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TESIS DOCTORAL

A Geography of Strangeness
Transcultural Personhood and Fractal Identity in Contemporary South Asian Muslim American Literature

Presentada por Muqarram Khorakiwala para optar al grado de doctor
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Dirigida por
Dr. Jesús Benito Sánchez

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Dedication

In memory of
my nanima Salma
my dadima Batul
two exceptional women
ahead of their times
who lived exemplary lives
perfectly balancing
tradition and modernity

Acknowledgments

This project has been in the making for fifteen years, and while I begin to think about everyone who has helped, supported, guided, inspired, advised, and counseled me throughout this journey, inspired by Syed M. Masood's idea, a verse from Chapter 55 (Ar-Raḥmān / The Merciful) of the Holy Quran, repeated thirty-one times, comes to my mind – "Which of your Lord's blessings do you deny?" The verse is apt in the context of this literary dissertation as the chapter of Ar-Raḥmān is composed entirely in rhymed prose typical of classical Arabic poetry, each layer recursively revealing a different and fascinating nature of our fractal lives in the contemporary era. While it is impossible to acknowledge every single person who has led me to this point, they have all been nothing but a true blessing. Some of the people I would like to thank are mentioned below. My profound gratitude to Dr. Jesús Benito, my supervisor, for taking an active interest in my work and patiently guiding me through the research process. Our paths crossed again in 2019, ten years later, after I completed my Masters at the Universidad de Valladolid, but it feels as though the connection was always there, and he made it so easy to pick up where I left. Without his encouragement and support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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March 31, 2022

Abstract

A modern definition of cultural identity must include not only personal biographical aspects but also the diversity, stresses, and tensions of life in late modernity. It should help make sense of the individual's present not uniquely in terms of their past. Still, it should also offer a mechanism to explain that individual's links with the unfamiliar environment in a comprehensive manner. Further, such a conceptualization of identity should be composed of multiple components, constantly evolving and reflecting the pluralistic realities of today's culturally diverse and globalized world. Theorizations of cross-cultural, multicultural, and intercultural identity need to be replaced with conceptualizations of transcultural identity to better reflect the lived and imagined realities of global diasporas, which are becoming increasingly transcultural and transnational. With the changing role of nation-state and nationhood in the twenty-first century, identity can no longer be linked to a specific geographical space. Instead, the question of multiple simultaneous homelands makes any discussion of identity complex and complicated. In this regard, the mathematical concept of fractality has interesting applications in forming plural social identities and explaining the cultural complexity and multiplicity of "being" and "becoming" in diverse societies such as the United States.

This dissertation carries out an epistemic inquiry of identity in South Asian Muslim American literature published in the twenty-first century. The selection of works analyzed includes five novels, two poetry collections, one memoir, and one collection of short stories, representing different narrative forms and styles by eight South Asian Muslim American writers. The authors have been selected for their work on the themes of displacement, identity, intergenerational conflict, gender, and religion, to highlight the transcultural nature of the literary works and present the fractal nature of the identity of literary characters and their discursive imaginations. The chosen literary publications examine a range of identity theory concepts coupled with the material and philosophical realities of the late modern world such as globalization, digital transformation, time-space compression, structuration, and reflexivity. Each author's work is analyzed for the South Asian Muslim American diaspora's response to the transformations, contradictions, and challenges confronting contemporary Islam as it moves forward in the twenty-first century. Far from normalizing the identity of these diasporic individuals, the focus of this dissertation is to present them as complex adaptive beings possessing and exhibiting fractal identities. Furthermore, by incorporating facets of the Muslim American identity and Islamic identity, which have their unique idiosyncrasies, worldviews, and cultural practices, this study attempts to present a more holistic view of contemporary South Asian Muslim Americans and their fiction. Therefore, the core of this project centers around the effects of displacement on identity formation moving towards an existential model of fractal identities in these transcultural diasporic individuals across generations, genders, and religion, highlighting sociologically and politically relevant themes.

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How is one to tell them

That in no garden anywhere are all the flowers of one color

They cannot be

For, many colors live together hiding in one color

Look at the fate of those who have

Tried to make their garden all of one color

See how a hundred colors have seeped into a single color

How troubled they are

How worried they look

The New Ordinance[1]
by Javed Akhtar

کسی کو یہ کوئی کیسے بتائے

گلستاں میں کہیں بھی پھول یک رنگیں نہیں ہوتے

کبھی ہو ہی نہیں سکتے

کہ ہر اک رنگ میں چھپ کر بہت سے رنگ رہتے ہیں

جنھوں نے باغ یک رنگیں بنانا چاہے تھے

ان کو ذرا دیکھو

کہ جب اک رنگ میں سو رنگ ظاہر ہو گئے ہیں تو

کتنے پریشاں ہیں کتنے تنگ رہتے ہیں

کسی کو یہ کوئی کیسے بتائے

نیا حکم نامہ[2]

[1] Translated from Urdu by the Indian writer, critic, and literary historian Rakshanda Jalil.
[2] The Urdu text has been reproduced from www.rekhta.org.

Introduction

> All around me I see the face of America changing. So do you if you live in cities, teach in universities, ride public transport. But where, in fiction do you read of it? Who, in other words, speaks for us, the new Americans from nontraditional immigrant countries? Which is another way of saying, in this altered America, who speaks for you?
>
> Bharati Mukherjee, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!"

The rhetorical questions posed by one South Asian author shortly after her naturalization as an American citizen in 1988 compel us to reflect on the altering literary landscape in the U.S. Becoming American for these immigrants is no longer a purely bureaucratic exercise but also a literary experience, where Ellis Island is replaced by modern Court Houses handing out certificates of naturalization. "Such energy, such comedy, such sophistication and struggle and hunger to belong – yet who tells their stories?" (B. Mukherjee 1988, "Immigrant Writing") The immigrant narratives in the late twentieth century are a departure from minimalist fiction. These new Americans have so many stories to tell from their lives that can no longer be compressed or withheld. "They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime – village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, educated. What they've assimilated in 30 years has taken the West 10 times that number of years to create" (B. Mukherjee 1988, "Immigrant Writing"). The post-1965 wave of immigrants and their diasporic offspring, especially those from South Asia, entering the U.S. under the highly skilled labor category are not afraid of claiming their rights and creating their niche as naturalized citizens. "These new Americans are not willing to wait for a generation or two to establish themselves. They're working for themselves and their children, of course, but they're not here to sacrifice themselves for the future's sake" (B. Mukherjee 1988, "Immigrant Writing"). South Asians have a history of duality and pluralism, and their culture is steeped in accepting achievements of the 'other' as the 'collective ours.' As B. Mukherjee (1988) finally points out, "[p]erhaps it is this history-mandated training in seeing myself as 'the other' that now heaps on me a fluid set of identities denied to most of my mainstream American counterparts" ("Immigrant Writing").

In today's increasingly diverse world and specifically in the U.S., which has already started changing from a traditional Anglo-centric community to a non-Anglo-centric one, we need to think about new ways of conceptualizing the immigrant and diasporic experience. Since a few decades in literary studies and social sciences, there has been a shift in the discourse from single identity to that of multiple identities, from the idea of a single American culture to multiple American cultures, without questioning the legitimacy of their Americanness. In addition to the changing nature of the diaspora, communication technologies are shrinking the world like never before in history. So, total assimilation is not only unrealistic but also impossible and should not be expected. The diasporic individual now has more ways than before to stay in touch with "home" and even wants to do so in a more positive sense. South Asian Muslim American fiction has also moved from merely narrating tales of loss and pain to exploring ways of putting to rest dualistic dilemmas and of finding comfort in this new albeit strange state of "being." The strangeness in the new geography in which these diasporic individuals find themselves is overcome by relying on the familiar, by initially bonding with the known, and eventually creating constantly evolving, fluid, and fractal identities.

A vastly underrepresented yet interesting and complex demographic category is that of South Asian Americans who trace their immigration history to the U.S. up to four generations now. Among these are many Muslim Americans from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh who exhibit a unique blend of cultural characteristics common across the subcontinent. These are enmeshed with the rites and rituals from Islam with its origin in the Middle East. Due to the global mobilization of the workforce, there has been a marked increase in the number of upper-middle-class South Asians immigrating to the U.S. Unlike the old migrants from the colonial era that began their American journey at the lowest rung of the economy as indentured labor, the post-1960 wave of South Asian immigrants was primarily attracted to the U.S. in pursuit of state-sponsored opportunities in the fields of higher education and scientific research (S. K. Mishra 2016). In the last few decades, due to the U.S.'s information technology boom, South Asians are seeking admissions to prestigious American universities to pursue technical and managerial degrees. They first change the American higher education landscape. Then when they enter the workforce at the top rungs of the corporate ladder, they force leading capitalistic political strategists to consider flexible forms of citizenship (Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008). Furthermore, South Asians, mainly from India are the fastest-growing group of immigrants in the U.S., and their numbers have doubled from 2.2 million in 2000 to 4.9 million in 2019. The median annual household income of Indian Americans is double the same number in comparison to all American households (Bhattacharjee 2018). This is a consequence of the high demand for skilled labor in the U.S., which has attracted top talent from around the globe, firstly, due to the relaxation of the immigration reforms in the sixties, and lately, because of globalization and digital transformation of the world. The reality of diasporic individuals is widely reflected in the literary imagination and has resulted in many contemporary works of fiction and films on the themes of migration and diaspora. Specifically, in the case of South Asian American fiction, many of these writers have achieved international fame, won prestigious literary prizes, and their books have often been bestsellers in *The New York Times*. Yet, their work is currently under-researched like that of other Asian American writers (Partridge and Wong 2004). One often finds themes of confused identities, a feeling of nostalgia and longing for the homeland, the excitement of creating a hybrid identity or even multiple identities in the U.S., the struggle to retain their "old" culture, especially the conflict between first- and second-generation immigrants, and the perplexing sense of being "American" yet not being able to fully integrate or acculturate, for lack of any convincing "role models" or for simply being different. This so-called "conflict" is thought to be more pronounced in second- and third-generation diasporic individuals, whose loyalties are divided between multiple cultures and lifestyles but who are as "American" as any of their other fellow country people.

There is an increasing debate and discussion about the plurality of self-expression among diasporic individuals. The core identity is enriched by peripheral identities that are in a state of perpetual movement, thus defining the diasporic individual's state of "being"[3] and "becoming."[4] This complexity can be characterized by comparing the human identity to the natural phenomenon of fractalization, whereby on the surface, the differences in form are not visible. Still, a closer examination reveals the multitude of self-similar layers that constitute the whole. This phenomenon was studied formally in the 1970s by the Polish-born French American

[3] "Being" in this context can be conceptualized as the diasporic individuals' present set of identities that are in a constant state of flux and evolving in space and time.

[4] "Becoming" for the purpose of this study can be defined as the future set of identities toward which the diasporic individuals are evolving. "Becoming" can also be considered as transient as "being" for it is not an end-state, rather it simultaneously marks the end of the present identities and the beginning of the future identities.

mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot who developed a new branch in mathematics called fractal geometry[5] dedicated to the research of self-similarity, irregularity, and recursion in natural and artificial objects. In his memoir, published posthumously in 2012, Mandelbrot describes himself as a "fractalist"[6] and discusses his life-long interest in discovering and characterizing the roughness of the physical world and finding beauty in the uncontrolled elements of life. "Nearly all common patterns in nature are rough. They have aspects that are exquisitely irregular and fragmented–not merely more elaborate than the marvelous ancient geometry of Euclid but of massively greater complexity" (Mandelbrot 2012:xi). In a certain manner, the roughness of the diasporic identity insofar as how it is viewed by mainstream society needs further examination. The Mandelbrotian concept of fractals can help us to look beyond the surface, to discover the hidden component parts that constitute the whole, to examine the phenomenon of fractality[7], and inquire into the fractalization[8] of diasporic identity such that it becomes possible to transcend the limitations of hyphenated identities and normalizes the existence of a myriad of identities. However, it also must be stressed that though plural identities are indeed a form of self-enrichment, they are not devoid of troubling elements. One of the major difficulties arises due to the unique religious and cultural practices of the South Asian Muslim American diaspora. There is also the intergenerational conflict between parents who try to hold on to these religious and cultural practices and the children who sometimes want to hold on to them. Still, then they miss out on the American way of life, thus leading to a lower rate of integration. This aspect is unique to South Asian Americans when compared to their other Asian American counterparts. However, it must be admitted that fractalization, as it were, is something very prevalent in all formations of identity in the American context. Following Mandelbrot's (2012) advice of drawing parallels between the roughness in nature and its representation in art, the fractal attention to non-hegemonic irregularity may open a new space of visibility to the multiplicity of the diasporic self. Why one is the way one chooses to be in a country premised on freedom of choice and speech is something that needs to be explored in greater detail. It would also be worthwhile to explore the secular, economic, political, and educational outreach aspects of integral Americanness that diasporic individuals have chosen to cleave to.

The approach toward theoretical foundations and literary analyses in this dissertation follows the ideas promoted by Francoise Král's study on *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*, published in 2009. In her analysis, Král makes a strong case for using a transdisciplinary approach to any literary analysis of diasporic literature in the twenty-first century. In the words of Král (2009), this "reflection on identity takes place at a time when identity continues to occupy center stage not only in literary and cultural studies but also in the humanities

[5] Any of the various extremely irregular curves or shapes for which any suitably chosen part is similar in shape to a given larger or smaller part when magnified or reduced to the same size. This term was coined in 1975 to describe shapes that seem to exist at both the small-scale and large-scale levels in the same natural object. Fractals can be seen in snowflakes, in which the microscopic crystals that make up a flake look much like the flake itself. They can also be seen in tree bark and in broccoli buds. Coastlines often represent fractals as well, being highly uneven at both a large scale and a very small scale. Fractal geometry has been important in many fields, including astronomy, physical chemistry, and fluid mechanics. And even some artists are benefiting, creating beautiful and interesting abstract designs by means of fractals (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

[6] Term coined by Mandelbrot and also used in the title of his memoir *The Fractalist: Memoir of a Scientific Maverick* (2012)

[7] Used as a noun to describe the quality of being fractal or exhibiting fractal properties such as self-similarity, irregularity, and recursion.

[8] Used as a noun to describe the process of examination at an increasingly finer scale to identify underlying patterns that contribute to the formation of the whole.

in general, while being subjected to various critical as well as contextual assaults" (1). She reasons that "[t]he same situational impact of history and politics which had propelled issues of national and regional identity to the forefront of postcolonial studies is now starting to undermine the pertinence, if not the validity of such categories in diasporic studies" (1), which according to her have resulted from "new phenomena such as transnationalism, the formation of international communities and globalism" (1). Furthering her argument about this contextual shift, she posits that "[n]ot only has the essentialist conception of identity come under criticism with deconstructionism" (2), but "the link between identity and authenticity has also been the object of much speculation and has been interrogated to such an extent that today, it has become difficult to apprehend identity independently of identity construction and the mechanisms it involves" (2). It is impossible to conduct an inquiry into identity in literature without engaging in theories from sociology, politics, and economics, and this dissertation is no exception. Considering the issues faced by the diaspora in the contemporary era, new methods of investigating multiplicities and hybridities need to be considered. The mathematical concept of fractals provides such an alternative to account for the multitude of layers in the diasporic subject's identity, that on the surface seem unrelated even divergent, but that are in fact an indivisible part of the core identity. Therefore, Král contends that the twenty-first century is a "paradoxical time when identity still occupies pride of place while being on shaky ground" (2), and it is precisely why "its unreconstructed parts continue to haunt the field of literary studies with the recurrence and perseverance of a specter to the point where it almost seems that the more identity is under threat, the more it resurfaces" (2). This trend can be witnessed in the plethora of literary works on the subject of identity published by diasporic writers around the world. Král acknowledges the divergence in approaches when dealing with identity in sociology and literature and given the complexity in any discussion on identity today, it is precisely why we need to look for a transdisciplinary approach that converges various viewpoints in a dialogic fashion. On the one hand, literature allows "for the grammar of identity to express itself in all its complexities, in the jarring polarities of its fragmented nature, and for the divide between objective markers of integration and one's sense of belonging to widen to unexpected proportions" (3). By considering literary representations of identity as fractal, we are afforded the possibility of attaching infinite layers of multiplicities and contextualities to diasporic identity. On the other hand, the interest of sociologists in language helps the exact sciences to break away from objective and even idealistic conceptualizations of identity allowing "[t]he diverging methodologies of literary studies and sociology or anthropology" to "converge around specific nexuses involving the pivotal part played by language and myths – whether they be canonical myths or the more popular *doxa* of our era – in the coming together of new types of communities" (3-4). Král, then offers a warning that "[s]uch an approach would run the risk of instrumentalizing the literary texts, and potentially reduce them to mere testimonies on immigration" (4). However, Král contends that, if done carefully, using concepts from sociology consist "more in showing how these texts either explicitly interrogate or invite us to interrogate the conflicting patterns of identity constructions and understand issues which are only starting to emerge and have been left out of existing theoretical paradigms" (4). Therefore, this dissertation engages with a detailed discussion on sociological theorizations of identity, demonstrates the socio-political factors that either facilitate or hinder the construction of diasporic identity and uses concepts from multiple disciplines to address the gap in existing identity models.

The richness of fractal geometry to characterize irregularity as an inherent natural phenomenon, when extended to human identity, allows for a coherent explanation of the perpetual

interstitiality in diasporic individuals. Král asserts that although identity is "always necessarily interstitial, there is a sense in which the complexity inherent in identity today is pushed to a radical point by the diversification of identity definitions in a world whose human geography is constantly redefined by mass migrations" (6). Furthermore, according to Král, the changing nature of migration and "the epistemological crisis it has triggered" has "been rendered more acute by the fact that the theoretical framework itself is in crisis; indeed, the grand narrative of identity construction is experiencing difficulty recovering from the assault of deconstructionism" (6). Hence, as will be discussed in Part 2 of this dissertation, it is also necessary to move away from multicultural and intercultural modes of identity construction to a more transnational and transcultural mode. In elaborating the problem with deconstructionist approaches in the theorization of identity, Král stresses that deconstructionism, "by dissociating categories it also empties them of their ontological depth. One of the consequences of studies focusing on counter-discursive strategies is that the self and other become two poles, two abstract signifiers, interrelated and interdependent" (7). The concepts of transcultural personhood and fractal identity elaborated in this dissertation allow us to explore the literary representations of identity in all its ontological and existential complexities and complications. Continuing Král's line of argument, "[i]nstead of being envisaged as mere signifiers, the self and the other need to be apprehended in their ontological depth, a depth made of various layers, of an intricate geology" (7).

Migration from the erstwhile colonial nations from South Asia has taken on a new meaning in the post-1965 era of liberalization of immigration laws in the U.S. Furthermore, the forces of globalization compel us to redefine our understanding of such migration, which can be regarded as "transnational," especially among the skilled labor force and affluent members of the diaspora. In South Asian Muslim American fiction published since the start of this new millennium, there is a marked shift from traumatic discourses resulting from forced migration to narratives depicting attempts at exploring and experimenting with the "self" in multiple homelands. The literary representations of the demographic included in this study do not have the usual themes of postcolonial writing. It is important to clarify the meaning of the terms "postcolonial" and "postcolonial literature" used in this dissertation. They should be treated in the narrow sense of the word that refers to the literature produced by authors from the formerly colonized nations that predominantly concerns with the colonial past and its impact on the present situation in the independent nation-states. The literary works analyzed here do not directly engage with the usual tropes of this genre defined by scholars like Hart and Goldie (1993) such as the problems of colonization, the consequences of decolonization, issues pertaining to political, economic, social, and cultural independence of former colonies. There is no doubt that the notion of "postcolonial" is applicable to the U.S. context in the contemporary era considering it is a financial, political, military, and cultural imperial superpower. There is also much to critique about racialism resulting from colonialism in the American context. Furthermore, as discussed later, the U.S. does not hold the same "postcolonial" significance for diasporic American authors when compared to writers from the subcontinent in the U.K. who have had a more direct colonial relationship in the recent past. Recent trends in South Asian Muslim American literature, as will be discussed throughout the dissertation, indicate that these writers, especially the second generation, consider themselves Americans and want to write about their struggles, aspirations, and hopes in the U.S. Mukherjee (1989) articulates this departure of South Asian American writers from postcolonial writing as:

> I totally consider myself an American writer, and that has been my big battle: to get to realize that my roots as a writer are no longer, if they ever were, among Indian writers, but that I am writing about the territory about the feelings, of a new kind of pioneer here in America. I'm the first among Asian immigrants to be making this distinction between immigrant writing and expatriate writing. Most Indian writers prior to this, have still thought of themselves as Indians, and their literary inspiration, has come from India. India has been the source and home. Whereas I'm saying, those are wonderful roots, but now my roots are here and my emotions are here in North America. ("Bharati Mukherjee by Ameena Meer")

Therefore, this style of diasporic writing, as discussed below and in Part 2 of the dissertation, can be characterized as transcultural in the sense that its scope is transnational spanning multiple geographies, and its characters inhabit multiple homelands, concerned more about building a shared future in the U.S. and claiming their Americanness. In many ways, the post-1965 wave of the South Asian Muslim American diaspora and their successive generations is a privileged demographic and has a certain power to influence the mainstream social, political, and literary landscapes. More than simply trying to fight and resist the challenges of representation in the post-9/11 U.S., South Asian Muslim American writers are trying to work around the narratives and policies of dominance by asserting their audacity to be equal in all spheres of public and private life. The social themes prevalent in the novels, plays, short stories, poems, and memoir selected for this dissertation lean more towards diaspora studies, juxtaposing the notion of "belonging" with globalization and digital transformation. The resurgence of religious identity and religiosity among younger generations of South Asian Muslim Americans is also represented from a critical and analytical viewpoint merging the personal and political in the literary works included in this research project. This is not to say that the concept of hybridity defined by Bhabha to locate the immigrant subject within the dominant culture is no longer valid, but it needs to be reevaluated. Král (2014) argues that Bhabha's theory "provides a very efficient tool of analysis to account for the multilayered complexity which results from the intersecting of trajectories and the crossovers in a postmodern world characterized by increased migrancy and intercultural exchanges" (173). However, as Král (2014) continues to challenge Bhabha, she claims that "[h]is positioning implies that one moves away from the original categories of race, gender, and socio-political positioning so that we can focus on the areas of intersection where the different coordinates overlap" (173). Instead, Král (2014) proposes that "the intersecting of coordinates should be allowed for without jettisoning the original categories" (174). This intersection is possible by using the concept of fractals borrowed from geometry that has been outlined in Part 3 of this dissertation, as Král (2014) herself, offers fractality as a tool to converge multiplicity, hybridity, complexity and interstitiality:

> These aspects of one's personality can surface simultaneously or in turn, depending on the larger context of the nation and its politics of identity. For example, they can either come up chronologically or simultaneously and some aspects of my personality will be most salient or I may choose to emphasize them depending on the broader panorama of the wider political context. As Denise Riley argued in '*Am I that Name?*' there are various parameters in my identity, none of which fully defines me; each parameter is likely to come to the forefront when triggered by contextual changes in the politics of the nation, or I may choose to foreground some specificities or play down some others as part of a larger strategy of fitting in or sticking out. (174)

Král (2014) offers this pertinent quote from Riley's work on fractal identities in literature:

> The impermanence of collective identities in general is a pressing problem for any emancipating movement which launches itself on the appeal to solidarity, to the common cause of a new group being, or an ignored group identity. This will afflict racial, national, occupational, class, religious, and other consolidations. While you might choose to take on being a disabled person or a lesbian, for instance, as a political position, you might not elect to make a politics out of other designations (Riley, 2000, 16). (174)

Further clarifying the analogy of fractal identity, Král informs us that, "Denise Riley refers to this process as 'skating across several identities'" (2014:174).

A diverse and representative set of writers, novelists, playwrights, and poets of South Asian origin and their works published since the beginning of the twenty-first century have been selected to analyze South Asian Muslim American identity. The list includes Agha Shahid Ali (first-generation Indian Muslim American poet), Ayad Akhtar (second-generation Pakistani Muslim American novelist and playwright), Dilruba Ahmed (second-generation Bangladeshi Muslim American poet), Haroon Moghul (second-generation Pakistani Muslim American writer), Nafisa Haji (second-generation Muslim American novelist of Indo-Pak descent), Syed M. Masood (first-generation Pakistani Muslim American novelist), and Tahira Naqvi (first-generation Pakistani Muslim American writer). It was impossible to find any literary works by Muslim American writers from the other countries of South Asia, such as Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the current selection of authors from the three countries with significantly large Muslim populations provides a myriad of perspectives, ranging from intergenerational diversity to gendered nuances. They also explore various religious rites and rituals representing the diverse Muslim populations within the subcontinent. The narratives are full of stories of clashing identities, of balance between faith and modern life, of displacement and belonging, and of struggles to carve out unique Muslim American identities in the twenty-first century. The writers weave a rich tapestry of lives torn between countries, divided loyalties, love, loss, relationships between couples, siblings, and families, aging, and death. And above all, the common theme across all novels is exploring Muslim identity, what it means to be a Muslim, and how to be a Muslim in modern America. These new-generation American writers depict the experiences of identity construction across generations, gender, and social classes in late modernity. In addition to the commonality of the central theme of diasporic identity, works by these authors also feature representation of Islamic identity in the pre- and post-9/11 U.S. to highlight narratives and strategies of "belonging" as American Muslims. The experiences of affluent diasporic writers and the characters and narratives portrayed by them, and their ever so slightly increasing social acceptance in the U.S. make it possible, to a certain extent, to reduce the tension of having to deal with multiplicities. Through a wide range of literary works and forms (two poetry collections, one memoir, one short story collection, and five novels), representing South Asian Muslim culture from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, its dislocation and relocation in the U.S., and the strong influence of religion on the identarian development and manifestation processes, this dissertation presents a critical literary analysis of works published after the year 2000.

All literary works analyzed in this dissertation can be classified as transcultural (Dagnino 2012, 2013, 2015) works of art. Transcultural works of literature challenge our historical and traditional conceptualization of race, nation, and citizenship. In analyzing their narrative form, this research investigates the fractal nature of identity in South Asian American Muslim literature produced in the twenty-first century. The very purpose of such literature is to detach culture from nationality. When considered from an enculturation viewpoint, the perception of the lack of acculturation of first-generation immigrants attributed to frequent physical and emotional nostalgic trips to the homeland is a natural process of transcultural "being" and "becoming." Displacement increases the understanding of the real "self" and the "other" and provides an opportunity for holistic development in the adopted homeland. It is also essential to place this debate in the larger historical and the more contemporary context of racialization and its politics in the U.S. as it affects South Asian Americans. These literary representations seek to define and redefine diaspora by sketching detailed accounts of broken identities resulting from crossing national and cultural

borders. They highlight a crisis in human values by being forced to create imaginary homelands and the continuous struggle to achieve multicultural commitment. Through vivid portrayals of life in exile, going beyond ethnicity, striving towards the enigma of cultural multiplicity, these writers narrate about a quest for identity on the alien shore, which is also their home now. They offer hope by looking beyond the diaspora, dehyphenating human relationships, and curing existential maladies. Therefore, identity is not immutable in the "homeland," as it were. The traumas in late modernity are all too vivid in contemporary fractured identities in a vastly diverse multicultural mix like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Identities of class, caste, language, socioeconomic status, rural-urban, educated-illiterate, politicized-apolitical, sectarian-secular, religious-atheist often mingle and overlap in mysterious ways. In this context of cultural complexity (Kraidy 2004), this research analyzes the phenomena of identity formation amongst South Asian American Muslims. The choice of writers for this project is based on two main criteria: one, on the richness and relevance of their work, and two, on the scarcity of academic research of these works in particular and this demographic in general. One of the reasons for limiting the selection of authors to Muslims is to investigate the effect of religion on identity formation in the post-9/11 U.S. landscape and the more recently imposed bans on Muslims by the Trump administration, resulting in an increased Islamophobia. Therefore, the writers selected for this study offer thoughtful generational and gendered insights into the world of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi American Muslims, who practice Islam like Arab Americans but who are culturally and socially closer to non-Muslim South Asian Americans. It should be mentioned that there are more South Asian British Muslim writers who explore similar themes, owing to the colonial history of the subcontinent and the U.K. being a more popular migration destination during the *raj* and immediately afterward. There are also other South Asian Muslim American writers like Sara Suleri and Bapsi Sidhwa who belong to Salman Rushdie's categorization of midnight's children. However, shifting the focus to midnight's grandchildren presents an opportunity to contribute to the scarcity of current research on contemporary South Asian Muslim American literature. The works published by the authors for this study, therefore, depict discursive realities that not only go beyond the traumatic themes of postcolonial writing but also deal with more contemporary issues by moving away from assimilation to carving their unique niches in the U.S., ultimately claiming their place in U.S. society as Muslim Americans.

The literary narratives, that depict characters that are transcultural and fractal in nature, analyzed in this study can be situated within the sociopolitical and economic context of the late modern period as defined by prominent thinkers in the field of social sciences like Bauman (1998, 2000), Beck (1992), Giddens (1979, 1981, 1984, 1990, 1991, 1998, 1999) and Castells (2009, 2010). Unlike the widely accepted view in literary periodization where modernism gives way to postmodernism, which then transitions into a new poetic realism and beyond, the sociological conceptualization considers the period after modernism as an extension of modernity itself. The late modern period or late modernity emphasizes the intensification of the global structures, economic disjunctions, the information revolution, and the potential emancipatory politics of a late capitalist world. Bauman (2000), who introduced the idea of late modernity or liquid modernity, has defined the period as a chaotic continuation of modernity that allows an individual to fluidly transition from one social position to another owing to feelings of uncertainty in people and increased ambivalence. In the context of diasporic individuals, their breaking away from traditional support networks of their ancestral homeland and their ability to free themselves from the restrictions of placing their loyalties in a single cultural system is both a burden and a boon. The responsibility of defining hybrid cultural traditions falls on the diasporic individuals, and "the

result is a normative mindset with an emphasis on shifting rather than on staying—on provisional in lieu of permanent (or 'solid') commitment—which (the new style) can lead a person astray towards a prison of their own existential creation" (Brown 2002:196). Similarly, Giddens (1991) argues that although there has been a marked shift from traditional modernity, the current period can still be considered as "late modern" instead of postmodern. The traditionalism of modernity is now replaced by reflexive modernization as a post-traditional order where modernity becomes self-referring instead of relying on the erstwhile conservatism of classical modernity. With regards to diasporic individuals, it can be derived that when confronted with competing, uncertain, and ambiguous dilemmas in multiple homelands, their identity in late modernity is constituted of numerous self-reflexive fragments or fractals. In other words, diasporic identity "is irreducible to the vagaries of nationalism, or, more precisely, statist definitions of the self and community" (Mandalios 1999:2). Furthermore, "the idea that cultural identity is not reducible to any single, seemingly unitary juridico-political entity suggests that no 'culture' or society is fundamentally closed, hermetically sealed, unitary or an island unto itself" (Mandalios 1999:2).

Late modernity is also referred to as reflexive modernity in the joint conceptualization of this social phenomenon by Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1994) because it opposes modernity just as modernity opposed feudal traditionalism. Additionally, according to the thinkers mentioned above, the traditional institutions of modernity are beginning to fall apart in the face of today's economic and cultural globalization. The transnational nature of corporations and non-governmental organizations is paving new ways for the rights of all individuals, including the diaspora, as can be seen in the appointment of Indian Americans as CEOs of global companies like PepsiCo, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter. The trio of thinkers argues that the changing nature of the family, the flexibility and increased opportunities for work, the lack of solidarity with a single political agenda due to the global nature of the enterprise, have all paved way to the rise of individualization. These three sociologists draw our attention to different aspects of late modernity. If Beck (1992) characterizes this as the age of risk society, then Giddens (1998) proposes a third way of formulating social policies that consider the challenges and risks posed by late modernity, and finally, Bauman (1998) focuses on the social side effects of globalization which has created new divisions between those who are essential and those who are excluded from the global flow of information in this hyper-technological age. Coupled with late modernity is the concept of the information age or the network society as defined by Castells (2009), who argues that in the new world economic order, industrialization has been replaced by informationalism. He posits that the network formed by the social, economic, and political interrelationships is the critical defining feature of the contemporary era. The culture of virtuality is organized around electronic mass and social media. One might consider that Castells' conceptualization of the space of flows as a time-space where "the material arrangements allow for the simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity" (1999:295) that permit the transcultural diasporic individual to possess fractal identities. Furthermore, such a time-space "is not purely electronic space [...] it is made up first of all of a technological infrastructure of information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines" (1999:295). And that "the capacity and characteristics of this infrastructure and the location of its elements determine the functions of the space of flows, and its relationship to other spatial forms and processes" (1999:295). For diasporic individuals, it can be considered that the process of reflexive modernization allows them to question not only the cultural dominance of their ancestral homeland but also the cultural and political hegemony of their adopted homeland. Instead of expanding the perimeter of their traditional identity, they can reevaluate the choices accorded to them by multiple homelands, resulting in the reformation,

optimization, and adaptation of their fractal identities through self-reflexivity. The network society in which these diasporic individuals live also allows them to dismantle knowledge barriers with the help of technology, further enhancing the process of self-reflexivity in late modernity. The authors and works selected for analysis in this study are a result of the network society and use the newly available and easily accessible information from multiple worldviews to inform their own identities and those of their literary characters.

In conclusion, the dilemmas and tribulations of the late modern "self" are distinct from its predecessors in the last century. Therefore, today's definition of identity must include not only personal biographical aspects but also the diversity, stresses, and tensions of life in late modernity. It should help make sense of the individual's present not uniquely in terms of their past, but in addition, it should also offer a mechanism to explain that individual's links with the "unfamiliar" environment sensibly and sensitively. As a coherent and consistent construct, identity in diasporic individuals is currently hotly debated among literary scholars and social scientists. It will continue to intrigue individuals and groups that have been displaced from their homelands and those that receive these displaced entities. To go beyond first-generation diaspora, Rayaprol (2005) draws our attention to their children and grandchildren, thus highlighting the generational aspect of migration as an increasingly relevant area of research. She also touches upon some gender aspects and mainly on religion as an important factor distinguishing South Asian Americans from their other Asian American counterparts. Research into the resurgence of religious identity and religiosity and its inseparability from contemporary American identity in South Asian Muslim American literature may be considered one of this project's important contributions. This is particularly timely and necessary insomuch as, especially after 9/11, the Muslim American identity is seen to pose a significant threat to the mainstream American identity. Given the increasing Islamophobia in the U.S., more so during the Trump administration from right-wing social and ideological circles, the emergence of an American identity linked with Islam appears menacing to the stability of the prevailing secular American identity. Notwithstanding, in the post-9/11 U.S., there is an increased need for interfaith dialogue and the prospering of healthy citizenship and holistic identity development in the children and grandchildren of the diaspora. In both its canonical and late modern manifestations, the choice to consider religion as an uncompromised part of their fractal identity, without any fear or remorse, should be freely available to the diaspora and should not be considered a failure to assimilate. Based on literary fiction as an expression of human experience, and by using select characters from the works of first- and second-generation writers, this dissertation analyzes contemporary literary works for the effects of displacement on the South Asian Muslim diaspora and their trajectories of "being," "becoming," and "belonging." The nostalgia and the longing for traditions from the former homeland and the critical inquiry into their relevance in the adopted homeland reflect the challenges faced by the diaspora in their identity (re)formation process. Having to straddle between two worlds, needing to make difficult choices, questioning the need to retain the old traditions are complex dilemmas that shape their identity, the kind of individuals they are and want to become. Gender, generation, and faith in the light of present-day economics, religion, and politics are interspersed throughout the study as essential constituents of identity. Is the possibility of fractal identities viable in the long run? What are the psychological and emotional implications for the individual and their personality development? Is the acceptance of such multi-identity individuals by themselves and by others possible? These are questions worth pondering, researching, and answering.

Methodological Notes

> The social sciences fear the radical impulse in literary studies, and over the decades, we in the humanities have trivialized the social sciences into their rational expectation straitjackets, not recognizing that whatever the state of the social sciences in our own institution, strong tendencies toward acknowledging the silent but central role of the humanities in the area studies paradigm are now around.
>
> Gayathri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*

At the outset, it is essential to clarify some definitions and terminology used throughout this dissertation before proceeding any further with the methodology used in this research project and before outlining its structure. Firstly, the term 'diaspora' has been used instead of 'immigrant' as it is more appropriate to refer to the naturalized citizens as diasporic individuals rather than immigrants. The term 'immigrant' refers to newly-arrived individuals who are still at the beginning of their journey of establishing their place and identity in a foreign country. Whereas diasporas are more settled and, in addition to economic advancement, they also play an active role in the political and social aspects of their adopted homeland (Edwards 2007). At the same time, diasporas maintain a strong connection with their heritage homelands, and as transnational communities, they influence and are influenced by multiple cultures irrespective of where they are physically located (Sigona et al. 2014). If the literary artists selected in this research project are examples of the lived reality of Muslim Americans, then their works are a demonstration of the diasporic imaginary. "[P]olitical and social battles often emerge powerfully in the domain of the aesthetic and especially when the aesthetic is also a critique. […] [T]he demotic itself becomes the discourse of the aesthetic, we begin to understand the hitherto silenced" (V. Mishra 2007:21) narratives and discourses of Americanness. Secondly, the use of the term "(South Asian) Muslim American" has been privileged over the use of "(South Asian) American Muslim" as it refers to Muslims of South Asian descent who reside in America as opposed to South Asian Americans who are Muslim. The adjective "Muslim" is the modifier for the noun (South Asian) American to highlight the notion of cultural expression as opposed to religion and religiosity (Yulianto 2018). Further, given the diversity within Islam itself, "(South Asian) Muslim American Identity" relates to diasporic identity associated with Muslims rather than Americans. As evident from the analysis of various literary works in this research, the notion of being "Muslim" is an integral part of the conceptualization of "Americanness," whether the writers and the literary universes created by them display overt religiosity or not. Thirdly, some clarity is needed concerning the generational status of the diasporic individuals, mainly since the terms "first-generation" and "second-generation" are frequently used interchangeably. The classification in this research follows the definitions set out by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Therefore, first-generation American refers to anyone born outside the U.S. and has become a naturalized U.S. citizen or classified as foreign-born. Second-generation American refers to the native-born U.S. citizens with at least one parent being born outside the U.S. Third-and-higher generation American refers to native-born U.S. citizens, both whose parents were born in the U.S. Lastly, the term "(Indian) Subcontinent" refers to the geographical area in South Asia that includes the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Mann 2014). This term is also used to highlight the cultural similarities and the influence of local customs and traditions on Islam, as seen in the literary works analyzed here.

Now that the key terms have been defined, before providing some methodological notes and overview of the different chapters of this research project, it seems appropriate to discuss its purpose. The primary objective of this dissertation is to analyze the processes of "being" and "becoming" and the strategies of "belonging" adopted by the South Asian Muslim American diaspora in (re)constructing their identity in their adopted homeland despite the inequalities and injustices of the dominant groups. An attempt is made to move away from the postcolonial conceptualization of "third spaces" (Bhabha 1994), and arguments of "thirdworlding" the dominant mainstream are studied from the perspective of reflexive modernization (Giddens 1991). The uniqueness of each individual and their need to coexist simultaneously in multiple time-spaces is highlighted in the selected literary works. These literary representations desire to "fit in" mainstream American literature not by the opposition of power but by expanding the perimeter of the very forces that seek to exclude them. Therefore, the focus has been shifted from postcolonialism to transculturation and transculturalism (Ortiz 1995; Lewis 2002, 2008, 2010, 2011; Epstein 2009, 2016; Slimbach 2005) as an alternative framework for analyzing identity (re)construction among such diasporic individuals. The narratives in the selected literary works straddle between multiple geographies, and identity is developed through gradual learning from recurring reflexive life experiences. Further, by using the theory of fractals (Mandelbrot 1982) from mathematics, the secondary objective of this research is to conceptualize the identity of diasporic individuals, such that it can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole. Fractals provide an opportunity to represent the "complexity" in understanding the infinite nature of human identity, shifting the focus from multiple or plural identities to more complex, dynamic, fluid, and transient identities. Properties of fractal objects found in the physical world are comparable to the varied identity layers in diasporic individuals. Therefore, they provide a basis for explaining possible ways to coexist simultaneously or "fractally" in different homelands amidst the shrinking geographical distances and technological advances in travel and communication mediums.

