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Historicizing Muslim American Literature: Studies on Literature by African American and South Asian American Muslim Writers

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Historicizing Muslim American Literature:
Studies on Literature by African American and South Asian American Muslim Writers

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

In response to the challenge of understanding Muslim Americans in a way that highlights their integral role in the United States through literature, this research starts with two questions: 1) how should we read Muslim American literature in relation to the lived experiences of Islam in America? and 2) how does Muslim American literature contribute to the more mainstream American literature.

To answer those questions, this research takes as its foundations the theories by Stuart Hall and Satya Mohanty on, firstly, the evolving nature of diaspora identity and on the epistemic status of identity. Following Hall's argument that every expression of art is also a reformulation of identity, artistic expressions by Muslim Americans are parts of Muslim American identity. Following Mohanty's argument of the epistemic status of identity, literature by Muslim Americans can help us see the lived and intellectual experiences of Muslim Americans. Inspired by Fredric Jameson's argument for historicizing a literary work and interpret it against its historical background, this research discovered that the at the core of the Muslim American literary works selected for this research lie political causes that underlie the aesthetic of Muslim American literature.

For African American Muslim literature, such underlying historical spirit is the tension between 'asabiyya (or peoplehood and community building among African Americans) and *ummah* (or the sense of belonging to the global Muslim community). This spirit, I argue, manifests in Marvin X's *Land for My Daughters* and Murad Kalam's *Night Journey*. Meanwhile, for works by South Asian American Muslim writers, the historical spirit lies in the tension between the essentialist view of identity and the acceptance of American identity. This tendency manifests in different ways in the Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* and Ayad Akhtar's

Disgraced.

The discussions on literary works by African American and South Asian American Muslim writers here highlight the collective concerns that underlie the literary works by the two different demographic groups. In doing so, the research places Muslim American literature as a political niche in American literature. This tendency of being political makes Muslim American literature align more with works from marginal cultural communities.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Nadia and Avis.

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Introduction

Historicizing Muslim American Literature

The Kite Runner is the first work of fiction by an American writer with Muslim background that achieved a significant success in the United States and internationally, not only as a novel, but also as a major Hollywood movie. There had been movies about American Muslims before *The Kite Runner*, including *Today's Special*, written by and starring Aasif Mandvi, an Indian American comedian; however, none of them had enjoyed a massive success comparable to that seen by *The Kite Runner*. The novel tells the story of Amir, an Afghani immigrant in California who hides a guilt from his childhood and makes a journey back to Afghanistan to make up for the childhood sin. After going through a dramatic trouble¹, Amir eventually succeeds in redeeming his childhood guilt, saving his best friend's son from the hand of a local Taliban figure, and becoming a more religious American Muslim person. Published not long after the start of U.S. Invasion of the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, the story shows that there are at least two types of Muslims: the good Muslims and the bad Muslims.

The notion of good Muslims and bad Muslims itself is not unique to *The Kite Runner*. Mahmood Mamdani discussed this notion in relation to the American policy in discussing the presence of Muslims both within the U.S. borders as well as internationally. As Mamdani observes, the roots of the notion of good and bad Muslims could be traced to the proponents of the "Culture Talk," the theory that "assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence" (17). Under this notion, a

¹ *The Kite Runner's* story, especially the second part, the adventures of Amir in Afghanistan, is so dramatic that Stephen Chan even comments that the second part is "all Hollywood," which constitutes the book's "great fault," i.e. "it was Hollywood even before it was acquired" (832).

person's cultural background is the strongest cause for his or her views and actions. This notion is most prominent and famous in the work of Samuel P. Huntington on the "clash of civilizations," a phrase that Huntington borrows from prominent orientalist Bernard Lewis, whose use of "civilization" here can be substituted by the word "culture" in Mamdani's sense above. For Huntington and Lewis, the 9/11 events were the proof of such theory. However, realizing that the act of a few people cannot define an entire religion, George W. Bush said in a formal statement made after the 9/11 events that only a bad minority of Muslims—instead of the entire global Muslim community—were to be blamed for such crime. In short, some Muslims are bad and some others are good. Regardless, the notion is strong that, to be considered a regular member of the U.S. community, Muslims must pass a certain type of litmus test, the good/bad test.

This dichotomy of "good Muslims and bad Muslims" implies that Muslims are not yet considered an ordinary part of the American fabric. The regular Gallup poll results in the last fifteen years offer us a look how Muslims are perceived in the United States. Polls conducted in different years still show that Muslims are still often accepted in the United States with reservations. Both the 2006 and 2010 polls indicate the attitude of "significant minorities" in the United States towards Muslims. The 2006 poll shows that 39% or almost four out of ten Americans feel prejudiced against Muslims around them. The presence of Muslims in their neighborhood and in their flight (Saad) made some people feel uncomfortable. Somewhat similar is the result from the 2010 poll, in which 43% or a little more than four out of ten Muslims admit that they feel a prejudice of some sort towards Muslims (Studies). From these two findings, we can infer that there is a sense of distance between Americans, as represented by the findings, and Muslims in the United States—regardless of their citizenship status. This fact is quite unusual

considering that a significant number of respondents admit that they know Muslims around them.

Aside from this external cause of Muslims being considered a nonorganic part of the American fabric, much of recent scholarship on Muslim Americans has also contributed to the distance, and the impression of exclusiveness, of Muslim Americans from the larger American society. In response to the heightened suspicion towards Muslim Americans by a significant percentage of American society, many scholars who study Muslim Americans highlight how Muslims have been faring in the United States and write material introducing Muslims' daily habits and religious practices with which many Americans are not familiar. GhaneaBassiri calls this kind of literature the "get to know your neighbor scholarship" (367), such as Asma Gull Hasan's *Red, White, and Muslim: My Story of Belief* (2005). As GhaneaBassiri acknowledges, such scholarship project is "highly admirable and humanizing," because it makes Muslim Americans more visible to American people, many of whom hold prejudice against Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. However, as GhaneaBassiri then emphasizes, such projects "neglected to examine the dynamic development of Muslim institutions and communal relations in the history of [the United States]" (366). As GhaneaBassiri discusses at length in his book *A History of Islam in America*, Muslims have been involved in various periods in the history of the United States, and the events of 9/11 and its subsequent atmosphere, but among the Muslim society and in the larger American society, highlight mostly the facts that Muslims are people of a different "civilization" that is fundamentally different from the United States. The focusing the presence of Muslims in the United States in the sense that highlight the Muslims' difference from the larger Americans renders Muslim Americans a separate community within the United States and fails to represent the facts of Muslims' being an organic part of the American fabric. In other words, the facts about Muslims being part of the American history recedes more to the

background.

Because showing the uniqueness of Muslim Americans does not seem to help with bridging the widening gap between Muslims and the larger American community, the opposite is what the United States needs. Instead of the “get to know your neighbor” scholarship, which is influenced by “politically-driven discourses,” it is more advantageous to conduct a study that is about the internal dynamics of Muslim American experience (GhaneaBassiri 376). This is in line with what GhaneaBassiri sees as the challenge that Muslim Americans face in the first decade of the twentieth century: “to construct institutions, communities, discourses, and relations that reflected their actual lives and history in the United States” (376). Bringing forward such elements will make the presence of Muslims in the United States more meaningful. Such project seeks a path other than the divisive and tokenizing “good Muslims vs bad Muslims” path, and leads to better understanding of the presence of Muslim American populations in the United States as an organic part of the American society and its history.

Just as some historians have written the history of Muslim Americans both as encounter between Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans and as individual studies on Muslim communities, literary scholars have done equally colorful studies about Muslim Americans. Scholar and poet Khaled Mattawa, in his article “Writing Islam in Contemporary American Poetry: On Mohja Kahf, Daniel Moore, and Agha Shahid Ali,” strongly starts with an underlying argument that the emerging trend of “writing Islam” (taking up Islam as a subject matter in their works) “in European languages” assumes an audience that is mostly outsiders. Grounding his reading on the fact that literature is a “secular world ... in contemporary Muslim societies,” Mattawa states that authors who “write Islam” are outside the two folds of “Western literature per se and the literatures of their Muslim societies of origin” (1590). This basic assumption in

Mattawa's essay indicates that authors who take up Islam as their subject matter do not rightfully belong to "Western literature per se." Mattawa's statement claims the impossibility of a Muslim American literature, if "Muslim American literature" means including Islam as a subject matter.

In an article that explores the possibility of Muslim American literature as an emerging field, Kahf proposes various categories of Muslim American writers; each of these categories is characterized by the subject matter that each poet take up in their works. "Prophet of dissent [coming] from the Black Arts Movement," for example, is the first category in Kahf's list; this category includes works by Marvin X and Sonia Sanchez during her Nation of Islam period. These works are strongly political poetry books that also include Islam as a subject matter, as well as draw stylistically from Islamic funds of imagery and language. By the standard that Mattawa uses in the abovementioned essay, these works are "writing Islam." Some of the other categories that Kahf proposes also include political works with some Islamic content by Muslim American authors that come from various demographic groups and ideological leanings. Kahf's emphasis on the "cultural, not religious, notion of Muslim" indicates the secular approach with which Kahf approaches Muslim American literature (167). Here, Kahf sees that it takes two aspects for writing to count as "Muslim" in the "Muslim American" setting: elements of content as well as elements in the biography of the author. In other words, Muslim writing is composed of at least two aspects, which Mattawa does not seem to distinguish in the opening of his essay. Kahf's approach represents a different view of the possibility of Muslim American literature.

In Sylvia Chan-Malik's exploration of "Islam in the arts" in the United States, Chan-Malik "[seeks] to explore the complex 'culture' facilitated by Islam's presence in the USA, both in how Islam and Muslims have informed broader constructions of American culture, and in how Muslims themselves have worked to express their Islamic identities through artistic expressions"

(320). Chan-Malik's statement implies the general assumption that guides her exploration of the topic, which is the need to highlight the interconnection between Muslims as a demographic group in the United States and the larger American society. Instead of treating cultural expressions by Muslims as a separate and distinct form, Chan-Malik treats them as part of "American culture." In other words, Chan-Malik is here aligned with Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, who, as quoted above, places a significant importance on the need to explore such bridge between Muslim institutions and the larger American society. Throughout "Islam in the Arts in the USA," one can find how the cultural expressions of Muslim Americans are part and parcel with the American ideological and material experiences, although they are filtered from the eyes of Muslim Americans. Chan-Malik's approach to the phenomenon, I argue, can serve as a point of departure for a study on Muslim American literature.

To further the study that has been started by earlier researchers, I would like to take up the way Muslim American literature contributes to the understanding of Muslim American experiences in the United States. For that purpose, this research aims to answer two fundamental questions, namely: **How should we read Muslim American literature in relation to the lived experiences of Islam in America? And, in what ways do Muslim American literary works contribute to the larger American literature?** Guided by these questions, I explore the ways with which the history of Islam in America manifests in Muslim American literary works. In addition to that, I explore the inseparability of literary works by Muslim Americans from the larger literary landscape of the United States. The result of such analysis will indicate the potential of literary works by Muslim Americans to show the interconnectedness between Muslim Americans and the rest of the American sociocultural landscape. In other words, the research covers another area of Islam in America beyond both the "good Islam and bad Islam"

dichotomy, and the outdated dichotomy of “Islam and the West.”

Theoretical Grounds

To answer the above-listed questions, there are a number of points one needs to consider. First, we need to establish the most reliable method to define the cultural identity of Muslim Americans and, by extension, the position of Muslim Americans in relation to the American society. Stuart Hall’s classic essay “Cultural Identity and the Diaspora” will prove to provide a sound groundwork in this effort. In the essay, Hall presents two ways of defining cultural identity and argues that in one of them lies the explanation of cultural identity for diaspora people. The first conception of cultural identity that Hall proposes is one that is unchanging and shared by a group of people with the same history and the same set of traits (223). In the second conception, which Hall argues can better explain the condition of diaspora people, cultural identity is dynamic and dependent on how we respond to history (225). In other words, in the second conception, cultural identity is fluid and keeps evolving as it does not deny the role of history in its formation. Discussing the Caribbean film, Hall argues that it is not “a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak” (236-37). Here, Hall defines cultural identity not as a fixed set of habits and tendencies. Instead, it is a fluid set of characteristics that is repeatedly redefined with every single performance. With every cultural expression, regardless of its form, the cultural identity of a group is redefined.

Hall’s second notion of cultural identity has two implications. For one, it means that it is no longer possible to see Muslim Americans as a group of people that has a fixed cultural identity that can neither change nor be influenced by the history of its presence in the United

States. While Muslim Americans with immigrant backgrounds might say that their descendants come from Africa, Middle East, South Asia or Southeast Asia, their cultural identity is composed of various elements, which include both elements from their ancestors' lands and elements from American experience. Secondly, Hall's understanding of cultural identity leads to the idea that Muslim American literature as a cultural expression also plays a role in the formation of Muslim American cultural identity. Thus, analyzing Muslim American literature and its depiction of Muslim Americans, its representations of the conflicts related to Islamic values, and so on means studying the redefinition and reformulation of Muslim American cultural identity.

To complement Hall's forward-oriented view of cultural identity, Satya Mohanty's argument on the nature of identity lends valuable insight into the significance. Mohanty argues that cultural identity is shaped by experience, which he understands as a collection of knowledge and feeling from many people in a community. In Mohanty's view, experience does not only cover phenomenon as we can perceive with our five senses, but also ideas that we acquire and even choose to believe and hold fast. These elements of experience eventually constitute a cultural identity. On the flipside, then, cultural identity (whether they be inherited—such as ethnicities—or consciously chosen—such as ideological leanings) is “[a way] of making sense of our experiences,” which makes it “epistemic” in nature (Mohanty 55). In his analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Mohanty demonstrates how scenes in the novel carries with them the collective memory of slavery and racism in the United States. By this logic, therefore, attempts to explain Muslim American cultural identity will require going into the lived and intellectual experiences of Muslim Americans—this will help provide a sound background for the analysis of cultural identity in the sense that Hall argues for.

Hall's and Mohanty's arguments on cultural identity here are complementary in the study

of Muslim American literature. These two arguments highlight the fluid and illuminating qualities of cultural identity. Hall proposes that cultural identity keeps evolving with its every iteration in cultural expressions as he observes in Caribbean cinema. Mohanty, with a more emphasis on the cultural identity, offers to see cultural identity as the sum amount of various ways of making sense of experience, as he exemplifies through how *Beloved* hints at the many aspects of African American experience during the slavery era. Whereas Hall holds that every act to express identity constitutes the definition of such identity, Mohanty goes further by pointing at both the inherited identity aspects and the fact that political, intellectual, and ideological aspects of identity constitute cultural identity. Both Hall and Mohanty, nonetheless, argues for the potential of cultural expressions to offer hints of the cultural experience and knowledge of a cultural group. In Mohanty's words, identity has an "epistemic status." In the context of this research, Muslim American literature can be analyzed dialectically to see its potential as the expressions of cultural identity of Muslims in the first decade of the twenty-first century and as a window to understanding the experiences and political leanings of Muslim Americans during the same period of time. In the context of this research, such exploration on cultural identity in the works of Muslim American writers will, ultimately, answer the first question regarding how Muslim American literature represents the complex relation between Muslim American literature and the experiences of Islam in America.

Such view of cultural expressions is coherent with the general materialist position on literary work. A literary work, which essentially is the product of human mind, carries in it the influence of the material condition under which their authors live. This influence can be interpreted both as direct, affirmatory relation, and indirect relationship. Both are expressions that carry with it the residue of human material experience and can potentially inform an analyst

of the universe in which the writer lives and create. There are two concepts from Jameson that, as affirmed by Adam Roberts, are useful for our discussion, namely, history and mediation (Roberts). Accepting these two concepts will lead to an appreciation of literature as neither pure reflection of the society nor a cultural product separate from reality.

While it might not be immediately relevant to the theoretical groundwork of this research, Fredric Jameson's works need to be discussed here for the inspiration that they contribute in thinking about Muslim American literature *vis-à-vis* the notion of literature that is political. Since Muslim Americans as a group are often politicized during critical moments in the twentieth century, it is necessary for us to discuss the relation between literature and what it means to be political. The term "political" is known to have two at least two different uses². On one hand, it refers to the quality of something related to the governance of a country; on the other hand, the term refers to the quality of something that is oriented towards common good. In literature, the term "political fiction" refers to a genre of fiction in which characters are involved in the more conventional understanding of politics, such as in the leadership of a country. The earliest theorists of this genre acknowledge the fact that the genre has developed from British didactic or moralistic literature (Whalen-Bridge 20). For this research, however, I will be using a much wider sense of the term "political" with regards to Muslim American literature. As an illustration, the peripheral discussion in Fredric Jameson's controversial essay "Third World Literature in the Era Multinational Capitalism" might prove useful to highlight the political nature of some literature, including Muslim American literature. In the essay, Jameson offers an "oversimplified" explanation for the difference between literature in the capitalist culture and one

² What it means to be political is a subject of a classic essay by Eugene F. Miller entitled "What Does 'Political' Mean." In the essay, Miller argues that the term "political" is used equivocally to refer to at least two different things, but the equivocality of the term is not pure. In other words, the term "political" is used to refer to two different things that have some common features although they are of two different realms (Miller 57).

that is not:

one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx. ("Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 69)

Here, it appears that Jameson uses the word "political" to refer to something that is not private, not merely poetic, or something that pertains to public concerns more than private concerns. This kind of understanding of political is also central in Jameson's more famous work *The Political Unconscious*, in which he argues that literature (this time in the capitalist society) also bears the residue of the society that is mediated in such a way that on the surface it does not look political while underneath, on the unconscious level, it is also political--thus political unconscious. We can extend this to mean that "political" while it is generally used to refer to the ruling of a country by government, being political can also mean doing something for the cause of many or doing something with social orientation, especially for the good of many. This is the understanding of political that will be used in this research.

From the brief description of the use of the term "political" above, we can see a slight resemblance between Muslim American literature and Jameson's "authentic cultural production." Works by Muslim American literature often talk about social issues (as the discussion in the next chapters will reveal) that, by the definition I presented above, can make us call them political works. These works, while as many modern literary works carry personal topics, also have strong society-oriented themes. In other words, one does not need to get to the unconscious level to find the political cause it strives forward to, unlike works in the capitalist culture that Jameson discusses in *The Political Unconscious*. Instead, I argue through this research that many of the works by Muslim American writers are in fact closer in nature to what

Jameson calls “authentic cultural production,” that for Jameson refers to

“[cultural production] which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system: black literature and blues, British working-class rock, women's literature, gay literature, the *roman quebécois*, the literature of the Third World” (*Signatures of the Visible* 23).

Works by these groups are political in the sense that they champion their collective causes. Their concerns with collective experience make them less attuned to the general tendency of literature in capitalist society that has a proclivity to the personal than the social, to the poetic than the politics. This is where most Muslim American literary works belong, as the next chapters will reveal.

Therefore, an effort to historicize Muslim American literature needs to be done in a way that is different from Jameson’s original use of the word “historicize.” By historicizing Jameson refers to the reading of cultural artefacts in the light of the history as Marxists hold, that is the progress of mankind from different modes of production, which ends in socialism. A cultural artefact, for Jameson, can be read in terms of its position in the progress of history towards the final manifestation, not as an allegory but as one that pays attention to the “common logic of organization or structure” (Roberts 30). For Muslim American literature, however, historicizing needs to be defined in a narrower way: reading a cultural artefact in the light of its community’s struggles or biggest concerns. This is analogous to Jameson’s proposition to read Third-world Literature as a national allegory (“Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” 86). In other words, since this scope of “history” as understood here is narrower than the History as Jameson understands it in *The Political Unconscious*, we might refer to it as a weaker version of history. It is historicizing, nonetheless.

To clarify further uses, it is important here to define the term “Muslim American” and “Muslim American literature” as I shall use throughout this paper. Scholars have been using

different terms to refer to Muslim people and the religion of Islam in the United States. There are at least two common terms used here: “Muslim American” and “American Muslims.” However, in the field of humanities, both appear to refer to the same definition. GhaneaBassiri uses the term American Islam to refer to “the variety of efforts through which self-proclaimed Muslims have sought to root their understandings of Islam within the social, political, cultural, and economic life of [the United States]” (8). The religion of Islam here is defined based on the admission of a person as Muslim. In other words, Islam in this definition covers various denominations, including the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Nation of Islam, two denominations that in the global conversation, in which the Sunni denomination of Islam is the majority, are not generally considered “mainstream Islam.” This understanding of the term seems to also be applied by Amina Beverly McCloud in her work *African American Islam*. In this work, McCloud includes in the term African American Islam all sects or denominations of Islam that have existed in the African American Community. In the list of organizations that were operating between 1960 to present, for example, McCloud includes “Moorish Science Temple, Ahmadiyya Movement, Nation of Islam, Darul Islam, Islamic Party, Islamic Brotherhood, United Submitters International, Shiite Communities, Ansarullah Nubian Islamic Hebrews, ‘Isa al Haadi al Mahdi, Naqshabandi Community, Tijaniyyah Community, Addeyuallahe Universal Arabic Association, and Fahamme Temple of Islam and Culture” (*African American Islam* 41-42). This kind of definition is considered inclusive of all period who have been influenced by the teachings of Islam as defined narrowly to refer to the main sunni-shiah category.

As for the use of “Muslim American” as opposed to “American Muslim,” the decision was made to highlight the American presence. In her classic book *Islam in America*, Jane I. Smith uses the term “American Muslim,” aligned with the use of the term by Islamic Society of

North America (ISNA), to refer to any Muslim individuals in the United States regardless of their nationalities³. In this dissertation, however, the term “Muslim American” is preferred although it might refer to the same demographic group. The reason for this is, first, the fact that linguistically the term “Muslim American” consists of the adjective “Muslim” that modifies the term “American.” However, just as the term “Muslim” is understood not theologically but culturally, the term “American” is here understood culturally, referring to any individual with the experience of living in the United States, whether or not they hold an American passport. In other words, the people to whom the term refers are Americans who are Muslim in the above-mentioned definition of the term “Muslim.” The second reason for the selected label is that the term fits well with the subject of the study when it is then combined with the cultural expressions from this group. The term “Muslim” refers to the people who are culturally Muslims, whether they be practicing the religion or growing up in a Muslim family. When it is used as a modifier, for example in the phrase “Muslim identity,” the term can mean “related to Muslims.” This is markedly different from the adjective “Islamic,” which mean related to the religion of Islam or adhering to the tenets of the religion of Islam. From here, the term Muslims clearly refers more to the people who are mentioned above, while “Islamic” refers more to the religion or the faithfulness with the tenets of Islam.

With this limitation to the definition of Islam and Muslim American, the objects of this study are getting clear. Considering the importance of cultural identification with the culture of Muslims in the United states, the limitation to writers with Muslim background is a must. The background as Muslims or having Muslim family will justify the cultural Muslimness of a writer.

³ In an address given at an ISNA event that Smith quotes, the speaker says “...the American Muslim community is comprised of people drawn from a wide-ranging ethnic and professional mix” (x). This use indicates the stronger emphasis on the faith than the presence in the United States.

Therefore, the experiential aspect of this identity is of an utmost importance. On the same wavelength as Satya Mohanty's argument on the epistemic status of cultural identity, this study neither ignores the importance of identity nor use identity the only reference, then completeness is the key. Islam as a lived experience, which one gain by the raised Muslim, and as a chosen identity, which one gains through active learnings, are necessary for the completeness of answering the questions proposed above. Therefore, works that are discussed in this dissertation are those written by Muslim Americans whether or not they are practicing. With regards to the American identity, along the line with the description on the Muslim background, the most important aspect is the presence in the United States. Writers who have spent a significant number of years and experienced Amerika and developed affinity with the United States, qualify in this regard, whether they formally hold U.S. citizenship or not. These two aspects of Muslim American identity will be the guidance in deciding the works and writers included in this project.

Chapters Overview

In this project, I begin with the social and historical review of each of the communities to give an adequate view of major societal concerns of these communities. After that, I analyze the literary work to get a further view of how the literary works represent the societal concerns. I then continue with an analysis on how the two works represent their societal concerns.

Chapter 1 theorizes the major conceptual aesthetics of African American Islam based on the strong tendency present in among African American Muslims from various denominations. The chapter opens with a review of the history of Islam and America, starting from the colonial era to the current era with a special attention to the Nation of Islam and the rise of Islam among African American in the decades leading to the Civil Rights Movement. Amina Beverly

McCloud argues that African American Muslims across denominations share the tendency to experience the tension between *‘asabiyya* (or a deep spirit of “nationhood” with the term “nation” understood not as nation-state but more as “peoplehood” or ethnic affiliation) and *ummah* (or a sense of being part of the global Muslim community. Eventually, I argue that this same tendency is strongly present in various ways in literary works by African American Muslims. This argument is inspired by Jameson’s theorization of cultural artefacts isolated cultural pockets tend to be more political and in tuned with the collective spirit.

Chapter II applies the theory established in Chapter 1 to discuss a 2005 poetry collection by Marvin X entitled *Land for My Daughters*. In this chapter, I argue that Marvin X exemplifies the tension between the community-building tendency and the universalistic spirit of Muslim American literature. Marvin X’s community-building tendency is visible in his consistent exploration of the Black Aesthetics, which assumes African Americans as its audience, complemented with a strong awareness of gender justice that makes him noticeably peculiar among male African American writers in the Black Arts Movement. As for the universalistic tendency, it manifests in Marvin X’s coverage which suggests a global awareness of the oppression that includes workers in the third world instead of the oppression experienced by African Americans. In other words, Marvin X’s alignment with oppressed peoples is a strong feature of the Black aesthetics and is a community-building tendency, while the widening the scope into international community makes it more universalistic.

Chapter 3 is another application of the theory about African American Muslim literature in the reading of Murad Kalam’s novel *Night Journey*. The discussion on the novel focuses on its representation of the systemic urban poverty. The novel was published in 2004, but the conflict was set between mid-1980’s and 1996, peaking with the Million Man March organized by

Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam. Following the life of an urban poor boy and his attempts to escape poverty by searching for a father figure, the novel highlights the various cultural factors behind urban poverty, which are inseparable from the structural factors behind poverty in the inner cities. In its exposition of various forces that attempt to uplift the main character from the ghetto, the novel embodies a tension between the community-building ethos and the more universalistic tendency to solve the plight of African Americans in the novel. I argue that Eddie's journey in navigating urban poverty can be explained through the Islamic "night journey" narrative, which centers on Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem to the seventh heaven within a night. Unlike Marvin X, which tends to be explicit and prescriptive in his views African American community, Murad Kalam is more on the descriptive side of the spectrum. The spirit of the night journey narrative at the end of the novel suggests a hope to solve one of the cultural factors behind the systemic poverty experienced by African Americans in American inner-cities.

If Chapters 1, 2, and 3 cover Muslim American Literature by writers from African American background, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 cover a different area, namely, Muslim American Literature by writers from recent immigrant background, especially South Asian background. This part begins in Chapter 4, which opens with an argument to counter the common notion that Muslim Americans with recent immigration background tend to live in cultural bubbles. The chapter uses the argument to theorize the aesthetics of literature by American Muslims from recent immigrant background as a resistance against essentialism. Enlightened by Stuart Hall's theory on the hybridity of diaspora community, which is defined each time it is expressed, and complemented by Anne Phillips's theory of four types of essentialism, this section proposes that Muslim Americans with recent immigrant background are aware of their position and make

efforts to overcome insularity.

Chapter 5 applies the argument proposed in Chapter 4 about Muslim American literature from recent immigrant Muslim background to discuss *Disgraced* by Ayad Akhtar. The Pulitzer-winning play is here discussed with a special highlight on its tug-of-war between essentialism and hybridity. The play centers on the downfall from grace of a young lawyer after he becomes a subject of stereotypes and after his employers discover his Muslim past. In the light of Anne Philips's four types of essentialism, I explicate how the characters in the play display one type of essentialism or another. The main character is essentialist in his view of Muslims. So are his Jewish employers. The essentialist tendencies displayed by the characters appear caricatural when juxtaposed to the fact that most of the characters are cultural hybrids. None of the main characters in this play have enjoyed living in the same community holding fast to the same traditions or beliefs. Therefore, their essentialism in one way or another represents how easy one falls into essentialism without realizing it.

In the last chapter, I analyze *The Domestic Crusaders* by Wajahat Ali by focusing on how the novel epitomizes the tendency of leaving model minority stereotype, an extension of the awareness of the danger of essentialism in Muslim American literature produced by writers of South Asian background. This discussion is aimed to further what the previous section—the discussion on *Disgraced*—has achieved, i.e. that Muslim American of immigrant backgrounds, after realizing their hybridity, also leaves the model minority stereotype and even starts to merge with the larger members of American society, including the Muslim American society. In this play, such tendency manifests in the main characters' eagerness to take up professions that are popular among South Asian immigrant children, resistance to matrimonial match, and shift of religious practice.

Lastly, I sincerely hope that this dissertation can provide a way to consider the role of Muslim American literature as one of the expressions of Muslim American identities, which following Satya Mohanty's argument should have an epistemic status that can inform us of the various aspects of Muslim Americans.

Chapter 1

The Tension between Community Building and Global Kinship in African American Muslim Literature

One of the most important notions in the discussion of African American Islam is the tension between the particularistic understanding of and the universalistic claim of Islam or, in practice, between *'asabiyya* (or the sense of peoplehood and, eventually, community building) and *ummah* (or the membership in the global Muslim community and, in practice, solidarity fellow Muslims around the world). According to earlier scholars of African American Islam, such notion permeates throughout the entire existence of African American Islam from community organization to cultural expressions. This chapter will first review literature surrounding the dynamics between community-building and connection with global Muslims in African American Islam by focusing on the rise of African American Islam in the twentieth century. Afterwards, I will propose that such tendency also manifests consistently in African American Muslim literature, constituting a defining feature of this body of literature, which eventually distinguishes it from the larger African American literature or Muslim American literature by authors of other social groups.

In turn, this distinguishing feature of African American Islam can potentially bring African American Muslims into view from their relative invisibility. During the time when Islam is often seen as a foreign element in the United States, and amidst efforts by mostly recent immigrant Muslim Americans to present Muslims as no different than other Americans, highlighting literature by African American Muslims will give a view of Muslim Americans that can do more justice to the members of Muslim American community. In addition, such effort will also reveal the fact that Islam has a deep root in the United States and has been involved in

segments of American life that are not commonly associated with Islam. Literary works by African American Muslims attest to the existence of Islam as an organic element of the United States, especially in terms of individual advancement and moral lift among African American people who had been denigrated for generations.

