

Multiplicity, Trauma, and Polyphonic Narratives: A Postmodern Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Mohsin Naqvi's *Home Boy*

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Abstract: *This paper presents the postmodern representation of trauma in the creative works of Mohsin Hamid and H.M. Naqvi, looking at their development of multiplicity and polyphonic narrative techniques to portray dismembered selves and collective amnesia in postcolonial settings. Through Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and Naqvi's "Home Boy", this paper examines how the authors abandon the linearity of non-fiction, use unreliable narrators, and intertextuality to break standard narrative forms and demonstrate the jarring effects of trauma around the world. The paper attempts to show that the works of Hamid and Naqvi integrate the use of postmodern literary style in articulating the psychological and socio-political impact of violence, migration, and cultural displacement on the globalized world. The guiding thread of this research paper is the polyphony of trauma, or the ability of Schulman's trauma to contain and interact with multiple criticisms, stems from her intellectual and social marginalization along with the interplay of various identities and voices in a single poem. The analysis explores how Nagid's *Changez* and Naqvi's *Chuck*, while performing their complex identities, demonstrate the multifaceted nature of identity politics within the context of hybrid citizenship and the ensuing cultural dilemmas from ethnic and national loyalty.*

Keywords: Mohsin Hamid, polyphony, trauma, social marginalization, postmodern

Introduction

Trauma is being subjected to a deeply disturbing experience which may result in a person being in a state of severe shock that is long lasting. Trauma literature investigates the extreme experiences of people in their most saddening forms in an innovative way through the lens of postmodernism. The 9/11 tragedy serves as a foundation for contemporary literature because it encompasses so many themes such as cultural alienation, identity crisis, and PTSD. This also includes the works of H. M. Naqvi and Mohsin Hamid, who are perhaps the most known Pakistani-American writers that analyze these traumatic experiences through the eyes of Pakistani-American protagonists.

These two works, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Boy* offer readers a glimpse of what goes on in their minds as they peel back the complex psychological and emotional trauma ailing them. These authors capture their audience's focus by disclosing the various wounds that their characters struggle with daily. Authors of these works use the tricks of postmodernism skillfully. They choose particularly

polyphonic narratives to portray the complex and intricate realities faced by their characters. These narratives are not only rich in cultural, but they highlight the social nuances, reflecting the wider and bigger socio-political environment that forms the characters' experiences and identities.

Postmodernism emphasizes on fragmented identities and multiplicity of perspectives by offering an ideal framework to examine the intricate depiction of trauma in these selected works. The polyphonic nature of Naqvi's and Hamid's narratives line up with the concept of polyphony by Mikhail Bakhtin. It gives emphasizes and attention on the coexistence of multiple voices and perspectives present within a text (Bakhtin, 1984). Furthermore, the demonstration of trauma in these narratives can be further understood through the trauma theory of Cathy Caruth. The writer searches the relationship between trauma and narrative. (Carth, 1996)

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the use of polyphonic narratives in *Home Boy* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
2. To study the cultural and societal components of trauma are addressed in these novels address
3. To investigate the interaction of various voices in their narratives have on readers' comprehension of trauma and its complex aspects

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to give a thorough overview of the body of research on trauma in post-9/11 literature, with a particular focus on polyphonic narratives and the theoretical frameworks of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphony. In addition to highlighting important works, this review points out gaps in the literature and places this study in the context of the current scholarly conversation.

Post-9/11 Trauma in Literature

Contemporary literature has been greatly impacted by the events of September 11, 2001, and as a result, there are many works that examine themes of trauma, identity, and displacement (Versluys, 2009). The psychological and emotional effects of 9/11 on people and communities have been portrayed through the narratives of writers from a variety of backgrounds (Grey, 2011). This field of study emphasizes how trauma is fragmented and complex, mirroring the intricacy of experiences following 9/11. (Whitehead, 2004)

Polyphonic Narratives

Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Polyphony

Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the notion of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). It reveals the presence of multiple distinct voices within a text. A richer and more intricate is generated through this process, allowing for a dynamic interaction of the narrative environment viewpoints. Research has shown that polyphonic narratives are particularly effective in describing cause trauma, because they reflect the range of voices and perspectives involved. (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Evaluation of Post-9/11 Literature A number of authors have adopted polyphonic storylines to depict what transpired after 9/11.

