



## Exploring Identity Fragmentation, Victimization and Othering in HM Naqvi's Home Boy



**Muhammad Iqbal**

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Northern University, Nowshera, KP, Pakistan.

**Ahsan**

PhD Scholar, Department of Modern Languages and Literature (LILEC), University of Bologna, Italy.

**Abdul Rashid**

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Layyah, Layyah, Punjab, Pakistan.

**Abstract:** *The catastrophic incident of 9/11 split the world into two halves, Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim identity came under the clouds of suspicion and caught global attention. Soon after 9/11, the Western self-concocted narrative portrays Muslims as terrorists, barbaric and uncivilized. However, Naqvi's novel deconstructs this stereotypical narrative. Home Boy is a counter-narrative against the horrendous narrative of Muslim victimization, fragmentation and Othering. Indubitably, this dominant stance influenced world literature and legitimized the war on terror which sabotaged Muslim identity worldwide. But the narrative of Pakistani writers in the form of 'Home Boy', 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' etc. exposed Western so-called dominancy explicitly. The present study analyzes that Chuck the protagonist of 'Home Boy' was civilized and progressive before the fall of the Twin Towers but after 9/11 he was labelled negatively though he was not involved directly or indirectly in any terrorist activity. The current paper undertakes textual analysis as the main research method under the conceptual framework of Homi. K. Bhabha and Edward Said's concepts for the analysis of the primary text.*

**Key Words:** Identity Fragmentation, Victimization, Migrant Identity, Othering

**Corresponding Author:** Abdul Rashid (Lecturer, Department of English, University of Layyah, Layyah, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: [Abdulrashid@bzu.edu.pk](mailto:Abdulrashid@bzu.edu.pk))

### Introduction

In post-9/11, after the collapse of the Twin Towers, the expatriates with Muslim identity in the USA faced the heaviest brunt of it. It would not be wrong to say that postcolonial literature is drenched with issues of identity, cultural clashes and the concern of Otherness. The paper will explore

multifarious questions regarding assimilated identity, segregation, othering, religious identity and stereotypical identity explicitly. After 9/11 the immigrants in America become homeless and helpless. These circumstances reveal their profused and bruised concerns of identity fragmentation and victimization with the concept of Othering. They are



treated as others, being the bonafide citizens of the USA. Particularly, Muslims feel uneasy and insecure in the USA due to their biased attitude. It goes without saying that the 9/11 incident proved the last nail in Muslims' coffin to discriminate, alienate and dehumanize them on national, international and intranational levels.

The 9/11 attacks triggered the question of identity at various levels—from individual to global, especially Muslim identity targeted worldwide in the Western media. Identity refers to one's own being, their affiliation with society and societal values and norms. As a result of immigration and assimilation, the indigenous identity gets confused and becomes a shapeless and obscure identity...identity fragmentation. *Home Boy* (2010) adds more to the postcolonial literature in terms of identity crises. As a result of the 9/11 shocks, Muslims in America questioned themselves, who they are. The research conducted by Anne Campbell states identity is a social construct (Campbell, 2000).

Othering refers to biased thinking which creates the concept of "Us" and "Them". It entails the 'Other' to be inferior, odd and deviant. It can occur on personal, interpersonal, institutional or any systematic level which targets other people being devalued, discriminated against, marginalized and stigmatized. Edward Said is to be considered the pioneer of the concept, 'Us' and 'Them'. The Other is the one who is not the 'Same' as others. The construct of the other is delineated and explained by Lacan, Spivak and Said in different contextual boundaries. The paper will analyze the conspicuous attitude of Americans towards the hybrid and assimilated identity of three Muslim expatriates named Chuck, AC and Jimbo in *The Home Boy* by H.M Naqvi.

## Research Objectives

---

The researcher endeavours to seek the following objectives:

- To explore the Identity Fragmentation and victimization within the text in the backdrop of post-9/11.
- To investigate the ways in which the characters are subjected to Othering based on religion ethnicity and social values.

## Research Questions

---

The following research questions will be addressed in the current study:

- How has the Muslims Identity fragmented in post-9/11 times in the USA?
- How are the Muslims othered on the basis of religion, social and ethnic values?

