Islam at Home: Muslim American Literature and American Myths

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2018

Date of final oral examination: 10/19/2018

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Acknowledgments

Alhamdulillah. Praise be to God, and I thank Him for the many blessings He bestowed on me during this process.

I am extremely grateful to my advisor Cherene Sherrard-Johnson whose encouragement and assistance guided me through this project and a huge thank you to Susan Stanford Friedman, Craig Werner and Aida Levy-Hussen who provided invaluable feedback.

Thank you to the friends who provided encouraging words, emotional support and academic guidance, especially Nmachika Nwokeabia, Safiya Songhai, Duaa Salameh and Sagashus Levingston as well as to Eric Gaither who insisted that I include "Moro."

Thank you to my entire family—the many aunts, uncles and cousins who encouraged me along the way—and a very special thank you to Mom, Dad, Samiyyah, Muneerah, Osman and Taliah who provided the love, support and space I needed to do this work.

May God reward you all.

Abstract

This dissertation proposes that understandings of what it means to be Muslim American are filtered through distinctly US configurations of racial identity. *Islam at Home* examines this intersection of race and religion in the writings of Muslim Americans by taking the concept of whiteness and Muslim American identity as sites of difference. I argue that in challenging and reworking US cultural myths, Muslim American writers not only rewrite themselves as at home but also change the very dimensions of home. I use theories of African American Muslim liminality as well as intersectional theories—black Muslim feminist and identity performance— to examine intra-ummah and wider US understandings of Muslim American identity and belonging. Chapter 1 locates the origins of Muslim American literature in the writings of enslaved African Muslims, and through readings of Omar ibn Said's 1831 autobiography *The Life of Omar Ibn Said* (2011) and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) examines the shifts in what it has meant to be black, Muslim, and Black Muslim in the US. I underscore how racism, specifically anti-blackness, figures into the US public sphere's understanding of Muslim identity. Chapter 2 analyzes Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)*,* and examines US and intra-ummah depictions of the hijabi, arguing that US depictions are read through a lens of antipathy to non-white femininity. In centering her main character's experiences between those of two black women, Kahf promotes cross-cultural sisterly alliances as resistance to US racism and xenophobia and intra-ummah silence on anti-black racism. Chapter 3 focuses on Wajahat Ali's play *The Domestic Crusaders* (2004, 2010), and explores some of the different ways in which the post-9/11 racialization of Islam crystallized a number of Muslim identities as not-white. In examining the terrorist *amalgame* I pay particular attention to what it has meant to perform Muslimness as opposed to status as Muslim alone and argue that Ali uses such performances to engage with paradigms that question Muslim American presence and shape what it is to be Muslim against hegemonic ideas of the US.

Introduction

Strangers in the Village: Religious Alterity and Cultural Indigeneity in Muslim American

Literature

Since the twentieth century scholarship on the stranger has flourished with studies depicting the stranger as a completely foreign entity on one hand or as located in each individual on the other. In relation to migration studies, the stranger was thought to dwell exclusively on the margins. However, more recent scholarship emphasizes strangeness as the condition of marginalized domestic populations—as opposed to an exclusively foreign presence or a ubiquitous one—and strangers as those who traverse everyday spaces as opposed to distant borders.

In his essay "re: Location| re: Definition" Muslim American poet, author and educator Mark Gonzales interrogates the process of creating the stranger through his analysis of the "obsessively" asked question "Where are you from?" Noting the question's deceptively simplistic appearance Gonzales writes,

> *"Where are you from?* is one of the most widespread writing prompts across community, cultural, and educational spaces in the United States. A question that, even when asked innocently, is layered with implications. One need only be or ask a person who has ever walked through an urban war zone, or feared forced relocation due to lack of papers, to understand this. For even when offered from the warmest of hearts, *Where are you from?* implies the following: *You are not from here*."[1]

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[1] Mark Gonzales, "re: Location| re: Definition" *All-American:45 American Men on Being Muslim.* Ed. Wajahat Ali and Zahra T. Suratwala. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2012. 29-33. 29-30

In Sara Ahmed's work on the concept of the stranger Ahmed similarly asserts that in such an encounter a type of recognition has already taken place: "Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognized as not belonging,* as being out of place."[2] In addition to its categorization of the stranger, "Where are you from?" simultaneously solidifies the boundaries of those who are recognized as being "at home."

In his musings in response to "Where are you from?" Gonzales proffers several answers that—in taking into account his indigenous Mexican American roots as well as his embrace of Islam—fuse the cultural with the spiritual and alternately both complicate and simplify notions of identity and origin. He ultimately determines:

Where are you from? My mother's womb: no hyphen.

Where are you from? My ancestors: no hyphen.

Where am I from?

Allah. No hyphen.[3]

Gonzales is not alone in his desire to reconcile perceptions of Muslim alterity with US belonging. His essay like others included in *All-American: 45 American Men on Being Muslim* as well as those included in its sister text *I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim* indicates that ideas of estrangement, home and belonging resonate deeply in discussions concerning Islam and Muslim Americans. I begin with Gonzales's essay, however, because much of the scholarship on Muslim American belonging has coalesced around this question—"Where are you from?"

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[2] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality.* London: Routledge, 2000. 21
[3] Gonzales 33.

Islam at Home: Muslim American Literature and American Myths builds upon studies of the relationships between the stranger, home, race, gender and religion in the US to investigate questions of Muslim American belonging. I examine not only Muslim identity but also whiteness as sites of difference. My project primarily focuses on four "indigenous" Muslim American narratives— *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said* (2011),[4] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965),[5] Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006),[6] and Wajahat Ali's play *The Domestic Crusaders* (2004, 2010).[7] I explore how Muslim American writers—an enslaved African, an African American convert, a Syrian American and Pakistani American—negotiate their identity in the face of US representations of Muslim strangers/strangeness and critique ideas of whiteness that give rise to such representations. Thus, the writings assembled here highlight the most prevalent and alienating racial and gender clichés of Muslim identity: the Black Muslim, the hijabi victim/perpetrator, and the post 9/11 "Muslim looking" terrorist. I argue that by refuting and reworking such myths, writers configure themselves as "of here."

While cosmopolitan studies of the stranger have identified the stranger as a universalizing concept, feminist and postcolonial—especially African and African American—scholars have emphasized that estrangement is too often limited to particular bodies. In her *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) Ahmed explains that "The recognition of strangers within the neighbourhood does not mean that anybody can be a stranger, depending on her or his location in the world: rather some-bodies are more recognizable as strangers than

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[4] Omar ibn Said and Ala Alryyes, *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
[5] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley.* With Foreword by Attallah Shabazz. New York: Ballentine Books, 1999.
[6] Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: A Novel.* New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006.
[7] Wajahat Ali, *Domestic Crusaders.* San Francisco: McSweeny's, 2010.

other-bodies precisely because they are already read and valued in the demarcation of social spaces."[8] She examines the concept of strangers and strangeness away from the margins insisting that it is in proximity that we encounter the stranger.

For Ahmed, the stranger is based on knowledge and is produced in contrast to the "safe" community. Such a contrast between what is strange and what is safe ensures that the designation of being a stranger is not a neutral occurrence but rather one that can have devastating consequences. Although Inderpal Grewal does not employ the term "stranger" in her analysis, she similarly elaborates upon what Ahmed terms "stranger danger." In "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11" Grewal analyzes US racial and gendered stereotypes after 9/11 focusing on Middle Eastern men and Muslims. Her analysis underscores that race, gender and religion have overdetermined the level of threat posed by some-bodies. She writes,

> Through the twentieth century, risk emerged as a mode not only of judging actions and events but also of bodies….From the 'criminal' as one level of risk for violence, to 'terrorist' as the designation of the person who is a risk to the nation, we can see the progressively higher levels of risk associated with particular bodies within specific locations…Such an understanding of 'risk' can enable us to see the ways in which the identifications of 'populations at risk' are allied both to the idea that racial and gendered (and often sexual) minorities are a danger to themselves and to others and thus have to be subject to forms of regulation and self-regulation.[9]

Stranger danger, or the "higher levels of risk associated with particular bodies within specific locations," is not a stable concept. As strangers become stranger the risk increases.

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[8] Ahmed *Strange Encounters* 30.
[9] Inderpal Grewal, "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11." *Social Identities.* 9.4 (2003): 535-561. 539

Postcolonial scholarship has also emphasized that just as the stranger is limited to "particular bodies within specific locations," the designation of who is allowed to be the body at home is similarly regulated. Pointing to Gertrude Stein's statement that 'I am an American and Paris is my hometown,'[10] Chinua Achebe argues that such a statement is inaccessible for third world tourists or even immigrants. The bodies of third world travelers are more recognizable as strangers.

Race plays a central role in US understandings of the stranger. In African American scholarship, race has been a central focus in studies of the stranger even when the designation of "stranger" is not specifically invoked. The trope of being "in and not of" the US, for example, has been a frequent refrain in African American literature with many African American writers noting the discrepancy between full citizenship rights and the rights that have been afforded African Americans. While African Americans have been *in* the US for centuries, it was not until the 1868 ratification of the14[th] Amendment that they were legally made citizens, and the attainment of equal protection of the laws is arguably an ongoing process.

Consequently, many African American writers have equated the stranger or "other" with being black, arguing that we are able to identify the stranger in part because we have already identified the body at home. Audre Lorde's touchstone of black feminist scholarship "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (1984) maintains that "in america" devalued, and what Grewal refers to as "at risk," bodies are in fact read and defined against a "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure" "mythical norm."[11] The more individuals differ from the mythical norm, the stranger they become.

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[10] cited in Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile.* New York: Anchor Books, 2000. 92
[11] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." (1984) *Literary Theory: An Anthology (Revised Edition).* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. 630-636. 631

Not only have Africans Americans been recognized as strangers, they have also been allied to danger/risk. Similar to Grewal's identification of a connection between minority bodies, risk and the subsequent regulation to which those bodies are subject, African American studies of the black stranger have drawn connections between black bodies specifically and the regulation of movement and control of space. Contemporary culture encapsulates the intersection of blackness, local space and danger as "driving/walking/flying/barbecuing/breathing/selling lemonade… while black." In particular, theories of strangeness have linked the patrolling of black bodies historically with US slave patrols when members of the white citizenry would assert authority over black space and black movement. Such linkages open the possibilities for re-evaluating contemporary reports to police of unfamiliar black bodies in familiar spaces as originating from more than just the concern of community members.

African American writers have also pointed to a dependent relationship between the individual who wants to be considered at home and the one designated a stranger. In identifying who the other is, individuals can reinforce their own identity. In Toni Morrison's *The Origin of Others* (2017), for instance, Morrison presents the process of othering as a forced choice—participate in defining the stranger or be at risk of becoming the stranger.[12] Such a choice reiterates the decisiveness of US racial categories, which have been predominantly understood in black and white terms. In essence, individuals capable of distancing themselves from blackness stand a greater chance of attaining full citizenship rights. Blackness has historically been linked to stigma with the US's infamous one-drop rule perhaps being the most visible reification of the country's fixation with race. Of immigrants entering into the dynamics of the US racial system Morrison explains the

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[12] Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017. 30

most enduring and efficient rite of passage into American culture: negative appraisals of

the native-born, black population. Only when the lesson of racial estrangement is learned

is assimilation complete. Whatever the lived experience of immigrants with African

Americans—pleasant, beneficial, or bruising—the rhetorical experience renders blacks as

noncitizens, already discredited outlaws.[13]

Morrison uses her writings to resist racial estrangement through her rejection of the racial

fetishism produced by this othering process.

James Baldwin—whose 1953 essay I am invoking in the title of this introduction—argues

against narratives of African American estrangement as well. He maintains that while he may be

considered a stranger in the small Swiss village that is the setting of his essay, African

Americans can no longer be considered strangers within the US. Baldwin shifts between

bitterness and resignation in his description of the villagers' "innocent" reactions to his presence

and juxtaposes their reactions against the racial climate at home. According to Baldwin

No road whatever will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village

where white men still have the luxury of looking on me as a stranger. I am not, really, a

stranger any longer for any American alive. One of the things that distinguishes

Americans from other people is that no other people has ever been so deeply involved in

the lives of black men and vice versa.[14]

While Baldwin refutes the term "stranger," the meaning that that designation carries for him

differs from the way in which Ahmed employs the term and the way in which I—taking my cue

from Ahmed—employ the term here. The difference can be understood as one of distance: for

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[13] Morrison, "On the Backs of Blacks" in *What Moves at the Margins: Selected Nonfiction.* Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 145-148. 146
[14] James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays.* New York: The Library of America, 1998. 117-129. 129

Baldwin to be a stranger is to dwell on the margins whereas for Ahmed the stranger moves in close proximity. Baldwin notes the wonder that his appearance in Leukerbad causes the local citizens—they marvel at his skin, his hair, the fact that he comes from America[15]—while US black-white relations have long moved from these stages of initial contact. A stranger is for Baldwin someone who is unknown, and if not un- then at most just-recently encountered.

Other critics, however, conceive of strangers as a permanent condition rather than a state that is endured for a short period of time.[16] In Teju Cole's "Black Body," Cole revisits Baldwin's essay as well as Leukerbad's physical location and considers the shifts in Leukerbad's understanding of African Americans since Baldwin's visits. Citing the presence of African American culture that he encounters in the form of R&B and hip-hop music, Cole argues against African Americans being a stranger anywhere in the world by Baldwin's standard. It is not however, by Baldwin's standard that Cole measures when he determines that "To be a stranger is to be looked at, but to be black is to be looked at especially."[17] Cole's essay emphasizes that the global consumption of black culture does not mean necessarily an embrace of the black body. Despite frequent encounters, a particular type of strangeness remains.

Religious Alterity

Turning our attention to strangeness in Muslim American literature can enrich our understanding of what it means to be a stranger and what it means to be "at home" in valuable ways. Muslims are increasingly understood as strangers in what has become a global village. A

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[15] Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" 118-119.

[16] See for example Madan Sarup's "Home and Identity." *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement.* Eds. George Robertson et al. New York: Routledge, 1994. 93-104. Sarup explains "There is cultural exclusion of the stranger. S/he is constructed as a permanent Other. Stigma is a convenient weapon in the defence against the unwelcome ambiguity of the stranger. The essence of stigma is to emphasize the difference; and a difference which is in principle beyond repair, and hence justifies a permanent exclusion" (91).

[17] Teju Cole, "Black Body" *Known and Strange Things.* New York: Random House, 2016. 3-16. 6

combination of religious clichés, limited interaction with the less than 1% of Muslims in the US, as well as legal edicts and government policies aimed at Muslim exclusion have strengthened the progressively dangerous narrative of Muslim Americans as not being "at home" in the US. Certainly, the lack of information about Muslims and the abundance of misinformation have historically been used to keep Muslims strange. However, for much of the Western world, the September 11th attacks crystallized Islam and Muslims as unassimilable in general and un-American in particular. Following the attacks there was a 1600% increase in crimes against Muslims,[18] and a 2005 phone survey sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) concluded that, "[a]pproximately one-in-four Americans believe Islam is a religion of hatred and violence."[19] CAIR's findings closely linked distrust of Islam and Muslims with ignorance of the religion and little one-on-one contact with Muslims. More recently, executive order 13769, popularly termed the "Muslim ban," further underscored the purported disconnect between Muslim identity and the US as home/host. Critics of the ban argued that it legalized Islamophobia in that the order in part imposed a 90-day travel ban to the US by passport holders from seven Muslim majority countries. Additionally, it proposed that when travel resumed preference would effectively be given to non-Muslims from those countries. The unfortunate result of such rhetoric and official policy is a discourse that allies Islam with danger and consequently singles out Muslims as not belonging. In essence such rhetoric fosters the misconception that Islam's teachings are antithetical to US values and that Muslims are strangers

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[18] Southern Poverty Law Center, "SPLC Testifies about Increase in Anti Muslim Bias." N.p 29 March 2011. Web.

[19] CAIR Council on American-Islamic Relations Research Center, "American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims 2006" Web.

residing uneasily within America. Nevertheless, to classify Muslims as the "new blacks"—as some critics have done—is by no means an accurate assessment.

Part of what complicates Muslim American strangeness is that Muslims are far from being a homogenous group. In regards to race alone, a 2008 Gallup poll labeled Muslims as "the most racially diverse religious group" in the US—35% of Muslim Americans are African American, 28% are "white," 18% are Asian and 18% classified as other. [20] However, statistics are further complicated by what Moustapha Bayoumi and others have referred to as the racialization of Islam. Comparing the profiling of Muslims to the profiling and eventual internment of Japanese Americans, who were depicted as "not only culturally different but also politically threatening,"[21] Margaret Chon and Donna Arzt argue "A similar differentiating process is at work today. Islamic beliefs are frequently viewed as religious zealotry directed against the secular or Christian West."[22] Building upon Bayoumi's argument that Islam is racialized, Chon and Arzt explain that

> racial formation is the hardening of a combination of attributes into an ascribed 'immutability,' whether or not the attribute is in fact immutable. Furthermore, racism is the ascription of concomitant inferiority to those attributes…especially through the war on terror, Islam is acquiring characteristics of immutability, innateness, inevitable inheritability and, importantly, inferiority.[23]

What racialization means for post 9/11 Muslim identity is that while Arabs may be conflated with whites numerically—i.e. their bolstering of the 28%—recent studies of Arab and Muslim

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[20] Mohamed Younis, "Muslim Americans Exemplify Diversity Potential: Key Findings from a New Report by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies" March 2 2009. Web.
[21] Margaret Chon and Donna E. Arzt, "Walking While Muslim," *Law and Contemporary Problems.* 68 (Spring 2005): 215-254. 226
[22] Chon and Arzt 226.
[23] Chon and Arzt 228.

Americans have shown that this conflation obscures the social reality of Arabs in the US, who are subject to state-sponsored actions and legal decisions that have effectively "un-whitened" Arab identity. Despite this "hardening" of negative characteristics around Islam, however, references to Muslims as "the new blacks" are inaccurate in that they solidify the conflation of Muslims with Arabs, erase the presence of African American Muslims and erroneously assume that all Muslims experience oppression at the same or similar level with no regard for other factors.

The emerging response to a discourse that fosters a sense of alienation—for American born Muslims and first and second-generation immigrants—has overwhelmingly been a refusal to buy into paradigms of Muslim estrangement. Nevertheless, as I emphasize in *Islam at Home,* ideas of home and estrangement are not homogenous within the US *ummah.* For example, the ways in which African American Muslims in particular engage with and establish roots in America can look markedly different from immigrant American cultural production.

Cultural Indigeneity

Although his study found that differences between African Americans and immigrant Muslims were lessening, Ihsan Bagby traces those differences back to the origin and class differences of the two groups noting that

> African-American Islam emerged in the 1920s, on the heels of Marcus Garvey, as a
> challenge by African Americans to white racism and white intellectual hegemony. More
> recently, large numbers of African Americans converted to Islam in the 1960s and 1970s,
> imbued with the spirit of Black power and Black consciousness. Immigrant Muslims,
> arriving in large numbers in the 1970s, came from a fractured Muslim world, some
> seeking economic betterment and others fleeing political oppression. Each group carries

its own unique cultural baggage that shapes its understandings of Islam. Class

differences are also a distinguishing feature between the two. Many immigrant Muslims

have fulfilled the American dream by becoming highly educated and well-to-do, while

many African American Muslims seem to be still working their way up America's

economic ladder. Reflecting these differences, African-American and immigrant

Muslims have historically lived separate existences within organizations made up of their

own kind.[24]

Bagby's study points to the way in which African Americans and immigrant Muslims can be

strangers not only to the outside community but also to each other.

Another way in which African American and immigrant Muslims have separated

themselves is in terms of who is "indigenous" and who is not. Muslim American parlance uses

the term indigenous to denote a long-standing presence within the US, and thus the question with

which we began—"Where are you from?"—has had since the late twentieth century a special

intracommunal resonance. While the term generally refers to those present before an outside

force colonizes, scholars of Islam in America use the term to refer to Muslims who are US born

as opposed to those who have more recently arrived. Amina McCloud, for instance, uses the

1965 expansion of immigration law as a definitive marker for indigeneity, asserting that

indigenous Muslims would then be those present in the US before policies allowed for the arrival

of large numbers of immigrant Muslims. Although some expand the borders of indigeneity to

include other native-born US groups, the vast majority of scholars of Islam in America use

indigenous as a tacit marker for race to refer to African Americans in particular,[25] and in

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[24] Ihsan Bagby, "Comparison of African-American and Immigrant-Mosque Participants," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 33:1 and 2 (Spring 2006): 89-110. 90
[25] There is no disagreement that African Americans make up the largest number of indigenous Muslims but a difference of opinion on whether other Americans are included in the claim to indigeneity. See Ali Mazrui,

application, the term most frequently becomes a means to define African Americans in opposition to immigrants. While the term indigenous has not been met without controversy— with some critics arguing that such a divisive term has no basis in Islam[26]—it nevertheless remains in current use among US Muslims.

African American Muslims applying the term indigenous to themselves are in the midst of a double negotiation—with fellow Americans on one hand, and with fellow Muslims on the other. Indigeneity offers the possibility of an innate belonging that pushes against a history of African American estrangement. For intracommunal relations the reasoning behind such a claim can be found in what Akbar Muhammad calls "an observable diminution in national and international attention to African American Muslims who were, until the 1960's, the principle representatives of Islam in the United States."[27] Sylvia Chan-Malik similarly maintains that there has been

> a fundamental shift in both Islam's cultural meanings and community presence in
>
> the United States, in particular the manner in which conceptions of Islam and Muslims
>
> became conflated with the notion of an orientalized foreign threat, a development that
>
> ultimately served to distance the religion from its long-standing presence and culture
>
> associations within Black communities in the United States.[28]

"Between the Crescent and the Star-Spangled Banner: American Muslims and US Foreign Policy," *Ethnicity and International Relations* 72.3 (July 1996): 493-506 and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "Muslims in America: A Select Bibliography." *The Muslim World* 76.2 (1986): 93-122. Mazrui uses indigenous to "describe people who have been American for at least a century. We might therefore conclude that indigenous American Muslims are mainly African Americans, with a small percentage of white Americans" (504). Haddad on the other hand is more decisive in her explanation of US indigeneity in terms that fall along racial lines, asserting that "The term indigenous Islam is used by American Muslims to refer to persons from the African American community who have come to identify with the religion of Islam during [the twentieth] century" (98).

[26] See for instance Samory Rashid's "Islamic Influence in America: Struggle, Flight, Community." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 19:1(1999): 7-31.

[27] Akbar Muhammad, "Muslims in the United States: History, Religion, Politics and Ethnicity." *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 12:2 (1991) 433-448. 443

[28] Sylvia Chan-Malik, "Cultural and Literary Production of Muslim America." *The Cambridge Companion to*

Thus, what is at stake in this claim to indigeneity is not only the right for African Americans to be recognized as and claim an existence as Muslims prior to widespread Muslim immigration but also the right for African Americans to help fashion the identity of US Muslims. These late-twentieth century claims to indigeneity sought to clarify that, with one group's familiarity with Islam and the other group's familiarity with the US, immigrant as well as indigenous Muslims could provide valuable religious and cultural contributions. As Ali Mazrui explains, "indigenous American Muslims are new to Islam but old to America…Today, African American Muslims are fully Americanized but not always fully Islamized. With immigrant Muslims the situation is the reverse. They are old to Islam but new to America. They are often substantially Islamized but not yet fully Americanized."[29] However, by the beginning of the 21st century, with an increase in the population of US-born Muslims who are the descendants of Muslim immigrants, the term indigeneity has begun to acquire a new meaning.

Umar Abd-Allah's "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" (2004) shifts the focus of Muslim American indigeneity from a race-based one to one that is religious. A call to cultural production in the vein of WEB DuBois, Abd-Allah argues in his essay that

> For centuries, Islamic civilization harmonized indigenous forms of cultural expression with the universal norms of its sacred law….In history, Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal clear river. Its waters (Islam) are pure, sweet, and life-giving but—having no color of their own—reflect the

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American Islam. Ed. Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013: 279-298. 292

[29] Mazrui 505.

bedrock (indigenous culture) over which they flow. In China, Islam looked Chinese; in

Mali, it looked African.[30]

Abd-Allah presses the need to create a collective indigenous Muslim American identity asserting

that without which the Muslim American ummah cannot effectively participate in policy/politics,

and without which they cannot be psychologically and emotionally stable and without which

Islam cannot "flourish" in America. Most importantly, he calls for equal rights and

representation in cultural production. Abd-Allah explains that

Islam in America must become *wenye ji*, something belonging here. It must be

indigenous—not in the sense of losing identity through total assimilation or of being the

exclusive property of the native-born—but in the word's original sense, namely, being

natural, envisioned and born from within. Regardless of birthplace, Muslim Americans

become indigenous once they truly belong. Islam in America becomes indigenous by

fashioning an integrated cultural identity that is comfortable with itself and functions

naturally in the world around it.[31]

 The call for a collective fashioning of Muslim identity represents a form of resistance to

classifications of Muslims as strangers, others and dangers to US life. In her own writings as

well as in her identification of an indigenous Muslim US canon, author and critic Mohja Kahf

reiterates that the work of cultural indigeneity has already begun.

