

2022

H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* as a Response to Post-9/11 Islamophobia and as Implicit Critique of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Ambreen Hai
Smith College, ahai@smith.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/eng_facpubs



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hai, Ambreen, "H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* as a Response to Post-9/11 Islamophobia and as Implicit Critique of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" (2022). English Language and Literature: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
https://scholarworks.smith.edu/eng_facpubs/21

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in English Language and Literature: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu

**H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* as a Response to Post-9/11 Islamophobia
and as Implicit Critique of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

In the two decades that have passed since the world-changing events of September 11, 2001, the outpouring of literary and popular fiction (to say nothing of non-fiction, poetry, film, television series, and other media representations) concerned with either the experience or aftermath of 9/11 has come to constitute a genre or sub-genre of its own. However, much of this fiction, celebrated in the west, and written from mostly white American (and some white British) perspectives, often ends up reinforcing negative stereotypes and prevalent Islamophobic notions about Arabs and Muslims, especially Muslim men, and especially the common association between Islam and terrorism.¹ Obvious examples include John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006), Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), and Martin Amis's short story, "The Last Days of Mohamed Atta" (2006). Others center on white people's experiences, fear, and trauma—Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Jonathan Safran's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006)—not those of people of color affected by the fallout of 9/11 within the US or beyond.² In their introduction to the important collection, *Terror and the Postcolonial* (2010), Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton affirm the urgent necessity of "interrogating the category and experience of terror from the standpoint of the colonized and the abject of history" (12). (That terror could be occasioned by state-terrorism or by non-state actors.) The work of Muslim Anglophone writers, educated in the West, who address, from a non-white, non-Western perspective, both 9/11 and the West's subsequent increased fear and suspicion of Muslims, and who highlight the standpoint of those targeted and (unjustly) feared, becomes therefore crucial counter-discourse that can intervene in globally dominant narratives and their epistemological frameworks, and offer alternative ways of thinking about 9/11 and its global consequences.³

Of such counter-discourse, Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is probably the most well-known and highly acclaimed. In this essay, however, I would like to

shift attention to a post-9/11 novel by another male Pakistani writer, H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), which has been comparatively neglected, and which, I will argue, does importantly different postcolonial literary and cultural work.⁴ I want to highlight how *Home Boy* constitutes both a cosmopolitan Muslim response to 9/11 and its aftermath, and an important strategic or tactical alternative to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which has become a cornerstone in scholarly discussions of post-9/11 Muslim and particularly Anglophone Pakistani literature that takes on the problems of the so-called "War on Terror," neo-Orientalism, Islamophobia, global geopolitics, and American economic and cultural imperialism. A quick search on the MLA bibliography for articles on Hamid's novel yields an astonishing 110 results (as of April 2021). By contrast, Naqvi's *Home Boy* yields only 9. A few literary critics have discussed these two novels together as similar examples of post-9/11 fiction from Pakistan.⁵ But these scholars overlook what I think are significant *differences* between these novels, and the *implications* of those differences, which I address in this essay. In my reading therefore, I suggest how *Home Boy* offers not only an explicit critique of the Western response to 9/11, but also an implicit critique of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The two novels, published only two years apart, do manifest, at first glance, remarkable similarities. Explicitly making 9/11 their center-point, both also center, through a fictive first-person voice, the experiences of a young, male, middle-class Pakistani narrator-protagonist, a recent graduate of an elite American university, who lives and works in New York City in the financial sector at the time of the attacks. In Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (henceforth *RF*), Changez, the narrator, attends Princeton (as did Hamid himself), and then works for a fictional firm, Underwood Samson (which has the same initials as the US). In Naqvi's *Home Boy* (henceforth *HB*), Chuck, the narrator, has just graduated from NYU, worked as an investment banker, but has been laid off and is working as a taxi-driver when 9/11 occurs.⁶ Hence both novels deploy the coming-of-age narrative of a secular, cosmopolitan, "western-educated urbanite" (*RF*, 54), a "metrosexual" (*HB*, 4) who, at least pre-9/11, feels at home in New York City even if he is not an American. "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was

immediately a New Yorker,” asserts Changez (*RF*, 33; emphasis in original). Likewise, Chuck reflects (albeit with unacknowledged class and male privilege), “in New York you felt no different from anybody else; you were your own man; you were free” (*HB*, 20). Both novels deploy innovative, ingenious, sometimes even dazzling, verbal and formal tactics. Both present a powerful critique of American imperialism and American responses to 9/11, the military attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and within the United States, of the Islamophobia, racism, racial profiling, unwarranted detentions, and suspensions of civil rights that targeted those perceived to be Arab or Muslim, and especially men. And in both novels, the young male protagonist, after suffering some form of traumatic breakdown, decides to return to Pakistan at the end, despite his having fallen in love with an American woman who is, in the case of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, white and upper-class, and in the case of *Home Boy*, a middle-class Pakistani American.⁷ Both young men thus sacrifice their romantic ties and personal desires when overwhelmed by the horrors of the political and nationalistic toxicity that ends their “American dream” and effectively drives them out of the U.S. (*RF*, 93).⁸

But despite these similarities, there are also important differences between these two novels in their narrative strategies, stylistic choices, and plot devices, that affect the political-cultural work that they do. Although both use the voice of a first-person narrator who tells his own (counter)story, Hamid’s narrator-protagonist Changez maintains throughout, and remains at the end, under a dark cloud of ambiguity, where it is unclear if he has joined up with militant extremists (to become the religious fundamentalist suggested by the title) and is planning to ambush the unnamed American to whom he is telling his story, or whether he is to be believed, is not militant or violent, and is himself under American surveillance, likely soon to be assassinated by the American who may be a CIA agent in disguise. In so doing, Hamid ends up reinforcing, instead of contesting, the Islamophobic tendencies of a good many of his readers (as I elaborate below). By contrast, Naqvi’s narrator-protagonist, Chuck, while clearly more adolescent, naïve, even foolish, is presented with unwavering clarity as indubitably trustworthy, empathetic, and engaging. Chuck is complex but unambiguous, self-ironic and disarmingly humorous, prone to

make mistakes, but also to learn from them, more credible and sympathy-inducing, a trauma survivor whose final decision we are asked to understand and respect. The reliability of Chuck as a narrator and character is key to the different route that *Home Boy* proposes to the problems both addressed and produced by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. But first, before discussing these in more detail, some words on Islamophobia, and the problem of (re)framing.

The Problem of Frameworks, Framing, and Reframing:

Global Audiences and the Frameworks of Suspicion

In his important recent book, *Islamophobia and The Novel* (2018), Peter Morey describes Islamophobia “as the dominant mode of prejudice in contemporary Western societies” (1). This prejudice, which affects everything from foreign policy to everyday culture, is evoked not merely by fear or even terror or terrorism, he notes, but is fed by concerted Western interests and politics, the “enabling context” of “global geopolitical arrangements, [and] their complex prehistories” (15). Since 9/11 this Islamophobia has increased exponentially:

During the war on terror, it was necessary to create a ‘spectacle of fear’ around Muslims and Islam to bolster support for an illegal imperialist foreign policy. Continuing this mission into the Obama and Trump years, a highly organized network of Islamophobic opinion formers, many with direct links to the corridors of political power, have ensured that an avalanche of suspicion and invective continues to flow.” (13)

Hence, in a Saidian move, Morey notes, “Islamophobia—like all prejudices—actually reveals more about those holding the prejudice than it does about its objects” (14); “the framing of Muslims amounts to a refraction, not a reflection, of reality” (4-5).

What I find particularly useful about Morey’s formulation is his emphasis on frameworks and framing. Morey cites Edward Said, who highlighted the problem early on in *Covering Islam* (1981) as a version of Orientalism: “Today Islam is defined negatively as that with which the West is radically at odds, and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam” (quoted in Morey, *Islamophobia*, 4). Hence, *Framing Muslims*, Morey’s previous book, co-authored with Amina Yaqin, “seeks to trace the restricted, limited ways that Muslims are stereotyped and ‘framed’ within the political, cultural, and media discourses of the West”

(*Framing Muslims*, 2). Indeed, Morey adds in *Islamophobia*, the project of *Framing Muslims* was to explore “the nature of this frame, ... this encircling discursive boundary as it appears in political rhetoric, journalism, and popular-media texts” (4). Likewise, Boehmer and Morton, in their introduction to *Terror and the Postcolonial*, also present the problem as one of framing: “The discourse of terrorism, ... couched in familiar orientalist metaphors, is another way of framing the anti-colonial other and legitimating the colonial self by contrast” (11).