Moving on to some notes on methodology–all research in general, including literary analysis, must contain two elements. The theoretical aspect and application of the theory to explain what it tells us about the literary work, how it adapts or not to reality, what answers it provides, and, more importantly, what problems it poses in our reading of the literary work and our understanding of its characters and their narratives. Following Kaelin's (1964) idea of literary criticism as composed of two aspects, a workable method of analysis (aesthetics) and travaux pratiques, the use of the procedure laid down (criticism), this research uses an eclectic methodology that engages elements of textual analysis (narratology and close reading), as well as transcultural studies relating to aspects of communication, behavior, and psychology of diasporic individuals. Further, this research uses an identity construction framework based on Mandelbrot's (1982) fractal theory and the concept of transcultural personhood derived from Lewis' (2002) and Slimbach's (2005) models of transculturalism. An integrative approach has been followed to allow us to view identity construction in such individuals in all its complex and hybrid manifestations as a truly multivariate phenomenon. A similar approach is also taken by many of the leading cultural identity theoreticians whose models have been discussed here. In that respect this work echoes all their primary concerns and extends their theories to reflect the contemporary reality better. A transcultural reading of the literary works makes the literary analysis relevant to the changing needs of the new century. Transcultural adaptation is viewed as a universal human phenomenon. It is far from being a solitary variable given the thriving chaos in identity construction that is both impacted by and impacts globalization, communication, and literature dynamically and

evolutionarily. The use of fractals allows us to account for the complexity, hybridity, and irregularity in identity construction in today's world. The multidisciplinary approach used to theorize fractal identity draws from the principles of mathematics, psychology, and cultural theory by adapting it to critically analyze literary narratives produced in the last twenty years. Further, the fractal identity framework outlined in this research satisfies Kitcher's three principles of a good (scientific) theory. The first is unity when the theory consists of "just one problem-solving strategy, or a small family of problem-solving strategies, that can be applied to a wide range of problems" (1983:47). The fractal identity framework helps to address identarian formation and development issues at multiple levels and for various groups and classes of people. Further, the theory can be applied to analyze the content of the chosen work and its form combining a wide array of literary aesthetic techniques into a single framework. The second is fecundity where "a good theory should be productive; it should raise new questions and presume those questions can be answered without giving up its problem-solving strategies" (1983:48). The nature of human identity is forever evolving, and so are the surrounding environmental factors where these individuals are situated. The fractal identity theory provides a basis for questioning the status-quo, which should develop depending on the needs of the time. The advantage of using a multidisciplinary framework is that it allows us to employ the breakthroughs in the underlying fields associated with our core theory to advance research in our chosen domain. The third is auxiliary hypothesis which "ought to be testable independently of the particular problem it is introduced to solve, independently of the theory it is designed to save" (1983:46). The boundary conditions have been defined in the form of fractal space, critical traits in the form of fractal dimensions, and each of these dimensions has specific competencies that are measurable both qualitatively and quantitatively. Multiplicity and complexity are further explained using the properties of fractal geometry, and it is possible to analyze and break down each personality layer of the *mise en abyme* that forms the complex identity amongst diasporic individuals.

Generally, in the social sciences, a theory can be validated using either qualitative (*emic*) or quantitative (*etic*) approaches or ideally using a combination of both methods to achieve a more holistic result. Since this is literary research, it is necessary to use the qualitative analysis methodology for studying the literary narratives, their form, and their characters in selected works by South Asian Muslim American authors published in the twenty-first century. The methodological framework draws from the principles of narrative analysis based on psychotherapy which uses narratives to deconstruct and make meaning (White and Epston 1990). The relevance of this technique in analyzing literary identities, especially in the transcultural domain, allows a non-essentialized approach to identity. Narrative practices require us to separate persons from qualities or attributes that are taken-for-granted essentialisms through externalization. The positive and negative life experiences are detached from the individual such that the person is not the problem; rather the problem is the problem. Through self-reflection, the diasporic individuals can then engage in the construction and performance of preferred identities. A novel or a play can be considered a set of narratives that inform us about its characters' life episodes and their sociocultural circumstances. In literary criticism, using the principles of narratology, we can examine how these narratives structure our perception of cultural identities. Further, our ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes one of the primary ways we construct meaning in general. "Far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, the narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (White 1990:1). Identity construction can be metaphorically described as a journey in both space and time, or in other

words, to understand who we are and who we want to become –we need to travel to other places. We can decipher the processes of "being" and "becoming" through narratives. The primary idea that gives meaning to identity construction in literary works is the process of self-reflection and the character's journey across multiple homelands. In psychotherapy, similar reflections are captured through narrative conversations between the therapist and the client. In literary criticism, the text itself constitutes the narrative. Our (the researcher's) close reading of the text helps us to arrive at the characters' inner and outer transcultural journeys. Some characters experience critical incidents and personal crises during their lives which lead them to reevaluate their way of living seriously. They do this by existentially reflecting on their lives. They reflect upon their past, present as well as future. When faced by cultural tensions and conflicts, "identity construction becomes a reflexive project, whereby the person must be able to reconsider standpoints and ways of living in the light of changes. Their journeys to other places (both outer and inner) give them perspectives on themselves and develop their self-awareness in a more reflexive manner" (Lindgren and Wåhlin 2001:369). A similar methodological approach based on "epiphanies" found in interpretative biographies is used to assess a literary character's reaction to events framed as turning points involving confrontation and experiencing personal, professional, or moral crises. Analysis of literary works, particularly biographies "rests on subjectively and intersubjectively gained knowledge and understanding of the life experiences of individuals, including one's own life" (Denzin 1989:27-28). All the works selected as a part of this research project reveal accounts of individuals after significant changes in their lives, in this case, either by crossing the border and moving from the subcontinent to the U.S or concerning the rising Islamophobia after 9/11. We can get an insight into the physical, emotional, and psychological transformation and adaptation of such transcultural diasporic individuals and the transcultural journey itself by probing these literary narratives and viewing them through the lens of fractal identity.

Before discussing the structure of this dissertation, it seems pertinent to provide a brief note about the motivation for this study. Having lived in the European Union for over fifteen years now, the topic of diasporic identity has been a constant source of challenges and opportunities personally and professionally for me. My background in mathematics and computer sciences, a deep interest in learning European languages such as French, Spanish, Italian, and German, and exposure to American media and the anglophone world in India, have guided the multidisciplinary nature of this research. Like many Indians, the boom in the information technology industry has led me closer to American cultural and business practices having worked either directly with U.S. companies or with firms servicing U.S. clients. I was naturally drawn to South Asian American fiction both for its ability to offer a glimpse of life for diasporic individuals outside India and the stories about characters that were personally and professionally relatable to me. While there was a great deal of focus on British Asian fiction in India, it was still strongly overshadowed by the colonial legacy of the British Empire, and this is not something many from my generation can fully relate to. Whereas South Asian American authors such as Bharathi Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, and Jhumpa Lahiri wrote about a new generation of Indians trying to forge hybrid identities in the U.S., my initial interest in these new-age narratives has informed my research into literary texts depicting diasporic experience in the new millennium. The twenty-first century presents a unique set of difficulties for the Muslim diaspora, especially after the events of 9/11, and at the same time also grants more possibilities to the diasporic individual to inhabit multiple time zones and spaces, both converging and diverging numerous identities in these deemed outsiders. Being a Muslim led me to dive further into the nature of an identity rooted in Islamic culture and traditions from the subcontinent. I desired to move away

from a traditional postcolonial reading of diasporic fiction. I decided to draw from my European academic pursuits of a Masters course in Diversity Management from the Rennes School of Business in France, a Masters in Advanced English Studies from the Universidad de Valladolid in Spain, and my two-decade-long professional experience in the field of foreign language teaching, translation, and intercultural training in the corporate sector in India and Europe to study diasporic identity from an intercultural lens. However, I soon realized that life in the new millennium coupled with the generational advancement of the erstwhile immigrants into the more established diaspora who yearn to belong to multiple homelands simultaneously, requires a more complex theoretical tool for analyzing identity. My early academic background in mathematics helped forge an attempt to combine concepts from the pure sciences, social sciences, and literary studies to the analysis of diasporic identity. Therefore, this study is the culmination of a twenty-year effort in understanding the processes of "being" and "becoming" in the South Asian diaspora.

After outlining the methodological considerations and the motivation for this study, it is also necessary to explain the structure of this dissertation, which has been established based on three main lines of inquiry: the "location" of South Asian Muslim Americans, the role of "transnationality," and the "complexity" or "fractality" of identity in the contemporary diasporic imagination. The first part deals with the depiction of parallel worlds, highlighting the nature and effect of displacement in the age of globalization and digital transformation in the new millennium. The second part focuses on shifting perspectives from discussions of multicultural and intercultural identity in postcolonial writing to transcultural identity and reflexive modernization in the era of late modernity. Finally, the third part attempts to theorize lived and imagined realities in and beyond the age of late modernity by exploring the concept of fractal identity in the twenty-first century. Throughout the dissertation, the analysis of religion plays a vital role in connecting western literary criticism techniques within the context of a late modern, transcultural, and fractal identity. Each part contains at least one chapter on theoretical considerations from a sociological perspective relevant to the section's thematic concerns. Several literary narratives are analyzed in each part based on the central theme of identity and its complex nature. Each chapter containing literary analysis includes a brief biography of the author and a summary of key themes from their literary fiction, as well as the impact of their lived realities on their imaginary productions.

On the theme of displacement in the age of globalization and digital transformation in Part One, Chapter 1.1 discusses vital theoretical aspects of cultural globalization, hybridity, cultural complexity, and reflexive modernization. It briefly touches upon cultural identity before discussing factors like ethnorelativism, assimilation, and acculturation that act as impediments to cultural identity. The objective here is to provide a background of the socio-cultural, political, and economic factors that are unique to identity construction discussions today, especially in the context of South Asian Muslim Americans. Chapter 1.2 provides background on specific demographic details about South Asian Muslim Americans and the changing face of this diaspora and its literature. Key terms such as diaspora and their relevance are further explained. The importance of religion in the context of South Asian Muslims is described. Migration trends since the 1960s are discussed along with an overview of the changing nature of diasporic novels. Further, some key concepts of transcultural literature and transcultural novels are introduced. Lastly, the idea of fractals as a tool for analyzing hyper-complexity in diasporic identity and literary analysis is presented. The first half of this chapter is sociological in nature, and the second half focuses on approaches for literary analysis of relevance to this research project. Chapter 1.3 presents an analysis of the novel *Homeland Elegies* (2020) by the second-generation Pakistani American author Ayad Akhtar in the context of globalization, cultural complexity, racial politics (A. Ahmed

2007, 2010) for Muslim Americans, and the economic aspects (Darity, Hamilton, and Stewart 2010) of the American dream through different characters in the novel. The novel's narrative style alternates between reality and fiction, blurring the narrator's role as a fictional character to a point where the reader can't know if the narration is autobiographical or fictional. The novel is an example of essential debates in relation to the meaning of "belonging," financial success, and race in the U.S. Chapter 1.4 frames an epistemo-ontological argument in the backdrop of structuration theory based on concepts by Bourdieu (1977), Bhaskar (1978), and Giddens (1991) and comments on the societal impact of 9/11 on identity construction for Muslim Americans in the second-generation Pakistani American writer Haroon Moghul's memoir *How to be a Muslim: An American Story* (2017). It also includes a discussion on ethnoconvergence (Nayak (2011); Ribas (2011); Merrell (2011)) and relates the concept to the memoir as well as Moghul's work in the field of interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews. Chapter 1.5 argues about the need to move away from assimilationist approaches to an integration approach by analyzing the novel *A Place for Us* (2018) by the second-generation Indian American writer Fatima Farheen Mirza in light of space-time theories (Giddens (1984), Dodgshon (1999), Král (2014)). This analysis succinctly illustrates the overall theme of finding one's place in the diasporic family and the U.S. as depicted in the lives of different characters from the novel. Further, this chapter illustrates the changing role of borders through temporal and spatial boundaries in constituting diasporic identity.

Regarding a shift in perspective from multicultural identity to transcultural personhood in Part Two, Chapter 2.1 focuses on defining culture, cultural identity, multiculturalism and its drawbacks, pluralism, and interculturalism. It discusses various models of theorizing multicultural and intercultural identity. It explores the idea of using the concept of 'personhood' instead of 'identity' in tracing the developmental trajectory of the diasporic individual. A definition of culture proposed by the Cultural Studies scholar Jeff Lewis (2002) is provided as an alternative to existing conceptualizations highlighting its relevance and need in the twenty-first century. Chapter 2.2 analyzes the various theoretical concepts of transculturalism developed by scholars from different disciplines: Ortiz (1995), Cuccioletta (2001), Slimbach (2005), Lewis (2002), Vauclair et al. (2014), Dagnino (2015), and Bond and Rapson (2014). Second-generation Pakistani American author Ayad Akhtar's pre-9/11 debut novel *American Dervish* (2013) is analyzed considering various principles of transcultural identity discussed in the previous chapter. The intertextuality and transculturality of the novel are analyzed to understand better the identarian process in the context of South Asian Muslim Americans. In Chapter 2.3, the focus is shifted towards the return to roots, the generational responsibility to bear witness to the ancestral homeland and its cultural traditions, and the manifestation of transcultural personhood in Nafisa Haji's novel *The Writing on My Forehead* (2010). Lewis' (2002) principles of transculturalism, language wars, and the role of Western media are used to discuss the identarian journey of the novel's protagonist, who is incidentally a journalist. The novel examines the expectations from women and the constraints placed on them by religion through a second-generation narrative spanning both Indian and Pakistani American identities in the work of this second-generation Indo-Pak American novelist. Since religion is a core aspect of the Muslim American identity, Chapter 2.4 analyzes a first-generation Pakistani American narrative in Tahira Naqvi's collection of short stories *Dying in a Strange Country* (2001). It discusses the creation and negotiation of Muslim identity in the material and spiritual worlds, drawing heavily on Islamic concepts of life and identity beyond death. Extensive footnotes to explain Quranic concepts relevant to understanding Muslim identity in a Western context have been added. Continuing the theme of religion in the context of late modernity, Chapter 2.5 focuses on reflexivity, but instead of discussing reflexive identity

formation, it uses Giddens' (1991) concept of the tribulations of the "self" and return of the "repressed" to explore religious identity and religiosity in the second-generation Bangladeshi American poet Dilruba Ahmed's latest collection of poems *Bring Now the Angels* (2020). The literary form of these poems ranges from traditional lyrical poetry to a new-age composition style created, for example through autocomplete options provided by a Google search. The poems offer a deep insight into the post-9/11 Muslim American psyche and the struggle for maintaining a distinctly South Asian Muslim American identity in opposition to an Arab American Muslim identity.

Lastly, concerning the changing role of religion and its impact on the lives of Muslims in contemporary America, the focus is shifted to questions of cultural and identarian complexity during late modernity in Part Three. Literary narratives are analyzed based on the principles of fractal geometry, both in terms of their form and the fractal identity of their characters. Consequently, the purpose of Chapter 3.1 is to provide a simplified background for mathematical concepts from fractal geometry for a literary audience and to draw parallels with human identity in the case of transcultural diasporas. The model is based on fundamental concepts by Mandelbrot (1982), Falconer (2006), and Slimbach (2005), among others. By combining theoretical ideas from the natural and social sciences, an attempt is made to demonstrate the use of pure sciences to explain literary phenomena. Subsequently, the aim of Chapter 3.2 is to use the core theoretical concepts defined in the previous chapter in the literary analysis of fractal identity. The first-generation Pakistani American author Syed M. Masood's novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2020) is an excellent example of the manifestation of fractal identity in a literary narrative and serves as a representation of the fractal structure of the narrative itself. Set against the background of a strategy board game called checkers, the novel is structurally divided into parts where each part represents a key strategic aspect of the game. Within each part, individual chapters alternate between two narrators who are geographically separated but culturally connected to Islam. One narrator's journey starts in the U.S., and the other narrator's journey ends in Canada, passing through the U.S. Midway through the novel the narrators meet, and the narrative merges in such a way that both stories combine into a single tale, often blurring the singular voice of each narrator. Like fractals, the layers within the narratives and the narrators' personalities represent the complexity of identity through each narrator's relationship with practicing Islam in twenty-first-century America. If the previous chapter uses the concepts of fractal identity to analyze a fractal narrative, then the intention of Chapter 3.3 is to use fractals to demonstrate the fractal nature of poetic form and its conduciveness to manifest a fractal poetic imagination. The first-generation Kashmiri (Indian) Muslim American poet Aga Shahid Ali popularized a hybrid form of poetry in American literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Modeled after the most popular poetic form in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu literary tradition called *ghazal*, this poetic composition consists of seven to twelve rhyming couplets with no connection between each other yet enjoined throughout by a common theme. The English *ghazal,* like its oriental counterpart, resembles a fractal object. A parallel is drawn between the strict compositional rules of the *ghazal* (Kanda (1998); Nathani (1992)); and the gestalt of features that characterize a fractal form: non-integral dimensionality, self-similarity, emergence, irregularity, and recursion (Falconer 2006). The theme of Muslim identity in the contemporary U.S. is the commonality that runs through each *ghazal* and the totality of ghazals included in the posthumously published collection *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* (2003).

In conclusion, the methodological approaches for literary analysis based on the principles of narratology and close reading have been established. The rationale behind dividing the

dissertation into three parts has been explained. Further, as outlined in the individual chapter overviews, the possibilities for performing a close reading based on the exploration of fractal identity and transcultural personhood through analyzing literary characters, literary forms, and literary expressions have been presented. The cultural complexity resulting from globalization and digital transformation in the twenty-first century, the difficulty in separating religion from modernity for Muslim Americans, and the assertion of second-generation South Asian Muslim Americans of their fractal identity are abundantly visible and exhaustively analyzed in a range of literary forms spanning the first twenty years of the new millennium. However, this multidisciplinary analysis is by no means complete. I sincerely hope that it provides a strong starting point and a robust foundation for elaborating and understanding diasporic identity in contemporary South Asian Muslim American literature.

Part One–
Parallel Worlds: Displacement in the Age of Globalization and Digital Transformation in South Asian Muslim American Literary Narratives

1.1 Globalization, Cultural Hybridity, Religion, and Identity Construction Determinants for South Asian Muslim Americans in the New Millennium

> While globalization seeks to spread such cherished American ideals as democracy and human rights, it also corrodes values that many people admire about American society, such as individualism. Unrestrained, the American emphasis on individualism can override duty and responsibility toward the family and community, traditional values that Muslims hold in high esteem. Indeed, the overarching message of globalization and the American spirit, also of sociologist Max Weber's Protestant work ethic, is independence in all its forms, rapid results, and material self-indulgence—all of which can have deleterious effects on the individual and society as a whole.
>
> Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization*

The continued expansion of globalization, social media, and artificial intelligence-driven technologies in the twenty-first century require political leaders, corporations, educational institutions, policymakers, and social scientists to understand the need for the existence and manifestation of cultural hybridity and multiple identities more than ever before. "Cultural hybridity is one of the emblematic notions of our era. It captures the spirit of the times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion, and it resonates with the globalization mantra of unfettered economic exchanges and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures" (Kraidy 2006:1). Multiple disciplines have widely studied the idea of globalization of culture in the social sciences and humanities in the age of neoliberal capitalism. U.S. popular culture has seen world domination to an unprecedented extent in the new millennium with significant consequences for the rest of the world. One could regard this either "as the transfiguration of worldwide diversity" or "as a process of hybridization in which cultural mixture and adaptation continuously transform and renew cultural forms" (Kraidy 2006:16). While both scenarios have their own merits, considering that in the contemporary era, changes in cultural impact are felt by everyone, irrespective of whether one crosses the border or stays at home, it makes more sense to adopt the latter view. It is paramount to acknowledge that "hybridity, then, is not just amenable to globalization. It is the cultural logic of globalization" (Kraidy 2006:148). Moreover, "[c]ultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid, and if it has been the practice in the West since Immanuel Kant to isolate cultural and aesthetic realms from the worldly domain, it is now time to rejoin them" (Said 1994:68). Globalization leads to hybridity which in turn leads to multiplicity in the identity of diasporic individuals, rendering the process of "being" and "becoming" complex, complicated, and reflexive. Therefore, before we attempt to study this phenomenon, it is essential to place our analysis in context by exploring the notions of cultural hybridity and the approaches hindering the formation of such identities among the South Asian Muslim American diaspora. To understand and appreciate its power, we need to look at the dialectics, complexity, and relevance of cultural hybridity. "For hybridity, empowerment is about the achievement of agency and authority, rather than the fulfillment of the 'authenticity' of identity – however mixed, however 'multi,' however intersective or intercultural" (Bhabha 2015:xii). In this sense, we need to move from essentialist approaches toward more universalist strategies that help to theorize and analyze the fractal nature of complex diasporic identities.

We live in a culturally hybrid era where hybridity is no longer seen as out-of-the-ordinary or novel. Still, rather it is all-pervasive and routine in today's hyperconnected reflexive modernity. Modernist theorists have conceptualized hybridity as 'transgressive.' After all, it challenges the social status quo and is 'subversive' because it juxtaposes traditions and customs. From a postmodernist perspective, hybridity has become routine, especially in the context of globalization. For late modernists like Giddens (1999), hybridity resulting from globalization leads to "detraditionalization" as opposed to "decline of tradition." The diasporic individual is exposed to multiple traditions. Instead of simply changing these traditions to fit into the mainstream, they question the role of these traditions in their daily lives. This further contributes to the declining predictability and stability of monolithic cultures and the diaspora's realization of the possibility to alter practices and lead alternative lifestyles. At the same time, during late modernity, global populations have developed a higher level of risk consciousness emerging from threats caused by terrorism, war, and climate change (Beck 1992). This mainly affects the Muslim American diaspora, both a subject of terrorism and subjected to the consequences of the resultant discrimination and negative sentiments by mainstream U.S. society, especially after the tragic events of 9/11. We see that numerous attempts are being made to build bridges and foster alliances across differing opinions and ideologies as we no longer have a choice but to co-exist in shared physical and virtual spaces. We see that identities continue to resist hybridization even though they are subjected to constant change and mixing (Werbner 2015). This is indeed paradoxical, and it is essential to understand why hybridity is still regarded as both constructive and destructive. Any theorization of identity amongst diasporic individuals must consider this duality that exists in late modernity. The over-emphasis on social order and strict adherence to age-old traditions that do not apply fully to minorities are major causes of their non-acceptance. The demarcation of the western culture as elite is also a remnant of the colonial hegemonic tradition (Bauman 2015).

In late modern societies where hybridity is quotidian, we need to develop a new understanding that expands the limits of traditional cultural identity. Additionally, we need to comprehend the forces that oppose this hybridity in the first place and why such resistance is difficult to overcome. It is now widely accepted that culture incorporates all the extensive knowledge and skills needed and acquired by members of any group to be regarded as a part of that group. An interesting critique of the classical concept of culture, which originates from boundedness, lends the idea of 'homogeneity,' 'coherence,' and 'continuity' to a culture. This definition has been used to characterize small societies, and it is suggested that even if this paradigm was scalable and applicable to industrial societies, it still retains the totalitarian idea of a 'complex whole.' It assumes that "human beings are generally to be regarded as cultural beings who are formed by processes of enculturation and who, at the same time, participate in this forming through interaction" (Wicker 2015:35). This philosophy postulates that once the diasporic individual is assimilated into the 'other' culture, and in the case of minorities, the assimilation is asymmetrical due to the power dynamics of the dominant culture, the ethnic difference disappears, thus leading to an essentialist and monolithic view of identity. Given the reality of cultural and economic globalization, where boundaries are blurring, and identities are increasingly becoming multi-faceted, and where hybridity is becoming the norm, it is an opportune moment to reconsider the concept of culture in such a way that we move away from "complex culture" to "cultural complexity" (Kraidy 2006). In a complex nation-state such as the U.S., the concept of a distinct culture is incompatible with the composition of cultures that make up the country's total population. Even if assimilation occurs among the diaspora in terms of language acceptance, education, professional integration, consumerism, and digital presence, the original ethnic identity

cannot be erased or denied. A definition of culture, upon which the identity of the twenty-first century diasporic individual is based, should move away from the notion of its timelessness, boundedness, geographical rootedness and shift towards "creolization" because "this amounts to saying that culture – far from being a complex whole in the form of identifiable structures or significations – exists only in its variations and transitions. Culture, then, is the result of past, present, and future process of creolization" (Wicker 2015:38). Consequently, such a conceptualization no longer stresses the importance of adherence to the customs and traditions of the dominant culture to achieve assimilation instead it pushes the boundaries of culture through perpetual transformation and enlarges the concept of "belonging," "being,"," and "becoming" to encompass multiple, hybrid, and fractal identities.

Having established that we are increasingly faced with "cultural complexity," which in turn results in the representation of a multi-faceted fractal identity, it is equally important to consider the "authenticity" of such hybrid and fractal manifestations of the "self." In recent developments in anthropology regarding the 'location' of culture in hybrid societies and modern nation-states, the discussion on migration has shifted from research on far removed rural frontiers to modern metropolises such that "non-western cultures are no longer located outside the West but form an increasingly important social element of the Western cultural scene itself" (Van Der Veer 2015:92). Explicitly talking about Islamic traditions and how they act as a means for authenticating their identity, a critique of the prevalent sentiment (in this case vis-à-vis British Muslims but equally applicable to Muslims in America and other countries where they form a minority) suggests that "migrants who are at the vanguard of political resistance to the assimilative tendencies of the nation-state, who have their own cultural project for living hybrid cultural lives in a non-Islamic nation (…) are condemned" (Van Der Veer 2015:102) for regarding the Islamic cultural and religious traditions as scared and adhering to them to remain authentic to an essential facet of their identity. Moreover, in the discussion on the displacement of culture, it is also important to note the transference in anthropological theory towards "agency, actors and the actor's point of view" (Van Der Veer 2015:92), further stressing the authenticity of the experiences lived by diasporic individuals in our highly fragmented yet digitally connected global world. For hybridity to survive and flourish in today's democracies and adhere to the universally acknowledged human rights, it is vital to reject the "cultural whole" and recognize the diversity within ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, paving the way for a sort of transcultural hybridity. "This, in turn, enhances the prospects that hybridity, a condition that is constituted in part by communication, fulfills its social and political potential, mitigating social tensions, expressing the polyvalence of human creativity, and providing a context of empowerment in which individuals and communities are agents in their own destiny" (Kraidy 2006:161). Before we discuss multiple, transcultural, and fractal identities that are a product of cultural hybridity, let us first consider the forces that favor and hinder the construction and manifestation of these identities in the South Asian American diasporas.

The first factor hindering the identity development process in diasporic individuals is ethnocentrism. Societies have favored and prioritized in-group politics and ethnocentric behaviors since ancient times in their pursuit of establishing social-political-cultural supremacy. Ethnocentrism can be classified as "a social and psychological phenomenon related to ethnicity and culture," which is a transgenerational problem as "ethnocentric stereotypes may be passed down from generation to generation through the process of socialization" (Shala and Cooper 2015:318-319). This could also result in reverse ethnocentrism, where the diasporic individuals remain ghettoed in their own cultural groups and avoid contact with the mainstream due to a lack

of sufficient linguistic skills or extreme ideological differences incredibly grounded in religious beliefs. The term ethnocentrism was coined at the beginning of the twentieth century by William Sumner to explain social group membership behaviors. States and societies that promote ethnocentric policies tend to favor their behaviors and values connected to physical features, language, religion, customs, traditions (McCornack and Ortiz 2017) which in turn leads to believing in the superiority of the in-group members and systematic disregard of those outside the group (Sumner 1940). Since ethnocentrism can be an acquired behavioral trait, it negatively impacts identity development in diasporic individuals. In the extreme case, it might also result in complete rejection of the adopted homeland's culture. This, in turn, gives rise to social conflict and tension both at individual and societal levels, especially regarding the religious practices of Islam. In the post 9/11 scenario, to achieve and maintain a peaceful relationship between South Asian Muslim Americans and people from other faiths, ethnocentric attitudes are not desirable to play a part in diasporic identity development. On a positive note, one study shows that globalization seems to reduce people's ethnocentric tendencies at social, economic, and political levels. Specifically, at the social level, "as people are exposed to higher levels of exchange of people, information, and cultural influences, they tend to be less ethnocentric" (Machida 2012:456). However, this study does not represent actual trends in many countries, and its scope is limited to a very niche subset of economic migrants.

The second factor hindering the identity development process in diasporic individuals is assimilation. The term assimilation is often used synonymously with integration or is sometimes used to mean integration, or at other times it is used interchangeably with integration. Assimilation has been used by American scholars like Park (1950) and Gordon (1968) in an essentialist manner leaning towards complete adoption of American culture while maintaining either none or very little of the original cultural values and traditions. Integration can be viewed as a constructionist approach wherein the goal is for individuals to be a part of the new homeland without necessarily abandoning their identities and practices linked with their ancestral homeland. In that sense, "assimilation" and "integration" are at the opposite end of the spectrum as far as their influence on identity development is concerned. Moreover, assimilation should not be confused with adjustment. Here, I focus on the assimilation approach to dealing with diasporic individuals, which has been very popular in the U.S. since the beginning of the twentieth century when there was a massive influx of foreigners, especially from Europe. The approach centers around accepting American culture, adopting its cultural norms and values, and its manifestation in external behavior.

> First, diverse ethnic groups share a common culture through a natural process along which they have the same access to socio-economic opportunities as natives of the host country. Second, this process consists of the gradual disappearance of original cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones. Third, the process moves inevitably and irreversibly towards complete assimilation once set in motion. Hence, diverse immigrant groups are expected to 'melt' into the mainstream culture through an inter-generational process of cultural, social, and economic integration. (Algan et al. 2013:4)

The leading proponents of this theory are Park (1924, 1950) with his race relations cycle and Gordon with his seminal work *Assimilation in American Life* (1968). Both these theories work for Anglo-centric and Christian immigrants who mainly migrated from European countries as "these groups of immigrants followed progressive trends of social mobility across generations and increasing rates of intermarriage, as determined by educational achievements, job market integration, English proficiency, and levels of exposure to American culture" (Algan et al. 2013:5). However, the assimilation approach seems to fail in the second half of the twentieth century and

moving into the present time, with the influx of non-European immigrants with entirely different value systems and religious beliefs. Assimilation theory promotes a melting-pot approach where all cultural differences gradually blend into a single American culture. In the case of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia, they appear to preserve their ethnic and religious identities very strongly. Further research indicates that while there is a high correlation between the assimilation rates of various generations, there are significant differences in assimilation practice within the home and outside (Johnston 1969). This indicates the presence of multiple identities and attitudes and defeats the purpose of assimilation in the sense of complete mainstreaming. Another perspective on the transgenerational aspect of assimilation in a comparative study on established and newcomer generations of Americans living in the Silicon Valley suggests that:

> The multigenerational process of assimilation for the post-1965 wave of immigrants is not the only way that American society will change. As the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the post-1965 immigrants come of age, they will be part of the established population that will play host to the successive waves of immigrants. Like their forebearers, this newly established population will find that contact with the next wave of newcomers will force them to adjust to contexts once again being reconfigured by immigration. Immigrant newcomers and established individuals will be strangers to each other. And America will be again remade through a bumpy process that ultimately makes them more familiar. (Jimenez 2017:239)

Therefore, the assimilation model posited by the proponents of the melting pot theory needs to be revised to incorporate a more diverse type of immigrants into the American mainstream. The continuity in assimilation is inevitable, and something that has been practiced for over two centuries needs time to change. While it is good to have alternatives in place in the long term, in the short and medium-term, it is essential to understand the impact of this continued assimilation in education, culture, economy, and politics on American society and on the diaspora, whether long-established or their successive generations, in the minority or majority. In the twenty-first century, boundaries will inevitably be crossed and blurred. The contours of race and ethnicity will be changed, and non-white demographic narratives will eventually color the white hegemonic discourse. However, if American society continues to push for assimilation, "even if it expands to embrace non-Europeans, it is unlikely to dissolve racial distinctions entirely in the United States and to end the inequalities rooted in them" (Alba and Nee 2005:292). Progress can only be made by adopting a salad-bowl type approach that allows each cultural and ethnic group to retain its uniqueness such that multiplicity is the norm rather than the exception. "The pluralist alternative envisions that, in the contemporary world, the choice to live in an ethnic, social, and cultural matrix need not be associated with the loss of the advantages once afforded almost exclusively by the mainstream" (Alba and Nee 2005:6). Assimilation does not favor the development of multiple identities among diasporic populations. It needs to be rethought in the context of increasing globalization and cultural hybridity that is so typical of American society today.

The third factor hindering the identity development process in diasporic individuals is acculturation. This term was introduced in the late nineteenth century by the American ethnologist J. W. Powell, to describe the psychological changes in Native Americans who were observed to imitate White Americans in terms of language, dressing and other socio-cultural customs (R. Harris 2013). Several proponents of this theory originated in anthropology, and sociologists furthered that. However, in the past few decades, psychologists have done considerable work on this theory. Berry's (2005, 2008) model is the most well-known model for explaining acculturation in cross-cultural psychology. While there is a hint of positivity, the theoretical foundation of acculturation arises from practices involving discrimination, exclusion, segregation, or exclusion

of the out-group individuals by the mainstream group. The model has been used extensively to describe the adaptation strategies of first-generation immigrants, sojourners, refugees, asylum seekers in societies and camps, and indigenous people (David & Berry 2006). This approach might have been suitable to explain people's reaction in the postcolonial era, where the rhetoric consisted of establishing a level playing field for poor migrants, or in the case of long-term migrants (sojourners), or those suffering from social and political persecution. However, in the case of immigrants from South Asia who have been drawn to the U.S. in pursuit of highly paid economic activities, with the shrinking of geographical boundaries in the age of globalization and cultural hybridity, such a model based on a unidirectional acculturation strategy is insufficient primarily to explain identity development, especially among those who have migrated to the U.S. after 1965. Furthermore, Leonard (2005) points out the increasing diversity in terms of geographic origin, skill levels, religious and caste affiliations of immigrants from the subcontinent:

> The recent immigrants are not rural people but predominantly urban, highly educated professionals. They are migrating in family units, women and children accompanying the men. Many religions are represented, many kinds of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, and Parsis (Zoroastrians). Also, many "traditional" caste and community categories still have some significance in the lives of immigrants, particularly in the choice of marriage partners. The diversity of the subcontinent is well represented in the United States. (66-67)

Given the predominant cultural diversity within the South Asian diaspora that is already used to a highly multicultural environment in the subcontinent, acculturation seems to be a step backward. It does not work very well even in monoethnic groups, and unless expanded to include other more complex dimensions, this pure constructionist approach towards diasporic individual identity development is not equipped to handle the complexities of the twenty-first century. Lastly, while the difference between ethnocentrism and the two other negative factors mentioned above is apparent, it may be worthwhile to clarify the distinction between assimilation and acculturation. These are two different processes that may occur independently of each other. Acculturation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for assimilation, and an indefinite amount of acculturation is needed before assimilation can even begin (Teske and Nelson 1974).

It is now time to move to the discussion of positive determinants for diasporic identity construction. The first factor favoring the identity development process in diasporic individuals is ethnorelativism which is in direct contrast to ethnocentrism. Bennett conceptualized this paradigm in the context of developing intercultural competence among individuals to help them enlarge the radius of their cultural reality. Bennett (1986) created the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) based on a constructivist approach and grounded in communication theory as a tool to explain how people create boundaries between the "self" and the "other" when they are faced with cultural differences. The model is mainly used in the intercultural communication education and training fields to measure a person's cultural competence. It also has interesting implications for the analysis of identity in literary texts about migration. It describes a developmental approach along a scale of increasing awareness and sensitivity from one's own culture to one's adopted culture. When applied to religious diversity, this model maps the development of interreligious competence among multicultural individuals from a psychological perspective. "Religious diversity is a reality in many social contexts. For religious individuals, pluralism often presents a particularly radical confrontation with the constructed nature of one's own meaning system" (Morgan and Sandage 2016:133). This is particularly true within the South Asian Muslim American diaspora, where in addition to inter-religious diversity, there is also intra-religious diversity. For example, in South Asia, Sunnis and Shias have different mosques, and

there is often communal tension between people from these Islamic sects. However, in the U.S., these Muslims might be forced to use the same place of worship and therefore require developing some intra-religious competence within the diasporic boundaries. With the current climate of globalization and cultural hybridity, individuals keep oscillating between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism at different stages of their "being" and "becoming," especially in matters of religion. This is more pronounced in the second and subsequent generation Muslim diaspora in some cases due to the prevailing socio-political attitudes towards Islam and in other cases due to increased electronic connectivity and easily accessible information on social media from other countries practicing Islam. However, the coexistence of multiple religious ideologies is an inescapable feature of the twenty-first century, and societies, and individuals need to adopt an ethnorelativistic view toward various faiths and beliefs for,

> … (religious) pluralism is not going away; if anything it will become an increasingly apparent reality. Therefore individuals can choose to withdraw into echo chambers of their own belief or learn to engage across difference and trust with an open curiosity and humble self-reflection that such relationships will ultimately deepen their spirituality. (Morgan and Sandage 2016:152-153)

The second factor favoring the identity development process in diasporic individuals is integration which is in direct opposition to assimilation. From a Durkheimian (1933) perspective, integration implies the inclusion of outgroup members into the mainstream society to develop a collective social consciousness. The new and existing group members feel an integrated sense of social belonging. From a diasporic perspective, in addition to social integration, it is also essential to consider the economic and identity aspects of integration to make sense of the developmental aspects of the incoming individuals. The ultimate objective of integration is to foster a society with safety, stability, and justice without voluntary or involuntary assimilation. As we have seen above, the proponents of assimilation argue that successive generations of immigrants in the U.S. will blend in to form a singular American culture practiced by the mainstream, implying that all other forms of cultural expressions are non-American. However, "the demographic realities of the United States have given additional momentum to the rethinking in progress on the assimilation of immigrants and their descendants" (Alba and Nee 2005:8). The post-1965 wave of immigrants constitute about twenty percent of the American population according to the 2000 U.S. census data, and they "have achieved a critical mass sufficient to exercise a strong, if not increasingly dominant, influence on regional developments" (Alba and Nee 2005:9). Furthermore, it should be noted that:

> Historically, the American mainstream, which originated with the colonial northern European settlers, has evolved through incremental inclusion of ethnic and racial groups that formerly were excluded and accretion of parts of their cultures to the composite culture. Although cultural elements from the earliest groups have been preserved—in this sense there is great cultural continuity—elements contributed from subsequent immigrant groups have been incorporated continually into the mainstream. (Alba and Nee 2005:12)

The construct of integration is rooted in the idea of a multicultural society that includes people from different ethnicities, religions, and races. They form an integral part of the social and economic fabric rather than remaining marginalized. On the one hand, Glazer and Moynihan (2005) urge us to think beyond the melting pot where the diaspora can maintain their own unique ethnic identities instead of blending into the mainstream resulting in a more enriched and diverse society. On the other hand, Orosco (2016) provides a sharp critique of the assimilation models still prevalent in the U.S. and urges us to topple the melting pot paving the way for alternative approaches favoring integration by pragmatic American thinkers Horace Kallen and John Dewey.

While Kallen's "alternative democratic society permits immigrants to preserve certain aspects of their group culture and thereby alter the way US American national identity can be conceived" (Orosco 2016:117), Dewey,

> amended the scope of cultural pluralism so that different ethnic and immigrant groups can maintain their traditions so long as they do not harm individuals, but more importantly, they can also share their traditions and practices with one another, and with dominant society, in deliberative conversations. In the process of doing so, they would help to develop a richer and more robust US American identity that incorporates the best from many different ways of life. (Orosco 2016:117-118)

Therefore, integration aims to merge culture, development, and social theory such that we can conceptualize a reality beyond the singular mindset of assimilation towards a pluralistic approach that can work within the constraints of globalization and the framework of cultural hybridity. It has been suggested that:

> As the world enters the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is evident that, despite the widespread culture of denial that persists in sweeping our major common problems under the collective carpet, it is entering and has indeed already entered a period of unprecedented crisis. Unprecedented not only because of the scale of the problems, but equally because of the convergence of what were once seen to be, if considered problems at all, quite separate ones, and because the evidence is that the tools that we have used in the past to manage the crises that have beset human society are no longer adequate to the tasks in hand. (Clammer 2012:3)

The hijab and the beard continue to be frowned upon in today's U.S. culture. Still, they seem to be symbols of revolt rather than faith, openly flaunted not by the first-generation immigrants but by their successive younger generations. Most of the theories used to understand the development of identity in diasporic individuals are based in the traditional cultural studies domain, but their "approach to social reality has been narcissistic and has failed, like the postmodernism that gave birth to much of it, to address the larger questions of human life" (Clammer 2012:243). Additionally, to understand these post-millennials who are disrupting and reshaping the U.S. hegemony, we need to break away from the "weak and inadequate philosophical anthropology – a failure to grasp the fullness of human being and as a consequence to develop the tools for a deeper understanding of processes of change and transformation" (Clammer 2012:243).