Reading Black, Reading Feminist, Reading Muslim

Although scholars date the earliest Muslim American writings from at least the 18th

century, the identification of Muslim American literature as a discrete genre is relatively

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[30] Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "Islam and the Cultural Imperative." *CrossCurrents.* 56.3 (Fall 2006): 357-375.
357
[31] Abd-Allah 369.

new. Kahf's 2010 study "Teaching Diaspora Literature: Muslim American Literature as an Emerging Field" proposes dividing the existing and emerging literature into four categories: "prophets of dissent," those marked as outside the margins; "multi-ethnic multitudes," those who have come to writing through the academy; "New American Transcendentalists," whose inspirations (and ancestors) have been Sufi poetry and the American Transcendentalists; and "New American Pilgrims," those who have taken Islam as a topic in the spirit of the Puritans. In reconciling what can sometimes be an uneasy divide between African American and immigrant Muslims, Kahf's canon construction pays homage to criticism that African Americans were foremost in promoting or trying to theorize Islam in America. Chan-Malik similarly traces the origins of the literature to African American Muslims proposing that a distinctly Muslim American literary presence emerged, first through the 1965 publication of Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and, later, through the poets, writers, and playwrights of the Black Arts Movement.[32]

Islam at Home is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of the Muslim American canon but rather is meant to think through some of the ways Muslim Americans have written about the US home, belonging and American identity while being cast as strangers. The guiding questions that I consider here are: what is an American, and what does it mean to be a Muslim American? I focus specifically on the intersection of race and religion in Muslim American writings in a way that allows for the reassessment of common assumptions about Muslim American identity and writing. Building upon Kahf and Chan-Malik's identification of Muslim American literature's African American genealogical roots, much of my texts centers African American Muslims and pushes the reader to think beyond Muslim American literature as solely an

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[32] Chan-Malik 286.

immigrant genre. I look at what the racialization of Islam has meant for African Americans and immigrants and argue that Muslim American writers have created alternative ways of belonging that both reinforce and challenge ideas of Muslim American indigeneity. My dissertation explores three tropes of Muslim American strangeness—the Black Muslim, the hijabi victim/perpetrator, and the post 9/11 "Muslim looking" terrorist, arguing that in revising myths of Muslim alterity, writers also reassess taken-for-granted US cult/ural staples. I employ the word cult/ure throughout to refer to both US social norms as well as to how those norms have been inflected with a particular brand of US chauvinism. In each chapter I draw upon studies of white supremacy (Chapter 1) as well as its gender (Chapter 2) and class (Chapter 3) manifestations, which have produced these racial and religious clichés of Muslim Americans. Such myths of Muslim otherness have made it possible to establish Muslim bodies in general and specific Muslim bodies in particular as figures of risk. I argue that by refuting and reworking such myths, writers not only rewrite themselves as "of here," but also change the very dimensions of "here."

In examining the alienating image of the twentieth century Black Muslim I begin with an earlier manifestation of African American Muslim liminality to emphasize the shifts in racial identity and Muslim alterity. Following historians and scholars of Islam in America I date the earliest Muslim American literature as emerging in the form of writings by and about enslaved African Muslims. This first generation of Muslim American writings extends from the early part of the 18th century until the latter part of the 19th and—considering how much "the act of narration itself contributed to the development of the Black slave narrative"[33]— can be said to include biographical memoirs such as Thomas Bluett's account of Job ben Solomon in *Some*

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[33] Florence Marfo. "African Muslims in African American Literature." *Callaloo.* 32.4 (2009): 1213-1222. 1213

Memoirs of the Life of Job (1734) as well as accounts within accounts such as the brief

fascinating first-hand account of the capture and enslavement of an unnamed African Muslim

told in Charles Ball's *Slavery in the United States* (1837).[34] Omar ibn Said's *The Life of Omar*

Ibn Said and Nicholas Said's *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said; A Native of Bornou, Eastern*

Sudan, Central Africa (1873) also fall within this category.[35] Omar ibn Said's narrative, which I

discuss in Chapter 1, stands out in that it is the only surviving autobiography of a US-enslaved

African written in Arabic.

Considering the emergence of Muslim American literature as coterminous with the

emergence of African American literature retains the literature's African American genealogical

roots but disrupts narratives of uncomplicated African American Muslim indigeneity and

emphasizes that Islam has not only been depicted as estranged from US culture in general but

also that it has been linked to black estrangement in particular. Part of my project involves a

reassessment of the narratives of enslaved African Muslim writings because while Allan D.

Austin's 1984 text *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* and his 1997

condensed and updated follow-up *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories*

and Spiritual Struggles have been well received by scholars of Islam in America, the writings by

enslaved African Muslims that his texts bring to light continue to be not only largely absent but

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[34] The full titles are *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave about Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734,* and *Slavery in the United States. A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War.* The unnamed Muslim is mentioned first on page 165 of Ball's text and his story may be found on pages 167-186.
[35] Nicolas Said's narrative was also published as "A Native of Bornoo" in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1867. There are slight differences between the *Atlantic* account that Austin cites in "Mohammed Ali Ben Said: Travels on Five Continents" and the account published a few years later in Memphis. The account published in 1873 is expanded and includes differences that may have been made in deference to white Southern sensibilities such as referring to the African women with his Arabs enslavers as wives in the 1867 version and as concubines in the 1873 version as well as the omission that he fought for the Union Army in the latter.

also purposefully excluded from African American literature—the very place where such narratives might have stood out as remarkable. These narratives have been estranged from African American literature largely due to the fact that they do not conform to the dimensions of Christian spiritual autobiographies.

The Muslim narratives that I have assembled allow me to think through what it has meant to be American, but outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. A survey of African American literature shows Christianity as a tool of black liberation but also of black nation-building, and while Bagby (cited above) and many other scholars have linked Islam to black liberation, links to nation building have been limited to Muslim American indigeneity. As Edward Curtis has noted of later African American Muslim groups "The mere fact that these persons decided to call themselves Muslims represents a dramatic break with the past; in the context of an African-American culture defined or at least influenced by Christian institutions, language, symbols, rituals, and doctrines, these human beings crossed a key social boundary."[36] If, as scholars have argued, Christianity has been a tool of nation building, what then of Islam? Can Muslim writers make themselves "at home"?

Islam at Home uses the aforementioned theory of Muslim American liminality as well as theories of intersectionality to explore the interconnections between strangeness, religion, race, gender, class, performance and home that the texts bring to light. Such theories help in understanding the role that race and anti-black prejudice in particular has historically played in US understandings of Islam. As for liminality, Kambiz GhanneaBassiri argues that African (and later African American) Muslims occupied a space in which they were read as "not black." In the case of enslaved African Muslims such "de-negrofication" helped ensure that the intelligence

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[36] Edward E. Curtis IV, "African-American Islamization Reconsidered: Black History Narratives and Muslim Identity." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* 73.3 (September 2005): 659-684. 681

and literacy they possessed would not be attributed to their African identity, and in the space-conscious South this estrangement from blackness could mean access to social and physical spaces denied other African Americans.

Intersectionality theories on the other hand allow for a more internal evaluation of Muslim strangeness. Such theories allow for the evaluation of how Muslim bodies are differentiated and read against each other in that these theories illuminate the varying degrees of estrangement and oppression to which Muslim Americans are subject. In Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on anti-discrimination she describes intersectionality as pushing against the "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis."[37] Crenshaw maintains that black women in particular are marginalized in discussions of race, where the focus is on black men, as well as in discussions of gender, where the focus is white women. The fundamental problem of such marginalization is that their experiences as black women can be distinct from the experiences faced by black men and from the experiences faced by white women. By moving black women from the margins to the center of anti-discrimination discourse, however, it is possible to address the needs of the most disadvantaged and therefore all. As Crenshaw puts it "The goal of this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter.'"[38]

More specifically, my project uses Jamillah Karim's elaboration of black Muslim feminist theory to think through the intersection of religion, gender, and racial politics. Karim whose work can be placed amidst the scholarship of Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought*) and Deborah King ("Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context

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[37] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader.* 2nd ed., Ed. Adrien Wing. New York: NYU Press, 2003. 23-33. 23
[38] Crenshaw 31.

of a Black Feminist Ideology") uses black Muslim feminist theory to underscore that levels of oppression can differ among Muslims as well and argues that African American Muslim women are marginalized in discussions of Muslim women.   Just as black and third world women argued that white Western feminists ignored racial oppression, Karim's research indicates a similar disinterest among South Asian and Arab Muslim American women in reflecting on the differences between themselves and African American Muslim women and consequently a disinterest for the ways in which anti-black racism affects African American Muslim women.

Additionally, I use Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati's elaboration of identity performance theory to explore how varying performances of Muslim identity affect Muslim American strangeness. Carbado and Gulati's "The Fifth Black Woman" uses Crenshaw as a point departure to argue that just as it is a mistake to assume that racial discrimination would be "unmodified by gender" or sexual discrimination unmodified by race, it would also be a mistake to assume that discrimination would be unmodified by performance. Their identity performance theory as it relates to anti-discrimination argues that "how black women present their identity can (and often does) affect whether and how they are discriminated against."[39] Turning toward Muslim Americans, Khaled Beydoun argues that historically "the *more* an individual appeared to be Muslim, the *less* he or she was perceived to be American."[40] I couple identity performance theory with ideas of racial capitalism, which we can understand in the context as capitalizing on the performance of Muslim identity to illustrate the ways in which stranger fetishism has also complicated notions of Muslim American belonging.

Chapter Outlines

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[39] Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati, "The Fifth Black Woman." *Journal of Contemporary Legal Studies.* 11 (2001): 701-729. 717

[40] Khaled Beydoun, "Acting Muslim" (March 1, 2017). Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review (CR-CL), 53 (2018). 4

My dissertation is divided into three major chapters. Chapter 1, "A Muslim from America: Muslim American Literature and Its Literary Antecedents," is chiefly concerned with the historical shifts of "Black," "Muslim," and "Black Muslim." I trace the Muslim American literary presence back to the first US Muslims in order to examine this evolution of the African American Muslim body as a figure of risk. I analyze Omar ibn Said's fifteen-page *The Life of Omar Ibn Said,* which commences with a Qur'anic surah before briefly recounting the details of Omar ibn Said's life including his capture, arrival, brief escape and re-enslavement. Inasmuch as his writing does not fit the traditional African American jeremiad it has been taken as confirmation of African American Muslim silence on US slavery. My analysis, however, explores the ways in which his brief text both pushes against as well as reinforces the theory of Muslim American liminality. I use Omar ibn Said and Job ben Solomon's texts to suggest that enslaved African Muslims performed revolutionary acts in narrating and writing works that challenge white cult/ural supremacy, and by doing so, they disrupt narratives of Muslim silence on slavery. I argue that Muslim American literature has been at the forefront of interrogating images of whiteness originally from the standpoint of religion but by the twentieth century from the standpoint of politics as well. Muslims enslaved in the US speaking and writing from a position of liminality did not place the system of slavery in jeopardy, but they did provide alternative ways of thinking about US belonging. Putting this generation of writings in conversation with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the iconic representative of the twentieth-century reemergence of Muslim American literature shows both a consistent Islamic ethos as well as illuminates the centrality of race in informing US understandings of Muslim identity.

In Chapter 2, "American Hijabi: True Womanhood, Bad Girls and Superwomen," I focus on Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf,* a novel in which Khadra, a Syrian American who

grows up in 1970s Indiana explores tensions—between Muslim/American, African American/immigrant—in an effort to portray Muslim American life "from the inside." I use Karim's elaboration of black Muslim feminist theory to analyze external narratives of the hijabi as victim/perpetrator on one hand and internal narratives of the hijabi as a bad girl/ superwoman on the other. I argue that Western/US interpretations of the hijabi as victim/threat are informed by a standard of white beauty and femininity that had been encapsulated in the Victorian concept of True Womanhood and is currently captured by the postmodern pop culture equivalent "Becky." In addition to its dismantling of the hijabi victim/perpetrator stereotype, the novel also confronts intra-ummah anti-black prejudice, which has often been overlooked beyond the African American Muslim community. Ultimately, I suggest that Kahf promotes cross-racial sisterly alliances as an internal cultural strategy for dealing with Western feminism's silence on racism and xenophobia and intra-ummah silence on racism. I suggest that in doing so she is engaged in a recovery project that tries to elaborate a stable indigenous Muslim American identity in the present that attempts to reestablish Muslim America's roots to African American culture.

Chapter 3 "Identity Performance and American Dreams" looks at what the more recent racialization of Islam has meant and how immigrant American Muslims in particular are treated racially. I examine the terrorist *amalgame*, a post/ 911 catch-all category that renders threatening anyone who consciously or unconsciously passes as Muslim. While we might paraphrase Cole and acknowledge that "To be a stranger is to be looked at. To be Muslim is to be looked at especially," I emphasize how performances call attention to this racialization, or rather the solidification of negative characteristics, of Islam and Muslims. What it means to be Muslim American is presented against the backdrop of anti-Muslim hysteria, and I bring together ideas of

identity performance—here how Muslims perform Muslimness and Americanness—and racial capitalism—here the superficial engagement with Muslims based on economic motives. I begin by positioning Ali's two-act drama *The Domestic Crusaders*—which portrays a day in the life of a Pakistani American family—within the broader US tradition as well as within a Muslim American cultural tradition that finds its roots in an African American cultural past, an important contribution given that US narratives orientalizing Muslim identity have often rendered African Americans as "not Muslim." In the second part of the chapter I draw upon Carbado and Gulati's articulation of identity performance theory and use Ali's play to address an understudied aspect of Muslim identity—the importance of performances of Muslimness as opposed to status as Muslim alone. Ali's drama shows some of the ways in which Muslim identity has been constructed and performed. While status—as black, white, immigrant—has frequently been understood as a critical factor, the importance of identity performance as a factor in discrimination has been given less attention. I analyze to what extent being American is an event that must take place in public, be performed. Focusing primarily on the performances of the men in the text I analyze how performing Muslimness both challenges and reifies superficial distinctions between who gets classified as strangers and who gets classified as neighbors.

Chapter 1

'A Muslim from America': Muslim American Literature and Its Literary Antecedents

"I'm a Muslim. I believe in the religion of Islam. I believe in Allah. I believe in Muhammad. I believe in all of the prophets. I believe in fasting, prayer, charity and that which is incumbent upon a Muslim to fulfill in order to be a Muslim….but at the same time that I believe in that religion, I have to point out I am also an American Negro, and I live in a society whose social system is based upon the castration of the Black man, whose political system is based on castration of the Black man, and whose economy is based upon the castration of the Black man…."[41]

This chapter considers Muslim American slave narratives as the genesis of Muslim American literature and proposes that they provide a useful lens through which to explore the emerging body of that literature and the contemporary Muslim body in US culture. Reading Omar ibn Said's 1831 slave narrative alongside Malcolm X's 1965 autobiography allows for the consideration of how race—particularly blackness—informs the US public sphere's understanding of Muslim identity. By illustrating the relationship between earlier depictions of the first US Muslims—enslaved African Muslims—and the modern image of the "Black Muslim," I am interested in the process by which the African American Muslim body evolves into and as a figure of risk. Drawing upon what Kambiz GhaneaBassiri identifies as a liminal phase occupied by African American Muslims, my analysis underscores that what these different generational writings lack in historical continuity they make up for in thematic. At the heart of Omar ibn Said's text is a critique of a cult/ure of white racial supremacy that reemerges most

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[41] Malcolm X, "Oxford Union Debate" 3 December 1964.

vividly under Jim Crow in the twentieth-century writings of the Nation of Islam and subsequently in the literature of the Black Arts Movement.

Although folklorist Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1909) is credited with first using the concept of the liminal phase to describe anthropological rites of passage/transition, it is Victor Turner who is acknowledged as having theorized and explored liminality's broader implications. GhaneaBassiri's *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (2010) draws on Turner's concept of "'liminal entities' as being 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial'" to capture the state of in-betweeness experienced by African American Muslims throughout their history in the US.[42] Because Islam was seen as a "semi-civilizing" religion, to be Muslim was incompatible with white supremacist notions of blackness. Although she does not term it as such, Sylviane Diouf explains what is essentially a liminal position as byproduct of the US's fixed racial poles, which—unlike in the Latin American and Caribbean destinations of other enslaved Africans—do not have intermediate racial categories. In the US, "there could only be inferior blacks and superior whites. Within these limits, a particularly 'intelligent black' had to stop being black and become an ersatz white."[43] This phenomenon resulted in what Allan D. Austin and others have described as the "de-Africanizing" and "de-negrofication" of African American Muslims. The critical difference in African Muslims in particular operating from this threshold relies on an understanding of what

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[42] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 29
[43] Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas.* New York: New York University Press, 1998. 100

Stephanie Camp refers to as "the spatial history of American slavery."[44] As Camp explains, "Space mattered: places, boundaries, and movement were central to how slavery was organized and to how it was resisted."[45] In Camp's formulation this spatial history is constituted literally and metaphorically as "[e]nslaved people's inferior and subjected position within the framework of antebellum southern society, their social 'place,' was reflected and affirmed by white control over their location in space, their literal place."[46] The draw of the liminal space occupied by African Muslims is in that space's potential to provide access to spaces, places, even protections denied other African Americans. Such an existence is not without its drawbacks, however:

> [t]he liminal entity…reinforces existing communal categories by transitioning through her liminal state and entering into a new state or category of belonging within the community….her state of liminality also points to the shortcomings and inadequacies of existing structures that reduce her to invisibility or non-being while she is in her liminal state.[47]

And it is in this fragile nature of liminality and its inability to effectively challenge existing hierarchies in which I am primarily interested. The elaboration of such a space enables my reading of Omar ibn Said's narrative by emphasizing that such a space was at best a temporary home and was intended to collapse, or at least was always at risk of collapsing, into the surrounding African American community, and for African Muslim slaves to speak from such a fragile position was an act of resistance that challenges narratives of Muslim silence. The twentieth-century emergence of the Black Muslim, however, reconciles Islam with the black

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[44] Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 4

[45] Camp 6.

[46] Camp 17.

[47] Ghanneabasiri 29-30.

body in such a way that maintains if not increases the threat of blackness, making the adoption of liminal space an unwise if not untenable position.

I have divided this chapter into two primary sections. In the first I build on recent scholarship on Muslim American slave narratives that—in arguing that Job ben Solomon's and Omar ibn Said's narratives are in fact anti-slavery texts—tries to recover Muslim narratives within the African American slave narrative tradition. I will explain how early Muslim American literature—specifically *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said* (2011) and for emphasis *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave about Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734* (1734)— identifies and critiques EuroAmerican white supremacy cult/ure by speaking from the protection of a liminal space. I argue that because this space was predicated upon the deliberate misreading of their African bodies, as writers/speakers from this liminal space they are careful in considering the instability of the position from which they speak. The second part of my chapter picks up from the relinquishment of antebellum liminality, and in examining *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* illustrates a commitment to antiracist ideologies based in an Islamic ethos. I argue that the voluntary relinquishment of liminal space enables the establishment of cultural literacy as a method for simultaneously reclaiming African American identity and masculinity as well as establishing Islam in the US.

The Cult/ure of White Supremacy

To explain the image evolution of African American Muslims it is necessary to consider first the US sociohistorical climate into which literature by and about them is borne. What sort of existing American myths would make it necessary to establish the African American body

generally and the African American Muslim body particularly as figures of risk? In her *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), Michelle Alexander explains the US's most enduring and destructive myth as the idea of white supremacy. For Alexander, mass incarceration is but a descendent of slavery and Jim Crow—the latest method by which to maintain the existing power structure. Her insightful analysis of the US racial caste system, argues that

> White supremacy, over time, became a ***religion*** of sorts. Faith in the idea that people of the African race were bestial, that whites were inherently superior, and that slavery was, in fact, for blacks' own good, served to alleviate the white conscience and reconcile the tension between slavery and the democratic ideals espoused by whites in the so-called New World. There was no contradiction in the bold claim made by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that 'all men were created equal' if Africans were not really people.[48]

What we see in scholarship that conceptualizes whiteness—that is scholarship that does not take it for granted—is that the African American body becomes—willingly or not—the greatest reinforcement *of* as well the greatest threat *to* this cult/ure of white supremacy. In fact, African American apostasy would result in system collapse. As Toni Morrison explains, embedded in the rhetoric of US white supremacy is dependency on African *American*—not just "black"—inferiority, the recognition not only of a black other but one that must *also* and *always* be present in America. Much as Morrison would in 1970 describe Pecola's guilt and pain as the source of her community's sanctity and health, twenty-two years later Morrison would argue that

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[48] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010. 26, emphasis added.

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.[49]

In Keith Miller's formulation, however, this relationship between a white self and a black other is instead one of codependency, reliant not only upon black presence but also black cooperation for its maintenance. Miller credits Malcolm X with upending 150 years of black oratorical complicity after identifying—as Alexander would years later—that

> the core tenet of white supremacy underwrote an unending litany of horrors and was never seriously challenged during the American Revolution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, or later…. [Malcolm X] argued that, in attempting to legitimize the principle of equality, a long cavalcade of African American notables had projected onto Jefferson and Lincoln a view that they never held or acted upon.[50]

While Miller describes Malcolm X as the first in 150 years to reject the African American jeremiad in favor of theorizing whiteness and condemning supremacist ideology, I argue that his African slave coreligionists initiated the condemnation of that belief system much earlier, albeit from the protection of a liminal space.

Early Muslim American Literature and the African American Canon

Scholars and critics of African American literature overwhelmingly exclude early Muslims speaking/writing from this liminal space from the larger American and African

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[49] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* New York: Vintage Books, 1993. 42

[50] Keith D. Miller, "Plymouth Rock Landed on Us: Malcolm X's Whiteness Theory as Basis for Alternative Literacy." *College Composition and Communication.* 56.2 (December 2004):199-222. 210

American canon. While Florence Marfo emphasizes connections between Muslim American narratives and those of their Christian brethren, Austin and more recently Muna Al-Badaai note that the inclusion of Muslim American writings in African American literature demarcates a gap between theory and praxis. More telling for them is that, thus far, no anthologies of US slavery and freedom literature incorporate writings by Muslim Americans.[51]

Marfo hypothesizes several reasons for Muslim American exclusion. Citing Frances Smith Foster's 1994 text *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives,* Marfo proposes in part that Muslim slave narratives fall outside the boundary of slave narratives in that they lack a Christian abolitionist agenda "governed by a white western supremacy that narrators either embraced or accepted as the price of Black freedom in America,"[52] and in terms of genre they more closely obey the rules governing personal narratives rather than slave narratives. Marfo argues that

> ***Historical context aside***, African Muslim narratives would seem to fall within the personal narrative category, either because they focused on an individual and his adventures (Nicholas Said and Omar Ibn Said) or because their objective was to inform and educate the reader, without prompting him to take political action….Job's *Memoirs* is a petition for his freedom on the grounds of his inadaptability to American slavery, and Omar Ibn Said's autobiography can be read as praise of the rectitude of one of his owners, Jim Owen, and his family.[53]

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[51] See Allan D. Austin's *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles.* New York: Routledge, 1997, 52 and Muna Sulaiman Al-Badaai's, "Positioning the Testimony of Job Ben Solomon, an Enslaved African American Muslim. *International Journal of Applied Linguistic & English Literature.* 4.6 (November 2015): 204-211. 204

[52] Marfo 1219.

[53] Marfo 1215; emphasis added.

Although she notes a number of similarities between narratives by Muslims and other American slaves, she nevertheless concludes that the exclusion of Muslim American works is "justified."[54]

What I attempt to establish in my reading of Omar ibn Said's narrative, however, is the very impossibility of putting the historical—as well as racial, social and particularly religious—context aside. In doing so I am building on the work of scholars such as Al-Badaai whose 2015 essay "Positioning the Testimony of Job Ben Solomon, an Enslaved African American Muslim" similarly attempts to place Job ben Solomon's biography in the African American literary tradition. Al-Badaai argues of Job ben Solomon that although he may have been concerned for his own freedom, he may have—from his position as a "noble savage"—intended to persuade his audience to adopt and promote an anti-slavery stance.[55] And although Akil Kahera's "God's Dominion: Omar Ibn Said's Use of Arabic Literacy as Opposition to Slavery" does not specifically attempt to place Omar ibn Said's narrative within the larger African American tradition such placement is a necessary consequence of Kahera's assertion that in Omar ibn Said's use of Surah Mulk "it is here that Omar reveals his secret thoughts about captivity, about the tensions between master and slave as well as his plan to overthrow the system of oppression."[56] As useful as those arguments may be to our studies of slave narratives, however, they limit African Muslim narratives to characteristics defined by a genre that never seriously considered them when constructing those definitions.

In conceptualizing these narratives within the African American literary canon—as opposed to parallel to it—I argue that Muslim American narratives can be read as anti-

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[54] Marfo 1221.
[55] Al-Badaai 206.
[56] Akil Kahera, "God's Dominion: Omar Ibn Said's Use of Arabic Literacy as Opposition to Slavery." *The South Carolina Review.* 46.2 (2014): 126-34. 131

supremacist texts (and consequently as abolitionist texts even) if we think about them as emerging from a tenuous, always at risk of collapse, position of liminality. I argue that rather than assaulting the institution of slavery, the texts that I consider here clandestinely assault the cult/ure of white racial supremacy at the heart of the US's socioeconomic infrastructure. If we can briefly return to Alexander's analysis of the US's racial caste system: as long as the concept of white racial supremacy remains in place it will continue to produce systems of inequality— hence Jim Crow's replacement of slavery and mass incarceration's replacement of Jim Crow. I argue that Muslim slave narratives are engaged in a project of deracination. While they lack the *Christian* abolitionist agenda of standard slave narratives, they condemn instead the very foundation of EuroAmerican slavery—a cult/ure of white racial supremacy that fuels the embellishment and exploitation of racial difference. And frequently embedded in such assessments are also critiques of the way in which Christianity becomes employed to uphold such supremacy. Job ben Solomon questions the use of images in religion while Omar ibn Said who I will discuss in more length compares a religious valuation system with a race-based one. And although they are personal narratives, the personal is always political at least in as much as it deviates from a standard norm—a concept I will explore more fully in chapter 2.

Muslim American slave narratives are most frequently passed over but have not been wholly omitted from studies of African American literature. Previous discussions of those narratives usually examine them under the hallmark of the genre, the literacy/freedom dynamic, but while scholars of African American literature are virtually unanimous in the coupling of literacy/freedom and black humanity, nascent scholarship on early Muslim American texts suggests that the relationship between literacy and freedom is more complicated[57] and the

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[57] See for instance Osman and Forbes, "Representing the West in the Arabic Language: *The Slave Narrative of Omar Ibn Said." A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said.* Omar ibn Said and Ala Alryyes.

relationship of either to humanity problematic. What the literacy/ freedom dynamic does not fully consider is the space from which the Muslim enslaved wrote/spoke. Ronald Judy notes in his *DisForming the Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (1993) that Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for instance, asserts in *Figures in Black* (1987) and again in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) that Job ben Solomon "literally wrote his way out of slavery,"[58] but that statement—while true—limits Job ben Solomon's contribution to African American literature. That this dynamic would be used to examine Muslim slave narratives is not surprising, however, considering the difficulty in overstating literacy's importance in the African American tradition. William Andrews maintains that "The acquisition of literacy, the power to read books and discover one's place in the scheme of things, is treated in many slave narratives as a matter equal in importance to the achievement of physical freedom."[59] And certainly, for early African American writers "[m]astery of language, the essential sign of a civilized mind to the European, implicitly qualified a black writer, and by analogy those whom he or she represented, for self-mastery and a place of respect within white civilization."[60] But what type of literacy is this and mastery of what language? Most interestingly, the genre has for the most part conceived of literacy in English as *the* defining sign of an individual's humanity, and for this

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Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, 182-194 and Diouf's *Servants of Allah.* Diouf notes that although some slaves were literate in Arabic before their capture and subsequent enslavement, their literacy did not translate into actual freedom. Omar ibn Said, for instance, who did not write his text on behalf of a Christian abolitionist cause would remain a slave for the rest of his life.