To frame, of course, carries multiple suggestions, including (i) to limit, enclose, set boundaries around something, and (ii) to cast suspicion, to implicate someone wrongfully of a crime, often by planting false evidence, or constructing the wrong framework. Frameworks can both hold up (in every sense, as in support, stall, or arrest) and limit or distort, disallowing what is outside the frame. Among a range of meanings, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “*framework*” (noun) as “an essential or underlying structure; a conceptual scheme or system;” “*frame*” (noun) as “a structure made of parts joined together,” “a rigid structure that supports or encloses something,” or “a surrounding structure such as a border or case in which something is set.” To “*frame*” (verb), is to “to shape, form, direct (something),” “to devise, invent, fabricate,” “to contrive,” and hence also “to concoct, fake,” “to conspire to pin a crime falsely on someone,” “to concoct a false charge,” “to devise to make someone a victim of a frame-up.”⁹ Framing and frameworks are hardly uncomplicated.

Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim prejudice, creates what I would call a *frameworks of suspicion*, framing the Muslim, in Morey and Yaqin’s words, creating a rigid, implicit epistemological frame that counter-discursive writers like Naqvi and Hamid always, inevitably, have to contend with and contest. To put it simply, these dominant frameworks of Islamophobia *frame* the Muslim (in every sense) as suspicious. And, given the global reach of Islamophobia, especially after 9/11, thanks to Western circuits of discursive and material power, these frameworks are dominant well beyond the boundaries of the US or UK, extending to readers in other English-speaking Western countries (white settler former colonies like Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada), Europe, and around the globe. India, with its history of anti-

Muslim prejudice, is another key example. As Morey and Yaqin observe, “The reach of today’s global media conglomerates and the tangled machinations of international politics gives the structures of representation we describe a fierce power and extensive reach” (*Framing Muslims*, 4). Hence, I would add, the work of writers like Naqvi and Hamid is addressed not only to audiences within the U.S., but to global audiences beyond, audiences that do of course vary, but that are all inevitably touched by these frameworks, via assent or dissent. Unlike Western audiences, audiences in Islamic cultures may be more sympathetic to the ideological counter-push of writers like Naqvi and Hamid, precisely because of these powerful frameworks, but none exist in a vacuum separate from these influential and dominant ideologies, nor are exempt from the warping effect of these frameworks of suspicion.

Hence, even responses to these frameworks of suspicion have to work within the frameworks of suspicion. Morey and Yaqin cite the impact of this global climate on Muslims: “the frequency with which Muslims are ‘framed’ in such discourses has a complex but definite relation to [their] lived experience” (*Framing Muslims*, 4). Some Muslim responses can also replicate that framing, repeating the pernicious dichotomies that such frameworks set up: “Intolerant images and pronouncements breed a kind of self-fashioning that operates as the other half of a distorted dialogue” (*Framing Muslims*, 5). How then are writers like Naqvi and Hamid to find a third space, an alternative to these dichotomies that not only dismantles such frames and frameworks, but that enables a *reframing* that allows for other ways of seeing and understanding? In an important essay, Vron Ware introduces the notion of “white fear” as a powerful diagnostic, as that which produces these dominant frameworks and discourses of terror and suspicion, framing the Muslim and Islam as the culprit and the “other” of the innocent, rational West.¹⁰ But what about non-white fear? Placed in the position of the feared, how are the (non-white) objects of fear to articulate their own fear of being (unjustly) feared? How to break the binarism? The challenge for writers like Naqvi and Hamid who straddle the West and non-West, who can speak to both, formed by both, is to devise strategies not to evade but to address these dominant frameworks, to find an other language that can be heard.

Scholars of postcolonial literature have long recognized that writers like Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Tsitsi Dangarembga address themselves simultaneously to multiple audiences: readers in the West, whose stereotypes and long histories of racialized or orientalist representation this literature seeks to contest; readers within the nation, for whom postcolonial literature may seek to bolster cultural or national identity, damaged by aforesaid histories of representation; and global readers anywhere, including those of other postcolonial nations, who may read the text in its original language or in translation. Given the hegemony of English as a global language, and the circuits of publication and distribution of Anglophone fiction, contemporary Anglophone writers have to anticipate in their writing, through forms of multiple address, these diverse readerships, knowing that different readers will read differently. Likewise, post-9/11 postcolonial Muslim writers like Hamid and Naqvi at once address themselves to a diverse global readership, while aware (to varying degrees) of the frameworks of suspicion that attend upon the reception of their work. As critical scholars, we also have to recognize that such writing is at once addressed to global readers, where readers in Pakistan, for example, may read very differently than readers in the West the same narrative of a Pakistani man subject to prejudice in the West; and that such writing is shadowed by the dominance of global suspicion of Muslims that frame both the reading and writing of such texts. In fact, I would argue, the frameworks of suspicion both inform and heighten the divergent ways in which all such readers read. Differently situated readers' divergent responses to the same texts are intensified and sharpened precisely by the overarching hegemonic existence or shadow of these frameworks of suspicion, prompted towards either conscious or unconscious protest or agreement.

Peter Morey notes that literature, depending on the standpoint of the writer, can reinforce or contest Islamophobia:

Artistic and cultural forms can reinforce Islamophobia. But they can also expose it, dramatize its inconsistencies, or outright oppose it. For every Martin Amis scurrying to rearticulate the truisms of Euro-American cultural superiority, there is an Abdul Rahman

Munif addressing the human cost of the pursuance of Western greed and exceptionalism, but they do not enjoy equal exposure” (*Islamophobia*, 28).

While I agree whole-heartedly, I would add that what determines a text’s ability to reaffirm or challenge pernicious ideologies is not just the positionality or standpoint of the writer, but the narrative *strategies* they choose to deploy, given the contexts of the frameworks of suspicion. As I show below, while both Mohsin Hamid and H. M. Naqvi attempt to contest these frameworks of Islamophobia, in this heightened and fraught context of global power imbalances and reception, the different narrative strategies and techniques they deploy carry very different implications and have very different effects. They land differently. I propose, then, as a method of analysis, a theoretically and politically informed close reading, in order to tease out the complex impacts of these literary strategies and techniques as forms of address and intervention.

The Set-Up, or Opening: Naqvi vs Hamid

For the purposes of this essay, I want to summarize briefly three key problems (elaborated elsewhere) that arise with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.¹¹ The first is the ambiguity about Changez, the narrator-protagonist, whose otherwise compelling critiques of American imperialism, US political and military intervention in and economic exploitation of Third World countries, and US responses to 9/11 are undermined by the strong possibility posed and maintained by the novel that Changez has become sympathetic to militant extremists in Pakistan, if not one himself. In addition, Changez’s unappealing, slightly menacing persona, his snarky, sneering, even threatening remarks to the putative American whom he induces into becoming his auditor and guest, and his problematic gender and sexual politics, collectively work to discourage at least Western readers from trusting him or his point of view.

A second problem is Changez’s highly problematic reaction to the news of the occurrence of 9/11: when, in a hotel in Manila, he sees on television the twin towers falling and realizes that he is seeing “not fiction but the news,” he says, “I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (RF, 72; original emphasis). In retrospect, he explains, his pleasure was occasioned, not at the thought of the victims, but at the

notion that “someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (*RF*, 73). And the third is the deliberately incomplete, indeterminate ending, which leaves unresolved the question of Changez’s innocence, guilt, or degree of involvement in what may be a plot to attack the American in Lahore. Mohsin Hamid has attested in various essays and interviews that he set up the novel to be read differently by different sets of readers, providing alternate sets of clues that led to alternate readings, and that he left the ending incomplete in order to allow readers to complete the story for themselves, because his ultimate goal was to enable readers to realize how their predispositions (or prejudices) incline them towards the kinds of interpretations they already favor.¹² Unfortunately, however, evidence from actual readers reveals, as I show in my essay (“Pitfalls”), how Hamid fails to anticipate the power of the frameworks of suspicion, or the degree to which the global imbalance of power and dominant suspicion of Muslims predisposes a majority of his Western lay readers (and some scholarly ones) to view Changez as unquestionably a terrorist or fundamentalist. For a wide swath of global readers, the novel hence confirms, instead of challenging, or making them aware of, the negative stereotypes it purportedly sets out to dismantle.

