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THE DYNAMICS OF MUSLIM IDENTITY IN POST-9/11 LITERATURE: A CULTURAL MATERIALISTIC APPROACH

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SUMMARY: This study examines the representation of Muslim identity in four post-9/11 novels through the perspective of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. Conceptualizing culture as an active, continuing process, this approach investigates how literary works narrate the political, economic, and social structures that shape collective awareness. The study investigates how literary novels actively contribute to the construction of identity and cultural discourse, rather than just reflecting social norms. The narratives intertwine with power dynamics, questioning and reopening the bordered terrains of knowledge around terrorism, migration, and globalization in relation to Muslim identity. By exploring the previously unexplored areas of the texts, this study uncovers how authors utilize literary devices and narrative techniques to depict the experiences and resilience of individual Muslims and communities, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim identity in contemporary literature.
Keywords: Muslim Identity, Cultural Materialism, Societal Dynamics, Hybrid Narratives, Transnational.

INTRODUCTION

This work initiates the interpretation of the role of Muslim characters and identities using Williams' theory and offers a new dimension to the method of cultural and religious perspectives for exploring the position of Muslims in society. The presnt study extends Williams' cultural materialism in order to examine the multiplex and frequently conflict-ridden construction of Muslim subjectivity. This methodological approach provides the necessary groundwork for understanding how literature as culture occurs and how it is an active site of cultural problems, corresponding to larger serves and transformations in society and history. Therefore, by studying the selected literary works, the author examined issues of identity politics as well as otherness and belonging while exploring the possibilities and challenges of representing Muslim identifications in the post-9/11world.

Additionally, this research contributes to the continued development of a more nuanced and diverse textual presence of Islam and by extension Muslims in literature, while also working to challenge misconceptions to deepen and broaden understanings of Muslim existence and narratives in the world. In distinguishing the capacity of literature for shifting cultural temperaments as well as the construction of identity in this research, many voices and stories are given weight within the literary canon. In conclusion, this studyshall work towards the surrounding desire of enhancing public consciousness about how narratives of Muslim identity in literary and cultural practices foster a greater understanding, inclusivity, and the cultivation of a more accommodating and harmonious world.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Perhaps the biggest strength of the present study is its ability to fill gaps that are urgently needed in order to understand the function of contemporary literature as a resource for constructing cultural meaning in postmodernity. Analyzing those four novels with the help of cultural materialism means exploring rather unexplored territory in the field of literary criticism. First of all, this study intends to contribute to a critical understanding of new trends of Muslim representation in the context of post-9/11 American fiction. Although researchers have focused on stereotype representation, few have focused on how these stereotypes are complicated by representational complexity. This analysis demonstrates that authors are progresssively crafting and refining the represntation of so-called Muslim characters.

Secondly, this study underscores the role of literature in shaping and influenng public opinion. These novels actively participate in the constructiion and potential transformation of the referent community subjects'

identity as Muslims, thereby illustrating the critical power of literature in shaping social realities. Moreover, this research contributes directly to the broader body of knowledge within the scope of identity formation. Such critical emphasis on Muslims acts as a clue for studying other minorities' identities in current novels more broadly.

From the methodological point of view, our interpretation of cultural materialism in relation to these specific texts could suggest different ways of how the representation of identity could be analyzed within literature. This could make it possible for other such studies in other cultural settings to be done easily. Finally, the implications of this study may therefore be significant for educators, policymakers, as well as other scientists in the social sciences. Perhaps, if we explain the subtle strategies literature uses in addressing identity questions, we can contribute to a less polarized approach to cultural understanding and integration programs. In other words, it is not simply a scholarly investigation into four novels. It's about why and how narratives are constructed how they can redefine and enlighten us, and whether or not such books contribute to creating a broader multicultural society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uncovering Muslims in literature has been a fascinating area of interest for researchers who want to understand the intricacies of societal movements and character narratives. In his book, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World,* Edward W (1982) examines how media portrays Muslims and Islam. The ideas from this source will be applied to the chosen novels to reflect the interaction or challenge those narratives and shed light on the position of literature in dialoguing these stories.

The 'Muslim' aspect of a character's identity quest often takes precedence over the specific geographic cultural influences. Throughout this study, 'Muslim' serves as a cultural wellspring for character identity formation, connecting rather than limiting. The concept of 'hybridity' is frequently misinterpreted as 'exotic', largely because the most apparent identity traits tend to overshadow the less visible, internal ones. In this context, 'Muslim' acts as a unifying thread, drawing from various cultural elements to shape characters' identities. It provides a common ground without imposing restrictions. The misunderstanding of 'hybridity' as 'exotic' stems from the tendency to focus on the most obvious or outward characteristics of identity, potentially overlooking the more sophisticated, internal aspects that contribute to a character's complex identity.

Additionally, *Muslim Voices in School: Narratives of Identity and Pluralism* (Adam, 2011) is an edited collection of narratives that focuses on the experience of Muslim individuals in education. This book gives insight into how Muslim identity is developed within particular settings. It offers subtle and balanced accounts that readers will find familiar or that will challenge the literary constructs offered in the suggested novels. All the narratives in this collection add to a greater overall understanding of how Muslim identity is negotiated within societal structures.

Based on the conventional stance towards Muslim subjectivity, several recent works have offered a great insight into the processes that shape Muslim subjectivity in the periphery of the contemporary globalized world. Akbar Ahmed's *Journey into Islam: Another valuable source*, is *The Crisis of Globalization* (2007) which presents an analysis of globalization's influence over Muslim personality (Ahmed, 2007). Through extensive fieldwork across the Muslim world, Ahmed categorizes Muslim responses to globalization into three broad groups: Revisionists argument with pre-modernists, post-modernists, and post- mystical. This framework is especially useful in the context of literary analysis as when drawing a picture of Muslim characters in contemporary novels one might consider how these characters might imagine their existence in a globalized world. Out of Ahmed's work mapping emergent cultures of sex and gender, the conflicts between the Islamic culture and globalized culture mark the background against which the Muslim identity can be represented.