[58] Ronald A. Judy, *DisForming the Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 152

[59] William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography: Theory and Explication." *African American Literary Criticism:117 to 2000.* Ed. Hazell Arnett Ervin. New York: Twayne Publishers: 223-234. 231

[60] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay, "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom:1746-1865" in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. 127-136. 128

reason the literacy/ freedom dynamic in its Eurocentric rigidity can seem ill-equipped to challenge the ideology and reality of white supremacy.

Negotiating a Liminal Space

Muslim American writings, particularly those in Arabic challenge the idea of mastery of English as the tool for self-mastery, but that is not to say that literacy does not hold a special resonance within the Muslim community as well. The first word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was the second person imperative "Iqra" from the tripartite Arabic root qaf-ra-hamza, meaning to "read, recite, study."[61] While the verse in its entirety "Iqra' bismi rabikal ladhi khalaq" is an address to the Prophet Muhammad specifically, it is also taken more generally as a command to every Muslim—"Recite [or read] in the name of your Lord who created." Reading is understood then as a religious duty and literacy in classical Arabic—the language of the Qur'an—a thing to be prized. In her seminal text, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (1998), Diouf notes the measures African slaves used to retain religious knowledge maintaining that

> [i]n contrast to the men and women who learned to read and write in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese, the Muslims who strove to maintain their literacy in Arabic did so even though it had no relation to the larger world in which they were living. A slave literate in Arabic could not forge a pass. His or her ability to read could not help access useful information. In the world of the slaveholder, the Muslims' skills seemed completely useless. In the Muslims' own world, however, they were of the utmost importance.[62]

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[61] Muhammad Mohar Ali, *A Word to Word Meaning of the Qur'an: Explanatory Notes, Word Meanings with Cross References and Grammatical Hints: Vol III Surahs 36 (Ya-Sin) to 114 (al-Nas).* Ipswich, Suffolk: Jam'iyat 'Ihyaa' Mihaaj Al-Sunnah, 2003: 2004.
[62] Diouf 122-3.

Despite not being the language of American commerce, Arabic served a critical function in the Muslim slaves' identities as Muslims and in their ability to carry out the commandments of their faith.

While black bodies are always a threat to US order—particularly ones not bounded by illiteracy—the Muslim slaves' identities as Muslim and their literacy in Arabic frequently altered the way in which "masters" regarded their slaves' black bodies. [63] In their efforts to reconcile the intelligence of enslaved African Muslims with their own understandings of blacks as inferior, slave owners and slavery sympathizers were sometimes at pains to efface an African identity with an Arab one. In *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (1997), Austin, for instance, calls attention to the fact that in an eloquent description of Job ben Solomon's physical appearance his white biographer Thomas Bluett mentions everything—height, size, disposition, hair that is "very different from that of the Negroes commonly brought from Africa"—*everything,* except his color.[64] De-Africanizing pushed Muslim slaves into a liminal space and what being an enslaved—or as is the case with Job ben Solomon a formerly enslaved—Muslim frequently meant was to operate from this tenuous, unstable, betwixt and between borderland. As social position dictated movement, the existence and maintenance of liminality cannot pass unnoticed by fellow African Americans:

> African Muslims managed to pass and gain all types of access to racial and social spaces
> not typically afforded to blacks. In *Up from Slavery,* Booker T Washington comments on
> how a Moroccan black man could enter a 'local hotel' that barred American Negroes and

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[63] Ironically Muslim identity and Arabic literacy simultaneously decreased the imagined threat to slave owners as it potentially increased the real threat. Despite their inability to forge passes in the language of their captors at least one South American slave holding community found that they were nevertheless capable of organizing amongst each other. See Diouf 153-163.

[64] Austin 57.

gain access to a third space in the nation that allowed black Muslims to evade traditional

racial boundaries and to maneuver in nonconventional ways.[65]

On plantations, liminal space took the form of privileged positions and in literature as a

space *just* above blackness.[66] Such is the case for Bilali, an enslaved African Muslim from

Sapelo Island who not only toiled as a real-life driver over hundreds of slaves but was also the

inspiration for at least one literary character.[67] The titular Aaron in Joel Chandler Harris's *The*

Story of Aaron (So Named): The Son of Ben Ali (1896) explains of his father—Ben Ali/ Bilali:

"'He was no nigger'" but was by origin an "'Arab—man of the desert—slave hunter.'"[68] In

phenotype and behavior Harris's Aaron continues to remain above his enslaved brethren. He

indulges in none of the usual habits of the surrounding "negroes"[69] and is "the most remarkable

slave in all the country round…because he had a well-shaped head, a sharp black eye, thin lips,

and a nose prominent, but not flat. Another remarkable feature was his hair, which instead of

being coarse and kinky, was fine, thick, wavy, glossy, and as black as jet."[70] Nicholas Said who

journeys as a slave through the Ottoman Empire and Russian aristocracy before arriving free in

America similarly draws from the privileged liminal position, using his Africanness as a passport

through the Reconstruction South.[71]

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[65] Safet Dabovic. "Out of Place: the Travels of Nicholas Said." *Criticism.* 54.1 (Winter 21012): 59-83. 75
[66] See Michael A. Gomez's "Africans, Culture, and Islam in the Lowcountry." *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010: 103-130. Gomez proposes some of the factors—including influence from surrounding whites—that might have accounted for class distinctions between enslaved Muslims and nonMuslims and "an attitude of Muslim superiority." Also, see Gomez here as well as Austin's *African Muslims in Antebellum America* for important ethnic distinctions that I gloss over here in my focus on the category of Muslim.
[67] Gomez 107.
[68] Joel Chandler Harris, *The Story of Aaron (so Named) the Son of Ben Ali: Told by His Friends and Acquaintances.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1896. 13
[69] Harris 70.
[70] Harris 5.
[71] In his autobiography Said provides the text of a letter from a "Colonel Oates" in which Oates assures the reader that Said is "without a doubt, a native African, and whose ostensible object in traveling through this country, is to obtain subscribers to his Autobiography." Said 207.

It is the fragility of this position that the more popular term "noble savage" does not capture. From a liminal position it is easier to imagine blackness as ever-watching, ever waiting to reclaim. Citing Mark Twain's vitriolic assessment of one African Muslim after he returned to Africa, Michael Gomez "underscores the dilemma of [African Muslims] seeking an accommodation with such racism: the inescapability of blackness, and the unattainability of whiteness."[72] To speak/write from such a tenuous position, such an ever-encroached upon space was to commit a revolutionary act.

Speaking/ Writing in Liminality

Although Foster disregards Job ben Solomon's memoir in part because it is "a biographical narrative of a black written by a white"[73] as Robert Levine argues: despite white envelopes black revolutionary messages could came through loud and clear.[74] In viewing Job ben Solomon's *Memoirs* and Omar ibn Said's autobiography through a similar lens it is far more difficult to dismiss the *Memoirs* and the autobiography as only a petition for freedom and hymn to enslavers. In fact, despite predominantly white Christian audiences, Job ben Solomon and Omar ibn Said use critiques of Christianity in their condemnations of supremacist ideology.

In doing so they are not dissimilar from many of their enslaved and free brethren as critiques of Christianity feature most prominently in the works of African American Christians. Olaudah Equiano, for instance, often uses the term Christian ironically to refer to those professed Christians who have strayed far from the gospel. He details the experiences of enslaved men

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[72] Gomez 119.

[73] Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979. 35

[74] Robert S. Levine, "The Slave Narrative and the Revolutionary Tradition of American Autobiography." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative.* Ed. Audrey Fisch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 99-114.

with "christian master[s]" who extort and torture[75] in addition to his own need for economic redress from "tender christian depredators."[76] So vehement was Frederick Douglass in his attack on the "Christianity of America" that he perforce includes in his narrative an appendix assuring the reader of his own embrace of Christianity. Inasmuch as his narrative is a call for abolition it is also a critique of the mores of self-professed Christians who use Christianity as justification for their evils. Among numerous other instances his narrative condemns a "pious mistress" who withholds food,[77] a "pious town" that prohibits a Sabbath school for slaves,[78] "pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them,"[79] and a "pious soul" with a reputation as a "'nigger-breaker.'"[80] Such a dichotomy between the "Christianity of America" and the "Christianity of Christ" leads Douglass to conclude, "[w]ere I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me."[81] While it is David Walker's "Appeal in Four Articles,"—its forcefulness notwithstanding—that most closely resembles the critiques of enslaved Muslims, it too falls slightly short. Commenting on the "hellish cruelties" whites had collectively perpetuated post Christianity, Walker postulates, "[i]f it were possible would they not *dethrone* Jehovah and seat themselves upon the throne?"[82] Job ben Solomon and Omar ibn Said would argue that they already had.

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[75] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa The African. Written by Himself.* Leeds: James Nichols, 1814. *The Classic Slave Narratives.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor, 1987. 1-182. 73,76

[76] Equiano 86, 94.

[77] Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written By Himself.* Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845. *The Classic Slave Narratives.* Ed. HenryLouis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor, 1987. 243-331. 286

[78] Douglass 288.

[79] Douglass 288.

[80] Douglas 289.

[81] Douglass 302.

[82] David Walker, "*From* David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Bluett, Job ben Solomon's biographer explains an incident in which Job ben Solomon

obliquely challenges the idea of a white god. After being persuaded to sit for his portrait:

> When the Face was finished, Mr. Hoare ask'd what Dress would be most proper to draw
>
> him in; and, upon JOB's desiring to be drawn in his own Country Dress, told him he
>
> could not draw it, unless he had seen it, or had it described to him by one who had: Upon
>
> which JOB answered, If you can't draw a Dress you never saw, why do some of you
>
> Painters presume to draw God, whom no one ever saw? I might mention several more of
>
> his smart Repartees in Company, which shewed him to be a Man of Wit and Humour, as
>
> well as good Sense: But that I may not be tedious, what I have said shall suffice for this
>
> Head.[83]

It is in this incident that Job's voice most clearly emerges from the "white envelope." His appeal

here is primarily to whites to remove themselves from an impossible position of authority. His

skill lies in being able to do so without causing irreparable offense, no small task considering his

predominantly white Christian audience. If as Foster asserts "slave narrators affirmed

themselves as human being"[84]—a problematic assertion that implies their humanity could be

queried—then Muslim narrators—unquestioning of their own humanity—reduced whites to

human beings. In Job ben Solomon's promotion of an all-powerful raceless, faceless God he

challenges ideology incompatible with the tenets of Islam and consequently condemns white

cult/ural supremacy.

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and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. 179-190. 189

[83] Thomas Bluett. *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734.* London: Richard Ford, 1734. *Documenting the American South.* 1999. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 11 June 2017 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bluett/bluett.html> 50-51

[84] Foster 33.

Similarly, building upon what Ala Alryyes identifies as subversive elements in Omar ibn Said's autobiography, I argue that far from being a text that merely praises enslavers or "inform[s] and educate[s]," Omar ibn Said's narrative, a combination of life writing and Qur'anic text, is one that encourages his readers to accept slavery—but as the condition of all human beings—and to reject racism altogether. It is his positioning within a liminal space that enables Omar ibn Said to criticize white racial supremacy even as he uses elements of that ideology to protect the position from which he speaks.

There are a number of differences that distinguish Omar ibn Said's fifteen-page autobiography[85] from the narratives of his enslaved/ formerly enslaved contemporaries. His literacy in Arabic is one of the chief ways in which he differed from his contemporaries, and use of that language to describe his life closed the door to many American readers. The scarcity of Arabic readers and writers means that Omar ibn Said is unquestionably the author of his text and that he wrote the text without the editors who are a frequent presence in African American literature. Although translators could—and did—translate his text to more closely align with their agendas, they did not alter the original text. In addition, while many slave narratives were written in response to calls for narratives that could soften white hearts toward the enslaved, Omar ibn Said orients his text more around fact than feeling. His narrative was written in response to a request from a "Sheikh Hunter," and there is no indication that it was to be used as an abolitionist propaganda text. Indeed, it might have been difficult to do so given Omar ibn Said's terse descriptions of the difficulties of US slavery and comparatively more eloquent description of his master's benevolence. What is most interesting in his autobiography is the way

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[85] In Alryyes's introduction to his translation of Omar ibn Said's text, he refers to the manuscript as twenty-three pages long but also notes that pages six through thirteen are blank, thus accounting for this discrepancy of the length between his and the number given in Diouf's *Servants of Allah*.

in which he uses religion as opposed to race as the primary characteristic by which he distinguishes the enslaved from the enslaver.

Omar ibn Said writes his 1831 manuscript when he is 63 years old and has already been a slave for twenty-four years. He begins with a Qur'anic text before detailing the story of his life. The inclusion of the surah not only marks him as literate in Arabic but also confirms his Qur'anic study. He gives his birthplace—Futa Toro—and then provides a brief sketch of his education. After his capture and enslavement, he arrives in Charleston, South Carolina where he is sold to "[a] small, weak and wicked man who did not fear Allah at all, nor did he read nor pray."[86] He flees his master's control and travels to North Carolina where he is captured as a runaway slave and placed into prison before eventually being sold to Jim Owen.

The first part of the text, covering four of the fifteen pages, is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of Omar ibn Said's narrative. He opens his narrative with the sixty-seventh chapter of the Qur'an, Surah al-Mulk. Although his translator the Reverend Isaac Bird dismisses the passages from the Qur'an as "not autobiographical," he nevertheless includes the translation concluding that, "These remembrances from the past[87] were part of the man, and help to give greater completeness as a 'human document' of unusual and somewhat pathetic interest."[88] Citing the first two verses of the surah[89] which reminds the reader of God's control over all, Alryyes presents a compelling argument in his introduction to his 2011 translation of

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[86] Omar ibn Said and Alryyes 77.

[87] Bird considers these verses as "from the past" because several reports indicate that Omar ibn Said converted to Christianity. However, scholars such as Diouf, Austin, as well as Alryyes in his introduction to the 2011 translation of Omar ibn Said's text and Osman and Forbes in their essay in the same volume debate the sincerity of his conversion to Christianity.

[88] Omar ibn Said and Bird 87. Isaac's Bird's 1925 translation can be found on pages 87-92 of the Alryyes text, but is entitled *Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831*

[89] Blessed be He in Whose hands is the *mulk* and Who has power over all things. He created death and life that He might put you to the proof and find out which of you had the best work. He is the most Mighty, the Forgiving One.

Omar ibn Said's narrative that the reproduction of Surah al-Mulk is in fact an act of rebelliousness on Omar ibn Said's part. Referring to the inclusion of the surah in the autobiography as a "double utterance," Alryyes argues that, "through his choice of *Surat al-Mulk*, Omar seems to refute the right of his owners over him, since only God has the *mulk*, the power and the ownership."[90] To consider Omar ibn Said's double utterance in the context of African American literature—while other writers contributing to the foundation of African American literature had as their focus "access to their full humanity,"[91] Omar ibn Said's intention here is entirely different—it is to de-deify whites. In effect: we are all slaves to the One in whose hand is the dominion.

Omar ibn Said begins his text in a manner familiar and unfamiliar to those who study African American slave narratives: "I cannot write my life for I have forgotten much of my talk [language] as well as the talk of the Arabs. O my brothers, I ask you in the name of Allah,[92] not to blame me for my eye is weak and so is my body."[93] On one hand Omar ibn Said's text is familiar in its self-questioning of the author's ability to properly convey the story, and on the other, it is quite dissimilar in its use of the Arabic language to tell it. His assurance that his eye and body are weak might also be an assurance to his readers that despite his literacy he is not a threat.

What is clear in the language that Omar ibn Said uses to depict his environment is that he derives his value system based on religion rather than race and extends this perception to others

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[90] Ala Alryyes 18.

[91] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay, "Preface: Talking Books" *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, The Norton Anthology of African American Literature.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. xxxiii.

[92] Alryyes leaves Allah untranslated in his translation of Omar ibn Said's text. I leave Alryyes' translation as it is but Allan Austin translates the word God arguing that while Muslim and non-Muslims use the name to refer to God, the name is more closely associated with Islam only in the context of US usage. *Introduction* 18.

[93] Unless otherwise indicated the following translations are from Ala Alryyes's translation of the autobiography.

considering them in terms of their value system rather than something biological. The identifying

marker for his captors is not their skin color but their religion or lack of it. Understatement

aside, one of the most poignant moments in the text is Omar ibn Said's description of his

introduction into slavery:

> I reside in our country because of the great harm. The infidels took me unjustly and sold
>
> me into the hands of the Christian man (*Nasrani*) who bought me. We sailed on the big
>
> sea for a month and a half to a place called Charleston in the Christian language. I fell
>
> into the hands of a small, weak, and wicked man who did not fear Allah at all, nor did he
>
> read nor pray.[94]

Omar ibn Said's depiction of his enslavers here is very much in line with his earlier use of Surah

al-Mulk. Ghada Osman and Camille Forbes argue that, "[t]hrough the use of Arabic and

Qur'anic references, Omar reveals an image of the 'West' and the 'Other' not as something to

which the African must aspire, but instead as an 'Other' in the realm of his enslaved Muslim

African's world."[95] Omar ibn Said's repeated references to Christianity as opposed to race as *the*

distinguishing characteristic between himself and his captors indicates that

> language and religion are conflated for him. He recounts that he was 'sold to a Christian
>
> man' and 'sold in Christian language' in a 'Christian country,' specifically in a place
>
> called 'Charleston in the Christian language.' He explains the meaning of the English
>
> word 'jail' by referring to it as 'jeel in the Christian language.' Upon his release from
>
> jail, he saw 'many men whose language was Christian.' They spoke to him, but he 'did
>
> not understand [hear] the Christian language.'[96]

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[94] Omar ibn Said and Ala Alryyes 77.
[95] Osman and Forbes 191.
[96] Osman and Forbes 188.

The text marks the alienation that Omar ibn Said feels as a Muslim in a foreign environment but more importantly is indicative of the value system from which he operates. The contrast between how he views himself and the world differs significantly from the way that the surrounding community views him. His focus on religion as the point of difference in his own worldview denaturalizes race as a categorization and forces the reader to think outside of the racial paradigm in a way that the literacy/freedom dynamic does not allow. Omar ibn Said's narrative consequently reads as an inverse of the black spiritual autobiography—from the spiritual he moves into the realm of the US secular.

His description of his capture as a runaway slave underscores the contrast between his world view and the world into which he enters. More specifically his capture illustrates the way in which he changes from a Muslim into a black man, an act that commences both the inauguration of a stereotype and the birth of an American:

> I saw a young man who was riding horses, then his father came to the place. He spoke to his father that he saw a *Sudanese* man in the house [church]. A man called Hindah together with another man riding a horse with many dogs took me walking with them for twelve miles to a place called Faydel.[97]

This point in the text is critical in that it marks the only place where race becomes a factor or is even mentioned. Alryyes explains in his footnotes to the autobiography that the term "Sudanese" that we see in the translation is common Arabic terminology for black people, and Bird simply translates "black man" here.[98] This, along with his incorporation of Surah al-Mulk is where we find a vital contribution that Omar ibn Said makes to African American literature. In a few short sentences he establishes that his lived experience of slavery differs little from that of

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[97] Omar ibn Said and Ala Alryyes, 63; emphasis added.
[98] Omar ibn Said and Bird, 89.

his Christian brethren. As Toni Morrison observes in her *Playing in the Dark* "[i]t was not simply that this slave population had a distinctive color; it was that this color 'meant' something."[99]

What this moment becomes in a sense is an awakening of a consciousness and a critical moment of transitioning. Contextually it is the disruption of the Muslim/Christian binary in which Omar ibn Said has heretofore engaged and his introduction to living life as a representation of blackness—and when he is identified as black he is thereafter associated with being a threat. In assigning him the label "black man" they immediately transport him into a narrative in which his skin color ultimately transforms him into a lesser being and demands their show of power and control. His brevity here obscures what must have been a terrifying experience and scene, but is enough to illustrate the fragility of the space from which he operates and how easily it may be dismantled. While it is true—as Marfo asserts—that Omar ibn Said's autobiography *can* be read as praise to his enslavers it is equally true that it can also be read as a revolutionary text. That is although it carefully guards the borders of an unstable space, it yet assaults the very foundation of slavery.

Modern Muslim American Literature: Blackness Reinscribed and Recovered

While early Muslim American literature was frequently dependent on the erasure of African identity, modern Muslim American literature reemerges with blackness reinscribed on the Muslim body to such an extent that it often obscures Muslim identity. In turning to an examination of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* it is as if we are, in a sense, picking up from the moment of Omar ibn Said's awakening as black, and the question that we begin to deal with

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[99] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* 40.

when we turn to modern Muslim American literature is what happens when Muslims become identifiably black?

Certainly, the reinscribing of blackness on the Muslim body leads to the voluntary and involuntary relinquishment of antebellum liminality. In the twentieth century, African American Muslims reemerge most vividly in the US public imagination as a security risk—that is, in the threatening guise of the Black Muslim with Malcolm X cast unwillingly in the role of archetypal figure. Although scholars argue for and cite empirical evidence suggesting that the African American liminal figure retains a role in US understandings of Islam, I argue that such a role is often obscured—in the public imagination at least—by the reconciliation of blackness with the Muslim body in the image of the Black Muslim. Additionally, it is through the voluntary relinquishment of liminal space that African American Muslims can challenge false images of blackness. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides an illustration of such in that, rather than distance himself from blackness, Malcolm X uses his text as well as his public speeches to challenge previously held conceptions of black identity and engage in the restoration of blackness and black masculinity—a task it would be impossible to perform from a liminal space. While traditional literacy is yet a valuable commodity, the intertwining of the religious value placed on reading with the historical experience of African Americans leads to increased cultural literacy, a critical necessity for establishing Muslims in America and valuable method through which to spread the message of Islam. Although methods differ, there remains a thread of consistency in the autobiographies of Omar ibn Said and Malcolm X—a theorizing of and rejection of white cult/ural supremacy based in an Islamic ethos.

In many ways, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* illuminates the difficulties of thriving in a home in which you are not just considered a problem, but rendered a criminal threat. For

Inderpal Grewal this concept of risk "is a racial and gendered notion of danger that… becomes allied with knowledges, visibilities and technologies of power." She uses the idea of risk to "understand the incarceration and criminalization of certain kinds of bodies which are identified as inclined to commit violence or having tendencies of violence essential to them."[100] What we see in the story of Malcolm X is an evolution of the level and type of risk associated with his body at particular moments. Chapter names including "Mascot," "Hustler," "Satan," and "Black Muslims" encompass a history of African American erasure and criminalization.

It is little wonder that Attallah Shabazz's 1999 foreword to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* commences the text with a double reclamation—a daughter's reclamation of her father's oft-hijacked legacy and a nation's reclamation of a "courageous American hero,"[101] "worldwide hero,"[102] and model of "proud black personhood."[103] Throughout her introduction to her father's work she disperses an account of the unveiling of his Black Heritage commemorative stamp. She details the ceremony at intervals—including snippets from speeches by various political, media and entertainment personalities—amidst a quick biographical sketch of her father's life and legacy that clarifies her father's ideological stance and explains the resurgence of interest in him. The referenced photographic image at the heart of the stamp unveiling ceremony captures her then 38-year old father. The name Malcolm X is spelled in large lettering beneath his photographic image, but underneath that most recognizable name is another written in significantly smaller font: El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, a rendering that is perhaps indicative of the way his politics of black nationalism have—in the US imagination at least—overtaken his Muslim identity.

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[100] Grewal, "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11." 539
[101] Shabazz xvi.
[102] Shabazz xviii.
[103] Shabazz xxii.

The *Autobiography* itself is both a conversion narrative as well as a treatise on US racial inequality. The text provides a detailed account of Malcolm X's rise from petty criminal to spokesman for the Nation of Islam amidst a call for African American rights to be recognized as global human rights. The narrative chronicles his family's descent into poverty following the death of his father and his own transition from model student to childhood delinquent. A chance visit from his sister Ella leads Malcolm Little to move from his home in Lansing to Boston, Detroit, and finally Harlem where he is arrested for burglary. His detailed description of his criminal life and disillusionment with religion make more astounding his conversion into the Nation of Islam and subsequent rise to leadership. Despite his eventual disavowal of Nation of Islam leadership and ideology, he maintains that Islam is the solution for the US's biggest social ill. Contained within the larger narrative of the individual are a series of minute historical accounts, including that of the city of Harlem and the Nation of Islam, that project an overall picture of revisited, reimagined and intertwining roots. With its critique of institutional racism and its recasting of US narratives as insufficient, *The Autobiography* is as much about the reconstruction of African American identity as it is the story of Malcolm X. What distinguishes Malcolm X's personal narrative from the works of conversion narratives by other Muslim writers is its simultaneous investment in the reclamation of both racial pride and masculine identity for African Americans.

The text's authorship, although more ambiguous than Omar ibn Said's, is yet readily attributed to Malcolm X. Critics have variously depicted Alex Haley as a collaborator, coauthor and simply dictee. Haley details a relationship sometimes fraught with tension because of Malcolm X's initial disbelief that he would have the final say. In the epilogue to *The Autobiography*, Haley notes the agreement that Malcolm X made with him: "'Nothing can be in

this book's manuscript that I didn't say, and nothing can be left out that I want in it.'"[104] Salah D. Hassan refers to *The Autobiography* as a "quasi-indigenous" text,[105] a qualifier that on one hand reflects the text as rooted in a distinct if yet emerging Muslim culture specific to the US milieu and on the other indicates an ambiguous authorship as well as an ambiguous state of belonging. As such to be quasi-indigenous might be considered as embodying a state of liminality.

Whether scholars consider the text as conversion literature in the style of Thomas Aquinas, self-made man literature in the style of Benjamin Franklin, "a touchstone of Muslim American culture," or "consciously or unconsciously" rooted in the slave narrative, *The Autobiography* has always had a home in US literature. From its publication, critics placed *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the category of American classic in part no doubt because of how it pushes against what Georges Gusdorf's seminal essay refers to as the "limits and conditions" of autobiography. Gusdorf argues effectively that, "autobiography is condemned to substitute endlessly the completely formed for that which is in the process of being formed,"[106] and Haley's push to keep the earlier text as written—with its emphasis on Malcolm X's allegiance to the Nation of Islam and its leader—rather than alter it in light of Malcolm's X's later religious conviction is responsible for *The Autobiography*'s conveyance of its subject as possessing a life in process. Malcolm X himself questions, "How is it possible to write an autobiography in a world so fast-changing as this?"[107]And indeed, an overriding theme of his text is reinvention, a fundamental aspect of which is the right to self-definition.