By contrast, Naqvi seems more canny about these global frameworks of suspicion. *Home Boy* adopts very different strategies to address the challenges of representing post-9/11 Pakistani experiences and perspectives especially for potentially wary or hostile American or European readers. To begin with, Naqvi sets up his narrator very differently. Unlike Hamid, who creates a narrative frame that itself frames or casts suspicion on the narrator (why does Changez accost the unknown, unnamed American, and why is he telling this story, at this moment, to this particular listener), Naqvi’s novel simply plunges into the first-person autobiographical narrative, recognizable as belonging in a convention that dispels suspicion instead of prompting it. Deploying the idiom of American youth culture, Chuck’s voice is casual, insouciant, cool, and hip, reminiscent of classic American narrators like Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* (a key text referenced later in an important scene in the novel).¹³ (By contrast, Hamid creates a voice that actively invites suspicion, that in fact stokes fear based on dominant Western stereotypes of

Muslims. Hamid describes it himself as “a voice born of the British colonial inflections taught in elite Pakistani schools and colored by an anachronistic, courtly menace that resonates well with popular preconceptions of Islam.”¹⁴)

Hence, although Naqvi also uses the first-person voice of a protagonist telling his own story, unlike *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which takes the form of the dramatic monologue (a genre used to signal a guilty, very unreliable narrator who unwittingly discloses his secrets as he speaks), *Home Boy* uses what James Phelan has theorized as a *reliable* narrator.

The essence of reliable narration is the implied author’s communicating matters that she endorses through the filter of an ontologically distinct character. Authors adopt such filters because anchoring the narration in the perspective and experiences of an actor and teller in the storyworld can increase the thematic, affective, and ethical force and significance of the whole narrative. (Phelan, 178).¹⁵

Drawing on Phelan’s rhetorical approach to character narration, I would argue that Naqvi constructs Chuck as a reliable narrator, clearly separate from but often convergent with the implied author. Chuck is a narrator whose “narrating-filter” may remain thick, in that he is foregrounded as a distinct “experiencing-I,” and whose understanding may at times be limited, but whose reporting and evaluating often converges with that of the implied author’s (Phelan, 178-79). Unlike Hamid, Naqvi offers no cues that might lead readers to suppose that Chuck is not to be trusted or believed.

Moreover, instead of using the monologue form and focusing on a single man’s experiences, *Home Boy* is more dialogic and variegated, including multiple voices, perspectives, and stories. Chuck, Naqvi’s narrator, tells not just his own story, but also the stories of three other young Pakistani men who live and work in New York City. Naqvi thus multiplies the story he is telling, insisting from the beginning on the diversity and variety of Pakistani experiences in New York, where even of these four relatively privileged, 20-something men, only two are recent arrivals, one is an American citizen, born in New Jersey, and one a permanent resident. This kaleidoscopic presentation in itself makes an important point: that there is no one single story of the Pakistani immigrant in post-9/11 America. Indeed, Chuck both makes explicit that

homogenizing assumption, and pushes back against it: “Though we shared the common denominator and were told half-jokingly, *Oh, all you Pakistanis are alike*, we weren’t the same, AC, Jimbo, and me (*HB*, 2, italics in original). Each has a Pakistani name and a Westernized nickname, suggestive of their hybrid identities, and comfort in dual belonging.

Chuck, or Shehzad, has graduated from NYU with a major in English Literature, worked as investment banker until he was laid off in July 2001, and has been working as a cab driver since, a development that he conceals from his widowed mother in Karachi, to whom he sends his earnings. His friend AC, short for Ali Chaudhry, is Punjabi, older, a perpetual graduate student, and a radical and politicized intellectual who looks out for his friends. Jimbo, or Jamshed Khan, of Pathan and *mohajir* descent, born and raised in New Jersey, works as a DJ and music producer, and is in love with an affluent white American woman, whom he wants to marry but is hesitant to introduce to his patriarchal but gentle, oddly appealing father. And the fourth, Mohammed “Mo” Shah, or “the Shaman,” is described as “an American success story, a Pakistani Gatsby,” who has reportedly worked his way up from gas station work to a job in a “top-tier insurance company,” a Mercedes, and a lavish house in Connecticut (27).¹⁶

Naqvi’s stylistic choices also work to dispel suspicion, where Hamid’s work to invite it. Naqvi’s ingenuity lies not in ambiguity, nor in the narrative technique of intertwining two timelines of the present frame and the narrator’s past (as Hamid’s does), but in his engagingly humorous style, which establishes clarity without falling into dull didacticism. Chuck’s voice is chatty, jaunty, slangy, signaling an artless sincerity and trustworthiness, extending a bridge, through shared idiomatic expression, wit, and cultural connection, to Western readers who might at first be inclined to distrust him. It is also upbeat, self-ironic, and self-reflective, as if the narrator is not just trying to explain to others but also trying to figure himself out; it quickly establishes his knowingness, city-cool, and familiarity with a range of idioms and cultural knowledges. Here is how the novel opens: “We’d become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren’t before. We fancied ourselves boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men, AC, Jimbo, and I. We were mostly self-invented and self-made and certain we had our fingers on the pulse of the great

global dialectic” (1). The startling racial epithets of the first sentence suggest how 9/11 has suddenly changed the identities of these young Pakistani men, who have become othered, subject to racialized abuse, like those referenced by these other categories. The collective “we” suggests both their camaraderie and their diversity. “We weren’t the same,” Chuck tells us (2). All four are the “home boys” referenced by the title, arrivants from somewhere other than New York City, and yet feel they belong in this cosmopolitan city; they are “Metrostanis” as he later terms them, who see themselves as cosmopolitan, belonging to the world, not to one nation (14). They take pride in their intellectual and cultural versatility: they are storytellers and eclectic readers; they are as familiar with American literature as with American media and cinema, high and low culture; they know *The New York Times* and “gangsta rap”; they listen to American and Pakistani music and thrive in New York’s underground youth culture (1). (This confidence will later rupture, when they have to confront the racist fallout of 9/11.) They are not necessarily admirable: they drink irresponsibly, smoke, take drugs, and think nothing of casual sex as they hop between night-clubs. But from the beginning of the novel, in his mode of address to all readers, the narrator establishes his double belonging and dual allegiance, his familiarity and comfort within both Pakistani and American cultural arenas. As an important contrast to Hamid’s novel, Naqvi’s opening and its narrator-protagonist put up no red flags, nor try to appease the potentially suspicious Western reader.

Naqvi uses a variety of innovative techniques to produce complex effects in this novel: the verbal gymnastics; the tonality that conveys seriousness with a sense of the absurd; the narrator’s flippancy that reveals the attempt to cope with pain and seriousness beyond words; the use of understatement that highlights the enormity of the effects of post-9/11 toxicity for a young brown man in New York; the self-knowing humor and irony that makes his narrator more complex, respect-worthy and endearing. But through all this, Naqvi maintains the absolute clarity of his initially naïve, flawed young narrator’s innocuousness. Chuck’s use of humor helps establish his intelligence and trustworthiness, and calls for all readers’ empathy as we see him demonstrate his ability to cope with adversity and rise above it with engaging resilience.¹⁷ His

reliability may be as limited as that of any first-person narrator is, trustworthy to the degree that any character narrator's limited perspective allows, but Chuck is not intentionally mendacious or duplicitous. *Home Boy* thus carefully sets up its Muslim narrator such that neither he nor his friends can be suspected of lying, deception, or terrorism, to forestall and not to invite suspicion. Where Hamid's narrative choices predispose readers to view Changez as an actual or potential terrorist, Naqvi's do the opposite.¹⁸

The Middle: Representing the Experience of 9/11 and Its Aftermath for Muslims

A key difference between *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Boy* is the protagonist-narrator's reaction to 9/11, and the way the event is incorporated into the narrative. In Hamid's novel, 9/11 occurs structurally at the middle of the trajectory of events Changez narrates, and becomes a critical turning point after which his attitude to the US changes, and after which Hamid's portrayal of Changez also becomes more negative. Changez's infamous smile, his self-reported immediate gladness at seeing the US attacked, both help him realize his latent resentment of the global superpower's interference and negative impact on Third World countries like his own, and seems designed to foment Western readers' revulsion against Changez. Certainly, one could explain this representational choice on Hamid's part as an attempt to complicate, to puncture the one-sided outpouring of sanctimoniousness from the US, and challenge the assumption that instant sympathy with the US could be the only global reaction. Changez's smile may be intended to suggest how others outside the US had more mixed reactions, how many, especially in the global south, did not view the US as innocent or the attacks as unprovoked. Certainly, some or even many non-Western readers might find in this moment a rare, important act of recognition of such occluded perspectives. But others might find it disturbing because of the way it bolsters global frameworks of suspicion.

