

**Marginality as a Site of Resistance: Disrupting and Challenging the Status Quo in H.M. Naqvi's Home Boy**

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***Abstract***

*Considering the sublime notion of emancipation, enlightenment and transformation associated with research, this chapter explores the response of contemporary Pakistani literature in English, i.e. how writers are responding, reacting, and relating to the contemporary reality of terrorism, violence, extremism and suicide bombing. This paper highlights the exclusion and discriminating attitude faced by the Muslim American men and women, specifically Pakistani Americans, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in America. Through the lens of fiction; namely– Home Boy ( H. M. Naqvi), I have endeavored to bring into light the terrible experiences the Pakistani Americans underwent, the humiliation and discrimination they endured at the hands of the American government and individuals, the personal and collective impacts of 9/11 on their lives and above all the ways in which Pakistani Americans have adapted to the post-9/11 attitudes and situations. H. M. Naqvi's Home Boy deals with the events of 9/11 in varying degrees and relations and adopts various strategies for representing this devastating event. The paper exposes the margins as a site of resistance as well as representation and aims at giving voice to the earlier unheard marginalized peoples by exploring the writer's humble struggle for decolonizing the future i.e. not only disrupting the status quo, but also challenging and questioning it.*

**Keywords:** *terrorist attacks, post- 9/11 status quo, disrupting, challenging, resistance, marginality*

## 1. Introduction

The impact of 9/11 and its literary representation by the Muslim authors give an insight into the marginalized and inhuman treatment of Muslim Americans on one hand and exhibit the discriminating psyche of Americans on the other hand. The American and British writers have also represented 9/11 in their literature but these representations tend to demonize Islam, derogate and defame the Islamic faith and its fundamentals. Immediately, one year after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, more than twenty books had been written and published with the central theme of associating menace, terrorism, and destruction with Islam (Watanabe, 2002). Of these, two anti-Islam books became the best-selling titles at amazon.com (Watanabe, 2002). These were, *Militant Islam Reaches America* by Daniel Pipes and *American Jihad: The Terrorists Among Us* by Steven Emerson. In response to such literary output, Muslim authors took a strong stand against terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. *Home Boy* (H. M. Naqvi) is one of the few novels that responded to the negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims. This text brings into light the crucial issues of resistance, extremism, hostility, violence, fear, identity, and an endeavor for an enlightened and emancipated society (Rumi, 2009). The writers through their characters, not only disrupt the status quo, but also challenge and question it. Following comment by bell hooks, a renowned feminist theorist and cultural critic, can be connected to H. M. Naqvi's novel, *Home Boy*, by exploring the themes of intervention, identity, and liberation.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators (hooks, 1990, p.343).

Both the comment and the novel can be seen as interventions within their respective contexts. hooks' comment is a call to challenge and disrupt existing power structures and dominant narratives, particularly in relation to race, gender, and class. Similarly, *Home Boy* can be seen as an intervention within the literary landscape, offering a nuanced portrayal of Pakistani immigrant experiences that goes beyond stereotypes and clichés. Furthermore, both bell hooks' comment and *Home Boy* address the notion of identity. hooks emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and embracing multiple identities, particularly those that

challenge traditional norms and expectations. Similarly, *Home Boy* explores the complexities of identity formation for its characters, who are caught between their Pakistani heritage and their experiences in America. The novel highlights the struggles and conflicts faced by these individuals as they negotiate their cultural, religious, and personal identities. Lastly, both the comment and the novel touch upon the theme of liberation. bell hooks' statement suggests that the message emerging from the space between her work offers a path towards liberation from oppressive systems. Likewise, *Home Boy* presents a narrative that seeks liberation for its characters, both individually and collectively. The novel portrays the characters' quest for freedom from societal expectations, cultural constraints, and personal limitations.

Pakistani Americans have endured discriminatory attitudes, verbal harassment, violent threats and coercion, physical assault; also, religious profiling, and employment, education and housing discrimination, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Pakistani Americans have coped with and responded to the assaults on their faith, personal and national identities in a number of ways. The concepts of identity and representation in the wake of the 9/11 attacks have been analyzed from the lens of fiction. Since post-9/11 discourses have not only focused largely on American identity (especially related to wealth, capitalism and economical and cultural domination) and representation of Islam and especially fundamentalist Islam but have also ignored the perspective of Muslim Americans, curbed their individual, collective, national and religious identity, who in consequence, disrupted the status quo to reclaim their true identity. As Che Guevara, in his speech to the United Nations on December 11, 1964, announces, "The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination".

Islam as a religion has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented in the United States for long and there were lots of suspicions in the Western mind regarding the Muslims. Yet, the response that followed 9/11 was unexpected and a shock for the Muslim community settled in America.

## **2. Literature Review**

9/11 was a catastrophe not merely for the American nation but it was equally painful and had adverse effects on the lives of all those who lived in the United States of America irrespective of color, creed, race and religion. Therefore, Habermas announces it as “the first historic world event” (2003, p.7). Prior to discussing the devastating effects of 9/11 on the lives of the Muslim community of the United States, I would like to give the widely acclaimed definitions of terrorism and terrorist, and would then give an account of this widespread disaster, unfolding its catastrophic effects on the lives of the Muslims worldwide and specifically on Muslim Americans. Grant Andrews (2010) in his Master’s thesis titled *Representation and Identity in the Wake of 9/11: Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner, Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Frédéric Beigbeder’s Windows on the World and Don DeLillo’s Falling Man*, has also highlighted the response of both Western/European and Muslim writers to the tragic attacks of 9/11. Andrews, while discussing the use of the term terrorism by Muslim novelists, elucidates that the novels written by Muslim writers undoubtedly respond to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, yet they rarely use the word “terrorism” themselves, showing an awareness of the emotive, fraught, and contested nature of this concept (2010). I have also used the term “terrorism” in this text with a similar interpretation. Martha Crenshaw deals with the problem of defining terrorism, “The problem of defining terrorism has hindered analysis since the inception of studies of terrorism in the early 1970s. [...] The use of the term is often polemical and rhetorical. It can be a pejorative label, meant to condemn an opponent’s cause as illegitimate rather than describe behavior” (2000, p. 406).