The third factor favoring the identity development process in diasporic individuals is enculturation which provides a viable alternative to the acculturation approach. Researchers like Spindler (1968) and Kottak (2013) have approached it from a socialization perspective stressing the aspect of the acquisition of culture by an individual to function appropriately in society. Other researchers in psychology, like Herskovits (1970), have approached it from a developmental perspective. The focus is on unconscious learning during the early years, which does not sit well with the construct of culture as a dynamic living process where individuals make conscious choices to learn, unlearn, and relearn cultural norms and values at different stages in their life. However, it provides a good starting point to move away from acculturation because

> […] enculturation is primarily an anthropological concept. It is a construct, a process in the behavioral sense that delineates the dynamics of transmission and transmutation of culture throughout human growth. Cultural transmission is the process of acquiring the traditionally inherited culture; cultural transmutation, on the other hand, is a process of psychosocial transmutation, through deliberate, reflective, functional, yet occasionally incidental processes of teaching and learning. Enculturation, thus, involves innovation and inquiry which is a particular type of epistemological sensitivity to culture. (Shimahara 1979:148-149)

If acculturation involves shedding one's culture and leaving behind some or all the values, norms, and beliefs of one's original culture, then enculturation involves the cognitive process of learning the values, norms, and beliefs of the other culture in addition to those of one's own culture. This is especially true in the case of second and subsequent generations of the diaspora. They first enculturate the U.S. culture outside of their home, unlike their parents who have first enculturated their home culture and subsequently the American culture upon their arrival to the U.S. Thus, enculturation is a much better-suited concept and is more expansive and integrative in comparison to the pure constructionist approach of acculturation. It must be noted that Berry's model of acculturation has evolved significantly since its initial conception. However, it remains deficient in terms of the type of immigrants, their successive generations, and the challenges of globalization, further leading to cultural hybridity. Furthermore, Segall et al. (1999) have defined acculturation as the extent to which immigrants adopt and practice the cultural norms of the mainstream while continuing to maintain and adhere to the cultural norms of their own culture. This conceptualization is a slight improvement over the former, but it does not explain the process in second and subsequent generation immigrants born in the U.S (Alamilla et al. 2017). On the other hand, enculturation involves the maintenance of and adherence to multiple beliefs and values without the idea of completely giving up one's own culture in favor of the dominant group's culture. The need for enculturation in the age of globalization has been studied from an intercultural communication perspective (Pruskus 2013), from a bicultural marketing perspective (Korzenny et al. 2017), and a global media consumption culture perspective (Choi 2002) by many scholars. It has also been argued that "[l]inguistic identity of language emerges only gradually, by means of the child's increasingly competent participation in the discursive processes of reflexive enculturation" (Taylor 2010:14). Finally, the impact of enculturation on moral relativism positively increases tolerance and reduces intercultural tensions (Rezan 2008) and in child development where the child is enculturated and enculturating cultural concepts in social interactions throughout the course of its development (Vinden 2004).

In conclusion, we can safely agree that cultural identity is no longer fixed and absolute. It is constructed across differences through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth within the framework of spatio-temporal realities. In a way, "cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture" (S. Hall 1990:226). The past is inevitably present in the construction and experience of identity, but this is not a fixed, 'factual' past. There is a relation to this past, and the diasporic individuals engage in constant negotiation with it, thereby playing a vital role in the reconstruction of cultural identity in the adopted homeland. It is in migration, a shift in place and culture, that the fluid, flexible, and fractal nature of the construction of identity is more apparent. Identity is thus a "continually constituted and reconstructed category, a process of becoming which entails not a fixed position but positionality and locations" (Naficy 1991:298). The fluidity of experience in constructing identity between the past and present, the imagined, desired and the real and contemporary, unfolds unconsciously in the larger ideological framework of the state, religion, and society. These regulate and provide static and fixed boundaries to the multiplicity and fractality of diasporic experience. It is finally the state that largely determines the experience of the diaspora both in the context of departure and settlement. However, in the postcolonial world, the imperial forces tried to control the colonial subjects, imposing categories and identities to fix the imperial "others," only to be met with refracted images that fully subverted and undermined the imposed identities. If hierarchical, vertical impositions of identity failed in the colonial world, it's hard to imagine that they would work in the West's modern "internal colonies" (Bhabha 1994). Therefore,

I have provided a background on the sociological realities in which the authors and literary works selected for this research are situated and the factors that act as negative and positive determinants to identity construction.

The next chapter provides a more nuanced view of the South Asian American diaspora and critical characteristics of the type of literature published by diasporic authors.

1.2 Changing Face of the South Asian American Diaspora and their Literature in the Twenty-First Century

> If it is written and read with serious attention, a novel, like a myth or any great work of art, can become an initiation that helps us to make a painful rite of passage from one phase of life, one state of mind, to another. A novel, like a myth, teaches us to see the world differently; it shows us how to look into our own hearts and to see our world from a perspective that goes beyond our own self-interest.
>
> Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*

I

The U.S. has the highest number of immigrants than any other country globally. It is estimated that about one-fifth of the world's migrants live in the U.S. It is home to about 44 million immigrants, out of which 22 million are from Asia. Among these, there are six million South Asian[9] immigrants (four million Indian Americans, seven hundred thousand Pakistani Americans, one hundred and eighty-five thousand Bangladeshi Americans), making them the third-largest immigrant group in the U.S. after Mexicans and Chinese immigrants (United States Census Bureau). By race and ethnicity, more Asian immigrants than Hispanic immigrants have arrived in the U.S. in most years since 2010. Asians are projected to become the largest immigrant group in the U.S. by 2055, surpassing Hispanics (Pew Research Center). Despite their growing presence in the U.S., immigrants from South Asia have not been fairly represented in America's history. People from South Asia have lived in the U.S. since the 1700s, but they achieved significant numbers only from the late 1800s. The early settlers were primarily from Punjab and Bengal, Sikhs and Muslims, respectively, who started forming communities in the states along the Pacific coast. Like immigrants from other countries, South Asians faced their usual share of discrimination and violence. Still, things gradually changed after the Luce-Celler Act was passed in 1946, and the community established its presence in the hospitality, medical, and technology sectors in the 50s and 60s. Following the abolition of immigration quotas in 1965, the American landscape started to see a further increase in immigrants from South Asia, and this time most of them who entered

[9] "South Asia" as a constructed category is often used as a strategic geopolitical or geographical term indicating political alliances, both in Asia and the diasporas, and the term is one that can configure social identities and categories without necessarily alluding to national identities. It is not to be taken as a term designating an object of study, as does area studies, but rather as designating a constructed geopolitical region with interlinked political economies and histories, a subject of study. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the ambivalent function of the term; although South Asia provides opportunity to analyze the region because of its interconnected history, politics, and economics, it is also imagined as a homogenous community from an "external" (often Western) point of view.

Unfortunately, discussions of India dominate the study and meaning of South Asia in most (inter)disciplinary scholarship and (identity) politics. The framework of "South Asian" can reflect a liberal Euro-American discourse that views the region as a homogenous monocultural area in which an Orientalized version of India represents South Asia. Thus, strategically identifying oneself or one's politics as "South Asian" can create, though does not ensure, meaningful alliances within certain contexts. Nation-states such as Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, and Indian minorities, including Muslims and Sikhs, as well as subaltern groups, offer multiple points to deconstruct not only the dominant national but also the Indian normative and multiple points from which to configure South Asia. Historical contexts have produced multiple oppressions and conflicts through the concept of religious differences within and between nations. In other words, the term needs to be unpacked to understand the complex relations of power that operate to consolidate a singular Hindu Indian construction of South Asia (Desai 2004:5).

the U.S. were highly qualified professionals. South Asians have established their presence gradually over more than three centuries and now comprise up to four generations of immigrants that are constantly enriching the American demographic landscape (South Asian American Digital Archive). Among these are small-scale business owners and entrepreneurs who run motels and general stores, high-tech innovators who have changed the face of Silicon Valley, and artists and entertainers who are becoming increasingly visible in mainstream American media. From food to music to movies to literature, South Asians have achieved success and fame in all sectors of American society. However, the term "immigrants" does not seem to do justice to the multiple generations and millions of South Asians who call the U.S. home. Instead, the term "diaspora" or "diasporic individual" in the sense of a group of people who share a common ethnic or heritage identity, those who have voluntarily or involuntarily settled in the U.S., those who are descendants of the erstwhile emigrants and are still interested in maintaining a connection with their ancestral homeland, and those digital nomads leading transient, circular transnational lives, more accurately describes the present-day populations of South Asian Americans.

However, it is essential to distinguish between the political use of the term 'diaspora' and its conceptual meaning as exile. Due to global market forces, changes in population flows are markedly different from earlier forms of permanent exile (Ong 2003). The terms 'diasporic communities' and 'global ethnoscapes' have been used by Appadurai (1996) to refer to migrant communities, and they help to contextualize the tension between 'cultural homogenization' and 'cultural heterogenization.' These communities, groups, and individuals inhabit 'imagined worlds,' that is, "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of people spread across the globe" who are able to "contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind" (Appadurai 2010:31). However, the term 'diasporic communities' indicates a 'homogeneous' group of individuals with similar 'imaginaries' who seek to influence state policies and programs in a similar way (Ong 2003). Therefore, 'diaspora' no longer refers to permanent exile but includes the range and diversity of transnational communities worldwide and articulates an inclusive global ethnicity for disparate populations. The term has also been extended to accommodate a "wide range of fluid, spatial, cultural and political locations" (Walsh 2003:3). This emphasis on the transnational leads us to our focus on identity, its construction, and the experiences of the South Asian American Muslim diaspora in the context of this shifting and fluid malleability of borders, locations, and positions.

In terms of non-Western religious affiliation, the majority of South Asians mainly practice Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. While some cultural practices like dress, yoga, and vegetarian food are specific to a section of South Asians, namely, the Hindus, the other cultural traditions related to music, movies, family dynamics, and literature transcend religious and geographical borders. Further, in the case of South Asia, religion plays a vital role in the ideology of nation. This religious nationalism is a colonial legacy of the British (Thapar et al. 2010), and it is also very highly visible in the South Asian diaspora (Veer 1995, 2015). Their country of origin shapes the lives of all diasporic individuals from the subcontinent, which is equally true for Muslim immigrants. Specifically, in the case of Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh and, by extension, from other Muslim Asian countries, Islam exerts a powerful and multidimensional influence (Kibria 2011). However, it should be noted that the cultural practices of South Asian Muslims are heavily influenced by their geographical neighbors in the subcontinent, which sets them apart from Arab Muslims. After September 11, 2001, it seems appropriate to highlight the uniqueness and diversity of the Muslim diaspora from the subcontinent, especially from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Furthermore, it is essential to distinguish them from their Arab counterparts regarding religious

ideology and draw parallels with their Hindu counterparts regarding their cultural traditions, norms, and practices. South Asian Muslims present a unique blend of cultural hybridity, affecting their worldview and identity deeply. And although Muslims do not constitute a race, they experience a type of ascribed racism from which their Hindu counterparts are exempt. South Asians have a fascinating and unique history in terms of their migration to the U.S., and the racialization of their religious identity heavily impacts the essence of the South Asian Muslim diaspora. Consequently, this changes the social location of South Asian Muslims by pushing them further away from the center and compromising their status as American citizens along the way (Selod 2018). Furthermore, in the wake of 9/11, there is a growing trend of primacy in the assertion of religious identity over other forms of social identities in Muslim Americans (Peek 2005). So, it becomes essential for us to study the impact of Islam on the South Asian Muslim diaspora and their identity in particular as we continue to progress in the twenty-first century.

Migration has been a natural phenomenon throughout human history. Unlike dispersion in the plant and animal kingdom, human migration involves much more than the mere physical movement of people. Migrants carry with them a predefined social identity. In the case of the South Asian diaspora, given the internal diversity of the region, this social identity is complex and hard to compartmentalize. What separates the South Asian and South Asian Muslim diasporic individuals from their other Asian counterparts is the diversity and complexity of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, which are so central to their "being" and to the process of their "becoming"; their norms and values regarding family and kinship and their plethora of pan-ethnic[10] differences. These socio-cultural aspects are so diverse that they have resulted in the fragmentation of the South Asian diaspora into diasporic communities divided by religions and languages. Indians (and the same holds for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, given their close geographical and social proximity) tend to recreate the social structure wherever they go. They tend to hold on to their native culture, and their mode of adaptation has a clear preference for economic integration more than cultural assimilation (Sharma 1989). Furthermore, the circumstances and timing of migration are also important factors to consider in the formation of identity amongst diasporic individuals. The large-scale and steady emigration of skilled professionals from South Asian countries to the West is a recent phenomenon, especially in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of the liberalization of the U.S. immigration policy. While this type of emigration has been largely referred to as 'brain drain' in India and other South Asian countries, it is "essentially voluntary and mostly individual in nature" (Jayaram 2004:22). With the emergence of second and third-generation diasporic individuals enjoying increased economic prosperity and better sociocultural rights in the U.S., the study of their identity formation takes on new dimensions. While the first-generation diasporic individuals who are naturalized U.S. citizens tend to hold on to their South Asian roots firmly, the American-born second-and-subsequent generations have shown evidence of ambivalence as apparent in the literary representation of the lives of South Asian American Muslims in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is no denying that there is a great deal of intergenerational cultural conflict present among this diaspora in the U.S., with the most

[10] Panethnicity is a term coined by Espiritu (1992) to describe groups based on common characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, geographical and cultural origin. While the term was used in the anti-colonial and national freedom movements in the mid-twentieth centuries, it was Espiritu who popularized the concept in the context of Asian American diaspora to bring together very diverse cultural and ethnic groups who only had one similarity, in that they were from the continent of Asia, but more specifically to the geographical regions referred to as the Far East. The term can be extended to the South Asian American diaspora as well, because, just like their East Asian counterparts, South Asians too do not belong to a single ethnolinguistic or racial group, and yet share similarities amongst themselves, similarities that distinguish South Asians from remaining Asians.

common factor being the practice of Islam and the religious rituals and cultural traditions associated with it. So, it is imperative to research this dimension when analyzing identarian development in the literary fiction created by these diasporic individuals and their portrayal of the transcultural imagination.

In late modernity, a distinct feature of the diaspora is that the diasporic individual is no longer cut off from their ancestral homeland. Thanks to communication technologies and modern transportation, it is now possible for diasporic individuals to be virtually and physically connected to their multiple homelands. Electronic communication systems offer an opportunity to the diasporic communities to produce new identities, and they are using different means to achieve this (Mitra 2002). However, this shift between the U.S. and the heritage homeland may also be seen as unfavorable and as South Asians not trying to assimilate or integrate fully into their adopted culture. The following questions could be raised:

> ... do the Asians create their own difficulties by their own way of life, and by remaining separate from the host society, or do their troubles arise mainly from excess of chauvinism or racism in the country of their adoption? Do they offend because they are, visibly, both pariahs and exploiters in alien societies? Or are they scapegoats, singled out for victimization because their adopted country (or its government) needs an alibi for poor performance in the national sphere? (Tinker 1977:138-139)

While globalization encourages the free movement of skilled labor, it has also resulted in a power struggle both within the diasporic communities and the dominant groups. As pointed out earlier, South Asian diasporic individuals tend to preserve their identity in the cultural and religious domains; that is, they remain Indian or Pakistani, or Bangladeshi in their primary groups but act Americanized in their secondary groups (Saran 1985); while in the economic domain they are quick to integrate (Gordon 1987). As South Asians prosper economically in the U.S., they are asserting their American citizenship rights and at the same time strengthening their voice through academic research[11], political involvement[12], and boardroom prowess[13]. The complexity of the process, the multiple and heterogeneous backgrounds of this diaspora, and the differential experiences of various South Asian sub-groups make it challenging to analyze the formation of diasporic identity and the politics surrounding it. Citing the case of South Asian American literature in the contemporary era, Srikanth and Song (2016) contest:

> The space between literary and social worlds grows thin, and the two worlds may even intimately intrude upon each other, when what becomes identified as literature is inextricably linked with a political context. Such is the case with Asian American literature, which has unavoidable political origins and makes only incomplete sense without an understanding of these extraliterary beginnings. (3)

Keeping in mind the above observation, all literary works discussed in this study are analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing from sociology, politics, literary studies, and even mathematics.

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[11] See the extensive list of South Asians that form the SAADA Academic Council which is a community of scholars committed to furthering the academic study of South Asians in the U.S. through supporting the work of the South Asian American Digital Archive (saada.org/academic-council).

[12] See the report by Mehta (2021) published on "FiveThirtyEight" on the detailed statistics of South Asian American participation in mainstream U.S. politics (fivethirtyeight.com/features/many-south-asian-americans-tap-into-their-community-to-kick-start-their-political-careers/) and the recent success story of Zohran Mamdani and Jenifer Rajkumar's election to the New York State Assembly in 2020, a city that is home to more than 300,000 South Asian Americans (nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/new-york-elects-first-south-asian-americans-state-assembly-n1245860).

[13] See the list of South Asian CEOs of U.S. companies at startuptalky.com/south-asian-ceo/, an analysis of the "bamboo ceiling" phenomenon at the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) (www.pnas.org/content/117/9/4590), and research about Hi-Tech South Asians by Professor G, William Domhoff, from the sociology department of University of California at Santa Cruz (whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu/power/diversity_update_2020.html).

II

The late twentieth century has seen a rise in the migration of elites. These affluent workers enter the top echelons of social and economic hierarchies. "These processes are tightly bound to the development of global capitalism, as business and professional elites associated with sectors of finance, import-export, and post-Fordist hi-tech industry have now joined labor migrants in movements around the globe" (Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008:505). Modern nation-states are adopting neoliberal forms of "flexible citizenships" offering fast-track citizenship to elite immigrants and diasporic individuals (Ong 2003). The materialist position on literary work states that literature as an artistic expression of the human mind is influenced directly and indirectly by the residual, emergent, and oppositional material conditions of the society the authors live (Williams 1981). The majority of characters created in the fictional works selected for this project have all arrived in the U.S. either as part of highly skilled immigration programs for doctors and engineers or to pursue higher education opportunities not available in their heritage countries at that moment in time. All narratives depict the intergenerational differences in religious and cultural identity struggles, but there is a dialectical progression from essentialism to universalism and humanism in each case. In the present century, we are seeing more members of the second-generation South Asian Muslim Americans who are both openly embracing Islam and denouncing the 'model minority' status to reclaim their complex hybrid identities. While there has been an upsurge of immigrant and diaspora rights movements, we also see a rise in populism on the other hand in the U.S., which forces us to reconceptualize our understanding of nation, migration, diaspora, and citizenship. Integration – "social, economic and political – is emerging as the strategic operative framework in nearly all postindustrial societies of immigration" (Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008:507). Some of the literary works selected for this project depict what Kahf (2010) refers to as the secular nature of Muslim American literature[14], focusing on cultural and not religious aspects. Conceding to Jameson's (1990, 1991) theorization of history and mediation in approaching literature, and given the events of 9/11, some other narratives are simultaneously and overtly political yet with an underlying focus on Islam as a culture and not a religion. Therefore, further asserting Jameson's ideas that art, when viewed from the lens of its historical context, reflects the socio-political situation that influences both its production and consumption. That being so, all literary works selected for this project have been published after 2000, and six out of the nine have been produced by second-generation writers, poets, and playwrights. There is a departure from the postcolonial writing style and a transition towards transcultural themes and narration.

Dagnino posits that owing to the socio-economic changes in the twenty-first century and an increasing shift towards transculturalism; there is also a need to theorize this phenomenon within the literary context. We see an emerging trend of growth in transcultural writers who "by choice or by life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences, cultivate bilingual/plurilingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple

[14] My criteria for Muslim American literature are a flexible combination of three factors: Muslim authorship. Including this factor, however vague or tenuous, prevents widening the scope to the point of meaninglessness, rather than simply including any work about Muslims by an author with no biographical connection to the slightest sliver of Muslim identity (such as Robert Ferrigno with his recent dystopian novel about a fanatical Muslim takeover of America). It is a cultural, not religious, notion of Muslim that is relevant. A "lapsed Muslim" author, as one poet on my roster called himself, is still a Muslim author for my purposes. I am not interested in levels of commitment or practice, but in literary Muslimness (Kahf 2010:167).

cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities" (2012:1). This is also evident in the literary works of second-generation South Asian American writers being analyzed here whose fiction represents an evolving sensitivity to the changing ideas of "belonging" and the creation of a legitimate American identity without the need for hyphenation. Each of these writers poses some pertinent questions through their artistic creations. Is it possible to regard their work as mainstream "American" instead of a straightforward diasporic narrative of loss and longing for the native land? Can a diasporic fictional universe with Muslim characters simply be considered as a need for presenting role models to Muslim Americans instead of the need for justifying the difference and otherness of its characters? Can a Muslim American writer lament the situation in their American homeland without being branded anti-national? Is there space for South Asian Muslim Americans for critiquing Islam and its place in the late modern world in opposition to the fundamentalist views held by an Islamic minority from the Middle East? Dagnino further argues that "[t]ranscultural writers seem to be tuned in to a different wavelength and thus are able to capture the first still embryonic, still incoherent, still mostly unexpressed or intercepted symptoms (signals) of a different emerging cultural mood/mode" (2012:4). These writers are disrupting mono- and multicultural narratives based on their lived realities, their exposure to Western education systems and "are developing an alternative discourse that in any case is perceived by both mainstream parts (let us call them the assimilationist and the multiculturalist stances) as destabilizing the perceived *status quo*" (Dagnino 2012:4).

In the age of multiple modernities, the departure from the postcolonial novel toward new expressions of the diasporic experience has resulted in the transcultural novel. Present-day narratives are not restricted to a comparative perspective between two cultures; rather, they simultaneously overlay multiple cultures in several geographies. Therefore, a traditional postcolonial or inter- or multicultural reading of the novel proves insufficient in explaining its hybridity and complexity of contemporary diasporic identity. Helff (2009) provides a critical summary of the state of transcultural literary studies and the need for separating them from the postcolonial literary canon considering the changes in lived realities for present-day diasporic individuals. Therefore, the conceptual strength of transcultural criticism lies in the argument that "it highlights processes of cultural amalgamation as the very foundation of 'culture.' These processes are 'limitless' in a geographical, historical, and also socio-political sense and show no particular preference for either difference or homogeneity" (Helff 2009:78). There is an overreliance on identity based on unbridgeable differences and alterity in postcolonial theory, concepts that are not relevant to the so-called elite migrants or diasporic individuals. This is a shortcoming for the transcultural critic in analyzing narratives of one-way migrations, such as the case of refugees, asylum seekers, and other liminal groups. Nevertheless, Helff argues that transcultural literary criticism in the context of individuals experiencing cultural globalization in late modernity does "not necessarily entail subversive maneuvers–they simply exist and need to be reckoned with. Conceptualizing transcultural life in a globalized modern world, therefore, challenges postcolonial concepts such as hybridity (which always implies and thus relies on notions of subversion)" (2009:78). Furthermore, there is a need to differentiate between a novel's multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural readings. Helff states that the latter is based on ambivalence instead of differences. Culture should be seen within the socio-political and economic context of late modernity and the hyperconnected dynamic lives of transcultural and cosmopolitan citizens. In this regard, "transculturality not only highlights a shift in the perspective and in the description of life, but also indicates a changed reality of life altogether" (2009:81). Reflecting on

the possibility of creating radically individualized narratives without necessarily choosing a single worldview, transcultural fiction represents the uncertain and ever-changing realities of our contemporary era forcing its authors and readers to confront multiple modes of "being" and "becoming." Helff concludes that a "general feature of the transcultural novel is its self-doubting characters, whose actions are dominated by uncertainty, a mindset which thereby frequently influences the whole narrative" (2009:82). In such novels, transculturality is not only depicted in the conflicting personalities of the novel's characters but also in the novel's narrative structure. It is also enhanced by the author's own transcultural identity leading them to challenge the notions of belonging and home by challenging the group identity of a particular culture causing structural changes at the discursive and receptive levels. As Helff (2009) elaborates:

> [a] common imagined community is thus lost to the main protagonists, since transcultural characteristics challenge essentialist modes of identity construction. This is also why the transcultural novel is increasingly marked by ostensibly bizarre narrative situations in which self-doubting perspectives interact with obviously questionable views of the world. This struggle with transculturality within and beyond the novel is demonstrated not only on the level of plot but also in the patterns of narrating a story. The narrated worlds often run up against diverse idealized notions of cultural nationalism – for instance, imagined homogeneous national cultures and conventional concepts of home and gender roles. (82-83)

Pursuing the idea that we live in the age of reflexive modernity (Beck et al. 1994), where our personal and cultural identities have become hybrid (Bhabha 1994), constantly evolving and fluid (S. Hall 1990), and the shift in diaspora literature from postcolonial to transcultural narration, it can be argued that identity construction is a reflexive process that is both ontological and epistemological. The South Asian Muslim American diasporic individual is placed in a social universe rife with conflict, especially religious separationism associated with the Arab world, with which they share nothing in common except the basic tenets and principles of Islam. They are already laden with multiple complex identities. They have learned to outdo and overcome inequality, a daily struggle in South Asia, be it social, political, financial, educational, ideological, religious, or ontological. To restrict these individuals within the confines of bicultural, multicultural, intercultural, or even transcultural identity does not seem to justify their already complicated developmental and ontological processes of identity formation at home and abroad. We need something additional, something extraordinary that can help us to quantify the dimensions of this complex multiplicity. To fully appreciate and understand Muslim American literature in the context of Islam's reality in America and for its Muslim citizens, as well as to establish the legitimacy of Muslim American literature as mainstream American literature[15], we need to delve into the phenomena of self-similarity, emergence, irregularity, and recursion. These become apparent only when we probe epistemologically within the depths of the ontological processes of "being" and "becoming" in the narratives produced by diasporic individuals in the contemporary U.S.

Building on the principles of transculturalism from the field of literary studies and supplementing the framework with the mathematical concept of fractals (Mandelbrot 1982), I attempt to theorize an alternative identity model. Fractal identity can help us analyze the hyper complexity in the processes of "being" and "becoming" for today's diasporic individual and their literature. The pure sciences give us the means to treat the complex and random nature of our material reality and the links between the physical and social world, adding to the research being

[15] See Yulianto (2018) for a detailed account of historizing Muslim American literature in the works of African American and South Asian American Muslim writers.

done in the social sciences. Literature should not be merely viewed as a medium to rise above lived reality to deconstruct its meaning. Still, it should be seen as something that submerses us into a complex, creative, and continuously transforming the material world, with the possibility of multiple "becomings." In the literary universe, human agency is only one of the many factors that drive the redistribution of subjectivities that are widely present despite the hyperconnectivity in our globalized world (Page 2016). The fractal identity of diasporic individuals is reflexively formed through the constant evolution of their transcultural personhood within the changing materialities and historicities. Today's diasporic narratives are laden with the unprecedented instantaneous connection to multiple homelands, and our narrators have far more choices of "being" and "becoming" than those from the last century. As discussed above, this is true more so in the economically, academically, and professionally affluent Americans from South Asia as well in the literary works produced by authors from this region, allowing us to radically question the anthropocentricity of postcolonial, linguistic, and constructivist paradigms used for identarian analysis in the works of South Asian authors in the Western world. The task is highly challenging because the narratives to be analyzed are a product of a society where the location of culture has been displaced, orientalism has been replaced by terrorism, and in a particular manner, not only can the subaltern speak, but they can also be heard[16]. Therefore, there is benefit in revaluating and redefining theoretical frameworks, arguments, and propositions for critical evaluation of identity formation in diasporic literature. As Rancière (2004) contends:

> [f]or literature to assert its own power, it is not enough for it to abandon the norms and hierarchies of mimesis. It must abandon the metaphysics of representation and the "nature" on which it is founded: its modes of presentation of individuals and the connections between individuals; its modes of causality and inference; in short, its entire system of signification. The power of literature must then be sought in that zone before representative sequences, where other modes of presentation, individuation, and connection operate (148).

Like materialism and new historicism theories have argued, literature produced in any age reflects its contemporary social mores and complexity, and the twenty-first century is no exception. To comprehend complex realities, analyze entangled narratives, to penetrate hybrid personalities, it may be engaging in the human sciences to consider approaches used to analyze these very same phenomena in the pure sciences. Fulton (1999) argues:

> [c]ommon sense, moreover, suggests that contemporary work must be inflected by the pressures of its day regardless of the poet's willed intentions. Even a strenuous attempt to duplicate a previous aesthetic would fall into the temporal gap and become, at best, ventriloquism. Difference is a given. Describing that shift–the changes in poetry's metabolism across generations and time–is an ongoing project for scholars and poets. (126)

Mandelbrot (2012) reflects in his memoir that if fractals are widely present in nature, then they should indeed be present in the representation of nature in art: "Skilled artists must find arrangements, like mixtures of eddies of all sizes, that look balanced; does that not mean that elements of all sizes are distributed in a natural–that is, fractal–way?" (2012:286). Mandelbrot (2012) further argues that not everything in nature and therefore art is regular; rather roughness or irregularity is an inherent aspect of life. In mathematics, fractals allow the possibility to measure and express this roughness precisely through computer-generated formulas and advances in computer graphics that allow investigating geometric forms at significant depth. By applying

[16] See Mishra (2007) for a critical view on the agency of the subaltern in the contemporary diasporic imagination.

concepts from geometry to art and, more specifically literature, a new way of understanding can be developed; and to illustrate the crossover of fractals between disciplines, Mandelbrot posits:

> To appreciate the nature of fractals, recall Galileo's splendid 1632 manifesto: [Philosophy] is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures, without which … one is wandering about in a dark labyrinth. Observe that circles, ellipses, and parabolas are very smooth shapes and that a triangle has a small number of points of irregularity. These shapes were my love when I was a young man, but are very rare in the wild. Galileo was absolutely right to assert that in science those shapes are necessary. But they have turned out not to be sufficient, "merely" because most of the world is of great roughness and infinite complexity. However, the infinite sea of complexity includes two islands of simplicity: one of Euclidean simplicity and a second of relative simplicity in which roughness is present but is the same at all scales. (2012:293)

In addition to voicing the unheard and marginalized who can no longer be ignored, fractal analysis can also provide us the tools to analyze the disruptions in textual and narrative discourses in the age of multiplicity of publishing platforms and an uncontrollable production and consumption of literature that doesn't necessarily and neatly conform to the aesthetics of postmodern and poststructural forms. Furthermore, language plays an essential cultural role in representing transculturalism and the manifestation of transcultural personhood. A new vocabulary unknown to the dominant culture can lend new meanings to hitherto known words. Identarian politics can be heightened or subdued by using multiple languages depending on the context allowing the transcultural "self" to reveal itself in multiple planes or dimensions. This is true more so in the case of South Asian Americans who speak at least two languages other than English, and either the underlying structure of the native languages influences the narrative, or the author's use of a non-English word suggests a shift in the identarian layer. By applying the various properties of fractal geometry to the analysis of literary texts, we can be in a better position to offer a well-rounded critique and appreciation of transcultural narratives. Finally, the production and consumption of literature are no longer restricted to the elite in the literal and figurative sense. Just as fractals can be used to explain the in-betweenness of literary texts and their characters' identities, they can also be used to provide a new middle ground to its unusual hip-hop and hipster producers and consumers who can no longer be ignored, thanks to the democratization of the sheer magnitude of textual corpus available and accessible to everyone anywhere, anytime. This is also reflective of the authors selected for the present research, some of whom are very accomplished in their field and genre. In contrast, some others are first-time creators but with equally powerful narratives of displacement, transcultural identity, and reflexive modernization. In the words of Fulton (1999):

> [a]nd yet. The implications of popular culture – and the engines of its power – have come under scrutiny only recently. Rather than exclude the popular, fractal aesthetics want to understand its magnetism – and sometimes richness. […] Fractal poetics considers both. Neither elitist nor populist, it exists on a third ground between "high" or "low" terrain, resistant to those classifications. Like the components of complex systems, the poems' inclusions neither lock into position nor dissolve into turbulence. (131)

In conclusion, just like Helff's (2009) characterization of a transcultural novel where the narrative shifts between intercultural and transcultural spaces, it can be argued that in a fractal narration, the reader can perceive the different layers of uncompromised identarian complexity of its characters. Helff (2009) also suggests that "[a]n interdisciplinary approach to narratology that connects a contextualized approach to narrative unreliability with individualized modern worlds, therefore, provides a viable methodology for gaining insights into the deeper structure of the

novel" (83). Continuing with Helff's (2009) line of argument, like transcultural novels, fractal literary works also have "the power to redefine and modify processes and experiences in the social world" (83). This is achieved by reflexively generating "a focus on the act of storytelling by utilizing metafictional devices within the narrative itself" (Helff 2009:83). However, a fractal narrative is not a simple metafictional text; rather fractality can be found in the structure of the novel or poem, in the themes it juxtaposes, in the crafting of characters that assert their belonging in multiple homelands, in the circularity of the plot, and in the transformation of identity that moves from hybrid to fractal. The literary works selected for this project heavily rely on metafiction by referencing verses and stories from the Quran in Arabic or poetic verses from Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali, further complicating the narration and the story for a Western reader who is unfamiliar with these other languages. In Part Three, the analysis of the selected novel illustrates the inherent fractality in the characters' identity. The critique of the chosen poems describes the structural fractality of the text by juxtaposing the rules of Urdu poetry into English. It should be noted that, apart from the physical sciences, the concept of fractal analysis is also being pioneered in research in social sciences. Some notable uses of fractals in humanities are in the field of poetry (Fulton 1999, Keller and Swensen 2007, Riach 1995, Romesburg 2010), film studies (Palumbo 1996, 1998, 1999, 2002), theater studies (Roeschlein 2012), narrative analysis and literary criticism (Brick 2012, P.A. Harris 1993, Mikkelsen 2002, Sánchez 2003, Wenaus 2011, Voicu 2014[17]), and cultural studies (Adham 2008, Akkerman 1992, Andrus 2012, Mallard and Foucault 2011, Mische 2015, and Uzendoski 2010). The final part of this dissertation provides a detailed theorization of fractal identity and its application to the analysis of diasporic literature. While it is by no means exhaustive, it opens the door for future interdisciplinary research in literary criticism and analysis.

III

Before commencing the analysis of literary works selected for this dissertation, it seems appropriate to provide a brief history and an overview of the evolution of South Asian Muslim literature in the U.S. This field of writing falls under the larger purview of Asian American literary studies in the U.S. There is no established discipline for the exclusive study of American literature by authors originating from this region. Given the diversity within the socio-politically defined region, it is hard to combine literature from various countries in this geographical area. Nonetheless, Rajini Srikanth, Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts and editor of numerous South Asian American anthologies, has authored *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America* (2006), which is a crucial academic publication in this field. While attempting to write the history of this subfield of literature, Srikanth (2006) cautions us:

[17] Notions of hybridity and multiplicity in literature situated in multicultural space and context and their impact on identity have been analyzed by Voicu (2014) using the properties of fractals in Jean Rhys' fiction based in the Caribbean. Both the narrative content and form of Rhys' fiction have been subjected to fractal geometry's rules and an analysis of identity development and relationships reveals both cultural and identarian fractality. The main premise of the research revolves around the themes of empire, postcolonialism, and postcolonial identity against the backdrop of the Black Atlantic as represented in the trans-racial Caribbean setting. Voicu (2014) uses the concept at a superficial level without providing the readers any background information or context on fractal theory and its possible applications to literary analysis. Nevertheless, this research is the only precedent that has used fractals as a viable tool for analyzing literary fiction.

> The history of South Asian American literature is relatively recent; the creative energy of the immigrant generation and the rising number of second-generation writers in the United States promise to shape narratives and images about experiences as diverse as those of Bangladeshi cabdrivers in Washington, D.C., motel owners in the deep South, dotcom entrepreneurs in the Silicon Valley, and filmmakers in New York City. South Asian Americans, with their heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, national, and socioeconomic spaces, are ready to be imaginatively rendered in their myriad complexity. (48)

Srikanth (2006) discusses the transnational and transcultural nature of South Asian American literature, which complicates existing conceptualizations of space, citizenship, and allegiance in literary narratives from this region as they straddle across multiple physical and cultural homelands. Writing in the cultural, sociopolitical backdrop of the twenty-first century and the more recent events surrounding 9/11, one of Srikanth's (2006) primary objectives is to highlight the shift in South Asian diaspora literature in America from postcolonial studies to ethnic studies. She sees South Asian American literature "as providing the means to pull back from a close-up view of the United States to reveal a wider landscape of other nations and other peoples (2006:4), further arguing that "[s]uch enlargement of perspective is a moral responsibility, particularly in the twenty-first century, when no nation is an island unto itself" (2006:4). The literary works produced by South Asian American writers in the twenty-first century move beyond the conventional notions of family, religion, nationality, and sexuality, and break free from the so-called orientalist portrayal of South Asians, particularly Muslims, instead placing the second-generation literary subject in a co-owned American civic space. Describing the nature of emerging works by such contemporary authors, Srikanth observes that "[t]he most satisfying South Asian American writing seeks to escape 'the grammar of expectancy,' both by presenting the reader with a complex landscape of indeterminate unpredictability and by challenging the reader to withhold summary explanation" (2006:12). Furthermore, in the case of Muslim American literature from authors tracing their roots to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, Sudhakar (2018) argues that both fictional and non-fictional narratives spanning all genres ranging from the paradigmatic 9/11 novel to the bildungsroman, including plays and memoirs, posit not only a critique of Islamophobia in the U.S., but at the same time also offer stories for building solidarity across faith, race, and nation. In this regard, Srikanth rightly asserts that "[w]e often forget or take for granted that the writer enriches, deepens, and widens our understanding of complex situations" (2006: 28). The growing list of South Asian Muslim American authors from non-academic and non-literary backgrounds and from within the established academy reveals the changing nature of narratives produced in the twenty-first century. While it is true that some South Asian American works contain ideas "which often sell well, include the patriarchal nature of particular communities; intergenerational strife; identity confusion; the prevalence of arranged marriage; and the need for flight from a benighted, Orientalized South Asian motherland" (Maxey 2012:214), the new generation of South Asian American writers "explore the ideas mentioned above in a critical and nuanced fashion – which serves to energize and encourage other writers, examining different ideas, on both sides of the Atlantic" (Maxey 2012:215). The impressive list of literary prizes awarded to South Asian American writers in the last thirty years and their ability to engage readers from a cross-section of non-Asian American and global audiences is visible as these works appear in top-selling author lists in mainstream American and international media. Additionally, these works of life-writing and fiction offer role models to future generations of South Asian Americans, helping them find their place in the American literary landscape joining the diasporic wave in the coming years. Maxey (2012) argues:

> Although some might contest the existence of such an imagined community, especially within the US, it remains the case that for those writers who perceive themselves as belonging to it, this community has the very real impact of creating increasingly complex literary genealogies which move across class, gender, national and ethnic boundaries. Its presence also suggests the continuing need to understand this writing within a transnational, and specifically a transatlantic, frame. (215)

Non-Muslim writers from India such as Kiran Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri have dominated the scene of diasporic writing in the U.S. since the 1970s. They have won numerous literary awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, and their works have been published by mainstream American publishers. On the other hand, Muslim American writers from India are a handful, the most prominent among them being the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali who moved to the U.S. in 1976. An alumnus of the University of Arizona (MFA 1985) and Pennsylvania State University (Ph.D. in English 1984), A.S. Ali taught various courses on poetry and creative writing at universities in the U.S. He has published several poetry collections since the seventies on the themes of exile, the injustice in Kashmir, and Muslim American identity. A.S. Ali was mainly known for popularizing the Urdu poetic form called *ghazal* in American English and edited an anthology of English ghazals by American poets, *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000). Except A.S. Ali, most Indian Muslim American writing in the U.S. was published after 2000. Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla is an Ismaili Indian American writer and filmmaker born in Kenya but later moved to Los Angeles. He has published two novels, the critically acclaimed *Ode to Lata* (2002), which won the 18th Annual American Book Award and was adapted into a film in 2007, and *The Two Krishnas* (2011). In both novels, Dhalla explores themes of American identity and sexuality, spanning three continents, and the impact of Islam on the lives of the gay protagonists and their families. Both novels portray affluent Muslim characters who are bankers and highlight the intersectionality between religion, gender, and identity in this category of South Asian Muslim Americans in the twenty-first century. Another American writer and activist of Indian origin is Samina Ali, best known for her debut novel *Madras on Rainy Days,* published in 2004 and winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award in Fiction. She is the co-founder of the American Muslim feminist organization Daughters of Hajar and regularly blogs for *The Huffington Post* and *Daily Beast*, two major digital news aggregator platforms in the U.S. Like her activism work in real life, her novel provides an insight into the process of arranged marriage and women's rights in the context of Islam. Set in Hyderabad, the story follows the life of a young Indian American girl who travels to India to get married only to discover that her husband is a closeted gay man. Like Dhalla's *The Two Krishnas* (2011), S. Ali's novel also conducts a detailed inquiry into the influence of Islamic rituals on second-generation Americans. It vividly portrays the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India, alluding to the complex relationship between nation and religion. In this sense, all three writers above focus more on the background of the factors that color and form the South Asian part of its characters' American identity or provide a metafictional account of the dilemmas of their lives in the ancestral homeland. In this shortlist of Muslim American writers of Indian origin is also Fatima Farheen Mirza, who was born in 1991 and raised in California. Currently the only second-generation author in this category, Mirza is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and spent almost a decade on her debut novel, *A Place for Us*. It is the first novel from Sarah Jessica Parker's new imprint, SJP for Hogarth, published in 2018. The story follows the lives of three siblings from an affluent South Asian American family and is narrated from multiple viewpoints. Centered around a wedding in the U.S., the intergenerational struggle of children for finding a place in their own family and the homeland adopted by their parents is described through both perspectives. The novel also explores the impact

of 9/11 on the identities of its characters. It demonstrates the strategies used by each generation to negotiate their Muslim American processes of "being" and "becoming." It is one of the first novels that attempt to unravel the complexity of what it means to be a Muslim and an American of Indian origin in the contemporary era.