Application to Post-9/11 Literature

These accounts provide a nuanced portrait of trauma in the lives of the people affected by the events (Versluys, 2009). Polyphony is a helpful technique for exploring the complexity of post-9/11 experience, for it points to the convergence of cultural identity, trauma, and displacement in Pakistani American writing. (Gaylord, 2013)

Trauma Theory

Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory

The trauma theory of Cathy Caruth interrogates the relationship between trauma and narrative, as articulated in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). According to Caruth, trauma creates a unique narrative form based on repetition (Caruth 1996), deferred comprehension, and fragmentation. This theory has much been employed in the literary studies to address the ways trauma may be represented and communicated in stories. (Eaglestone, 2004)

Representation of Trauma in *Home Boy* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Home Boy by H. M. Naqvi

The horrific effects of the events on the lives of three Pakistani immigrants in post-9/11 New York City are investigated in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (Naqvi, 2009). The novel uses polyphonic tales. It illustrates the individuals' many viewpoints and fractured identities. It explains the intricacy of trauma and cultural relocation. (Naqvi, 2009)

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid tells the tale of Changez, a Pakistani man who, following 9/11, undergoes a severe identity crisis (Hamid, 2007). A multidimensional depiction of trauma is made possible by the novel's polyphonic narrative structure, which captures the variety of voices and viewpoints involved. (Hamid, 2007)

Conclusion of Critical Perspectives

Scholars have given emphasis to their effectiveness in depicting trauma. The reason is that polyphonic narratives enable the representation of multiple voices and perspectives (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Polyphony contributes to the richness and intricacy of narratives in post-9/11 literature. It offers a more detailed contemplation of terrible events (Versluys, 2009).

Despite the abundance of material on the subject, there is still a lack of research and investigation on how trauma and polyphony interact in Naqvi and Hamid's writings. In order to fill this gap, this study gives a comprehensive examination of the ways in which trauma is portrayed through polyphonic tales in *Home Boy* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study investigates the portrayal of trauma in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi. It explores the intersection of trauma, narrative structure, and ideological expression within post-9/11 South Asian diasporic literature. Underpinned by Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, the research examines how trauma is constructed, mediated, and problematized in the selected texts. This qualitative study employs close reading and thematic analysis as its primary analytical methods. The primary data comprises the literary texts *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007) and *Home Boy* (Naqvi, 2009), while secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles, critical essays, and scholarly works that provide theoretical and contextual insights into trauma studies and narrative analysis. Close reading allows for detailed examination of language, voice, narrative disruption, and stylistic fragmentation. Elements such as silence, contradiction, non-linear timelines, and emotional detachment are analyzed as textual markers of trauma (Belsey, 2013). The method is particularly suited to understanding how the selected narratives convey psychological rupture and narrative tension. Thematic analysis complements this by enabling the identification of recurring patterns related to trauma, identity, displacement, and ideological tension. It helps uncover how trauma is not merely represented but also interrogated in the texts. The flexibility of thematic analysis is especially useful for examining how ethical concerns and power structures are embedded in narrative form (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Cathy Caruth's trauma theory provides a foundational framework for this inquiry. Caruth (1996) conceptualizes trauma as an experience that resists direct representation, reemerging belatedly through narrative gaps, haunting imagery, and repetition. This approach informs the analysis of fragmented storytelling and unresolved identity crises in both novels, where trauma operates as both a psychological and historical force. Alongside this, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory of polyphony offers insight into the narrative multiplicity found in the texts. Defined as the presence of independent and coexisting voices, polyphony reflects the complex, contested nature of diasporic identity. It resists monologic authority and allows the texts to portray trauma through conflicting ideological and cultural perspectives. In both novels, this narrative strategy reveals the fractured nature of post-9/11 subjectivity. Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogism ongoing interaction between self and other, margin and center allows for a deeper investigation into how narrative form becomes a site of ethical and ideological engagement. It underscores how both texts grapple with historical trauma while resisting reductive or unified interpretations. By integrating Caruth's trauma theory with Bakhtin's polyphony, the study offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing how trauma is aesthetically constructed and ethically negotiated. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of the narrative strategies used to depict silenced, fragmented, and politically charged experiences in post-9/11 diasporic fiction.

