

**Confused Identities: A Dramatization of Race,  
Religion and Identity in Ayad Akhtar's Disgraced  
(2013) and The Invisible Hand (2015)**

هُويّات مرتبكة: التفاعل بين العرق والدين والطبقة في مسرحيّ "المنبوذ"  
(٢٠١٣) و"اليد الخفية" (٢٠١٥) للأياد أكhtar

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**Confused Identities: A Dramatization of Race, Religion and Identity in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2013) and *The Invisible Hand* (2015)**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Ayad Akhtar, in his plays *Disgraced* (2013) and *The Invisible Hand* (2015), concerns himself with examining power dynamics between the west and the east. His main aim is to underline the impact of the interaction of Race, Religion and Identity on eastern individuals especially Muslims living in the west showing whether or not the social surveillance they undergo may bring about discipline in societies. The dramatic events of these two plays show how societies and powerful organizations manage to train individuals to behave and think in a certain way in order to achieve discipline according to a certain stereotypical image they claim. The institutions, sects, and organizations that exist in a certain society are expected to contribute to and achieve the targets of a certain power. The events of *Disgraced* and *The Invisible Hand*, underline that rejection, negative stereotyping, and targeted surveillance toward Muslims in the western societies do not bring about peace within societies or among individuals. Trying to tame individuals by passing specific laws to guarantee that they would behave in a certain way does not lead to discipline or more security. Instead, this results in anarchy, increases rage, and hatred between the west and the east; or rather between Muslims and western nations.

**KEYWORDS:** Power Dynamics –Race - Religion - Identity – stereotyping

The Pakistani-American playwright, Ayad Akhtar in his plays, *Disgraced* (2013) and *The Invisible Hand* (2015) concerns himself with examining power dynamics between the west and the east. His main aim is to underline the impact of western surveillance on eastern individuals especially Muslims living in the West pinpointing an interplay of Race, Religion and Identity and showing whether or not this may bring about discipline in societies. In her essay "*The Invisible Hand: Taut and Tense*," Natasha Tripney writes: "The shifting power dynamics between all of the characters are very well-sketched, and [the play] potently conveys the fact that these days wars are being fought online as much as they are in the air and on the ground" (Tripney). *Disgraced* (2013) and *The Invisible Hand* (2015) show how societies and powerful organizations manage to train individuals to behave and think in a certain way in order to achieve discipline according to a certain stereotypical image they claim.

In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains how discipline is planned to be attained in societies, and how bodies are being tamed to function as obedient agents. The body becomes the "object and the target of power. It is easy to find signs of the attention paid... to the body- to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (Foucault, *Discipline*, 136). Powerful bodies focus their attention and effort to manipulate others to serve and achieve the bodies' own targets. The institutions, sects, and organizations that exist in a certain society are expected to contribute to and achieve the targets of a certain power. That is why they should remain in that power's grip. Foucault adds: "The body had become the object of ... imperious and pressing investments; in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (Foucault, *Discipline*, 136). This way, power would guarantee that the body and perhaps the individual remain under control, and that both of them will adhere to the regulations, traditions, and customs set to be the norm in a society under the effect of this power. Akhtar in his above-mentioned plays aims at examining the impact of social observation on Muslims in the west, and at finding whether it made them docile and disciplined or brought about chaos and violence in society.

There has always been a struggle between the West and Islam throughout history. Yet, since the 9/11 events, the West-East clash has been increased and heightened. The powerful regimes of the West make use of this event to inaugurate a discourse of Islamophobia. Ghauri and Umber feel that, "many scholars believe that among the many sources of information that contribute to distort the image of Islam and Muslims in Westerners' minds, the media is the most influential one" (2). Muslims and Islam in the West have ever been demonized much more than they were before the attacks. Hatred towards Muslims living in the West was reinforced, and Muslims have been looked at and treated as 'the other'. This discourse enhances discrimination, negative preconception, and prejudice against Muslims generally and particularly against Muslims living in the West.

This sense of antagonism between the west and the east, or rather the clash of power between them "gained much notoriety after the September 11<sup>th</sup> crisis in demonizing the race of Muslims, isolating them, and considering them as the others" (Bagato 122). Ever since, Muslims started to fall victims of destructive stereotypes. Moreover, oppressive measures and domineering laws have been passed to enforce social surveillance over this religious sect. Such authoritarian procedures and cruel laws have been passed to be applied only on Muslims. Oren Gross notes that these "adopted measures do not affect ordinary law which applies to ordinary decent folk, i.e. to ourselves [white westerners], and are instead directed against a clear enemy of 'others' namely the terrorists [Muslims]" (44). In the western perception, Islam, thus, becomes a race of which descendants cannot be mixed up with any other race. Muslims are looked at as a race "with a shared history and ancestry" (Hall "Cultural Identity" 69). The West has adopted strategies that ended up in creating a "race out of [this] religion.... Without outspoken critique, special registration continued to race Muslims and Racing religion" (Bayoumi 56-71). Being seen as a nation/a race by all other ethnicities and nationalities in the West, Muslims are stereotypically related to terror, backwardness, and violence; and are looked at as a monolithic nation. "All Muslims" are seen "as Arabs, and all Arabs are terrorists" (Schønemann 16).