As a postcolonial scholar and former Pakistani citizen myself who has lived in the US for almost four decades, I find Hamid's representational choice a dangerous move. It consolidates the fallacy that Muslims and Pakistanis were (and are) so hostile to the U.S. that their primary, gut reaction to the attacks was gladness. It moreover disregards the many Muslims who were in

the Towers at the time, as well as those who watched their televisions with horror and anguished over loved ones in NYC and the aftermath to follow. Given the asymmetric power of global representations, Changez's smile serves to intensify distrust of Muslims and reinforces a binary us-them mentality. Hamid's choice thus also disregards the burden of representation that minority writers perform have to bear, especially in such highly fraught conditions: it further endangers the thousands of men like Changez who live and work in the US.¹⁹ As a powerful and illuminating contrast, we might compare the complex reaction of the Palestinian American poet Suheir Hammad voiced in her stunning poem, "First Writing Since" (2001), which highlights the intense horror of Muslims at the attack, redoubled and complicated further by the fear of ensuing anti-Muslim backlash, especially against Muslim men like her brothers, one of whom serves in the US military.

Naqvi, in contrast to Hamid, clearly challenges the framework of suspicion of Muslims as he reframes the experience of 9/11 for Muslims in New York City. His narrative presents 9/11 as the structural but silent center of Chuck's narrative, a site of trauma such that it cannot be addressed until it is reawakened by a subsequent trigger. Chronologically, 9/11 has occurred just weeks before the novel begins, but Chuck does not begin with it, nor describe it, nor mention it, until Hamid has established the world and world view of his narrator. At best Chuck refers to it elliptically, circling around it, as if it is the unnameable center, the constitutive absence, the unspeakable reality that is only too well known and too much to be named. "Two, maybe three weeks later we decided to assemble at Tja! Because we were anxious and low and getting cabin fever watching CNN 24-7. Moreover, we believed there was something heroic in persisting, carrying on, in returning to routine, revelry" (HB, 7-8). The elision suggests that Chuck is unable to name the event in relation to which the time of the present is marked, as if it is too big, too traumatic to mention, and as if everyone and anyone anywhere in the world would know what he is talking about. He focuses instead on the small-scale heroism or resilience of carrying on, like any courageous New Yorker, with habitual, quotidian activities, like returning to a favorite haunt "located on the periphery of Tribeca," Tja!, described earlier as a "bar-restaurant-and-lounge

populated by the local Scandinavian scenesters and sundry expatriates as well as socialites, arrivistes, homosexuals, metrosexuals..." (4). Chuck thus affirms his cosmopolitan identity, his belonging in the hip, young adult culture of this city. Neither he nor any of his friends identifies as Muslim. Chuck and his cohort are not presented as heroes, but nor does the text create or allow any suspicion that they are terrorists or sympathetic to terrorists. If anything, unlike Changez's suspect reaction, Chuck and his friends share an indignation directed against the terrorists. "Those bastards," fulminates AC one evening in Jakes, (another favorite haunt, a pool room and bar), "they've fucked up my city. THEY'VE FUCKED UP EVERYTHING!" (29, emphasis in original). Ironically, it is this loud statement that invites trouble, as two white men overhear and attack Chuck, AC, and Jimbo, mistaking them for "A-rabs," and get them thrown out of Jakes, their favorite bar (30). Naqvi thus calls attention to the cloud of suspicion that makes Muslim men targets in their everyday lives, and challenges it head-on.²⁰

It is in this episode that Chuck mentions 9/11 for the first time, when the three in Manhattan become concerned that they have not heard from their friend Mo in a while, and decide to go to his house in Connecticut to check on him. They have heard stories circulating about Pakistani men being detained and subjected to police and other forms of harassment: "After 9/11 we heard not only from family and friends but from distant relatives, colleagues, ex-colleagues, one-night stands, two-night stands, neighbors, childhood friends and acquaintances, and in turn we made our own inquiries, phone calls, dispatched e-mails" (27-28). Maintaining his irreverent peppiness, Chuck affirms how, since 9/11, they have become part of a larger community in a crisis. When the three friends arrive at Mo's house, they do not find him, but his neighbors become suspicious of Chuck's yellow cab parked in the driveway, and call the police. At this pivot point of the novel, located structurally at its center, three men from the FBI arrive, arrest Chuck, Jimbo and AC as suspected terrorists, and take them to the MDC, the Metropolitan Detention Center, also known as "America's Own Abu Ghraib" where "the worst abuses in the American prison system after 9/11 took place" (133). The center of Naqvi's novel is thus not

9/11 itself, as it in Hamid's, but Bush's speech and Chuck's consequently evoked memory of 9/11.

Chuck does not reveal until this point in Chapter Seven, in the exact middle of the novel, that he is himself an eye-witness and survivor, that he was in either the twin towers or an adjacent building when the attacks occurred.²¹ Naqvi thus calls attention both to the importance of this memory by its very placement, and to the fact of its suppression by its delayed release. What triggers Chuck's memory is Bush's presidential State of the Union address, which Chuck accidentally hears on television at Mo's house. As Bush declaims on the heroism of ordinary Americans, and declares, "*Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done*" (118, emphasis in original), the dam seems to break in Chuck's consciousness. He begins with a somber reflection, "Every New Yorker has a 9/11 story, and every New Yorker has a need to repeat it, to pathologically revisit the tragedy, until the tragedy becomes but a story" (119). Chuck's opening makes clear both his unambiguous view that he sees 9/11 as a "tragedy," and his knowledge that the experience was a form of trauma, for which the retelling is pathological. And in retelling that memory, Naqvi brings us closer to understanding how Chuck himself, despite his apparent ebullience, is in fact suffering from trauma.

Unlike Changez, with Chuck there is no question of a smile, not even a transitory moment of pleasure at America brought down. What makes it more powerful is that Naqvi places the resurfacing of this buried memory of 9/11 at the moment of Chuck's post-9/11 subsequent trauma, when he is about to be apprehended and questioned by the FBI. Refusing to sensationalize, Chuck recalls the mundane yet exact details: how he woke up in the morning, late for a job interview; how he cut himself shaving, caught a cab, and heard something "on the radio about a plane hitting Rockefeller Center" (a false report, as many were circulating); how, preoccupied with his resume and lateness, he reached the fifty-sixth floor at "seven after nine," barely noticing the absence of "routine sounds of office bustle" (119). It was only then that he noticed the "eerie" "deathly silence," that people were gathered by a south-facing window on

that floor, where a woman, to whom he handed a tissue, was sobbing, and he looked out together with them, as much taken by surprise as they were, to see what he does not or cannot describe: “I pressed through the smudged glass. I stood there for a long time, dazed and a little dizzy. I would have remained longer had the building not been evacuated, and though I found myself on the street afterward, safe and sound, in brilliant sunshine, I remained in a daze for weeks” (121).