This first section will then be followed with the analysis of two contemporary African American Muslim works. The first analysis is on Marvin X's poetry collection *Land of My Daughters*, in which the above-mentioned tension between the particular and universal aspects of religion manifests in the voices that challenge the declining role of religion in empowering social movements. In addition to that, the book also criticizes the lack of gender awareness within the civil rights struggle of the sixties, in which religion played not a small role, especially in the Northern cities. The second analysis will shed light on Murad Kalam's novel *Night Journey*, in which the tension between the particularistic role of Islam to provide a platform for individual moral improvement and the universalistic nature of Islam that are at play in an effort to help a Black youth navigate his life in the inner-city. This novel presents a critique of the harms that can come from a community-building project centered on the allegiance to a monolithic figure while at the same time it also criticizes the superficial adherence to a universal Islam, which dilutes the potential of religion to promote advancement on a personal level. A common denominator that both sections share is that structural racism is at the root of the problem, which becomes the beginning and end of the discussion regarding community-building.

The Defining Feature of African American Muslim Literature

Among African Americans in the early twentieth century, Islam propagated in the forms of unorthodox spiritual teachings and doctrines that consist of tenets of orthodox Islam and doctrines of racial pride. This happened at the time when African Americans as a group

experienced a hostile living condition even after the slavery era was officially terminated and the Constitution was supposed to guarantee their rights. The Jim Crow law in the Southern States and poverty in the urban North provided as the social and historical contexts for the first major spread of Islam in the United States. This inseparable tie was disrupted as orthodox Muslims, who were mostly immigrants, gained more influence and voiced the universality of Islam as a religion. While immigrant orthodox Muslims had been in the United States starting from the waves of Syrian immigrants in the late nineteenth century, they had not been involved in missionary activities until much later. However, since orthodox voices began to be heard, such as through students or foreign influence, African American Muslims started to face the reality of the universal aspect of Islam. Still, with the strong need of black liberation and the potentials that Islam offers for the cause, Islam then became an organic part of the community-building project within African American community. Furthermore, I argue that this tension will also manifest in the literature by African American Muslims in a way that distinguishes it from the larger African American literature.

Contrary to the general perception, especially in the post-9/11 context, Islam has been in North America for centuries and has assumed various forms of expression. While the first major spread of Islam happened among African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, the first Muslims of African origin had actually been in the New World as early as 1501 (Diouf 4) and in North America, particularly, since the early seventeenth century ("Black History Milestones" "Black History Milestone"). These first Muslims were enslaved Africans from West Africa, where Muslims were a significant minority that included "traders and rulers" (Diouf 21). Sylviane A. Diouf proposes that there were approximately 2.25 to 3 million African Muslims enslaved in both North and South Americas, comprising 15 to 20 percent of the 8 million

enslaved Africans forcibly transported from West Africa between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries (48). Despite their harsh living condition, the African Muslims managed to maintain their Islamic beliefs and to practice Islam for several generations before the practice eventually waned and blended into daily customs even as the subsequent generations converted into Christianity by the end of the nineteenth century. In Diouf's statement, since the fifteen century "Islam in West African [where most of the enslaved Africans had come from] gradually became associated with the Sufi orders," whose ritual practice includes the "recitation of the Qur'an, incantations (*dhikr*), music to attain spiritual ecstasy (*sama*)" (21). Cultural expressions among the enslaved Africans and their descendants would hint at the traces of this Sufistic leaning in West African Islam despite the disappearance of Islam as a formal religion from among African Americans of the nineteenth century. As daily practice, however, oral history indicates that there were practices among sporadic black individuals that can be associated with the influence of Islam (Georgia Writers' Project's *Drums and Shadows*). This kind of practice would later become objects of pride for African American Muslims who value the struggle of their ancestors to maintain their dignity and customs in the face of harsh living conditions in the Americas.

When Islam resurfaced among African Americans in the early twentieth century, it projected a different spirit and occurred in a different context. This different spirit and context make the propagation of the faith in the United States unique among other stories of the propagation of Islam in the whole world. The Northern U.S. cities saw the rise of several religious sects with names and references to Islam but with details and tenets that were not found anywhere else in the world. Most of these early Muslim communities rose from within African American communities, while a few of them originated elsewhere but made African American

community their target of missionary activity. Commonality between these sects lies in their appeal to African Americans who as a community were treated as second-class citizens in the country where they have set roots for several generations.

Together, the new denominations of Islam that started within African American community in the first half of the twentieth century and others that followed later make up what scholar Amina Beverly McCloud terms “African American Islam.” It is worth noting, however, that “African American Islam” does not refer to a monolithic practice of the faith. The first in this wave happened in the 1920s with the rise of Moorish Science Temple of America, a religious group founded and led by Noble Drew Ali. Fundamental to this religious group was the teaching about their national identity as “Moors” whose origin was North Africa (McCloud *African American Islam* 5). Moorish Science Temple of America taught basic Qur’anic concepts that center around the sovereignty and responsibility of mankind (McCloud *African American Islam* 5). The sect's holy book *Circle Seven Koran* includes a teaching of metaphysical unity that “[fosters] self-respect and [emancipates] one from the stigma associated with the black race” (GhaneaBassiri 220).⁴ The other most well-known African American Islamic denomination came to existence in the 1930s, when Nation of Islam was founded in Detroit by W.D. Fard, who would mysteriously disappear not too long afterwards. Nation of Islam’s core teachings center on the oneness of God, the evil of the white race, and the eventual victory of Black men (McCloud *African American Islam* 27-28). In practice, Nation of Islam taught its members practical instructions to manage all aspects of life, from dietary restriction to long-term personal and professional agendas. After a steady but slow growth in the 1930s and 1940s, Nation of Islam's

⁴ In *A History of Islam in America*, historian Kambiz GhaneaBassiri explains the relation between Moorish Science Temple of America and Freemasonry, with a highlight on detailing the fact that content of *Seven Circle Koran* is adapted from “metaphysical and theosophical religious writings popular with Masons” (GhaneaBassiri 202)

membership increased significantly in the 1950s and early 1960s under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad with a major role of minister Malcolm X, who was the organization's "most able and well-known evangelist" (Curtis "Malcolm X" 88). As an articulate speaker, Malcolm played a major role in enlarging the organization, before he was eventually chastised by The Honorable Elijah Mohammad after making a controversial comment on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, against the warning from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad who prohibited Muslim ministers from commenting on it and participating in political activities (Curtis "Malcolm X" 90). Malcolm, who by then had been suspicious of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad's morality and had started to read and acquired materials related to Sunni Islam, eventually became closer to Sunni Muslims and started his own mosque separate from the Nation of Islam (Curtis "Malcolm X" 91-92). Following the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, the leadership of Nation of Islam was handed down to his son Warith Deen Muhammad, who gradually revised NOI's theological and political views, radically changed NOI's organizational structure, and aligned the organization with global Sunni Islam, which became official when it named itself a Muslim organization within the fold of Sunni Islam in 1975. Despite this theological shift, the organization still put community-building among African Americans on top of its agenda.

The Muslim organization that originated outside the African American community was the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement, which spread among African Americans in the 1920s. In the beginning of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement in the United States, this organization targeted mainly the educated elites in the United States (GhaneaBassiri 211). When it started a new office in Chicago in 1922, the Ahmadiyya Movement started to gain followers from Marcus Garvey's UNIA and even publicly proposed Islam as an appropriate solution to the "race problem" in the

United States (GhaneaBassiri 211). Eventually, the Ahmadiyya Movement began to fade among African Americans with the rise of other Muslim organizations with Black nationalist leaning among African Americans in the late 1920s (GhaneaBassiri 215). Besides, there was a reservation among African American followers of the Ahmadiyya Movement related to the fact that the leadership of the organization was still dominated by South Asian figures and that the organization was not ready to appoint African Americans to hold important positions such as being missionaries (GhaneaBassiri 215). Wali Akram, a prominent member of the organization, then left the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission to establish the Cleveland Mosque, Ohio, which is known as the first “Sunni Mosque”—although technically the mosque was initially a reaction to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and became a “Sunni mosque” only when the leadership of the mosque became Sunni Muslims much later (GhaneaBassiri 215).

In its twentieth century reemergence, Islam within the African American community became visibly different from Islam as practiced by enslaved West Africans during the slavery era. In the twentieth century, Islam had a strong political undertone, unlike the strongly Sufistic version as practiced by West Africans and, thus, the enslaved Africans. In its reemergence, African American Islam was unique to the historical experience of African Americans of the era; however, it also connected them to the larger fold of Islam as practiced by Muslims in other parts of the world.

This community-building tendency of African American Islam in the first half of the twentieth century was consistent with the social and historical context of African American experience during that time. It was congruent with the larger trend within African American community, namely, demanding the actual end of racial inequality in the United States. Starting the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, prominent African American

figures started to rise as the Southern states codified the “separate but equal” motto in Jim Crow law. During this time, inspired by the thoughts of prominent black figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded. NAACP would later steadily gain prominence in the civil rights struggle by challenging racist policies that denied the promises of the U.S. Constitution and, especially, the 14th amendment, which should have guaranteed the civil rights of African Americans in the Southern states after the Civil War (Campo "Bedoin" 99). As living condition in the South deteriorated, more and more African American people migrated to the Northern cities, which eventually also lead to urban poverty. African American Islam’s teachings took part in raising the moral and affecting better living practice among this population, while in the South nonviolent activists were participating in sit-ins, boycotts, strikes, and bringing legal cases to federal courts to overthrow Jim Crow law. African American activists, servicemen, and athletes made many important achievements in pursuing equality by the end of the 1950s. Among these achievements are the integration of U.S. Army and the desegregation in sports with the rise to prominence of Jackie Robinson as a major league baseball player. In the late fifties, after the 1955 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which ended segregation in basic education on paper, substantial achievements were made, including the desegregation of Central Arkansas High School in 1957. Further protests, boycotts, and sit-ins involving celebrated figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Ruby Bridges, and Rosa Parks eventually led to the signing of the Civil Rights bill by President Lyndon B. Johnson. With these historical events in the background, African American Islam contributed to the struggle for the advancement of African American community, especially in Northern cities, where Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, the Ahmadiyya Movement and others uplifted the morale of African American people and taught discipline and self-reliance to

empower them individually economically. If the civil rights movement “put its hope in legal equality and voting rights,” the black nationalist movement in Northern cities, as represented by Malcolm X and Nation of Islam and visible in the teachings of African American Islam of early twentieth century, saw importance in “economic, social, and psychological reforms” of Black people (Awad and Curtis 353). African American Islam, thus, contributed in complementing the black liberation struggle waged during this time that led to the signing of the civil rights bill.

Scholars of Islam in America have identified two different but mutually complementing characteristics commonly found among African American Muslims. The two characteristics are the commitment to community-building within African American communities and the awareness of the connection with fellow Muslims all over the world. Using the Arabic terms *'asabiyya* and *ummah*, Amina Beverly McCloud explains the importance of the two concepts in understanding the nature and development African American Islam (*African American Islam* 4). The term *'asabiyya* appears for the first time in the work of fourteenth century sociologist Ibn Khaldun to refer to kinship (McCloud *African American Islam* 4) or a tie between members of a tribal community that eventually becomes the origin of a nation (Campo "Bedoin" 99). However, McCloud holds that “the term can also be usefully extended to encompass group affiliations that are somewhat broader in character, affiliation that comprise national and cultural identities ... [designating] a key theme in the history of African American Islam—namely, the theme of nation-building” (*African American Islam* 4). McCloud adds that this is relevant to the history of African American in the first half of the twentieth century, during which Moorish Science Temple taught its followers about the dignity of Black people and Nation of Islam taught self-reliance to its followers. As the use of the term “nation” in McCloud’s sense and that in the name “Nation of Islam” might be confused, it needs to be clarified that McCloud’s use here refers to a

tribal or ethnic sense of belonging. As for *'ummah*, it refers to three understandings of the community of Muslims. In the first understanding, this term refers to the community of Muslims during the life of Prophet Muhammad, which according to the *Qur'an* and *sunna*, is considered the ideal community. The second meaning of the term refers to all Muslims living in the Islamic Caliphate from the time of the spread of Islam until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, the third meaning of the term refers to its use in the modern time, during which Muslims live in modern nation-states all over the globe; in other words, the third understanding refers to all Muslims around the world (Campo "Umma" 688). As discussed above, African American Islam in the first half of the twentieth century is dominated by the spirit of *'asabiyya* or community building rather than by solidarity with other Muslims around the globe⁵.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the inevitable increase of contact with the larger community of Muslims led to the increasing importance of *umma*. As more immigrant Muslims arrived in the United States, African American Islamic denominations that leaned more towards *'asabiyya* were eventually seen as heretical and—in the case of Nation of Islam with its essentialist ideology—racist (McCloud *African American Islam* 5). McCloud proposes that the tension between these two tendencies is best represented in the life story of Malcolm X. As a minister in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm faithfully believed and taught the teachings of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad that emphasize the nobleness of the black race, the evilness of the Caucasian race, and the eventual victory of the Black people. In other words, Malcolm was engaged in the practice of an Islam that is strongly directed at community-building purposes (McCloud *African American Islam* 36). Later, however, when he left Nation of Islam and

⁵ A sign that indicates this tendency can be found in the tendency among members of Nation of Islam to follow the teachings of Elijah Muhammad in terms of the personal development and ideology while they did not perform prayers like Muslims around the world did, although this practice is encouraged by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad (Curtis "Malcolm X" 89).

eventually converted into Sunni Islam, Malcolm embraced his membership in the global community of Muslims with its fourteen-hundred-year-old tradition. While Sunni Islam does not condone the black essentialist ideology held by Nation of Islam, Malcolm believed that Islam included teachings that justify one's struggle in the cause of black liberation. Malcolm is critical to the possibility of "Muslims overlooking injustice in their own communities for the sake of participation in the larger community of believers" (McCloud *African American Islam* 37). Malcolm's concerns with both community-building and global fellowship of Muslims can be seen in the two organizations that Malcolm initiated at the end of his life, i.e. the Muslim Mosque, Inc. (a Sunni Muslim organization) and the Organization of African American Unity (a black liberation organization). This tendency of Malcolm X represents, in McCloud's words, "the tension between the demands of *'asabiyya* (community-building) and the commitment to the *ummah* (the world community of Islamic believers)" (*African American Islam* 35). How Malcolm resolved the tension between the need for black liberation and the universality of Sunni Islam became a good example of how such tension cannot be easily brushed aside but instead becomes a significant topic of discussion within African American Muslims in later time⁶.

As more and more Muslim immigrants arrived in the United States following the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, the tension between *'asabiyya* and *umma* among African American Muslims became stronger and more meaningful. GhaneaBassiri, in a section of *A History of Islam in*

⁶ Quite similarly, historian Edward E. Curtis IV in *Islam in Black America* provides a detailed analysis on how Malcolm's conversion into Sunni Islam while still strongly championing black liberation entailed was part of a larger political tension among large Muslim organizations in the Middle East. While Malcolm's Saudi benefactors tried to make sure that Malcolm understood the universality of Islam, Malcolm himself could not part from the need to advocate black liberation through black nationalism. For Curtis, at the end of his life Malcolm ceded his authority to define Islam and left that role to his Muslim missionary sponsors but still strongly while he still held black nationalism as the political ideology for his black liberation. He had not resolved the tension between the universalism of Islam and the particularity of black liberation when he was assassinated. It was Warith Deen Muhammad who would resolve this question a decade later when he assumed the leadership of Nation of Islam (Curtis *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* 105).

America devoted to Muslim Americans after the Hart-Celler Act, notes the various ways in which Muslim immigrants participated in political activism and community building. Much of the political activism during the 1980s and 1990s were inseparable from U.S. involvements in various global political events such as the invasion of Afghanistan by Russia, Iran Hostage Crisis, and the Iraq War. Meanwhile, the non-activist Muslim immigrants were involved in community building through the establishment and managements of mosques. The latter is mostly involved in maintaining the religious education of young Muslim immigrants. There is a general sense of optimism among Muslim activists about both “the fundamental fairness of the political system” (314); while for the non-activists, which is the majority of Muslim immigrants, they are more concerned with preserving the legacy of Islam in a foreign land by building communities, and mosques, for mostly their cultural groups that usually have the same national origins, a tendency which was strongly criticized even by fellow immigrant Muslims themselves (GhaneaBassiri 318).

Unlike the above-mentioned immigrant Muslim groups, African American Muslims were involved in community-building projects to cope with structural racism, which persisted despite the issuance of the Civil Rights Act. Some African American leaders such as Imam Warith Deen Muhammad and Imam Siraj Wahhaj were involved in Muslim organizations founded by Muslim immigrants, “they remained culturally and socially within African American Muslim community” (GhaneaBassiri 319). Based on his fieldwork on Muslim Americans between 2007 and 2011, sociologist Akbar S. Ahmed presents several instances related to this difficult relationship. In one, an African American Muslim man whose mosque Ahmed visited during the study mentioned that immigrant Muslims saw African American Muslims “through white eyes,” suggesting the presence of racism or the stigma of African Americans as a second class citizen in

the way immigrant Muslims see African American Muslims (208). In addition to that, Ahmed suggests that immigrant Muslims tend to consider African American Muslims less knowledgeable about Islam. African American Muslims in some parts of America complained to Ahmed that “immigrants behaved as if they had a monopoly on understanding Islam, viewing African American Islam as a ‘secondhand’ version, despite the efforts of individuals like Imam W.D. [Mohammed] to promote orthodox learning and scholarship in the community” (Ahmed 209). Jamillah Karim also notices this trend, which is quite odd considering that the African American Muslims that become the target of this denigrating view are in fact Sunni Muslims (Karim). Some African American Muslims also complain that immigrants tend to live as Muslims in the United States without making efforts to alleviate problems experienced by African Americans, such as urban poverty (Ahmed 210)⁷. This inability to connect with the reality of African American history and experience seems to have played a part in the tendency of immigrant Muslims to quickly dismiss African American Islam as being heretic when faced with African American Islamic denominations that stress on the community-building ideology more than the commitment to the orthodox views. As Ahmed says:

“What they failed to appreciate was the community’s struggle to reach toward a distant vision of Islam in difficult if not impossible circumstances. Without the foundations laid by these early Muslims, there would have been no Islam in America among African Americans (169).

Immigrant Muslims disregard the material conditions that led African Americans into Islam in the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike African American Muslims, immigrant Muslims see religion more as a spiritual ideology than a social power. Ironically, Imam Warith Deen Mohammed community, the largest Sunni African American Muslim organization which

⁷ This will be the subject of my analysis on Murad Kalam’s *Night Journey* and will be touched upon to a degree in my analysis of Wajahat Ali’s *Domestic Crusaders*.

evolved from Nation of Islam, celebrates the legacy of Nation of Islam although it has rejected many of its fundamental teachings. It also means that immigrant Muslims who easily dismiss the early African American Islam as heretical also miss the fact that African American Muslims have been successful at making the connection between religion and the modern reality.

This attitude eventually leads to the absence of African American Muslim from the leadership of Muslim Americans—a condition that peaked as immigrant Muslims were in the spotlight for national security issues following the 9/11 events and as national Muslim organizations, which are dominated by immigrant Muslim Americans, wage campaigns to present Muslims as integral part of the American society. In her opinion essay “Anti-Islamophobia and Black American Muslims,” Margari Hill charges national Muslim organizations that make efforts to fight Islamophobia, such as CAIR, with failing to significantly include African American Muslims (Hill). Ironically, there are two Muslim Congressmen in the history of the United States, Keith Ellison and Andre Carson, both of whom are African Americans. Commenting on the leadership potential of African American Muslims, Ahmed mentions the fact that “President Obama’s main Muslim appointees advising him on Islam are immigrants, as was the case in the Bush administration” (23). The appointment of immigrant Muslims to assist the President of the United States can be interpreted in several ways, but it suggests the U.S. Government’s tendency to deem immigrant Muslims more relevant than African American Muslims in issues or policies related to Islam. The same case is also observable at the level of cultural production and exposure. Based on several lists of Muslim American books recommended to the general audience and Muslim audience available in popular websites, African American Muslim works rarely appear⁸. Works by African American

⁸ No African American Muslim books are featured in “14 Novels about Muslim Life That Shouldn’t be Missed” (www.buzzfeed.com) and “10 Books by Muslim Writers to Celebrate Ramadan” (www.bustle.com). In Mariam

Muslims are less visible than the works of immigrant Muslim Americans, a fact which in turns strengthens the association between Islam in America with immigrant Muslims. These two instances from two different areas constitute but instances of how African American Muslims have been forced into invisibility in the United States.

This relationship between African American Muslims and immigrant Muslim Americans constitutes a significant part of the larger dynamic between *'asabiyya* and *umma* or the universalistic and particularistic tendencies in African American Islam. The larger dynamic can be seen very clearly in the later development of the two forks that have branched out of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. While African American Muslims have still been naturally focused on community-building, they have come a long way to be part of the larger community of Muslims. Just as Warith Deen Mohammed's community shifted towards Sunni Islam, Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, an organization that was revived in 1979 with the original Black Nationalist teachings of Elijah Muhammad, also experienced an ideological shift. While still holding on to the original mythology of Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan has introduced significant changes in NOI's tenets—making it more aligned with Sunni Islam—and in its rhetoric and relationship with other Muslim organizations (including the community of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed) and other racial groups, and others⁹. Ultimately, African American Islam has leaned further towards the universalistic understanding of Islam, without purging its community-building tendency.

Such tension between the demand of *'asabiyya* and the commitment to build connection

Elba's 2015 article "Words of American Muslims: A New Literary Movement" featured on Muftah (www.muftah.com), which discusses the emerging trend of Muslim American writers, no African American Muslim writers are mentioned.

⁹In the concluding chapter of *Islam in Black America*, Edward E. Curtis IV discusses how Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam has evolved and, while maintaining a strong sense of particularism, has increasingly leaned towards universalism in their belief and practice of Islam.

with *umma*, or between the particular and the universal, also manifests in the literature produced by African American Muslims. Having drawn some of the social and historical contexts of African American Muslim literature, we must next contextualize it considering the larger African American literature. African American literature has been closely associated with the plight of African Americans, especially during the era of Jim Crow Law. One of the most prominent positions on this is that from Kenneth Warren, who goes as far as claiming that African American literature came into existence, or “gained its coherence” during the Jim Crow Law in the Southern states (Warren 1). Under these conditions, African American literature became an important tool in expressing Black people's voices and in raising awareness of their condition. Therefore, for Warren, when the elements of the Jim Crow Law were repealed, African American literature lost its coherence and stopped existing as African American literature (1). For Warren, thus, African American literature is not an ethnic category; instead, it is a historical category. This view is consistent with Jameson’s argument about the authentically political nature of literature that draws from the collective experience of marginal communities (23). African American literature (along with other literatures that draw from the experience of marginalized pockets of the community whose cultural products have not been touched by capitalism) has a defining feature that distinguishes it from mainstream American literature. I would argue that African American Muslim literature, which branched out of the African American literary tradition, shares much of this characteristic in addition to the influences that come from the universalistic tendency of Islam.

While such a political definition of African American literature has been challenged, many critics agree that African American literature plays a major role in the Black Liberation movement of the 60’s and 70’s. Warren’s book *What was African American Literature* was

welcomed with a number of criticisms.¹⁰ Most of the essays challenge and question Warren's limiting the definition of African American literature on that created during the Jim Crow era despite the fact that African Americans had produced works prior to the Jim Crow era and have been producing literature since the end of the Jim Crow. Carpio criticizes Warren, whom she considers "too subtle a thinker" to argue that African American literature was merely a response to a historical context and to disregard the fact that African American writers also write with the sense of freedom and joy (387). Carpio suggests that Warren treats African American literature as "fiction with a passive role of culture evidence" (387). Meanwhile, Jarrett questions Warren's epistemology for his definition of African American literature. Instead of understanding African American literature as the product of Jim Crow era, Jarrett proposes that Jim Crow law is only one of the "modes of servitude and racial subjection" in the United States that subjugate people of color—the others include slavery (389). While Jarrett is opposed to Warren, whose categorization of African American literature is based on only one instance of subjugation, his definition of African American literature still builds on the assumption that African American literature is an agent in the struggle for black liberation. Carpio's and Jarrett's views, ultimately, lead us to see the ways a category of literature can be approached, namely, as a historical category and as an identity category.

Since the categorization of Muslim American literature as I discuss in the introduction also considers the historical context as much as the biographical context, it is thus also necessary to see an understanding of African American literature that also considers the biographical aspect of the literature. Michael Cooke offers such approach when he categorizes African American literature into four groups according to their conditions of creation. Cooke's categorization

¹⁰ The criticisms include the publication of a special section in a *PMLA* volume that includes essays responding to the book.

considers both the identity of its authors and how they relate to the historical contexts, which Cooke terms "conditions." Cooke's categories include "self-veiling," "solitude," "kinship," and "intimacy." Each of these categories represents the way an African American writer relates to his or her social condition. Whereas in *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy* Cooke uses twentieth-century American literature to explain these conditions, these conditions also serve well in identifying the four periods of African American literature throughout its history. Cooke describes "self-veiling" as a condition when African American writers create "unassertive, undemanding adaptation to the environment" (35). Such characteristics can be found in the work of the first published African American poets, such as Phillis Wheatley, whose 1773 book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* was the first full book published by an African American. Wheatley's poems in this collection were written in the style of Alexander Pope and did not present any call to pay attention to the plight of the enslaved Africans, Wheatley's people. The second condition, "solitude," is one in which the African American writers can unveil themselves, in which "the black character stands out from the veil and survive" (Cooke 38). Examples of works that show these characteristics are slave narratives by Frederick Douglass and other former slaves. In these works, the focus is on the stories of African American individuals. While these narratives were more personal stories than immediately political works that build a community among people of the same conditions, they eventually became the inspiration for future works. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Charles T. Davis, in the introduction to *The Slave's Narrative*, even argue that the narrative of freed slaves, which amount over 100 narratives, would later serve as the "generic foundation" for subsequent African American fictions and non-fiction alike (xxxiii). Cooke's third condition, "kinship," will prove to be the most useful for our discussion of Muslim American literature. In this third

condition, according to Cooke, African American literature is characterized by the prominence of “relations” among African Americans in the face of oppression without necessarily achieving any “relief” (39). Under this condition, African American literature captures the spirit of African Americans in raising awareness about their conditions and thus builds a community. Warren’s controversial definition of African American literature as discussed above fits well within this third condition. Lastly, Cooke's fourth condition of African American literature, “intimacy,” is a condition in which African American writers do not have any distance from the mainstream literary tradition and thus can appropriate it for any purpose. Here, African American authors can be inseparable from the larger American literature. African American writers no longer use literature as another way of advocating social justice for African American people.

Originating at the intersection between African American and Muslim American identities, African American Muslim literature, I argue, bears another defining feature of African American Muslim identity as discussed above, namely, the tension between the leanings towards community-building (*‘asabiyya*) and the commitment with the global Islamic tradition (*ummah*). In other words, I argue that Muslim American literature is located at the intersection between the particular and the universal. With regards to the four conditions of creation surrounding African American literature as discussed above, African American Muslims have been recognized as contributing written works in three of them. In the solitary condition, there are a number of written works by enslaved African Muslims in the form of autobiographical accounts, namely the autobiographical accounts written by Omar ibn Said (in Arabic) and Nicholas Said (in English).

However, for this project, I focus my reading on works by African American Muslim authors since the period of the reemergence of Islam among African Americans, i.e., works by African American Muslims of the twentieth century. The first Muslim American literary work

from this period is *Circle Seven Koran*, which appeared for the first time as the Bible for Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple of America¹¹. However, the first work that gained national popularity and has become so is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as narrated to Alex Haley, which was published around the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This autobiography was then followed by the works of African American authors who were the exponents of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), such as Sonia Sanchez's poetry anthology and Amiri Baraka's plays. Twenty-first century African American Muslim literature displays more diverse exponents, including the works of Ruby Moore or Umm Zakiyyah, whose fictions explore the themes of Sunni Islamic teachings practiced among urban Muslim Americans, and the works of some African American writers whose creative non-fictional works are included in the anthology *Love, Inshallah*. This category is a rich domain that explores both Islamic teachings as well as experiences of being African American Muslims.

Here, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* deserves a spotlight, particularly as the first prominent work of African American Muslim literature. This autobiography is important for several reasons. Firstly, the narrative is important because of its moving account of the changes that Malcolm experienced throughout his life. The story of his transformation from a small-time criminal into a prominent speaker and spokesperson of Nation of Islam, the first African American Muslim organization to create nation-wide impacts. Secondly, somewhat related to the first one, the autobiography became a manifesto of Black power movement around the world in the late 1960s (Awad & Curtis 73; Curtis "Malcolm X" 352) Published shortly after the

¹¹ This claim is debatable, of course, because the book was somewhat an adaptation of earlier work used in the masonic order as Kambiz GhaneaBassiri discusses in *A History of Islam in America* (GhaneaBassiri 202). Thus, any attempt to consider *Circle Seven Koran* as a Muslim American literature work must be done in the awareness that much of the book was derived from Masonic texts that are adapted into the purpose of uplifting the pride of urban Blacks by using terminology from the Islamic tradition

assassination of Malcolm X, the autobiography lines out many of Malcolm X's critiques of American society, including his strong statements about white people, which he would amend in the last years of his life, especially as he has embraced the universalistic aspect of Islam and opened himself to alliance with those who support black liberation. Considering the major role that Islam plays in the changes of Malcolm X's life as it is narrated in it, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is as much an important work of African American literature as it is the first prominent work of Muslim American literature.

The autobiography also holds an important position especially among Muslim American writers of the subsequent generations. In her brief survey of Muslim American literature, Mohja Kahf puts Malcolm in a category called "the Prophets of Dissent" to highlight Malcolm's position with regards to the U.S. politics. However, Kahf also states that Malcolm's influence is also present in writers of all the other categories of Muslim American literature. The book aptly captures what I argue is the defining spirit of African American Muslim literature, namely, the prevalent tension between the particularity of African American Islam and the universal claim of Islam. Malcolm's narrative of his spiritual development in Nation of Islam, which emphasizes personal improvement through black pride and the care of self that Nation of Islam promises to a black person, marks the first blend of the universal teachings of Islam and the application of those teachings for African Americans. However, this tension becomes apparent as the autobiography touches upon the period during which Malcolm X leaves Nation of Islam and starts to learn more about Sunni Islam. Malcolm's account of his pilgrimage to Mecca, especially the vision that he receives when he sees people of all colors pray together, reflects his realization of Islam as a universal religion. However, this section also includes a tension between the realization of religion as a universal system of values and the application of such values in real

life. Following Aminah Beverly McCloud, this tension manifests in the two organizations that Malcolm founded, OAAU (Organization of African-American Unity) and Muslim Mosque, Inc. In the former, Malcolm focuses on black liberation, in collaboration with other parties committed to the same cause. In the latter, Malcolm focuses on the practice of Sunni Islam. According to Curtis' exploration of the tension between the particular and the universal, the tension lies behind his staunch commitment to black liberation as an African American person and the demand of Islam as a universal religion whose struggle should not be restricted to one particular racial group (*Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* 105). This tension was left unreconciled at the end of Malcolm X's life. The presence of this tension, I argue, is what eventually gives *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* its utmost value as a work of Muslim American literature, or African American Muslim literature.