The result of such discrimination is depicted in *Disgraced* and *The Invisible Hand* where Ayad Akhtar introduces examples of different Muslim characters and shows their inner struggle as a result of living in western societies during and after the 9/11 events. For example, in *Disgraced*, he presents the characters of Amir and Hussein, two Pakistani Americans, who were brought up in the USA. In *The Invisible Hand*, Akhtar portrays the character of Bashir, a Pakistani-British young man who also becomes a victim of negative preconceived conceptions and discrimination because of his race and of being a Muslim. The three characters are treated as 'the other' by the West which regards them as inferior to the western mainstream White race. Muslims, generally, are viewed as an inferior, ignorant, and uncivilized race by most westerners who, as a result, feel that they must have power over such race. Thus, a westerner generally claims that he/she is more privileged, empowered, knowledgeable, civilized and wiser than a Muslim. In his "The West and the Rest, Stuart Hall writes that the term 'Western' is being used currently as an adjective that describes "a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern" (57). Any nation that meets these criteria is mentally conceived as a civilized nation that belongs to the first world and that deserves to be treated as a western nation because the "West = developed = good = desirable; [and] ... the non-West = underdeveloped = bad = undesirable" (Hall, "The West and the Rest" 57). That is why being a Muslim from an eastern origin and living in a society where the dominant discourse belittles one's own culture makes many people experience a long process of self-scrutiny and perhaps self-loath, searching for a better identity image to adopt, in order to be able to confront their inner sense of inferiority. In *The Invisible Hand*, Bashir vocalized his serious sense of estrangement, subordination and alienation he is made to feel by westerners. Speaking to the White American Nick Bright, he says:

You always think you're better than everyone else.... You look down on me because of what I'm doing here. At least that's what you think. But in fact, that's not it. Not even. 'Cause the thing is? Wouldn't be any different if I were back in London driving around in some black Beemer in my Dolce Gabbanas, chasing after white girls like my schoolmates. You would look down on me then, too, just in a different way. (*The Invisible Hand* 24)

In this extract, Bashir expresses the look of inferiority the West maintains about Muslims or eastern people generally. In fact, Nick's negative opinion of Bashir does not only stem from Nick's despise of the terrorist actions Bashir is involved in; rather they basically stem from the fact that Bashir belongs to the inferior eastern culture. Because Bashir belongs to the other, Nick thinks of him negatively, Schönemann writes:

Negative stereotypes and characteristics are often placed upon out-groups, and the 'others' are most likely to be cultural, racial or religious minorities that stand out as different from the norm. It is not their ethnic or cultural distinction per se that creates the negative image, but explicit imagination and stereotyping about the 'others'. (2)

Despite being kidnapped, Nick does not only fear Bashir, but he also looks down upon him because Bashir is a Muslim. This brings fresh to Nick's mind that Bashir is a potential threat. He could be at any time a terrorist, from Nick's viewpoint, because his religion is stereotypically a violent, bloody religion. Besides, he belongs to the primitive East which is inferior to the West and this is another reason for Nick to belittle Bashir. This sense of inferiority that eastern nations endure solidifies the sense of pride the western nations maintain and reinforces western superiority and centrality. Hans Bertens writes in his *The Basics of Literary Theory* :

The inferiority that Orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West's superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive. The West always functions as the 'centre' and the East as a marginal 'other' that simply through its existence confirms the West's centrality and superiority." (Bertens 175)

The western centrality makes any nation that is attached to the eastern culture be insecure about their original culture and identity. In many cases, people would tend to be dissatisfied with their original culture, which render them into marginal agents in the eyes of the rest of the world.

The centrality of the western culture claiming to maintain peace and discipline become, in fact, the main justification of the western nations to practice mass surveillance over 'the other'/Muslims especially after the 9/11 events. Surveillance is supposed to be practiced in order to maintain society's discipline and welfare. It is a tool that is supposed to achieve peace, freedom, and security among people when applied. Originally, applying it is supposed to enhance the richness of a community with cultural diversities and many identity types because surveillance guarantees that every citizen can enjoy his life freely without any social, racial, or cultural judgments. In his *Discipline*, Foucault asserts that surveillance is:

an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; an adaptation and a refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behavior, their identity, their activity, their apparently unimportant gestures; another policy for that multiplicity of bodies and forces that constitutes a population. (77)

Hence, surveillance is originally a means that is accredited by a government in order to generally assure safety and discipline in a society. It is supposed to guarantee that all individuals in a society can maintain their identities despite being diverse, and that they would enjoy their freedom as long as they do not transgress the rights of other fellow-citizens. However, surveillance, with the 9/11 events, becomes a tool that is used to watch over Muslims who have been potentially turned into suspects of terrorism. All Muslim-citizens fell into this classification. Maras mentions that "the US Justice Department's actions post 9/11, where they detained hundreds of persons based on little more than the fact that they were Arab or Muslim non-citizens, clearly demonstrates this" (67). This means that only being an Arab or a Muslim becomes in itself a sound reason for accusation or detention. It does not matter whether or not this person really commits any terrorist act or any other kind of criminality. Moreover, being a western Muslim means that one is to be watched over for fear of being a potential threat.