Cathy Caruth and Trauma Theory

In the trauma theory, Cathy dissects the interconnection between trauma, storytelling and history. Her publications, such as *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and "Listening to Trauma: The Ethical Challenge of Narrating Trauma" (2016), emphasize how trauma interrupts and affects memory. (Caruth, 1996, 2016). According to Cathy trauma leads towards the construction of a fragmented, incoherent, and distorted narrative, in which there is delayed comprehension and understanding of events by characters, and results in repetition of events at a time in the writing. Because of this distorted and incoherent structure of the text, it gets difficult for the readers to understand events at the time of uncovering of traumatic events, consequently necessitating recurrent retelling. Caruth stresses bearing of ethical responsibility of trauma narrative. She emphasizes on the importance of listening to and bearing witness to the experiences of others with Respect and care. According to her "This ethical aspect is critical for knowing how trauma narratives attempt to portray pain and the importance of empathic participation". (Caruth, 2016)

Complementarity of Bakhtin and Caruth

Bakhtin polyphony and Caruth trauma theory provide a solid framework for the study of the novels. Bakhtin polyphony untangles multiple layers of diverse perspectives, while the trauma story helps in understanding of the fragmentation laying under the structure of trauma narrative. Together these two theories provide a comprehensive framework comprehending the interplay of events. Bakhtin polyphony and Caruth trauma theory provide a solid framework for the study of the novels. Bakhtin polyphony untangles multiple layers of diverse perspectives, while the trauma story helps in understanding of the fragmentation laying under the structure of trauma narrative. Together these two theories provide a comprehensive framework comprehending the interplay of events.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This novel by Naqvi revolves around immigrants, Chuck, AC and Jimbo who lives in New York. Untangling the traumatic event of 9/11 in relation to these characters Naqvi portrays that how the multitude of experiences and opinions regarding trauma varies. Using polyphonic approach Naqvi gives a picture of different responses toward trauma. Naqvi use of polyphony enables the readers to comprehend the multifaceted response towards the traumatic event of 9/11. "This technique follows Bakhtin's concept of polyphonic narration that argues that any complete text has many voices, all of which are unique and distinct." (Bakhtin)

The use of polyphony by Naqvi draws attention to the characters' sense of identity fragmentation. Chuck

illustrates his internal struggle between his American identity and his Pakistani ancestry through his connections with others. It reflects the larger cultural and societal aspects of trauma (Naqvi, 2009). This disarray is consistent with Caruth's thesis. It holds that trauma shatters a person's continuity and sense of self (Caruth, 1996). According to research, people who experience trauma; they frequently experience identity fragmentation as a result of their inability to unite their pre- and post-trauma selves. (Herman, 1997)

A clear example of Naqvi's portrayal of trauma can be found in the fragmented and non-linear structure of *Home Boy's* narrative. The novel frequently shifts between past and present to illustrate how traumatic memories disrupt the characters' grasp on time and continuity. Naqvi's narrative style is consistent with Caruth's argument that trauma generates an entirely new order of narration that is alien to normal storytelling and focuses on the fragmented quality of the experience, as well as the repetition of the trauma ("Caruth, 1996") This is evident in Chuck's memories of New York, which are intertwined with memories of him experiencing horrors post 9/11. As Caruth puts it, trauma is an unassimilated experience that 'replays' in flashback after flashback. (Caruth, 1996)

