

The Muslim American Encounter in Narratives of 9/11 and Its Aftermath:

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*

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This thesis examines fictional narratives of contemporary Muslim American experiences applying postcolonial literary theory. A survey on the subgenre of 9/11 fiction gives further context to the two texts under analysis. The first text is the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, in which a Pakistani-born Changez has found success in New York City's finance industry, but is disillusioned after the 9/11 attacks. Similarly, in Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* (2013), the successful attorney Amir descends into brutal violence after a catastrophic dinner party.

I argue that the two authors with Pakistani backgrounds engage with 9/11 discourse through the bold perspective of two Muslim Americans who are confronted with the difficult task of negotiating their dual identities in a post-9/11 society. Stereotypes of Islam and Muslim as presented by the Western media after the 9/11 terrorist attacks are not only harmful but also dangerous in a society that is preoccupied with condemning and vilifying its 'Other'.

Using Culture Talks as conceptualized by Mahmood Mamdani in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, I analyse the two primary sources' engagement with the topics of profiling, surveillance, violence, and radicalisation.

Key words: postcolonial literary theory, orientalism, 9/11, terrorism, Islamophobia, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Disgraced*

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1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on literary responses to the September 11th terror attacks and the effects in the social climate in post-9/11 America. The historical significance and consequences of the terrorist attacks are major, and the impact can still be felt in many areas of society. Following the atrocities on 9/11, many artists have since been inspired to take part in the discourse. According to Randall (2011, 144) “the impact of the event continues to be felt, in often disturbing and challenging ways, and will inevitably encourage more artists to reflect on its meaning”. In this thesis I discuss how two texts from two Pakistani writers rethink the questions of violence and identity in the post-9/11 era.

The texts analysed in this thesis are *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a novel by Mohsin Hamid and *Disgraced* (2013), a play by Ayad Akhtar. According to Saldivar (2013, 4), “[s]ince the turn of the millennium, and especially since 9/11, a new generation of writers, born for the most part in the post-civil rights era, has come to prominence”. I argue that both texts analysed in this thesis are examples of 9/11 narratives that challenge the stereotypes and prejudices on racial identity, specifically of Muslim men in America. In addition, the texts take a stance on the treacherous nature of the so-called ‘American dream’, through topics such as the global ‘War on Terror’ and the anti-Islamic rhetoric promoted by the Bush Administration. The aim of this paper is to shed light on contemporary issues in immigrant writing in the US by focusing on the effects of 9/11 in South Asian American experiences in America.

Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistani author whose texts are prototypical examples of global literature. According to Darda (2014, 108), scholars are increasingly interested in how “literary works endeavour to transcend national boundaries and imagine global community”. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can at first glance be easily mistaken for anti-American hostility due to its sensitive subject matter. However, many critics have praised it for its innovative narrative style and perspective. Like Hamid, Ayad Akhtar is a Pakistani writer undertaking the task of depicting Muslim experiences in post-9/11 America. Akhtar’s play *Disgraced* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013, capturing audiences with its depiction of the struggles Muslim Americans face in post-9/11 America.

The importance of this thesis lies in acknowledging the prevalent post-9/11 anti-Islamic sentiment and its pervasive consequences. According to Basu (2016, 84), “[i]n post-9/11

America, the media has been saturated by negative images of Arab and Muslim Americans”. Through postcolonial theory, I set to examine the otherness of Islam and the Muslim men portrayed in the texts. In the second chapter of this thesis I will introduce the theoretical background to my analysis as well as note on the corpus of 9/11 narratives in general. In chapter three I will focus on the analysis of Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in chapter four I will analyse Akhtar’s *Disgraced*. The final chapter will compare the texts in order to get a comprehensive look at some of the characteristics of 9/11 narratives written by South Asian Americans.

2 Background

In this chapter I will introduce the theoretical background of the analysis as well as introduces the genre and theories of 9/11 fiction. The theoretical background of this thesis emphasises postcolonial literary theory, specifically the concept of Otherness and the dichotomies that are used to construct a negative image of Muslim Americans. In section 2.2 I will introduce the relevant literature of 9/11 fiction studies, as well as establish a definition of the 9/11 genre, which will be used in the analysis chapters to locate both Hamid and Akhtar's texts in its sphere.

2.1 Theoretical Background

The frame of reference of this study is in postcolonial literary theory. I will examine the primary materials through concepts such as identity construction and otherness. This study uses ideas of Muslim American identity construction from Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (2004), which introduces a social theory that explores the cultural and political identities of Muslims as shaped by post-9/11 discussions in American society. This study aims to examine the ways in which both Hamid and Akhtar write about the Muslim American identity in post-9/11 America through Mamdani's concept of 'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim as well as the term 'Culture Talk'.

The premise of this study assumes that harmful generalisations about the Muslim population are born through Culture Talk and cause multi-directional violence. According to Mamdani ([2004] 2005, 17), "Culture Talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. Culture Talk after 9/11, for example, qualified and explained the practice of 'terrorism' as 'Islamic'". When Muslims are seen as antimodern, or resistant to modernity, it produces fear as well as police and military action (Mamdani [2004] 2005, 18–19). Anti-modern fundamentalists are seen as destructive, which is "taken as a proof that they have no appreciation for human life", and as a result, "[c]ulture is now said to be a matter of life and death" (Mamdani [2004] 2005, 19). According to Morey (2019, 271), some of the central implications of Orientalism that predominate discourse are, firstly, "the notion that Muslims' behavior is directly attributable to something in their religion and culture" and, secondly, the assumption of "the absolute difference between the individual West and the collectivist East" (Morey 2019, 273). The

latter leads to a situation where all Muslims are “held collectively accountable for acts of terror and required to repudiate them, whereas other groups are not” (ibid.). This study argues that assumptions about collective accountability have been detrimental to the identity negotiation tactics that Muslim American employ in the post-9/11 period.

In order to understand Muslims in contemporary America it is important to consider the nature of Islamophobia. Mutman (2019, 261) understands Islamophobia as a phantasmatic projection, a constructed fantasy “in which Muslims or Islam function as a major threat”. This is supported by Morey (2019, 273), who argues that “a particular reality is discursively constructed, which Muslims are then required to inhabit”. Negative affective statements and ideas that are projected onto Muslims are constructed through the perceived religious excess and backwardness of Islam (Mutman 2019, 261), and therefore “it is associated with violence” (Mutman 2019, 261–262). Islam is assigned the cultural markers of violence, oppression and barbarism and “[t]he culturalization of religion thus implies a *radical, non-negotiable cultural difference* because it refers to a culture that is the very opposite of the concept of culture” (Mutman 2019, 262; italics as in the original). In conclusion, “[i]ts persistence *as* culture (its backward and repressive nature via religious excess) is what makes it a threat to the civilized community of rational people” (ibid.). In my analysis I explore how these cultural markers have been affected and employed by 9/11 discourse and how the two texts mediate the boundaries of civilization.

Discourse around the good/bad Muslim distinction is largely constructed by Western media as follows: “good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent” (Mamdani [2004] 2005, 24). Therefore, Muslims are pitted against each other by the Western gaze. To distinguish between good and bad Muslims is to “cultivate the former and target the latter (Mamdani [2004] 2005, 253). According to Mamdani ([2004] 2005, 254), “[t]he danger of bringing notions of good and evil into politics cannot be underestimated”, continuing that “if the struggle against political enemies is defined as a struggle against evil, it will turn into a holy war” (ibid.). The War on Terror has deeply shaped the perception of Muslims: “The enemy in this war has been produced through both the ideological framings of the war and the diverse ‘counterterrorism’ activities that constitute the war” (Rastegar 2021, 5). In addition, “a more marginal discourse about ‘good’ Muslims has also been integral to War on Terror discourses and construction of what it means to be Muslim” (Rastegar 2021, 6). In this thesis I will demonstrate how Culture Talk and a good/bad dichotomy have shaped Muslim identities in narratives of 9/11 and its aftermath.

Binaries such as good/evil, civilized/barbaric, rational/irrational, and progressive/backward have been employed to justify the War on Terror and military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq (Khalid 2011, 15). These binaries are reminiscent of the colonising mission's efforts to bring civilization to the uncivilized: "The discourse of terrorism [. . .] couched in familiar orientalist metaphors, is another way of framing the anti-colonial other and legitimating the colonial self by contrast" (Boehmer and Morton [2009] 2010, 11). According to Khalid (2011, 15), "Orientalism as a form of critical analysis is key to understanding US War on Terror discourse, as it deals with the relationship between depictions by Westerners of non-Western subjects, and the material power relations that arise out of such depictions". As Holloway (2008, 4) puts it, "[t]he idea of war on terror was itself a representation of events, a rhetorical construction, a series of stories about 9/11 and about America's place in the world". As reported by Rastegar (2021, 6–7), media discourse about tolerating and sympathizing with Muslims is misleading:

In certain forms, these discourses function as alibis for U.S. war and violence, particularly by articulating a civilizing mission, where U.S. cultural or military involvement creates the possibility of the production of more 'good' Muslims. They more broadly function as a policing and disciplining discourse that casts Muslims as tolerable only if they exhibit particular characteristics.

According to Shirazi (2018, 24), in the post-9/11 era, "[t]he process of immigration has become inextricably interlocked with the issues of identity and security". This study finds it valuable to re-investigate the motives and consequences of the War on Terror, its roots in Orientalism and the cultural markers it utilizes to validate violence and military action.

2.2 Narratives of 9/11 and Its Aftermath

The corpus of 9/11 novels is large and continues to grow with time (Versluys 12, 2009). It can be said that it has developed its own literary canon. Some of the most famous novels of 9/11 include Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) among others. It is noteworthy that the immediate literary reaction to the attacks was predominantly through white male authors, which is reflected in the 'canon'. This might be related to the rise in general patriotism and outrage, which were the result of such large-scale trauma and difficult-to-comprehend violence. The result is that "writers have either ignored or failed to understand the terrorist 'character' and thus their novels have, perhaps unconsciously, re-enacted certain prevailing stereotypes" (Randall 2011, 136). According to

Alshetawi (2020, 178), this surge of 9/11 literature even promoted Islamophobia, though “[a]t the same time, a steady growth of what could be termed Arab American literature has occurred in both the United States and Britain to counter the surge of Islamophobia in these countries” (ibid.). This Arab-American literature is manifested through “[t]he need to identify and explain oneself” (Alqahtani 2018, 395), by Arab and Muslim Americans “who often finds themselves the subject of both curiosity and fear since 9/11” (ibid.). As Versluys (2009, 183) points out, with time, “the immediate shock has worn off and that, as a result, the concerns expressed will be less directly related to the experience of trauma”. Suspicious and distrustful attitudes towards Muslim Americans amplified the perceived necessity of government interference both at home and overseas.

This study examines how the suspicion cast on the Muslim population gave birth to a wave of counter-narratives, often written from the perspective of religious and ethnic minorities. According to Bieger, Saldívar and Voelz (2013, vii) “the field of ‘transnational American studies’ is growing with breathtaking rapidity, generating work on a wide range of cultural, political, and economic configurations that reach across national boundaries and change our views of what is situated within them”. Especially within the 9/11 fiction genre there has been a call for alternative perspectives to the terror attacks. It is more important than ever to focus on these perspectives since “the fictions of 9/11, rather than articulating literature’s potential engagement with questions of difference, otherness, and strangeness, have underscored such ethical concerns” (Dutt-Ballerstadt 2016, 115). I argue that Hamid and Akhtar take part in the writing of these counter-narratives.