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[104] Alex Haley, "Epilogue." *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley.* With Foreword by Attallah Shabazz. New York: Ballentine Books, 1999. 390-463. 394
[105] Salah D. Hassan, "Infinite Hijra: Migrant Islam, Muslim American Literature and the Anti-Mimesis of *The Taqwacores.*" *Culture Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing.* Ed. Rehana Ahmed et al. New York: Routledge, 2012: 87-100. 89
[106] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 28-48. 41
[107] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 415.

While Michael Eric Dyson argues that "Malcolm's life has been shaped by myth,"[108] I would rather underscore here that one of his most important accomplishments has in fact been his construction of counter myths that interrogate and reimagine US identity. His mastery of cultural literacy—that is his fluency with US myths about itself coupled with empirical knowledge of the African American experience—provides him with the ability not only to read but also to reinterpret US events. Keith Miller argues that "[b]y assailing the Pilgrims and the *Mayflower* as harbingers of slavery and racism—instead of as sacrosanct symbols of freedom— Malcolm X supplied a perspective by incongruity that subverted an extremely well-established, rival piety."[109] In an appeal that has largely taken over the public imagination,[110] Malcolm X asserts, "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock, my brothers and sisters—Plymouth Rock landed on *us!*"[111] Malcolm X radically challenges the glory of US inception with a counter myth emphasizing Plymouth Rock as a crisis for his African American audience.   What lands upon African Americans is the imposition of a racial hierarchy with the cult/ure of white supremacy at its head, resulting in a simultaneous inclusion/exclusion for African Americans.

For Malcolm X this notion of contested belonging articulates a struggle between African American visibility/invisibility. He argues that, "[i]t has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren't considered *of* them. Even though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me*."[112] In his "Islam as a Pastoral in the Life of Malcolm X,"

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[108] W., L. and Dyson, Michael Eric. "Self-Reinvention, Spiritual Uplift, and 'The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X': An Interview with Michael Eric Dyson." Religion & Literature. 27.1 Giving and Testimony: African American Spirituality and Literature (Spring 1995): 89-105. 89

[109] Miller 210.

[110] Though arguably less popular than "By any means necessary," "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock…" has similarly been popularized in media and film including Dave Chappelle's performance in *Robin Hood Men in Tights* in which Chappelle paraphrased the famous quote while donning black rimmed eyeglasses.

[111] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 205.

[112] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 28.

Abdelwahab Elmessiri points to the institutional degradation used to constitute an effective

policing of boundaries for Malcolm X and the Little family:

> Welfare people looked at the members of the family 'as numbers and as a case in their
> book, not as human beings' (p.22). Later in life, Malcolm was once more literally
> converted to a number when he was sent to jail. His number became a part of him,
> 'stenciled on his brain' (p.152). Malcolm discovered that the conversion of men into
> numbers is a cultural necessity for America, because while this country can solve the
> problem of sending men into outer space, it cannot deal with human beings.[113]

In Renato Rosaldo's formulation, "The notion of belonging means full membership in a group

and the ability to influence one's destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions. People

often speak of citizenship, not as an either/or matter, but along a continuum from full citizenship

to second-class citizenship."[114] Although Malcolm X may not have attained full citizenship, he

possesses full knowledge of how the system works. For Malcolm X this continuum of citizenship

mirrors US racial hierarchies with white Americans at one end and African Americans at the

other. It is a paradigm that African Americans have for generations been born into but is also

one into which immigrants step. Watching a scene of immigrant arrival—an airport reunion with

children speaking in a language other than English—Malcolm X concluded, "'By tomorrow

night, they'll know how to say their first English word—*nigger.*'"[115] In this scenario African

Americans serve as a type of litmus test for immigrants' assimilation—the greater the effort to

distance themselves from blackness, the greater the possibility for attaining full citizenship. To

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[113] Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri, "Islam as a Pastoral in the Life of Malcolm X." *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times.* Ed. John Henrik Clarke. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990: 69-78. 71
[114] Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy." *Cultural Anthropology.* 9.3 Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future (1994): 402-11. 402
[115] Haley cited in "Epilogue" 406.

not actively distance the self from blackness is to incur the possibility of being tainted by it. Malcolm X indicates that efforts at distancing continue in subsequent generations. According to Malcolm X, "immigrants' descendants are running as hard as they can to escape the descendants of the Negroes who helped to unload the immigrant ships."[116] Noting the mass internment of Japanese Americans but not German Americans, Malcolm X ascertains what Grewal would years later—that threats will only be associated with certain kinds of bodies.

Black Muslims: at the Intersection of Race and Religion

Considering that Christianity was used to justify anti-black racism it is significant that Malcolm X like many African Americans—but certainly not all—enters Islam through the Nation of Islam, a religious organization that used religion to affirm black identity as not only positive but preferred. Nation of Islam teachings such as "Yacub's history"[117] contradicted the teachings of Islam and "infuriated the Muslims of the East."[118] Nevertheless many credit the Nation of Islam with encouraging national introspection. In his framing of the group as anti-American, anti-Christian and anti-white Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" uses the Nation to position his own movement as the more moderate choice and to encourage whites to accept nonviolent protests as mode of change. In *The Autobiography* chapters such as "Saved" and "Savior" detail the history of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X's intense devotion to the man and mission and are in line with still popular images that reduce Malcolm X to anti-white. Even as Malcolm X's spiritual journey and ministry evolve eventually

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[116] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 85.
[117] For a detailed explanation of Yacub's history see *Autobiography* 167-171. The Nation of Islam taught that a black scientist (Yacub) created the "devil" white race whose inherent evil resulted in the race being eventually rounded up and sent to Europe.
[118] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 171.

leading to ideological clashes with the Nation of Islam and its leader he nevertheless seeks to balance his attention to US racial politics with his understanding of Islamic spiritual teachings.

While race is mentioned at only one point in Omar ibn Said's autobiography, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is particularly adept at showing the way in which race became and remains a factor for African American Muslims. Unlike Omar ibn Said's work, Malcolm X's text attests to a thorough understanding of the "Christian language" as his autobiography engages in the process of restoration for African American and Muslim identity. Although there is no indication that Malcolm X was aware of Omar ibn Said's narrative, it is clear from his own autobiography that he was aware of the presence of Muslims in America before the twentieth century. In speaking to his "black brother inmates" about their communal whitewashed history "I told them that some slaves brought from Africa spoke Arabic, and were Islamic in their religion."[119]

For GhaneaBassiri and Sylvia Chan-Malik, African American Muslims in the twentieth century, particularly those involved in the Ahmadiyya movement,[120] were also understood as existing in a liminal space that functioned in a similar manner to that experienced by African enslaved Muslims. The designation of such space provided the Muslim individual protection against negative stereotypes of blackness. Names and clothing were often modes through which African American Muslims could identify themselves as different. According to GhaneaBassiri, "despite the widespread prejudice against Islam in white America, it continued to be significant

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[119] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 186.

[120] A Muslim missionary group often dismissed as heretical because its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed to be the promised messiah. Jamillah Karim links the group to the Nation of Islam quoting the speculation that WD Fard, the founder of the Nation of Islam, was once an Ahmadi. See Karim's "Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation: Young Muslims Inherit Global Muslim and African American Legacies." *The Muslim World*. 95 (October 2005): 497-513. 499

as a 'semi-civilizing' and thus a liminal religion for African Americans."[121] Chan-Malik argues

that conversion to Islam could provide a "political safeguard from white supremacy, an identity

that at times allowed them to transcend their parochial identities as 'Blacks' and embrace a

global community of Muslims."[122] Malcolm X bears witness to African American Muslim access

to US liminal space while recalling a stop he made in Europe en route to perform Hajj: "I saw

something I had already experienced when I was looked upon as a Muslim and not as a Negro,

right in America. People seeing you as a Muslim saw you as a human being and they had a

different look, different talk, everything."[123] With his life a series of moving from one stage to

another, in many ways Malcolm X is the quintessential liminal figure. While he may have

experienced liminal status as Muslim, however, it is through the voluntary relinquishment of

liminal space that Malcolm X can combine an Islamic ethos with the cultural reality of living as

a black man in the US.

Public perception of African American Muslims made liminal space unrealistic for many

in that it tied images of blackness to Islam in a way that caused Islamic identity to increase the

threat of blackness. The Nation of Islam—and Malcolm X—entered the public conscious

beginning with articles published in black papers until the creation of their own newspaper

(which Malcolm X developed and first produced).   Widespread exposure, however, is attributed

to the 1959 television documentary *The Hate that Hate Produced* and C. Eric Lincoln's *The

Black Muslims in America* (1961). *The Autobiography* indicates that these outside media

depictions of Nation of Islam members invariably wrapped them in layers of otherness designed

to racialize Islam and portray them as a risk to the nation. *The Hate that Hate Produced* helped

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[121] GhaneaBassiri 206.
[122] Chan-Malik 285.
[123] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 328.

bring the previously unheard-of group to public attention but presented them in the terrifying

image of hate-mongering black racists and aided in catapulting the organization—in the public

mind at least—to a national threat. The programming depicted them as a type of counter-Klan.

Such a narrative no doubt made for a more captivating story, but it dramatically recast victims as

oppressors and oppressors as victims. Malcolm X noted that, "in New York City there was an

avalanche of public reaction. It's my personal opinion that the 'Hate…Hate…' title was

primarily responsible for the reaction. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, black and white,

were exclaiming 'Did you hear it? Did you see it? Preaching *hate* of white people!'"[124]

In addition to the documentary, Lincoln's groundbreaking text chronicled the

development of the Nation of Islam and coined the term that would prove so discomforting to his

subjects. The racialization of Islam and Muslims allowed for the compounded alienation of

African American Muslims in America—with both Islam and African Americans as antithetical

to US ideals and the term 'Black Muslim' creating an image of terror. According to Malcolm X,

> The public mind fixed on 'Black Muslims.' From Mr. Muhammad on down, the name
>
> 'Black Muslims' distressed everyone in the Nation of Islam. I tried for at least two years
>
> to kill off that '*Black* Muslims.' Every newspaper and magazine writer and microphone
>
> I got close to: '*NO!* We are black *people* here in America. Our *religion* is Islam. We are
>
> properly called 'Muslims'!' But that 'Black Muslims' name never got dislodged.[125]

Malcolm X's resistance to this name is at least two-fold—on the one hand the group is resisting

the act of naming and on the other hand the name itself. The imposition of the outside definition

is made more unsettling by the fact that their self-definition cannot dislodge it. The term "Black

Muslim" aided in synonymizing the group with hatred. Such a race specific identification also

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[124] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 242-243.
[125] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 252.

threatened the belonging within the larger Muslim community of African Americans not associated with the Nation of Islam. Additionally, it ensured that the larger community would also face similar disapprobation. In fact, Lincoln asserted that, "[b]ecause of [the Nation of Islam], 'an insidious stigma' has become attached to *all* Islamic societies in America."[126]

Media sources translated the kalimah—Islamic declaration of faith—into digestible English that divested Islam of its universality. When Muhammad Ali announced his conversion into the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X maintains,

> Cassius never announced himself a member of any 'Black Muslims.' The press reporters made that out of what he told them, which was this: 'I believe in the religion of Islam, which means that I believe there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Apostle. This is the same religion that is believed in by over seven hundred million dark-skinned peoples throughout Africa and Asia.[127]

Even when Malcolm X rejects the ideology of the Nation of Islam the name and image of the Black Muslim remains attached.

In Malcolm X's disavowal of the Nation of Islam ideology what remains constant is the denunciation of US white cult/ural supremacy, a denunciation he extends to the Christian church. For Malcolm X Christianity is linked through the concept of white divinity to black degradation and self-hatred. Before his visit to Mecca—commonly thought of as his second conversion— Malcolm X propagates Islam as a solution to "the *white man's* Christian religion."[128] He argues that

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[126] Charles Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns Publishing, 1994. 167
[127] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 315.
[128] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 166.

> And where the religion of every other people on earth taught its believers of a God with whom they could identify, a God who at least looked like one of their own kind, the slavemaster injected his Christian religion into this 'Negro.' This 'Negro was taught to worship an alien God having the same blond hair, pale skin, and blue eyes as the slavemaster.[129]

As the concept of white divinity is such a troublesome underpinning of the cult/ure and ideology of white supremacy, it is little wonder that the central tenet of this anti- white cult/ural supremacy becomes dethroning. When still a prisoner Malcolm X addresses the prison Bible class with a critique of religious imagery's use of uninterrogated whiteness that is reminiscent of Job ben Solomon's:

> I stood up and asked, 'What color was Paul?' And I kept talking, with pauses, 'He had to be black…because he was a Hebrew…and the original Hebrews were black…weren't they? [the Harvard Divinity student] had started flushing red. You know the way white people do. He said 'Yes.' I wasn't through yet. "What color was Jesus…he was Hebrew, too…wasn't he? Both the Negro and the white convicts had sat bolt upright. I don't care how tough the convict, be he brainwashed black Christian, or a 'devil' white Christian, neither of them is ready to hear anybody saying Jesus wasn't white. The instructor walked around. He shouldn't have felt bad. In all of the years since, I never have met any intelligent white man who would try to insist that Jesus was white. How could they? He said, 'Jesus was brown.' I let him get away with that compromise.[130]

The hajj pilgrimage yields a major turning point in Malcolm X's life and the published letter from Mecca a defining moment in his ministry. He challenges the idea of Islam as

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[129] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 166.
[130] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 193-194.

incompatible with the West and the Muslim as risk to the nation by proposing Islam as the solution to US racism. For Malcolm X what it means to root Islam in the US is to (re)turn to the human. He takes an approach to calling people—black and white—to Islam that shows awareness of "American type thinking" as well as awareness of the sociohistorical background in which he taught. The turn to the human is made more profound by the theme of erasure that has until then resonated throughout the text.

In asserting that, "America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem,"[131] Malcolm X makes a call strikingly similar to that of Omar ibn Said's use of Surah Mulk. In his first call for US whites to Islam Malcolm X is as forceful in his language conveying the threat the country faces as David Walker is in his "radical" *Appeal*. In combining his new understanding of Islam with cultural literacy Malcolm X charges that racism is an "incurable cancer" with the US on a "suicide path," but

> if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept *in reality* the Oneness of Man—and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their 'differences' in color. With racism plaguing America like an incurable cancer, the so-called 'Christian' white American heart should be more receptive to a proven solution to such a destructive problem. Perhaps it could be in time to save America from imminent disaster—the same destruction brought upon Germany by racism that eventually destroyed the Germans themselves.[132]

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[131] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 347.
[132] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 348.

It is important that Malcolm X addresses a white audience here specifically in that it shows an embrace of an Islamic injunction that he had not previously considered relevant to whites: "'No man has believed perfectly until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.'"[133] His letter from Mecca is in part a concerned plea to white Americans—one most reminiscent of the narratives of Job ben Solomon and Omar ibn Said in that it asks whites to eliminate any traces of the oppressor within themselves.

Conclusion

Certainly, Muslim American literature finds its genealogical roots in that "uniquely American" genre, the slave narrative. While the incorporation of Muslim Americans writings in in the broader US canon has been a stalled process, the inclusion of those writings would challenge narratives of Muslim silence on slavery and broaden our understanding of the role Muslim identity has historically played in condemnations of white cult/ural supremacy. Although the brief protection of a liminal space allowed African Muslim slaves to condemn white cult/ural supremacy and share Islamic doctrine in creative ways, liminality has lost viability as a safe space from which to establish Islam and Muslims in the US. In fact, it is in reflecting upon the collective experiences of African Americans rather than in avoiding blackness that Muslims can most effectively challenge US narratives. Looking ahead to the following chapters race remains a central component in understanding Muslim American identity, particularly in articulations of gender. In chapter 2, I examine Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* as a recovery project—one that seeks to envision a Muslim American presence that maintains ties with a black cultural past.

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[133] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 326.

Chapter 2
American Hijabi: True Womanhood, Bad Girls and Superwomen

"Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical* norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows 'that is not me.' In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society."[134]

"I am not my hair/ I am not this skin/ I am not your expectations."[135]

This chapter analyzes Mohja Kahf's 2006 novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and conceptualizes Kahf's novel and efforts to theorize Muslim American literature as a project to uncover/recover an indigenous US identity. More specifically, I use Kahf's text to examine how internal and external gender expectations—those of the US ummah and those of the surrounding US community—contribute to understandings of an indigenous Muslim American identity. While the guiding question for critics of the hijab—the symbol at the heart of these internal and external expectations—might be, How can those whose appearance and characteristics are so ostensibly un-American belong? For those who would imagine a stable Muslim American identity, belonging—while not yet uncontested—is already assumed, and the question is instead What is peculiarly American about the experience of the muhajjaba—or to use American parlance—the hijabi?

In her essay "The Muslim in the Mirror" Kahf juxtaposes Islam as a "pie-in-the-sky ideal" with "Islam-on-the-ground-as-a-lived-reality," arguing that "Islam is always manifested

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[134] Lorde 631.

[135] India Arie Simpson, et al. "I Am Not My Hair." *Testimony Volume 1: Life and Relationship,* Motown, 2006.

inside a particular culture and in specific, earth-rooted human bodies."[136] In his timely essay

"Islam and the Cultural Imperative," Umar Abd-Allah asserts this sentiment axiomatically with

"in China, Islam looked Chinese; in Mali, it looked African," and in the US, Islam must also

reflect the "indigenous" culture from which its practitioners spring. [137] Abd-Allah's

understanding of the term indigenous reflects a sea change in the relationship between US born

and immigrant Muslims. Scholars of Islam in America predominantly use indigenous as an

intracommunal term to refer almost exclusively to African American Muslims present in the US

before the 1965 arrival of many immigrant Muslims.[138] While the race specific application of

the term indigenous is perhaps a useful way to make African American Muslims and their

concerns distinct from immigrant Muslims, it also creates an uneasy binary that makes a

complicated history into black and white and could create Muslim complicity in the racialization

of Islam. By contrast, Abd-Allah's usage is broader including the entire Muslim American

ummah—US born and immigrants. He argues effectively that "[r]egardless of birth place,

Muslim Americans become indigenous once they truly belong. Islam in America becomes

indigenous by fashioning an integrated cultural identity that is comfortable with itself and

functions naturally in the world around it."[139]

Kahf "fashion[s] an integrated cultural identity" that reconciles tensions between not only

the Muslim and US populations but also between the American born and immigrant US ummah.

In doing so, she illuminates two competing yet equally destructive narratives for the American

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[136] Kahf, "The Muslim in the Mirror" in *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak*. Ed. Saleemah Abdul Ghafur. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005. 133-138. 133
[137] Abd-Allah 357.
[138] McCloud, "Islam in America: The Mosaic," in *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish and Muslim Experiences in the United States*. Eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith and John L. Esposito (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003): 171; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "Muslims in America: A Select Bibliography." *The Muslim World* 76.2 (1986): 98; Ali Mazrui, "Between the Crescent and the Star-Spangled Banner: American Muslims and US Foreign Policy," *Ethnicity and International Relations* 72.3 (July 1996): 500.
[139] Abd-Allah 369.

hijabi: a mythical norm and her antithesis—the religious superwoman and the impious bad girl. The stark dichotomy Kahf initially depicts between being Muslim and being American creates a warped image of what a hijabi ought to be and to do, and for Kahf's main character Khadra there is little room to develop an alternative to the idealized image of Muslim womanhood on one hand and the antithetical bad girl on the other, both of which represent alienation—from either US society or from the Muslim ummah. By positioning her experiences between those of two black women, Kenyan American Zuhura and African American Hanifa, Khadra uses them as mirrors to reflect upon and understand her own experiences as an Arab American woman in the US and underscores that constructing an indigenous US identity cannot yet be understood without understanding the role of blackness. In reading Kahf's novel through a black Muslim feminist lens I argue that Kahf emphasizes cross-racial identity for Muslim women both as sisters and as Americans in the US home.

I have divided this chapter into two primary sections. In the first I explore external complications to establishing a stable US Muslim identity. I connect Western critiques regarding the hijab with some of the discourses surrounding black hair and in doing so offer cultural context for understanding an antipathy to nonwhite femininity. In placing discussions of the hijab within this context I argue that Khadra as a hijabi enters into an already established US discourse on hair—one that devalues, renders threatening and ultimately goes so far as to de-gender women who do not comply with a (visible) mythical norm. In the second section I explore internal complications within the Muslim community in constructing a stable US identity, complications that in Kahf's novel are based on a false binary between Muslim/American as pure/impure. It is from this understanding of what it means to be pure or impure that Khadra positions herself between the superwoman Zuhura and the bad girl Hanifa. I argue that Kahf as

author uses such complications to create cross-racial coalitions of color. In privileging the relationships between "sisters" she provides a counternarrative to a feminist literary tradition overwhelmingly devoted to mothers and daughters.

Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is the story of Khadra Shamy, a Syrian American Muslim growing up in America's heartland. The adult Khadra assigned the task of photographing Muslim American life, returns to her hometown to do so. Like Malcolm X, Kahf interweaves the principal character's story into the narrative of the developing community life—that of the small Dawah community, the larger Muslim community in Indiana, as well as the broader Muslim American community. Additionally, Kahf intersperses Khadra's present life—in 1992—with that of a much younger Khadra growing up in 1970s Indiana. Setting her novel amidst the rise of the New Right, Kahf positions Khadra's quest for a stable Muslim and American identity against the backdrop of a US, which after the civil rights gains of the fifties and sixties, was amidst its own identity reconstruction. The text depicts a sometimes-ambivalent relationship with hijab, and Khadra's progression through life and understanding of her identity—that is what it means to be Muslim and what it means to be American—is told metaphorically in her relationship with the hijab.

In one of the most profound statements in Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Brent Lott, the main character's childhood bully, pronounces concerning hijab, "It's just hair."[140] Lott's intention of course—after having ripped Khadra's scarf from her head—is to divest himself of responsibility for what effectively amounts to a hate crime. What his statement does not account for is the extent to which the hijab—often understood as *the* symbol for Muslim identity—has also become a symbol of a perceived incompatibility between Islam and the West. The Arabic

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[140] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 124.

word hijab literally refers to a "screen, curtain, partition, cover, barrier, veil."[141] The hijabi—Muslim American slang equivalent to the Arabic word muhajjaba—is a Muslim woman who wears hijab, and unlike with her masculine counterparts— the Black Muslim of chapter one and the terrorist *amalgame* I discuss in chapter three, who are wholly the product of the public's imagination—the mythology that surrounds her is created within and outside of the Muslim community. Internal and external narratives imagine her as a victim/ threat on one hand or a Muslim superwoman/bad girl on the other.

External Depictions of the Hijabi: Victim and Threat

Western/Imperialist understandings of the hijabi's identity are generally tied to her head as questions of belonging too often begin and end with her scarf. Nevertheless, as scholars argue, her identity cannot be reduced to the decision of whether to remove her covering. Despite the connection drawn between the hijab and Islam, increasingly the image of the Muslim woman—covered *and* uncovered—is subject to othering in the West. Mariam Cooke, for instance, asserts that, "[t]he veil, real or imagined, functions like race, a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape."[142] Like Cooke, Yvonne Haddad suggests that even nonhijabis can become encapsulated in stereotypes of the hijabi. Within the claim to the racialization of the hijabi are underlying assumptions about identity: what a hijabi looks like, where she must be from.

In addition to being mispresented, Muslim women can become complicit in their own misrepresentations. In her "On Being a Muslim Woman Writer in the West," Kahf criticizes the Western publishing industry's cynical reliance on formulaic depictions of Muslim women and Muslim life, arguing that only certain types of Muslim women and Muslim writing are

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[141] Muhammad Mohar Ali 482.
[142] Miriam Cooke, "The Muslimwoman." *Contemporary Islam* (2007):139-154. 140

recognized. According to Kahf, the industry attempts to squeeze Muslim women's writing into a handful of common tropes including "the victim," "the meek mother," "the forbidding father," "rotten religion," "cruel country," "the vile veil," and "stifled sexuality." While Kahf concedes that works have resisted such classifications, she argues that the way in which works have resisted have in fact reinforced negative depictions of Muslims. In Kahf's formulation, the alternative to the victim is the escapee, an identity that reinforces the depiction of Islam as an oppressive religion—particularly for womenfolk. Strong Muslim women—those able to escape from victimhood—fall victim to stereotypes that espouse intelligence, strength, agency even, as anomalies for Muslim women.

While Myra Macdonald links the veil to power, arguing that there is a "threat posed by the veiled woman's ability to see without being seen. Her gaze defies voyeurism, and even mimics the photographer's power,"[143] most scholars readily take Annabelle Sreberny's view that the Western audience is firmly in that position of power, lined up behind the camera waiting for Muslim women to "unveil" themselves.[144] Recently, for instance, ABC Family stirred controversy from CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) and other Islamic advocacy groups when the network debuted the concept for *Alice in Arabia,* a show in which "Alice must count on her independent spirit and wit to find a way to return home while surviving life behind the veil."[145] The tagline alone incorporates at least three of the pervasive tropes.

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[143] For an introduction to veiling including history and prevalence in other cultures see Macdonald's "Muslim Women and the Veil: Problems of Image and Voice in Media Representations." *Feminist Media Studies.* 6.1 (2006): 7-23.

[144] Annabelle Sreberny, "Seeing Through the Veil: Regimes of Representation." *Feminist Media Studies* 2.2 (2002): 270–2. 271

[145] Renee Lewis, "Civil Rights Groups Charge ABC with Bigotry Over Pilot 'Alice in Arabia.'" *Al Jazeera America.* N.p. 20 March 2014. Web 7 March 2017.

