

# THE COLONIAL FARCE: POST-9/11 TRAUMA IN *HOME BOY*

\*Dr. Ali Usman Saleem, Dr. Ghulam Murtaza, Rafhan Ul Islam

## Abstract

The paper explores the post-9/11 trauma and the reemergence of colonial discursive strategies as depicted in *Home Boy* (2010) by Hussain Muhammad Naqvi. The paper highlights the rising tensions within the American society and the colonial farce practiced by America on the Muslim immigrants after 9/11. By using the ideas of Jeoffery C. Alexander in his *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012), the paper deconstructs the characters of Chuck, Jimbo and AC who were subjected to extensive interrogations and suffered the post-9/11 trauma the most. Naqvi, like other Anglophone Pakistani fiction writers, questions the construction of definition of a terrorist and the post-9/11 traumatic circumstances for the Muslim immigrants in America. 9/11 brought trauma not only for the white Americans but also for other Diaspora communities, specially the Muslims, settled within America. It left permanent marks upon their group consciousness and transformed their future identity in irrevocable ways. The paper further determines the role of American media and political discourse in relegating the Muslims to the marginalized status.

**Key Words:** 9/11, trauma, memory, identity, phobia, America, Pakistan

H. M. Naqvi, a Karachi based novelist, depicts the lives of three characters (Chuck, Jimbo and AC) in *Home Boy* (2010) and delineates the after effects of 9/11 on their normal life in America. Chuck is cryptonym for Shehzad, AC for Ali Chaudary and Jimbo for Jamshed Khan: a banker, a PhD student and DJ respectively. They were “bonafide Americans” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 3); deeply submerged in the local culture but all of a sudden their lives were traumatized only for being Muslims in post-9/11 America. This paper analyzes those traumatic circumstances that they had to face. All the three characters were arrested by FBI, because they had friendship with Mohammed Shah (Shaman) who was missing and a terrorist suspect.

The paper employs the work of Jeoffery C. Alexander who argues that, “Trauma is an acute discomfort that enters into the core of collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (Alexander 2012, p. 15). Hence, the farce practiced by America after 9/11 turned out into a social trauma

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\*Assistant Professor of English, GC University Faisalabad  
Assistant Professor of English, GC University Faisalabad  
M. Phil Scholar, GC University Faisalabad

and badly affected Muslim immigrants' community in America. All that was normal had gone abnormal after 9/11 as Alexander (2012) further asserts that trauma is a "narrative about a horribly destructive social process" (Alexander, 2012, p. 6). The social scenario for these immigrants after 9/11 was not only challenging but also questioned their loyalty to America and American ways of life. Muslims were considered outsiders and a threat to American solidarity and dream. The post-9/11 American suspicion was a collective social inquisitive gaze mistrusting the whole of the Muslim community within and outside America. This sudden question mark regarding their loyalty with America and challenge to identity led to a traumatic cultural experience for the Muslim community within America. Individuality turned into collectivity as Alexander (2004) in *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* (2004) contends:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memory forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.(Alexander, 2004, p.1)

This paper, while focusing on the repetition of the old colonial discursive and cultural practices, explores the trauma for the Muslim community in the post-9/11 American society, as depicted in *Home Boy* (2010). Alexander further contends that, "It should not be surprising, then, that literary interpretation, with its hermeneutic approach to symbolic patterns, has been offered as a kind of academic counterpart to the psychoanalytic intervention" (Alexander, 2012, p.11).