It is the fabricated stereotypical material broadcasted by mass media about Muslims, Islam, Arabs and the eastern culture in general that gives way to racism against Muslims and to watch over them. In *Disgraced*, for example, Hussein speaks about a racial, stereotypical situation to which he and his friend have been subjected by a barista in a coffee house, only because of their outfit and how they look.

Hussein and his friend have become frightening in the eyes of Westerners. This fear of Muslims that has been implanted in the Western psyche results in violence and oppression against Muslims. Katy Sian writes in this concern indicating that the violence and racism practiced after 9/11 have some serious results even on people who look like Muslims: "Both the US and Canada have seen a sharp increase of hate crimes waged against the Sikh population who have been 'mistakenly' targeted in racist attacks directed at Muslims – for example the first person to be killed in a 'revenge attack' following 9/11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh turbaned man in Arizona" (40). This unfair rage and hatred that has been instilled in the psyche of non-Muslim Western nations against Muslims can cause serious damages to others and to the society in general. It turned the USA, one of the most powerful and secure countries in the world, into an unsafe country for many people of certain races and religions. Hate, of course, is to be met with hate, violence is to be met with violence, and rage is to be met with rage. That is why the Barista's suspicion of Hussein and his friend provokes the rage of Hussein's friend and encourages him to answer her question indicating that the "Americans are the ones who created Al-Qaeda" (*Disgraced* 73). This in its turn leads the barista to call the FBI to arrest these two terrorists. How easy it becomes in the West to be arrested and get accused of being a terrorist if you are only of a darker complexion or of a Muslim appearance!

Muslims, thus, are made to continually defend themselves and justify their beliefs and actions hoping that they would not be misunderstood or mistakenly categorized as 'bad Muslims'. In his *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, Mahmoud Mamdani asserts that after the 9/11 events, President Bush distinguished "good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'...'bad Muslims' were clearly responsible for terrorism. At

the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that 'good Muslims'... would undoubtedly support 'us' in a war against 'them'[bad ones]" (196). Hence, from that day on Muslims have to prove that they are good Muslims, the thing which is to be proven, as Bush stressed, by turning their backs to their original cultures, identities and religion, and by abiding to the western culture. A good Muslim is supposed to support the West as Bush put it. This is because "unless proved to be good, every Muslim was presumed to be bad" (Mamdani 196).

This philosophy puts Muslims living in the west under a psychological pressure and stress. Now and then, they have to verify that they belong to the good-Muslim category otherwise they are mostly presumed to be terrorists. Ayad Akhtar highlights this idea in *Disgraced* through the FBI interrogation of Hussein where he has been asked questions which may reveal that if he does not accept and abide to the western lifestyle, he will not be recognized as a member of the society; rather, he would be viewed as 'the other', categorized as a person who belongs to bad-Muslims. Hussein says:

We sit through this ridiculous interrogation.... [They asked] Do we believe in jihad? Do we want to blow stuff up? How often did I read the *Koran*? Do we have girlfriends? Had I ever had sex? Do I watch porn? Do I hate America? They knew a lot about me. Where I'd gone to school. About Mom and Dad, where they were born. Like they already had a file. They brought up my immigration status. (*Disgraced* 73)

It becomes clear then that the interrogators have been compiling and maintaining a complete record of Hussein's life history, the procedure which means that he has already been under governmental surveillance in addition to the societal one. This reduces his sense of belonging to this society and enhances his sense of alienation.

Moreover, most of the questions Hussein is asked are about some prohibited actions in Islam. According to Bush's philosophy, to be a good Muslim, he is supposed to fully adopt the western culture. Yet, if he prays five times a day, reads the Quran, and happens to be a practicing Muslim, he will be classified as a potential terrorist. This is because they often claim that Quran encourages terrorism and violence. This stereotypical and "negative portrayal of Muslims in the American media is often a consequence of lacking knowledge about

Islam as a faith, the Quran as a Holy Scripture, and Muslim culture in general" (Schønemann 2). This lack of authentic knowledge about Islam makes people ready to believe in whatever information presented to them through mass media. To the average western citizens, Muslims have become a threat. This is what they have been educated throughout their mass media.