## Importance of the Study

---

The catastrophic event of 9/11 had a detrimental effect on many innocent Pakistani expatriates in the USA. Prominent writers and international media misrepresented Muslims as terrorists in the wake of 9/11. The Western marred and defamed Muslim identity in the world. This conventional allegation aired Islamophobia. Moreover, this biased treatment paved the way for insecurity among the Muslims in the United States of America and they had to pay a heavy cost for this untrue labelling. Many Pakistani immigrants had to face racial harassment under the USA Patriot Act of 2001. Literary works like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Home Boy* (2010) highlight such sort of discrimination. This paper will spotlight the heart-rending issue of identity fragmentation, victimization and Othering on the part of the protagonist, Chuck. This is supposed to shed light on the misrepresentation of Muslims in the world, particularly in the USA.

## Theoretical Framework

---

To conduct qualitative research, textual analysis has been used as a research method

under the theoretical concepts of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and GayatriChakarvorty Spivak for the analysis of the primary text.

## Literature Review

The writers of postcolonial literature claim that identities are not fixed, rather they are social constructs. Identity refers to some distinctive features, beliefs and set values of an individual or a society. Postcolonial literature is brimmed with identity clashes and conflicts such as identity formation and fragmentation, victimization and the concept of Othering. And owing to this stereotypical thinking identity suffers and identity conflicts emerge in a person's ideology implicitly and explicitly. As a result of identity crisis individuals are ostracized and considered 'Other'. (a.Gomez, JFMorales, S. Hart, V. Alexandra, B. William, 2011). When the identity of a person or a society got fixed, they go through a crisis and are considered as 'Other'. Bhabha calls it 'stereotyping' and according to Said it is termed as 'fixity' (Bhabha 2001). After the 9/11 attacks, a stigmatic identity is adhered to by Muslims called 'Terrorists' or Islam allows terrorism. In postcolonial writing, identity crisis becomes a burning issue. The *'Home Boy'* delves into the issues of identity fragmentation, victimization and the biased concept of Othering in the context of pre and post-9/11.

Since 9/11, Muslims were portrayed and printed as terrorists in American literature. H.M. Naqvi's narrative denies this blemish critique and mirrors the scenario of pre and post-9/11 through his vivid characterization. The protagonist of the novel, Chuck goes through the bleak phase of suffering, crisis, fragmentation, alienation and victimization. The historical speech of President George Bush took this lava situation by storm. George Washington Bush declares on 20 September.2001. "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either

you are with us, or you are with terrorists." After this speech, the issue of identity and Islamophobia, fragmentation, victimization and Othering spread like wildfire in the Western world. Muslim expatriates are termed as extremists and fundamentalists on the basis of religious and ethnic values (Duncan, N. T., &Tatari, E. (2011).

Mansoor. A (2012) explores in her research entitled 'Post 9/11 Identity Crisis in H.M Naqvi's *Home Boy*' how Pakistani immigrants in New York City faced the 9/11 phase of identity fragmentation and victimization on a collective and individual basis. Muslims were victimized on the basis of religious, racial and linguistic markers. The research objectives and research questions deal with the notion of fragmented identity in the kinetic personality of Chuck, the protagonist of the novel. The research delineates the prejudiced attitude of the West scrutinizing the personality of Chuck in pre and post-9/11. The study investigates the re-chiselled term of terrorism which encapsulates Muslim terrorists as portrayed by the treatment meted out to Chuck in the *Home Boy*. The study also incorporates the identical issues of identity, self, victimization, terrorism and formulated concept of Othering.

Iqbal, Gulzar, M.A, Umar and Khan, (2021) explore in their study how the Muslim identity deteriorated in the wake of 9/11 and how it affected consciously and unconsciously every ear in the East and the West. The post-9/11 scenario agonized the Muslim immigrants physically and psychologically as well. The main characters of *The Home Boy* were marginalized and disintegrated and they were victimized in the post 9/11. Federal Bureau of Investigation and Metropolitan Detention Centre and CNN played a major role in the misrepresentation of Muslims on national, international and intranational levels.

Bhabha (2012) explores the question of Muslim identity in his seminal work *The*

*Location of Culture*(1994). He underscores the concepts of mimicry, interstice, hybridity, Third Space and liminality. *Home Boy* resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, third space and liminality, Characters of *Home Boy* became assimilationists (mimicry) in pre-9/11. But in post-9/11 they are marginalized and victimized. They had to face the brunt of the 9/11 gigantic catastrophe. Bhabha in his theory states the concept of 'unhomeliness'. The characters of *Home Boy* feel a sense of unhomeliness and they don't feel at home after this horrendous incident of 9/11. Bhabha's theory sheds light on the concept of Otherness. In the novel characters face stereotypical attitudes of Americans and they go through the experience of othering. They are suspected and undergo the mirror of surveillance in the post-9/11 era. Homi K. Bhabha's theory confines all the prescribed aspects of expatriates' life in the USA in the wake of pre and post-9/11.

Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) plays a vital role in the exploration of *Home Boy* in terms of Otherness (Thomas-Olalde & Velho (2011). Said opines that American stereotype literature represents biases and prejudice against Eastern culture and categorizes them as 'Other'. Muslims have been discernably portrayed as extremists and terrorists after 9/11 and H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* is a staunch narrative against this European fabricated narrative. The article also throws light on the cultural and political hegemony of the West over Muslims. The Western media manoeuvres to legitimize their domination in the fabric of Otherness. The concept of 'Other' is incorporated in a text in the shape of binary opposition. Edward Said says, "We are this, they are that" (Orientalism 237). H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* is a counter-narrative in the subsequent times of 9/11. The novel became the voice of the victimized and marginalized. 'Others' supposed in American narrative AC, DJ and Chuck are bonafide

Americans and mimic men but they feel marginalized outsiders in post-9/11 America.

After 9/11 Muslims were equated as terrorists and they had to face media trials globally. A journalist, Anne Coulter states, "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity" (Rubin & Jaap 157). Naqvi's novel explicitly brings forth the traumatic condition of Muslims and it is a staunch resistance which quests the surveillance in American society in post-9/11. Pathan and Ahmed (2019) intend in their research to entail the media portrayal of Muslims as this media tintured the American psyche and attitude towards Muslims as being bad and vicious. *Home Boy* rejects the notion of sympathy towards Muslims and demonstrates the Muslim trauma as Chuck thinks America is "The Land of the Free" (Naqvi 215) but now I'm afraid of them (Naqvi 206). Naqvi's novel tangibly presents the aftermaths of 9/11 and endeavours to turn the American narrative upside down and exposes the malign agenda against Muslims in post-9/11 America.

Shanthi (2016) in her study 'Performing Identities' states in her study on *Home Boy* by HM Naqvi that Chuck, DJ and AC play the role of insider and the outsider, the terrorist and the terrorized. After the havoc destruction of 9/11, Chuck strives to reconcile his American and indigenous identities but it falls flat. He thinks America is "The land of opportunities and the land of free people" and finally gets prey to schizophrenia in the recurrent war on terror ambience. 9/11 elevates and equates Muslims as terrorists and colonial subjects accordingly. Americans label young Pakistanis terrorists in the foreign land and they want to malign Muslim identity holistically. The novel intends the notion that you cannot be a good person and a Muslim.

Zaidi and Sahibzada (2018) investigate in their research paper that *The Home Boy* by H.M. Naqvi presents Islamophobia as a self-perpetuated stereotype of the West. They

vent their prejudice against Muslims and Islam. The novel portrays the fear of Islam in several places in terms of American think tanks. *Home Boy* (2010) demonstrates an American imperialist attitude, including President Bush's speech in September 2001. They marginalized Muslims as Others. The 9/11 incident added fuel to injury in terms of misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. It strengthened Western stereotypical religious thinking about, Muslims being terrorists and fundamentalists in the context of 9/11. Such untrue and obscure alleged miscommunications marred the image of Muslims and Islam globally.

Mehdi and Abbas (2021) explore the root cause of Muslim immigration to the USA. No doubt, America was the hub of opportunities in the pre-9/11 era. Muslims from various parts of the world came and settled in the United States of America. They become heart-core assimilationists and absorbed the culture, language and set traditions to get adjusted. The traumatic event of 9/11 smashed their American Dream and all the perks and privileges were confiscated from Muslims. This incident blasted their peaceful lives in the USA and the world and Western media got a chance to bruise Muslims' identity. Muslims were discriminated against, alienated, victimized and othered in the wake of 9/11. Muslims were labelled terrorists, extremists and radicals. They were thrown behind bars for the fake cases filed against them. Islam was misrepresented and considered a breeding spot for terrorists; even Azan was banned in American states. The USA closed the doors of opportunities for Muslims. To conclude, Muslims were targeted and victimized in each and every segment of American society in post/11 era.

