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Moratorium or Achievement: Identity Statuses in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Abstract *The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) traces the evolution of Changez's sense of belonging by encompassing a substantial part of his life odyssey, ranging from his movement to the US for higher studies to his disillusionment and redirection of fundamental desires. This study explores those transformative stages that help shape his identity. For this purpose, James Marcia's theory of identity achievement has been used as a theoretical framework. Marcia (1980) contends that certain situations and events (called 'crises') act as catalysts to prompt identity moratorium. The internal conflict caused by such catalysts stimulates adolescents to probe into their beliefs, goals and values. Changez also encounters the four statuses described by Marcia i.e., identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and final achievement. Consequently, a refraction in his sense of belonging takes place - from love for American exceptionalism to love for Pakistan and Islam (Morey, 2011). This study evaluates the level of identity achievement in Changez as a result of this refraction.*

Key Words: Identity Achievement, Identity Moratorium, Islam, Pakistan, Sense of Belonging, Fundamental.

Introduction

The study explores Changez's choices and commitments that determine his identity in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). In this regard, his identity is discussed on three levels: choice of education and career, choice of sexual orientation and choice of ideology. In order to determine his identity, the study incorporates James Marcia's four statuses; i.e., identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement (Marcia, 1980). The paper will elaborate whether Changez achieves a well-developed identity through having a clear sense of his strengths, weaknesses and sense of belonging or not. In this regard, the role of moratorium stage to achieve a well-articulated self is also discussed in detail. Since Marcia used interviews of adolescents to interpret their identity development stages, the character of Changez is pertinent for this analysis because he himself describes the stages of his identity development based on the choices he makes through his monologue – a narrative technique meticulously chosen by Mohsin Hamid.

Literature Review

Although identity crisis is one of the most popular research areas for analyzing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Marcia's statuses have not been applied before to analyze Changez's identity development. Most of the studies use postcolonial constructs to interpret his identity crisis from nationalistic or religious point of view. For example, Khan (2015) discusses the insider-outsider role of Changez in peripheral spaces. Similarly, Ghosh (2013) focuses on the alienation and integration process of Changez in his travel to the US and back to Pakistan. Changez's alienation results from the racism he faces in the US and integration begins with the resurgence of his sense of belonging to Pakistan. Perveen (2019a) analyzes his quest for self-coherence through a Jungian analysis. Žindžiuvienė (2014)

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explores trauma as a personal experience in the wake of 9/11 by discussing the novel as tracing identity problems and the existential questions resulting out of trauma elements. Changez's struggle with American dream, idols and prejudices, and East and West's deteriorating relationship entails trauma and final inward transformation. [Shirazi \(2018\)](#) relates his ambivalent identity to the uncertain state of migrants who are caught in liminal spaces between national and global geographies.

[Scott \(2014\)](#) considers the novel an assertion for "an equal voice for the subaltern not by preserving some isolationist idea of traditional culture but by realizing that contemporary identity is often a hybridized formation, fluid and adaptive, rather than fixed" (p. 32). The paper studies identity emerging out of one's choices about occupation, ideology, sexual orientations and interpersonal domains. However, in this novel identity formation has a postcolonial and post 9/11 context. According to Greta Olson (2011), the novel criticizes the reduction of identity to outer appearance only. The Eurocentric discrimination of Muslims after 9/11 based on their appearances and names ensued in segregating Muslims because of the colour of their skin.

The literature produced on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* mostly studies the novel as a post 9/11 text with the identity crisis of Changez as a migrant or postcolonial diaspora who keeps oscillating between nationalism and the American dream. Very few studies focus purely on psychological development of Changez as an adult. My paper traces the shifting choices of Changez, their impact on his identity development and the final achievement of identity based on a series of crises.

