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Cover Page Footnote

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Troublesome Minorities: Questioning Assimilation in *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist and *Home Fire*

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Abstract

Cultural discourse has long proposed assimilation as the method for the successful social and political incorporation of immigrant populations in the West. The model minority myth is perpetuated as a success story of the immigrant (particularly the Asian immigrant) achieving the American Dream, of finding success through hard work and trademark American determination, while marketing the perceived silence and patience of the minority as honorable traits. However, these ideals are insufficient and problematic as they ignore the challenges immigrants and their descendants face in the post-9/11 era and promote deep set notions of race and associated categories. In order to better understand the incorporation of immigrant communities in the new century, we need to deconstruct and reevaluate the collective memory of mainstream western societies for their own myths of cultural and hegemonic superiority. We must study these societies as ethnic, as equally rooted in tradition as immigrant communities are accused of, and then a step towards a new, more just vision of adaptation must be taken. Exploring English literature, specifically works by South Asian Muslim writers on the post-9/11 western diaspora, reveals a more "humanist" understanding of these communities. Considering novels like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Fire* alongside theoretical works such as *Orientalism* by Edward Said, *White* by Richard Dyer, and Omi and Winant's racial formation theory offers a much more nuanced

discussion on the racialization of Muslims after 9/11 through policing and surveillance, and the resulting isolation of the community into fundamentalisms and binaries.

Keywords: postcolonialism, orientalism, racialization, Asian American literature, Muslim literature, post-9/11 literature, globalization, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Home Fire*

Introduction

Western intellectuals have long defined and speculated about the people of the East; formulating and understanding images of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians as dark-skinned savages, as the Other. My research is not focused on how the West has depicted this group in the past with a non-humanist view of belittling and animalizing; rather I will focus on how racialization has retained Orientalism and radicalized to encompass new discourses. My research will include *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, texts written after 9/11 that grapple with the identities of Muslim South Asians living in an increasingly hostile West through first-person narratives. In response to contemporary discourse on the diaspora being mainly Eurocentric, these texts serve as new representations. They reclaim agency to represent and replace an older model of analyzing this demographic from white perspectives by articulating inner conflicts through fiction and initiating a flow of cultures between people. First, the paper addresses popular political rhetoric and laws like the Patriot Act that reflect the continuous resurfacing of cemented binaries in the West. Having explored this rhetoric as functioning in the same world the novels are set in, my paper then explores what these books have to contribute about the model of assimilation for immigrant communities through

close reading of the text. How do the writers create individuality for a group consolidating their postcolonial subjectivity with the racialized images projected upon them? In times of criminalization, policing, surveilling, and mass media and political rhetoric misrepresenting Muslims in the West, how does assimilation become complicated? What are we assimilating towards? What is the common American identity and why does the delusion of a “model minority” persist? What is the price to pay when one deviates from it? I focus on these texts and their characters as they are individual aesthetic objects with autonomy but are significant because of the dialogue they conduct with a historical era. The personal lives of the authors or the reception of the books does not inform the study. This is a portion of my original thesis.

Through close reading I explore these immediate questions and the larger questions of what this particular demographic has to contribute to minority literature. Functioning with a postcolonial twenty-first century focus, what place do these texts have in the modern configuration of Muslims and Islam? What is their place in Asian American literature? Do the novels provide a conceptual model for identity formation that is different from the racial identity model of colonial times? What can minority discourse contribute to majoritarian values? I believe that such works deconstruct imposed and self-imposed ideas of how proper western citizenship and personal Muslim identities formulate. They replace the model minority myth, the idea of a silent Muslim Asian promoted both within the Asian culture, post-9/11 Muslim populations, and by dominant assimilation discourse in the West. Such work subverts the image of a docile, cooperative minority based on stereotype and the reality of post-9/11 fear; it breaks the Asian culture of silence and belief that such an absence of speech or writing will protect the livelihood of immigrants. Stemming from the hazy assumptions and ignorance of what Edward Said calls Orientalism, racialization after 9/11 also involves surveillance, policing, and other

forms of criminalization, of these various ethnic and religious groups that are perceived to be the same. Considering these circumstances, my theoretical base includes *White* by Richard Dyer, Omi and Winant's racial formation theory, and Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Elda Maria Roman's *Race and Upward Mobility* and John Alba Cutler's *Ends of Assimilation* also play a role in how I define assimilation.

