

International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



The Construction of Borders in Post 9/11 Muslim Pakistani Fiction

[PP: 01-12]

Noura Shafie

Department of English
University of Prince Mugrin
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Samar H. Aljahdali

(Corresponding Author)

Department of English
University of Jeddah
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

The 9/11 events have marked a new shift in border studies. Pakistani writers have engaged with (mis)representations of Muslims, giving voice to silenced immigrants who narrate their experience in the U.S before and after the attacks. This paper investigates the representations of abstract and concrete borders in post 9/11 Muslim Pakistani fiction, with particular focus on Bapsi Sidhawa's *An American Brat* (1993), Mohsin Hamid's *the Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and H. M Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009). While based on postcolonial theoretical framing, the study draws on K. Alrasheed's (2015) recent conceptualization of neo-Orientalism and D. Newman's (2006, 2015, 2017) theorization of borders in the wake of the 9/11 events. The study engages with how the 9/11 events have redefined borders, and invigorated a securitization discourse that embraces the separation and exclusion of ethnic minorities. The selected novels, while presenting the unheard and counter narratives of the Muslim subaltern, have shown how the tightening of borders, both concrete and cultural, has limited the mobility of Muslim immigrants in the US and relegated them to marginalized enclaves.

Keywords: *Muslim Pakistani Fiction, post 9/11 fiction, border studies, neo-Orientalism, Bapsi Sidhawa, Mohsin Hamid, H. M. Naqvi*

ARTICLE	The paper received on	Reviewed on	Accepted after revisions on
INFO	24/07/2020	27/08/2020	01/10/2020

Suggested citation:

Shafie, N. & Aljahdali, S. (2020). The Construction of Borders in Post 9/11 Muslim Pakistani Fiction. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 8(3). 01-12.

1. Introduction

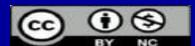
The events of 9/11 have brought a new paradigm change in the study of borders, refocusing attention on the process through which borders can be more rigidly controlled, closing rather than opening in some cases almost being sealed [...] The securitization discourse aimed at preventing the infiltration of terror activities into the United States has made it much more difficult to cross into the United States, culminating in the tightening of border crossing procedures.

(Newman, 2006, p.149)

On Friday, March 15, 2019, the world was shaken by a terrorist attack against Muslim minorities in Christchurch, New Zealand. According to the CNN, Muslims were targeted during Friday prayer by Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant, who opened fire in two mosques, leaving fifty dead and fifty others seriously injured (Chavez & Regan, 2019). Terrorism has

been redefined by the 9/11 events with stronger associations to Arab and Muslim agency, thus rationalizing hate crimes against Muslim minorities. In the above epigraph, David Newman draws attention to agency of the 9/11 events in rerouting border studies. This paper contributes to understanding bordering as represented by post 9/11 Pakistani Muslim Fiction.

Pakistani writers have engaged with (mis)representations of Muslims, giving voice to silenced immigrants who narrate their experience in the U.S before and after the attacks. Narratives by Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, H.M Naqvi, Mohammed Hanif and Ali Sethi have readjusted the focus of their lenses to redefine Muslim identity in the post 9/11 world. This paper investigates the representations of abstract and concrete borders before and after the attacks, with particular focus on Bapsi Sidhawa's *An American Brat* (1993), Mohsin Hamid's *the Reluctant*



Fundamentalist (2007) and H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009).

2. Literature Review

Recent literature has shown increasing interest in how Pakistani writers have given literary form to the 9/11 events and their impact on the construction of the Muslim identity. Challenging the focus of most 9/11 related literary critiques on fiction, Langah (2019) finds in bringing together fictional and non-fictional texts a useful way to enrich the 9/11 discourse. Pakistani intellectuals were relegated to silence, yet they crossed over generic classification and techniques to manipulate the tension between art and the postcolonial state and break the code of silence. She argues that the interrelation between Islamization in the local context and Islamophobia in the global context has contributed to the stigmatization of the Muslim and Pakistani identity. Tilwani (2019), however, investigates the exclusion of Muslim immigrants in the US in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 events as represented in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He argues that the "War on Terror," waged by the US, is heavily entrenched in European colonial ideologies and practices, concluding that the Twin Tower represents the complicity of capital and power in the post 9/11 formulation of an American hegemony based on racial exclusion and material exploitation.

While investigating Muslim Pakistani fictional responses to the 9/11 events, this paper engages with current debates on border studies. The study is theoretically grounded in the emergent field of border studies. Recently, the politics and poetics of bordering have received much attention. G. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) discusses borders not only as physical or geographical, but as invisible walls that divide and separate ethnic groups. Her focus on the conceptuality of borders rather than their physicality has encouraged negotiations of non-physical borders (Prokkola, 2009, p. 23). She explains how borders that separate social classes, opposite genders and ethnic groups impact the individual's identity, eventually leading to identity crisis. Negotiating the American/ Mexico borderland, Anzaldúa (1987) contends that "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under,

lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (preface). Anzaldúa's (1987) discussion of non-physical borders has created a significant move in theorizing border studies, bringing to the fore the function of these abstractions in formulating national identities. This paper will take her argument further by investigating the construction of abstract borders along the 9/11 divide.