More African American Muslim literature surfaced with the rise of Black Arts Movement at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. The assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 inspired a number of African American artists to start the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS), which basically became the artistic extension of Malcolm X's radical approach to civil rights during his Nation of Islam days (Smethurst and Ramsby II 407). Claiming to be the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept," which was partially inspired by the assassination of Malcolm X, the Black Arts movement follows an aesthetic that espouses self-reliance and difference from the mainstream American art (Neal 29). Under the assumption that there are two American spirits, i.e. black America and white America, Larry Neal, one of the most significant proponents of the Black Arts Movement, states that Black Art is one that caters to the "spiritual and cultural needs" of Black people, unlike the canon of American art that addresses the need of white America (29). This kind of aesthetic, Neal argues, is a radical

departure from African American intellectuals and artists that came before, whom Neal considers were dominated by “white ideas” or “Euro-American cultural sensibility,” because they failed to question the standard of values that was on the oppressor’s interest. Neal goes on to say that Black Art is different from “protest” literature as the two has different audiences. For the proponents of Black Art, art is supposed to elevate the dignity of mankind, especially black men (Martin). Thus, the Black Arts Movement submits to the utilitarian value of literature. According to Larry Neal, the organization was “opposed to any concept of art that alienates a person from his community” (29). However, this aesthetic should be distinguished from “protest” literature, which appeals to the status quo, or in this case the white structure, regardless of who composes; Black Art, as Neal emphasizes, appeals to Black people (Neal 30). The first example of such aesthetic, Neal continues, can be found in Leroi Jones’s poem “Black Arts,” in which the persona of the poem calls for poetry that speaks to the need of Black people, or poetry that does not rely on the apolitical aesthetic of the status quo, just as the Black Power movement aims to achieve self-determination for Black people (32). Leroi Jones’s poem depicts this tendency of the movement: “Poems are bullshit unless they are teeth or trees or lemons piled on a step” (“**Black Art**”). In addition to Leroi Jones, who was then a member of Nation of Islam,¹² many other important members of this Black Arts initiative were African American Muslims were also members or former members of Nation of Islam. One of them was Sonia Sanchez, whose most important poetry collection during her Black Arts movement, *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magic Woman* (1973), was dedicated to Elijah Muhammad, whom she praises on the dedication page of the book as the messenger of God.

Considering its emergence in the twentieth century, during the time when African

¹² Edward E. Curtis IV mentions that despite the common recognition of Leroi Jones or Amiri Baraka as once belonging to Nation of Islam, there was no conclusive proof that Amiri Baraka was ever a Muslim.

American Islam was inseparable from black liberation efforts, African American Muslim literature is strongly influenced by the tension between *'asabiyya* and *umma*. This is markedly different from when African American literature appeared for the first time in antebellum America as slave narratives, when the writings were mostly centered on the live stories among individual African American enslaved in the Southern plantation without any apparent agenda to raise collective awareness of the problems with slavery. When it appeared as poems and plays from the members of the Black Arts Movement, however, Muslim American literature became different. Unlike the slave narratives, African American Muslim works from this era were no longer individualistic in nature. The works, especially those written by members of the Black Arts movement, are characterized by their proximity to the miserable experience of urban poor African Americans. Members of the Black Arts Movement, which as Larry Neal claims was the “spiritual sister” of the Black power movement, went so far as despising poems that were not relevant to the plight of Black people; the purpose of Black Arts was to elevate the dignity of mankind, especially the black men. Here, the Black Arts Movement prioritizes particularism over universalism, just as African American Islam at one point prioritized *'asabiyya* over *ummah*. Ironically, while the life and autobiography of Malcolm X represent a good balanced between *'asabiyya* and *ummah* as McCloud argues above, Black Arts Movement—which was strongly inspired by Malcolm X and his autobiography—started as a highly nationalistic work with very little attention to *ummah*, or the universalistic theme in Islam. Only later did some members of Black Arts Movement start to depart from the strongly Black nationalist ideology in favor of a more general concern, namely, social justice for all oppressed people. Among these figures are Amiri Baraka, who later embraced the socialist ideology, and Sonia Sanchez, who saw problems in the patriarchal tendency of the Nation of Islam. Today, with the increasing

number of Sunni African American Muslims, there seems to have been an increase in works that lean more towards the commitment with *ummah* than the exclusive commitment to community-building within African American community or even isolationist tendency of black nationalist organizations.

Two African American Muslim works highlight the potential that Muslim American literature, especially that by African American Muslims, can offer to understand how Islam is an integral part of American society despite its invisibility. The first of these is Marvin X's poetry anthology *The Land of My Daughters*, which suggests a critical look at the civil rights and black power movement especially from the gender perspective enlightened by the concept of intersectionality. The second work is Murad Kalam's novel *Night Journey* to focus on the dynamic between various forces in preventing a young man from falling into the life in the inner-city of Phoenix. In both, the tension between the application of Islam in community-building and the commitment to the universalistic element of Islam results in complex situations that appear to be far from easy. However, I do hope to show, by historicizing these two works, that African American Islam has a potential to contribute in the discussion of the image of Islam as a foreign element in the United States and in how Islam is propagated in the United States in cultural pockets. Historicizing African American Muslim literature will expose the role that Islam has been playing in a segment of American society that has not been given enough attention in the mainstream media. This is where the tension between *ummah* and *'asabiyya* becomes strongly and organically felt. By highlighting the *'asabiyya* in African American literature, we can see that Muslim Americans, in this case African American Muslims, also invest in the community-building projects within the United States.

Chapter 2

Marvin X's *Land of My Daughters*: Being More Universalistic on the Same Particularistic Ground

The tension between particularism and universalism finds its manifestation in Marvin X's positionality in *Land of My Daughters*. In this poetry collection, Marvin X espouses both a strong commitment to community building through the unmistakable spirit of the Black Arts Movement and a markedly widened concern with the concern of global community in the face of domination by the capitalist system. Between these two, Marvin X's poems in the collection also indicates the intersection between the particularistic attention to African American issues and the more universalistic commitment to humanity in the feminist tropes in the poems. Marvin X's poetry collection constitutes an example of African American literary work that embraces the influence of African American Islam and espouses the critique of the patriarchal and capitalist systems that concern people both within the African American community and those outside it. Presented in the aesthetic of Black Arts Movement, the poetry mostly addresses African American audience while the subject matters are beyond the ethnic border.

The community-building tendency registers in Marvin X's consistent use of the Black Aesthetic throughout *Land of My Daughters*. Marvin X's use of the Black Aesthetic deserves a special note because the aesthetic is considered passé. While critics hold that Black Aesthetic died in the early 1970's, Marvin still strongly argues that the aesthetic is very much alive. In this book, Marvin X maintains the general approach to aesthetic practiced by the Black Arts Movement, namely, keeping the immediate relation between the poems and structural oppression, which we can see in their focus on problems experienced by African Americans due to their race and status in the United States. One can see a direct connection between every poem

in the collection and structural oppression relevant to African American people as a community. With regards to its rhetoric, in line with Larry Neal's statement on one of the premises behind the Black Arts Movement discussed in the previous section, Marvin X's poems in this collection address black audience directly. As discussed in the previous section, unlike "protest" poems, which address the status quo responsible for certain conditions experienced by the protester, poems in *Land of My Daughters* speak to fellow victims (Neal 30). These poems address people who have fallen victims to structural forces of history and do so in a way that awakens them to certain oppressive realities of contemporary African American life and, following Reginald Martin's statement on the tenets of the Black Arts Movement, "[elevates] all people—but especially black people—to a higher consciousness and a better life" (Martin). This is perhaps to be expected from a book written by Marvin X, who was one of the proponents of the Black Arts Movement.

This community building agenda in Marvin X's aesthetics, however, is far from being simplistic. Instead of raising awareness of the oppression that Blacks suffer as an ethnic community, Marvin X's poetry also considers the complexity of gender category. While bringing to light the structural racism that subjects the entire Black community, Marvin's poetry also targets those in the intersection of ethnic and gender categories, i.e. African American women. This tendency indicates Marvin's awareness of what in contemporary feminism is known as "intersectionality," which refers to "the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions" of women's experiences (Crenshaw 1244). Marvin X's poetry suggests that to complement raising his audience's awareness of structural racism it is important to consider the position of Black women who experience oppression on multiple levels, namely, racial and gender. The poems in *Land of My Daughters* bring to light the problematic gender

relations that put African American women at the receiving end. Through his meditations on relationship between himself and important women in his life, i.e. his wife, his girlfriend, his former girlfriend, and his daughters, Marvin X launches autocritique both to himself as well as to African American men. In the light of the characteristics of the Black Arts Movement, this autocritique constitutes a revision. This tendency embodies Marvin X's view of the role of gender relations in Black Nationalism. In an interview with Lee Hubbard, Marvin X states that the black revolutionary generation of the 1960s neglected something in their struggle for the advancement of black people: that in addition to the civil rights struggle, black people also needed the revolution inside their families (Hubbard and X 8). In this statement, Marvin X poses an auto-critique to his own generation of African American activists about the lack of gender awareness in their revolutionary activism. This criticism, which has also come from African American female intellectuals in the form of the U.S. Black feminist or Womanist movement and African American literary works by female writers, also appears strongly in Marvin X's own poetry collection *Land of My Daughters* (2006). I want to argue in this section that *Land of My Daughter* espouses a strong shift in the aesthetic of Marvin X that can be identified as the result of a tension between particularistic and universalistic tendencies.

This is related to the common conception that the Black Nationalist Movement in the history of African Americans is a place where masculinity and manhood are most prominent. Indeed, the movement was dominated by male figures some of whom strongly voice masculinist ideologies. Nation of Islam, as one of the organizations that championed Black Nationalism, is known for its traditional patriarchal ideology that demands men to hold important outside jobs and women to be in charge of home-related works, such as educating children. The Black Arts Movement was also dominated by male artists who support black revolutionary agendas. bell

hooks, criticizing the masculinity in the Black Nationalist Movement, argues that the patriarchy and masculinity of Black Nationalist figures worked within the framework of normative masculinity, which displays more influence from the European concept of gender roles than that by the concept of gender roles within African or Native American traditions (91). A critique of the movement that indicates the level of masculinism in the movement can be seen in hooks's strong criticism of sexism in the movement, such as when she points out the sexism in Amiri Baraka's essay "american sexual reference: black male." For hooks, Baraka's critique of white man's masculinity clearly demonstrates Baraka's position that the perfect example of masculinity is what men of Black Nationalist activism demonstrate (98). In other words, as hooks states, Baraka wants the white men to "man up." The Black Nationalist Movement is a moment when such masculinity reemerged. The combination of masculinist leaning of most aspects of the Black Nationalist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s gave the Black Nationalist Movement a masculinist and phallogocentric streak. However, a closer look at the movement will prove that it is more nuanced than how it is often perceived.

In reality, the relationship between the Black Arts Movement and gender was complex and colored with various voices. As James Edward Smethurst argues based on his "reading, archival research, and interviews" with the proponents of the Black Arts Movement, the Black Arts Movement was powered by people with different positions on gender at different times (84-85). Some of the Black Arts activists "deny bitterly that the movement was particularly homophobic and misogynist" and some acknowledge that the lack of gender awareness was actually "rampant in all sectors of the United States" (Smethurst 85). In addition to that, observers tend to generalize from what individual members of the Black Arts Movement at one time express as the ideology of the entire movement, while in fact they would eventually revise

their views later in time, as Askia Touré said in an interview with Smethurst (Smethurst 86). Amiri Baraka's view quoted above is one of the examples of a statement by a Black Arts activist that is often generalized as the view of the entire movement. Haki R. Madhubuti is another case in point. In his book *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, and Dangerous?*, Madhubuti criticizes gender problems within African American society and calls "Afrikan American men to stand tall and dare to be great ... dare to be beauty, dare to be creative fire, *dare to be fathers, husbands*, dare to be quiet life fighters with a smile" (*Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* viii-ix). In the words of bell hooks, Madhubuti "[questions] sexism and [calls] on black people to explore the way sexism hurts and wounds us" (113). Gay and lesbian writers of the movement also posed challenges to the masculinism of the movement, making the movement more nuanced than how we tend to perceive it. This is not to mention the fact that many Black Arts activists were themselves female artists who did not hesitate to voice their own views, including those regarding gender relations.

In *Land of My Daughters*, the gender trope showcases first and foremost Marvin X's positionality in his Black Aesthetic. Marvin X navigates the tight spot between raising awareness of the systemic racism in the United States and posing autocritique of African American men regarding problematic gender relations. Within the frame of the latter, Marvin X also highlights his own failure in establishing an ideal relationship and criticizes other African American men with their masculinist tendency. This position suggests Marvin X's masterful positional navigation. As we shall see in the analysis section of this sub-chapter, Marvin X is able strongly criticize African American men, both for gender and for lack of political awareness, but he nonetheless does not slip into victimizing the most vulnerable group in the American society.

In addition to the community-building tendency that covers the concerns of African

Americans in general and African American women, *Land of My Daughters* also includes voicing concerns that are beyond the African American community. In his poetry collection, Marvin X also touches upon the plight of peoples in the world who are subject to the capitalist structure, which for Marvin X is often inseparable from the role of the white status quo in the modern world. Such plight in *Land of My Daughters* includes issues that pertain to incidents affected by U.S. foreign policy. These concerns, however, are not fully inseparable from African Americans since Marvin X, in the tradition of the Black Aesthetics, frames them as an account presented to his African American audience. In other words, the narratives are presented to help build the class consciousness of African Americans, who are Marvin X's audience. Included here are critique to the capitalist system that exploits global human and natural resources and demeans the way different societies on earth view the world. This vision is inseparable from the fact that Black Nationalism was a movement inspired by global kinship with the Third World, including the 1955 Bandung Conference. Therefore, with this last tendency, *Land of My Daughters* represents the tension between the community building within African American community and the global solidarity with people who fell victim to the capitalist power, the power that also exploits racism within the United States.

A Shift in the Aesthetic

Marvin X, as discussed above, gained his initial fame during the heyday of the Black Art movement. He was one of the Movement's leading figures who eventually faded away from literary scene as other members of the Black Arts Movement also drifted away from the movement. However, as Marvin X states in his interview with Lee Hubbard that his relationship with the Black Arts Movement had never stopped and he was still "working in it" (Hubbard & X "Marvin X Unplugged"). Here, Marvin X speaks along the lines of other writers from the era of

the revolutionary movement, such as Nikki Giovanni, who says that the revolution has never stopped or faded away; it merely evolved (Tate 61). For Marvin X, the Black Arts Movement is still alive, such as in the form of what he terms “recovery theater,” an activist theater committed to ending substance addiction among African Americans. I argue that *The Land of My Daughters* represents Marvin X’s unflinching commitment to the visions of the Black Arts Movement but improved with a more explicit awareness of gender justice. The poems included in this collection demonstrate the directness of expression (or, in Marvin X’s words, “telling it as it is”), its unflinching commitment to the advancement of African Americans, aesthetics of Black Arts Movement, and raising black consciousness among African Americans (Hubbard & X “Marvin X Unplugged”). In addition, Marvin X’s poems in this collection also address an area that has not been much covered by male poets from the Black Arts Movement, namely, gender awareness and active attempt to correct the problems of gender relations which Marvin sees as rampant among the black revolutionary generation.

The best proclamation of the shift of Marvin X’s aesthetic can be found in “Poetics 2000.” This poem evokes Marvin X’s commitment to the Black Arts Movement while carrying it forward in a different spirit. Its most prominent theme is that poetry should usher changes instead of merely being an object of beauty. Marvin X strongly states here that “Poetry is revolution” and, as if to make sure the reader knows the direction he is headed, he also adds that “[poetry is] Not something cute.” Written in a manner that does not make any effort to distinguish the poet and the persona, this poem proposes that poetry awaken its reader and even “raise the dead.” Marvin X’s poems, then, are “make stand poems.” To define poetry further by way of negation, the poem strongly states that poems are weak if what they can do is to give beauty or to pacify. As if to complement its claim on the importance of being truthful, “Poetics 2000” also criticizes

weak poems, i.e., poems that are only linguistically beautiful and complex. The reason for eschewing complexity is because the amount of time for accessing such poems is comparable to “[stealing] time from truth. Hiding truth with fat/Particles articles.” Like Amiri Baraka’s “Black Arts,” Marvin X’s “Poetics 2000” reasserts the commitment of an African American poet from the revolutionary movement to the potential of poetry to move its audience and to liberate them. Thus, the ideal poetry for Marvin X is still one that serves a purpose other than its own existence. It is not merely becoming and being beautiful, but it is also does something for a people. Poetry is not something that stands for itself, but for something much greater.

Having said that, it does not mean that the ideal poetry according to Marvin X is artless. Its artistry lies in the effectiveness with which it can deliver its revolutionary message. The poet still needs to go through a rigorous editing process. For that purpose, Marvin X says, “Cut a paragraph/Revise revise revise/Edit discard page or two/Nothing holy/Yo dodo ain't sacred.” Such poetry, which is effective and awakening, needs to be measured to achieve certain effects. In other words, poetry in Marvin X’s terms must be simple but far from being simplistic. Its simplicity is a rhetorical choice. It is so because it is an instrument to achieve a purpose. The pragmatism of such poetry is emphasized when Marvin X says “Yo dodo ain't sacred.”

Besides emphasizing on the liberatory orientation of poetry, “Poetics 2000” also suggests a significant tendency, namely, the non-masculinist tendency. After stating that complex poems are counterproductive to the spirit of Marvin X’s poetics, the poem states: “We sit seeking light/Wake us up poems/Hard dick poems. *Pussy poems work too* (emphasis mine).” Whereas the term “Hard dick poems” clearly suggests a highly masculinist leaning with which Black Nationalism is often charged, it is immediately followed with the next line, which represents a gesture toward women’s writing. Whereas the adverb “too” at the end of the line suggests that

this statement might be an after-thought, the line itself shows an awareness that the androcentric language could exclude women as liberatory poets. The last words of the poem offer more humility than domineering masculinism: “Yo dodo ain't sacred/You don't own words/Just learning to talk/Peace.” These last lines imbue a different spirit to the poem; although it begins with strong lines with masculinist expressions, it also indicates that such attitude is not the only possible way to struggle for one's right. In brief, Marvin X's new poetics evokes a difference from the poetics of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and early 1970s that was more focused on Black Nationalist agenda in the narrow sense. As for the last word, “Peace,” it both echoes the traditional Islamic salutation for arrival and departure and represents a more universally embracing greeting because it is not stated in Arabic.

The second big element that marks Marvin X's consistence with Black Aesthetics, if in a more nuanced manner, is his autocritique of African American community. Marvin X's autocritique puts a spotlight on African American youths, particularly regarding their lack of political awareness. Here, Marvin X seems to use what is identified as “black-chastisement” in Malcolm X's speeches. “Black chastisement” refers to a rhetorical strategy to urge black people by harshly criticizing them for their faults with the aim to raise their black consciousness (McLaren 101-02). On the surface, this strategy looks similar to unveiling the black community's dirty laundry, chastising one's own community for committing mistakes. However, Marvin's “Black chastisement” speech does not negate that there is a systemic, structural force that has caused such mistakes. Such mistakes include the neglect of personal development and the lack of historical awareness. Here, Marvin X's poems serve what he insists is the duty of Black Arts to make its audience aware of the grave social problem in which they have participated. Marvin X's attention to the structural social problem experienced by African

Americans is in tune with LeRoi Jones's opinion on Black Arts. For LeRoi Jones, dealing with the structural problem will make works by African American independent and great, unlike the mediocre works that basically aim to be on the same plane with the white establishment (109). The legitimate literary work by an African American writer has to come out of the structural problems experienced by African Americans, "completely outside of that conscious white myopia" (L. Jones 113). In Marvin X's poems, this authenticity comes from his unflinching commitment to internal critique addressing the structural problems experienced by African Americans, including their lack of political awareness, lack of personal responsibility, and their absorption into consumerism.

The first focus of Marvin X's autocritique for African American community is the social crisis of the 1990's. While the Black Arts at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies focused its attention on raising black consciousness about the systemic racism in the north and the segregation of the South, the focus of Black Arts in the 1990s is the combination of the continuing legacy of that era and the social crisis of African American community despite the success of the Civil Rights Movement (from the Encyclopedia). In Marvin X's poems, today's problem experienced by African American youths include drugs use and the lack of awareness about freedom. In the poem "Date with My Son," Marvin shows how his son uses a candle in a manner which hints at his son's use of heroin. Marvin criticizes the lack of parental role in educating the younger generation in the poem "Nigguhs Crazy." The latter is particularly remarkable for its wide-ranging criticism from participation in criminal activities ("amazed they murder/Without reason?"), male chauvinism ("How can they talk of bitches/Hoes motherfuckers"), domestic violence ("When he beat them/When he raped them"), failed parenting ("We said,/ 'Bring yo girlfriend over for the night/[he was only 13]/Screw her

downstairs/just use a rubber”)), and failure to identify problem, mistaking freedom for the final goal (“We forgot the lesson of political correctness ... Basic humanity ... In our rush/to be free”) (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 38-39). This poem needs to be read in the light of “black chastisement” or the tradition of autocritique among African American leaders. Like Malcolm X, who used chastisement as a powerful rhetorical tool in his speeches, Marvin X in this poem enumerates several symptoms that make him call the targets of his criticism “n---.” In the light of other poems in this collection, “n-----s crazy” and its criticism of contemporary African Americans constitute part of his unapologetic critique of the community.

“n-----s Crazy” is one element in the machinery of Marvin X's poetics in engagement with African American life. Marvin X's poems address holistically the internal problems of African American society, ranging in tone from the most hopeful and empathic to the most painfully critical towards African American youths. “N-----s crazy” is among those poems that are painfully critical towards African American youths. However, when read in the context of Marvin X's poetics and politics, this poem is far from being self-loathing. As discussed earlier, Marvin X follows the tendency of Black Arts Movement to address African American audience instead of addressing the power structure in the manner of protest poetry. Therefore, by reiterating the symptoms that can be found among African American young people, it is meant to serve as a mirror for African American audience. Just as Malcolm X's use of chastisement in his speeches, Marvin X's enumeration of such symptoms forces his audience to reflect on themselves. However, Marvin X's of chastisement, it is not always immediately followed with instructions on what to do afterward. A familiarity with Marvin X's other poems, and probably other writings, is here necessary. Therefore, when read in the context of Marvin X's poetics, a poem such as “n-----s crazy” can be considered constructive.

An indication of the constructive orientation of Marvin X's poetics is visible many poems. Among such poems in *Land of My Daughters* is "The Negro Knows Everything." In general, the poem is divided into two parts. The first part consists of some exaggerated and satirical remarks on "the Negro" opened with a strong statement "The Negro knows everything, don't tell him nothing" (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 91). The second part contains a scene in which the speaker's mother, in her deathbed, repeatedly urges the speaker to "leave dem n-----s alone" but the speaker insists that he "[love] dem n-----s." The structure of the poem suggests that the first part is the speaker's critique of "the Negro." What is clear is that it is not the mother's opinion, considering the use of "the Negro" instead of "dem n-----s," which the mother uses. Regardless, it seems that both the speaker and his mother seem to share the same opinion about "the Negro." In the first part, we can see that the speaker presents some satirical remarks such as that "the Negro" knows the "History of the atom, construction of the pyramids, Exact location of Bin Ladin, How to grow marijuana with air Everything Expert Scientist Einstein's teacher." This part suggests the futility of teaching "the Negro." To add to this, the subsequent lines present the speaker's ironical statements that "[the N----] knows how to be a loyal slave like no other/His drugs are holistic/He doesn't need treatment, but more drugs." These hint at how "the N----" has been made "a loyal slave" and a drug addict who resorts to drugs, which refer to narcotics, for all his problems. With these two important aspects, the first part of the poem depicts the condition of "the N----." We can see this part as Marvin X's definition of the term "N----," i.e. a group among African American who refuses to listen and thus becomes "a slave," including a slave to drugs.

However, in the light of Malcolm X's "black chastisement," the first part of "The Negro Knows Everything" is more than just describing "the Negro." Instead, this first part constitutes

the “black chastisement” rhetorical strategy. The ironical and satirical statements are here to highlight the characteristics of “the Negro” who keeps refusing self-improvement and liberation but instead immersing themselves in what brings them lower. The reader will find that this first part is a constructive chastisement as he or she arrives at the second part. In this latter part of the poem, the speaker, who has made the satirical comments earlier, repeatedly emphasizes that he cannot leave “dem n-----s.” In a move that indicates the speaker’s resoluteness, the poem pairs the speaker’s decision to not leave “dem n-----s” with the fact that the mother urges the speaker to do the opposite in her death bed—and the decision does not change after the death of the mother. Thus, the resoluteness to side with this segment of African American community is uncompromised, and it would make more sense to see the first part of the poem as a strategy to point out at the weakness of a segment of African American community that Marvin X wants to help alleviate.

Marvin X’s strategy sheds light on his consistency with the spirit of the Black Arts Movement. Unlike protest literature, which talks about the plight of the oppressed by appealing to the oppressor in its effort to affect change, the Black Arts Movement as discussed above seeks to affect changes on the side of the oppressed. Through his use of the Black chastisement strategy, Marvin X seeks to build consciousness among African American, especially “dem n-----s” of the systemic oppression that they experience. At the end of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, this task is as relevant as it was in the sixties and early seventies. Making black people aware of the injustice and oppression under which they live is still a big task that an African American poet or artist has to embrace according to the premise of the Black Arts Movement. If the Black arts movement of 1965 to 1975 historically showed the systemic reality of oppression in African American life, today's Black Arts Movement deals with the endemic

results of that oppression that have remained in place even after the Civil Rights Movement removed legal impediments to equality. An interview with Marvin X reveals that Marvin X considers drug abuse as part of the oppression of African Americans (Hubbard and X).

Land of My Daughters also espouses a modern manifestation of the Black Arts aesthetic through the unveiling of racism and subjection in the post-Civil Rights era. In this regard, some poems comment on elements of today's economy that are not much different from elements of earlier economic system that have subjected African Americans. A number of poems, while focusing on different topics, mention concerns about Black executives holding high-paying positions in multinational companies in a manner that suggests the importance of such reference. One poem that clearly espouses this concern is "We Are the 60s." In brief, the poem highlights the pride of the Civil Rights Movement generation as a generation that had a strong historical awareness, which the current generation (when the poem was written) lacked. After referring to the chastisement of Black activists by intellectuals, the assassinations of Black leaders, the discrimination, and the rampant drug abuse among Black activists, the poem comments on today's generation that does not seem to realize that they are in some sort of slavery or unfreedom. The speaker of the poem says:

“Shall we free them of their freedom?
 high paid slaves with MBAs
 Fired and robbed by Eron Moran Chevron
 Shell Exxon
 Yes, generation X
 as in Malcolm
 What is your contribution
 in the tradition

Make your mark in the sun
 Buppies and yuppies of the economic revolution
 Slavery was economic revolution stupid
 We are the 60s
 Generation revolution
 We studied American history
 We are American history”

Marvin X positions himself within the generation that took part in a revolution, a drastic and rapid change that led to the relative acknowledgement of the worth of Black people. However, it is also the generation whose steadfastness and bravery to stand up for their rights paved the way for major political changes regarding minorities (*Encyclopedia of American Politics: Minorities*). For Marvin X, generation X or the millennials do not seem to realize that they live in an enslavement of some sort. The economic revolution (including the dot.com boom that X mentions when he opens the poem) that made them employed and then fired was, for Marvin X, a different form of slavery. “We are the 60s” does not give any hints at what constitutes slavery in the jobs with multinational companies except for the fact that they can be hired and fired in one breath, but other poems might give us a clue for this.

Clues about what Marvin regards as modern-day slavery can be found in the poem entitled “I Was.” In this poem, Marvin X uses sarcasm in retelling the story of African people’s displacement from Africa to the Americas, which some often consider to be salvation from Jesus. Africans people were “saved” by European slave traders from the normality of African life (with its trades and travels and civilizations) only to live a life that is not necessarily better and to lose their identity. The poem opens with a confident statement “I was African/A few days ago,” then shifts into “Now I am branded/Tommy hilfiger/I’m his nigger/Or Master Fila/Or Nike/Anybody

Done")("20 Craziest Things Dennis Rodman Has Ever Done,")("20 Craziest Things Dennis Rodman Has Ever Done")("20 Craziest Things Dennis Rodman Has Ever Done"). Just as poet Phillis Wheatley had to be recognized with her master's name, today's African Americans (along with people of all races) fall prey to consumerism, which defines a person by what she/he wears. While this younger generation can think that they are free from discrimination as it was formalized in Jim Crow Law, Marvin X still sees that there is still something missing from this kind of freedom. Attention to this impact of consumerism and capitalism brings Marvin X to a larger context because the project of liberating people from consumerism cannot exclude and must include anyone, not only African Americans. Marvin X indeed indicates that he comes from a generation that reads history (and becomes history). This so called economic revolution, which at the surface level benefits some people, also includes something wrong.

This kind of attitude distinguishes Marvin X from those who are critical of African American without engaging in the issues of African Americans. Marvin X's position with regards to African American is complex and a reading on one poem can easily make sound like a traitor of his own people. "N-----s Crazy" and "The Negro Knows Everything" demonstrate Marvin X's position in the issues of African Americans. As a comparison, we can take Bill Cosby's position when he made a controversy and was called a racial traitor after giving a speech at NAACP anniversary. In the speech, later known as the "pound cake speech," Bill Cosby blames "lower economic and lower middle economic people" for failing to provide proper parenting, which results in the 50% dropout rate, the crime rate, and the out-of-wedlock pregnancy rate among African American youths (Bill Cosby). This speech was later criticized by many for attacking poor blacks, who are among the most vulnerable in the American society. Among the strongest critiques was one by Eric Dyson in his book *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or has the Black Middle Class*

Lost Its Mind? In this book, Dyson argues that Bill Cosby has left the most vulnerable and his character and his lawyer wife in the show “hardly ever uttered a sentence about racial or class struggle” (Dyson). Complementary to Dyson's argument, Cosby does not consider the larger issue about what causes the high poverty rate among African American people. This is starkly different from Marvin X's poems in *Land of My Daughters*: while in “N-----s Crazy” he unapologetically chastises the African American community, especially the youths, for their social crisis, he also mentions his determination not to leave the matters of black people from his poetry, even though people around him tell him to stay clear of the problems of problematic African American people, such as in “The Negro Knows Everything.” His chastisement of the community is but a phase of his entire engagement with African Americans.