Shamsie tells a story of third-generation Britons of Pakistani descent: Isma, the oldest sister, and Aneeka and Parvaiz, the twins. Following their tragic childhood of abandonment by a fundamentalist father and the death of their mother and grandmother, Parvaiz goes to Syria to join the troubled pursuits of his dead father. Isma tries to lead a life without the loss and disappointment of her brother in the US as she researches the "sociological impact of the War on Terror" while Aneeka takes desperate steps to save him (40). In contrast to these siblings is half-Pakistani, half-American Briton Eamonn and his father Karamat Lone. These two serve as the image of successful assimilation through the embodiment of whiteness that the others fail at. Karamat Lone is a notorious political figure from a Pakistani immigrant community. He continually dissociates himself from his past and eventually becomes Home Secretary, one of the many important positions in a nation fearful of Muslims. Lone has insight on how the community of Muslims thinks and how to successfully isolate them. Eventually the paths of all five central characters cross as the siblings try to save each other and Karamat Lone attempts to save his own son and serve his nation by destroying its "enemies." Hamid's novel follows a young Pakistani man named Changez in his shifts from Princeton student to employee of an impressive valuation firm to reluctant fundamentalist. His job at Underwood Samson, his steady adoption of American attitudes and mannerisms, and his relationship with a white woman named Erica allow entry to the elite social and economic world of Manhattan. Changez demonstrates how he begins to assimilate into

American society through his adoption of whiteness and the quick rejection he faces as he is absorbed into the racialized categories of suspect after 9/11. The novel is set entirely from the perspective of Changez as he gives a monologue to a suspicious American visitor in a restaurant in Lahore. The identity of the mysterious man is never revealed, and he is continuously offended by Changez's deteriorating relationship with the US. Both of the novels produce complicated struggles to be loyal to one's family and home while still being accepted by the western societies the characters have either adopted or been born into. The permeation of policing and surveilling into the way both political figures and citizens perceive Muslims in the West makes the post-9/11 era different from previous racialization that may have been limited to fewer and less dangerous incidents of discrimination.

My thesis begins by exploring *Shamsie* as she does not offer a solution or stance. *Home Fire* presents the humanity of these characters and their attempts to survive in a very hostile environment, even more hostile because of the decisions their family has made.

They are trying to lead a normal life, but *Shamsie* challenges what normalcy is. Is a stable life for a Muslim the result of complete erasure of one's beliefs? Does the possibility of being loyal to one's family and culture and still being British exist?

With *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid offers more of a conclusion. He begins with some similarities to *Shamsie* while focusing on the specifics of New York, demonstrating how exactly Muslims are racialized through contrast with characters that are not immediately judged by their appearance and why assimilation is difficult. They both establish that the West is not as concerned with being humane as it keeps saying it is and Hamid also demonstrates that the American Dream is not as viable as promoted. It is the words and promises of an ideal against the reality of policies. However, Hamid's protagonist has other options besides struggling; he can

return home knowing he will get a job with his American education. When he returns to Lahore and starts working as a professor, he begins criticizing US policies and the War on Terror. I argue that Hamid is proposing that Changez is stuck between two fundamentalisms, American corporate capitalism and the fabrication of Islam. Hamid presents Changez as reluctant to become a fundamentalist of the capitalist system in the US. That is what the majority of the novel is dedicated to, him trying to become a part of the “empire” by conforming to whiteness and constantly being rejected because he is seen only for his race. This repeated rejection and the treatment of the Muslim world after 9/11 make him more reluctant to follow the fundamentals of a capitalist corporation but also make him cautious of the fundamentalism taking hold at home.