Novelists and playwrights from Pakistan are seen to dominate the category of South Asian Muslim American writing, partly because Islam is the majority religion in this part of South Asia and partly also because Pakistani Muslim American writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, most known for her novels *Cracking India* (1992) originally published as *Ice Candy Man* (1988), and *Water* (2006); and Sara Suleri, founding editor of the *Yale Journal of Criticism* (1989-2005) and author of *Meatless Days* (1989), have been well known globally since the 1980s. As discussed above, these authors write in English, but their themes are postcolonial in nature, dealing with the trauma of the Indo-Pakistan partition. One of the first writers to evoke the theme of Muslim American identity in the twenty-first century is Tahira Naqvi, whose collection of short stories *Dying in a Strange County* was published in 2001. Naqvi is an Associate Professor of Urdu at NYU and is most known for her prolific translations of the Indian Urdu writer Ismat Chugtai's works into English. Her aforementioned short story collection is one of the earliest literary depictions on the subject of South Asian Muslim American identity. It lays the foundation for understanding the impact of Islam as a significant identity-building block. It is heavily centered on the first-generation's experience in negotiating their processes of "being" and "becoming" hybrid Americans but also offers a brief opening into the future generation's identity dilemmas and attempts to answer questions such as what it means to raise Muslim children in the U.S. in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, as is discussed throughout this dissertation, 9/11 has marked a turning point in the lives of all Muslim Americans and among their South Asian counterparts, but the impact has been felt the most by the Pakistan American diaspora hence Islamophobia and Islam are at the core of any work produced by many of these literary artists.

In the group of second-generation Pakistani American writers, the most well-known is the playwright, novelist, and actor Ayad Akhtar born in New York in 1970 to a doctor couple. Educated at Brown (BA) and Columbia (MFA), A. Akhtar has penned four plays and two novels and has won several awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Disgraced* (2013). His latest novel *Homeland Elegies* (2020) was given the American Book award among other honors. Currently serving as the president of PEN America, A. Akhtar has extensively written from a second-generation perspective on the role of debt and its relationship with the American Dream and, by extension, American identity. He also writes on the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and his works contain a critique of Islam from both within and outside the Muslim community and the impact of 9/11 on the identity of South Asian Muslim Americans. His writing style blurs the lines between multiple genres and attempts to rationalize the Muslim debates in the U.S., driving it from the past of Islam's Golden Age into the practical realities of life for Muslims in the West today. A. Akhtar is joined by the California-born Wajahat Ali, an English major from UC Berkley, a licensed attorney, a social sciences researcher, a reporter for leading U.S. newspapers, a playwright, and a novelist. W. Ali wrote and produced the play *The Domestic Crusaders* in 2005, published in the Fall of 2010, about an upper-middle-class Muslim-American family of Pakistani origin that deals with the notion of the individual "self," the collective family, and societal constraints imposed by multiple cultures into the making of a South Asian Muslim American identity. In his memoir, *Go Back to Where You Came from: And Other Helpful Recommendations on How to Become American* (2022), he describes his experience growing up in the "margins of the American mainstream, devoid of Brown superheroes, where people like him

were portrayed as goofy sidekicks, shop owners with funny accents, sweaty terrorists, or aspiring sweaty terrorists" (W. Ali "Go back to where you came from, you terrorist"). W. Ali is not alone in his desire to "expand the American narrative to include protagonists who look like him" and who use their pen "to fill in missing narratives, challenge the powerful, and booby trap racist stereotypes" (W. Ali "Go back to where you came from, you terrorist"). The second-generation Pakistani American author and commentator Haroon Moghul's memoir *How to be a Muslim: An American Story* (2017) provides a historical insight into Islam's journey from seventh-century Arabia to twenty-first-century America. Moghul deals with the importance of having Muslim chaplains in American universities and highlights the stigma around mental health among South Asian Americans. His debut novel, *The Order of Light* (2008), follows the journey of a young Pakistani Muslim American student from the U.S. to Cairo to understand his faith in the setting of an Islamic country. Moghul investigates the age-old conflict between the East and West in the global context of late modernity and the impact of Islam on second-generation South Asian Muslim Americans.

Two other writers stand out in the list of contemporary authors from the twenty-first century: Syed M. Masood and Ali Eteraz. S.M. Masood is a first-generation Pakistani American born in Karachi but currently living in California. He has graduate degrees in Law and English literature. He writes predominantly about second-generation Muslim Americans, and two of his young adult fiction novels, *More than just a Pretty Face* (2020) and *Sway with Me* (2021), have been published by Little, Brown and Company. The same publishing house has also published many works by A. Akhtar. His most notable work is *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021) that provides a historical background to American occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the role of Pakistan in this global conflict. The novel depicts the physical and psychological journeys of "being" and "becoming" across three continents and multiple generations and cultures with characters from all three countries. The narrative also presents an intersectional view of life for affluent Muslim Americans and those with lesser financial means, including a look into Islam practiced by diverse Muslim denominations in the U.S. The story can be regarded as fractal in how it structurally alternates the voices of the characters: masculine versus feminine, first-generation versus second-generation, legal immigrant versus refugee, affluent versus poor. Furthermore, the female protagonist changes her nominal identity as she moves between countries signaling a fractal identity. Her present identity is constituted of fragments from her past that are impossible to discard despite changing her name. It offers a look into the trauma of displacement, making it a matter-of-fact way of living and survival, ultimately ending in a message of hope. As for Ali Eteraz, he was born in Pakistan and has lived in the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean, currently residing in the U.S. He is a lawyer by profession and a writer by choice, most known for his memoir *Children of Dust,* published in 2011 by HarperCollins. Like Moghul and S.M. Masood, Eteraz also provides a historical background on Islam's trajectory, particularly from Pakistan to America. The memoir is constructed circularly, divided into five books, where each book constitutes an essential fragment of the author's fractal identity. Patterns are repeated unconsciously and what would be customarily dismissed as irregularities on the surface reveal multiple self-similar replicas of the constituent identities forming the writer's present-day Muslim American identity. Eteraz's debut novel *Native Believer,* published in 2016, tells the story of a second-generation immigrant in the backdrop of 9/11 who wants to raise his children as full-fledged Americans. Confronted with existential degradation and fed-up with being treated as a second-class citizen, the novel depicts the everyday experience for Muslim Americans and their struggle for shaping identity and forging belonging at all costs.

The female perspective is also well represented in literary narratives by contemporary Pakistani American women writers. Nafisa Haji, a second-generation Indo-Pak American, is a graduate of American History from UC Berkeley. Her novel *The Writing on my Forehead* (2010) is a transnational and transcultural tale of two sisters coming to terms with life and death in a post 9/11 U.S. The novel deals with the theme of the Indo-Pakistan partition, albeit from the perspective of what it means for the second-generation South Asian Muslim Americans. The intergenerational tale spanning three generations narrates parallel stories, each emphasizing the burdens of past legacy on the characters' "being" and the dilemmas of their future "becoming" while exposing multiple journalistic viewpoints about the September 11 attacks. Sehba Sarwar is a first-generation Pakistani American born in Karachi but educated in Texas. She is the co-founder and co-director of Voices Breaking Boundaries[18], a non-profit multi-media arts organization that aims to create social change through art. Her novel *Black Wings* (2004) provides an account of rural Pakistan as deftly as it portrays life for a migrant family in America. This is an intergenerational tale, written in the form of chapters alternating between the perspective of the visiting Pakistani grandmother who represents the ancestral homeland and the American mother who represents the adopted homeland, connecting the children's past, present, and future. The narrative style is almost fractal because it juxtaposes the views of two generations only to realize how deeply connected they are and how one influences the other. Like Naqvi, Sarwar's is also predominantly a first-generation perspective that does not focus on the 9/11 events but helps us understand life in post-partition Pakistan and how it alters the life of future generations in twentieth-century America and beyond. Several other works by notable women writers like the Chicago-based Asma Gull Hasan's critical analysis of American Muslims with biographical elements in *Red, White, and Muslim: My Story of Belief* (2009), Washington-based Maliha Masood's travel memoirs *Zaatar Days, Henna Nights* (2007) and *Dizzy in Karachi* (2013), the comic book editor and co-creator of the first Muslim American female comic character, Sana Amanat's *Ms. Marvel* (2014) series, and Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2010) have also contributed to the field of South Asian Muslim American literature.

There are fewer Bangladeshi American writers than Pakistani and even Indian American writers. One of them is Rumaan Alam, who grew up in an upper-middle-class Bangladeshi American family in an affluent suburb of Washington D.C. and writes exclusively about the mainstream non-South Asian American experience, which sets him apart from other diasporic writers. In 1997 when *The New Yorker* published a special fiction issue dedicated to Indian writers, Alam decided he did not want to be niche because "it underscored the way in which an Establishment that judges what fiction is will always append that modifier," and instead he wanted to succeed at a game he did not devise but whose rules he was able to read and internalize" (Shapiro 2020, "Delusions of Whiteness"). His latest novel, *Leave the World Behind* (2020), a finalist for the National Book Award in the U.S., will be adapted into a film by Netflix[19]. In the list of other diasporic writers, Tanwi Nandini Islam is a second-generation Bangladeshi American writer and founder of a Brooklyn-based perfume company called Tanaïs. She was born in Illinois and raised in different parts of the U.S., including the Midwest and South. With a background in social justice and an MFA, her debut novel *Bright Lines* published in 2015, was named a finalist for the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, shortlisted for the Brooklyn Eagles Literary Prize, and the Edmund White Award for debut fiction. The novel is set in 2003 Brooklyn with references to the area in

[18] For more details, see https://www.vbbarts.org.

[19] For more details, see https://deadline.com/2020/07/netflix-julia-roberts-denzel-washington-sam-esmail-leave-the-world-behind-auction-rumaan-alam-novel-1202989464/.

the nineties and explores a cross-section of diverse lives and narratives from this borough of New York. In a way, each character in the novel is searching for a home, in the literal and the figurative sense. The narrative also explores queerness and surprises the reader by not attaching the usual religious prejudices associated with sexuality. It is an example of a transcontinental and transgenerational narrative written from the particular to the universal. It explores the journeys of all the people living in an American urban neighborhood from all types of economic backgrounds, not just the lives of its Muslim protagonists. The themes covered in Islam's novel also set her apart from other diasporic writers because they do not exclusively contain Muslim American characters but figures from the entire cross-section of American immigrants. Nevertheless, Islam provides a detailed historical and political background on the making of Bangladesh and its subsequent independence from Pakistan. We also have Dilruba Ahmed, a second-generation Bangladeshi American poet who has won several awards and whose works have been published in several prestigious American journals and anthologies[20]. She represents the duality of her experiences in Bangladesh and America that are hard to categorize. She portrays the difficulties of being Muslim and American in the twenty-first century. Like A.S. Ali, D. Ahmed has also written many English ghazals that are included in her poetry collections, elucidating both transcultural and fractal aspects of belonging and identity in the contemporary era. If A.S. Ali's is a male perspective on longing for the forgotten homeland, then D. Ahmed's is a feminine perspective on religion's impact and consequences on the processes of "being" and "becoming" in the adopted homeland. Other Bangladeshi American authors like the writer and professor Sharbari Zohra Ahmed's collection of short stories *The Ocean of Mrs. Nagai* (2013) depicts the life of Bangladeshi American characters from Hell's Kitchen in New York City, and like Islam, S.Z. Ahmed's debut novel *Dust Under Her Feet* (2019) provides a historical background on Bangladesh during World War II. Incidentally, S.Z. Ahmed is also one of the writers for ABC's thriller drama *Quantico* starring Priyanka Chopra, an Indian American actress in the lead role. The latest to join the list of diasporic authors among Bangladeshi Americans is the young fiction writer Tashie Bhuiyan[21], whose debut novel *Counting Down with You* (2021) and the upcoming novel *A Show for Two* (2002), both published by Inkyard Press at HarperCollins are based in New York, narrate the lives of Bangladeshi teenagers that readers from similar backgrounds can identify with. Reviewing Bhuiyan's debut novel, Monamee sums up the experience of all South Asian American readers when she observes that the novel:

> was like a mirror to my soul. For the first time, I felt seen as a reader and could relate to the things the protagonist was feeling. From the rich descriptions of Bangladeshi food to small things like the Muslim intonations in the protagonist's speech, all of it made me feel like the story was for once about me. (2021 "The teenage life of a Bangladeshi-American")

As mentioned before, there are no Muslim American writers from other South Asian countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka who have published literary works in the U.S., partially because apart from Sri Lanka, all countries are predominantly Hindu or Buddhist. Among the non-Muslims, there are some Sri Lankan American literary writers, such as the first-generation poet-diplomat, essayist, and multilingual figure Indran Amirthanayagam[22], who writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole, and whose poems have been published in leading American reviews. His poetry collection *The Elephants of Reckoning* (1993) won the Paterson Poetry prize in 1994. *The New York Times* best-selling author of historical

[20] For a brief biography and notable works, see https://www.pw.org/directory/writers/dilruba_ahmed.
[21] For a brief biography and notable works, see https://www.tashiebhuiyan.com.
[22] For a brief biography and notable works, see https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/indran-amirthanayagam.

romance novels, Rosemary Rogers, is Sri Lankan American. There is also Mary Anne Mohanraj, a Sri Lankan American writer, editor, and academician, currently teaching in the English department at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who writes on cultural identity and sexuality and is the co-founder of the speculative fiction magazine *Strange Horizons*. We also have Sunil Yapa[23], the biracial second-generation Sri Lankan American author, whose debut novel *Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist* (2016) centered around the events of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, has won several awards and recommendations from leading American top-selling lists. To sum up, in the words of Srikanth (2006), given the growing influence of South Asians in America's economic, cultural, and sociopolitical landscapes, an ambitious goal of American writers tracing their roots to the subcontinent is to reassert their presence and re-represent their identities themselves:

> Consider whether there would be any circumstances under which an individual in the United States would train him/herself to take on a South Asian or South Asian American persona. It seems unlikely, given the reality that there is no pressing need to do so. So it falls to South Asian American literature to supply the narratives and images that are compelling enough to make readers in the United States aware of the gaps in their consciousness, and intriguing enough to move them to fill these gaps by reading with care and living with vision. (33)

In the remaining chapters of Part One of the dissertation, two novels, and one memoir have been analyzed to discuss the literary representations of South Asian Muslim Americanness and belonging; debt, race, and social structuration in late modernity; identity as epistemo-ontology and the usefulness of ethnoconvergence for interfaith dialog; and the integration of South Asian Muslim Americans across temporal and spatial boundaries.

[23] For a brief biography and notable works, see http://sunilyapa.com.

1.3 Depictions of South Asian Muslim Americanness, Belonging, Debt, and Race in Ayad Akhtar's *Homeland Elegies*

> I wouldn't see it until our private lives had consumed the public space, then been codified, foreclosed, and put up for auction; until the devices that enslave our minds had filled us with the toxic flotsam of a culture no longer worthy of the name; until the bright pliancy of human sentience—attention itself—had become the world's most prized commodity, the very movements of our minds transformed into streams of unceasing revenue for someone, somewhere.
>
> Ayad Akhtar, *Homeland Elegies*

Ayad Akhtar's latest novel, *Homeland Elegies* (*HE*), published in 2020, is partly autobiographical and partly fictional, blurring the lines between literary genres, just like the hybrid identities of today's diasporic individuals who inhabit multiple homelands. It reflects the state of political and economic affairs in the U.S. in the last fifty years from the viewpoint of a second-generation South Asian Muslim American. The novel raises important questions about race, belonging, intergenerational struggles, debt, Islamophobia, and the meaning of the American dream for racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups. It is neither entirely autobiographical, nor autofiction, neither pure fiction nor pure reality. Inspired by Philip Roth's writing style, A. Akhtar has deliberately chosen to insert himself into the storyline and characters based on his first-generation American parents and several other non-Asian characters, ranging from Donald Trump to Black republicans. The literary form resembles a symphony leading to a new kind of writing style for the genre of novels, just like there is a shift in the definition of what constitutes the American dream for the non-white naturalized citizens. A. Akhtar is unequivocally claiming his place in the American literary canon and writes from the perspective of the "non-other" American. The overture is a lament on the state of affairs in the author's native soil, America. The three acts are written from the perspective of belonging, debt, and race in America. The coda describes what has become of the American dream and whose dream it is today. As Wang (2017) offers:

> The "other" has gained a voice, but only continuously explaining, qualifying, and making sense of itself. The dense hermeneutics of context-explaining takes up much of the space necessary for the real dialogue required by any ambitiously speculative and interdisciplinary artistic practices operating outside the Euro-American epistemological comfort zone. More insidious is the continued prevalence of self-exoticizing art practices with built-in, bite-size, self-explanatory mechanisms. (7)

An alumnus of Brown and Columbia universities in the U.S. and currently serving as the president of PEN America, A. Akhtar is an American playwright, novelist, and screenwriter who came into the limelight when he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013 for his play *Disgraced*. He was born in Staten Island, New York City, where his parents moved in the seventies, but was raised in Milwaukee. His writing is informed by his own experience growing up as a Muslim American and is heavily influenced by the Jewish American immigrant journey. His plays and novels incorporate a critique of the current state of Islam from the point of view of religion and religiosity, both within and outside the Muslim community. There is also an overt presence of money, more specifically debt, and its relationship to the American dream for immigrants as a recurring theme in his works. *The Economist* (2015) has reported that his literary works "are as essential today as the work of Saul Bellow, James Farrell, and Vladimir Nabokov were in the 20th

century in capturing the drama of the immigrant experience." A. Akhtar has explained in an in-depth interview with Cathy Park Hong (2020), the renowned Korean American poet, that his writing is not primarily about the discrimination faced by Muslims in America but about Muslims as American citizens seeking equal opportunities. He writes from a "particular" to a "universal," and *HE* is a provocative book rather than a coming-of-age novel that raises important questions about the oppositional forces at play in the late capitalism era that goes beyond racial injustice. The novel is written in a live-reality television-show style form that constantly keeps the reader on the edge as they scroll through the narrative in an Instagram-style story format. A. Akhtar reflects on "Homeland" in its three different nuances, the land considered as home by first-generation Americans, the multiple homelands inhabited by his own generation, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security created in response to the 9/11 attacks, which changed the lives of Muslim Americans drastically in every sphere of American society. Through the voice of various characters, A. Akhtar attempts to explain why immigration and Islam are not the problems plaguing the American economy. For one such character, Riaz Rind, "[t]he current of anger growing across the world has nothing to do with immigration, he believed but was all about the System that debt had created, an inescapable, asymmetrical, transnational force" (*HE* 154). In this chapter, I analyze the identarian process from the viewpoints of belonging across borders for Muslim Americans, the meaning of the American dream fueled by the economic status that has resulted in plunder and pillage of the homeland, and the place of Islam in twenty-first-century America.

Globalization, on the one hand, has resulted in the shrinking of borders. On the other hand, it has turned the cosmopolitan centers of political and economic powers into a permanent borderland, rife with conflicts over claims to nation, identity, and belonging. "Thus, while globalization's open markets facilitate the exchange of goods and information and stimulate the movement of people to new places, its closed borders restrict human mobility through intensified policing of reinforced geopolitical boundaries" (Mendez and Naples 2015:6). In the case of second-generation descendants of naturalized citizens, there is an increased assertion of rights and a demand for accountability from the State concerning their place and status in the country of their birth. Having been born and raised in the U.S., the children of immigrants embrace Western education systems and lifestyles. With more similarities than differences with the mainstream population, their cultural identity differs in many ways from their first-generation parents. With an immigration history of almost four generations, the South Asian American Diaspora can be regarded as "American" as their Caucasian and Black counterparts. However, despite the significant contributions of diasporic individuals to the socioeconomic spheres, we see that governments in the Global North are imposing stricter border controls on their citizens whose heritage culture is Islamic. "Citizenship becomes, in the Foucauldian sense, a technology of government to regulate the very rights, access and ability to be and become mobile within an increasingly global and neoliberal economy" (Rygiel 2014:142).

Although the U.S. has been a country of immigrants, through its different waves of European settlements, it is still considered a young nation-state where migration is a continuous reality in people's lives. While the physical border in the U.S. is constantly under political and economic pressure, the ability of its naturalized citizens to easily move between multiple homelands renders the psychological conception of the border as ever-shifting and permeable. "Borders are multidimensional phenomena, with intricate complexities that reflect the deeper nature of the relations between the states that they divide" (Hart 2011:333). In a culturally complex country such as the U.S., any attempt at a homogeneous American identity is futile, and using

historical approaches to assimilation will result in a complete failure for its non-Caucasian citizens. A. Akhtar draws attention to the myth of assimilation in the U.S. and questions the legitimacy of the melting pot. He claims it is impossible to think about a singular American culture when its citizens today are made to question their roots every day because they are not from the right place, don't have the right skin color, and who dare to look at the same things in entirely different ways. "They call it a melting pot, but it's not. In chemistry, they have a buffer solution—which keeps things together but always separated. That's what this country is. A buffer solution" (*HE* 319-320).

A. Akhtar offers a detailed commentary on the problem facing the U.S. today through diverse characters like Riaz Rind, a second-generation Muslim American democrat of Pakistani origin, and Mike Jacobs, a black libertarian Republican who grew up in Alabama. He draws a parallel between what has historically happened with Blacks and what is happening with Muslims today. A. Akhtar comments that before 9/11, Americans did not know where he and his family came from, but after that fateful Tuesday, the only place they could have come from was somewhere bad. The discrimination of Blacks was not purely racial but also economical. In the post-civil rights movement era, White Americans "saw the rising tide of racial diversity and its economic and political consequences; they were plotting their response—a reassertion of white property rights, an accumulation of power in corporate hands to ensure that whites remained in charge" (*HE* 238). A. Akhtar then infers that immigration is less of a threat to political and economic stability in the U.S., and he offers a historical perspective on how the lust for money has replaced the pursuit for happiness, and that big structural changes are needed for the American dream to succeed. Through Riaz's story, A. Akhtar draws our attention to the fact that the global issues facing the world today have nothing to do with immigration but more to do with the system of debt created by late capitalism. "For what grew now were not communities or economies but capital itself—and debt was the means, which meant it was also, now, the dominant cultural logic" (*HE* 154). Migration specialists argue that with so much racial and religious diversity, policies that give agency to citizens in reforming societal processes and structures without segregation in terms of race alone can help move from a multicultural to a transcultural society. Such policies advocate for the active and inclusive role of all cultural groups "in creating ever-new social expressions and structures; they study processual structures and structured processes as well as caesura, conflicts, and clashes" (Hoerder 2011:40).

The field of border studies today aims at promoting a cultural politics of diversity and inclusion; however, "this work literally can be produced only by means of— can be founded only upon — exclusions" (Johnson and Michaelsen 1997:4). In the post-industrial U.S. crumbling under the burden of debt, race needs to be decoupled from class, and there is merit in viewing intergroup inequalities from the perspective of stratification economics. Economists like Darity, Hamilton, and Stewart (2005, 2010, 2015) argue that differences in human capital do not impact financial prosperity and cannot be used to explain the disparities in competitive market economies. These authors question the traditional American dream and the status of America as a land of opportunities where monetary gains are possible irrespective of the financial position of one's family. Historically, minority groups in the U.S. have been at a disadvantage because their parents and grandparents do not have the same resources as those from the white classes, resulting in marked differences in wealth accumulation for people from non-white backgrounds. Riaz desires to become a billionaire and characterizes himself as a merchant of debt. But he is fully aware of his disadvantage amidst the structural disparities for minorities in the U.S. He argues that Capitalism in the West is based on the protection of assets from being redistributed after the

owner's death, resulting in a banking system of almost five hundred years of accrued capital. Islamic finance is based on inheritance law that requires the disbursement of wealth to the immediate family after the owner's death. By using this historical logic, Riaz wants to get the message out: "[t]hat's why we're behind. Because Muslim laws were trying to take care of wives and children! We're behind because we cared more about what happened to people than money" (*HE* 145). With nearly seven million Muslims living in the U.S. today, scholars argue that it is in America's interest to better understand and appreciate its Muslim immigrants, if not for the sake of its founding principles and humanity, but for the balancing the global flow of power between its Muslim citizens and their multiple homelands (A. Ahmed 2010).

A. Akhtar uses the character of Mike Jacobs to provide a detailed account of Robert Bork, an American judge, legal scholar, and government official in Reagan's administration, whose ideas and anti-trust regulations favoring the corporate sector over the ordinary citizens, have fundamentally changed American economy and society. "Bork had educated and promoted a generation of disciples who shaped opinion from the bench, on the nation's business pages, and in America's boardrooms" (*HE* 236). A. Akhtar infers that the dominant metric of the common good in the U.S. today is defined by the lowest price to the customer. There are no checks on the abuse of power by corporations when they cut costs affecting local suppliers and cut jobs affecting local populations, as this is done to pass on the savings to the consumers. A. Akhtar reasserts that the recent financial crisis and the resultant rise in suicide, drugs, depression, and anger have more to do with the systemic economic deficiencies and less to do with rising immigrant numbers.

> The market had seeped into our language; we sought upside and minimized our exposure and worried about the best investment of our sweat equity. Even suffrage was monetized, true political power lying not in the ballot box but in one's capacity to write a check. We were now customers first and foremost, not citizens, and to buy was our privileged act. (*HE* 240)

Economists and sociologists further argue that social policies in terms of property rights and access to public funds have been discriminatory, and instead of looking for cultural explanations for such disparities, Darity (2009) proposes that we turn towards structural stratification. Hamilton (2017) argues that in the U.S., both democrats and republicans have attributed racial disparity in income to joint dysfunction fully ignoring the deeply embedded structural inequalities. There is a need for transformative policies that address race-based economic inequality at the grassroots level to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups are not left behind. A. Akhtar argues that "American prosperity is believed to be the great equalizer. Riaz is in pursuit of his first billion dollars because if he can become part of the minority of the best that he will then finally be an American" (2020:00:25:57). Through Mike's perspective, A. Akhtar highlights the increasing role of consumerism that is causing more harm to the American hinterland and eroding the social fabric of the U.S., so much so that "there isn't any abiding sense of loyalty to a collective. There is the abiding sense of loyalty to oneself and fulfilling the American Dream. That becomes the ideological signifier for a whole bunch of other stuff" (2020:00:35:05).

In *HE*, both Mike and Riaz are using their wealth to help their own kind, and if this continues, perhaps they will usher in a new era of empowerment for the minorities. Mike Jacobs, a Black American, is a renowned republican Hollywood agent who believes that Obama has been a terrible advocate for Blacks in the U.S. Like Riaz, Mike donates a significant amount of money to black causes taking advantage of the Republican policies like saving taxes, self-reliance and learning to fend for oneself. Mike believes that whites will not change the country for Blacks and that Blacks must do that themselves. Mike's perspective is not about race, but colonial pillage,

where the country has been plundering itself and individuals have treated America not as a homeland but as a place to make their fortunes. And where the consumer getting the lowest price seems to come to stand in for some sort of social covenant above all. This new mercantile order was set into motion in the 80s, and the damage was "not just to the black community but also to the very notion of American community itself" (*HE* 240). The obsession of the American economy with the manufacture of debt, which in turn is a great enabler of capital, is "the surest means to, yes, indenture the vast hordes of the lower and middle class (and the nation's youth) to the process of money's growth" (*HE* 153) irrespective of their race. Therefore, A. Akhtar believes that "the real issues are fundamentally economic and that the systemic problems are more existential than racial. The economic problems are not specific to a group of people but to the species" (2020:00:28:18). According to the latest U.S. immigration trends (Budiman 2020), it is predicted that immigrants of color will be the majority population in the U.S. by 2050. A. Akhtar thus argues that "if we are going to continue living in this neoliberal system, then it doesn't matter if this country is white or majority black or majority brown or majority anything" (2020:00:27:59). He contends that capitalism is a system that benefits anybody who aligns themselves with that system irrespective of race. He is convinced that solely pursuing racial justice over these fundamental economic issues without giving as much importance to the economic questions is ultimately not going to serve us well. In *HE*, reflecting on the movie *It's A Wonderful Afterlife*, A. Akhtar's character, Ayad, wonders if the American dream is in the accumulation of cash in a world thriving on debt. He believes that if someone cannot see this picture, then they're in denial and deliberately choose not to see it.

The arguments put forward by the economists above are primarily in the context of Black Americans. Still, they are equally applicable to all minorities residing in the U.S. for a few generations. In the traditional sense, the denomination of South Asian Muslim American does not constitute a race per se but given the growing hostility towards Muslims in the U.S. post 9/11 and the political debates surrounding their secularism, citizenship, and political beliefs, "Islam" and "Muslims" from all countries have been globally racialized into a monolithic "Other" in opposition to the West (Hammer 2018). "Islam is not a race, except when it is. Islamophobia is like racism because Islam functions, for the Islamophobe, like race does for the racist – but for many Muslims too, Islam functions like a kind of race" (Moghul 2017:30). Further, considering the recent image of Islam globally, the feminist critiques of the headscarf, the discrimination against their Muslim citizens by the Trump administration, the question of Islam's compatibility with Eurocentric values and traditions have been raised by many critics. While there is much scholarly debate on the "racialization" of Islam globally (Foner 2015, Considine 2017, Froio 2018), in the context of American Muslims, this racialization poses two problems: first, those existing theories do not account for the ethnic diversity of Muslim Americans, and second, those existing approaches are top-down in nature ignoring the racial ambiguities and strategies used by Muslims in their relationships with other Muslims of color as well as Whites (Guhin 2018). Even among South Asian American Muslims, particularly the Pakistani Diaspora, there is so much diversity that the approaches of various ethnic groups in resisting the hegemonic identity narratives and the response to their marginalization differ widely (Considine 2019). Consequently, for us to understand the dimensions of belonging in the U.S., it is essential to understand the racial, religious, and civic dimensions of Islamophobia and the strategies used by diasporic individuals to manifest their American identity. As Gerteis et al. (2020) contend:

> [i]t is thus important to understand anti-Muslim sentiment not simply as a religious or even racial form of prejudice, but as part of a discourse of national belonging in which religion and racial distinctions are intertwined with understandings of civic life, American identity, and the assumed cultural bases of citizenship. (740)

In *HE*, Riaz is a Pakistani American whose parents had immigrated to the U.S. during the post-1965 immigration reforms period. His family initially settled in Philadelphia and later moved to Pennsylvania. He grew up in a town where his family was discriminated against because of their religion even before 9/11. On leaving the ancestral homeland, for Riaz's father, Aftab, religion was a replacement for homesickness. He made several attempts to find a place to build a mosque to gather the growing Muslim community in the region. Although they succeeded in building a mosque, violent clashes between the local population resulted in the mosque being vandalized and eventually closed. This was in the 1980s during the height of the Iranian American crisis, and Islam's image had already started to become negative. Despite filing police reports, nothing was done. Following a year of harassment, Riaz's sister attempted to commit suicide and was admitted to the hospital. Aftab was humiliated by the local police, who thought it was a case of honor killing, which had nothing to do with the actual discrimination faced by her daughter. Aftab later submitted a proposal to build another mosque, which the city council disapproved. "They jeered and chanted against Iran, though of course Iran had nothing to do with any of it. Aftab wasn't even from Iran, he tried to explain when it was his turn to speak" (*HE* 161). This further extends the argument of how the actions of any one Islamic country are singularly attributed to everyone practicing the religion. A. Ahmed (2010) argues that,

> [o]f all the immigrant communities in the United States, the Muslim one poses the greatest challenge to American identity. American pluralism, which had initially attracted Muslims to this country, now treats them with distaste and indifference. The cultural role of women and Muslim commitment to democracy, progress, and peace are all under scrutiny. Mostly non-white and entirely non-Christian, Muslim immigrants cannot be part of American primordial identity; and because immigrant Muslims were identified with the terrorists of 9/11, they have become the magnet for negative attention from American predator identity. (301-302)

This was well before 9/11, but the sentiments prevalent before and after the most significant event that changed the course of Islam in America remain the same. In *HE, there were a series of misfortunate events for the Rind family* that led to economic instability and emotional distress when Riaz's father lost his job, and his sister attempted suicide again and died. Riaz confesses, "'[y]ou can probably understand why I wanted a life for myself where I was never at anyone's mercy,' he said. 'And I mean never'" (*HE* 161). Riaz becomes a successful businessperson in hedge funds, and one of his commercial ventures, Timur Capital is into debt-based investments. He also runs a philanthropic trust to change conversations about Islam and improve Muslim lives in America. A. Akhtar draws a parallel between the Zionist Sheldon Adelson and his strong advocacy for Jewish causes and Riaz's mission to change the plight of Muslims in the U.S. "Like Adelson, Riaz wants to shape not only the nation's policy but also its governing personnel, which is the only way he thinks we, Muslims, will ever truly be welcome here" (*HE* 122). While Riaz exploits the capitalist system to make money, he also remains true to his Muslim heritage by redistributing the profits to charitable organizations instead of accumulating them. Post 9/11, Riaz plotted his revenge against the municipalities of towns that blocked mosques from being built in their communities by getting them to purchase rent-backed securities in Goldman Sachs style deception, which resulted in

enormous losses for the public bodies since the securities were shorted. Those civil authorities fell prey to the system's indentured servitude fueled by the debt economy and have no way to blame Riaz. Riaz uses the profits to fund projects and causes to improve the lives of Muslim Americans.

In the novel, A. Akhtar's fictional character Ayad is also a playwright and author, as the real-life Ayad Akhtar. Riaz invites Ayad to the committee of his philanthropic organization and persuades him to write about the condition of American Muslims and, in a way, influence the popular opinion. Throughout their interactions and in other episodes in the novel, we see an attempt to shift the focus from the Arab version of Islam towards a South Asian interpretation. Historically, Islamic organizations in the U.S. were started by the wave of Arab immigrants in the 1970s and oscillated between modernist and literalist versions of Islam (A. Ahmed 2010). This is beginning to change as more South Asian Muslim Americans come to the forefront in every sphere of American society, leading various Islamic organizations and non-religious organizations, thereby demonstrating an ability to persuade and influence public opinion and policymaking. As A. Ahmed (2010) elaborates further:

> The dynamic between Arabs and South Asians in the Islamic organizations reflected the realities of the Muslim world. The Quran was in Arabic, the Prophet was Arab, and the Arabs had oil and therefore money. The South Asians, committed to Islam and ambitious to be its leaders, nonetheless accepted a role, even if reluctantly, as lieutenants to the Arab captains, who thus retained control over the direction and strategy for the ummah. Even the physical attacks on the West—leading up dramatically to 9/11—were led by Arabs, but it was not long before the center of gravity shifted and South Asians entered the fray. (270)

In *HE*, Riaz has funded a focus group-based study to find out the American perception of Islam. He reveals that on an unconscious level, the top five words associated by Americans with Islam were death, anger, separate, suicide, and bad. There is no silver lining in the case of how Americans view Islam, but this is precisely what Riaz has set out to change. Riaz refers to the quote by the sociologist Norbet Elias "[t]he established majority takes its we-image from a minority of its best, and shapes a they-image of the despised outsiders from the minority of their worst" (*HE* 139). For Riaz, then, the only way to truly become American is to become rich. America as a land of freedom and opportunity is a mythical reality that is only true if you're from the right race and have the right kind of money. Riaz echoes this sentiment that "[i]n this country, the white majority is basically blind to the worst in themselves. They see themselves in the image of their best, and they see us in the image of our worst" (*HE* 139-140). He believes that the only way to lay claim to the American identity is to own what White Americans think they see in Muslims and then turn that perception right back at them, reflecting the true source of the problem.

Furthermore, in *HE*, Ayad concurs that post 9/11, Muslims are not welcome in their own homeland, and they're constantly confronted with a culture that does not want them. But the prevalent postcolonial discourse has led them to obsess with what Americans really think about Muslims rather than what Muslims think about themselves. More amount of time is being spent on correcting the West's perception of Islam rather than reflecting on how to forge an authentic identity in postmodern America, where Islam has a meaningful role in the lives of children of immigrants that have moved to the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century. "Having parents who wanted to work within the American system but still guarded their heritage jealously and drummed its importance into the heads of their children, many of this new generation are caught between past and present, between here and there" (A. Ahmed 2020:292). In *HE*, Ayad is from that generation of Americans who want to break away from the "orientalist" conceptualization of "otherness" in the context of Islam. In critiquing Edward Said, Ayad argues that "[c]onstantly defining yourself in opposition to what others say about you is not self-

knowledge. It's confusion" (*HE* 141). Like Ayad, Riaz also does not want to make the same mistakes as his parents, who were outsiders because they came from somewhere else. But Riaz was born in America, and unlike his father, who thinks he's American, but in reality, he is still doing everything that is needed to become American, Riaz is American from the day he was born. Riaz also highlights that his generation is not that different from his parent's generation when it comes to making money. "We do the same thing they do: we make ourselves out to be better than we are. And what really doesn't help is how we end up using their contempt as an excuse to avoid our own failings" (*HE* 142). Consequently, Riaz does not cling to the past, and his approach is to do what the white majority does and lay claim to the American dream by shoving the best of the minority down the majority's throat. There is no point in obsessing over what Americans think about Muslims because like all immigrants, Muslims too have come to the U.S. to pursue a better future. So, for Riaz, mastering the rules of the game to achieve financial success should be more important for Muslims instead of constantly complaining about the golden age of Islam. He believes that capitalism doesn't have a moral conscience and that this is not going to change. "But to 'make a real mark'—he would say—you needed to understand what everyone was up against; there was no excuse for anything less than all the clarity you could muster about the world as it truly was" (*HE* 155).

In conclusion, A. Akhtar laments that today the American dream is associated with the regime that supports and promotes consumerism as the most essential way of life. "America had begun as a colony and that a colony it remained that is, a place still defined by its plunder, where enrichment was paramount and civil order always an afterthought" (*HE* "Overture"). Americans have not only pillaged and plundered their own country but the entire world. The first-generation immigrants called America the land of opportunity. Still, the second-generation offspring questions what that opportunity really means in defining who they really are as Muslim Americans instead of the Lacanian maxim of desire is the desire of the other in what they want to become. In studies conducted by A. Ahmed (2007, 2010), it has become clear that despite living in Western society, all generations of Muslim immigrants in the U.S. do not want to separate religion from their core identity. They are willing to shed their heritage homeland as their primary identity signifier and are forging a new type of identity as American Muslims, claiming their homeland in the U.S. The underlying financial problems plaguing America affect people from all races, ethnicities, and religions, and "the current crisis is nothing short of a challenge to the very identity of humankind as a caring and thinking species" (A. Ahmed 2007:244). In *HE*, if Riaz has become the merchant of debt, representing the materialistic side of the identarian process, then Ayad brings us face-to-face with the most profound dimension of the American dilemma facing today's American Muslims, representing the humanist side of the ontological journey.

