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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Home Boy: A Case of Identity Crises and Transformation**

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**ABSTRACT**

Colonial legacy has been very influential in postcolonial literature and its characters always remain under the shadows of painful past. Identity crises is a major concern in Postcolonial literature. South Asian literature especially focuses upon issues of identity, cultural clash, ambivalence and duality of people who have been under foreign rule and still live in a system that perpetuates the colonial ideology. Postcolonial literature doesn't pose any solution to such ambivalent issues but tries to make individuals and characters reconcile with such issues. This paper deals with suffering, crises and reconciliation of Chuck with his identity issues in H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*. It also explores the root causes and systematic oppression of neocolonial system that put Chuck into an ambivalent situation and finally he reconciles with his newly found identity.

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**Keywords** | 9/11, Identity Crises, Postcolonial, Transformation

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**Introduction**

With the fall of twin towers, the concept of identity becomes a challenge in USA. Especially for the denizens of 3<sup>rd</sup> world, whom identity becomes shapeless, was shifted from hybrid identity to "fixity" and question of identity in past, present and future rise in their mind. Identity crises are discussed in several postcolonial literatures. This research paper will present the identity crisis in light of Bhabha, Edward Said's concepts of Othering and stereotyping in one postcolonial fiction *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi. This research paper will investigate different questions about hybrid identity, religious identity and stereotypical identity.

Identity means individual self or the relation of an individual with society or the awareness of sameness with others in society. With the increase of immigration rate and colonization, there was a state of confusion of self (identity). Identity crisis becomes an important discussion in Post-colonial literature. Postcolonial writers are in quest of their identity, who they are? After 9/11, mostly migrated people marginalized in America and question of their identity came into their mind. In *Home Boy*, Naqvi highlights the issue of identity.

While identity has been declared a social construct, it is normally defined within two conceptual frameworks (i.e. Difference and Sameness). The Other is generally the individual who is not the 'Same', and these notions are constructs that stem from the notion of difference provided by Lacan, Spivak, Said, etc. in multiple

contexts. Generally, it is those who are socially hegemonic who impose the notions of Sameness and Otherness. Otherness remains a multi-dimensional concept dealt with by Lacan in his philosophical anthropology, by Spivak in feminist discourse, and in “the Kantian notions of taste and sense” (Buyze) that focus on the Other as being less rational and more crude and primitive. However, in imperial discourse, the concept of Otherness was further elaborated upon vis-a-vis the Us/Other binary that existed between the colonizer and the colonized. In his work *Orientalism*, Said deals with the concept of the Orient as the Other of the West: inferior, alien and conquerable.

The notion of naturalization verses nationalization has brought the hybrid identity to the margins and they are not treated as human beings but animals. This novel captures how pluralities – a conspicuous trait of the American melting pot gets altered for three Pakistani young men in the wake of 9/11.

### Literature Review

Identity means distinct personality of an individual or recognition of a person through culture, nation or religion. And during conflict identity goes into crisis because of hybridist or stereotyping. Identity crisis can be defined as conflict in thoughts of a person about identity. Identity goes into crisis when people start marginalizing because they are “Other” (Bhabha, Said) or when a specific image is made for a specific group and behave them according to that image, Bhabha termed it as “Stereotyping” and Said called it “Fixity”. When an image and identity is fixed with a person or group or nation then their own identity goes into crisis and religion, nation become their recognition and they are treated as “Other”. That cause conflict psychologically in human mind and a question raise “who they are?”. The examples of stereotypes are: “Africans are Savages”, “Indians as Barbarian” and after 9/11, a new stereotype identity is fixed with Muslims called “Terrorist” or Islam allow terrorism. When stereotypes forms, then people start resisting their identity in third space or make their own third space (Bhabha), that formation of identity is called resisting identity. During and after colonization and because of immigration, identity crisis start because of “racial/ cultural/ historical differences” (Bhabha’s *The Other Culture...*), in result identity take new form that called Hybrid Identity or crisis in identity because of “domination and power” (19) relation between colonizers (West) and colonized (East). Because of power, identity shift in stereotype identity. In Postcolonial literature, identity crisis becomes a hot issue for writers. As:

In *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie, identity remains in crisis, it move from clear identity in Japan during WW2, to hybrid identity in subcontinent, to suppressed stereotypical identity in USA after 9/11.

Hamid also discuss identity crisis in *Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez lost his national identity and religious identity was fixed with him by mainstreams but at the end he maintains his identity to comeback his own country and become a lecturer.