Newman (2003) has emphasized the need for a clearly worked-out theory, formulating a research framework that responds to the interdisciplinary nature of the emergent field of border studies. The 9/11 events, however, have marked a new shift in border studies, redefining bordering in/with the US and constructing more borders in foreign landscapes. In his recent essay "Theoretical Reflections on the State of Contemporary Border Studies", Newman (2015) has emphasized the emergence of 'securitization discourse' in the US, while discussing post 9/11 borders and the "reterritorialization" of landscapes in the Middle East following ISIS coming to the scene (p. 14). While Newman focuses on the physicality of post-9/11 borders, Wuthnow (2011) focuses on the shift in Western attitudes towards Muslim minorities in the United States in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. He explains that hate crimes against Muslims and mosques reached a whole new level of hostility. The construction of domestic and international borders after 9/11 highlights the urgency and continuity of the event and its representations.

Emphasizing the discursive shift affected by the 9/11 attacks, Alrasheed (2015) has revisited Saidian Orientalism in the light of U.S politics, theorizing the emergence of what came to be known as Neo-Orientalism. While unsettling Eurocentric hegemony, Said (2003) highlights imaginary borders between the West and what was mis(represented) as the Orient. Alrasheed's (2015) move highlights a post 9/11 US version of European Orientalism:

Until 9/11, American Orientalism viewed the Middle East mainly through the European experience. However, after 9/11 the United States begins to have its own colonies in the Middle East...the United States sees the primary justification of its military presence in the Muslim world as the securing of its

own safety and an altruistic delivery of democracy. (p. 3-4)

According to Alrasheed (2015), Neo-Orientalism promotes a nuanced ideology, justifying the rise of US new-colonialism and its military intervention in the Middle East, as part of a post 9/11 securitization discourse.

Neo-Orientalism has found medium in post 9/11 Western literary discourse that associates Islam with terrorism, thus re-inventing newly rigid borders between a Muslim East and non-Muslim West. Defining the subgenre of 9/11 fiction, Kanwal (2015) explains that “the term has recently emerged as a category that includes both novels that reinforce the US public rhetoric equating Islam with terrorism...and those that highlight the lives of Muslims affected by the 9/11 events” (p. 19). Unlike mainstream literary critique, Gray (2009) argues that post 9/11 American novels manipulate the political scene and shift focus to the domestic world of the protagonists, featuring the personal and the private; he notes that “cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists” (p. 134). This is evident in how these novels, instead of focusing on the ‘cataclysmic’ event, opt to engage with common social issues such as romance and failing relationships between couples, to “assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures” (p. 134). According to Gray (2009), this obvious negligence of (inter)national repercussions as well as the marginalization of changes in the American cultural landscape following the 9/11 events are major limitations. For Gray (2009), American fiction in the immediate post 9/11 period has failed to represent how the U.S has become a “cultural borderland” where “different cultures meet, collide, and in some instances collude with each other” (p. 135). He notes how novelists immigrating to the US have better contributed to configuration of the U.S as a cultural borderland (p. 135), an area that will receive attention in this paper

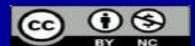
Reviewing Gray’s “model for the kind of deterritorialization of the novel” in the wake of 9/11, Rothberg (2009) emphasizes the need for exploring immigrant narratives for a better understanding of “international relations and extraterritorial citizenship” (p. 153). The new voice of immigrant narrative has found medium in South Asian fiction, particularly

Pakistani Muslim fiction, which redefines and reconstructs their national, Muslim identity. Through this emergent counter-discourse, Chambers (2011) contends that Pakistani Muslim writers “challenge stock images of, while highlighting divisions and disagreements among, Muslim groups” (p. 123). One reason why Pakistani literature gained such popularity, Shamsie (2011) explains, relates to how the “Pakistani imagination is also linked to the wider Islamic world” (p. 119). This wider imagination is attributed to Pakistan’s multilayered Islamic heritage influenced by its borders with India, Afghanistan and Iran (p. 119), thus contributing to the richness and multiplicity of Pakistani literature beyond local cultural landscape.

The 9/11 events mark a dividing line between the first and second generation of diasporic Pakistani writers (Aamir, 2016, p. 169). First generation writers, including Hanif Kureishi, Sara Suleri, Bapsi Sidhwa and Nadeem Aslam, “had a dominant post-colonial perspective”(Aamir, 2016, p. 169). Their pre 9/11 literary works are mainly concerned with Pakistan’s 1947 partition from India, the post-independence era and its consequences on both the individual and the community (Kanwal, 2015). However, second generation writers, including Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Ali Sethi, Mohammed Hanif, Maha Khan and H. M Naqvi, focus more on redefining the Islamic identity in post 9/11 world as well as writing back to a Western discourse linking Muslims with terrorism. Kanwal (2015) notes that “these writers, whilst taking 9/11 discourse in new directions, represent historical and political connections between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East in the context of both the rise of religious extremism in these countries and the rise of Islamophobia discourses in the West” (p.19). This group of writers has revolutionized not only Pakistani English literature, but the sub-genre of post 9/11 fiction as well.