With the use of the “I” (emphasizing the seeing eye), Chuck’s sentences grammatically maintain his self as subject and as subjective, experiencing consciousness, emphasizing his position as he both experiences and witnesses what occurs. But his verbs gradually shift him from active subject to a passive one, from “I pressed” against the window, to someone immobilized and stunned (“I stood there”), shocked and traumatized, to voicing a conditional preference without agency (“I would have remained”), to being unable to recall how he (was) moved from one place to another (“I found myself on the street”). He describes himself standing still, witnessing what he cannot describe, what he knows his readers know only too well, and yet, repeatedly, in a “daze”, where even memory is numbed. The gaps in his narrative emphasize the repression, and the enormity of what cannot be said. Here is a rare moment in the novel when Naqvi absents humor and irony altogether from Chuck’s voice. There is only shock, only trauma, and a silence that refuses to contribute to the sensationalist reports that have become cliché. It is only later that Chuck can say that he was in a daze, a daze that perhaps continues in his post-traumatic narration. As Cathy Caruth famously explains psychic trauma, “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (4, emphasis original). The “enigmatic core” of trauma is this “delay or incompleteness in knowing;” hence “PTSD ... is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history” (5). Chuck cannot will either the return or non-return of its memory. He cannot even be said entirely to have witnessed it, because the trauma of the event “precludes its registration;” it creates “the inability fully to witness the event as it occurs” (Caruth, 6-7).

What Naqvi’s mode of representation moreover emphasizes is that Chuck clearly is, and sees himself as, one of the New Yorkers who were there, in that historical moment, and who

were similarly affected by what happened. He literally joins the people standing by the window watching, experiencing the event as it occurs; he is not, as a Pakistani or brown or Muslim man, apart from them. Almost as a direct response to Hamid, Naqvi's narrator does not smile. Such a strategy on Naqvi's part strives, to state the obvious, not only to enlist (all) readers' sympathy, but also to insist, in the face of American paranoia and distrust, on the brown Muslim man's belonging, and equivalent trauma, heightened, or added to, by subsequent traumas of unjust suspicion and hostility. Where Hamid unnecessarily creates suspicion and loss of sympathy for Changez, Naqvi actively works to dispel suspicion and invite sympathy for Chuck, from all readers, Western or non-Western.

In this pivotal chapter, Naqvi also brilliantly uses the narrative devices of alternation and juxtaposition to heighten the ironic and satiric effects. As the experience of listening to Bush's speech brings back the memory, Chuck begins to sob, as he himself describes it, "unexpectedly ridiculously" (121). As Bush, in the background, reminds the nation that "*citizens of 80 other nations,*" including "*dozens of Pakistanis*" died along with Americans on 9/11, Chuck remembers how, when his father died, he was taught Muslim cultural modes of coping with shock and grief, and recites the Koranic sentence, "We come from God and return to God" (121). Naqvi thus underscores (to all readers) both the fact that Muslims and Pakistanis were among the victims, calling on Bush's speech to add to the fact's credibility, and that Chuck grieves for all the victims as he did for his own father. But the situational irony is heightened by the arrival of the FBI, who apprehend Chuck and his friends as potential terrorists, while Bush declares on television: "*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*" (129). The lie to Bush's statement becomes ludicrously apparent, to Naqvi's readers as well as to the FBI agents themselves who are spreading terror under the President's very aegis, one of whom "bark[s], 'YOU NEED TO TURN THAT OFF RIGHT NOW'" (129). Either the President lies or he has to be silenced, because his words expose a total disconnect from what the FBI is doing. Naqvi's clever juxtaposition and satiric humor highlight how the actions of one of the nation's most

powerful institutions, prompted by Bush's own "war on terror," turns his own declarations into lies, and produce state-induced terror for its innocent victims, who include both legal immigrants and American citizens. Naqvi thus makes space for other narratives of 9/11, for understanding what happened to Muslims in the US, and the ironies of their mistreatment by a state that declared itself the protector of global human rights.

Subsequently, in presenting the detention and interrogation scenes at the MDC, Naqvi, like Hamid, calls attention to racial profiling and suspension of civil and human rights under the so-called Patriots Act. But where Hamid offers only one brief scene where Changez is detained, questioned, and mistreated at an airport when he returns to the US from the Philippines, Naqvi takes over two chapters to dramatize what happens to Chuck and his friends. Moreover, Naqvi makes this an occasion to confront head-on some of the most dangerous myths and misconceptions about Muslims and terrorists circulating globally via dominant Western cultural-political discourse and popular media. Chuck's first interrogator is predictably brutal and crude, establishing the tone of the detention center—the threat, the violence, the shackles, the Islamophobia, the racial epithets:

'How d'you feel about what happened on September eleventh?'

'What''—[Chuck is interrupted]

'Did it make you happy?' (135)

This seems Naqvi's direct response to Hamid, specifically to the scene of Changez's smile. Here, the interrogator suspects all Muslims of that response. Naqvi not only refuses to present such a response from a Muslim, but shows the suspicion itself to be both hostile and ludicrous.

'This is ridiculous' [says Chuck] 'I want to make my phone call. I know my rights.

'You aren't American!' He fired back. 'You got no fucking rights' (135)

Chuck's second interrogator is more reasonable, producing a more interesting exchange. Instead of making assumptions, he begins by asking about Chuck's religious beliefs, if he reads the Koran, drinks or eats pork, as if those are indicators of a Muslim's guilt, or likelihood of being a terrorist. But Chuck (and through him, Naqvi) hence begins to deconstruct this

Islamophobic logic, to expose its absurdity and racism. “Won’t Al-La get mad,” asks this man (whom Chuck dubs “Grizzly”), if Chuck drinks (143). Chuck replies, “I don’t think it matters to Him, sir, you know, whether I drink or not” (144). Naqvi both uses humor himself, to undercut the interrogator, mocking his American mispronunciation of “Allah,” and highlights Chuck’s own slightly irreverent, cheeky use of humor, coupled with the deferential “sir.” However, Grizzly begins to listen to Chuck when he learns that Chuck has studied literature at NYU and worked as a banker, features of Chuck’s identity that clearly carry cache and cultural capital. Getting Chuck his first glass of water, he asks Chuck to help him “understand why Muslims terrorize” (146). Just in case some readers don’t get why this is a ridiculous question, Naqvi makes sure to add Chuck’s ironic comment: “As a Muslim, he figured, I would have special insight. ... But like everybody, I figured the hijackers were a bunch of crazy Saudi bastards” (146).

Naqvi’s deployment of Chuck’s first-person perspective coupled with his cheeky asides calls on all readers’ sympathy to be aligned with Chuck, directing all readers towards understanding and caring about what he feels as he undergoes this Kafkaesque inquisition. Unlike the first-person narrator of Hamid’s narrative, who averts many Western and non-Western readers’ sympathy (let alone identification) by his frequent problematic moves, Chuck’s first-person narrative, despite or precisely because of his naïveté and bewildered innocence, makes Chuck more sympathetic to all readers. Moreover, Chuck’s humorous irreverence, his ability to better his questioner by the use of wisecracks and wit, works to draw even initially unsympathetic readers into siding with Chuck. Naqvi does not give readers the choice to opt out that Hamid does. Unlike Hamid, Naqvi does not use strategies that might divide his readers. To put it another way, Naqvi does not create a divided address that would divide his readers, and calls instead for a more unified response. The narrative allows no doubt that Chuck is the injured party, while it both entertains and educates Western and non-Western readers with humor into a greater complexity of understanding.

When Grizzly demands again that Chuck should explain why Muslims are terrorists, Chuck attempts to answer, recalling salutary history lessons from AC, reminding his interrogator that historically Islam has not been associated with terrorism, nor does Islam have a monopoly on it, and that, to be accurate, terrorism in the 20th century was pioneered by Serbs in Austria, Jews in Palestine, followed and perfected by the Japanese, Hindus in India, and Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. Effectively, Chuck, and hence Naqvi, deploy deconstructive logic and knowledge of world history to debunk the racist assumptions that one, all Muslims are terrorists, and two, that all terrorists are Muslim--and to rebut them with two key points: one, many terrorists are *not* Muslims; and two, that most Muslims are not terrorists (147). When, somewhat deflated, the interrogator says, "All I want to know is why the hell did they have to blow up the Twin Towers," Chuck replies with an equalizing gesture: 'Your guess, sir, is as good as mine.' "Can't you put yourself in their shoes" asks Grizzly, still trying to connect Chuck to the 9/11 terrorists by association with religion or culture. "No," answers Chuck, "can you?" again implicitly challenging the assumption that he would have an insider's knowledge of the terrorists' motivations (147-48).