In Hanif Kureishi’s *Black Album*, the protagonist Shahid is also in quest of his identity he “couldn’t tolerate” (16) Paki as his identity and was not accepted as Britain in British. He was confused about his identity because he was in search “which was his real, natural self” (21).

Media also shows identity crisis because of 9/11. As Mansoor in *Khuda Kay Liye* was arrested because of his religion, his identity make fixed as terrorist and he face torture because of stereotype of USA.

Another example of identity crisis in *My Name Is Khan*, Rizwan Khan's identity was fixed as terrorist after 9/11, because of his Muslim name and he is trying to resist his identity by repeating this sentence "My name is Khan and I am not terrorist".

There are several other examples that show their characters in issue of their identity as *Heart of Darkness*, *Moth Smoke*, *Twilight in Delhi* and *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi is also one of them.

## Discussion

Identity means distinct personality of an individual or recognition of a person through culture, nation or religion. And during the conflict identity goes into crisis because of hybridist or stereotyping. Identity crisis can be defined as conflict in thoughts of a person about identity. Identity goes into crisis when people start marginalizing because they are "Other" (Bhabha, Said) or when a specific image is made for a specific group and behave them according to that image, Bhabha termed it as "Stereotyping" and Said called it "Fixity". When an image and identity is fixed with a person or group or nation, then their own identity goes into crisis, religion and nation become their recognition and they are treated as "Other". That causes psychological conflict in human mind and a question raise "who they are?". The examples of stereotypes are: "Africans are Savages", "Indians as Barbarian" and after 9/11, a new stereotype identity is fixed with Muslims called "Terrorists" or Islam allow terrorism. When stereotypes forms, then people start resisting their identity in third space or make their own third space (Bhabha), that formation of identity is called resisting identity. During and after colonization and because of immigration, identity crisis start because of "racial/ cultural/ historical differences" (Bhabha's *The Other Culture...*), as a result identity takes new form that called Hybrid Identity or crisis in identity because of "domination and power" (19) relation between colonizers (West) and colonized (East). Because of power, identity shifts in stereotype identity. In Postcolonial literature, identity crisis becomes a hot issue for writers.

H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* presents the issue of identity of Muslims in Western countries. It also presents the problems that Muslims face in USA after 9/11. The novel discusses the way in which identity goes into crisis and effects of stereotypes on hybrid identities that transform identities and destroyed others psyche and life also.

The novel opens with the woe of identity "We'd become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren't before". (1) Shows that before 9/11 they all were same but now their hybrid identity transforms. This novel is about the experiences of protagonist Chuck (Shehzad) and his friends Jimbo (Jamsheed Khan), and Ac (Ali Chaudhary). Three Pakistani musketeers enjoying hybrid culture and transform their own identity from Pakistani to New Yorker, by changing their names and adopting Western life style. Though they, themselves transform their identities but never realize it before 9/11 because America is based on "freedom of speech/ freedom of press/ freedom of your own religion" (98) and it was the place where "you don't have to explain yourself...it didn't matter...where you are from... you were free" (15). But "the turn of the century had been epic" (3) and after 9/11 no one is same they become Japs, Jews and Niggers.

The concept of racism and othering came in front that effect on everyone's identities because American stereotypes fixed their identities with their religion or countries and treated them according to their own stereotypes.

Chuck and his friends adjust in western culture to fulfill "American Dream", they used to listen "Nusrat", read "Translation of Babur Nama" and "Ibn e Khaldoon's Muqaddimah" (65) they considered themselves as "New Yorker" as mini aunty told him that after ten years in any other country you will never feel their citizen but "after spending ten months in New York, you were a New Yorker" and he consider himself as "New Yorker" (hybrid identity) but after 9/11 their identity was in crisis and their hybrid identity transform a "Fixed Identity" (Bhabha) and that was "Moslems" and "Arabs". With the fall of twin towers, a new kind of identity was fixed with Muslims that was "Terrorist". Here Chuck identity becomes as terrorist. For that stereotype, Chuck and his friends were imprisoned and under investigation of terrorist charges.

There is another transformation in identity when Chuck was in jail and he tries to resist his identity.

Grizzly: You a terrorist?

Chuck: no Sir.

Grizzly: You a Moslem?

Chuck: Yes, sir.

Grizzly: So you read the Ko-ran?

Chuck: I've read it.

Grizzly: And pray five times a day to Al-La?

Chuck: No Sir. I pray several times a year, on special occasions like Eid.

Grizzly: You keep the Ram-a-Dan?