September 11, 2001 witnessed terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers by Al-Qaida that resulted in the death of 2977 people. 9/11 created shock among American people that later on got turned into a social phobia and paranoia. 9/11 led to a rise in racial prejudice within American society and even in most of the Europe. America also waged a war on Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan being an American ally also had to suffer a strong wave of terrorist suicide attacks on its civilian population and military personals. 9/11 led to adoption of extremist

strategies by both the sides, America and terrorist organizations. Muntadar al-Zaidi, an Iraqi journalist, threw a shoe at George W. Bush in 2008 during a press conference to register his protest against American policies. In Norway Andres Behring Breivik became the perpetrator of 2011 Norway attacks by killing 77 people and asked Government authorities for banishment of all the Muslims from Europe. This real and discursive war caused a great trauma for the people of both the sides. Naqvi in *Home Boy* (2010) focuses on this trauma and highlights the way various characters respond to it. Trauma includes inflictions, both physical and mental. Oxford English Dictionary defines trauma as, “an emotional shock that follows stressful events or physical injuries that end up in neurosis” (OED). Furthermore, Roger Luckhurst (2008) claims that trauma “disrupts memory” (Luckhurst 2008, p. 1). Aside from these mental and physical affliction 9/11 gave birth to a collective trauma, it was very difficult for the Muslim immigrants to survive in post 9/11 America as Jeffrey C. Alexander (2012) contends that, “trauma is an acute discomfort that enters into the core of collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (Alexander 2012, p. 15). Hence, trauma after 9/11 is to be linked with identity crises of the Muslim immigrants within America who had to face a stereotypical inquisitive gaze of the American society and government as well.

Elleke Boehmer (2010) argues that within the overarching context of this post-9/11 world, “there is a relationship between three terms: terror, the colony, and what has been called the postcolony – which refers to the effective continuation of the authority structures of the colony in the post-imperial nation despite flag independence” (Boehmer 2010, p.7). Consequently, because of the recent War on Terror discourse, the colonial project still continues within postcolonies through the farce of colonization (Bhabha, 1994, p. 85) and creates terror. The effects of this colonial farce have become a hot issue in the mainstream Pakistani fiction where Pakistani writers have tried to provide a rebuttal of prejudiced American media and literary discourse regarding War on Terror. Kanwal (2015) argues that it is not only Muslims but Islam itself is also being targeted (Kanwal, 2015, p. 4). The paper also investigates Naqvi’s construction of the Muslim identity in *Home Boy* (2010). This misrepresentation is also claimed by Kamila Shamsie as a ‘trump card’ (Shamsie, 2009, p. 362). Hence, today’s Western discourse on War on

Terror identifies these once colonized nations through different presupposed prejudiced stereotypes. After 9/11 throughout the Western hemisphere the Muslims are being looked suspiciously by the local inhabitants of those Western countries in which they reside. So, there started a series of writings on this issue by those who suffered ethnic and racial prejudices. *Home Boy* (2010) is one of those works in this regard as Naqvi puts it, "The story was simple, black-and-white: the man was Muslim (shaman), not a terrorist" (p, 214).

Regarding traumatic memory, H.M.Naqvi's debut *Home Boy* (2010) is one of the finest examples as while talking about this novel; in one of his interviews he said: I scrawled a few lines on a cocktail napkin one fateful night back in '03, and when I subsequently transcribed the sentiment, I accidentally embarked on a project that would take me four years to complete (<http://www.hmNaqvi.com/Libas.pdf>). The whole work seems to be a series of flash backs in the writer's mind that continued for four years and in the end got the form of a complete novel. The writer has been a worker in World Bank in America, and a teacher of English Literature at American university. The traumatic description of events and delineation of his sentiment in the novel seems to be autobiographical and belated as Caruth (1995) contends: "The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, 1995, p.4).

Naqvi has spent a long time in America writing, banking and teaching. He himself experienced the post-9/11 shift in the American society and social behaviors. He explains "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" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 94). Cathy Caruth (1991) also puts that, "Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrences of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1991, p.181). These repetitive occurrences haunt Chuck throughout the novel, when they (Chuck, Jimbo, AC) were arrested. Later on, Chuck's traumatic memory was full of torture and humiliation

when he recalls “I remember holding my head between my hands. I remember Trig instructed us to *sit-the-fuck-down* and *shut-the-fuck-up*. I remember Jimbo muttering, ‘We’re cool, we’re cool’” (Naqvi 2010, p.102). Before 9/11, these three metrostanis were enjoying the modern currents of New York but later on all the scene had changed in contradiction with their expectations:

