only an imaginary caravan ride away from my city, or a sail by night down the Ravi and Indus” (147). As a poet and public figure, Neruda “stood at the forefront of the fight against fascism and imperialism and he battled relentlessly for social equality in his native Chile” (Bleiker 1129). Hamid expertly uses the juxtaposed symbols of subjugation and freedom in the form of the Janissaries with their unflagging loyalty to the Ottoman empire and the image of Neruda’s abode. These two experiences become instrumental in Changez’s final disenchantment with America and are the turning points that signify Changez’s own transition from the subjugated model minority position towards the post-model minority identity. Changez, therefore, makes the deliberate but rash decision to return to New York without completing his

assignment. He loses his lucrative American job as a result of this decision. With an almost expired visa and no job in hand, he decides to return to Lahore, Pakistan, where he himself takes up the role of a dissident.

On his return to his country, Changez joins a local university as a professor teaching finance and becomes popular among the young students due to his outspoken personality and political insight. Along with his students, Changez also actively participates in demonstrations against policies and decisions by the government that endanger the sovereignty of his country. At this point, the narrative shifts towards one of Changez's students who has been arrested for planning to assassinate an American coordinator. He adds that he thinks that the boy is innocent, and reminds his American auditor that he is averse to violence and is a simple university lecturer. Changez also refers to his comments on American aggression on international television, an act that brings warnings and concerns from friends that there will be consequences to his outburst. Moreover, Changez worries that he will be admonished by America or may even face a worse fate. Changez speaks of his paranoia over these concerns and compares himself, as already explained, to a Kurtz who is waiting for his Marlowe (that is, in this sense, waiting for his assassin).

In conclusion, Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a complicated work of fiction where Hamid presents the narrative of the post-colonial subaltern speaking from the experience of a South Asian model minority in America. As the novel ends, he purposely escalates the tension between the narrator and the listener, allowing the mutual suspicion to grow. However, he keeps the perspective close to Changez. The American's continued silence allows for an open interpretation for the reader. It also challenges the singular nationalistic American narrative condemning all Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, the reverberations of which were seen in the

form of war on terror. This situation, with the silent but suspicious American and the speaking subaltern, also allows Hamid to present a mimicry of the geopolitical relations between the two countries as suspicious allies in the aforementioned war. The novel also presents the ethos of the model minority in America as it presents the same suspicion on the part of the narrator that is usually accorded to South Asian Muslim identities in America. Change(z), however, changes this positionality by hinting at his own suspicion towards the American who keeps texting on his peculiar phone, “one of those models capable of communicating via satellite,” and has a bulge under his clothes that reminds him of “undercover security agents” (30, 139). However, whether feigned or genuine, what Changez gives his listener at the end of the narrative is the benefit of the doubt, “given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy. I trust it is from the holder of your business cards” (184). Whether he is sincere in assuming that the American might be keeping his wallet there for protection against thieves, or is toying with him, is also left open for the reader’s interpretation.

As the conversation wraps up, the American leaves for his hotel and Changez suspiciously insists on accompanying him. This mutual distrust again mimes the distrustful relationship between Pakistani and South Asian Muslim identities and America. As Changez explains, “you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins (183). However, the America(n)’s apprehension keeps growing while Changez walks him to his residence. Hamid leaves several things ambiguous: the American’s feeling of intimidation, as he is shown reaching for his pocket; the real intention of the waiter from the restaurant approaching them; and the fate of both American and Changez. This ambiguity mimics the fate of the allies in the War on Terror as well as the precarious status of South Asian model minorities in America.

The analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through MMT brings to the forefront the identity shifts within Changez, who is visibly torn between conflicting cultural values. These conflicting identities, when observed through the first- and second-person narrative approach and thematic concerns of the novel, provides an insight into his shifting oriental/occidental positionalities. Hamid's post-colonial ethos is presented within the context of globalization or its failure. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects the complexities within the social construct of American existence for South Asian Muslims' hybrid identities. Hamid provides the Other's perspective and leaves his reader to decide the meaning within this context. However, the failure to assimilate in America even as a model minority does offer an opening to identify the factors that are hindering assimilation, and to question whether assimilation is required at all. This discourse, nevertheless, is only possible when there is a desire to touch upon the uncomfortable subjects of post- and neo-colonial disparities that are part and parcel of these South Asian identities' histories, and when mutual suspicions that emerged as a result of 9/11 are set aside.

Chapter 3:

The Model Minority on Stage in Akhtar's *Disgraced*

Ayad Akhtar is a second-generation postcolonial writer who, like Mohsin Hamid, raises the question of rupture in the South Asian Muslim diaspora identity in post-9/11 America. As compared to Hamid's representation of geo-political factors, with the globally dispersed settings of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Akhtar's play focuses more on socio-political themes found within American society, namely its New York City setting. Both Akhtar and Hamid actively grapple with the issues of Islamophobia, assimilation and identity for South Asian Muslims in post-9/11 America. Born in 1970 in Staten Island, New York, Akhtar, as a director, screenwriter, actor and editor, has been contributing to the diasporic literature since 2002, and through his work, has tackled some of its most controversial questions. Themes of identity, bigotry, neo-orientalism and integration for South Asian Muslims in America are consistent throughout his body of work.

He incorporates these themes concerning self-identification for Muslims in America by highlighting their different facets, as he explores the dilemmas attached to them. He was a co-writer and actor for the American drama film *The War Within* (2005), "a depiction of terrorism in the heart of America and at the center of the Muslim American Community" (Basu 49). It is a daring take on an immensely sensitive issue, a "humanized portrayal of the suicide bomber and an intimate glimpse into the processes that lead to the protagonist's radicalization" (Basu 49). The film presents the underlying "sense of personal trauma produced by torture and moral grievances against the United States, which leads to involvement in terrorist action" (Basu 49). Akhtar revisits these motifs of identity, religion and assimilation in America in his 2012 debut

novel, *An American Dervish*. The novel is a bildungsroman, a coming of age story about a Pakistani-American grappling with issues of identification as Muslim, as American, and as a human. Nina Subin, in a review published in *The Globe and Mail*, describes the work as “a Sufi invocation, a Chopin nocturne or even the weight of silence experienced in a meditative trance” that portrays “the faultless mimicry of the spoken language of a community of Pakistani immigrants in American suburbia” (Subin). Akhtar also questions the religious and cultural choices of Muslims in America as he presents “two provocative themes,” including “the twinning of adolescent sexuality with spirituality, and the moral courage to expose spiritual hypocrisy and anti-Semitism practised by Muslims” (Subin). These incendiary thematic approaches animate Akhtar’s entire body of work. Through these approaches, he questions prevailing cultural perceptions and their relevance in America.

In this chapter, I will analyze how Akhtar’s *Disgraced* disrupts the post-9/11 binaries associated with the model minority status of South Asian Muslim Americans. The analysis will be carried out through an application of MMT to the motifs and characters of the play. Applying MMT shows how Akhtar challenges the authenticity of established model minority stereotypes about Muslims in America. The religious, political and personal complexities presented in the play, analyzed through model minority signifiers, help identify the physical, cultural and psychological impacts of forced internalized assimilation on South Asian Muslims in America. Accordingly, this chapter first situates Akhtar's play in the context of model minority theory, where it carries forward the critical analysis already offered in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. I will then examine how it entangles Akhtar's own tendency toward Islamic critique or reform with the very drive toward secularization and assimilation that makes the model minority's identification so conflicted. Accordingly, this chapter first situates Akhtar as a

model minority theorist. It then establishes the character Amir's status as a model minority protagonist. Lastly, it explores the representation of the conflicted identity that emerges as a result of forced assimilation and model minority stereotypes.

Akhtar as Model Minority Theorist

Akhtar's controversial and provocative narratives constantly explore the binaries between the Orient and the Occident. He addresses the rupture caused due to the displacement of South Asian Muslim identities as a result of their migrations and efforts of integration. Although Akhtar does not use the framework explicitly, Akhtar's artistic concerns can be best described using Model Minority Theory. He recurrently thematizes the narrative of the successful American experience, its criteria for success, and the price associated with its achievement. The dynamics at play in Akhtar's works match what Tahseen Shams describes in her article "Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth:" before 9/11, South Asian Muslim Americans were viewed as a "mostly foreign-born population [that] has long been lauded as a model minority because of their high levels of education and economic attainments—a racial minority that has "made it" in America" (1-2).