1.4 Structuration, Epistemo-ontology, and Ethnoconvergence in the Context of South Asian Muslim Americans in Haroon Moghul's *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*

> Before, the gaze of an omniscient God compelled me. Thereafter, the omnipresent eyes of a surveillance state would not leave me be. There would be nowhere we could go where we would not be asked to apologize. Many like me would come to regret wasting the time when we could have chosen to be different people.
>
> Haroon Moghul, *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story*

A second-generation Pakistani-American writer and commentator on Islam and interfaith dialog, Haroon Moghul was born in the U.S. to a Punjabi father from Pakistan and a Punjabi mother from India, both doctors, who moved to New England in the 1970s. Raised in a family where religious identity was given even more importance than his parents' heritage identity and growing up in a small town in America where he was the only person of color, Moghul has had to deal with difference and discrimination all his life. He has constantly struggled with his faith and has had moments of self-doubt, leading him to question his belief in religion. He came into the spotlight following the 9/11 events, when he led the New York University's Islamic Center, and since then has also been a regular speaker at events on Islam across the U.S. From being a non-believer to mechanically practicing religion, to truly achieving self-realization, *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story (HTBAM)* is a memoir of Moghul's attempt to negotiate the various layers of his identity. Dealing with dual discrimination, first because of their brownness and second because of their religion, Moghul places Islam followed by South Asians within the context of the American reality. Moghul's memoir is an important contribution to the diaspora literature and offers an insight into their relationship with Islam in forging a hybrid American identity. An identity that transcends the fourteen-hundred years of temporal distance and the fourteen thousand miles of spatial separation resulting from a combination of institutionalized action and routinization. The knowledge about Islam and the actions of its practice are seldom explained by first-generation immigrants to their offspring born in the U.S. For the children, who already find it hard to come to terms with their multiple identities, the practical consciousness resulting from the knowledgeability passed on by the parents is constantly challenged as they begin to come of age. The lack of rational and logical explanation of the actions and rituals associated with Islam leads to a diminished discursive consciousness. In this chapter, I employ certain aspects of structuration theory from the social sciences to perform an epistemo-ontological[24] reading of Moghul's memoir and combine it with the concept of ethnoconvergence to highlight the structural changes required for the social integration of Muslim Americans to overcome the prevalent Islamophobia in the U.S.

Moghul's memoir opens with the impact that 9/11 has had on him and as well as on Muslim Americans. Instead of defending the cultural practices of Islam that do not fit well in the U.S., Moghul chooses to first understand the meaning of faith himself by detaching it from his received version of predetermined rules. He then uses this knowledge to promote cultural understanding

[24] Concept borrowed from New Materialism and Systems Research. The idea is to extend the concept to analyzing hybrid identities in diasporic individuals to account for the recursiveness, emergence, self-organization, and complexity in the transition zones between the various strata of their identarian development. For more information on the original concept, see Geerts (2016) and Tunç (2016).

and interfaith dialog by separating Islam's political, cultural, and religious aspects, tracing back its history across the world, and then placing it in the American context. Once he has deciphered what faith means for him, he acknowledges that it is impossible to separate it from his American identity. He declares, "[i]n just over a decade, I'd gone from an inelegant twenty-one-year-old, compelled by an act of terror to enter a public spotlight he was terrified by, to a man sure-footedly navigating a privileged world of pundits, politicos, policymakers" (*HTBAM* 1). In late modern societies, the rapport between structure and agency is no longer a one-way force, but both are interdependent actors in identity formation. Structuration is a widely studied theoretical construct from sociology, which helps redefine the relationship between the agency of human beings and the societal structure. As societies become increasingly diverse, material and cultural aspects of people's lives no longer conform to the established norms and values of the hitherto dominant structures. However, as a child of immigrants but born and raised in the U.S., Western education becomes a starting point for Moghul to deconstruct his heritage: to view the Quran and the teachings of the prophet from a non-Arabian perspective. He narrates that, "[t]hrough the philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, I'd seek to better understand non-Western modernity; framed by thinkers like Koselleck, Foucault, and Chakrabarty, I'd explore how spatiality and temporality functioned in an Indo-Islamic contemporaneity" (*HTBAM* 1-2). Moghul presents this argument through a new historicism approach by providing an account of the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. He argues that through its global expansion between 650 to 1650 AD, Islam has adapted and adopted local cultural practices, indicating a feedback-feedforward approach rather than the misconception propagated by the current political and popular ideologies that still consider Islam to be a pre-modern religion.

In this context, it should be noted that through his conceptualization of the habitus, Bourdieu has posited the dialectical relationship between internalizing the external and externalizing the internal, as external societal structures are incorporated within the "habitus," and the exchanges between actors are externalized by the actions of the agent into social relationships.

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu 1990:53)

As Moghul explains, "[i]n Islam, death is not the end. Our expiration is our transition from this circumscribed world to a far more elaborate and enduring plane, grander or graver than the life we know now" (*HTBAM*, 8-9). The Islamic religious habitus[25] tends to extend beyond physical life,

[25] It is interesting to expand the scope of habitus to include religion and religious practices. In the case of Islam, as discussed in Chapter 2.5, the eschatological belief among Muslims, that life in the material world extends beyond death into the spiritual world, leads us to investigate the influence of religion on habitus. Grusendorf (2016) discusses Bourdieu's concept of habitus (and others ideas like field and capital) in the context of religion as representing a particular way of living. He posits that "[h]abitus is then to be understood as a part to play, a life to live, a role to be filled. Habitus is both informed by society as well as the very thing that informs society. Whether one holds to a generally informed agency or a specifically informed agency, it is important to note how habitus engages religion. (…) For some, this is a habitus in which they have grown from infancy to maturity. For others, it is a new habitus presented for consideration and possible adaptation by the human agent" (Grusendorf 2016:10). Other scholars like Mellor and Shilling (2014) have conceptualized a religious habitus built upon the principles of reflexivity and embodied subjectivity in late modernity. They argue that, "conceiving of the religious habitus as a series of reflexively informed acts involving the instauring of orientations towards the transcendent offers a distinctive basis upon which

yet it requires material actions in this world that help to ensure continuity in the afterlife. Moghul elaborates that "[t]he Qur'an opens with a vociferous condemnation of those who claim to follow Islam in public while deriding it in private. External adherence without internal conviction is the deepest deceit" (*HTBAM* 10). The importance attached to the rituals and their performance in daily life is a necessary condition for entry into the spiritual habitus. It can be inferred that diasporic individuals as agents are socialized in a "field" represented by the values, norms, and behaviors from their heritage and adopted cultures, where a series of hierarchical forms of "capital" such as their social standing, financial background, etc. are at stake. By accommodating the expected roles and desired relationships vis-à-vis their position in multiple homelands, the diasporic individuals internalize the processes necessary for operating in each cultural milieu. Over a period of time, these internalized relationships and habitual expectations constitute the "habitus." In other words, diasporic individuals build strategies that are adapted to the expectations and realities of the plural identities they manifest and the multiple homelands they inhabit. It can also be derived that "habitus" for diasporic individuals does not solely operate at the level of discursive consciousness; rather it is considered an embodiment. For Muslim Americans, faith is embodied, whether they are practicing Muslims or not, and often works in a pre-reflexive manner, subconsciously governing all aspects of their lives. For Moghul, the identarian challenge of being a Muslim American lies in the balancing of "the repeated performance of Islam for the consumption of others" (*HTBAM* 11) versus the creation of an awareness about what he told people about who he was, or what they assumed he was, and what he was (not). The memoir takes us through his journey from faithlessness to self-realization and self-acceptance through a euphemistic condemnation of "talismanic Islam." This term is coined by Moghul to denounce the orthodox form of Islam being practiced by some Muslims superficially as an external performative act as opposed to the internalization of the true meaning of Islam's message. This is particularly relevant in the case of some South Asian Muslims who are swayed by the conservative Islam exported from the Middle East with claims that it is based on ancient scripture. Due to their lack of understanding of the Arabic language, Muslims from the subcontinent tend to believe such messages without critically questioning the political, social, and cultural intent of the regions where these messages have emanated and the ideologies of people who transmit these puritanical ideas. From his own experience, Moghul explains that in his childhood he "was a little clone of the obedient Muslim boy" (*HTBAM* 11), and he could "quote source text, from the letter of the law to the spirit of the argument" (*HTBAM* 11). However, there was no way for him to get answers to practical questions about everyday life in the U.S. He did not know any other Muslims from his age group and his parents' acquaintances were easily swayed by a blanket dismissal of non-Muslims and their practices as anti-Islamic, based on what they heard in the social communities around them. While this may have worked for the first-generation, it seems to have resulted in a momentary loss of faith for someone like the second-generation Moghul, who then embarks on the journey to finding the balance between being an American, a Muslim, and a Muslim American.

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to assess its on-going significance today. It allows us to avoid any sense that religion is acquired and maintained merely through unthinking processes of acculturation or socialization that function to reproduce and legitimate social structures, or that it operates as a means for assimilation into 'authoritative discursive traditions whose logic and power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable' (Mahmood 2005, 32)" (Mellor and Shilling (2014:294).

Also see Winchester (2008) for a discussion on embodying faith through religious practice and the creation of a Muslim moral habitus; and Naaman (2017) for a historical account of the idea of habitus from al-Fārābī through Ibn Khaldun to ʿAbduh, demonstrating the trends involved in the application of this sociological theory to religious discourse in Islam.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's conceptualization of "disposition" can be used to strengthen the liminality in hybrid identities of diasporic individuals shaped by the prevailing structures and their own agency in the ontological development process. Dispositions are generally shared by people with similar backgrounds in a monocultural society, but they can also be acquired by diasporic individuals through mimesis. As a result, the established cultural norms and values change over time, influencing both individuals and their surroundings. However, there is an additional strain on marginalized populations because it is difficult to challenge the collectively and socially shaped mainstream institutions unless the minorities reach a critical mass. Through the processes of compression[26] and distanciation[27], American Muslims learn the rules of the 'game' and therefore approach their faith and its place in American society using partly rational and partly intuitive cognition mechanisms. Dispositions that constitute the habitus for these diasporic individuals are deeply conditioned responses manifested spontaneously in their daily lives. Faced with discrimination and racism because of their faith, Muslim Americans confront the power structures of the established habitus by challenging the prejudicial legitimization of the social forms of domination that are commonplace in the U.S. By starting the NYU Islamic center, Moghul aims to redefine the "habitus" from its predefined and biased socially ingrained perceptions and dispositions towards Muslims and amongst Muslims from different Islamic denominations. As Moghul states: "Outside Muhammad's massive ummah the Prophet is often mocked, rarely acknowledged, and above all ignored. In the West we say 'Judeo-Christian,' excising Islam from the tradition of which it is undeniably a part" (*HTBAM* 66). The religious foundation of the U.S. is predominantly based on the Judeo-Christian tradition, so by placing Islam within this historical reality, Moghul attempts to highlight the universality of Islam.[28] He also aims to show the similarities between these three faiths that influence the behaviors and beliefs of Americans, similarities that have become an integral part of the U.S. habitus and deeply ingrained in the actions of its European settlers.

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[26] The concept of 'time-space compression' was introduced by sociologist David Harvey in 1990. Primarily aimed at analyzing the impact of communication technologies and transportation advancements in reducing temporal and spatial barriers for economic globalization, time-space compression can also be applied to diasporic identity. The last few decades have seen the migration of highly skilled labor from South Asia into the U.S. and these migrants have been able to stay in touch with their ancestral homeland both virtually and physically with relatively fewer hardships when compared to the migrants in the first half of the twentieth century and earlier. Their access to knowledge is instantaneous and their ability to straddle across multiple homelands is facilitated through social time-space compression.

[27] The term time-space distanciation was proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) to describe the stretching of social systems across space and time. Giddens used this concept in the context of structuration theory to reject the conventional belief in social theory that considers societies and cultures as coherent and bounded. When applied to diasporic identity, it helps us understand the dynamic nature of cultural systems and dislocate culture from local space and time by abstracting it into the economic, political, and social aspects of life in late modernity. Diasporic identity has progressed from an identity rooted in strictly a monolithic ancestral culture characterized by low levels of time-space distanciation to a form of identity guided by both old and new cultural systems, enabling them to create a new hybrid identity. Furthermore, considering Giddens' (1984) view of the structuration theory, higher levels of time-space distanciation allow for the interpretation of rules and mores in a non-deterministic way since they are applied reflexively and, if needed, can be adapted, replaced, or reproduced differently to serve the needs of society.

[28] Islam sees prior prophets and their followers as Muslims, believers in an earlier iteration of the same faith Muhammad was sent to renew and revitalize. Rather than see Islam as a descendant of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, Muslims see Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity as offshoots of a primal Islam. Since Muslims believe prophets were sent to all nations, some have made the case that Hinduism, Buddhism, and many other pre-Muhammadan religions may also be branches of the same primordial faith, which God first vouchsafed to Adam (*HTBAM* 70).

Continuing this line of inquiry, Bhaskar (1979) argues that if human agency is dependent on social structures, these structures themselves also require the proliferation of some actions and pre-conditions. Furthermore, the people living in these social structures possess the ability to reflect and take actions necessary to change these structures. For social transformation to occur, Bhaskar (1979) contends that events occurring in society cannot be purely attributed to people even though these very people and their actions form the social structure. In doing so, Bhaskar (1979) rejects the Durkheimian notion of power exerted by dominant social groups in determining the course of society by excluding the marginalized groups. If society is not solely created by people from scratch because it pre-exists, and if it is dependent on the activity of the people that compose it, then each of them is a necessary condition for the other. For Bhaskar (1979), both are required to transform social activity. Moghul presents the argument by the Pakistani poet Iqbal (a scholar educated in Western philosophy in Germany and England), who rejects the notion of collectivism in existential development. Iqbal instead argues that if Muslims believed that the physical world was merely a manifestation of God and that everyone was the same, instead of regarding the world as a transitory space for moving to the next dimension, then no action would be possible. At the individual level, interpreting Iqbal's philosophy, Moghul argues that the self's purpose in life is "to become full of our selves, more completely and courageously individuated" (*HTBAM* 93). As Moghul explains, the reason for this individuation is that "Iqbal refused to accept the world as it was. He demanded that Muslims rise again. He refused to accept that Islam was a spent force" (*HTBAM* 93). Therefore, at the structural level, Moghul reasons that Islam is "not the automation of Homo sapiens by ritual indoctrination" (*HTBAM* 93); rather it is a "technology of the self that produced persons who were not controlled by the world, but bended the world to their will" (*HTBAM* 93). Both Iqbal and Moghul believe that historically Islam has always adapted well to reason and critique and adapted to the prevailing world order. Therefore, rather than accepting the established cliché that Islam needs a reformation in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to consider Islam as an ongoing reformation. Moghul further argues that just as Iqbal was not blindly mining ideas from Western thinkers, we need to look at non-Arabian interpretative traditions beyond the Quran by adopting thoughts from other philosophers like Ghazali and poets like Rumi and Iqbal. It is not possible to equate the interpretation of the sources with the sources themselves. Moghul elucidates one such possibility for rational thinking in the example of the Indo-Pakistani poet and philosopher Iqbal –

> Islam, Iqbal argued, was genetically dynamic: it was meant to be purposeful movement in a world fated to change. Iqbal not only went back to Islam's sources but also demanded every generation of Muslims separately and together do the same. Iqbal took Muslim societies, ideas, and practices, and compared and contrasted these with Islam's sources, which Sunni Muslims would contend are primarily the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet. Then Iqbal urged us to reflect honestly on the results of such comparison and contrast. (*HTBAM* 95)

Moreover, Bhaskar (1979) posits that social structures have emergent properties and are comparable to objects in the physical world, albeit with three key differences. Firstly they "do not exist independently of the activities they govern" (38), which means that they are interdependent. Secondly, social structures can be considered from a constructionist perspective because they are influenced by the "agents' conceptions of what they are doing" (38). The transformative power can be harnessed by influencing people's beliefs to ultimately change the discursive reality. Thirdly, unlike physical objects, human belief can change in a relatively more straightforward manner and does not require an elaborate process of evolution. Although this human agency is exerted by material beings, Bhaskar (1979) explains that because of the emergent consequences of

neurophysiological complexity in human beings, they can act intentionally and produce change. Through the "synchronic emergent powers of materialism" (97), he proposes that "the powers associated with the mind are both real, that is, causally efficacious… and irreducible, that is, emergent from matter" (107), rejecting the reductionist perspectives that propound that the action of individuals is determined only from a physiological perspective. As a result, the intentionality of human action is partly also based on reason which is an example of our emergent thought process. In tracing the history of political and social changes brought about by Prophet Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula at the advent of Islam, Moghul demonstrates how the prophet's personal actions were in direct conflict with the majority in Mecca.

> Muhammad's religion had long challenged aristocratic Mecca's glass and ordinary ceilings, but it had now become a threat to their way of life: the Prophet had gone from the persecuted leader of an unimpressive collection of marginalized converts to the governor of a city-state that lay astride Mecca's lifelines, the trade routes to Persia and Byzantium. (*HTBAM* 75)

Yet, as Islam spread outside the Arabian Peninsula, it dramatically transformed society and people by focusing on their good qualities and appealing to their intellect and reason. Moghul attempts to separate the revelation aspect of Islam from its civilizational part to remind us of the similar circumstances presented to Muslim Americans and look for precedence in the Prophet's life.

Additionally, by combining ontological realism with epistemological relativism, Bhaskar (1978) maintains that reality has depth, but knowledge cannot fully penetrate to the bottom of that depth. In the case of diasporic individuals, Bhaskar's argument for an ontology of stratified emergence and differentiated structures can be used to challenge the epistemic fallacy, which "consists in the view that statements about being can be reduced to or analyzed in terms of statements about knowledge" (36). When starting the Islamic Center at NYU, Moghul contends that he began approaching religion based on constructing an external worldview that reflected his internal beliefs. By challenging the conventional radical interpretations of Islam, he focused on the universality of its message by localizing its practice even in a geography that is essentially incompatible with this diasporic faith. When the first generation has barely come to terms with their own identity in a foreign land, it becomes even more difficult for the second generation to make sense of their "being" and "becoming." The parents rely on their familiar networks of a culture shared by their former homeland, but their homeland bears no resemblance to their existential reality for the children. Reinterpreting al-Ghazali, Moghul believes that for South Asian Muslim Americans, in the absence of understanding Arabic, among other things, religious knowledge is acquired through intuitive, experiential, and empirical means, which he equates to "becoming." But he disputes that "knowing" something does not necessarily mean "becoming" something and definitely not "being" that thing. People can master religion but not be religious at all. Moghul then emphasizes that Islam requires self-transformation, which can only occur through the Foucauldian concept of "technology of the self," where we constantly improve the "self" even as we continuously measure the "self." Therefore, "knowing," "being," and "becoming" are inseparable in the co-creation of identity among diasporic individuals for them to make sense of the world. In summarizing Iqbal's philosophy of the reformation of Islam and the Muslim "self," Moghul proposes that:

> The Qur'an not only could be applied to the world even as it provided me serenity and purpose but it should. Would have to. Just as Islam is regularly judged by secular epistemologies, I wondered if, say, Rumi's ontology could become the foundation for an alternative means of knowing—and doing—and critiquing. If Iqbal's vision of *khudi*[29] could be used as a mechanism for understanding life, even or especially my own life. If we could draw nourishment from other embodiments of faith and belief. (*HTBAM* 96)

Likewise, in the age of rampant misinformation about Islam and Muslims in the American media, Moghul questions how non-Muslim Americans can understand a culture about which they do not have any direct experience. This points to the infallibility of knowledge perpetrated on social media platforms; but this transitive domain of knowledge can change over time with the right conversations. As for the intransitive objects of knowledge, Moghul offers a historical perspective of Islam across the world and its certain core aspects that remain the same despite the diversity of religious beliefs in Islamic communities in the U.S. At the end of the historical trajectory, which concludes with his family's emigration to the U.S., he takes it upon himself "to carry this legacy, this unbroken fourteen-hundred-year-old chain, to the New World, migrating as our predecessors did, loyal to God, yes, but also to the *ummah*, the worldwide community of Muslims" (*HTBAM* 16).

Moghul also evokes intergenerational differences in building institutions. He states that first-generation immigrants were born into Islam which they carried with them to the U.S. and most often reproduced without much thought. Whereas the second generation struggled in determining which parts of their faith they could keep and which parts they could let go. In this regard, Giddens (1979) observes that systemic knowledge is transformed into actions through embedded memory, also called "memory traces." Besides, "[s]tructures exist both internally within agents as memory traces that are the product of phenomenological and hermeneutic inheritance" (Stones 2005:27). In addition to emphasizing the duality of structure, Giddens also refers to the concept of recursiveness by suggesting that "the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution" (1979:5). Moghul optimistically narrates the changing face of Islamic institutions in the U.S. led by young Americans with equal gender representations. He states that, "[c]haplains are a great development in American Islam, freeing students to focus on academics, student life, and new opportunities for personal and social growth" (*HTBAM* 86). Some scholars argue that relations shaped in a specific structure are independent of the context in which they have been created and, therefore can even exist out of time and place (Bryant and Jary 2003). When confronted by the differences in his Turkish wife's (Hafsa) Islamic culture, Moghul draws the distinction between religion and culture for Muslims today and argues that Muslimness does not necessarily imply sameness.

[29] At the center of Iqbal's philosophy is *khudi*, a term that originally meant selfishness. (The root, "khv," is present in the Persian word for God, *Khuda*, and in English as "sui"-cide.) Iqbal asked Muslims to revisit the definition of "khudi," or rather, by force of personality and argument, he forevermore forced them to. Through him, "khudi" began to mean self-fullness, a robust and vigorous individuality, the original and necessary form of which existed as the Divine "I"—Khuda—and the contingent form in "us." Rather, actually, as us. Iqbal believed we are selves, though more potentially than actually (*HTBAM* 93).

> Like many modern Muslims, steeped in some kind of neo-Islamist miasma, I was taught that religion and culture were two different and exclusive things, and that the more of one you had, the less of the other. This is not only very stupid, but explains why so much of religious Muslim life is so godawful boring, and so much of our contemporary literature is literally childish: we are afraid to think complicated thoughts, for fear that any kind of nuance is only a gateway drug to heretical atheism. (*HTBAM* 136)

Giddens (1979) posits that structuration follows a cycle of give-and-take between agents and structures, resulting in the combined actions becoming a part of the duality of structure. Furthermore, social change occurs from a confluence of micro- and macro-level forces. Social practices and attitudes are generally affected by large-scale social movements occurring at the macro-level, which are in the first place caused by people's discontentment with smaller micro-level issues in their daily lives. Institutionalized action and routinization are fundamental to creating social order and the reproduction of social systems, but routinized social practices are not a result of merely simple coincidence; rather they are accomplished by skilled and knowledgeable agents. Giddens (1979) elaborates that:

> […] trust and tact, as basic properties which participants bring to encounters, can be interpreted in terms of the relation between a basic security system, the sustaining (*in praxis*) of a sense of ontological security, and the routine nature of social reproduction which agents skillfully organize. The monitoring of the body, the control and use of face in 'face work' – these are fundamental to social integration in time and space. (86)

Moghul has learned to go beyond the fetishized rituals of religion and disdains "superstitious and incantatory mysticism," which he thinks is reserved "for people who did not want to fight, to argue, to build, to succeed, to struggle" (*HTBAM* 187). Through his systematic acquisition of knowledge, his "predilection for action and construction, a new world would be born, history rerouted" (*HTBAM* 187). The last part of the structuration cycle provides an explanation that involves "a dialectic of presence and absence which ties the most minor or trivial forms of social action to structural properties of the overall society, and to the coalescence of institutions over long stretches of historical time" (Giddens 1979:24). It can be derived that even small social actions are responsible for changing or perpetuating social systems and that agents always possess dialectical control, which can bring about social change. In this regard, media plays a large part in reflecting and shaping people's worldviews, both positively and negatively (Gauntlett 2008). Moghul regrets that the so-called "experts" on the Middle East in the American media know nothing about Islam. Yet, they are allowed to interpret the socio-political-cultural events in Islamic countries "because they're (usually) white males. What I mean to say is, certain people are assumed capable of rising above not just their own but all particularities, for they presumedly possess none. Everything about them is universal" (*HTBAM* 87-88). Throughout the memoir, Moghul presents other examples of bigotry and discrimination from Eurocentric cultures urging us to reevaluate the structural inequalities.

To conclude, we must consider that in culturally complex countries like the U.S., faced with hybrid identities among diasporic individuals, there is a need to acknowledge the emergent properties of the collective (Durkheim 1960) and its impact on both the diaspora as well as the native populations. For South Asian Muslim Americans, social structure cannot be considered an epiphenomenon, since we have yet to see the impact of their actions and activities in achieving a radical mindset shift in the U.S. At the heart of the conflict is the adherence to Islam by diasporic individuals and the image of Islam prevalent in the U.S. and perpetrated by the media. Like all second-generation diasporic individuals, Moghul struggles with his American identity and

wonders if he could really become a part of white America and then, can his faith find a place in the U.S. "But fleeing into whiteness would be abandoning who I was, and I don't just mean this religiously, because Islam is a religion, yes, but Islam is also a cultural identity, a heritage, an ethnic marker, a civilization, and sometimes more these things than faith" (*HTBAM* 30). In the aftermath of 9/11, several studies[30] have been conducted to situate the Islamic faith and its customs in America, both for Muslims and non-Muslims (A. Ahmed 2007, 2010, 2018), to promote interfaith dialog. These glocal conflicts and the attempts to resolve them rightly emphasize that any debate about the duality of structure and agency should acknowledge the centrality of faith when analyzing primarily Islamic societies or when discussing identity in the Muslim diaspora. While we see that the concepts of structuration have been extended from the field of social sciences (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1984, Bhaskar 1979) to other fields such as economics (Lawson 2015), critical psychology (Dreier 2008), information systems (Mutch 2010), education policy (Archer 2003), and in entrepreneurship (Mole and Mole 2010), there is still some work that needs to be done in accounting for the importance and resurgence of religion within late modernity.

Borrowing from intercultural communication studies, one possibility of achieving structural and social changes and therefore creating a more wholesome American identity for diasporic individuals is to move away from ethnocentric approaches to cultural differences. At the other end of the spectrum is the phenomenon of ethnoconvergence, that can be used to describe the relative convergence of multiple cultural identities in diasporic individuals. As societies and individuals move from behaviors and practices that favor ethnocentrism to those that favor ethnorelativism, the resultant transition can be characterized as ethnoconvergence. This term can be used to describe cultural convergence at ethnic and religious levels for the South Asian Muslim American diaspora and their subsequent generations. Although this term is relatively new and not used for this specific purpose, it has been used in similar contexts to describe the two-way interaction between globalization and local cultures leading to ethnoconvergence of cultures (Nayak 2011). It has also been used to interpret the perspectives of Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes on the genesis of Hispanic cultures in Latin America.

> …ethnoconvergence seem to be a reaction to the late-twentieth-century tension between the promises of global cosmopolitanism and the dilution of national projects in Latin America (…), clouded by the fear of a cultural globalization guided by American cultural imperatives. Fuentes responds with a reaffirmation of a new type of transnational identity, which we could call "Transhispanic," that is based on concepts that echo the contemporary late-twentieth-century anxiety before an "Americanization of culture". (Ribas 2011:169)

Furthermore, to describe both conformity and resistance as being part of the cultural process in our highly globalized world such that "a dose of conformity accompanying a tendency toward resistance can synthetically help keep broad cultural processes on an even keel, balancing mind and body, conflicting theories and methods and modes of living, and styles of reason and unreason in equilibrium" (Merrell 2011:77). In diasporic individuals, we see a degree of conformance to the mainstream culture to function optimally in the foreign land as well as a resistance towards the center by retaining aspects of their own culture to be true to their original "self," resulting in a confluence and convergence of different cultures.

[30] For detailed findings based on six years of research and 50,000 plus interviews representing Muslims in more than 35 Muslim countries, which represents the largest and most comprehensive study of Muslim opinion about the West and particularly about the U.S., see Esposito and Mogahed's *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims really think*.

Drawing from Giddens' *Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998), I end with three examples from Moghul's memoir on how convergence, and by extension ethnoconvergence, as a social movement can ultimately lead to social change via the "democratization of democracy" resulting in a "dialogic democracy." Firstly, from a material viewpoint, convergence is "the tendency of unrelated animals and plants to evolve superficially similar characteristics under similar environmental conditions" (Lexico "Convergence"). Moghul shows us that the diasporic individuals learn and adapt to some of the cultural norms and values at a superficial level and develop certain similarities with the mainstream society, not just to conform to the center but to coexist meaningfully in the foreign land so that there is a sense of shared social coherence and congruence. Secondly, from a spatial viewpoint, convergence is "a location where airflows or ocean currents meet, characteristically marked by upwelling (of air) or downwelling (of water)" (Lexico "Convergence"). Through his own work as a Fellow in Jewish-Muslim Relations at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America and his memoir, Moghul outlines the urgent need for a two-way relationship between the center and the margin to maintain cultural harmony. In coming together, there is some level of conformity which, although unbalanced in the contemporary U.S. is slowly being challenged through cultural resistance and a desire to maintain and advance one's heritage culture. Thirdly, from a logical viewpoint, convergence can be defined as a "property (exhibited by certain infinite series and functions) of approaching a limit more and more closely as an argument (variable) of the function increases or decreases or as the number of terms of the series increases" (Encyclopedia Britannica "Divergence"). From a South Asian perspective, religion appears to be more important than ethnicity, as seen by the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 based on religion rather than ethnicity or linguistic similarities. "Islam is not just what you believe; for most Muslims, who aren't recent converts, Islam is part of where they come from and who they come from" (*HTBAM* 30). Therefore, religion needs to be included in any discussion of ethnicity in the case of the South Asian American Muslim diaspora because Islam heavily influences all cultural norms, values, traditions, and practices.

To move toward a state of ethnoconvergence, especially in the post 9/11 U.S., Moghul shows us that some Muslim Americans tend to balance the overt manifestation of religion in specific contexts. Some are observed to increase it in social situations where appropriate to feel at ease and be true to their original "self" or decrease it in situations that demand shared spaces of coexistence. One way to achieve a balance is through dialog and transcultural communication between different groups so that the diasporic "self" can navigate identarian challenges in the age of reflexive modernity. For Moghul, it was representing the Islamic Center at NYU, as he perceived his place in the Islamic community and the crisis unfolding in the U.S. He attributes his successes to his reading of Islamic history as well as his hybrid religious humanist upbringing. "I helped build a growing community, defended it at its most vulnerable—when our city, our country, our sense of ourselves, and even my religion were attacked—and kept on, establishing a fixture on Gotham's religious landscape (*HTBAM* 125). He is no longer caught between Muslimness and Westernness, Americanness and Pakistaniness, for he can embrace all these identities as complimentary without reducing his core "self" to any one result, label, or type.

1.5 Integration of South Asian Muslim Americans across temporal and spatial boundaries in Fatima Farheen Mirza's *A Place for Us*

> I will wait by the gate until I see your face. I have waited a decade, haven't I, in this limited life? Waiting in the endless one would be no sacrifice. And Inshallah one day, I know I will see you approaching. You will look just as you did at twenty, that year you first left us, and I will also be as I was in my youth. We will look like brothers on that day. We will walk together, as equals.
>
> Fatima Farheen Mirza, *A Place for Us*

Fatima Farheen Mirza's debut novel, *A Place for Us* (*APFU*), published in 2018, is a *New York Times* bestseller that depicts the American immigrant experience from the perspective of a family drawing their heritage culture from India. More than the longing for the native homeland, Mirza focuses on narrating the story from an American perspective and their lived reality in the twenty-first century. Mirza traces the struggles of first- and second-generation characters in finding their place in the U.S., both within the local Muslim community and within the larger American society. Born and raised in California, Mirza is a second-generation Indian American writer constantly negotiating the physical and cultural spaces of her father's homeland in India, her mother's family in the U.K., and her own existence in the U.S. She has stated in several interviews (2018, 2019) that the novel is not autobiographical. Although it is about a devout Muslim American family, it is not meant to be seen in terms of the religion that separates the characters from their cultural milieu in the U.S. Rather it provides a narrative that others from her own generation and ethnic background can relate to. Growing up, Mirza wanted to become a writer. Still, there were no contemporary South Asian role models that she could identify with in literature, so this novel is a decade-long attempt to create a space for showing the universal experience of an American Muslim family and love from varied perspectives. The story merges cultures and communities, tracing multiple transformative layers of space-time that make us question our traditional notion of the identity of a place. However, it is impossible to write a novel with Muslim characters and not evoke the themes of belonging, identity, and faith for diasporic individuals today. In a post 9/11 America, Mirza draws us into the rapidly escalating religious tensions and the different characters' relationship with Islam by highlighting the effects of the multi-dimensional nature of space-time on those inheriting complex cultural identities.

The proponents of assimilation (Park 1924, Park 1950, Gordon 1968) argue that successive generations of immigrants in the U.S. will blend in to form a singular American culture practiced by the mainstream, implying that all other forms of cultural expressions are non-American. However, as discussed before, today's demographic make-up of the U.S. has forced scholars to rethink the concept of assimilation for new waves of immigrants and their successive generations (Alba and Nee 2005). As the post-1965 wave of immigrants gains momentum in size and voice, the conceptualization of American identity needs to be reconfigured to suit the needs of a transcultural society with pluralistic cultural norms, values, and traditions. Furthermore, in today's digital transformation era, the Internet and new media platforms are shrinking the world like never before, and total cultural assimilation is unrealistic and impossible to achieve and expect. Second-generation individuals from the Muslim American diaspora have more ways to remain in touch with their parents' homeland and, in the process to assert their Islamic religious and cultural

heritage unreservedly. Several scholars (Veer 1995, Rai and Reeves 2010, and Sarwal 2017) describe the changing face of South Asian American fiction, which can be analyzed within the context of shrinking of space and time. As shown by Mirza's novel, literary works published in the twenty-first century have moved away from merely narrating tales of loss and pain to exploring ways of putting to rest dualistic dilemmas and of finding comfort in this new state of being. In this chapter, I discuss the effect of time and space on cultural values and traditions and their impact on the processes of integration and identity formation in the different characters depicted in Mirza's novel, *APFU*.

Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2008) report that owing to the global mobilization of the workforce, there has been a marked increase in the number of upper-middle-class South Asians immigrating to the United States. Earlier migrants from some European and African countries began at the lowest rung of the economy and then gradually moved upwards. South Asians, in the last sixty years, have entered the U.S. either as students in Ivy League colleges or directly as specialized professionals. This change is reflected in the writings of second-generation American authors like Fatima Mirza, who narrate stories involving characters that inhabit spaces shaped by dramatic globalization. *APFU* is the story of such upper class, academically and professionally accomplished Indian Muslim Americans, Rafiq and Lyla, their eldest daughter Hadia, their middle daughter Huda, and their youngest son Amar. As evident in the novel's name, the characters are searching for their place within their family, their multiple cultures, and in their new homeland in California. The novel depicts identity struggles linked to space and time in matters of culture, tradition, and faith, both in terms of compression and distanciation. Written based on the lived experience of the post-millennial generation that has constant access to online resources for truth-seeking, the depiction of the characters is not reductive; it honors the heritage values as well as critically examines the individual's and the collective family's place in America before and after 9/11.

The Silicon Valley, where the novel is set, thrives on highly skilled migrant labor, constantly juxtaposing the fixity of place with the mobility of space, creating an invisible urban milieu that is constructed through the collective experiences of immigrant communities (Mendieta 2001). The local is fused with the global, where cultural traditions of South Asian Muslims are merged with the larger Islamic immigrant community. As depicted in the novel, South Asian Muslims frequent mosques, and schools shared by the global Islamic community for universal spiritual matters. On religious issues particular to the subcontinent, they socialize in invisible spaces with community members who practice the same denomination of Islam, thereby creating an alternative space-time for their families. The children create their own micro spaces during community gatherings with their friends and develop a heightened consciousness of space within a limited amount of time. As Mirza recounts,

> The lobby is the only section of the mosque, besides their classrooms during Sunday school, that isn't segregated. Everyone seems to slow when they are in the lobby, linger, wanting to take advantage of the brief moment when the veil between the genders is lifted. (*APFU* 49)

Spatial invisibility is emphasized through the use of native language as it evokes a type of hybridity to manifest those parts of the identity that surface in times of stressful situations. Urdu words are used throughout the novel to give the reader access to key cultural concepts specific to the Indian subcontinent. In terms of Islamic references, there are several instances where Urdu is used to explain Quranic stories and verses. This is done to highlight the differences between the version of Shia Islam specific to the family so that it can be nuanced from the global denomination of

Islamic practices and traditions associated with the Middle East. Therefore, the novel's strategic use of Urdu words gives the reader insight into alternative discursive realities that would otherwise be inaccessible to the reader. To preserve ties with their heritage culture, most immigrant narratives depict parents who insist on speaking with their children in the native language at home. In the case of *APFU,* the children talk to each other in Urdu only when their otherness is heightened. Mirza articulates this either as the need for the siblings to protect each other, when for example, Amar calls her sister using the honorific Urdu word:

> "It was a hard lesson, Hadia Baji[31]. It made me feel sick."
> He only called her *sister* when he needed something from her. (*APFU* 28)

Or an escape into a secret world for the children:

> Why do things always sound sadder in Urdu? Prettier too. She likes that they speak to each other in Urdu, how even speaking it feels like access to their secret world, a world where they feel like different people, capable of feelings she could experience, let alone speak of in English. (*APFU* 28)

Or as a way of interpreting the liminal sentiments of their parents, arising out of anger, which does not necessarily involve bitterness or resentment, rather a form of regret born out of a forced and misplaced spatio-temporal existence in the adopted homeland. For example,

> *Afsoos* was the word in Urdu. There was no equivalent in English. It was a specific kind of regret—not wishing he had acted differently, but a helpless sadness at the situation as it was, a sense that it could not have been another way. (*APFU* 237)

Or reprimand each other for actions they know will not be approved by their parents. When Amira (Amar's lover and his best friend Abbas's sister) wants to smoke, they use curse words and sarcasm in Urdu:

> *Batamiz*, Abbas joked as she walked away, *begharat*—which meant, the one who is disrespectful to their elders, the one who is without shame. She turned on her heel and replied *khushi se*—with pride, with happiness. How much more fun it was to throw Urdu terms at one another in jest; how different it felt when the same words were spat from their parents' mouths. (*APFU* 107-108)

The relative distance between multiple homelands inhabited by diasporic individuals is contracted in the twenty-first century given the global forces at play. This indicates time-space compression through the intersection of the capitalist economic system and modern technology (Harvey 1989). The separation of time and space leads the parents Rafiq and Lyla, to move away from the notion of place to form communities (May and Thrift 2007) bound by shared experiences. When they first moved to the U.S., in addition to growing accustomed to the new city and their new home, it was crucial for them to get "to know the mosque community" (*APFU* 40). They often socialize with other community members at the Ali family residence. The Ali family lived in the area for a long time and commanded much respect from the entire Muslim community. Despite their modern outlook in terms of the way they and their children dressed and behaved, "no one community member ever turned down an invitation to the Alis' home, nor did anyone deny themselves the pleasure of their presence at their own parties" (*APFU* 55). The Ali family is represented as financially successful. The entire community aspires to recreate their lives modeled on the success of the Ali family's accomplishments in fulfilling the American Dream. It makes it

[31] Urdu word for older sister.

worthwhile for them to stay so far away from their families in their ancestral homeland. Their daughters, Hadia and Huda, create a "third time-space" (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996) where new social realities are constructed in spaces that are constantly being created. Their son Amar drifts away from both cultures depicting a lack of integrative social structures succumbing to the power structures generated by the dissolution of spatial and temporal boundaries. Amar lives in a time-space edge (Giddens 1981), reflective of a society where the intermingling of absence and presence is an everyday reality. Consequently, in any discussion of diasporic identity, social geography is more relevant because the way communities perceive the notion of space is very different from each other, and their "social horizons" may be reserved to the block where they live or to the store where they work or shop, or may extend across geographies to maintain connections with their loved ones (Buttimer and Seamon 2015). To acknowledge these differences is to recognize that such individuals possess multiple spatial identities allowing them the possibility to coexist within multiple social spaces releasing the "self" from the burden of singular authenticity in the plurality of life. "The modern industrial world is a place where local practices are linked with disembedded systems that influence others across vast spaces and times" (Sullivan et al. 2016:470). Unless this social space is generated in the new homeland, it is not possible for diasporic individuals to constitute or identify themselves (Lefebvre 1991). Therefore, the production of this space becomes central to the (re)formation of their identity, which is both located and dislocated, displaced and replaced. As the relative distances shrink, the self permeates spatial and temporal boundaries by creating replicas of constantly oscillating experiences resulting in a hybrid identity.