Gender Awareness

While the above-discussed feature of Marvin X's poems in *Land of My Daughters* demonstrates his consistency with the Black Aesthetics as espoused by male African American poets from the revolution era, another feature of *Land of My Daughters* indicates the widening of the Marvin X's poetic coverage. Marvin X's poetry strongly suggests the poet's intersectional awareness. In this book, the tendency appears in the poet's noticeable awareness of gender relations, and is the strongest and most salient theme of the collection, as implied by its title. In fact, awareness of the struggle for gender justice can easily be called the defining feature of Marvin X's poetry in this collection. One can identify this change since the first poem in this collection, which is titled “In the Name of Love.” While its title suggests gentleness, this poem does not fail to carry the power of resistance. The title and repeated phrase, “in the name of love,” echoes the opening of all but one Quranic chapters, “in the name of God the benevolent, the merciful,” which in the shorter form, “in the name of God,” is a common expression that is

traditional for Muslims to recite when they start an activity. This poem in general feels gentle without neglecting the actual painful experience and suffering of many within the African American community. In fact, Marvin X mentions hardships in life several times throughout this poem, such as in the line that reads “long suffering is not love peace is love” (*Land of My Daughters* 11). Throughout the poem, Marvin X alludes to the hardship of African Americans, from the struggle of Harriet Tubman to the harsh image of the junkyard of Oakland. All of this is constantly interspersed with the expression “in the name of love” or simply the word “love.” In the last two sentences of the poem, we can see the strongest merge between love and hardship:

Let love wash away evil and pain sickness and disease
Lies and oppression let love unite the people in a
dance of praise to freedom and truth. Let daughters
unite with fathers and fathers with daughters and
sons in the name of love. (*Land of My Daughters* 13)

This last line confirms that this gentle poem does not only aim to make one forget real problems in life. The poem becomes soft in order to replace the hardship of life with something pleasing. Finally, it concludes with hope for the unity of fathers and children. Here, the fact that only the father unites with the children echoes the reconstruction of the relationship between the children and the father, a theme that keeps appearing in this collection. This opening poem both sets up the tone of the entire book as a collection of poems with a strong emphasis on the plight of African American while at the same time embracing gentleness and love as a reconciling power. Its allusion to “in the name of God” and the repetition of this expression more than ten times gives this poem an aura of a religious chant.

A more explicit gender awareness is visible in another poem that evokes a critique of female objectification directly addressed to black men. In the poem “How to Love a Thinking

Woman,” Marvin X assumes a didactic tone, teaching young men on two important themes: intellectual appreciation and partnership between men and women. The first theme, intellectual appreciation seems to be of utmost significance in this poem, even making it the title of the poem. Here, poem instructs its audience against objectifying women, which in this poem is represented in the instruction to treat a woman with more than just praises and verbal expressions of love. Marvin X tells men to

“thrill her with yr original thoughts/actions
 Be revolutionary, radical, bodacious
 Stay beyond the common
 Have some class about yaself
 With the classic lady
 Wearing a mind of her own
 So you too
 Be unusual
 Say unusual things
 Beyond I love you baby
 kindergarten games
 With bling bling on your minus brain brain” (*Land of My Daughters* 14)

With a woman who has “a mind of her own,” saying “I love you” alone is too banal, like “kindergarten games.” A man needs to say “unusual things,” which can only come out of men who are “bodacious.” Further into the poem, Marvin X also suggest that those “unusual things” that “she’s never heard before” can include “Ihdhina sirata al mustaqim,” a line from the most important chapter in the Quran that means “guide us on the straight path.” The reference to the Quran here suggests an interpretation of an Islamic text, which as we find from the poem, might

not be anything usual for the free-thinking woman. The appearance of this quotation from the Quran indicates how religious texts are still relevant and can contribute to the conversation between a free thinker (the woman) and a religious man.

Furthermore, the poem goes on to talk about the ideal partnership between black men and black women. The poem reminds men of the fact that both black men and women have come from the same ancestors who experienced the harsh reality of slavery. Therefore, enmity between black men and black women will only ruin the unity among black people. After reminding about the harsh life during the slavery era, the poem states:

“Think about it
and never think
This is some heaven on earth
think unity force unity, Elijah said” (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 17)

These lines carry two important references here. For one, it explicitly refers to a speech by Elijah Muhammad in which he suggests that unity brings force. The unity between African American men and women is one source of power. However, in the universe of Elijah Muhammad’s teachings, this unity is built on the foundation of essentialist division, with men leading the woman. The second reference is to the revolution that Warith Deen Mohammed brought to the Nation of Islam when he assumed the leadership in 1975. In the poem, with their unity, men and women need to rise and “climb the mountain together/Man and woman thinking” (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 18). As Jamilah Karim states in *Women of the Nation*, as discussed above, one of Warith Deen Mohammed’s first revision of the Nation of Islam’s theology was the position of women. For Warith Deen Mohammed, both men and women are equal and exalted for their faculty of mind.

Another form of redressing gender inequity in *Land of My Daughters* is the

acknowledgment of past participation in oppressive behavior, namely, failure to play the role of a father. In various poems throughout the book, the speaker faces the consequences of such mistake. The speaker's participation in patriarchal culture includes neglecting the responsibility towards a partner and failing to carry out the duty of a father. One of the poems in which Marvin X exposes his vulnerability as a "patriarchal sinner" and admits his mistake is "Two Poets in Central Park." While this poem is dedicated to the memory of Sherley A. Williams, a prominent African American poet and critic and Marvin X's childhood friend and former girlfriend. While Marvin X and Sherley A. Williams had a long romantic relationship¹³, "Two Poets in Central Park" focuses on a moment of reunion after "17 years of silence" between them. Of all the things in their relationship, this elegiac poem gives a significant portion on telling about Marvin X's requesting her to abort the pregnancy from their romantic relationship during high school. That Marvin X mentions this and expresses his regret for this renders this poem unusual as a eulogy. By exposing himself the person who suggested the abortion, Marvin X puts himself in a vulnerable position. That the poem says "aborted child *at my request* (emphasis mine)" (*Land of My Daughters* 116) indicates that the abortion was not her own idea—although it is impossible to tell from the poem whether or not it was against her will. Marvin has made Sherley do a big and painful procedure not of her own accord. In a time when the question of abortion is a matter of one's personal choice, telling a person to do it is a serious thing, especially if it is from the man who has caused the pregnancy. Thus, the mention of the abortion and Marvin X's role in it are quite unusual for a eulogy, which usually mentions only proud and glorious moments in the deceased's life. Nonetheless, this bump in the eulogy hints at a major shift in Marvin X's attitude towards gender relations within urban African Americans.

13 In an autobiographical essay in *I Wish I Could Tell the Truth*, Marvin X tells in detail about his relationship with Sherley A. Williams, which is casual but involves romance whenever they meet.

More of the acknowledgment of past sins is present in poems that talk about his relationship with his children and sometimes subtly as allusions in poems on other topics. As Ishmael Reed says on the back cover of the collection, Marvin X left his family during the years of the revolution. Now, when his children are all grown up, he is still reminded of his failure to fulfill his responsibilities as a father. Marvin X's somberness in talking about his relationship with his son evokes Marvin X's acceptance of the consequences of that failure. The poignant poem "Date with My Son" strongly depicts such somberness. The bipolar syndrome that the son suffers and the son's constant reminder of Marvin X's failure as a father put Marvin X in a more vulnerable position. Early in the poem, Marvin X mentions explicitly that he never raised his son (or his daughters) and his son both has no respect for him and asks him money to make up for the years when he owed him child support:

It is morning now. He wants to go home

He wants money for child support payments

I missed 35 years ago

He wants a trust fund

If I leave him one he will seek healing

He promises

For security, he packs a stack of my books

and cd's to sell

Promises not to give me any money (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 52)

To add to this, the son does not show respect and has transgressed into calling Marvin X with profanity:

He will keep it all

calls me bitch

More properly bee-ach

Says I taught him to talk like this

I say we must stay on the father-son plane

Not brother/brother

He laughs

Says shut up bee-ach (Marvin X *Land of My Daughters* 52).

The poem thus serves two purposes. On one level, it is a memento of a day spent with his adult son, a reunion that he always cherishes given the nature of his past relationship with his family. On another level, this poem evokes Marvin X's past as a poor revolutionary activist who did not realize that the problem with the revolution was that it assumed that the fight for the rights of African American people justified their absence from the day to day fight to do their responsibility in the family. This scene best evokes the past of a father who was preoccupied with social revolution who neglects to start a revolution on a personal level.

Despite the appreciation and acknowledgment of women's subjectivity as discussed above, Marvin X still projects a lingering dilemma in gender relation. In the critique of Black men's role in a heterosexual relationship, a theme that indicates the traditional distribution of roles keeps appearing. Black men's role as fathers who provide and who are present in the family is a theme that recurrently appears in the work of Marvin X. This is especially true in Marvin X's works after the "crack years," the period when Marvin X was a cocaine addict, which according to *If I Could Tell the Truth* took place between from early 1980's until before 1995 (*Wish I Could Tell the Truth* 31-43). The failure of a father to be present with a mother to raise a child is one of the major themes for Marvin X. The same topic is also present in his play *Take Care of Business* (2001), a term that was common in Black Nationalism to refer to the work done by African American men for the cause of black liberation, as mentioned above in relation to Sonia

Sanchez's 1973 poetry collection *A Blues Book for a Blue Black Magic Woman*. In Marvin X's play, "take care of business" assumes a different meaning, which is more domestic in nature. In this play, former college student Joe Simmons finds himself in jail on charges of confronting the police. Simmons asks his father, with whom he is not on speaking terms, to bail him out. Simmons has no respect for his father, although deep inside he believes that it is important to reconcile with him (Marvin X *Take Care of Business* 12). However, when his father refuses to bail him out, Simmons becomes enraged and curses him. At the end of the play, Simmons is shocked to know that his father has in fact tried to get him out of jail but then got a heart attack, which ended his life. Dumbstruck by the news, Simmons swears that it is time for him to "take care of business," to rebuild his connections to his own sons (Marvin X *Take Care of Business* 25). Here, "taking care of business" assumes a different meaning. If, as exemplified by Sonia Sanchez's poem, "taking care of business" meant, in the old narrative, leaving the family to work for the cause of the liberation, in this new play the same term means reconciling with the family. In the new narrative, revised by a raised awareness of gender justice, reconciling with family is also part of struggling for black liberation. This brings us back to Marvin X's own statement in his interview with Lee Hubbard discussed in the beginning of this section. Commenting on the revolution of the 1960's, Marvin X says that, "We thought we could free the people, but we did not free our families or ourselves. We abused our families. We neglected our families, yet still we were fighting revolution. ... there is no revolution without the family." In the revised narrative, which Marvin X promotes in the entire book, African American men are expected to be aware of the possible excess of participating in a social change movement. There is, for Marvin X, a revolution that is equally important, the revolution of family relationship. This part indicates that despite the general revisionist nature of Marvin X's poetry in terms of gender

relation, Marvin X seems not to have fully departed from Elijah Muhammad's teachings of the role of man as the sole leader in his version of an ideal family.

Political Awareness

Land of My Daughters also demonstrates the international scope of Marvin X's criticism. Instead of exclusively targeting U.S. racism, the poems also target foreign policies of the United States government that exploit or oppress people in other parts of the world. Indeed, association with oppressed peoples (especially of non-European origins) has a long history in the Nation of Islam. One of the major doctrines from The Honorable Elijah Mohammad is that African American people are "Black Asiatics," which indicates the connection between Black people in America and other people of color in Asia (Marable 139)¹⁴. Then a famous member of the Nation of Islam, boxer Mohammad Ali similarly expressed his sense of connection between analysis of U.S. racism and foreign policy, when he refused to serve in the Vietnam War in 1967, saying, "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on Brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over" (Zirin 58). In the case of Marvin X, the international scope, as I will demonstrate soon, indicates his belief that one person's struggle for freedom from oppression should not be at the expense of the oppression and exploitation of others.

This is visible in Marvin X's critique of the U.S. government with regards to its foreign

¹⁴ Nation of Islam also considered important the Bandung Conference in 1955, in which delegations from 25 countries gathered in what then Indonesian president called the "first transnational conference of colored peoples in history" (Marable 139).

policy, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His critique of the Gulf War suggests his strong positional awareness. This is evident in several poems in which Marvin X takes the theme of Gulf War and other wars in which the United States is involved. The poem “Reply to Bush in United Nations” powerfully shows Marvin X’s critique for Bush’s involvement in other countries. In the first half of this poem, Marvin lists several hardships experienced by impoverished minorities in the United States, such as, minimum access to education, lack of water, persecution, and so on. The poem then leads a brief but clear presentation of what Bush’s troops do to people he deems terrorists: “wave your flag/dance the filthy dance of hypocrisy/abomination of the constitution/guns tanks copters planes bombs missiles/fences checkpoints bulldoze homes search seize the/poor because they resist squalor pain from your boots” (*Land of My Daughters* 102). The poem ends by declaring that while Bush rushes to call them terrorists, the speaker can relate to how these people fight back with violence, because there was a time when African American people responded with violence because they no longer could take being discriminated. The poem sees the suffering of people in other parts of the world as inseparable from what African American people experience. For Marvin, American’s involvement in other countries is similar to the white people’s treatment of African American in the United States. Although Marvin X still uses terminology from Nation of Islam, such as “cave man,” which in Nation of Islam discourse refers to white people, he uses it to refer more generally to those who perpetrate oppression.

This international scope of *Land of My Daughters* corroborates the fact of shift in Marvin X’s aesthetic from the particularistic African American focus to a more universalistic scope that covers any disadvantaged groups throughout the world. One might argue that this wider coverage will make Marvin X’s aesthetic lose its defining feature as a work of *Black* aesthetic; however,

one can also argue that this kind of tendency still falls along the lines of LeRoi Jones's definition of the Black aesthetic. If the original Black Arts Movement as Larry Neal defines it was "the spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (29) Marvin X's poetry indicates suggests more synchrony with Amiri Baraka's conception high art as "truthful accounts of human life" and "emotional experience of Negro life" (L. Jones 109). For Marvin X, whose poetry also covers the plight of peoples disadvantaged by U.S. foreign policies, in addition to African American issues, the Black experience and Black community function only as the starting point. This point of departure does not limit the coverage of its aesthetic. In fact, this widening coverage is nothing but the logical consequence of Marvin X's Black Arts aesthetic, especially as the border between the Black community and other disadvantaged community throughout the world is thinning with the advance of globalization.

Marvin X's recent poetry affirms that the Black Art Movement has not faded but its scope has expanded and evolved into something more relevant to the demands of contemporary times. These ideas are in fact not uncommon among the former exponents of the revolutionary era of black liberation. Nikki Giovanni is one such African American intellectual, who vehemently believes that the revolutionary spirit of black liberation never died (Tate 62). Instead, for Giovanni, the revolution of the 1960's was only one stage in the revolutions of Black people in the United States. For Giovanni, the revolutionary spirit is alive in every age and it is the responsibility of each generation to decide how they want to realize it. This notion is implied when Giovanni says, "My generation [of the 1960s] didn't start the bus boycotts. But we decided where they should go. Now it's time again to decide a direction" (Tate 62). Similarly, for Marvin X, the Black Arts Movement has never died—even though many believe that Amiri Baraka's conversion to communism in [date] is known as the unofficial end of the movement. The Black

Arts Movement first evolved, in Marvin X's work, into Recovery Theater, which aims at helping impoverished Black people recover from addiction amidst the crack cocaine epidemic. In more recent times, when awareness of gender-related issues has increased, this became part of the widened scope of Black Arts as manifest in Marvin X's work. Finally, and when not all people realize the seriousness of consumerism, and lack of historical awareness among young people, literary works that participate in the effort to solve those problems by appealing to Black people themselves will be a legitimate manifestation of the Black aesthetic or the Black Arts Movement.

This widening coverage is attuned to the underlying theme in the development of African American Islam. Marvin X's poems in *Land of My Daughters*, like his other recent works, cover more ground than the works of the Black Arts Movement, which focused on the plight of African Americans and were often colored with the essentialist views of white Americans inspired by Nation of Islam ideology and other heterodox African American Islamic denominations prominent in earlier eras. In the 1960's Black Arts were aimed at raising Black people's awareness of the systemic racism that subjugates Black people despite the promises of the Recovery era. In his works from the late 1990's and early 2000, Marvin X addresses Black people to raise their awareness of another type of social problems that they experience. And, as discussed above, these problems are more complex with more at stake. This time, while still addressing the same people, African Americans, Marvin X covers more ground that are not restricted to problems caused by a white status quote, but any social force that subjugates people. Such force might be white people, but it might also be corporations, or even social symptoms such as consumerism and male chauvinism. Covering those two areas, thus, makes *Land of My Daughters* cover a more universalistic space while still rooted on the same particularistic ground.

Conclusion

The above analysis on *Land of My Daughters* demonstrates first of all the epistemic potential of a literary work by an African American Muslim writer as an expression as well as embodiment of identity. In this case, the poems help reveal the shift of Marvin X's aesthetic toward a more gender aware and the widening scope of political awareness. These two tendencies are structurally on the same wavelength with the ideological tendency among African American Muslim communities, namely, the tension between the community-building drive or *'asabiyya* and the tendency to make connection with the global Muslim community known as *umma*. In other words, *Land of My Daughters* and its motives of widening its scope from a narrower spaces, such as the masculinist-leaning Black Arts Movement or Civil Rights concerns of the sixties, toward a wider scope, i.e. being political in the spirit of the Black Arts Movement with a deliberate gender awareness and subjection of not only African American people by a racist system but also any people in the world by the capitalist system—all of this are on the same wavelength as the tension between the tendency of community-building and aligning with the global Muslim community in African American Islam.

In the next chapter, I will analyze a different work in which the *'asabiyya-umma* tension in African American Islam will manifest in a different way. In the discussion on *Night Journey* by Murad Kalam in the next chapter, I demonstrate how a literary work by an African American Muslim writer can be read to shed light on the intellectual as well as material experiences of African American Muslims. Instead of reminding us of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s and 70s, *Night Journey* will prove to lead us to the African American Muslim experiences in an immediately later period, i.e. the late 80s and early 90s, during which alignment with the global Muslim community appears to be stronger while the concerns of community-building among

African American community are still considerably strong.

Chapter 3

Murad Kalam's *Night Journey* and the Precondition to Solving the Structural Urban Poverty

Whereas through poetry Marvin X can participate in the social life of African Americans exploring issues related to gender and highlighting the problems with young African Americans, through novel Murad Kalam offers a narrative of the structural and cultural factors behind a poverty stricken African American community in the post-civil rights America. Whereas *Land of My Daughters* contains poems that explicitly criticize the underlying racism of contemporary America and forcefully bring African American men and youths to such awareness, rendering the book political and prescriptive, *Night Journey* is more on the descriptive side of the spectrum and provides a narrative with a lot of room for interpretation. In this 2003 award-winning debut, Murad Kalam, who has not published another novel ever since, offers a significant observation of urban poverty and its various elements. By covering the cultural factors—which are unrelated to the structural or systemic factors—behind urban poverty among African Americans, Murad Kalam, like Marvin X has done earlier, disproves Warren's opinion that African American literature can only exist in America during the Jim Crow era (Warren 1). Both Marvin X's and Murad Kalam's works show that there are still a lot of reasons for African American writers to produce literary works that are essentially different from other works in American literature, thus giving them an identity as a separate body of literature.

Night Journey narrates the life of Eddie, a young black man who tries to save himself from the trap of the ghetto of Phoenix. The journey takes Eddie through many areas in the life of an African American from the inner cities of the United States to the glittering world of professional boxing. The story is peopled with father figures who are tasked with saving Eddie but keep failing. Eddie's biological father, on the other hand, has left Eddie's family shortly

before the story opens, which leads Eddie and his brother to seize whatever parenting they could find. The brothers then turn into totally different individuals with Turtle, the elder brother, falling deeper into social problems by becoming a drug dealer, a car thief, and a pimp—especially after they meet Jules, a drug dealer and night life businessman. As the relationship between Turtle and Jules becomes tense and ends with a murder, Eddie has been introduced to two avenues that can potentially lift him from the ghetto, namely, the Nation of Islam and boxing. Both solutions do not immediately work for Eddie as each of them has an internal problem that either prevents Eddie from succeeding in his attempt or erodes Eddie’s trust in them. The same thing also happens when Akbar Muhammad, a boxing promotor, promises to take Eddie to the lucrative world of professional boxing. Eddie tries to explore the field with Tommy, a fellow boxer from Phoenix. Tommy soon realizes that the professional boxing was different from what it has been promised to Eddie and decides to return to Phoenix and resume his life. After a while, after becoming a close friend with an Indian boxer, seeing the ills of the business, finding the futility of his romantic preoccupation with Tessa, and being impressed by the Million Man March, Eddie decides to return to his hometown with optimism and is ready to rebuild his ties with his family and to resume what he has recently left. The political potential of the novel is clearly visible when it is discussed in terms of its two elements, namely, the failed attempts to save Eddie and the return to family.

Intriguingly, while *Night Journey* was released in 2003¹⁵, its story is set in the 1980’s and ends in 1996, at the peak of what is now known as the “social crisis” among African-American. The first part of the novel centers on the fight between the juvenile groups in the inner city of Phoenix over a vacant house. This house would eventually be a crack house and a shelter for

15 According to the copyright page of the book, part of the novel has been published in Harper’s Magazine and in the anthology of O. Henry Award 2001 Prize Stories.

street prostitutes. While the main character later has the opportunity to gain success as a professional boxer in a budding boxing federation, he eventually returns to the inner city after seeing that his romantic preoccupation will never manifest and that black people could come together in the Million Men March. In the light of the title, Eddie's decision to return suggests that everything that he has done is a journey at night that will end in the morning. While Eddie's attitude towards his brother and children in his neighborhood at the end of the novel can be interpreted as his awakened sensibility to take charge in improving the condition of his neighborhood, it can also be interpreted as the novel's acceptance that the novel has been in the culture of the black people in the neighborhood all along. Here, I argue that a review on the development and hypothesis on the problem of concentrated urban poverty and the concept of "night journey" in Islam can explain this curious case of the novel. These two perspectives will help explain the relevance of a novel set in the 90s to people living in the early 2000.

Concentrated urban poverty has two major roots, structural and cultural. Such notion was proposed by William Julius Wilson in his major book *Not Just Race*. On one hand, Wilson argues that a number of government policies have made restricted African Americans within the inner-city. Among the most prominent cause of the structural racism is the redlining policy, the Federal Public Housing policy (Wilson 36), and the out-migration of middle income blacks (37). These structural problems eventually led to the concentration of urban poor, mostly African American with Latino members. On the other hand, Wilson also argues that in order to fully comprehend problems related to urban factory, it is important to acknowledge of role of cultural factors in the process of the concentration of urban poverty (28). The term "cultural factors" here refers to the development of "behaviors and outcomes" among the urban poor that results from exposure to similar behaviors within the inner-city. Such behaviors can include violence, drugs

use, and teenage pregnancy. However, as Wilson reminds the reader, one must not interpret the acknowledgment of these cultural factors as blaming the victim. Besides, the scale of the cultural aspect of the this problem is much less influential compared to the structural factor (53).

Isolating cultural factors from the structural factors equals to what Bill Cosby does in his “Pound Cake speech” as discussed earlier. However, discussing the urban poverty problems without acknowledging the cultural factors is ignoring the fact that urban poverty problems have worsened with time. These two factors are inseparable causes of the urban poverty in the 1990’s. Therefore, awareness of these two complementing factors is vital in helping to understand the basic social context of the novel.

However, to understand the potentials of the novel in viewing the social problems, it is important here to review Islamic concept of “night journey.” Along with the explanation about the structural and cultural aspects of the concentrated poverty, this Islamic concept of “night journey” will help explain the question regarding *Night Journey* mentioned above. The “night journey” or “*mi’raj*” in Arabic, refers to “Muhammad’s extraordinary journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and/or from the earth to the heavens” (Colby and Sells 454). Narrated in the *Quran* elliptically, this journey has eventually developed its own tradition of references, including the Quran, hadith, and commentaries (Colby and Sells 454), which blend together into a Muslim’s understanding of the religion to the degree that most Muslims today cannot easily tell easily where a particular bit about the journey from (Safi 166).

There are several features of the journey that make it a good explanation for Murad Kalam’s *Night Journey*. These features include the notions of primordial state, the experience of heaven and hell, the audience with God (or the ascension of Muhammad instead of the descent or revelation of God’s words), and the return to the society. These four notions, extracted from

Omid Safi's exploration of the night journey narrative in *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* and Colby's and Sells's brief account of the narrative, offer a significant insight to read Eddie's account of his journey being a temporarily mute boy from Phoenix to a young adult who is committed to improve himself and be responsible for his family.

These four concepts establish Muhammad's night journey as an important journey narrative with relevance to all Muslims despite involving only Muhammad alone. The first concept, *fitra* or primal state, comes from the meeting between Muhammad and Angel Gabriel, who offers Muhammad two types of drinks, wine and milk, in which Muhammad chooses milk. Here, by choosing milk, which is often associated with what babies drink, Muhammad indicates a return to *fitra*. As for the second concept, which is the experience of heaven and hell, Muhammad is shown the best and the worst of what humanity can gain. The sight becomes for Muhammad a view of what can and cannot be done by humans if he or she is to be happy in the long run. The third one is the audience with God, which eventually offers an imagination for Muslims to look up to. This aspect of the journey eventually inspired other Muslims, especially Sufis, to claim their own ascension and audience with God. For Colby and Sells, this ascension aspect is significant because of its stark departure from the more common notion of descent or revelation of God's message (455). Finally, the last notion is the notion of returning to the society even after his elevated state with God, which to Safi represents the commitment of Muhammad, and expectedly Muhammad's followers, to the social situation. These four notions offer a way of reading Eddie's journey, while it looks like any other adventure in search of a better life, into a life-changing, if spiritual, journey. These notions, as I shall reveal soon, constitute an offer to go around the structural racism experienced by African Americans.

The Urban Poverty and Its Structural and Cultural Factors

Throughout the novel, *Night Journey* does not really touch upon the structural factors behind concentrated urban poverty. The reader will not get any scene or suggestion of government policies that entrap urban poor in the ghetto or any scenes in which Black people are deprived of the capability of living in other neighborhoods. However, the fact that they live in project houses indicate that they are currently living in the shadow of the structural factors of concentrated urban poverty. The entire novel, instead, presents the reality that the main character grapples with, a reality that is filled with what William Julius Wilson calls the cultural factors behind concentrated urban poverty. These cultural factors, while mostly dealing with African American characters, if we are to follow Wilson, came as the extension of the structural factors. Acknowledging that the entire novel deals mostly with the cultural factors that have followed an unnamed structural factor, it will be reasonable to see the relevance of the “night journey” as the answer to the problems. The “night journey,” the chance to see beyond the confinement of the ghetto, which is the product of structural racism.

In dealing with the urban poverty among African Americans in the 1980s and 1990s, *Night Journey* takes an unusual point of view. On the most superficial level, it depicts the life of a young man whose life crosses path with people who explicitly want to help him from his condition of poverty and violence in the ghetto. On the next level, however, it also shows that attempts to rescue the young man will eventually fail, regardless of who makes the attempt. This tendency suggests that the young man in the inner city does not have any chance for social mobility. In her review of *Night Journey*, Arlene McKanic states that the novel has a “theme of children who are badly parented, or not parented at all” and Eddie, in particular, “takes whatever fathering or mothering he can get” (McKanic 52). Each of the surrogate parents that Eddie

encounters in this tries to help him either survive the hard life in the inner city of Phoenix or thrive in the face of marginalization in the United States. From these failed attempts, we can see that there are at least three most important themes that keep resurfacing, namely, the failure of father figures, the lack of unity within the ghetto community, and the tendency among the father figures in the novel to evade problems instead of addressing them at their roots.

The first and most salient tendency in the failure of saving Eddie from the trap of the ghetto life is the failure of the father figures themselves to live up to their expectation. While it does not appear to be the strongest reasons behind the failed attempts, the failure to become a father figure is clearly the most visible from the beginning of the story. The first person who attempts to be a father figure, Jules, is portrayed at the beginning of the story in an almost comical manner. Irony and doubts are strongly present, in Jules comments and attitudes with regards to saving Eddie from the ghetto. The first irony with the character can be found in Jules's attempt to prevent Eddie from getting involved in drugs and prostitution, while Jules himself is a drug dealer and night life manager. In one scene, Jules strongly warns Eddie against using drugs right after snorting cocaine himself.

... "If I ever catch you snorting cocaine," Jules shouted. Eddie watched him, Turtle watched Eddie handing Jules his Bible from the glove compartment. Jules opened his door, wiped powder from his nose with his bony fingers, climbed out of the car into the binding bright parking lot in his black suit, Jesus-happy, wing tips scraping against the gravel, Turtle and Eddie hurrying after him. "Our people have strayed from the church," Jules muttered. "Our people have gone astray with the out-of-wedlock and the drinking and the welfare and the drugs and the gangs and the killing and homo-sexuality. Our people have forgotten Jesus, and it has been our ruination" (Kalam 20).

In this scene, Jules strongly states a common critique of African American social crisis, like Bill Cosby's "pound cake speech" discussed in the previous section—the content of this speech incited a heated discussion, before Cosby himself received repeated allegations of rape. There is a sense of seriousness when he tells Eddie and Turtle never to try cocaine, as he also gives them,

especially Eddie, other advice when they are together on a different occasion, but the clause “as he wiped powder from his nose” shows why it is impossible for Eddie and Turtle to take what Jules says about morality other than as lip service. This is the first confirmation for Turtle that Jules cannot be serious with his big talk about the importance of education and his attempt to set himself as a role model for Eddie.

The most serious problem between Jules’s express attempt at becoming a surrogate father for Eddie and his own failure to live up to the expectation that comes with the role can be found in his deviant sexual behavior. While Eddie has heard rumors and seen indications since the beginning pointing toward Jules’s homosexuality, Eddie does not seem to have any problem with it, until he finally discovers that Jules sexually abuses the boys that he saves, drugging them before molesting them. Eddie eventually loses his respect for Jules when the latter tries to make advances while both are high on marijuana after Eddie has lost a boxing match:

“He’d lost today. You lost and you wanted to cry. Jules ran his pinky across Eddie’s forearm, Eddie thinking that moment of Tessa, Tessa somewhere in the city, climbing into a car because it was Friday, as now Jules kissed Eddie’s forehead, caressed his face with his spindly black fingers until Eddie froze upon the pillow—*No, no, please, please, I ain’t no punk. Don’t . . . I will hit you if you touch me, no matter what you done for me—* and Jules lay down again” (Kalam 76).

While Jules will still be prominent in the story after this point, it has become clear that he no longer has the little credibility he had as a role model for Eddie. Eddie can no longer take advice from Jules. Turtle, who has all this time been loyal to Jules and takes orders from him, starts to drift away from Jules. Jules’s fall eventually peaks with his murder by Turtle, who later confesses that Jules has molested him for a long time. The murder of Jules by Turtle, which appears to be fueled partly by revenge for the sexual abuse he has done to Turtle, represents his actual failure to be a role model. Jules does not have the credibility of a father figure to begin with.