As discussed in chapter 1, the concept of the model minority aims at creating and maintaining racial hierarchies in American society. In terms of the conventional model minority approach, this racialization is carried out by celebrating Asian immigrants as a successful, assimilated minority group that other minority groups should emulate. Nonetheless, this 'positive' assumption indirectly promotes whiteness by blaming other minority groups for their comparative failure to rise in the system, and ignoring the different socio-cultural experiences

and systemic obstacles faced by each. It also accords an honorary white positionality to the model minority. Anjana Mudambi, in her article “South Asian American Discourses: Engaging the Yellow Peril Model Minority Dialectic,” explains how the model minority myth “creates a three-tiered racial structure, which categorizes many Asian American groups as honorary Whites [and] demonstrates how they form a buffer group between Whites and collective Blacks, keeping the lowest tier at bay while maintaining a facade of racial mobility” (286). The discourse of the model minority thrives by generating intergroup conflict between Asian Americans and the community. They form a buffer community between Whites and Blacks while retaining a façade of ethnic autonomy, keeping the lowest tier at bay. Mudambi further explains:

The 'honorary white' status gives a relative degree of privilege to South Asian Americans. In exchange, they contend with racial discrimination, glass ceilings, and underemployment and underpayment without claims to welfare protection, affirmative action, or other group welfare rights [...] Because their model minority status compels their subservience and passivity, the only solution to discrimination is to work harder; complaining would facilitate the "yellow peril" discourse's construction of them as a threat. (287)

The model minority debate thrives by fostering intergroup animosity between Asian Americans and the community, positioning South Asian Americans as pawns in the white supremacy system. While model minority status had long been associated with Asian and South Asian Americans, its application to South Asian Muslim identities in post-9/11 America can be seen through the binaries created between Muslim and non-Muslim South Asians, as well as between “good” and “bad” Muslims. Shams explains how “the security associated with the Model Minority stereotype was ultimately shown to be “fleeting” as in the aftermath of 9/11, “South

Asian Americans found themselves no longer a glorified Model Minority but, conflated with Muslim and “Muslim-looking” groups, targets of virulent Islamophobic backlash and targeted surveillance” (2). In her article “Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth,” Shams further explains:

The long history of political, military, economic, and cultural transactions between South Asia and the Middle East has led to much foreign policy tensions over the years between the United States and the Muslim-majority countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh. These tensions, in turn, have helped paint Pakistan’s and Bangladesh’s global national image as “dangerous” Muslim countries. (5)

She refers to Balbir Singh Sodi, a South Asian Sikh, who, due to misidentification as a Muslim, was the first fatality of post 9/11 backlash. As explained in the previous chapter, after 9/11 the identification of the South Asian Muslim Model Minority was established anew, not based on a binary between Muslims and non-Muslims but on a binary between the “good” and “bad” Muslims. Mahmood Mamdani, in his article “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism,” questions “the claim that we can read people’s political behavior from their religion, or from their culture” (768). Mamdani further writes, “Could it be true that an orthodox Muslim is a potential terrorist? Or, the same thing, that an Orthodox Jew or Christian is a potential terrorist and only a Reform Jew or a Christian convert to Darwinian evolutionary theory is capable of being tolerant of those who do not share his or her convictions?” (768). This socio-political divide based on religious identities can be detrimental to a cultural construct such as America. This binarism between the good and bad Muslims establishes model minority stereotypes anew, which, in turn, complicates the socio-political existence of Muslims in America.

In “Visibility as Resistance by Muslim Americans in a Surveillance and Security Atmosphere,” Shams writes, “The post-9/11 terror-panic climate has irrevocably transformed Muslims from a relatively invisible minority in America to hypervisible suspects of terrorism” (73). Shams, like Mamdani, insists that this binary of Good/Bad Muslims in America “shifts the cultural discourse from talking about terrorists and civilians to differentiating between “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims” (86). Shams also advises caution towards such implications as it further “entrenches the perceived link between Islam and terrorism in that it presumes terrorism as an “essential” characteristic of Muslims” (86). As a result, Shams explains, “Muslim Americans try to distance themselves from the “Muslim” label, which associates them with “terrorists.” Instead, many categorize themselves into the seemingly more favorable “moderate” identity” (91). This dynamic between Islam and terrorism, when interpreted in terms of the model minority myth, creates another three-tiered racial structure based on religious categories: the secular Muslim identity becomes honorary Whites while creating a buffer group between Whites and Muslims. This new model minority myth alleges that “those who have rejected this violent inclination and embraced secularism are the ‘good Muslims,’ whereas the terrorists, or the ‘bad Muslims,’ are expressing Muslims’ so-called characteristic tendency to inflict violence upon ‘the West’” (Shams 86). This stereotyping approach is dangerous, as Shams explains that “this binary implies that the “good” or “moderate” Muslims who are rejecting terrorism are not being their “authentic” selves, and so should be always watched in case they give in to their “essentially” violent character” (Shams 86). The ‘good’ Muslims must also—if they are to be perceived as non-violent—be perceived as secular; yet even after they have become more secular and assimilated, they remain under suspicion. This double-bind is precisely the subject matter of Akhtar’s *Disgraced*. With its secularized and even self-hating Muslim protagonist Amir, the play

aims to unsettle and disrupt the established binary of ‘good/bad’ Muslims, as Akhtar explores these stereotypes and does not balk at addressing the ingrained prejudices within Muslim as well as American identities.

In *Disgraced*, Akhtar is focused on the exploration of these binaries through their portrayal in the protagonist, a model minority South Asian Muslim, who has a critical view of his own Islamic heritage. Akhtar represents this secular Muslim identity through the character of a South Asian lapsed Muslim, Amir Kapoor (formerly named Amir Abdullah). Through Amir, Akhtar establishes a new lens for an examination of conflicts within the cultural and religious identity of South Asian Muslims who present as a secular model minority. However, he also addresses the price associated with the betrayal of self and the discarding of one’s own cultural/religious identity for successful assimilation. *Disgraced* also explores these binaries beyond Islam through the representation of orthodox and reformed characters of other backgrounds through a mix of Jewish, Christian and African American characters. Akhtar makes subtle use of neo-Orientalist tropes to accentuate these thematic approaches. He purposely creates controversy to unsettle these binaries through a process that can be interpreted through what Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, describes as the “perplexity of living.” As he writes:

It begins [...] from that anterior space within the arbitrary sign which disturbs the homogenizing myth of cultural anonymity. From the margins of modernity, at the insurmountable extremes of storytelling, we encounter the question of cultural difference as the perplexity of living, and writing, the nation. (311)

In *Disgraced*, Akhtar presents this “perplexity of living” through the model minority positionality of Amir’s secular identity. The play is set a decade after 9/11 in a luxury Manhattan apartment. The plot focuses on Amir, who has achieved considerable worldly

success. Does this achievement cause him to renounce his cultural and religious identity, or is the other way around—is the renunciation of his identity the cause of his success as he is homogenized by capitalism?

Disgraced presents this perplexed positionality of Amir's character, as he is trapped between his religious and cultural identity and the American dream. This leads to his eventual fall from grace even when he has discarded these identities and embraced the model minority positionality for assimilation in America. This representation of Amir helps Akhtar examine the impacts of racialization based on the religion and culture of model minorities. Akhtar skilfully portrays the implications of model minority theory through the prospect of becoming, if not white, then a racial identity that successfully approximates whiteness. This approximation is held out to those who perform their model minority status most successfully. The prospect is often used as bait – offered, withdrawn, offered again – in service of manipulating particular kinds of social and political performances. In the aftermath of 9/11, the possibility of achieving some empowering proximity with whiteness is withdrawn from Muslims, particularly those who can be visibly identified as Other. The social and political operation of the Model Minority as an idea and ideological construct is to preserve and reproduce the centrality, the status, and the dominance of whiteness.

In *Ayad Akhtar, the American Nation, and Its Others after 9/11: Homeland Insecurity*, Lopamudra Basu describes Akhtar's key concerns as a writer: “[he] concentrate[s] on the problems of male Muslim identity caught between the representative frames model minority/ ‘good Muslim’ and its always present shadow doppelganger, ‘the bad Muslim’” (121). Aparajita De, in *South Asian Racialization and Belonging after 9/11: Masks of Threat*, explains Akhtar's approach as a “thoughtful meditation about the fraught political climate that South Asian

Muslims encounter in post 9/11 America, where the traditional mythology of immigrant success is harshly undermined by counternarratives of surveillance and deportation of South Asian Muslims” (83).

