

# BACHELOR THESIS



Identity crisis due to the 9/11 terrorist attack

Analysis of Amir and Changez identity  
development after 9/11

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## 1. Introduction

Unfortunately, we live in a time when media almost daily report terrorist attacks. The terror attack on the Twin Towers, the 11th of September in the year of 2001 is among the most publicized tragedies in recent times and still is an inspiration for many literary writers. Many of the publications about 9/11, both fiction and fact focus on the victims or the terrorists from a Western point of view. Comparatively few works in English have focused on the perspectives of terrorists or people caught up in Islamic fundamentalism.

This essay focuses on Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* (in book form) and Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Both texts have main characters that are affected by the tragic event of 9/11. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (TRF) is entirely written from the first-person point of view, from which the main character Changez tells his story to an American stranger in a café in Lahore, Pakistan. The author brings up the perspective of how the change in America after 9/11 in a way forced Changez to question his identity. The open ending of the novel leaves much to the reader to interpret: Is the Stranger an American operative? Has Changez become a fundamentalist? *Disgraced* (in book form) is a play in four scenes. The play has five characters and is set in an apartment in New York. Amir, a first-generation Pakistani-American is the lead, and throughout the play, his Pakistani upbringing follows him and influences him in ways that have devastating consequences. The protagonists in the works have Pakistani ancestry, are well educated and hold prestigious jobs in America, similarities they share with the authors. The two works together bring different perspectives to the analysis of identity development due to the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City.

By using psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory, this essay will explore how the identities of the two protagonists, Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Amir in *Disgraced*, are affected by 9/11. The essay will show that living in America after 9/11 and being the "other" could affect one's identity, both in conscious and unconscious ways.

## 2. Authors' background

Ayad Akhtar is a New York-born actor, novelist, and playwright with roots in Pakistan. His works often center on Muslim-American experiences. Early on he became interested in writing and drama. This interest led him to begin acting. He attended Brown University and

majored in theater. He spent a couple of years studying and teaching acting before returning to the academic world, earning the degree Master of Fine Arts in film directing from the Colombia University School of Art (*AyadAkhtar.com* ).

His first breakthrough was co-writing and starring in the 2005 movie *The War Within*, a movie about a man from Pakistan who becomes a terrorist after being apprehended and questioned by the CIA on suspicion of being a terrorist. The New York Post critic Lou Lumeick wrote: “Ayad Akhtar makes an impressive screen debut” (Lumeick 2015). In 2012 he published his first novel *American Dervish*, a coming-of-age novel about a young Muslim-American struggling with identity. The same year his play *Disgraced* premiered at the American Theater Company in Chicago and Lincoln Center in New York. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2013. On the Pulitzer Prize homepage, one can read: “A moving play that depicts a successful corporate lawyer painfully forced to consider why he has for so long camouflaged his Pakistani Muslim heritage” (*ThePulitzerPrizes.com*). Mr. Akhtar has since then produced three additional plays: *The Who and the What* (2014), *The Invisible Hand* (2015) and *Junk: The Golden Age of Debt* premiered in September 2017 (*AyadAkhtar.com*).

Charles Isherwood at the New York Times wrote in an early review of *Disgraced*: “Everyone has been told that politics and religion are two subjects that should be off limits at social gatherings. But watching Mr. Akhtar’s characters rip into these forbidden topics, there’s no arguing that they make for ear-tickling good theater.” (2012). The Guardian’s reviewer Michael Billington wrote:” It is not perfect, but it is a tough, compelling play that covers a lot of ground in 90 minutes and that gains an extra urgency as apparently jihadist-inspired violence returns to our streets.” (2013).

Mohsin Hamid is a writer, novelist and brand consultant. He was born in Lahore, Pakistan, but like some of his characters in his novels, he has moved from his native country and has lived in California, London and New York (*MohsinHamid.com*). When Hamid was three years old his father enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Stanford University and the family spent nine years in California before moving back to Pakistan. When Hamid was 18 years old, he moved back to America to attend Princeton University, where he studied under two famous American writers, Toni Morrison and Joyce Carol Oates. During this period, he started working on his first novel. Hamid finished his academic career in 1997 when he graduated from Harvard Law School (Perlez 2013).

Hamid released his first novel *Holy Smoke* in 2000. It became very popular in Pakistan and India. His second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was published in 2007 and has since been translated into 25 languages. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2007 and turned into a major movie in 2012, the same year he released his third novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. In 2017 his latest novel, *Exit West* was released. It deals with current topics such as migration and being a refugee (*MohsinHamid.com*).

Both authors have a common background with roots in Pakistan and moves between Eastern and Western societies. They have both received a higher education in America. They write about critical moral issues, and the main characters in this essay share many similarities with each other. They are both from Pakistan, non-practicing Muslims, well-educated and successful within their different fields. However, most of all *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Disgraced* deal with questions of identity after 9/11.

### **3. Literature reviews**

#### ***3.1 The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

An MLA database search for *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* yields 68 entries. When searching for the other novels he has written, Mr. Hamid's first novel *Moth Smoke* gets seven hits on MLA, his third *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* has nine and *Discontent and Its Civilisations: Despatches from Lahore, New York & London* has none. Mr. Hamid's latest novel *Exit West* also has zero entries. Searching for the Mohsin Hamid's name, there are 49 entries. The majorities of them are about *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and also appear in searches for the novel.