3. Methodology

While based on postcolonial theoretical framing, the study draws on K. Alrasheed’s (2015) recent conceptualization of neo-Orientalism and D. Newman’s (2006, 2015, 2017) theorization of borders in the wake of the 9/11 events. It extends studies on Muslim Pakistani fiction with particular focus on the impact of the 9/11 events in (re)defining abstract and concrete borders between a Muslim East and a secular West. Negotiation of border construction is linked to the measure of freedom allowed for the



mobility of Muslim immigrants in the US, and the security control policies limiting border permeability. The selection criteria of texts are based on the temporal frame of the text and the year of production. The paper, then, examines selected pre and post 9/11 Muslim Pakistani fiction including Papsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993), Mohsin Hamid's *the Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and H. M Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009).

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Borders in pre 9/11 Muslim Pakistani Fiction

Bapsi Sidhwa's pre 9/11 novel, *An American Brat* (1993), tells the story of a young Muslim Pakistani immigrant in the US during the late 1970s. Along the journey from Pakistan to the US, Feroza comes across many sites and places that function as physical borders, separating her from the host culture. According to Newman (2003), "The essence of a border is to... prevent the entry of undesired elements—be they people, goods, arms, drugs and...information." (p. 14). These borders are constructed and maintained by a powerful society not only to separate, but to protect those who are inside from any intrusion of foreign bodies and values from the outside. In *An American Brat* (1993), the airplane marks the first physical border experienced by Feroza. Feelings of alienation and exclusion are triggered by the change of atmosphere, which resulted from having foreign passengers on the plane. It is noteworthy that she does not feel as such at the beginning due to the familiarity of the passengers. But when the aircraft stops in London, she immediately notes how; "the space within the aircraft, the atmosphere, had changed, become foreign" (1993, p. 54). The aircraft thus turns into a bordered space, limiting Feroza's mobility, and heightening her sense of marginality.

The high security measures at the airport further heighten Feroza's border experience, relegating her to margins of what Newman describes as 'undesired elements'. As she has arrived in the airport, however, Feroza has experienced another border and site of exclusion. She is treated with unfriendliness by the immigration officer who questions her excessively about the length of her stay in the U.S (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 54). After discovering that Feroza's uncle is already living in the U.S, the officer's attitude becomes more hostile to the point that he "appear[s] to doubt everything she [says] with chilling

implacability" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 54). She is asked to give her uncle's name then transferred to secondary inspection, where she is interrogated with disrespect and humility. She is forced to swear to tell "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (p. 60) as if she is a suspect in question. She is furthermore warned that "If [she] give[s] false testimony... [she] may be prosecuted for perjury", and if convicted accordingly, she will "be fined two thousand dollars or imprisoned for not more than five years, or both" (p. 60). Every answer she gives is received with skepticism. Her uncle is also called for inspection and asked to provide proof that he did not break his visa regulations. The officers' strict inspection highlights the intolerance of the United States towards foreigners' crossing of its borders during the 1970s, the time frame of the events in the narrative.

It is worth noting that the building in which Feroza and her uncle Manek live during their stay in New York is in itself a bordered space. It is divided into floors that are inhabited by different social groups;

When he had booked into the YMCA the day before, Manek had discovered that the fifteenth floor was reserved for married couples...The twenty-second floor was for women only. The rest of the building appeared to have been taken over by weirdos and winos, of various shades and races, who hung out on all the levels. (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 69)

These floors are protected by barriers including locked doors to the staircase, and elevators which do not stop at all levels. When Feroza is locked inside the staircase, she discovers that all doors are closed, thus freaks out and feels as if "shut...out of New York" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 88). The confinement of the stairs evokes Feroza's thoughts of alienation and detachment from the city; "when she opened her eyes, her world had unaccountably shrunk, as if nothing existed outside the stairwell. America assumed a ruthless, hollow, cylindrical shape without beginning or end, without sunlight, an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her fear" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 90). The closed staircase, Goma (2014) suggests, mirrors Feroza's "in betweenness," whilst the dark staircase shuts Feroza out of the New World and takes her back to her own homeland (p. 74). Goma's (2014) description of Feroza's in betweenness also mirrors her border-crossing experience in the airport, where she felt alienated and

detached. The YMCA thus acts as a bordered space with borders controlling mobility along the state of the building. It not only separates different social groups from each other, but detaches them from the city itself, a microcosm of the bordered world beyond.

Contrastingly, the house in which Feroza and her uncle stay in Boston is inhabited by a homogeneous ethnic group of South Asians. Shared by five Pakistani and Indian students, the house is described as old, shabby and tight. The area where it is located, i.e. Somerville, is described as “seedy” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 96). Feroza and her uncle do not encounter any Americans in the neighborhood. It is also stated that the former occupant of the attic is Bangladeshi. Enclaves of South Eastern inhabitants limit the possibility of cross-cultural encounter. Similar to the New York building, the Boston house fences off Feroza and her roommates from the American cultural landscape.