Disgraced was the first-ever widely acknowledged depiction of a South Asian Muslim protagonist on Broadway. The critical and commercial success of *Disgraced* enabled the projection of the apprehensions of South Asian Muslim diaspora on the American and, through it, reached a wider American audience. Diana Benea, in her article “Negotiating the Quandaries of Post-9/11 Pakistani American Identity in Ayad Akhtar’s *Disgraced*,” describes the importance of the play for American audiences and South Asian Muslim playwrights in America:

Contemporary Pakistani American drama is perhaps best known via Ayad Akhtar, the first playwright to achieve national and international recognition following the success of his debut play. Such recent contributions consolidate the position of Pakistani American theatre on the emerging South Asian American theatre scene. (54)

Through his play, Akhtar aims at projecting the existence of a massive rift between South Asian Muslims in America and non-Muslim Americans in terms of acceptance and perception. He explores the uniformity within these perceptions when, in one of his interviews to “Theater Talk,” he claims that “I wanted to write a play in which everybody was right because that’s actually what reality is always about so we are all right from our own perspective [...] and then we end up often being wrong when we try to put that rightness out there into the world.” He used the narrative of the successful American experience, its criteria, and the price associated with its achievement, and elucidated his concerns about the South Asian Muslims partaking in the American experience as a result of immigration. This allows him to question through *Disgraced*

the conceptual definition of the successful experience of having made it in America. Akhtar explains the importance of depicting immigrant experiences in his “One on One” interview to Steve Audobato, stating:

The American experience, I think of it this way, is really about folks coming from an old world to a new world. Rupture from that old world, renewal of the self in a new world, leaving things behind making new things around. And that process of rupture and renewal you see it seventy generations in, folks/kids leaving their parents moving to other coast, beginning new lives. Its central to the American experience, its breaking away and renewing the self. And the play in a lot of ways is about the cost because we always talk about the cost. The cost of breaking away, of losing, severing one’s self from what one comes from...Nothing is black or white we like to think it is. But everything is filled with contradiction. Yes, there is a lot to be gained but there are things that are lost. And in the post 9/11 landscape I think that the Muslim American immigration, immigrant experience is much more complicated.

The idea of “renewal” through assimilation for South Asian Muslims leads to the establishment of Model Minorities. The very concept of this status, however, also contributes to the Othering of minorities. Akhtar uses a variety of thematic approaches that accentuate the racialized positionalities of Muslim Model Minorities. The setting of *Disgraced* contributes further towards portraying their Otherness within American society.

Through *Disgraced*, Akhtar, therefore, launches a corpus that presents “a new kind of critical and experiential interculturality” (Sudipto 114). This interculturality stems from the duality of his own hybrid identity as a South Asian Muslim American. It brings about what Ashis

Sengupta, in “Staging Diaspora: South Asian American Theater Today,” describes as a “diasporic consciousness that both encompasses a plural sense of nation, belonging, and ethnic and cultural identity in a transnational capitalist and global context,” and acknowledges “the tension between those plural narratives and positionings” (837).

The commercial success of the play brought an acknowledgement of the concerns of South Asian Muslims in America. As Benea writes:

The interstitial position occupied by this emerging theatrical tradition, accommodating dual allegiances and complicated layers of hybrid subjectivity, allows in turn for a dual critical stance, targeting, in Akhtar’s case, not only an idealized construction of American society and its policies, but also the more controversial aspects of Muslim culture, especially what the West construes as its fundamentalism. (54)

In *Disgraced*, Akhtar brings to stage a collection of different cultural and religious identities that challenge any generalization of an American identity. In *Crossing Borders in Victorian Travel: Spaces, Nations and Empires*, Barbara Franchi and Elvan Mutlu quote Timothy Powell’s proposal that it is time for “a new critical epoch, a period of cultural reconstruction in which “identity” is reconfigured in the midst of a multiplicity of cultural influences.” Powell, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, also insists that these reconfigured identities should “more closely resemble what Homi Bhabha has called the ‘lived perplexity’ of people’s lives” (quoted in Antosa 16). Powell, therefore, urges new ways of thinking and identity theorization by constructing paradigms that take into account the fluidity, multiplicity and inherent contradictions that characterize all types of cultural identity.

To a similar end, Akhtar makes blatant use of shock value to unsettle his audience. It is through this unsettling and shock that he is able to address the most controversial topics surrounding the “perplexity of living.” He deliberately bombards his audience with a torrent of visual and verbal stimuli. He does not merely touch or skirt around these issues but, in fact, peels mercilessly at all their layers, thus forging a complex destabilizing arrangement that brings the resentments between the involved parties to a head. He does not spare either of the participants in this discourse of East and West, making it impossible to deny the underlying issues anymore. Through complexities stemming from his religious and cultural disconnect, his desire and efforts to assimilate at the cost of them, and his eventual failure, Amir’s character portrays a precarious picture for model minority assimilation in post-9/11 America. Through Amir’s precarious position as a model minority, Akhtar questions the security associated with model minority status. Shams contextualizes the differences for model minorities pre and post 9/11, as she writes about the contemporary “precariousness” associated with model minority status:

Indeed, their education and professional credentials were all the kinds of indicators of immigrant success that help portray South Asian Americans as a model minority. And yet, while their educational and socioeconomic background gave these immigrants some recognition and privilege, their “Muslim-ness” exposed them to Islamophobic contexts, setting their experiences apart from other Asian model minorities. (“Successful” 3)

In *Disgraced*, Akhtar also takes away the safety blanket associated with the model minority on the part of South Asian Muslim Americans. He does so by threatening the social accomplishment and personal success of his protagonist. Ironically, the threat comes from his religious and cultural identity, which he has already discarded for the sake of assimilation. This creates in

Amir a sense of abandonment and as a result, he falls back on his own worst assumptions about his discarded identity, performing some of the worst stereotypes about Muslims. Akhtar's approach of taking away this sense of security associated with model minority positionalities allows him to illustrate that any semblance of acceptance based on model minority status in America is superficial. Akhtar, therefore, establishes model minority status for South Asian Muslims as a mere myth and exposes that any attempt at attaining it is futile. In "Successful yet precarious," Shams, speaking in a similar vein, presents the context of assimilation within hybrid generations:

South Asian Muslim Americans' overall feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and otherness offset, to some extent, the sense of security that they might derive from being members of a "successful" immigrant group in America. Despite some measures of economic stability and high expectations for their children, these immigrants do not see themselves as successful. Rather, they feel that they have to work thrice as hard to get to the same position as their white peers[...she argues that] many South Asian Muslim Americans' sense of security based on their academic and financial successes are, to some extent, undermined because of their stigmatized Muslim identity. (14)

Disgraced, therefore, deconstructs the concept of assimilation in post-9/11 America by discarding the newly constructed secular "good" Muslim model minority image. The message conveyed is that the only way out is accepting and acknowledging these differences, along with an attempt to build a discourse around them instead of attempting to mitigate or eliminate them through assimilation.

Amir as Model Minority Protagonist

Amir Kapoor, the protagonist of *Disgraced*, is a successful Pakistani-American lawyer, living in a luxurious apartment situated in the Upper East Side of New York. Amir is a South Asian lapsed Muslim who is moving up in the corporate world, and he has distanced himself from his religious, ethnic and cultural roots. Amir has become alienated from his heritage to assimilate in contemporary American society. He has, in an attempt to obscure his Muslim family background, changed his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor. Amir is married to the white Caucasian American artist Emily Hughes-Kapoor. The duo is the definition of accomplishment in the American capitalist world, specifically the upper-class New York scene. They have a taste for the fine things in life. Their apartment is artfully decorated and contains an amalgamation of cultural motifs ranging from a statue of Lord Siva to bottles of alcohol, along with Islamic architectural art. In fact, the stage directions call for “subtle flourishes of the orient” (6). In other words, Amir’s life is the definition of a model minority in America.

Through *Disgraced*, Akhtar explores how the discourse on terrorism jeopardizes the fragile sense of identity that ethnic and religious minorities feel in the United States, and how this discourse on terrorism threatens Muslims’ already tenuous option to identify as a model minority and a successful group of immigrants. He depicts the unravelling of Amir’s world by introducing seemingly small but extremely relevant disruptions in the play. The first disruption comes as a result of reluctantly revisiting his cultural and religious identity. On the insistence of his wife and his nephew Abe, who has changed his name from Hussain, Amir visits a local Imam, Fareed, who is being held on suspicion of terrorism for collecting alms for a mosque. His appearance in court in support of Imam, at the urging of Emily and Abe, is seemingly a small event in the play. Yet it results in the unravelling of Amir’s professional and, eventually, his

personal life. This unwitting revisiting of his cultural and religious identity does not sit well with the firm he is working with as he is perceived as a terrorist sympathizer—the very reason Amir had initially been reluctant to help the Imam. As a result, he is discriminated against and is eventually fired.

The next disruption is created over a dinner party, where a casual conversation turns into a heated debate on religion and politics. The guests are Issac, a colleague and friend of Emily and the secular Jewish curator of a renowned Art gallery; and his African American wife Jory, who is also Amir's colleague at the law firm. The dinner is placed right after Amir's heated interaction at the office as a result of his firm's inquiry into the misrepresentation of his surname and heritage. The inquiry was carried out in the first place, because he visited the court to support Iman Fareed. As a result, an altercation takes place where he blames the firm for discrimination due to his support to a Muslim Imam. After losing his job, Amir is drunk and distraught. Akhtar adds to his protagonist's misery through the bombardment of information as, during the course of the evening, he learns first about losing his previously expected promotion to Jory, and then about his wife's affair with Issac. The veneer of civility is lifted—ironically through Amir's indulgence in alcohol, a marker of his distance from his Islamic heritage—and in a fit of rage, he strikes Emily. Amir's abuse of Emily is something he has already framed in an earlier conversation as the performance of a particularly ugly Muslim stereotype. This violence on Amir's part ultimately results in Emily leaving Amir. This reversion from a model minority caricature to a racialized stereotype also affects Abe, Amir's nephew, who, after being a witness to Amir's battery of Emily, begins to assert more passionate ties to his Muslim identity, leaving behind his earlier commitment to a secular and assimilated life. The play ends on that note of

extreme polarization of identity, with Abe's arrest over suspicion of terrorism and Amir's clear conflict between the Oriental and Occidental parts of his identity.