Rashid, Jabeen and Shahbaz (2020) state in their research article that owing to oriental strains, Americans represent an odd view of Muslims from a religious and political point of view before 9/11. They depicted Muslims as having a judgmental identity. Before 9/11,

Muslims were perceived as unlawful opponents of the USA but it got vivid clear that Western media intentionally created a narrative of terrorism against Muslims. Resultantly, Muslims were excluded. They had to cope with social prejudice and scrutiny in the context of terrorism. Following 9/11, the narrative of "Us" vs "Them" split the world into two halves. It got binding upon Muslim writers to respond and redefine their identity exclusively. These discursive stances girded up Muslims to create a counter-narrative against the false representation of the West. The Muslim characters represent themselves in the true picture because of their status as "Others" by rationally redefining them to be devout Muslims. In the text of *Home Boy* Chuck portrays himself as a moderate Muslim; he is not a frantic being. It got crystal clear from the disintegrated and fragmented identities to redefine themselves through literary pieces such as *Home Boy* by H.M Naqvi and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid advocate Muslim identity. Naqvi's counter-narrative remained a persistent resistance as long as Western discourse misrepresents Muslims in the post-9/11 context.

Iqbal, Gulzar, Umar and Khan (2021) explore in their research that the protagonist of *Home Boy* and his friends endeavoured to reform the deconstructed identity. They adopted the culture of the host country. Apart from financial survival, the protagonist had an intense urge to fulfil his American Dream. In pursuit of their dream, they exchanged their identities, demeanours and perspectives. This study underscores how America changed its mindset and perceptions about Muslims specifically after the 9/11 tragedy. The pivotal role of FBI and MDC handled the situation on a stern basis. Media represents Muslims as alienated, dehumanized, barbaric, fundamentalists and others. No space was left for Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. Media discourse moulded,

distorted and dichotomized their religious and cultural identity after the 9/11 tragic incident.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Home Boy (2010) explores the lives of three Pakistani expatriates Chuck, DJ and Jimbo who settled in the USA to pursue their American Dream. They show deep Assimilation with America like cultural assimilation, linguistic assimilation, racial assimilation and psychological assimilation. Even they feel disconnected from their native norms and values and they feel alienated in the host country. In a sense, they sacrifice their culture, traditional values and norms to fulfil the American Dream. But after September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, they had to encounter various issues including difficulties in assimilation, prejudice and financial problems. After 9/11, America altered attitude its attitude towards Muslim immigrants. The study investigates the issues of identity fragmentation, victimization and Othering in the context of 9/11.

According to Homi K. Bhabha identity crisis occurs when people are considered as "Others". H.M. Naqvi's Home Boy (2010) presents the identity crisis of Muslims in the USA after 9/11 in a realistic pictorial manner. The novel starts with 'we'd become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren't before.' It shows their transformed and reshaped identity. The novel expresses the experiences of Chuck (Shehzad) and his friends Jimbo (Jamshed) and AC (Ali Chaudhry); they are Pakistani musketeers but they adopt a Western lifestyle and become New Yorkers. They realize their assimilated identity before 9/11 but after the 9/11 attacks, they feel alienated and dichotomized. As after 9/11 a new kind of identity was associated with Muslims that were "terrorists". Chuck's fellows were thrown behind bars under investigation against terrorist dangers. There is another identity transformation when Chuck was in jail; he was asked the following questions:

'You are a terrorist? You are a Muslim? You read the Koran? You pray five times to Allah? You keep the Ramadan? Does the Koran sanctions terrorism?'

In these questions, Naqvi tries to illustrate how a stereotypical identity is labelled with Muslims after 9/11. In America, people say to them, "No more room for you" (19). Chuck's friend Abdul Karim was targeted; the FBI entered his house and interrogated his six-year-old daughter.

In the context of 9/11 Pervez Musharaf (2001) categorically declared in his speech that there is no connection between Islam and terrorism and who commits evil in the name of Allah, blasphemes the name of Allah. But Americans didn't accept this justification. In prison, Chuck realizes his Americanness but the FBI says, 'You aren't American...you got no fucking rights (107). Now Chuck came to know the prejudiced and biased attitude of Americans. In this way, Chuck faces an identity crisis and resists this narrative and introduces himself as a Pakistani and writes an article about his friend Muhammad Shah who was missing after 9/11 as Americans considered him a terrorist. Chuck writes in the article "The story was simple, black and white: the man was Muslim, not a terrorist."

Tries to release Jamshed Khan from jail when he comes across his old father, who argues that all men are equal whether they are Americans or Pakistanis; they are from East or West. She says, "Your eyes tell me you are a good person'. It makes no difference whether a person is Eastern or Western, black or white, from New York or from New Jersey. I say Pakistani and Americans are not equal. Natives have a lot of rights and the foreigners don't have rights they are aliens and Others.