However, Feroza’s movement to the city of Denver for study has exposed her to a new environment where she has experienced a relatively more open space than New York and Boston. For the first time since she has arrived in the US, she finds familiarity and acceptance, as she notes: “this was the America she had imagined herself in...Beyond the skyscrapers was the jagged wall of mountains, spectacular in the sunset, dwarfing everybody and everything with its billowing mass” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 212). The description of the landscape indicates an unfamiliar borderlessness of an American city. Here, Feroza seems unrestricted by buildings similar to the ones in New York and Boston. Furthermore, the university’s heterogeneous community brings her out of the alienation circle:

From her very first day at the University of Denver, Feroza sensed she was in the right place, that her life would develop in unexpected and substantial ways...the cosmopolitan variety of students — black, Hispanic, Arabic, Irani, and some unmistakably Pakistani and Indian — filled her with suppressed excitement. (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 212)

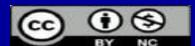
Feroza believes that this particular landscape will help her grow in different, unconventional ways; “the feeling she’d had about Denver and the University — that she was in the right place and that her life would bloom — now appeared affirmed” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 215). The cosmopolitan nature of Denver allows her to interact with different

multicultural communities, turning Denver into a cultural borderland, where different communities intervene and interact across cultural borders.

In the student residence, Twin Falls, Feroza’s greater visibility and interaction with the dominant culture, mainly through her friendship with the American girl, Jo, reveal how abstract borders that separate the West from the Muslim East resist erasure. To assimilate into the American culture, Feroza follows Jo’s instructions in terms of language and appearance. Jo teaches Feroza to speak the American accent and “cures” her from using phrases that indicate her foreignness (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 154), and adjusts Feroza’s foreign way of dressing to the American way (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 172). Even though Jo thinks of Feroza as a good friend, she does not accept her for who she is. Her attempt to mediate her “foreignness” highlights the former’s intolerance to difference. Thus, through their friendship, an abstract border is sustained to separate the Orient and the Occident. It is a relationship of the Self/Other whereby Jo’s culture is regarded as superior and Feroza’s is exotic and inferior. This abstract border is controlled and maintained by the Occident as it is manifested in Jo.

Feroza, in return, introduces Jo to the Pakistan that she has never known. Despite Jo’s “political naïveté” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 171), Feroza tells her about the disturbing politics of Pakistan. Influenced by Feroza, Jo eventually gets involved with her friend in keeping up with the increasing problems in Pakistan, questioning the “one-sided” news about Third-World countries (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 171). Feroza is thus the one who attempts to navigate the abstract borders between the Orient and the Occident presented in the novel.

The Orient/Occident borders of Feroza’s pre 9/11 world, whilst more often rigid and impassable, allow infrequent crossings. The Twin Falls community has emphasized her foreignness and made her aware of the physical signs of difference. This difference is inextricably linked to a hierarchical positioning; “Dismayed by her own brown skin, the emblem of her foreignness, she felt it was inferior to the gleaming white skin in the washrooms and the roseate faces in the classrooms” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 152). However, in Denver, Feroza’s encounter with the Indian student, Shahi, has brought her in contact with a wider circle of “Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Pakistani, Indian, Middle



Eastern, Far Eastern, black, and white friends” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 214). This cross-cultural exposure has developed later into an intimate relationship with David. Feroza’s love story with this American Jew and their plan for marriage introduces a new opening in the border. “It was as if she had taken a leap across some cultural barrier,” the narrator describes Feroza’s experience, “and found herself on the other side of it to discover that everything was comfortingly the same” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 251).

The impassibility of borders becomes apparent towards the end. Since friendship and marriage are social acts of border-crossing, neither are really crossed in the novel. Feroza’s failing friendship with Jo allows her to voyage in and rediscover herself and the world:

Feroza found herself on her own much of the time as a perceptibly shrinking Jo cavorted with new-found confidence and new friends. Had it not been for Shashi’s determined advent into her life, Feroza might have clung longer to the umbilical cord by which she had attached herself to Jo. (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 214)

Feroza’s relationship with the Indian student, Shahi, permits her to “access to happier places within herself” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 215). She experiences a “shift in perspective” in her mind and [finds] herself indulging in new, different forms of knowledge (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 215). This dramatic change in perspective highlights the common trope in colonialist discourse, “separating ‘us’,” as Said (2003) notes, “from an Orient destined to bear its foreignness as a mark of its permanent estrangement from the West” (p. 244).

Upon returning to Pakistan, exposure to the Western culture in the US seems to have constructed a new border between Feroza and her native culture. As she returns home, Feroza realizes how different she is from her old friends; she “knew she had changed, and the life of her friends there had also changed, taken a different direction from hers. Their preoccupation with children and servants and their concern with clothes and furnishings did not interest her” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 312). According to Gul et al. (2016), Feroza’s alienation in America is more tolerable when compared to her detachment from Pakistan, explaining that “the unhomeliness that America makes her feel is what helps her in shedding the various restrictions imposed on her by her home country” (p. 151). Contrastingly,

Vaishnavi & Kumar (2017), argue that Feroza’s rejection to her homeland is attributed to experiencing reverse culture shock. Crossing the East/West border, more often than not, unsettles the relationship of the Eastern immigrant with his native cultural landscape.

