

Coloniser conundrums and subjugation in the aftermath of 9/11 catastrophe in

H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*

Author

M.RAJENTHIRAN
Ph.D. Research Scholar
PG & Research Department of English
Pachaiyappa's College
Chennai – 30

Co-author

Dr. K. R. VIJAYA
Assistant Professor
PG & Research Department of English
Pachaiyappa's College
Chennai – 30

Abstract

The Twin Tower attacks in the United States of America was a disaster which made the western society more violent, disruptive, suspicious, judgemental and xenophobic. This paper focuses on the racial and communal subjugation of Muslims in the United States with reference to the novel *Home Boy* written by H. M. Naqvi. The Muslim immigrants in the United States of America undergo troubles such as racial oppression, islamophobia, imperialism, ethnocentric issues, Muslim identity, cultural and political controversies in the wake of September 11, 2001. The World Trade Centre attacks have reincarnated racism and imperialism in the western society, targeting Muslims and Islamic countries. This study also points out the role of American media and its (mis)-representation of Muslims, religious affiliations and Islamic countries. The conundrums of Muslim immigrants are unearthed by placing the novel under the lens of Edward Said, Fanon, Bhabha, and Foucault theories. The critical works these popular critics show the colonial relationship establishes itself in the cultural representations. The findings reveal that the select text along with the theory can instil a positive view of Islam and change the westerners' perception about the Muslim community.

Keywords: September 11, xenophobic, subjugation, imperialism, orientalism, conundrum, Home Boy

Introduction:

“To demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the grounds that it is ‘enraged’ at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of a therapeutic, punitive attention”

— Covering Islam (35)

H. M. Naqvi’s debut novel *Home Boy* is a work of 9/11 literature which provides a real-life traumatic experience in the aftermath of September 11. This novel has won DSC Prize for literature in 2011. The *New York Times* praised it as “smart debut”, “*Home Boy*” is a remarkably engaging novel that delights as it disturbs”. The western writers and media portray the stereotype Muslims considered as terrorists in general. The media and writers’ portrayal about Muslims make the natives undergo a sense of insecurity amongst Muslims. The media’s personification changes the westerner’s opinion about Muslim countries on culture, politics, economy, and language. This novel showcases the intensified racism and suspicion encountered by Muslims who are othered under the umbrella of Islam. This novel is about three young immigrant adults living in America with the idea of becoming natives “metrostanis” (Naqvi 11) when they migrate and live. But the young men face a different America in the post 9/11 world.

The novel *Home Boy* reveals the shattered life of Chuck, AC, and Jimbo in the aftermath of September 11. They live an accultured life thinking themselves as a “Bonafide American” and they discard their Pakistani culture and identity to acculture into the American society wilfully. They shorten their names which sound like American names, as if they are natives of America. Sheshad a.k.a Chuck, Ali Choudary a.k.a AC, and Jamshed Khan a.k.a Jimbo. The catastrophe changes their life as a living Americans to global terrorists. Even this name transformation is questioned in the novel by the FBI. The immigrants are never considered as Americans or natives in the eyes of the westerners. They call Muslim immigrants as “Bumfuckistan” (Naqvi 107), the FBI officer

never accept them as an American “you aren’t American!... you got no fucking rights” (Naqvi 107). After the twin tower attacks the religion Islam is linked to terrorism and political ideology which worsen the lives of Muslim immigrants who live in the United States of America. This reveals the westerner’s opposition on the immigrants especially Muslims.

In the world Trade centre downfall Chuck’s friend Mohamad Shaw, a.k.a Shaman dies, but the three friends are in search of him. They search as they do not know Shaman’s whereabouts. The three friends visit Shaman’s residence in Connecticut. But unfortunately, these men are suspected as terrorists. They are beaten up the locals, then the locals call the FBI in suspicion because they break into the house which is a usual phenomenon among them. These young men are imprisoned by the FBI and questioned regarding religion and national affiliations. Ali Chowdry, friend of Chuck, is sentenced for fifteen years of imprisonment. “the terrorist charges against AC were dismissed – the bomb making manual and the sinister Arabic literature turned out to be *the Anarchist Cookbook* and Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, respectively – the authorities found four and a half grams of cocaine *on his person*.” (Naqvi 193) The Muslims are turned colonial subjects in post 9/11 and the Muslims are equated with the terrorists who blew up the twin towers.