For today's diasporic individuals, the process of time-space distanciation (Giddens 1984, 1990) also helps us better comprehend identity creation processes. Regarding the first generation, the concepts of time and space are closely tied together. Still, for their second-generation offspring, these dimensions are "distanciated," or they do not hold the same level of physical and psychological attachment as the previous generations. Scholars have argued that time-space distanciation occurs at the societal level due to the rise in capitalism in post-industrial societies. At the identarian level, it is observed that the interdependency between cultural practices and religious traditions associated with a particular space and time decreases significantly as the first-generation diasporic individuals settle down in their adopted homeland. In *APFU*, Mirza provides a detailed account of how each character in the novel progresses through their spatio-temporal distanciation. The journey and process are different across and within generations and gender. To preserve their culture, language, and religious practices from India, the parents Rafiq and Lyla, have created social structures together with the community they frequent. The entire narrative is centered around the religious Indian wedding of their eldest daughter Hadia. Furthermore, the stories of various characters always unfold in relation to Islamic traditions and their place in American society. Every aspect of their life, including food, friendships, career choices, familial relationships, social behavior, love, and marriage, are influenced by Islam. The parents try to inculcate these values without attempting to explain the logic behind their actions. They fail to recognize the impact of the environment in which their children are embedded. They try to replicate the space and time of their heritage culture by providing as many familiar sociocultural experiences as they can by frequenting other people from their community who have also settled down in the U.S. From the children's viewpoint, in the case of Hadia, she feels that she is not entirely free to make any important life decisions without seeking permission from her parents and the extended community. For instance, as a teenager, Hadia always wondered if it was ever possible for someone who was not in her family to love her.

> Baba's words made her think of her home like a fortress they could only leave to go to school or mosque or to the home of a family friend who spoke their language, and in this fortress she and her siblings were lucky, at least, to have each other. (*APFU* 63)

For the parents, following Islam in the manner they practiced it in India is very important. Since this is the only experience they have had, they continue to preserve their faith and identity by socializing with other Shia Muslims. Initially, they believed this was the best way to protect their children in a foreign land. Later they contend that it would have been impossible to influence the personal, professional, and spiritual choices of their children. Towards the end of the novel, Rafiq reminisces that, as a father, he could have done better if he had instilled a sense of hope in his children instead of focusing on the steadfastness of their faith. If their daughter, Hadia, is not able to openly express her love for the boy she meets at the community gatherings, then their son, Amar, is also not able to pursue his love interest, which eventually results in his estrangement from the family. For most of the story, the father is depicted as a strict and angry character who is feared by everyone in the family except Amar. It is later revealed that the women in the family are responsible for driving away Amar despite their claims to understand better his predicament in matters of identity, love, and faith. In the last part of the novel, which offers a heart-rendering account from Rafiq's viewpoint, we come to understand the logic of his actions and choices retrospectively.

> Amar, I know I must have struck you as a religious man, a man of faith. And I have fasted, and I have prayed, and I have gone to Mecca and Karbala and I have worn black and bent my head in mourning every Moharram and I have given money to the needy and I have taught my children to stand when the *adhaan*[32] is called. I believe, sincerely, that eating non-halal meat is a sin, backbiting is a sin, drinking is a sin, not praying is a sin, and defying one's parents is a sin. But what I never told any of you, never even explored within myself, is that it has been a habit, my faith, a way of living I never questioned, and once you three were born it was for you all that I adhered to it as I did. I wanted you three to grow with an awareness of God, with that order and compass and comfort it provided, safe from the dangers I could not imagine and could not protect you from. (*APFU* 363)

All the things mentioned above form an integral part of practicing Islam as a faith and as a lifestyle, which Rafiq intended to pass on to his children. As the story progresses, we learn that the children are dis-embedded from the space and time that is so significant for their parents. The daughters observe that adherence to religious rules for their father is more important than loving his children. The son, on the other hand, realizes the importance attached to his parent's cultural values but dares to test the limits of their tolerance. However, as time progresses, the son completely drifts away from the family, both physically and emotionally, and the daughters can negotiate their own place in American society. In the end, Mirza reveals a change in the parent's perspective and especially the father's longing for his son. We are led to conclude that love, after all is more important for the father despite his inability to express it to any of his children.

Within the social structure created by the parents, the children eventually develop agency that leads to social change. Mirza delicately depicts this transition where the characters honor their Islamic traditions and create their own destiny in America. The eldest daughter Hadia follows a professional path preferred by her father. Her only choices are to either get married or become a doctor if she wants to attend university. It was her only way to leave home, for we learn that,

[32] Call to prayer often announced via loud speakers in mosques in Islamic countries in the Middle East as well as in South Asian countries with significant Muslim populations.

> …nothing compares to the promise of stepping into a classroom knowing she will step out a different person. That she could learn something that would change the way she saw the whole world and her place in it. There is even the private hope that if she does work as hard as she absolutely can, there is a chance she will be able to sway the outcome of her life, and maybe one day a door will be presented to her, and an opportunity to walk through it. (*APFU* 102)

Hadia becomes a successful doctor and marries a man who is not selected by her father and is not from the Shia community. The middle child, Huda works as a fourth-grade teacher. Rafiq is very proud of his daughters' professional achievements. The love and loss for his son are so profound that Rafiq ultimately takes comfort in the emancipatory nature of Islam. He teaches his grandson Abbas that God is not a "being with a heart like a human's, capable of being small and vindictive" (*APFU* 376). Reminiscing about the last time he met his son, Rafiq realizes that God's compassion and mercy are more encompassing than following the dogmatic rules.

> But when I look back on that night, though there is much I cannot remember, and though I was painfully aware I was in the company of a man who had been drinking, I am proud of myself for not letting that thought keep me from sitting next to my son. (*APFU* 381)

From the above discussion, it emerges that immigrant or diasporic identity is not fixed and absolute but is constructed through what Dodgshon (1999) defines as layers of memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth, as the immigrants or diasporic individuals navigate through multiple homelands, altering the relationship between space and time. The sense of building transcultural spatial communities for the first generation is reflective of the importance of maintaining a strong religious identity. Rafiq remembers the kindness shown to him by the local community in India when his own father passed away when Rafiq was thirteen years old. He returns this favor years later in America to a different community as he describes:

> I volunteered for our mosque in different ways. I dropped off and picked up *moulanas*[33] at the airport. We often sponsored *iftaars*[34] during Ramadan. Another duty of mine was performing *ghusl*[35] on people who had passed away. (*APFU* 373)

The preservation of faith for Rafiq is linked to space. When his son's best friend Abbas Ali passes away in a tragic accident, Rafiq organizes a spiritual trip to Iraq for the family. Abbas had a very positive influence on Amar, and it was because of Abbas that Amar looked forward to going to the mosque and *madrasah*[36] every week. But Abbas's death had shattered Amar, and he stopped all religious activities.

> After his death, I began to fear that the little that connected you to our faith would be severed and eventually I organized a trip for our family to do *ziyarat*[37] in Iraq[38]. I wanted there to be nothing I did not introduce you to that could be a tool for you and your spirituality. (*APFU* 353)

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[33] Urdu word for priest.

[34] The traditional evening meal for breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan when it is customary to offer social meals to other community members.

[35] Ritual bathing of the deceased person's body as per Islamic tradition.

[36] Urdu word to indicate a school for religious education including but not limited to learning how to read the Quran in Arabic.

[37] Urdu word for the act of visiting the shrines of holy persons.

[38] For Shias, Iraq is the third holiest place in Islam after Mecca and Medina. The shrine of the prophet's successor Ali according to Shia doctrine, is in Najaf. The shrine of the prophet's grandson Husain who was killed by an oppressive caliph is in Karbala.

The adoption of a reflexive narrative format in the novel by Mirza mirrors the journey of its complex characters, who draw upon their inherited social structures. The plot is polymorphous and multidimensional as it shifts between multiple space-times, whether absolute or representational. Within a single event, Mirza weaves a web of references to the past and present, leading the reader to discover the recursive and reflexive nature of the character's myriad cultural experiences. Inside each structural encounter, the parents reflect on their lives in India and their need to adhere to religion to protect their children. The children subconsciously use religion as the frame of positive and negative reference in their interactions and life choices in America. Even though their youngest son Amar stops praying and is involved in substance abuse, he still reflexively enacts the physical actions related to the demonstration of their faith ingrained through his childhood. At his sister's wedding, despite being drunk and having been away from his family for a long time, Amar joins in the ritualistic chanting of the *Nara-e-Takbir*[39].

> THE MOMENT HE first heard the *naray* called out and maintained one long note, he yearned to reply, and when the *naray* stilled and the crowd took a breath before answering in unison, he had responded as well, with as much gusto as all around him. Had Huda heard him beside her? She must have. How could he make sense of how he felt hearing the recitation, how he stood through every turn and rising, as if on tiptoe. He looked around the hall. He did have something in common with them, and it was like a reflex. If there was so much he lacked in faith—the ability to fully believe and follow—why could he not also lack the desire for faith? (*APFU* 241)

However, as he drifts away from his family, we realize that Amar does not rely solely on religious knowledge passed on by his parents as the single truth definable in space and time. He has access to other expert systems and information networks to derive his own interpretation of the truth, even if it cannot be fully trusted. Amar eventually runs away from home, never returning physically to his family but choosing to remain in touch with her sister's son Abbas discreetly. Towards the end of the novel, Rafiq wants his estranged son to return, despite the distance that has been created over the years between them. He asks his grandson, Abbas, to memorize this message and convey it to Amar during their following conversation.

> 'There is another way. Come back, and we will make another path'. And if he says no, and if he says nothing, will you say this: 'I used the wrong words. I acted the wrong way. I will wait until you are ready. I will always wait for you. (*APFU* 378)

In the context of anglophone diasporic literature, Král (2014) presents an interesting discussion on social invisibility within urban milieus. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, this phenomenon is reversed. As their hijabs and beards turn into hypervisibility, Muslim Americans need to adjust their physical appearance paradoxically and momentarily recede into the realm of conscious banality. When Amar gets into a fight with his classmates in the locker room upon being asked to go back to his country, he is not angry, "but he is surprised by the presence of something else in his voice – discomfort or defensiveness, he can't tell" (*APFU* 112). And when he's asked if his father is a terrorist, he does not feel anger or fear, but he feels a sense of shame. What he really wants to tell them but does not is,

[39] This phrase is derived from the Arabic word *Takbīr* (meaning greatest or greater) and is recited by Muslim speakers of Urdu and Persian on all types of occasions, during times of celebration or sadness, to express approval for a decision, or to express praise for a victorious occasion. The response to this chant is *Allahu Akbar* meaning God is great. It has also been used as a battle cry or during times of revolution in the Islamic world.

> […] no, my father points out the stars in the sky to us if we haven't looked up in a while, he teaches us how to look for the new moon to mark the month, he reads books he underlines with a faint gray pencil. My father always says excuse me if he passes someone too close in the street. My father has never lost his temper at a stranger. (*APFU* 378)

The horror and marginalization caused for Muslim Americans because of 9/11 can be equated to abjection (Kristeva 1982) for Rafiq. Despite his strong religious beliefs, he asks his daughters not to wear their hijabs. "We don't know how people will react," he said. "We don't know where they will direct their anger if they are afraid" (*APFU* 117). But for the daughters, the hijab has become a part of their identity, and the son feels hatred towards the members of the Islamic community, the very people he was taught to have a shared sense of identity.

> "I refuse", Hadia said. "What have we done?"
> "Please", Baba asked her. "Please. Listen to me."
> He had never said please before. His voice, the expression on his face–he was unrecognizable. None of them spoke. Hadia and Huda went into a bedroom, closed the door. I hate them, Amar thought, picturing the terrorists they have showed on TV, I hate them more than I've ever hated anyone. (*APFU* 117)

In conclusion, *APFU* sketches a trajectory of an immigrant family and their search for a home in the literal and figurative sense possible through the process of integration by careful navigation of the relative advantages and disadvantages of time-space compression and distanciation. As seen through the developmental trajectories of the Hadia, Huda, and Amar in embracing Islam in America and the relative change in Rafiq and Lyla's attitudes towards the distanciation in spatial and temporal terms from their heritage culture, *APFU* highlights the increasing structural deficiencies in each generation's struggle to forge their hybrid identity in a neoliberal society. The U.S. continues to receive waves of immigrants from non-European and non-Anglo-Saxon countries. The second generation of the post-1965 immigrants have also reached a critical mass and are no longer regarded as immigrants but naturalized American citizens with access to the same fundamental American resources as their non-Muslim compatriots. The development of identity among these diasporic individuals in the U.S. has to integrate the needs of its diverse population, who don't necessarily subscribe solely to the material aspects of American culture but are also striving to practice a faith that currently does not have a respectable place in the U.S.

> Any integral concept of 'development' has to be fundamentally concerned with the existential issues that form the basis of human life on this planet. These include embeddedness in culture, including its artistic dimensions, the religious dimension of human life, and, inevitably, suffering. Any concept of development concerned only with the external aspects of life – growth, accumulation, consumption, material resources and even politics narrowly defined – is profoundly impoverished. (Clammer 2012:242)

Belonging, identity, faith, and self-acceptance come to the forefront in the twenty-first century for any attempt at creating space for diversity in a world where people are judged based on appearance, religious affiliation, and personal choices that do not conform to the mainstream's idea of American identity. *APFU* successfully debunks the myth and stigma surrounding Islam for non-Muslims. For Muslims, the novel demonstrates the possibility of practicing faith in the U.S. and the option of creating a transcultural American identity. The last part of the novel is a deconstruction of the process of creating this transcultural identity. If Rafiq is seen as a strict father throughout the narrative, then in the final part, Rafiq reflexively explains the intention behind his every action. He confesses that:

> Of all my mistakes the greatest, the most dangerous, was not emphasizing the mercy of God. Every verse of the Quran begins by reminding us of God's mercy, I tried to tell you that, and you nodded, but how can I know what you heard or what you would remember. (*APFU* 381)

Rafiq is aware of the importance of forgiveness, but he cannot convert it into action. His son Amar, seen from an orthodox religious perspective, is a very bad Muslim, someone who drinks and doesn't care about the community. However, Amar is always shown to be kind and considerate to everyone he meets in life. Mirza deliberately uses this intergenerational juxtaposition to represent the changing nature of faith and belonging in the U.S. for South Asian Muslim Americans. At the same time, *APFU* is an American novel with predominantly Muslim American characters. It represents the daily lives and struggles of the older and younger generations to create spatio-temporal transcultural identities in the U.S., first as human beings, then as Muslims, and finally as Americans.

In Part One, the spatiality and temporality of the South Asian Muslim American universe have been located. In the backdrop of globalization, the nature of immigration is different from the migration of indentured labor during the colonial era. The meaning of belonging is being redefined by second-generation writers such as Ayad Akhtar, Haroon Moghul, and Fatima Farheen Mirza. The politics of representation and identity for Muslim Americans is more important than before, and there is a need to destigmatize the tribal nature ascribed to Middle Eastern Islam. In Part Two, we will shift the focus from an identity rooted in space to an identity rooted in culture. Like other diaspora fiction in contemporary literature, a distinct feature of South Asian American fiction is the shift from multi- and inter-culturality to trans-culturality. The literary works discussed in Part Two will explore various aspects of transculture, transculturation, and transculturality. It will situate religion as a critical aspect of identity (re)formation in South Asian Muslim Americans.

Part Two–
Shifting Perspectives: From Multicultural Identity to Transcultural Personhood in South Asian Muslim American Literature

2.1 Theorizing Identity in South Asian Muslim American Diaspora from an Intercultural Perspective

> My dad is from that generation where he feels like if you come to this country, you pay the American dream tax. You endure racism, and if it doesn't cost you your life, pay it. There you go, Uncle Sam. But for me, I was born here. So, I actually have the audacity of equality. I'm like, "I'm in Honors Gov, I have it right here. Life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. All men created equal." It says it right here, I'm equal. I'm equal. I don't deserve this.
>
> Hasan Minhaj, *Homecoming King*

Culture plays a vital role in defining a person's identity, especially in a foreign land. Questions of identity come to the surface, particularly when one is away from the native homeland trying to make sense of one's new environment and find one's bearings as they gradually progress in their physical and psychological journey. In our hyperconnected world today, diasporic individuals constantly negotiate multiple identities and struggle every day to balance these identities. There may be some apprehension that these multiple identities cannot coexist and are not alterable. In our discussion on identity in South Asian Muslim American literature, it is important to establish key constructs such as culture and cultural identity and their impact on identity construction among diasporic individuals in the contemporary era. One of the salient definitions relevant to the twenty-first century and frequently used in intercultural communication is that culture is "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede 1991:19). Furthermore, culture is a complex social phenomenon that comprises behavior, norms, and customs of individuals and groups living in a society passed on from one generation to another. From an anthropological perspective, culture can be viewed as a society's memory, or in other words, it denotes the collective knowledge of a group (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963). There are various aspects of this knowledge system: culture is shared by groups belonging to different races, ethnicities, or nationalities; it is manifested through beliefs, arts, customs, policies, and habits; it acts as a medium for communication and provides a common language to its members; it is transmitted across generations or acquired by outsiders who want to become a part of that group; and finally it is in a constant state of change and remains fluid by adapting to the needs of the new members, be it from within the group or from outside (Hong and Khei 2014).

By considering culture as knowledge, it is implied that it can be learned or acquired systematically. The value systems, customs, traditions, and social behaviors make the fundamental building blocks of culture. If self-identity is a clustering of beliefs, values, physical and psychological traits of a person, then cultural identity is a collection of processes comprising all the distinguishing characteristics common to and shared by individuals belonging to a group or a culture (Hong 2009). These processes can be conceptualized as the operation of a group's shared knowledge where individuals form a mental image of this common knowledge. However, because of the unique self-identity of everyone within the group, this shared knowledge is not manifested uniformly by the members of that group (Hong and Khei 2014). Culture can also be considered as consisting of frameworks of maps of meaning which allow us to unravel the ambiguity that exists in the world. A society shares these maps of meaning and these shared meanings will enable us to make sense of the world around us (E.T. Hall 1976). All these definitions of culture from

psychology, sociology, anthropology and communication studies are fundamental to our understanding of culture. However, we need to critically examine and evaluate the themes and conceptualizations that lie deep beneath the surface of the cultural iceberg to comprehend the complexity of cultural identity in the diaspora. One of the critical questions to evaluate is the applicability of the theories and approaches developed in the second half of the twentieth century to South Asian American immigrants and their successive generations in the twenty-first century. If our world has changed drastically from events of the postcolonial era in the fifties and sixties to the events that forced the cultural turn in the eighties, then the transformation that has occurred between the eighties and the end of the twentieth century is unmatched to that of the past fifty years. The pace, rhythm, and rate at which the world has metamorphosed into its current state in merely two decades of this new millennium are unprecedented. Based on what we have seen so far, the transmogrification of our physical, virtual, and psychological spaces is bound to continue at galactic speeds. Therefore, we need appropriate tools, processes, and constructs to define who we are, who we are "becoming," and from a spiritual, humanistic point of view, who we want to "become" and how we want to shape our "being" and "becoming."

Continuing our discussion about the definition of culture, let us consider an explanation that helps us move easily between the various deeply interconnected aspects of cultural studies. A conceptualization that combines textual analysis by drawing on the legacy of cultural studies' foundations in anthropology and structural linguistics, combined with governmentality, civics, and policy debates, to engage more pertinently with realities in late modernism is more representative of the literature produced by contemporary South Asian American writers. Battling Islamophobia in print and digital media and creating new forms of making meaning of overcoming the problems of "manufacturing consent" (Herman and Chomsky 1988) in American media, these Muslim American authors are redefining the sense of cultural belonging. Cultural Studies scholar Jeff Lewis (2002) advocates that:

> Culture is an assemblage of imaginings and meanings that may be consonant, disjunctive, overlapping, contentious, continuous, or discontinuous. These assemblages may operate through various human social groupings and social practices. In contemporary culture, these imagining and meaning-making experiences are intensified through the proliferation of mass media images and information. (23-24)

Culture gives us the ability to communicate with each other and to form communities; just as society comprises people, culture includes the imaginings and meanings we attribute to known and unknown phenomena. These meanings are represented using textual analysis tools, always remaining fluid with the ability to be transformed by space, time, and human action. Lewis (2002) argues that "[i]maginings and meanings operate to form one another, but they can never be relied on as stable and sustaining formations. Meaning and imagining can at any time confirm or destabilize one another" (23). Furthermore, the very nature of culture is characterized by transience, transformation, boundlessness, and instability. Unlike the sociologically accepted concept of fixity and orderliness in languages, cultures are open to an infinite number of interpretations, sometimes overpowered by the dominant meaning, but always consisting of "competing interests and many different individuals and groups" (Lewis 2002:23). Moreover, culture includes multiple layers of human personality and interaction like family and relationships, nationality, ethnicity, globality, professional sphere, religion, education, technology affinity, sports, gender, sexuality, and so on. Some of these layers may be subject to formally or informally defined institutionality, subject to its own peculiar rules, regulations, and ideology. These, in turn require conformance from individuals while at the same time not restricting the number of cultures

that the individual may practice or the number of institutions that the individual may belong to. It is perfectly acceptable to experience "severe dissonance" (Lewis 2002:23) because of these multiple layers of culture. Finally, thanks to new media and technology, there is a significant increase in the origin and propagation of cultural discourses forming new trends in the twenty-first century. Lewis (2002) contends that "[t]he particular characteristics of electronic communication have rendered the problem of cultural dispute, dissonance, instability, and transition more acute; it has also vastly extended the available resources for imagining and meaning-making" (23).

Therefore, Lewis' (2002) definition of culture liberates it from the fixity related to the implicit dependency on language, ethnicity, race, and discourse. It acknowledges the dissonant coexistence of multiple layers of culture within an individual and, by extension, the existence of such individuals in contemporary society. Furthermore, it decenters the interpretative and ideological dominance of the mainstream culture by allowing any individual, anywhere in the world, at any given time, to imagine their reality and create meaning thanks to the pervasiveness and availability of information in almost real-time to the individuals with access to the right technology. By accepting the dissonance in such a definition of culture, we can acknowledge the presence of norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and ideologies practiced by the mainstream or the so-called dominant groups. No matter what we do, it is not possible to not have some sort of a center that attempts to draw the boundaries closer to itself. Dissonance does not necessarily mean that everything is acceptable; it merely indicates the ability to balance one's priorities and self-expression in a given space and time by respecting the sanctity of the shared and communal nature of such a spatio-temporal imagination. As a final remark on Lewis' (2002) definition of culture, it is impossible to envision a perfect world free from inequality, injustice, and bias. Thus, any individual, including the diasporic individual inhabiting the globalized world in the twenty-first century, needs to be comfortable with their multitudes. They should be able to manifest multiple self-expressions equipped with competencies and strategies to minimize and manage dissonance for peaceful coexistence with other communities.

There are several factors and unique challenges to consider when discussing identity development in diasporic individuals of South Asian origin. They include but are not limited to the trauma of geographical dislocation, key life aspects such as employment, marriage and sexuality, friendship and socialization, religion and politics, old age and mourning for the death of loved ones, and preparing for one's death, and the constant pull and push between multiple cultures for the new generation (S. Akhtar 2014). These are cyclical phenomena and require more sophisticated approaches to analyze the formation and maintenance of identity among diasporic individuals. Globalization has changed the dynamics of geography and space in the twentieth century and beyond. With easy access to transportation, almost real-time connectivity through digital communication technologies, and constant access to social media, the economic co-dependencies between the U.S. and other countries in terms of manufacturing and knowledge needs as well as the availability of ethnic goods and commodities at the click of a button, the physical borders for the affluent diasporic individuals are becoming less significant than before. In this new era, when societies and states are inhabited by people who can easily coexist in multiple homelands compared to their predecessors, a paradigm shift is needed for the social and political inclusion of the already multicultural and diverse population of South Asia. As Leonard (1997) argues, "South Asians are settling into the United States in ways unanticipated only a decade or two ago. Not only are the young people moving into the American mainstream, but elderly parents are also following their adult children in the United States" (169). While many of these from the older generations are confined to suburban homes, acting as caretakers and proponents of the home

culture to their grandchildren, "some of them contribute to changes in American life, helping to make South Asian culture more available" (Leonard 1997:169). For this new wave of South Asian American immigrants to feel comfortable with multiple socio-cultural norms, let us consider two theoretical approaches used in intercultural communication and literary analysis to analyze identity among diasporic individuals.

The first approach is multiculturalism, which is one of the most widely accepted and used theories of identity construction in Western nation-states like Australia (Theophanous 1995), Canada (Wayland 1997), the U.K. (Ashcroft and Bevir 2020), and the U.S. (Buenker and Ratner 2005, Orosco 2016). Multicultural identity involves the study of individuals implicated with multiple cultures and the effects of multiculturalism on members of the majority and minority groups. Globalization, along with postcolonialism, has ushered a new era of multiculturalism around the world and has redefined the purpose and meaning of immigration. In a sense, multiculturalism transcends the restrictions posed by nationalism and aims at promoting a more globalized community. Technological advancements and the movement of skilled labor across world markets have only strengthened the need for global citizens. The construct of "multicultural" resulted from mass social and political movements in many western countries such as the U.K., Australia, and Canada in the second half of the twentieth century. This was also a time when the civil rights movement was at its peak in the U.S. Multiculturalism essentially refers to the existence of racially and ethnically diverse populations within a society or a state (Byrd 2015). However, in multicultural societies, individuals and groups live alongside one another, but they do not necessarily engage meaningfully with each other. This is the classic racial and ethnic segregation case commonly found in the U.S. and U.K.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, although these minority groups have been accorded seemingly equal status, the equality is rather superficial. The focus is solely on the politics of representation and the morality of fulfilling diversity quotas. Multiculturalism seems to be a concept constructed in direct response to addressing the problem of forced or voluntary homogeneity in societies and countries where individuals from minority ethnicities and races are required to assimilate and acculturate to the mainstream culture. It then appears to be a question of morality for the liberal Western countries that advocate the idea of multiculturalism to provide a level playing field for the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversities that they are faced with. Further, multiculturalism assumes that culture is static and that the changes in one culture, especially over successive generations, will not impact the other cultures, as each culture seems to operate individually. However, Kukathas (1993) argues:

> The fundamental point to be made here is that ethnicity and culture are not static but constantly changing in response to economic, social and political conditions. In looking at culturally pluralistic societies – that is to say, most societies – what we find are neither melting pots nor mosaics but ever-shifting kaleidoscopic patterns. In absolute terms, there are few if any stable cultural formations, since nearly all are affected not only by immigration and intermarriage but also by the trade in cultural products and information, and by the expansion of the world's largest industry: tourism. (24)

The idea of pluralism then emerges and seems more plausible to explain the concept of multicultural nation-states or societies. Kukathas (1993) contends that multiculturalism should only be considered as one aspect of pluralism. Furthermore, multiculturalism should not be allowed to dominate the construct of pluralism as culture is only one of several aspects of pluralistic societies. Joppke (2017) argues that multiculturalism is essential for a liberal society to function especially in the context of increasing waves of immigration across the world. For anti-discrimination legislation and public measures to work in a diverse social milieu, Joppke (2017)

suggests that anti-discrimination needs to embrace multiculturalism in the sense of accounting for the social multiplicities of the minorities which may be in direct opposition to mainstream conventional practices. He proposes an alternative in the form of 'multiculturalism of the individual' that is liberal-individualist instead of being focused on the group as a whole. This allows for the possibility of hybrid and multiple identities because it welcomes differences and even furthers them making such individuals visible to the mainstream society instead of blending them as a part of just another minority cultural group. Phillips (2009) concurs in this regard when culture is prioritized at group-level over individuals to ease the notions of multiculturalism in Western societies. She argues that one of the biggest problems with culture is its "tendency to represent individuals from minority or non-Western groups as driven by their culture and compelled by cultural dictates to behave in particular ways" (8-9). In doing so, she continues to argue that "[c]ulture is now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say or do" (9). When translated to legal and public policy, she contends, "[t]his sometimes features as part of the case of multicultural policies or concessions, but it more commonly appears in punitive policies designed to stamp out what have been deemed inappropriate or unacceptable practices" (9). Therefore, she offers that especially, in the case of religion, particularly Islam in Western societies, "[i]t would be difficult to argue that citizens as individuals do not have the right to follow the prescriptions of their religion, or that religious authorities do not have the right to offer authoritative interpretations of religious law" (171). She is opposed to multicultural policies that give or distribute power to different cultural groups, because "[t]he rights that matter in developing a case of multiculturalism are those of individuals, not groups" (165). Furthermore, she asserts that the rights at the heart of the matter involve personal quotidian aspects such as "the right to choose a marriage partner without interference from the state, to follow the dress code prescribed by one's religion or culture, or more generally, to live one's life in accordance with one's beliefs" (165). Following her comment that none of these rights "should be seen as unconditional for like most rights, they depend on context and may need to be balanced against other rights" (65), it can be concluded that the circumstances of each individual may be different from the priorities set by the group they primarily identify with, and that cultural difference is not the sole identifier in the formation of immigrant, post-immigrant, and diasporic identities. In addition to cultural multiplicity, in the twenty-first century, we also need to consider multiplicities in aspects related to demographics, geographical concentration, economy, social classification, religious institutions, politics, psychological, intellectual, and scientific choices, and even morality which all lead to the idea that societies exhibit pluralism rather than multiculturalism. To summarize, traditionally multicultural identities reflect the most commonly understood meaning of multiculturalism: the peaceful coexistence of multiple diverse cultures within a state. The concept of national identity can easily replace multicultural identity. Old school proponents of multiculturalism argue for creating a shared common culture in the interest of political and social stability. However, such a culture often seems to be equated to national identity or aligns with the values and norms of the mainstream dominant cultural group. For the reasons stated above, pluralistic societies are much more complex to govern, and attempts at assimilation and acculturation have failed for the non-European immigrants in the U.S. Nevertheless, there have been several attempts to theorize the psychological and developmental aspects of multicultural identity, ranging from socio-cognitive elements to integrative and intersectional aspects of intergroup relations (Benet-Martínez and Hong 2014). It should also be noted that multiculturalism has not been devoid of criticism. Many scholars consider it a failed model for dealing with

challenges posed by diverse ethnic and religious communities around the world (see Hudson and Réno 2000; Jansen 2013; Nathan 2010; and Werbner and Modood 2015).

The second approach is interculturalism, which can be understood as the process of developing significant relationships between multiple ethnic and racial groups. Each is impacted by the other, ultimately leading to a change in the country's social, moral, political, and economic fabric. There is a notion of mutuality, reciprocity, equality, understanding, and acceptance of all the pluralistic aspects that impact the processes of "being" and "becoming," including cultural diversity and differences among all individuals, hosts, and diasporic individuals alike. In other words, interculturalism is not a substitute for the national identity attributed to the individuals from the mainstream group. Interculturalism thrives in societies that promote the ideals of ethnorelativism. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by Bennett (1986, 2004, 2013) introduced the idea of interculturalism as a developmental capacity of an individual where they can negotiate the differences between cultures by accepting and accommodating aspects of their own culture and those of the other culture with a sense of progressive ease. Extending this concept to societies, as they move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, there is a shift in collective cognition and behavior of both the dominant and the minority groups. However, Bennett's model is geared more towards developing the competencies needed to increase intercultural sensitivity and lacks a framework that can help analyze intercultural identity in literary narratives.

Building on the concepts of pluralism, promoted through ethnorelativism and integration, a new form of cultural identity can be developed to describe the processes of "being" and "becoming" in diaspora literature. As mentioned before, American society can no longer be viewed as a melting pot, and any attempts at creating a so-called "common culture" are futile in the wake of digital transformation and globalization. The last fifty years have funneled highly qualified immigrants, especially from South Asia, into the U.S. whose offspring is now no longer willing to accept the second-class citizenship that was accorded to their parents upon their first arrival to the U.S. These new non-white Americans are changing the idea of what it means to be American and to embrace the true meaning of equality granted to all its citizens by the U.S. constitution. Literary productions by these new generation Americans vocally and unreservedly question modern America's cultural, political, and financial hegemony. This new generation has rejected the submissiveness of their parents and has decided to take matters into their own hands and create their own destiny. Authors like Ayad Akhtar and Haroon Moghul, among others, are raising consciousness among the diaspora to stop accepting rejection by the dominant groups and take control of their future as American citizens with equal rights in the land of opportunity many cultures, races, and ethnicities call home. Such writers advocate the concept of interculturality through their literary and non-literary works where there is a mutually reciprocal relationship between the white and the other Americans, where people want to transform the American dream, shape a new dream together. The characters of immigrant children represented in this new wave of South Asian American writers no longer wish to survive merely. They are also not afraid to question the imbalances in power, for they can now meaningfully contribute, dialog, debate, and transform society alongside the dominant group. If brown faces like those of Hasan Minhaj and Priyanka Chopra have entered the mainstream American media, then brown elite CEOs like Google's Sundar Pichai and Microsoft's Satya Nadella are leading corporations at the crux of changing human understanding of the future world. In the process, no one has been left unchanged, and in the real and imagined narratives, people are beginning to examine the understanding of their own culture. This has resulted in personal and collective transformation through deep learning,

demonstrating the move from ethnocentrism and assimilation towards ethnorelativism and integration.

To describe this new type of persona, Kim (2001, 2008, 2015) has theorized the phenomenon of intercultural personhood, which can be meaningfully applied to understand the ontological aspects among South Asian Muslim Americans and their successive generations. At its very core, "intercultural identity is employed as a counterpoint to, and as an extension of, cultural identity, and as a concept that represents the phenomenon of identity adaptation and transformation beyond the perimeters of the conventional, categorical conception of cultural identity" (Kim 2008:359). The concept of intercultural personhood is based on the systems theory approach, which posits that humans are complex beings that are constantly evolving. By extension, the same properties of complex systems can also be applied to human culture. "Plasticity, the ability to learn and change through new experiences, is highlighted as one of the most profound characteristics of the human mind and is the very basis upon which individuals acquire an identity" (Kim 2008:362-363). Further, the theorization of such a persona is based on the constructionist approach where individuals create dynamic relationships, both within their own groups and with the other groups leading to "a dynamic, adaptive, and transformative identity conception—one that conjoins and integrates, rather than separates and divides" (Kim 2008:360). Here, the individual is not confined to a narrow and singular view of cultural identity rather their fate and identities are intertwined and interdependent with all groups with which they share the geographical and virtual spaces of coexistence. In a sense, it blends cultural identity with both social identity and group identity, thereby allowing us to conceptualize a more holistic approach toward understanding the personal and psychological aspects of identity among diasporic individuals. As our societies and nation-states transition from multiculturalism to pluralism, we need to change our theorization of cultural identity from the realm of the individual to that of collective social personhood. Here the individual is an extension of the larger social group, and societies can accommodate and function with diversity and plurality in institutions, politics, education, business, thus highlighting the true essence of interculturalism.

However, pluralism is not sufficient in itself and has its own problems and biases. Kim (2008) highlights two such issues by means of positivity bias and oversimplification inherent in the academic research on pluralism, which seems to be somewhat different from the reality experienced by diasporic individuals. To promote fairness, justice, morality, and equality for minority groups, there is a tendency to knowingly or unknowingly ignore the negative connotations associated with cultural identity. The intellectual aspects fail to see the conservationism associated with a focus on preserving culture, be it the dominant culture or the minority culture, or the moral factors are more concerned with ensuring that societies remain liberal and that there is no place for oppression or injustice. While these are great ideals, we need to understand that,

> individuals identify with a group in a manner that is self-serving. The way people experience cultural identity is essentially not a rational but an emotionally driven experience. When it comes to our relationships with an outgroup in competition or conflict, we are less than likely to be fair and objective and more likely to be irrational and defensive, favoring our ingroup and discriminating against the outgroup that threatens our ingroup. (Kim 2008:361)

The U.S. is no exception to this ideology positioning and suffers from positivity bias like other Western nation-states. Secondly, in discussing the oversimplification aspects of pluralism, there is a tendency among the current academic discourse,

> to portray cultural identity as an "all-or-none" or "either-or" entity that belongs exclusively to a particular category of people. A person is often viewed to belong to one, and only one, particular ethnic group. The monolithic and static conception of cultural identity is often reflected in statements that inflate uniformity among the individuals who are associated with a particular group category. (Kim 2008:362)

Nevertheless, in our globalized world, including the U.S., the manifestation of cultural identity among the new immigrants and their successive generations is moving towards multiplicity. In fact, by considering minority groups as homogenous, the very principles of pluralism are being violated. Pluralism and interculturalism apply to differences and diversity between cultures and within cultures. Although there are similarities between individuals from South Asia, there are differences between Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. Still, there are also differences between people practicing different religions within each of these countries. Bridges need to be built within the South Asian community as much as they need to be built between South Asians and Americans. Interculturalism needs to acknowledge the complexity inherent in pluralism, and any conceptualization of intercultural identity needs to critically examine the biases mentioned above to mirror the ground reality.

Kim's intercultural personhood or identity theory is based on three main principles: acculturation and deculturation aspects in the immigrant's cultural adaptation process, the stress – adaptation – growth dynamic from a temporal perspective, and finally, intercultural transformation through the processes of individuation and universalization. Let us consider these three aspects below and understand their benefits and drawbacks vis-à-vis South Asian Muslim Americans and the needs of the new millennium, which calls for alternative theorizations of diasporic identity. Firstly, the foundation of building identity among diasporic individuals is the cultural adaptation process, where they unlearn certain aspects of their own culture and learn new things that help them respond to the same situations in the new culture. The concept of deculturation and acculturation is used from a purely cognitive perspective and maintains that "acculturative learning does not occur randomly or automatically following intercultural contacts and exposures. (…) Rather, it is a process over which each individual has a degree of freedom or control, based on his or her predispositions, pre-existing needs and interests" (Kim 2008:363). As discussed previously, acculturation does not necessarily impact identity in diasporic individuals in a positive manner. So, we need to be mindful of this aspect even though it is used from an intercultural learning and communication perspective. "This interplay of acculturation and deculturation underlies the psychological evolution individuals undergo—from changes in "surface" areas such as outwardly expressive behaviors such as choices of music, food, and dress, to deeper-level changes in social role-related behaviors and fundamental values (Kim 2008:363). The constructionist aspect of modifying behaviors and fundamental values to acculturate with the mainstream culture is the first drawback of the intercultural identity model. The new millennium diasporic individual should not feel compelled to acculturate to the mainstream culture; rather they should be allowed to enculturate and to take it a step further, to transculturate. Secondly, deculturation and acculturation cause psychological stress as individuals try to balance their old and new identities caused by the disequilibrium in their inability to handle familiar situations in an unfamiliar environment. Stress in such situations is inevitable and a desired element of successful cultural adaptation as individuals attempt to renegotiate their heritage identities and recreate their acquired identities. Eventually, the stress–adaptation disequilibrium results in the individual's psychological growth over time and helps them to respond better to their new environment. The process is never-ending and repeats every time there is something unfamiliar in the environment that needs adaptation. Furthermore, the stress–adaptation dynamic changes in relation to the degree of change and the

longitudinal presence of the individual in the new environment. Since systems theory is one of the building blocks of the intercultural identity development process, stress "is intrinsic to complex open systems and essential in the adaptation process—one that allows for self-(re)organization and self-renewal" (Kim 2008:364). However, this stress is not exhibited linearly but is rather cyclical. First, there is resistance towards the change, and then, the individual is pushed forward to accept the change and subsequently adapt to it. "As growth of some units always occurs at the expense of others, the adaptation process follows a pattern that juxtaposes integration and disintegration, progression and regression, and novelty and confirmation" (Kim 2008:364). This is the second drawback of the intercultural identity model, as the diasporic individual does not seem to have a choice between maintaining multiple identities. Success, in this case, is defined as conformance to the dominant culture rather than the simultaneous coexistence of different cultural realities. Thirdly, as individuals move through the processes of deculturation and acculturation and the stress–growth–adaptation dynamic, a new identity emerges in them, which comprises an "open-ended, adaptive, and transformative self-other orientation (Kim 2008:364). The basis of this intercultural identity relies on individuation, where there is a distinct recognition of the "self" as an individual that is not defined by conventional social categorizations or stereotypes, and on universalization, where the individual can recognize the commonalities across cultures in human behaviors and values. They use this new understanding to build bridges across the different communities that inhabit the shared social, political, and psychological spaces. Kim (2015) posits that:

> Together, the two interrelated processes of intercultural identity development define the nature of the psychological movement toward an identity orientation that is no longer bound by conventional cultural categories. Through individuation and universalization, individuals undergoing the process of intercultural transformation can cultivate a mindset that integrates, rather than separates, cultural differences. (7)

The intercultural identity model is essentially based on the processes that facilitate intercultural communication among diasporic individuals. First, the emphasis is on survival in a new culture through adaptation by recognizing that all individuals in the target culture do not necessarily possess the stereotypical values, behaviors, and customs associated with the dominant culture. Second, the new entrant is encouraged to develop mutual understanding and find common ground by recognizing commonalities amongst differences. A third drawback of this model is that the choice is left to the individual who is "willing and able to use his or her free will to embrace the process of intercultural identity development, and who is open-minded and resilient enough to endure the stress inherent in the situations of new learning and adaptation" (Kim 2015:10). Therefore, success is guaranteed in an environment that favors acculturation and to an individual who exhibits endurance and persistence in the process of cultural transformation. This is neither desired nor available universally to outsiders living in Western societies where the hegemonic forces are not favorable, especially to a non-White Muslim immigrant from South Asia. Nevertheless, the idea of intercultural personhood is an improvement over some of the other prevalent identity models based on multiculturalism's emphasis on assimilation and underlying ethnocentrism (Adler 1977; Berry 2005, 2007, 2008; Stewart and Bennett 1991). The systems theory approach provides a reasonable basis for defining the complexity of this developmental process. The individual can never lose all aspects of their original self, and the new elements that are acquired over some time enrich the personality in such a way that the whole becomes much more significant than simply the sum of its parts. "A+B = A′+B′+X, with A′ and B′ indicating modifications in some of the original cultural patterns (A), some of the new cultural patterns (B),

and the two interrelated facets of identity transformation (X), individuation and universalization" (Kim 2015:7). There is a need to develop an increased emotional, cultural, psychological, cognitive, and perceptual maturity to deal with the complexities presented by the twenty-first century, where our fates are intertwined even though our faiths are untangled in the global web be it physical or virtual. Therefore, it makes sense that:

> The idea of intercultural personhood has profound relevance in our time of great uncertainty. People worldwide are being challenged to adapt to an unprecedented acceleration of technological, social, and cultural change and to discover ways to live more cooperatively together. The individuals, social organizations, communities, and nations that cannot adapt to these changing forces will eventually alienate themselves from the world. (Kim 2001:234)

However, we need to think beyond interculturalism and intercultural identity to better respond to the developmental and ontological challenges faced by diasporic individuals and their successive generations in the U.S. "Existing terms close to intercultural identity include 'meta-identity,' 'cosmopolitan' or 'transcultural' identity, all of which indicate less dualistic and more meta-contextual, conceptions of self and others rather than rigid boundedness vis-à-vis conventional social categories such as ethnicity or culture" (Kim 2008:364).