This focus on divided identities is built into the play's setting: from its first moment to when the final curtain is drawn, the play's setting and scenery are fraught with symbolic allusions that speak to this struggle for assimilation as a model minority on the part of the protagonist. Amir's abode, an opulent apartment, in Manhattan, New York, speaks of affluence and accomplishment. As one reviewer put it, Amir Kapoor "with his Upper East Side apartment, his \$600 Charvet business shirts, his Brylcreem-tamed hair, his [white American] artist wife and his en-route-to-partner career as a litigator is the definition of the first-generation immigrant made good" (The Australian). Amir's dwelling, therefore, is emblematic of personal and cultural accomplishment and luxurious life and indicates a crucial criterion for the successful assimilation of a South Asian Muslim immigrant as a model minority.

In the sociological context, Shams, in "Successful yet Precarious," also writes about the lack of stability associated with the South Asian Muslim model minority assimilation in America. She explains it as an "aware[ness] of the temporariness of the model minority stereotype" and associates it with fears "that despite their or their children's achievements, South Asians and Muslims will never be perceived to belong in the U.S. society" (2). Amir, in a similar attempt for assimilation, effaces his Muslim identity. Mona Bagato, in her article "Exploring the Theme of Neo-Orientalism in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*," writes that Amir "tries hard to hide his racial and religious background in order gain acceptance into the mainstream society; however, his performance does not ensure successful assimilation in society. Unfortunately, his society can't accept his brown skin, his origin, and his Pakistani and Muslim roots" (Bagato 129). As a result, "he [remains] the unassimilable other in spite of his perfect American accent," and in spite

of his carefully decorated abode exuding multiculturalism, which becomes a microcosm for the idea of America as a melting pot (Bagato 129).

The stage is set in Amir's world, as mentioned earlier, with an Islamic painting on the wall, a statue of Lord Siva on a marble mantle above the fireplace, and some bottles of liquor on a small table. This diverse cascade of imagery brings out an internal confusion of the character while projecting his outward struggle for assimilation. The statue of Lord Siva, as mentioned earlier, has been received by Amir as a gift from his Jewish boss Mort who mistook him as Hindu. Amir is happy to comply with the mistaken interpretation of his identity over his own cultural heritage. Akhtar confronts these insecurities through Amir's characters not only by accepting a misinterpreted gift, but also through a deliberately changed moniker from "Abdullah" to "Kapoor." The bottles of liquor add further to this deliberate discarding of self.

The only semblances of self can be seen firstly "in the furnishings [that] are spare and tasteful with subtle flourishes of the orient"—which, however, actually speaks of Emily's and not Amir's association with Islam. Emily, "white, lithe and lovely," and in her early thirties, is Amir's spouse and an upper-class liberal white Caucasian woman (6). Akhtar uses Emily's character to show how "exotic representation [is] a constant negotiation between the modalities of ethnographic documentation on the one hand, and fantasy on the other" (Kanwal and Aslam). Emily's inclination for Orientalism also includes her attitude toward her relationship with Amir. Emily, an up-and-coming artist, finds inspiration in ancient Islamic traditions for her work even though she is Christian, and she has been accused of using Islamic elements opportunistically. Kanwal and Aslam, in *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing*, describe the play as "a useful site for the citing and re-citing of Orientalist tropes with a difference." Amir's hybrid identity and his marriage to a white Orientalist artist allow for "the liminal or border

space opened up between the ethnographic impulse for “authentic” documentation of a multiracial and multi as well as anti-religious post 9/11 American reality” (Kanwal and Aslam 63).

Aroosa Kanwal Saiyma Aslam et. all in *Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* describes Amir’s alienation from his religious identity:

The play makes it patently clear that even for the most privileged second-generation Pakistani-American, there is no comfortable post-ethnic cosmopolitan space to inhabit, 9/ 11 having shattered the illusion that such a magical place might be more than a temporary delusion. Of course, Amir’s US- American identity may have always been more contested than his list of achievements implies. Everyday racism and his struggle not to be typecast as ‘the Muslim attorney’ serve as reminders of his inoutsider status. His wife’s religious-themed art continuously forces Amir to reassert his position between a discarded Muslim past and his all-American success story. His absolute repudiation of Islam appears to be a defence mechanism. (63)

The duality of this hybrid identity on the part of both Amir and Emily, as well as other characters in the play, “rubs up uncomfortably against not just the fantasy of the white and black, Christian/Jewish/atheist/secular characters of the play toward the Muslim(s) in their midst—but, more importantly perhaps, against the self-Orientalizing fantasy that the main character [...] succumbs to, with tragic effect” (Kanwal and Aslam). The term “self-Orientalizing” here is apt, and works in a manner similar to internalized racism: in his attempts to efface his own cultural and religious identity, Amir has built a defence mechanism against his identity by perceiving the worst in it and defining Islam by its most extreme stereotypes.

Another symbol of Amir's Muslim identity is the Islamic painting on the wall, "a vibrant, two-panelled image in luscious whites and blues, with patterns reminiscent of an Islamic garden. The effect is lustrous and magnetic" (5). Notably, this decorative choice is not deliberate on Amir's part but is, in fact, a tribute to Islamic orientalism from Emily. Art and paintings, throughout the play, play a pivotal role, as they symbolically reassert the characters' multifaceted identities and highlight the conflicts within and without. Less symbolically and more literally, they also exhibit how culture can be abstracted or de-particularized through an aestheticizing of neo-oriental elements. The most central case in point is Emily's portrait of Amir, which has been modelled on Diego Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja. Amir, in the very first scene, is posing for this portrait as Emily paints. As Basu notes, "the painting of Amir by Emily" based on the portrait of Juan de Pareja "is a motif that structures the organization of the play," and is crucial for the analysis of the racialized lens of model minority identity of the protagonist (Basu 64). Pareja, a Spanish painter of Moorish descent, was born enslaved and was freed by Velázquez. Painting Amir in the style of Pareja creates a number of parallels that can be observed through Oriental and Neo-oriental motifs. Amir and Pareja serve as a parallel to each other as Pareja is posing for his Master. Emily, through her insistence and positioning of Amir for her painting, parallels Velázquez. The inspiration for this painting for Emily came as a result of Amir being racially profiled and discriminated against by a waiter at a restaurant. Pareja, a man of Moorish descent, is a representation of power dynamics that Emily takes as the opportunity for a painting, but in some ways still seems oblivious to. In fact, the painting takes on a new form in the fetishizing of Amir's exotic otherness. Amir is a representative of a previously colonized South Asia who is presented through Emily's western gaze. These parallels are minutely illustrated by Akhtar throughout the entire play, as Pareja is shown fashionably

dressed in a shirt with fine embroidery and a lace collar just as Amir, a South Asian Muslim from once colonized Pakistan, is similarly dressed “in an Italian suit jacket, a crisp collared shirt” from above the waist (6).



Figure 1: Diego Velázquez, *Juan de Pareja*. 1650. Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437869>.

In the painting by Velazquez, Pareja “seems to be directing his gaze at a spectator/owner outside the frame of the painting [...] seeking the approval of an owner” (De 87). Amir’s painting on a similar note speaks to this master/owner relationship dynamic. Amir is a representative of postcolonial citizens “who managed to penetrate the space of the Other through their intellectual and physical existence and ambivalent subjectivities” (Ali 357). Their post-colonial diasporic model minority existence is, however, still at odds with their previous positions as colonized subjects. Regardless of his material accomplishments, Amir is similarly named a “slave” by Issac as tensions rise in Act 3 (70). Isaac remarks about Amir’s portrait when he is alone with Emily and points out to her that “he puts you on a pedestal. It’s in your painting. *Study After Velazquez*. He’s looking out at the viewer - that viewer is you” (70). He goes on to berate Amir by saying that Amir’s expression in the painting speaks of “Shame. Anger. Pride,” and reads Amir’s facial expression as a pride that “the slave finally has the master’s wife” (70).