Chan-Malik's *Being Muslim: In A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (2018) an important gendered intersectional framework of Muslim subjectivity is given. Siddiqui's research commissioned for this book is on the lives of Muslim women of color in America, in their multi-fold ways, thus offering a vibrant account of how race, gender, and religion mix together to demarcate Muslim subjectivities. This intersectional approach becomes very handy for literary scholars desiring to study and interpret the complex images of Muslim women in literature. The analysis of Siddiqui's work provides tools for considering how literature can represent or problematize such singular images of Muslim women (Chan-Malik, 2020).

Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The article – The Veil's Resurgence: The Middle East to America* (2011) adds to the knowledge of Muslim identity by paying attention to the symbolism of the veil. Whereas Ahmed

deplores the re-appropriation of the veil's symbolism from the orientalist perspective, the reception of the Muslim chaplain, as well as the American stereotype of the Islamic female veiled body and its confining implications for Salman, offers a historical and cultural reinterpretation of the veil and its connotations. It makes it possible to examine how a single cultural artifact – in this case, the veil – might have accrued multiple and possibly even contradictory significations in its travels from the Middle East to America. This is of particular significance for literary studies since it offers the tools for examining in detail how the authors employing the veil or other cultural signifiers construct, undermine, or complicate the Muslim subject positions in the works (Ahmed, 2011; Winter, 2016).

Among the important works essential for setting the understanding of Muslim existence in America, Hussain's *Muslims and the Making of America* (2016) is an imperative piece of historical account. Hussain, therefore, refutes the culture of ethnic coloring or overlay that portrays Muslims as incomers to the American scenery during the social-reformation period but rather as early settlers and features of the colonial image map. With life and intensity, Hussain shows that today, Muslims have influenced and are influencing American society, culture, and economy in a number of ways. His work is quite significant in providing a glimpse of how Muslims live their lives in the social fabric of America while still being the face of American Muslims through intricacies. This perspective is especially suitable for handling issues of cultural representation, and analysis of Muslim characters in modern American novels. While Hussain's work can still be seen as offering new ways to examine how literary works might either mirror the historical experience of Muslim Americans or resist dominant discursive constructions that consolidate Muslims as alien intruders into the US context (Hussain, 1970).

Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin's *Framing Muslims: stereotyping and Representation after* 9/11 (2011): discuss the representation of Muslims in media. In the last two decades, the public and political discourse regarding the influence of global migration and cultural and ethnic diversity in the context of post-modern Western societies has been quite active. This has of course reignited longstanding questions of the role of 'Others' or 'strangers' within these societies, questions that problematize the idea that globalization and consumerism have weakened the state and the nation, the 'people'. Parallel to this, there has been emerging scholarly demand for understanding the construction and circulation of images and representations of ethnic minority and migrant groups in today's media. It is notable, however, that this period of heightened awareness of cultural difference coupled with multiculturalism, in theory, has been marked by a new 'dragging up' of stereotypical modes of representations when constructing cultural identities as such, which does not sit easily with the proclaimed liberal politics of the present age (Morey & Yaqin, 2011).

Georgiana Banita's *Plotting Justice: In the essay "Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after* 9/11 (2012), ethical issues of post-9/11 literature are discussed (Banita, 2012). Rehana Ahmed's *Writing British Muslims:* The book "*Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (2024) is useful for understanding how British Muslims are depicted in contemporary fiction. Cara Cilano's Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: The essay "Idea, Nation, State'' (2013) focuses on Pakistani writers' treatment of the 9/11 event (Ahmed, 2024). Similarly, in Leerom Medovoi's *Dogma-Line Racism: In 'Islamophobia and the Second Axis of Race* (2012) the author provides an analysis of how Islamophobia has been formed in the world (Cilano, 2013; Medovoi, 2012).

Altogether, these works offer a strong basis from which the formation and portrayal of Muslim subjects in novels can be analyzed. It is relevant to stress their focus on global, intersectional, and symbolic approaches when it comes to defining Muslim characters as well as Muslim themes in contemporary novels. However, they also emphasize the historical, cultural, and social construction of Muslim identity, which is also visible in literature. However, these works are under-researched; there is thus the need for more pointed research on the ways these profound epistemologies on Muslims are reflected in current literature. Such is the case with the Boolean gap which suggests the existence of a related but distinct scope of research that explores authors' engagements with the complex European Muslim subject and how literary works address the subject in European literature and vice versa: to what extent do literary narratives participate in the construction of the European Muslim subject (Cilano, 2013). In the current study, the special perspectives and expertise of these critics will be used in understanding the complex insights of the authors, their literary techniques, and cultural representations of Muslim identity in Post-9/11 literature, which enrich the investigation of Muslim identity and societal representations in the selected novel.

METHODOLOGY

The exploration of Muslim identity in contemporary literature is deeply intertwined with historical, social, and political contexts, particularly in the aftermath of significant global events such as World War II and the September 11 attacks. Muslim identity encompasses a complex interplay of belonging, religious beliefs,

cultural affiliations, and individual experiences (Kuyucu, 2020). As Ahmed (2011) emphasizes, it is a dynamic construct shaped not only by religious doctrines but also by historical events and societal influences. This complexity manifests in various forms, including individual Muslim identity, which reflects personal spiritual practices and lifestyles influenced by contemporary culture. The phenomenon of "Muslim cool," as discussed by Khabeer (2020), showcases how younger generations blend Islamic ethical practices with urban activism, resulting in innovative expressions of Muslim identity that challenge prevailing narratives of Islamophobia.

