

Issue of Identity in Jamaica's *A Small Place* and Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: A Comparative Postcolonial Study

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Abstract *The study analyzes the issue of identity under postcolonialism by comparing two postcolonial novels from different countries. The data consists of selected textual passages taken from the two works to invoke comparative study. Hamid presents that America is acting like a Neo-colonial power to show its superiority, while Kincaid evinces the realistic manner that depicts the inferiority of indigenous culture, which is also the result of Neo-colonialism. Postcolonial theory is used as a research methodology. Homi K. Bhaba's concepts of identity, hybridity, mimicry and otherness provide a basic framework for the research. Fanon's concept of national identity will also provide support for the completion of this research. The research concludes that the elite and educated class should seek identity from their own culture rather than adopting the westernized mimic culture, which makes them an inferior race in order to show their own superiority.*

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Introduction

Postcolonialism is a political, intellectual, and literary movement that is based on the effects that colonization has done on different societies and cultures of different countries. Post-colonialism suggests its own meaning as after colonization, after the end of empire or after independence. [Edward Said \(1998\)](#) was the first theorist to focus on the way in which colonizers who are regarded as human beings of the first world wrongly depicted the third world countries which were once colonized. Colonized people, especially Muslims, are still being represented as terrorists in the world, which is totally a false belief. [John McLeod \(2000\)](#) describes postcolonialism as a representation that has a long history and ranges throughout the past and present. He says that the main aim of postcolonial writings is to reject the hegemony of the colonizer by showing them the indigenous superiority.

Identity is a term that means the way in which an individual or a group presents itself in the world. Homi K. Bhaba (1994), who is famous

for his different concepts like mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence, also introduces the concept of third space and says that due to mimicry and hybridity, the third space comes to the surface. He is of the view that the original identity does not exist; rather, its existence is based on a contact zone that is created as a result of dealings of people who do not have the same culture, and in this system, hybrid identity is generated. Bhaba also talks about unhomeliness and says that due to the hybridity of different cultures, homeliness is created, which is not homelessness rather is a situation where the characters of those cultures are unable to find self and others. Bhaba, in his essay *Of Mimicry and Man*, also talks about mimicry. He says that people of colonized areas try to copy almost and everything of the colonizers, and in this method, they lose their own identity, which is replaced by their mimic identity.

Frantz Fanon, who is famous for his books *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin and White Mask* (1967), personally observed the

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condition of colonized people and their loss of identity. Fanon says that identity is always a stable phenomenon, and it is fixed. He says that original identity can only be retained back through the spirit of nationalism. He further describes different phases of nationalism in which firstly he says that man just copies the literature of intellectuals and in second, he asserts that man writes his own literature, and this literature is the literature that is written just before the war, and thirdly the native intellectual actually challenges the dominant narrative of the colonizers.

[Erik Erikson \(1968\)](#), a psychologist, says that identity crisis happens as a result of adolescent circumstances in which someone remains unable to achieve his or her ego identity. He further says that frustration for the original sense of identity leads man towards identity crisis as the person is incapable of getting indigenous identity gets the negative identity which leads him towards crimes. He says that “The basic strength that should develop during adolescence is fidelity, which emerges from a cohesive ego identity” (Erikson 1968).

The issue of identity is well depicted by Mohsin Hamid throughout the novel, he utilizes the concept of identity to show the real identity of the person who forgets his identity after getting admission to a foreign university. Changez, who is the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), is basically a Pakistani who gets a scholarship for higher education. After getting a scholarship, he goes to America for higher education and applies for a job in a famous company in America. The interviewer asks him several questions, which he replies in a manner that the interviewer recruits him. The problem of losing identity arises from the aforesaid scenario, and the protagonist totally forgets his identity by adopting western culture. The job provides him with the best status in America where his other colleagues from different areas become too many fans of him. Changez totally forgets his identity and says that my Pakistaniness has been totally disappeared by my dress and bank balance and most of all by my good-mannered colleagues who work in Underwood Samsun Company.

Kincaid, in her *A Small Place* (1988), challenges the western hegemony. She not only presents that the native Antiguan are not capable of getting independence; rather, she blames that western monopoly has not allowed

them to be independent. She proclaims that now although most of the countries of Africa have got a better educational structure, still it cannot be fully implemented in their countries as it is based on a westernized culture that is not present in Africa or Antigua.