When *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) first published, there are two entries. The first is an article written by Rajini Srikanth, "South Asia and the Challenge of Intimacy in the 'Global War on Terror'" the other one is an interview with the author by Deborah Solomon in the New York Times (2007). Two early works on the novel have their focus on Pakistani literature, Cara Cilano; "Manipulative Fictions: Democratic Futures in Pakistan" (2009) and Shamsie Muneeza; "Covert Operations in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction" (2009). In 2011, Gohar Karim Khan's paper focuses on how Pakistani fiction wants to change our stereotypical view of the terrorist being a Muslim man from the Middle East and highlights the connection the protagonist in the novel has to America. There are several recurring themes when looking

through the entries, such as post-9/11 America, Globalisation and Fundamentalism, East meets West, identity, “the other” and trauma.

The article “Psychoanalysis and Transformation of Heroes in Mohsin Hamid's Novels “*Moth Smoke*” and “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” by Abdul G Awan, Shaista Andleeb and Farhat Yasin from the Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan-Pakistan will be used in this essay. The authors compare the two Pakistani heroes in Mohsin Hamid’s novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Changez) and *Moth Smoke* (Daru). In their paper, they highlight many of the similarities between the two characters even though they live in different countries, one in America and the other in Pakistan. Both heroes face critical events that change them into anti-heroes. Changez leaves his successful life in America after 9/11 and moves back to Pakistan to start a new life. Daru has a good job but loses it. He does not have the right contacts or economic stability to get back on his feet. He starts using drugs and ends up in prison. The authors write that “the heroes are representative of typical Pakistani mentality. One is over-ambitious about living and working in America, and the other is obsessed with looking rich (Awan 15). They remark that as Hamid has a Pakistani background, he has a good insight into local thinking and conditions.

In their conclusion they write; “The two-story reflect that the heroes pass through a critical situation, and thereby they go significantly transformed” and “the character changes under the impact of the events they meet and how they define their versions of actions and incidents” (14). This essay will show how the trauma of 9/11 will change the identity of Changez.

In Sobia Kirans article “Identity Crisis as Reflected in Selected Works: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and the *Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi” she compares the main characters’ personal development and identity crises. Both main characters are from Pakistan but live in a Western country, America, and England, respectively. They do not feel at home in their new countries or in their native country Pakistan. She suggests that Pakistanis are facing identity crises like the characters in the two novels because Pakistan is engaged in the war on terror while at the same time being a victim of terror. Kiran writes that “loss of identity is the major dilemma faced by people caught up between two worlds” (39).

In “Identity and Identification in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*,” Greta Olson claims that the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11, 2001 still hold great importance for the whole world’s development. It has, among other things, influenced authors all over the world. Olson examines how identity and identification are represented both in the

novel's discourse and story. She writes about the changes in the main character's identity after 9/11 and brings up the significance the beard plays from both the perspective of the main character and the environment in America. Olson reflects on how the end of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is left open for the reader to interpret. Olson concludes that "identity as in national, social, and personal identity, can hence be seen as central for the interpretation of the novel" (17). Her essay and thoughts about personal identity will be helpful in the analysis of the characters in this essay.

### **3.2 *Disgraced***

Searching the author's name, Ayad Akhtar on MLA will result in 3 hits. Two mentioned above and a biography. Using the search-engine JStore, there are no hits on *Disgraced* or Ayad Akhtar. Searching the MLA for *Disgraced*, there are 13 hits. Three of them have a direct connection to Akhtar's work. The first one is written by a Korean author in 2016 and focuses according to the preview on ethnic and Muslim identity. Unfortunately only the abstract is in English, as the article itself is in Korean.

The second one is Madison T Peschock "Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* Proves Worthy of the Pulitzer Prize". Peschock describes the play as thought-provoking, and the play discusses racism after the 9/11 attack. She states that Akhtar writes about significant issues in the 21st century: culture, religion, politics, racism, and identity. All these subjects are difficult to confront, and when one reads or sees the play; it becomes necessary to discuss them. Peschock describes the four scenes and points out some major themes. The first primary question is: "are people racist because they prefer to be friends with their own kind, or is this idea itself racist?" (47).

Other significant themes are religion and one's commitment to heritage and that while everyone learns racist ideologies from parents but it does not mean that everyone believes them. The play also shows that judging someone based on race or religion can be misleading (Akhtar 51). Another theme that Peschock points out is that the main character was born into one culture, the Pakistani, but embraces another, the American. Another perspective is that it is more difficult for minorities to advance in professional life than it is for white Americans. The play wants to show the lack of justice in society. The final major theme is about identity and the importance of being true to oneself. The protagonist tries so hard to assimilate into American culture that he forgets who he is.

Peschock argues that the best scenes have not been written. Instead, people who read or see the play and start to discuss it discover that other people have seen it from another angle based on their heritage and ideologies about racism (55). The final paper I found on MLA is written by Lopamudr Basu also in 2016 and deals with masculinity in Muslim men after 9/11.

## **4. Key concepts**

### ***4.1 Identity***

The Oxford dictionaries define identity as: “Identity is the fact of being who or what a person or thing is. The characteristics’ determining who or what a person or thing is.” Fearon writes:” Your personal identity may be expressed as that what distinguishes you as an individual from other individuals” (22). One can also talk about other identities: social identity and national identity. Social identity is a person’s sense of who she is, based on what group she belongs to. Howard mentions ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, class, age and (dis-)ability. (367) National identity is based on the sense of belonging to a nation or a state. In this essay, focus is on personal identity.