As for the marriage border, not only does it remain uncrossed, but it stands as evidence for the impossibility of crossing American/Pakistani borders in the text. Manek, Feroza’s uncle, never marries his American girlfriend, instead, he travels to Pakistan to marry a Parsee girl. Moreover, David renounces marrying Feroza after being confronted with her culture. Feroza’s mother, Zareen, travels to Feroza in order to convince her not to marry a none-Parsee. As she fails to fulfill the task, she reluctantly agrees with the condition that David and his family come to Pakistan to have a “grand wedding” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 297). After being exposed to the traditions of Pakistani weddings, he acknowledges their differences and thus his feelings change accordingly; “the very thing that had attracted him to Feroza, her exoticism, now frightened David... He felt inadequate, wondering if he could cope with some of the rituals and behavior that, despite his tolerant and accepting liberality, seemed bizarre” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 309). Feroza’s exoticism, while attracting David at the beginning, causes him to reconstruct the border and cancel his marital plans. While Feroza challenges her family’s Parsee rituals, which ban mixed marriage, deprive the mother from “any communal or religious rights or privileges” (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 305), and delegitimize the children, David remains skeptical and decides not to take the challenge. The pre 9/11 context of *An American Brat*, then, problematizes border crossing in terms of the lack of reception and failure of affiliation experienced by both cultural spaces across the divide.

4.2 Post 9/11 Muslim Pakistani fiction and the Resealing of Borders

Whilst the border between the Orient and the Occident has long existed, the 9/11 events have increased its visibility, marking a shift in the conceptualization of borders. Newman (2017) explains;

Following the events of 9/11 and the emergence of global terror and violence, there has been a move toward the resealing and reclosing of borders as a means through which states prevent “alien” and “illegal” elements from

crossing into the territories and the space of the homeland. (p. 4)

Initiated by the United States and followed by the rest of the Western world, the closing of borders and the exclusion of undesired groups after 9/11 were perceived to be necessary measures for security. In the wake of these attacks, the emergent “securitization” discourse in the US promoted further fortification and separation in narratives and beyond (Newman, 2017, p. 4). Whilst hegemonic securitization rhetoric over immigrants is rationalized along national security lines, anti-hegemonic narratives attempt to unsettle this exercise of power. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Hamid writes:

There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as duty and honor. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back... What your fellow countrymen longed for was unclear to me—a time of unquestioned dominance? of safety? Of moral certainty? I did not know—but that they were scrambling to don [sic] the costumes of another era was apparent. (pp. 130-131)

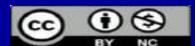
The quote signals the rupture of a progressive ‘America’ and a return to what Hall (2013) has described as “the old, the imperializing, the homogenizing form of ‘ethnicity’” (235), a reverse from a borderless, multicultural dream land to a bordered space. After the attacks, Eastern Muslim immigrants are seen as a foreign minority unfitted to live within the American soil. The inclusion of certain entities and the exclusion of an inferior race suggests a new America in the making; one that is fixed and defined by a superior, white race. The events of 9/11 therefore function as a border, marking the start of a dynamic era where the demand for strict borders and “walls” is rapidly increasing. Under such circumstances, mobility and the freedom to roam were rigidly restricted, leading to global and more complex crisis. This hegemony is reflected in post-9/11 novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Home Boy* (first published in 2008).¹ The

¹ Here I refer to the year in which the novel was first published. However, elsewhere in the paper when I quote from the novel, I cite the edition published in 2010.

representations of abstract and concrete borders implemented within both texts are noticeably present as opposed to the pre-9/11 narrative of Sidhawa’s *An American Brat* (1993)

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) represents Erica’s house as a microcosm of the post 9/11 US with highly secured borders limiting and more often refusing the entry of Muslims and Easterners. With “a coldly disapproving expression,” the doorman at the gate uneasily allowed Changez to enter the building with Erica (Hamid, 2007, p. 56). However, *Home Boy* represents a place that is both bordered and borderless; the bar “located in the periphery of Tribeca Tja” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 8) while unreachable by elite Westerners, invites fugitives and social outcasts. Unlike other bars, it is a borderless space where “there were no gilded ropes circumscribing the entrance, no bouncers or surly transvestites maintaining vigil outside” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 8). It attracted people like “Scandinavian scenesters and sundry expatriates as well as socialites, arrivistes, homosexuals, metrosexuals, and a smattering of has-been and wannabe models” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 8). These were likely to be society’s outcasts assembled in order to escape their otherness in an unfamiliar landscape.