Theoretical Framework

Based on Erik Erikson's groundbreaking work on identity and psychosocial development in the 1960s, Canadian developmental psychologist James [Marcia \(1980\)](#) contends that the adolescent stage is determined neither by identity resolution nor identity confusion, but rather by the degree of exploration and commitment to an identity in a variety of life domains. Marcia's theory of identity achievement is based on the interplay of crisis and commitment. He argues that an adolescent's identity faces crisis when one's values and choices are being reevaluated leading to a final commitment. Crisis is the time of upheaval whereby old values are contested and redefined paving way for a final commitment. Erikson proposed eight chronological stages of ego growth. On the other hand, Marcia proposed the following four Statures of psychological identity development:

Identity Diffusion

The adolescent does not have a clear sense of choices at this stage and as a result fails to make a commitment. At this stage, both exploration and commitment are at a very low level.

Identity Foreclosure

The adolescent is willing to commit to some relevant roles, values, or goals in future. The level of commitment is high in comparison to a low degree of exploration at this stage.

Identity Moratorium

The adolescent faces a crisis, but has not made any commitment so far. At this stage, a high level of exploration decreases the level of the prior commitments.

Identity Achievement

Finally the adolescent after going through an identity crisis has made a commitment to a redefined identity. This stage is achieved through a high level of exploration as well as commitment ([Marcia, 1980](#)).

The core idea in the identity formation process is that one's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain personal and social phenomena. The work done in this paradigm considers how much choices one has made and how much commitment has been

shown to one or more choices. A well-developed identity makes one aware of one's strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. A person with a less well-developed identity is not able to define his or her personal strengths and weaknesses, and does not have a well-articulated sense of self. Marcia's model has been tested and is popular even today due to its validity and relevance ([Kroger & Macia, 2011](#)). The study probes Changez's levels of exploration and commitments by subdividing his journey into the four statures as delineated by Marcia.

Discussion

The Reluctant Fundamentalist fabricates a complex relationship between beliefs, capitalism and subjectivity. The bildungsroman element of the novel encompasses Changez's development from a believer in global capitalism to a radical critic of the American dream ([Kennedy, 2018](#)). This odyssey shapes his personality which can be divided into four phases; i.e., identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. The following sections will discuss these stages one by one.

Identity Diffusion

Identity diffusion refers to a week or nonexistent period of exploration (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Changez belongs to Pakistan and was born in an affluent and noble family. He is happy with the prestige he enjoys in having a big house, servants and opportunities afforded by the elite class in Pakistan. Both his grandfather and father had the opportunity to graduate from the UK. Other than inherited affluence and name, Changez is also a brilliant young man who works hard to win a scholarship. At this stage, he, like many other Pakistanis of his class, only wants to study abroad (which is not only a status symbol but also a symbol of success in Pakistan) and his exploration is circumscribed.

Identity Foreclosure

[Berry and Sam's \(1997\)](#) bidirectional model of acculturation proposes that immigrants need to address the adaptation and separation issues. The former may lead to *bicultural* acculturation, the latter to *separation* from the host culture. Other than these, *assimilation* and *marginalization* are also possible. Assimilation refers to the choice of forsaking original culture for adopting the host culture, and *marginalization* refers to distance from native culture as well as the inability to establish strong ties with the host culture. Based on this definition, the study contends that Changez's identity foreclosure takes place through his choice of assimilation in the host culture given that bicultural acculturation was not feasible in the US. Therefore, the choices he makes are to excel in education at Princeton, in career at Underwood Samson and to win Erica as a sexual partner.

Changez not only proves himself to be a brilliant student at Princeton but also a shining soccer player. His conscientious perseverance wins him a job at a consultancy firm known as Underwood Samson. This accommodates him in the elite scholastic and economic groups in the US. Changez is different from ordinary immigrants due to his profile. Hamid has meticulously chosen the profile of his protagonist. He is a talented young man in all respects other than belonging to an affluent family of Pakistan. Therefore, he is exempted of all those complexes that may result out of dilemmas arising out of poverty and elusive dreams. He is unlike those immigrants who struggle to move to the US to eradicate poverty as he gets everything through a proper channel, be it a scholarship for higher education or a job on merit.