The widespread negative conception of Muslims in mass media does not only formulate the non-Muslims' perception of Muslims and Islam, but it also encourages some Muslims to question their own religion and culture, and to mistakenly start believing that Islam is really a religion of violence and terrorism. In *Disgraced*, for example, Amir represents this category of Muslims who blindly accept and adopt President Bush's categorizing Muslims into 'good' or 'bad' Muslims. Moreover, the surveillance practiced over Muslims after 9/11 turns many Muslims like Amir to be docile bodies: willing to adopt whatever discourse presented to them by the West, the civilized center of the world, only to prove their good intentions towards the west. In *Disgraced*, Amir seems to be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" by the Western society (Foucault, *Discipline*, 136). Amir can be regarded as an embodiment of docility in *Disgraced*.

Within the sphere of power dynamics Amir chooses to change his own inferior culture due to adopting the Western conception concerning his own original eastern culture. For example, he revolts against his eastern culture rejecting his own identity and the teachings of Islam. He questions the holy book of Quran referring to it as an old book that comes from the desert and that encourages terrorism:

The Quran is about tribal life in a seventh-century desert, Isaac. The point isn't just academic. There's a result to believing that a book written about life in a specific society fifteen hundred years ago is the word of God: You start wanting to *re-create* that society. After all, it's the only one in which the Quran makes any literal sense. That's why you have people like the Taliban. They're trying to recreate the world in the image of the one that's in the Quran. (*Disgraced* 56)

The way he describes Quran is exactly the same way Quran is being referred to in western mass media. In his opinion the terrorists of Al-Qaeda and Taliban, who believe that the Quran is the word of God, are willing to re-create the primitive society in which this book was revealed. Hence, he searches for an alternative of his eastern culture and he finds resort in the American way of life by defying "the dietary taboos of Islam; he is seen throughout the play drinking wine and eating pork" (Noureiddin 28). Besides, he dresses up in expensive Charvet shirts that cost about "six hundred" dollars (*Disgraced* 44). Amir thinks that getting dressed up in expensive clothes would introduce him to the American society as a full typical American citizen and not as an uncivilized, poor Pakistani young man. However, these changes of dietary and outfit, and shifts from an inferior eastern culture to a powerful western one, in fact, "barely conceal self-doubt and self-loathing and startling rage" (Soloski). The westernized expensive shirts show that Amir loathes his roots so much that he tries to assume the lifestyle of the central, superior 'other'/the West. Amir's original culture is accused of primitiveness, so it becomes disgraceful in his viewpoint. His religion is also stereotyped by the mainstream mass media as a terrorist religion that calls for violence. Ghauri and Umber assert that "This phenomenon of prejudiced, negative, and biased representation and propaganda against Islam and Muslims by Western media is not a new one. Many studies in the field of media and political discourse ... portray Islam and Muslims in an unfavorable, stereotypical, and discriminatory way" (2). That is why Amir, who searches for acceptance and approval from the American society, becomes ashamed of belonging to this culture.

It is expected, then, from such a person to rid himself of any ties that connect him with his original identity and attach him to this socially disliked group. That is why Amir changes his last name from Abdullah, a Muslim name, into Kapoor, an Indian Hindu one. His name, Abdullah, is an indicator of his original identity, so it becomes necessary for him to change it in order to lead a normal life away from any kind of discrimination. Chaki writes in this concern saying that after the 9/11 event "cultural markers such as body, behaviour and dress have come to be regarded, in the Muslim case, not as symbols of yet more cultural diversity on the American landscape but rather as signs of a more dangerous, threatening backwardness in ideologies and lifestyles" (155).

Hence, as a human being who longs for assimilation with the American society, Amir chooses willingly to turn his back to his original culture and religion because "many Americans turned their backs to anyone with a Muslim name or brown skin" (Awatramani). Amir thinks that by turning against his religion, he would demonstrate his loyalty to the western culture, and would liberate himself from the shackles of the constructed stereotypical image of Muslims in America. However, he has always been marginalized by this western society that does not accept him as a full American citizen. As a result, he exaggerates in his indulgence into western culture raging against Islam and Pakistanis. In response to his nephew who wishes to go home to Pakistan, Amir says: "To a country you haven't known since you were eight years old.... There's a reason your father came here. Same reason my father did. They wanted to make a better life for themselves and their families.... And to do it honestly. Which isn't an option in Pakistan" (*Disgraced* 74). As a result, as an eastern immigrant, Amir tends to copy the master, because, as Ghada Moussa puts it, the immigrant always "copies the person in power, because he hopes to have access to that same power and position one day. However, while copying the master, the immigrant has to intentionally suppress one's own cultural identity" (42). Amir is presented in the first part of the play as an immigrant who is working hard to suppress his eastern, Islamic culture which is categorized as weak, subordinated, uncivilized culture.