Although criticisms of the veil most commonly fixate on hijab as a sign of oppression and the women who wear it as oppressed, more recent criticism—that is post 9/11 and 7/7—reiterates that embedded in the rhetoric of the hijabi as victim is the hijabi as threat. If as scholars argue we understand concepts in binaries that are subsequently made hierarchical,[146] then those Audre Lorde describes as America's "mythical norm"—the "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure"—not only stand in stark contrast to but are also necessarily greater or less than the American hijabi. What is yet more disconcerting is the greater the deviation from Lorde's norm, the greater the perceived threat, and not surprisingly, being viewed as threatening can have detrimental effects.[147] Haddad argues that,

> in an America traumatized by 9/11, many Americans began to identify the *hijab* as the standard of the enemy. No more a marker of piety and obedience to God, it came to be seen as an affront and the flaunting of an identity associated with those who have declared war on the United States.[148]

Judith Miller's incendiary "The Bomb Under the Abaya," bears witness to Haddad's claim. Her 2007 article links traditional Muslim women's clothing—here the long loose overgarment—to terrorism. Her story of two Palestinian suicide bombers—one of whom she describes as "the

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[146] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties." (1978) *Literary Theory: An Anthology (Revised Edition).* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. 578-584. 578

[147] Studies indicate that false ideas about race in particular can contribute to everything from police violence to healthcare inequality. Consider for example Goff et al's "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children" in which researchers concluded that "the Black/ape association predicted actual disparities in police violence toward children" (526). The study found that African American boys were not afforded the same protections of childhood as whites. Participants in the study—including police officers—who were exposed to associations made between blacks and apes perceived African American children as older than they were and less innocent than their white peers. Similarly, Trawalter, Hoffman and Watyz's "Racial Bias in Perceptions of Other People's Pain," found that participants thought blacks felt less pain than whites. Hoffman et al later found in "Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs About Biological Differences" that those with "some medical training" used such beliefs to "inform medical judgements" (4296).

[148] Haddad, "The Post 9-11 'Hijab' as Icon." *Sociology of Religion.* Muslim Integration in the United States and France 68.3 (Fall 2007): 253-267. 263

quintessential victim" and the other a "willing human weapon"[149]—showcases the shifting stereotypes of Muslim women. Most alarmingly, Miller concludes that "[t]he face of modern terrorism, and of suicide bombing in particular, is increasingly female."[150] Miller does not, however, acknowledge her own role in representing Muslim women. Keeping in mind Stuart Hall's assertion that identity is "constituted within, not outside, of representation,"[151] illuminates Miller's role as an architect. If the identity of Muslim women becomes associated with terrorism, it will be because the writings of those like Miller have played no small part.

There is a paradox in noncompliance with a gendered mythical norm that must be made clear. Despite the ostensible focus on the female, the goal of such representations is to ensure the collapse of gender and that consequently noncompliant women should not be afforded the same protections associated with white femininity. While discussions of the hijab are framed around its "otherness," those discussions enter and reflect an already established and heavily politicized discourse on hair. Historically, this strategy of de-gendering has most successfully been employed against African American women. Just as the hijab is understood as one of the most visible signs of Muslim identity, in a similar manner critics home in on black hair as "the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin."[152] In her "Afro Image: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," Angela Davis laments how her own image has been divested of its political context and replaced with nostalgia for fashion. She reminds readers she "was portrayed as a conspiratorial and monstrous Communist (that is, anti-American) whose unruly natural

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[149] Judith Miller, "The Bomb Under the Abaya." *Policy Review.* (June and July 2007): 43-58. 48
[150] Judith Miller 52.
[151] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference.* Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence &Wishart, 1990. 222-237.
[152] Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/ Style Politics." *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader.* Ed. Kwesi Owusu. London: Routledge. 111-121. 113

hairdo symbolized Black militancy (that is, antiwhiteness)."[153] In calling for "revolution glamor" to be linked to historical memory, Davis argues that the "hidden historical content that lurks behind the continued association of my name with the Afro" was that "hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Afro-wearing Black women were accosted, harassed, and arrested by police, FBI, and immigration agents during the two months I spent underground."[154] To the extent that they differ from a white and straight hair norm, noncompliant women risk depiction as terrorists or militants, and such depictions place them at risk of state-sponsored and public violence. In this manner, their treatment differs little from that received by their African American and Muslim brothers.

If we return to the moment of Khadra's unveiling, for instance, hijab is both the symbol of Khadra's gender and the hallmark of her identity as Muslim, but also the stated cause for her loss of feminine protection. When Brent Lott—with help from his buddy Curtis Stephenson— accosts her in the school hallway and rips her scarf from her head, the violent unveiling results in an internal crisis for Khadra, and so that her audience may process the gravity of the incident, Kahf specifically places it in a cultural context that incites feelings of protection for white femininity: "If Mindy Oberholtzer's[155] little pleated cheerleader skirt had been ripped off, so that she'd been rendered half-naked right in the middle of school where people could see her, she *might* have felt as mortified as Khadra did then."[156] While she provides a graphic depiction of the attack with Curtis offering to hold Khadra down, the hijab "torn in two" and the brooch that

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[153] Angela Y. Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia." *Critical Inquiry.* 21.1 (Autumn 1994): 37-45. 39
[154] Davis 42.
[155] The naming choice evokes an infamous rape/murder case in Indiana and US legal history. Klan leader and local politician DC Stephenson kidnapped and brutally raped Madge Oberholtzer and was held responsible for her death after she in her diminished capacity took bichloride of mercury tablets. See Stephenson v. State. 22 Ill.205 Ind. 141 (1932)
[156] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 124; emphasis added.

held her scarf "poking her skin, drawing blood,"[157] it is in associating Khadra with white femininity that Kahf claims outrage for her character.

That her tormentors are unwilling to see that protection extended to Khadra is indicated in their actions before and after the assault. For Brent and Curtis there is an inherent connection between the hijab and them personally—it is "the flaunting of an identity," and the symbol of Khadra's otherness. In removing it they can attack her difference as well as the threat to themselves. While they can assault Khadra in this specific manner because she is Muslim and because she is female, in their association with her as threatening, they can render her genderless. Prior to their assault the pair mock Khadra with a genderless insult when they insist she "Take off your towel first, raghead,"[158] and after the assault her tormentors mock Khadra's fury and respond with "It's just hair you psycho!" In an echo of the politicization of black hair, what they illustrate in fact is the opposite of what they profess to show—for neither party is it "just hair."

While the sight of hijab or black hair does not always incite violence, their sightings are often viewed through the lens of a standard/mythical norm that consequently renders them politically provocative, countercultural or deliberately confrontational. Melissa Harris-Perry explains recent cultural explorations as having reified this standard for dominant notions of beauty under the rubric "Becky."[159] Tracing the character back to Sir Mix-A-Lot's 1992 song "Baby Got Back," Harris-Perry explains that "Becky is a way of expressing a particular version of white womanhood" and argues that "Becky personifies the cruel rejection of black women's

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[157] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 124.
[158] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 124.
[159] Singer Beyoncé brought "Becky" to national attention with the song "Sorry" from her 2016 album *Lemonade.* The singer set off a firestorm of speculation when her "Sorry" persona tells her cheating partner that "He better call Becky with the good hair." Listeners unsuccessfully scrambled to find the "real" Becky, but Harris-Perry and others argue for Becky as a metaphorical expression for uninterrogated white female privilege.

bodies through a small-minded policing of white beauty standards."[160] Cultural critic Kobena

Mercer argues that processed or natural, black hair is always in response to dominant notions of

beauty, i.e. Becky. Although he takes issue with the notion that there is an inherent link between

processed hair and self/race devaluation and natural hair and racial pride, Mercer yet maintains

that,

> when hairstyling is critically evaluated as an aesthetic practice inscribed in everyday life,
>
> *all* black hairstyles are political in that they each articulate responses to the panoply of
>
> historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both social
>
> and symbolic meaning and significance.[161]

In her *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, Noliwe Rooks asserts that

she learned from an early age that "My hair bridged a space between personal identity and a

larger racial politic,"[162] a claim reinforced from popular culture to institutional regulations. In

2014 it took the intervention of the Congressional Black Caucus to communicate the need to

revise US military attempts to control black women's hair. Regulations based on the Becky

standard sought to pressure women to adopt straight hair norms by maligning natural hairstyles

designed for the upkeep of black hair— such as locs and twists—as "matted" and "unkempt."[163]

More recently in 2016 Kentucky's Butler Traditional High School stirred controversy when their

personal grooming guidelines forbade "Hair styles that are extreme, distracting, or attention-

getting…No dreadlocks, cornrolls, twists, mohawks, and no jewelry worn in hair," prohibitions

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[160] Melissa Harris-Perry, "What Do You See When You Look at This Cover: Melissa Harris-Perry Respond's to Elle's August Cover." *Elle*. N.p. 11 July 2016. Web. 7 March 2017.

[161] Mercer 115; italics in original.

[162] Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty Culture, and African American Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996. 2

[163] Maya Rhodan, "U.S. Military Rolls Back Restrictions on Black Hairstyles." *Times*. N.p. 13 August 2014. Web 7 March 2017.

critics felt were again aimed at black hair.[164] Celebrities have been particularly subject to hair

scrutiny from the disparagement of the Rutger's women's basketball team as "nappy headed

hos,"[165] to Disney Star's Zendaya Coleman's locs drawing attention because they looked like

they smelled like weed,[166] to Gabby Douglas's ponytail attracting more attention than her gold

medals,[167] to Malia Obama's twists condemned as unfitting of a president's daughter,[168] to Blue

Ivy's afro maligned as unkempt[169]—the last a criticism of a child not yet old enough to wield a

comb.[170]

Similarly, representations that portray hijabis as victims on one hand, or victimizers on

the other at best seek to pressure Muslim women to comply with a visible norm and at worst set

them up for state and public violence. Reading these representations against a history of US

racial exclusionary practices reiterates that such representations are strategies that are part of a

playbook that has long been enforced against African American women. Inasmuch as such

strategies seek to exclude Muslim women, they simultaneously place them within what Harris-

Perry refers to as a US "legacy of brutally racist cultural practices."[171]

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[164] Julee Wilson, "Kentucky High School's Dress Code 'Stinks of Racism,' Bans Dreadlocks, Cornrows and Braids." *Essence.* N.p. 29 July 2016. Web. 7 March 2017.
[165] David Carr, "Networks Condemn Remarks Made by Imus." *The New York Times* N.p., 7 April 2007. Web 7 March 2017.
[166] Victoria Dawson Hoff, "Zendaya Speaks Out After Her Dreadlocks are Criticized at Oscars." *Elle.* N.p. 25 February 2015. Web 7 March 2017.
[167] Tiya Miles, "Opinion: Why Focus on Gabby Douglas' Hair?" *CNN.COM.* N.p. 6 August 2012. Web 7 March 2017.
[168] Catherine Saint Louis, "Black Hair, Still Tangled in Politics." *The New York Times.* N.p. 26 August 2009. Web 7 March 2017.
[169] Kara Brown, "Blue Ivy's Hair is Perfect and You Should Shut Up About It." *Jezebel.* N.p. 26 August 2014. Web 7 March 2017.
[170] What criticisms of Blue Ivy and Gabby Douglas in particular emphasize is that the policing of black bodies is not solely the province of nonblacks. Miles and Brown note criticisms of the two were mostly from the African American community, which suggests an internalization of the Becky standard.
[171] Harris-Perry "What Do You See When You Look at This Cover."

This is not to say that there are not equally celebratory counternarratives of black hair and hijab. As for black hair, Mercer explains that "racism works by encouraging the devaluation of blackness by black subjects themselves, and that a recentring sense of pride is therefore a prerequisite for a politics of resistance and reconstruction."[172] And while black women remain at the forefront of these celebratory narratives even "mainstream" culture has begun to take part. After discovering that his adopted daughter had begun to internalize white beauty standards that caused her to feel dissatisfaction with her own looks, white Sesame Street head writer Joey Mazzarino penned the lyrics to "I Love My Hair," a song that celebrates the beauty and versatility of black hair. In testament to the demand for positive representations of black hair the video of a young black female puppet singing the song went viral.

As for hijab, there are Pinterest sites and conferences dedicated to Muslim American fashion as well as other artistic works that articulate belonging. Hipster Hijabis and Hijabistas—a fusion of hijab and fashionista—are terms for fashion forward Muslim women who follow Islamic rules for modesty without sacrificing creative expression. Kahf as poet too celebrates the hijab, theorizing a link between hijab, respectability and African American men. In "Hijab Scene #5" the speaker notes the respect black men give to hijabis and that such respect is not limited to African American women:

> When you're wearing *hijab*,
>
> Black men/ you don't even know materialize
>
> all over Hub City/ like an army of chivalry,
>
> opening doors, springing
>
> into gallantry.[173]

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[172] Mercer 114.

[173] Kahf, *E-mails From Scheherazade.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. 31

Kahf as speaker associates hijab with acceptance from other communities and argues that it is such belonging that whiteness cannot access. In fact, to discard the hijab means to "pass lonely as white."[174] The "loneliness" here indicates a loss of recognition and a resulting loss of cross-cultural acceptance if not belonging.

At the Intersection of Religion, Race, and Gender: Internal Depictions of the Hijabi

Thus far I have interrogated Western/Imperialist (mis)understandings of the Muslim woman, and the strict comparison of African Americans and Muslim women in which I have heretofore engaged obscures membership overlap. As I turn to an examination of the intra-ummah assumptions of gender used to construct Muslim American identity, it is impossible to do so without addressing the role blackness has historically played in US identity construction. From without, the identity of Muslim women might appear as "all-encompassing; it erases identity and differences,"[175] but as Jamillah Karim and Kahf point out there are internal divisions and expectations that challenge the idea of universality. While in the Western imagination, the dominant understanding of Muslim American women centers on the experiences of immigrant women, particularly those of Arab and Middle Eastern descent, the portrait Kahf presents of Muslim women is more complex, with Kahf highlighting Muslim complicity in ignoring the concerns of African Americans or sometimes joining in and condemning blackness. It is no coincidence that Kahf's Khadra, an Arab American woman, brackets her experiences as a Muslim woman in America between those of two black women, and it is relatively easy to privilege the experiences of black women in the text because of the way in which Khadra privileges them in her own life.

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[174] Kahf, *E-mails From Scheherazade* 31.
[175] Cooke 139-140.

In discussing the marginalization of African American Muslim women, cultural anthropologist Carolyn Rouse uses the black feminist theory work of scholars such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins as well as the Islamic feminist scholarship of Fatima Mernissi and Aminah Wadud to claim space for African American Muslim women within black feminist thought. In her seminal text *Engaged Surrender* (2004) Rouse argues that black Muslim feminists bring a "unique contribution" to black feminist thought as their experiences are informed by a final authority: the Qur'an and the Sunnah.[176] The mythical norm remains constant, and they face the same problems as African American non-Muslims, similarly "challeng[ing] hegemonic discourses about race, gender, community and faith at the level of the everyday."[177] What differs is that they approach such problems in an Islamically sanctioned manner. For instance, Rouse argues that for such women "*Hijab* is the performance of moral character in an attempt to undo racist assumptions about the loose morals of African Americans."[178]

Like Rouse, Karim intertwines black feminist and Islamic feminist scholarship to propose what Rouse only begins to gesture toward—that African American Muslim women face an additional mythical norm. According to Karim's "To Be Black, Female and Muslim: A Candid Conversation about Race in the American *Ummah,*" not only do "American Muslim women experience multiple and overlapping layers of discrimination" but "these overlapping sites of injustice can reinforce a sense of difference between African Americans and immigrants when

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[176] In general, sunnah refers to an established way or practice. Specifically, it is used to refer to the way of the Prophet Muhammad. See Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi's *The Hadith for Beginners.* New Delhi: Goodword Books, 1961. 30
[177] Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 11
[178] Rouse 65.

the *extent* of oppression varies between groups."[179] Ultimately, African American Muslim and immigrant Muslim women face problems of marginalization in sometimes intersecting and sometimes parallel ways. If Rouse's task is to reclaim space for African American Muslim women within black feminist thought, then Karim's is to reclaim space for them within the Muslim ummah. Karim's analysis of the testimonies of Muslim American women indicates that African American women can sometimes feel alienation in the ummah because of their experiences being pushed to the margin in favor of the experiences of immigrant Muslim women. She argues that "By discounting African American struggle, immigrants downplay the systemic effects of anti-black racism and downplay immigrant privilege."[180]

Karim notes in her "Through Sunni Women's Eyes: Black Feminism in the Nation of Islam" that African American Sunni Muslim women's experiences "make up part of the Black feminist tradition" helping to "broaden the scope of Black feminist thought."[181] An invocation of black *Muslim* feminist thought therefore should not be taken to imply that black Muslim women are outside the black feminist tradition but only that an analysis focusing on Muslim women's experiences must include the Qur'an and Sunnah as authority. Otherwise the only other fundamental difference between black and black Muslim women's feminism is the need to convey. While black feminism stresses that it is the other's job to educate herself—it is a critical part of the Muslim woman's duty as a Muslim to convey the message of Islam.

As Karim illustrates, thinking intersectionally aids in challenging hegemonic readings of Muslim women. Such an approach illuminates the tensions within the landscape of Muslim

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[179] Jamillah Karim, "To Be Black, Female, and Muslim: A Candid Conversation about Race in the American *Ummah." Journal of Minority Affairs* 26.2 (August 2006): 226-233. 231, italics in original
[180] Karim, "To Be Black, Female, and Muslim" 228.
[181] Karim, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes: Black Feminism and the Nation of Islam." *Souls* 8.4 (2006): 19-30. 29

America, clarifying the vast differences in the women's experiences as Americans and as

Muslim women that appear in Muslim's women's writing. Cultural identity plays a crucial role

in their lived experience as well as in how they interpret their experiences and identity as Muslim

women. I am deploying Karim's model here to argue that Kahf is at the forefront of a new

tradition in terms of feminist writing. While the focus of feminist writing has overwhelmingly

been the mother-daughter relationship,[182] Kahf's vision of Muslim women's writing is one that

defines itself as a *sisterly* tradition, allowing for the cross-racial embrace of experiences—

particularly those of African American Muslim women. While the search for our mothers'

gardens might be a fundamental step in our development, the discoveries of our sisters' might

prove equally foundational in finding our own.

Pure Hijabis, Filthy Americans and Maternal Mandates

Kahf's Khadra develops her understanding of religion over time and shifts from an

acultural perception of Islam—that is one that imagines Islam as free from any cultural

influences—to a perception of Islam that allows for many ways of practice including as a

Muslim American. She experiences a number of spiritual awakenings including introductions to

different sects of Islam, a reconnection with her Syrian roots, as well as personal trials that

encourage her to soften her hard-liner stance. My particular focus is on the intersection of race

and religion, particularly the undercurrent of anti-blackness that Khadra exposes in the Dawah

community and Kahf exposes in the Muslim American.[183]   This presence of African American

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[182] Marianne Hirsch, "Maternal Narratives: Cruel Enough to Stop the Blood." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates. New York: Penguin, 1990. 415-430. 415
[183] For a more complete treatment of the novel as a whole see Steven Salaita's "Exploring Islam (s) in America: Mohja Kahf," which examines the multitude of themes in Kahf's work and describes the novel "as a primer on Islam in America" (41).

Muslims allows us to interrogate what it means to be Muslim American in a way that challenges popular conceptions of Muslim identity.

Kahf's text begins with an embrace of maternal lessons and much of the novel involves Khadra breaking down an unsustainable model of citizenship derived from her recently immigrated parents. For Ebtehaj in particular to belong to the American community is to be *in* and not *of*—a model that— in being all too reminiscent of the antebellum liminality occupied by enslaved Africans—is insufficient for establishing Islam and Muslims in America. Rather it requires destabilizing artificial binaries between Muslim and American belonging to understand what is peculiarly American about Muslim American identity and literature. For the Shamy family as a whole, this process begins with understanding what is and what is not American. The characteristics the Shamys initially associate with the American mythical norm—here white males and females—are overwhelmingly negative. Given the New Right's highly charged language calling for "total war in the United States against the evils that we see in our cities" and for "an all-out offensive against crime, against narcotics, against permissiveness in our country,"[184] the Shamy family may be forgiven for mistaking political rhetoric for social reality. Ultimately, the freedoms US citizens associate with being "free white and 21" are reassessed as the freedom to commit gross excess, and American individualism as the total lack of concern for the welfare of others. For this reason, the boundary between Muslim and American identity is largely understood—by the Shamys at least—as insurmountable. According to the Shamys,

> The Americans were the white people who surrounded them, a crashing sea of unbelief in
> which the Dawah Center bobbed, a brave boat. (There were black people who were
> Americans, but that was ***different***).…Generally speaking, Americans cussed, smoke, and

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[184] Ava DuVernay, director. *13th*. Netflix, 2016.

drank, and the Shamys had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs.

Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and

lots of divorces. Americans were not generous or hospitable like Uncle Abdulla and

Aunt Fatma…. Americans believed the individual was more important than the family,

and money was more important than anything…. All in all, Americans led shallow,

wasteful, materialistic lives. Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they but

knew.[185]

Given the negative characteristics the Shamys associate with American identity, belonging is

virtually impossible without giving up identity as Muslims. The Shamys mask their personal

assumptions and prejudices under a façade of objectivity and "good authority," investing

American identity with qualities antithetical to Muslim identity and thus not even accounting for

American born Muslims.

Despite the Dawah community's "smokescreen of denial," tensions between the African

American community—a significant portion of American born Muslims— and the immigrant

Muslim community suggest that African Americans are not only "different" but also the victims

of intra-ummah anti-black prejudice. Syrian grandmother Téta's disgust with the "repulsive hair

of *Abeed*, all kinky and unnatural"[186]—a double insult that devalues black hair and black

people—and Khadra's parents' aversion to intermarriage between blacks and Arabs indicates

that while such prejudice may be exacerbated by the US racial climate it is certainly not

exclusive to it. Téta, for instance, traces her thoughtless use of the term *abeed*—an Arabic word

for slaves here meant to refer to blacks—back to her Syrian upbringing. While the Shamys' anti-

black prejudice did not originate in America, the benefits of continuing it in America is not lost

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[185] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 67-68; emphasis added.
[186] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 75.

on them. In one poignant scene of interaction between immigrant and African American Muslims—occurring shortly after the Shamys become US citizens—an African American Muslim brother questions Wadjy's newfound loyalty to the American home:

> 'You're just discovering that you're American and you want to wave a flag now…Brother Wadjy, I've been American all my life. And I still don't want to wave no flag…You immigrant brothers come in yesterday, and suddenly you white.... We been here longer and this country was built on our backs. I don't see nobody trying to give us a silver platter.'[187]

This moment is important in that it underscores Karim's emphasis on the way in which varying degrees of oppression can reinforce difference. That Wadjy's *khutba*, or sermon, on the virtues of US citizenship "was not received as warmly" in front of African Americans as it had been in front of immigrants speaks to the discourse around immigrant Muslims that they can assimilate more fluidly into aspects of America than African Americans who "have been here longer" and had the country "built on our backs." The glossing over of anti-black prejudice in efforts to stake claims in America cuts ties with Islam's black cultural US past and positions immigrant Muslims in opposition to African Americans. Such positioning ultimately creates difficulty in establishing a stable indigenous identity because that identity must include and value immigrant as well as US-born Muslims.

Such an understanding—of American whites as impure and blacks as "different"—ultimately leads the Shamys to create a Muslim counter norm, one resistant to the effects of living amongst such neighbors. The family's goal is to be Muslim *in* America but not *of* America. That is to live as Muslims untouched—and thus unsullied—by American culture, a

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[187] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 144-145.

phenomenon that Karim explains as a byproduct of Islam on the move. Karim argues that "the newness of Islam in America led Muslims to imagine it as a space where Islam could emerge free of any cultural baggage."[188] However, to be Muslim is to be human, and to be human is always to be rooted in a particular culture. The cultural demands of living in America entail negotiating notions of race, and the tensions that Kahf depicts between immigrant and African American communities give credence to sociologists Jennifer Lee and Frank Bean's suggestion that immigrant groups are still consciously steering clear of blackness.[189]

For the Shamys, however, it is a maternal mandate that whiteness/ Americanness is also to be avoided. When Khadra and Eyad come home late one day after playing, their parents are understandably terrified at the possibility that they have been harmed. Ebtehaj's alarm turns to fury and frustration when the children return home dirty but unharmed. Ebtehaj seizes the opportunity to reinforce the border between the Shamys and Americans by scrubbing her daughter clean and screaming "We are not Americans!"[190] Ebtehaj's focus on filth as a defining characteristic of Americanism is undoubtedly troublesome but her own preoccupation with purity as the defining characteristic for herself is equally if not more problematic.

Ebtehaj's mandates perhaps arise more from personal experience than Islamic law. Readings of Kahf's novel rightfully consider Zuhura's rape and murder as a pivotal moment for Khadra's growth and development but few consider the rape of Khadra's mother as worth mentioning and none have considered it impactful. On the contrary, I argue that Ebtehaj's rape is a catalyst for her own and eventually her daughter's construction of and investment in the hijab

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[188] Karim, "Can We Define 'True' Islam?: African American Women Respond to Transnational Muslim Identities." *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism.* Eds. Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press: 114-130. 114-115
[189] Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean, "American's Changing Color Lines: Race/Ethnicity Immigration and Multiracial Identification. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 221-242. 238
[190] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 67.

as *the* symbol of virtue. Such oversight of the assault is not surprising, however, considering both Razanne, Khadra's aunt, and the text quickly pass over Ebtehaj's rape with Khadra's mother—in Razanne's estimation at least—at fault. When Ebtehaj returns from a school trip abroad after having been raped by a beloved teacher, Razanne's insistence that, "She had to learn the hard way,"[191] glosses over the devastation the teenage Ebtehaj undoubtedly endured to lock herself away for hours and use up all of the house's water. While it is easy to dismiss the Shamys' concern with purity as a byproduct of their Muslim identity, such an assumption is to accept that "the self of the Other is authentic without a problem."[192] Far from being unimportant, Ebtehaj's rape has a profound effect on the family as a whole as it is almost certain that it is the root of her fixation with cleanliness/purity. Judith Herman argues concerning survivors of trauma that, "Survivors challenge us to reconnect fragments, to reconstruct history, to make meaning of their present symptoms in the light of past events,"[193] and it is difficult to avoid the temptation to revise Ebtehaj's story. Throughout the novel she attempts to remove the taint of filth—real and imagined—from herself and her children. Indeed, in considering Ebtehaj's actions in light of her assault, her many adjurations to avoid impurities—dirt, pork—and her scrubbing Khadra and screaming, "We are not Americans!" appear not as religious devotion but as symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder. Ebtehaj's subsequent life is a quest to escape defilement, a perpetual search for cleanliness, and for much of the novel she invests the qualities that she searches for in the hijab. For both Shamy women—Ebtehaj and Khadra—the hijab acts as a symbol of piety and purity, a shield from American filth.

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[191] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 286.