Hamid (2007) and Naqvi (2010) represent Muslim Pakistani characters facing concrete borders, which restrict their freedom to roam in the US in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. The airport is the first border Changez of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) faces while returning from a business trip in the Philippines to New York. In Manila’s airport, he is separated from his colleagues and “escorted by armed guards into a room where [he is] made to strip down to [his] boxer shorts” (p. 85). He is treated as a suspect in the Philippines due to his color, which implies that the misconceptions about Muslims are not solely restricted to the Western mindset, but extended worldwide to reach the cultural landscapes of the Far East. When he lands in New York, Changez is separated from American citizens at the immigration central and treated with hostility by an official immigration officer, requesting an answer for his question about the purpose of coming to the United States. When Changez makes it clear that he lives there, the officer replies, “that is not what I asked you, sir,” and repeats the question as if his living there is against the law. Consequently, after Changez gives the same answer, he is



referred to a secondary inspection “where [he] sat on a metal bench next to a tattooed man in handcuffs” (Hamid, 2007, pp. 85-86). Changez is incriminated and discriminated because of his Muslim Pakistani background. This early encounter with institutional discrimination at the border foreshadows a new era when foreigners are no longer accepted and crossing borders is no longer permissible.

Similar practices of institutional rejection are represented in Naqvi’s *Home Boy* (2010), where the mobility of Muslim Pakistani characters in the US is circumscribed by checkpoints and detention orders. After the disappearance of their friend; Chuck, AC and Jimbo, all Pakistani, drive a cab from Manhattan to Connecticut in search for their missing friend. Mainly for their foreign appearance, they are stopped by “two patrol cars facing each other at a slight angle” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 127), and questioned by the police officers. Chuck recalls “I had no idea what triggered his concern...but at the time the following thought hit me: We’re a bunch of brown men in a car, the night of heightened security in the city...it was the first time I had felt this way: uneasy, guilty, criminal” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 129). Like Changez of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the three characters here are put under suspicion for the unfamiliarity of their skin color, and their mobility is restricted. Shortly after arriving to their missing friend’s house, they are arrested by FBI agents with no real charge and taken to the Metropolitan Detention Centre, in which “the worst abuses in the American prison system after 9/11 took place” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 176). This prison marks a rigid border, which permanently changes the characters’ lives. Chuck is separated from his friends and treated with extreme violence as if he is a terrorist; “I was shoved into the sedan, hooded, and sandwiched between two bodies...I was sure that I wasn’t nestled among friends” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 173). At the center of these arrests lies the question of “[W]hy Muslims terrorize” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 193). After two days of imprisonment, Chuck is asked to leave the country permanently in five days. It is noteworthy that Chuck arrived legally in the US with a student visa and later acquired a work permit. Jimbo, on the other hand, is released with no consequences due to his American passport. Even though he is of a Pakistani origin and is treated accordingly, he still enjoys the rights of an American citizen, constraining the FBI agents from taking

actions against him. AC, who is an immigrant, is charged for fifteen years to life for possession of cocaine (Naqvi, 2010, p. 320). Even though he comes out clean of the terrorist charges, the agents managed to find something that keeps him locked up for an extended amount of time. According to Shanthi (2016), the negation of Muslim Pakistani voice reduces them to the periphery (p. 61). The mobility of Chuck and AC within the American soil is highly constrained; whether by being locked up in jail or expelled out of American lands, these concrete borders, are controlled by US power politics and made impossible to cross.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Hamid represents the human body as a form of concrete border limiting interaction between a secular West and a Muslim East after the attacks. Erica, an American girl whom Changez falls in love with, changes after the attacks and retreats to a “powerful nostalgia” (Hamid, 2007, p. 129) of her dead boyfriend Chris. It is implied that 9/11 triggered something within her that caused her to suffer from severe depression, thus shutting Changez gradually out of her life (Hamid, 2007, pp. 117-118). Her body has become a physical border unpenetrated by Changez. He only succeeds when Erica imagines Chris, implicitly rejecting him in return. America is thus eroticized through Erica’s body, similarly to the African woman represented in Western colonial writings, whose “sexual knowledge of her body is knowledge of Africa itself” (Spurr, 1993, p. 171). The irony of the situation lies within Hamid’s excessive use of symbolism. Morey (2011) contends that Erica represents an America that is “fixated with past cultural certainties” (p. 140). He further explains how

Erica is made symbolically to embody the whole fate of her home nation after September 11. The tentative flowering of her relationship with Changez represents the possibility of East/West rapprochement in the cosmopolitan spaces of New York, but she begins to diminish physically and mentally in the novel’s second half. Like her country, relying on the comforts of a military response and invoking the spirit of the Second World War in the weeks after 9/11, Erica disappears into a “dangerous nostalgia”. (Morey, 2011, p. 140)

Like the events of 9/11, Erica herself marks a physical border which separates a past, powerful America from a new,

insecure state embracing military fortification and intervention. Her rejection of Changez mirrors a new America that rejects racial heterogeneity. The impossibility of their relationship acts as a microcosm of the Muslim East/Occident failing relationship after the attacks.