Leach demonstrates some of the tensions around this concept in the context of 9/11 and the war on terror:

Within a postmodern world in which old-fashioned racist values must never be acknowledged, a new racism has evolved — or ‘metaracism’ as Etienne Balibar has described it — in which ethnic or racial factors cannot be ‘named’, and yet in which alternative cultural values cannot be accepted. Hence the convenient slogan of the ‘war on terror’, in which freedom fighters of different ideological persuasions can only be construed as ‘terrorists’ (2003, pp. 85-86).

Leach exposes the true American psyche and its colonial mindset of dehumanizing and discriminating the Orient/ the terrorist other who happen to be the Muslims after 9/11. He states, “ for the United States, Muslim freedom fighters are ‘terrorists,’ and the United States is ‘the land of the free,’ while for Muslim extremists suicide bombers are volunteer

‘martyrs,’ while the United States is tainted for supporting the ‘terrorist’ State of Israel (2003, p. 89).

Keeping this definition of a terrorist in mind, terrorism cannot be defined by the identity, ethnicity or religion of its executors or even by the cause they advocate. Instead terrorism is identified by the nature of the act. Terrorism is the premeditated and intentional assault on innocent civilians. An important point here is that terrorism must be differentiated from lawful acts of war that intended to curb combatants and may well accidentally harm civilians. The terrorists by design murder, mutilate, and threaten civilians. No cause, no accusation, and no excuse can ever validate terrorism. Terrorism against any nation may it be Pakistanis, Americans, British, Israelis, Russians, or anyone else, is all the same; a fraction of the same vice and ought to be treated as such.

### **3. Methodology**

The present research is located within Fairclough’s framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which looks at the underlying ideological structures ingrained within the discursive structure of text i.e. the written discourse. This framework is used as it encompasses characteristics of multi-faceted analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerges from a critical theory of language which observes that the use of language is actually a form of social practice. As all social practices reflect particular historical contexts, hence language as a form of social practice becomes the means to not only produce or contest prevailing social relations but also to serve specific interests.

Norman Fairclough’s framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an all-inclusive approach that takes into account the multifunctional, multidimensional, critical and historical facets of social discourse. The multidimensional aspect of Norman Fairclough’s framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees discourse from three interrelated perspectives; discourse as text, the discursive practice of discourse and social practice of discourse. Thus, for Fairclough discourse as a text is viewed as comprising a variety of linguistic elements within its internal structure to communicate certain meaning and produce certain effects on the readers, as recipients of the discourse. Hence discourse becomes a site for communicating meaning by means of manipulating the linguistic elements prevalent in the text.

The analysis will focus on the probable interpretations on the role of the writer as producer of the narrative discourse in carrying on the ideologies revealed within the discursive aspect of the narrative discourse. This is critical as narrative discourse is considered to be a social discourse that serves as a site for the struggle between members of society in relation to the ideological formation exhibited in the narrative discourse. Through this analysis, I endeavor to explain the dialectic relationship between society and discourse; by revealing how the writer has effectively challenged and questioned the Eurocentric values imposed on the Muslims by the whites in previous discourses, by subverting and decolonizing the typical representation of the Muslim Americans in the present narrative discourse.

#### **4. Marginality as a Site of Resistance: Disrupting and Challenging Status Quo in H. N.**

##### **Naqvi's *Home Boy***

Often, formerly colonized countries including Pakistan are frequently homogenized under an umbrella term i.e. the Third World countries and the present terrorism and chaos have worsened the situation and raised an urgent need for contemporary Pakistani fiction writers to not only reclaim but also reinterpret their identity. H. M. Naqvi, through his literary endeavors is struggling to reclaim the true Muslim-Pakistani identity by challenging the status quo and questioning the Western hegemony. One of the major problems faced by Pakistan and almost all Third World countries is the crisis of representation, marginalization and the label of being the Other. The present wave of terrorism following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, has further misrepresented and moved the Pakistani Muslims further to the margins. Muslim Americans, specifically those from Pakistani origin, are forced to see themselves through the Western lens, which has occupied the center since long. Pakistani writers have felt the urgent need of giving voice to the earlier unheard and silenced Pakistani community and taken a stand against their misrepresentation. They are not merely concerned with recovering past cultures and histories, but discovering how the world can move beyond colonialism towards a region of mutual esteem and respect. These writers emphasize that the formerly colonized nations would continue to be hybrid with a wretchedly schizophrenic identity if they don't challenge and question the Western hegemony. The center is shifting anew; formerly colonized and silenced voices are entering the discourse.

The lives of the three protagonists in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* also take a turning point after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In *Home Boy*, H.M. Naqvi presents an innovative voice; a novel approach to investigate and comprehend the lives of Muslims in New York City in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11. This is the narrative of three youthful men, Chuck, Jimbo and AC, who live in the present and are least bothered about tomorrow. Simultaneously their carefree attitude conveys that they are indecisive and vague about the rationale of their lives. They are also struggling to tune to the reality that they are actually denizens of two worlds; one is the ever-flourishing and modern world of the United States, while the other is apparently backward but traditional world of Pakistan. The crucial event around which the narrative revolves, the fall of the Twin Towers, occurs when the three are out on a search for an informal acquaintance, Mohammad Shah nicknamed Shaman, and happen to land at his apartment in his absence. They plan to spend the night at Shaman's place. Shaman is assumed to be involved in some mysterious business so the neighbors report to the FBI as this was immediately after the 9/11 attacks. *Home Boy* echoes the tone of the juvenile, hip-hop, and youthful man struggling to mingle into a different and changed world that is completely detached from the world in Karachi. The narrative unwraps immediately after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 with a potent opening sentence, "We'd become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren't before. We fancied ourselves boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men, AC, Jimbo, and me. We were mostly self-invented and self-made and certain we had our fingers on the pulse of the great global dialectic" (Naqvi, 2010, p.1).

