

Chapter Three – Wall Street Sons: American Hospitality in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*

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The following chapter is part of a wider chapter taken from a dissertation submitted to Leeds Beckett University. The dissertation situates second-wave post-9/11 novels in relation to the broader post-9/11 literary production, post-colonial approaches to the 'war on terror' and Derrida's deconstructive theories. The texts studied in this chapter and in the wider dissertation openly call into question the destructive stereotypes that contribute to the dehumanisation of minority communities. The post 9/11 novels studies in this dissertation address the increase in anti-muslim xenophobia and racism caused by the 9/11 attacks. However, they also examine how the 9/11 attacks unearthed historical prejudices and binaries which had hitherto been used to justify Western colonialism and imperialism. Western colonial powers have continued to distort and manipulate ideas of forgiveness and hospitality in the two decades since 9/11. These books offer an alternative, asking us as readers to push for unconditional forgiveness and universal hospitality.

Just as Shamsie highlights the instrumentalization of forgiveness in *Burnt Shadows*, Naqvi effectively highlights the conditionality of hospitality within his novel *Home Boy*. Both Mohsin Hamid's and H. M. Naqvi's novels present us with dichotomous representations of New York in the aftermath of 9/11. Before 9/11 the city space is a relatively hospitable and welcoming space; allowing immigrants from various backgrounds to assimilate into the very fabric of the city: "after spending ten months in New York, you were a New Yorker, an original settler" (Naqvi, 2009, p. 15). For Chuck and his peers, New York has become a home that welcomes migrants regardless of their ethnicity or place of origin. They are allowed to thrive and prosper in the US making it their home, arguing that they had 'since claimed the city and the city had claimed' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 3) them. However, after 9/11 all sense of hospitality and belonging is suddenly replaced with an 'almost inconceivable Otherness' which 'betrayed all sense of reason that pre-9/11 America had promised' (Heidemann, 2012). Naqvi's work employs a variety of literary strategies, such as recurrent allusions to African American rap culture, to call into question the conditionality of the hospitality shown to Muslim immigrants.

Through his theories, Derrida presents us with his political ideal of a 'democracy to come' (2001, p. 55) in which he emphasises the 'deconstruction' (2001, p.viii) of harmful binaries perpetuated in contemporary society which lead to the othering of marginalised communities. The theories of unconditional forgiveness and unconditional hospitality encourage the dialogue between 'host and parasite', 'friend and enemy', 'West and East'. In the aftermath of 9/11, Derrida's philosophical reflections on forgiveness and hospitality in relation to otherization are significant because he places particular significance on the universal rights of refugees and asylum seekers. However, he also questions the realities of 'unconditional hospitality' in reference to what he has coined the 'refugee problem'. If both physical and social borders are removed, what distinguishes and keeps the host land safe is removed; therefore, the safety of the host land is demolished. Derrida argues that there is no immediate or feasible solution to

this problem. However, we can use his theories to question the hierarchal binaries that lead to the otherization and dehumanisation of minority groups.

H.M Naqvi's novel stands alongside the works of Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, and Kamila Shamsie which present us with distinctly anti-orientalist portrayals of 9/11 and the West's 'War on Terror'. However, unlike Hamid and Shamsie, Naqvi's novel has been overlooked by many critics. This is perhaps because it is not a seminal work in the emergence of this writing but instead a perfect example of what 'deconstructive' post 9/11 writing should be. His narrative skilfully brings together Derrida's ideas of forgiveness and hospitality that underpin many post 9/11 novels. Birte Heidemann argues that 'Naqvi's narrative draws attention to the "post-9/11" post-Orientalist ideologies' (Heidemann, 2012), which place narrative autonomy in the hands of the 'other'. From the outset of the novel, Naqvi's protagonists are characterized as 'metrostanis', three Pakistani men living in New York, 'potential terrorists' (2012). The characters fight the dominant rhetoric of the war on terror where the stereotypical identification of one's ethnicity and or religion leads to immediate distrust and suspicion. According to Heidemann, the novel uses a series of 'rhetorical ploys' (2012) to question the dominant hierarchical binaries which perpetuated a sense of otherness in the aftermath of 9/11. One of these 'rhetorical ploys' is the novel's use of 'the spatial' (Golimowska, 2016, p. 70). Set in New York the novel combats post-9/11 "othering" and the East-West binaries, creating a novel in which 'cities function as synecdoches for the civilizations and cultures in which they are situated, and hence correspond to various levels of the dichotomous reality' (Golimowska, 2016).