Literature Review

Muneeza Shamshie, in her book *Hybrid Tapestries; The development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2017), writes that Hamid, though he lives in The United States of America, he still has a greater loyalty for Pakistan. She says that after the 9/11 attacks, the west became preoccupied with the literature that depicted Muslims as terrorists, and the novels like “Terrorist” by Updike depicted the western point of view regarding the 9/11 incident. She says that Mohsin’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) successfully challenged that assumption as Hamid writes about otherness, nationalism, capitalism and terrorism. [Sheeba Sharma \(2015\)](#), in her article “The crises and complexity of identity in Mohsin Hamid Reluctant Fundamentalist”, states that Hamid has not only shown the complex Muslim identity, but he also has highlighted the role of the fabricated image of Muslims in post 9/11 scenario.

Dr. [Muhammad Ayub Jaja \(2007\)](#), in his article *The Reluctant Fundamentalist: A Quest for Identity*, states about colonialism that has made colonized people mentally ill, and they imitate each and everything of the colonizers. Furthermore, he says that now the trend of imitation has been moved from Britishers towards America as the United States of America has emerged as a colonial power in the twentieth century. [Humaira Tariq \(2014\)](#), in her article “Identity at stake: Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*”, asserts that the identity that is previously conceived by the protagonist becomes a permanent problem for him as he remains unable to adjust himself to a totally different culture. Humaira Tariq utilizes Erik Erickson theory of identity crises and stresses that the identity of every person is different from another person due to the different situations, and identity crisis originates when the existing identity of a person clashes with a new identity.

Corinna McLeod (2008), in her article *Constructing a Nation: Jamaica Kincaid’s A small place*, states that Antigua is a subaltern nation. She questions whether Antigua is a neocolonialist

territory or a postcolonial nation. She further highlights that Antiguans themselves have undermined their identity, and it is the purpose of Jamaica to get back the lost identity of the Antigens from the Tourists who are regarded as a white generation. Ayla Kiran, in her book *No motherland, No fatherland, No tongue- Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small Place" and the Quest for Antiguan Identity* (2007), narrates that due to the implementation of western thoughts in the Caribbean world, their own indigenous identity has been submerged. It is necessary for this situation that the Caribbean should deconstruct their own cultural identity by leaving Eurocentric cultural hegemony.

Theoretical Framework

The term postcolonialism has been well-defined in many different ways by a variety of writers, but the common thing in all definitions is that it deals with the aftermaths of colonialism. The book *Empire Writes Back, written by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002)*, describes the difference between hyphenated and unhyphenated postcolonialism. The book suggests that the unhyphenated term postcolonialism deals with all the cultures that are affected by the imperial legislation, after the commencement of colonialism to today, i.e. the era of neocolonialism. While on the other hand, the hyphenated term post-colonialism shows a specific meaning, like the end of colonialism. John McLeod describes postcolonialism as a representation that has a long history and ranges throughout the past and present. He says that the main aim of postcolonial writings is to reject the hegemony of the colonizer by showing them their own superiority.

Homi K. Bhaba was mainly influenced by Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan and Frantz Fanon. Homi K. Bhaba has introduced many terms in postcolonialism, i.e. hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, identity etc. Homi K. Bhaba, while defining colonialism, avows that it is grounded on a lot of assumptions that are usually related to validation of their stance over the indigenous people. In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha presented the concept of mimicry and said that in mimicry, colonized people copy the style of colonizers. Bhabha says that in mimicry though the colonized copy each and everything from the colonizers, a still blurred copy is generated, which is very harmful. He says that by

copying everything of the colonizers, s they forget their original identity, and sometimes they are thrown into a third space that is also called a liminal space. In this third space, people lose their own native sense and copy also does not work for the; resultantly, they remain in a space where they are neither in their own country nor in the foreign land. Bhaba concludes that instead of copying the western ways, one should adopt or cherish his or her own glorious past as this would only be the way that would work for the person who has a colonial background. Bhabha writes, "To be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English."

In his Book "The Location of Culture (1994), Bhabha introduces his concept of hybridity. Bhabha says that in this world, there is no pure or original identity; both the colonizers and colonized are dependent on one another for the construction of identity. He introduces the term "Third Space", which is a liminal space, and says that all kinds of identities are built-in third space. Newly generated identity is the result of hybridity, and it foregrounds all the differences which are based on time, space, personal or national identity. Bhabha claims that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the 'Third Space of Enunciation'.