Regrettably, this pulse was on the verge of delegating into an immense, unfamiliar arrhythmia that would have drastic effects on the lives of the protagonists, though in diverse ways.

Naqvi compares the speeches of President George W. Bush ["As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world" (Bush, 2001)] with the incidents and sufferings in the lives of these young men who over and over again discover that their skin color and their Muslim names go against them. It is basically the narrative of the maturing of a young immigrant who tries to hang on to all that is imperative in his world.

#### **4.1 No More an American**

Muslim Americans' loyalty and patriotism were in no degree less than the Anglo-Americans, they owned her and felt empathy and oneness with the Americans, who were back in their most celebrated guise of the colonizer in the aftermath of 9/11.

This discrimination and marginalization can be traced in the development of Shehzad aka Chuck's relation with America and its varying dynamics. The notion of belongingness to New York City is witnessed in the character of Chuck, the possible hero of H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*. The narrator of the novel Chuck introduces Jimbo as "born and bred in Jersey, Jimbo was a bona fide American"(Naqvi, 2010, p. 3). Chuck, the only expatriate among three friends, goes to the extent of claiming the New York City, "I had arrived in New York from Karachi four years earlier to attend college, which I completed swimmingly in three and though I was the only expatriate among us, liked to believe I'd since claimed the city and the city had claimed me" (Naqvi, 2010, p.3).

The characters of Naqvi dwell in America, not to attain any material goal or out of a sense of gratitude, but merely as personalities who symbolize a blend of New York Metropolitan and Pakistan. As Naqvi narrates;

We surveyed the *Times* and the *Post* and other treatises of mainstream discourse on a daily basis, consulted the *Voice* weekly, and often leafed through other publications with more discriminating audiences such as *Tight* or *Big Butt*.....we had read the Russians, the postcolonial cannon, but had been taken by the brash, boisterous voices of the contemporary American fiction;... we listened to Nusrat and the new generation of native rockers, as well as old-school gangsta rap (Naqvi, 2010, p.1).

Chuck, AC and Jimbo occupy America as buoyant cosmopolitans, as confident men of the world, as people whose compliance banishes remoteness because these three Pakistani cum American heroes of the novel are as much at home in Jack's bar as they would have been at a restaurant in Karachi. At an instance, Naqvi expresses this notion of belongingness to the New York as,

You could as Minie Auntie told me once, spend ten years in Britain and not feel British, but after spending ten months in New York, you were a New Yorker, an original settler and in no time you would be zipping uptown,



downtown, cross town, wherever, strutting, jay walking, dispensing directions to tourists like a mandarin (2010, p.9).

Naqvi's novel infers that the story of the denizens of the Third World steadily progressing in America, or struggling to, has been squeezed dry. Their American dream has turned to nothingness. The three heroes that decide to lead their lives in America in the novel *Home Boy* are by now American as they are already home boys on the forte of their self-belief. But with the fall of the Twin Towers, the scene changes utterly. The American dream of Chuck is turned into nothingness, in the post-9/11 times, when color and racial discrimination was at its peak; every Muslim American was looked upon as a suspected terrorist. These three men fancied themselves to be bona fide New Yorkers, nearly in all aspects, but in the post-9/11 times, they are suspected of being terrorists; the only reason being that they were outside on road in the late hours of the night. Chuck gives a hint to the post-9/11 attitudes in the words, "Who then could have anticipated that it would soon not be possible for three brown men to drive across America in a rented car, even with a blond in tow" (Naqvi, 2010, p.69).

#### **4.2 Muslims become The Other(s): Changing Status quo**

The novel exposes the complexities and the issues that arise because of Otherness. The three young men in *Home Boy* are all overpowered by a strong sense of Otherness in their lives which serve as the turning point in the novel. The verbal harassment and the use of abusive language against Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 were clear indications of categorizing them as the Other. From the postcolonial perspective, the term 'the Other' gives a clear indication of the West dominating the world, marginalizing or excluding the non-West and universalizing its thoughts and ideologies. The Other or as Said calls him the Orient and Spivak has termed him the subaltern, suggests a relation of supremacy, power and domination between the East and the West. Said argues that the Western portrayal of the Orient gives an indication of an inferior human race that is backward, illogical, and violent. This gives the West an opportunity to identify themselves as opposed and contrary to these characteristics; as belonging to a world of superiority, a world that is logical, communal and non-violent. The negative traits attributed to the Orientals can be witnessed to date, for example, Muslims especially the Arabs are portrayed as uncultured people and Islam is

regarded as a violent religion. Naqvi expresses this derogatory attitude of Americans towards Islam and Muslims in his novel quite often, at one instance he goes on to say:

Bawler No.1 hissed, ‘A-rabs’

Repeating the word in my head, I realized it was the first time I’d heard it spoken that way, like *a dagger thrust and turned, the first time anything like this had happened to us at all* (2010, pp.23- 24).

The term Muslim had become an abuse, as Naqvi states, “‘Moslems, Mo-hicans, whatever,’ Bawler No.2 snapped” (2010, p.24).