### ***4.2 Identity crisis***

The Oxford dictionaries define identity crisis as: “A period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person’s sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to change in their expected aims and role in society.” The psychologist Erik Erikson coined the term identity crisis, and according to him, it is a time of intense analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. Such a crisis can occur at any time in your adult life. Baumeister et al. describe it “... the essential precondition for the identity conflict is the status of having a strong personal (and presumably emotional) commitment to two distinct identity components that become incompatible” (412).

### ***4.3 Trauma***

The Oxford dictionaries define Trauma as: “A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.” Trauma is the psychological effect of a highly stressful event or situation like an accident, rape, natural disaster or terror attack and it also includes responses to a chronic or repetitive experience like living in a violent relationship or in war. A psychological trauma refers to the emotional reaction to a hazardous event in which a person’s previous coping mechanisms fail.



A traumatic crisis occurs when a traumatic situation and event overwhelm a person. If an event is or is not traumatic depends on a person's individual subjective experience.

A traumatic crisis can start with a big disaster that involves many people, like the tsunami in Asia in December 2004 and the terror attack in New York 9/11 2001. A so-called life crisis can be triggered by such a traumatic event even though a person is not directly involved in it. It means that a person can start to question her whole life and identity. A person can begin to ask herself who she is (American Psychological Association). The terror attack 9/11 threatened the wellbeing of entire communities. Margulies writes that a whole national identity was effected, and the whole Western society was influenced (7).

## **5. Theoretical framework**

### ***5.1. Psychoanalytic theory***

The psychoanalytic theory makes a good foundation when looking into the characters psychological development, Louis Tyson writes in *Critical theory today*, "if psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behavior" (11). According to the psychoanalytic theory, we are shaped as human beings through our early relations to other people, and how we solve our inner conflicts, which are a part of our psychological development. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is considered the father of psychoanalysis and his work is the foundation for modern psychoanalytic theory. In the following comes a presentation of Freud's basic theory that will be used in the analysis of the main characters in *TRF* and *Disgraced*.

#### *The Conscious, the Preconscious and the Unconscious*

A model for describing different states of consciousness in a human being is to divided it into conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The Conscious is the part of a man's mental life of which he is fully aware, and this state enables us to know where we are and what happens around us. The next state is the Preconscious, where memories and things one has done, quickly can be picked up in the conscious state. For example when one suddenly remembers the title of a song that one has been thinking of or a particular incident when someone reminds one of it.

The next state is the Unconscious, which is the most fundamental level of the consciousness if one wants to understand human behavior. This state is kind of a mental storehouse for all that a one's mind had gone through. During sleep and moments of stress, the unconscious may come bubbling up (Bischof 57-60). The unconscious is of central importance in psychoanalytic theory. That is one of Freud's most fundamental insights and is still influencing psychoanalytic thinking (Bischof, 32-34). Psychoanalytic theory aims to help us understand and solve our psychological problems. For example if a person has anxiety and not is aware of the reason for the problem, the problem can take control of her. That is why the existence of the unconscious is so central in psychoanalytic thinking.

### *The Id, the Ego, and the Superego*

Other fundamental concepts in psychoanalysis that describe the human psyche are id, ego, and superego. The id is the primitive and instinctive part of personality and contains the basic stuff that energizes man throughout life, such as aggression and sexual energy. The id knows only the pleasure principle, which means that every impulse should be satisfied immediately without any thought of the consequences. The id just looks for desire and wants and release of tension. The id belongs to the unconscious state and has no morals. A new-born child is governed only by id. The ego is the more organized and realistic part. It also seeks pleasure and to avoid pain but follows the principals of reality and can postpone gratification and impulses from the id. One can say that the ego is the decision-making part and it considers social realities and norms in the outside world. The superego is the ethical-moral part of the personality. It incorporates the values and rules of the society and from parents and other people in the surrounding. One can also call it conscience. The id, ego, and superego are interwoven in all that man does. The ego balances with the impulses from id and the demands of the surrounding and the society. The ego masters the conscience. The methods that the ego uses to keep the balance between id and superego are different kinds of psychological defense mechanisms. All defense mechanisms "work" without the knowledge in the conscious mind (Bischof 44-47).

#### *5.1.1. Defense Mechanisms*

We use psychological defense mechanisms to protect ourselves from harmful feelings. The mind can use different defense mechanisms to avoid feelings and thoughts that might be painful. Sometimes our defenses break down, and we feel anxiety. That means the defense has not protected us from feeling hurt. All these mechanisms are not under our conscious control

(Bischof 60-69). Tyson describes it as “Defenses are the processes by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious. In other words, they are the processes by which we keep the repressed restrained to avoid knowing what we feel we cannot handle knowing” (15). Next follows a short description of six defense mechanisms that will be used in the analysis.

*Repression, Projection, Identification, Regression, Selective perception and Denial*

Repression keeps disturbing or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious. Such thoughts can result in feelings of guilt if they become conscious. It is a fundamental defense mechanism, and it starts very early in life. For example, if a man who is happily married feels attracted to another woman he pushes these feelings away from the conscious, otherwise he feels guilty.

Projection means that a person protects one’s ego from thoughts or feelings that produce anxiety by casting them toward another person. The person condemns the other instead of confessing the belief in herself. For instance, if a person despises someone and the superego tells that such a feeling is unacceptable the problem can be “solved” by believing that is the other person who has the feeling.