The genre of 9/11-novels has further established itself through theories of Gray (2011), Randall (2011), Gauthier (2015), and Versluys (2009). These theorists have pointed to the inadequacies of language to represent the trauma of 9/11. Writers of 9/11 have explored transnational writing, through which the representation of trauma could be expressed. Transnational writing includes themes such as being caught between two cultures, reimagining geographical borders, and exploring the notion of home and belonging. According to Salaita (2004, 148), “[m]ore than anybody, Arab Americans experienced far-reaching socio-political implications following 9/11”. Salaita (2004, 149) goes on to say that “it can be said that no single event shaped the destiny of Arab Americans more than 9/11”. Fadda-Conrey’s (2014, 139) theory of Arab and Muslim representation post-9/11 critiques the public rhetoric that “separates the American from the un-American, the patriotic from the unpatriotic, with Arab and Muslim subjectivities being squarely cast in the latter category”.

The struggle of Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 period has to do with the persistent us-versus-them binary, that casts Arab and Muslims Americans as the figure of the Other.

It is notable, that the US national rhetoric post-9/11 deliberately casts the US as an innocent victim, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks as the only catastrophe of unimaginable violence in modern history. However, theorists of transnational writing have underlined the harmful and misleading nature of this rhetoric. According to Fadda-Conrey (2014, 157), the attacks can be viewed “through a transnational lens”, and that it allows writers to “connect the attacks of 9/11 to Arab-Americans’ direct or indirect experiences of war and conflict in the Arab world” (ibid.). The terrorist attacks are just a part of a “larger rubric of conflict and loss that transcends US national boundaries” (Fadda-Conrey 2014, 157). This depiction of 9/11 as “part of a chain of violence to which people across the globe are repeatedly subjected” (ibid.), is an important notion that Arab and Muslim American transnational writers can highlight, and through which they explore Arab American identity in the post-9/11 America. The deceptive nature of US public rhetoric post-9/11 goes together with the Good/Bad Muslim theory. In order to come across as a ‘good’ Muslim, Arab and Muslim Americans had to quickly denounce the terrorist attacks and join the American patriotic rhetoric, although that same rhetoric “pitted the two parts of their hyphenated identities against each other” and “[t]hey could not adequately grieve as Americans since their Arab racial and religious attributes and affiliations connected them with what quickly and simplistically became synonymous with evil or, simply, anti-American” (Fadda-Conrey 2014, 159). This is in accordance with Mamdani’s idea of collective accountability and its consequences on the Muslim population.

It is notable that while the subgenre has garnered a lot of attention from scholars, the term ‘9/11 novel’ enjoys some ambiguity. In an article on the topic, Eikonsalo (2024, 137) claims that “critics have applied the label 9/11 too liberally to contemporary fiction”. Eikonsalo (2024, 139) goes on to asks the question “What do we mean by saying that a novel is *about* 9/11?” (italics as in the original). While the answer is mostly found in the temporal and spatial setting of the novel, the thematic and symbolic relevance of the terrorist attacks too offer textual evidence of the subgenre (ibid.). Some novels engage with the terrorist attacks in a superficial manner, but even then “they do still seem to say something about 9/11” (Eikonsalo 2024, 140). Eikonsalo (2024, 148) gives a clear definition:

I suggest to define the 9/11 novel as a group of works written after the terrorist attacks which address the 9/11 attacks or their consequences implicitly or

explicitly in a thematically significant manner through tropes, themes, plot elements, symbols, and character types that are closely related to the discussions that surround 9/11 and which can be commonly found in the works throughout this subgenre and rarely in other novels.

It is therefore notable that novels may be deemed to belong to this subgenre “as long as they address the 9/11 attacks or their consequences in a thematically significant manner” (ibid.).

As both texts discussed in this thesis engage with the latter, it is important to include that here consequences are referred to as the “different political, social, and discursive changes after the 9/11 attacks” (148). Likewise, Holloway (2008, 108) recognizes 9/11 novels that address “contemporary anxieties about state activity, and about the state’s jeopardising of the safety of its citizens”. In addition, Eikonsalo points out that the distinction between 9/11 novels and post-9/11 novels, as suggested by some researchers, “does not appear justified” (Eikonsalo 2024, 149). As a result, I will continue to refer to the texts discussed in this thesis as 9/11 fiction.

Eikonsalo (2024, 138) highlights the importance of “theoretical consideration of what it in fact means when we say that a novel is about 9/11”. Therefore, in the following chapters I will discuss how the chosen texts relate to the 9/11 subgenre by pointing to textual and thematic evidence as well as referring to Eikonsalo to demonstrate why both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* can be labelled as 9/11 fiction. As the theoretical background demonstrates, issues of identity and safety of Muslim Americans has been amplified by 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. The following analysis on Hamid and Akhtar’s texts sheds light on contemporary concerns of capitalist globalisation, the targeting of minority identities and 21st century Orientalist rhetoric. In the next chapter I analyse how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* questions the cultural markers employed by a global War on Terror, after which an analysis on *Disgraced* will unveil a more thorough look into the lives of Muslims living in post-9/11 America in chapter 4.

3 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) by Mohsin Hamid is a 9/11 novel which follows Changez, a Pakistani immigrant in American and Princeton graduate, who has returned to Lahore, Pakistan, after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The novel seems initially to be about Changez's radicalisation, but further study reveals the complexities of the narrative, and the Muslim American identity in post-9/11 America. Furthermore, the deployment of an unreliable and morally questionable protagonist brings about an interesting discourse on the post-9/11 national narrative of innocence and national solidarity. Considering that in the immediate aftermath it was "difficult at the time even for writers not to dichotomize the events, that is, not to fixate understandable anger on a well-defined enemy" (Versluys 2009, 151), most authors opted to depict narratives that were sympathetic to the victims and condemned the 'enemy'. As Donnelly (2019, 3) points out, "[a]t the point of its publication in 2007, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* spoke directly to post-9/11 America using voices that had been excluded from mainstream discourse". Writing a global narrative of personal conflict, Hamid critically engages with dominant War on Terror discourses. Some critics have found it easy to label the novel as 'Anti-American' (Liao 2012, 153). However, looking further into the novel will reveal reflections on the "ambivalence of identity", which makes the previously mentioned critique over-simplifying (ibid.). This chapter analyses *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a novel of 9/11 and its aftermath through an investigation to its portrayal of the 'fundamentals' of capitalist globalization.

Another unique characteristic in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (henceforth abbreviated as *TRF*) is the first-person viewpoint of the protagonist, Changez, who is speaking to an unnamed American listener. The dynamic is set in the first sentences of the novel: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (*TRF*, 1). The conversation in the beginning of the novel takes place in Lahore, where Changez shows hospitality to this visiting American. However, instead of a conversation the novel consists mostly of Changez's monologue. The conversation in Lahore is the frame story, which introduces us to the framed story, Changez's immigrant past in the US, which he recounts to his listener. The frame story takes place approximately three years after the framed story. Changez's relationship to his host country is complex. Until 9/11 his life in America is prosperous; he attends high-ranking schools and has a successful career in finance in New York. However, his 'American dream' is broken

after 9/11 due to personal and political reasons. At the core of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is Changez's disillusionment with American capitalism and his increasing contempt with its fundamentals.

In this chapter I examine the ways in which *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an attempt at "fully engaged 9/11 representation" (Randall 2011, 136). Changez "possesses the experiences of both the Western and the Eastern world" (Gasztold 2015, 17), and I argue that through Changez, Hamid rethinks the concept of violence and fundamentalism, thus revealing the complexities of Muslim American identity. In section 3.1 I take a further look into the major themes and plotlines of the text. In section 3.2 I discuss issues of identity in Hamid's text. The chapter concludes in section 3.3 where I discuss some of the characteristics that make *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a part of the corpus of 9/11 fiction.

3.1 'Armor of Denial': A Global Narrative of Disillusionment

Having arrived in America as an international student, Changez recounts how "we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first" (*TRF*, 5). It is established in this moment that his 'joining' to American society has either failed or ended. In addition, his willingness to adapt into Western society seems to have been short-lived. Acquiring an internship at an esteemed valuation firm, Underwood Samson & Company, Changez begins his successful career in finance. Soon after, he meets Erica, "a lioness: strong, sleek, and invariably surrounded by her pride" (*TRF*, 24), who he begins a relationship with. This love story has been read "as an allegory of the relationship between America and Europe" (Hartnell 2010, 337), an allegory that I discuss further in section 5.1.

Changez's work takes him to Manila, Philippines, to value a music business. He recounts a moment of disorientation, when encountering "the driver of a jeepney" with "an undisguised hostility in his expression" (*TRF*, 76). According to Darda (2012, 112), the recognition of the jeepney has historical significance, revealing the long history of imperial rule in the Philippines: "Jeepneys, a portmanteau combining 'jeep' with 'jitney', are public utility vehicles built from American jeeps that were left in the Philippines after World War II". This is the first of several encounters Changez has with the evidence of American colonialism. Changez is confused by the angry stare, later concluding that "he and I shared a sort of Third World sensibility" (*TRF*, 77). Aligning himself with the Third World reveals something about his failure to truly assimilate to Western society and continuing to feel out of place despite his

self-deceptive pursuit to appear American. His confliction becomes deeper, when a day before he is meant to return to New York City, he turns on the television and sees “what I first took to be a film [. . .] I realized that it was not fiction but news” (*TRF*, 82). He is indeed watching the towers of World Trade Center collapse, but instead of horror, he feels pleasure: “And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (*TRF*, 83, italics as in the original). I argue that Changez’s reaction is a reflection of his complex dual identity, his reluctance to completely assimilate to his host country, which has been exercising its economic, colonial and military power on those that Changez sees as his own tribe.

Upon returning to a New York in mourning, Changez meets Erica, for whom “[t]he destruction of the World Trade Center [. . .] churned up old thoughts” (*TRF*, 94) of her dead ex-lover Chris. Changez himself, in his “armor of denial” (*TRF*, 108), is tasked with valuing a cable operator in New Jersey. He recalls that in late October 2001, “something happened that upset my equanimity” (*TRF*, 112). This is the first time that the War on Terror is explicitly discussed:

I chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post. My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury. (*TRF*, 113–114).

Though he wishes to forget ever seeing the newscast, Changez is “no longer capable of so thorough a self-deception” (*TRF*, 114). I argue that this is the beginning of his disillusionment. He does, however, decide that there is nothing he can do, since “these world events were playing out on a stage of no relevance to my personal life” (*ibid.*). His relationship with Erica slowly deteriorates as she declines into “a powerful *nostalgia*” (*TRF*, 129, italics as in the original). That winter, Changez completes the evaluation of the cable company and is extensively awarded by Underwood Samson for his efforts. He describes being unable to feel happy about it, since “earlier that week armed men had assaulted the Indian parliament, and instead of celebrating my good fortune, I was confronting the possibility that soon my country could be at war” (*TRF*, 138). I argue that throughout the novel Hamid continues to build a global narrative through these insights into the consequences of US foreign policy after 9/11, weaved into a personal narrative of immigrant identity negotiation.