Although Chuck, AC and Jimbo were regular visitors at the Jakes bar yet they experience humiliation and discrimination in the aftermath of 9/11. Post-9/11 attitudes were a shock for them. Post-9/11 situation and circumstances fortified the hatred and resentment that Americans had in their hearts for the Muslim Americans. Chuck, AC and Jimbo were kicked out of Jake’s bar and as in the words of Naqvi, “things were changing” (2010, p.25). The awareness of the disruption in the status quo; the identity blow; the first and foremost moment of realization of the shifting grounds in the novels evoke a quest to disrupt and challenge the status quo for Chuck as in the words of bell hooks make “marginality as the site of resistance” (1990, p.343). Naqvi in the very beginning of the novel most remarkably, expresses the shifting of grounds and the disruption in the status quo as Chuck, AC and Jimbo realize the prejudiced attitude they faced in the aftermath of 9/11. They call themselves bona fide Americans but this claim is turned into nothing more than a swank as post-9/11 attitudes give them a severe identity blow. Their American dream is turned into ashes, as they encounter intolerance, discrimination, abuse and verbal harassment. As in their own words; “We’d become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren’t before. We fancied ourselves boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men, AC, Jimbo and me. We were self-invented and self-made and certain that we had our fingers on the pulse of the great global dialectic” (Naqvi, 2010, p.1). The reference made by Naqvi to the attitude of the Americans with the Japs, suggests the domination and supremacy that America has been exercising over the rest of the world and has pushed the colonized nations towards the margins.

### 4.3 Breaking the Silence: Muslims Challenging and Questioning the Status

#### Quo

H. M. Naqvi, in his novel *Home Boy*, blames America for its unnecessary interference in the affairs of the world. Through the character of Chuck, Naqvi openly calls America's attitude toward the Third World countries and previously colonized nations to be inhuman. Chuck has the guts to bring the American mindset into light and pull apart the veil of hegemony and domination. Chuck symbolizes the deviant and probing Muslim mind; who is ready to challenge the American discrimination and domination and create for Muslims a space of resistance within the margins, hence making the margins the center and breaking the eerie silence. Chuck tears off the veil of national security under whose guise America actually interferes in the affairs of the rest of the nations and then launches military raids and attacks on them. As in the words of Chuck,

'The point is how do you go about it? In the name of national security, states commit crimes-'

'What crimes?'

'You threw a thousand Japanese into camps, whole families-women, children, old people- because they posed a security threat. That's not right. That's wrong and now it's us. It's me.' Fueled by adrenaline, I continued, 'I was starved (Naqvi, 2010, p. 136).

The plight of the Muslim Americans after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 is very much similar to the sufferings of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The post-9/11 discriminatory attitude can be further traced in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* where Chuck is fired from his job without any obvious reason. The VP at Chuck's office confesses his helplessness in this regard and admits that he is being fired irrationally and unfairly.

A year later, however, just after Independence Day, at the beginning of the end of the Great Bull, I was fired. It was quick and efficient, and the pink slip was

unexpectedly yellow. After I had cleared my cubicle into a shoe box, my VP was good enough to invite me into his office. -----Although he must have spoken for ten minutes I only caught his concluding remarks: ‘My hands were tied. You’ll do okay, sport. You’re a team player. You’re taking one for the team’ (Naqvi, 2010, p.30).

Pre-9/11 attitudes also exhibit Muslim Americans challenging the status quo, just on the basis of racial discrimination and suspicions regarding them. The accusation of being the so called extremists had already brought an upheaval and disruption in the mindsets of Muslim Americans. Similar is the case with Chuck, who had been a diligent, loyal and hardworking employee but still he was fired. This firing of Muslims from the jobs was most common in the post-9/11 times when America was ready to go to any extent to satisfy her avenging nature. Firing off innocent Muslims from jobs was one tactic to harass and torture the Muslim community in America.

H. M. Naqvi also hints at the ill-treatment of blacks at various instances in *Home Boy*. Once at the Tja Bar, Chuck’s encounter with his sommelier friend Roger opens him to the plight of Blacks in America. Roger’s comment that a “black man has to adhere to a tacit code ‘right here, right here, right now, today, in the twenty-first century US of A” (Naqvi, 2010, p.120). Further, he goes on to say that,

‘My presence threatens people. When a big white guy moves quickly, people laugh, but when a big black guy moves quickly, they take cover: mothers fear for their children, I’ve seen cops reach for their batons. And I work chi-chi restaurant. I dress well; speak English in grammatically defensible sentences---. And I look into the eyes of these people, and I know they’re thinking, you got no business telling me about no Lestonnac family and no Pavillion Rouge! Know what I’m sayin’ (Naqvi, 2010, p.120).

The accusation of being from a suspect race and an outcast in American society has been the fate of Black Americans since long but post-9/11 attitudes showed that it was now the turn of Muslim Americans to face the music. The ill-treatment and discrimination faced by Roger, a Black man, was similar to the post-9/11 treatment of Muslim Americans. Although majority of the Muslims living in America owned her, they had been born and

bred in America, never once visited their parents' homeland, their parents had immigrated to America even before their birth and didn't return even once. Racial discrimination and harassment in America is an open secret and can be traced back to the initiation of the institution of slavery. Slavery has known to become one of the most ruthless racial discrimination in America's history, and in the world's history. Slavery is a curse and represents one of the worst atrocities that man has afflicted on his race. This curse of slavery was initially introduced in 1619 in the colonies of Great Britain, although, slavery had been known already since long before it came to present-day America (Boles 1984, p.3). Slavery was eradicated from America in 1865 with the announcement of the 13th Amendment in the American Constitution but still, African Americans face discrimination and prejudice and are treated to be inferior to the White Americans (Boles 1984, p.73). The struggle to gain equal rights for African American citizens in America has been a dreadful and long process, and is still ongoing.