Identification means that a person identifies herself with another individual, a real or a fictive person. When a person merges her personality in the personality of another person, it is identification. It is more than to imitate another. It means that one feels like being the other person.

Regression means that a person goes back to a previous state in development. When a person is troubled or frightened, it is not unusual that behavior becomes more primitive. The person can regress to an infantile form of behavior such as pouting or hitting. Daydreaming when a person gets stressed, and a child who has stopped using diapers and begun to wet itself when a younger sibling is born, are examples of regression (Bischof 60-69).

Selective perception means that a person hears and sees only what the person psychologically can handle. Denial involves blocking external events from awareness. If something is too much to handle, then the person refuses to experience it. A person can deny that a problem does not exist at all or that an unpleasant situation has never occurred. An example of that is a smoker that denies that smoking is bad for the health (Tyson 15).

Much of development of identity takes place in the unconscious. Therefore you have to look at the psychological processes and defense mechanisms that play a vital role in the unconscious mind. When wanting to understand the characters' behavior, the defenses can help explain why they act in certain ways.

## ***5.2 Postcolonial theory***

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define post-colonialism (postcolonial theory) as a theory for investigating the effects of colonization on culture and societies (168). In *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson describes postcolonial theory as particularly useful helping us see connections between all aspects of life. The theory also gives us a framework for examining similarities within the critical theory that focuses on oppression (417).

One of the most prominent thinkers within postcolonial criticism is Homi K. Bhabha. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), a collection of essays, he presents some of his most important ideas, such as mimicry, unhomeliness, and double consciousness. To shape his theories on culture, Bhabha based his work in Marxism, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Farahbakhsh 105). Hans Bertens writes in his book *The Basics Literary Theory* that postcolonial perspective is still used fully in the twenty-first century even though colonies largely has disappeared but neo-colonial relations abound, not only between Western nations and their former colonies but also within these nations and between majorities and minorities.

### ***Double consciousness & unhomeliness***

Colonial subjects often have a double consciousness, which means they become divided between two antagonistic cultures, that the colonizer and that of the indigenous community. Tyson also states that people with a double consciousness often have an unstable sense of self. She further explains it as being in a psychological limbo, a trauma of feeling caught between two cultures, not belonging to neither one, Bhabha calls this state unhomeliness. Tyson further explains unhomeliness or being "unhomed" as never feeling at home because you do not feel at home in yourself, you are a psychological refugee (421).

### ***The "other"***

Said's work on *Orientalism* states that the colonizers believe that the world is divided between "us" (the civilized, The West) and "them" (the others, The East), in which the others take on

the characteristics the West does not want to see in itself (Tyson 420). Orientalism is a discourse that in present times has spread to a wide range of institutional constructions of the colonial other, being a form of political control and influencing self-construction in a way that erodes distinctive traits of individual countries (Ashcroft 154). Bhabha defines the other or otherness as a stereotype, and the most crucial signifier for the identity of the stereotype is skin color (111-114). The other is anyone that is not the same as one's self and is a way to define what is "normal." By identifying the other, one can find one's place of belonging (Ashcroft 154).

### *Mimicry and ambivalence*

Colonized people may feel inferior and try to imitate the colonizers in dress, speech, behavior, and lifestyle. Doing so shows both the individual desire to be accepted by the ruling culture and the guilt that colonized people have over their own, guilt they are programmed to feel by the colonizers (Tyson 421). Bhabha in *the Location of Culture* (1994) describes mimicry as;

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. To be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which appropriates the other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate. However, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both normalized knowledge and disciplinary powers (Bhabha 86).

Closely related to mimicry is ambivalence, which developed within psychoanalysis to describe the constant alternation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite and the simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion of an object, person or action. Homi Bhabha describes it as a complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Ashcroft further explains the relationship "The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer" (10).

Both the novel and the play have protagonists who face challenges on both conscious and unconscious levels. The theories in the essay have a close relationship with one another and will help to describe the development of the character's identity.

## 6. Analysis

The analysis will focus on the main characters Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Amir in *Disgraced*, and how their identities develop throughout the novel and play. With the general theories and concepts; Psychoanalytical and Postcolonial, the essay focuses on investigating how the two protagonists struggle with their identities and are affected by the terrorist attack of 9/11. The analysis is divided into three main parts. The first part focuses on Changez' and Amir's attempts to blend in among Americans. The theoretical concepts of this section are identity, othering, and mimicry. The second part deals with the characters development of their identity post 9/11. Concepts used in this section are identity, othering, and unhomeliness. These two parts are each followed by examples of psychological defense mechanisms. The third part is about Changez' beard and what it means for his identity.

### 6.1 Adjusting to America

For Homi Bhabha, the term mimicry has been crucial for looking at the ambivalence of colonial discourse (Ashcroft 125), mimicry being "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86). Amir and Changez both adopt what Bhabha would call the colonizer's culture.

Both of the main characters, Changez and Amir, are struggling with their identity. Kiran quotes Gail Ching Liag Low "The reflected image, after all, is not the self but an image of the self as Other; identification is hence both recognition and misrecognition" (36). Kiran also writes that; "Changez tries his best to camouflage his Pakistani identity under the mask of American identity, trying complete assimilation into American culture" (Kiran 37). Changez, a middle-class Pakistani citizen in his twenties, comes to America on a scholarship to Princeton. He describes coming to Princeton as everything now being possible. He conducts himself in public as a prince, well dressed, polished, generous and carefree with a sophisticated accent. He says in a job interview that "Most people were taken in by my public persona" (Hamid 12). At the same time, he holds down three on-campus jobs at locations not frequently visited by his fellow students. He describes this as something that makes him feel ashamed. Arriving at Princeton, Changez describes his life like having the lead in a movie. But in reality his life is not so glamorous he has to work hard to keep up his façade resulting in him feeling like an outsider trying to fit it among the other students, many of whom come from wealthy families (Hamid 9).