In December, Changez returns to Lahore, a city preparing for war. He recalls feeling worried and powerless. His return to the US makes him feel like a traitor: “What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances? And what was I abandoning them for? A well-paying job and a woman whom I longed for but who refused even to see me?” (*TRF*, 145). He returns to New York feeling deeply angry and wearing a two-week-old beard, not being able to recall if it was as a “form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind” (*TRF*, 148). On his return, Changez learns that Erica has been admitted to a mental institution. At work, he is given a new project in Valparaiso, Chile, where he is to value a book publisher. The chief of the company, Juan-Bautista, reminds Changez of his grandfather and he recalls liking him at once. Though Juan-Bautista is not pleased to have him there, he can sense that Changez’s “blindness were coming off” (*TRF*, 165), a direct reference to his disillusionment. A critical evaluation is made: “[i]n this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present” (*ibid.*). I argue that these reported values construct the core of productive identity negotiation, setting Changez on the path of achieving a more stable identity representation.

Changez now feels indifference towards his work and is preoccupied with thought of home, where the situation with India “continued to be precarious” (*TRF*, 169). He recalls being “on the threshold of great change” (*TRF*, 170). That threshold is crossed during a lunch with Juan-Bautista, who tells him of janissaries, “Christian boys [. . .] captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army [. . .] The janissaries were always taken in childhood. It would have been far more difficult to devote themselves to their adopted empire, you see, if they had memories they could not forget” (*TRF*, 172). This conversation drives Changez into a “deep bout of introspection” (*TRF*, 173), the result of which is simple: “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with kinship to mine” (*ibid.*). This is the ultimate recognition that brings Changez’s disillusionment to its climax: “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” (*ibid.*). He is determined to resign from his job, which he knows will ultimately lead to his US visa expiring. During his final days in New York, Changez learns that Erica has disappeared from the clinic, turning him into an “incoherent and emotional madman” (*TRF*, 189). Returning to Pakistan, he feels “emotionally

entwined with Erica”, reflecting that such relationships change something in one’s constitution fundamentally: “Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us” (*TRF*, 197). Not only has the relationship with Erica changed him fundamentally, but also his relationship with his former host country. I argue that Changez is now ready to enter the final phase of his identity negotiations.

The final part of the narrative is about how, following his return to Pakistan, Changez has dedicated himself to ‘stopping America’ (*TRF*, 191). The frame story takes place approximately three years since his departure from the US. Changez recalls how during the summer of his return “[t]he threat of war with India reached its highest point” (*TRF*, 201), and how the following September, “negotiations began to make progress” (*TRF*, 202), however, “six months later the invasion of Iraq would be under way” (*ibid.*). The War on Terror is now fully in motion, creating a massive global impact. Changez acquires a job as a university lecturer and makes it his “mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine” (*TRF*, 203) by participating in “demonstrations that the foreign press would later [. . .] come to label anti-American” (*ibid.*). Changez becomes a mentor for students, “bright, idealistic scholars possessed with both civility and ambition” (*TRF*, 205), claiming himself to be “a believer in nonviolence” (*TRF*, 206). After a student of his is found to be planning an assassination of an American agent and is “whisked away to a secret detention facility, no doubt” (*ibid.*), Changez gives a controversial statement to an international news network. Later he is warned that “America might react [. . .] by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse” (*TRF* 207–208). This warning rings true, since the nameless American is found behaving increasingly suspiciously in Changez’s presence. Changez’s possible radicalisation is discussed further in section 5.2.

3.2 Identity Construction in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Hamid’s novel is a testament to the treacherous nature of the so called ‘American dream’. Throughout the novel, Changez’s struggles as an immigrant in America are emphasised in relation to his drive for success. It seems like he is set to fail no matter what due to his background as a South Asian American. Changez’s story can be seen as a search for “a stable core self” (*TRF*, 168). This search is established “through an attempt to communicate with (what can only be conceived of in terms of) the cultural Other” (Rennhak 2016,73). I argue that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* identity is negotiated through the precarious dichotomies of good/bad, barbaric/civilized and us/them. In order to successfully establish a

stable core self, Changez needs to evaluate the fundamentals he is being offered by American capitalism and recognize how they are an antithesis of his authentic self.

Before 9/11 Changez feels powerful and privileged with his identity as a New Yorker with a degree from Princeton and a high-paying job at an esteemed business in finance. In the beginning of the novel, Changez's ideology is centred around the greedy nature of the finance world and global capitalism. According to Randall (2011, 138), "[i]ncreasingly, Changez comes to see these economic 'fundamentals' as being crucial components of merciless American capitalism. In effect, Changez adopts the persona, reluctantly, of the American fundamentalist". Still, "[h]e is reminded that although he has been rewarded for his dedication [. . .] he will always remain an outsider" (ibid.). His distaste for some of the attitudes in the privileged financial circles is obvious when he observes the behaviour of his colleagues. Throughout the novel, Changez's becomes a witness to the consequences of his fundamentalism: "Thus Hamid attempts, with no small degree of irony, to turn the meaning of 'fundamentalist' around" (ibid.).

Throughout the narrative, Changez negotiates with his dual identity as a Pakistani immigrant and the executor of American economic fundamentals. According to Maira (2009, 634), "'[g]ood citizenship' is performed by Muslim American individuals and organizations in a variety of ways, testifying loyalty to the nation and asserting belief in its democratic ideals" thus validating "the humanitarian premise of U.S. invasions that presumably liberate oppressed peoples around the world". I argue that in the first half of the narrative Changez performs good citizenship by engaging in global capitalism in his duties at Underwood Samson, intentionally ignoring any conflicting loyalties. Morey (2011, 238) argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* engages in the "deterritorialization of literature which forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, 'Them and Us' and so on – those categories continuously insisted upon in 'war on terror' discourse". I concede, adding that the good/bad Muslim discourse is an added dimension of this deterritorialization.

'Bad' Muslim citizenship is performed in the latter part of the narrative, when Changez's 'anti-American' action is described. In an ironic twist, the discrimination and surveillance that the US government performed in order to make people conform to their society, has instead angered and positively radicalized its target. According to Singh (2012, 33), "[t]he redemption of the character, if any, is built on instability". My finding is that Hamid portrays a reality

where one has had to choose between a false and a true self. The former is represented by the conquered, subjected immigrant, the latter by a postcolonial, empowered subject. I do not, however, believe that the result is instability. I argue that *The Reluctant Fundamentalism* engages with the ways in which the War on Terror has had implications on the political, religious and ethnic identities of Muslim American citizens.

At the very end of the novel there is a revelation that Changez had a malignant motive when he and the American listener are leaving a restaurant, seemingly being pursued by men who “are rather close, and yes, the expression on their face of that one – what a coincidence; it is our waiter; he has offered me a nod of recognition – is rather grim” (*TRF*, 208). In addition, there seems to be a revelation of identities: “It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins” (*TRF*, 208–209). Here Hamid is explicitly questioning and critiquing the essence of all harmful stereotypes. The American guest is suggested to be an undercover assassin, and this is confirmed by the final sentences of the novel, when Changez ironically refers to a gun hidden in the jacket of the American ‘assassin’: “But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of the business cards” (*TRF*, 209). The ending of the novel is somewhat ambiguous, since the subsequent action is not revealed, but it either way concludes Changez’s investigative journey to his core identity. He seems calm, content with his place in a world where he could have pursued financial success through capitalist fundamentalism but chose not to.

3.3 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a post-9/11 Novel

The Reluctant Fundamentalist undeniably addresses the thematic and symbolic impact of 9/11 through the tropes, themes and character types “that are closely related to the discussions that surround 9/11 and which can be commonly found in the works throughout this subgenre and rarely in other novels” (Eikonsalo 2024, 148). The progression of the ‘War on Terror’ seems to be at first a minor subplot in the narrative of the novel, which reflects Changez’s blindness and self-deception. Though he has started to experience some of the changes of post-9/11 discourse and paranoia, in the immediate aftermath he still seems to believe in the American dream. Changez describes how the city was in mourning after the attacks, building “shrines to the dead” (*TRF*, 90) and invading its streets with the American flag:

They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America* [. . .] *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath*. Gazing up at the soaring towers of the city, I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle. (ibid; italics as in the original)

The days and weeks following 9/11 are described as if “America was gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage” (*TRF*, 106) and that “the mighty host I had expected of your country was duly raised and dispatched” (ibid.). Changez, however, is preoccupied with Erica who “[like so many others in the city after the attacks [...] appeared deeply anxious” (*TRF*, 94). During the span of the narrative, the War on Terror and its various global consequences take a bigger role in Changez’s disillusionment and eventual radicalisation.

The visuality of the 9/11 attacks are of undeniable importance to the 9/11 subgenre. According to Brodzinski ([2009] 2010, 372), “September 11 was primarily a visual event with particular images being endlessly circulated throughout the media”. Leggatt (2016, 2010) agrees, stating that “[t]here is no doubt that 9/11 was a mediated event. It was an event that for most was experienced entirely through the media”. Like so many people that day, Changez saw the towers fall on the television, being “caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that somebody had so visibly brought America to her knees” (*TRF*, 83, italics as in the original). Additionally, visuality of the aftermath of 9/11 is recurrently brought up in the narrative. In October 2001, Changez “had been avoiding the evening news, preferring not to watch the partisan and sports-event-like coverage” (*TRF*, 113) of the bombing in Afghanistan, which “reminded [him] of the film *Terminator*” (ibid.) due to “the mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty-first-century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below” (ibid.). Hamid also evokes a visual element in the nostalgic patriotism that became prevalent in American public rhetoric following the attacks, calling it a ‘dangerous nostalgia’: “Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War; I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Technicolor but in grainy black and white” (*TRF*, 131). I argue that the employment of such visuality is not only a powerful but realistic tactic to manifest a picture of post-9/11 public and political spirit.

The treatment Changez faces at his workplace, the airport and on the subway is also a powerful testimony of the treatment people faced during post-9/11 paranoia. After 9/11, “[f]ear was evident across the United States, often stoked by the rhetoric and policies of the Bush administration, news reports, and other cultural productions that reminded the public of

an ever-present, unresolved, and often-mysterious threat” (Alsultany 2012, 6). Following Changez’s disaffection with America, he describes how “[a]ffronts were everywhere; the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history —not just from the government, but from the media and supposedly critical journalists as well — provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger” (*TRF*, 190). According to Alqahtani (2018, 397), “[t]he rhetoric of ‘the nation in danger,’ perpetuated in TV news and media, has turned the stereotypes into accepted truths, legitimized racist practices against Arabs and Muslims, and categorized them as the contemporary enemy”. A message was being communicated everywhere you looked, and its target was a perceived terrorist enemy.