On various levels, post 9/11 novels employ city spaces to examine the multi-layered post-9/11 duality. The city serves as a key to comprehending the wider effects of 9/11 on American hospitality. The use of setting within post 9/11 novels is extremely important as it highlights the ambiguity of the Other. Changez others his white American; whilst Chuck resolves to return to Karachi in *Home Boy* to avoid being labelled as the 'Other' in post-9/11 New York. The majority of post 9/11 novels are set in New York, centring around the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2001. As the centrepieces of the World Trade Centre, the Twin Towers represented the increasing globalization of American values and culture. This is where post 9/11 anglophone Pakistani writers can be distinguished from Western post 9/11 writers, as the Western writers tend to focus more on the immediate 'victims of the attack' whereas post 9/11 anglophone Pakistani writers tend to focus on the wider impact of the attacks such as the West War on Terror, as well as the 'symbolism of it all' (Hamid, 2008, p. 83). Within their novels, the financial sector is presented as a microcosm of wider American and Western Hospitality in Post 9/11 fiction. Thus, the attitudes and views valued perpetuated in wider society are reflected in the sector. As a fresh graduate Chuck, is welcomed and encouraged into the 'secret, intricate, if procrustean machinery that made capitalism tick' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 29). However, after 9/11, society has grown considerably more hostile to Muslims, particularly South Asian Muslim males, and this shift in attitudes and sentiments has become much more visible. Within the novels this change has been mirrored in the treatment of the characters in the workplace. Chuck is fired from his job without any plausible reason, despite him becoming a 'slave' (p. 29) to the system. Just like the discrimination and violence

seen in wider society, Chuck being fired from his job 'isn't personal' (p. 30), it is simply an extension of the 'Invisible Hand' (p. 30) of discrimination caused by the rampant Islamophobia that is still present to this day. In this context, Naqvi refers to Adam Smith's theory of the Invisible Hand, which he coined in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759. It is an economic term that outlines the unintentional increased societal advantages and public good brought about by people acting in their own self-interest. Chuck's VP brings him into his office and explains how he is 'taking one for the team' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 30). The utilization of this notion as a reason for Chuck's dismissal demonstrates how individual and social biases found justification after 9/11. Naqvi appears to be suggesting that, in the aftermath of 9/11, societal and cultural prejudice, racism, and xenophobia were justifiable as a kind of self-defence.

Hospitality, according to Derrida, is conditional in the sense that the immigrant or outsider must fit the requirements of the known 'other', suggesting that hospitality is not extended to a guest who is completely unknown or unpredictable since the host has no reason to trust or welcome them. After 9/11, prior preconceptions and ideas of the 'other' or guests drastically changed into images of the parasitical enemy. The acceptable 'other' of the useful immigrant is challenged; the Pakistani or Muslim immigrant is no longer the safe and predictable guest, thus, becoming a parasite. Within the novel, Naqvi presents us with both conditional and unconditional hospitality, as well as the distinctly different treatments of guests and parasites. Naqvi deconstructs this symbiotic relationship as flawed. The American host controls the discourse surrounding the relationship. This means they can dictate whether the immigrant is a guest or a parasite. All though Chuck is 'Dependable, Conscientious' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 30), he is still cast aside after 9/11, despite it not being 'personal' (p. 30). The hospitality is shown to be conditional; he is only welcome if he is useful to the host.

'The theoretical premise of America' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 15) is a symbiotic relationship between the American host and the immigrant guest which benefits both mutually. Chuck is actively encouraged to learn the secrets of the trade and is welcomed as a vital piece of the machine that is the heart of American society. For Chuck and his fellow 'able young Pakistani men' (p. 28), 'the pursuit of happiness' 'was material' (p. 28), found in the potential 'millions' being offered by America. The efficiency and speed with which Chuck achieves his mother's dream of becoming 'her *Wall Street son*' shocks him, seemingly proving the sincerity of the American hospitality being presented. Whilst he is preoccupied with fulfilling his dream of a 'happy, all-American family' (p. 28), he is willing to work 'fourteen, fifteen-hour days, including most weekends' (p. 29). The colloquial candour with which Chuck addresses the demanding nature of his job leads us to question the conditionality of the hospitality being offered by The United States; Naqvi's presentation of US Hospitality, in Derridean terms, is not as unconditional as it seems. For Derrida unconditional hospitality necessitates the 'host' allowing 'guests' to act as they like; there should be no pressure or responsibility to act in a certain way. Unconditional hospitality does not place a demand on the 'guest' that would make them feel pressured. Despite not having an 'aptitude for the sciences' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 29) or a complex grasp of 'financial concepts' (p. 30), Chuck works overtime to 'create value' and 'make markets more efficient' (p. 29). Like Changez, Chuck's employment in wall street allows him access to

American hospitality but it also exposes the conditionality of this hospitality, as he constantly having to prove himself by the 'exacting standards of Wall Street' (p.30).