Unlike Amir, both Hussein and Bashir are not deluded by the negative image of Muslims created by western media. Amir's self-loath is revealed when it is contrasted with Hussein and Bashir's adherence to their original eastern culture. Hussein and Bashir in *Disgraced* and *The Invisible Hand* respectively experience a sense of pride in their original eastern culture as a reaction to the same western racism and surveillance. Hussein, Amir's 22-year old nephew, born in Pakistan and then brought to America, first appears on stage looking like a typical American young man. In the stage directions, Akhtar describes Hussein as follows: "ABE—22, of South Asian origin. But as American as American gets. Vibrant and endearing. He's wearing a Kidrobot T-shirt under a hoodie, skinny jeans, and high-tops" (*Disgraced* 17). Although Hussein's outfit gives the impression that he

is as westernized as Amir; yet he intentionally assumes this Western attire and name only as an attempt to safely lead a peaceful life in a racist western society. This is because this society is a "world where White is automatically given prominence over minorities in the global society so these minorities try to imitate them in order to be accepted" (Moussa 41). Yet, this imitation hides, in fact, an actual inner rebellion. Unlike Amir whose change is an indicator of his assimilation with the American culture, Hussein superficially changes only to live calmly in a racist society. Asked about the reason of changing, Hussein says: "You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name? It's in the Quran. It says you can hide your religion if you have to" (*Disgraced* 18). Hence, Hussein's decision stems from a religious perspective.

The characterization of Hussein is intended to reinforce the fact that people are to be judged by their beliefs and behavior not by their appearance. Hussein's thoughts and behaviours always contradict with his appearance. When he appears on stage looking like a completely western American young man in his *hoodies*, *high tops* and *jeans*; yet, his beliefs show that he is a practicing Muslim who follows the instructions of his religion. He is convinced that nothing is wrong with his faith or his people. Later on in the play, he starts assuming the attire of a radical Muslim, wearing a kufi and starts using his original Arabic Muslim name on stage. These traits go along with the stereotypical image of Muslims in the Western culture, the image which frightens western nations. Chaki elaborates: "The bearded Muslim fanatic and the 'oppressed' Muslim woman in a burqa are common images disseminated in the media, presenting the Muslim subject always as a problem, or a threat to Western ideals of democracy and freedom" (154-155). Hussein appears on stage with a Kufi which relates to the image of Muslim terrorists in the western consciousness. Even at this point, Hussein's behaviours and ideas contradict with what his appearance indicates.

Hussein's Islamic outfit urges one to expect that he would accept and support Amir's uncivilized behaviour of beating his wife, Emily, for her adultery. This is because "religious group membership may, in some contexts, be a stronger predictor of prejudice than race or ethnicity" (Frings 38). Yet, Hussein/Abe unexpectedly rages against

Amir's behaviour. Hussein says: "I know what you did to her. How could you?" (*Disgraced* 76). The reaction of each of Amir and Hussein to 'beating Emily' completely contradicts with the indication of the appearance of each of them: Amir who embraces the beliefs of a civilized western culture beats his wife, while Hussein who sticks in his appearance to the stereotypically uncivilized eastern attire rejects this act. This situation refutes the attitude of judging one according to one's own external appearance. Judging people based on their appearance or race is the main reason why Hussein is against adopting the western culture.

The painting Emily draws of Amir concretely objectifies the western undermining stereotypical view of eastern Muslims. The portrait of Amir is painted "in the style of Diego Velazquez's *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*" (Putri and Destari 283). Amir is painted as a reflection of an image of Velazquez's servant/Moor. In his western white wife's eyes, Amir is seen as a servant personifying, thus, the inferior eastern culture. From a western viewpoint, he is no more than a servant/Moor like Juan de Pareja who is granted his freedom by his western civilized master. The portrait functions as a stage sign adeptly signifying the way the West views the eastern Muslims. Akhtar is, thus, able to tangibly objectify the insulting stereotyping of Muslims in the western culture, an offensive stereotype that has been instilled in the western sub-consciousness for hundreds of years. This enhances Amir's self-loath and reinforces his ambivalence. He feels that he is not accepted by all the people that surround him: Muslims view him as a lapsed Americanized person, and his wife and friends look at him as an inferior outsider who is not enough for a white woman. Thus, his sense of rejection is deepened when he discovers his wife's affair with the white American Isaac. Emily's betrayal symbolizes the complete rejection of the whole society of Amir because, for him, Emily is the key to the Western culture. Having Emily cheated on him and preferred her white western boyfriend is an indication that Amir, the Pakistani Muslim husband, is not accepted or welcomed as a citizen in this society. That is why his reaction to Emily's betrayal is cruel and vicious. Akhtar describes his insane rage as follows: "*All at once, Amir hits Emily in the face. A vicious blow. The first blow unleashes a torrent of rage, overtaking him. He hits her twice more. Maybe a third.*"

*In rapid succession. Uncontrolled violence as brutal as it needs to be in order to convey the discharge of a lifetime of discreetly building resentment" (Disgraced 67-68).* In so-doing, Amir releases much of the self-loathing, rage, and despise he has hidden deep in his psyche for a lifetime against the west.