Moving to New York to begin work at the valuation firm Underwood Samson, Changez immediately feels at home, “I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker” (Hamid 37). He is split between his ambivalence towards the American culture and his Pakistani heritage because he is very much attached to his Pakistani home. Waterman writes that Changez’ sense of belonging always been based on his association with others (130). In New York he meets more people that he can relate to, he hears his native language daily and even smells native Pakistani cooking at different street corners (Hamid 36-37).

Changez has a relationship with a girl named Erica. He meets Erica on a post-graduation trip to Greece. She becomes interested in him because he is not like the others in the traveling group. Erica says to him “I’ve ever met someone our age as polite as you.....Not *boring* polite. Respectful polite. You give people their space. I really like that. It’s unusual.” (Hamid 28). His fellow post-graduates also see him as the other, describing him as an exotic acquaintance. Changez himself reflects on the differences between Eastern and Western values when it comes to money, respect for elders and how one presents oneself to others (Hamid 23-24). Changez sees himself as different but not necessarily in a negative way. He attracted Erica and is a strong believer in his own cultural set values.

Back in America, Erica introduces him to the chic heart of New York to which he otherwise has no access (Waterman 125). He spends several hours deciding what to wear when meeting Erica's parents for the first time, giving much thought to the impression he wants to make. Should Changez visit them as an American or as a man from Pakistan? He again feels split between his two identities, ending up wearing a white kurta (traditional Pakistani) over a pair of jeans (Western clothing) (Hamid 55). Nevertheless, the attitude of Erica's father when meeting Changez for the first time reinforces his feeling of otherness. The father brings up topics such as Pakistani political instability, Islamic fundamentalism, and other religious aspects making it clear that Changez is not one of them (Hamid 82). To fit in at Samson Underwood, Changez works hard, but he also starts to behave more and more like his American colleagues and adapts the same mannerisms and speech. He believes that he needs to do this to succeed in business. This is a good example of him using mimicry.

Amir in *Disgraced* has also adapted to life in America, he is married to an aspiring painter that finds her inspiration in Middle-Eastern culture. He has changed his surname from the traditional Pakistani name Abdullah to the more Indian-sounding Kapoor he has even changed

his social security number. He lies about where his parents were born, being ashamed of his Pakistani heritage and fearing it could damage his career. Amir works hard to become a partner at the law firm Leibowitz, Bernstein and Harris. According to Awan et al. a typical Pakistani mentality is to be over-ambitious about living and working in America and looking prosperous (15). Amir and Changez are playing different roles, so others only see what they choose to present avoiding exposing their inner identities. Goffman writes about the American society that it: "... seems to have been singled out as an extreme example of wealth-orientated class structure – perhaps because in America the license to employ symbols of wealth and financial capacity to do so is widely distributed" (46). Living in the American culture where success and economic wealth are highly valued, in combination with the Pakistani mentality of succeeding in America, gives the protagonists much to gain and also much to lose.

Both characters are chasing the American dream. Changez' attempts to behave as an American culminates when he visits Manila on a business trip. Changez sees how the Manila businessmen look at his American colleague, and also wants that kind of respect; "I did something in Manila I had never done before: I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American" (Hamid 74). Riding a cab during his visit to Manila, Changez notices a man driving a jeepney and feels that the man looked at him with great hostility. Changez stares back at him, which is very impolite in Pakistani culture. Changez cannot understand why the man acted like that towards him (Hamid 76). The event in Manila shows that Changez is torn between his Pakistani identity and the American identity he wants to claim (Olsson 7). When he puts his Pakistani identity aside, he expresses feeling uncomfortable. Olsson writes that "the pervading impression of Changez playing different roles,...makes the reader feel as if his outer shell, but not his actual identity could be identified" (7). For the first time, Changez sees the foreignness in his colleagues and from this point on he begins his alienation from America.

Changez plays roles to fit in that is, he takes on different personal identities and is essentially going through an identity crisis. He states: "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged – in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid 168). Identity is a feeling of being one with oneself, and neither of the characters seems to have that feeling. They are unhomed not only in America but also in themselves. Changez and Amir struggle to fit into the adoptive society. Having success does not ensure they will get acceptance. They are still being othered.



### *6.1.2 Psychological aspects (defenses)*

#### *Identification*

When Changez (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) comes to Princeton he describes feeling like a movie star and that life is glorious, but in reality that is not true. He has to work three different jobs to earn money to be able to afford his student life and send money back to his parents and he thinks this is something shameful (Hamid 12). Identification with a film star in this situation is a defense mechanism. This mechanism protects Changez from being emotionally hurt, realizing his real situation. His life is not that easy as in a film. Another example of identification is when Changez takes the role of his girlfriend's dead boyfriend and lets her call him his name. Changez is taking the role so he can make love to her and this probably is also a way to feel more "American", or that he is chasing some part of the American Dream, embodied by Erica. He says: "I cannot, of course, claim that I was possessed, but at the same time I did not seem to be myself" (Hamid 120). By identifying with the dead boyfriend, Changez does not feel hurt because he has been rejected intimacy when he was himself. He shows his split self by saying: "Perhaps by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes" (Hamid 121).