Chuck: Yes, sir, I usually keep about half, sometimes more but mostly less -

Grizzly: Do you eat pork?

Chuck: No Sir.

Grizzly: Won't Al-La get mad? ... What's important to Him...?I'm trying to understand why Muslims terrorize....ok why don't u just stick to the Islamic religion?.....I want to know does the Koran sanction terrorism?

Chuck: I've read it. I'm no terrorist

Grizzly: Then why do Moslems use it to justify terrorism?

Chuck: it's all matter of interpretation, is not it? I mean take the Bible. It's interpreted differently...

Grizzly: ok...I said ok. Look, all I want to know is why the hell did they have to blow up the twin towers?" (113-117)

In these lines Naqvi tries to describe that how a stereotypical identity is fixed with Muslims after 9/11 but the people tries to resist as chuck says I am Muslims, I read Quran but I am not terrorist that shows his "resisting identity". But the fixity of an image was so strong in Americans mind that they think all Muslims are terrorist and all books in Arabic are "Bomb making manuals" as Grizzly told Chuck that you are terrorist because we "found books in Arabic, and bomb-making manuals." (108) but in actual bomb-making manual and sinister Arabic literature, turned out to be the anarchist Cookbook and Ibn Khaldoun's *Muqaddimah*. They think Chuck "defended Islamic religion, terrorism" (117)

The identity transforms from Pakistani to Hybrid identity, to Fixity (religious identity), to resisting identity. The incident of 9/11 not only effect on Chuck's identity but whole Muslim community suffer because of stereotyped religious identity. People uses abusive language for them and say "No room for you" (19) and Chuck's friends attacked by gang and Abdul Karim's family also suffer, FBI came into their house and start investigation because they are Muslims and they also investigate Karim's six years old daughter. That shows every one was facing the issue of identity.

Media play an important role at that time and defines Muslims identity as media describe Mahmood "had no terrorist objectives" (91) but also indulge in some illegal activities and did not tell that these illegal activities was only to help a Pakistani friend in extending visa. On the one hand, Media says, Mahmood is not terrorist; on the other hand, tag a label of terrorism with Muslims also.

Though Musharaf's speech clearly declares that Islam's "teaching are good and peaceful and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah" (97) and that there is no connection between Islam and terrorism. But Americans were not ready to accept the ideas of the others. In prison Chuck realizes that he considered himself as American but FBI clearly change his identity by saying "you aren't American... you got no fucking rights" (107) and then Chuck realizes crisis in his identity and " finally, got it,... three Muslims had become a sleeper cell" (121). In this way Chuck's identity goes into crisis but at the end he try to resist and introduce himself as a Pakistani and write article about his friend Mohammad Shah who was missing during the incident of 9/11 and American considered him a terrorist but Chuck wrote in his article "the story was simple, black and white: the man was Muslim, not a terrorist".

Before 9/11, everybody was free in thinking or doing whatever he wants to do, but things are totally changed after the fall of twins towers, " It was a free country: he was free to stare; I was free to cringe"(122). That was the thinking of the people who were living in America. But these thoughts were completely changed after the occurrence of the incident of twin towers, to be free was somewhat enigma for the people, especially for the Eastern, "please report any suspicious activity or behavior" (122), such announcements are made there regularly. So the circumstances are become crucial at this time which once looked pleasant and enjoyable.

Chuck and his friends were living a happy life and feeling themselves at home in America, they drove cars at the nights and made fun there without realizing that they are in foreign country, everything was running smooth and right for them. But after the 9/11, the smoothness and happiness had vanished somewhere. Chuck's

talks to Abdul Karim's wife, "I feared for my friends, feared telling Ma that I have been fired, jailed, and had to flee; feared for my sanity" (134). Once physically and mentally as free man is now feeling the fear in the same land because he has lost his identity and sense of independence by the transformation of the identity. He is questioned by the natives of the land and feeling as an alien there.

Duck has done something to release Jimbo (Jamsheed Khan) from the jail. When she comes to visit Old Khan, Jimbo's father, Old Khan tries to explain her that there is no difference among the people of America or the people of East or West, "Your eyes tell me you are a good person. It doesn't matter if a person is Eastern or Western, black or white, from New York or from Jersey. In my experiences, each human needs the same things: food, shelter, loving" (178).

Though she is a good friend and a helper for Jimbo yet she is not convinced by the arguments of the Old Khan, and says, "You know, my father would agree with you" (178). Even though she has intimacy with Jimbo and his family but she is not ready to accept these ideas that everyone is equal in America, Pakistani and native cannot be equal. Natives have lot of rights and the foreigners do not have those rights.