Chuck's (and Naqvi's) use of humor and logic together thus enables the novel to debunk, to upend the dangerously implicit by making it explicit, exposing pernicious assumptions as patently ridiculous and unjust. On Chuck's part, the humor works both to undermine the interrogator's power, and to reassert his own resilience and resistance in a situation of powerlessness. On Naqvi's part, the humor ameliorates the intensity and ugliness, while not reducing the seriousness, enabling him to appeal to and reach readers who might otherwise be averse to the points that could not be as effective if made straight. Naqvi enhances the point with the final irony that Grizzly *still* does not get it: though he finally lets Chuck go, Grizzly continues to see and reports Chuck as "defend[ing] terrorism" (148).²² Naqvi makes explicit the absurdity of those powerful assumptions and frameworks, upending them forcefully through humor.

Ending Conclusively (or Otherwise)

Yet another significant problem in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is its inconclusive ending. With Changez's abruptly terminated last words, as if the speaker-listener relationship ends because one or other no longer exists, Hamid leaves it open to readers to decide whether Changez is killed by the American who pulls a gun on him, or whether Changez or some third party kills one of them. While clearly Hamid's goal was to mirror back to readers how their own presuppositions color the way they read, unfortunately, as I have shown elsewhere, this salutary instruction often fails to come across, leading a large number of Western readers to confirm, instead of dispelling, their prejudices (Hai, "Pitfalls"). Hamid's ambiguity, in other words, does not work to achieve Hamid's goals. It does not push back against the frameworks of suspicion of Muslims. In contrast, Naqvi chooses clarity, leaving no doubt not only of Chuck's innocence, but also clearing and resolving, seemingly by accident, the mystery of Mo's disappearance, on account of whom Chuck gets embroiled in his misadventure with the FBI. As if to push back further against the ambiguity of *RF*, Naqvi hits us with a final twist, and a surprise. Where Hamid refuses closure, Naqvi insists on double closure, a double ending that concludes both Chuck's story in America, as well as that of his missing friend, Mo.

In one ending, Chuck, after release from the detention center, decides to leave the US, even though he is assured both of a romantic and conjugal future with Amo, Jimbo's sister, and of a new job that will give him the legal visa-status he needs to stay. At a key moment in Central Park, Chuck reflects on Holden Caulfield's question, "Where do the ducks fly in winter?" (245). For Chuck, the answer is emigration, departure from the US, as if he needs refuge from the winter of unwelcome and the destruction of the American dream. Even as he contemplates a future with Amo, Chuck sees a "short black female cop" coming towards him: "though there was nothing unusual in her appearance, nothing threatening in her manner, I shrank within myself and looked away" (249). It is only later that Chuck realizes not only that she was not coming for him, but that he had a panic attack, and passed out, and that he "had been in the throes of some sort of culture-bound psychosomatic psychosis," such that "the authorities gave [him] existential heebie-jeebies" (250). Naqvi's point is that the experience of living after 9/11 in New York City,

especially after Chuck's experience with detention, has given him a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. He can no longer live there, even if he wants to. After a bout with depression and attempted suicide, Chuck decides to return "home," to Pakistan. As a final indictment of the US response to 9/11, Chuck tells his mother, "there was a time when a police presence was reassuring, like at a parade or late at night, ... but now I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid all the time. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal. It's no way to live" (262).

But, as if the story of Chuck is not enough, Naqvi adds, as an addendum, or a second ending, the story of Mo. As Chuck is leaving the U.S. and packing up his apartment, he comes across an old issue of *The New York Times* that finally reveals what happened to his missing friend. The narrative thus picks up the thread left dangling since the three friends were apprehended by the FBI, for until the last pages, we do not know what happened to Mo, for whom they made the trip to Connecticut. As Chuck now discovers, Shah was in the twin towers on September 11, 2001, and did not survive. (The *Times* in reality did run a regular column titled "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief," commemorating those lost to the 9/11 attacks as their details were discovered.) Fortuitously Chuck thus comes across Mo's obituary, which cannot of course include the textured details of his life known to his friends. Chuck comments, "It was the oddest obituary. ... There was no mention of the ship jumping, gas pumping, porn watching, cigarette running--...and there was no mention of us. The story was simple, black and white: the man was a Muslim, not a terrorist" (270). While giving credit to the *TNYT* for its attempt to dispel prejudice, to undo the frameworks of suspicion, by telling the truth about Muslims who also died in the attacks, Naqvi's novel, by contrast, knowingly does more than give a simple portrayal of a Muslim as not-a-terrorist. Instead, with the stories of all four men, he complicates, humanizes, and ironizes. And, almost as a direct response to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, he maintains clarity. In so doing, Naqvi makes an importantly different intervention than Hamid. *Home Boy* has its weaknesses as first novel, but it knows--and fulfills--its responsibility as a post-9/11 anti-anti-Muslim novel.

Naqvi and Hamid's Male Narrators' Approaches to Women and Gender

Finally, another sticking point in Hamid's novel is Changez the narrator's troubling approach to gender and sexuality. Changez, from the start, is restricted to viewing women as objects of the male gaze. At the teashop, he invites the American to share in his pleasure at gazing at some "attractive" girls in jeans and T-shirts (*RF* 16), students from a local arts college that he is proud to display as signifiers both of the permissiveness of Lahore culture and of the "prett[iness]" of its female population (*RF*, 22). This sexualized ocularity is intensified in his account of his meeting with Erica, to whom he is attracted for her exposed body, and whom he instrumentalizes for the access she provides to upper-class New York circles of whiteness, wealth, and power. Worse, as their relationship progresses, Changez ignores Erica's mental illness and contributes to her final decline when he persuades her, in an encounter that verges on the non-consensual, to have sex with him by pretending that he is her deceased white lover Chris. In such a representation of Changez, Hamid unfortunately feeds the Western stereotype of the deceptive, predatory Muslim male as a sexual threat to white women.

Naqvi, by contrast, approaches the problem of Western stereotypes of Muslim men and women very differently. First, the woman that Chuck becomes romantically involved with is not white but a Pakistani American, Amo, introduced in teenage boy lingo as "Jimbo's hot kid sister," to whom Chuck is attracted for her engaging feistiness and familial connection, not for her nationality/citizenship (*HB*, 51). *She*, moreover, pursues Chuck, while he remains self-restrained. Through this deft move, Naqvi upends the stereotypes of both the compliant, passive Muslim woman with no agency, and of the over-aggressive Muslim man. Second, Naqvi also takes on the thorny question of Muslim women veiling, with an unexpected angle. Chuck's attraction to Amo is diminished, not enhanced, by the fact that recently, upon starting her freshman year of college, she has "donned the hijab" or head scarf (*HB*, 61). To Chuck, this seeming act of religiosity is unappealing: "it weirded me out," he reports (68). Chuck's own mother, whom he describes as "a paragon of virtue and grace and sensibility," has never worn one, even though she lives in Pakistan while Amo lives in New Jersey (*HB*, 68). Chuck's discomfort with the hijab is not, however, based merely on unfamiliarity, but on reason. It seems

to him both the result of a “faulty interpretation” of the Quran, and an unnecessarily public emblazoning of only one aspect of one’s identity: “I did not care to wear my identity on my sleeve,” is his understated quip (*HB*, 68). It is not until almost the end of the novel that Amo reveals that she began wearing the hijab not for religious reasons, but to ward off unwelcome advances from white boys in high school (*HB*, 265). She does not explain however, why, at the end, she has decided to discontinue wearing it, implying perhaps that as a college student, she has now found more adult modes of dispelling unwanted male attention. Nonetheless, though Chuck now finds her even more attractive, after his experiences at the MDC, even Amo’s desire and desirability are insufficient to keep him in the US.