#### *Projection*

Another sort of defense mechanism is illustrated in the situation when Changez is on a business trip to Manila. He is trying to behave like his American colleagues to get the same kind of respect as they get. He is riding a cab when he notices that a driver of a jeepney looks at him with great hostility. He cannot understand his hostile look and stares back to him (Hamid 76). According to Bischof, this is called projection (63), meaning that Changez is projecting his resentful feeling against the Asian driver by thinking that it is the driver who is resentful towards him. By doing this, his negative feeling stays in his unconscious. He is struggling with his identity: is he Pakistani or is he American? And it is hard to admit that he has a hostile feeling against his "own kind".

### **6.2 Identity affected by 9/11**

Trauma can be a trigger to start questioning oneself and it can also disrupt one's sense of identity. Life goals may change when traumatic events take place, and values and beliefs

about the world may be shattered (Berman 1-2). The situation for people with a Middle Eastern appearance was now more than before the subject of othering. Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* that; “an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence in the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (94). After 9/11 Changez and Amir feel more and more like outsiders, showing signs of being “unhomed”.

During the business trip to Manila, Changez hears about the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. At first, he has a hard time believing it but realizing it is happening he smiles and feels pleased. He cannot understand the feeling of satisfaction over America’s pain. “But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack...I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (Hamid 83). Meeting his colleagues that same evening, Changez plays the role of being as shocked as they are. It is not until realizing that Erica could be hurt that he no longer needs to pretend, he becomes just as worried as the others. Amir also feels ambivalent about the attack. He feels proud of the people that would die for their values and expresses a sense of pride (Akhtar 62). He says “we are finally winning” referring to the event not as a Muslim, but as a man from the Middle-East (Akhtar 63).

At the airport in Manila to take a flight back to America, Changez is subject to special screening, before being let on to the plane to America. Armed guards escort him to a separate room where he is forced to take off his clothes. He feels humiliated. Olson writes that people always classify other people according to characteristics that will distinguish the others from themselves. Before the terror attack, his outer appearance did not give him any negative exclusion or made him experience othering in the same extent (10-11). Entering the aircraft as the last person, the passengers look at him with suspicion. Arriving in America, he joins the queue for foreigners and is asked for his passport by a woman with “a mastery of English inferior to mine” (Hamid 86). “What is the purpose of your trip to the United States? She asked me. I live here, I replied. That is not what I asked you, sir, she said. What is your purpose of your trip the United States?” (Hamid 86). He is profiled and sent to a room for a further inspection. When realizing his colleagues have already left the airport, Changez feels humiliated and very much alone (Hamid 86). His sense of belonging has been transformed overnight (Waterman 130), a major turning point for Changez identity. Haoloi writes in her article that Changez is subjected to discrimination because of his ethnicity and he realizes that he never fully given up his Pakistani identity (303).

In *Disgraced*, Amir describes how he handles the security control at airports and that he always volunteers to get screened. He explains his behavior, “On top of being more and more afraid of folks who look like me, we end up being resented too”. Amir’s behavior is a passive aggressive reaction to the situation of being the other (Akthar 49-50). America was in mourning after 9/11 and feelings of anger spread across the country. Changez hears rumors about Pakistani cabdrivers being beaten, the FBI raiding Mosques and private homes and Muslim men disappearing. Changez tells himself that these stories are not real or at least could not happen to him because he is both well-educated and wealthy (Hamid 107). Being a man from the Middle East, Changez faces suspicion from his surroundings. He is called “fucking Arab”, unknown men want to fight him, and his car is vandalized on several occasions (Hamid 109).

Amir in *Disgraced* also experiences his fair share of othering. An example of this is when he is in public with his white wife they get looks from other people. He is also met with suspicion after being present at a trial for an imam accused of inciting terrorism, a trial he only attended because his wife persuaded him. Amir’s wife Emily reacts to people looking at her and Amir for being an interracial couple, this does not bother Amir, as he is used to it being a man from the Middle East. Emily reflects over this saying that “not seeing who you really are, the gap between what he was assuming about you and what you really are” (Akhtar 7). Amir is ambivalent towards Emily art; he especially dislikes the Islamic cultural influences that she sometimes uses, he instead likes her landscape painting in contradiction to the reviews she has received of her pictures (Akhtar 47). By not liking her more Middle-Eastern inspired pictures he displays an adverse reaction to his Pakistani origin.

At work, Amir’s boss starts to ask questions about his name and where his parents are born, but Amir is dishonest when answering. Goffman writes about such a situation “Those caught out in the act of telling barefaced lies not only lose face during the interaction but may have their face destroyed, for it is felt by many audiences that if an individual can once bring himself to tell such a lie, he ought never again to be fully trusted” (69). His dishonesty about his identity results in him losing his credibility at work, a colleague says that they do not trust him at the firm. In the play’s final scene his nephew mentions Amir has lost his job (Akhtar 83).