This thesis argues that colonial practices such as racialization disrupt postcolonial dreams of humanism and individuality. In contrast to the racial categories of crime and suspicion that confine South Asian Muslim communities, the primary texts reveal complex individuals with the ability for as much good or bad as anyone else is afforded. The characters’ central, omnipotent positions in narration provide a less explored framework of ambiguous endings and perspectives from which the audience is meant to draw conclusions. These texts work through the effects of racialization and the tensions of assimilation that capture Muslims between modern systems of human subjectivity: western capitalism and religious fundamentalism, two ways of belonging to nationhood. Each offers something essential yet contradictory. Adopting a free-moving globalist lifestyle with the hope of economic and social upward mobility often involves the characters performing whiteness in a corporate setting, a world of plenty. While the other option requires another sacrifice of identity, family and country. The thesis explores how Islam is configured in the modern world and how Muslims negotiate an identity under the pressures of acceptance, social status, self-worth, and family.

The main discourses and fields this study interacts with are Orientalism, postcolonialism, globalization, specifically in the twenty-first century, and critical race theory. Edward Said describes the term Orientalism as such: “it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power” (Said 5). This idea applies to how Muslims are racialized. It does not occur in an incubator by politicians or other people in power, but rather develops in disorderly interactions with “power intellectual,” “power moral,” and the media, social and traditional (Said 5). Orientalist thought can be traced back to several European thinkers who were able to distribute their knowledge as the sole source of information on the “Orient,” an obsessively large amount of political, anthropological, scientific, and popular literature that was the authority on matters of the East due to the lack of any other available information and the fact that most people from European metropolises had not visited and would not visit this region. Today, in the postcolonial era, we continue to see such a phenomenon despite the democratic growth of publishing avenues and easier travel allowing multiple voices to be heard online and in person. Western powers, mainly the US, are able to shape worldviews and justify policy based on discourse that they produce and control. Other ideas become marginal and difficult to access. Thus, exploring the persistence of Orientalism and countering it with alternative narratives, narratives by the people of the “Orient” and their descendants in the West, becomes urgent.

Said and Dyer provide a historical background of how race and racial binaries came to be. They map and deconstruct the religious and cultural rhetoric around race that forms a) the East as the exotic, static “Orient” and b) the West as outside race and ethnicity. “The Matter of Whiteness” by Dyer studies whiteness as a race and highlights the different ways in which it is embodied: “a wider notion of the white body, of embodiment, of whiteness involving something that is in but

not of the body. I approach this through three elements of its constitution: Christianity, ‘race’ and enterprise /imperialism” (Dyer 14). This paper will explore how these embodiments are performed by the various characters in order to assimilate into western workplaces, politics, and social elite. According to Dyer, “as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone defines normality and fully inhabits it” (Dyer 9). The central position of these characters is outside the “human condition,” outside the linear progression of western societies, and this outsider position depicts just how “raced” the West is. Omi and Winant establish what it means to live in that category, to have race determine every aspect of one’s life from daily encounters with the public to job opportunities to how the justice system treats one. As their work explains, racialization “emphasize[s] how the phenomic, the corporeal dimension of human bodies, acquires meaning in social life” (Omi and Winant 109). Thus, Muslims attempt to shed the visual images associated with their race from their corporeal existence to ease social interactions. Besides discussing how race manifests in modern-day America, which I will expand to include the West in general, the racial formation theory provides definitions of racialization that are essential to understanding how exactly interracial relationships become so complicated. I will also use their work as an explanation for why some Muslims are racialized more than others. My close readings of the two different post-9/11 settings will break down who is able to successfully embody these ideals, who is not, and why. Together these works provide the framework of the racial world that the novels function in. Essentially, the characters of *Home Fire* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are navigating a world that still holds on to ancient ideas of the Other, binaries between the East and West, and celebrates multiculturalism while maintaining myths of the “model minority” and actively encouraging the embrace of white traditions in order to achieve social, financial, and political success.