In the remainder of Part Two of this dissertation, the concepts of transculturation and transcultural identity are defined and used to analyze literary works by selected South Asian American authors. As an emerging movement in the twenty-first century, transculturalism also provides the foundation for conceptualizing the fractal identity model in the final part of this dissertation.

2.2 Transcultural Identity in South Asian Muslim Americans in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*

> It's because you're different. You can't live life by rules others give you. In that way, you and I are the same. You have to find your own rules. All my life I've been running away from their rules, Hayat. All my life. You will be the same.
>
> Ayad Akhtar, *American Dervish*

Ayad Akhtar, described as a renaissance man in an interview by Samuel Hankins (2012), is a Pulitzer Prize-winning Pakistani American playwright, novelist, director, actor, and teacher who currently leads PEN America. A. Akhtar also describes himself as both a poster boy and a detractor for South Asian American artists in another interview by Fern Diaz and Matt Kagen (2017) while criticizing the role of identity politics in art. *American Dervish (AD)*, his debut novel published in 2013, is a coming-of-age novel located in the American hinterland. It is narrated from the point of view of a young man named Hayat – reflecting and negotiating his relationship with Islam during his formative years, growing up, and discovering himself as a transcultural American man. A. Akhtar has expressed in several interviews with Terry Gross (2012) and Michael Silverblatt (2012) that he intended to write an American novel and that it should not be read as a narrative solely about the religious identity of its characters. Hayat's parents and his aunt Mina may be Pakistani-American, but Hayat is a truly American character. The influence of Islam on Hayat is the same as the influence of Judaism on Nathan – Hayat's father's Jewish friend and colleague, who, like Hayat is a second-generation American. Mina enamors both Nathan and Hayat, and one wants to become a Muslim, and the other wants to become a *hafiz*[40] and memorize the Quran. Mina's character is polyvocal (Malik 2017); she reads the *Heart of Darkness* and the Quran*,* which is liberal and repressed but at the same time has complete agency. The polyvocality is also reflected in the depiction of Islam and the diverse interpretation of this otherwise monolithic faith, by contrasting orthodox perspectives with the more moderate beliefs and the marginalized doctrine of Sufism. In the NPR interview with Terry Gross, A. Akhtar (2012) clarifies that, like, the narrator Hayat, he too has gone through a journey of evolution in his faith from "a childlike relationship to faith and the depth of that, and then sort of turning away from the heritage and then reopening, something that I've been exploring for many years" ("Writing about the Midwestern Muslim Experience"). A. Akhtar further clarifies that he is not a literalist in the strict sense of the meaning of practicing Islam, and he has been influenced by Sufism and meditates using the learnings from Sufi masters globally. Malik (2017) argues that "[a]s a response to a culture that imagines Muslim men as violent Islamists, Hayat's path to national assimilation and inclusion is through an embodied feminine approach, a central battleground between Sufism and the wider Islamic tradition" (52). However, Philippon (2018) argues that although Sufism is used by the West as an instrument of positive branding and soft power to counter the discourses that rely on the presumed hatred and intolerance perpetrated by Islam, Sufism remains at the margins and has

[40] The word *hafiz,* derived from the Arabic verb *hifz* which means to memorize, refers to a person who has memorized the Quran in its entirety. Mina inspires Hayat to memorize the Quran. As A. Akhtar narrates in the novel "[M]ina said that becoming a hafiz was one of the greatest things a person could do in one's life. It meant not only securing one's own place in Janaat, but a place for one's parents as well: Janaat, our word for 'Paradise': that garden in the sky that was the ultimate end of all our labors. And though I didn't know much about our faith, I knew how important Paradise was. To us Muslims, life here on earth was of no value if it did not lead to that abode of endless peace and pleasure, where rivers of milk and honey flowed, and where the famous virgin hordes awaited our arrival" (*AD* 38).

its own problems in diplomatic and transnational practices. Unlike Malik's (2017) argument that *AD* "draws on Sufism's embattled and marginalized position within Islam to project it as amenable to national inclusion, and dismisses and discounts other approaches, sanctioning hatred against them" (54), the depiction of Sufism in the novel should be considered as an expression of love rather than a religious ideology. Addressing the problem of identity politics, pluralism, Islam, and 9/11, Dressler (2009) explains that "one of the major aims of US patriotism is to transcend ethnic and religious differences" (77), however, this "is based on an implicit model of layered identities and loyalties, espousing a civic patriotism that aims at integrating ethnic identities into the American national mainstream and demanding loyalty to the nation's symbols and values" (77). To only privilege one form of Islam over others is not amenable to a holistic formation of identity in the diverse cultural and religious subgroups that constitute the South Asian Muslim American diaspora. Dressler (2009) posits that the "ethnic and religious inclusivism of American nationalism is, however, fragile. The layered identity model fails in times when national values and interests are being seen in conflict with those of particular religious or not-yet-Americanized ethnic communities" (77). Religion is an important layer of the South Asian Muslim American diaspora's identity, however, using Sufism as an argument to reduce the complexity of Islam to the good versus bad Muslim binary, and using this liberal yet marginalized form of Islam to build a national American identity is highly questionable. Instead, I argue that the novel depicts a gradual reconstruction of Hayat's identity in a self-reflexive manner as it transitions through the various developmental phases revealing the "becoming" of Hayat's path as an American *dervish*[41]. It also unravels the transformation of Mina into a *dervish* unleashing the self-inflicted and tragic suffering as a means to achieve a higher state of consciousness that is practiced by certain denominations of Sufism. However, far from being a story of the loss of identity (D. R. Ali 2015) and faith (Berzenji 2016), the novel portrays the creation of a transcultural identity fostered by a transcultural space for interfaith dialogue.

In the twenty-first century, immigration can no longer be viewed as an independent process where populations merely migrate to overcome poverty and overpopulation in their home countries. In fact, in the present day, highly skilled professionals form a significant part of immigrant flows from the global South to the global North. Many affluent South Asian Muslim diaspora members have entered the U.S. as immigrants in service sectors such as health and IT with some level of knowledge about American culture. The reasons and motivation are not merely rooted in the home country; instead, they are also largely dependent on the need for highly paid knowledge workers to fuel the capitalist expansion project (Ong 2006). Such diasporic individuals have to deal with cultural complexity and hybridity, faced with endless choices in their "becoming," aided by a variety of socio-cultural transnational activities funneled through the confluence of multiple and parallel histories of cultural traditions (Dirlik 1996). Their subsequent generations are also presented with new challenges when local politics become transnational, global culture can easily be replicated locally, and borders of religious practices and faith become porous (Peggy 2001). When the transnational elite turns into transnational villagers, their identity cannot be sufficiently addressed through traditional postcolonial theories of cultural identity. Moreover, to define and understand the developmental aspects of "being" and "becoming" in these diasporic individuals, approaches to cultural identity based on dualities such as bicultural identity

[41] *Dervish*, Arabic darwīsh, [is] any member of a Ṣūfī (Muslim mystic) fraternity, or tariqa. Within the Ṣūfī fraternities, which were first organized in the 12th century, an established leadership and a prescribed discipline obliged the *dervish* postulant to serve his sheikh, or master, and to establish a rapport with him. The postulant was also expected to learn the *silsilah*, the spiritual line of descent of his fraternity (Encyclopaedia Britannica "Dervish").

theories, multiplicities such as multicultural identity theories, or even continuums such as intercultural identity theories discussed in the previous chapter are not suitable.

AD narrates the story of such transnational diasporic individuals of Pakistani American origin with diverse cultural backgrounds living transnational lives across multiple geographies with fluid identities. Dagnino (2013) explains that transcultural fiction is "written in a way that makes it hard for a reader to understand or infer, without knowing anything about their complex biographies and multiple forms of identities, to what nationality, cultural community, or ethnic group their authors belong" (135). Without an understanding of South Asian histories, the religious traditions of Islam, the role of Sufism within Islam, and the shared histories of the three major monotheistic faiths within the American context, the analysis of *AD* characters' transcultural identities is not possible. The novel itself is narrated by a second-generation character, Hayat, who negotiates his relationship with faith, both personally and culturally, throughout the story. His father, Naveed represents the elite or voluntary immigrant who has topped his medical class in Lahore and has been offered an opportunity to train as a neurologist in the U.S. His mother, Muneer follows her husband to America, and although she chooses to be a housewife, she has studied psychology in college and defies the stereotypes of a traditional Muslim woman. His aunt Mina having arrived in the U.S. after a troubled marriage, is exposed to transcultural experiences in America and develops transcultural sensibilities leading her to fall in love with Nathan, a Jewish friend of the family. In addition to stories from the Prophet's lives and verses from the Quran, the novel has several Freudian references to personal development, gender roles, and relationships. Furthermore, unlike the postcolonial immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and other former British colonies to the United Kingdom, the South Asian American immigrants have no such colonial history with the U.S. The novel is set in rural Wisconsin, where there are no other South Asian Muslim families. The family tries to recreate a transnational identity with Muslim immigrants from other parts of the world based on their religious commonality. Dagnino (2013) contends that "what makes this kind of writing different is, most of all, its resistance to being appropriated by one single traditional national canon or being identified with one single, specific cultural/ethnic expression or tradition" (136). In a similar vein, *AD* deals with multiple interpretations of religion ranging from orthodox, moderate to conservative. It also represents hybrid expressions of faith and opens avenues toward interfaith relationships between various religious communities in the local, national, and international contexts. Although Hayat's parents are not very religious, they are influenced by the Jewish-American tradition. Dealing with the repercussions of a problematic marriage, his mother uses both religion and science to influence Hayat's attitude towards women. She raises him to be a little Jew as she explains the patriarchal nature of Islam to Hayat and wants him not to be like his father.

> That's why I'm working so hard to give you the pieces he doesn't have. So you can have a wonderful relationship with a wonderful woman someday. Having a good partner is the greatest blessing in life. The Prophet said it! And so did Freud! Your father has a wonderful partner and he doesn't even know it!" (*AD* 143-144)

Transnationalism can be used to analyze the interconnectedness between migration and the shrinking of the socio-political and financial significance of borders for today's diasporic individuals, thanks to the ease of travel between multiple homelands and the increased availability of communication technologies (Dirlik 1996). "We have defined transnationalism as the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Schiller et al 1992:1). In creating these social fields across multiple geographies,

through a process of life-long negotiation, a shared identity emerges from the identities of diasporic individuals and groups, thereby juxtaposing the concepts of transnationalism and identity (Vertovec 2001). In *AD*, A. Akhtar portrays the reality of a transcultural nation struggling with the reemergence of religion among the second-generation diaspora who are no longer immigrants. The novel does not offer any single interpretation of identity and ends with a metanarrative alluding to the transculturation of faiths and cultural heritages. The narrative opens with an interfaith relationship between Hayat, a Muslim character, and Rachel, a Jewish character, and towards the end, speculates their future in the words of Hayat to the reader as "[o]ur wonderful and troubled interfaith romance is a tale for another time" (*AD* 329). The transnational then becomes the transcultural because, for these members of the South Asian diaspora, it is not a simple matter of succumbing to the hegemonic American culture or merely losing their own culture. Instead, they forge their own unique identities as inheritors and creators of hybrid and fluid cultures culminating in tertiary cultures, which can be grouped under the broad umbrella of a transculturation framework. They move from developing plural and multicultural identities to forming constantly evolving transcultural identities that continuously redefine, shift, and at times merge the center and the margins. Such a concept of transculturation was introduced by Fernando Ortiz (1940), a Cuban anthropologist, to make sense of the cultural hybridity and complexity of races and cultures that constitute the Cuban identity. However, the term is appropriate to diasporic individuals from all cultures trying to shape their ontological processes of "being" and "becoming" in foreign lands. Ortiz (1940) contends:

> I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. (102-103)

In a sense mentioned above, transculturation is more suited to studying cultural identity in diasporic communities and building effective, ethical, and responsible global citizenship dialogs. There is a two-way interaction between cultures being created beyond the center in a fused, permeable, and collective transcultural space that absorbs and dissipates different values, traditions, and norms through cultural osmosis. Identities for transcultural individuals "cut across distinct frames of reference; multiple identities which have recourse to several cultures; attachments which link up discrete cultural territory: such transgressions bring to crisis a traditional understanding of culture and have, for some time now, promoted conceptualizations of transculture" (Stein 2009:253). There has been much research on transculturalism in cultural studies (Ortiz 1940; Cuccioletta 2001; Reichardt 2017; Slimbach 2005; Lewis 2002) and transcultural literary studies (Dagnino 2012, 2013, 2015; Fischer 2016; Pettersson 2008; Nordin et al. 2013). Furthermore, Bond and Rapson (2014) have used the term 'transcultural turn' to respond to the need for new vocabulary and concepts to deal with the novel and complex realities unfolding before us at an accelerating pace. In the last twenty years, the transcultural turn has manifested itself in many cultural and literary studies areas. The notion of transculturalism intersects multiple disciplines and is well suited to respond to the challenges faced by diasporic individuals in the twenty-first century in making sense of the changes occurring in lived and imagined realities. Dagnino (2012) argues:

> In this light, transculturalism, understood in its broader and all-encompassing way, might be deployed as a concept for creative culture-making, an instrument for cultural identity formation, a mode of experiencing

> one's cultural identity and an analytical/critical tool able to capture the interplay between culture, the different modes of modernity, and the works of a globalized imagination and sense of citizenship. (13)

As discussed in the first part of this dissertation, globalization has turned our attention from complex culture to cultural complexity and hybridity. Vauclair et al. (2014) offer an attractive theoretical perspective building on Cuccioletta's (2001) concept of transculturalism based on the existence of '*metissage*' among the culturally diverse populations in Canada and the U.S. The term refers to the ability of individuals to view the transcendental aspect of culture, resulting in the combination of values, norms, and traditions from multiple cultures. In this sense, in *AD,* transculturalism facilitates the formation of unique cultural insights for Mina and Hayat. These characters are not bound to a particular culture, whether Pakistani, American, Islamic, Jewish, or Sufi, but their worldviews echo all the different cultures surrounding the myriad experiences through their journeys of personal growth, "being," and "becoming." This makes Hayat culturally adaptable and capable of navigating the inconsistencies and conflicts he encounters in his daily life when dealing with multiple cultures. For example, unlike his other Muslim classmates, Hayat is not perturbed by his college professor's lecture about discovering an alternative version of the Quran. Hayat aspires to become a *hafiz*, but he memorizes the Quran in English. When he is mocked about it at the mosque, his aunt Mina reminds him that one's intention is more important than the language one speaks in spiritual matters. Mina says that "[b]eing a hafiz is not what matters. It's the quality of your faith. Not the name you put on it" (*AD* 307). Hayat's relationship with Rachel, a Jewish classmate, marks an essential milestone in his identarian development. At the end of the novel, Hayat declares, "It was in Rachel's arms—and it was with her love—that I finally discovered myself not only as a man, but as an American" (*AD* 329). The presence of such a "transcultural approach to the self as an open-ended process" (Dagnino 2012:6) in the novel requires us to move away from the traditional notions of fixed belonging and non-permeable cultural practices. As seen in the preceding chapter, multicultural identity focuses on conventional aspects such as national, ethnic, and racial identity instead of the cultural agnostic foundation of the transcultural identity. And while interculturalism provides an excellent alternative to the problems left unsolved by multiculturalism, it still does not help us adequately deal with the ontological and developmental challenges faced by diasporic individuals in the age of globalization and digital transformation during late modernity. However, before we further analyze transcultural identity in *AD,* it is essential to briefly clarify the differences between multiculturalism, interculturalism, and transculturalism.

> Wolfgang Welsch describes transculturality as "the most adequate concept of culture today – for both political and normative reasons" (Welsch 1999, 194). Rejecting any notion of culture as territorially bound, Welsch contends (in terms reminiscent of both Eliot and Bhabha) that [c]ultures today are in general characterized by *hybridization*. For every culture, all other cultures have technically come to be inner-content or satellites" (1999, 198). Transculturality thus differs from either interculturality (which "seeks ways in which [different] cultures could nevertheless get on with, understand and recognize one another" (1999, 195)) or *multiculturality* (which "takes up the problems which different cultures have living together within one society" (1999, 196)), by refusing to subscribe to any separatist notion of cultures as discrete and impermeable entities. Resisting the idea that either values or lifestyles can be contained within any form of border (be it national, economic, ethnic or religious), Welsch argues "for a multimeshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive understanding of culture [...] whose pragmatic features exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition" (1999, 200). (Bond and Rapson 2014:13-14)

A pertinent conceptualization of transcultural identity is offered by Vauclair et al. (2014), who define it as a more personal construct based on an individual's interaction with multiple cultures rather than a social construct. The three reasons for such a theorization are: different people have different cultural experiences in the same situation. The ability to learn from these experiences and process any differences and conflicts is not the same for everyone. Furthermore, people choose what they want to embrace as a part of their identity autonomously and consciously. *AD* describes the journey of Mina's *dhikr*[42] to become a *dervish*. Mina is both traditional and liberal in matters of religion, and for her, "faith wasn't about the outer forms. She didn't wear a head scarf" (*AD* 50). Mina is unable to fast because of medical issues, but she finds ways to remain faithful to the intention behind Ramadan by depriving herself of things that she loves. She does this "in order to feel that quickening of the will–and the deepening of one's gratitude–that she said were the reasons we Muslims fasted" (*AD* 50). Mina's resultant transcultural identity is fluid. It changes depending on new cultural experiences by rejecting existing norms, values, and traditions and embracing new ones to grow the "self" further. Hayat's characterization of Mina is that she is "a paradox I couldn't resolve, my opposing ideas of her—enlightened and devout; intrepid and passive—only ever colliding, and never sitting comfortably enough for me to hold them at all, let alone function" (*AD* 324). Mina takes personal responsibility for all her actions and is content with all her decisions taken of her free will. Her interpretation of Islam leans more towards Sufism. In this way, Mina exhibits a transcultural identity where she sees everything as an expression of Allah's will no matter what country or circumstance she finds herself in. She comes to the U.S. to escape a bad marriage in Pakistan; falls in love with Nathan but cannot marry him; ultimately marries a conservative Muslim man in the U.S. who abuses her physically and mentally, eventually driving her to her deathbed. Yet, Mina counsels Hayat when he goes to see her at the hospital during her last days:

> Faith has never been about an afterlife for me, Hayat. It's about finding God now. In the everyday. Here. With you. Whether I'm living in a prison or in a castle. Sick or healthy. It's all the same. That's what the Sufis teach. What comes our way, whatever it is, that is the vehicle. Every single life, no matter how big or small, how happy or how sad, it can be a path to Him. (*AD* 326)

Since the choice always remains with Mina, her identity is more personal and does not necessarily resonate with the collective social identity of the dominant group. Mina is an advocate of *ijtihad,* or personal interpretation in practicing religion. She chooses to become a beautician when she arrives in the U.S. and even divorces her first husband. She could not have done this in Pakistan. Still, when she is heartbroken after splitting with Nathan, it appears that she purposely chooses to inflict suffering by marrying Sunil to follow the path of the Sufis. From the tenth century onwards, orthodox Islam prohibits any innovations in religion from personal interpretation, but as

[42] Dhikr, also spelled [z]ikr, (Arabic: "reminding oneself," or "mention"), ritual prayer or litany practiced by Muslim mystics (Ṣūfīs) for the purpose of glorifying God and achieving spiritual perfection. Based on the Qurʾānic injunctions "Remind thyself [udhkur] of thy Lord when thou forgettest" (18:24) and "O ye who believe! Remember [udhkurū] Allāh with much remembrance" (33:41), the dhikr is essentially a "remembering" of God by the frequent repetition of his names. Originally a simple recitation of the Qurʾān and various religious writings among ascetics and mystics, the dhikr gradually became a formula (e.g., lā ilāha illa ʾllāh, "there is no god but God"; Allāhu akbar, "God is greatest"; al-ḥamdu līʾllāh, "praise be to God"; astaghfiru ʾllāh, "I ask God's forgiveness"), repeated aloud or softly, accompanied by prescribed posture and breathing. As the Ṣūfī brotherhoods (ṭarīqahs) were established, each adopted a particular dhikr, to be recited in solitude (e.g., following each of the five obligatory daily prayers) or as a community. The dhikr, like fikr (meditation), is a method the Ṣūfī may use in his striving to achieve oneness with God (Encyclopedia Britannica "Dhikr").

far as Mina is concerned "these 'gates' could never be closed, because they were the gates that led to the Lord. 'Somebody just said they were closed. I walk through them as I please,' she added." (*AD* 51). The transcultural identity of the different characters in *AD* can be compared to a mosaic pattern, where the different identities merge to form a new identity based on a collection of multiple cultural experiences and the resultant learning. The outstanding features are therefore the personal and cognitive aspects of cultural identity formation among individuals inhabiting multiple cultural spaces such as Mina and Hayat. In order to describe the behavior and internal representation among transcultural individuals, Vauclair et al. (2014) build upon Lücke et al.'s (2013) model of cognitive patterns resulting from multicultural experiences: "compartmentalization (separate cultural cognitions), integration (interconnected cultural cognitions), inclusion (enhanced home cultural cognitions with added foreign culture elements), convergence (merged cultural cognitions consisting in overlapping schemas), and generalization (new cultural cognitions of meta-cultural schemas)" (Vauclair et al. 2014:16). This is consistent with the transcendental, autonomous, cognitive, generalized, and fluid aspects of dealing with cultural similarities and differences in Hayat's immediate family, including his parents and aunt. The developmental aspects in such individuals do not focus on the deep knowledge of the specific cultural content but instead focus on their ability to form connections between various cultural schemata, thus highlighting the capacity to handle cognitive structures. In *AD,* we have characters with multiple cognitive skills. There are rationalist humanists like Hayat's father, who completely rejects religion and takes no interest in his son's religious education, and Nathan, who is willing to convert from Judaism to Islam for the sake of Mina. There are literalists like the cleric Souhef who use verses from the Quran out-of-context and create an anti-Semitic atmosphere that breaks Mina and Nathan apart, and Sunil, who follows an orthodox and tribal version of Islam. And finally, there is the mystic like Mina, who deliberately meets a tragic end despite being in complete control of her present. The transnational, transcultural, and cosmopolitan aspect of the novel lies in how these extremist reactions are dealt with by its more rationalist and mystic characters.

Furthermore, in terms of defining and understanding the developmental and ontological processes among diasporic individuals such as Mina and Hayat, Epstein's (2009) conceptualization of trans-postmodernism is well suited to deal with cultural identities that transcend our traditional understanding of space and time in the context of transcultural individuals inhabiting multiple realities.

> In considering the names that might be used to designate the new era following "postmodernism," one finds that the prefix "trans" stands out specially. The last third of the twentieth century developed under the sign of "post," which signaled the demise of such concepts of modernity as "truth" and "objectivity," "soul" and "subjectivity," "utopia" and "ideality," "primary origin" and "originality," "sincerity" and "sentimentality." All of these concepts are now being reborn in the form of "trans-subjectivity," "trans-idealism," "trans-utopianism," "trans-originality," "trans-lyricism," "trans-sentimentality," etc. (Epstein and Genis 2016: 546-547)

Their transcultural identity draws from multiple sources of knowledge and worldviews. We see in *AD* that despite being foregrounded by Islam, the characters are not fundamentalists. They have learned to rationally distinguish the literal meaning of Quranic verses quoted in Friday sermons at their American mosque. And although they participate in transcultural Islamic gatherings of Muslim immigrants from many different countries, their primary objective is to seek a sense of community rather than righteousness. We learn that Hayat's maternal grandfather spent time in London with Jews during the second world war. He taught his children that intellectual curiosity was compatible with religious rituals. "[T]hinking did not have to weaken one's bond to tradition

but could actually strengthen it" (*AD* 103) and the popularly held belief "that pursuing knowledge for its own sake was the sure sign one had fallen from the straight path leading to God" (*AD* 103) was not valid. Further reading of Epstein's theory suggests a more pragmatic approach to deciphering trans-postmodernism and, by extension, transculturalism. It cautions about the complexity of what lies ahead of us and to be mindful of the failures of multiculturalism which has not necessarily helped the cause of modern diasporic individuals and their postmodern offspring. It also lacks relevance to conceptualizations of identity definition among the post-postmodern generation, such as *AD*'s author A. Akhtar and its protagonist Hayat. Epstein and Genis (2016) argue that:

> This new lyricism, however, is not the kind that surges forth spontaneously from the soul; this idealism does not proudly soar above the world; this utopianism is not like the one at the beginning of the twentieth century, which aggressively sought to reconstruct the world. It is an "as if" lyricism, an "as if" idealism, an "as if" utopianism, aware of its own failures, insubstantiality, and secondariness. (546-547)

Second-generation transcultural diasporic individuals such as Hayat must deal with multiple cultures and numerous forms of social phenomenon that eventually result in the multiple and cyclic nature of their identity. The same patterns need to be repeated for each experience that the "self" discovers, whereby the already complex threads of "being" start to converge into an infinite and interminable process of "becoming." The "trans" aspect of transculturalism and transcultural identity becomes a personal rather than a social phenomenon of self-expression for Hayat. It is manifested in terms of who he is and how he chooses to tell his story of who he is becoming and who he will become. Hayat memorizes the Quran to save his parents from hellfire; he betrays Mina for the sake of religion that, breaks up Mina's relationship with Nathan; he stops believing in Islam but still takes classes in Islamic history; he does not lose faith; he still remembers verses from the Quran despite not having opened the book in ten years; and he may even marry Rachel, a Jewish girl. Epstein and Genis (2016) posit that:

> Nevertheless, these "trans" phenomena want to come to self-expression in the form of repetition. Paradoxically as it may sound, it is precisely through repetition that they reclaim their primacy and authenticity. Tired gestures, which are no longer automatized, as in the poetics of postmodernism, are replete with their own lyricism. In repetition, in quotation, there is a naturalness, a simplicity, an inevitability which is lacking in a primary act, born of effort and with claims to revelation. (546-547)

In conclusion, in the contemporary world and South Asian American novels such as *AD*, we see that new cultural forms are constantly evolving. These result in a fusion at multiple levels, displacing the location of mainstream culture from the old center to a new center without any fixed boundaries and certainly with fluid margins. Bhabha's postcolonial conceptualization of a "third space" where the old cultural norms, values, customs, and traditions can be "appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (1994:55) needs to be questioned. For it isn't merely about looking at culture from a different perspective; instead, it is about understanding the impact of a newly created culture on the identity of diasporic individuals. Stein (2009) argues:

> Bhabha's notion of cultural translation has a narrower scope than the concept of transculturation employed here; it merely entails the *revision* of reference, norm, and value systems, whereas transculturation denotes the creation of these systems anew. But transculturation also institutes and follows new rules of transformation in producing new regimes of reference, norm, and value, regimes that draw upon several cultural backgrounds. In such an evolved context, cultural authenticity and authority are denaturalized and require reconstruction. (264)

Considering the importance and relevance of transculturalism to the reality and imagination of the twenty-first century, literary scholars need to delve further into the analysis of transcultural identity in transcultural literature that mirrors the experience of today's diasporic individuals, their families, and their successive generations. Whether we are "[r]eady or not, a "transcultural" era is upon us" (Slimbach 2005:205), and "[t]ransculturalism is rooted in the quest to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders. (…) to address consequential global issues such as personal prejudice, group violence, environmental protection, and human rights" (Slimbach 2005:206). Our future "selves" cannot escape the increasing presence of transnational and transcultural forces in the field of culture, economics, politics as migration becomes a reality of late modernity.

> The expatriates of the old world were defined by one sending country and one dominant set of cultural experiences. The emerging epoch will increasingly demand transpatriates—persons who move between the multiple cultures, fashioning identities that are dynamic and porous. The test of transculturalism is to think outside the box of one's motherland, seeing many sides of every question without abandoning conviction, and allowing for a chameleon sense of self without losing one's cultural center. (Slimbach 2005:211)

AD is a highly intertextual transcultural novel and requires knowledge of all three Abrahamic faiths, which are presented as a continuous heteroglossial whole. Despite being written in the first person and having many similarities with the author's own story, *AD* is a fictional narrative. This is made explicit in the title by adding the words "A Novel" after "American Dervish." The novel is divided into four books, the first named after Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The narrative progressively describes Hayat's fall from belief to disbelief in Islam and Mina's transformation into a Dervish symbolizing the restoration of faith and spirituality in the story. The writing style also resembles a play wherein each Book is divided into chapters that are akin to a theatrical act. Following Dagnino (2015), from a narratological viewpoint, *AD* tends to follow a non-linear narrative that appears to be fragmented "where the storyline (or, in many cases, a storyboard particularly adaptable to our ever-growing visual imaginations and cinematic transpositions) is exploded in multiple layers of meaning" (182). It is debatable who is being referred to as a Dervish, Hayat, or Mina? Furthermore, despite being a novel about a Muslim American family, a significant part of the narrative is devoted to Judaism, its impact on Muslim characters, its role in the U.S. vis-à-vis Islam, and the global perception of Jews by Muslims from different parts of the Islamic world. The prologue describes the discovery of an alternative text of the Quran in Yemen, contrasting it with the widely held notion of the holy book being the definitive written word of God. The *Hadith Qudsi*[43] included in the epigraph alludes to deconstructing the esoteric meaning by combining and contrasting the Quran with other revelations narrated by Prophet Muhammad that can be directly attributed to God. This further highlights the non-uniqueness of the Quranic word and the importance of multiple divine sources that need to be interpreted to find true meaning. The novel's title alludes to a Sufi version of Islam where the focus is on entering an ecstatic trance to achieve higher meaning. The word Quran itself is mentioned 114 times in the novel, reminding us of the same number of chapters present in the holy book. For

[43] Hadith Qudsi is a "sacred tradition or report. Also called hadith rabbani or hadith ilahi (divine hadith). Refers to a saying (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad in which the meaning is revealed by God and the phrasing is formulated by the Prophet. Unlike prophetic hadith (hadith nabawi), the chain of transmission is traced back directly to God instead of ending with the Prophet. In contrast to the Quran, which is considered divine revelation in both meaning and wording, the authenticity of sacred hadith varies from one narration to another, and they may not be recited in prayer. They function as extra-Quranic revelation (Oxford Dictionary of Islam "Hadith Qudsi").

Hayat, memorizing the Quran is redemptive, as shown by his recitation of Chapter Ninety-Four[44] on solace or comfort in the epilogue. Hayat says, "[a]s I walked with the wind, verses from the Quran I'd not recalled or thought about for more than ten years echoed inside me, unbidden" (*AD* 335). Interestingly, the choice of names of the two main characters is significant to the process of identity (re)construction in the novel. Hayat means life indicating the process of "being," and Mina alludes to the tent city in Mecca where the pilgrims stay over many nights before they ascend to Mount Arafa during the annual pilgrimage of Hajj, reflecting on their past, present, and the future, indicating the strategies of "becoming." Dagnino (2015) argues that by imaginatively tracing a "web of narrative transcultural routes, transcultural authors help us realize that as citizens of a globalized world, we can develop and expand our sense of cultural identity and, possibly, reach a transcultural dimension" (183). In *AD*, the transcultural motifs are revealed through five distinct techniques of narrative representation, as detailed by Dagnino (2015). The novel is located in multiple geographies and cultural milieus and reflects the author's own transnational experience and relationship with Islam. Most characters are exposed to multiple cultures. This results in the transformation of the "self" when they come in contact with the "other." Despite her Islamic upbringing, Mina is transformed by American literature and culture and falls in love with a Jewish man. Hayat's mother narrates the virtues of Judaism in its treatment of women and Hayat also falls in love with a Jewish girl. Transcultural novels "look at the different, often complex aspects or concerns of life from a multiplicity of angles by interweaving in their texts a plurality of voices or by exposing the subtle interplay of their characters' multiple identities" (Dagnino 2015:186). In *AD*, multiple approaches to faith are presented, and the characters often depict juxtaposed identities signaling a plurality of voices. A. Akhtar also intentionally engages by inserting foreign words from Urdu and Arabic into the narratives, but he also intersperses the story with verses from the Quran, hadiths by Prophet Muhammad, and stories of other prophets. Dagnino (2015) posits that such a "choice reveals a psychological enfranchisement from the dominant language in which these writers write their works, as well as the openness and lack of inhibition to think, imagine, and communicate through other linguistic codes and worldviews" (187-188). As discussed above, A. Akhtar is trying to establish continuity and similarities in the three major Abrahamic faiths. Finally, as a transcultural novel, it is hard to fit *AD* into a single national or religious context – American, Pakistani, Islamic, or Jewish. It blurs boundaries, questions established notions of religion and religiosity, and forces us to reconsider our understanding of hyphenated identities. It may be "best understood as the creation, re-creation, and interlacing of diverse cultural landscapes through which the author and the readers are able to see things from different perspectives" (Dagnino 2015:189). Therefore, all transcultural motifs described above are extensively present in *AD*: in its style, narrative technique, structure, narrative voices as well as focalization.

[44] All the verses quoted in *AD* including the ones from Chapter 94 are Akhtar's own personal inspirations as seen through the eyes of the fictional characters that he has created as mentioned in the Acknowledgement section of the novel.

2.3 Return to Roots, Bearing Witness, and Transcultural Personhood Among South Asian Muslim Americans in Nafisa Haji's *The Writing on My Forehead*

> Umm—what you just said—isn't that only true in the short term? I mean—who remembers the news when they read a novel? The news at the time it was published? Does anyone know about the war that was taking place in the background of *Pride and Prejudice*? Even novels that seem to be grounded in the context of history can be read without much reference to the news of the day—like Tolstoy, for example. His stories stand alone—and most people who read them today have no idea what was going on in the newspapers at the time. Excepting what the authors chose.
>
> Nafisa Haji, *The Writing on My Forehead*

Nafisa Haji's first novel, *The Writing on My Forehead (TWOMF),* published in 2010, was a finalist for the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association Book of the Year Award. Haji, a second-generation American of Indo-Pakistani descent, was born and raised in the U.S. when her parents moved to Los Angeles from Karachi in the late 1960s. Haji was not formally trained as a creative writer but pursued an undergraduate degree in American History and was an elementary school teacher until she delved fully into writing fiction. Her work features the themes of transcultural identity, belonging, religion, and gender roles for today's Muslim American women. *TWOMF* is set across three continents, from Pakistan to England to North America, recounting the stories of three generations of women across different points in time. The narrator and protagonist, Saira Qader rejects the traditional roles of family, duty, destiny, and confinement attributed to Muslim women. Instead, she pursues a career in journalism that takes her worldwide. She works closely with Mohsin, her paternal cousin and a photographer, who lives in the U.K. and is deeply interested in preserving the legacy of their previous generations. Their paternal grandfather had written a journal entry on the day Mohsin was born urging him to "bear witness," and this forms a central theme of the narrative throughout the novel.

> On this day was born my grandson, Mohsin. An auspicious birth, he brought with him a sister. It is on your shoulders, my son, that I rest all of my hopes for the future. Do not fail me in your efforts for what is right and what is just. Bear witness to their opposite, to evil and injustice, which are one and the same. Bear witness so that they may not be committed with impunity. Whatever path your journey takes, do not succumb to the seduction of indifference to suffering, which authorizes evil. (*TWOMF* 140)

The novel recounts the family's life events and intersects the narrative with defining world events such as the partition of the subcontinent, the feminist movement in the West, and the impact of 9/11 on Muslim Americans. Despite moving away physically and emotionally from her family, Saira's life is guided by her mother's maternal aunt, a woman ahead of her time in Pakistan, and the English family of her maternal grandfather in the U.K., both having led transcultural lives in their time. Like Haji herself, who served on the board of Freedom Forward[45], an organization that helps ensure that American ideals of freedom are aligned with the reality of American foreign policy, Saira too views the world from a transcultural lens and aspires to make a difference in her personal and professional spheres after the death of her sister in a post-9/11 hate crime.

[45] https://freedomforward.org

TWOMF contrasts the postcolonial histories of both India and Pakistan and the cultural revolution that took place in the U.K in the eighties while juxtaposing the events of the transcultural reality in the post-9/11 era, especially for the second-generation Muslim diaspora. In the late twentieth century, the cultural turn has redefined the importance of and repositioned the stature of cultural and literary studies by mainstreaming "the causal and socially constitutive role of cultural processes and systems of signification" (Steinmetz 1999:1-2). This was done to make sense of a postmodern and poststructuralist world when globalization and technological innovations were still in their infancy and multiculturalism was posing a challenge in Western countries with a history of postcolonialism such as the U.K. and France in the Old Continent, and the U.S. in the New World. However, we now pose this question: Are we ready for a transcultural turn? We live in T. Turner's (1995) "post-postmodern" times where the spatiality of borders and boundaries has changed dramatically. Physical and virtual connectivity has seen unprecedented penetration in our daily existence, heralding the age of what Kirby (2008, 2009) calls "pseudo-modernism" or "digimodernism." Colonialism is being replaced by terrorist fanaticism, whether state-sponsored or ideological, or religious. This, in turn has sparked new ethical concerns that call for new strategies such as Gans' (2009) theory on "post-millennialism" to counter anti-terrorist racial profiling and victimization of Arabs in particular and Muslims in general. The space and time we live in today are very different from the notion of cultural studies envisioned by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its members. The great philosophers and thinkers of this movement have undoubtedly broadened the scope of culture from merely the appreciation of high arts. They have positioned cultural studies and culturalism at the forefront of sociological, anthropological, and political theories and debates. Now more than ever before, it seems opportune to envision a post-Gramscian and post-Foucauldian perspective to make sense of our future "selves" or at least attempt to do so to discover what lies beyond the postmodern and poststructuralist imagination and reality. If Stuart Hall (1980, 1997) has categorically and unreservedly claimed the presence of a political agenda in the field of cultural studies, it also seems apt to reevaluate the significance of and, the importance attached to ideology, power, and hegemony in a world where other forms of oppressions have replaced postcolonialism. It, therefore, ensues that our future and our identity have taken on new meanings while dealing with the positive, neutral, and negative demands of globalization and digitalization.