Changez meets more and more hostility in his adoptive country and starts to reflect on what he does not like about America. He reminds himself that he always has resented the way that

America had presented itself to the world and that money was the primary means by which America exercised its power (Hamid 177). An incident in which Changez reacts in a way that surprises himself is when watching TV seeing American troops invading Afghanistan. Changez realizes that he identifies himself more with the people of Afghanistan, a country that neighbors Pakistan, than with the Americans. He gets so upset that he trembles and has to drink whiskey before falling asleep. Changez connects more and more with his Eastern identity. Later that year the Indian army mobilizes and Changez is worried about his family's safety in Pakistan and becomes irritated when realizing that America would not assist their ally Pakistan in a possible conflict (Hamid 114). Reflecting on this he says,

I was no longer capable of so thorough a self-deception. I did, however, tell myself that I had overreacted, that there was nothing I could do, and that all these world events were playing out on a state of no relevance to my personal life. But I remained aware of the embers glowing within me, and the day I found it difficult to concentrate on the pursuit- at which I was normally so capable- of fundamentals (Hamid 100).

The instability in the world influences his sense of self.

He has thought about leaving America, but he has not asked himself why and for what (Hamid 145). Once again Changez doubts who he is and where he belongs.

Certainly I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream (Hamid 106).

A turning point in Changez' life, brings him closer to his Pakistani identity: "As for myself, I was clearly on the threshold of great change, only the final catalyst was now required, and in my case, that catalyst took the form of a lunch" (Hamid 170). That lunch is in Venezuela with Juan-Bautista, the chief of a firm he is sent to evaluate. Bautista tells him the story of the Janissaries, a person who is kidnapped and made to fight against her own culture (Hamid 172). Changez begins to think about his own identity and how he is living his life.

There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war (Hamid 173).

His new insights into his identity results in him neglecting his work, and in the end, he quits the firm and leaves America to move back to Lahore, Pakistan. Changez later reflects over his meeting with Bautista, "Thank you Juan-Bautista, I thought as I lay myself down in my bed, for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed" (Hamid 178).

In *Disgraced*, Amir expresses a lot of negative opinions about Islam and the Quran (Akhtar 53-). He is later called a closet jihadist in a heated discussion with Isaac, a Jewish friend, about the Israel and Palestine conflict, in which he admits wanting Israel wiped into the ocean (Akhtar 64-65). When he is pressured his true feelings come out, and he blames it on his Islamic upbringing. Isaac does not stand by this and says, “No shit it’s wrong. But it doesn’t come from Islam. It comes from you” (Akhtar 64). The same evening, Amir finds out that his wife has cheated on him with Isaac and he learns that he has not made partner at the law firm. His psychological stability is disrupted. The heated discussion with Isaac results in Amir spitting him in the face (Akhtar 73). Alone with his wife, he cannot control his emotions anymore and starts to beat her (Akhtar 75).

The dilemma for Amir is similar to Changez that they are both born into one culture, the Pakistani, but embrace another, the American. They try hard to assimilate into America forgetting or repressing what they were and what they still are. “Those who migrate abroad to find meaning in their life, still fail to discover their true identity” (Kiran 36). Both experience an identity crisis when struggling with their dual identities – American versus Asian and Muslim versus secularist (Moss *TheGuardian.com*). They deal with ambivalent feelings about the terrorist attack. After 9/11 their position as the other becomes more and more evident. Due to their appearance as Middle Eastern men, they are subjects of psychological and physical abuse.

### ***6.2.1 Psychological aspects (defenses)***

#### ***Repression***

The first example of a defense mechanism is repression, which according to Bischof is a fundamental mechanism because it starts very early in life (61). When Changez in *TRF* hears about the attack on World Trade Centre and realizes that it has happened, he smiles and feels pleased (Hamid 84). He cannot understand what he feels. Amir in *Disgraced* also feels ambivalent about the attack and feels proud of people who could die for their values (Akhtar 63). If someone had asked them before 9/11 what they think about such an event, they would probably have condemned it, but now when shocked, they cannot hold these forbidden feelings repressed. Under ordinary circumstances, our defenses keep us unaware of unpleasant feelings (Tyson 18). Trying so hard to identify as Americans that they never before consciously have reflected on what they did not like about America.

### *Selective perception*

In *Disgraced* one example of selective perception is when Amir and his wife are in a café in New York, and Emily reacts to people staring at them because they are an interracial couple. Amir does not bother about the looks they get, as he is used to this being a man from the Middle East (Akhtar 7). To psychologically manage this type of situation Amir represses his feelings. Tyson describes this psychological defense by saying that a person hears and sees only what she feels she can handle (15). When Changez hears about bad things that happen to Muslims, how the FBI treats people, how people get beaten and sometimes disappear, he does not believe these stories or at least he tells himself that it cannot happen to him (Hamid 107). He cannot psychologically handle all this information about how Muslim people are treated so he ignores his unconscious thoughts.

### *Denial*

In *TRF* there are a couple of examples of the defense mechanism denial. A slow transformation of Changez' identity starts after the terror attack, and he begins to reevaluate America. When he visits Pakistan, he understands that he has denied all doubts about his American dream (Hamid 106). He has been so keen on adapting to America that he has denied all negative thoughts about the country. Another example of denial is when Changez meets more and more hostility in his everyday life in America (Hamid 177). All his negative thoughts and emotions about America has stayed in his unconscious. When he was living the American dream, this kind of feelings would have made it difficult to adjust to the American society, but when he no longer feels welcome, they become essential to who he is. According to Tyson, this defense is called denial (15).