Changez recounts how before 9/11 “my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and – most of all – by my companions” (*TRF*, 82). Following the attacks, like so many Muslim Americans after 9/11, Changez becomes a target of profiling and surveillance. Returning from Manila to New York, he describes feeling “uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion” (*TRF*, 85). The consequences of the targeting of Muslim individuals in America is aptly described in the novel: “Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse” (*TRF*, 107). According to Field (2017, 51), “[a]fter 9/11, policies were put into place by American government targeting Muslims, including surveillance, detention, and racial profiling”. Rastegar (2021, 5) continues, stating that “the government has targeted Muslims, and many non-Muslim Arabs, with the threat and reality of extensive surveillance, raids into homes and businesses, entrapment, indefinite detentions, and mass deportation”. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an exceptional novel of the 9/11 genre in that it does not only address the global War on Terror and its international consequences, but also the lived experiences of Muslim Americans that became the target of a national discrimination operation masked by a discourse of security and ‘counterterrorism’.

The temporal and spatial settings of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are important indicators of the 9/11 genre. Not only does the narrative take place in New York City, but it also covers the periods before and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The thematic relevance of the terrorist attacks in Hamid’s narrative is undeniable. What has been debated is the moral standing that the novel represents. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has gained criticism since its publication in 2007 — mainly in relation to the novel’s alleged anti-American sentiment. Jones and Smith (2010, 946), are worried that novelists such as Hamid are “helping to write the West into a

state of denial or bewildered moral collapse”. Arguing that the “disgust with urban secular attachments” (Jones and Smith 2010, 939) in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “leads to a radical questioning of the liberal-democratic response to *jihadism* and a somewhat perverse empathy with terrorist motivation” (Jones and Smith 2010, 940, italics as in the original). Darda (2014, 108), however, argues that the novel “challenges the logic of war on terror in the interest of not anti-American hostility but of international solidarity” (Darda 2014, 108). Interrogating the US’s role in international violence is part of the post-9/11 writing that aims to “shift the focus from the 9/11 events themselves to their causes and consequences” (Liao 2012, 155). According to Conte (2020, 40), “[p]olitical affect is a powerful feature of the post-9/11 novel, though it should not be confused with political agency”, although proceeding to argue that “no novel can compel political agency; to resist, which is to make oneself vulnerable to assault in body and social being, required the instigation of political affect”.

As previously discussed, there is a lack of 9/11 narratives that venture outside the white American perspective. According to Randall (2011, 137), “Hamid’s novel is one of the first attempts to reconfigure the attacks through the eyes of a non-Westerner whose thoughts and feelings about 9/11 are strikingly ambiguous and finally ambivalent”. The novel shows how 9/11 affected not only New Yorkers and US citizens but also the immigrants who were trying to build a genuinely good life in America. The narrative shows compassion to the Muslim Americans who struggle with questions of identity and belonging following the terrorist attacks. Hamid’s novel goes against the American patriotism that many 9/11 novels before it have promoted, but regardless I argue that it does condemn the terror attacks. According to Leggatt (2016, 208), the ‘9/11 myth’ refers to the understanding of the terrorist attacks as the moment that everything changed: “9/11 fiction [...] has not only proclaimed 9/11 as an event productive of change, but even more as an event that changed everything, that has, in effect, reordered the world. And yet, such a response is both disproportionate and restrictive of the resulting post-9/11 discourse”. I argue that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez becomes increasingly aware of the fact that “terrorism, fear, US imperialism, radical nationalism, religious fundamentalism, random acts of violence, restriction of liberty: none of these concepts that have been used to define the post-9/11 era are new” (Leggatt 2016, 209), and that is what, most of all, makes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a counter-narrative of 9/11 fiction.

This section concludes the chapter on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Themes of radicalisation, violence and intercultural relationships are further discussed in chapter 4,

where the two primary texts of this thesis are contrasted and compared. In the next chapter, I discuss in detail Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*.

4 *Disgraced*

Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* (2013) won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013 and was the most staged play of the 2015–2016 season in the US (Field 2017, 49). Set in 2011, the play depicts the ramification of the September 11, 2001 attacks for Arab and Muslim Americans in the decade following it. Like in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the main protagonist of *Disgraced* is a man with South Asian heritage, Amir Kapoor. Amir's parents are Pakistani Muslim immigrants, but Amir himself was born in the United States. He has abandoned the practise of Islam to assimilate to the American population. Like Changez, Amir too has a successful career in New York, but instead of finance he practises law. Central themes in the play have to do with the concealment of Muslim identity that both Amir and his nephew, Abe, take part in. This chapter analyses *Disgraced* as a play about 9/11 and its aftermath through a dissection of the Orientalist stereotypes it portrays and critiques.

In this chapter I argue that Akhtar's intention is to show the ways in which our perceptions of race, ethnicity and religion are affected by the stereotypes and prejudices offered to us from the outside world. In section 4.1 I introduce the major plotlines and characters of the play. In section 4.2 I will further discuss themes of Muslim identity construction in *Disgraced*, after which I will reflect on the text's thematical significance and place in the 9/11 fiction subgenre in section 4.3.

4.1 'They Disgraced Us': A Narrative of Concealed Identities

The play is constructed of four scenes spanning one year. All scenes are set in the main couple's living room. The play opens with a scene where Amir is posing for his wife Emily's painting in their home, "[a] spacious apartment on New York's Upper East Side" (Akhtar [2013] 2021, 2; henceforth referred to as *Disgraced*). The painting is inspired by Velazquez's *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*, which to Amir is "a little fucked-up" (*Disgraced*, 7) since Juan de Pareja was Velazquez's slave. The two get into a small tiff about whether Juan de Pareja was a slave or an assistant, setting up the tense dynamic in Amir and Emily's relationship that underlies the rest of the play.

The first scene ends with a visit from Amir's nephew, Abe, who has come to his attorney uncle to convince him to take on a case of Imam Fareed, who was convicted of allegedly "raising money for terrorists" (*Disgraced*, 60). Abe tells Amir how the Imam would like to be represented by a Muslim: "He'd just be more comfortable if there was a Muslim on the case"

(*Disgraced*, 12). Amir's response is the first time we see his distaste for Islam: "[H]e might not feel the same if he knew how I really felt about his religion" (*Disgraced*, 12). He tells an anecdote about how his mother taught him that Jews were evil: "God hated them more than other people" (*Disgraced*, 13). This is also the first time that Emily is seen defending the Islamic tradition: "There is so much beauty and wisdom in the Islamic tradition, Amir" (*Disgraced*, 16). The back-and-forth between Emily and Amir on the topic of Islam is an overarching theme in the play and will be repeated later.

The second scene takes place two weeks later and opens with Emily reading a statement that Amir has made about the Imam's case in *The New York Times*. Perhaps because of Abu and Emily's persistence, Amir has attended a hearing on the case and given a statement in the Imam's support. The reporter, however, has made it seem like Amir is one of Imam Fareed's attorneys, going as far as mentioning his place of work: "Amir Kapoor of Leibowitz, Bernstein, Harris supported the Imam" (*Disgraced*, 18). Amir is not happy, saying "I think it reads very clearly that I was supporting his defiant tone. That I was supporting him being defiant" (*Disgraced*, 19). In truth, Amir is afraid his true identity will be revealed to the public and his employers, saying "[t]hey'll know the name isn't Muslim" (*Disgraced*, 19) and "[w]hy did they have to mention the film?" (*ibid.*).

The scene continues with a visit from Isaac, who is described as "forty, white, smart, attractive. A curator at the Whitney" (*Disgraced*, 22). Isaac and Emily have a conversation about her work, which Isaac is considering adding to an upcoming show. It becomes clear that Emily has been trying to convince Isaac of her inclination to Islamic art. Isaac's response says a lot about prevailing views on cultural appropriation: "You know you're going to be accused of... (*Off Emily's silence.*) Orientalism... I mean, hell. You've even got the brown husband" (*Disgraced*, 25, italics and typography as in the original). It seems, however, that after seeing the painting of Amir as inspired by Velazquez and hearing Emily defend Islamic tradition, Isaac is inclined to adjust his own stance.

The third scene takes place three months after the first two. The play comes to its climax in a dinner party with Emily, Amir, Isaac and Jory, who is Isaac's wife as well as Amir's colleague. She is described as "*mid- to late thirties, African American, commanding, forthright, intelligent. Almost masculine*" (*Disgraced*, 30; italics as in the original). Earlier that day, Amir has been questioned on his ethnicity by two colleagues. It is revealed that Amir has told his employers that his parents were born in India instead of Pakistan. In addition,

when he changed his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor, he also changed his social security number, saying “Steven must have been digging around. He has it in for me. I knew I never should have gone to that hearing” (*Disgraced*, 29). It seems Amir’s worries about his position in the company being jeopardized by his statement about the Imam has come true.

The dinner party itself therefore starts on shaky grounds, as Amir is already in a highly agitated state. Isaac has come bearing good news to Emily, whose art has been accepted in the upcoming show. The conversation moves to Emily’s painting of Amir, and Isaac makes a comment on Amir’s appearance: “So there you are, in your six-hundred-dollar Charvet shirt, like Velazquez’s brilliant apprentice-slave in his lace collar, adorned in the splendour of the world you’re now so clearly a part of” (*Disgraced*, 38). Amir’s distaste for anything that reminds him of Islam is made clear once again when Emily says: “We both know why you like the landscapes. [...] Because they have nothing to do with Islam” (*Disgraced*, 39). The conversation spirals from here to airport security and the jihad. It seems that Amir and Jory are on one side while Emily and Isaac are taking the opposite stance. The squabble turns darker when Amir brings up wife-beating as it is described in the Quran. Emily has her response ready: “The usual translation is debatable” (*Disgraced*, 50). Amir’s response reveals his thoughts on Emily’s desperate approach: “Only for the people who are trying to make Islam look all warm and fuzzy” (*ibid.*).

The heated discussion continues to a discussion on 9/11, and Amir admits to feeling pride about the attacks: “[W]e were finally winning” (*Disgraced*, 55). He continues by pointing to Isaac’s Jewish background, saying “I’m sure it’s not that different than how you feel about Israel sometimes” (*ibid.*). Isaac does take this kindly and the conversation is once again taking a turn into generalisations about the two men and their differing but at the same time parallel ethnicities. Amir’s rage arrives at its peak when he finds out that Jory was made partner in the company over him even though he has “been there twice as long as she has” (*Disgraced*, 60). We are made to understand that Amir’s statement about the Imam is the reason for this decision. After finding out, Jory and Amir walk in on Isaac and Emily kissing as we find out that they have been having an affair. Isaac and Jory leave and Emily is trying to apologize to Amir when he punches her: “*All at once, Amir hits Emily in the face. A vicious blow*” (*Disgraced*, 66; italics and emphases as in the original). The scenes end with Abe entering the apartment and seeing a beat-up Emily.