Cultural Muslim identity further complicates this landscape, encompassing the traditions, customs, and norms that define Islamic communities. This identity has evolved in response to historical forces, particularly during periods of colonialism and globalization, which have transformed local practices and societal structures. The concept of 'ummah' manifests the interplay between religious beliefs and cultural unity amidst diversity, while intergenerational transmission of identity reveals tensions, especially in diaspora communities where younger generations negotiate their Islamic heritage within their contemporary environments. Post-9/11 novels reflect these complexities, characterized by innovative narrative techniques and themes that address the changing cultural landscape. Authors like Salman Rushdie and Don DeLillo exemplify the cosmopolitan nature of this literary period, engaging with post-colonial realities and employing experimental structures to convey fragmented identities. This evolution in literature complements the principles of cultural materialism, as articulated by Raymond Williams, which posits that culture is shaped by material conditions and socio-economic factors.

Transnational literature, in particular, reflects the experiences of individuals navigating multiple cultural landscapes, underscoring the complexities of migration and diaspora. It often incorporates multilingual elements, emphasizing the fluidity of language and identity in a globalized world. Together, these concepts provide a framework for examining the representation of Muslim identities in contemporary literature, revealing the intricate relationships between individual experiences, cultural practices, and broader societal changes. Through this lens, literature not only reflects the realities of Muslim lives but also serves as a site for challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding in an increasingly interconnected and complex world. Societal dynamics play a crucial role in shaping these identities, encompassing the social processes and interactions that influence cultural, political, and economic transformations. The impact of technology on communication and social relations further complicates these dynamics, leading to shifts in how identities are constructed and perceived. In this context, hybrid narratives emerge as a powerful literary form that transcends traditional boundaries, blending genres and cultural frames to create a 'third space' for expressing complex identities. This approach challenges singular notions of identity and opens up new avenues for understanding cultural differences.

As John Brannigan notes, "Cultural materialism insists that the literary text is as much an agent or instrument of social change as it is a reflection of social forces" (Brannigan 1998). This dual concern enables the researchers to consider how novelists who write about Muslim realities and representation in today's world simultaneously conform to and subvert the current social imagination. However, such a framework as Cultural Materialism can be effectively applied to analyze representations of minorities because of the focus on power relations and ideologies. It offers means through which one can find out how the positive discourse on Muslims is either reiterated or challenged in literature. As it has been rightly pointed out by Dollimore and Sinfield (1994), "A cultural materialist approach considers how subordinate, marginal or dissident elements are contained by the dominant culture.

Further, this is the reason why such focus is assigned to the marginalized, as it sheds light on the sociopolitical relations within which cultures are created and promoted. Identifying the rationality of selective erasure, misrepresentation, or incorporation of specific voices that theoretically or empirically challenge the dominant culture's discursive regime allows cultural materialists to destabilize the hegemonic cultural power structures. On the same note, they describe the actions and staking endured by the minorities to fight for their inclusion, defend their culture, and express their views.

Cultural materialism also acknowledges the fact that cultures sometimes possess antithetical connections where subordinate voices connect with dominant cultural forms. It hardly ever entails more or less linear patterns of diffusion, but rather performances of adoption that are characterized by negotiation, adaptation, or even hybridization. In this case, dominant cultural practices may be borrowed by the marginalized people and be used in a new context. On the other hand, some aspects belonging to the historical subordinate cultures might be incorporated into the dominant cultures where they can either function in a subversive manner eroding the hegemony from time to time or they merely maintain the social hierarchy.

This is also true for the methodological orientation adopted by the research as well. Applying Raymond Williams' cultural materialism to the analysis of novels centered around Muslim identity, particularly in the

context of post-9/11literature, provides a robust framework for understanding the interplay between cultural texts and their socio-historical contexts. This approach emphasizes that cultural products are not merely artifacts of individual creativity but are deeply shaped by the material conditions of their production and reception, including economic, political, and social factors.

A central tenet of cultural materialism is the principle of historical specificity, which posits that the significance of a cultural work cannot be understood without considering the historical conditions of its creation. As Williams states, "We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction" (Williams, 1961). For instance, novels addressing Muslim identity written in the early 2000s must be examined within the context of post-9/11 geopolitics, shifts in immigration policies, and the changing rhetoric surrounding Islam and Muslims. This historical lens allows scholars to contextualize how these texts respond to or reflect societal anxieties and transformations regarding Muslim communities.

Cultural materialism also foregrounds the socio-economic context in which these novels are produced. Analyzing the economic systems at play can reveal how capitalist market dynamics influence the creation and distribution of literature about Muslim experiences. Understanding the publishing industry's structure and the marketability of narratives concerning Muslim identity can illuminate how these stories are shaped by economic considerations. This extends to class relations, where the authors' backgrounds and class positions may affect their perspectives and the representation of social hierarchies within the narratives.

The role of cultural institutions—such as publishing houses and educational systems—cannot be overlooked. Cultural materialists examine how these institutions determine which narratives are given prominence and how they shape public reception. For instance, the criteria employed by publishers in selecting manuscripts about Muslim identities can significantly influence the diversity and depth of representation available to readers. This institutional analysis can reveal underlying power dynamics and the mechanisms through which certain narratives are privileged over others.

Through ideological critique, cultural materialism seeks to uncover the underlying power relations and ideological messages within cultural texts. In the context of novels about Muslim identity, this involves analyzing how these works engage with or challenge dominant ideological frameworks, such as nationalism or Islamophobia. A novel might simultaneously reflect societal fears about terrorism while also offering counter-narratives that humanize Muslim characters and critique prevailing stereotypes. This dual perspective enables an understanding of how literature can serve as both a reflection of and a challenge to dominant cultural ideologies. Cultural materialism pays particular attention to marginalized voices, recognizing that representations of subordinated groups—such as Muslims—can provide richer insights into cultural processes. Novels that explore Muslim identity often display the complexities and diversities within Muslim communities, challenging monolithic portrayals. By focusing on how these literary works negotiate and subvert dominant cultural narratives, scholars can uncover how marginalized identities assert themselves and resist erasure.

In conclusion, applying cultural materialism to the analysis of novels centered on Muslim identity allows for a comprehensive exploration of how these texts interact with historical, socio-economic, and institutional contexts. This methodology reveals the intricate relationships between literature and the socio-political dynamics of the time and emphasizes the role of cultural texts as agents of social change. Examining these novels through a cultural materialist lens allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how they reflect, challenge, and contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding Muslim identity in a rapidly changing world.