[192] Sneja Gunew and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Questions of Multi-Culturalism: Sneja Gunew and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Hecate* 12.1 (1986): 136. *ProQuest.* Web. 8 Mar. 2017

[193] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* New York: Basic Books 1992. 3

Despite her ostensible rejection of all things American, Ebtehaj's hyperawareness feeds into an earlier American discourse on the politics of respectability. Her focus on impurity versus purity recalls nineteenth-century ideals of the cult of True Womanhood—one of the cardinal values of which is purity—and her anxiety to ensure that she and her daughter perform in accordance with that ideal suggests an investment in the controlling images of True Womanhood that are not dissimilar from the goals of nineteenth-century African American women. If the Becky standard is nonwhite femininity disparaged and disdained, then True Womanhood is nonwhite femininity erased and ignored. However, although the cardinal values were originally understood only as they relate to middle class white women, it was also through the theoretical adaptation of the Victorian notion of True Womanhood that African American women writers could resist racial clichés. Similarly, Ebtehaj uses the idea of purity to eradicate if not the memory then at least the taint of her sexual assault.[194] While Ebtehaj's fixation with purity may not be completely divorced from religious injunction, it is yet deeply connected to an ideology that shames the victim. E. Frances White explains in regard to African American women the "need to attack the ideology behind the good woman/bad woman dichotomy. [African American club women] struggled to have black women reclassified as good women rather than expose the bankruptcy of the entire system."[195] Ebtehaj's internalization of the good/bad woman and filthy American/ pure Muslim dichotomies means that she would rather scrub her daughter clean than attack Razanne's assessment that she acted as an agent in her own rape.

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[194] For a detailed description of these values including the other three—piety, submissiveness and domesticity—see Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*. 18.2 Part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

[195] E. Frances White, "Black Feminist Interventions." *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism & Politics of Respectability*. E. Frances White. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. 25-80. 35

From Ebtehaj's ideas of purity we learn the extent to which the hijab acts as a repository of virtue, a valuable critique for the hijab as threatening. In one amusing but poignant scene Kahf interrogates notions of the hijab's alterity and problematizes it as *the* sign of Muslim identity. A suicidal tourist mistakes Ebtehaj—with young Jihad on her hip—for "*Santa Maria*" and, under threat of jumping, demands to speak to "Madonna in the blue robe. Madonna with the angelic child! Madonna of the mountain!"[196] For Ebtehaj on a personal level the scene indicates that to some extent she succeeds in distancing herself from the accusation of being an impure/ bad woman. The young girl who once used a houseful of water to rid herself of the taint of her rapist becomes a woman mistaken for the Christian and Muslim archetype of chastity and virtue. More broadly, the scene underscores the dramatic extent to which religious context plays a role in interpreting hijab. In invoking a comparison with the Virgin Mary, Kahf encourages readers to examine assumptions that cause outsiders to view Ebtehaj as Maryam as pious and Ebtehaj as hijabi as threat. What is it that makes us suppose that there are bombs under her abaya but not her robe?

Such contrasting perspectives of the hijab indicate that not only do we interrogate hijab as we do no other form of dress but also that we interrogate hijabis in a way that we do not interrogate anyone else. To invoke the earlier comparison with black hair: what recent controversies surrounding black hair have aptly shown is that Afros and other unprocessed black hairstyles need not be linked to Black nationalism to pose a threat to professionalism in the workplace or order in the schools; they need not even be attached to visibly black bodies. Once black hair is disassociated from the black body, however, it is possible to redefine black hairstyles in a way that reduces threat and renders them fashionable (to white Americans) as

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[196] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 100.

opposed to rebellious. While wearing cornrows may be considered threatening, wearing "boxer braids" is a much less politically charged act. Likewise, divesting the hijab of its religious context miraculously mitigates the hijab as threat; however, it is interesting to note that the hijab need not be placed in a secular context to become harmless—only divested of its relationship to Islam.

Ultimately such a divestment drives the breakdown of binaries. A crucial part of hijabi insiders Ebtehaj and Khadra reconciling their identity as Americans with their identity as Muslims is in eschewing the belief that clothing alone makes the woman. As many Americans before them, the Shamys—particularly Khadra—begin to discover their Americanness abroad. Mecca is again the site of epiphany as Ebtehaj stutters through a defense of nonhijabis and Khadra sees hijabis in a new light. For Khadra the visit to Mecca is anticlimactic, even anti-religious. She and her mother both conclude that clothing alone is no indication of piety. Ebtehaj posits to her friend that there is no inherent connection between modesty and morality, and she instead blames American mothers for not teaching modesty to their daughters and US culture for glorifying immodesty. Kahf juxtaposes Ebtehaj's exchange with her friend concerning American women's dress with Khadra's encounter with hijabi Afaaf.

Afaaf, the daughter of their Saudi hosts, takes Khadra to meet a group of Saudi youth who mock what they view as the contradiction between Khadra's religious principles and American nationality. After a member of the party tries to assault her, Khadra directs most of her fury not at the young man who tries to molest her but at the family friend who brought her to the party: "'I *hate* you—you're a FILTHY girl, with FILTHY friends—you take me home—you take me home RIGHT NOW. You—you—you *goddamn bitch.'"*[197] Khadra's verbal assault on

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[197] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 178.

Afaaf illustrates the extent to which she has internalized her mother's psychological trauma. For Khadra, the accusation of filth is as insulting as the profanity she uses. What lives on for Khadra is not the rape that her mother endured—she has no idea of it for much of the text—but rather the expressed concern—to near obsession—for what is pure and what is impure. To be filthy is to not be Muslim. Afaaf—despite her hijab and Saudi background—enacts most of the stereotypes and assumptions that the Shamys had until now reserved for Americans. With her shallow, wasteful, materialistic life she is the embodiment of Ebtehaj's fears for Khadra, Eyad, and Jihad. Ebtehaj, however, bases her fears in the belief that it is the taint of American identity that will imbrue her children. For Khadra to encounter the characteristics she had avoided all her life in hijab-wearing Afaaf broadens the fissures in the family-erected boundary between being Muslim and being American. If Afaaf can be filthy then there is nothing inherently American about filth. In fact, Khadra can return home to Indiana under the belief that "[t]he sweet relief of her own *clean bed* awaited her there—and only there, of all the earth."[198]

Just as Khadra's exchange with Afaaf radically challenges the myth of the inherently pure and virtuous hijabi on a personal level, Khadra's encounter with Aunt Ayesha challenges the myth of the virtuous hijabi on a communal level. Aunt Ayesha's criticism of Dawah Center parents "[w]anting [their children] to carry our vision for us, our identity—our entire identity, on *your* heads'[199] indicates the particular role the hijabi has played as signifier for Muslim identity. On one hand, the hijab is a repository for the individual's virtue, and on the other, the hijabi is a repository for the community's. Although Khadra herself bears some of the responsibility for carrying the community's identity on her head, no character so completely carries the weight of the community's expectations as Zuhura.

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[198] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 179; emphasis added.
[199] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 405.

Between Muslim Superwomen and Impious Bad Girls

To further the breakdown of expectations and binaries, Kahf situates Khadra between two powerful controlling images that embody the purity/ filth dynamic: a Muslim superwoman—the aforementioned Zuhura— and an impious bad girl— Khadra's childhood friend Hanifa. Although maternal injunctions are a foundational part of Khadra's development, Khadra's understanding of Zuhura is equally foundational to her discovery of self. So much so in fact that she ties her own fate into Zuhura's acceptance and belonging. For much of the text, Khadra uses Zuhura as the standard-bearer by which to measure her own degree of Muslimness. For Khadra and for the Dawah community Zuhura is the model of the virtuous hijabi, and the heavy burden placed on Zuhura to uphold the community's expectations is never ending. Zuhura with her religious background and knowledge, respectable hijab, education and leadership drive is the Muslim superwoman before her death and after it, the community's martyr.

Religious identity and African American tradition collide in Zuhura—she is both the idealization of virtue and womanhood and the incarnation of the African American superwoman. In her *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1978) Michelle Wallace describes the figure of the African American superwoman as a woman possessing

> inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact stronger emotionally than most men. Less of a woman in that she is less 'feminine' and helpless, she is really *more* of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves.[200]

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[200] Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman.* New York: Routledge, 1978. 107

The image of the Muslim superwoman that Zuhura embodies is too a woman of "inordinate strength;" however, Zuhura departs from her African American counterpart in that she is perhaps even more fierce and uncompromising. She does not possess the "habits and mein [sic] of most of the Indiana black women…or their understanding of the unspoken rules of 'getting along' in this place where they lived."[201] In fact, far from 'getting along,' her unwillingness to compromise allows her to keep clean amidst American filth. Being a Muslim superwoman requires an ability to perfectly balance family life with religious devotion, an impossible task unless she is able to live in the US without being tainted by US culture and ideals. What aids in forging such a stereotype is an all or nothing philosophy—that you embrace every element of American culture or that you reject every element of it. Just as Wallace argues that such an image of African American womanhood—a façade of superhuman strength and "imaginary advantages"—in fact leaves women vulnerable to the realities of sexual and racial inequality,[202] Kahf similarly argues against the myth of the Muslim superwoman. Zuhura goes missing one night while driving from school, and her battered corpse is found in a ravine, the victim of unknown assailant(s). Zuhura's violent death indicates the impossibility of living up to such an image, but the way in which her memory pervades the text attests to the pervasiveness of myth.

The myth of Zuhura lives on for Khadra, but the breakdown of Zuhura the individual begins immediately after her rape and murder. More broadly, Zuhura may be considered to represent "the classic intersectionality problem wherein black women [here a foreign black woman] fall through an anti-discrimination gap constituted by black male and white female experiences."[203] Through her groundbreaking articulation of intersectionality, Kimberlé

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[201] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 43-44.
[202] Wallace 108.
[203] Carbado and Gulati 712-713.

Crenshaw decries the "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis,"[204] and indeed the media reports of Zuhura's murder approach from different perspectives that leave no room for the possibility of identity overlap. The newspaper accounts of Zuhura differ in accordance with the racial, class, and gender background of the publication's audience, and her death leads to several groups attempting to claim ownership of her identity:

> The *Indianapolis Freeman*—Uncle Jamal brought over a copy—said it was about race, said how could it not be, in light of the Skokie affair and recent area rumblings from the Klan? It called Zuhura 'a young black woman' and didn't mention that she was Muslim at all. On the other hand, the *Indianapolis Star* pretended like race wasn't there at all, calling Zuhura a 'foreign woman' and 'an IU international student,' as if her family didn't live right there in town. The *Indianapolis News* article treated it like just some random crime, giving it one tiny paragraph in the back pages. The front-page news was about a march. A photo that showed a group of white women yelling 'Take Back the Night.'[205]

Considering the publications in connection with each other challenges the notion that identity can be parceled out into neat pieces. The newspapers in part showcase the ways in which some identities are more visible than others and that media authorities—that choose to parcel in this way—are unequipped to take the individual as a whole. Instead, each article treats Zuhura in terms of either/or. At the heart of what could be most distressing for Khadra is the threat that in belonging everywhere, Zuhura belongs nowhere, especially not *here*. If Zuhura could be parceled out like this, then perhaps Khadra could as well. The reports indicate that

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[204] Crenshaw 23.
[205] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 95.

power/authority conceives in binaries, and to be fully one is to be in opposition to the other: Zuhura is black or she is foreign or she is a woman or she is Muslim. Zuhura's religion did not fit the narrative of those who wanted to refer to her as black, her family in town did not fit the narrative of those who wanted to see her as foreign and her race did not fit the narrative of those who wanted to see her only as a woman. The *Freeman*, for instance, could understand her dying as a black woman—it fits the narrative of what is happening with the Socialist party and the Klan, but in all situations some aspect of Zuhura's identity did not fit with the appropriate pre-constructed narrative.

Perhaps most glaring is her marginalization in the *Indianapolis News* in favor of foregrounding the group of white women. Read against a history of US racism and US exclusionary practices for immigrants in general and immigrant Muslim women in particular, the moment underscores Western feminism's silence on racism and xenophobia. Danielle Haque notes that Kahf's "text…gesture[s] to secular feminism's ignorance of the plight of Muslim American women in terms of anything but oppression by Muslim men."[206] Such oversight emphasizes that for all her perfection, Zuhura is no Mindy Oberholtzer—or Becky—and the protections of white femininity or even white feminists do not apply to her.

Zuhura's centrality in Khadra's story illustrates the way in which Khadra not only lays claim upon her but also becomes invested in the myth of either/or as well. Khadra implies that, despite the claims of various organizations, Zuhura belonged to *us:* "Clearly [her rape and murder] was religious bigotry, the Muslims said. Salam Mosque and Dawah people agreed. It was related to her vocal espousal of Muslim causes on campus, it was political."[207] In fact, in

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[206] Danielle Haque, "The Postsecular Turn and Muslim American Literature." *American Literature.* 86.4 (December 2014): 799-829. 812
[207] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 95.

Steven Salaita's formulation, "Zuhura's death has become indivisible from Khadra's own growth,"[208] and certainly the different portrayals—from the media and Muslim community—are at the root of Khadra's concerns about who Zuhura was and lead her to question who she herself is.

While Zuhura briefly lives on as "a sign for all to consider,"[209] her physical death compels the Dawah community to do what nothing else has: that is to consider the changes that occur when Islam travels and, more specifically, to conceive of new ways of practice that do not contradict Islamic doctrine or US law. The resulting practices are a means of belonging within both the Muslim and American communities thus enabling the establishment of a stable indigenous Muslim community. As Karim explains, "When Islam travels, new questions are asked and new forms of knowledge and practice are produced." [210] Even as Zuhura's murder disrupts her fellow believers, the resulting emergence of Muslim cemeteries and literature on Muslim American burials indicates the possibilities for the peaceful coexistence of identities. In life Zuhura represents an unsustainable model of Muslim womanhood while in death she is a disrupter of narrative, a destroyer of myth. And it is in destroying myth that Khadra can initiate the development of a stable indigenous Muslim identity. Khadra in a sense resides in a liminal space between two arbitrarily fixed points. Positioned between the image of a superwoman and that of a bad girl there was little room to maneuver, but in collapsing unstable binaries there is freedom.

If Zuhura is the model of the virtuous hijabi then Hanifa is the text's "bad woman," the embodiment of the metaphorical filth permeating the text and the resident example of everything

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[208] Steven Salaita, "Exploring Islam in America: Mohja Kahf." *Modern Arab American Fiction.* Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2011: 32-41. 40
[209] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 428.
[210] Karim, "Can We Define 'True' Islam?" 116.

Khadra ought not to be or to do. To be a bad woman is to not embody all of the characteristics of the virtuous hijabi. More specifically, a bad woman is one with moral laxity, and, in the economy of the text, one who behaves too much like an American. As Zuhura's opposite, Khadra's childhood best friend Hanifa is the culmination of the community's fears. Hanifa's expulsion from the Dawah community underscores the friction between living in America and belonging *too* much and assimilating American moral values.

According to Khadija, Hanifa's mother, race plays an important role in understanding how the myth of the bad woman operates. She implies that the bad woman is a label that specifically haunts African American women, and that the hijab is an effective means of liberation for African American women still scarred by the degradation of slavery. In Khadija's assessment, the hijab is a reclamation of modesty and a sign of self-empowerment: "'Imagine being made to stand naked in front of a whole bunch of people…That's how it was for black women back in slavery times. Up on the auction block. Covering up is a strong thing.'"[211] Deborah Gray White links African American women's uncovered bodies to the Jezebel figure through the white male gaze maintaining that, "The very sight of semiclad black women nurtured white male notions of their promiscuity."[212] If, as White maintains, the construction and preservation of images of African American women as lascivious and subservient were central factors in maintaining an unjust balance of power with white men as the chief benefactors,[213] then to disrupt images of African American female lasciviousness means also to disrupt power dynamics. Khadija argues that the hijab represents an opportunity to recast African American women in more respectable roles and ultimately continue the dismantling of white patriarchy. In

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[211] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 25.
[212] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. 33
[213] Deborah Gray White, 61.

metaphorically casting off her hijab, Hanifa is represented as having failed multiple communities.

While I agree with Steven Salaita that Zuhura's death is undoubtedly linked to Khadra's growth, so too is Hanifa's expulsion from the Dawah community. According to Islamic injunction, sexual relations outside of marriage is a major sin,[214] and Hanifa's pregnancy is proof against her—that her actions at least are those of a bad woman. When Hanifa becomes pregnant and is sent to live with her non-Muslim grandmother, Khadra's mother attempts to erase her presence from Khadra's life by insisting Khadra "'Never speak her name again.'"[215] Hanifa's out-of-wedlock pregnancy is as much a threat to Ebtehaj and Aunt Ayesha as Zuhura's murder. What they fear most is their children "being swallowed up by this land, reduced to nothing,"[216] and this is the case for Hanifa for most of the text. What makes her distinct from Afaaf, the Saudi family friend Khadra describes as a "filthy girl," is the widespread condemnation Hanifa incurs. Her pregnancy results in the community's disapprobation rather than Khadra's alone. While Zuhura remains "a sign for all to consider," the community considers Hanifa best forgotten. Faced with such an alternative, it is little wonder that Khadra initially chooses the role of superwoman.

Khadra faces her own accusation of being a bad woman, however, when, used to the presence of women in US masjids, she attempts to visit a Saudi masjid on her own. Unprepared for the police and family censure, she briefly internalizes their accusations and as a result almost finds herself swallowed up and reduced to nothing:

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[214] Among instances where *zina* is prohibited in the Qur'an are 17:32: "And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way." Sahih International Translation
[215] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 130.
[216] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 405.

The tone when he said 'this woman'—it was like the police thought she was some kind of bad woman, out in the street at that dark hour, alone, face uncovered, and were going to haul her in for some sort of *vice* crime…. And then the expression on Uncle Zaid's face when he couldn't look at her at first and then when he recognized her: it was that look again. For a minute, she actually *felt* like a bad woman, as if she really had done something wrong, and she shuddered, and it frightened her.[217]

More frightening than the accusation itself is the ease with which they convince her that the looks they give her are a true reflection of her self. What is most frustrating for Khadra is that her behavior, when checked against Islamic measures, is guiltless. However, despite there being no Qur'anic or Sunnah injunctions prohibiting her presence in the masjid, she is yet viewed as an immoral woman. While Khadra immediately becomes "angry that she let them get inside her feelings," she only understands the full ramifications of being a bad woman when she experiences her husband's and family's response to her abortion. Combined with her own ambivalent feelings the result is inevitable: "the Dawah Center poster girl had fallen."[218] Khadra can effectively attack and dismantle the one-dimensional ideology behind the pure hijabi/ filthy American and the good/bad woman dichotomies only when she comes to understand that "the belief system of her parents and their entire circle, including the Dawah Center… wasn't identical to Islam itself, just one little corner of it."[219]

Although Khadra begins by defining herself and her identity in accordance with her mother's view of what it means to be Muslim and American, a critical step in her development is in reflecting upon the experiences of her Muslim sisters. When Hanifa eventually reenters the

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[217] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 169; italics in original.
[218] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 251.
[219] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 233.

text as a Nascar driver, upon her brother opening with, 'She's the first Muslim woman to—,'

Khadra rushes to prevent Hakim from placing Hanifa within the prison of an either/or label that

is insufficient for capturing the diversity of the Muslim American community, but weighty

enough to crush the individual. In an awkward conflation of Hanifa, and herself, and Zuhura,

Khadra urges, "'Don't say it. Don't put that on **her**. I'm so tired of everyone putting that on **us**.

Every single thing **we** do has to 'represent' for the community. Zuhura, having to represent this

and represent that. Everyone had to put their meaning on **her**. Just let her be…just let **us** *be*.'"[220]

No longer prisoners of controlling images—superwoman/ bad woman, pure/filthy—the women

have instead become the models for Khadra's own development. The ultimate conflation that

Kahf makes here seeks to revise much of US feminist literature through its emphasis on cross-

racial sisterly alliances, as well as the broader national literature, which Morrison describes as

characterized by its estrangement from its black "presence."[221] For Khadra the greatest threat to

the establishment of an indigenous Muslim American culture lies not in an external clash

between Muslims and the West, but rather in the myths that Muslim Americans create about

themselves.

Conclusion

As concerned as Khadra is with constructing a stable identity in America on an individual

level, Kahf as author and theorist is just as concerned with constructing a stable Muslim

American identity on the community level. The prominent presence of African Americans in

Kahf's narrative challenges several US myths concerning Muslims—including that all Muslims

are Arab, and that all African Americans fit under the rubric of the Black Muslim. Kahf

additionally dispels notions of harmony within the US ummah citing points where privilege

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[220] Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 399; emphasis added.
[221] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark.*

distances immigrant and US-born Muslims. However, in applying black Muslim feminist theory, I ultimately read Kahf's novel as a variation on a well-used trope within black feminism: where African American Muslim women enter, we all enter.

Although the end of Khadra's story circles back to the beginning, significantly it does so without Khadra's parents. They do not appear in the final chapters of the novel as if their voices only belong in the beginning—in forging the earlier Khadra— and there are only echoes of Wadjy and Ebtehaj in the latter part of the novel. It is important to note that even as Kahf presents an alternative understanding of Muslim American womanhood she cautions the reader against accepting her voice as *the* representative for Muslim American women:

You claim "I broke

The Idol of Illusion—

I'm liberated!"

But I fear

Your Manifesto is itself

An idol[222]

Such an attitude allows and even calls for the perspectives of other Muslim women in forming a coherent Muslim American identity. Despite internal and external pressures to separate her from home, the American hijabi is yet rooted in the history of Muslims in America.

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[222] Ahmad Jami cited in Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 442.

Chapter 3

Identity Performance and American Dreams

"The surprising nature of encounters can be understood in relation to the structural

possibility that *we may not be able to read the bodies of others*."[223]

Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* illuminates some of the difficulties of

transculturation faced by immigrant American Muslims—difficulties that have been exacerbated

by the racialization of Islam and the significant post 9/11 shift toward Islamophobia. In contrast

to how the racialization of Islam worked for African American Muslims—that is by emphasizing

race and rendering African Americans politically threatening—the racialization of immigrant

Muslims rendered immigrant Muslims religious fanatics and effectively unwhitened identities

which could to varying degrees previously benefit if not from the wages of whiteness then could

at least expect greater economic returns by not being black. Thus far I have emphasized the role

that anti-blackness has played in internal and external understandings of what it means to be a

Muslim American, however xenophobia steeped in religious bigotry has also had a significant

impact on understandings of religious identity. This chapter uses Ali's drama *The Domestic

Crusaders* to examine the intersection of class and religion to understand what happens when

religion becomes racialized. I argue that Ali uses varying performances of Muslimness to capture

the preferences for particular performances in order to critique the US's dream cult/ure. While

status has long been indicated as problematic in attaining the American dream, the importance of

intragroup identity performances has been given less attention. Prevalent on both sides of the

political spectrum, the superficial engagement with Muslims based on economic motivations can

be understood as the dominant form of encountering Islam and Muslims in the US, and both

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[223] Ahmed *Strange Encounters* 8.

sides generate scripted ideas of Muslim identity that attempt to regulate Muslim behavior. Because of such superficial engagement, however, identity status is generally the focus point of discussions of Muslim identity so much so that there is little thought given to identity performances. All things being equal—or at the very least race, class, religion and gender—how do various performances of Muslimness help shape our understanding of an indigenous Muslim American identity and literature?

For my understanding of identity performance, I turn to Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati whose identity performance theory builds upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's articulation of intersectionality. Crenshaw's pioneering work—which forms the basis of the black Muslim feminist theory used in chapter two—depicts the legal ramifications of black women's exclusion from antidiscrimination discourse, arguing that the fundamental problem of foregrounding the experiences of a mythical norm in doctrine, theory and politics is that where the experiences of individuals differ from the most privileged in terms of race and gender then their experiences are often obscured or ignored. Crenshaw proposes that by moving those individuals—and she specifies black women in particular—from the margins to the center then it becomes possible to address the needs of the most disadvantaged and therefore all. What Carbado and Gulati, argue, however, is that essentializing is potentially a problem here as well. Just as it is unreasonable when one "assumes that there is an essential…experience that is unmodified by gender" or race,[224] it is similarly unreasonable to assume that experiences are unmodified by performance. In Carbado and Gulati's formulation

> the theory of identity performance is that a person's experiences with and vulnerability to
> discrimination are based not just on a status marker of difference (call this a person's

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[224] Carbado and Gulati 713.

identity) but also on the choices that a person makes about how to present her difference (call this a person's performance identity).[225]

In short, "how [people] present their identity can (and often does) affect whether and how they are discriminated against."[226] More concretely, if we consider such an idea in the context of the previous chapter's discussion of hijab, it is possible that a company would be more willing to hire an Arab Muslim woman who wears corporate attire and her scarf in a bun than an Arab Muslim woman who wears *hijab* and an *abaya* or that a company would promote an African American Muslim man who attends functions where alcohol is served over another African American Muslim man who refuses to attend such functions. Carbado and Gulati argue that in its focus on status "[i]ntersectionality does not capture this form of preferential treatment."[227] Therefore, an examination of not just identity status—here being Muslim—but also identity performance—how individuals perform Muslimness—might be a means to capture preferential treatment in intragroup distinctions. Identity performance relies on choice, and although some aspects of identity are scripted, it is the individual's choice—albeit an often coerced one—whether to perform particular aspects of identity.

I have divided this chapter into two primary sections. In the first I examine *The Domestic Crusaders* as rooted in US literary tradition in general as well as more specifically rooted in and underscoring Muslim American literature's ties to a black cultural past. I suggest that Ali's efforts to resist the dream cult/ure and spread positive images of Islam and performances by Muslims tap into an earlier African American Muslim tradition that calls for Muslim Americans to consider Islam specifically within the context of a public-relations-conscious US culture. In

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[225] Carbado and Gulati 701.
[226] Carbado and Gulati 717.
[227] Carbado and Gulati 712-713.

the second section I explore the elaboration of scripted performances of Muslim identity as the dominant mode of engagement with Muslim Americans, illustrating its prevalence on the traditionally conservative right as well as the liberal left. In analyzing *The Domestic Crusaders,* I consider how the intermixing of status and performance contribute to understandings of Muslim American identity and literature.