The fourth and final scene takes place six months later and opens to Amir packing up the apartment. Abe and Emily arrive, with the former's appearance changed from the beginning of the play: "**Abe** is wearing a Muslim skullcap. And his wardrobe is muted. Unlike the vibrant colours of the first scene" (*Disgraced*, 67; italics and emphasis as in the original). There is also a change in his demeanour, as he retails how he was questioned by the FBI after a barista at Starbucks hears his friend Tariq say that "this country deserved what it got and what it was going to get" (*Disgraced*, 69). Amir reveals his disillusionment on America in his response: "When you step outside your parents' house, you need to understand that it's not a neutral world out there. Not right now. Not for you" (*Disgraced*, 71). I would argue that as much as these words are directed to Abe, they apply to his uncle Amir alike, though he is still reluctant to admit it. Abe in turn reveals something about Amir: "You'll always turn on your own people. You think it makes these people like you more when you do that?" (*Disgraced*, 73). Abe insists on his views, adding that "[f]or three hundred years they've been 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" (*Disgraced*, 74). The play closes with Amir's final apology to Emily, who is leaving him while admitting that she had a part in their fallout: "My work... It made me blind" (*Disgraced*, 76). The play closes with Amir standing in the empty apartment gazing searchingly at "Study after Velazquez's Moor" (*Disgraced*, 37).

The other central character of the play is Amir's wife Emily who is a white American woman. Emily's fate in the play is one of tragedy. In the third scene of the play, which can be considered the play's climax, Amir beats her up. Violence in *Disgraced* is further discussed in section 5.3. In the final scene of the play, we see that Emily has divorced Amir and that he has lost his job at the law firm. The consequences of Amir's violence reach his nephew as well. Abe decides to return to the ways of fundamentalist Islam, and he becomes a target to the FBI. According to Field (2017, 67), "[g]iven the similarities drawn between Amir and his nephew, it seems clear that Akhtar wants us to realize how deeply the younger generation may be influenced by the negative experiences of older role models". Amir and his nephew's differing tactics of participating in identity politics is discussed in the following section.

4.2 Identity Construction in *Disgraced*

Evidently, the primary issues of identity in *Disgraced* has to do with Amir's reluctance to embrace his Muslim identity. His hesitancy goes so far as to deceiving his employers of his background as a Muslim man. I argue that this in turn participates in his downfall since upon

finding this out the employers deny him partnership in the company, which had been his goal for a long time. Some of the practical concealments that Amir makes is the change of surname from Abdullah to Kapoor.

In the third scene the conversation seems to push Amir to the edge, where he finally seems to admit to his conflicting identities, when he admits to ‘feeling pride’ (*Disgraced*, 54) on September 11. This pride he talks about is roused by seeing “[t]hat we were finally winning” (*Disgraced*, 55; emphasis added), seeing America finally being defeated. In addition, to validate this reaction to the terrorist attack, he suggests that Isaac, who is Jewish, feels pride when Israel throws “its military weight around” (*Disgraced*, 55), therefore drawing a connection between the jihadi terrorists and Israeli government. While Amir “has taken conscious action to a certain degree to integrate into the American society” (Putri & Destari 2019, 285), he is unable to escape the “Muslim psyche” (*Disgraced*, 45), saying “[i]t’s tribal Jor. It is in the bones” (*Disgraced*, 55). According to Field (2017, 52), “Akhtar portrays the positioning of one’s cultural identity by oneself and others as complicated”. Basu (2016, 84) establishes the text’s core issue accurately: “In post-9/11 America, the play seems to offer a diminished horizon for agency, presenting instead, a deterministic trope for South Asian Muslims as unable to reconcile their cultural and religious identities with American civil and political life”. I concede, adding that this deterministic trope could be argued to have been established through the rhetoric employed by the War on Terror.

Another issue regarding identity in *Disgraced* has to do with its representation of Jewishness. Guttman (2021, 906) argues that “Jewish–Muslim intimacy is the key to Akhtar’s identity politics, a fact which reframes questions of globalization, and ought to trouble its contemporary theorizations”. Amir’s decision to reject Islam is partly due to its anti-Semitic rhetoric; remembering how his mother told him to not associate himself with Jews, resulting him in spitting in the face of a Jewish girl. Amir therefore highlights the stereotype of Muslims as anti-Semitic in his argument for leaving the faith. Despite this, Isaac, the only Jewish character on stage calls Amir anti-Semitic when recounting something Amir had said to his employers: “Jory said your husband broke down. Was crying at a staff meeting. And apparently shouted something about how if the Imam had been a *rabbi*, Steven wouldn’t have cared. Steven thought the comment was anti-Semitic” (*Disgraced*, 61; italics as in the original). Here Akhtar engages with the issue of the relationship between Jews and Muslims, revealing complex issues of negotiating historical tensions in Muslim-American identity construction. The reason why Amir is willing lie to his employers about his ethnicity is

because he is more likely to succeed in a Jewish-run company as a Hindu rather than as a Muslim. In addition, in a heated moment, Amir does end up spitting in Isaac's face, showing that the bigotry has not left him despite having abandoned his Muslim faith.

Finally, I will discuss the symbolism of the Velazquez painting. According to Putri and Destari (2019, 283), “[t]his particular piece is a framing device which hold together the narrative of the story. It triggers points of conflict and serves as an important metaphor for the central relationship between Emily and Amir”. Basu (2016, 83) calls it “the principal visual artifact of the play” and that it “parallels mainstream American society’s gaze, which is fixed on the South Asian male subject in a post-9/11 America” (ibid.). Essentially, Emily’s painting of Amir bares the foundation of their relationship: a white woman’s portrayal of a brown man’s identity. All things considered, Amir and Emily’s views on ‘the question of his place’ (*Disgraced*, 39) differ vastly, which I would argue precipitates the downfall of their relationship. Emily: “Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are” (*Disgraced*, 4). She continues: “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” (*Disgraced*, 5). Amir corrects her: “A slave” (ibid.). I argue that Akhtar paints a compelling picture of minority identity that is controlled by a colonising, white subject.

Amir “appears to be an almost Shakespearian tragic character who falls victim to his own flaws” (Abadian 2023, 252). Scholars (Basu 2016; Field 2017; Putri & Destari 2019) seem to agree that Akhtar’s work is framed by William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603). Pointing to the parallels between the two plays, especially violence is mirrored:

Amir’s violent outburst toward Emily is often paralleled with Othello’s murder of Desdemona. Each protagonist is a racialized outsider seeking proximity to whiteness and privilege through different levels of identity effacement, a denial that leads to gendered violence and eventually to their own downfall. (Abadian 2023, 252)

Both Othello and Amir are Othered, despite their high standing in their respective societies. They both seem to seek belonging but are denied it due to their racial identities: “As a product of the society, in the end, Amir becomes a realization of the identity he had always opposed and resisted” (Abadian 2023, 253). Continuing that “a comparative reading of the two historically and contextually different plays can potentially dilute Akhtar’s intended defiance” (ibid.). Agreeing with this view, I discuss the violence of the play further in section 5.3.

4.3 *Disgraced* as a post-9/11 Drama

Although Akhtar’s play is set in 2011, I argue that it can be considered to take part in the discourse of 9/11. The central characters feel pressured to conceal their real identities because of the rise in hostility towards Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks. According to Field (2017, 67), “*Disgraced* demonstrates the lack of agency that Muslim men in post-9/11 America have in determining their own identities and destinies, pointing instead to the power held by others in creating one’s lived reality”. I argue that *Disgraced* is a play about the place and identity of the American Muslim in the post 9/11 world. In order to discuss *Disgraced* as 9/11 fiction, I will refer to Eikonsalo’s definition that was introduced in section 2.2. In this section I will discuss how *Disgraced* addresses “the 9/11 attacks or their consequences implicitly or explicitly in a thematically significant manner through tropes, themes, plot elements, symbols, and character types that are closely related to the discussions that surround 9/11” (Eikonsalo 2024, 148). I argue that while *Disgraced* does not “engage with the terrorist attacks on a larger scale as a major political, global event” (Eikonsalo 2024, 140), it does “say something about 9/11” (ibid.) and its consequences.

Firstly, I will address the temporal and spatial setting of *Disgraced*. While the play takes place ten years after the terrorist attacks, it is set in New York City, which I argue is relevant to the genre of 9/11 fiction. The specific setting of the play is described in stage directions as “[h]igh ceilings, parquet floors, crown moulding. The works” (*Disgraced*, 3). This is emphasizing Amir’s social status as a successful lawyer, which collapses as his employers find out that his ethnic background is not Indian, but Pakistani Muslim. Eikonsalo (2024, 148) suggests that her definition “allows these works to vary in features such as style, setting, minor themes, and narrative technique as long as they address the 9/11 attacks or their consequences in a thematically significant manner”. Thematic significance can therefore be constructed of several topics:

By consequence, I am referring to different political, social, and discursive changes after the 9/11 attacks, which include but are not limited to emotional reactions to the attacks, trauma, changes in values and attitudes, the ‘War on Terror’ and the Patriot Act, the heightened suspicion and animosity toward Muslims and immigrants, and the rhetorical divisions of the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’. (Eikonsalo 2024, 148–149)

I argue that while *Disgraced* may loosely be related to the 9/11 genre by its temporal and spatial settings, its strengths lie in the thematic significance described above: “Akhtar incorporates these aspects of post-9/11 America – profiling, surveillance, detention, passing,

and name changes – to explore how Amir and his nephew navigate the fraught territory of Muslim identity in twenty-first century America” (Field 2017, 52).

In the third scene of the play, an increasingly hostile conversation is had about the nature of Islam and, in extension, Muslims. Many revelations are made about prevailing patterns of thought. On the topic of airport security, Amir tells that he volunteers himself up for inspection, saying “I know they’re looking at me. And it’s not because I look like Giselle. I figure why not make it easier for everyone involved...” (*Disgraced*, 42). Amir silently accepts the racial profiling at airports, stating that “[t]he next terrorist attack is probably gonna come from some guy who more or less looks like me” (*ibid.*). One of the major consequences of the 9/11 attacks were “the changes in US domestic legislation due to increased demand for security” (Cvek 2011, 8). After September 11, with policies like the USA PATRIOT Act, the Bush administration “secured the nation’ domestically by legalizing heightened surveillance measures and reenforcing anti-immigration laws” (Alsultany 2012, 6), resulting in what is essentially institutionalized racism. Racial profiling was and is still maintained as a part of these security measures: “Some (i.e., the political right) even went as far as to say that racial profiling had nothing to do with racism and everything to do with national security. Racist policies and practices are advanced often through the very stance that purports it and disavow it” (Alsultany 2012, 11). I argue that Amir’s competing identities spur him into allowing himself to become a victim of racial profiling.

On the topic of detention, in the fourth scene Abe reveals that he has been detained by the FBI and questioned: “She goes back to work, and before we know it, the police are there. She called them. They cuff us. Take us in. Two guys from the FBI are at the station, waiting. (*Beat.*) We sit through this ridiculous interrogation” (*Disgraced*, 69). According to Alshetawi (2020, 180), after 9/11, “[a]s a result of the public hysteria following the attacks, Arab-American citizens were put under surveillance, and they were often interrogated by the FBI and other government agencies”. In addition, the FBI agents bring up Abe’s immigration status in order to have him work for them: “They’re going into our community and looking for people whose immigration status is vulnerable. Then they push us to start doing stuff for them” (*Disgraced*, 70). According to Kamali (2017, 74), the FBI uses deportation to their advantage when they are trying to turn Muslims into informants and spy on their own communities. Akhtar makes very clear the consequences of resisting this request: “If you’re not smarter about this, you are going to get deported” (*Disgraced*, 72). Not only were these tactics deployed to gain information on the non-American threat, according to Fadda-Conrey

(2014, 164), “[t]he containment of radicalized bodies at home (in the US) through surveillance, incarceration, and deportation becomes an extension as well as justification of the US wars abroad, all in the name of preserving (and disseminating) US freedoms”. I present that Akhtar’s portrayal is a compelling and realistic representation of Muslim American experiences in post-9/11 America.

