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Convergence of Experiences Between African-Americans and Muslims in America: An Analysis of *Invisible Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist Through* Critical Race Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative study between Ellison's "Invisible Man", and Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist", through Critical Race Theory to close-read the two pieces of literature. Essentially, the paper asks whether a parallel can be drawn between the racialized experiences of African-Americans and Pakistani-Muslims. While the research does not attempt to force Ellison's Invisible Man to be applicable to Pakistani-Muslims or other non-white populations (diaspora and indigenous), there are clear convergences that the two communities face. These similarities are contingent upon race-theory, which is explored. Moreover, both Ellison and Hamid utilize the same tropes of American fiction to highlight the white-gaze, the Othering of persons-of-colour and communities-of-colour, and living in the USA. For instance, both texts mention how American universities are designed to white-wash minority communities, stripping them of their culture and racial markers, in order to facilitate the domination of the American empire. Both African-Americans and Muslims are peddling a system that, ultimately, benefits white supremacy. Another trope that both authors use is the "white woman," where desire for her denotes a thirst for freedom, and fear or anger towards her translates as a denial of that coveted freedom. Both texts talk about the lack of identity African-Americans and Muslims can experience—for instance, Changez's relationship with Erica, or the Invisible Man being sexualized by the white-gaze, rendering their true selves as invisible.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been used by American academics to understand how structural racism operates within the American legal system and public service institutions, such as the police force, public sector universities, regulatory authorities, and even banks that provide mortgages. CRT is used to understand how non-white populations are subjected to systemic forms of racism in their everyday lives, and Pakistani-Americans who identify as Muslims are no exception. Historically, CRT has been dominated by African-American academics, research and even fiction. In 1952, Ralph Ellison published *Invisible Man* and wrote

about the place African-Americans had in the U.S.A. His text was heavily influenced by some of his own experiences with communist groups that operated in New York City. Much like his own life, Ellison's unnamed narrator ultimately becomes disenchanted by the political left and escapes to the underground, rendering himself invisible, as he cannot be both visibly black *and* American. This is based on W. E. B. Dubois's concept of double-consciousness—the idea that questions whether *American* means white only. Ellison's book was primarily written with African-Americans in mind, and while this paper does not seek to explore that angle specifically, it begs the question whether there is a convergence of experience and racial issues when it comes to other communities of color, such as Pakistani-Americans? Is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* a story that has universal application to persons-of-color who do not identify as black?

In 2007, Mohsin Hamid wrote *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and though the text is completely different from *Invisible Man*, it operates on some of the same issues raised by CRT and W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness—is it possible to be both Muslim and American at the same time? Is the white woman (the Battle Royal scene in *Invisible Man*) and the character of Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* similar in their symbolism, because regardless of religion and identity, if a person is a person-of-color, their access to being American is contingent upon accessing what the white man has access to: the white woman?

Aims and Objectives

- Whether Critical Race Theory is applicable to Pakistani-Americans living in the USA.
- Whether Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* has broader implications on other communities of color in the USA.
- If there is a convergence of race-related issues faced by African-Americans and Pakistani-Americans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ellison (1952) has a written a novel, *Invisible Man*, that follows the life of a nameless African-American narrator, who talks about his black identity being erased or rendered invisible in America. The novel charts his life from his days in a historically black college (probably modelled after Tuskegee University) and follows him through to New York City, where he works in a paint factory (that makes the whitest paint), and his membership in a Marxist group that goes by the name Brotherhood. The novel is replete with symbolism and metaphor, and explores the place of black identity in modern America. Some of the more famous tropes and symbols are a white woman (who symbolizes freedom), the post-colonial theory of "double consciousness," as introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois, and opposition to capitalism.

Hamid (2007) has written a novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, about a Pakistani protagonist, Changez, who narrates his journey of participating in the American dream and achieving financial success, to becoming more critical of empire and America's role in the world after 9/11, causing him to embrace a new, reactionary identity influenced by his interpretation of Islam. Some comparisons with *Invisible Man* that are explored in this paper are: is the character of Changez the

Muslim version of the narrator in Ellison's novel? Is his conversion from a successful professional in NYC to a potential extremist after 9/11 a connotation of becoming the "underground man"? Foley has written *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*, in which she documents Ralph Ellison's life and his relationship with the communist community in the USA. She writes about how Ellison distanced himself from the political left to embrace patriotism for the USA, and wrote a text heavily influenced by the Cold War. Her analysis of Ralph Ellison's commentary on the role of African-Americans in *Invisible Man* are central to the writing of this paper.