#### **4.4 Post-9/11 America: Nets Cast Everywhere to Ensnare Muslims**

The suspect race psyche was most prominent in the post-9/11 years when there was ongoing gush of high-profile trials against Muslims on terrorism charges, and in the majority of the cases, at the end the allegations usually turned out to be false and bogus, but still such false allegation and unjust trials continue to keep the Muslim Americans afraid. Many innocent Muslims had to suffer ill-treatment and worst abuses in prisons after being accused of involvement in terrorist activities. No particular type of prejudice or racism defines the discrimination and the ill-treatment experienced by a lot of Muslims since 9/11 in American prisons at the hands of American law enforcement officials. Similarly, the humiliation and abuse of Islamic faith at the hands of Western media cannot be justified. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a large population of Muslims was captured and imprisoned and they were detained without charge and even access to attorneys was denied to them; and a number of Muslims reported that during their detainment in American prisons they were psychologically tortured and physically abused (Ghazali, 2021) The Justice Department confesses that a number of unidentified Muslim Americans had been imprisoned and held in captivity without bond and access to the attorney was also denied to them, although such unjust acts clearly violate the American Constitution (Ghazali, 2021) The arrest of AC, Jimbo and Chuck, in *Home Boy*, is an indication of this suspect race psyche, where these characters are trapped in

a fake and bogus case and accused of charges of terrorism on bogus grounds without much substantial and relevant evidence. The ill-treatment and physical and mental tortures AC, Jimbo and Chuck were subjected to, were really harsh and cruel. As Naqvi describes; “----- but we would later learn that the worst abuses in the American prison system after 9/11 took place at MDC, the Metropolitan Detention Center. According to later, possibly hyperbolic headlines, MDC was ‘America’s’ Own Abu Gharaib” (Naqvi, 2010, p.105).

Muslim prisoners were ill-treated and tortured brutally. It was the height of cruelty and animosity. The American hostility reached its climax when human beings were treated worse than animals. According to a report published in September 2005 by the Human Rights Watch Committee, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the investigation officers at the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), New York, treated the detainees- especially Arab and Muslim Americans in an inhuman and abusing manner, immediately following their arrest (“Human Rights Watch”). The report reveals that the correctional officers banged the detainees against the walls of the prison which caused pain and injuries. According to the report, these officers even twisted painfully the wrists and fingers of the detainees, pulled their restraints brutally to cause bodily harm and pain to their arms and legs or even tripped them so that they might fall down on the floor. The arrestees subjected to this ill-treatment were not at all resistant and non-cooperative with the correctional officers. While a number of investigations were carried out, the Department of Justice concluded that the evidence was not sufficient enough to continue with prosecutions. Human Rights Watch has acknowledged and advocated against American government’s decision to subject almost 752 non citizens to long and mostly arbitrary imprisonment immediately after 9/11. These detainees were imprisoned merely for routine immigration violations but they were illogically involved in 9/11 investigations merely on assumptions and suppositions that these detainees might have links with the terrorist organizations. It is a common misapprehension that a number of non-citizens were detained due to the USA Patriot Act, which was announced law on 26 October 2001 (Ghazali, 2012). Actually, the American government overlooked routine protections for the immigration detainees and detained them till they were cleared off links to terrorists and terrorism.

In H. M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy*, Chuck too had to face a terrible and manipulated interrogation. Chuck, AC and Jimbo were arrested because of their suspicious presence in the

house of Mohammad Shah and AC's ridiculous and silly behavior with the officers. Apart from this, they had committed no other crime. Officer Rooney, who was given the charge of interrogating and investigating Chuck's case, admits that Chuck is in big trouble now. It is preplanned and Rooney admits that they will entrap him in a fake terrorism case and link it with the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Logically, Chuck, AC and Jimbo should be charged with the accusation of breaking and entering Muhammad Shaw's house and should be detained and interrogated on this offence but instead Rooney starts the interrogation with a question which is totally out of context and he asks Chuck what he feels about what happened on 9/11. The question has no relevance with the real offense for which interrogation is being carried out, i.e. breaking into someone's home in his absence. These irrelevant questions regarding 9/11 are evidence of the avenging and discriminating nature of an American investigation officer who considers the Muslims to be extremists and involved in nearly all the terrorist activities and atrocities against America. Rooney is least bothered about Chuck and his friends breaking into Muhammad Shaw's house; he doesn't pay heed to the real offense instead his discriminating and avenging psyche is pleased that he has caught and trapped three young Muslims who were once bona fide Americans with all their loyalties and patriotism. Rooney is free to manipulate the charges against them and trap them in a false and bogus terrorist case and become an American hero by playing his role in taking revenge for the 9/11 attacks from the Muslims. This clearly indicates the shifting grounds and the changing of the status quo after 9/11. The very first question in the interrogation is irrelevant and shocking for Chuck, his senses cease to work at this unexpected question;

'Lemme ask you something: How d'you feel about what happened on September eleventh?'

'What-'

'Did it make you happy?'

'This is ridiculous. I want to make my phone call. I know my rights.'

'You aren't American!' he fired back. 'You got no fucking rights' (Naqvi, 2010, p. 107).