The same motif also stands out in Eddie's relationship with Kell, which is colored with the lack of credibility of a father figure. As much as Turtle and people around him want Eddie to live up to his potential both as a student and as a boxer, South Phoenix does not have enough options available for that purpose. The only available choice of boxing trainer in their area is Kell, an alcoholic trainer who has never brought any trainee to success in a major boxing competition. On top of that, Kell himself states from early on that he does not want to be a surrogate father to Eddie (*Kalam 41*). Kell appears as someone who does not have any interest in building Eddie's professional ethics. Even after he decides to train Eddie to become a champion, Kell is still unable to become a father figure. His sole interest is in Eddie's success as a boxer without taking ownership of the other aspect of becoming a boxer. Kell lacks the interest in building Eddie's personality. As the story unfolds, when Eddie starts showing he can knock down a boxer very quickly, Kell shows interest in his potentials, promising Eddie that he could be a big boxer. Kell's sweet words to Eddie has made the latter believe that he could be a professional boxer. However, Eddie later discovers that Kell might have taken advantage of him by praising him, raising his spirit, and taking him under his wing so that he can ask Eddie to buy him liquor. Granted, there are moments when Kell believes in what Eddie can achieve and prods him to be a good boxer. Still, Eddie eventually sees for himself that he cannot expect Kell to be the person who will take him to success as a boxer. In Chicago, where he is supposed to compete at the Golden Glove, Kell leaves the hotel and gets drunk, making Eddie and Robert worried, indicating that Kell is still more overwhelmed by his own problems than focusing on Eddie (*Kalam 234*). Here, the person that he hopes to be able to take him to success, the person whom his brother has appointed to be a surrogate father, lacks the resoluteness to uplift Eddie's status as he himself is still trapped in alcoholism.

Another structural factor that plays in the novel is the lack of motivation among the people who are attempting to change Eddie's life. This is where the novel is exemplary of African American Muslim literature. The goal of saving a black man from the difficult life in the inner-city was challenged by the tension between groups of African American Muslims, which in this case is represented by the Nation of Islam and Sunni Islam. There are moments when certain characters' or groups' insistence on upholding their religious tenets prevails over their intention to help Eddie in the *Night Journey*. The novel depicts this tension in two areas, namely, the relationship with the nation of Islam and Sunni Muslims and Malcolm X and the person of Akbar Mohammad. These tensions represent quite well how the Islamic denominations, which were appealing to African Americans mainly due to its potentials for black liberation, have tenets are in opposition from one another, which eventually surpassed the importance of the goal to uplift the status of African American people. In the novel, the different tenets that African American Muslims hold eventually lead to animosity between African American Muslims from one denomination and those from another denomination. In such a situation, the focus in the relationship between one African American person to another is more on the tenets of the religion than on the common goal of uplifting the status of African American person.

The "Night Journey" and the Structural Factors behind Poverty

Amidst the above-mentioned cultural factors in his poverty, Eddie is experiencing his "night journey," an experience that teaches him about wisdoms that he has never seen growing up in the inner city of Phoenix. This journey is particularly important because it serves as an opportunity to experience an alternative to the restrictive experience in the inner-cities. In other words, the journey offers an answer to the structural factors behind Eddie's experience of living in the poor neighborhood of Phoenix. Eddie's encounters with various types of people, from

whom he learns about alternatives of life outside the inner-cities, suggest what the hitherto unseen structural factors have denied Eddie. Like the Islamic night journey narrative that features the primal condition of mankind, the experience of heaven and hell, and return to society, Eddie's night journey also introduces him to many elements in the reality bigger than what he has seen in the inner city.

Eddie receives a new perspective about improving the condition of a society for the first time when he is in Chicago. The Chicago journey, which is originally for a boxing competition, also includes an errand from the Phoenix's chapter of the Nation of Islam. Eddie, who is assigned a duty of delivering a package from Phoenix to the desk of NOI's leader Mr. Louis Farrakhan. An accident made him see the content of the package, which turns into some kind of revelation for Eddie. Eddie accidentally sees that the package contains documents about the Million Man March, which was planned for later in the year. As Eddie's Chicago quest progresses, it becomes clear that the planned march leaves a strong impression on him.

“... and the package—to the leader!--that most important package had smacked against the cement floor and spit out elegant paper, the watermarked paper, made him privy to the most beautiful secret, a sign from Allah—a million!--and now in the Nation House, he was among the believers” (Kalam 221).

Seeing the process of learning such information as a revelation indicates the importance of both the process and the information. The idea of gathering a million black people has not completely left his mind when he goes out on a patrol round with Mansoor and the other members of the Fruit of Islam. The implication of such committed gathering becomes stronger in Eddie when he sees how much respect and trust people had in the Nation of Islam during his patrol round.

“Eddie caught his breath. Never had his uniform aroused such respect from the people he passed on the street; never had he felt of such significance. Mothers waved from windows. Children approached them, touching their hands, calling them by name. Slouching boys on stoops even crushed out their blunts at sight of the patrol” (225).

For Eddie, who has never seen such respect black men could get in Phoenix, such sight is

inspiring. This is an important moment that would leave a strong and lasting impression on Eddie. This strong impression, arguably, stays in the back of his head later, especially when the Million Man March eventually materializes later in the novel.

This Chicago journey experience acts as a struggle against the structural factors behind the urban poverty. If the structural factors as Wilson notes ostracizes the poor urban blacks and prevents them from experiencing the enriching and constructive outside world, the Chicago journey makes Eddie experience hope that is strong in attempts to solve social problems. Thus, the journey in this case breaks a part of what structural racism can do. Like Muhammad's journey that takes him out of the bound of mankind, Eddie's journey takes him out of the confine of something that has been obstructing his view with regards to social improvement.

The Chicago journey, however, also reveals the dark side within the liberation movement. If Eddie's learning about the Million Man March and the patrol with Fruit of Islam can be equated to the experience of Muhammad seeing heaven, the Chicago journey also makes him see what can be seen as the equivalent of hell. This negative aspect of the Chicago journey is Eddie's learning about the animus between Nation of Islam members and former members of Nation of Islam. While he heard about the bitterness of former NOI members from an NOI member in Phoenix, in Chicago he sees in person what such enmity looks like (Kalam 217). Eddie finds a contradictory attitude among the members of the NOI with regards to others who also make attempts in the improvement of African-American life—including Malcolm X, who has been a significant factor behind the development of the Nation of Islam. This is where the novel is exemplary of African American Muslim literature with its tension between *'asabiyya* and *ummah* as discussed earlier. In this novel, one's will to liberate fellow black people faces fanaticism to the tenets of one's Islamic denomination. While both current NOI members and

former members have a common goal to save Black people from structural racism, they do not communicate well, as they see each other's tenets of religion being wrong. This phenomenon gives the impression of isolated struggles. The different tenets that African American Muslims hold eventually lead to animosity between African American Muslims from one denomination and those from another denomination.

The most noticeable manifestation of this tension is in the current NOI members' attitude towards Malcolm X. The NOI members consider Malcolm X a traitor and a backbiter. The NOI members do not even appreciate the major role that Malcolm X played in increasing the membership of the Nation of Islam before he was eventually chastised by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad following his comments on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. During his stay in Chicago, when he meets Mansoor, a member of Nation of Islam, Eddie hears in person how members of Nation of Islam do not like Malcolm X and seem to have forgotten the major role that Malcolm X plays in shaping Nation of Islam and even considers Malcolm X a traitor. Mansoor complains about the fact that many people have come to Nation of Islam thanks to Malcolm X, even until today (Kalam 225). For Eddie, who has started to see the figures of Nation of Islam as heroes, exemplifying people who have escaped the ghetto and become exemplary individuals, such attitude towards Malcolm X becomes disturbing. The irony here is clear for Eddie: Mansoor, a person who commits himself to help uplift the living condition of urban blacks, hates Malcolm X, a role model whose life was also dedicated to the same cause, because of the role model's critical attitude towards the leader of their movement. Mansoor's belief in the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the vision of current leader Louis Farrakhan bar him from seeing the possibility of whether Malcolm X's criticism about Elijah Muhammad could have been right. What results is a negative attitude towards somebody who might share the same

aspirations, which include the liberation of African Americans from systemic racism and structural marginalization.

In a move that amplifies the problem in the relationship between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, Mansoor relates a story about the Mother Wheel, which establishes Malcolm X's position as the guilty party on a theological level in the Nation of Islam. In one way or another, the Mother Wheel story is similar to the narrative of the "night journey" in orthodox Islam. If the "night journey" narrative tells about Prophet Muhammad who is transported to the seventh heaven to be shown, among others, heaven and hell, the "Mother Wheel" narrative tells about Louis Farrakhan being taken to the Mother Wheel to meet important characters in the theology of the Nation of Islam. If the "Night Journey" narrative represents "a mandate for Muhammad's superiority in status over the former prophets as the Seal of the Prophets" (Lemming 529), "The Mother Wheel" story also legitimizes Louis Farrakhan as the current leader of NOI. In the Mother Wheel story, Minister Farrakhan also meets Malcolm X, who is described as behind bars. This narrative is among Farrakhan's moves to legitimize his leadership of the revived Nation of Islam and "confirmed the validity of [Elijah] Muhammad's teachings" in the wake of W.D. Mohammed's massive shift of the organization towards Sunni Islam (Curtis *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* 130).

In *Night Journey*, Eddie cannot take the Mother Wheel story seriously. Eddie, who is a high school student at this time, cannot seem to believe it and cannot understand how Mansoor, whom he considers a reasonable college student, believes in such a story. Following the story about the Mother Wheel,

Eddie gave a weak smile. "I have not heard that one." He hid his face so that [Mansoor and the other members of Fruit of Islam] would not see his anger. That anyone could

believe this. He was competing in twelve hours. He'd wasted the night running around with them, dodging bullets, to uplift the ghetto, when they believed this! Now they were at Mansoor's car" (Kalam 227).

This paragraph suggests Eddie's anger. For one, Mansoor's disrespect for Malcolm X has made him angry. For another, which appears to be more important in this paragraph, he cannot grasp the fact that these decent people—mostly college students—believe in the Mother Wheel story, which for Eddie was unrealistic. Here, he starts to feel that he has spent his evening with the wrong people. Or, as indicated by what he later thinks, there is a sense that Mansoor has an explanation to clear up Eddie's misunderstanding of the story. Still, the patrol with the Fruit of Islam and the conversation that Eddie has with Mansoor have planted seeds of doubt in Eddie's mind. To Eddie, Nation of Islam is no longer the answer for the social problems, no longer an organization that can uplift people like Eddie by teaching discipline and other ingredients for success. In fact, the members of this organization also have some enmity towards African American people, including Malcolm X, whom Eddie has considered an important figure who put his life on the line struggling for the advancement of African American people. Eddie's experience, or the way the novel narrates it, implies that there seems to be a disconnect between the Nation of Islam and the larger mission of Black liberation. The novel's narration of Eddie's disillusionment implies that interpersonal friction between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad caused the friction within African American people who in fact champion the same cause.

Meanwhile, from the former NOI members, such animosity can be seen in the person of Akbar Muhammad. Here, Eddie starts to see that theological elements obstruct black liberation can be found in Eddie's relationship with Akbar Muhammad. Here, we can see how the universalistic elements of Islam is used to justify the enmity towards the more particularistic version of African American Islam. There are two major problems in Eddie's relationship with Akbar Muhammad. The first problem is related to Akbar Muhammad's attitude towards the

Nation of Islam, which mirrors Mansoor's attitude towards Malcolm X or other African American figures who struggle for the betterment of black people outside the Nation of Islam. As far as Islam is concerned, Akbar Muhammad thinks that only Sunni Islam is legitimate. In his conversation with Eddie, Akbar Muhammad states the following:

"Nothing." He leaned forward, whispering. "The ghetto is filled with sentimental motherfuckers. You don't owe nobody nothing. When I saw you I knew you had heart, Eddie, I knew you was a real Muslim. I said, Akbar, teach this boy the true Islam, guide him. Get him away from the Nation of Flimflam [emphasis mine]. Make him rich. How'd you like to spend Ramadan in Mecca? This can all be arranged" (Kalam 230).

Akbar Muhammad presents himself as someone who follows the true Islam and invites Eddie, whom he must have read as a serious follower of the Nation of Islam who wishes to live a better disciplined Muslim life, to join his rank. However, Akbar here has come off as someone who values the superiority of Sunni Islam over the political role of the Nation of Islam, a religious organization that has made efforts to help better the life of African Americans, both its members or otherwise (as indicated in Fruit of Islam's activity patrolling the neighborhood to increase the security). This scene also reveals Akbar Muhammad's detachment from the low-class life of African Americans. Prior to this scene, Akbar even makes fun of African American boxers in the Golden Glove competition in Chicago by telling them to dance for money in front of women he calls his wives to show them that African American men would do anything for money. By telling Eddie that he can celebrate Ramadan in Mecca with him, Akbar appeals to Eddie's sense of piety, something that both Sunni Muslims and the members of Nation of Islam share.

Another part of the journey shows that what has been promised as a racial uplift is nothing but a money-oriented venture. Akbar Muhammad, whom Eddie has seen with respect since their first meeting in Chicago, shows his real self in Las Vegas. Far from the image of a "true Muslim" that he purports to be, Akbar Muhammad turns out to be a person who selectively practices certain teachings of Islam while living a luxurious life that includes many activities

violating Islamic teachings. While Muslims are strongly prohibited from drinking alcoholic beverages, Akbar casually drinks, makes an apology for it, and uses Islamic teachings to justify his many other personal indulgences, such as having his relationship with two women he claims to be his “wives” who might be religiously married to him but not legally officiated (Kalam 268). Akbar shows his real self even the first day after he assigns Eddie a professional fight, in which Eddie must fight with an employee who has been paid by Akbar Muhammad to lose. Here, Akbar’s demeanor is different from when they met for the first time. Akbar is seen with drinks, with an apology that alcohol is one of his weaknesses, but states that he still prays and promises to make Eddie his companion to prayers on Fridays. He also argues that the Colored Boxing Federation, C.B.F., is not only about making money, but also “about uplifting the black man” (Kalam 268). The way he sees black liberation and religion here is different from the formal teachings of the Nation of Islam, in which the liberation of Black people highly depends on personal improvement, such as by avoiding the use of what they consider harmful elements, namely liquor, drugs, and tobacco. Soon after, however, another person challenges Akbar, suggesting that C.B.F. is nothing but a business for Akbar to make money (Kalam 270). In his Black Nationalist vision with the C.B.F., Akbar is still not fully engaged with the poor African American families who are fighting their way out of poverty. His luxurious life and repeated insult of inner-city life indicate his actual distance from actual engagement with the people he claims to uplift. Thus, Akbar represents the last person who falls from grace in attempting to save Eddie from the ghetto. Without much heroism, Eddie leaves this scene, not with some histrionic gesture of defiance: he follows the scenario he has agreed upon and feigns loss to Van Brett who does not have the stamina to stand long enough in the ring to stage a winning fight. Eddie has decided that Akbar Muhammad will not be able to save him.

The final journey experience for Eddie is a trip to Oakland, during which he sees a vision of heaven that he wants. While Eddie initially planned the trip to see Tessa, a woman he loves, the journey eventually brings Eddie to see the impact of a successful Black liberation attempt. This leg of Eddie's journey to Oakland makes him see the power of commitment to a unitary cause. This trip indeed does not give Eddie what he wants as Tessa seems to be comfortable in Oakland and would not want Eddie to be with her. Besides, Eddie has a strong impression that Tessa has started using drugs (Kalam 295). However, it is also during this visit that Eddie sees the empty street of Oakland because many of the black men has gone to Washington to join the Million Man March in Washington. Here, he is struck by a thought about what would happen if black men are no longer in street corners:

“Eddie walked beside [Tessa], watching the dirty walks, walks devoid of black men. Eddie wondered what it would be like if one day all the black men in the world were swept off the streets, and the streets looked like this. He looked at [Tessa] now. He tried to imagine her in a head scarf, reformed, a Muslima, but he could see her only in her street clothes, her hair uncombed and dry as straw” (Kalam 290-1).

Eddie's imagination of “walks devoid of black men” and Tessa “in a head scarf, reformed, a Muslima” might mean his optimistic view of having Black men off the street, living a regular life of middle class people. However, the phrase “swept off the streets” suggests a force erasure of Black men, and it is relevant to what he can imagine Tessa like, “her hair uncombed and dry as straw.”

These contradictory images that Eddie has indicate his struggle to understand his situation. The Million Man March is present on the sidelines throughout Eddie's two-day stay in Oakland. Eddie and Tessa hear the radio DJs talk about the march and are amazed at how the TV channels plan to cover the March when it happens the next day (Kalam 296). It is also during this time that Eddie realizes that he will not see Tessa again and that Turtle, his brother, has always loved him (Kalam 297).

Turtle had been right. (And Turtle had loved him, he thought: he'd been so cold not to see Turtle off to prison.) He climbed to his feet and went to [Tessa], touching her sleeping face with his hand one last time, putting to memory her sallow face. He went out to the door and shut it softly behind him (Kalam 297).

He has now realized that he needs to return to his folks in South Phoenix, especially his brother, who has loved him and cared about him. As for Tessa, she does not appear to have the connection with Eddie anymore. Eddie's journey to California wraps up the various journey he must take to come to the realization that he needs to repair the connection he has with his brother, his family members, people who care about him in Phoenix. In this morning, when in Washington Black people make the commitment to help themselves and to improve themselves, Eddie eventually comes to a decision to settle his account in Las Vegas and then returns to Phoenix to resume what he has left behind.

The Million Man March is an important landmark in the history of African Americans during which up to one million African American men gathered in Washington D.C. Initiated by Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, this event was joined by mostly African American men of all faiths from all over the United States. The magnitude of its influence made this event an important part of the recent history of the United States (Curtis "Introduction" xviii). The event was able to gather from 700,000 to one million people, mostly African Americans, from all over the United States in a peaceful march to rebuild their commitment to be united in efforts to atone for past sins and to pledge to create a better life (Curtis "Million Man March" 370). According to Haki R. Madhubuti, the Million Man March was an answer for a people that had been experiencing social crises on multiple fronts:

If anything was needed, it must be an action—collective in nature—that would resound around the nation and the world that stated without doubt or hesitation that Black men cared, that we hurt and needed healing, that we needed each other, that we do have money, resources and an independent spirit and mindset, that we are family-based, and that we do have fire in our bellies for that which is right, correct and good ("Took Back Our Tears, Laughter, Love and Left a Big Dent in the Earth" 2).

The event climaxed with a long speech by Farrakhan, in which he invited the participants of the event to make a pledge to atone for their past sins, to commit themselves to foster a better relationship among themselves, to improve respect for women and children, and to better care for themselves by avoiding harmful substances (26-7). While many black leaders boycott the event because of its association with Louis Farrakhan, a figure who has been notoriously known as “an anti-Semite, racist bigot, sexist,” a number of prominent black scholars and leaders praise the event for its constructive and conciliatory messages (Curtis "Million Man March" 370). The notable participants and speakers in the event include prominent public figures and intellectuals such as Jesse L. Jackson, Maya Angelou, Cornel West, and Betty Shabazz, the wife of Malcolm X, whom the Nation of Islam had hitherto considered a traitor. For Eddie Bloodpath in *Night Journey*, the conciliatory message of the Million Man March, which he hears on the radio while he is with Tessa in Oakland, seems to awaken him, inspiring him to rebuild his ties with his family in Phoenix.

Eddie’s final decision to return to Phoenix to be and share his experiences with his family and real girlfriend shares the same spirit with the Million Man March. *Night Journey* turns to family and reconciles kinship as the answer to Eddie’s search. For *Night Journey*, escaping the social problem in the inner-city at the cost of disassociating with kins is not an effective solution—none of such attempts pan out in the story. This is in line with Louis Farrakhan’s pledge referred to above. The contents of this pledge seem to echo what Eddie also needs. Therefore, before he gets too deep into the professional boxing, in which Akbar is manipulating and taking advantage of him, the Million Man March inspires Eddie to return home, to rebuild his ties with his folks instead of insisting on staying with Tessa, a woman he has loved since his childhood but has recently fallen deeper into using illegal substances. Granted, the novel does

not explicitly say anything about how the Million Man March influences Eddie in deciding to return to Phoenix. In his conversation with fellow C.B.F. boxer, Eddie says that he does not know why he wants to return to Phoenix. However, considering the recurrent appearance of the Million Man March during critical moments, it is not very far to conclude that the Million Man March and its conciliatory message play a major role in influencing Eddie's decision. In fact, in this novel, reconciliation with family is not present only in Eddie; a native American boxer, with whom Eddie has become friends, eventually also returns to his tribe as Eddie also makes the trip back home to be with his family in Phoenix.

To add to that, Eddie also expresses his intention to take his GED, or high school equivalency exams, and then to resume his life where he left off. Whereas before leaving for Las Vegas Eddie has expressed his hatred for his brother Turtle, when he returns to South Phoenix, he is ready to reconcile with his brother. This is a gesture that Eddie is embracing his roots in South Phoenix. The alluring solution that Akbar Muhammad has offered cannot work for Eddie. It might have proven successful to save Akbar from the ghetto of East St. Louis and to make him live in the luxury of Las Vegas, but it happens at the cost of distancing him from the actual engagement in "uplifting black man" as he likes to see himself doing. For Eddie, Akbar's solution does not solve the problems of those who come from the ghetto; Akbar's solution only takes one from one problem and puts him or her in another problem. By contrast, Eddie's return to South Phoenix is filled with hope and acceptance of his family.

Such solution triumphs over any other that people often consider solutions to the social problems that plagued African American community in the late 1980's and 1990's. The most common cure that people offer to solve social problem is religion, due to its moral ground. *Night Journey* does not see religion as the single working solution that can solve social problems

experienced by African American people in South Phoenix. However, the novel acknowledges that religion is what people often turn to in the face of social problems. This notion is introduced through an early scene when Jules takes the young Turtle and Eddie to a Church congregation. In this church, where most members of the congregation were female, except for children and the band players, religion appears almost like a pain killer taken every Sunday to distract the members of congregation from the hardship of living in poverty. This attention to Christianity, no matter how indicative, only makes up a fraction of the discussion on religion in this novel. The major portion of the discussion on religion regarding this novel can be found in relation to Islam, both Nation of Islam and Sunni Islam among African Americans. However, each of the religious traditions is unable to be a single powerful force to save Eddie from South Phoenix. As discussed above, distancing Eddie from his family and kins is among the internal problems that make the attempts to help Eddie fail. The last paragraph of the novel, where Eddie in his hometown feels irritated as he sees a young boy rule over the dead woman's house as his brother used to do, suggests what has made him feel that he must return to his family:

“Again the prostitute shouted at the boy from the doorway, her corpulent figure leaning on the doorjamb, shouting, shouting. The little lord of Woodland Ave., Eddie thought. King of the dead woman's house. The sight of the boy was maddening now. In his hood. On his street. He hurried back to his house and stood on his porch. [...] It was this. It was this. Yes, he must go with them tomorrow, he thought. He could not wait to see his brother now. There was so much to tell him” (Kalam 309).

Eddie understands that his place is to be with his family and his folks, and he also has responsibility towards his “hood.” Thus, the end of his journey, although not a success, is a precondition for a successful solution to the social problems in his hometown.

The Million Man March appears as the answer that Eddie has not discovered elsewhere throughout his journey. While it was initiated by a figure notorious for his over-particularistic tendency, the Million Man March represents a balance between particularistic tendency of

African American Islam towards community-building and the universalistic tendency of Islam to build connection with God and all mankind. The message about atonement, whose importance is apparent from the fact that Louis Farrakhan's speech is titled "Day of Atonement," suggests a more universal appeal to all black men of all faith to rebuild connection with all mankind—as it is also clear from the "Million Man March Pledge" (Madhubuti 29). The novel suggests that for Eddie, the Million Man March represents the best from both the particularistic and the universalistic leanings of African American Islam. Eddie's journey, thus, a journey that introduces him to the various possible solution to the social problem he comes from and to expose their negative sides. From this exposure to the various options, the novel eventually brings us to the solution that could give the best hope.

Thus, Muhammad's "night journey" becomes the right metaphor for Eddie's journey. As Muslims believe, during the "night journey," spiritual or physical alike, Prophet Muhammad is introduced to other Prophets and Messengers of God and receives from God in person the order to observe prayers five times a day. During the journey, as various Muslim sources mention, Muhammad is shown heaven and hell. Eventually, Muhammad takes home from the journey the injunction to pray five times a day. Eddie's journey to be with members of the Nation of Islam in Chicago, to attend Akbar Muhammad's invitation in Las Vegas, and to go to Oakland to be meet Tessa and then saw the empty streets when the Black men went to Washington D.C. to participate in the Million Man March—all of these make Eddie's journey a "night journey," something that brings to him a solution to the threat that he has faced. Or, to compare it to Louis Farrakhan's ascension to the Motherwheel as a metaphor, the night journey gives Eddie the legitimacy to solve his own problem in his own way, as he has learned in person what is happening to African American people.

To better understand the significance of Eddie's journey to gain success, it is necessary to return to the tension between the concepts of particularism and universalism, which as we have discussed above, are among the most important concepts in African American Islam. *Night Journey* highlights the tension between the particularistic and universalistic leanings of African American Islam in Eddie's relationships with members of the Nation of Islam and the African American members of Sunni Islam. In his young age and apparent lack of knowledge, a fact which is highlighted in his relationship with Marchalina (Kalam 97-105), Eddie maintains a critical attitude towards members of the Nation of Islam whom he meets in Chicago because of their express animosity towards Malcolm X, as discussed above. On the flip side of the coin, Eddie also stops to revere Akbar Muhammad as soon as he realizes the latter's lack of commitment towards the constructive aspects of Sunni Islam. The over-particularistic tendency of the Chicago members of the Nation of Islam and the over-universalistic tendency of Akbar Muhammad irritate Eddie who is probably really a seeker as Marchalina sees him. However, the suggested influence of the Million Man March suggests Eddie's eventual acceptance of the balance between the particularistic and the universalistic leanings.

Conclusion

In the light of the importance of the narrative of "night journey" in Islam, Murad Kalam's novel includes an allegory for a journey to receive knowledge. Just as the narrative of the night journey in Islam places Muhammad in the ranks of other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, Eddie's night journey lends Eddie legitimacy, setting his place among black people whose eyes have been opened to reality. His trip to Chicago, where he participates in the National Golden Gloves and meets members of Nation of Islam, opens his eyes to the reality of wealthy black men and the pride of black people who have committed themselves to keep the neighborhood

safe. His trip to Las Vegas to join Akbar Muhammad's C.B.F. opens his eyes to the other side of Black people's life, the life of those who are successful at building his business but is himself led astray by his own wealth. His trip to Oakland to meet Tessa coincides with the Million Man March organized by Minister Louis Farrakhan and Nation of Islam in March 1996.

Thus, *Night Journey* does not offer a conclusive and comprehensive solution to the social problems that Eddie experiences in South Phoenix, but it offers something equally important. It offers a narrative on how one can arrive at a precondition for such solution, namely, the acceptance of one's root and determination to start a project of recuperating from the crisis through family, education, and optimism. To arrive at that point, one must go through a number of journeys in which Eddie sees various things that he otherwise would never see if he stayed in South Phoenix only. This night journey, the journey through the beauty and the ugly of African American experiences in major cities eventually opens his eyes to what options he has out there and that he has a brother who loves and cares about him, while out in the world he can find people who might have their different agendas in dealing with him. This return to family is ultimately an allegory of the role of Islam in African American community, as a religion that represents the tension between the commitment to the *ummah* and *'asabiyya*, or the commitment to the larger Muslim community and the responsibility of community-building within African American community itself. Unlike Marvin X's *Land for My Daughters*, in which the allegory to the important aspect of African American Muslim experience is more oriented towards community-building and building connection with the global community, not only global Muslim community, *Night Journey* proves to be more immediate with the African American experience if we are to read it as an allegory for the tension between *'asabiyya* and *umma*, which as I discussed above in Chapter 1 is a strong defining feature of African American Muslim

experience.

In the next chapter, I will shift the discussion to South Asian American Muslims and the defining feature of their experiences. This discussion will then be followed with analyses on two plays by writers with South Asian American Muslim background in the manner with which I have discussed the two works by African American Muslim writers in Chapters 2 and 3, i.e. analyzing their epistemic potentials as providing the avenues to understanding the intellectual and material experiences of South Asian American Muslims.

Chapter 4

Dispelling Essentialism and Building Alliance in South Asian American Muslim Literature

Is it ethical to treat this body of literature as “immigrant literature” instead of “American literature”? Are writings by immigrant Muslim Americans only about asserting the writers’ place in the United States? To put it more crudely, is it ethical to view immigrant Muslim Americans as un-American and to view their cultural expressions as representing foreignness? Questions of this nature, which have often resurfaced in recent history, need to be addressed seriously due to their neglect of the fact that Muslim Americans, including those with immigrant backgrounds, have increasingly involved themselves in the project of community building instead of wallowing in identity politics.

A historical review of the presence of Muslims in America since they first appeared in a historical document to the present day will reveal the changing positions of Muslim in the American society. These changes are consistent with the understanding of cultural identity as elastic rather than stable, the understanding of culture that Stuart Hall applies in studying postcolonial societies (227). To challenge the recent tendency of viewing immigrant Muslim Americans as outsiders, it is necessary to highlight 1) the possible causes of this negative tendency and 2) the reality of Muslim Americans’ role in today’s America. This chapter will meditate on the possible cause of the negative sentiment towards immigrant Muslim Americans: essentialism. To complement that, this chapter will also discuss the trends among the younger immigrant Muslim Americans to leave their cultural cocoons, to dispel the model minority image, and to engage with the larger social issues in the United States by embracing other minorities.

Literary works as cultural expressions play an important part, not only as a reflection of

the culture but also an expression that eventually shapes the identity of the culture from which it comes. For that reason, this chapter will analyze two plays, Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* and Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*. These plays capture 1) the atmosphere that gave rise to the negative sentiments towards immigrant Muslim Americans and 2) the disposition among immigrant Muslim American youths to blend with the larger American society without necessarily leaving their heritage.