Lastly, I will address name changing in *Disgraced*. Both Amir and his nephew Abe partake in name changing in order to integrate into American society and prevent discrimination directed towards Muslim individuals and to “navigate the fraught territory of Muslim identity in twenty-first century America” (Field 2017, 52). In the beginning of the play, it is told that Abe has changed his name from Hussein to Abe Jensen, arguing that in the Quran it says that “you can hide your religion if you have to” (*Disgraced*, 10). Amir refuses to acknowledge the new name, stating “I’ve known you your whole life as Hussein. I’m not gonna start calling you Abe now” (*Disgraced*, 10). This is quite contrarian, since Amir himself has changed his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor in order to make himself appear more of Indian origin than of Pakistani, stating that “[m]y father was born in 1946. When it [India and Pakistan] was all one country, before the British chopped it up into two countries in 1947” (*Disgraced*, 28). In 1947, “Indian independence took the form of the partitioning of British India into Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India” (Sen 2018, 1), resulting in mass displacement and a refugee crisis (Sen 2018, 3). I would argue that Akhtar hereby participates in a form of historicism, placing the Pakistani identity in a larger historical context: “It was all India. So there’s a different name for it now. So what?” (*Disgraced*, 28). According to Banita (2012, 4), 9/11 fiction reveals “a new set of anxieties about how to relate the present to the past, but also about how knowledge of the past (and its residual traces) inflects our understanding of the present, seen not as a break with history but as its organic outcome”. The historical context of terrorism is of utmost importance in understanding the global violence and retaliation tactics of the War on Terror.

By the end of the play, Abe has changed his name back to Hussein. Not only that, but his whole appearance seems markedly changed: “The Prophet wouldn’t be trying to be like one of them. He didn’t conquer the world by copying other people. He made the world copy him” (*Disgraced*, 73). Abe has turned to Islam to fight back against global colonizing powers: “For three hundred years they’ve been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want to be like them. Look like them. Marry their women” (*Disgraced*, 74).

In conclusion, the spatial setting, the discussion of detention, deportation and name changing are only some of the ways in which *Disgraced* discusses the September 11 attacks and their aftermath. The 90-minute play embodies many of the experiences and conflicts that Muslim Americans have faced in the post-9/11 era. Returning to Eikonsalo's definition of 9/11 fiction, I argue that *Disgraced* does address the consequences of the 9/11 attacks in a 'thematically significant manner', establishing its place firmly in the subgenre. In addition, according to Conte (2020, 3) post-9/11 literature "is not a literature that speaks to the converted with platitudes and reassurances, but one that challenges virtually every cultural, political, and historical assumption held by its reader". Adhering to this view, too, I argue that Akhtar's *Disgraced* is an exemplar of the genre. This section concludes the chapter on *Disgraced*. In the next chapter, I compare both *Disgraced* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, specifically through the themes of intercultural relationships, radicalisation and violence.

5 Comparisons

The texts under analysis in my paper have very similar themes. Both engage in the discussion of racial stereotypes and the construction of identity among the Muslim American population. Previous analyses of the texts show conflicting interpretations as to the authors' intentions. The aim of this section is to compare some of the main issues that I have considered in the main analysis sections such as radicalisation, identity construction and the continuum of 9/11 narratives. In section 5.1 I will shortly discuss something that has not already been mentioned in the main analysis of the texts, the depiction of interracial relationships. In sections 5.2 and 5.3, I discuss the complex depictions of radicalisation and violence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced*.

On 9/11 literature, Conte (2020, 11) writes: "What these writers have in common is transnational politics: they envision themselves not as nation-state citizens but as cosmopolitan, global citizens and non-state actors". Although the reading of the protagonists of both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* is deeply rooted in their position as American immigrants, they engage the reader in the investigation of the texts' positions in the imagination of a global citizenship.

5.1 Intercultural Relationships

Something that both Hamid and Akhtar's texts have in common are the depictions of intercultural relationships. In *Disgraced*, Amir and Emily's marriage dynamics perform a key role in the destructive outcome of the narrative, revealing the complexities of intercultural relationships. Putri and Destari (2019) interpret Emily's character as the antagonist, who is causing Amir's downfall with her "'White Saviour' desire". This analysis of Akhtar's text justifies Amir's violence as a retaliation to Emily dominating his representation and identity construction. I think this stance is an essentialized take on the text's issues and should be elaborated on further. Through her painting, Emily thinks she is "positively presenting the racialized Brown Other" (Field 2017, 53), however, the representation is made through a white subject's gaze, and its authenticity is therefore questionable. A central frustration for Amir is "his inability to fully script his own identity" (Field 2017, 55), as elaborated by his "essentializations about religion and identity" (ibid.). I argue that this inability is born from the imposing of identity not only by Emily, but by the American society.

The interracial relationship in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not as central, but it is still an important part of Changez's fallout with his host country. Erica's previous boyfriend, Chris, had died the year prior to their meeting. For Changez, the beginning of their relationship seems to mark another milestone in his assimilation to American society: "my excitement about the adventures my new life held for me had never been more pronounced" (*TRF* [2007] 2017, 34). Both Erica and Chris have been analysed differently by critics. Erica is often found to be an allegory of America — (Am)Erica (Donnelly 2019; Gray 2011; Hartnell 2010; Singh 2012), while Chris has been read as either Christopher Columbus (Gray 2011; Hartnell 2010) or Christ/Christianity (Donnelly 2019; Hartnell 2010). According to Donnelly (2019, 2)

Erica is trapped by a nostalgic longing for an old world of innocence and purity, a mythical time she believes she shared with him [Chris]. In her pursuit to restore a lost (imagined) purity, (Am)Erica builds a wall around herself, sealing off her already pierced emotional and corporeal borders.

Hartnell (2010, 343), however, argues that Chris "recalls not only Europe's Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas, and the continent's status in the European imagination as an object of its own discovery". Proposing a somewhat critical look on these simplistic comparisons, I argue that they do not establish a very strong base for profound or rich analysis.

Whether read as Columbus or Christ, after the 9/11 terror attacks Erica seems to disappear into nostalgic longing of Chris. A longing that is mirrored in the Bush administration's reaction to 9/11: "Like Erica, America also indulges in a denial of current reality and is lost in the illusion of the past (Chris) and the fear of an abstract enemy (Islamic radicals), thus she is unable to embrace a transition and change in her current reality" (Shirazi 2018, 25). Randall (2011, 141) too argues that "there is a correlation between Erica's 'nostalgia' and post-9/11 American foreign policy". Evidently, being cognizant of American capitalist propaganda has extensive implications: "Changez thus rejects America at the moment when he has realised that he was never fully accepted in the same way that he realises that he was never fully accepted by Erica" (Randall 2011, 142). I find that this analysis is accurate and reflects the mechanisms of isolation enacted in the post-9/11 period.

5.2 Radicalisation

Both Hamid and Akhtar take a relatively new perspective in 9/11 literature by tackling the theme of radicalisation. For Hamid, radicalisation is a slow process that takes place

throughout the novel. For the reader it is not exactly obvious at first, which is for the benefit of the revelation at the end of the novel. Changez is portrayed as civilized and successful – characteristics that most would not associate with a potential terrorist. Some scholars do not see Changez’s radicalisation as one that leads to terrorism or radical Islam itself. According to Darda (2014, 115), “Changez does not turn to Pakistani nationalism per se and thereby resituate the nation-state as the mediator of all freedom struggles; instead, he considers the lives of others contextually first, as sustained or endangered by social and political conditions”. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the “issue of ‘sided’, and the necessity of making a choice after the 9/11 attacks, comes under scrutiny” (Morey 2011, 143). Negotiating minority identities in the case of both texts has implications on radicalism and its perception in the media.

The depiction of terrorism and radicalisation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is of particular interest to researchers since it has a rather new perspective on the matter. According to Liao (2012, 123), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* “depicts a paranoid world post 9/11 and grapples with the problem of unhomely dwelling in displacement”. When the American dream is not fulfilled Changez feels angered and disillusioned and he “returns to Pakistan and swears to take action to stop the self-righteous US” (Liao 2012, 123). Therefore, the depiction of radicalisation in Hamid’s novel is blamed on the change in social climate in post 9/11 America. Morey (2011, 138, italics as in the original) argue that “the novel sets itself up as a *confession*” as we follow the tale of Changez’s political awakening. However, Morey (2011, 139) does not think that Changez is a religious fundamentalist as he “does not even claim to have some renewed awakening of his faith after the discrimination he experiences”. As a result, “the promise of a true confession is always held in abeyance, rendered dubious by an increasingly edgy and paranoid tone” (Morey 2011, 140).

For Akhtar, radicalisation is portrayed through a minor character, Abe, who becomes radicalised during the six months between scene three and four. Abe has started wearing a Muslim skullcap and has changed his name back to Hussein, marking a major shift in his identity construction. He reveals that he has been interrogated by the FBI and faces possible deportation. Even though Abe hasn’t been to Pakistan since he was eight years old, to him the thought of dislocation sounds like it “wouldn’t be the worst thing” (*Disgraced*, 72). Upon hearing this Amir is upset since he is still optimistic about their future in America. I argue that, like Changez, Abe has become disillusioned by the American dream, emerging as bitterness and hostility towards America. Abe’s comment to Amir illuminates this discovery:

“You want something from these people you will never get” (*Disgraced*, 73). The ‘something’ Amir wants from ‘these people’ is acceptance and opportunity – something that many South Asian Americans struggled receiving in the aftermath of 9/11.

The title of Akhtar’s play is in reference to the radicalisation of Abe, who says this to Amir: “They disgraced us” (*Disgraced*, 74). ‘They’ most likely refers to the American people, but also to the rest of the Western world, that has participated in the dichotomisation of the East and the West. Abe’s objective now is vengeance validated by the Quran: “They’ve conquered the world. We’re gonna get it back. That’s our destiny. It’s in the Quran” (ibid.). Akhtar’s depiction of radicalisation is very overt in contrast to Hamid’s. Still, I argue that Akhtar leaves room for the contemplation of the complexity of South Asian American identity by having Amir condemn his nephew’s hateful words. Hamid does so by contemplating Changez’s identity as reluctantly radicalised. There appears reluctance in Amir as well, who goes against his fundamentals when he beats up Emily at the dinner party. The violence depicted in both Hamid and Akhtar’s texts is discussed in the next section.

5.3 Violence

In the sections before, I have talked about the similarities between *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced*. This section will address the major differences between the text, the obvious one being that of the role and depiction of violence.