It was later that I realized that I had been in the throes of some sort of culture-bound psychosomatic psychosis, like the hysteria in fin-de-siecle Vienna that had inspired the Great Quack, or brain fog in West Africa that periodically turned men and women into zombies, or anorexia and bulimia that ravaged prep-school and party girls in Manhattan. The authorities gave me existential heebie- jeebies. (Naqvi, 2010, p.197)

Traumatic experience haunts the sufferer in historical terms as Caruth (1995) asserts, “The traumatized we might say, carry an impossible history within them or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth, 1995, p.5). After returning from MDC (Metropolitan Detention Centre), Jimbo said to Chuck “Dude, I’m here. Don’t wanna go back in the hole. Know what I’m saying?” (Naqvi 2010, p.172). Jimbo did not even want to have that memory of what went with him in MDC. Jimbo can be anything but a terrorist. Naqvi writes, “Jimbo’s many things --- a great DJ, a bad drunk-- but he’s no terrorist. Everybody knows he’s like a teddy bear, a lamb” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 166). He had no business with political world around him, but during his incarceration in MDC he went through torture and became very fearful about jail and his political position as a Muslim in the post-9/11 America. 9/11 enlisted many innocents like Jimbo in the traumatic history.

After his arrest in MDC, Chuck was in doldrums of certainty about his survival in post-9/11 America. In jail Chuck talked to himself, “Stop sweating, chum, I chastened myself, we’re in this together. We’ve done nothing wrong. We’ve got nothing to worry about. This is obviously a mistake. You’ll get your phone call. Everybody gets phone call” (Naqvi 2010, p.106). By giving himself consolations, he survived in MDC. He went to America for a financially good and stable life, his migration from Pakistan to America seemed to be another act of financial survival as when he was attending an interview with the director of a

company, the director asked how the things were going in Pakistan and Chuck replied:

There's a war on our border again, an influx of drugs and arms. We've had a war on our border, on and off, for the last thirty years. we live in one of the toughest neighborhoods in the world: we're bordered by Afghanistan on the north, a collection of warring fiefdoms, then there's nuclear aspirant and fundamentalist Iran to the west, and on the east there's India, a country with a million-man standing Army. (Naqvi, 2010, p.158)

His arrest at MDC was a big question mark on his American dream, and this destruction later on, backfired with the issue of survival as Caruth (1993) contends, "Problem of trauma is not simply the problem of destruction but also, fundamentally an enigma of survival" (Caruth 1993, p.24). Chuck was fired from his job, as his Vice President says: "You know, this isn't personal, right? I suppose I did; it had to do with the bottom line, the invisible hand" (Naqvi 2010, p. 30). The invisible hand has symbolic importance. In company's downsizing he was fired first because he was a Muslim immigrant. This "economic depression" (Alexander 2012, p.8) was another marker of his traumatic survival. Besides unlawful detention he has to face financial exploitation, and indignation and humiliation, "Doors would open, doors would close, and I would be smacked around, molested, hauled back and forth between cells and interrogation sessions" (Naqvi 2010, p.112). When Jimbo is released and he meets Chuck, he mumbles: "It occurred to me that if Jimbo had been beaten, AC would have been left for dead. He wasn't easy. You survive, dude. Like my old man. We are survivors" (Naqvi 2010, p.180).

Chuck's life became unpredictable in post-9/11 America. Before 9/11 he was very shining student who got his degree before time and became a competent banker but after 9/11 things changed unexpectedly when he was fired from bank and he turned into a drug addict. Chuk remarks that, "One had to navigate drunks, druggies, potholes, labyrinthine detours, speed traps, summons abuses" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 62). The change of circumstances in *Home Boy* (2010) was at social level and Chuck went through more pathetic situation than ever before: "Later we also realized

that we hadn't been putting on some sort of show for others, for somebody else. No, we were protagonists in a narrative that required coherence for our own selfish motivations and exigencies" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 6).