The works of Roman and Cutler discuss assimilation as the popular sociological model for the incorporation of immigrants and how socioeconomic power and class standing are tied to understandings of success. There is a tension between the characters that have and have not assimilated. In *Race and Upward Mobility*, economic upward mobility is the divisive factor between an ethnic group and that progression involves a “crisis of affiliation” (Roman 1). The classic sitcom characters that Roman discusses are experiencing a crisis in their class and ethnic affiliations, but the characters I will be discussing also experience this crisis in religious, familial, and national affiliations. What separates people within the same group and from other minorities is their economic status and the resulting disparities can express a sense of betrayal to one’s ethnic origins. This thesis will adapt the idea of socioeconomic success being perceived as closer to whiteness to the immigrant characters of the two novels. Being an “authentic” racial person and possessing an ethnic identity, a trait not debated for the white majority, means adhering to the standards and behaviors of a lower economic and social status. Titles like “resistant or sellout” are complicated by upwardly mobile characters and the specific situation of Muslim immigrants in the post-9/11 context adds more forces and ideologies to be contested with (Roman). Also, the novels deal with different areas of upward mobility; in Hamid’s novel it is economic upward mobility and social class status. Shamsie’s novel focuses on one’s political and social upward mobility, analyzing how the various rankings lead to one’s respect in western society and how they relate to the right of citizenship.

In *Ends of Assimilation*, Cutler examines Park and Burgess’s 1921 definition of assimilation, the result of which is a “common cultural life” (Cutler). Cutler comments on what is lacking from this definition: “persons and groups ‘are incorporated’ with other persons and groups, but the definition names no agent of incorporation, as if the process happened by magic” (Cutler

3). I would like to add that the sociological definition is suggesting a mechanical, almost clinical agent of forceful transplant. Their definition is eerily biological: “interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups” (Cutler 3). It is almost as though the incoming persons or groups, in this case immigrants, must go through a procedure of cell replacement, a rewiring of individual human memories with the new nation’s experience and history in order to create the same sentiments and outlook. The purpose is to replace the old, not mesh it with the new as there is only room for one. As Marilyn Chin explains, “The vector of assimilation only goes one direction” (Macdonald). As Cutler argues, “sociologists of assimilation, under the guise of providing a disinterested description, valorize a particular vision of American culture,” as if it is a proven process, devoid of errors (Cutler 5-6). These works disrupt the nature of fact assimilation discourse pretends to possess and the various “vision[s] of American culture” (Cutler 6). I argue that resistance is the cultural production of these texts in response to hegemonic systems offered to them by fundamentalist corporations and politicians.

The following close reading and analysis are a portion of my complete research and demonstrate some of my arguments.

Home Fire

The contrasting dynamics of a minority, “ethnic” culture and that of the mainstream are more stark in *Home Fire*. The differences between the South Asian immigrant community and the rest of England are more stressed and the tension takes on an urgent note. As if there is an ultimatum, the community is aware of its marginalization and their politicians’ impatience with their differences. The Pasha family, at the center of this story, represents all their fears. Their father was a terrorist

and their brother is in Syria. However, Shamsie mirrors the Greek tragedy *Antigone* for its literary agency, its relatability and uses this family as a takeoff point. There is a view of this family that the authorities have and there are the intimate workings of the Pasha household and their inner trauma that Shamsie reveals as recognizable.

The following passages, related to Karamat Lone and Isma's relationship with his son, give insight into Lone's journey in upward mobility and Isma's struggle to survive in a society that views her as the enemy. Furthermore, it reveals how these different patterns and levels of success separate people belonging to the same community and ethnic group. When Eammon receives news that his father, Karamat Lone, has been made Home Secretary, he expresses anxiety over an unpleasant incident from the past.

"*All the old muck.* He meant the picture of Karamat Lone entering a mosque that had been in the news for its 'hate preacher.' LONE WOLF'S PACK REVEALED, the headlines screamed when a tabloid got hold of it, near the end of his term as an MP. The Lone Wolf's response had been to point out that the picture was several years old, he had been there only for his uncle's funeral prayers and would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space. This was followed by pictures of him and his wife walking hand in hand into a church. His Muslim-majority constituency voted him out in the elections that took place just a few weeks later, but he was quickly back in Parliament via a by-election, in a safe seat with a largely white constituency, and the tabloids that had attacked him now championed him as a LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims." (36).