This stage where the subject in question desires to be the other is described by Marcia (1980) as identity foreclosure. Changez's identity foreclosure begins with his desire to be a part of the global elite and to be honoured like the Americans. He makes this choice without pondering upon its implications as his commitment is high at this level but exploration is low. His immigration to America, Princeton success story and job at Underwood Samson all are part of this stage. Committed to the American dream, he leaves no stone unturned to improve his social standing. The turning point at this stage is his falling in love with Erica. He meets her when a group of Princetonians go to Greece on a holiday in the summer after their graduation. It is Athens where he first encounters her, and mesmerized by

her regality, fitness and beauty cannot resist offering her to carry her backpack. Her fear of loneliness helps Changez get closer to her.

Changez's wish to achieve success in America – his identity foreclosure – materializes through winning a good job and an American girlfriend. Fully engrossed in his newly achieved status, Changez shows an attitudinal change which reflects his self-chosen acculturation gradually transforming into assimilation. The major cause of his choice of acculturation is his attraction towards global capitalism. In the heyday of his stay in New York, Changez's only god is money (Braz, 2015). This is because his firm has made its place by focusing only on business values. Underwood Samson trains him to achieve maximum productivity. Drawn to Wall Street capitalistic principles of achieving maximum productivity, Changez forgoes his Pakistani identity and starts considering himself an Underwood Samson employee only. He is overawed when he beholds the firm's offices on the forty first and second floors of a building. He had never seen that high a building in Lahore - his native city in Pakistan. The view from the lobby of his offices galvanized him more than when he was flying over the Himalayas. He is overawed by this technologically cutting edge part of the world, far advanced than Pakistan. According to Braz (2015), the first letters of Underwood Samson (US) stand for the United States which reflects Changez' immersion into the spirit of the US culture and economic fundamentalism entailing complete assimilation.

His first business trip to Manila exhilarates Changez. He travels in the first class and enjoys the flirtatious air-hostesses. By this time, he considers himself like a James Bond, a movie star, only younger and slightly darker in complexion in comparison. His expectations about Manila are not very high as he assumes it to be like Lahore or Karachi, but to his disappointment and excitement he comes across many skyscrapers and superhighways, mansions of the rich and glittering skylines over there, unlike Pakistan. Even the slums are compared by him to that of the 1950s America and not Pakistan. He does not want to make comparisons but he is shocked to find Manila richer than Pakistan because in his perception so far only America was better than Pakistan. His sudden realization that Pakistan was far less progressed than Manila, unnerved him. The more disappointed he gets from his own country, the quicker he leaps into assimilation.

He begins projecting himself like an American to act superior to the people in Manila. He learns to move to the front rows by representing his American affiliations, epitomizing the American superiority complex. This was because he observed that the people in Manila treated his American colleagues as the world business elites, and since he enjoyed the same status on his job, he wanted the same sort of respect too. He enjoys agency by being a representative of the superpower and is further enthralled by the decision making power while in Manila about the retention or firing of local workers. His "Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by [...] suit, by [...] expense account, and—most of all—by [...] companions" (Hamid, 2007, p.71). Thus Changez makes a choice for assimilation which is his identity foreclosure. Changez's trip to Valparaiso in Chile further stamps his success and his employer Jim calls him "a shark" because of his efficiency. This approval matters because Changez is the only non-American amongst his colleagues and Changez has no regrets about his identity foreclosure.