This extended comparison of Amir to Pareja—and to two forms of a colonizer’s gaze—allows Akhtar to dive further into the post-colonial trauma of South Asian Muslim Minorities and their existence in America. As Diana Benea writes in “Negotiating the Quandaries of Post-9/11 Pakistani American Identity in Ayad Akhtar’s *Disgraced*”:

Akhtar’s construction of characters in point of reverse positionings is thus brought into focus from the very first scenes: on the one hand, Amir’s choice of a white American wife can be interpreted as a strategy for smoothing his integration into upper-middle-class American society; on the other hand, Emily’s choice of a husband of Muslim background is nothing but consistent with her enthusiastic appropriation of Islamic art. (Benea 59)

The placement of identity as well as gender roles are also challenged by Akhtar in the play to address the subject matter of the categorization of South Asian Muslim identities in America. The incident of racism towards Amir by a waiter in a restaurant, which sparks the painting in the first place, exemplifies this. Emily describes the offending waiter as “A man, a waiter, looking at you. Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are. Not until you started to deal with him. And the deftness with which you did that. You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you, and what you really are” (7). She implies, then, that her artistic gaze can, in fact, see through to who Amir really is, though within the play, the painting’s function is to allow the audience to see a similar “gap” in the couple’s own relationship. This incident lays the foundation for exploring two seemingly juxtaposed yet similar positionalities of the Western view of South Asian Muslim identities. It highlights the explosive nature of racial bias on the one hand, while on the other, it speaks of the white saviour complex towards model minorities that is central to the American perception of minorities.

The derogatory attitude of the waiter towards Amir is situated in the Western perception of brown bodies and Muslim identities after 9/11. Because of racial bias, the “waiter could not “place” Amir properly. Robin E. Field, in “‘The Question Remains... Of Your Place’: Challenging Reductive Identities in Ayad Akhtar’s *Disgraced*,” explains the behaviour of the waiter. Specifically, it is “his focus upon Amir’s race that makes him believe his racial identity gives him power over Amir (Field 52). Nitasha Sharma, in, “Racialization and Resistance: The Double Bind of Post-9/11 Brown,” tries to explain the historical and contextual reasons fueling discrimination towards brown bodies in America in the post-9/11 era, as she explains:

The racial project of the post-9/11 Brown also wedded older stereotypes of East Asian Americans (the model minority myth and the perpetual foreigner) to

stereotypes of West Asians (terrorist, oppressed veiled woman, religious fanatic) grouping together people who come from a vast landscape including Eastern Europe, Asia, South Asia, and East Asia (their Americanness unrecognized).
(139)

This perception of a lack of Americanness in the brown bodies of the South Asian Muslim feeds into the perceived self-superiority of the white Americans in the play, since “in foregrounding only Amir’s Brown identity over all of the factors comprising his identity, the waiter relies upon a script of whiteness as the essence of being American” (Field 52). The reaction of Emily to this situation is opposite, but it still speaks to a perceived superiority by revealing a saviour complex towards Amir’s brown body. As a reaction, Emily falls back on a model minority narrative in her “line about the man being ‘a waiter,’” which “intimates that Amir used his socio-economic and/or educational privilege to establish himself above this waiter in the social hierarchy” (Field 52). This also prompts her to paint Amir in her “Study after Velazquez’s Moor” (Akhtar 45).

The logic Emily provides in the ensuing dialogue—where they discuss the incident with the waiter—also hints at a reversal of gender roles in the play is a saviour/sufferer dynamic:

AMIR

The guy’s a racist. So what?

EMILY

Sure. But I started to think about the Velazquez painting. And how people must have reacted when they first saw it. They think they’re looking at a picture of a Moor. An assistant.

AMIR

A slave.

EMILY

Fine. A slave.

But whose portrait - it turns out - has more nuance and complexity and reality than his renditions of kings and queens. And God knows how many of those he painted. (7)

Emily accords this racialized positioning of slavery to Amir by painting his brown body in the same vein as Pareja's portrait. She also refutes any protest from Amir by basing her response on the historical importance of Pareja's portrait and not on Amir's own concerns about being racialized.

This aspect of model minority racialization from Emily is a persistent pattern throughout the play, since Amir consistently resists the racialized roles he is asked to fill. In the scene when Amir's nephew Abe, for example, asks him to help Imam Fareed, Amir protests, arguing that he is a corporate lawyer and not a public defender. He also mentions that the Imam already has a defense team, to which Abe counters with a troublingly anti-Semitic claim that those defending him are Jews, and he will be more comfortable with a Muslim defending him. He adds that it is Amir's duty as a Muslim to defend a fellow Muslim. Amir vehemently denies Islam as his religion, and then a telling conversation takes place with Emily as she tries to convince Amir to speak with Imam Fareed:

EMILY

(cutting him off)

You told me. So what? So a man who has nothing left but his dignity and his faith is still trying to be useful in the only way he knows how? I mean, if he feels he needs one of his own people around him—

AMIR

I'm not one of his own people.

EMILY

You are. And in a way that's unique. And that can be helpful to him.

Why can't you see that? (21)

Emily's attribution of the word "unique" to Amir is another way that she emphasizes his model minority status. It is not just that Amir is also of Muslim heritage, but that he is also uniquely positioned within the legal profession. This status, which Amir claims as well, is actually based on a certain degree of alienation towards his cultural heritage, which the play shows as a prerequisite for attaining an assimilated minority status. On the other hand, the play also addresses how this alienated status is part of what makes Amir (and Islamic cultures more broadly) acceptable to Emily in the first place. As Benea writes:

Amir's wife, Emily [...] seems to be embracing the very tradition Amir is running away from, albeit in an artistic register—as a painter on the rise, not only is she employing Islamic forms and motifs in her latest pieces, praising them for their virtue of effacing the individual artist, but also arguing for the central place of that

tradition, alongside the classic Greek and Roman one, as part of “the spiritual and artistic heritage we can all draw from... thus it might be argued that Amir—the racialized Eastern subject gazed at by a Western artist—represents just another artifact in his wife’s collection of Oriental (and Orientalist) paintings.” (59)

A parallel can again be drawn with the portrait of Pareja and Amir here, just as “the style of the painting and its expression presents Juan de Pareja as an object of beauty and achievement, desired by his master and other spectators” (De 87). Amir’s brown body in the play is similarly objectified by Emily. The positioning of Amir’s body in his underwear, from the waist down, is contrasted with a sleek Italian shirt, which serves not only as an interesting visual to accentuate a touch of his model minority hybrid existence but also hints at the sexualization of Oriental brown bodies, which is similar to the exotic Otherness created through Pareja’s identity. This indicates on the larger scale that in order to be rescued, the Oriental sufferer must present himself in a light appreciated by the Occidental saviour.

This sexualization of Amir, through the semi-nakedness of his brown body on the stage, speaks of the continuing Orientalism of politics in America, as De notes with reference to the exploitative photographs that circulated from the Abu Ghraib prison. In hindsight, a “Muslim man’s body in Emily’s painting of Amir stands in conjunction with images of tortured prisoners from Abu Ghraib [shown] in states of sexual shame and debasement... [they] are the result of unequal power relations between the photographed and photographer” (De 91). The two acts cannot be considered as fully parallel, yet “in both instances, the Muslim male body is being acted upon by the white society and being denied its own autonomy” (De 91).

This projection provides an opening for a discourse of sexualization of Orientalized brown bodies and gender roles in the context of 9/11, as explicated by Maryam Khalid in her article “Gender, Orientalism, and Global Politics”:

Orientalist justifications for intervention in the War on Terror depend on these binaries as the division of the world into ‘civilised’ and ‘barbaric.’ With irrational violence and misogyny intrinsic to ‘their’ world, the US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq can be presented as necessary in order to bring civilisation, democracy, and equality to the oppressed and to discipline the barbaric enemy. In terms of War on Terror discourse, this can be seen in the dichotomy between the benevolent, civilised and moral masculinity of the West and the backward, barbaric, oppressive, deviant masculinity of the ‘brown man.’

(31)

These gender binaries and their reversal can also be seen in *Disgraced* during the casual table conversation eventually turned explosive during the dinner in the third scene of the play. The discussion about Emily’s “Study after Velazquez’s Moor” leads Amir to light-heartedly (though slightly resentfully) call himself Emily’s “very own personal Moor” (45). Emily tries to disrupt this self-attributed status quo as she counters Amir by saying, “*Muse* is more like it” (45). These examples from the play also reinstate that the “gendered identities do not exist independently of other factors and must be viewed as intertwined with, for example, race or ethnicity if we are to understand the hierarchical organisation of identities” (Khalid 19). Akhtar, through Amir and Emily’s relationship, therefore, rewrites the very concept of the saviour/sufferer relationship with the master/slave dichotomy. As Basu writes, “Emily may be a female artist reversing the long tradition of male gaze by directing her gaze at her husband, but in spite of her gender identity

Emily belongs to the racial group that has a concentration of power with regard to representation” (Basu 66). Although this reversal of roles had its potential for a reversal of gender disparities, it is problematic in the atmosphere of suspicion, scrutiny and surveillance of post-9/11 America, where Muslim brown bodies as suspected terrorists are already under the scrutiny of a collective social gaze (Basu 67).