The conduct and suspicion of the Americans and the FBI worsens the lives of the immigrants. Three Muslim men are captured, suspected as an individual then as a religion then as a community. Chuck, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes constant torture in the prison which enables him to question his identity and the self-transformation and fragmented unstable identity. The investigator asks him a sequence of inappropriate questions.

You are a terrorist?

You read Ko-ran?

Pray five times a day to Al-la?

You keep the Ram-a-Dan?

Do you eat pork? Drink?

Ko-ran sanctions terrorism?

Why do the Muslims use it to justify terrorism?

And why the Muslims terrorize? (*Naqvi* 113).

The Muslim Arabs are accused and mistreated as a whole community psychologically, physically and verbally - ‘Moslems, A-rabs, Fucking Arabs’ (*Naqvi* 23-24). The westerners assume that Asians are backward, poor, illiterate, harmful and ugly whereas the Western society is advanced, decent, beautiful and wealthy in nature. The US president George W Bush addresses in the television to the nation, “Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done” (*Naqvi* 94). Bhabha has commented on Said’s use of Foucault’s concepts of power and discourse that “Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentring of multiple power relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary” (Bhabha 72). Though the immigrants are powerless, helpless, non-authoritative the westerners rival with the Muslim or Islamic countries by using their supreme power directly or indirectly.

The protagonist is dragged by the guards and chucked to another room, they are constantly ill-treated, thrashed and shouted. The conundrums make the Muslim immigrants hide their identity, change their name, profession, attire, and appearance in the survival battle.

...conscious of the way I looked, behaved, the way I anxiously scratched my nose, my ear. when they announced ‘Please report any suspicious activity or behaviour’ over the speakers, I closed my eyes like a child attempting to render himself

invisible. When the hand grabbed me by the shoulder then I almost cried... (*Naqvi* 122)

Chuck's imprisonment makes him to experience a sense of reality and makes him strip the last strand of Americanness that he took pride in possessing/performing. Chuck declares "In prison, understood that just like three black men were gangbangers, and three Jews a conspiracy, three Muslims had become a sleeper cell" (*Naqvi* 121). The post 9/11 America visioned an 'ethnically cleansed' nation without immigrant Muslims. This is enforced through "death, literal and figurative of complex interweaving of history and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood" (Homi K Bhabha 5).

The FBI tortures the protagonist and illtreats him.

I was grabbed by either arms, lifted up... I was uncuffed by the guards, then commended to strip. They must have watched as I reached around my waist, unbuttoned my shirts, kicked off my lizard skins one by one... ...take off everything, sand nigger, they instructed... 'He's cut, he's cut,' they cried, clapping or slapping fives (*Naqvi* 108)

The torment seems endless, ill-treatment of magnitude, scientific torture makes him tremble and the threats of harshness stirred in him a profound sense of panic. On the other side, the role of media (print and electronic) portrays Arabs and Muslims of South Asia as terrorists and evil doers, especially in the backdrop of 9/11. Besides, the writer draws attention of the reader to the hegemonic role of American media to a very effective and productive tool of propaganda for Eurocentric values. America's compulsory strategies are set to enforce its own World Order through the mediums like military, police, intelligence agencies, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Metropolitan Detention Centre, judiciary, religion, educational institutions, political systems and organizations and vibrant media which are used as a valuable and effective tool to thrust its

narrative to influence world's opinion and re-formulate pro-western and pro-American perception all over the globe. The supreme power like the U.S.A has power to influence or to install and collapse governments of less powered countries and democrats both, but only those can live who serve its purpose.

In Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction considered to be a myth, a cause to deprive Iraq from its oil resources and create chaos. The American news channel CNN spreads news day in and day out to influence the world's opinion, Especially, in the post 9/11 about Islam. Their views, opinions and thoughts are constructed in a way that showcase the half-truth or partial facts that fulfil their purpose and aim. This kind of manipulation is a professional manipulation of world order establishing and advertising. In Naqvi's novel one can identify that American media CNN is destructive and ambiguous. The common people have no real knowledge of ground realities and they have become experts to mislead American people (*Naqvi 90*).

The post 9/11 becomes hard and challenging for the immigrant Muslims because of the media. It is through media's domination Muslims are scarred and Islam is slandered. The Mujahedeen's progeny has become barbaric and uncivilized. Naqvi insists there was a time when the Muslims were praised and were considered as heroes and equated with forefathers. Through secondary opposition, a significant shift has taken place.