Written at the height of anti-Muslim hysteria in the days following September 11th, *The Domestic Crusaders* attempts to dismantle the ever-widening gulf between media portrayals and Muslim life. Ali's drama is an invitation into the home and quotidian existence of a single Pakistani Muslim American family. The family gathers in their Los Angeles suburban home to celebrate the birthday of twenty-one-year-old Ghafur. Set post 9/11, the play uses NPR and television voiceovers to provide a sense of the climate of Muslim surveillance under which the family lives. In addition to external concerns, however, are domestic problems, including the shock the family receives when Ghafur reveals his intention to forego his parents' dream of him becoming a financially successful doctor to enact his own of becoming a teacher. He hopes to attain a PhD in history and work as a professor to educate an uninformed and misinformed public on Islam and the Middle East—a job he describes as on the lower rungs of the "desi monetary hierarchy." While the revelation surprises the entire family, it devastates and infuriates Salman, Ghafur's father and the family breadwinner. Salman, disheartened by his own white collar but dead-end job sees his son's becoming a doctor as a critical step in the family's economic and social success. Additionally, Salman, designated "Sally" by his boss, discovers the day before the party that he will again be passed over for promotion this time in favor of a fellow Muslim— someone younger and less qualified but whose appearance as more "authentically Muslim" will potentially result in better relations and greater economic returns for their company's Middle

East business interests. Salman's fury with what he construes as his son's betrayal leads him to verbally berate and then physically assault Ghafur. Ghafur nevertheless remains committed to his desire to become a teacher and the play ends with the family singing "Happy Birthday" to Ghafur and Ghafur blowing out the candle and making an unspecified wish.

The US and Muslim American Cultural Tradition

The Domestic Crusaders began as an assignment to fill a void in US culture when Ishmael Reed instructed his then-student to write a play that would "counter the ugly stereotypes promoted by a media that sees its profits in raising fear and dividing ethnic groups and races."[228] Reed's introduction to the text version of Ali's play explains that in the aftermath of 9/11, Ali's duties as a student leader caused him to miss three weeks of Reed's class. When Ali returned, Reed gave him the assignment of writing a twenty-page play that would enable him both to pass the course and to counter the media's widely-circulated misconceptions of Islam and Muslims. Once the play was written Reed continued to prod Ali over the next few years to bring the play to the stage with Carla Blank, Reed's wife, signing on as dramaturge and director. *The Domestic Crusaders* premiered at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre on July 15, 2005. A casualty of "the era of Bush's 'war on terror,'" the play was only staged twice afterwards until a 2009 five-week off-Broadway run at New York's Nuyorican Poets Café. An article in the *Indian Express* cites Ali's difficulties in producing the play, quoting Ali as saying: "there was fear to produce a Muslim play. Every director who read the play told me they loved it but asked me to write another play."[229] By opening the off-Broadway run on September 11th Ali deliberately engaged with the date that set the play in motion.

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[228] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* ii.
[229] Irena Akbar, "Eight Years After 9/11, a Play Questions Racial Slants." *The Indian Express.* N.p., 8 September 2009. Web. 1 May 2017.

In relation to the broader US tradition Reed regards Ali's play as having "begun the Pakistani American Renaissance."[230] For Reed, Ali's play is reminiscent of other American "kitchen" or kitchen-sink dramas—including the works of Frank Chin, Arthur Miller, Lorraine Hansberry and Eugene O'Neill—in that it is "the sort of play that concerns itself with food, dating, sibling rivalry, intergenerational conflict, humor, and pathos."[231] If "[t]he family home is a touchstone of U.S. identity,"[232] then a community's kitchen-sink drama is the benchmark of its US identity and inclusion. These dramas act as a stage for US anxieties—those that the communities experience from within as well as those projected onto the community by other Americans. In the same sense that Chin's *The Year of the Dragon* (1974) is a play concerning Asian American anxieties and Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) about African American anxiety, Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* concerns Pakistani and Muslim American anxiety. These plays focus not only upon issues relevant to the immediate family—the family life and home, job losses and gains—but also address issues relevant to the community—racism, sexism, US belonging.

Much like Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun,* Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* finds universality in the specific. In her *To Be Young Gifted and Black,* Hansberry maintains about *A Raisin,*

> not only is this a Negro family, specifically and definitely culturally, but it's not even a New York family or a southern Negro family. It is specifically Southside Chicago…. In

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[230] Ishmael Reed, "The Celtic in Us." *Comparative American Studies.* 8.4 (December 2010): 327-336. 333
[231] *The Domestic Crusaders* ii.
[232] Joe Perry, "Consumer Citizenship in the Interwar Era: Gender, Race, and the State in Global Historical Perspective." *Journal of Women's History.* 18.4: 157-172. 162

other words, I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they're supposed to be, to that extent they can become everybody.[233]

So, despite being a play about a single family in the Southside of Chicago, *A Raisin* is also a play that highlights the injustices and inequalities that have typified African American experiences in the US as well as the hopes and dreams that have typified US life in general. Similar to Hansberry's desire to portray the Younger family as a typical US family, Ali's overriding concern is to present "the crusaders"—the drama does not provide a last name—as a realistic portrayal of Muslim Americans with aspirations similar to their US brethren. On the play's universality Ali has described the play as "by us", "for everyone."[234] One *New York Times* article quoted Ali as maintaining, "Take away the religion, take away the Islam, take away the politics, the Arabic and the Urdish….What remains are universal themes like sibling rivalry, expectations of parents, conflict between the generations."[235]

In addition to universality, Muslim American literature's more specific black cultural past provides a useful lens for understanding the cultural imperative of Ali's drama. In explaining that African American Muslims were especially attune to the necessity of striking a balance between culture and religion, Jamillah Karim argues that

> The NOI [Nation of Islam] was the only Muslim group that emphatically charged its
> men to identify with American dress styles as its men donned bow ties and shaved their
> faces. While other groups imagined that Islam must challenge race-class inequalities in
> the U.S. by rejecting America's core values, the NOI skillfully condemned American

[233] Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young Gifted and Black.* New York: Vintage Books, 1995. 128

[234] "Muslim-themed Play Carries Universal Message: Writer of Domestic Crusaders Hopes his Work Helps Us 'Bust Out of Our Cultural Cocoons.'" *The Toronto Star.* 31 July 2010: E4.

[235] Laurie Goodstein, "A Pakistani-American Family is Caught in Some Cultural Cross-Fire." *The New York Times.* 8 September 2009: C3. *New York Times* Web. 1 May 2017.

racism without compromising American identity, thereby surpassing the other groups in numbers and influence.[236]

With the death of the Honorable Elijah Mohammed—and the end of the "first experience"[237]—the overtly antagonistic rhetoric of the Nation of Islam (NOI) gave way to a more integrated approach for African Americans for living within the US. In the years following his father's 1975 death, Imam Warith Deen Muhammad would lead his estimated two million followers away from teachings that contradicted the oneness of God and the Prophet Muhammad as the final messenger but would see no contradiction in retaining the community's ties to US culture. Calling Imam Muhammad "not only a visionary but also a practical leader,"[238] Akbar Ahmed explains that "Today, millions of African American Muslims are comfortable with being as strongly American as they are being devout Muslims, demonstrating the two are not incompatible. This achievement is due entirely to Imam W. D."[239] The *Muslim Journal*, a weekly Muslim American newspaper associated with Imam Muhammad's community has for many years—certainly long before 9/11—featured on its front page the US flag in addition to a flag depicting the kalimah—there is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God—the universal statement of Islam. In this tradition, Ali similarly attempts to destroy clash mythology by presenting US culture as intertwined with Muslim identity: "I am both Muslim and American; one cannot coexist without the other. My values from both identities complement one another and intersect. I am living proof that there is no conflict between the West and Islam.

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[236] Karim, "Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation: Young Muslims Inherit Global Muslim and African American Legacies." *The Muslim World.* 95 (October 2005): 497-513. 500

[237] A name used by former members of the Nation of Islam (NOI) to denote the time period before the death of Elijah Mohammed and the subsequent widespread movement of African Americans to "orthodox" Islam.

[238] Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2010. 175.

[239] Akbar Ahmed 174.

Proof that there needs not be an Armageddon or a clash of cultural values."[240]

Additionally, Ali—a practicing attorney and essayist as well as playwright—taps into an already established legacy of Muslim American works that illustrate versatility with a public-relations-conscious US culture. On one hand, Muslims and other minorities have been victims of US image making, and on the other, they have benefited from adapting such know-how themselves. On the process of image making, Malcolm X explained that US racists

> use their ability to create images, and then use these images that they have created to mislead the people. To confuse the people and make the people accept wrong as right and reject right as wrong. Make the people actually think that the criminal is the victim and the victim is the criminal.[241]

Providing a concrete example, Malcolm X argued that

> When they want to suppress and oppress the Black community, what do they do? They take statistics, and through the press, they feed them to the public. They make it appear the role of crime in the Black community is higher than it is anywhere else…This keeps the Black community in the image of a criminal. And as soon as this impression is given, then it makes it possible, or paves the way to set up a police-type state in the Black community, getting the full approval of the white public….[242]

In a similar manner, Ali has explained his own work as a cultural imperative in the age of Islamophobia: "I realized, as a student of American history, the current boogeyman is American Muslims,"[243] and certainly Ali's statement seems valid considering incidents that range from

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[240] Matt O'Brien, "Lawyer/Humorist Wajahat Ali Tackles the Serious Topic of 'Islamophobia.'" *San Jose Mercury News*. N.p. 20 August 2011. Web.
[241] Malcolm X and Bruce Perry. *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches.* New York: Pathfinder, 1989. 167-168
[242] Malcolm X and Bruce Perry 162.
[243] O'Brien, "Lawyer/Humorist Wajahat Ali"

Peter King's (R-NY) hearings on radicalization to the recently enacted "Muslim Ban."

However, image making has been beneficial for Muslim Americans as well. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X considers public relations as foundational to US culture and proposes it as a valuable tool for calling people to the message of Islam. When he visits Mecca and encounters a space seemingly free of the racial boundaries that vigorously separated Americans, he considers the site in the language of US advertising:

> Behind my nods and smiles, though, I was doing some American type thinking and reflection. I saw that Islam's conversions around the world could double and triple if the colorfulness and the true spiritualness of the Hajj pilgrimage were properly advertised and communicated to the outside world. I saw that the Arabs are poor at understanding the psychology of non-Arabs and the importance of public relations. The Arabs said *'insha Allah'* ('God willing')—then they waited for converts. Even by this means, Islam was on the march, but I knew with improved public relations methods the number of new converts turning to Allah could be turned into millions.[244]

In the following I argue that Ali emphasizes intrareligious performances to underscore two diametrically opposing—but equally problematic—images of Islam and Muslims. In doing so he critiques the white cult/ural supremacy at the heart of the American dream. Finally, he presents alternatives for how to disrupt what has become traditional narratives.

The Dream Cult/ture

Scholars have argued that spending is a hallmark of US identity and shown that the dream cult/ure is a part of national myth. In his *Consumption and Citizenship, 1809-1945: Sold American* Charles McGovern maintains that the US produced a "commercial system where

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[244] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography* 351.

anything—not only food, clothing, and furniture, but ideas, perceptions, and emotions themselves—could and did become a commodity."[245]Cultural studies have also found that buying into such "relentless commercialization"[246] has through advertising been linked to equality. Inderpal Grewal explains that "Consumer culture worked by producing desires and fantasies that could be linked to group as well as individual identities and were also linked to a consumer citizenship through which liberal equality became possible."[247] However, that material measurement does not equate to social acceptance is a recurring theme in studies of assimilation (as well as throughout Ali's *Domestic Crusaders*). Embrace of dream cul/ture—choice + buying=citizenship=equality—relies after all on a deliberate avoidance of the harsher realities of injustice and discrimination. And where those injustices have been highlighted has most frequently been in terms of status—i.e. as white, black, nonwhite immigrant.

> For instance, Grewal explains that
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> The immigrant search for success was shown as a search for participation in consumer culture—to buy a house, to have a car and all the objects that the dream promised. Yet becoming American was also a dream not fully open to Asian immigrants, since they were unable to participate in public life and the public sphere because of racism against Asians.[248]

In a study of segmented assimilation sociologist Min Zhou similarly found that "many Chinese immigrants believe in the American dream and measure their achievements materially,"[249] but

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[245] Charles F. McGovern, *Consumption and Citizenship, 1809-1945: Sold American.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. 10
[246] Perry 158.
[247] Grewal, *Transnational American: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. 29
[248] Grewal, *Transnational American: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* 64.
[249] Min Zhou, "Segmented Assimilation and Socio-economic Integration of Chinese Immigrant Children in the USA." *Ethnic and Racial Studies.* 37.7: 1172-1183. 1180

she also underscores that "[n]ew stereotypes can emerge and un-'whiten' Asian Americans any time and anywhere, no matter how 'successful' and 'assimilated' they have become."[250]

From the vantage point of racial theory and civil rights, scholars note that since its inception the US has placed value in racial identity, and to become un-'whitened' is no small thing when trying to access the Dream. Cheryl Harris has shown that whiteness as an identity bestows value and privilege on its possessor. For white Americans, an embracement of dream cult/ure requires an investment in the myth of white solidarity. In his essay "The Price of the Ticket," James Baldwin ponders the intangible cost of white assimilation. According to Baldwin,

> The price the white American paid for his ticket was to become white….They come through Ellis Island, where *Giorgio* becomes *Joe*, *Pappavasiliu* becomes *Palmer*, *Evangelos* becomes *Evans*, *Goldsmith* becomes *Smith* or *Gold*, and *Avakian* becomes *King*. So, with a painless change of name, and in the twinkling of an eye, one becomes a white American. Later, in the midnight hour, the missing identity aches. One can neither assess nor overcome the storm of the middle passage. One is mysteriously shipwrecked forever, in the Great New World.[251]

Here, Baldwin locates Ellis Island as a radical space of de-*rac(e)*-ination in that it is the site of uprooting from previous identities and rooting in American whiteness. In Baldwin's formulation, the price of the ticket is in part an erasure of identity, the knowledge of self that is attainable only once you "*know whence you came.*"[252] This exchange of the intangible for

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[250] Zhou 1181.
[251] Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket." *James Baldwin: Collected Essays.* New York: The Library of America, 1998. 830-842. 842
[252] Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket" 841.

material benefit leaves the ticket holder ethnically bereft, but this investment in whiteness allows them to claim their status as property.

For African Americans, the dream cult/ure is far more costly. In fact, Ta-Nehisi Coates explains that the Dream relies on the destruction of the black body, one of the US's most valuable "natural resource[s]":

> I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways. The Dream is treehouses and the Cub Scouts. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake. And for so long I wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies.[253]

Ali's drama depicts 9/11 as a turning point in which many immigrant Muslim Americans awoke to the possibility that the dream is perhaps more elusive for them as well.

The Domestic Crusaders elaborates upon the difficulties immigrants face in attaining the dream after the process of "un-whitening," and in doing so, echoes many of the themes from Hansberry's *A Raisin* including the tensions between assimilation and cultural retention, materiality and spirituality, and between dreams and racial realities. Similar to the Younger family and Kahf's Shamys, Ali's crusaders must decide on the extent of their family's cultural assimilation, but each family concludes that whiteness is the measure of all things American. Hansberry's Beneatha explains the process of assimilation as "someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case *oppressive* culture."[254] The crusaders have embraced aspects of US culture—just not the same aspects or to

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[253] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. 11
[254] Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 57

the same extent, and the play highlights the spectrum of difference of the performed identities. The tensions between materiality and spirituality also play out in the dramas. While for Mama Younger it is between her Christian beliefs and her son's yearning for material possessions and for the crusaders it is the reconciliation of Islamic injunctions with those possessions.

Perhaps Ali's crusaders echo the Youngers most closely in the depiction of the tension between dreams and racial realities: while the dream cult/ure might compel Hansberry's Walter Lee to aspire to a house in the suburbs and "yachts someday! Yes, I want to hang some real pearls 'round my wife's neck. Ain't she supposed to wear no pearls?"[255] the darker reality of that cult/ure similarly compels the block association's opposition and acts as the community's catalyst to keep the family out. Similarly, the crusaders find their middle-class existence marred by heightened security with Muslims specifically targeted. Certainly much has changed in the intervening years since *A Raisin's* 1959 debut that has led many to believe that racial injustice and discrimination are part of the US's past rather than present. However, in the following I argue that Ali underscores performances of Muslimness—as opposed to status alone—in order to critique a dream cult/ure that is fueled by the illusion of the post racial, a dream that in its best form gives rise to grotesque pantomimes of racial unity and in its worst a virulently xenophobic nationalism.

The Amalgame on the Right

In contrasting the everyday reality of Iranians with the depiction of them on television, comedian Maz Jobrani asserts,

> The thing that frustrates me is when I see us on TV nowadays. Who do they always show? They always show the crazy dude burning the American flag going, 'Death to

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[255] Hansberry, *A Raisin* 94.

America!' Always that guy. Just once I wish they would show us doing something good….like baking a cookie or something, right? Because I've been to Iran; we have cookies.[256]

What is at the heart of Jobrani's humorous commentary is unease and frustration with the ease with which the image of the flag-burning terrorist becomes the everyman for Iranian Muslim men and the representation of who Jobrani himself is and what he looks like. In displaying three performances—the one on television, the one with which he is familiar, and his own—he implicitly encourages his audience to accept what he has seen and who he is as more authentic. Jobrani's own contribution to this racial and religious discourse—and that of the rest of the male comics comprising the *Axis of Evil* comedy tour—is to interrogate this dangerous *amalgame* as well as to counter it by doing something good—like just telling jokes.

The term amalgame is useful to characterize this terrorist figure because embedded in the term is a means through which to simultaneously confront and deny. According to Marianne Doury "the word '*amalgame*' is a French meta-argumentative expression the purpose of which is to disqualify an antagonistic argumentation as fallacious."[257] That is, while the term amalgame in its literal sense refers to the mixture of two disparate parts, more recently—at least by the late 90s—the term in everyday French argumentation has come to mean that an opponent is invoking an invalid association.[258] Doury's case study on the term—which cites the term's usage in French newspaper articles—identifies two primary "targets" of amalgame accusations. The first

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[256] *Axis of Evil Comedy Tour*. Dir. Michael Simon. Image Entertainment, 2007.

[257] Marianne Doury, "The Accusation of Amalgame as a Meta-Argumentative Refutation," *Argumentation in Practice*. Ed. Frans H. van Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005. 145-161. 146

[258] To turn to a real-world example: in a 2015 *New Yorker* article George Packer cites one Facebook user who—shortly after the Charlie Hebdo shootings—lamented, "I fear for the Muslims of France. The narrow-minded or frightened are going to dig in their heels and make an *amalgame*." In this instance, Packer defines the amalgame as to "conflate terrorists with all Muslims," and further in the same article Packer uses the term himself in referring to "the right's tendency to make an *amalgame*—to mix up terrorists with all Muslims."

is "an association of two objects x and y on the basis of properties which are presented as shared and conclusive."[259] Under this rubric to make an amalgame might be to make a faulty parallel, a generalization or to "excessively broad[en] a class definition."[260] The second primary target of amalgame accusations is making "the connection between two objects x and y because of a relationship of dependence between them,"[261] which might be to invoke a false causal. I use the term here as opposed to stereotype because embedded in the term is denial and logical rejection of such an association with Muslim identity.

In examining the origins of this particular amalgame—this conflation of Muslims with terrorists—critics explain that it is the result of government policies that racialized Muslim identity. Salah D. Hassan argues that although policies before and after 9/11 have been used to racially profile Arabs in particular, it is after 9/11 that such policies have especially marked Arabs for treatment as second-class citizens even as official policy included them in "whiteness."[262] According to Moustafa Bayoumi for instance "Special registration[263]… reinscribed, through a legal mechanism, the cultural assumption that a terrorist is a foreign-born, an alien in the United States, and a Muslim, and that all Muslim men who fit this profile are

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[259] Doury 154.
[260] Doury 156.
[261] Doury 157.
[262] Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State." *Middle East Report.* 3(2002): 16-21.
[263] What was then the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) expanded an existing registration program. In its new form the program required males over the age of 16 who were nationals or citizens of what started as 5 countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria) but eventually came to include 20 more (Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen) to submit to government fingerprinting, interviewing and monitoring. It was not until December 23, 2016 that the Department of Homeland Security officially "remov[ed] outdated regulations relating to an obsolete special registration program for certain nonimmigrants." See "Removal of Regulations Relating to Special Registration Process for Immigrants." *Federal Register: the Daily Journal of the United States Government.* 23 December 2016.

potential terrorists."[264] It is with this amalgame that Middle Eastern became synonymous for Muslim in a way that discounts the racial diversity of Muslims, the religious diversity of Arab lands as well as the history of Arabs in the US, which particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century consisted predominantly of Christian immigrants. Despite such attention being given to Muslim status, the ability to round up Muslims in an amalgame relies on the power of misrecognition in general and the inability to recognize the Muslim body specifically. What this means is that although attention is frequently confined to Arabs, this amalgame also puts a number of other bodies at risk. Broadly speaking it encapsulates all Muslim men, men who could pass as Muslim, and—as we have seen in the previous chapter— increasing representations of hijabis as threats speak to their immasculation and demand their inclusion as well. Such a mass roundup of over one and a half billion Muslims along with the few billions who look like them is the epitome of an amalgame in that it associates what is disparate, makes unfounded/incorrect generalizations, mixes/confuses and makes false causals all at once.

While the superficial engagement with Muslim identity is characteristic of both the political left and right, the dominant perception of Muslims is fueled by the far right's capitalization on the US public's ignorance of Islam and Muslims,[265] a void that can be filled with misinformation. Noting the difference between media representations of South Korean and Polish democratic demonstrations, Elaine H. Kim maintains that "visual-media racism helps craft and reinforce our identification with Europeans and whites while distancing us from fearsome and alien Asiatic hordes."[266] Similar tactics are deployed against Muslims. While media

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[264] Moustafa Bayoumi. "Racing Religion." New Centennial Review 6.2 (2006): 267-293. 275

[265] See for instance Wajahat Ali et al. "Fear, Inc: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America" 26 August 2011. Web. The report by the Center for American Progress links a plethora of misinformation concerning Islam and Muslims back to five political donors.

[266] Elaine H. Kim, "Home is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheaval." *Social Justice.* 20.1/2 (Spring/Summer 1993): 1-21. 6

depictions of the figure of the Black Muslim characterized him as "the hate that hate produced," the far right's amalgame hates the US/West because he hates US "freedoms."[267] How is it possible then to create a stable indigenous Muslim American identity when an amalgame—particularly one as dangerous and detrimental to multiple communities as the Muslim as terrorist—is manufactured, commodified and sold as fact?

Because the far right's engagement with Muslims is designed to capture and distort Muslim identity, it is concerned with performances only in as much as they can mitigate Muslim status. Creating such warped images of Islam and Muslims generates scripts for acceptable Muslim behavior, and one way in which Muslims have created homes in such inhospitable environments is in ensuring that their performance closely adheres to those scripts. This idea is not foreign to the US. Historically, the threat of becoming encapsulated by the racial discrimination experienced by others led many US minority groups to further discriminate against those groups by portraying the self as "us" in the formulation of "us" versus "them" rather than questioning the portrayal of "them." Discrimination by members of marginalized groups range from circa World War II buttons reading "I am Not Japanese"[268] to the ubiquitous presence of US flags in the aftermath of 9/11 such that they even donned the heads of Muslim women. So, while individual performances of Muslimness are lost in the far right's essentialized notion of Muslim status, conscious performances of US identity are not. In turning to *The Domestic Crusaders* I am interested in the way in which not only identity status—being

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[267] See David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. What is critical to understand in the discussion of the freedom-hating terrorist is how the term freedom operates, both the way in which it gets employed and what it means in reality. Media and political deployments of the term, particularly after 9/11, most frequently employ little to no critical analysis because, as David Harvey explains, "[t]he word 'freedom' resonates so widely within the common-sense understanding of Americans that it becomes 'a button that elites can press to open the door to the masses' to justify almost anything'" (39). Despite its wide application, freedom is much more limited and limiting.

[268] Kim 18; footnote 8.

Muslim—but also identity performance—performing Muslimness—plays a crucial role in understanding Muslim American identity and literature.

Islam at Home

> Of the title Ali maintains that *Domestic Crusaders* is a reference to hundreds of years of alleged inherent acrimony between the West and Islam…I wanted to reframe that within this multi-hyphenated Muslim-American family. These 'crusaders' instead of being blood-thirsty warmongers, are nuanced, hypocritical, self-involved, quirky people. Instead of Kalashnikovs and swords and missiles, we see them fighting with stings barbs and wit and regrets and secrets.[269]

I would also suggest that "Domestic" in general means life within the US homeland, but more specifically is a reference to the drama's setting—the family home—an indication that what follows will be private performances of Muslim identity, and the play begins, in fact, with loosely hijabbed middle-aged Khulsoom preparing food. As the curtain opens and the lights gradually rise on Khulsoom cooking, the adhan (the call to prayer) plays on a clock radio and immediately grounds the play and home in a religious context, announcing to the audience that this is a particular type of kitchen. While much of the adhan may be unfamiliar to non-Muslim listeners, certainly right-wing portrayals have been at pains to draw a connection between its opening words, "Allahu Akbar" (God is greater) and terrorists and terroristic acts.[270] However, the melodic intonation of the play's muezzin (the caller to prayer) is far removed from any associations with violence. Still too, through the figure of Khulsoom, Ali resists more-popular

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[269] "Short Story Long." *American Theatre.* 28.2 (February 2011): 12-13.
[270] See for instance Robert Spencer's "'Allahu Akbar: It Means Almost Everything—Except What the Establishment Media Says." *Breitbart.com* 25 December 2015. Spencer labels the phrase the "battle cry of Islamic jihadists as they commit mass murder." Spencer is not coincidentally one of the individuals the "Fear, Inc" report characterized as one of a handful of "misinformation experts on Islam."

narratives by connecting a familiar sight to what may still be an unfamiliar sound. As if in answer to Jobrani's comical call for Muslims baking cookies, Khulsoom, in the act of setting a table, introduces the audience to a glimpse inside the domestic sphere of middle-class Muslim America.