The incipient romance with Amo, and the contrast with Erica does not however mean that Naqvi makes a case against interracial or cross-cultural relationships. Jimbo, Amo’s brother, is in a long-term relationship with an upper-class white woman, Dora, and the two eventually become engaged despite the initial reluctance of both fathers, whose approval they eventually secure. But unlike Erica (for Changez), Dora is not a means of entry to America or Americanness for Jimbo (for one thing, he is already American). Naqvi thus offers a diversity of romantic possibilities (instead of a single, problematic sexual allegory), and avoids the problems that Hamid falls into with regard to gender and prevalent negative assumptions about Muslims and gender. In fact, Naqvi actively counters these problems by offering complex, nuanced portrayals of a variety of attitudes to gender and to the gendered identities of men and women who inhabit cultures of Islam.

At a key moment, Dora, annoyed with Jimbo’s need for his father’s approval, despite his otherwise western ways, criticizes the home-boys’ apparent two-facedness:

“I don’t get how you guys are always boozing it up and everything, but, like, aren’t supposed to. Jimbo’s father doesn’t know his son drinks. He certainly doesn’t know we’ve been dating for years. That’s crazy to me. . . . I mean, you guys are like one way here, like hardcore, homeboys, whatever, but when you guys go home, you become different, all proper and conservative. You have to decide what you’re about--” (*HB*, 92-93)

But Chuck interrupts her with a pointed response:

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Easy on, Dora!” My mouth was dry, and I felt sweaty and dizzy. “You’re about, like thirty-one? Have you decided what you’re all about yet? Why is it so strange that our behavior is, um, defined by certain contexts? Do you snort coke in front of your parents? I mean, what’s this really all about?” (*HB*, 93)

Chuck’s bodily reaction to these charges of effective hypocrisy attest to how deeply they hurt. His response is an important one, because it contests her assumptions that identity is simply and internally consistent, and that Muslim men are the only ones to manifest apparent inconsistency. Pungently, he points out her double-standards, as he reminds her that white Westerners like herself also conduct themselves by different standards than their parents’, and also do not divulge those truths to their families, but expect Muslims to live up to a consistency and openness they do not practice themselves. More to the point, the “homeboys” seeming duality is not necessarily an indicator of hypocrisy or confusion, as she implies, but of the conditions of hybrid existence. Muslims, men and women, who live by western codes may not be internally troubled by their own practices, but may not wish to distress their parents who live by other codes and who would neither accept nor understand nor be able to explain to their communities their offspring’s different systems of belief or unbelief. Most importantly, Naqvi suggests, the non-disclosure of one’s life choices to parents is neither unique to the “homeboys”/secular Muslims like Chuck himself, nor a mark of confusion or contradiction, but rather, a signifier of the simultaneous habitation of dual sets of codes, one set to which they are inclined by choice, and the other by familial allegiance, love and reluctance to create familial hurt, shame, or strife.

Conclusion

Home Boy offers both a critique of and a tactical alternative to Hamid’s novel. My goal is not to set up an either-or choice between these two novels, which clearly have different strengths and weaknesses. *RF* is acclaimed for good reasons, for both its formal and political interventions. But some of its particular strategies and modes of representation produce significant problems when it comes to addressing frameworks of suspicion and contesting global Islamophobia. *Home Boy* is more modest, but it tackles head-on that framework and attempts to reframe the problem,

to break through the frame/framing, from the standpoint of the wrongly feared and suspected. It also makes admirable formal innovations and shows itself connected to various strains of the American (male) literary tradition (*The Great Gatsby*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Black Boy*). While *HB* also has aspects that are less successful or admirable, (a sentimental sub-plot of family reunion, and occasional simplified or unfinished characterization), it poses nonetheless an important alternative to Hamid's novel in its clarity of purpose and execution, its emphasis on the trauma experienced by Muslims, its renunciation of the temptations of ambiguity, and more thoughtful approach to issues of gender with regard to Muslims. Naqvi's textual strategies (humor, self-irony, and ultimate clarity about the innocuousness of his narrator-protagonist, and hence his narrative), perhaps due to a more knowing view of globally dominant readership, work to upend his readers' expectations and preconceptions, and bespeak an arguably more responsible politics of literary intervention. These strategies, I argue, contribute more effectively to Naqvi's (indeed both authors') goals of intervening in, unsettling, and countering dominant discourses that perpetuate neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia. I read both novels as valuable postcolonial interventions and responses to 9/11, post-9/11 US imperialist and Islamophobic frameworks, but I highlight key differences of form and strategy that carry different consequences given prevalent conditions of global suspicion and anti-Muslim prejudice in an age of fear-mongering and terror.

In his contribution to *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Robert Eaglestone argues that leading contemporary Anglophone writers (Ian McEwan, Jonathan Safran, Martin Amis, and even Salman Rushdie) fail, in their post-9/11 fiction, "to address precisely the concerns with terrorism that they set out to claim. Yet this failure ... makes us aware of the limits of current Western understandings of these crises, and perhaps, also, of the contemporary limits of the novel's form itself" (361). I would agree that the fiction of these male writers reveals the limits of—and is limited by—the Western frameworks that they use. (It would be interesting to investigate how and to what extent differently situated women writers, both Western and non-Western, challenge these frameworks.²³) But I disagree that the problem lies in the form of the novel. As the work of

hybrid or Westernized non-Western writers like Hamid and Naqvi shows, the novel form is perfectly capable of challenging these frameworks. Much depends on what strategies writers choose to employ and the extent to which the writers reframe, or attempt to dispel or undo the frameworks of suspicion. Indeed, that is the great responsibility of such fiction. Robert C. Young notes:

Fiction has the unique ability not only to represent terror, to mediate it through narration, but also to produce it. The question to be asked is whether it can also effect a counter-discourse of resistance. Can fiction also show us how to move out of terror, how to refuse its effects?" (310)

Both Hamid and Naqvi demonstrate that they can produce this postcolonial counter-discourse. But, as I have tried to argue, we have to be attentive to the particular strategies post-9/11 postcolonial fiction chooses, given the context in which it is likely to be received. Naqvi offers an example of a post-9/11 postcolonial novelist more savvy in the strategies he uses to achieve his goals.

Works Cited

- Allen, Chris. *Islamophobia*. England: Ashgate, 2010.
- Boehmer, Elleke and Stephen Morton. "Introduction." *Terror and the Postcolonial*. Eds, Elleke Boehmer & Stephen Morton. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. 1-24.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995. 3-12.
- Delueze Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "What is a Minor Literature?" *Falling Into Theory*. Ed. David Richter. New York: St. Martin's, 1994. 166-172.
- Eaglestone, Robert. "'The age of reason was over ... an age of fury was dawning': Contemporary Fiction and Terror." *Terror and the Postcolonial*. Eds, Elleke Boehmer & Stephen Morton. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. 361-369.
- Ernst, Carl, ed. *Islamophobia in America: An Anatomy of Intolerance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

- Esposito, John, and Ibrahim Kalin, eds. *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Golimowska, Karolina. *The Post-9/11 City in Novels: Literary Remappings of New York and London*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016.
- Gauthier, Tim. *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness*. Lexington Books, 2015.
- Hai, Ambreen. "Pitfalls of Ambiguity in Contexts of Islamophobia: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Studies in the Novel* 52.4 (Winter 2020): 434-458.
- "Uses of Humor in Post-9/11 Pakistani Anglophone Fiction: H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* and Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*." *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing*. Eds. Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam. London: Routledge, 2019. 80-93.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. New York: Harcourt, 2007.
- Discontent and Its Civilizations*. New York: Penguin, 2015.
- Hammad, Suheir. "First Writing Since." 2001.
https://web.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/first_writing.pdf. Accessed April 10, 2021.
- Morey, Peter. *Islamophobia and the Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Morey, Peter, and Amina Yaqin. *Framing Muslims*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Naber, Nadine. "'Look, Mohammed the Terrorist is Coming!': Cultural Racism, Nation-based Racism, and the Intersectionality of Oppressions after 9/11." In Jamal, A. and Naber, N. (eds.) *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008.
- Naqvi, H. M. *Home Boy*. New York: Random House, 2009.
- Phelan, James. "The Immigrant Experience in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Third and Final Continent': Postcolonial and Rhetorical Perspectives." *Narratology and Ideology: Negotiating Context, Form, and Theory in Postcolonial Narratives*. Eds. Divya Dwivedi, et al. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2018. 173-192.
- Roy, Bidhan Chandra. "The Tragic Mulatto Revisited: Post 9/11 Pakistani-American Identities

- in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* and Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 11. 2 (2011): 1-17.
- Sheehi, Stephen. *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims*. Atlanta: Clarity, 2011.
- Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Ware, Vron. "The White Fear Factor." In Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (eds), *Terror and the Postcolonial*. 99-112.
- Young, Robert C. "Terror Effects." *Terror and the Postcolonial*. Eds, Elleke Boehmer & Stephen Morton. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. 307-328.
- Zayed, Hasan al-. "'The City's Changed': *Home Boy*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the Post-9/11 Urban Experience." In De, Aparajita (ed.) *South Asian Racialization and Belonging after 9/11: Masks of Threat*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2016.