It is also interesting to note here that although Amir is willing to accept his model minority status by posing for a slave-inspired painting, with a little protest, he nevertheless refuses to even see Imam Fareed by telling Abe that he cannot defend the Imam as he is not a public prosecutor. Amir’s refusal is a performance reflecting the gaze of the dominant racial group within the socio-political hierarchy. His unwillingness to perform from his model minority position for other South Asian identities is a performance that involves a demonstration of his ties to his Americanness, a position that is dominant. He eventually only does so to appease his wife, Emily, who is part of the dominant culture. Amir’s reluctance to represent the Imam speaks of his intentional estrangement from his own cultural heritage. Shams, in her article “Successful yet Precarious,” explains this alienation from one’s own identity as deriving from “the stigma attached to South Asian Muslim Americans’ religious identity,” and from the fact that “immigrants’ political engagements, or the lack thereof, reveal a more complex picture of American society, global politics, and Muslims’ collective precariousness post-9/11” (12).

In the play, however, it is not just Amir who feels this compulsion to sever ties with his religious background. Amir’s nephew, Abe, “22, of South-Asian origin,” is also struggling with the issues related with religion and assimilation (12). Taking a hint from Amir, who has changed his last name, Abe also changes his name from his birth name Hussain, stating, “You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name? It’s in the Quran. It says you can hide

your religion if you have to” (13). But contrary to these words, both Amir and Abe are no longer who they were. Their clothes are a tell-tale sign throughout the play. Amir has his expensive shirts, and Abe is as “American as American gets. Vibrant and endearing. He’s wearing a KidRobot T-shirt under a hoodie, skinny jeans, and high tops” (12). The name and clothes, as well as professional choices on Amir’s part, serve as telltale signs of their external and internal struggles associated with their aspirations to model minority status.

Amir’s professional choice as a lawyer at a renowned Jewish-led firm requires a complete disassociation from his Muslim identity. Amir has changed his last name purposely to pass himself off as a Hindu. This willingness to be misrecognized shows in a loaded event in the plot: his reception of Siva’s statue as a gift from Mort, his Jewish boss and mentor at the firm. Emily, unaware of Amir’s reasons for this projection of a different identity, asks her husband whether Mort thinks Amir is Hindu, and Amir replies, “He may have mentioned something once....” (11). Amir, however, changes the subject immediately by declaring that he was expecting to be named partner in the near future. Amir’s estrangement from his Muslim identity is clearly intentional as he does not disabuse Mort of the presumption that he is Hindu. This moment establishes the importance of Amir erasing his Muslim identity to succeed at this firm and, concomitantly, Emily’s naïveté about the workplace discrimination Amir would soon experience as a Muslim after 9/11.

This disassociation from Muslim identity by Amir shows, on the one hand, that Amir’s decisions and rationale behind the name change were his alone. On the other hand, it shows that this estrangement from self did help him earn his desired success in his professional life. It is also in direct contrast with his upbringing. His deliberate alienation and professional choice of working for a Jewish firm has a lot to do with the way that Jewish Americans serve as a model

minority to which he sees Muslim Americans also aspiring to. The relationship to secularized Judaism becomes even more contentious, however, in light of Amir's Antisemitic upbringing. Akhtar informs us of this dimension of Amir's identity through a flashback. In the first scene, when Amir informs Abe that he has renounced his religion, Abe says that his mother (Amir's aunt) and grandmother say that Amir is just going through a phase. This remark from Abe triggers Amir, as he relates an Antisemitic incident from his childhood, when he unknowingly fell for a Jewish girl named Rivka in sixth grade. His mother angrily spat on his face when she learned about this interaction. Amir, as a child, replicated this pattern and spat on that girl's face later. Amir concludes his narrative by proclaiming that the only "phase" that he is going through is "intelligence." For Amir, dissociation from his previous identity becomes a logical solution for providing a pathway to success. Stepping into this new world is only possible through a severance from his old world, which is here his religious identity as a Muslim. Ironically, though, he keeps his South Asian brown identity intact enough that it becomes the very reason for unravelling his model minority identity.

Assimilation and Conflicted Identity

The central premise of *Disgraced*, then, is that Amir, a South Asian Muslim American, is juggling identities in order to establish successful assimilation in America. His upbringing is at constant odds with his adult self and his desire to become a model minority. Shams also describes this struggle for assimilation in the societal context of "South Asian Americans—Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian Muslim immigrants [and] their racialized positionality combined with the stigma attached to their religious identity." Shams, in "Successful yet Precarious," explains that this stigmatized identity can "induce in [South Asian Muslims] a sense

of insecurity and vulnerability,” thus enmeshing their hybrid existences (2). This entangled hybrid identity and the struggle to become and remain a model minority drives the narrative of the play. Through Amir’s struggle, Akhtar portrays the disintegration of the internal psyche that constructs itself as a model minority and shows how disruptions affect these identities with devastating outcomes. This portrayal is intricately built within the structure of the plot; through settings and illustrations, and in characters through flashbacks and dialogues.

In this light, it is worth returning to Amir’s visit to Imam Fareed with an assist from Said’s work on Orientalism. Akhtar uses this event to add layering to the representation of identities in the play as it explores three major factors contributing to the misperception of Islam that Edward Said describes. The first is the “perception of the Arabs and Islam into a highly politicized, almost raucous matter: [...] the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism (26). This characterization of a “raucous,” politicized, and intolerant Islam is something that Akhtar develops most clearly—and controversially—in terms of Pakistan’s (and Islam’s) relation to Judaism and Israel.¹⁵ Amir’s Antisemitic upbringing, rooted in his mother’s geo-political identity as a Pakistani, is rejected by him as he joins a Jewish law firm and aspires to replicate the secularization and assimilation that define characters like Isaac. However, that Antisemitism does leave a lasting influence on his personality, and he continues to react against it as he constructs his adult identity. Amir’s disassociation from his childhood identity is reflected in his conversation with his wife, Emily, about how his mother might react to his becoming a partner in the firm:

EMILY

¹⁵ For the political background see Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country*.

Leibowitz, Bernstein, Harris, and Kapoor.

AMIR

My mother will roll over in her grave...

EMILY

Your mother would be proud.

AMIR

It's not the family name, so she might not care, seeing it alongside all those Jewish ones.... (11)

His sense of personal accomplishment comes at the expense of an assumed familial disappointment. Moreover, Akhtar reinforced this internal conflict in Amir's identity emerging from the historical context within the play through the still more shocking Antisemitic incident in his childhood, involving his crush on Rivka. In *Orientalism*, Said highlights this struggle from the perspective of Muslims in the American context. He argues that American political discourse and popular general opinion only legitimizes one side of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Akhtar, however, departs from Said's narrative and goes beyond the question of Jewish-Muslim tensions as a nuanced two-sided issue: he also depicts the spectrum of bigotry on both sides, which is associated with the geopolitical and cultural values constructed from the perspective of multiple cultures including Islam. Amir's mother's reflexive disdain for Jewish culture is juxtaposed with Amir's choice for working with a Jewish Law firm, and this serves to incorporate a clear and considered disassociation on Amir's part from his cultural upbringing.

His embracing of the model minority stereotype is a form of secularism. However, even though his enthusiasm for helping Imam Fareed is lukewarm, this display of support for his cultural and religious community still does not sit well with the predominantly Jewish law firm that he works for. The intolerant aspects of Amir's own upbringing are paralleled by the firm's intolerance towards Islam. As a result of his involvement with the Imam, the validity of his South Asian identity as Kapoor is questioned; he is discriminated against and is eventually fired. This discrimination, of course, is meant to say more about post-9/11 American Islamophobia than about American Judaism in particular. However, Amir himself problematically winds up equating that prejudice with the Muslim/Jewish context, as is reflected in his outburst that "if the Imam had been a *rabbi*, Steven [his Jewish boss] wouldn't have cared" (69). The firm's reaction of interpreting Amir's outburst as "anti-Semitic" may, therefore, be justified. However, the audience of the play might also be inclined to read it as a conflict between Amir's secular and tolerant adult identity and his return to the inter-religious tensions he associates with his earlier childhood identity. Likewise, the fact that the firm is particularly suspicious to discover Amir's name change—and his presumed motive of passing as an Indian and Hindu rather than a Pakistani Muslim—reflects dual bigotry: Amir's own internalized Islamophobia and the firm's stereotyping of his identity (69).