The invisible borders that emerged between the Muslim East and the Occident after 9/11 are too rigid, relegating Muslim immigrants to margins of alienation and detachment from the centre. The American flag, an official signifier and a visible reminder of the national border, is repeatedly represented to “enunciate the sense of a nation” whilst othering foreign minorities (Suhana, 2018, p. 68). The desired effect of the American flag is successfully fulfilled as several South Eastern writers negotiate its signification in their works. In Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Changez criticizes the sudden post 9/11 affluence of American flags—what he describes as the invasion of land by American flags:

Your country’s flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields and windows; large flags fluttered from buildings. They all seemed to proclaim: We are America—not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different—the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath. (p. 90)

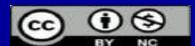
The flags, here, signify the dialectics of power politics, reinforcing superiority and aggression over that which lies outside the national boundaries. A similar observation has been noted by the Afganistani novelist, Khalid Hosseini, in his post 9/11 novel *The Kite Runner* (2003), emphasizing how “the American flag suddenly appeared everywhere, on the antennae of yellow cabs weaving around traffic” (p. 320). Following the 9/11 events, the unusual rise of these flags inside the US marks a corporate and institutionalized formulation of abstract borders, separating Americans from foreigners within American spaces, and reasserting the superiority and dominion of their national identity over other lands and nations.

Muslim immigrants in both Hamid’s and Naqvi’s narratives are treated with hostility and labeled as “Arabs” regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Terrorism is thus redefined in relation to Arabs and dark

complexions. A clear example can be found when a stranger attacks Changez and calls him a “fucking Arab”, negating the differences of an entire race that does not even speak Arabic (Hamid, 2007, p. 134). Similarly, Chuck and his friends in *Home Boy* are physically attacked by two violent men who condemn them for being “A-rabs” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 41). Chuck is startled by the aggressive way the word is pronounced, “like a dagger thrust and turned” and thus tries to explain their own difference (Naqvi, 2010, p. 41). One of the attackers claims that there is no difference between Muslims and Arabs, even after Jimbo clarifies that he too is American. Moreover, Chuck is labeled stereotypically as a “sand nigger” and a “terrorist” by an official agent in the detention center (Naqvi, 2010, p. 181). These situations highlight the irrationality with which non-Westerners are discriminated by the American society. Said (2003) explains that “the age-old distinction between ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ or ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’ herds beneath very wide labels every possible variety of human plurality, reducing it in the process to one or two terminal, collective abstractions” (p. 156). The Orient is perceived collectively, reducing its rich diversity to a monolithic homogeneity, and bracketing it off the Euro-American supremacy.

The construction of these abstract divisions has made Muslim Pakistani immigrants, in both Hamid’s (2007) and Naqvi’s (2010) novels, feel anxious about difference, uncomfortable in their own skin, and subject to exclusion. With utmost disappointment, Changez recalls memories of being treated like a terrorist in Manila’s airport: “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious” (Hamid, 2007, p. 85). Similarly, Chuck of *Home Boy* (2010) feels “like a marked man...an animal” (p. 342), very much conscious about the way he looks and behaves:

I was conscious of the way I looked, behaved, the way I anxiously scratched my nose, my ear. When they announced “Please report any suspicious activity or behavior” over the speakers, I closed my eyes like a child attempting to render himself invisible. When a hand grabbed me by the shoulder then, I almost cried bloody murder. (p. 203)



Muslim Pakistani immigrants are perceived as a threat to humanity, and thus subjected to control measures familiar to what Michel Foucault has described as an abstract and more generalized conceptualization of the Panopticon model of eighteenth and nineteenth-century European prisons (see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, 1995). This feeling of being constantly watched by authority is part of the surveillance rhetoric manipulated in what Newman defines as ‘securitization discourse’ to discursively construct and maintain borders along the 9/11 divide.

Both Hamid and Naqvi have represented post 9/11 exclusionist practices against Muslim minorities in their narratives. Changez describes how “Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse” (Hamid, 2007, p. 107). Since the seventeenth century, contends Said (2003), Western discourse has linked Islam with “terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma” (p. 60). These exclusionist practices have resulted in mass departure from American cities. An invisible border is reconstructed by the Occident, making the immigrants’ lives intolerable within the American landscape.

The discursive construction of post-9/11 borders has been further complicated by the US resealing of its borders and the return of Muslim immigrants to their homelands, suggesting a reverse border construction from the other side. Chuck observes how the Roosevelt Avenue in New York, which represents a microcosm of Pakistan, is deserted. Shops and houses are abandoned as people “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 return” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 300). Those who choose to stay configure other forms of border to signal their national identity. Changez, for instance, grows his beard as a “form of protest on [his] part, a symbol of [his] identity” (Hamid, 2007, p. 148). Consequently, he has been “subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers” and becomes the “subject of whispers and stares” in his workspace (Hamid, 2007, p. 148). Chuck shows resistance by speaking up against the United States’ segregationist

policies against immigrants. History, according to Chuck, reveals how the US has dealt with security threats by throwing “a hundred thousand Japanese into camps, whole families—women, children, old people—because they posed a security threat” (Naqvi, 2010, p. 226). Towards the end, the protagonists decide to leave the centre with its shattering dreams and return home, further separating themselves as Muslim minorities from a Western “project of domination” (Hamid, 2007, p. 177). Changez regrets the time he spent in the US, and considers his stay a form of participation indirectly though, “in facilitating this project of domination” (Hamid, 2007, p. 177). The Muslim Pakistani protagonists, Chuck and Changez, have reacted to the fastening of Occidental borders by redefining their national identities in relation to rebuilding strong connections to their homelands. They have realized that staying in the US has become humiliating. The construction of post 9/11 borders and the following traumatic experiences have redefined their identities as Muslim Pakistani immigrants in the US.