There has always been indirect and direct relationship between trauma and survival as Caruth (1993) puts:

The intricate relation between trauma and survival indeed arises in this text [*Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals*] not, as one might expect, because of a seemingly direct and un-meditated relation between consciousness and life threatening events, but rather through the very paradoxical structure of indirectness in psychical trauma. (Caruth, 1993, p.24)

After 9/11 the Muslims were directly targeted. Detaining of Chuck in MDC brought in him a horrendous physical change: "I appeared criminal: my hair had congealed in thick clumps, and a film of beard covered my jaw like a growth of moss" (Naqvi, 2010, p.109). In the name of national security, racial prejudices were in practice. After his release, when Chuck came to Mini Aunt's home, he told the guests there: "In the name of national security, states commit crimes" (Naqvi 2010, p.136). The political actions of America after 9/11 in the name of social security were seen as a threat to the Muslim citizenship and the concept of model citizenship was blurred:

You threw a hundred thousand Japanese into camps, whole families--- women, children, old people--- because *they* posed a security threat. That's not right. That's wrong. And now it is us. *It's me*. Fueled by adrenaline, I continued, 'I've been in jail for the last forty-eight hours. I was humiliated, starved, physically and mentally abused. Mini Aunt's brother, Ali, is still inside. We're not model citizens--- I'm not a citizen at all--- but I can tell you this much: we've done nothing wrong. This is no way to treat human beings, and this is no way to achieve security! (Naqvi, 2010, p. 136)

Trauma is a collective noun as mentioned earlier and includes different perspectives for its completion as Luckhurst (2008) claims that, "[c]oncentration camp inmates, Vietnam and Gulf war veterans, victim

of atrocities, traumatized parents and survivors of disaster are the subject of intensive political, sociological, biological, psychiatric, therapeutic and legal investigation and dispute” (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 2). Chuck was very tense because of 9/11. He recalls “I shut down, and it worked for me. I shut down again on the day of September the eleventh” (Naqvi, 2010, p.94). Later on, during his incarceration he was furious on what was going to be done with him. In MDC Chuck was so tense at his racial exploitation by American police that he issued out loudly, “*Fuck the police comin’ straight from the underground/ young nigga got it bad cuz I am brown*” (Naqvi, 2010, p.109). His arrest resulted in anger at his torture and humiliation: “The stench of cold urine filled my nostrils” (Naqvi, 2010, p.110). Not only Chuck was disturbed by the ongoing racial prejudices at that time in America, his mother far away in Karachi was also very upset at her failure to get in touch with Chuck, “And when I didn’t hear back, I began to get worried. I thought, may be something’s happened to him. These days, with all these terrorists running around in America, you don’t know” (Naqvi, 2010, p.139). The parents also had to undergo trauma as their children were arrested without charges. Mr. Khan (Jimbo’s father) had severe heart attack and was fighting between death and life in Christ Hospital, Palisade Avenue. He comes to know about the incarceration of Jimbo through a phone call and was victimized by heart attack as soon as he received the phone call: “It was not the tea or the news that had caused the seizure but the phone call. At seven in the morning the day before, Old Man Khan had learnt that his son had been jailed” (Naqvi, 2010, p.168). The death and incarceration has been the hot issue of *Home Boy* (2010). Furthermore, when Amo ( Jimbo’s sister Amina) turned on the TV, there were

sightings of dark men with dirty bombs and devices in their shoes. Planes appeared and disappeared over the horizon. Our nerves already frayed, we were told to report suspicious activities, to be vigilant. Above all death recurred on TV, in vivid color, charred bodies among concrete ruins, like pornography. *Allah rehamkray*, proclaimed Old Man Khan. (Naqvi 2010, pp.56-57)