Social and Cultural Context

The events of September 11, 2001, have had a great impact on the culture of the United States as well as changing the view on Muslims in the Western world. It reshuffled the geography of power in the world but, more notably for millions of Muslims in America and other Western countries, it colored the very identity of America and other developed states. In the literary field, the representations of Muslim experiences in America post 9/11 have provided a rich understanding of the Muslims in America which is more eloquent and more representative than the general preconception about the Muslims in America. This chapter examines four novels that grapple with the multifaceted representations of Muslim identity in the post-9/11 era: Messud's, *The Emperor's Children* published in 2006, Naqvi's *Home Boy* published in 2009, West (2003) *The Immensity of the Here and Now: A Novel of 9/11* published in 2003 and Waldman's *The Submission* published in 2011. These works which were created almost a decade after the attack, present a multiplicity of considerations and realistic complexities for Muslims, and those profiled as Muslims in America. In this

chapter, by focusing on these texts, it will be possible to discover how Muslim identity is portrayed in contemporary American literature within the framework of a dramatically changed social and cultural reality.

CLAIRE MESSUD'S THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN

The Emperor's Children by Messud (2007), the narrative delves into the lives of privileged New Yorkers whose identities and values are profoundly challenged by the events of 9/11. As the characters grapple with their sense of purpose and belonging in a world that has been irrevocably altered, the novel reflects emergent cultural forms that question the previously held beliefs of the elite. The relationships among the characters evolve significantly as they confront the reality of the attacks. This evolution reveals a shift in social dynamics, where superficial connections deepen in the face of shared trauma. This transformation shows Williams' idea of emergent culture, which creates new kinds of relationships in response to societal upheaval. Emergent cultural forms represent "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship [that] are continually being created" (1977). These are often (but not always) in opposition to the dominant culture. Williams stresses the difficulty in distinguishing between truly emergent elements and those that are merely "new phases of the dominant culture": "What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form" (1977). Moreover, the novel examines the complacency of the upper class and their detachment from broader societal issues. It emphasizes the disconnection between their privileged lives and the harsh realities faced by others.

In *The Emperor's Children*, Muslim identity is represented through the lens of the societal changes and tensions that arise in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The novel primarily focuses on the lives of three American characters, yet it subtly incorporates the experiences and perceptions of Muslim individuals. This inclusion suggests that Muslim identity is not monolithic but encompasses a range of experiences and perspectives. This complexity challenges the stereotypes and simplistic representations often found in mainstream discourse. The interactions between the main characters and the Muslim community reflect broader societal tensions that emerged after 9/11. These interactions capture the anxieties and fears permeating American society and indicate how these feelings impact individual identities and relationships. This representation highlights the need for empathy and understanding in a time of division and conflict.

The narrative exposes the shift in societal attitudes towards Muslims following 9/11. It showcases how characters grapple with a changing American identity in which Muslims are often viewed with suspicion and fear. This shift mirrors broader media narratives that conflate Islam with terrorism and lead to a simplified and distorted perception of Muslim identities. This dynamic reflects Williams (2020) assertion that cultural narratives are constructed not passively but actively, influenced by current power relations that dictate which histories are valued and which are forgotten.

Messud's multi-perspective approach is crucial in reflecting the themes of American society's cohesion and the shared trauma of the September 11 attacks. The characters Marina, Danielle, Julius, and Bootie offer differentiated viewpoints on the events and their aftermath. For instance, Bootie's outsider perspective critiques the Manhattan elite: "They were frauds, he thought, all of them. [...] And yet how was it possible, in a city like New York, to be anything else?" (212). In contrast, Marina's insider view reveals the insecurities beneath privilege: "She felt, suddenly, as if she were teetering on the edge of an abyss, about to fall into a life of inconsequence" (98). This narrative technique reinforces Williams' idea of cultural complexity, where culture encompasses both learned meanings and new observations. The use of multiple narrators indicates the oscillation between hegemonic cultural meanings and emerging ontological reconstructions in the wake of 9/11. Providing a multifaceted description of society during this historical period, Messud emphasizes the heterogeneity of American realities post-9/11.

The main characters, who belong to the cultural elite, manage their privileged lives while remaining acutely aware of the societal changes around them. Their interactions with Muslim characters feature the tension between their privileged status and the prejudices faced by Muslims in America, underscoring the complexities of identity as they confront their own biases and the implications of their social positions. Messud's depiction of the cultural elite in New York affirms the material conditions under which these characters operate. Bootie, as an anti-hero protagonist, embodies the sense of displacement experienced by minority Muslims, feeling lost and disillusioned after moving to New York. His perspective investigates the Manhattan elite, revealing the fractures in class and identity that have become more pronounced post-9/11.

Marina's struggles with her book project symbolize the superficiality and self-absorption of the pre-9/11 cultural scene, showcasing how economic and social structures shape personal aspirations. This aligns with Williams' emphasis on how institutions impact cultural discourse and the accessibility of cultural narratives (1982). Williams' cultural materialism underscores how their material conditions and social contexts shape

characters. This perspective reflects culture as a site of struggle rather than merely a reflection of society. In The Emperor's Children Have No Clothes, Marina's symbolic attempts refer to the superficiality and self-absorption of the pre-9/11 cultural elite. The quote, "She has no other words to say to him or rather she has one thing to say to him, and she has said it" (35), encapsulates Marina's writer's block and underscores the emptiness behind the façade of culture and intelligence that characters like her represent. In juxtaposition to global events, the critique of children's clothing manifests how confined and self-restrained the characters' reality is. More profoundly, the lack of resolution signifies the collapse of certain American dreams and the challenge of establishing a new cultural paradigm post-9/11. The title alludes to Hans Christian Andersen's The Emperor's New Clothes and questions societal illusions as well as the role of cultural representatives in maintaining them. Marina's struggle with her book reflects the broader challenge of creating meaningful art in a world of privilege.

The dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony are also at play, as Bootie's outsider perspective comments on the privileges of the elite. This perspective challenges the dominant narrative of the American Dream and fosters new understandings of belonging. While these characters are influenced by economic and social conditions, their struggles also reflect personal and cultural responses to trauma. The narrative showcases how culture can serve as a site of political struggle. For instance, Ludovic Seeley's plan to start a magazine embodies a critical response to the changing dynamics of cultural authority in a globalized, post-9/11 world. Bootie's outsider perspective questions the elite and depicts an emerging counter-narrative that challenges the dominant culture.

The narrative depicts culture as a "whole way of life," *Culture and Society* by Williams (1983) where the characters' lives are deeply intertwined with their social realities. For instance, the destruction of the Twin Towers serves as a powerful symbol in the novel, representing the loss of American innocence and the shattering of lives perceived as "other." The towers, once symbols of American economic power and cultural dominance, become reminders of the fragility of identity and shifting power dynamics in society, prompting characters to reevaluate their understanding of safety, belonging, and identity, including that of Muslims. Williams' extension of hegemony within his cultural materialism represents a significant advancement in understanding the culture-power equation in society. Grounded in Antonio Gramsci's theories, Williams enhances and elaborates on the concept to fit his cultural materialist framework. In Marxism and Literature by Williams (1977), he defines hegemony as "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world." This definition emphasizes that hegemony permeates daily life, influencing thoughts, attitudes, and the very categories of mundane existence. It is not a fixed condition, but rather a dynamic process that is constantly performed, validated and renegotiated in response to new social circumstances.

While hegemony represents the dominant culture, it operates at an existential level, often remaining hidden and perceived as natural. This process creates a shared perception of reality that serves the interests of dominant forces. Williams argues that hegemony is never complete; it must be continually restored and justified against emerging social threats. For every operation, there exist forms of politics and culture that differ from or directly conflict with the hegemonic framework. This situation reveals the potential for counter-hegemonic practices—cultural forms and activities originating from subordinate or oppressed subjects who are excluded from mainstream narratives. Williams' notion of counter-hegemony is particularly relevant to his concepts of emergent and oppositional cultural forms. He asserts that the complexities of culture encompass variable processes and social definitions, including traditions, institutions, and formations. This complexity is reflected in the dynamic interrelations of historically varied elements. The practical consciousness arising from these interactions can serve as a foundation for subversive practices that challenge hegemonic power.

The dynamics of hegemony are evident in the portrayal of the cultural elite versus the dislocated experiences of characters like Bootie in the novel. The dominant narrative of the American Dream is scrutinized through the characters' realizations of vulnerability and insecurity in the post-9/11 landscape. Williams' concept of hegemony captures how these characters reflect on their privileges and the societal structures that uphold them, revealing fissures within these dominant narratives. The shifts in New York's skyline serve as a powerful metaphor for the disruption of hegemonic ideals. These changes prompt a reevaluation of identity and belonging. The aftermath of 9/11 serves as a backdrop for the characters' transformations and realizations. The destruction of the Twin Towers symbolizes a disruption of the cultural hegemony that defined pre-9/11 America. As the characters grapple with their identities in a changed world, the narrative explores the tensions between individual aspirations and collective trauma. This shift in power dynamics prompts a reexamination of societal values, as characters confront their vulnerabilities and the precariousness of their positions.

H. M. NAQVI'S HOME BOY

Home Boy by H. M. Naqvi, the narrative addresses the experiences of Muslim immigrants in the wake of

9/11, exploring themes of identity, belonging, and cultural alienation. The characters explore a landscape where dominant narratives surrounding terrorism and Islamophobia redefine their identities. This exploration creates new meanings that challenge stereotypes. As they confront external prejudices and internal conflicts, their friendships and community bonds undergo testing and transformation, reflecting the emergence of new practices of solidarity and resistance against cultural marginalization. This reflects Williams' notion of emergent culture and shows how the characters form new relationships in response to their experiences.

The novel serves as a counter-narrative to the prevailing cultural discourse that often portrays Muslims negatively. It explores the complexities of this experience, particularly for Pakistani-Americans, and showcases how socio-political changes affect personal identities and community dynamics. Naqvi affirms Williams' notion that culture encompasses all aspects of human life, as characters journey through their cultural identities through language, food, and social interactions, demonstrating the blend of their Pakistani roots and American experiences. This embodiment of emergent cultural forms resists dominant narratives and offers a thorough perspective on the lives of Muslim immigrants and their struggles for identity in a post-9/11 world. The material conditions surrounding the characters are crucial for understanding their experiences. Chuck's transition from banker to taxi driver reflects the economic degradation many immigrants face, particularly after 9/11. This shift inquires the American Dream by clarifying how institutional factors—such as immigration policies and societal prejudice—shape the characters' realities. Chuck, a young Pakistani immigrant, embodies this struggle. His intelligence and ambition contrast sharply with his new role as a cab driver, a position that symbolizes both economic survival and the barriers imposed on immigrants in a post-9/11 landscape. The cab serves as a liminal space that allows characters to navigate their complex identities while also representing the regression in social and economic status that many face during crises. Chuck's transition from banker to taxi driver underscores the material conditions that shape immigrant experiences. This shift not only challenges the American Dream but also clarifies how institutional barriers—such as immigration policies and societal attitudes—impact personal narratives. Chuck's journey shows the struggle between assimilation and cultural retention, a central theme in Williams' framework, as characters confront their identities in a society that often views them with hostility.

While impacted by broader socio-economic factors, the characters' personal narratives reflect a relative autonomy that allows them to challenge and renegotiate their identities (1977). Chuck's internal conflict regarding his beard symbolizes the struggle between assimilation and cultural retention. This portrays how culture can serve as a site of political struggle. His journey from self-assertion to self-realization reinforces Williams' idea that culture can instigate change rather than merely mirror social structures. Through Chuck, Naqvi portrays the immigrant's quest for acceptance and identity in a society marked by suspicion and discrimination.