In fact, this is not the only scene that uncovers Amir's rage against the west. Amir vocalized the triumph of the inferior eastern culture and the defeat of the so-called superior one when he announces that the 9/11 events help him feel proud because "*we*" are winning finally:

Amir: .... even if you're one of those lapsed Muslims sipping your after dinner scotch alongside your beautiful white American wife—and watching the news and seeing folks in the Middle East dying for values you were taught were purer—and stricter—and truer... you can't help but feel just a little bit of pride.

Isaac: Pride? .... (*Beat*) Did you feel pride on September Eleventh?

Amir (*With Hesitation*): If I'm honest, yes.... I was horrified by it, okay? Absolutely horrified....

Jory: Pride about what? About the towers coming down? About people getting killed?

Amir: That we were finally winning.

Jory: *We*?

Amir: Yeah... I guess I forgot... which *we* I was.

Jory: You're an American...

Amir: It's tribal, Jory. It is in the bones. You have no idea how I was brought up. You have to work *real* hard to root that shit out. (*Disgraced 56-57*)

Amir subconsciously groups himself with the eastern Muslims when he uses the first-person plural pronoun, *we*, an indication that he unconsciously belongs to his eastern original culture. Hall comments on the use of the first-person pronoun stating that it "must be thought of as, itself, enunciated. We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', *positioned*" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 68). Here, Amir speaks from the context of an eastern Muslim cultural

perspective. It is true that Amir is supposedly a lapsed Muslim and a fierce American citizen against Islam; yet, when exasperated, he unconsciously reveals an inner sense of belonging to his original eastern culture.

Amir develops two layers of identity: one of them is expressed when he assumes the American culture; and the other is his original eastern self which he tries to conceal but is unwillingly uncovered when he is unconscious. Amir's original eastern Muslim identity has been instilled in his psyche since his early childhood in a Pakistani house so he cannot completely uproot it because it seems that it resembles his actual cultural identity. Hall states that one way to define 'cultural identity' is to define it in terms of,

the idea of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall "Cultural Identity" 69)

Amir's hidden eastern cultural identity pushes him, for example, to spit on Isaac, raging against him for having an affair with his wife, Emily. Thus, he shares the same collective culture with the Pakistanis, a culture that lies deep beneath the layers of the superficial westernized cultural identity he tries to assume.

Being rejected and unable to lead a normal life in the western civilized America like Amir, Hussein considers departing America. Although he is brought up in America and does not know any other homeland except America, he does not enjoy a sense of belonging there. He says: "Maybe that's the problem. Maybe we never should've left. Maybe we never should have come to this one [America]" (*Disgraced* 49). He regrets leaving Pakistan, and wishes his parents would have chosen to settle down in their original homeland. It seems that Hussein's parents had been fascinated in the past by the glare of

the American Dream and the brightness of the American myth of easy material success. As a second generation in the family, Hussein experienced a sense of disillusionment, realizing the bitter fact that he cannot settle down enjoying a sense of belonging in the hostile western cultural environment. Moreover, the easterners have been stereotypically formulated in the sub-consciousness of the westerners as inferior, uncivilized and perhaps violent terrorist nations. This is why he nostalgically wishes his parents would not have come to such an environment.

In the first scene of the first act of *The Invisible Hand* (2015), Bashir, the protagonist of the play, pinpoints to Nick Bright the stereotypical image of the western culture in the sub-consciousness of the Eastern nations. Bashir says to Nick: "I think you're full of shit. (*Shifting*) Wealthy American looting our country" (14). It becomes crystal clear, then, that from an eastern point of view, western nations have always been the main reason behind the social deterioration and the economic difficulties of the eastern nations. The West had conquered the East, claiming to help the eastern countries liberate, get enlightened, or resist the oppression of their regimes. Westerners had given themselves the right to be responsible for liberating other nations, spreading democracy, and enlightenment. Bashir highlights the fact that while the western nations used to claim that they are invading other inferior countries to enlighten and liberate them, they, in fact, conceal their actual motivation. He says:

The Spanish? Went to the New World telling everyone they wanted to bring Christ to the heathens. What were they really doing? Taking gold, silver, taking land. Then, the English? Went all over the world bringing civilization to the savages. What were they really doing? Taking tea, rubber, diamonds. Taking land. And now, America has the whole world in its hands. Wants to bring growth, cooperation, peace.... Democracy. With the war on Iraq. But what are you really doing? (*The Invisible Hand* 43)

These actions have led to the fact that the eastern nations are sinking more and more in the damaging consequences of colonization, surveillance and stereotypes. On the other hand, western nations are

gaining more power, wealth, and civilization which enhance western centrality.