NOTES

¹ Although the history and etymology of the term Islamophobia suggest merely a fear of Islam or Muslims, in fact, as many scholars argue, Islamophobia encompasses a complex of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam political, racial, anti-immigrant, nationalist, and gendered attitudes and practices with deep historical, Orientalist roots in Europe and America. Carl Ernst describes it as "anti-Islamic prejudice" that has been promoted, in the US, by organized, well-funded right-wing networks, that permeates politics, popular media, public opinion, journalism, and is institutionalized in the police and military (8). I understand Islamophobia both as: "a form of racism, based on assumptions about (and attributions of) inherent characteristics linked with national origin, or other markers such as names, forms of dress, etc.," that shows how "race" continues to shift, and how "'racism' is constantly being remade" (Naber, 303); and as "an ideological formation" emergent from post-Cold War politics, that has accompanied and enabled the rise of U.S. imperialism and globalization, and which "exists to promote political and economic goals, both domestically and abroad" (Sheehi, 31-32). Peter Morey rightly clarifies that Islamophobia is not just "direct hostility" to Muslims leading to "discrimination or violence," but includes "the legitimizing frames of thought that allow Muslims to be 'Othered' in a whole variety of ways," as a form of "cultural racism" (126, 127). See also Allen for a more detailed account of Islamophobia in Britain and Europe, and Esposito and Kalin for a multidisciplinary collection of approaches. That said, I also value the importance of reserving

space to make valid critiques of *all* religions, and am wary of the misuse of the charge of Islamophobia to shut down any criticism of Islam.

² Western scholars who have published books on this genre also tend to replicate this tendency to focus on white American perspectives and writings. See for instance Versluys and Gauthier. Morey is an important exception.

³ Hamid and Naqvi belong to and have inside knowledge of cultures of Islam, which does not necessarily mean that they identify as religious, believing or practicing Muslims. Both are also double-voiced, in that they have access to the discourses that enable them to speak at once to Western and non-Western cultures. Mohsin Hamid was born in Pakistan, grew up in the US, returned to Lahore for high school, and attended Princeton University, where he earned his B.A. After completing a law degree from Harvard University, he worked as a financial consultant at McKinsey & Company in New York City. He has lived for long stretches in London and Pakistan. H. M. Naqvi, also born in Pakistan, spent some of his childhood in Algeria, and attended Georgetown University, where he earned his B.A. He worked at the World Bank before obtaining his M.F.A. in creative writing at Boston University. He now lives in Karachi, Pakistan.

⁴ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2007 and won numerous other awards, including the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature. It was selected by *The Guardian* as one of the books that defined the decade (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/dec/05/books-of-the-noughties>) and has been assigned reading for incoming undergraduates at numerous American colleges. In 2012, it was adapted into a film of the same title by Mira Nair. *Home Boy* has also drawn positive attention, though not to the same extent. It won the first DSC prize for South Asian literature in 2011. Naqvi has also won the Phelam Prize for poetry and gained prominence in various US slam poetry performances.

⁵ See for example Roy, Zayed, Golimowska.

⁶ In his discussion of this novel's exploration of urban spaces as sites of contestation between "Muslim migrant subjects" and Islamophobic "individuals and institutions" (127), Peter Morey comments on the title: "From being a 'Home Boy'—a hip and trusted member of the New York scene—Chuck becomes persona non grata, told to 'go home, boy'" (*Islamophobia and the Novel*, 146). In my view, the title uses the colloquial term "home boy" (meaning male peers from one's hometown living in a foreign place) to highlight the Pakistani origins of Chuck and his friends as the primary bond between them.

⁷ Chuck's breakdown is marked: he passes out after a panic attack, and ends up attempting to commit suicide. Changez's breakdown is less obvious (especially in contrast with Erica, whose mental illness gets far more attention and resources), but he also has a slow, and to him inexplicable, pathological reaction, manifested in his inability to work, until he returns to Pakistan.

⁸ In a reversal of chronology, Naqvi ends his otherwise chronological narrative not with the moment of departure, but with the moment of arrival, with Chuck ironically remembering, as he leaves, his naïve optimism, hopes and impressions upon first arrival, and his first taxicab ride to the tune of Frank Sinatra's song "Start Spreading the News" ("New York, New York") (274). The dischronological placement of this epilogue heightens the poignancy of those dashed hopes and shattered dreams, as it is juxtaposed with what the reader by now knows was to follow.

⁹ OED, accessed April 5, 2021.

¹⁰ Vron Ware discusses "white fear" as explanatory of Western militarism and "active forms of racism alive today" directed at putative enemies both within and without Western nations (99).

As she argues, “the phenomenon of white fear helps to identify a connection between ... two currents: the reaction to perceived and imagined threats coming from outside the country, and the undertow of white supremacy that determines a predictable response to all manner of insecurity” (100).

¹¹ See my essay, “Pitfalls of Ambiguity” (2020), for more detailed discussion of these problems.

¹² Hamid, *Discontent*, 104.

¹³ First-person character narrators can certainly be unreliable for unintentional reasons such as limited understanding, bias, or memory, but Naqvi does not augment the unreliability of the form, as Hamid does, with a frame that suggests a deliberate or intentional liar. Naqvi uses the convention of the straightforward, sincere, and engaging first-person narrator, who, without flags that evoke suspicion, instead invites empathy and trust. In fact, such a narrator constitutes what James Phelan calls a reliable narrator.

¹⁴ Hamid, *Discontent*, 93.

¹⁵ Phelan distinguishes between three types of reliable narrators, along a spectrum of author-character narrator-audience relationships, depending on the thinness or thickness of the intervening filter.

¹⁶ The *Gatsby* reference works on several levels. One, it establishes both Naqvi’s familiarity with the American canon, and suggests how his novel might extend or revise it. Second, it introduces the ominous hint that Mo, the Shaman, too will ultimately not win the American game of seeming meritocracy: like *Gatsby*, who could not overcome the embedded hierarchies of class difference, this *Gatsby* will be obstructed by differences of race.

¹⁷ See my essay, “Uses of Humor” (2019), where I elaborate on how Naqvi and other post-9/11 Pakistani Anglophone writers deploy humor as a tactic of resistance, defusion, and connection-building.

¹⁸ To clarify, I am not arguing that authors from underrepresented communities must make their protagonists likeable or produce merely positive representations. I am arguing for complex representations that nonetheless, do not feed prejudice, and that attempt instead to challenge and undo lazy assumptions.

¹⁹ It would be well to remember here Deleuze and Guattari’s famous remarks (regarding Kafka and Jews in Germany) on minority literatures, in which “everything is political,” “everything takes on a collective value,” and where “the political domain has contaminated every statement” (166, 167).

²⁰ Needless to say, Naqvi here thus also underscores the point that not all Muslims are Arabs. Nor are all Arabs Muslims.

²¹ Chuck leaves his exact location unclear. Later, his mother tells him that she was told that the building he had worked in had collapsed (175).

²² Eventually Jimbo, an American citizen, is released thanks to the string-pulling influence of his rich white girlfriend, who fondly affirms his normality and belonging, “Jimbo’s many things—a great DJ, a bad drunk—but he’s no terrorist” (209). But AC remains in detention, because though they cannot implicate him in terrorism, “the authorities [find] ... some cocaine on his person” (245). It remains unclear whether the drugs were planted or in fact found, and whether his sister, a doctor with influential friends, can secure his release.

²³ Novels by cosmopolitan women writers affiliated with Islamic cultures, such as Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* and *Burnt Shadows*, and Laila Hallaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*, offer important alternatives that I cannot address within the scope of this essay.