Williams defines selective tradition as the process of presenting specific elements of a civilization's culture and history while ignoring others. This selection arises from current interests, power relations, and societal needs. The concept serves as a means of historical and cultural memory, reflecting how a society perceives its history, values, and identity. It involves the active reconstruction of history based on present imperatives, determining which aspects are deemed valuable and which are forgotten. Williams argues that selective tradition is not merely nostalgic; it actively shapes the present and future by creating narratives that serve contemporary interests while sometimes perpetuating existing cultural and political power structures. Importantly, selective tradition is not a static process; it is subject to constant debate and revision, especially as marginalized groups challenge dominant narratives and accentuate overlooked aspects of history. This interplay connects selective tradition with the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony, showcasing the ongoing struggle to define cultural meanings and values.

The novel demonstrates the dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony, as the dominant cultural narratives are contested through the characters' experiences. The dominant narrative of post-9/11 America, marked by suspicion and hostility towards Muslims, faces challenges through the perspectives of Chuck, AC, and Jimbo. AC, the son of a Pakistani diplomat, represents a different class of immigration and signifies that social status does not exempt one from prejudice. Jimbo, a second-generation immigrant, navigates his own cultural conflicts. First-generation immigrants often experience profound nostalgia for their homeland, marked by a longing for past lives, cultural practices, and familial connections. This emotional landscape intertwines with a desire to preserve cultural identity and traditions, leading to feelings of pride but also isolation as the characters navigate life in a new country. Their strong connection to heritage influences their worldview and interactions with American society, often manifesting in social circles that provide comfort through familiar cultural practices. Despite facing economic hardships and social discrimination, these immigrants demonstrate resilience and adaptability, driven by a commitment to succeed and provide better

opportunities for their children. In contrast, second-generation immigrants grapple with identity conflict and ambivalence, feeling torn between their parents' cultural expectations and the desire to assimilate into American society. This internal struggle often leads to feelings of alienation and confusion about their identity, as they navigate the complexities of living between two cultures. They embody a hybrid identity that blends elements from both their parents' culture and the dominant American culture. This blend allows them to confront multiple influences while complicating their sense of belonging. Overall, the emotional responses of first-generation immigrants are rooted in survival, resilience, and a deep connection to their cultural heritage, shaped by migration, loss, and hope for a better future. In contrast, second-generation immigrants experience confusion and frustration as they explore multiple cultural landscapes and the pressures of living up to their parents' expectations.

The characters engage with their Pakistani roots through language, food, and social interactions, which become crucial in constructing their identities. Naqvi displays how these everyday practices reflect a blend of cultural influences and emphasizes the complexities of belonging in a society marked by suspicion and prejudice. Additionally, Naqvi's use of food as a symbol further implies these complexities of belonging. The characters' enjoyment of both Pakistani and American cuisines reflects their bicultural identities. Yet, it also underscores the tensions that arise in a post-9/11 context, where cultural spaces once celebrated become sites of suspicion. The kebab shop, once a symbol of diversity, becomes a place of hostility and emphasizes the backlash against Muslim and Middle Eastern cultures. Naqvi employs a distinctive narrative style in Home Boy, significantly enhancing the novel's impact and themes. The story is primarily narrated from Chuck's first-person perspective, which allows readers to experience his thoughts and emotions intimately. This perspective fosters a strong identification with Chuck, particularly during distressing moments, while also reflecting the anonymity and confusion of the post-9/11 landscape. Naqvi's use of language blends Americanisms with Urdu expressions and references to both Western and South Asian popular cultures. This approach emphasizes the characters' cultural liminality and lends authenticity to their voices. The rhythmic patterns of speech create a distinctly Pakistani-American narrative that infuses irony and humor throughout the story. Despite addressing serious issues, *Home Boy* incorporates humor and irony, which gives it a tragicomic feel. Naqvi uses laughter to portray absurd situations, adds realism to the characters, and helps them cope with their new lives. While the main storyline follows a chronological order, Naqvi includes flashbacks and digressions that deepen the reader's understanding of the characters' lives before September 11. This nonlinearity emphasizes the shift from innocence to a disturbed present and highlights the mutability of the characters' experiences. His vivid descriptions of New York City make the city feel like a character in its own right, painting a lively picture while conveying the changes it undergoes post-9/11. The narrative is rich with allusions to literary, musical, and popular sources from both Western and South Asian contexts, which demonstrate the characters' cultural awareness and connection to multiple identities. Throughout the novel, Naqvi gradually builds tension, especially as the characters face misunderstandings and conflicts with authorities. The pacing quickens in later chapters, reflecting the characters' increasing sense of danger and confusion. Through these narrative techniques, Naqvi effectively captures the complexities of identity and experience in a post-9/11 world (Naqvi, 2009).

Furthermore, the novel addresses the collective memory of trauma experienced by the characters in the wake of 9/11. The societal fear and prejudice that arose post-attack permeate their lives, influencing their interactions and self-perceptions. The characters' navigation of this trauma reflects the power dynamics of memory and identity, where cultural narratives are shaped by historical events. Old Man Khan, a significant figure in the narrative, embodies the loneliness and displacement felt by many immigrants, linking personal stories to broader themes of cultural identity and generational relationships.

PAUL WEST'S THE IMMENSITY OF THE HERE AND NOW

Paul West's The Immensity of the Here and Now (West, 2003), just two years after the attacks—serves as an immediate response to the trauma of 9/11. The fragmented narrative structure and experimental style mirror the chaotic social and emotional landscape of post-9/11 America, influenced by a media environment characterized by sensationalism and fear. This reflection of the chaotic reality underscores the material conditions of cultural production and how they shape narratives in times of crisis. In Culture (1982), Williams explains: "Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production" (64). This approach enables one to consider culture in its relation with society with the possibility of taking into account both structural factors as well as the strategies of cultural practitioners.