Many people who were residing in America for many years are facing the identity problems after the 9/11. Abdul Karim and his wife are in America for many years but they are still Pakistani, their identity his hybrid identity. They could not cut themselves down from the tag of the Pakistani -Americans.

When Chuck (Shahzad) talks to their six year old daughter and they ask each other about their names, she asks,

"What is your name?

Chuck, she chuckled, what kinda name is Chuck?

Well...I suppose, it's American. (Hybrid identity)

Are you an American?

Um, no...I'm actually Pakistani.

What about you?

I'm a Pakistani-American. (Hybrid identity)

So what's your name?

My name is Tanya" (188).

Tanya was born in America, she does not know much about Pakistan and Pakistanis, still she is a Pakistani-American, it can be said a conflict even in the mind of a child that she is not purely American or Pakistani, she is also facing identity crisis, and tries to merge her both divided identities into one. Like Chuck (Shahzad), he shows himself as an American by adopting name Chuck instead of Shahzad. Although he has adopted American name yet he is a Pakistani Muslim (religious and national identity).

Amina is a sister of Jamsheed Khan, Amina has also adopted American name, as she is called Amo in the family and friends. There is also confusion with her identity whether she is Pakistani or American. In the whole novel, before 9/11, she wears hijab, full sleeve shirts, and tries to avoid the eye contacts even with the family friends. Naqvi has shown purely a Muslim culture or Pathan's culture and traditions through the character of Amo.

But after 9/11, transformation took place in Amo; she became an American girl because she does not want to face any problem regarding her hijab or her identity as a Muslim girl.

When Shehzad meets Amo for the last time, he observes changes in her dress and politely asks her about this change, "When I politely inquired about the recent changes in her sartorial

Regime, 'she asked you mean the skirt?' Um, no, I replied.

Lemme guess, Shehzad, you mean hijab?' (Religious identity or cultural identity)

Folding my arms, I expected an expression on identity" (209).

So, the transformation has taken place in the member of the society who has strict beliefs regarding their dresses, culture and religion, they are compelled to change themselves dual identity problems.

The most important change took place in the protagonist, in the character of Shehzad, who once felt that he is an American and wanted to fulfill his dreams by living in America. But after the incident of 9/11, when he was jailed, as they considered him a terrorist, he became bewildered and confused with his identity that who he is. The confusion about the identity problem brought a revelation to his mind and he wants to come back to Pakistan because Pakistani identity gave him a relief.

When he talks with his mother, he says,

"That life's changed? The city's changed...but now I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid all the time. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal" (206).

After realizing that he is an alien in America, he wants to return to his own country where he can enjoy all the rights that other people have in Pakistan. He wanted to get red off the identity crisis which has torn him a part in America. Therefore, remembering his native land, he imagined, "I could hear the purl of rickshaws over the clamor of crosstown buses; I could almost smell the smog, feel the breeze against my cheek. I heard myself say, I want to come home, Ma" (207).

When he meets his identity, he meets solace, tranquility and comfort and by imagining himself as Pakistani, not an American, he feels at home.

In short, we can say, Chuck was living with his friends in America and enjoying his hybrid identity and had no need to explain himself, but after 9/11 "things were changing" (25) and "it was time to explain" toward Americans and his identity crisis start. He was confused about his identity who he was and who he is but after facing Americans behavior after 9/11, he realizes and starts introducing

himself that he belongs to Pakistan and Americans calls him Chuck but my name is Shehzad. He found his identity.

Identity is distinct personality of an individual and an identity goes into crisis because of hybridist, stereotyping and power relation. In *Home Boy*, Naqvi discusses that the protagonist's identity transforms and the effect of 9/11 on Muslims, and after 9/11 new identities are constructed and fixed with Muslims. Chuck collective identity transforms into religious identity as a terrorist, and then crisis start and he "didn't know who he was and tries to know who he is.

**Conclusion:**

Postcolonial fiction whether it is African or south Asian, Latin American or diasporic, its major concern has always remained with identity issues and Naqvi's *Home Boy* is not any exception. Postcolonial legacy never left its heirs alone and since the days of earlier postcolonial fiction, 21st century literature and its characters are haunted by the ghost of lost and distorted identities. Naqvi's *Home Boy* and its central character Chuck's identity crises and transformation is another influential addition in a longlist of postcolonial and especially south Asian English literature which deals with the issues and causes which work as catalysts to transform individuals and make them conscious of their identities.



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