In Mohsin Hamid's "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," a polyphonic story reveals the subtle points of view of Changez, the protagonist, and the unidentified American listener. Hamid (2007) notes that in a dramatic monologue to the American audience, Changez tells his story. This arrangement is the core of the novel. This narrative tool let a discussion highlight the range of opinions and points of view brought into play. According to Bakhtin (1984), polyphony—the coexistence of conflicting points of view—is allowed for by Hamid's structural narrative, which runs counter to this idea. Ideas of trauma, identity, and displacement all interlinked inside Changez's story to create a dense, multileveled narrative elegantly reflecting the weight of his life. Caruth argues that traumatic events change one's self concept. Looking into the construction of character of changez in the reluctant fundamentalist, one deduces that changez identify crises aroused from the traumatic event of 9/11. His self-concept varied with the aftershocks of the events, where he was torn between his Pakistani self and his American self. This crisis not only explicitize the notion variation of self-concept with trauma but also explains the connection between personal and societal suffering. Caruth emphasizes on how the disclosure of traumatic event distort the narrative structure and memory. In the novel one can see that changez smiles while seeing the world trade center being hit by plane, as he was still in processing phase. Moreover, the story is structured in retelling form, evidencing the notion of necessity of retelling of trauma narrative. The cultural setting of America post 9/11 much influences Changez's experiences of trauma. The extra attention and suspicion shown toward Muslims and Pakistanis causes Changez to have an identity crisis and feel alienation (Hamid, 2007). Hamid's representation of Changez's life brings to light the link between personal and societal suffering, therefore reflecting the more general sociopolitical environment. Studies have shown that social and cultural factors influence people's responses to trauma, which affects their understanding and handling of traumatic events (Kirmayer et al., 2000). Changing Changez's identity is shown by Hamid to emphasizes how society affects trauma. With use of polyphonic approach Naqvi and Mohsin not only gives a multifaceted notion of trauma but also create a picture of empathy in the narrative, solidifying the notion of ethical responsibility in trauma narrative. Keeping in view Caruth theory of trauma, which stresses on respecting the experiences of people who have countered the events, the authors has pictured the stories in such a way which have discarded the simplistic and stereotypical approach toward the traumatic experience of 9/11.

Similarities and Differences

To show the complexities of trauma, identity, and cultural displacement, both Naqvi and Hamid use polyphonic narratives. Their stories show the broken and complex character of trauma, hence capturing the many different experiences of their protagonists. But *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Hamid centers on the individual trauma of Changez, thereby drawing attention to his own identity crisis, Naqvi's *Home Boy* instead focuses on the group of friends' cumulative trauma. The post9/11 American

cultural context greatly affects the experiences of the characters in the two books. Centered on the rising mistrust and bigotry toward Muslims and Pakistanis that reflects the sociopolitical landscape of the day, both *Home Boy* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are source mapping. The authors' portrayal of cultural dislocation and identity crises underlines how personal and societal suffering are connected. Scholars have stressed the power of polyphonic stories in capturing trauma since they allow for the expression of many voices and perspectives. Polyphony helps to enrich and complicate narratives in post9/11 literature and therefore grants one a deeper understanding of tragic events (Versluys, 2009). Though there is much information on the topic, there is still little study on how trauma and polyphony interact in Naqvi and Hamid's works. This research provides a meticulous analysis of how trauma is depicted in polyphonic stories in *Home Boy* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* so as to close this gap.

CONCLUSION

The examination and criticism show how H. is. In their works, M. Naqvi and Mohsin Hamid use polyphonic narratives to show the intricacies of trauma, identity breakdown, and cultural migration. The writers bring out the complex character of post9/11 trauma by offering many voices and points of view, therefore stressing the interrelatedness of personal and community events. This study has given a thorough and detailed examination to the method of portraying trauma in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*. The study has brought attention to the intricacies of trauma such as identity fragmentation; and cultural relocation in post-9/11 literature by applying Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphonic narrative theory. Both authors utilize polyphonic narration to effectively depict the complex nature of trauma. Their novels reveal multiple voices and perspectives. The novel also links personal and social experiences. The research highlights the necessity for ethically telling such experiences and how culture can impede the character's experience of trauma. Rather than conveying monolithic narratives of trauma, works of Naqvi and Hamid contribute in subtle ways toward understanding post-9/11 identities and the greater sociopolitical context.

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