Islam is by no means a new phenomenon in the United States. A record from early seventeenth century indicates that there were at least two men called "the turks," a common derogatory term to refer to Muslim irrespective of their origins (GhaneaBassiri 9). Around the same time, many enslaved Africans from West Africa, which had a large Muslim population, were brought to America. While there is not yet a conclusive number, scholars have estimated—based on the regions from which enslaved Africans had come—that up to "tens of thousands" of the slaves were Muslim (GhaneaBassiri 15; McCloud *African American Islam* 1). In early nineteenth century, an enslaved African Omar bin Said wrote a memoir in Arabic narrating his early education in West Africa, capture by Army troops, being sold as a slave, escape from the slave master, life with the Owens, possible conversion into Christianity while still using Islamic references to God and Prophet Muhammad (Curtis *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* 5-9). The late nineteenth century saw the rise of Alexander Webb, an American diplomat and Theosophist "who formally converted to Islam in 1888 and went to found the first American Muslim mission" (GhaneaBassiri 114). However, the first time Islam received a national recognition was during the decades leading to the Civil Rights movement, when the Nation of Islam became the largest African American enterprise and key player in voicing the concerns of African American people in urban areas in

the North with Malcolm X as the most prominent minister. However, as the Civil Rights movement receded into the background of history, Islam has also waned from the public. This is despite the surge of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia following the Hart-Cellar Act, the immigration reform that opened entry to the U.S. for merit-based immigrants from all over the world. Islam resurfaces in the media only during times when the U.S. foreign policy brushes shoulder with Muslim-majority countries such as during the Iranian hostage crisis, the Soviet-Afghan war, and the Gulf War. Nevertheless, despite their four centuries of existence in the United States, Muslim Americans are still considered something short of an outsider, as followers of a faith that belongs to outside the United States.

The misperception of Muslim Americans as foreigners, even accused of loyalty to something other than the U.S. Constitution, is even stronger concerning immigrant Muslim Americans. This misperception is often exacerbated by geopolitics, whether or not it is related with countries where individual Muslim Americans call home countries. An example of this is the phenomenon during and after the Iranian Hostage Crisis. During this time, there started to grow a common trend of neo-orientalism that includes the essentialization of American identity and the “Othering” of, among others, Muslim Americans. The Iranian hostage crisis is an important stage in the changing relationship between Americans and Muslims. The image of Muslims propagated by centuries of scholarship that Edward Said terms “orientalism” changed overnight after the Iranian hostage crisis. If orientalism led people to see Arabs and Muslims as a weak and disorganized people, the hostage crisis turned the image of Arabs and Muslims into that of a violent people (Tuastad 594). While the vilification of Arabs and Muslims by Hollywood has been going on for around a century, as Jack Shaheen explores in *Reel Bad Arabs*, the 1980’s saw Arabs and Muslims as a violent group in various movie, from *The Delta Force* to

Back to the Future. When the first Gulf War erupted in 1991, the association between (and conflation of) Arabs and Muslims (which together represent foreignness and backwardness) became amplified. By 1996, after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the media were ready to associate Islam and Middle Eastern looking people as the new threat after the fall of the communist Soviet (Gana 1575). That later it was found that the perpetrators of Oklahoma City bombings were fundamentalist Christians did not seem to reverse the-popular stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. Islam and Muslims have worn a new image as a violent threat.

For some, this negative image and the foreignness of immigrant Muslims in American were later confirmed by the events on September 11, 2001. The authority discovered that the hijackers who crashed the planes in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were nineteen Muslim Saudi nationals. Bernard Lewis, for example, holds that this series of events confirms Samuel Huntington's hypothesis of the "clash of civilizations." In his 1993 essay, Huntington proposes that the major conflicts of the future will no longer be dominated by nation states and their ideologies and economic systems, but by "civilizations," which in Huntington's definition are determined by "language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and ... the subjective self-identification of people" (24). Muslims (often conflated with Arabs or South Asians, especially the Sikhs, whom everyday Americans might not be able to distinguish from Muslims) have come to be seen as an essentially different element of the American society. This hypothesis, however, has been strongly challenged elsewhere by sheer fact that many Muslims in America do not see any contradiction between being Muslim and being American. Huntington states that civilizations will clash because "cultural characteristics ... are less mutable than political and economic ones" and exemplifies that "it is more difficult to be half-Catholic and half-Muslim"

(27). This argument assumes that Huntington's Western civilization is essentially and undeniably Christian; and that cultural identity is static. In fact, that is not the only way one perceives cultural identity, as I will soon discuss.

It was also the 9/11 events that made public in the United States more aware of Muslims within the U.S. borders. The 9/11 events caused a major change in the life of Americans (GhaneaBassiri 328). Before September 11, 2001, the only time when the United States suffered an attack in its own soil was in December 7, 1941 in Pearl Harbor. The 9/11 events, which took more than three thousand American lives, raised a lot of concerns and eventually led to historic changes in U.S. policies, which affect the lives of American people. Significant federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, were established and "law enforcement and immigration authorities, along with the Treasury, [were given] greater power of surveillance and regulation to combat terrorism" (GhaneaBassiri 328). Considering the events that led to these major change in day-to-day life were perpetrated by Muslims, "most Americans began to take stock of the presence of Muslims in the United States (GhaneaBassiri 328). It is during this time that Muslims came again to the surface. Muslims also began to open their communities for people to know them better. By this time, because of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, the demography of American Muslims has changed with over fifty percent of them being immigrants, either first or second generation. The 2011 Pew Research Center Study on American Muslims indicates that 63 percent of Muslim Americans are first generation immigrants and another 15 percent second generation immigrants (Pew 8). Since the time of the Civil Rights Movement until September 11, 2001, American Muslims had seen the rising leadership of new immigrants many of whom came as students who were "inspired by Islamist movements, mainly the Jama'at-i Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood" (GhaneaBassiri 273). While these Muslims were not the majority of

American Muslims, they are the ones who are more active in organizations, and thus they became the strongest voices of Islam (GhaneaBassiri 273). By 2001, Islam no longer had the image of the Civil Rights Movement; it had now been associated with immigrants. Oftentimes, discussions of Muslims were inseparable from discussions of Arabs.

From 2001 to this day, a significant segment of American public holds a negative opinion on Muslims and Islam. In 2009, eight years after the 9/11 events, a Gallup poll revealed that 43% of Americans admitted to feeling some prejudice toward followers of Islam ("In U.S., Religious Prejudice Stronger against Muslims"). Gallup conducted the poll not long after the Fort Hood shootings by a Muslim American military officer Major Nidal Hassan that killed 13 people. This is an extraordinarily high number considering the number of Muslim Americans, especially considering the general assumption behind this prejudice is the acts of violence committed by Muslims in the United States. A 2013 Gallup poll revealed that there had been 160 acts of violence committed by Muslim-American terrorist suspects and perpetrators, a number that makes up only "a percentage of the thousands of acts of violence that occur in the United States each year ("Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West"). This negative sentiment has been fluctuating not unrelated to various factors in the American society in such a way that it indicates a type of essentialism, which leads one to believe in a collective characteristic of a social group. It is something that turned out to also affect even liberal media personality such as Bill Maher, who has in different occasions harshly criticized religions and called Islam "the motherlode of bad ideas" and "right now, in this country, [...] the most dangerous" (Beinart). As Beinart suggests in the article, Maher's "wild overgeneralization" indicates Maher's disregard of the unique national circumstances of individual Muslim-majority countries (Beinart).

The negative sentiment that leads people to believe that Islam is essentially a foreign element in the United States arguably also results from an active effort towards that direction. In a 2001 report called “Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America,” Center for American Progress reveals their discovery of a group of pundits and commentators that work with grassroots organizations to propagate fear of the threat of Islam in America (Ali et al. 2). The report calls these individuals and organizations “the Islamophobia network.” These individuals include activists, bloggers, academicians, and media personalities such as Frank Gaffney, Daniel Pipes, David Yerushalmi, Robert Spencer, and Steve Emerson. Through their respective outlets and national media, the individuals have made comments about the threat of the application of Sharia law in the United States. This group argues for the impossibility of Islam and the United States to co-exist. Ali et al. express concerns that the fear created by the Islamophobia network can influence the then upcoming 2012 presidential election, just as it has influenced the laws in several states in the U.S. The claim and the fear created by this think tank group have been in contradiction the findings of reliable research, such as the one conducted by Charles Kurzman, and categorically rejected by FBI Director and U.S. Attorney General (Ali et al. 41).

The 2016 Presidential Race that started in Summer 2016 saw the rise of a rhetoric that is not unrelated to the work of the “Islamophobia network.” Early in his campaign tour, Donald Trump uses a poll by Frank Gaffney to propose a “complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” (Pleat), a remark that raised his popularity among a segment of Americans while inviting rebukes from others, including the House Speaker Paul Ryan, a fellow Republican. Prior to this, Gaffney had appeared as a speaker in hearing for regulations regarding the banning of Sharia in several states. The controversial issue of Muslims’ loyalty to the United States and its

constitution has also surfaced in another issue of note during the 2016 Presidential Election. The presidential race is colored with anti-Muslim rhetoric on the part of some Republican candidates to win voters' support. Ben Carson, for example, even stated explicitly that he would not vote for a Muslim president, which contradicts the U.S. Constitution that says that there should not be a "religious test" for the position (Younis). This is like the rhetoric circulated around John F. Kennedy's election that said a Catholic can never be president because he owes his allegiance to the Pope rather than to his country.

Cultural Identity of Immigrant Muslim Americans

These misperceptions, prejudice, and other negative sentiments towards Muslims, especially immigrant Muslim Americans, strongly indicate the presence of an understanding of cultural identity as a fixed entity. Immigrant Muslim Americans in the contemporary era include people with their own cultural baggage, who have experienced at least two different cultures and different epochs. Here, I find Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity to be a useful lens to look at this phenomenon. In his classic essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall acknowledges the two ways that one can view cultural identities, fixed and elastic. The static view of cultural identities, in which people believe in the presence of one ideal cultural identity, is common and useful in a society that aims to achieve a certain collective target. When it comes to understanding a group of individuals with "traumatic experience of colonization," Hall leans towards the understanding of cultural identity as something that keeps evolving with every intervention of history. In this definition, cultural identity is perceived as

"a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation." (Hall 225)

By this definition of cultural identity, any development of tendencies in the society that strays

from the common can be embraced as part of a certain cultural identity. The cultural identity is not static and unchanged, but keeps evolving with time. The same thing applies to religion if it is accepted that religion needs culture to accept its universal values. Here, religious communities are also understood as cultural communities. Understood as such, cultural identity is a fertile ground in which an individual is an agent whose every reaction to history and society counts as a building block of his/her cultural identity. Consequently, as Hall stresses towards the end of the essay, a cultural text, which in Hall's essay refers collectively to the then-newly emerging Caribbean cinema and black cinema, is not "a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak" (Hall 236-7). Thus, not only does the way a cultural text represents or comments on a certain culture have its claim of legitimacy, but also it plays a role in the formation of the cultural identity of said community. Having said that, it does not necessarily mean that the role that said cultural text is big. Indeed, the role might just be equal to that of a mirror that makes a person question his/her own culture, yet it is certainly an agency, potentially creating at the very least a ripple in the fabric of cultural identity.

Stuart Hall's theorization of the cultural identity of Caribbean people can serve as a model to understand diaspora communities that result from traumatic colonization. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall notes two ways of defining cultural identity, stable and fluid. The former definition assumes the presence a stable definition to which one can refer. Hall uses the negritude movement as an example of this way of understanding cultural identity. The latter view, however, believes that cultural identity is "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 225). Hall argues that this second view can help us "properly

understand the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’” (225). Using Aimé Césaire’s and Leopold Senghor’s metaphor “presence,” which refers to a collection of customs, tendencies, or consciousness, Hall theorizes Caribbean cultural identity in relation to “African presence, European presence, and American presence.” Caribbean cultural identities are shaped by these three different presences although the majority of Caribbean people are of African descent. As Hall explains further, the African presence is always present although the experiences of force displacement and slavery have made it no longer “original African.” The European presence is similarly never pure, because it is something that the colonial power has forced into the Caribbean people, although it eventually shapes their consciousness. Finally, the third element is the American presence, which Hall defines here as the culture characterized by the emergence of Caribbean people after the erasure of the native civilization, “the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference” (Hall 223). Only by considering these three cultural elements that one can properly explain the cultural identity of Caribbean people that appear to be diverse and hybrid as it manifests in Caribbean cinema.

In discussing immigrant Muslim Americans, whose presence in the United States includes different phases that are significantly different, Hall’s theorization of the diaspora cultural identity of Caribbean people offers a useful critical model. GhaneaBassiri explores and narrates these different phases. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Muslim immigrants in the United States were socially invisible as a religious community by either self-identifying ethnically or passing as Christians to be accepted more easily in the United States (GhaneaBassiri 41, 136). Following the issuance of the Hart-Cellar Act, which favored professionals and highly-skilled individuals, many of the Muslim immigrants came from higher strata in their home countries and were more ready to gain acceptance in the United States

(GhaneaBassiri 275). By the turn of the twenty-first century, after events that have put American Muslims in the spotlight in unflattering ways, immigrant Muslim Americans and other Muslim Americans were pushed to engage themselves in American public life in a drastically different way that they did in the previous phases (GhaneaBassiri 329). While not all immigrant Muslim Americans undergo anything comparable to “the traumatic characteristics of the ‘colonial experience’,” I want to argue that it will be appropriate to understand the cultural identity of a people who has experienced drastic changes using Hall’s second view of cultural identity, the more fluid view of identity. Unlike Caribbean people whose colonial experience makes their African presence never original and their European culture always “creolized,” Muslim Americans of immigrant backgrounds are shaped by their memory of being Muslims in their homelands and by their “American presence.” For some Muslims, the memory of being Muslims in their homelands can be revived in the United States, such through the founding of institutions that provide education more Muslims growing up outside Muslim-majority communities. By “American presence,” I am here referring to the situation of Muslims in the twenty-first America. This situation is colored with the stereotypes of Muslims in popular culture, the association of Islam with terrorist attacks, the atrocities committed by ultra-radical organizations around the world, and the backlash on Muslim Americans following acts of violence that involve Muslims.

It is here, in the intersection between situations that surround the Muslim Americans of immigrant backgrounds, that the cultural identity takes shape. Each of these elements contribute to the formation of “identity,” which itself is nothing but another element which will interact with other elements throughout a person’s life—in fact, what I have so far called “the African consciousness” itself is an amalgamation of various elements that, for convenience, we can only tentatively call “the African consciousness.” Applying this to Muslim American issues, the

tendency to see American Muslims as immigrants who follow different values means neglecting the elasticity of cultural identity. Such tendency means neglecting the fact that for much of the immigrant Muslim Americans, their identity is a result of an evolution from what they had when they or their parents landed on the U.S. soil and encountered American societies. Seeing Muslim Americans simply as immigrants, whose identity is already fixed somewhere far away in their home culture prior to their arrival in the U.S., and whose identity also is fixed around Islam, around a static notion of what Islam is supposed to mean to them, ignores the insights of Hall about the elasticity of identity.

The Problems with Essentialism and the Rise of Solidarity with Other Minority Groups

In addition to the closed understanding of cultural identity as discussed above, such negative sentiments I argue can also be attributed to the dangerous level of essentialism, both within and without immigrant Muslim American circles. From outside Muslim Americans, the Islamophobia network discussed above is one of the most visible instance of viewing Muslim Americans, especially immigrant Muslims, from an essentialist perspective. Another example is the common surge of backlash against Muslims during the time when an act of violence happens that involves a Muslim perpetrator. From within Muslim American communities, there are also elements that hold an essentialist view of Muslims, such as the view that the ideal life of a Muslim is the one in the Muslim-majority countries or even the Prophet Muhammad's time. As Akbar Ahmad finds in his fieldwork, there are Muslims who hold on to the belief that a Muslim's failure to strictly follows Islamic tenets, for example due to their presence in the United States, makes him/her less Muslim.

Anne Phillips' identification of four types of essentialism and her argument that the danger of essentialism lies in its degree instead of its category will help us understand Muslim

American literature by writers from immigrant background. Critical literature on the types of essentialism and lends us a critical tool to see the problem with essentialism in studying Muslim Americans. Anne Phillips identifies four types of essentialism, namely: a) attributing a certain characteristic to a particular social group invoking a social group; b) attributing characteristics to certain categories in a way that naturalizes or reifies what may be socially constructed; c) invoking a collectivity either as subject or object in a way that homogenizes their plurality; and d) policing a category in such a way one's failure to meet certain characteristics harms his or her claim of belonging to the category (Phillips 49). In line with Phillips's argument, the danger of an essentialist tendency is less on the types of essentialism than on the degree. An essentialist tendency to find the perpetrator of a sexual attack from the opposite sex of the victim is one instant of a useful essentialism. Assuming that a member of a religious community has certain characteristics is, conversely, a harmful essentialism. The four types of essentialism that Phillips identifies include an example of the problem with essentialism, as Phillips keeps returning to, is the ban on Muslim headscarves in France on the grounds that they represent oppression of women. In the context of Muslim Americans and immigrant Muslim Americans, we can find instances of attitudes, rhetoric and phenomena that fall into any of Phillips's four categories. The suspicion over the loyalty of Muslim Americans and Muslim immigrants is an example of the first type of essentialism. The rhetoric among liberal Western groups to liberate Muslim women from oppression, which assumes that all Muslim women who wear scarves are doing that because of oppression by male Muslims, is an instance of the third type of essentialism. The example of the fourth type of essentialism can be found in the tendency of some immigrant Muslim Americans who belittle the Muslim identity of Muslims who do not observe certain Islamic rulings as being "un-Islamic." Akbar Ahmed's story of a man and his wife who are

threatened by members of his Muslim community is an extreme example of such view.

Therefore, it is not surprising that dispelling essentialism becomes a major theme in Muslim American literature. This theme appears very often especially in the post-9/11 Muslim American literature. *The Kite Runner*, for example, has a strong theme of dispelling the essentialist tendency of some Afghan immigrants in the United States who still look down on Hazara people, the Shiah Muslim ethnic minority of Afghanistan. In the novel, Amir, who grew up in the United States, being a member of the Afghan immigrant community who take manual or semi-manual jobs and buy second-hand goods, holds that it is no longer relevant for him to consider the ethnic Pashtu as a more superior ethnic group than ethnic Hazara—besides, he has found the evidence of mix-marriage in his family. Meanwhile, in Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*, we see a protagonist whom her relatives in India consider an American girl instead of an Indian girl because her general attitude is different from that of her Indian relatives. The other example is Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*, which displays Muslim characters whose characteristics are different from the stereotypical portrayals of Muslims. The narrator's mother is different from the stereotypical submissive Muslim wife. So is the grandfather, who is a pious Muslim but was married to a Coptic Christian woman who had never converted to Islam until the day she died. This theme is present consistently in Muslim American works, whether they be immigrants, African Americans, or white Muslim converts. The consistency with which this theme manifests in Muslim American literature renders the theme too important to ignore, and thus cultural analysts need to consider it if they are to properly understand the cultural identity of Muslim Americans.

However, despite the dangerous essentialism on both sides, there appears to be a noticeable trend among Muslim Americans and in Muslim American literature, namely the

tendency to build solidarity with other marginalized social groups in the United States. Being members of a highly politicized social minority that is as much by ideas as by birth, Muslim Americans are in a position that is prone to targeting but can find alliance in other minorities in the United States, especially the marginalized ones. In literary criticism, Lisa Suhair Majaj has done an initial work when she discusses the growing tendency among Arab American writers to build coalitions across ethnic divides. One of the powerful Arab American writers Majaj discusses at length is Naomi Shihab Nye, many of whose poems narrate the life stories of people of other ethnicities in the United States. Among the small number of poems in which she talks about Arab American, there is a noticeable group of poems inspired by the Muslim side of her family. For Majaj, building solidarity is inevitable for Arab Americans, as a solitary struggle of identity politics may not be consistent with the principles of justice. Here, one is reminded of Martin Luther King, Jr. who in Letter from a Birmingham Jail says “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (in Rieder 170). Majaj grounds her analysis partly on David A. Hollinger’s idea of “postethnic America” in which people were not defined by their ancestry but by their decision of affiliation, just as in religion one has the liberty to “entry and exit” (Hollinger 118). The other half of Majaj’s theoretical foundation comes from Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, whose idea on the shift to “radical multiculturalism” from “liberal pluralism” includes the refusal to divisive discourse between cultural communities and “challenging the hierarchy that makes some communities “minor” and other “major” (47).

I would argue that such alliance between Muslims and other minorities in the United States is a very possible and has even begun long before. In addition to that, while Muslim Americans are a religion-based social group, their alliance is not limited to other religious communities. Islam, as a community that is bound by ideas and much as hereditary, can find

alliance in other social groups as long as it is within the corridors of values that are also upheld by Muslims. What appears probably as the oldest instance of Muslims' alliance with other social groups is the story of Muslim jazz musicians in the South. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Islamic Mission of America embraced a significant number of African Americans in the South, many of whom were jazz musicians, in a move that suggests their belief that African Americans should have been treated equal to white people and pointed out how Christianity had been used to justify slavery. It indicates the alliance that at that time, the Muslim American minority—who were Ahmadi Muslims, who are also persecuted minority in many Muslim-majority countries (GhaneaBassiri 247-9). After the 9/11 events, the desire to be more active in the community and the wish to clear up the negative images that Muslims have received since the 9/11. However, some other show that it is indeed one's responsibility to care for the unfortunate. Examples of these two different tendencies can be found in the ongoing case on the lead-contaminated water in Flint, Michigan, different voices from Muslim communities in the United States. One website mentions explicitly that it is the chance for Muslims to improve its negative image since 9/11. Meanwhile, another group uses a line from Prophet Muhammad saying that no charity is better than fixing giving water (Wang; *America The National Catholic Review*).

Muslim American Arts and Literature

Muslim American literature that came out during the times when Muslim Americans saw the manifestation of the negative sentiments towards them reflects and constitutes Muslim identity. Literature by immigrant Muslim Americans from the last decade of the twentieth century and, in an unprecedented intensity, after the 9/11 events portrays well the negative sentiments, essentialism, as well as the trend towards building coalitions with members of other minorities. In her comprehensive account titled "Islam in Arts in the USA," Sylvia Chan-Malik

pinpoints the dramatic change in the cultural products by Muslim Americans after the 9/11 events. The years following the 9/11 saw the rise of “Muslim American culture,” a label that evokes a marked difference with the cultural expressions by Muslim Americans in the previous periods in the history of Islam in America. This new phenomenon, which I prefer to call contemporary Muslim American literature to distinguish it from Muslim American literature in the previous periods, “has been shaped and informed by the ways in which Islam has been ‘enculturated’ in the USA” (Chan-Malik 320). In other words, this new cultural expression has been influenced by earlier traditions of Muslim American literature. Considering the continuity of this timeline, Chan-Malik argues that the contemporary “Muslim American” culture, despite its emergence after the 9/11, is an “outgrowth” of earlier works by Muslim Americans or works “infused with Islamic sensibilities,” such as blues and hip-hop (321-2).

The contemporary Muslim American culture, which is dominated by immigrant Muslim Americans, is distinguishable from Muslim American literature in its focus on tropes that are closely tied to social issues faced by Muslim Americans. When Muslim Americans performed and published their works noticeably for the first time during the Civil Rights movement, their works included the autobiography of Malcolm X and plays and poems by Muslim American writers, who made up a significant number of members of Black Arts Movement. Among these artists were Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones, Marvin X, and Sonia Sanchez. The literary movement itself was declared soon after the assassination of Malcolm X (Chan-Malik 325). During the seventies, several Muslim American writers also produced their works as part of the multicultural boom in the American arts. During the Reagan era, when “civil rights achievements were rolled back” (Chan-Malik 326). In the eighties up to today, Islam has also appeared in one of American mass culture, hip-hop, especially the Nation of Islam and its off shot, the Five

Percent Nation of Gods and Earths (Chan-Malik 326; Swedenburg 2). Conversely, contemporary Muslim American literature indicates either the increasing attention to Islam in the United States or the more explicit presence of Islam in these works. In contemporary Muslim American literature, I would argue that Muslim American writers 1) explore American Muslim experiences in the face of anti-Muslim backlash in the U.S. following the 9/11 terror attacks, 2) demonstrate criticism of essentialism both within and without Muslim American circles, and 3) portray or grapple with the building of solidarity with other marginalized social groups in the United States.

Two plays, *The Domestic Crusaders* by Wajahat Ali and *Disgraced* by Ayad Akhtar, can be fruitfully examined for their dismantling of Muslim American identity politics and their portrayal of how Muslim Americans build solidarity with minority groups in the United States. *The Domestic Crusaders* has gained respect for its engaging content that centers on the life of a Pakistani American family. It has received a number of awards, including the Otto Castillo Award for Political Theater in 2011. The play has been performed in various places from a South Asian restaurant to the prestigious John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington D.C., suggesting its appeal among immigrant Muslim communities and among those who consider its educational values. Unlike *The Domestic Crusaders*, which began its performance to entertain mostly South Asian audience or those who sympathize with the social group, *Disgraced* started as a Broadway performance with a general audience. The play earned the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2012 and was soon performed in other big cities, including cities in the United Kingdom, and is now even being produced in Germany. The roots of the conflict of *Disgraced* and the portrayal of the second-generation immigrant Muslim Americans in *The Domestic Crusaders* demonstrates well how immigrant Muslim American literature offers a much more nuanced meditation on how immigrant Muslim Americans transcend identity politics and even

foster solidarity with other minorities or marginalized social groups in the United States.

Chapter 5

Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*: Putting Essentialism in the Spotlight

Winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013, Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* holds a prestigious position among American plays. As soon as one sees or reads the first scene, one cannot fail to find elements that set this play apart from previous winners of the award: Arabic names, Muslim characters, issues of contemporary Muslim Americans. Amir, the main character of this play, is a Pakistani American lawyer from an immigrant Muslim family. As one delves well into the story, he or she will find that Amir's biggest conflict revolves around Islam. The story revolves around the tug of war between his denouncement of the faith that is closely associated with his ancestral homeland and the reality of living in an environment in which a weak tie to Islam is often enough to make someone a victim of prejudice. The presence of recent immigrant characters and the trope of adjusting to the adopted country can lead those who champion the Eurocentrism of the United States to label *Disgraced* an "immigrant play." However, this tug of war between Islam and America in Amir's problematic character characterizes *Disgraced* as a literature born in a country that is experiencing a historical demographic transition, where white people will be a minority by 2043¹⁶. In other words, *Disgraced* is a valid play from an immigrant nation. By this rationale, if one insists on calling this play an immigrant play, he or she will also have to call plays other than by Native American writers "immigrant plays." *Disgraced* explores various types and degrees of essentialism and juxtaposes them with the reality of hybridity, which it treats as a natural background to the

16 Pankaj Mishra questions the validity and worth of categories such as "immigrant fiction" and "New American" in an essay published in *The New York Times*. In it, Mishra argues that such categories are no longer valid considering that immigrant writers, many of whom living in their different linguistic communities in the United States, are parts of today's America. Furthermore, he concludes the essay by stating that such categories are only valid for those who hold that "white Anglo-Saxon Protestants are the main content providers of American identity" (Mishra and Prose).

conflict, thus making the play an authentic.

Disgraced centers around the downfall from grace of Amir Kapoor, a successful merger and acquisitions lawyer working for a Jewish firm. Amir is portrayed as a strong critic of anything Islamic, in contrast to his wife Emily who tenderly defends Islam whenever she has the chance. As a painter, Emily draws the inspiration for her artistic works from “Islam.” At the request of Emily and his nephew, Amir attends a court hearing of a case in which a local *imam* is accused on collecting money for a radical organization overseas. While his presence is fully personal, to provide a moral support, a *New York Times* article ambiguously suggests that Amir is present in the hearing as a legal support. What follows is Amir stumbling upon problems in his workplace, especially as his employers find out about his Muslim origin—and the fact of his name change, which has been unknown to them until then. In the climactic dinner with Emily’s art dealer Isaac and his wife Jory, who is also Amir’s colleague at the firm, Amir’s bad lucks culminate in a fiery fight in which Amir reveals himself not only a self-loather, but also anti-Semitic. Finally, Amir discovers that Jory has just been promoted as a partner by his employers and that Emily has slept with Isaac, which led to a domestic violence. The end of the play sees Amir unemployed and his wife refusing to have any more contact with him, thus completing his downfall.

Disgraced covers a wide are of immigrant Muslim American experience, even the potentially dangerous domain. Its coverage ranges from a fully integrated to the insular Muslim Americans, from the secular or even atheistic to the strictly religious. In relation to Amir, Chris Jones describes *Disgraced* as “something of a *cri de Coeur* for the lot of the upwardly mobile Muslim professional. It’s especially focused on the first-generation Muslim professional, maybe an Ivy League guy married outside the faith and caught between a life of progress alongside

those who claim they harbor neither suspicions nor resentments and the abiding personal sense that everything will come crashing down on his head” (C. Jones). A Muslim American literary work that also covers this area is Mohsen Hamid’s critically acclaimed novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which features a promising young Pakistani professional who then stumbles upon an internal conflict amidst the changing social and political conditions in the aftermath of the 9/11 events. On the other end of the spectrum, Muslims who are strictly religious are also covered. One might even say that *Disgraced* treads into an area that fuels the association between Islam and terrorism with its portrayal a Muslim who cheers for the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Given the severe prejudice towards Muslims after the 9/11, acts of violence that involved Muslim, and the rise of IS, the presentation of a main character who silently cheers after seeing the destruction of the Twin Towers is something that can fuel the prejudice and plays on the fear of American, a topic that recently surfaced and led to a heated media conversation during the 2016 Presidential Election Race. As we look closer, however, it becomes clear that this is part of how the play appeals to its audience.

Replicating Essentialism

Disgraced places the audience in the middle of a dilemmatic situation that its main character, a Pakistani American raised as a Muslim, experiences in the post-9/11 America. The play engages in contemporary Muslim American experience, by replicating the situation that entraps the main character, which forces the audience to empathize with him. In an interview with PBS, Ayad Akhtar states that he sees play as a medium that allows the audience to experience the dilemma that unfolds before their eyes, to empathize with the character (PBS). In practice, *Disgraced* only presents Amir with his sweeping generalizations of Muslims without any redeeming resolution. With this, the play replicates the situation of being in the middle of a

confusing situation, a situation that can be misleading if the audience is not aware of the unreliability of Amir as the most prominent character in the play. This is consistent with Akhtar's statement that for him "art was no longer about self-expression but about creative engagement with the world," but not by "being a spokesman for anything other than [his] own concerns" (Moss and Akhtar). *Disgraced*, Akhtar's "creative engagement with the world," in turns invites the audience to experience the simulation of the main character's dilemma. This is also the dilemma experienced by "upwardly mobile" secular Muslims in the United States. By making the audience experience this dilemma, *Disgraced* raises social and political awareness without really having to do that explicitly. It is political literature, nonetheless.