The narrative captures a wide range of emotions and responses to trauma, depicting how cultural practices—such as photography, mathematics, and emergency response—shape individual and collective experiences during times of crisis. The characters—Aroop, Sabine, Yassin, and Lyle—interweave their lives against the

backdrop of tragedy and reflect the profound impact of 9/11 on their identities and relationships. For instance, Aroop's mathematical thinking symbolizes the human urge to impose order on chaos (35). This points out a deeper philosophical quest for meaning amidst incomprehensible suffering. His character embodies the struggle to find rationality in an irrational world and refers to Williams' perspective that culture is not merely artistic but a vital social process.

Sabine, the German photographer, represents the ethically ambiguous role of the observer in times of crisis. Her documentation of the falling man raises questions about objectification and the ethics of representation, supporting Williams' ideas about the interplay of culture and social transformation. Through her lens, West explores how art can both illuminate and obscure the reality of tragedy, reflecting the complexities of cultural production in a post-9/11 context.

Yassin, a Muslim-American paramedic, provides critical insight into societal perceptions shaped by fear and prejudice. His experiences reveal the shifting attitudes toward Muslim-Americans, who, despite actively participating in rescue efforts, become targets of xenophobia. This resonates with Williams' view of culture as a battleground for competing meanings, where emergent voices challenge dominant narratives. Yassin's character validates the struggle against the hegemony that equates his identity with extremism, emphasizing the potential of personal narratives to disrupt simplistic portrayals of heroism and villainy.

Additionally, the emphasis on personal narratives challenges dominant cultural narratives surrounding 9/11. It suggests that culture can instigate change and foster understanding in the face of adversity. Moreover, the novel's symbols—the Twin Towers, the falling man, dust, and debris—serve as powerful motifs that encapsulate the shift from strength to vulnerability. The Towers symbolize not only American might but also the fragility of constructed identities, while the falling man reflects the despair and hopelessness of the victims. These symbols, along with the pervasive dust, signify the erasure of boundaries between life and death, underscoring the collective experience of trauma.

Williams' concepts of determination and mediation are pivotal in understanding how West's characters confront their realities. Determination suggests that economic and social frameworks influence cultural production, but they do not rigidly dictate outcomes. For example, Yassin, a Muslim-American paramedic, faces societal prejudice despite his heroic contributions during the crisis. His experiences display the pressures exerted by dominant narratives surrounding Muslim identity, reflecting Williams' idea that culture can be a battleground for competing meanings.

The novel critically engages with hegemonic narratives that emerged after 9/11, particularly those associated with nationalism and prejudice against Muslim-Americans. Through characters like Yassin and Sabine, West presents counter-narratives that challenge prevailing assumptions and biases. By giving voice to a diverse cast of characters, the novel disrupts simplistic portrayals of heroism and villainy, indicating the nuanced realities faced by individuals affected by the attacks. This resonates with Williams' view of culture as a battleground for competing meanings, in which emerging voices can reshape dominant ideologies (1977).

West employs a complex syntactical style that captures the poet's perspective on the September 11 attacks. This approach emphasizes the difficulty of finding appropriate words for such an unprecedented tragedy. His language is both descriptive and figurative, which blurs the line between beauty and the grimness of the events and creates an ambivalent reaction in readers. The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques provides a personal view of the disaster and connects external events to the characters' inner thoughts. Also, this fragmentation reflects their mental states during the attacks, allowing readers to witness subconscious responses that characters may not fully recognize.

West's manipulation of time enhances the novel's impact. Some episodes are extended in detail, while others are condensed or omitted. This technique mirrors the disorientation felt by trauma survivors and aligns with the title, suggesting that a single day can hold immense drama. Striking sensory descriptions immerse readers in the experience and make the events feel immediate and tangible. Additionally, this focus on sensory information counters the potential distance of fictional representation. It evokes empathy and creates a detailed sensory archive of 9/11 that deviates from familiar imagery.

AMY WALDMAN'S THE SUBMISSION

Published ten years after 9/11, Waldman (2011) *The Submission* explores the memorial controversy and reflects the urgency of addressing sensitive issues through art. The sensationalized coverage of the memorial debate notes how media narratives can reinforce societal fears and prejudices, shaping public opinion around religious identity and national symbols. The characters' interactions with the media depict the power dynamics at play, emphasizing the importance of media as a tool for both perpetuating and challenging dominant ideologies. The narrative centers on a controversial design competition for a 9/11 memorial, which becomes a focal point for societal tensions and the redefinition of cultural values in post-9/11 Amer-

ica. Waldman questions the dominant cultural discourse that often marginalizes Muslim voices. The back-lash against the architect's design symbolizes the struggle to reconcile ideals of inclusivity with prevailing fears and prejudices. Centering on a Muslim protagonist, the novel opposes the tendency to homogenize and stereotype, embodying emergent cultural forms that redefine understanding in contemporary America. Waldman's *The Submission* manifests Williams' view of culture as encompassing all aspects of human experience (1966), particularly through the character of Mohammad Khan. His experiences reflect how individual identities are shaped by societal perceptions, collective memory, and trauma. The novel engages with the complexities of American identity post-9/11, focusing on how cultural practices—such as memorialization and media representation—influence public discourse and personal experiences. The tensions between personal grief and national identity underscore the idea that culture is lived and experienced in multifaceted ways. Mohammad Khan's experiences exemplify how personal narratives intertwine with societal perceptions, collective memory, and trauma. The novel explores the complexities of American identity in the aftermath of 9/11, emphasizing how cultural practices like memorialization and media representation shape public discourse and influence personal experiences. This tension between individual grief and national identity underscores the multifaceted nature of cultural experience.