While this remains a remarkable memory in the mind of the British Muslim community, to Eammon and his family it is an inconvenient incident. To them, the Muslim community that elected Lone is the perpetrator and the cause for insignificant, petty, “old muck.” Without having any connections to that community, Eammon is unable to view the issue from any other perspective than his own. Previously a “lone wolf,” a man with unknown allegiances, Karamat Lone’s predatory nature becomes associated with a whole group of people when he enters the mosque, a suspicious pack of others. Rather than questioning the racist tones of such headlines, he immediately becomes defensive and separates himself from the Muslim community, remarking on “problematic” details along the way. To counter the “absurd” ways of the Muslim place of worship, Lone makes another public appearance, “walking hand in hand into a church” with his white wife. The image of an interracial couple affectionately entering a church as a performance of a perfect, white, Protestant marriage, one that is rooted in western morals and religious hegemony, and not the intruding, backwards traditions of an isolated community is a calculated move. Lone strategizes his ascent to the mainstream white constituency just as elections are being held again. Being voted out by his Muslim supporters and rescued by his white ones is a clear shift of “allegiances.” Having cleverly used his campaign as a platform for the lower-class, immigrant voice to make his way into the political world, he discards them when it is necessary to his upward political mobility. He is now situated with his new supporters in a “safe seat” that secures the longevity of his career rather than complicating it with issues of a controversial and difficult community. His title changes from Lone Wolf to “Lone Crusader,” an imperialist-minded man of ambition. Karamat Lone as the “Lone Crusader” is a prop for the conservative and liberal media to interchangeably and simultaneously use as a symbol of successful assimilation, defying regressive gender norms and religious ideals, a brave warrior set apart from “his people” and aligned with the interests of the

state. He is the successfully assimilated man of color now on a crusade for the state in its efforts to either assimilate or isolate the rest of his kind.

It is equally important to explore possible motivations behind Karamat Lone's decisions, without endorsing them, as it is to observe Parvaiz's early life to understand how both these characters reached such different extremes. As Dyer suggests, "those who occupy positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated - human not raced There is something especially white in this non-located and disembodied position of knowledge" (Dyer 4). Lone's every action is "raced;" his every decision is associated with character, the very biological nature of his race, as if he and the monotonous mass of brown faces, Muslim and not, are genetically engineered to have certain responses. Entering a mosque, a free place of worship, is judged to be motivated by malicious intentions rather than a simple attendance of a funeral. Not only will he come under scrutiny, but so will the "gender-segregated space" of his mosque and the other attendants. Meanwhile his obviously strategized move to enter a church hand-in-hand with his white wife goes on to not only be free of minute criticisms, but actually praised. The "cultural hegemony" of a white couple and a church, a Christian place of worship, makes this action seem not like a political move, but "neutral and unsituated" in the problematic ideals of white race, a natural and "human" habit. The "disembodied position of knowledge" of mainstream media outlets and the white constituency voting him into parliament decides which of Lone's movements are rooted in "backwards" ideology and which are acceptable. If he aligns himself with white cultural and religious symbols, "non-located" in the color of his skin, he can accomplish his goals with less scrutiny.

Despite his son's revelation that he is in love with Aneeka and wants to help her brother come home, Karamat Lone's perspective remains the same. He sees the relationship as an attempt

to use his powers to free a terrorist and seems to be motivated by his son's irreverence; wanting to harden him to the truth as he perceives it, he becomes more volatile in his decisions. However, Aneeka is too late in her attempts and Parvaiz is killed outside the British embassy in Istanbul by an unknown man. In a newspaper article featuring a statement from Isma about her brother's murder after spending months working for the ISIS media cell, Lone's idea to contain threats like Parvaiz is revealed: "Sources in the Home Office say the Immigration Bill due to go before Parliament in the next session will introduce a clause to make it possible to strip any British passport holders of their citizenship in cases where they have acted against the vital interests of the UK." (205-06). In order to punish the criminal and to discharge British authorities and society of all responsibility, Lone seeks to strip a future Parvaiz of citizenship. Stateless, Parvaiz is no longer the responsibility of his homeland where he first became disillusioned and misled into this fundamentalism. Just as his family was abandoned in childhood, Parvaiz is literally banished once again and his family is left to make amends and prove their loyalties through media statements; he is a burden that even his sister must reject for her own survival. As Shah explains, "State power and sovereignty came into being over the regulation of human mobility. States simultaneously regulated individual identity through passports, permits, and visas, and channeled human mobility through defined gateways, transportation systems, and territorial boundaries" (Shah 30). One of colonialism's many legacies is the creation of borders and legal forms of identity like passports. Lone seeks to control Parvaiz's mobility even in death, prohibiting the entrance of his corpse into the nation as if even in death he presents some threat. He is equally guilty of promoting fundamentalism as Parvaiz or Changez are; Lone is caught in a political fundamentalism while Parvaiz is attaching himself to a religious one in some attempt for personal autonomy.