The violence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not emphasised until the very end of the novel. Throughout the novel the reader is increasingly suspicious about the fact that something else than a peaceful conversation between Changez and the American listener is going on. Since the novel ends abruptly, the violence in Hamid’s work is not carried out in the text, but it is suggested. This is supported by Singh (2012, 32), who argues that “[t]he reader is left with a foreboding of violence but also with the discomfort that such an assumption may be unwarranted and constructed purely by the discursive power of the novel”. Hartnell (2010, 341) goes on to argue that “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* casts Islamism as both the product of and a rebellion against American-led globalization”. I argue that a cycle of violence is implicated in the text’s interrogation of American colonising efforts.

In contrast to the implied violence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the brutality of Amir’s violence is emphasised in the stage directions. Akhtar writes: “All at once Amir hits Emily in the face. A vicious blow” (*Disgraced*, 66). Amir’s violence comes out of nowhere, surprising

himself and others. In the last scene, six months later, Emily seems to be sad and almost apologetic: “I had a part in what happened” (*Disgraced*, 75). She is referring to Amir getting fired after he beats Emily at the dinner party. The portrayal of violence in *Disgraced* highlights Amir’s inner struggle with his identity: “These shocking acts undermine his careful distancing of himself from negative stereotypes about Muslim men, giving rise to questions about his true beliefs and fundamental nature” (Field 2017, 50). Abadian (2023, 253) agrees, stating that “[a]s a product of the society, in the end, Amir becomes a realization of the identity he had always opposed and resisted”. While the violence of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a critique on globalism, I argue that the violence in *Disgraced* is a much more intimate account of inner clash, one that can be compared to a Shakespearean tragedy.

One may ask why Akhtar has decided to write about such a precarious subject as a Muslim man’s violence towards a white woman. This would, however, be a reductionist stance on the text’s issues. According to Putri and Destari (2019, 289), in order to decipher the violence in *Disgraced*, the reader must “peel back various conflicts that happen in different levels due to Emily and Amir’s imbalanced power relations”. The violence in the play seeks to introduce emotional responses in the audience and advocates for a more diverse interpretation. The play exhibits the “post-9/11 vilification of Islamic society as violent and misogynist” (Basu, 2016, 87). The play does not demand the audience to ask themselves whether Muslim men are inherently violent, but to ask where this judgement arises, who it targets, who maintains it, and what the consequences are.

6 Conclusions

9/11, its consequent global War on Terror, the USA PATRIOT Act and their accumulating consequences are clearly relevant nearly 25 years since the terrorist attacks. This thesis acknowledges the importance of Muslim American narratives of complex identity construction in a post-9/11 climate of anti-Islamic rhetoric. Both Changez and Amir are negotiating with their dual identities – a negotiation which results in the awareness of the contemporary politics of racial difference. I argue that the positioning of these narratives in the dichotomy of “us” and “them” reveals the simplifying rhetoric of the War on Terror.

In the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid builds a narrative of successful immigration and assimilation in the story of Pakistani-born Changez, who builds a career in the financial scene of New York City. Through his work assignments around the globe, Hamid takes the reader on a journey where America’s global economic and military powers are discovered and explored. The 9/11 terrorist attacks take place in the middle of the narrative, causing a rupture in his new-found identity. I argue that while tied to both Pakistan and the US, Changez must negotiate his double identity in a time when suspicious eyes have turned their gaze to his ‘tribe’. I find that Changez’s disillusionment with his host country is reflected in the disappearance of Erica. Changez’s return to Pakistan marks new chapter in his life – one of potential radicalisation. I assert that Hamid’s reflections on terrorism and radicalisation are complexified by the purposeful breaking of the myth of the perfect immigrant.

Whereas *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be called a ‘return home’ story, a different narrative strategy is present in *Disgraced*. Amir is a successful attorney of Pakistani ethnicity, adjusting to the post-9/11 climate which is the play’s temporal setting. The consequences of post-9/11 US politics are explicitly discussed and recounted in the character’s dialogue. In my analysis I argue that while Amir explicitly tries to appear like a ‘good Muslim’, implicitly he is harbouring his own stereotypes of identity and social status that are revealed in the explosive dinner party of the play’s climax. I assert that through topics such as violence, passing and surveillance Akhtar weaves an intricate web of issues that Muslim Americans face and negotiate in post-9/11 America.

The aim of this thesis is to shed light on the changes Muslim Americans experienced following 9/11, specifically in domains of citizenship, profiling and hostile attitudes directed

at Islamic communities across the nation. This thesis asserts that both *Disgraced* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflect a shift in US social climate that can be described as a departure from the status of a 'melting pot', a nation where people from all over the world are welcomed, and as entry to a status of a nation closing its borders from a perceived enemy. The implications of this thesis lie in the fact that while almost 25 years have passed since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, some of the same rhetoric that defined the immediate aftermath of the attacks can alarmingly be detected in present day political argumentation and action. This means that Muslim American must negotiate and re-negotiate their identities in a fluctuating political environment. It remains evident that studying the corpus of 9/11 fiction can yield reflections as well as solutions to the identities that are othered in contemporary America.

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Appendix

Finnish Summary

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee syyskuun 11. päivän terroritekojen ja niiden seurauksien kuvausta amerikkalaisten muslimitaustaisten kirjailijoiden teoksissa. Analyysin kohteina ovat Mohsin Hamidin teos *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) ja Ayad Akhtarin näytelmä *Disgraced* (2013). Nämä kaksi pakistanilaistaustaista kirjailijaa käsittelevät teoksissaan muslimien kohtaamaa syrjintää Yhdysvalloissa WTC-iskujen jälkeen. Tutkielma paikantaa nämä kaksi teosta 9/11-genreen, joka on herättänyt laajaa huomiota kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa. Hyödynnän tutkielmassa myös jälkikolonialistista kirjallisuudenteoriaa, ja keskityn erityisesti toiseuden käsitteeseen, sekä erilaisiin toiseuteen liittyviin dikotomioihin, kuten hyvä/paha, sivistynyt/barbaarinen ja progressiivinen/kehittymätön. Lähestyn aihetta myös Mahmood Mamdanin teoksessa *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (2004) esitetyn Culture Talk -käsitteen avulla.

Ennakkoluulot Yhdysvaltojen muslimiväestöä kohtaan muuttuivat radikaalisti 9/11-iskujen jälkeisenä aikana, johtuen erityisesti presidentti George W. Bushin hallituksen aloittamasta ”terrorisminvastaisesta sodasta” ja USA PATRIOT -lakialoitteesta. Yhdysvaltojen hallinto pyrki määrätietoisesti asettamaan kaikki muslimiväestöön kuuluvat henkilöt tarkkailun alaisiksi, johtaen pelkoon, pidätyksiin sekä maastakarkotuksiin. Väkivallan ja karkotuksen uhalla monet muslimit saattoivat päätyä identiteetin kätkemiseen ja ”hyväksi” muslimiksi tekeytymiseen. Mamdanin (2004) mukaan jokaisella kulttuurilla on ydin, joka selittää politiikan sen ytimen seurauksena. Terrorismi ja 9/11 selitetään siis kulttuurin seurauksena, mikä itsessään varjostaa kaikkien muslimien olemassaoloa, koska heidät voidaan nähdä kollektiivisesti vastuussa terroriteoista. Tutkielma pyrkii ottamaan huomioon terrorismin historiallisen kontekstin ja väkivallan syklisen luonteen. Oletuksena on, ettei globaali terrorismi synny tyhjästä, vaan on monien tapahtumasarjojen seurausta. Toisin kuin siis ajatellaan, syyskuun 11. päivän terrori-iskut eivät olleet ”hetki, joka muutti kaiken”, vaan osa globaalien väkivallan ja vallankäytön kierrettä. Tästä syystä on mielekäästä tutkia aihetta, terrorismia ja sen seurauksia, nimenomaan maailmanlaajuisena ilmiönä.

Keskeisenä tutkielman teemana on 9/11-genrelle tyypilliset konventiot kuten troopit, teemat, hahmot ja juonet. Genreen kuuluu laaja määrä erialaisia tekstejä, osin sen takia, ettei sille ole määritetty kovinkaan tarkkoja rajoja. Myös tutkimus on ollut kattavaa, mutta ei valitettavasti

ole osallistunut kovinkaan paljon genren määritelmän rakentamiseen. Tutkielmassa käytetään Eikonsalon (2024) määritelmää genren rajoista, jotka hänen mukaansa ovat olleet aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa tulkinnanvaraisia. Tutkielma osallistuu siis osaltaan vastaamaan kysymykseen siitä, mitä 9/11-kirjallisuus todellisuudessa on. Tutkielmassa käytettävän määritelmän mukaan 9/11-kirjallisuuden tärkeimmät vahvuudet voivat olla sijoittuminen terroritekojen tapahtumapaikkaan ja -aikaan, mutta keskustelu terroriteoista voi tapahtua myös implisiittisesti, kunhan se on temaattisesti merkittävää (Eikonsalo 2024). On huomioitava, että tutkielmaan valikoituneet tekstit ovat osa niin sanottua vastakerrontaa, koska genreä ja sen tutkimusta on dominoinut laajalti valkoinen amerikkalainen ääni. Pakistanilais-amerikkalaisten kirjailijoiden tapa kuvata ja analysoida terrorismia ja sen seurauksia saattaa erota huomattavasti tästä näkökulmasta, ja täten se voi tuottaa mielenkiintoista ja hedelmällistä tutkimusta.

Ensimmäinen tutkielmassa analysoitava teksti on Mohsin Hamidin *The Reluctant Fundamentalists*, jonka päähenkilö Changez on pakistanilainen maahanmuuttaja New Yorkissa. Narratiivi kuvaa Changezin opiskeluvuosia arvostetussa amerikkalaisessa yliopistossa ja hänen työharjoitteluaan kunnioitetussa finanssialan yrityksessä. Alkavalla urallaan Changez tutustuu ja osittain omaksuu amerikkalaisen kapitalismin peruseriaatteita. Tutkielma esittää, että Hamid rakentaa globaalin narratiivin lähettämällä Changezin toimeksiannoille maapallon eri kolkkiin, jossa hän joutuu kasvokkain isäntämaansa harjoittaman taloudellisen ja militaarisen vallan kanssa. Changezin käymää neuvottelua kaksoisidentiteettinsä kanssa hankaloittaa syyskuun 11. päivän terrori-iskut, jotka ajoittuvat narratiivin keskikohtaan. Samanaikaisesti Changezin romanttinen suhde Ericaan alkaa halkeilla ja lopulta repeää lopullisesti tämän kadotessa mysteerisesti mielisairaalaan. Aiempi tutkimus on mieltänyt Erican henkilöhaamon vertauskuvana Amerikalle itselleen. Terrori-iskujen jälkeen Yhdysvalloissa vallinnutta yleistä mielialaa voidaan kuvata isänmaallisuuden ja siihen liittyvän nostalgian lisääntymisenä. Erica kuvataan terrori-iskujen jälkeen poissaolevana ja nostalgiaan uponneena, eikä hän pysty enää pitämään yllä suhdettaan Changeziin. Samanlainen välirikko tapahtuu myös Changezin ja hänen isäntämaansa välillä, mikä johtaa hänen Pakistaniin paluuseen.