Those who suffer trauma are found in a strange communication within themselves as Luckhurst (2008) contends that “trauma is piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication” (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 2). Communication of someone with himself or herself is a basic feature that is caused after trauma as a mental ailment (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) does. Chuck wonders whether he should share his traumatic experiences with his mother or not. While talking to his mother Chuck keeps on talking to himself “I didn’t want to frighten her so I acted casual, but I was very frightened, I’ve been very frightened. I haven’t slept for two nights” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 139). Moreover, Chuck says to himself, “Prison is like that; no consolation, no catharsis” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 118). Back to the apartment after release from detention centre and losing job, Chuck, economically incapacitated besides mental infliction, was perhaps “suffering from Baby Bear syndrome, convinced that somebody had been in my apartment, and thought I saw no empty porridge bowls, I found the chairs suspiciously rearranged in a triangular scheme and the toilet seat mysteriously upright” (Naqvi 2010, p.143). His visa was also going to expire and he had only four days to get an employer who could give him legal status of living in America. In the end he got that but planned to come back to Pakistan, his native homeland. Post-9/11 trauma gave birth to a very complex society in Western hemisphere and America. It was racially prejudiced as Luckhurst (2008) puts: “Histories of gender, sexual or racial violence have indubitable reasons for finding explanatory power in ideas of trauma, yet traumatic identity is now also commonly argued to be at the root of many national collective memories” (Luckhurst, 2008, p.2).

These histories of racial violence are deep in *Home Boy* (2010). At Jake’s bar, two American brawlers fought with these three metrostanis. When one of these three friends told those American brawlers that they had misunderstood the situation, then one of those brawlers said, “Misunderstood my ass; came the reply in a tenor that suggested violence” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 23). This violence is racial as, “Brawler No.1 hissed, ‘A-rabs’” (Naqvi, 2010, p.23). Jimbo protested that they were not the men the brawlers were deeming them to be. In response the second Brawler retorts back: “Moslems, Mo-hicans, whatever, Brawler No.2 snapped. ‘I’m from Jersey dude! I don’t care

chief” (Naqvi, 2010, p.24). New Jersey is an American city that is thickly populated by Muslims as compared with other cities of America. A local American brawler bullies the Muslims but does not care for chief i.e. the law enforcement agencies. Law and order regarding suppressing hate against Muslims was out of control of American law enforcing institutions right after 9/11. All the Muslim immigrants were aware of this changing attitude as Chuck narrates: “We were kicked out of Jake’s. Things were changing” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 25). At MDC when Chuk reminds Rooney, the investigating officer of his rights as an American citizen, he blurts, “You aren’t American! ... You got no fucking rights. No phone call, no lawyer, no nothing. And if you’re lucky, someday we’ll put you on a plane--- a one-way back to Bumfuckistan” (Naqvi 2010, p.107). Hatred against Pakistanis and the Muslims is also quite obvious here. The three metrostanis were not only traumatized by general public but also by the American institutions as Alexander (2012) claims that, “Career groups ‘Police, general public’ are the collective agents of trauma process” (Alexander, 2012, p.16). The detention of all the three characters is full of torture and humiliation as at MDC, Chuck was commanded to strip and furthermore he felt:

They must have watched as I reached around my waist, unbuttoned my shirt, kicked off my lizard-skins one by one, and then unraveled my belt and slipped off my jeans like a pantomime getting into a tub of a hot water. Take off everything, sand nigger; thy instructed. (Naqvi, 2010, p.108)

Chuck had to face humiliation in front of the general public as on subway ride from prison Chuck saw Hispanic and Chinese people were staring at him: “It was a free country: he was free to stare; I was free to cringe” (Naqvi 2010, p.122).

After 9/11, there were societal threats to every Muslim in America as Alexander (2012) puts, “We need to think about social suffering, about emotions and existential threats to ethical convictions” (Alexander 2012, p.1). While going for Shaman Run, who was missing for many days after their arrest after 9/11, Chuck mumbled: “We should have turned back” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 73). In order to avoid any societal threats, the American Muslims also blatantly and protectively demonstrated their solidarity with America as “after 9/11, Muslims

cabbies bore American flags” (Naqvi, 2010, p.74). On the way to Shaman’s apartment, these three metrostanis were also an abnormal combination in a car and this combination was smelled by Chuck:

We are a bunch of brown men in a car, the night of heightened security in the city. We looked appropriately unshaven, unkempt, possibly unwholesome. I could have been silly or paranoid, but it was the first time I had felt this way: uneasy, guilty, criminal. (Naqvi, 2010, p.76)