Lalami (2012) talks about discrimination being experienced by American-Muslims and focuses on the Park51 mosque that was built in New York City in the time after 9/11. Lalami (2012) analyses various responses to the construction of the mosque, and also provides anecdotal evidence of bigotry and Islamophobia she has faced living in the United States as a Muslim. It is important to see how the Muslim-American experience can parallel some of the discrimination that is faced by the narrator in Invisible Man.

Rabb (2008) writes about unpacking the concept of "invisibility" in the context of African-Americans and Muslims within the events of hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Her article focuses on the ideas of unity within the Muslim communities to further their cause in the United States. Because she focuses on Muslim American identity, many of whom identify as African American, this becomes important to explore the deep connections between the black experience and the Muslim experience in the USA.

METHODOLOGY

The research paradigm applied for this study is both qualitative and quantitative. In the qualitative approach, content analysis by developing themes or categories were tabulated based on those sounds where mispronunciation was expected. Regarding the quantitative approach, just descriptive statistics were utilized. The target population or sampling frame, as Creswell (2005) view it, to be a group of those individuals that share some distinctive characteristics (Peshawari Hindko speaking intermediate level female students in this case) through which a list of nominees was identified. In terms of reading material, firstly, the minimal pairs were listed on the page, and particular pieces of newspapers were arranged in hard form. Secondly, these materials were scanned and sent to the participants. A one-to-one session with each and every participant was conducted. Participants were informed about the conduction and objectives of the session. After this informed consent, participants were let to read in a natural way and the process ended in the recorded reading.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison writes, "[w]ho know but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison 581). Although there is ambiguity whether Ellison intended the Invisible Man to personify little other than the conceit of the African-American minority, does that bar an assumption towards wider applicability to others racially marginalized in America? In his 2012 article titled *Fear and Loathing of Islam*, Bayoumi argues the irrationality and paranoia associated

by Americans with regard to Muslims in the United States. He states that "[in] 2007, the New York Police Department released a report called "Radicalization of the West: The Homegrown Threat," claiming that the looming danger to the United States was from "unremarkable" Muslim men under the age of 35 who visit "extremist incubators"" (Bayoumi 11). Writing for *Misbah*, a publication of Princeton University, Intisar Rabb argues the double-consciousness that exists for American Muslims; first in their beliefs and second, as Americans (Rabb 6). Rabb even mentions an "invisibility" for Muslims in America and, unpacking this through Ellison's *Invisible Man,* is it possible that Ellison's "lower frequencies" could speak to Muslims in America? In exploring an answer, let us juxtapose *Invisible Man* with another text that speaks of this "invisibility" for Muslims – Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In determining the possibility of Ellison's alternative "frequency," a drawing of parallels would be included, for instance Ellison's use of tropes and metaphor with respect to the "underground", or the wearing of a mask and the conceit of "[k]eep This Nigger-Boy Running" (Ellison 33). More importantly, where the two texts, perhaps, converge, is the function of the "white-woman" representing freedom, democracy and America, which shall be discussed in detail. There is only one Invisible Man and while the task here investigates similarities, it does not seek to uncover Ellison's intentions to limit or include other races. Rather, in noting the few similarities, the universality of the Invisible Man's sufferings is highlighted which may, in appreciation of Ellison, permit a deeper understanding of his text.

In Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist is a Pakistani called Changez who attains admission at Princeton University and then is inducted into New York's powerful financial district before realizing, in an erstwhile post-September 11th America that is hostile and xenophobic, that he will never be considered an equal because of his skin color and, by extension, his belief. Changez's relationship with Erica, a "white-woman" of declining mental and physical health, is a staggered deconstruction of the protagonist's relationship with America. Hamid writes this book in the first-person narrative of Changez, who is addressing another person identified only as "you", and the "you" in this case is a white American man, but is left non-descript to enable self-insertion for the reader.