### *Regression*

In *Disgraced* there are examples of the defense mechanism regression. After a day at work, when Amir's boss asked about where his parents are born, Amir starts to drink. Finally he smashes a glass on the floor (Akhtar 33). At a dinner party later that day, Amir learns that he is not made partner at the law firm, at the same time he finds out that his wife has cheated on him with his Jewish friend. After a heated discussion, Amir becomes so upset that he spits in his Jewish friend's face (Akhtar 73). He does the same thing his mother once did to him when she spat in his face for trading notes with a Jewish girl in school. Amir has done the same thing to the Jewish girl after his mother has condemned his friendship with her (Akhtar 17).

### *Id – Ego – Superego*

After the dinner party Amir's psychological stability is disrupted and when he is alone with his wife, he cannot control his emotions and starts to beat her (Akhtar 75). Amir cannot understand how his emotions could take such a physical form. He knows it is wrong to beat his wife and immediately realizes his mistake. This is an excellent example of how the human psyche, composed of the id, ego, and superego, works (Bischof 44-47). Amir's superego (his conscious) knows that it is not allowed to beat his wife and it is against his morals. The id is the primitive and instinctive part of the personality, in this case, it is aggression. The ego balances these two forces, so the id does not take over. In Amir's upset mood the balance is off, and he acts on his first impulse.

### **6.3 *The beard and identity -TRF***

The beard plays a vital role in Changez identity. Olsson states that after 9/11 Changez' appearance becomes a sign of otherness and that his different outer appearance defines him (10). He grows his beard while visiting his family in Pakistan, both his father and brother wear beards. When it is time for him to travel back to America, his mother asks him to shave, because she feels that the Americans would react negatively towards him because of the beard. Well aware of the difficulties the beard could cause him, he decides to keep it. He expresses an uncertainty for a reason for keeping it, but it seems like it is a step in actively creating his identity and reconnecting with his heritage.

Olsson writes that people always classify each other according to characteristics that will separate others from themselves (10). In Changez' case, with the beard, he looks more "foreign," and it strengthens his sense of Pakistani identity. Another example of this is when his boss at Underwood Samson says, "Listen, kid," he said, "some people around here think you're looking kind of shabby. The beard and all" (Hamid 156). Changez recalls, "It was, perhaps, 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, I do not now recall my precise motivation. I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry" (Hamid 148). His renewed contact with his suppressed identity takes a visible form in the beard. Because of this he experiences whispers and looks at work and is now defined by his colleagues as the Other.

In Muslim countries, beards are worn for many different reasons, such as if a man wants to look like Prophet Mohammed or if he wants to show masculinity or wisdom and authority. It is not necessarily an expression of resistance to the western world or a sign of religious fundamentalism (Olsson 13). Olsson states that; “Facial hair appears to have symbolic quality, as it is often taken as an outward identifying feature for terrorist” (Olsson 10). The terror attack of 9/11 changed the image of the Muslim world for many people into fundamentalists and terrorists and beards became immediately suspect.

## **7. Concluding discussion**

The analysis shows that both Amir and Changez try hard to fit into the American culture, wanting success and acceptance. If the attack on the World Trade Center had not occurred, their lives and identities might have moved in another direction.

Changez, who came to America on a scholarship before 9/11, seeks to fulfill the American dream. By adopting mannerisms and speech from his colleges, he takes on another identity he believes is the right identity to become successful. He uses identification as a defense, to protect himself from painful feelings. Even so, he never feels at home. His move to New York shows that he wants to have his Pakistani roots close. Choosing to wear a kurta over jeans when meeting Erica’s father for the first time, also amplifies his ambivalence between wanting to fit in and being true to his heritage. Even before 9/11, Changez is subject to othering, and it is an essential part of his identity development. One thing we learn about Amir before 9/11 is that he has changed his name and social security number hiding his Pakistani origin. By doing so, he denies his Pakistani roots and shows a willingness to do whatever it takes to succeed in his professional life. Amir is raised in a strictly Muslim family, and he had a crush on a Jewish girl in school but his mother strongly disapproved of such a relationship.

The trauma of 9/11 affects them both but in a different ways. They express ambivalent thoughts and feelings regarding the attack which in Changez causes him to reflect more deeply on life and identity. The negative thoughts towards America had not entered their conscious minds prior the attack. Both also face other forms of othering because of their Middle-Eastern appearance. Amir does not reflect on his dual-identities in the way that Changez does, but the attack still has a major impact on his life, in some ways he identifies



with the terrorist that flew into the Twin Towers. His othering changes his identity, by ending his career at the law firm and losing his wife. He also gains a new way of looking at his wife's art, not being as negative towards her Middle-Eastern inspiration. Amir is more culturally connected to America, being first-generation Pakistani-American, and displays indifference when facing othering but he is still affected. Changez instead has his home outside America, and when getting met with more hostility, he seeks to find the feeling of belonging back in Pakistan. As a consequence of his identity searching, Changez grows a beard, wanting to show that he has change(z)ed, eventually leaving America to move back to Pakistan. These two works show how many people have been and still are affected by the attacks on 9/11. Much of the literature about the terrorist attack in New York is written by western authors from a western perspective.

Amir and Changez, in many people's eyes, are viewed upon as the others in America, whether they like it or not. Their physical appearance gives them away. A white American citizen in America belongs to the majority and can probably in most cases avoid being seen as the other. These identity crises can be expressed in many different ways. Amir reacts to the othering with ambivalent feelings, while Changez reaction is that he finds his identity within the Pakistani culture, that he before had left behind when moving to America.

This essay shows that an identity crisis linked to terrorist attacks and group belongings can cause life-changing events, some positive and others negative, in which some cases may have devastating consequences.

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