And finally, when they reach, the knock at the door is also not a normal knock. When they are at Shaman’s house, they are intercepted by the FBI and Chuck knew that “they were not the men of God” (Naqvi, 2010, p.99). Such complex and racial prejudiced milieu forced many Muslims to displace themselves from America as Naqvi (2010) details this displacement after 9/11: “in the sweeps following 9/11, many had fled across the border, to Canada, to Mexico, with not much more than the clothes on their backs. Many would leave for the homes they had left decades ago, never to run” (Naqvi, 2010, p.181).

Alexander (2012) puts that “[r]eligion, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, each of these dimensions can be medium for inflicting social pain” (Alexander, 2012, p.1). Chuck, when he is heading towards Manhattan Alley, comes across a gangbanger who is “hanging back on the stoop with his crew, picking the dirt beneath his fingernails with a butterfly knife. You, homeboy; he had called out, you wanna tattoo?” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 64). Chuck is afraid of him because of the earlier threats to his existence as a Muslim immigrant in the post-9/11 America. Furthermore, there was anger among the American Muslims due to prejudiced treatment they received after 9/11 by the American society just for being brown. There were recurrent incidents of racial, national and ethnic prejudice being reported by the media after 9/11 as Chuck comes to know of another hate crime: “Twenty four year old Ansar Mahmood, a Pakistani born permanent resident, asked a passer-by to photograph him against the Hudson. A guard at a nearby post called the police because the shot included a water treatment plant” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 91).

Trauma can be ended only if things are settled right. Khan, an old man, despite being an Afghan whose native country was being bombarded by American Army right after 9/11, has no prejudice against

local Americans as while talking to Dora he says, “It doesn’t matter if a person is Eastern or western, black or white, from New York or from New Jersey. In my experiences, each human needs the same things: food, water, shelter, loving. Will you agree with me, Dora beti?” (Naqvi, 2010, p.178). His son is arrested by FBI without any charges, but he never becomes violent. Alexander (2012) observes, “When bad things happen to good people they become shocked, outraged, indignant” (p.8). When his son Jimbo, is released from MDC, Old Man Khan recovers from illness. Alexander (2012) adds: “Trauma will be resolved not only by setting things right in the world, but also by setting things right in the self” (p.10). As the narrative approaches its end, Chuck gets a job and it seems that the miseries are finally over. He recalls that, “It took me several moments to appreciate that the afternoon I attempted suicide, I had been offered a way out. Then I puked all over the place” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 202).

Whatever the Muslim American immigrants did in solidarity with America, as the cabbie drivers bore the flags of America on the front of their cabs, was useless. Kaplan (2005) comments: “Descendants of indigenous peoples in postcolonial contexts who are also living in terror still after centuries of displacement” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 1). It was because of the pre-conceived stereotypical notions of the Americans about the Muslims that they were arrested and investigated in a large number after 9/11. There was a preexisting binary between ‘you’ and ‘us’ and the reinforcement of such racial and ethnic binaries brought trauma not only for the Americans but also for the Muslim immigrants living in America and their relatives abroad. Michael Leonard’s obituary about Shaman’s death further highlights the racial violence in America. The obituary proves Shaman innocent as he lost his life in Twin Towers collapse. Naqvi at this point observes that, “The story was simple, black-and-white: the man was a Muslim, not a terrorist” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 214).

The analysis of *Home Boy* (2010) establishes that the Muslims are not terrorists as it has been propagated after 9/11 by the American media. The role of western electronic and print media discourse become questionable in this regard as Peek (2011) asserts that everyone who shared identical features regarding religion and ethnicity with the terrorists of 9/11, came under strict government surveillance, hatred,

ethnic prejudice and harassment (Peek, 2011, p.22). *Home Boy* (2010) through the tale of three metrostanis depicts how the trauma was faced by the Muslim immigrants in the post-9/11 America. Naqvi through his journey from Karachi to New York made the readers realize the social and political transformation within America after 9/11.

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