Frantz Fanon is another major theorist of postcolonialism who, through his two major works, "The Wretched of the Earth (1961) and Black Skins and White Masks (1967), presents the idea of national and cultural resistance. Fanon, through his works, presents the concept of construction of identity that is mainly done through the spirit of nationalism. In "On National Culture" (1967) he briefly describes Negritude and Native intellectuals. He says that national culture is made through three major phases. In the first phase, colonized people start copying the literature of their colonizers; in second, they are annoyed from copying that literature and in third, they become directly involved in a resistance movement that is produced mainly through nationalistic literature produced by those writers. Fanon also raises the issue of neo-colonialism and asserts that after independence from colonizers, the decolonized state is usually fallen into the hands of the corrupt indigenous upper class who repeats the same colonial management. He says, "The national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement" (p.122)

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter comparatively analyzes the two novels, *A Small Place* (1988) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Both of these novels have an identity crises that is the result of colonialism or neo-colonialism. The article is based on the conceptual framework of the ideas of Homi K. Bhaba and Frantz Fanon. Mohsin Hamid, who was born and brought up in Pakistan, is the author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, whose main themes in almost all of his novels are the effects of colonization on the minds of native people. On the other hand, Jamaica Kincaid is a Jamaican writer who mainly writes about the colonial legacy which still prevails in her country.

Original identity is sometimes called the indigenous or native identity. This is the identity that people get by virtue of belonging. Land, culture, history, and religion have a greater role in the building this type of identity. Many writers, including Homi K. Bhaba, have rejected the original identity and opted for the hybrid identity that is the result of the amalgamation of two identities, i.e. original and foreign. Bhaba also believes that it is the result of interaction between colonizers and colonized that a new hybrid identity is generated, and the original identity goes into the background. (p.201) Fanon is of the view that colonized people have their own indigenous identity that help them in getting liberation from the colonizers. He says in the *Wretched of The Earth* (1961), "For a colonized people the essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all dignity." (*The Wretched of the Earth* 1961) He also asserts that the colonized people adopt their own cultural heritage and cherish their glorious past.

Both Mohsin Hamid and Jamaica Kincaid lace the characters of their novel with original identities. They both, Mohsin Hamid and Jamaica Kincaid, are living abroad and present the indigenous identity with great care. Mohsin Hamid being a Pakistani writer, presents the Indigenous Pakistani identity while Jamaica being an Antiguan writer, presents the native Antiguan identity. In the *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid has tried to depict a character that loves his original identity and beautifully fulfils the demands of Frantz Fanon for the development of National Culture. Changez, although after going abroad, adopts the

foreign identity but soon after he realizes his original native identity, he adopts that native identity. From the very beginning of the novel, when Changez gives an interview in Underwood, Samson tells the interviewer about his native city, which is the ex-capital of Pakistan. This shows how much touchy he regards his identity that he is introducing his homeland in the foreign country as the interviewer is expected to be unfamiliar with this city. Changez says, "Princeton made everything possible for me. But it did not, could not make me forget such things such things as how much is enjoy the tea in this, the city of my birth." (p9). Although he had enjoyed while being a part of Princeton University but he does not cherish those enjoyable moments rather says that he is happy with having his original identity, which shows a spirit of patriotism in him.

Bhaba says with the interaction of different cultures, a new dual identity is generated, and Changez being a Pakistani, when he gets the chance of changing his life, changes his identity that is the result of intermingling. He becomes very happy with his American identity and forgets Pakistaniness till the event of 9/11 when Muslims without any distinctions were altogether regarded as terrorists, and he was stopped at the airport. After series of incidences, he abolishes his newly born hybrid identity and comes back to indigenous identity. It was Juan Bautista that made him remind his original indigenous identity when he told him about the Ex-Janissaries. Changez, upon getting the meaning of Janissaries, rejects the high-class western salary and chooses his native identity, and comes back to his hometown. Changez asserts, "Thank you, Juan Bautista, I thought as I lay myself down in my own bed, for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed!" (p.95).

On the other hand, Jamaica Kincaid also presents the indigenous identity and prefers her native identity over the foreign one. She exposes Antiguan identity to the world in order to get emancipation. She throughout her novel pinpoints the indigeneity that she and the people of her country possess. She highlights all the pitfalls of Antigua, such as slavery, sewage system, distorted buildings, and asserts that her heart aches when she sees all of these bad things happening to her country. While describing the lack of capability of Antiguan youngsters, she says that they are not able even to answer the

foreigners in their language. Throughout her novel, she describes the love for Antigua that shows a sense of belonging to one's country. Her love for the Antigua is clear from the following lines in which she puts forward her own love for the old Antigua. "the people at Mill Reef Club love the old Antigua. I love the old Antigua. Without question, we don't have the same Antigua in mind." (p.44)

Homi K. Bhaba also deals with the liminal space, which he calls the third space, which is the situation where the character is neither a part of his original identity, nor a part of gained foreign identity rather lives in-between conditions. He says that due to this, the cultural hybridity is generated, and this cultural hybridity sometimes becomes non-beneficial for the character, as in the case of Changez, who lives in between and finally goes for opting for his true identity. Bhaba says, "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains the difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." (Bhaba p4)