Hussein asserts that the sense of disgrace, easterners develop concerning their selves and culture is the result of the long years of colonization practiced by the West over the East: "For three hundred years they've been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want to be like them. Look like them. Marry their women. They disgraced us. They disgraced us. And then they pretend they don't understand the rage we've got?" (*Disgraced* 76). The westerners 'disgraced us'/Muslims, and then they look down upon the eastern nations for being uncivilized, poor, backward nations. In her essay, "Western Media has a Problem Portraying Islam," Chiara Awatramani seems to defend Islam and blame the western media: "in Western media, this peaceful religion [Islam] is seen as oppressive and dangerous." Living in a society where Islamophobia is implanted in the sub-consciousness of the nation makes it hard for many Muslims in these societies to declare their adherence to their original culture. Islam is introduced as a violent old-fashioned religion that comes from the desert; and that Muslim countries are unsafe, have many wars going on there, and that women are oppressed.

Unlike Amir who blames Muslims for being violent and Islam for being a terrorist religion, Hussein and Bashir believe that it is the West that created and funded terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and Taliban. Hussein and Bashir blame the self-centered West for the wars, destruction, terror, and vices that spread in the Eastern Muslim countries. The two characters believe that the West is self-centered, interfering with the national affairs of other countries to exploit these countries achieving more gains. Many Muslims think the same way:

The 2002 Gallup's Poll of the Islamic World of 10,000 people in the mainly Islamic countries (i.e., Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey)... reported that Muslim respondents associated a number of traits with westerners such as arrogant, non-religious, selfish, immoral and fond of interfering with the domestic affairs of other countries. (Mashuri 58)

However, in his two plays, Akhtar underlines the fact that the west lays the blame on the east when it comes to violence. From the Westerners' perspective, the wars they rage, and the violence they commit can be justified by being a reaction to the unfair acts of terror of Muslims. In *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11*, Amina Yaqin and Peter Morey differentiate between two versions of violence: "The ability to delineate the difference between so-called legitimate violence carried out by the state and acts of terror means that official discourses always depict the violence of outside agencies of the dispossessed as irrational and without context. This then excuses the wholly reactive violence of the state in pursuing and suppressing such violence" (35).

This proposes that any violence is basically reactionary; consequently, the 9/11 attacks, despite being terrorist and unaccepted, might be seen as a reaction against western racism, injustices, colonization and oppression practiced against the East. However, in Mashuri's words: "[The] conflict between Islam and the West not only directly predicts Muslims' negative stereotypes of the West, but also mediates the positive relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and the negative stereotypes" (Mashuri 57). Bashir's rage overwhelms him to the limit that he becomes a terrorist. Surveillance and constructing negative stereotypes about a certain sect of people cannot bring about peace or discipline. Instead, this provokes many of the negatively stereotyped groups to revolt. However, "this relationship between negative stereotypes and aggressive tendencies is mediated by the extent to which Muslims feel anger against the West" (Mashuri 57). Their tendency towards terror becomes a reaction to the injustices they meet. It can be that terror becomes the only way from their perspective that gives them voice, announces their case to the world, and enables them to express their anger.

In *The Invisible Hand* Bashir's resort to violence is the result of the Western policies and injustices from which he, his father, and the whole nation of Pakistan suffer. He says to Nick Bright: "You see, we are prisoners of a corrupt society that is our own making. But don't pretend you don't participate. Of course you do. That's your job. That was Mr. Carey Martin's job. To grease the wheels, to rape and plunder our nation" (*The Invisible Hand* 20). Bashir does not deny that some

Pakistanis are corrupted. Yet, he thinks that this corruption is also the result of western interference with the national affairs of Pakistan due to the power of the West. Consequently, Bashir is motivated to think of a way for revenge. He tries to figure out the factors that enhance western power aiming at adopting such factors of power. He finds out that the main factor of the power of the western nations is currency. In a conversation with Nick about his thesis, Bashir says:

Just started that chapter on currency being king.... You should have called this thing "The Secret Economic History of the World"... To most people [it is a secret] that it wasn't military power that took over the world. It was the dollar.... The brokers running the central banks, right? Those are the real power brokers. He who controls the currency controls the world. (*The Invisible Hand* 42)

Western economic progress and financial prosperity empowers them over the eastern nations. That is why Bashir and Selim kidnap Nick Bright, an American banker. They wanted to manipulate his financial knowledge to help them make \$10 million dollars so that they would be able to help the deprived Pakistani people. To do so, Bright starts to teach Bashir more about economics and its policies. He also shows him how the stock market is run. It is revealed that the term 'invisible hand' refers to the "18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher-economist Adam Smith's metaphor" (Higgins). Nick explains the meaning of this term to Bashir: "The free market is guided by the confluence and conflict of everyone's self-interest, like an invisible hand moving the market" (*The Invisible Hand* 33). Hence, Bashir's main aim is to become the invisible hand that controls the market. He arranges the bombing of the Central bank in order to control the value of the rupees and hence increase his profits:

BASHIR: And then I arranged the bombing of the central bank of Pakistan during their policy meeting .... And now that the rupee's collapsed, my position in the market's worth thirty-five million dollars. (*Beat*) You have any idea how much good this is going to do? (*Pointing to the paper*) It's going to bring down the government. The time is ripe for revolution. Spring has finally come to Pakistan.