At the heart of the dilemma that *Disgraced* simulates for its audience is the danger of essentialism and the understanding of cultural identity that is static throughout history and uniform across geographic regions. The flawed understanding of the identity of Muslims is observable the main character Amir Kapoor, especially in the way he sees Islam and Muslims. For While presenting himself as an enlightened and critical individual, Amir will sound uncritical and biased as soon as he starts talking about Islam and Muslims. In a conversation with Isaac, Amir explicitly states that Islam is a "backward way of thinking. And being" (Akhtar 51) because Muslims, in his understanding, depends on the textual and literal reading of the Quran for all matters in life. For Amir, Quran is the center of the Muslim's life in such a way that anything else that comes after it, that affects the daily life of Muslims throughout history, does not matter in defining the identity of a Muslim. For Amir, any attitude of Muslims that is not compliant with this original source is considered an anomaly. In other words, Amir does not recognize the evolution and variety of interpretations of the Quran among Muslim communities worldwide. When the art curator Isaac proposes that contemporary works by Muslims reflect

creativity infused with devoutness, using monoliths carved by a devout Muslim artist as an example, Amir replies: “When it comes to Islam? Monolithic pillar-like forms don’t matter... And paintings don’t matter. Only the Quran matters” (Akhtar 51). For Amir, any development among Muslims neither renews Islam neither makes the notion of Muslim identity evolve. Islam is still the same religion whose book Amir finds to be “one very long hate-mail letter to humanity” (Akhtar 55). In Amir’s view, Islam as a negative and unintelligent mindset creates what he terms the “Muslim psyche,” which a person needs unlearn in order to be intelligent (Akhtar 53). Amir’s use of “Muslim psyche,” which he sees as a latent tribal mindset that all Muslims have, epitomizes a classical orientalist mindset, which is still current among the exponents of the Islamophobia network. To be exact, Amir’s attitude is comparable to anti-Semitism, except that it targets Muslims instead of Jews. Amir unabashedly hates Islam to the point that it irritates even those who are not Muslim but is sane enough to understand that there is no label better than “self-loather” to describe a person like Amir. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that Amir thinks Isaac, just on the grounds of his Jewish ethnicity, has an unconditional support for Israel. This essentialist attitude eventually severs his ties from his firm, his wife, and his Pakistani background. To use the Anne Phillips identification of the four types of essentialism, Amir’s view of Islam and Muslims is marred by the first type of essentialism, “the attribution of certain characteristics to everyone subsumed within a particular category” (47). All Muslims, regardless of their backgrounds, be it social, economic, academic, etc., follow a “backward way of thinking [and] being.” Towards the end of this section, I will discuss how this essentialism proves to be problematic and potentially causes a (mis)interpretation of the play.

Not so much different from Amir’s essentialism is the attitude of his Jewish employers towards him. For the employers, Amir’s association with Islam is a significant factor in judging

him and even affirms their long-held suspicion. After the ambiguous report on *The New York Times* about Amir's presence in the hearing, his employers dig into his history and find out that Amir was born a Muslim, grew up in a Muslim home, and changed his name allegedly to disguise his Muslim past. From Amir, the reader later finds out that Steven, one of his employers, takes issue with Amir never telling about his name change and his Pakistani background. Amir's name change affirms his other employer's opinion that Amir is "duplicitous" (Akhtar 73). To add to that, Steven, who is a loyal supporter and big donor for the State of Israel, also takes issue with Amir being present in the hearing of a person accused of raising money to support terrorism. Steven's change of attitude towards Amir eventually leads to Amir's decreasing responsibility until he eventually loses his job. We can assume here that Amir's years of loyal service to the law firm is not strong enough to help him keep his position. This leads us to assume that having a Muslim past and giving a moral support for a Muslim allegedly donating for terrorist activities are conclusive evidence to judge a person, neglecting the fact that Amir has denounced his religion and he has attended the hearing because of his beloved wife's plea. For the employers, Amir, who has a Muslim background, by category shares concerns with an alleged terrorist. This act of stereotyping ignores the fact that Muslims have a variety of opinions and political leanings. Neglecting the individuality of a certain group, in this case Muslims, also ignores the historical fact that Muslims are various and many of them criticize one another. This same attitude, in the political realm, can be easily steered into bigotry and marginalization of minority groups.

Another character indicates a sense of essentialism, which is quite subtle. Jory, Isaac's African American wife, makes a comment that is unusual coming from an African American woman. Leading towards the climax in the dinner table discussion, Jory reveals what appears to

be a shocking truth for Emily:

Isaac: I'm married to a woman who has a Kissinger quote above her desk in the den...

Jory: *"If faced with choosing justice or order, I'll always choose order."*

Emily: Why do you have that above your desk?

Jory: To remind me. Not to get lost in the feeling that I need to get justice.

You pull yourself out of the ghetto, you realize real soon order is where it's at...

Emily: Me. Justice. Always.

Jory: You know what they say? If you're young and not a liberal, you've got no heart. And if you're not a conservative...

Amir and Jory (Together): ...you've got no brain. (59)

Jory's attitude indicates that she has passed into the status quo. While she comes from a racial group that even today is still subject to discrimination and police brutality, a racial group that still organizes demonstrations to demand attention to social injustice, Jory chooses to be pragmatic, siding with the status quo. She prefers "order," instead of endlessly demanding justice, because that is actually "where it's at," because that is what to her the inner-cities do not have. This attitude is strikingly similar to Amir's attitude towards Islam. Both tends to see that the problems that their respective communities face are from themselves.

The most ironic presence of essentialism in this play is in Emily, Amir's own wife. Unlike Amir, who exemplifies the first type of essentialism against Muslims, Emily also demonstrates essentialist attitude in favor of Muslims. To use Phillips's expression to describe the third type of essentialism, Emily "[invokes] a collectivity [...] in a move that seems to presume a homogenized and unified group" (47). Concerning Islam, Emily always looks at the bright side of the matter, indicating the lack of healthy suspicion. Emily takes inspiration for her later works from Islamic art, and she values the great achievements of Islamic civilization. With

her focus on the achievements of Islamic civilizations, Emily tends to turn a blind eye on problems that are present among Muslims, such as the exclusivist attitude among Muslims that concerns Amir the most. To take an example, whereas Amir is highly suspicious of the imam's good demeanor towards Emily as a sign that the imam wants to convert her, Emily sees this as a good attitude, not unrelated to the "beauty and wisdom of Islamic tradition" that Emily mentions shortly in the conversation (Akhtar 18). To exacerbate this attitude, Emily does not show awareness of the post-9/11 place of Muslims in American public discourse. When Hussein or Abe Jensen asks Amir to be present in the court, Emily talks Amir into doing it for her, unaware of how his presence will be perceived by the media or the firm where he works. Media eventually misrepresent Amir's presence in the hearing, which angers his employers and makes them scrutinize his background. Being a donor for Benjamin Netanyahu, his firm finds Amir's involvement unacceptable, although Amir does that on the grounds of his love for his wife. It is only at the final scene of the story that Emily realizes that she has been selfish and blinded by her creative preoccupation with Islam (Akhtar 86).

Outside Amir's immediate circle, there are also people who have their own essentialism, namely, the Muslims from Amir's Pakistani circle. Whereas the two types of essentialisms discussed above are directed towards the Other, this last instance of essentialism is directed towards policing a social group's identity, or the fourth type of essentialism according to Phillips (47). Some people in the story try to police the identity of a Muslim by imposing a certain set of behaviors and actions that a Muslim must do to avoid. This kind of attitude eventually patronizes other Muslims and, in the case of Amir, causes a childhood psychological trauma. For Amir, his mother's strictness concerning relationship with Jews gave him an incident in his childhood that he regrets, which we know without him saying it. When his mother found out that he traded

notes with his childhood crush, a Jewish girl named Rivkah, the mother immediately scolded him harshly and spat on his face so he would forever remember of her abhorrence of him having a relationship with a Jewish girl. The scene suggests that for Amir's mother, there are certain attitudes that a Muslim must maintain, and failure to maintain those attitudes will bring serious repercussions. The mother's attitude puts Amir in dishonor and he then dishonored Rivkah, the ultimate cause of his dishonor, in an attempt to absolve himself. Soon after, he suggests that he now no longer believes in such a thing, as he already has "intelligence," which sets him apart for Muslims who still believe in following the strict practices without considering their common sense.

The fourth type of essentialism also appears in an attitude that seen an absolute enmity between East and West. Abe Jensen demonstrates this kind of attitude in his final argument with Amir. Abe Jensen, now already very critical about the U.S. domestic policies in the aftermath of the 9/11, holds the opinion that U.S. foreign policy has led to the creation of terrorist organizations. He is also aware of the surveillance programs conducted the federal government. Amir's discussion about the Quranic verse about beating women and about Imam Fareed who has allegedly collected money for a terrorist organization might be bitter scattered examples that can potentially lead to the affirmation of suspicion towards Muslims. Similarly, Hussein's statement about Muslim communities being infiltrated by informants reflects what has been circulating as words of mouth. However, while Hussein sounds quite convincing—and confirming words of mouth about the surveillance programs—his judgment seems to conflate complicated issues into simplistic narratives, such as his belief that Al-Qaeda was created directly by the CIA. Furthermore, his simplistic radicalization becomes clear as he starts referring to colonization by the "West" as disgracing the "East." Here, Hussein reveals his

dichotomous thinking in seeing the relation between “East” and “West,” disregarding the hybridization that has taken place following the encounter between “East” and “West.” Like Amir’s and Emily’s characters that are redeemed only briefly at the final scene of the play, so is Abe Jensen’s character. Abe Jensen’s change of attitudes when he appears again at the end of the play adds to the simulation of life circumvented by essentialism.

Hidden Hybridity

The ubiquitous presence of essentialism in *Disgraced* feels caricatural against the ubiquitous presence of hybrid elements. Most of the conflicts in the play stem from characters who tend to draw clear distinctions between people and ignore nuances of matters. While the characters in this play accuse each other, sharply and mildly, of generalizing or simplifying matters, they do not seem to accept that they have ever-evolving cultural identities. These characters hold a view of cultural identity “with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (Hall 223). I would argue that the problem here is that the characters think about cultural identity as one point of reference for every member of a social category while they live in a society composed of people of various cultural backgrounds. Unlike the post-colonial Algerian context, which Hall uses to exemplify where the stable one-reference way of thinking about cultural identity can offer a powerful critical tool, the United States, especially from the perspective of minorities, demands a way of thinking about cultural that is more flexible and inclusive. As discussed above, Amir believes that the identity of Muslims lies in the Quran, and cultural achievements that came latter cannot surpass the importance of the Quran as literally read. Meanwhile, Steven and Mort, Amir’s employers, change in their judgment of Amir the moment they find that Amir has a Muslim past, which he tries to denounce as much as he could.

These personal narratives are interestingly set in a world occupied by people growing up

and living in more than one cultural background. The adult lives of these characters are different from their younger years, facts that are clear and referred to incessantly throughout the play, suggesting the play's awareness of the hybridity and elasticity of the characters' identities. Amir, while strongly essentialist of the first type in his attitude, works in an environment where cultural identity seems to be very fluid, although for different reasons. His employer, Mort, who is not featured in the play except for the influences of his decisions, is described a Jew who has a strong interest in Eastern spirituality, especially yoga and traditional healing. While Mort's change is not clearly represented in person except for what the characters talk about him, another character of Jewish parentage is presented here who has also undergone a cultural change: Isaac. Isaac is presented as a Jew, but he has eschewed his Jewish beliefs and customs. In a move that has become a pattern in Akhtar's work, Isaac is excited about Emily's cooking pork tenderloin jokingly commenting that he "Gotta make up for the lost years..." (Akhtar 39). This comment alone might not tell more than the fact that Isaac has purged what remains of his observance of Jewish dietary law—just as Hayat who eats pork to seal his total departure from Islam in Akhtar's 2012 novel *American Dervish*; however, Isaac's presence in the dining scene functions as a foil to show the darkest side of Amir. Through his engagement in a heated discussion with Isaac, Amir reveals himself to be an unredeemable essentialist and, eventually, he reveals himself to have a latent "tribal" consciousness, what he calls the "Muslim psyche," which makes him feel a little pride when he saw the events on September 11, 2001 and when he hears the misquotation from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about his desire to wipe Israel off the map. The heated discussion ends with the following dialog:

Amir: And I'm saying it's wrong.

And it comes from somewhere.

And that somewhere is Islam.

Isaac: No shit it's wrong.

But it doesn't come from Islam.

It comes from you.

Islam has no monopoly on fundamentalism. It doesn't come from a text.

Amir: You don't need to patronize me—

Isaac: You've been patronizing me this whole conversation.

You don't like organized religion? Fine.

You have a particular antipathy for the one you were born into? Fine.

Maybe you feel a little more strongly about it than most of us because... whatever? Fine.

...

But I'm not interested in your *absurd*—and frankly, more than a little terrifying—generalizations... (Akhtar 64)

Isaac points out clearly here the source of Amir's hatred for religion. Isaac here represents the sounder rejection to religion in the grounds of rationalism and humanism, the area of rejection to religion that Amir lacks, clouded by his hatred for his upbringing and religion that he learned growing up. If Isaac is a paragon of hybridity in the novel, a person of orthodox Jewish upbringing who then evolved to adjust more with the larger American upper-class community. The most prominent embodiment and most problematic of multilayered cultural identity is Emily's creative work. As a white American, Emily shows an unusual boldness in her artistic engagement with Islamic arts, especially in a time when people have become more critical about cultural appropriation. Emily takes inspiration from Islamic arts, especially the tiling traditions with their repetitive designs that, according to her, requires submission and quietness, predating the self-effacement aesthetic of midcentury American minimalists by a thousand years (Akhtar 30). She also strongly argues for the constructive role in Western civilization and culture has been overlooked. She closes her explanation "...Islam is part of who we are" (Akhtar 31). While

her attitude suggests a sincere intention, it also indicates her unawareness of how cultural appropriation might be offensive and might revive orientalism, which evokes the memory of colonialism.

However, the depth of Emily's commitment to understanding Islam or Muslims or the Other becomes evident when she paints a portrait of Amir. The portrait, titled *A Study on Velazquez's Moor* are important here for two reasons: the reference to Velazquez's major work *The Portrait of Juan de Pareja* (henceforth *The Portrait*) and the use of the word "Moor" in the title. *The Portrait* is Velazquez's important work that, according to prominent curator Theodore Rousseau of Metropolitan Museum in New York, is "among the most beautiful, most living portraits ever made" (Rousseau 449). The portrait is of a Spanish painter, Juan de Pareja, and who was born to slavery and inherited by Velazquez. Juan de Pareja then became Velazquez's assistant. A noteworthy fact is that he was a mulatto, a person of mix marriage, in his case between a half "moor" and Spaniard father. Velazquez painted the portrait at the peak of his career, when he was also painting Pope Innocent, the King of Spain, and other important royalty. For Rousseau, "[concerning *Juan de Pareja*] Velazquez had only to please himself, and there was a subject for whom he clearly felt real sympathy and affection" (451). Emily comprehends this irony, that a painting of an assistant, who is a "Moor," a second-class citizen, "has more nuance and complexity" than Velazquez's paintings of royalties. The attachment between Velazquez and Juan de Pareja, whom Velazquez also freed in the year when the portrait was painted, emanates in the painting. Palomino suggests that unlike Velazquez's other paintings displayed in Pantheon, this portrait has "truth" (Rousseau 451). In the opening scene of the play, Emily asks Amir to pose in the manner of Velazquez's portrait, and they talk about a recent incident when a restaurant waiter ignores Amir while Amir and Emily go out together, a

treatment that makes Amir feel unimportant as a man of color with a white wife:

Emily: A man, a waiter, looking at you.

Amir: Looking at us.

Emily: Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are. Not until you started to deal with him. And the deftness with which you did that. You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you and what you really are.

Amir: The guy's a racist. So what?

Emily: Sure. But I started to think about the Velazquez painting. And how people must have reacted when they first saw it. They think you're looking at a picture of a Moor. An assistant.

Amir: A slave.

Emily: Fine. A slave. But whose portrait—it turns out—has more nuance and complexity than his renditions of kings and queens. And God knows how many of those he painted. (Akhtar 5)

Just as *The Portrait*, which emanates emotion through the painter's closeness a more than at the superficial level, *Emily's* portrait of Amir also depicts him deeper than just what people see, more than just Amir's brown skin.

By giving it a title such as *A Study on Velazquez's Moor*, Emily imposes a certain reading on her audience. This imposed reading is guided by the association that accompanies the word "Moor," a label for the second-class population in Spain after what is known as the Reconquest of Spain. In *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Manuela Ceballos defines the word "Moor" as the historical name for North African people and, later, Muslims who lived in the Iberian peninsula (Ceballos 739). From the absence of the word from al-Andalus sources (Iberian literature from between the seventh and fifteenth centuries), Ceballos infers that

"Moor or Moors were ideologically charged concepts invoked to depict and produce ethnic, social, linguistic, and religious boundaries, even if those boundaries were porous and often contested (*italics mine*)" (Ceballos 740).

This part in Ceballos's definition can inform us about Emily's use of the word. For one, the word

evokes Juan de Pareja, the enslaved mulatto-turned-painter. For another, it tells the audience that this portrait is not merely about any young man who happens to have darker skin tone. The portrait is about the man's skin tone, which has made him overlooked. Compared to Emily's appropriation of the tiling traditions, the portrait represents a more genuine empathy with an Other. Whereas the former focuses on the formal aspects of the tradition of Islamic arts, the latter centers on the actual plight of an Other, a person of darker skin tone. Thus, it justifies Isaac's preference for the latter than the former, which invokes orientalism to him.

Conclusion

The strong presence of these hybrid elements in as a background to the rampant essentialism in the play helps us see the basic assumptions that underlie *Disgraced*. The focus on the fallacy of Amir's essentialism becomes clear only when it is set against his own evolution from being raised in a religious Muslim family into a fully assimilated young professional living a life very different from his upbringing and displaying a revulsive attitude against Islam. This realization will also lead to a more critical reading of what Amir says about Islam or what Abe Jensen says about the post-9/11 victimization of Muslim Americans. All of these must be read in context. This is a perilous area because there are indeed acts of violence conducted by Muslims and misconceptions about Islam circulating. The replication aesthetic, which in *Disgraced* is accompanied by the mention of patriarchal and exclusivist interpretations of the Quran and the presence of a radicalized young Muslim man, can counterproductively confirm stereotypes or prejudice. This is especially important considering the nature of our reading of cultural expressions by writers from outside the mainstream, which manifests in our slip into intentional or biographical fallacy. To use Jameson's comment on our reading of third world literature, we tend to read Third World literature as "already-read" (Jameson "Third-World Literature in the

Era of Multinational Capitalism" 66). In our current case, we see how the interviewers tend to see that Amir's views coincide significantly with Akhtar's.

As we can infer from the media sources cited in the beginning of this current discussion on *Disgraced*, reviewers have been intrigued by the fact that Amir is not a stereotypical Muslim. Furthermore, they are also interested in knowing how much Akhtar himself as a person growing up Muslim shares with Amir. Behind this tendency, there is a hidden assumption that Amir's outrageous views and what Amir says about other Muslims' are common among Muslims or people like Akhtar, who is from a similar Muslim background. By associating Amir and his opinions with Akhtar's, by accepting what Amir says as true, we conserve essentialism, whereas this play can potentially do more than that.

This is the dilemmatic aspect of *Disgraced*. On the one hand, its replication aesthetic makes the audience experience the dilemma felt by some Muslim Americans, especially those who are upwardly mobile but are still subject to prejudice. This kind of experience can potentially grow empathy and introduce the nuance of problems experienced by Muslim Americans. On the other hand, which is counterproductive to the first, the audience is exposed to negative stereotypes and misconceptions attributed to Muslims. This can leave a serious impact, considering that these statements come from a person who knows Islam from an insider's point of view. For example, Amir mentions about having a blush of joy seeing the destruction of the twin tower, an outrageous statement that can instill fear or hatred among Americans towards Muslims than informing about Muslims. While in *Disgraced* this statement is framed in the context of a person who is raised in a family that views Jews with a misconceived hatred, the association between the character and the author can make the audience see it as a common attitude among Muslims. To take another example of unredeemed misconception, in the heat of

the discussion between Amir and Isaac, Amir mentioned an oft-repeated misquotation of Ahmadinejad. To Isaac's claim that while he is Jewish he is critical to the Israeli government, Amir says: "How about Ahmadinejad's claim to wipe Israeli to the Mediterranean sea?" Amir makes it even worse when he says that he feels some kind of blush when he hears that. Until the end of the discussion, nobody corrects Amir for this common misquotation in the United States. With this misquotation, *Disgraced* conserve the fearful stereotype that Muslims hate Jews and want to do something like the holocaust.

With the comprehensive exploration of essentialism and the misled understanding of the concept of cultural identity, *Disgraced* is an important contemporary Muslim American literary work. That it is a tricky play in terms of its seemingly neutral and participatory aesthetic makes it even important to accompany it with adequate criticism. Without such criticism, what potentially can be an engaged literary work will become a work that fuels the Islamophobia by confirming stereotypes. Partly to provide a balance in the analysis, the next chapter will discuss Wajahat Ali's *Domestic Crusaders*, which has a starkly different atmosphere but brings further the discussion on essentialism and the hybrid nature of diaspora identity. The analysis will highlight the clash between members of the family who are still holding on to essentialism and the younger generation that has started to embrace their hybrid identity and is determined to decide their future with this in mind.

Chapter 6

Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*: Purging the Model Minority Status

The Domestic Crusaders portrays one day in the life of a Pakistani American family that has been experiencing a gradual transformation towards Muslim American identity. The family consists of three children (Salman, Fatima, and Ghafur), parents (Khulsoom and Salman), and a grandfather. On this particular day, the three generations gather together to celebrate Ghafur's (the youngest son) birthday. Khulsoom and Salman migrated to the United States when their first son was very young, and their other children were American-born. Salman has been a relatively successful professional and has given what he considers the best education for his children, which he believes will enable them to get the best careers. However, his children do not all follow his design. The first son has become a rebellious young man who is on bad terms with the father. Fatima the second child is a law student who likes to join demonstrations and is dating an African-American Muslim. The third son, to his father's disappointment, has just decided to take a doctoral degree in history, instead of in medicine as his father has planned for him. Instead of working as a doctor and making good salary, the son wants to help educate American students about history or to teach students in inner-city public schools.

The Domestic Crusaders shares many similarities with *Disgraced*. Not only is it written by an author who hails from Pakistani Muslim immigrant families, they also deal with difficult moments in the lives of South Asian immigrant Muslims in the United States. While novels or short stories by Muslim Americans from South Asian background are quite many, plays by writers of this background are not too many. Aside from *Disgraced* and *The Domestic Crusaders*, one can find *Dirty Paki Lingerie* by Aizzah Fatima, who was published in 2015. Previously, the only other play by South Asian American that gain popularity was Aasif

Mandvi's *Sakina's Restaurant* (1998), which was turned into a Hollywood movie *Today's Special* (2009). Like *Disgraced*, and *Dirty Paki Lingerie*, *The Domestic Crusaders* have also gained a significant critical success although it appeals to a different audience. Its popularity suggests the relevance of this play to our attempt of seeing the cultural response of immigrant Muslim Americans to the changing social landscape that surrounds Muslim Americans.

However, it does not take too long for anyone to notice that *The Domestic Crusaders* are significantly different from *Disgraced*. As I indicated above, *The Domestic Crusaders* has a different audience. If *Disgraced* started as a Broadway show and then was played in various prestigious theater stages around the country and abroad that are more associated with what is known as "professional commercial theater" (Donahue and Patterson 1). On the contrary, according to its website, *the Domestic Crusaders* has been performed venues that falls into the category of "not-for-profit theaters," in which events are sponsored by Muslim organizations, academic organizations (Donahue and Patterson 2). While members of the audience are presumably ordinary theater-goers, many members of the audience for *The Domestic Crusaders* are South Asian Muslims, students, or people interested in immigrant issues. Regarding the characters that people the plays, *Disgraced* features characters who are of assorted ethnicities, whereas *The Domestic Crusaders* only presents first and second generation Pakistani immigrants in a family of six. From these differences, there is arguably a difference in the focus of the play. If *Disgraced* centers on the issues of essentialism that are common in immigrant circles, *The Domestic Crusaders* tends to focus more on the constructive side of immigrant Muslim American experiences. *The Domestic Crusaders* depicts the process towards the formation of a pluralist America as immigrant Muslim Americans who are socially upwardly mobile leave their "model minority" status and embrace other ethnic minorities and build alliance.

How Matrimony and Job Can be Political

The Domestic Crusaders presents the audience with an affluent immigrant Muslim American family that has reaped the benefit of the 1965 Immigration Act. Salman the father came to the United States as a young dad with his wife and first son. And now, after over twenty years, Salman's family lives in a suburban house and sends and has sent all their children to college. Hakim, Salman's father, is now with them to enjoy his old age. Salman's oldest son, is now making money working in stock exchange. The second and third child are still in college, heading towards success. In short, the family is a portrait of a member of the "model minority" stereotype, a term whose use to refer to South Asian immigrants is getting more common.

Initially, the "model minority" stereotype was popular only to refer to East Asian Americans. According to A.L. Aoki in *Encyclopedia of Minorities in American Politics*, model minority is a stereotype used to refer to a minority group that has gained high earnings and advanced education. This term is used to refer to the East Asian minority in the United States. According to V. Bascara in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*, the model minority stereotype "serves a supposed evidence that America is truly meritocracy" (Hartlep 214). This stereotype, however, creates a sweeping generalization of all members of the group, disregarding the fact that many Asian Americans are among the lowest class in the society. In 2010, however, Asian Americans are not the only group that bear the stereotype. Today, this stereotype is not only restricted to East Asian people. People of South Asian origin, especially Indians, have also displayed the characteristics that gave Asian Americans the stereotype. According to a 2010 Pew Research poll, East Asians still appear to have high percentage of members who have college education and earn a high average income, Indian Americans have surpassed them in both aspects. Whereas 51 percent of Chinese Americans and 46 percent of Japanese American have

college degree, 70 percent of Indian Americans have college degrees. Whereas Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans share the same average household income of 65,000 dollars per year, Indian Americans have an average household income of 88,000 dollars. Thus, South Asian Americans are unquestionably the newest model minority despite challenges to this group. Muslim Americans, many of whom come from India and other South Asian countries, also contribute to the rise of South Asians as the newest model minority. Salman's family, with their success in career and education, is unquestionably a member of this group that has been stereotyped as the model minority

However, unexpected ways to Salman and Khulsoom, the younger members of the family show the tendency to disavow such stereotype. Instead tracing the design that has be laid out by their parents, and in compliance with the societal expectations, the children decide to live lives on their own terms. By "societal expectations," I am here referring to the expectations that are common among South Asian immigrants, who are commonly referred to as "desi," a Hindi word that means "region or area" that is now used to refer to people from South Asian countries. Initially, during the exchange between the first and second children, Salahuddin and Fatima, and their mother, Khulsoom, there appears to be a cultural tension between generations: the daughter calls her mother "fresh of the boat," while the mother refer to them as "American Born Confused Desi."¹⁷ As the story unfolds, it becomes clearer that the children, taken together, are more than "confused." While the first son has paved the path in a manner that has angered the father—the father and son are in a non-speaking term, the second and third children are moving towards a progressive change in the family. They do live in their affluent family and regularly return home,

17 The term "American Born Confused Desi" is a disparaging term used usually by first generation immigrants to refer to the younger generation of South Asian Americans who show resistance to the parents' custom. This is often used to counter the "FOB" label used by the younger generation to refer to the old generation.

but they are on the path towards being members of the larger American society in a more participatory way. At this point of their lives, however, this progressive tendency manifests in their departure from their insular community and its expectations.

The first move that indicates a departure from the insular immigrant Muslim American community from Pakistan is the attitude towards matrimony. In the first scene of the play, when Fatima and Salahuddin are talking to their mother, one of the topics of their conversation is marriage. Her mother, in line with the customs in her community, expresses her wish to see Fatima married and laments the fact that she is still single while already 24 years of age—which in her community is considered somewhat late for marriage. Fatima has made it clear that for her “[l]ife doesn’t revolve around marriage” (Ali 7) and does not plan to get married soon. On top of that, later in the play we find that Fatima has a relationship with Aziz, an African American Muslim man. Khulsoom strongly disagrees with the relationship and wants her to stop it, but Fatima indicates that she does not plan to end it (Ali 32).

The fact that it is with an African American man that Fatima has a relationship also hints at her readiness to challenge another tendency in Fatima’s family and community, a tendency to favor people with fairer skin color. In a comment on a man who can be a potential husband for Fatima, Salman the father says: “Hmn, hanh, I remember him. A charming man. Educated, intelligent. A little dark, but I liked him. He’s making really good money now. Stable job. Parents aren’t hyderabadi—” (Ali 30). Here, he suggests preference for lighter skin tone, although it is not an absolute factor. In *Transnational Muslims in American Society*, Religious Studies professor Aminah Beverly McCloud discovers in her field study that South Asian Muslims in the United States prefer to marry or marry off their children to people with lighter skin tone, regardless of their race. However, as McCloud also states that

“though they are color conscious in the extreme, they know it is wrong. Young men and women readily admit the extreme color consciousness while their parents patently deny its existence with the same amount of passion” (*Transnational Muslims in American Society* 65)

In this 2006 work, McCloud states that the new generation’s awareness of this color preference has not been brought up as a topic of community conversation. *The Domestic Crusaders*, conversely, indicates that the older generation no longer lets this color consciousness be the final judge for their children’s life. In a conversation between Khulsoom and Salman in their closed bedroom, Khulsoom expresses her acceptance of whatever might happen to them in the future:

“Ghafur and Fatima have grants and scholarships, we can sell this house—with these kids all marrying white women or black men, we’re going to end up in the old senior-center home, anyway” (Ali 82).

Here, she indicates that there it is something inevitable in their American life, which they should have anticipated before they decided to move to the United States. What started as the daughter’s resoluteness in her view of when to marry and with whom eventually turns into something that amounts to educating the elders about race relations and the way one sees color.

The second indication of the children’s departure from the insular community and their “model minority” status appears very clearly in their choice of profession. Salman, who came to the United States as a young student and then became successful after taking a job as an engineer, also plans for his children to follow his path, completing their education and securing good, well-paying, and respectable jobs. He sent them to private schools, which cost high, in the hope to give them the best preparation before studying engineering, medicine, or law in the university. The children, however, do not all follow the father’s design. Fatima goes to the law school; however, instead of doing her school work as quickly and possible and graduate to be a lawyer, she appears to be more lenient about school and prefers to take to the street protesting injustice, especially related to the plight of Muslim Americans. She does it to the dismay of her

mother who is concerned about what people would think about: "... Instead of attending her law-school classes, goes to these rallies. Once such a nice girl, now wearing hijab, giving controversial speeches, getting arrested at the university protest, going out on the town with *blacks*—" (Ali 7). Fatima prefers to stand up for humanitarian cause such as the massacre of Muslims (Ali 28), U.S. support for the Israelis who use heavy weapons to respond to the Palestinian resistance (Ali 30), and so on. She even goes as far as getting arrested for joining protests (Ali 32). She is still a student, but it seems that she indicates that her politics related to life and work will be in contradiction with that of her parents and her brothers. She is critical to his brother's lifestyle, such as his wearing an expensive belt that might have been produced by poor people in the third world. Fatima's temerity to express her political opinions and her participation in protest does not reflect the idea behind the "model minority" stereotype, which includes the image of docility. The model minority usually consists of people who have advanced skills, have high earnings, contribute to the economic development, and do not cause problems in the society. In fact, as Aoki mentions in her encyclopedia article, the concept of model minority "is often exaggerated to undermine the claims of racial minorities when they call for race-based compensatory policies" (*Encyclopedia of Minorities in American Politics: Volume 1 African Americans and Asian Americans* 309). Fatima raises awareness about social issues. Her arrest also indicates the seriousness of the disturbance that her protests caused, contradictory to the impression of "docility" that is expected from a model minority.