In writing about Changez, Hamid has him say early in the text, "*This is a dream come true.* Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. *I have access to this beautiful campus,* I thought" and then later "I was one of only two Pakistanis in my entering class – two from a population of over a hundred million souls" (Hamid 3). Changez also states, "I looked around me at the Gothic buildings-younger, I later learned, than any of the mosques of this city [Lahore], but made through acid treatment and ingenious stone-masonry to look older" (Hamid 3). There is a degree of immense gratitude that resonates with the Invisible Man's narrative, "[i]t was a beautiful college. The buildings were old and covered with vines and the roads gracefully winding" (Ellison 34). But Ellison shows us in *Invisible Man* that "the state college for Negroes" (Ellison 32) is a method to whitewash African-Americans and that can be seen in Hamid's work as well, when Changez says, "we were expected to contribute out talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first" (Hamid 4). When Changez attains insight as to the futility of his efforts, he writes, "finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination" and calls himself the "product of Princeton and Underwood Samson" (Hamid 156). He continues to write, saying, "I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain

was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer … I thought as I lay myself down in my bed, … push[ing] back the veil behind which all this had been concealed" (Hamid 157). Shortly after this insight, Changez hires "a charioteer [in New York City] who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permission to abide legally" and, in including this, Hamid brings Changez at par in terms of his invisibility. To a degree, this resonates with the Invisible Man, who finally attains insight of how he is peddling to be a part of a system that will never wholly accept him. However, this does not, in any way lend the Invisible Man with agency for other races. If anything, Ellison's Invisible Man is rendered more unique as a black man, for he turns to the underground, whereas this charioteer is choosing to participate in society and Hamid maintains a dichotomy of "us" and "you" for Changez. Ellison's Invisible Man does not hold on to such binaries – for him the paint is mixed.

In *Invisible Man*, Ellison has the protagonist wear a mask in terms of appearing, at times, the fantasy of the white-woman. In his text, Hamid has Changez typecast into a mold after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when he is returning to New York after a business trip in the Philippines. Hamid writes, "[a]t the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts- I had, rather embarrassingly, chosen to wear a pink pair patterned with teddy bears, but their revelation had no impact on the sever expression of my inspectors" (Hamid 74). A similar investigation is carried out on Changez when he enters the United States after the flight, and thus begins the protagonist's journey to be treated as a "fundamentalist." On occasion when the Invisible Man chooses to consciously wear that mask, for instance, telling Sybil, "I rapes real good when I'm drunk" (Ellison 523), Ellison effectively communicates the Invisible Man's frustrations in being treated as such, in ways similar to Changez who also chooses to end the farce by changing his appearance, replacing polite racism towards him from his peers to open hostility in New York City. In this instance, Hamid writes:

> It is remarkable, given its physical insignificance-it is only a hairstyle, after all – the impact a beard worn by a man of my complexion has on your fellow country-men. More than once, traveling on the subway-where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in-I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares. (Hamid 130)

A greater instance that is relevant to the wearing of the mask in both Ellison's and Hamid's text is the metaphor of the "white-woman." There is significant pedagogy in delineating the "white-woman" in Ellison's *Invisible Man* as representative of the United States of America. In introducing the "kewpie doll" during the scene of the Battle Royale, Ellison refers to her "small American flag tattooed upon her belly" (Ellison 19). In her book, Wrestling with the Left, Barbara Foley refers to an earlier edit of Ellison's text, and the Invisible Man's encounter with a character called Louise, in which his monologue says "[y]ou'll be my Liberty and Democracy, Hope and Truth and Beauty" (Foley 254). Further, Foley writes that Louise "functions as a symbol of democracy to him" (Foley 256). In introducing Louise this way, it appears that Ellison intermixes the archetype of her as America and her being an object of lust, for the Invisible Man continues to say Louis is "the justification of manhood, the motive for courage and cunning" (Foley 254). For the Invisible Man, therefore, America, or Freedom, is to be with a white-woman. Prior to constructing the nexus between Louise, Sybil and/ or the woman in the Battle Royal, and that of Erica in Hamid's text, it crucial to determine whether Ellison portrays female whiteness in contrast

to the Invisible Man being black, or their whiteness is non-contingent and inherent in them being the white-woman that is democratically America. It is in answering this that, perhaps, one can determine whether it is possible for those racially other than white to feel equally invisible to white-America in a vein similar to African Americans. In other words, is the white-woman as inaccessible to Changez as it may be to the Invisible Man? Despite this access being metaphorical in nature, it is played out in *Invisible Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as primal and physical, where desire for the white-woman denotes a thirst for freedom, and fear or anger towards her translates as a denial of that coveted freedom. In keeping the binaries sexual, both Ellison and Hamid remind us of what is essentially an anthropological genesis to a political and social dilemma, which seeks to exclude non-whites, or in Ellison's case, African Americans from mainstream America.