This interrogation is an open expression of the ill-treatment faced by the Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks. It clearly represents the hegemonic and sick American mindset in the form of officer Rooney who relates the whole situation with 9/11 although in reality their offence has no link with 9/11 terrorist attacks. He clearly admits the American discriminating psyche by announcing that Chuck is not an American so he does not have any rights. This is really ironical as Chuck, although an immigrant, had a strong sense of belongingness with America and especially New York. Chuck, the only expatriate among the three, goes to the extent of claiming New York City. "I had arrived in New York from Karachi four years earlier to attend college, which I completed swimmingly in three and though I was the only expatriate among us, liked to believe I'd since claimed the city and the city had claimed me" (Naqvi, 2010, p.3). Chuck's notion of belongingness, his patriotism is turned into ashes when Officer Rooney says that Chuck isn't American, so he doesn't have any right to make a phone call, i.e. he doesn't have any access to justice. Rooney is denying Chuck his basic right i.e. to appeal for trial. In accordance with the California Penal Code, section 851.5, instantly upon being arrested and, with the exception of a place where it is physically impossible, within the first three hours after being arrested, the arrested person has every right to make at least three complete telephone calls. He can make these calls free of charge if the calls are being made to telephone numbers that fall within the range of the local calling area. The arrested person may make the calls at his expense if the calls to be made fall outside the range of the local calling area. This law further elucidates that at any police station or any other place where the arrested person is being held, a sign or notice holding the above-mentioned information in bold block type shall be displayed in a conspicuous and noticeable place. Firstly, the arrested person has the right to make a complete call to an attorney of his or her choice. If the arrested person has no funds, he can make a call to the public defender or any other attorney appointed by the court to help indigents, whose telephone number shall also be posted. This telephone call shall not be eavesdropped upon, monitored or recorded. Secondly, an arrested person has the right to make a complete call to a bail bondsman. Thirdly, an arrested person also has the right to make a complete telephone call to a friend or a relative. The law further illustrates that any employee or a public officer who deliberately deprives an arrestee of any right allowed by the above section will be considered guilty of an infringement. The treatment which Chuck receives at the hands of Rooney is not only a total contrast but also a direct violation of this state law. It is a question



mark to America's claim to be one of the major supporters of human rights. Rooney's remark challenges and questions the fake slogan of equality claimed by American human rights associations. H. M. Naqvi shows a contrast to Rooney's comment in the presidential address of the American President George W. Bush and later on exposes the hypocrisy in the presidential address. The president admits that the teachings of Islam are peaceful and good and the Muslims are not the enemies of America, yet the government functionaries trapped innocent Muslims in fake terrorist charges just because of their Islamic faith. Later in the interrogation Rooney exposes his evil designs by offering Chuck a deal that if he admits that his friends were involved in terrorist activities, Chuck will be spared and will face an easy and lenient trial. As Rooney continues;

'Listen,' Rooney said conspiratorially. 'You admit that your pals were involved in terrorist activities, and we'll go easy on you. We'll plead for leniency. Don't protect your friends, because they aren't gonna protect you. All right, all right?'

'Terrorist activities?'

'What were you guys planning at Shaw's? Don't bullshit me because we've already busted into your pal Aly's apartment over in the city. We found books, books in Arabic, and bomb-making manuals. So do yourself a favor and cooperate' (Naqvi, 2010, p.108).

It was later found that the books announced as evil Arabic literature and the bomb-making manual were actually *Ibne Khaldun's Muqaddimah* and *The Anarchist Cookbook*. The issue that arises here is how could the investigating officers and officials responsible for the fate of a young Muslim prisoner carry out the investigation so casually and carelessly that they regard a classic book of Arabic literature as bomb-making manual without even taking an Arabic language expert's opinion on its content.

[...] Although the terrorism charges against AC were dismissed---- the bomb-making manual and the sinister Arabic literature turned out to be *The Anarchist Cookbook* and *Ibne Khaldun's Muqaddimah*, respectively----the authorities four and a half grams of cocaine on his person. 'The penalty for

possession in New York is the same for second-degree murder (Naqvi, 2010, p. 193).

H. M. Naqvi further exposes the inhuman treatment and the abuses that the Muslim prisoners suffered in the American prisons after 9/11. As Chuck narrates;

In another room, I was uncuffed by the guards, then commanded to strip. They must have watched as I reached around my waist, unbuttoned my shirt, kicked off my lizard-skins one by one, and then unraveled my belt and stripped off my jeans like a pantomime getting into a tub of hot water. ‘Take off everything, sand nigger,’ they instructed. I repeated slur in my mind as I stood before them in sagging black polyester-blend socks, my limp head dangling between my thighs. ‘He’s cut, he’s cut,’ they cried, clapping or slapping fives’ (2010, p. 108).

It was a really inhuman attitude that a prisoner is asked to strip off and made naked. This has nothing to do with the allegations that he is charged with. The stripping off of the Muslim prisoners’ pants to confirm circumcision, and hence their Islamic faith, was a procedure to confirm the innocent Muslims as extremists and terrorists. For a country like America, it is really ironic that their trials of innocent Muslims are dependent on such unreliable, illogical, and ridiculous investigations i.e. on confirming their Islamic faith after physical examination, they will be charged with terrorist allegations. Circumcision is a religious obligation for Muslims, a compulsion in Islam as well as in Judaism, which is being humiliated by the guards, symbolizing the American nation in general. Moreover, the use of the word *nigger* is insulting and derogatory. Nigger is an abusive word used for Black and a symbol of discrimination and humiliation. With the increase in hegemonic racism during colonialism (from the 19th to the first half of the 20th centuries) a number of terms, expressions and names were employed to portray and signify minority groups dwelling within Europe itself and in the colonies (Hubinette, 2012, p. 44). According to Hubinette:

Categories like “Negro”, “Redskin”, “Oriental”, “Eskimo”, “Lapp”, “Semite” and “Gypsy” were used within the scientific world as well as by the state apparatus, by the media, in the cultural sphere and, above all, in daily life, The word “Negro” and its even more denigrating version “Nigger” is

nowadays in an Anglo-American and English language context usually known as the N-word, several American baseball teams which were previously called “Redskins” have changed their names, and in 2002 the American congress decided to replace the term Oriental with the word Asian in statistical and official documents (2012, p.48).