It goes without saying that after 9/11 things were changing and there occurs a paradigm shift in the circumstances and the attitude of Americans. After 9/11, the identity

crisis becomes to hear the burning issue of the day. It was time to explain, things were changing. Chuck was confused about his identity. After facing American behaviour after 9/11 he calls himself Shehzad, he doesn't own his American name Chuck. When he talks with his mother, he says, "That life's changed? The city's changed... but now I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid all the time. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal" (206). After 9/11, when he was in jail, he was taken as a terrorist. He felt bewildered, alienated and Othered. Chuck is representative of all Muslim immigrants in the USA. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2010) is a counter-narrative on behalf of Muslim immigrants in terms of alienation, disintegration, identity fragmentation, victimization and Othering.

## **Conclusion**

---

Naqvi's novel endeavours to deconstruct the widespread stereotypical and dominant

narrative of the West about Muslims in terms of the 9/11 attacks. It highlights the issues of identity crisis i.e. identity fragmentation, victimization and Othering in the context of post 9/11. It was an agenda propagated by the Western powers to malign the image of Islam and the image of its followers under the pretext of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy. *Home Boy* is a sound attempt to turn the dominant narrative of the USA upside down. It can be inferred from the underlying study that identities are defined and constructed by rich countries like the USA. Identity is a ban and boon as well; due to identity markers like Muslims, Islam, Arabs, Qur'an and beard the protagonist Chuck undergoes bitter experiences in the foreign land. Muslim identity has been paralyzed. Moreover, the media did the rest to dislodge, dislocate and made them feel fragmented, alienated and Othered. In a nutshell, 9/11 proved as the last nail in the coffin to marginalize, alienate, dehumanize and other Muslims in the world.

## References

- Bhabha, H. (2001). The other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism. *The New Social Theory Reader: Contemporary Debates*, 388-402. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25934-2\\_54](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25934-2_54)
- Campbell, A. (2000). Cultural identity as a social construct. *Intercultural Education*, 11(1), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980050005370>
- Duncan, N. T., & Tatari, E. (2011). Immigration and Muslim Immigrants: A Comparative Analysis of European States. *European Journal of Economic & Political Studies*, 4(2), 171-195.
- Gómez, Á., Morales, J. F., Hart, S., Vázquez, A., & Swann, W. B. (2011). Rejected and excluded forevermore, but even more devoted: Irrevocable ostracism intensifies loyalty to the group among identity-fused persons. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(12), 1574-1586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211424580>
- Iqbal, Z., Gulzar, M. A., Umar, L., & Khan, U. (2021). Interstitial liminality, Assimilation and Alterity in HM Naqvi's Home Boy. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 24(2), 55-74.
- Mansoor, A. (2012). Post 9/11 identity crisis in HM Naqvi's Home Boy. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 4(2), 8-44. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/291839088.pdf>
- Mehdi, M., Mehdi, A., & Abbas, G. (2021). The Impact of 9/11 on Muslim Immigrants to the USA: A Post Traumatic Study of Home Boy. *Elementary Education Online*, 20(5), 6998-6998. <https://www.ilkogretim-online.org/?mno=80909>
- Mustafa, A. U. (2015). Terrorist Discourse in Naqvi's 'Home Boy': A Neo Orientalist Perspective. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(28), 6-14. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081179.pdf>
- Pathan, I., & Ahmed, H. (2019). Alienation and Othering in Post 9/11 American Society: A Study of H.M. Naqvi's Home Boy. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4038644>
- Rashid, A., Jabeen, S., & Shahbaz, S. (2020). Re-Writing Muslim Identity and Self against Western Discourse of Terrorism in Naqvi's Home Boy. *sjesr*, 3(2), 68-75. <https://www.sjesr.org.pk/ojs/index.php/ojs/article/view/156/67>
- Shanthi, P. (2016). Performing Identities: A Study of HM Naqvi's Home Boy. *Smart Moves Journal IJELLH*, 4(6), 7-7.
- Thomas-Olalde, O., & Velho, A. (2011). Othering and its effects—Exploring the concept. *Writing postcolonial histories of intercultural education*, 2, 27-51.
- Zaidi, S., & Sahibzada, M. M. (2018). A Political Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia through the Novel Home Boy. *Acta Islamica Vol*, 6(2), 1-18. <https://iri.aiou.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/A-Political-Discourse-Analysis-of-Islamophobia-though-the-novel-Home-Boy.pdf>