Tutkielma havainnollistaa niitä 9/11 genren konventioita, jotka ovat läsnä Hamidin teoksessa. Sen lisäksi, että se on tapahtuma-ajaltaan ja -paikaltaan sidoksissa terrori-iskuihin, ottaa se käsiteltäväkseen niiden seurauksia etenkin muslimiväestölle maailmanlaajuisesti. Kerronnassa kuvaillaan muun muassa terrorisminvastaisen sodan vaiheita. Tullessaan tietoisiksi

Yhdysvaltojen häikäilemättömästä kolonialismista ja globaalista vallankäytöstä Changez on huolestunut erityisesti Pakistanissa asuvan perheensä puolesta. Changez on joutunut hankalaan paikkaan ”meidän” ja ”heidän”, terrorismin vihastuttaman supervallan ja oman heikommassa asemassa olevan kotimaansa väliin. Kuvaillessaan itse terrori-iskuja kertomuksessa korostuu niiden visuaalisuus. Changez itse on tapahtuma-aikaan Manilassa, Filippiineillä, ja katsoo WTC-tornien kaatuvan televisiossa. Monet ihmiset ympäri maailmaa näkivät iskut juuri ruutujen kautta. Myös iskujen jälkeinen terrorismivastainen sota kuvataan Hamidin teoksessa tapahtuvan ruutujen välityksellä, muistuttaen elokuvaa *Terminaattori*. Kuvaukset globaalista terrorismivastaisesta sodasta ovat tekstin vahvuuksia, ja antavat kattavan kuvan Yhdysvaltojen kostotoimista Lähi-idässä. Tutkielma argumentoi, että erityisesti kuvaamalla tätä globaalia, militaarista vastareaktiota terrori-iskuille, Hamid juurruttaa kertomuksensa syvälle 9/11-genreen.

Ayad Akhtarin näytelmä *Disgraced* sen sijaan sijoittuu tapahtuma-ajaltaan 9/11-terrori-iskujen jälkeiseen aikaan. Näytelmän päähenkilö on pakistanilaistaustainen Amir, joka on löytänyt menestystä New Yorkin lakimaailmassa. Amir ei muslimitaustastaan huolimatta harjoita Islamia ja tekee parhaansa sopeutuakseen yhdysvaltalaiseen yhteiskuntaan. Tämän mukaisesti hän on myös vaihtanut sukunimensä Abdullahista Kapooriksi, erityisesti sen takia, että hänen työnantajansa ovat juutalaisia. Tutkielma löytää, että historiallisesti tunnettu jännite juutalaisten ja muslimien välillä on mukana kertomuksessa, koska se osaltaan johdattaa keskustelua uskonnollisista identiteetistä ja niihin liittyvistä stereotyyppioista ja uskomuksista. Identiteettineuvotteluun osallistuu myös Amirin veljenpoika Abe, joka omalta osaltaan osallistuu identiteettinsä piilotteluun, jottei tulisi syrjityksi. Näytelmän lopussa Abe on kuitenkin vaihtanut nimensä takaisin Husseiniksi ja vaikuttaa adoptoineensa ääri-islamistisia ajattelutapoja. Hän paljastaa olevansa karkotuksen uhan alla tullessaan FBI:n kuulustelluksi.

Vaikka näytelmä sijoittuu tapahtuma-ajaltaan syyskuun 11. päivän terrori-iskujen jälkeiseen aikaan, tutkielman mukaan se voidaan kiistämättömästi sijoittaa 9/11-genreen. *Disgraced* rakentaa temaattista merkitystä ottamalla aiheekseen muun muassa Patriot Act-lakialoitteen, FBI:n tekemät pidätykset ja yleiset epäluuloiset asenteet, jotka kohdistuivat erityisesti muslimitaustaiseen amerikkalaiseen väestöön terrori-iskujen jälkeen. Hamidin tekstin voidaan sanoa olevan globaali narratiivi, koska se vaikuttaa kritisoivan erityisesti Yhdysvaltojen harjoittamaan globaalia kapitalismia ja terrorinvastaista sota. Tutkielmassa esitetään, että *Disgraced* sen sijaan on intiimimpi katselmus yhteiskunnan asettamista vaatimuksista vähemmistöväestöjä kohtaan. Tämä tulee esiin esimerkiksi Emilyn hellittämättömästä

pyrkimyksestä määrittää Amirin identiteettiä maalaamalla hänet orjaksi. Tutkielma löytää Emilyn asenteen olevan heijastus myös laajemman yhteiskunnan pyrkimyksistä hallita muslimitaustaisten amerikkalaisten identiteetin representaatiota.

Tutkielman löydökset osoittavat samankaltaisuuksiin tekstien välillä. Molemmat käsittelevät muslimitaustaisten amerikkalaisten kokemaa identiteettiä koskevaa kyseenalaistamista, profilointia ja niiden laajempia seurauksia niin yksityiselämissä kuin yhteisöissäkin.

Tutkielma argumentoi, että erityisesti keskustelut uskollisuudesta omaa vähemmistöidentiteettiä kohtaan perustavat tekstien temaattisen sitoutuneisuuden sekä jälkikolonialistiseen tutkimukseen että 9/11-genreen. Oman identiteetin ilmaisusta tekee ongelmallista etenkin julkisen keskustelun synnyttämistä näkemyksistä terrorismista ja sen toteuttajista, joissa on nähtävissä vahingoittavia yleistyksiä. Yleistyksien seurauksena muslimitaustaisten amerikkalaisten on käytävä neuvotteluja siitä, missä, milloin ja miten paljon he voivat ilmaista muslimi-identiteettiänsä. Terrori-iskujen seuraukset ovat tämän tutkimuksen mukaan laaja-alaisia, ja ne ovat koskeneet ihmisiä niin Yhdysvalloissa kuin Lähi-idässäkin. Näiden kahden tekstin analyysi yhdessä voi luoda kattavamman kuvan seurausten todellisuudesta kuin niiden analyysi itsenäisesti.

Toisaalta molemmat tekstit ovat osaltaan vahvistamassa tiettyjä stereotyyppioita, joita päähenkilöt kokevat ja joita vastaan he pyrkivät taistelemaan. Disgraced sisältää kuvauksen väkivallasta monikulttuurisen avioparin välillä, jonka toteuttajana on muslimiamerikkalainen Amir. Väkiältä on tulkittavissa sitä edeltävän dialogin valossa. Illallisen aikana Emily, Amirin valkoinen amerikkalainen vaimo, puolustaa Islamia ja korostaa sen perinteiden kauneutta, jopa silloinkin, kun puheeksi tulee Koraanin kuvailema vaimon hakkaaminen hyväksyttävänä rangaistuskeinona. Amir ei yhdy tähän näkemykseen ja havainnollistaa omiin lapsuudenkokemuksiinsa liittyviä, muslimien hautomia ennakkoluuloja. Hän muun muassa halveksuu äitinsä osoittamaa vihamielisyyttä juutalaisia kohtaan, viitaten juutalaisten ja muslimien välisiin historiallisiin ristiriitoihin. Tutkielma esittää, että Amirin vastahakoisuus puolustaa Islamia ja täten hänen omaa identiteettiään muslimina johtuu hänen pelostaan tulla nähdyksi muslimiin liittyvien ennakkoluulojen kaltaisena barbaarisena, juutalaisvihamielisenä tai väkivaltaisena miehenä. Tämä pelko tulee kuitenkin toteen illan päättyessä hänen väkivaltaisuuteensa. Amirin väkivaltaisuus on tulkittavissa illalliskeskustelun paljastamien valta-aseiden ja Amirin hautomien sisäisten ristiriitojen kautta. Tutkielma löytää, ettei Akhtarin tarkoitus ole tukea muslimimiehiin liitettyjä vahingollisia stereotyyppioita, vaan saada katsoja kysymään itseltään mistä nämä stereotyyppiat johtuvat ja kuka niistä hyötyy.

Myös Hamid osallistuu osaltaan epäsuoraan keskusteluun väkivallasta ja radikalisoitumisesta. Tutkimus löytää hänen rakentamansa narratiivin olevan jokseenkin epäluotettava. Kehyskertomuksessa Changez vaikuttaa aluksi olevan vain isännöimässä amerikkalaista turistia kotikaupungissaan Lahoressa. Nimettömäksi jäävän amerikkalaisen henkilöllisyyteen ja motiiveihin kuitenkin välittömästi luodaan epäilyksiä epäsuoralla ja ironisella tyylillä. Vasta aivan narratiivin loppupuolella epäilykset kääntyvät myös päähenkilöön, joka kertoo paluumuuttonsa jälkeen tapahtuneesta poliittisesta ja ideologisesta heräämisestään. Kertomuksen loppu jää jokseenkin avoimeksi ja tulkinnanvaraiseksi, mutta Hamid antaa lukijan olettaa Changezin olevan ainakin jollain tasolla radikalisoitunut, koska hän on joutunut amerikkalaisen tiedustelupalvelun tarkkailun alaiseksi. Nimettömän amerikkalaisen oletetaan olevan amerikkalainen agentti, mikä selittää tämän erikoisen käyttäytymisensä. Epäluotettavuutta kuitenkin herättää erityisesti se, että kehyskertomus koostuu täysin Changezin monologista, minkä takia kaikki havainnot, jotka tekstistä voidaan tehdä ovat hänen kerrontansa varassa. Tutkimus esittää, että Changezin poliittinen aktiivisuus Pakistanissa on seurausta sekä särkyneestä henkilökohtaisesta suhteesta Yhdysvaltojen kanssa, että havainnoista yhdysvaltalaisesta globaalista vallankäytöstä edellisen työnantajansa toimeksiannoilla.

Tutkielmassa huomioidaan, että teksteissä esitetty väkivaltaisuus ja kuvaukset radikalisoinnista saattavat jakaa lukijoita ja jopa osaltaan vahvistaa vahingollisia yleistyksiä. On kuitenkin huomattava, että tekstien perusteellinen analyysi on tarpeellista niiden monitasoisten merkitysten avaamisessa. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on tuoda esiin valikoitujen tekstien esiintuomia vahingoittavia stereotypioita, joita muslimitaustaiset amerikkalaiset kohtasivat kasvavalla intensiteetillä syyskuun 11. päivän terrori-iskujen jälkeen. Myös globaali terrorisminvastainen sota on analyysin kohteena, sen vaikuttaessa usein näiden kansalaisten molemmissa kotimaissa. Tutkielman tärkein löydös on, että kuten tekstit esittävät, on muslimitaustaisten amerikkalaisten usein oletettu valitsevan uskollisuutensa näiden kotimaiden välillä, eikä näissä tiukoissa ajattelumalleissa ole ollut vaihtoehtoa kaksoisidentiteetille. On huomattavaa, että vaikka tapahtumista onkin kulunut kaksi vuosikymmentä, jotkin näistä terrori-iskujen jälkeisen retoriikan vahvistamista ja synnyttämistä stereotypioista ovat vallitsevia nykypäivän poliittisessa ja julkisessa keskustelussa. Tästä syystä 9/11-genren tutkiminen erityisesti vastakerronnallisesta näkökulmasta on edelleen ajankohtaista.