While discussing pre and post 9/11 identity of Changez, it is pertinent to discuss the racial identity aspect as well. Delphine Munos (2012) contends that new versions of American dream are being created due to racial melancholia. She interprets Changez's relationship to Erica as a parallelism to America (Am/Erica) and considers the urge for whiteness as one major cause for assimilation for immigrant communities. Changez is mesmerized by the whiteness of Erica and it is this whiteness that makes him find her regal - a whiteness which is representative of the superpower he aspires to affiliate with. Erica is reluctant to accept him as she already has a boyfriend named Chris – the name symbolic of Christian religion which is the majority religion of the US citizens, employing a contrast to Islam. Later on, his acceptance by Erica is not because of what he actually is, but it is his replica subsumed in the discourse pertaining to Chris. Erica does not resist him with her closed eyes imagining the figure of Chris. Changez impersonates Chris to win Erica and while doing so forsakes his identity. This act draws a parallel to his cultural assimilation in the US. However, none of the painstaking efforts makes him succeed in achieving an equal footing with the Americans. Erica never accepts him in true heart and

spirit. Lost in the memories of Chris, she finally seeks refuge in an asylum where he meets her for the last time. Munos considers this role playing of Chris a metamorphosis into unbeing or a total loss of his real identity: “– a form of un-being that travels back to the onlooker once Changez’s embodiment of Chris generates a point of contact with the invisibility of whiteness, thus threatening its centrality and revealing the emptiness at its core” (Munos, 2012, p. 403). The identity foreclosure is assimilation into whiteness, American-ness and globalization.

Identity Moratorium

The ambivalence of his choices begins to surface when Changez realizes Filipino’s hostility towards the US. It is when he and his colleagues are driving in a limousine in Manila’s heavy traffic and observe hostility in a bus driver’s gaze. At this point, he relates to the Filipinos for the third world feeling of hatred toward the US. Even at his identity foreclosure stage, the conflict begins at an unconscious level. During his visits to Manila and Chile, Changez considers himself an American but when he goes back to the US after 9/11, he is relegated to his immigrant status because he is inspected twice on the airport and by the time he is out of the ordeal, his colleagues have already left him behind to travel alone to Manhattan. This turns out to be the particular moment when he questions his choices about his identity. This incident turns out to be the initial phase of his identity crisis.

Braz (2015) contends that it is difficult to determine the degree of Changez’s belongingness to the US or Underwood Samson. Whereas he happily assimilates as described in the two examples given above, his views about the US foreign policy are unacceptable for his American colleagues, so he is less expressive about them. His dream to be a dictator of an Islamic Republic with nuclear capability, the joke that no one else understands except Erica, and his smile on the fall of twin towers, problematizes the concept of complete assimilation. US invasion of Afghanistan upsets him with equanimity, makes him tremble with anger and precipitates his return to Pakistan. Braz calls this transformation a psycho-political transformation. I contend that Changez’s identity foreclosure moved him from acculturation to assimilation before 9/11. However, it is 9/11 and succeeding events that enable him to question his choices and finally take a U-turn leading to his identity moratorium from the foreclosure stage. Similarly, Olson (2011) contends: “Before September 11, 2001, Changez perfectly blends in into the melting pot New York City. Despite and at the same time because of his foreign outer appearance, he is part of this multicultural city. However, as soon as the WTC is destroyed by the attacks, his foreign outer appearance becomes a sign for “otherness” (p.10).

One of the main catalysts in this transformation is the knowledge about Janissaries that he gets from Juan-Bautista who is the head of the publishing house in Chile which Changez visits to evaluate. He invites him to lunch at one of his favourite restaurants. During their conversation, Juan-Bautista mentions Janissaries who became the terror of Europe but originally were “Christian boys [...] captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to” (Hamid, 2007, p.151). Changez introspects that night whether he was like those Janissaries:

I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a coun-try with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan- Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (Hamid, 2007, p.152)

His throwing his lot with Underwood Samson – his identity foreclosure – is questioned by him when he feels compassion for those destroyed by the US. The movement from “struggling” to being “torn” shows the degrees of his identity moratorium.