To determine such whiteness, it is important to deconstruct each of the scenes which include the white-woman in *Invisible Man*, of which there are not many, and those present in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, to see if a glimpse of universal application may be gleaned from Ellison's text, even if not appearing on the surface. A perverse petition to be a part of America is seen during the Battle Royal scene in Chapter 1. Upon beholding the "magnificent blond-stark naked" (Ellison 19), Ellison writes that the Invisible Man:

> [f]elt a wave of irrational guilt and fear. [His] teeth chattered, [his] skin turned to goose flesh, [his] knees knocked. Yet [he] was strongly attracted and looked in spite of [him]self. Had the price of looking been blindness, [he] would have looked … [he] felt a desire to spit upon her as [his] eyes brushed slowly over her body. (Ellison 19).

The Invisible Man, here, looks upon America with a strong desire to be a part of it, yet experiences "irrational guilt and fear", betraying the effects of the African-American struggle to feel included and, yet, being denied the same. The Invisible Man refers to "blindness" as a result of freely gazing upon the white-woman. In one way, this reference is Biblical, inasmuch as the story narrates of Ham gazing upon a naked Noah resulting in the Curse of Ham, which, legend attributes to the enslavement of his descendants. The scene also denotes the illusion of African-Americans to consider themselves included in mainstream America, fooling themselves and, thus, suffering blindness. While it is indisputable that the "kewpie doll" or "magnificent blond," is naked because of her audience, it is less apparent, albeit no less significant, that she is white because of those watching her as well. It is as if Ellison describes her as such. Analyzing the text, her description is intertwined with the Invisible Man's reaction and description of his own physique, betraying the impossibility of her whiteness being beheld by anyone other than black. Ellison writes that the Invisible Man "wanted [to] … cover her from [his] eyes and the eyes of the others with [his] body" (Ellison 19). Again, given that it is a first-person narrative and the Invisible Man's eyes through which the reader is inserted, the white-woman is received through blackness and anything white that is mentioned, is noticed and, therefore, is white in the manner of the trope, because an African-American man is writing about it, and this comes across as more white because of that blackness in much the same way as Ellison's Liberty Paints scene. This severely limits the application of the "white-woman" for anyone else other than black, including, apparently Changez. Ellison, further, writes that the Invisible Man wanted to "love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the small American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V" (Ellison 19). Again, we see the binaries here, of love and hate and a struggle presents itself. Is

there any room to argue for the "white-woman" as representing democracy that does not hinge on the blackness of the viewer? It is discernable that Ellison describes the "kewpie doll" in terms of her nudity more than her whiteness, though she is indisputably white. If anything, his narration is multi-cultural, as she has "East Indian temples" for breasts. However, another way to tackle this argument is the *effect* the white-woman has on her audience, although she is flung into the air by the white Americans. Ellison devotes more text to the effect of beholding her by the African-American boxers. One is overwhelmed and faints, while another pleads to go home as he is sexually aroused and feels uncomfortable. Having said that, Ellison affords the white Americans the privilege to play with her, touch her, while the African-Americans can only watch. In effect, the "reaction" to "whiteness" is essentially black, or white, without discussing the more complex narratives of the boxers being treated in a degrading manner, tested to have the audacity to feel.

Where does this leave Erica in Hamid's text? Because of Ellison's specificity, can the metaphor of the "white-woman" be applied out of his text at all? While a close reading of *Invisible Man* may not yield such flexibility from within the text, a somewhat borrowed trope from it in Hamid's text does allow us to see Ellison's text differently perhaps. Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* represents America itself. In Hamid's scene involving a nude Erica, of somewhat similar import as the Battle Royal, Changez is the only witness. To provide some context, Changez is seen vacationing with his Princeton friends and Erica on the island of Rhodes in Greece. Prior to delving into her nudity, Hamid includes a brief trope, in which Changez states that Rhodes':

> Cities were fortified, protected by ancient castles; they guarded against the Turks, much like the army and navy and air force of modern Greece, part of a wall against the East that still stands. How strange it was for me to think I grew up on the other side! (Hamid 23).