Akhtar, hence, touches upon geopolitical factors and their socio-political relevance through religious bigotry on the part of both Amir and his coworkers at the law firm.¹⁶ Amir's South Asian identity is only brought into question when his Muslimness is brought into view as a result of his association with the Imam. Amir describes his interaction with his bosses in his

¹⁶ The geopolitical and socio-political context emerges, historically, from Pakistan and Israel's diplomatic relationships. It is rooted in Pakistan's pro-Arab and anti-Israel policies. See Moshe Yegar, "Pakistan and Israel," especially 128.

response to Emily's question about his distraught behaviour. He informs her that two of his firm partners questioned him about his father's country of birth. Amir had filled out a form at the time of joining the firm where he had mentioned his father was born in India. Again, what is perceived as evasion or suspicious falsehood can be read in terms of geopolitical complexity: the reason he had said so was that his father was born before the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. The city Amir mentioned in his employment form is now a part of Pakistan. As a result, the partners at the firm insinuate in a meeting that he had misrepresented himself as Indian, when his parents were, in fact, born in Pakistan. He also confided to Emily that they were aware that he changed his last name from Muslim name (Abdullah) to the Hindu name Kapoor. Mort, who was his mentor and a father-like figure for Amir, was also ignoring his calls, and that was making him very agitated. Ultimately, Amir blames going to Imam Fareed's hearing as the source of this investigation of his past by his firm.

This approach by Akhtar reflects the complexities and challenges of model minority identities in post-9/11 America. Amir, who wants his South Asian identity to be devoid of any Muslimness, feels the need to purposely discard his Pakistani heritage in order to assimilate. He is willing to pay the costs associated with this disassociation as, based on history and geography, he technically does attempt self-misrepresentation. The incident at the firm provides the first damage in the armour of a model minority worn by Amir throughout the play. It brings about a realization that any model minority leverage is only short-lived and that even a semblance of Otherness may lead these models of minority to a devastating outcome.

This incident, however, also highlights two other aspects of South Asian Muslim existence in American society. Firstly, there is the prejudice against Muslim identity in post-9/11 America that pressures Amir to depart from his own cultural heritage. Lopamudra Basu, in *Ayad*

Akhtar, the American Nation, and Its Others after 9/11: Homeland Insecurity, explains this departure on Amir's part by stating that "in a Homeland Security State, a Muslim lawyer must try to pass as a Hindu. The injustice of this shakes the foundational myths of American exceptionalism and immigrant belonging" (85). As a result, "the play cannot offer any other vision except the self-destruction of the protagonist and garner profound empathy that lead to this fate" (Basu 85). Akhtar goes on to add further layering to Amir's model minority aspirations by reflecting on his desire to be the "new Jews" of America—as I have already suggested, that is, he wishes to tread in the footsteps of Jewish Americans who have achieved what might look, from the point of view of a Muslim immigrant, like a model minority status worth emulating (41). These aspirations are again at odds with his culturally perceived tribal identity, which is reflected and mirrored in his interactions with Rivkah and later with Isaac beyond his professional sphere. When he spits on both of them—one in childhood, one in adulthood—it speaks to his anger and his shame at that early allegiance and early-formed identity to which he still feels tied.

The second event that disrupts Amir's personal life and ends with him and Emily parting ways is portrayed by Akhtar again in the form of a simple dinner party. Akhtar carefully positions a quartet of actors, all accomplished New Yorkers, representing varying cultures, creeds and colours to participate in an explosive conversation over a dinner table for the climax of the play. Their casual conversation soon turns into a heated debate on secularity, religious minoritization, and Islamic identity between Amir and Isaac. Amir, already shaken by the events at the firm and under the influence of alcohol, discards any filters of sensitivity and becomes ruthless in his criticism of Islamic ideology (and, by extension, of his own Islamic heritage) while Issac and Emily rise to its defense. For example, Amir refers to the Quran as "one very

long hate-mail letter to humanity” (55). He adds that the Quran demands unquestioned surrender. Issac, however, argues that the problem is not with the religion itself but specifically with Islamo-fascism. This back and forth argument establishes that Amir, as a fundamental model minority, harbors similar Islamophobic tendencies that are part of the post-9/11 American climate. Issac is able to identify Amir’s hatred towards his own Islamic identity, and points out that Amir seems to be “full of self-loathing” (61). For this reason, the climax of the play is achieved in a similar way as in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in terms of a shameful feeling of tribalistic pride.

During the course of his explosive tirade, Amir’s disgust towards Islam is replaced with another misconstrued identity as he claims that being a Muslim means to strive and recreate a similar world even if one has to fight for it. He adds that to be Muslim is to feel pride in the purity of the emotions of those willing to act out those beliefs—with which he begins to sound like he is passionately identifying with Islam, rather than critiquing it. Just to drive the point home, Amir touches upon his Oriental identity, which leads to the most controversial dialogue in the play:

AMIR

...And this is the real problem: It goes way deeper than the Taliban. To be Muslim — *truly* — means not only that you *believe* all this. It means you *fight* for it, too. Politics follows faith? No distinction between mosque and state? Remember all that? So if the point is that the world in the Quran was a better place than this world, well, then let’s go back. Let’s stone adulterers. Let’s cut off the hands of thieves. Let’s kill the unbelievers. And so, even if you’re one of

those lapsed Muslims sipping your after-dinner scotch alongside your beautiful white American wife — and watching the news and seeing folks in Middle East dying for values you were taught were purer — and stricter — and truer ... you can't help but feel just a little a bit of pride.

ISAAC

Pride?

AMIR

Yes. Pride.

Beat.

ISAAC

Did you feel pride on September Eleventh?

AMIR

(with hesitation)

If I'm honest, yes.

EMILY

You don't really mean that, Amir.

AMIR

I was horrified by it, okay? Absolutely horrified.

JORY

Pride about what? About the towers coming down? About people getting killed?

AMIR

That we were finally winning.

JORY

We?

AMIR

Yeah.... I guess I forgot... which *we* I was.

JORY

You're an American...

AMIR

It's tribal, Jor. It is in the bones. You have no idea how I was brought up.

You have to work *real* hard to root that shit out.

JORY

Well, you need to keep working.

AMIR

I am. (62-63)

Akhtar's replacement of Amir's resentment towards extremism with a confession of pride exposes the rupture within his model minority identity. His assimilation continues to make "Muslim" and "American" into extreme and incompatible binaries. As Chaki Rohini writes in her article "Desis in the House: South Asian American Theatre and the Politics of Belonging," "[Akhtar deliberately] takes a different, but provocative tack": he exposes the extremism within the Orient and Occident identities (48). His deliberate portrayal of violence in words and action "is tied to a political history that chronicles the cultural violence induced by global capital, the trauma of displaced postcolonial identities, the gendered violence of religion, and the violence that is a response to a long and storied history of persecution" (194-95). Predictably, Amir's explosive revelation leaves the table in an uproar. The situation is further worsened as he tries to make amends by comparing his emotions to the ones that Issac might feel as a Jewish man when Israel throws its military weight around. Issac, however, curtly tells him that he does not support Israel and that he is outraged by the violence in the Middle East, like many other Jewish people. Amir then inquires about his feelings when he hears a threat against Israel, to which Issac responds that he feels angry like everyone else. Amir opens himself to further resentment by telling him that not everyone feels appalled at threats against Israel: that there are some people who like hearing those threats. Issac refutes Amir's claims stating that Islam has not monopolized fundamentalism, and instead of making horrifying generalizations about radicalism

based on the text of the Quran, Amir must see that Amir alone is responsible for any such thought. Isaac comes close, in other words, to naming Amir's internalized Islamophobia as the actual cause of his incendiary claims.

In projecting the model minority stereotypes through Amir, Akhtar makes a clear demarcation between the personal and socio-political spheres. He falls back on the historical stereotypes of Muslim and Jewish rivalries in order to defend each of the religious identities on stage. Isaac and Emily's defence of Islam against Amir's critique of it is ironic against the backdrop of the political climate that was a prevalent part of the post-9/11 United States. We see a character of Muslim heritage critiquing Islam, and characters of Christian and Jewish heritage defending it. Akhtar also reverses the perception of Islam as fundamentalism through Amir's character. Through Amir's anti-Islamic sentiments, Akhtar is able to hold a mirror to the prevailing anti-Islamic sentiment in America. Hearing these caricatures from Amir himself makes them appear *less* like actual truths about Islam and more like internalized stereotypes. Through this role reversal technique, Akhtar not only brings an alternate cognitive experience to his audience but is also able to provide authenticity to the South Asian Muslim narrative. Amir's own defence of Islam might not even hold a candle to the fraught socio-political positionalities of South Asian Muslim identities in America.