Chuck further narrates the terrible abuses of the prison in the words;

As I lapsed in and out of consciousness, reconciling where I had been and where I was—two worlds separated, as it were, by light-years—the door banged open. Two guards entered. -----Swatting the back of my head, the white guy cried, ‘You pissed yourself, pencil-dick! I’m gonna make you pay for my kickers!’ It seemed routine, the invective, the casual violence, the way things are going to be: doors would open, doors would close, and I would be smacked around, molested, hauled back and forth between cells and interrogation sessions (Naqvi, 2010, p. 112).

The second interrogation session was even worst, as Chuck recounts;

‘Sit your ass down,’ the goateed guard instructed (and grabbing a handful of hair, reminded me that he’d see me soon). As per his instructions, I sat glued to the seat, braced for the worst: hamstringing, kneecapping, garroting, shock therapy, Chinese water torture. In a changed America, it seemed anything could happen (Naqvi, 2010, p.112).

Chuck is in the initial stage of interrogation, he hasn’t been proved guilty and still he is an accused, that too of fake terrorist allegations, but the ill-treatment and worst abuses he is subjected to; do not coincide with the procedure that should legally be adopted for a prisoner. The term “changed America” (Naqvi, 2010, p.112) is critical. The term encompasses a wider and deeper meaning. It indicates the changing status quo and the disruption in American society resulting in the disruption in the mindset of Muslim Americans. The term refers to the call for challenging and questioning the sick and discriminating American psyche. Chuck, AC and Jimbo who had once fancied themselves, “boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men”, had now been converted and demoted to the status of “Japs, Jews, Niggers” (Naqvi, 2010, p.1). The ill-treatment in the MDC makes them realize the bitterest reality of 21<sup>st</sup>

century, i.e. Muslim Americans should now reinterpret their identity as America no longer owns them. Post-9/11 insult and discrimination resulted in retaliation and hatred among the Muslim population in the United States of America and henceforth resulted in disruption of the status quo. The Muslims stood against this tyranny and discrimination and openly challenged American hegemony and her occupation of the center and focal position, and pushing the previously colonized and now the Third World countries to the margins. The center is shifting anew, the Third World countries and the suppressed ethnic groups within America are raising their voices and making the margins a site of resistance and creating opportunities for enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation hence leading to decolonization which should be and is the ultimate and logical consequence of this disruption and challenging of American status quo by the Muslim Americans.

#### **4.5 The Other Looks Back: Muslims Disillusioned with America**

H. M. Naqvi expresses the America's distrust and hatred for the Muslims in the post-9/11 scenario and their retaliation most beautifully and effectively. As Chuck narrates;

In prison, I finally got it. I understood that just like three black men were gangsters and three Jews were a conspiracy, three Muslims had become a sleeper cell. And later, much later the pendulum would swing back, and everybody would celebrate progress, the storied tradition of accommodation, on TV talk shows and posters in middle schools. There would be ceremonies, apologies, cardboard displays. In the interim, however I threatened order, threatened civilization. In the interim, I too had to adhere to an unwritten code (2010, p.121).

Chuck, symbolizing Muslim Americans in general, arrives at a clear and deeper understanding of the changing the status quo in the post-9/11 America and declares himself ready to disrupt and challenge it by questioning American hegemony and discrimination of the Muslim community residing in America. His comparison of the Jews and Blacks with the Muslims is worth considering. As discussed earlier, the Blacks had been victims of White Americans' hatred and discrimination since long. The Jews have also been an outcast in American society and been subjected to humiliation and discrimination. Similar was the plight of Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 America. H. M. Naqvi, peeps into history and

sheds light on America's strange attitude, firstly ill treating the previously colonized Third World countries and inflicting worst atrocities upon these nations and then after avenging and satisfying its hegemony and discriminating nature, America regards its ill-treatment as a response headed towards the betterment of these nations. The term "unwritten code" (Naqvi, 2010, p.121) is ironic and symbolizes hypocrisy and America's dual standards of justice which states that all Muslims are terrorists and meant to be subjected to ill-treatment and discrimination. In most of the trials and terrorist allegations against Muslims there is no reliable and authentic proof; just on the basis of unreliable and illogical information and self-invented proofs, these innocent Muslims are put behind the bars and subjected to worst abuses. The "unwritten code" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 121) symbolizes the taken for grantedness of America and its discriminating psyche; it's not a written code, yet every Muslim after 9/11 understood that they are meant to be ill-treated and subjected to humiliation, and discrimination. Moreover, the term unwritten code is also an indication of the American discriminating psyche although there was no law or any allegation against the Muslims in black and white; yet, in America, every Muslim after 9/11 understood that the Muslim community has become the major target of American hatred and discrimination and has replaced the Japanese Americans, Native Americans and Blacks and would have to confront the consequences.

Chuck, at another instance in the novel, while talking to his mother on phone, openly expresses the changed life in America, the disrupted status quo, the feeling of being in a strange and foreign land, where you never belonged and will never belong in future,

"What do you want me to tell you Ma? That life's changed? The city's changed? That there's sadness around every corner? There are cops every where? You know there was a time when a police presence was reassuring, like at a parade or late at night, at a street, in the subway, but now I am afraid of them. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal. It's no way to live. Maybe it's just a phase, may be it will pass, and things will return to normal, or maybe, I dint know, history will keep repeating itself....." (Naqvi , 2010, p.206).