Parvaiz's life is not perceived as an alarming fact of British society, a result of the complicated environment structured by policies and perceptions of Muslim communities. Rather than learning why he chose to go to Syria, the authorities ignore and eliminate the problem as non-British, ills of an immigrant community they need not answer. His actions do not inform psychology or cause self-reflection. This distinction is all the more tragic when recalling that Parvaiz's sister Isma is building an academic career through her research of post-9/11 policing of Muslims; her "textuality offers something that oral communication does not: an opportunity to challenge the dominant public discourse through sustained research and argumentation" (Chambers 215). However, Isma's "challenge" is unsustainable and the same policies she opposes are used against her brother. As Said explains in his book, "As a system of thought about the Orient, it always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia" (Said). Similarly, in a position of significant power, Lone can apply observations on a twenty-first century Arab terrorist to policies affecting young Muslims born and raised in Britain. The same psychology used to explain the "mentality" of a global criminal organization can be applied to young adults living across the world. Humanity is reserved for the white race, which as Dyer explains, is not associated with cruelty or crime. Britons want to disown Parvaiz and racializing him, associating his decisions with some innate fanaticism present in the brown body, is simple because he is not seen as the human norm.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Changez's central motivation is economic upward mobility and his idea of self stems from wealth and social status. As soon as he feels secure in the same strata as his colleagues, the equal sum of

acceptance and privilege minus a few minor, harmless racial remarks, 9/11 occurs and he is forced to face the illusion of acceptance.

This passage marks one of the points at which Changez decides his identity needs a remake and he starts with a physical change: “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” (130). Changez’s beard is a physical reassertion and reminder of what he sees as his identity, an attempt to regain the self-respect he has lost in the diminishing act he performed with Erica. He no longer wants to be the “single-minded” employee obliviously immersed in work and ignorant of the issues affecting the world outside his building. To Changez, the events of 9/11 and after are personal; they are not inconvenient politics to be left outside the office. His obvious association with the nations involved and his coworkers’ knowledge of this persuades him that by somehow donning the fearful image of a beard, he can embrace that association rather than deny his empathies. The conflicted condition of being a western citizen or being in the process is manipulated and Changez rejects it by claiming his corporeal identity. He is responding to the exaggerated patriotic expressions of “nostalgia” and countering his coworker’s “fair hair and light eyes” with his own physical foreignness, dark skin and thick hair. As Munos argues “the post-9/11 context makes it even clearer that the ethnic part of hyphenated identities must remain skin-deep and definitely not hinder the pursuit of ‘true’ Americanness” (Munos 401). While his boss Jim tolerates the illogical personal expression at first, he eventually loses patience for this differentiating marker because it cannot be “co-opted and altered ... into pre-existing raceless romances of upward mobility” (Munos 401). The recognizable feature is too closely associated with race, a classic feature of Orientalist images of dark-skinned men, unable to be appropriated into ideals of economic success and social progress because they are seen as foundationally

oppositional to the free-mined, linearly progressive superpower. Changez is the “tolerated neighbor” (Seval). He is a part of his coworkers’ world and a contributor to his firm, a part of New York. He becomes the “untolerated neighbor” once he decides to tear at the facade with his defiant beard (Seval). The unspoken possibility of his silly solidarities preventing promotions is something both he and Jim are aware of. By revealing Changez’s psyche with honesty, the reader’s own paranoia and habit of judging the Other’s body is acknowledged.