Here, Hamid highlights the binaries of East and West; Turkey and Greece; the past and the present status quo, and, perhaps, the Muslim world verse the Christian world, given the tone of the book and title. In doing so, Hamid provides racial tension. Hamid continues with stating that "[w]e were lying on the beach, and many of the European women nearby were, as usual, sunbathing topless" (Hamid 23). In writing of Erica, Hamid has Changez say, "when I noticed Erica was untying the straps of her bikini [at the beach] … she turned her head to the side and saw me staring at her" (Hamid 24). Contrast this with the Invisible Man, who says, "I had a notion that of all in the room she saw only me with her impersonal eyes" (Ellison 19). It is the same America that looks into both racially "other" men. In both cases, the "white woman" becomes flesh and blood because Ellison and Hamid permit action for her, and she is no longer received through their skin colors. So even though she is exposed to the scrutiny of the African-American boxers, their reaction is to her *nudity*. If Ellison continues to concentrate on their reaction, it is possible to argue that rather than excluding other races, by the use of the blackness, Ellison actually includes them, by unwittingly allowing the subject of "race" to even enter a scene that otherwise forces only two binaries upon the reader: passive nudity in the female and the active, clothed, male. This binary is stark in Hamid's text, for Erica is naked but Changez is not.

The dilemma of Erica's *nudity* and not so much her *whiteness* resonates to further determine Changez as an *other* as Hamid continues to write of Changez's reaction to Erica untying the straps of her bikini. He is thrown into a state of confusion and Hamid writes:

> A number of possible alternatives presented themselves: I could suddenly avert my eyes,

> thereby providing not only that I had been staring but that I was uncomfortable with her nudity; I could, after a brief pause, casually move my gaze away, as though the sight of her breasts had been the most natural thing in the world; I could keep staring, honestly communicating in this way my admiration for what she had revealed; or I could, through well-timed literary allusion, draw her attention to the fact that there was a passage in Mr. Palomar that captured perfectly my dilemma. (Hamid 23)

It is clear that Changez is embarrassed by Erica's nudity, being in close proximity. However, the complexity of his "dilemma" is telling of more "reaction" in a way similar to Ellison's African-American boxers. It is not unsubtle to note this novelty as more than embarrassment, as the "possible alternatives" are too complex and resonate fear; of not having permission; of not being white enough. The reference to *Mr. Palomar* by the author, Italo Calvino, highlights Changez's problem, inasmuch as Calvino writes of Mr. Palomar beholding a similar sight during a walk on the beach. He tries to look away, only to discover, "my not looking presupposes that I am thinking of that nakedness, worrying about it; and this is basically an indiscreet and reactionary attitude" (Palomar 10)

Another argument to be extrapolated by both the Battle Royal and Hamid's Rhodes' scene is the subjugation of the African-American boxers or Changez on the basis of their race through the agency of the white-woman. Ellison has the "magnificent blond" used for the exploitation by the white-man and, indirectly, the African-American boxers. Changez is dominated Erica's nudity in a way that diminishes him into thinking of his right to even look. The Battle Royal makes the African-American boxers appear more nude in places than the "white-woman" as they are reduced to pawns. It is a homosocial environment and, in limited degree, homoerotic, as physical reduction to primal instincts, for instance the "conceal[ing] [of] the erection which projected" (Ellison 20) is on display in nexus to the other men. There is a degree of voyeurism that pervades the scene.

In either case, the reaction of the men is a telling way to deem the white-woman as a prize, as something to obtain, for the attraction is every present. In *Wrestling with the Left*, Barbara Foley may disagree with the white-woman being white without comparison, when she speaks of the Othello theme.