Performing US Identity: Bulls and Things

The text underscores that, for some, the "performing self,"[271] already a feature of US consumer culture, faces the need to follow additional scripts in hostile social climates. Just as Kobena Mercer concludes that black hair is always in response to dominant notions of beauty, Muslimness is read in response to dominant notions of how one should or should not perform American identity. In following the script of acceptable behavior for Muslim men, Salahuddin/Sal, the family's eldest and an investment banker, consciously performs US identity, de-emphasizes performance of Muslimness, and subscribes to an understanding of us vs. them that divides the ummah along class lines. First, he principally relies on a scripted performance of US identity to reconcile—if not mitigate—his status as Muslim with his status as US citizen. Although his namesake is Salahuddin the twelfth-century Muslim ruler admired for his "ascetic personality, genial manners, cunning, and military brilliance,"[272] dressed in "designer pants, shoes and jacket" and a "Banana Republic business-type shirt," "Sal" with his focus on outward appearance and material possessions shows all the hallmarks of having successfully assimilated into the cult of personality. He adds to his already performing self a brand of aggressive masculinity that has long been associated with US identity and policy. A self-described "bull,"

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[271] Llewellyn Negrin, "Appearance and Identity." *Appearance and Identity.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 9-32. Negrin explains the performing self as when there is "greater emphasis upon appearance, display and the management of impressions" compared to earlier (pre-1920) US emphasis on character and morals (9).
[272] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* vi.

he makes clear his uncomplicated allegiance to capitalism, concluding before the end of the first act that, "In the end, it's economics. Simple economics. Always has been, always will be."[273] In Act II, scene I he counsels his brother who has just been slapped by their father for switching career tracks. Having earlier referred to himself as a "bull-stock,"[274] he invokes the metaphor of the bull again this time to invite his brother to embrace his economic and personal philosophy:

> If you have to remember one thing, Ghafur, remember this: you have to be a *bull* in this world. A bull among the cattle. (*Mimes this with hands and fingers as he speaks*) You take your aim and you *run*; no stopping; no looking back; no regrets about leaving the little people behind. Survival of the fittest *and* the smartest. And know that in the end, if it's between the bull and the cattle, the bull will not hesitate. It will ram any obstacle out of its path. The bulls of the world are the people who succeed, Ghafur. Me! Everyone else is just cattle. (*Points to GHAFUR's heart)* This, bro, this…is gonna be your downfall. I'm just lookin' out for you, is all.[275]

Sal's job as a "corporate drone"[276] informs his "bullish" assessments. His characterization of himself as a bull and earlier in the play as a "bull-stock" signals his own valuation of his worth; a bull market indicates a good economy and rising stock prices. Of the characters in the play he most clearly embraces and embodies the characteristics of almost unfettered consumerism, but nevertheless attempts to check his personal philosophy against religious doctrine. Decreeing his own lifestyle as religiously permissible, Sal maintains, "Allah never said not to make bank, wear Armani, buy a Tag, marry a beautiful wife—at least not when I went to Sunday school."[277]

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[273] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 49.
[274] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 30.
[275] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 66; emphasis in original.
[276] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 8.
[277] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 43.

Although he shows concern that his performance of US identity does not overwhelm his status as Muslim, he yet attempts the reconciliation of Muslim American identity by discouraging the performance of Muslimness. In Act I Scene I, for instance, he unleashes a barrage of personal insults against his sister that attack her decision to don hijab, including the derogatory reference to Fatima as "Hij-Abbie Hoffman"[278] and her fellow muhajjabaat as her "radical ninja 'sisters,'"[279] and the "jihadi penguin squad."[280] Despite his references to Fatima as "fundamentalist," however, his insults may nonetheless represent brotherly concern for his sister's safety as Fatima's post 9/11 overt displays of Muslimness could potentially expose her to discrimination, even danger. If she cannot adopt the bull persona then perhaps she can at least make herself less of a target.

Sal also invests in a dichotomy that makes the family distinct from "bad" Muslims rather than calls into question the right's amalgame. When Khulsoom cast doubts on the wisdom of Ghafur's choice to keep a beard and wear a *kufi*, it is Sal who responds to his mother by demonstrating a rigid understanding of citizenship based on a well-policed—albeit arbitrary—border between "us" and "them":

> KHULSOOM: Didn't I tell you to shave your beard before you came?[281] Who gave you the brilliant idea to keep a beard? And you wore the *topi*? Oy, uloo! Why didn't you hold a sign saying, I'M AN EXTREMIST. ONE WAY TICKET TO ABU GHRAIB, PLEASE.

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[278] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 10.
[279] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 9.
[280] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 10.
[281] Although not as distinct a marker of Muslimness, the beard is yet a type of masculine counterpart to hijab.

SAL: Relax, Ami. The government can't do anything to Ghafur. He's American, and a

college student. They only deport those damn fundamentalist Arabs and illegal aliens that

come into this country. Rightfully so, if you ask me.[282]

Such a rigid understanding of who belongs and who does not is informed by a dream cult/ure

that "thrives on generalizations, on limiting the number of possible questions, on privileging

immediate answers."[283] "Us" are college-educated American immigrants—even if they are

Muslim, while "them" are unAmerican, undocumented and characterized by their rigid

understandings of Islam. In fact, contrary to Sal's reassurances that Khulsoom can relax, as

Hassan explains in his "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State," "Arabs

and Muslims who are citizens have been less directly affected by the anti-terrorism measures, but

they too have been subject to blanket suspicion and racial profiling and have reason to be

concerned that these practices could intensify."[284] The blanket suspicion that Arabs and Muslims

encounter indicate that the amalgame is designed to capture and distort status rather than to

capture the subtlety of individual performances.

And it is the possibility of being encompassed within this amalgame that is responsible

for Sal's rigid determination of "us" and "them." Despite the far right holding out the allure that

performances can change the impact of status, there are various misreadings in the play that

reiterate the totalizing quality of Muslim identity status, including Ghafur's story of being

selected for airport security detainment,[285] Salman's of a supervisor who "loves his camel-jockey

and A-rab jokes"[286] and Hakim's of a child who questions whether he is a relative of Osama bin

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[282] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 41; emphasis in original.
[283] Coates 50.
[284] Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State" 18.
[285] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 40.
[286] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 79.

Laden.[287] Their fellow Americans' collapsing of distinct cultures and civilizations exasperate the family, who understand the confusion as a sign of willful ignorance and disrespect:

> FATIMA:…I heard the kids next door complain that our house smells like Little Kabul.
>
> KHULSOOM: Kya? Kabul? We're not those *Afghanis.* We're *Pakistanis!* Why don't you tell them, Fatima? I've lived here long enough. They should at least give respect and know who I am. At least not call me some Afghani.
>
> FATIMA: Yeah, Ami. Do you think trailer-trash Bob and his Podunk wife know the difference?
>
> HAKIM: Close—close enough. Afghanistan is next to Pakistan, and they are Muslims. They didn't call us Mexican. Or Sikhs, ha! Should be grateful.
>
> FATIMA: Exactly. They probably think we're Hindu or something.[288]

In a similar manner, in describing his response to a young boy's questioning whether he is related to Osama bin Laden, Hakim vainly attempts to clarify the identities of both parties: "no, no, I'm not. *He* is a terrorist who doesn't know the first thing about the religion of Islam. *I* am a proud Musalman, Alhamdulillah, born and raised in Hyderabad Deccan, India."[289] Despite Sal's and the family's efforts to distinguish themselves, scripted performances can be ignored and intragroup distinctions lost in the focus on status and the subsequent collapse of identities.

Just as Sal calls for an uninterrogated embrace of the dream cult/ure to reconcile his identity as a Muslim with his identity as an American, Salman/Abu, similarly calls for such an embrace of the materiality of home. While Sal chiefly relies on scripted performances of US identity and the de-emphasis of Muslimness to reify the borders of us and them, Salman relies on

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[287] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 16.
[288] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 16.
[289] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 17.

mass consumption to resolve tensions between materiality/his US identity and spirituality/his Muslim identity. Through spending he believes that he can realize the American dream—a dream often understood as economic plenty and quantified in terms of material possessions—as well as show his religiosity—prove his Islam by obeying God's commands.[290] That his wife, however, views her husband's devotion to the dream cult/ure as predominant is indicated in a pivotal exchange in Act II, scene II. After Salman learns that Ghafur has switched majors he retires with his wife to the master bedroom to both cool off and vent about the monetary sacrifices he has made for the family's livelihood:

> KHULSOOM: I never wanted any of this. *(She looks around and points to random commodities.)*
>
> SALMAN: Hanh, *now* she doesn't want any of this. You don't want the fine house in the suburbs, the jewelry and the nice saris, the Persian and Indian living-room set.
>
> KHULSOOM: I've put up with enough of your belittling through the years, Allah is my *Gavah,*[291] but I won't let you impose your vanities and insecurities on me!
>
> SALMAN: Vanities? Vah-vah, what English!
>
> KHULSOOM: I can tell you in English, Urdu, Punjabi, and languages only wives and mothers know! *You* were the one who always wanted the *mansion* and the BMW, and the big-screen TV. The *dunya*—all these—*things.* Shiny, gold, marble things to be seen as the *big* man, with the respect and wealth.[292]

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[290] By Qur'anic decree—surah Nisaa (the Women), verse 34—men are *qawwamoon*—custodians, guardians, managers—over women, so while Khulsoom works and states her ability to provide financially for her family, Salman takes it as his responsibility to do so.

[291] Ali defines this term in the footnotes as "witness."

[292] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 76; emphasis in original.

The Arabic word *dunya* denotes the life of this world and its ephemera and points to an inferiority in comparison with the *akhirah*, the hereafter—the more lasting. What is at the heart of Khulsoom's analysis is a plea to both her husband and the audience that they not become lost in the theater of this world. Stage directions aid in this critique. When Khulsoom "*looks around and points to random commodities*" that the commodities will differ between sets illustrates the arbitrariness and interchangeability of the specific commodities. That she views her husband's investment in their possessions as linked to his understanding of his own self-worth and the mansion, BMW, and big screen TV as big-ticket toys indicates her skepticism in consumption as a path to equality for anyone, particularly for herself or any of the women fluent in the languages that only wives and mothers know. She views her husband's relationship to the Islamic community as under threat as well—purchasing "shiny, gold, marble things" is no sign of piety but rather indicative of self-glorification. Salman's desire here to provide his wife with jewelry and saris is similar to Walter Lee's desire to buy pearls for his wife in that their desires are productions of dream cult/ure. In a discussion with Mama Younger, for instance, Walter Lee links his own investment in the dream as foundational to his sense of self. Before concluding that money is "life," Walter Lee imagines material possessions as the means to achieve personal fulfillment: "Do you know what this money means to me? Do you know what this money can do for us….Mama—Mama—I want so many things…."[293] While Salman's material possessions have been more attainable than Walter Lee's dreams of pearls and yachts there is yet an aspect of a dream deferred. The feelings of being a "big man" continue to elude him, and he invests his hopes in his sons attaining what he could not.

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[293] Hansberry, *A Raisin* 53.

For Salman, an investment in the dream cult/ure potentially provides the belonging that eludes his family. In viewing his own experiences with discrimination as personal failures, Salman can yet imagine class as independent of racial and religious status and performances. Ghafur's decision to become a teacher further fuels what Salman feels is a loss of personal, domestic, and professional control. In his Act I, scene V confrontation with Ghafur, Salman wars with feelings of emasculation, and the intense desire for his sons' financial success is rooted in his own feelings of failure.

> Well, as long as I pay the bills—you are becoming a damn doctor. And a good one at that! No, no, not a good one, the best! The absolute best! *(eyes drift slightly, as if he's pensive)* So they can never cut you down, or humiliate you, or take away your hard-earned rewards. No son of mine (*looks at SAL)*—sons of mine—is going to be some third-rate, penniless professor teaching little kids grammar and sentence-vocabulary structure and whatnot.[294]

Salman's lament both evokes the elusiveness of the dream and the efficacy of myth. While Salman has ensured that his family can possess a "fine house in the suburbs, the jewelry and the nice saris, the perfect Persian and Indian living room set," it is not enough to keep the family from post 9/11 un-'whitening': "When those two towers fell, we fell with them."[295]

The Token on the Left

In contrast to the right's principle focus on Muslim status, intragroup Muslim performances are sometimes emphasized when there exists the possibility of profiting from such performances. For instance, individual performances of Muslimness are frequently encouraged when the "thin version" of diversity is at stake. Linking racial capitalism with this superficial

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[294] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 53.
[295] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 83.

version of diversity, Nancy Leong notes that "what was once a means to an end has become an end in itself."[296] She argues that

> We have internalized the idea that racial diversity is a social good, and as a result, we assign value to the inclusion of nonwhite individuals in our social milieu, our educational institutions, and our workplaces. Nonwhiteness has therefore become something desirable - and for many, it has become a commodity to be pursued, captured, possessed, and used....problems with racial capitalism arise when white individuals and predominantly white institutions seek and achieve racial diversity without examining their motives and practices...This superficial view of diversity consequently leads white individuals and predominantly white institutions to treat nonwhiteness as a prized commodity rather than as a cherished and personal manifestation of identity. Affiliation with nonwhite individuals thus becomes merely a useful means for white individuals and predominantly white institutions to acquire social and economic benefits while deflecting potential charges of racism and avoiding more difficult questions of racial equality.[297]

Although Leong's "Racial Capitalism" focuses on the diversity initiative in employment and institutional recruitment, the marketing world presents several examples of race-based economic exploitation in the name of diversity. That is companies profit from the appearance of diversity without engaging in action that promotes cross-racial interaction and understanding and in fact might even inhibit it. For instance, a 2017 Pepsi commercial depicted a visibly diverse, young and physically attractive crowd involved in a peaceful protest. As the crowd passes in front of a young white female model she watches with interest, spontaneously sheds her blond wig and joins the passing crowd. The commercial culminates with the now brunette creating unity

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[296] Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism." *Harvard Law Review.* 126.8 (June 2013): 2151-2226. 2169
[297] Leong 2155.

between the crowd and the police officers standing guard when she approaches the officers and gives a Pepsi to one of them. While Pepsi stated that its goal was to "project a global message of unity, peace, and understanding," critics protested the cooptation of Black Lives Matter imagery and argued that the commercial instead "trivialized the widespread protests against the killings of black people by the police."[298]

What is also relevant in the context of this chapter is that when the thin version of diversity is applied to Muslim identity it relies to a large extent on an individual's making choices that can then be used to exploit and ultimately profit from difference. In such instances, performance becomes as important if not more so than identity status. If we return to the example above: in selling their message of global unity Pepsi featured several apparently tokenistic figures, and among those most prominently featured was a hijabi photographer and a black male wearing traditional "Muslim garb," in this case clothing that marks him visibly as Muslim. The superficial engagement with Muslims on the left is in fact characterized by a focus on profit-generating performances of Muslim identity. It is not enough to have the status of Muslim—and in the example above neither person need actually *be* Muslim—it is sufficient to be recognizable as such.

Muslim Performance and Racial Capitalism

Salman's company's capitalization on Muslim performances depends upon this elaboration of differences, and in deemphasizing his Muslim identity to conform to company culture Salman loses value. The promotion that he expects to receive goes instead to Abdullah who wears a beard and "looks like Osama bin Laden's younger brother."[299] When explaining to

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[298] Daniel Victor, "Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter." *The New York Times.* N.p. 5 April 2017. Web.
[299] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 80.

Salman why he was overlooked for a promotion in favor of Abdullah who is younger and has less experience, Salman's employer emphasizes the marketability of Arab and Islamic culture in specific corporate markets. In this example of diversity gone wrong, Hunter—appearing in the drama as a disembodied voiceover—operates under a hegemonic notion of what it means to be Muslim and masculine that leaves Salman profoundly unsettled:

> Sally my boy, we love you here, you know that. But we've decided to give this job to one of your boys, *Ab-doolah.* I knew you'd be happy—heck, you can barely contain your surprise or excitement, I understand. We're sending Ab-doolah because here's a young A-rab man who is absolutely serious about his Middle Eastern Ar-a-bic roots, and dedicated to his religion and culture, and it's exactly that image we need to drive home to our foreign investors and current business partners—that we, as Americans, respect their exotic culture and A-rab-esque heritage, and to prove it, we're gonna send 'em one of their own—*Ab-doolah!* That 'authentic' image we're gonna sell them needs a certain kind of representation that only Ab-doolah, God bless 'im has in spades.[300]

In an impressive array of insults, Hunter emasculates "Sally," infantilizes him, and criticizes his commitment to religion. The company's "bullish" corporate assessment of Abdullah's religious identity displays an essentializing of Muslimness that—in its recognition of only one type of Muslim performance as valuable—devalues Salman. Hunter centers Abdullah's 'authentic' image to manufacture and sell an artificial image of the company's progressiveness and inclusivity, but what is lost on Salman's employer is the irony that it is "only Ab-doolah" whose presence can vouch for the company's respect for diversity. The reader/ theatregoer is in fact left wondering if Abdullah is even Arab. Despite Hunter's assurance that he is an "A-rab" man with

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[300] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 80-81.

"Ar-a-bic" roots, considering the collapse of identities the family frequently endures, it is easy to imagine that Abdullah is possibly South Asian or any of the many other identities that become collapsed under the rubric Muslim.

The result of the company's investment in the thin version of diversity has negative consequences for the company as a whole and for Salman as an individual. Firstly, such a superficial investment hinders the "thick" version of diversity, which "views diversity as a prerequisite to cross-racial interaction"[301] rather than as a numbers goal. Secondly, the superficial investment offends Salman and places him in a personal and anti-discrimination quandary. As Carbado and Gulati explain of intragroup racial discrimination

> drawing intra-racial distinctions based on identity performances is tantamount to establishing racial (identity) terms upon which people will be hired and/or promoted…The problem is compounded by the fact that white people are not subcategorized based on their performance of white (racial) identity.[302]

Salman knows he is the victim of religious discrimination, but he feels too old to quit and he cannot complain that he was not Muslim enough for his employers. Certainly, there might be little sympathy for Salman from Muslims when they learn that he—by his own account—is "A Muslim passed over for a Muslim. For a Muslim who acts and plays the part."[303] This emphasis on identity performance over status both challenges and reifies the superficial distinctions between what is classified as "us" and what is classified as "them."

Hunter's assessment is a reconfiguration of the borders of "us" and "them" that does not consider Salman's performances as passable. In his racial and religious status Salman is too

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[301] Leong 2170.
[302] Carbado and Gulati 721.
[303] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 81.

much one of them to be counted one of us, and in his performances he is too much one of us to represent them. Conforming to expectations leads Salman to lose the "authentic" Muslimness that his bosses expect, and his brown skin and atypical US name prevent him from social acceptance as white. He can neither capitalize on the wages of whiteness nor on the exploitation of his own otherness. It is public de-emphasis of Muslim performances that ultimately determines Salman's (dis)placement. In the process of becoming "'Sally' to [Hunter], 'Sal' to Brian the CFO, and 'the Sal Man from Pak-is-tan' to all the interns and assistants,"[304] Salman experiences a separation from Muslim, masculine and US identity. With such scripts focusing on status on one hand and essentialized performances on the other, what then would be an appropriate method of disrupting the narrative, of rewriting scripts?

Changing the Scripts

If Salahuddin and Salman are adherents to the dream cult/ure then Ghafur and Hakim are the disrupters of myth as the latter are unwilling to conform to dream cult/ure expectations. With Ghafur, the family's youngest and whose birthday is the reason for their gathering, Ali uses modern cultural icons to disrupt scripted performances and as an effective means to challenge discrimination and engage Muslims and non-Muslims. The identity that Ghafur would perform is fundamentally at odds with the bull that Sal advocates becoming. In Sal's frustration with his brother's self-effacement, he instructs Ghafur to "Stop with your aw-shucks Jimmy Stewart routine….Be a man."[305] His invocation of middle-class everyman Jimmy Stewart is critical considering Stewart's perhaps most iconic role was George Bailey—a model figure able to maneuver in a capitalist society without living there destroying his moral compass. Indeed, *It's a Wonderful Life* teaches that the loss of such a figure would be detrimental to society, and the

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[304] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 79.
[305] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 43.

invocation of Stewart/Bailey indicates that the price of the Muslim American ticket is not only payable but the exchange profitable. What Ghafur must give up for survival/thrival is in fact what he values least— "a nice 401(k) plan, job stability, and medical degree."[306] Bailey's example is an alternative to Sal's rampant consumerism, and Salman's feelings of inadequacy. Additionally, Ali's reliance on a US cultural equivalency for Ghafur's "crusade" helps make Muslims more familiar to cross racial and religious audiences, and in turn aids in undercutting the more familiar narrative of the right's amalgame.

Bailey's is not the only equivalent that Sal draws for his brother's behavior. He also imagines Ghafur as a contemporary Prufrock and encourages his brother to ask himself "Do I dare disturb the universe? Figure that one out and you might have an idea where you're going."[307] Considering that in the scene prior to this one Ghafur incurs his father's wrath by informing him of his decision to switch career paths, the answer is certain, and indeed Ghafur spotlighted on a darkened stage dramatically accepts the challenge with, "It's about time someone did."[308]

Hakim's discomforting performance on the other hand illustrates the extent to which the family has bought into the Dream. In an affront to the American dream, Hakim's nightmare descends upon his family and confronts them with a creeping/pervasive history that he objects to leaving at America's borders. When Sal accidently knocks hot chai on his grandfather, Hakim turns directly to the audience and recounts a similar incident in which a spilled cup of chai saved his fugitive life. He surprises his grandchildren when he discloses his own participation in the violent upheaval surrounding the Partition and the role he played in retaliation murders. After

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[306] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 43.
[307] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 66.
[308] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 71.

watching his friends murdered and their murderers go unpunished, Hakim joined a group of vigilantes seeking vengeance for Muslim deaths. He recounts one particularly brutal murder he committed in which he used revenge as spectacle: "We killed them and hung their bodies from the same trees, *high up*—to show all of them, anyone who could see, that killing our people would not be tolerated!"[309] In informing his grandchildren of his role in the killings, he notes that he is attempting to pass a share of his burden on to them: "I would give *anything*, my entire life twice over, just for the memories to go away. Just to *forget* the screams. But I cannot. And whether you like or not, it is a part of me, so it is a part of you."[310] Rather than "make peace" with her history as her grandfather encourages, Fatima responds with a renunciation of her grandfather's past and condemnation of her parents' hypocrisy. For Fatima, her history begins within the geographic boundaries of America and with the separation and renunciation of a past un-American history and culture. In rejecting her grandfather's atrocities she asserts, "This is *not* my history. My history is just being an American Muslim who is in law school, and the worst thing I've ever done is to be arrested for protesting and standing up for what I believe in. And to try to marry a respectable man—even if he is black!"[311] Her response indicates the preferences the family has for performances that whitewash history.

What Ali reiterates is that the price of the ticket to invest in dream cult/ure varies not only across culture but also within immediate families. On the one hand, the cost is too high for Hakim who bemoans loss culture and Khulsoom who suggests Salman quit an emasculating job.

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[309] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 99.
[310] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 101.
[311] Ali, *Domestic Crusaders* 103.

The price of the ticket is on the other hand more reasonable for Sal who revels in US consumer culture and Ghafur who looks forward to paying the cost of bridging Muslim with American identity.

Conclusion

While status is generally the focus in discussions of Muslim identity, considering how Muslims perform Muslimness shines light on preferential intragroup performances and illustrates that the boundaries of us and them can be erected within statuses. In *The Domestic Crusaders* Ali engages in a reconciliation project to de-emphasize intragroup as well as the community borders between us and them. The benefits of theater as art form is in part that it provides an immediate and unmediated connection with the audience. Such an art form calls on audience members to move beyond the version of diversity associated only with numbers, and performances become a means to de-identify with hegemonic notions of Islam and Muslims. For Ali, the cost of being an American incudes engagement that calls for a reduction of the elaboration of and capitalization on differences, and it is with such engagement that he attempts to transform Muslims from strangers into neighbors.

Conclusion

This dissertation explores three US cultural manifestations of Muslim strangeness—the Black Muslim, the hijabi victim/perpetrator and the terrorist amalgame—and the ways in which Muslim American writers have refuted such labels in their reassessments of the US home and cult/ures. The writings assembled here challenge US cultural assumptions based in white supremacy that have been used to threaten Muslim American belonging and keep Muslims strange. Theories of African American Muslim liminality and intersectionality—black Muslim feminist theory and identity performance theory— call attention to the diversity of Muslim American identity as well as emphasize the varying levels of estrangement and oppression to which Muslim Americans are subject. My analysis underscores the role that race and anti-blackness specifically have played in the formation of these gender and racial clichés of Muslim identity, and in doing so, attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between US racial and US religious politics.

In the vein of this exploration an examination of Omar ibn Said's, Job ben Solomon's and Malcolm X's works calls attention to the tensions between African American literature and Muslim American literature writings by African Americans and—particularly in the case of Omar ibn Said and Job ben Solomon—the necessity of examining the critical overlaps. I have emphasized the importance of considering the emergence of Muslim American literature as coterminous with the emergence of African American literature. Such a reassessment of the writings of enslaved African Americans would entail revisiting the Eurocentric literacy/freedom dynamic and the African American jeremiad as *the* cornerstones of black resistance and US nation building. Also, considering Malcolm X's writings as a social critique that cannot be divorced from an Islamic ethos challenges broader narratives that have limited African American

Muslim identity to discussions of black resistance.

Although the twentieth-century raced based-notion of indigeneity has lost efficacy in defetishizing Muslims as strangers, Umar Abd-Allah's proposal for US cultural indigeneity based on the shared contributions of US and foreign-born Muslims has the potential to radically alter understandings of the US as home. Mohja Kahf's critical embrace of African American culture as essential to the development of Muslim American literature is part of the work of cultural indigeneity proposed by Abd-Allah. Kahf's creative endeavors also perform the work of racial and cultural reconciliation. In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* Kahf spotlights a number of internal and external community pressures that can inhibit the successful establishing of an indigenous Muslim American culture and identity. She engages in the defetishization of Muslim identities including Arab, the American hijabi and the black stranger/other. In situating Khadra's experiences between two black women Kahf emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and shared experiences without advocating for the erasure of the differences found in a racially and ethnically diverse community.

Similar to the ways in which the spiritual journeys of the protagonists of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf* lead them to reconcile their US and Muslim identity , Wajahat Ali's crusaders also present Islam in the US as "something belonging here" and Muslims—US and foreign born—as at home. In its critique of the post 9-11 racialization of Islam, *The Domestic Crusaders* emphasizes alternatives to acquiescing to imposed identities. In presenting Muslims "at home" Ali employs performances to illustrate social class as linked to white privilege and to defetishize Muslim strangeness. In highlighting the family's difficulties in assimilating culturally, Ali challenges boot-strap ideology—that hard work is the only ingredient necessary to achieve upward mobility. Additionally, while status as

Muslim can be all encompassing for those who view Muslim identity as antithetical to US identity, performances of Muslimness have been cynically appreciated by those who would capitalize on Muslim identity at the expense of engaging in cross-cultural understanding.

The writings assembled here reiterate home as an unstable concept and tap into specific ways of imagining Muslim and US identity in which to be a Muslim American is negotiated at the intersection of race and religion.

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