The novel explicitly engages with hegemony by addressing dominant cultural narratives surrounding 9/11. Waldman reveals how Islamophobia and nationalism shape public perception, particularly in reactions to Khan's memorial design. The memorial controversy serves as a battleground for competing meanings and allows characters like Khan to disrupt prevailing narratives of fear and exclusion. This situation embodies Williams' concept of emergent cultural forms. Furthermore, their varied responses spotlight the potential for culture to redefine societal norms.

The term "submission" carries significant weight in the novel. It refers to Khan submitting his design while also alluding to the Arabic meaning of "Islam," which adds depth to his participation in the competition and brings to light themes of identity and acceptance. The American flag appears throughout the novel and symbolizes complex issues of nationalism and belonging. During protests, flags waved on both sides create a visual representation of division and question who qualifies as a citizen. For some, the flag signifies belonging; for others, it raises concerns about identity.

The garden symbolizes America as a beautiful yet contested ideal. Khan discusses his inspiration from ancient Islamic paradise gardens, and as he speaks, the scent of jasmine and light filtering through the trees evokes an idyllic atmosphere, though this beauty is overshadowed by conflict and loss. In contrast, the void represents the emotional and physical absence left by the towers. Claire stands at Ground Zero, feeling drawn into the emptiness, which symbolizes not just a lack of space but an enduring emotional void. This opposition between the void and the garden raises complex questions about memory—whether to yearn for the past or to aspire for new growth.

The presence of cameras and reporters serves as a symbol of distortion in public discourse. The media often exaggerates or misrepresents events, turning meaningful discussions into soundbites. This "circus mirror" reflects society's perceptions, prompting readers to consider how much of what they "know" is shaped by media representation. West's experimental prose and Waldman's exploration of public controversies point out the need for a more layered representation of trauma and societal change.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of Muslim identities in contemporary literary and cultural works reveals how historical and socio-political events have shaped perceptions of Islam and Muslims, particularly in the post-1950 landscape. The significant shifts following the September 11 attacks, including the onset of the War on Terror and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, have had profound implications for civil liberties and societal attitudes toward Muslims. This era has seen a marked increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes, prompting writers to challenge fixed concepts and portray complex experiences through their narratives.

In works such as Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*, H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*, Paul West's *The Immensity of the Here and Now*, and Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, authors inspect the intricate dynamics between literary protagonists and their urban environments. This relationship underscores the notion of cities as living organisms, reflecting the interactions between individuals and the trauma of their surroundings. The literature not only depicts the struggle for survival and renewal after trauma but also facilitates a nuanced discussion of how urban settings influence identity formation.

These narratives mark a critical turning point in acknowledging Muslim identity through various artistic expressions. Applying Raymond Williams' theory of cultural materialism, this research elucidates how literature actively informs social perceptions and challenges dominant ideologies. The selected novels provide

a diverse representation of Muslim subjectivities, addressing themes of family, gender, and the complexities of cultural identity in a rapidly changing world. Besides, this study highlights the importance of moving beyond simplistic stereotypes and essentialist views of Muslim communities. Examining the intricate portrayals of Muslim characters and the socio-political contexts within which they exist allows literature to serve as a contested space for cultural dialogue. It fosters a deeper understanding of identity, voice, and power relations, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and tolerant society.

Claire Messud's The Emperor's Children investigates the impact of 9/11 on the lives of privileged New Yorkers, revealing how the attacks challenge their identities and values. The novel employs emergent cultural forms to display shifts in social dynamics, where superficial connections deepen in the wake of shared trauma. Through depicting the experiences of American characters alongside marginalized Muslim identities, Messud critiques the complacency of the elite and highlights the complexities of cultural perception post-9/11. The narrative underscores the tension between privilege and the societal changes that lead to suspicion and prejudice against Muslims. Williams' emergent culture and hegemony concepts are central to this exploration, depicting how cultural narratives are constructed and contested in response to trauma.

H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* poignantly explores the experiences of Muslim immigrants in the aftermath of 9/11, addressing themes of identity, belonging, and cultural alienation. The narrative reveals how dominant narratives surrounding terrorism and Islamophobia reshape the characters' identities, fostering new meanings that challenge stereotypes. The novel serves as a counter-narrative to negative cultural portrayals of Muslims, particularly for Pakistani-Americans, and underscores how socio-political changes affect personal identities. Naqvi's characters show the complexities of cultural retention and assimilation, as seen through Chuck's shift from banker to taxi driver, a transition that captures the economic impacts of the post-9/11 landscape.

Paul West's The Immensity of the Here and Now serves as an immediate literary response to the trauma of 9/11, utilizing a fragmented narrative structure that reflects the chaotic emotional landscape of post-9/11 America. This approach aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of cultural materialism, emphasizing how cultural practices shape individual and collective experiences during crises. Through characters like Aroop, Sabine, and Yassin, West explores the profound impact of the attacks on their identities, revealing the philosophical quest for meaning amid chaos. West's complex syntactical style and manipulation of time immerse readers in the sensory reality of the disaster, creating a detailed archive of 9/11 that evokes empathy The novel disrupts simplistic portrayals of heroism and villainy through the voices of diverse characters, depicting the realities faced by individuals affected by the attacks.

Amy Waldman's The Submission, analyzes the memorial controversy surrounding the events of that day, highlighting the urgent need to address sensitive issues through art. The novel portrays how media narratives can reinforce societal fears and prejudices regarding religious identity and national symbols. Centering on a Muslim protagonist, Mohammad Khan, Waldman challenges the homogenization and stereotyping of Muslim voices, emphasizing the complexities of American identity in a post-9/11 landscape. The narrative engages with themes of resilience and cultural negotiation, depicting how individual experiences intertwine with collective memory and trauma. Waldman's exploration of the memorial debate reveals the power dynamics at play, where the tension between personal grief and national identity underscores the multifaceted nature of cultural experience.

In conclusion, the representation of Muslim identities in contemporary literature not only reflects the challenges faced by these communities but also offers insights into their resilience and diversity. Engaging with these narratives allows us to better appreciate the multifaceted nature of Muslim experiences in the modern world and work towards reducing prejudice and fostering understanding across cultural divides.

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