Foley writes that for the Invisible Man, the character of Louise is Desdemona from Othello. She writes "while he claims that her color is not what draws him, it is evident that his attraction to Louise the woman cannot be separated from his estimation of Louise as the "prize," the "white meat of the chicken."" (Foley 255). Is it possible that Ellison considered the Invisible Man as occupying, however briefly, the role of Othello? Foley seems to think so, as she insists that Ellison has seen the performance of Paul Robeson as Othello, and it left him feeling strongly about the performance. However, Louise's whiteness, or her paralleling Desdemona is contingent on Othello. In other words, the white-woman is contrasted and dependent on being white, or seeks definition for herself, through the African-American, or in this case, Othello. Foley writes that Louise is "a white woman who breaks the mold of objectification and stereotype supplied by the other appearances of white woman in the novel" (Foley 256). In this way, Louise is probably a closer comparison to Erica than the Battle Royal white-woman or even Sybil, given that she is intellectually equivalent to Changez and a Princeton graduate.
However, in order to determine if *Invisible Man* could have universal application, of particular

interest is Foley's assumption of Ellison reimagining Othello in the *Invisible Man*. If that is, indeed, the case then Ellison must be privy to the controversy of whether Othello is actually black or of a lighter toned North African race. In *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello: The Moor of Venice*, Michael Neill states that "English acquaintance with the Moorish world had been largely mediated through recent Spanish history, Shakespeare was most likely to have imagined his hero as one of the light-skinned North African Moors expelled from Spain after the *Reconquista* -much like the historical Leo Africanus on whom he was partially modelled" (Neill 116). Neill further quotes Julia Reinhard Lupton, saying, "by contrast, [she] argues that it was not colour or 'race' but faith that marked the crucial divide for Shakespeare's contemporaries: prayers instituted by the Archbishop of Canterbury during the Turkish siege of Malta (1565) denounced Turks and other Muslim "infidels" as 'our sworn and most deadly enemies'" (Neill 116). However, this question is not easily answered by Neill, who is more conclusive about Shakespeare and his contemporaries being uncertain with regard to matters of race and ethnicity. However, this may be, the academic controversy is, perhaps, a misleading entry into Ellison's mind, as there is nothing within the text of *Invisible Man* to suggest Ellison interpreted the binary of Othello and Desdemona as being anything other than black and white, and certainly not Muslim and Christian. It does, however, highlight that Desdemona's whiteness is left unperturbed, or unquestionable, regardless of whether Othello is played as a black man or a North African moor of lighter skin.

The second scene in *Invisible Man* which draws a stark parallel to Hamid's text is the seduction by the "delicately plump woman … in the rich red of a hostess gown" in Chapter 19. The "white-woman" is more nuanced in this scene, as it is, perhaps, harder to establish she would have slept with a man other than black. In reference to "him [him speak]" she calls the Invisible Man "primitive" (Ellison 413) and says, "Yes, primitive; no one has told you, Brother, that at times you have tom-toms beating in your voice?" (Ellison 413). There is a definite conceit of a jungle theme being imposed by her upon the Invisible Man in this scene. Similar to the white-woman in the Battle Royal, the Invisible Man wants "both to smash her and to stay with her" (Ellison 415), creating the tension within him. This lividness has its genesis of the continuous denial of freedom meted out to African-Americans, whereas his attraction is the conceit of wanting that freedom. This is repetitive in this scene, for the Invisible Man states he is, "torn between anger and a fierce excitement", and, "I was lost, for the conflict between the idealogical and the biological, duty and desire, had become too subtly confused" (Ellison 416). While it is challenging to extricate denotation for other races in this scene, Foley describes this seduction that is poignant to Hamid's text as well. She states, "[the Invisible Man's] sexual experiences with white women help him escape the hold of Jim Crow; while his lover is involved in primitivist fantasy, he too is getting what he wants" (Foley 289). Further, she writes that the scene "only reinforces the protagonist's sense of invisibility" (Foley 289) when he is discovered by her husband, and is ignored. A similar conceit is played out in the rape scene with Sybil in Chapter 24 of *Invisible Man*. Here, the binaries of black and white are more solid, for Sybil becomes "poetic" and refers to the Invisible Man as "warm ebony against pure snow" (Ellison 520). As referenced earlier, the Invisible Man wears the mask completely when he deludes her into thinking he manifests her fantasy and says, "I rapes real good when I'm drunk" and "I kissed her again and calmed her and she dozed off and I decided again to end the farce" (Ellison 523).

In Hamid's text, Erica, despite being in a relationship with Changez, has not consummated it, as she is still mourning over the death of her soul mate, Chris, a white-man she feels complete with.