He cannot verbally express that he is “deeply angry” because his anger is no longer understood as a normal human emotion, but is criminal and invalid, a “natural” part of who he is as a dark-skinned Muslim. On the other hand, Isma is unable to express this anger as a “model mourner” because her brother dies escaping the fundamentalism he chooses rather than dying from normal causes. A part of this disparity is the result of their vastly different socioeconomic positions. Changez is one of the most valued employees at his firm and so his behavior is tolerated, and he is not immediately fired. Meanwhile, Isma is facing the law, which two of her family members have broken on a catastrophic scale. Her life and anger is visible to the public while Changez only upsets a couple of people at work. While Changez’s coworkers sympathize with him, very few find the same humanity in Isma despite her innocence. She has no defense to legitimize her anger and the free expression of it because the crimes of her family are mounted against her as well.

In the book *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective*, Madeline Clements discusses the difference between the terms affiliation and affinity and how those processes are realized in the context of South Asian Muslims. Affiliation is described as “a ‘turn’ from a lost or outmoded natural familial ‘filiation’ to a critically created and ‘compensatory’ cultural and societal system of ‘affiliation’ ... an individual’s desire to become an ‘agent’ or ‘bearer’ of a particular

notion of ‘civilisation’ or ‘culture’” (Clements 3). Affinity is “a more natural, unplanned or even involuntary sense of being drawn to a particular community grouping, geographical area, or imaginative realm” (Clements 3). Changez’s original affiliation with the highly educated, socially elite, ambitious young men and women of his Manhattan firm is a voluntary “turn from [his] lost or outmoded natural familial ‘filiation’” with his family and Pakistan. Having been so far from home and experiencing the loss of his family’s financial well-being and social prosperity elicits in Changez a desire to form new affiliations; he is experiencing what Roman calls a “crisis of affiliation” (Roman 1). Not only does he want to be a part of this new, “compensatory cultural and societal system,” but he wants to be seen as assimilated enough to be a default representation of this affiliation, a “‘bearer’ of [his new] notion of ‘civilisation.’” Changez repeatedly remarks on the past glory of the subcontinent's civilizations that is reflected in the remaining architecture of Pakistan. He laments the decline of his family’s old money respectability and in a larger sense the forgetting of an older civilization with the emergence of a new, more aggressively globalist one. Thus, he embraces this new formation of civilization by affiliation with his capitalist job and elitist friends. However, his reaction to post-9/11 injustices, the “anger” he feels at the United States’ ability to endanger any nation it wishes, is the result of “a more natural, unplanned, or even involuntary sense of being drawn” to the nations that are geographically proximal to Pakistan, and to the “community grouping” of Muslims. He feels an “unplanned” affinity with people that are related to him in either their culture, their religion, or appearance. The beard becomes a marker of affinity. In analyzing sociological discussions of assimilation, Cutler points out that much of discourse “reaffirms the superiority of white middle-class values and behaviors by opposing them to self-defeating gestures of ‘ethnic solidarity’” (Cutler 17). Changez’s “self-defeating gesture” of solidarity with his fellow Muslims through a politically charged corporeal identity is antithetical

to the white values of his upper-class status. There is something “lower-class” about his decision to discard elitist detachment from “ethnic” issues.

Conclusion

Perhaps the word assimilation, the age-old condition of acceptance, the demand and its fruitless promise, needs to be abandoned altogether. These works do not cooperate with mainstream ideas of the minority; they demonstrate the failures of western values and its redeeming characteristics. Troublesome minorities complicate perceptions and compete with various models of citizenship. As Edward Said argues, “Orientalism is— and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “‘our’ world.” Therefore, the literary study of Muslim South Asian literature should not be reserved for classes on ethnic studies or elective literature courses. Rather than remain nomadic in its categorization, the task of this literature is to hinder Eurocentrism. They do not lack the depth and relatability associated with the “universal” western canon and the characters are not far-removed particulars undeserving of our sympathy. Literature from the western diaspora has something profound to contribute about the West; Muslim American literature is American literature. Postcolonial studies need to expand to the present, to include emerging fundamentalisms and pressures in an age of globalization and that cannot be accomplished without discussing the intersection of race, religion, and class.

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