What proves to be the pivotal conflict of the play is the controversial decision of profession that the main character makes. Instead of following the path that has been prepared by his father, Ghafur decides to be an educator by majoring in history, focusing on Middle East, Islam, and Arabic. Eventually, he wants to pursue a profession that satisfies his wish to "make

people unlearn all the misinformation they've been force-fed their whole lives about Muslims, Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East" (Ali 55). This is contrary to what his father expects, that he will become a doctor. While there is no doubt that Salman acknowledges the nobleness of the teaching profession, he also thinks that being a teacher is not in his and Ghafur's best interest. Teaching is a position that one can take after one retires, suggesting his opinion that teaching is an easy profession. In the parents' opinion, a respectable as well as well-paying profession is important not only because it brings home a lot of money but also because it makes their South Asian circle respect them. For Salman, when Ghafur becomes a doctor, "everyone will see and take notice" (Ali 51); conversely, Ghafur's being a teacher or professor will humiliate the parents (Ali 55). Ghafur, unlike the stereotypical members of model minority who take high-paying positions such as engineers, doctors, computer scientists, and the like, prefers a profession that will leave a different impact, a profession that not many people with his background want to take up. Citing the misinformation about "Muslims, Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East," Ghafur holds that the teaching profession is not less important than the professions favored by his parents' "community."

Through the intergenerational difference of opinion in the two areas, i.e. matrimony and career choice, *The Domestic Crusaders* also points the shift of orientation across generations. While the parents consider their place in the community or "social acceptability" a very important, even defining, factor, the children have begun to see that there is a bigger issue to consider, i.e. the nation-wide "misinformation ... about Muslims, Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East." "Social acceptability" is of utmost importance among South Asians, and in *The Domestic Crusaders*, this idea is present strongly in the trope of gossip. For Khulsoom, both Fatima's relationship with the African American Aziz and her getting arrested for joining protests are

unacceptable because these have become topics of gossips in the “community,” which refers to her circle of South Asians in America. For Salman, similarly, Ghafur’s decision to be a teacher or a professor hurts him because such a thing ruins the family’s integrity in the “community.” In her study on transnational Muslims in America from South Asia, Amina McCloud also discovers that for South Asian Americans,

“[f]amily integrity, longevity, and cohesiveness are central, and some would say critical, to existence in South Asia. ... Parents rear children with both love and firmness, binding them in loyalty to the family, and the family all over the world is the community. All adults in the family along with the society affirm the child-rearing pattern, as do film and music. One goal of the family is social acceptability.” (McCloud *Transnational Muslims in American Society* 61)

For the parents, having a good profession is tightly related to their family integrity, to gaining recognition, in their community. For Salman, Ghafur’s being a doctor makes “everyone ... see and take notice.” The children are supposed to follow because that is part of being loyal to the family. Thus, a good profession is an ingredient for being socially acceptable.

The children, however, no longer hold on social acceptability in their South Asian American circle as the measure for their success in life. Their scope has expanded to include the entire United States. Their attitude resonates the common tendency among the younger generation of South Asian Americans, as suggested by McCloud when she states that “[younger people interviewed in the study] manifest the Western notion of learning to protest any infraction of what is perceived as right” (*Transnational Muslims in American Society* 61). For Fatima, what is right is to see that there is “no color barrier in religion” (Ali 7), and it is also right for her to criticize the U.S. government for their position in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. For Ghafur, it is also right that he wants to educate fellow Americans and to clarify the above-mentioned misinformation. For Fatima and Ghafur, these things are so compelling that they can ignore gossips within their community, which is relatively minuscule compared to the entire United

States.

This attitude signals a major shift in the way the immigrant Muslim Americans in this family see the United States. Khulsoom and Salman's attitude suggests that they came to the United States for a better education and living. However, they have lived a somewhat insular life, mostly within their own Pakistani immigrant circle and not with their American neighbors. Ghafur mentions this and more when he proposes the importance of building bridges in clarifying misinformation. Prior to expressing his intention to be a teacher, Ghafur expresses what appears to be the reason behind his decision:

“These extremists using those millions to teach their perverted version of Islam. The Taliban thinking it's Halal and Islamic to beat and lock up women. Thinking they're doing God's work. Americans, and these Christians here, thinking each and every Muslim is a Jew-hater about to go berserker-rage and blow himself and everyone else up. No one knows anything. And look at this media—that's the same garbage they get day in, day out. And no Muslim does anything—we just sit and complain. Why don't we go out and tell them how it really is? You could do it. (Ali 49)

This statement breaks down the actual problems in the United States with regards to Muslims. It also evokes the idea that he belongs not only to the family and Pakistani immigrant circle, but also to the United States. Ghafur takes matters in his own hand and decides to take an action. The statement that follows after this aptly captures his sense of belonging to the United States: “Call over all these neighbors—do a potluck. We've lived here fifteen years and I don't even know most of their names. Go to those churches and do some interfaith dialogue” (Ali 49-50). Thus, the younger generation in this family, especially Fatima and Ghafur, departs from the safe “model minority” zone of their parents towards the larger American society. Their attitude towards matrimony, career, and even gossips—together these factors play an important role in this process. It is not surprise then, that these themes are also popular in other literary works by immigrant Muslim Americans, especially those from South Asian background. Here, we can take Aizzah Fatima's play *Dirty Paki Lingerie* and Ayad Akhtar's novel *The American Dervish* as

two examples where profession and gossip are present and influential in the lives of the characters.

The Shifting Religiosity

Throughout this widening of scope from the tight-knit South Asian Muslim community to the larger American society, a shift in religious understanding plays a defining role. The first aspect of this shift of religiosity is the diminishing influence of South Asian culture in their application of religious practices. As the suggested in exchanges about Fatima's relationship with an African American Muslims in demonstrations and about Ghafur's decision to major in history, the younger generation of Salman's family understands religion and religiosity in a different way, in a way that empowers them to pursue social engagement. A very short line that suggests this enlightening aspect of religion is Fatima's reply to her mother's disparaging remark about black students with whom Fatima has protested: "Remember, no color barrier in the religion" (Ali 7). Unlike the parents who still strongly wish to hold on the tendency of preferring their children to marry a South Asian Muslim man, Fatima does not want to acknowledge that the man she wants to marry has to be a South Asian Muslim. She prefers Aziz, a Muslim convert, whom she describes like a future perfect husband:

"... He's such a good person. And we did everything Halal. We haven't even done anything! And he's smart and kind and he's passionate. He doesn't drink, and even before converting he never messed with girls or drugs or any of that. And he knows Arabic, like, *fluently*—totally awesome recitation and accent" (Ali 69)

Fatima here espouses an understanding of religion that is less influenced by the South Asian culture. Her being Muslim connects her to Muslims of other social groups in the United States, consistent with the trend among younger South Asian Americans. McCloud finds that "most of the young that that [she] spoke with refused to acknowledge their ethnic heritage and preferred to be just "American Muslims" rather than Pakistani or Indian" (*Transnational Muslims in*

American Society 66). Identifying as “American Muslims” instead of “Pakistani American” or “Pakistani American Muslims” brings them into a common ground that they share with Muslims of any ethnicity in the United States.

The second aspect of the character’s shift of religiosity is the increasing tendency to espouse the more ethical and organic understanding of religion. Salman is a traditionally practicing Muslim, but Islam does not appear to influence his profession. Fatima and Ghafur, on the other hand, take Islam into account in every important decision that they make. The tension between Ghafur’s more organic religiosity and Salman’s exotericism is hinted in their heated exchange after Ghafur expresses his decision to study history:

“Ghafur: Why not? As Fatima said—at least I’ll get the opportunity to make people unlearn all the misinformation they’ve been force-fed their whole lives about Muslims, Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East. And inshallah, Abu and you will get the blessings of my work.

Salman: Don’t bring religion into this. Using it to cover up your lying and deceit! Hunh? What—no, no, humiliating your parents, that’s part of the Qur’an and Sunnah, right? Now he’s teaching me about Islam—like I’m an idiot! I don’t know anything. Lying to me and using my money! Making a jackass out of me all this time! (Ali 55)

Ghafur’s statement indicates the importance of religion and its adherents, his people, in his decision to study history. His ending his statement about the “blessing” that his father will gain from his service to the religion and people also suggests his understanding of his parents, who believe in the afterlife and the blessing that one gets from his or her good deeds.

However, all these breakthroughs that the young people make in the story do not necessarily cause the young people the eventual voices of the story. In fact, the play ends with a scene that awakens the young people from their idealistic obsessions

Conclusion

The Domestic Crusaders is an alternate portrait of a post-1965 immigrant family from

South Asian countries arriving in the United States to work in technology-related fields. Rather than undergoing an easy assimilation into the larger American culture, the family goes through a different route. The children do not follow the lead of the parents in building the American dream by taking high-paying professions, gaining success in those fields, leading good lives, and assimilating into the rank of affluent Americans. They do not take advantage of being the member of the model minority who benefited from what Vijay Prashad calls the “inferential racism.” Instead, the play suggests that the young children are eager to build alliances with the disadvantaged members of American society. In *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Prasad discusses “antiblack racism” among Indian South Asian Americans. In his discussion, Prashad argues that South Asian Americans need to dispel their anti-Black racism, to leave behind the model minority rhetoric, and build an alliance with black Americans. Following the 1965 Immigration Reform, South Asian immigrants have made a significant presence with their average higher level of education compared to white Americans. Their success has sometimes been interpreted as the result of hard work and exceptional traits, neglecting the fact that the underprivileged African Americans have experienced structural racism such as ghettoization, depriving them of adequate capital to compete with the South Asian immigrants who are actually often from the privileged group in their home countries (Prashad 171). Thus, elevating South Asian immigrants to a model minority status is a racism, despite the fact that it is, on the surface, a positive stereotype (Prashad).

By the same token, the relationship between immigrant Muslims and African American Muslims is often marred by immigrant Muslims’ tendency to see their Islam as being superior to the one practiced by African Americans. This is the case even toward the followers of Imam W.D. Muhammad, who in 1975 brought the organization formerly known as the Nation of Islam

into the fold of traditional Sunni Islam. In his ethnographic fieldwork, Akbar Ahmed heard African American Muslims complain “that immigrants behaved as if they had a monopoly on understanding Islam, viewing African American Islam as ‘secondhand’ version, despite the efforts of individuals like W.D. to promote orthodox learning and scholarship in the community” (209). The negative sentiment that African American Muslims feel about immigrant Muslims is more egregious when it comes to the topic of Nation of Islam, whose followers are considered not real Muslims by immigrant Muslims due to their veneration of The Honorable Elijah Mohammed as a Prophet, even though Nation of Islam was a strong element in the civil rights struggle for black Americans and has been the gateway for African American Muslims into Sunni Islam. Immigrant Muslims, according to Ahmed, tend to “[fail] to appreciate ... the community’s struggle to reach toward a distant vision of Islam in difficult if not impossible circumstances” (169). From the perspective of African American Muslims, immigrant Muslims whom they perceive wealthy do not comprehend the reality of life for African Americans. Immigrant Muslims, especially those who came after the 1965 Immigration tend to accept “‘America for the wealthy’ and do not want to deal with problems of racism, inner cities and the like” (Ahmed 210). This is an irony considering that fact that the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act was a response to the nationwide Civil Rights movement. In the words of one of the African American Muslims interviewed by Ahmed, “[immigrant Muslims] see us through white eyes” (208).

However, as revealed in this analysis, the second-generation immigrant Muslim Americans in *The Domestic Crusaders* challenges the norms of living insular lives and focusing on technology-related professions. The younger generation, more physically and mentally attached to the reality of American life than to the homeland, lean towards building connections

with Muslim Americans. Besides, as Fatima strongly states, and consistent with McCloud's observation of young South Asian American Muslims, the South Asian Muslim American youngsters prefer to identify themselves as "American Muslims" than as Pakistanis or Indians (*Transnational Muslims in American Society* 66). The 9/11 events and the need present Muslims as part of the American fabric have undeniably become a tipping point in the trends among second generation immigrant Muslim Americans towards becoming members of the larger American society and assuming the social responsibility as members (McCloud *Transnational Muslims in American Society* 67).

In conclusion, it is important to highlight the elasticity of cultural identity in a time when immigrant Muslims in the United States are often seen as foreigners even though they were born and raised in the United States and have identified more as Americans than any other nationalities. Failure to perceive the ever-evolving nature of cultural identity will conserve, and even aggravate xenophobia. Besides, when this narrative and rhetoric are appropriated by politicians, either during presidential race or in policy making, what results is further prejudice towards certain social groups. In fact, it will result in gratuitous fear and stereotyping. In their different ways, *Disgraced* and *The Domestic Crusaders* offer portrayals and depiction of how immigrant Muslim Americans view themselves and their positions within the American society and in their own immigrant Muslim American circles. The roots of the negative sentiment towards Islam, and Muslim Americans by extension, are the dangerous essentializing tendency both in the way some people viewing Muslims and in the way some Muslims view themselves. In addition to that, there has not been enough attention given to the agency of Muslim Americans, especially the younger generation, who have reached out to the larger American society. Without this attention, it will be easier to think of immigrant Muslim Americans are one

insular community, neglecting their diversity and complexity. As Stuart Hall asserts towards the end of this essay on cultural identity and diasporas, cultural representations are not only faithful portrayals of the diasporas; rather, they are also what shapes their cultural identities. Understood as such, the two plays analyzed here also shape the cultural identity of immigrant Muslim Americans.

Conclusion

Towards the Investigation on Wider Muslim Experiences through the Epistemic Status of Muslim American Literature

The discussion in the previous chapters have proposed answers to the question of how Muslim American literature represents the tension between the imagined and lived experiences in Muslim American life. The literary works examined in this study offer an avenue to understand some of the experiences of some Muslim Americans, both lived experiences as well as intellectual experiences. By performing such roles, which is not how more mainstream American literary works operate as per Jameson's argument on literatures from marginalized cultural pockets being immediately political and Third World Literature that can be read in a national allegory, Muslim American literature calls for a different type of reading. However, such a function is not unique in that it occurs also in literatures from other marginalized communities in the U.S.—such as African American literature and Chicana/Chicano literature. Still, literary works by Muslim American authors are significant in shedding light on the experience of Muslims, whose presence in the United States has been intertwined with the global policies of the United States.

As the discussion in the previous chapters have demonstrated, these Muslim American literary works which I examine are often very political and are carrying the traces of Muslim American experiences. Granted, it is too far to claim that Muslim American literature is only about politics, but this body of literature is rich with highly political works. The literary works discussed above, when considered a manifestation of Muslim American identity that keep redefining the identity of Muslim Americans, are indeed powerful means to see Muslim American intellectual as well as lived history, as suggested by Satya Mohanty. In fact, a closer

look at Muslim American literary works also helps to answer the general tendency to see Muslims as not belonging to the United States and that Islam is the opposite of the United States.

As Stuart Hall emphasizes in the last moments in his essay, cultural identity can be understood as constantly redefined with every iteration by a member of a diaspora community, which is also the case with the cultural identity of Muslim Americans. Following Hall, Muslim Americans also have various several “presences,” namely the ancestral land presence, European presence, and finally American presence. The cultural identity of Muslim Americans, seen from this non-essentialist point of view, thus can be found in any cultural expressions that come out of this social group. Every time a Muslim American artist, writer, director, and so on, creates, an aspect of the fluid cultural identity of Muslim Americans can be seen. Such cultural expressions are not only the mirror to the diaspora people, but also one that continually defines the cultural identity.

I proposed to read this aspect of Muslim American identity along with its epistemic potential to understand the experiences of Muslim Americans, following Satya Mohanty. The project was conducted with the assumption that Muslim American literary works carry with them traces of the intellectual or theoretical experiences as well as the lived experiences of Muslim Americans. Considering that Muslim Americans comprise of various demographic groups, and each group has a specific set of live and intellectual experiences as discussed above, it becomes important to study each manifestation of cultural identity independently before going further. Doing so, a researcher can construct a picture of Muslim Americans from the reading of Muslim American literature in the light of each demographic group’s history. Doing so, we will be able to see the place of Muslim American experiences and intellect in American life.

The relationship between Muslim American literature and its backgrounds also shows a

dialectic which also informs the reader of the spirit that is most influential. In line with Fredric Jameson's proposal that works that are not yet influenced by the capitalist is essentially a national allegory, this dissertation has also demonstrated the extent to which Muslim American literature is a "national" allegory of Muslim American experience. This, as we have seen in the previous chapters, proves to be a complex issue considering the diversity of Muslim Americans in terms of their background and material conditions. What in Jameson is called "nation" cannot be immediately applied to Muslim Americans. Instead, if "nation" is to be understood as a social group of people with a shared history, place of living, and ideal, we can see that Muslim Americans comprise multiple "nations." Muslim Americans of different ethnic groups have different histories, experiences, and ideals. To read them as one social group would be neglecting the richness of this group and, most of all, the reality that is before our eyes. Therefore, a reading of Muslim American literature from this Jamesonian perspective requires a collection of minute studies, although it is very possible to make a connection between those studies. For this dissertation, I have conducted two studies each on a major ethnic group that composes Muslim Americans, namely, African American Muslims and South Asian American Muslims.

To establish the objectivity of the study, in the first section of Chapter 1 I theorize that the strongest tendency that has been discovered since the earliest African American Muslim writing is the tension between community building and solidarity with the Muslim community globally. Nation, which in Arabic is called "*asabiyya*," is justified by the social and economic condition of African Americans since their arrival in the New World as enslaved people until the present day when male African Americans are often the target of police brutality. Considering this situation, solidarity with fellow members of African American society is an important part of African American Muslim political causes. This community building tendency is still felt even as

African Americans embrace Islam, a religion that prioritizes solidarity with fellow members of the faith as opposed to other ties such as kinship and ethnicity. The first appearance of Islam among African Americans in the twentieth century is in the Moorish Science Temple of America. In this faith, the teachings of Islam are combined with an ideology that suggests uplifting the self-esteem of African Americans who by then had experienced slavery, abolition, and the Jim Crow law. This prioritizing the community-building was even stronger in the case of the Nation of Islam. Nation of Islam, both the original as well as the rebirth of the organization in 1978, represents the religion of Islam that strongly holds on to the notion of *'asabiyya*, which eclipses the solidarity with fellow Muslims around the globe.

Even as the major element of African American Muslims, i.e. the Nation of Islam, has aligned theologically with the mainstream Sunni Islam, the tension between *'asabiyya* and *umma* tendency is still present. When in 1978 Warith Deen Mohammad brought Nation of Islam closer to the global Muslim community, many of the teachings of Nation of Islam that are against the teaching of Sunni Islam are purged. However, realizing the role of Islam not only as a religious ideology but also a social power, Warith Deen Mohammad community, which evolved out of Nation of Islam, also pays tribute to the legacy of Nation of Islam. In its current movement, thus, African American Muslims, regardless of their current sect, see the community-building element as inseparable from their identity. This tendency gives African American Muslims a unique characteristic.

A close reading of literary works by African-American Muslim writers reveal how the tension between *'asabiyya* and *umma* is also present either as the subject matter or as the narrative. In the case of Marvin X's collection of poems *Land for My Daughters*, we can see that there is a tension between focusing on community-building while building solidarity with outside

African American circle. In terms of community-building, the poems in this Marvin X's collection talks about criticizing the lack of responsibility of the poet himself as a young man, criticizing the denigration of women by African American men in an effort self-criticism. This critique indicates the memory of the hyper-masculinist tendency of the Revolutionary generation. This criticism both affirms the legacy of masculinist rhetoric while at the same time highlighting the presence of an internal contradiction in the movement, in which women were given the opportunity to express themselves and that there were characters who were against such a masculinist tendency. Other than this tendency, Marvin X also shows the widening of his concern. Instead of focusing on the community-building for African American community only, the poems also concern with other groups such as oppressed people in the third world as well as Muslims in other countries in which the United States has a military operation. The community building in this collection takes the form of self-critique and the solidarity with others outside their groups is found in the attitude of the book towards people of other nations and other Muslims elsewhere. In this first work, the tension is not purely between *'asabiyya* and *umma* in the narrow sense, but between narrow loyalty to the nation to the more critical loyalty to the nation.

A variation of the tension is also visible in the Murad Kalam's *The Night Journey*, in which the tension is very subtle and dilemmatic. In the novel, the tension between *'asabiyya* and the solidarity with *ummah* can be felt in the life story of the main character. On the one hand, it might lead to an easier conclusion as the final decision is usually the one the narrative favors. However, that does not appear to be the case with *The Night Journey*. In the twist and turn of the main character's life, one can see the overlapping spirits. Dialectic is a better term to represent the tension between the tendency for community-building in the African American community in

the story and the solidarity or unity of vision with other Muslims around the world. The process of arriving at a final decision regarding the solidarity can be represented by the Islamic Night Journey narrative. The narrative tells about how Mohammed the Prophet goes to the seventh heaven and receives teachings and the order to pray five times a day. The narrative also tells of how Mohammed must choose between the good and the evil (represented by wine and milk) and then between staying in the eternal happiness of paradise and returning to the earth to guide his people. In the novel, this allegory appears in the moment when the main character must choose between staying in Las Vegas with enough wealth but selling his dignity as a boxer and leaving it for returning to Phoenix and to resume the life that he has left behind. His choice to return and continue his education and accepting the sense of responsibility for the youths in his neighborhood without entirely purging his most recent faith represents the acceptance of the community-building spirit of *'asabiyya* and the global ties with fellow Muslims. The main character's implied affirmation of the Million Man March also indicates his acknowledgment of the value of Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam despite its highly Black nationalist rhetoric and tendencies.

As for the tendency that drives the narratives in South Asian American Muslim literature, it is the drive away from essentialist notions that tend to accompany immigrant communities from South Asia. In the words of Jameson in "Third World Literature," if literary works by South Asian American Muslims are to be considered allegory, the reference for that allegory is the fight against the essentializing view of South Asian Americans. This view is consistent with Stuart Hall's argument that the cultural identity of a diaspora community is renewed with every performance of such identity. With that rationale, it is impossible to hold an essentialist view of a diaspora people, a view that is commonly held and displayed towards immigrants, including

Muslim immigrants from South Asia. Such view can manifest in the notion of model minority, which often refers to people with East Asian immigrant backgrounds or, more recently, South Asian immigrants—among which there is a big Muslim population. Such view, when it is held, ignores the emerging fact that more and more public figures with recent immigrant backgrounds build alliance for causes beyond identity politics. South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, Chinese Americans, and Japanese Americans champion the cause of minority communities beyond their ethnic backgrounds. The tendency to bring such phenomenon into attention is present in various manifestations in the works by South Asian American Muslim writers.

In the first work of South Asian American writer discussed in this thesis, the tendency to challenge essentialism is directed at various direction. Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* replicates essentialism through the story of a South Asian American lawyer with Muslim background who has tried to disguise his background only to discover later that such aspect of his identity—when revealed—is still a subject of essentialist views. The play presents the audience with a story of Amir who has decided to leave his Arabic name to disguise his Muslim background and the negative stereotype that comes with it. Later, however, in a caricature of guilty by association scene, he witnesses how the media misreports his presence in a hearing as his support of the Muslim religious leader currently on trial. In addition to highlighting the essentialist view directed against Muslims from outside, *Disgraced* also highlights the tendency among the members of Muslim community to apply an essentialist view in a different way, i.e. demanding the younger generations to follow the standards that are parts of the moral codes in the religion of Islam. The play replicates these two aspects of essentialism that prey on an individual who is caught in between, leaving him a very tight space to express himself as an individual, who is essentially hybrid, comprising two aspects, i.e. Pakistani background and American education.

The reality of hybrid identity, which makes up a strong background in the play, appears caricatural against essentialism as the main theme of the play. When the audience experiences the play and the dilemma that Amir finds himself, it becomes what I argue as the replication aesthetic. The play goes as far as saying the society tends to attribute identity towards a person in a way that is unavoidable and puts a person in a difficult situation he or she can escape. However, there are some potential problems within the application of this replication aesthetic, namely, the presence of themes that can serve to affirm negative stereotypes against Muslims with regards to the events of the 9/11 and views of Israel. The play, nonetheless, contributes to the discussion on the cultural identity of the diaspora people with regards to the prevalent essentialism, both within and without diaspora communities themselves.

Such war against essentialism manifests in a different spirit in Wajahat Ali's *Domestic Crusaders*. Here, the younger generation, those who are raised in the United States, are showing that they want to break away from the model minority stereotype and, instead, they chose to work for the cause of marginalized communities in the United States. A play of three generations, *Domestic Crusaders* depicts the change of political views in a family of Pakistani American immigrants in California. The parents, who have come to the United States to work as an engineer hopes for the best for his children by enforcing to keep the tradition from their land of origin, including religion, and emphasizing the notion of successful career in the field of engineering or medicine. The children, however, have different views. They either do not want anything to do with the tradition or want to strive for something other than success in the narrow understanding of the parents' generation. In the play, the children's generation breaks away from the parents' narrative by choosing a partner from outside their Pakistani immigrant community and by choosing a profession that is not considered lucrative to the parents, such as the teaching

profession and the legal profession for human rights. Considering the force to stay with what is known as the model minority circle and stereotype, matrimony and choice of profession become political in this play. This is so because decisions on those two areas eventually disprove the stereotype of South Asian immigrants as people who come to the country only to reap the wealth of the country for their own benefits. Besides, the second decision, in this case professions that champion the rights of marginalized Americans regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, also emphasizes the commitment of the younger generation of immigrants in the play to improve the social condition of marginalized people in America, an attitude that can only come from a sense of belonging to one's society.

The two plays discussed in this dissertation show different attitudes in depicting the life of Muslim immigrants in the United States. *Disgraced* takes the issue of essentialism that preys on immigrants of Muslim background both from inside as well as from outside. The play takes the issue to the extreme, replicating the difficulty of escaping essentialism because of people's unawareness of their hybrid nature. On the other hand, *Domestic Crusaders* depict, in a more optimistic tone, how essentialism and stereotypes are things that can be replaced by the younger generation who has grown to accept the United States as their home and feel the responsibility to improve it, which can mean working for people who are marginalized regardless of their social backgrounds. The two plays are complementary when discussed in juxtaposition. *Disgraced*, by showing an extreme case of loss in the hands of essentialism, might keep us aware of the real threat of such attitude; meanwhile, *Domestic Crusaders* demonstrates that despite the threat of essentializing views both from within or without the Muslim American community, a change of view towards the Muslim community in the United States is very much possible, and is even on progress, despite ever-strengthening voice that goes to the other direction.

The discussions on the four works from two major components of the Muslim American communities demonstrate the dialectic between Muslim American literature and the sense of nationhood among Muslim Americans. The experiences of Muslim Americans, as we can see from the history of Muslim Americans, are dialectically related to literary works by Muslim Americans, from which we can also infer the experiences of Muslim Americans considering the epistemic status of identity, whose expression can be found in literary works. The tension between efforts for the cause of African community and the connection with other Muslims regardless of their ethnic backgrounds is present prominently in the literary works by African American Muslim writers discussed in this dissertation. However, in addition of being passively reflecting the spirit that is present in the community, these works' engagement with the spirit potentially affects the actual condition of African American Muslims in a constructive way. For example, Marvin X's works champion the continuous awareness of gender relation and pose a continuous reminder of the threat of discreet slavery that looms over African American younger generations, albeit in a different manifestation. This affirms Jameson's argument on the authentic cultural production being those that "can draw on the collective experience of marginalized pockets of the social life in the world system," (*Signatures of the Visible* 31) which here can include African American Muslim communities. While the relation between an authentic cultural production and the class struggle (which in this dissertation is equated to the concerns and struggles of Muslim American demographic groups) is not immediate, in which the former does not causally lead to the other, this projection of reflection and offer of criticisms help raise the awareness of the Muslim American communities from which each literary work is originating. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, this notion applies in all the four works with each works reflecting the concerns of their respective social groups and proposing their

respective criticisms which dialectically contribute to the efforts of such groups in achieving their ideals.

This dissertation offers a humble beginning for a more comprehensive reading on Muslim American literature vis a vis its epistemic status to understand Muslim American experience. Considering the limited number of demographic groups of Muslim Americans discussed in this dissertation, however, this project can be considered an initial attempt in benefiting from literary works by Muslim Americans to understand the experiences (both historically and intellectually) of Muslim Americans. As I mentioned above in the main chapters, Muslim Americans are a religious group that comprises of so many demographic groups. While African American Muslims and South Asian American Muslims are important elements of contemporary Muslim American communities, there are still other Muslim American communities that are influential, such as Arab American Muslims, many of whom are descendent of immigrants from the Levant who arrived in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the recent African immigrant Muslim Americans from countries such as Somalia, white Muslim converts many of whom are active in public both as creative workers as well as teachers of Islam in communities, and still other Muslim American communities. These Muslim American communities also deserve to be studied while considering the intellectual and material experiences that make up their identities. Muslim American literary works or cultural artefacts produced by these groups will provide good materials to read more of Muslim American experiences with the approach that has been applied in this research.

In addition to that, since this research is focused on literary works by writers from two Muslim American backgrounds within a relatively similar period of time, further research can still be conducted on a paradigmatic scheme. Researching and comparing the driving force, or

the allegorical course of Muslim American communities can potentially shed light on the changes in the experiences of Muslim American communities as manifested in literary works. Such research can include a study on Muslim American works across different periods of history, such as the pre-1965 Immigration Act, the Civil Rights Movement, and years following the Iranian hostage crisis, during which US foreign policies often collide with Muslim majority countries. Such research will provide a better view of Muslim American experiences because such research will also touch upon how Muslim Americans take part in American social life, an area that has been explored extensively by historian Kambiz GhaneaBassiri in the field of history but has not been much explored in the field of literary or cultural criticism. I do hope that this dissertation contributes to more wide-ranging research on literary works by Muslim Americans in the hopes to provide a more colorful and far from stereotypical picture of Muslim American experiences, a task that as it turned out has become ironically more urgent despite the sweeping development in communication, which should have ideally made information more accessible for anyone to gain a comprehensive understanding on virtually anything.

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