In a 2018 report issued by the Watson Institute, 'between 480,000 and 507,000 people have been killed in the United States' post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan' (Crawford, 2018). These numbers only include the number of people killed by direct military action. The exact number of those killed or harmed by Islamophobic violence perpetuated by the unforgiving rhetoric of the United States and its counterparts after 9/11 is unknown. The novels seek to address the impact of the rise in xenophobia and islamophobia seen in the aftermath of 9/11. In her comparative critique of both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Boy*, Ambreen Hai argues that 'Hamid creates a voice that actively invites suspicion, that in fact stokes fear based on dominant Western stereotypes of Muslims' (Hai, 2022, p. 9). In contrast, 'Naqvi's novel simply plunges into the first-person autobiographical narrative, recognizable as belonging in a convention that dispels suspicion instead of prompting it' (p. 9). She argues that Hamid fails to recognize the strength of suspicion frameworks or the extent to which the othering and distrust of Muslims predisposes the majority of his Western readers to consider *Changez* as a 'fundamentalist'. Hai seems to suggest that whilst Hamid's novel implicitly and psychologically challenges the biased prejudices perpetuated in wider Western society, it is perhaps not explicit enough in its criticism of harmful binaries. However, it is important to acknowledge that the novel defies a single, moralistic interpretation, Hamid uses these frameworks of suspicion consciously to challenge the reader to consider their own imbrication within them. Naqvi, on the other hand, appears to be more astute about these 'global frameworks of suspicion' (Hai, 2022). For Hai, Naqvi's colloquial language and frequent references to American cultural idioms make the story's protagonist seem authentic and free of any misleading stereotypes. The simplicity of language and characterization lends itself to the novel's sense of authenticity and helps to question the harmful stereotypes that are attributed to the Muslim 'other'. This further emphasizes the unforgiving hostility with which the innocent protagonists are treated.

When the trio are attacked in Jake's 'speakeasy' by the 'waxen physiques of brawlers', Chuck comments that 'it was almost like we weren't just contending with each other but with the crushing momentum of history' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 23). No matter how they try to diffuse the situation they will still be attacked simply because of their appearance as 'A-rabs', 'Muslims, Mo-hicans' (p. 24). The city will never let them forget that they are outsiders, and they will never be forgiven for the crimes they did not commit. After the brawl, AC starts to quote from the 1988 song 'Straight outta Compton'. The critic Kiran Mehta argues that certain South Asian communities "attribute their harassment to the same systems of surveillance, imprisonment, and state-sanctioned brutality' (Mehta, 2013) that Black Americans do. She references the work of Nitasha Tamar Sharma who, in her book *Hip hop Desis: South Asian Americans, blackness, and a global race consciousness*, argues that the bonds between desi hip hop artists and their "Black peers" and "international communities" were strengthened after September 11. This is because traditionally both communities have not been allowed to assimilate seamlessly with traditional white America. 9/11 served to highlight these prejudices and how for some

communities accessing unconditional hospitality has never been an option, having been treated as 'parasites' rather than guests.

The protagonists struggle to come to terms with their "othering" in the Western world. This is highlighted in this iteration of N.W.A.'s song, 'Niggaz start to mumble/ They want to rumble/ Mix'em and cook 'em in a pot like gumbo...'. Here AC directly identifies with a marginalized community that seeks to question the instrumentalization of hospitality. 'Naqvi attempts to blend highbrow intellectual elements with narrative devices from popular culture to explore the impacts of the ill-conceived war on terror '(Sawhney, 2011). He is suggesting that we need to view the Islamophobic attacks in the novel as a part of a wider systemic 'otherization' of people of colour rather than just one of the many instances of violence that happened in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This is evident in Chuck's reactions to the continuous looks he receives while riding the metro. Regardless of how 'conscious' and uncomfortable the looks on the metro make him feel, he claims that 'it was a free country: he was free to stare' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 122), as though he accepted this treatment as a normal response to his presence. Yet, he tries to make himself less conspicuous 'like a child attempting to render himself invisible' (p. 122).

One of the numerous cultural scripts that define the characters in Naqvi's novel is their sense of kinship with an African American musical style. This scene is evocative of the various representations of microaggressions directed towards African Americans in popular culture. However, as the Sawhney suggests, this approach may be problematic because it does not acknowledge 'the relationship between social class and oppression'. Where Black Americans have been subjected to oppression and unforgiving hostility for centuries, they do not have the option to simply return to their original homes like many of the protagonists of post 9/11 novels can. Changez and Chuck both have both the financial and social means to leave America and return to Pakistan. This is because of their work on Wall Street. However, the texts encourage readers to view the repeated 'microaggressions' within the novel as part of the same prejudiced system that seeks to exploit other marginalized communities.

H. M Naqvi's novel *Home Boy* is rooted in early 2000s New York, to address the changes in sentiments towards Muslims and specifically Pakistani immigrants in the aftermath of 9/11. Where Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* uses a global narrative to question the instrumentalization of Forgiveness by Western countries. Naqvi's' novel uses the symbolic nature of the 9/11 attacks on the heart of capitalism in Western Society, to highlight the unjust utilization of hospitality in the United States. The novel's main protagonists are hip, cool 'metrostanis' who seamlessly seek to blend Eastern and Western culture to create hybrid identities which seek to ultimately challenge the 'otherization' of the East. Their immigrant Muslim identities are mixed in post 9/11 New York, where they emulate the cultural tenacity of Black rap artists to resist 'otherization' and marginalization by Western societal structures.

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