Mohsin Hamid, through his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, depicts the identity of his protagonist that is similar to the concept of dual identity presented by the Bhaba. Changez, who at first thinks that he is the true part of the United States of America and even in his tours around the world he shows that he is an American, loses his American identity after the 9/11 attacks and remains in-between conditions. Due to this liminal space, he remains unable to complete the assignment that he was supposed to do as an employee of Underwood Samson. After the attacks, he comes back to his home in Pakistan but remains unable to stay there and goes back to America but soon after knowing the behavior of the American, he flies back to Pakistan to get his original identity. Changez says, "I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in Both in neither." (p89). Later on, Changez, while talking about Erica, says that he had pretended to be Chris, but he could not become so because his own identity was so fragile as he had no idea from where he has come from and where he has to go. The same is the case with *A Small Place* (1988), in which Kincaid says that due to colonialism, people of Antigua are still following the colonial mentality and do not want to get out of it. She further says that although English people have formally left their country due to the long-lasting effects of

colonization, people of Antigua are still living in a Third Space. She pronounces that the country in which she was born and of whom she was aware of does not exist; rather, it is reshaped by the corrupt neo-colonialist and the rulers of the same country. She says, "That Antigua no longer exists. That Antigua no longer exists partly because the bad-minded people who used to rule over it, the English no longer do so." (23).

Colonization has always been the subject of humiliation at the hands of colonizers. Fanon in "On National Culture (1967) narrates that national culture is built through three major phases. In the first phase, the colonized copy the colonizer, and in the second, they write their own literature and challenge the colonizers through their own gaze. Mohsin Hamid and Jamaica Kincaid have adopted the same second phase that was described by Fanon. Hamid, through his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, has tried to challenge the country which is now a days acting like the colonizers and is representing herself as a neo-colonialist. Changez while talking to the second person who is assumed to be an American, narrates that "No country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America" (p110). Hamid not only tells the American about the role of his country in international affairs rather also shows him how badly it has impacted the world by declaring all Muslims as potential terrorists.

Jamaica Kincaid in comparison to Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in her novel *A Small Place* does the same thing and tries to reverse the colonial gaze. She through the help of second person who is also assumed to be an ex-colonizer, states that colonizers have badly influenced their lives and still after getting independence they are controlling their lives and are acting like the neocolonialists. She says "You murdered people. You imprisoned people. You robbed people. You opened your own banks, and you put our money in them. The accounts were in your name" (p35). Kincaid challenges the west through her work and asks them if they have got permission for coming into their country.

Conclusion

The research is carried out to find the comparative analysis of identity crisis in two different novels, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *A Small Place* (1988). The chief aim of

the study is to know about the identity crisis and how this identity crisis has impacted the lives of characters of both of the novels. Different questions like what type of identity is being developed as a result of cultural exchange and how this identity goes into the crisis when actual exchange and adoption of culture is done were kept in mind while doing the research. The importance of the research can be gauged from the very fact that people of once colonized countries have suffered and are incessantly suffering due to the western hegemonic behavior. Another important factor that will make the research more worthwhile is the representation of a sense of nationalism which ultimately rejects the Eurocentric hegemonic approach.

Developing countries all over the world are still facing an identity crises in different ways. The majority of developing countries are once colonized countries who are struggling for their identity as they need to be compared with the developed countries in order to achieve the international identity. Societies like Pakistan and Antigua are still longing for internal independence, and the population of these countries is in search of international fame, due to which they become unfamiliar with their own

homeland. The craze for getting foreign education and having green cards has led the people of once colonized countries to have a hybrid identity in which usually they remain in third or liminal space. Mohsin Hamid, a Pakistani born novelist, very skillfully highlights the different issues of world affairs in all of his novels. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, he throws light on the issue of world terrorism and challenges the west narrative of Muslims as terrorists. He projects a story of Changez, who is also the protagonist of the novel, and tells how he goes through an identity crisis in the west soon after the attacks of 9/11. He says that it is now America who plays the role of colonizers in the form of neo-colonization. Jamaica Kincaid, on the other hand, also projects the Antiguan culture and concludes that due to the American role of a Neo-colonialist hegemonic power, the people of Antigua are facing an identity crisis in their own homeland. She, through her novel *A Small place*, challenges the west for being the old colonizers, now turning into new neo-colonizers. She further says that people of Antigua have no tongue to speak about their grief; they even don't have their fatherland, whom they may call their own.

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