They have become Taliban now, the Bastards of War! ...a new coined identity. Naqvi has expressed his point of view in these words: ...they were called rebels, freedom fighters – Mujahideen – the Holy Warriors. ...they were the good guys, ... Now they've, ah, transmogrified into the villains of modern civilization (*Naqvi 11*).

The role of American media in post 9/11 is to flame nationalism, power-play and discourse of American supremacy. Chuck was going through the dailies and weeklies newspapers every day and there he found some compelling readings. The reader realizes America's double standards

through Chuck. America is the root-cause of violence, because of its injustice and interference in the affairs of other nations of the world. According to Derrida, America has developed an undermining factor instead of becoming a steady one. This has totally upturned “the system of interpretation, the axiomatic, logic, rhetoric, concepts, and evaluations that are supposed to allow one to comprehend and to explain something like ‘September 11’” (Derrida 1993). The human rights violations are portrayed in the novel *Home Boy* and also the liberty of the immigrants and minorities especially Muslims are restricted in America in the aftermath of 9/11. The Muslim immigrants are suffered in the hands of powerful forces such as the FBI and MDC, it is a scar on the face of democracy.

American’s standard for justice is dissimilar for both Americans and non-Americans. The Americans imagine and assume that the Muslims are niggers and sand niggers, worthless of the earth. Fanon can hardly be disregarded and his work is frequently cited, almost always approving throughout the field of postcolonial studies. Fanon had psychiatric training. Fanon has attempted to examine the impact of colonization and racism on the physical and psychological performance of the colonized people. Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (translated) strongly exposes and critiques the disagreeable process whereby “the colonized come to regard themselves as ‘other’, not fully human, and opened up the beginnings of a philosophical and existential critique of European humanism . . .” (McLeod 212). These instances in the novel highlights, how a non-white feel in the world of white. The observation “look a negro scenario,” is a killing one for the colonized both physically and psychologically a traumatic experience. “The very gaze of the white man splits black man’s frame of body and reference and completely blurs his field of vision” (Bhabha 42). Fanon contends that the Negro is subject to inferiority complex and the white man is puffed with pride and behaves like a master, consequently a new psychological relationship of power evolves that is master/slave relationship.

Home Boy describe the subjugation practices in America, as a direct outcome of 9/11. In the novel, this social and cultural development leads to voluntary repatriation being embraced as a form of narrative resolution. Even protagonist enjoys his life in the US, and to align harmoniously with national norms but find his life unsettled to the point of being rendered impracticable as Muslim immigrants fall victim to this regime of suspicion and hostility. By the end of novel, Chuck imagines only Karachi as a place in which he can live freely.

Conclusion

The findings of this study attempt to reveal the protagonist and his friends of *Home Boy* have to redefine, reform their new signs of identity through the medium of mimicry of the natives. Hence, this article explores the factual experiences of immigrants through the examination of the select novel *Home Boy*. Their mimicry has facilitated them assimilate into a new host culture for material gain and passion to become an American without realizing his complexion, race and creed. But the overwhelming passion made him agitated, to gain his ulterior motives he and his friends changed their names, appearances and frame of minds. This study is an attempt to trace that, after 9/11 event, the concept of identity has changed drastically in America. Previously, their identity is hyphenated and compartmentalized into different ethnicities. The event of 9/11 has seriously affected and paralyzed their subject position. The role played by the powerful larger powers like FBI and MDC have handled the situation with iron hand. Moreover, the misrepresentation of media does the rest to dislodge them, and make them feel humiliated, marginalized and alienated as if there is no room for them. Their religious and cultural identities are scared, misrepresented and opposed through colonial and media discourse. The haunting memories of torture cells have seriously affected their bodies and souls to the extent that their pro-American manner turned into non-American rather anti-American. The very situation enabled them to re-devise/revisit a conception of their own Self. Embracing their own Otherness, they have become engaged in intellectual debates about what it means to be a Muslim. The study showcases

how liminal space allows the protagonist and his comrades to be mimic men, but at the same time event of 9/11 pushed them to the serious crises of identity and led them to alienation.

Work Cited

Naqvi, H.M. *Home Boy*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, India, 2017.

Almond, Ian. *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2007

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. (2003). "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Studies." *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogue with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. By Giovanna Borradori. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 85-136.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Les Damnés de Terre* (1961, trans. *The Wretched of the Earth*). Introduction. In McLeod, J. (Ed), *The Routledge companion to postcolonial studies* (pp. 1-18). London: Routledge.

Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. London: Vintage, 1997.

_____. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

_____. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.