NICK: You killed all the central bankers...

BASHIR: Ever since that thing with Bilal Ansoor—him getting hit by Lashkar, and the window that gave us on the market—seven hundred thousand dollars in ten minutes... And then, all your pestering about the rupee—well, it finally caught on at some point. He who controls the currency controls the power, Nick. Currency is king. You taught me that. (*The Invisible Hand*57)

Bashir has already become a terrorist who is ready to bomb organizations, and kill innocent people only to achieve his own goals. He repeats it again: "He who controls the currency controls the power" (*The Invisible Hand* 57). This sentence summarizes the mentality that Bashir has developed after the western economy lessons he has been taught by Nick Bright. Bashir involuntarily becomes a copy of the western other

Like Amir who has gone through a similar situation of racial discrimination when he was with Emily in the restaurant; and like Hussein who was also discriminated against by the barista; Bashir and his father are also victims of the same kind of discrimination. However, unlike Amir or Hussein, Bashir reacts to these constructed images, stereotypes, rejection, and surveillance by departing the West, going back to Pakistan, where he seeks a way to help improve his nation. He finds resort in an anti-West terrorist organization that tries to provide for poor Pakistanis by assuming violent procedures. Bashir, who was brought up as a British citizen and who once tried to live peacefully in Britain has been turned into being a person who believes that revenge and violence is the only way to achieve peace and progress in Pakistan. He says: "sometimes the revolution is violent. And sometimes the peace can only come after the violence" (*The Invisible Hand* 30). Instead of turning against his religion like Amir, or rubbing shoulders with the West, Bashir decides to fight back. He joined a terrorist organization that fights for the welfare of Pakistan against Western policy. This way, he thinks he might be able to repair the damages western colonization caused to Pakistan and other Muslim countries through that organization.

Bashir's reaction to the cultural rejection he finds in the British society pushes him to go through a long journey that ends up with him being the head of a terrorist organization after being an average British citizen. His agony is deep because he is rejected, humiliated and excluded by the British society to which he heartily belongs for reasons which are beyond his control. Although, he has returned to Pakistan, he still refers to Britain using the term "home" in his conversation with Nick. Despite leaving the 'home' that rejects him and despite settling down in the home to which he ethnically belongs, he is still unable to fulfill his need for the sense of safety, ease of soul, surroundings of love, peace of mind or psychological tranquility because of his deep sense of alienation, and estrangement that engulf his inner psyche. Amir and Hussein, also, experience the same sense of suffering. Thus, surveillance which is supposed to bring about discipline is the main factor that causes the sense of bewilderment on the part of Amir, Hussein and Bashir. Instead of developing docile bodies that are willing to abide with the culture of the western societies within which they are brought up, they are pushed by surveillance and negative stereotypes to revolt against society/their present.

Despite the trials of the three characters to belong to their concerned societies, despite the hard effort they exert to assimilate, and despite the sacrifices some are ready to offer in order to feel that they are welcomed in the only homeland they have ever known, they found out that they would always remain rejected and treated as the other. Their beliefs, their faith, and their opinions would always be questioned and suspected. It does not matter how civilized, well-educated, well-behaved or good-looking Muslims they are; it does not also matter whether Muslims wear expensive clothes like Amir does, or call themselves Abe like Hussein does, or even try to be decent and kind like what Bashir has first tried to do in Western countries. A Muslim is always viewed as 'the other', an intruder, or a stranger that is not like Western citizens who are "ordinary law-abiding citizens" by default (Maras 68).

To conclude, after investigating the two plays, rejection, negative stereotyping, and targeted surveillance toward Muslims in the western societies do not bring about peace within societies or among individuals. "Scarce experiences with the minority group results in that the 'others' seem threatening and create a feeling of insecurity among the majority group" (Schønemann 2). Being outcasts in their own homeland affects their way of thinking and their attitude towards life and society. Instead of strengthening their loyalty and sense of belonging and patriotism to the western countries where they were born and raised practicing scrutiny over them, overcome Muslims by a sense of rejection, alienation, and anger. Trying to tame individuals by passing specific laws to guarantee that they would behave in a certain way does not lead to discipline or more security. Instead, this results in anarchy, increases rage, and hatred between the west and the east; or rather between Muslims and Western nations as shown in *Disgraced* and *The Invisible Hand*.

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