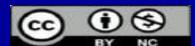
5. Conclusion

The discussion of representation of abstract and concrete borders in the selected pre and post 9/11 novels show some commonalities and differences. The pre 9/11 concrete borders presented in *An American Brat* function to separate Muslim immigrants from the American cultural landscape, but does not restrict their mobility. Whereas the post 9/11 borders as reflected in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Boy* separate them from the American landscape and limit their freedom to roam. These borders, which existed before and after the attacks, are constructed and controlled by the US—the West by extension—relegating Muslim immigrants to marginalized enclaves. Cultural borders remain uncrossed, following the 9/11 events, suggesting a new turn in the history of borders, with the emergent discourse of securitization. Individuals with dark complexions and different religious backgrounds are perceived as a threat to security, causing the construction of impassible borders between the Muslim East and the secular West.

References

- Aamir, R. (2016). Post 9/11 Pakistan’s Diasporic Fiction: Redefining Boundaries of South Asian Literature. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 19(1), 169-179.

- Alrasheed, K. M. (2015). *Invisible Humans, Visible Terrorists: US Neo-Orientalism Post 9/11 and Representations of the Muslim World*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Purdue University.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute Books.
- Bulut, E. (2016). Pride and Prejudice: the Context of Reception for Muslims in the United States. *Contemporary Social Science*, 11(4), 304-314.
- Chambers, C. (2011). A comparative approach to Pakistani fiction in English. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47(2), 122-134.
- Chavez, N. & H. Regan. (2019). "Suspect in New Zealand Mosque Shootings Was Prepared to Continue His Attack," PM Says." CNN, Cable News Network, 16 Mar. 2019, edition.cnn.com/2019/03/15/asia/christ-church-mosque-shootingintl/index.html.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. Vintage Books: New York.
- Gomaa, D. (2014). Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*: Becoming American, but "not yet". *South Asian Review*, 35(2), 67-80.
- Gray, R. (2009). Open doors, closed minds: American prose writing at a time of crisis. *American Literary History*, 21(1), 128-151.
- Gul, H, R. Bin Noor & H. K. J. Singh. (2016). Hybridity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 22(1), 141-152.
- Hall, S. (2013). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 392-403). London and New York: Routledge.
- Hamid, M. (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Penguin Books: India.
- Kanwal, A. (2015). *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lagnah, N. (2019). Islamization and Post-9/11 'Islamophobia': "the power of genre"—a response from Pakistani Writers. In N. Lagnah (Ed.) *Literary and Non-literary Responses towards 9/11: South Asia and Beyond* (pp. 79-96). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Mansoor, A. (2012). Post 9/11 Identity Crisis in HM Naqvi's *Home Boy*. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 4(2), 8-44.
- Morey, P. (2011). "The rules of the game have changed": Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and post 9/11 fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47(2), 135-146.
- Naqvi, H. M. (2010). *Home Boy*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India
- Nath, D. (2007). Wolf Children and the Discourse of Animality. Conference presentation at "Thinking Gender": 17th Annual Graduate Students Research Conference. February 2, 2007, University of California. Available at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5w43j47r>.
- Newman, D. (2017). Borders, Boundaries, and Borderlands. *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg1039C>
- Newman, D. (2003). On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework. *Journal of borderlands Studies*, 18(1), 13-25.
- Newman, D. (2015). Revisiting Good Fences and Neighbours in a Postmodern World after Twenty Years: Theoretical Reflections on the State of Contemporary Border Studies. *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 44(4), 13-19.
- Newman, D. (2006). The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our Borderless World. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(2), 143-161.
- Prokkola, E. (2009). Unfixing Borderland Identity: Border Performances and Narratives in the Construction of Self. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 24(3), 21-38.
- Rothberg, M. (2009). A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray. *American Literary History*, 21(1), 152-158.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. Vintage Books.
- Shamsie, M. (2011). Duality and Diversity in Pakistani English



Literature. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47(2), 119-121.

Shanthi, P. (2016). Performing Identities: A Study of H.M Naqvi's *Home Boy*. *Smart Moves Journal IJELLH*, 4(6), 59-65.

Sidhwa, B. (2012). *An American Brat: A Novel*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions,

Spurr, D. (1993). *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Suhana, P. A. (2018). Resetting Borders: Transnationalism, Identity and Home in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *IJAR*, 4(9), 67-69.

Tilwani, S. A. (2019). Exclusion in the Reluctant Fundamentalist. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity, and Change*, 9(9), 313-328.

Vaishnavi, K., and S. Karthik Kumar. (2017). Transnational Journey in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*. *Notions*, 8(2), 1-6.

Wuthnow, R. (2011). *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Kindle ed.