What makes Changez different from Janissaries is his choice of opting for US capitalistic globalization rather than being conditioned to be a part of it. His realization that the US would never

side with Pakistan in case a war between India and Pakistan takes place in spite of the fact that Pakistan sided with the US in the war against Afghanistan, further intensifies identity moratorium. He also ponders upon Indian and American alliance against Pakistan: "India was acting with America's connivance, both countries seeking through the threat of force to coerce our government into changing its policies" (Hamid, 2007, pp.148-49). Such instances make him feel the spirit of nationalism in his moratorium stage. He concludes himself as a man "devoid of substance" (Hamid, 2007, p.125). It is in Chile that Juan Bautista makes him introspect about his reality and "The rough treatment and inspection at the airport makes him think about Juan-Bautista in retrospect: "*Thank you, Juan-Bautista [...], for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed!*" (Hamid, 2007, p.157; italics in the text). Thus he realizes the roots he belongs to, his country, his religion and his nationhood. This accelerates his movement towards identity achievement. Therefore, he decides to quit his Wall Street position and return to Pakistan.

Similarly, Changez in his relationship with Erica explores the sickly whiteness of her colour and healthy brownness of his colour. So the identity moratorium takes place even in his sexual orientation. Cheng (2001) examines ethnic fantasy of Asian Americans in their manic relation to the American dream. She uses the term racial melancholia for this relationship, and considers it constitutive of both dominant white identity as well as subjugated brown identity of Asian Americans. She also considers it the spirit of the American dream and assimilation experienced by Asian American non-white groups who identify themselves as a model-minority. Cheng considers this aligning with the stereotype and obsession with the American dream as a nightmare. This is because the dominant white culture rejects the racial other while making use of them. The ramifications for the 'other' are that they find themselves in a suspended position (Cheng, 2001). Perveen (2019b) also considers American dream turning into a nightmare for the South Asian immigrants once its fickleness is exposed. Thus, the suspension, othering, rejection or not being able to win Erica cause Changez's identity moratorium which ensues in final reorientation of identity and sense of belonging.

Identity Achievement

After 9/11, Changez finds himself a misfit in the US and realizes that his identity is neither rooted in his being a Princetonian nor an employee of Underwood Samson, but in being a Pakistani and a Muslim with a brown complexion. He is desperate to go back to his country. He not only identifies himself with his nationality but also with his religion. Earlier he only faced his classification as a Muslim because of being a non-alcoholic by Erica's father. However, now he consciously chooses his identity as in Marcia's identity achievement stage. He grows a beard like his father and elder brother. Beard is a special reference to and symbolic of his Muslim identity because it becomes a cause of victimization after 9/11: "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" (Hamid, 2007, pp. 147-148). He becomes a prototype of both Pakistani and Muslim identity.

Tajfel and Turner (2004) explained the psychology of humans to categorize on similar qualities (ingroup) and on different qualities (outgroup). Changez's identity is shaped by ingroup-outgroup politics after 9/11. Changez's beard is a reversal of US defined ingroup-outgroup as for him it is a representative of his ingroup identity, i.e., the Muslim identity which differentiates him from the outgroup, i.e., any post 9/11 neo-imperial anti-Islamic groups. Choice of appearance, in this case, becomes a defining feature of Changez's identity.

When Changez comes back to Pakistan for the first time after 9/11, his identity achievement makes him choose Pakistani identity and dislike US attacks on Afghanistan. He develops an aggressive self-righteousness to exorcise the ghost of the American dream that obsessed him for a long time and develops a self-loathing for his previous choices. He makes his final choice – to stay in and serve Pakistan. He becomes a university professor with the mission to provoke his students to disregard the American dream to achieve national integrity. For the last time, Changez is seen talking to an American projecting his identity achievement and guiding him through the streets of Lahore.

Conclusion

As far as Changez's sense of belonging to Pakistan or Islam is concerned, he has achieved his identity. However, his participation in anti-American activities alludes to ambivalence in identity achievement or a new circle of identity foreclosure, moratorium and achievement in process, as he may, sometime in future explore a more poised hybrid self. However, by the end of the novel, the identity achievement takes place whether it is national, cultural or religious. Even his love for Erica loses significance by the end. Therefore, Changez becomes fundamental about his Pakistani identity but this is a hard achieved identity attained after tormenting moratoriums rendered by the matrix of multifarious geographies, economies, cultures and ideologies.

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