However, the situation quickly shifts from the socio-political to the personal sphere, when Amir learns about various ways he has been betrayed professionally and romantically by his firm, Jory, Isaac, and finally, Emily. It is in this sphere where on confrontation from Amir, a shift is seen in Isaac's character as well. Amir, incensed at the betrayal of his wife, spits on Isaac, an evident mimicry of his mother's action from his childhood and a reference to that earlier flashback. Isaac's enraged words in response to Amir, "There's a reason they call you people

animals,” discard any pretense of civility (73). This altercation between Amir and Issac further casts doubt on his earlier defense of Islam, creating confusion about whether Isaac’s earlier defence of Islam was hypocrisy or whether he is now merely making use of Islamophobic insults to retaliate. Akhtar, through this volatile interaction, brings out the presumed “tribal identities” with the historical context of both his Muslim and the Jewish characters. In his article “Beware Dinner Talk on Identity and Islam,” Charles Isherwood aptly sums up the entire interaction at the dinner table:

They have all arrived at the same high plateau of worldly achievement and can agree on the important things, like the tastiness of the fennel and anchovy salad and the banana pudding from Magnolia Bakery. What they cannot agree on — and what will ultimately tear apart at least one of the relationships in the play — is who they really are and what they stand for, once the veneer of civilized achievement has been scraped away to reveal more atavistic urges.

The interaction at the dinner table brings about a dramatic volte-face of all identities as it transitions from Islam to the personal sphere. Multiple character shifts can be observed within all represented identities. Akhtar deliberately uses Amir, a South Asian Muslim, to point out the post-9/11 Islamophobic perception of Islam in America. Amir’s interpretation of Islam, as already explained, emerges from his self-orientalizing tendencies. Emily’s defense of Islam is rooted within her neo-oriental and romanticized approaches towards Islam as for her, “there’s so much beauty and wisdom in the Islamic tradition” (19). Both Emily and Amir are trapped in their own ways within their Oriental fantasies. Akhtar ironically utilizes Isaac’s character as the voice of reason against Amir’s attacks on Islam, which he then reverses through the personal conflicts of identities. Emily’s infidelity brings about Amir’s self-orientalised fantasy of tribal instincts,

which he himself associated with Islam. His final assault on Emily leaves her dumbfounded. The dynamic of their relationship was already a ticking time bomb. As Amir resorts to anger, Emily sees a glimpse of the repressed Oriental caricature that lurked within his self-loathing identity. In their article “On the Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism in Ayad Akhtar’s *Disgraced*,” Alyssa Syahmina Putri and Herlin Putri Indah Destari suggest that:

The conditions that prompt these acts of aggression to happen stemmed from the central relationship of Amir and Emily and the ever-shifting power dynamics between them. Looking back at the whole story from the beginning, it is Emily’s actions that propelled the first domino to fall. From the act of making the painting until her insistence to push Amir so that he would help the imam, Emily is being written as the antagonist in a subtle manner. This fact then makes Amir’s violent response towards her infidelity as a kind of justice being served. Ironically, justice is part of Emily’s reasoning for her White Saviour Complex, the very thing that turns her into the villain of the story (288)

The horrific act of Amir beating Emily is the second climax of the play. Here a clash of binaries takes place. The suppressed resentment of South Asian identities is unleashed at Emily, the play’s stand-in for the all-American.

In the last scene of the play, in the aftermath of that night’s violent outburst and the dissolution of their relationship, Amir’s anger has given way to self-acceptance. He no longer thinks he can be a privileged minority as he explains to Abe that he is now working on the case of Imam Fareed. Abe, now dressed in traditional Muslim attire, has come seeking his help as he is now being questioned by the FBI. Abe explains to Amir that he was at Starbucks with his friend Tariq where his friend’s flirtatious conversation with the barista somehow turned quite

inflammatory due to the skull caps they were wearing. Their Muslim identities were questioned, which eventually led the discussion towards Al-Qaeda. As the conversation became heated, the youth implied that America created Al-Qaeda and that they deserved what they got. They were soon arrested, held on suspicion, and questioned by the FBI. At the play's end, Abe is worried as to what he should do now and asks Amir what he would do if he were asked by the FBI to work against his community. Amir advises him that he needs to be careful and that he must realize that the world outside his house is not impartial. He tells Abe that in a situation like that, one should make clear that they are on the side of authorities, to which Abe says he is not on their side. Amir adds that if Abe does not take this matter seriously, he might end up getting deported. Amir goes on to explain that their families came to America to have a "better life," which could not be attained in Pakistan. Abe angrily points out that Amir's life is not better: he tells Amir that he is deluded and has forgotten his own self in his quest for assimilation, which will never come to fruition as he will never be a part of "them." Akhtar sums up Amir and Abe's dilemma and cultural and historical grievances and anger in their ensuing dialogue:

AMIR

So now you think running around with a *kufi* on your head, shooting your mouth off in Starbucks, or sitting in a mosque and bemoaning the plight of Muslims around the world is going to—

ABE

(interrupting)

It's disgusting. The one thing I can be sure about with you? You'll always turn on your own people. What do you think that gets you? You think it makes these people like you more when you do that? They don't. They just think you hate yourself. And they're right! You do!

I looked up to you. You have no idea—

AMIR

No. I know.

ABE

No! You have no idea what it did to me.

(Beat)

I mean if you can't make it with them...?

...For three hundred years they've been coming to our part of the world. Taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want to be like them. Look like them. Marry their women.

They disgraced us.

They disgraced us.

And then they pretend they don't understand the rage we've got? (84-85)

This scene shows that Amir's efforts at being a model minority are rendered useless by Abe, who feels hopeless for himself, since even someone like Amir, the very definition of the model minority, could not make it in America. Akhtar uses Abe's dejected attitude to signify that the

goal of becoming a model minority in America is a myth. Amir is a stand-in for the South Asian Muslim community in America. He is showcased by Akhtar to illustrate the vastness of the divide, and to show that rudimentary solutions like becoming a model minority may not bring about acceptance so long as there is a perpetual bias between both cultures. The play ends with an interaction between Emily and Amir as she visits to give Amir his portrait, inspired by Velazquez's portrait of Juan de Pareja. Emily tells him that she was "selfish," and her work was "naïve" and that she thus played a part in what happened to Amir and between them. Amir denies that and tries to apologize to her by stating that "I just want you to be proud of me. I want you to be proud you were with me" (87). Amir's reluctance in parting with Emily, and his wishful effort to re-establish their relationship's dynamic, shows how deeply ingrained the post-colonial psyche is. The curtain falls as Emily leaves, and Amir is left alone, gazing at his portrait drawn by Emily.

In conclusion, the narrative of Amir's disgrace addresses the wider implications of the model minority myth on South Asian Muslims in America. His character helps "bring to a critical dialogue many contemporary trends in the discourse of racialization of South Asian Muslims in post 9/11 U.S. society" (De 83). Akhtar jarringly explores the constant pressures associated with living in an Islamophobic society. The resultant anger of these communities is internalized, taking a form of self-hatred, in the case of Amir. The suspicion accorded to South Asian Muslims around the world is also explored through Amir's self-identifying and volunteering himself for security checks at the airports, and in the use of words "duplicitous," mentioned to and relayed by Jory from his father-like boss Mort. Any anger or resentment showed by these communities over differential treatment will also seem to prove that suspicions of their barbarism are right. This situation is not even helped by changing one's identity or

moulding oneself into a more desired model minority. Thus, Amir's accomplishments, hard-work, and posing as a Hindu did not work out for him.

Akhtar places all his South Asian Muslim characters—Amir, Abe and Imam Fareed—in the play at different social and cultural standings. Their fates, however, collide, and for each of them, suspicion, loss and disgrace are similar conclusions. South Asian communities are forced to repress any anger and play the role of model minorities, even as anguish eats them away internally. Amir, a successful American man who has earned his success through perseverance, believed he had earned his place in American society. But Akhtar reveals that in a climate of suspicion and fear, no one is free. That Amir is even considering the idea of a pro-bono case for Imam Fareed enlists him in the list of suspicious terrorist sympathizers. A similar fate is meted out to Imam Fareed, whose mere act of collecting money for the mosque makes him end up in jail on vague charges. The third South Asian Muslim identity is represented through young Abe and his friend Tariq, who represent the current generation: Tariq is a youth of South Asian Muslim origins, who cannot counter any allegations or even debate and present a different perspective about 9/11 without being interrogated afterwards by the FBI. Regardless of their statuses, these disgraced South Asian Muslims are chained to their religious identity in the eyes of society, but any anger that they express is harshly punished with a fall from grace, threats of deportation, and even captivity.

Akhtar does not present any ready-made solutions. What he conveys is that there are no such solutions. What he aims to bring about through this play is an acceptance of reality. As Jacques Fleury writes in "*Chain Letter to America: The One Thing You Can Do to End Racism*," quoting Akhtar's words, "sooner or later we've all got to confront the reality that we have got to come to understand who we are and what we are doing, and the extent to which we are guided or

manipulated by the forces that are beyond our control” (Fluery). Akhtar believes that the only way forward is constant engagement in a discourse on the parts of all participants. In an interview with “Fresh Air,” he states, “I’m a storyteller. I feel like the issue of discourse is an important one because there’s a lot of political and ideological discourse that goes around, and we relate to that on an intellectual level” (Akhtar). *Disgrace*, therefore, is an effort to unravel the myth of the model minority and to bring to light the importance of South Asian Muslim discourse in America.

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