Of her, Hamid writes, "I just can't get wet. I don't know what's wrong with me" and, for Changez, "[h]er sexuality, she said, had been mostly dormant since his death" (Hamid 90). In a seminal moment, Changez and Erica make love, before which he says:

> "Are you missing Chris?" She nodded, and I saw tears begin to force themselves between her lashes. "Then pretend," I said, "pretend I am him." … "Pretend I am him," I said again. And slowly, in darkness and in silence, we did. (Hamid 105).

Further, Hamid writes of Changez that "we were under a spell, transported to a world where I was Chris and she was with Chris … Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*" (Ellison 105).

Although this does not parallel factually to *Invisible Man*, Changez becomes invisible for Erica in a particularly real and deliberate way. What is key here is the fantasy of the "white-woman", and not the color of the skin of that fantasy. It is about the "white-woman" more than about the protagonist in each case. The Invisible Man is as different from the hostess' fantasy of what a "primitive" African-American man can provide her as Changez is from Chris, or a white man. In asking the Invisible Man to be her idea of "black", Ellison is saying she is asking the protagonist something he is not and in behaving like Chris, Changez does not become white either. In both cases, the results are negative. The Invisible Man states that he is a "fool", that he was "unable to shrug off the notion that [he] had been tested and had failed" and that he was "caught between guilt and innocence" (Ellison 417-19). Similarly, Changez says that, "I felt at once both *satiated* and *ashamed*. My satiation was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes" (Hamid 106).

Perhaps, in this way, when Foley writes that the Invisible Man gets what he wants, Changez escapes, albeit briefly, his own skin. Towards the end of Hamid's text, Erica disappears into obscurity and Changez does not hear from her again and given that she represents the "white-woman", Changez ruminates that "It occurred to me that my attempts to communicate with her might have failed in part because I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequence; I lacked a stable *core*. I was not certain where I belonged-in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid 148). He continues, further, saying:

> Probably this was why I had been willing to try to take on the persona of Chris, because my own identity was so fragile. But in so doing- and by being unable to offer her an alternative to the chronic nostalgia inside her-I might have pushed Erica deeper into her own confusion. (Hamid 148).

We see a lack of identity on part of Changez actually destabilizes the "white-woman", insomuch as her need to truly represent a democracy, or freedom, is contingent upon the protagonist being certain of whom he is. That identity is crucial and Changez, in pretending to be white, or someone he was not, damaged her even more. It is in this monologue of Changez we see a striking similarity between Erica and the Louise that Ellison left out, as depicted by Foley for the latter. Summarizing from Ellison's notes, Foley writes that the Invisible Man could be seen to have a future with Louise and he would "treat her like a woman and not a goddess" and lead him to "[accept] the humanity of whites and see that "they're weak, heroic, etc, like himself"" (Foley 291). In quoting from

Ellison, Foley touches upon much of what Changez regrets in not having with Erica and, on a subtext level, not being a part of America and, eventually, overcoming his ideas about the whites.

The character of Changez is not the Invisible Man. Ellison's text does not credit other ethnicities and it is clear that Ralph Ellison did not intend it to be so. Perhaps the starkest difference between Hamid's text and Ellison's is the absence of an underground. Changez attempts to distance himself from America but is unsuccessful. Returning to Pakistan after the September 11 terrorist attacks for a brief visit, he says: "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore - or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth. Regardless, the effect of this was to pull and tug at my odds; waves of mourning washed over me" (Hamid 172). In the end Changez leaves the United States of America, thereby removing any doubt that an underground ever existed for him. In terms of invisibility and wearing the mask, we see a degree of relevance between the two texts. In terms of the "white-woman," it is clear that the male idea of conquest plays and sexual desire plays into seeking that identity and freedom in the "white-woman," but in both Hamid and Ellison's texts, sustaining a relationship with a "white-woman" or America is heavily contingent upon the protagonists being certain of their own identity, whether that is black or of lighter toned skin.

CONCLUSION

To conclude the above discussion, it has been noticed that the protagonists have taken the right decisions for themselves. Keeping in mind the nature of the study, the comparison of the selected texts revealed that identity and freedom both are states of the human mind. They exist inside the human mind which cause suffering after the clash with the outside world. Radicalization in Changez's ideology of isolation was not successful at the end which shows that running away from your problems is not the solution. Identity issues are always a part of a society. In short, being an African-American or Muslim-American, one's identity is questioned in the time of doubt. The social discrimination divides the people for no good reason it rather brings forth the hidden darkness in it.

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