## **5. Conclusion**

The ill-treatment of Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 clearly points out that America has launched a campaign that has harshly destabilized and threatened the social and legal rights of the Muslim population in America which happens to be a big minority. The abhorrence, grudge and distrust of the Americans are aimed at the Muslim Americans. Together with the imprisonment of the Muslim Americans immediately after 9/11 which was an accepted and acknowledged fact, now they are subjected to hostility and mental torture; the imprisonment of the Muslim Americans is now virtual symbolized by frequent home raids, interrogations, unlawful arrests, closed court rooms, secret evidence, special registrations, deportation and discrimination and harassment at workplaces and educational institutions that the Muslim Americans have faced since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. These virtual detention camps are sustained by hate, fear, racism, intolerance and religious bias.

Most Americans believe that taking away other people's freedom and liberty in their name of American security and stability is acceptable and fine. We should pay heed to the quote by one of the Americans' founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, who once said, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety" (1955, p.21). A sustainable and workable democracy needs an educated and active citizenry. Indifference and passivity will one day become one of the worst enemies for America even more than terrorism or any terrorist group. America's lack of care and engagement with her neighboring countries makes it much easier for America to make policies and legislate laws that will make her lesser accommodating, not only for the humiliated and shunned minority groups; the Muslim Americans but its repercussions will also be felt by the entire American nation.

At present, one rarely finds a place or residence in America where there are no Muslims residing and working. The Muslim community in America constitutes an important portion of the population of America. The Muslim community signifies many identities and movements. Muslim population is gradually increasing owing to conversion, migration and inter-faith marriages. The increase in the numbers of Muslims in America has led to the development of a number of institutions that cater to the needs of the Muslim community. But the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a hard blow for the Muslim community in America. Regardless of President George W. Bush's assurances, Muslims in America have to face all types of

problems. The Western media is mostly responsible for the biases and prejudices against Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. American Muslims are disrupting the status quo and challenging America's views of Islam as an alien faith and of Muslims as furious fundamentalists or bomb-dropping terrorists. Doing away with this negative image remains one of the toughest challenges for Muslims in America. Muslims are not only challenging these stereotypes; they are questioning and challenging the status quo which clearly shows that the Muslims are resolute to disrupt the status quo. *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi challenges and disrupts the post-9/11 status quo by humanizing Muslim characters, counteracting cultural stereotypes, critiquing surveillance and racial profiling, exploring interfaith relationships, and rethinking the immigrant experience. *Home Boy* presents a diverse range of Muslim characters, challenging the stereotypical portrayals prevalent in the post-9/11 narratives. Naqvi offers a nuanced portrayal of his characters, highlighting their individuality, aspirations, and struggles. By humanizing Muslim characters, Naqvi challenges the simplistic and often negative representations of Muslims in the mainstream media. The novel subverts cultural stereotypes by showcasing the complex identities and diverse interests of its characters. Naqvi challenges the notion that all Pakistani immigrants are solely defined by their religion or cultural background. Instead, he explores their multifaceted lives, including their pursuit of artistic endeavors, personal relationships, and dreams beyond the expectations placed upon them. Shehzad, Ali, and Jimbo are Pakistani immigrants living in New York City, and Naqvi delves into their personal stories, struggles, and aspirations, humanizing them beyond their cultural or religious backgrounds. By doing so, Naqvi challenges the monolithic portrayal of Muslims or immigrants as seen in the post-9/11 narratives. Through the characters of Shehzad, Ali, and Jimbo, Naqvi offers alternative perspectives on the post-9/11 world. Shehzad aka Chuck, a banker turned graffiti artist, expresses his frustration with the corporate world and channels his creativity into a form of resistance. Ali, an aspiring writer, seeks to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam through his literary endeavors. Jimbo, a free-spirited musician, embraces his identity as a Pakistani-American and refuses to conform to societal expectations. Naqvi addresses the heightened surveillance and racial profiling experienced by Muslims in the post-9/11 era. He underscores the impact of such policies on individuals' daily lives, creating a sense of unease and injustice. Through his characters, Naqvi sheds light on the psychological toll and erosion of civil liberties caused by these practices. The ill-treatment of Chuck and AC at MDC highlights America's

discrimination and racism against the Muslims. *Home Boy* challenges religious divides by exploring interfaith relationships. The novel depicts romantic relationships and friendships that bridge the gap between different faiths, emphasizing the shared humanity and connections that can exist beyond religious boundaries. By portraying these relationships, Naqvi challenges the narrative of a monolithic clash of civilizations.

America was believed to be a land of immigrants, a melting pot for all ethnic identities and races. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the immigrant Muslims along with the Muslim Americans continue to confront a number of challenges as citizens of America. Amongst these, the major issues include the up keeping of an Islamic code of life in a secular country like America and mostly the influence of the American society on Muslim children, devastating negative images which hinder the capabilities of the Muslims to make their needs heard and also Muslims being heard on matters of foreign policy in which the Muslim community has strong sentiments.

Muslim Americans seem to be moving into an altogether new stage of identity in which concerns like acculturation, occupation, dress, and relationship among diverse ethnic and racial Muslim groups along with relationship with Americans are being met and resolved in creative and new ways. Rising Muslim-American political awareness might be the surest and the most definite sign of assimilation. The present generation understands that to safeguard its rights as Muslims and Americans it has to raise its voice. It has to disrupt, question and challenge the status quo in order to change the status quo and consequently achieve their ultimate goal i.e. decolonizing the future.

I strongly believe that Muslim Americans relate to the American ideals of human rights, democracy, pluralism, and justice not merely through their American citizenship but also through their religious identity as Muslims. They strongly argue that the Islamic faith promotes all these ideals and values and hence Muslim Americans are at home with the political system of America. Nonetheless, they are over and over again disappointed and disillusioned with what they see as an incongruity and discrepancy in American values and ideals and American international and domestic policies. Muslim Americans continue to search around for a King or a Kennedy in the modern America. The need for a better and more empathetic understanding between America and Islam is grander, greater and more urgent than ever before.



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