In the last two decades, the Internet has changed communication media taking the 'digital' to a level where the message emanates globally at the click of a button by anyone privileged enough to access a smartphone. "We have an economic concept, a political concept, yet the one that remains the most important in our Global Village, the question of multiple identities without barriers, based on the movement and flow of peoples and of society is absent" (Cuccioletta 2001/2002:9). This gap can be addressed by Lewis' (2002) conceptualization of transculturalism and the significance of language wars (Lewis 2010) against the cultural transformation resulting from the crisis in the global mediasphere (Lewis 2011) born out of the cultural fluidity and constantly evolving cultural dynamics in the twenty-first century. As discussed before, in a multicultural identity, "being" is based on difference, and the focus is on creating an environment for accommodating multiple cultural groups. In contrast, a transcultural identity deals with both differences and similarities, permitting the acquisition of new forms of "being" through "knowing" in multiple homelands. *TWOMF* weaves a transcultural web of stories across the native homeland as Saira thinks about India while she wanders through her house in the suburbs of Los Angeles. "Mother India, where both Mummy and Daddy were born, was the source of all Mummy's improbable fables. Stories that always ended with a twist – of fateful, karmic proportions"

(*TWOMF* 7). The worldviews of Saira's mother and sister are pretty traditional despite having spent their entire adult lives in the U.S. But Saira constantly questions her mother's truth to adapt and adopt these discourses, values, ideas, and knowledge systems to her American reality. In the novel, she articulates her position as:

> Yet, from the beginning, I resisted. I focused instead on tangents—on pirates and glass eyes. Later, I was much too preoccupied by the whats, wheres, whos, and whys of the plots, stopping Mummy often to interrupt, focusing always on what she considered to be the unimportant details. (*TWOMF* 7-8)

Saira's maternal grandfather was a religious man, but he was drawn to Western culture and took on a white woman in England as his second wife. Saira is constantly reminded by her mother that "[w]hen you forget the rules of your culture, you lose it. You forget about what is right and wrong. You forget that the reason we are here is not just to enjoy ourselves selfishly" (*TWOMF* 14). Saira believes that to be true to her "identity" as a Muslim American; she must create a new shared culture through simultaneous deculturation of her parents' ways of "being" with a *métissage* of her journey of "becoming" (Ortiz 1995). She breaks all rules set forth by her family; she is the only one to travel to her half-sister's wedding in Karachi; she gets pregnant and delivers a baby girl Sakina out of wedlock. Sakina is raised by Saira's sister Ameena, and we only find out at the end of the novel after Ameena's tragic death that Sakina is Saira's daughter. The narrative is cyclical, and Saira faces the same dilemmas as the previous generations of women in her family. Lewis (2002) offers a pertinent theoretical framework with certain vital characteristics of transculturalism that provide a strong foundation for conceptualizing transcultural identity among diasporic individuals. Although these characteristics are meant to guide the transcultural critic in their investigation in cultural studies, we can also draw parallels with the developmental and ontological processes to analyze how such a transcultural identity is formed and manifested in diasporic individuals.

Lewis (2002) posits that transculturalism exposes the problems of the dominant culture by questioning the sources of power that influence our knowledge of the world. Saira's mother, Shabana from Los Angeles, and her sister Jamila from London and Lubna from Karachi have invented alternative ways of creating and distributing meanings across cultures. In their, every conversation "sentences began in Urdu and ended in English with liberal lingual hybridization sandwiched in between, which none of them had any trouble following" (*TWOMF* 17-18). This intermingling of language is reflected throughout the novel as a means of indirectly highlighting cultural crossover. Urdu words are used to describe the extreme emotional state of characters depicting the unconscious straddling between linguistic boundaries. References to Islamic rituals are made in a manner such that they transform the practice of everyday Islamic traditions as a part of the quotidian in America. The other side of the 9/11 debate is represented in the narrative from a Pakistani American perspective exposing the realities of life for South Asian Muslim Americans in the U.S. The Muslim response to the 9/11 tragedy in the novel is portrayed through arguments based on hearsay and logical analysis based on historical facts. In this sense, transculturalism also allows groups and individuals to experience and deal with the tensions that arise out of dissonant forms of logic. Saira has become a journalist because simple explanations have always made her uneasy. She narrates, "[f]or years I have traveled the world, uncovering the details overlooked by others, avoiding the details of my own past" (*TWOMF* 15), unlike her mother's neat and tidy stories without the details that don't serve any moral purpose. In response to the demands of cultural complexity and hybridity in the contemporary era, "transculturalism is as interested in dissonance, tension, and instability as it is with the stabilizing effects of social conjunction, communalism, and

organization" (Lewis 2002:24). Listening to the news on CNN, Saira questions the white male news anchor's presence representing the voice of Authority and Empire. Had she not been required to return home to take care of her own daughter, she "would be there, halfway around the world, working hard to uncover those details, those babies killed by bombs, those wedding parties showered with shrapnel, those soldiers scarred and wounded, killed and killing–all of the collateral damage" (*TWOMF* 14) that CNN dismisses as insignificant details when reporting about the Middle East. Thus, as a transcultural individual, Saira can communicate and interpret both positive and negative messages with equal ease. She can switch between the various layers of meaning-making in such a way that she has the power to both transform and be transformed by the situation, which in other words, is her ability to wage language wars. "These language wars create the conditions of stability and instability as individuals and groups congregate, communicate, and seek to assert their material and semiotic interests over others" (Lewis 2002:24).

Lewis (2005) further posits that the need for individuals and societies from different cultural backgrounds or even different generations to form communities based on differences and similarities makes language wars inevitable. As a part of her "becoming," Saira breaks all the promises she has made to her mother. Unbeknownst to her parents, she has consciously diverted from her mother's directions and decided to go first on a parallel route as her own parents and then in a completely different direction. Growing up, Saira somehow believed in the degrees of separation between her American "self" and her Pakistani "self," referring to everyone who could trace their heritage to the subcontinent. Her parents only socialized with *desis,* who were referred to as "auntie" and "uncle" as is customary in South Asian cultures instead of "Mrs" and "Mr." Saira's social universe of brown Americans is solely based on geography rather than religion, ethnicity, race, or even nationality. If culture is manifested through language wars, then language can create and destroy community, relationships, power, and boundaries. When Ameena is engaged only at eighteen and has to abandon her educational aspirations, Saira is determined to study harder in the hope of going to college so that she can get away from home. In her freshman year, Saira is cast as Rizzo from *Grease* in their school's Spring production. The play and the character become a profound metaphor for her own life. Like Rizzo, she knows all the rules of her parents' culture yet flouts them in the pursuit of happiness. Sara recounts that Rizzo "suffered the consequences, but it was a price she was willing to pay. She was nobody's victim. I borrowed Rizzo's cynical view of the world and made it a part of who I would become" (*TWOMF* 166). As a transcultural diasporic individual, Saira can use the medium of language to stay in control of the situation by distinguishing the different layers of discourse and rising above the problem with equal comfort whether she wins or loses the debate. She is denied permission by her parents to participate in the play but acts anyway, fully aware that her multiple cultural worlds will collide. She is willing to pay the price of being liberated, just like Rizzo.

> Any fears I may have had about these two worlds colliding—the world at home, Mummy's world, with the world at school, which was my own—were completely submerged in a heightened kind of awareness of myself as something more than what I had been before.
>
> But they did collide. As I suppose I knew they would. In the process, I hurt my mother by my deceit. At a level that I think she never quite recovered from. (*TWOMF* 166)

Furthermore, referring to S. Hall, Lewis (2002) suggests that "the struggle to signify" should not be polarized in a single direction but rather should change depending on the context, without resulting in a feeling of pride or guilt. For Ameena, *Grease* is cheap, immoral, and degrading and goes against everything their parents have taught them about honor and principles.

But for Saira, "'it's about Adolescence! And Innocence!' I could hear my own capitalization. 'It's about America and Individualism—and the Struggle against Authority—and Freedom, to be your own Person'" (*TWOMF* 169)! In her struggle to balance different worlds, Saira always falls back on the advice given by her Big *Nanima*[46]. When her mother drags Saira to Karachi in search of a groom, she is torn between the need to find a suitable husband versus pursuing her higher education. Big *Nanima* counsels her not to be too hasty and discard the old in favor of the new way of thinking. Saira is advised to make room for both; because the extended family's network is always present when we're born and when we die, and everything in life happens between these two significant life events. Clinging to one's roots is not always a bad thing. Saira's Big *Nanima* is both traditional and liberal, unmarried, and highly educated yet without any regrets – as she gets older, she sees great value in personal relationships and attachments. No matter the culture one identifies with most, there is always a price to pay. Therefore, it's up to Saira to decide how much of each culture she wants to keep and bear the burden of. In the end, Saira realizes that her values are closer to her own mother, more so than she had imagined. In comparing the semiotic, personal, and material outcomes of "language wars" (Lewis 2005) that each culture has to bear, Big *Nanima*'s advice from her own life's experience helps to change Saira's perspective on accepting her roots and yet living a liberal life. In comparing Pakistan with the U.S., Big *Nanima* tells Saira:

> In our culture, you are defined by who you are to other people—someone's daughter, wife, mother, sister, aunt. I, who have *not* been all of those things, cling even more strongly to those I *have* had the fortune of being. With these bonds, there are expectations, yes. The price you pay. But there—where it seems people define themselves on their own terms, where there is no price to pay, no expectations that you are required to meet—there is also less chance of reward. Of being needed, wanted. Obligations. Duty. That is the price you pay. But you are paying for *something*. Something of value that it would be a shame to lose completely. (*TWOMF* 216)

Lewis (2002) contends that transculturalism does not accord any privilege to the linguistic aspects of culture over its material aspects or the other way around. The latter's roots are buried deep in the historical context, which significantly influences the former. Majid Khan is another character in the novel which is also a journalist, novelist, and winner of the Commonwealth literature prize. He has a significant influence on Saira in shaping her worldview about the imbalance of power between Western and Eastern countries. Majid is also one of the people who has inspired Saira to become a journalist. While the shared history of migration from South Asia to the U.S. is less recent than similar experiences in the U.K., Majid presents a compelling argument to find similarities between the two nation-states' response to their immigrant populations. Majid encourages Saira to leave America and travel the world, for there is not much left of serious journalism in the U.S. Upon Big *Nanima*'s insistence, Saira shares one of her creative writing pieces with Majid. He advises her that "[q]uestions are all that matter. The answers don't belong to you. Too few journalists understand this in the rush to formulate a story" (*TWOMF* 223). It ensues for Saira that journalism is not about making sense or understanding the facts but merely bearing witness to the story. In this regard, Lewis (2002) argues that "transculturalism locates relationships of power in terms of language and history" (25). Therefore, Majid advises Saira to analyze the effects of language wars in terms of their historical context and accept things as they really are rather than what they seem to be at the surface. As a transcultural individual,

[46] *Nanima* in Urdu means maternal grandmother. Here Big *Nanima* signifies the maternal grandmother's elder sister.

Saira should be careful to practice taqiyya[47], or self-preservation in uncovering the truth. Majid suggests that a writer can be brilliant, but if "he chooses to hide his explosive truths in very dangerous places – too close to open flames where they ignite and divert attention from the message of his stories" (*TWOMF* 229), then that weakens their capacity to counter-surge political, cultural, and economic inequalities.

Lewis (2002) also contends that the capacity for discourse to be produced, the mediums of its distribution, the temporality and spatiality of its reach, the distortion of its meaning through the journey before reaching the intended audience, and the multiplicity of its interpretation know no bounds in our hyperconnected world. Majid warns Saira that young writers today are "altogether too self-consciously clever, too pat, too neat" (*TWOMF* 222) but reminds her that "[c]reative nonfiction is particularly repulsive–blurring the line between fact and fiction in a world already unable to distinguish one from the other" (*TWOMF* 222). "Transculturalism, however, identifies these multiple flowing processes in terms of broadly contested and uneven distributions, disjunctures, and concentrations" (Lewis 2002:25). Deriving from Lewis' (2002) views, it can be extrapolated that the transcultural individual should be able to evaluate the prolificness and propinquity of every message they receive from or send out in the globalized mediasphere. This seems necessary to minimize misunderstanding and misinterpretation to the extent possible because it is impossible to control the meaning once the message is emanated. Alluding to the reality of the post-9/11 world, Saira is reminded by Majid that power, "by its very nature, is blind to the destruction it causes. And anger is too easily exploited and transformed into hatred – a process that has begun and which we see the results of on one side of the world already" (*TWOMF* 262). Saira is in Pakistan when the 9/11 tragedy unfolds and observes people's reactions only to conclude that it is impossible for them to understand the pain of what it meant to be an American on that day and every day that followed this fateful event.

TWOMF provides an account of the differences between fiction and journalism, the most important being power. In a lecture at the Graduate School of Journalism in Berkley by Majid, Saira discovers that most of her Western classmates are unaware of the novels written by Rushdie. Still, everyone knows who the author is and what he represents. While fiction has more veracity than journalism, the latter is presumed to be based on facts. However, Majid contends that "facts are often disparate and contradictory. Their complexity eludes our understanding" (*TWOMF* 226). It is the journalist's role to contextualize the facts for their audience. But, as Majid explains to the class, "journalists in America, with very few exceptions, work hard to avoid them and ignore them – at best. At worst, they help point them out as ugly, unwanted growths worthy only of being destroyed" (*TWOMF* 227). Lewis (2002) posits that meanings are produced through social assemblages, and when they achieve a significant quantum, they are converted into ideological and hegemonic practices. As a non-American journalist, Majid shows his class at Berkley how mainstream media in the U.S. has colored the discourse on Islam. He clarifies that his students should be cautious of the facts dismissed by journalists "because they do not fit into the pattern of the stories we write, they cannot be eliminated, no matter how hard we try" (*TWOMF* 227). Majid

[47] *Taqiyyah*, in Islam, the practice of concealing one's belief and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury. Derived from the Arabic word *waqa* ("to shield oneself"), *taqiyyah* defies easy translation. English renderings such as "precautionary dissimulation" or "prudent fear" partly convey the term's meaning of self-protection in the face of danger to oneself or, by extension and depending upon the circumstances, to one's fellow Muslims. Thus, *taqiyyah* may be used for either the protection of an individual or the protection of a community. Moreover, it is not used or even interpreted in the same way by every sect of Islam. *Taqiyyah* has been employed by the Shīʿites, the largest minority sect of Islam, because of their historical persecution and political defeats not only by non-Muslims but also at the hands of the majority Sunni sect (Encyclopaedia Britannica "Taqiyyah").

also questions the Western hegemony and raises awareness about the notion of the facts that have been discarded "are still there, bricks in the hands of other people in the forest, who do see them and hear them, whose lives they inform. Take care. Those bricks can become weapons" (*TWOMF* 227). Furthermore, Lewis (2002) elaborates that "the process of fixing (meaning) transgresses the inevitable dynamic of meaning-making; signifiers are strained beneath the ossifying force of fixity, eventually splintering, fissuring, and separating in a process of dissociation" (25). Saira's Big *Nanima*, counsels her that "life is not only about the choices *you* make. That some of them will be made for you" (*TWOMF* 68). However, when *Big Nanima* is presented with an opportunity to leave Pakistan and study English literature in England, her mother surprisingly becomes her ally. But in the process, Big *Nanima* realizes that she has always had the option to choose her destiny. Similarly, Saira strives to live her own life in the footsteps of her accomplished and liberal Big *Nanima*, who narrates her decision of going to the U.K.:

> Defiance had never been an option. Until now. Until my mother had suggested that it was. She was right. This was a question of my life. My future. I would have liked to have my parents' blessing. But, for the first time, I realized—because of the argument that I would never have dared to offer myself, the one that my mother had just offered on my behalf—that the choice was mine to make. (*TWOMF* 73)

Saira learns to distinguish between decisions made with the heart and the questions of right and wrong. To that end, Saira is part of the apparatus that challenges these poles of power and seeks to incorporate new meanings into the mainstream culture unreservedly and unashamedly.

If the mainstream can transform Saira, she also has the power to change the dominant culture by engaging in language warfare actively. Such transcultural individuals as Saira must "elucidate the processes of meaning formation, deconstruct their sources and identify nodalizations and the brutish infamies of social and cultural injustice" (Lewis 2002:26) through continuous deconstruction and reconstruction. *TWOMF* draws a parallel between how Rushdie's work has not been read by people who found it offensive and those offended by it.

> *They*—those rioting hordes, those mullahs and fatwa-issuing ayatollahs—relied on the *news*. The same goes in the so-called Western world—so-called, because this kind of delineation, it seems to me, is a dangerous affectation that has nothing to do with the fact that we live in *one* world, all of us, with equal responsibility to care for it and equal opportunity to exploit and defile it. In the *so-called* Western world, few cared about Rushdie's novel per se. It was its effect that was the story, not its content. If that effect had not been reported on here, Salman Rushdie's book would have remained tucked away, however highly appreciated, in the literary niche where brilliant writing remains buried. (*TWOMF* 225)

Lewis (2002) argues that transculturalism does not passively wait for the center to implode the margins. Transcultural individuals actively engage in the pursuit of intellectual critique and cultural civics. In doing so, "de Certeauian and postmodern conceptions are incorporated into a broad visceral politics, which engages fully in all representational forms, including those shaped through human relationships, the body, and identity formation" (Lewis 2002:26). Accordingly, Saira learns to be open to cultural differences and at the same time be wary of them, which gives her the capacity to radically engage in social, political, and ideological debates without the idea of faithfulness or faithlessness, without the fear of loyalty or disloyalty, and the need for obedience or transgression. She can steer her "path through the minutiae and the macrocosms of various cultural assemblages, claims, and power nodes" (Lewis 2002:26). Furthermore, the process of transcultural identity formation is continuous, fluid, cyclical, constantly presenting multiple alternatives, highly contextual, destabilizing the "self." It also forces the "self" to challenge the

state and hegemonic institutions fearlessly. It is ephemeral because the process of making new meanings regularly drives out the old meanings. Lewis (2002) warns:

> [T]ransculturalism is deeply suspicious of itself and of all utterances. Its claim to knowledge is always redoubtable, self-reflexive, and self-critical. Transculturalism can never eschew the force of its own precepts and the dynamic that is culture. Transculturalism chooses the best option, action, or perspective from the matrix of claims. It recognizes the implausibility of a durable knowledge and the impossibility of truth beyond the moment. It deals, therefore, in options, perspectives, and strategies. The cultural patterns it encounters, and illuminates are a manifestation of the transitory— meaningful only in a localized and erstwhile manner. (26)

In conclusion, the above remark ascertainably summarizes the richness, versatility, and profound impact of transculturalism in today's world that is highly characterized by cultural complexity and hybridity. Lewis (2002, 2008) has provided a pertinent critique on the works and theories of some of the foremost thinkers from the mid and late-twentieth century. He has suggested that for the postmodern and poststructural theorists like Gramsci, power is constantly changing hands and always challenged as soon as it manifests. Furthermore, power is shaped through ever-evolving and incomplete language. Though the conceptualizations of power and hegemony may seem negotiable, they refute language's transient and unfinished notions. In consoling her dead sister's daughter, Saira realizes that there are many things that she doesn't understand about her past. She is also afraid of what the future might hold. She recalls the Quranic words from the Throne Verse[48] her mother traced on her forehead when Saira was a child. "*He knows what lies before them, and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge saved such as He wills"* (*TWOMF* 304). We cannot find answers to all questions, and we have to keep hoping and believing that some truths are beyond comprehension at times. Truth as such is never universal but always temporary, and because there is no center, language is relegated to the margins. Furthermore, according to Lewis (2002), because culture emanates from language, it takes on the same characteristics of transience and incompleteness. It becomes a source of individual liberation where everyone is free to define their own truth. It can be argued that systems and structures in any form are to be rejected and even revolted against for the transcultural individual. In seeking a rebellion in all forms of existence and expression, the center is dislocated to the margins and ceases to exist. "The institutional ascriptions of race, class, sexuality, gender, age, and geography are deconstructed and hence neutralized by a cultural studies which privileges the margins and the particulate over the formative and determinant" (Lewis 2002:16). Lack of effective communication across different communities necessitates a transcultural mindset premised on mutual understanding and accepting potential value in each culture. To solve some of the most challenging problems of the twenty-first century, there is a need for ecological and humanistic thinking (McIntyre-Mills 2008).

Therefore, Lewis (2002, 2008) also argues that the current imbalance of power around the world goes against the humanist principles that lie at the core of modern politics, which is nothing but "another form of institutional or normative containment, one which generally disguises political elitism within a collectivist discourse" (Lewis 2002:16). In opposition to humanists, the posthumanists want to move away from the radical liberation of identity, language, and expression. The only way to liberate oneself from the dominant group exerting hegemonic force in society is through a radical separationism from them. For the posthumanists, language and communication

[48] The Throne Verse is the 255th verse of the second chapter in the Quran and is widely memorized by Muslims worldwide, often recited to ward off evil.

"is perpetually self-shattering, constituted through ephemera, transience, and the radical fragmentation of subjectivity" (Lewis 2002:17). Yet, we see the coexistence of positively liberating and negatively inhabiting discourses in televised and social media, forcing us to question our beliefs and become suspicious of universal truths. "The corollary of this sort of separationism is the ultimate individuation of all human experience and the abandonment of any communicative or systematizing semiotic flow" (Lewis 2002:18). Therefore, in the post-9/11 world, if we have sought to find a universal brotherhood to overcome oppression and injustice, those very institutions and policies have resulted in the rejection of the common human denominator (if there was any in the first place) and have forced a rejection of anything or anyone that seems to exert control or power in any form whatsoever. *TWOMF*, thus, represents a narrative that strikes a balance between the individual and the collective forms of self-expressions. Saira's character yearns to form an identity that caters to the development of the "self" with the freedom it needs to function in multiple physical, temporal, emotional, and spiritual homelands. Saira represents the reality of second-generation diasporic individuals who have the dual challenge of "being" and "becoming." First in the face of unfamiliarity and then in their struggle to straddle between multiple expressions of "self" and "belonging" in the U.S., where American Muslims still haven't entirely found social conditions accepting a liberal transcultural ontology.

2.4 Religious Identity Among South Asian Muslim Americans in Tahira Naqvi's *Dying in a Strange Country*

> Her eyes shut, she found herself in another dwelling, a portion of land where her husband and so many of her relatives were resting. Dismal, overgrown with weeds and wildly tangled shrubbery, the only color was brought into the place by those who came to visit the graves. A red tinge from a dupatta here, a green kurta, a dab of purple chador, a brightly white cotton shirt, spotless like a new shroud. The earth here was dry, cakey and cracking, gashed where the pressure from the countless heavy stone mounds had dragged it open. The ocher of the earth presented no other hue. The trees that bent over the crumbling graves in postured of despair, were thin and untended, their spindly branches forever bare and shriveled. Spring seemed not to touch them, even lightly. It was like a place forgotten, by time, by nature, by life. The tall brick wall that enclaved the cemetery and which half stood, and half fell, as everything else did there, seemed to shut out nature's benevolence just as it shut out the living world.
>
> Tahira Naqvi, *Dying in a Strange Country*

The rich imagery in the above lines about a cemetery reveals the metaphorical importance of forging an identity based on religious beliefs. This identity continues to exist even after death. The homeland amorphously extends beyond the physical world as revealed to Prophet Muhammad in the Quran (2:156) "Indeed to God do we belong, and indeed, to Him we are returning."[49] Muslims commonly recite this verse upon hearing the news of a deceased as a mark of compassion for the surviving family members.

Tahira Naqvi is a first-generation Pakistani American short story writer, a prolific translator of works from Urdu to English, and an educator living in the United States since the 1970s. She is currently working on her first novel *A Hot Wind*. Naqvi's short stories have appeared in many journals and have been included in several anthologies on South Asian women writers. Her collection of short stories *Dying in a Strange Country* (*DIASC*), published in 2001, primarily portrays the immigrant experience of the first-generation Pakistani community in the U.S. As the title suggests, death is an important theme that runs through the book – the fear of death in a foreign country as well as the fear of death of one's native culture and traditions. The theme of religious identity – in terms of why it is essential to retain it and how American culture is incompatible with Islam – from the viewpoint of a visiting aged aunt from Pakistan is present in every story, whether it is set in Connecticut or Lahore. The views of the so-called cultural outsiders from Pakistan are juxtaposed with the newly arrived Pakistani American immigrants and how the latter adapt their religious identity to the practicalities of American culture. Although this is a collection of short stories, in reality, it is a novella with recurring characters, multiple voices, traversing several geographies and generations. More than a narrative of longing for Pakistan, the stories represent a

[49] This phrase is a part of a series of verses from 155 to 157 in Chapter 2 of the Quran. "And most surely We shall test all of you believers with something of fear and with hunger and with loss of wealth and life and crops. So give glad tidings of everlasting delight in Paradise to those who when affliction strikes them, say: Indeed to God do we belong, and indeed, to Him we are returning. Upon such as these descend prayers of blessing from their Lord and His Mercy" (Hammad 2014:39). It is intended to be recited both as a sign of patience as well as the acknowledgement that the followers will not be tested by God any more than what they can bear.

hope for the future generations of Pakistani American characters and fiction beyond the dilemmas of the newly arrived couple Zenab and Ali.

According to the Pew Research Center, the Muslim American population is very dispersed and diverse, and it includes many recent immigrants from multiple countries around the world. The unwanted negative attention faced by Muslims in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the travel restrictions placed on Muslim American citizens and all Muslims in particular by the Trump administration have a serious impact on the identity of Muslim Americans. Diasporic individuals identifying with Islam as their religious identity are rising in Western societies. A myth surrounding Muslims and their religious practices is that they are incompatible with liberal democracies, which often leads to their marginalization and isolation from public and policy debates. Far from being the case, research has proven that Muslim minorities have adapted their laws, educational practices, and institutions around the majority culture's norms. For pluralistic and diverse societies to function without conflict in the twenty-first century, a new type of political and social liberalism that is more accepting of Islam in the public sphere is needed (Jones 2020).

In *DIASC*, when Zenab, a first-generation Pakistani American, has to prepare a feast on short notice for her visiting aunt, she is apprehensive about obtaining *halal*[50] meat at short notice. When she first arrived in the U.S., Zenab and her husband Ali always traveled from Connecticut to New York to buy *halal* meat. However, as time passes, she begins to buy meat from the supermarket, and at the time of washing the meat, she recites the Arabic words meant for consecrating the meat. However, her aunt's visit prompts Zenab to be extra cautious about where she buys the meat, but she does not have enough time to go to New York. Her first point of reference is her Pickthall translation of the Quran, where she finds no contradiction in the translation of the verse[51] prescribing the concept of halal in the text. But her aunt may not accede to such an interpretation, for as Zenab remarks, "[w]e are all creatures of custom and habit" (*DIASC* 24). Zenab relies on the extended community's wisdom and calls Kaneez, who has been in the U.S. longer than Zenab. Kaneez counsels her to buy kosher meat from Pathmark, a local supermarket selling kosher food. Kaneez elaborates that all Pakistani community members eat kosher meat because "their meat is prepared just like ours. They recite God's name before slaughtering the animal and bleed the animal afterward" (*DIASC* 26). This is also confirmed by the entry on kosher[52] "in the column on the left. Right under Koran (*DIASC* 27)" in the *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary* that Zenab has carried with her from Pakistan. Zenab wants to be certain that this is all right, and she enquires if Wazira, another community member who, according to Zenab, has more authority in all matters of Islam in America, also consumes kosher. To this, Kaneez reassures her that,

> "Of course, Zenab, we all do it when there's an emergency."
> All? Ohh…
> "Especially in the winter. You see, it's difficult to make frequent trips to the City when the weather's so bad, you know. Thank God for the Jews." (*DIASC* 26)

[50] The Quranic term *halal* literally translates to "permissible" in contrast to "*haram*" which is translated as "forbidden". The binary opposition of *halal* and *haram* is applied to various areas of religious practice. However, in the West, the term halal is usually found in the context of food, particularly meat. This refers to a specific way of slaughtering animals where the incision is made with a sharp knife by an adult Muslim, the animal is laid down facing the direction of Mecca and an Arabic prayer is recited at the time of the slaughter (Qasmi 2009).

[51] The Cow: 2:168. Believers, eat of the wholesome things with which we have provided you… He has forbidden you carrion, blood, and the flesh of swine; also any flesh that is consecrated other than in the name of Allah (*DIASC* 24).

[52] Pure, clean according to the Jewish ordinances – as of meat killed and prepared by Jews. [Hebrew, from yashar, to be right] (*DIASC* 27).

Religious or Islamic identity is an essential developmental aspect among Muslim diasporic individuals from South Asia. In simple terms, it can be explained by group membership to religious practices and tenets of Islam and its significance to the concept of "self." It should not be confused with religiousness and religiosity, as not all Muslim Americans identify as practicing members. However, they still identify with Islam irrespective of their religious activity and participation in public and private spheres. It should also be differentiated from ethnic and cultural identities as not all South Asians are from the same ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. As discussed previously, Muslims from different South Asian countries do not speak the same language and have varying degrees of similarities even in the essential rituals and rites associated with Islam. Notwithstanding the differences, Islam has a significant influence on the worldview of modern Muslim Americans and forms a strong foundation in shaping their individual identity (A. Ahmed 2010). In *DIASC*, the character of Amjad Khan, a first-generation Pakistani American man in a mixed marriage, is representative of the balancing of Muslim and American identities in the South Asian American diaspora. While Amjad is perfectly fine with marrying a non-Muslim woman, he is not okay with his son dating girls in college without his consent or approval. They also have a daughter who they decided to call Marium. Amjad argues that the name is familiar and convenient plus it fits well with the U.S. mainstream culture when shortened to Mary. This is a happy compromise the family makes to remain true to their triple identity – Pakistani, American, and Islamic. In the true sense of the word "secular" in the South Asian context, the name is also tri-religious as Amjad remarks "[t]hat doesn't sound right, but if we can say bisexual, surely we can say tri-religious too. Why not? After all Islam, Christianity and Judaism all profess a claim to the same name" (*DIASC* 58). Twenty-first century writers like Ayad Akhtar and Haroon Moghul join Tahira Naqvi in the use of references to Jewish culture and traditions. Their objective is to find a precursor for a culturally familiar immigrant experience that Muslims can relate to in the U.S. The journey of the Jewish American community provides a precedent for forming a distinct American identity where religion and modernity go hand-in-hand.

In this sense, the collection of interlinked stories in *DIASC* provides an essential understanding of an immigrant's identity (re)formation process when religious identity is at the very core of their processes of "being" and "becoming." The stories alternate between multiple homelands in the U.S. and Pakistan, just as the character of Zenab shifts between watching news segments on Middle East and *Sesame Street* on PBS. Her struggle to form a meaningful Pakistani Muslim American identity is evoked in her dream involving three generations of her family.

> In a dream, she saw that she and Sakina Phuphi[53] were walking about anxiously, lost in an Arab village, looking for a place to buy oregano. In the dream she led her aunt by her arm through a maze of dust-ridden streets white and torrid sunshine, encountering on her way her son who ran from her as if she were a stranger. (*DIASC* 27-28)

Although they are not Arabs, the Islamic identity is highlighted by the fact that the dream is located in an Arab village instead of Lahore or Connecticut. The search for oregano, an Italian American spice used with spaghetti, alludes to her yearning to become American, as we also see in several other instances throughout the stories. The first-generation prefer their spaghetti like a pulao, but Zenab's children, born and raised in the U.S., like their spaghetti the way it is made in America.
And yet in another instance, on one of her annual visits to Lahore, Zenab realizes that it is impossible to renounce her Pakistani "self." A part of her American "self" is left in her former

[53] *Phuphi* is the Urdu word for paternal aunt.

homeland, and a part of her Pakistani "self" is carried forward to her new homeland. The metaphor of pomegranate[54], though the fruit is found quite easily in the subcontinent, also has a Quranic significance in terms of both sustenance and artistry, hinting at the Islamic identity as the common thread between Zenab's multiple homelands.

> Lahore is a marketplace, I think as the cool, tangy pomegranate juice travels down my throat. I'm constantly giving something of myself to it when I'm here, and I take something away each time. I'm never now what I was a minute ago. It changes me, makes me a stranger to myself. (*DIASC* 135)

While trying to explain the meaning of hybridity to her youngest son Kasim, Zenab wonders herself, "if there's an equivalent of 'hybrid' in Urdu, a whole word, not one or two strung together in a phrase to mean the same thing" (*DIASC* 59). The story in which this conversation takes place is titled "*Brave We Are,*" implying the complexity of a "hybrid" identity. While reflecting in her native language, Zenab unconsciously adds coriander and cumin to the meat, along with oregano to the spaghetti. At the same time, before making the spaghetti pulao for her husband and herself, she takes out some spaghetti for her children, for whom "[t]he strands must remain smooth, elusive, separate" (*DIASC* 60).

Despite the growing importance of religion and its impact on identity formation, the developmental models of identity mainly focus on ethnicity and gender as the primary influencers to the processes of "being" and "becoming." However, recent research (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; McCullough et al. 2003; Peek 2005) has shown that religion is an essential contributing factor in constituting the "self." Further, these intersectional studies have highlighted the distinct effect of gender, ethnicity, and intergenerational differences on the temporality of an individual's religious identity. In the face of threats to their ethnic status, the religious identity comes to the foreground in Americans from non-European backgrounds (Lopez et al. 2011). In terms of gendered religious identities, women attribute more importance to religious rites and rituals than men (King and Boyatzis 2004). When it comes to intergenerational differences, first- and second-generation diasporic individuals have a stronger religious identity compared to third-generation diasporic individuals. This is explained by the fact that older generations use religious affiliation as a starting point to build community and often frequent places of worship to form emotional and social bonds (Harker 2001). However, in third-generation adolescents, there is generally more emphasis on religious identity rather than religiosity (Hirschman 2004). To move away from an identity purely based on Arab heritage and to address the diverse Muslim American perspectives on religion, "[t]he new diaspora discourse on pluralism displays a strong awareness of the need for a pluralistic interpretation of Qur'anic verses that have been utilized by extremists to justify their terrorist actions" (Haddad 2011:38). Muslim Americans must confront and answer many questions about their place in the U.S. and the role of Islam in modern America. Jesus and Muhammad need to coexist in churches turned into mosques. The context and importance of religion may have changed in the past fifty years, but in essence, the dilemmas of forging and maintaining a Muslim identity remain the same. As Haddad (2011) argues:

[54] There is a *hadith* or saying from Prophet Muhammad indicating the importance of the fruit, suggesting that every pip is as important as the other – "There is no pomegranate unless there is a seed it in from Paradise and I would like not to miss a single seed in it" (Afroogh 2019:14). Pomegranate also holds great cultural, physical, and metaphorical significance in other ancient civilizations. For a detailed discussion see Stone (2017).

> Who is a Muslim? When does one cease to be a Muslim? What is the relation of Islam to culture, to politics, to economic practices, and how does a Muslim maintain adherence to Islamically prescribed and proscribed admonitions that relate to these issues? Given the broad range of backgrounds and associations, what practices and beliefs are negotiable, fixed, or malleable? How does the cultural baggage carried by the immigrants influence their perception of Islamic culture as it takes root in America? Is there a possibility of reinterpreting Islamic jurisprudence to provide more options for behavior in the American context? Does the slogan "Islam is valid for all times and places" necessitate consensus on a particular prototype that has to be implemented wherever Islam is transplanted, or is there room for reinterpretation to help Muslims adjust to the new environment in which they find themselves? Can Muslims tolerate the different choices that members in the community make, or should they deem those who veer from the proclaimed laws beyond the pale? Can a Muslim live in a non-Muslim environment and continue to be considered a believer? These and other questions have been the focus of extensive discussion and debate during the twentieth century. (25-26)

Returning to the discussion of hybridity in *DIASC*, as mentioned above, Zenab feels that she needs to demonstrate courageous endurance to explain the concept to her young child in a manner that will have a balanced effect on his "self." She reflects, "Brave we are, we who answer questions that spill forth artlessly from the mouths of nine-year old purists, questions that can neither be waved nor dismissed with flippant ambiguity. Vigilant and alert, we must be ready with our answers" (*DIASC* 59). Zenab starts explaining the meaning of "hybrid" by referring to a mixture of orange juice with lemonade. When her son is not convinced, she tries to explain hybridity in terms of crossbreeding in the plant kingdom, giving the example of a hybrid apple created from a Macintosh and a Golden Yellow apple. Her curious son then asks about hybridity in animals, and the conversation eventually leads to hybridity in human beings. Although Zenab tries to dissuade her son Kasim from using the word in the context of people, Kasim quickly asks about his classmate Mary Khan, the daughter of their Pakistani American friend Amjad and his white English wife, Helen. Mary has blue eyes and black hair, so by Zenab's analogy, Mary is hybrid. Kasim, of course abandons the topic soon, but Zenab reflects "with the absolute knowledge that 'things' are susceptible to misinterpretation" (*DIASC* 54) when she explains the meaning of "hybrid" as a "sort of mixture, a combination of different sorts of things" (*DIASC* 54).

The role played by women in traditional Islamic societies is dependent on their age, relationships with others in the family, and status in the community. These attributions differ across ethnicities, and certain communities are more open to adapting the roles and responsibilities to the American context. Some American Muslim women "are actively engaged in the effort to identify which elements of Islam are essential, mandated by Qur'an and Sunnah (the way of life exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad), and which are culturally determined rather than religiously prescribed" (Haddad et al. 2006:16). In all stories from *DIASC,* we see the vital role of women, especially elderly women visiting from Pakistan, like Sakina Bano, Zenab's paternal aunt, or Halima Khala, Zenab's maternal aunt, as transmitters of cultural traditions and practices between their children's homelands. The younger generation of women like Zenab and her friends Wazira and Kaneez interpret the Quran according to their American realities. In her copy of the Quran's English translation, Zenab reads: "Women shall have rights similar to those exercised against men, although men have a status above women. Allah is mighty and wise" (*DIASC* 24). However, when her aunt laments that men have to do household chores in the U.S., Zenab objects to this and reminds her aunt of the gender roles in America. For many practicing Muslims, "the family is also the place where many of the rituals of daily life are carried out, including the celebration of naming ceremonies for children, coming-of-age rituals, the study of the Qur'an, and sharing stories from the life of the Prophet" (Haddad et al. 2006:82). The Muslim American family

is based on spatial proximity. "In some cases so many members of one family may have come to this country—often choosing to live as closely together as possible—that some semblance of extended family is possible" (Haddad et al. 2006:84). Furthermore, some "seek companionship to substitute for the loss of the natural extended family. In some cases, this reinforces feelings of identification with others who share the same national or cultural background and language but not the same religion" (Haddad et al. 2006:84). Additionally, some of them also "opt to find their 'family' in the local mosque or Islamic center, where they share overall Islamic values but may find themselves affiliated with 'sisters and brothers' whose cultural customs in relation to family and other issues differ" (Haddad et al. 2006:84-85). We see in *DIASC,* that one of the first things that Sakina Bano's son does on her arrival in Danbury is to take her to the local Islamic center. Here men and women from different Islamic countries congregate for the Friday prayers. The community center acts as a mosque and a madrasah or religious school for teaching the children how to read Arabic so that they can recite the Quran. Sakina Bano is surprised at the diversity of the Muslim participants in the mosque, their physical appearances, the languages they speak, their different dressing styles ranging from the subcontinental shalwar kameez to the Arabian long robes. She is even more surprised at the Arabic pronunciation of the Egyptian imam, only to be informed that Arabic, not Urdu is his mother tongue. "When he began reciting from the Koran, how buoyantly the words of the ayaats fell from him, like unhurried rain from the heavens" (*DIASC* 11).

The character of Sakina Bano represents the female matriarchal voice responsible for upholding religious rites and rituals and ensuring that they are passed on to the youth in foreign lands. Sakina Bano is also the spokesperson for the parents of first-generation diasporic individuals who are reluctant to travel to America, not because of the fear of the unknown or that they have to undertake a long journey alone, but because, in the words of the sixty-nine-year-old widow Sakina Bano: "I'm old, I want to take my last breath in my own country, and be buried among my own people. Tell me this, if I die there, what will happen to me?" (*DIASC* 1) Death in Islam is not seen as a permanent end of life, instead as a transition point to the hereafter. The worldly life is a test and an opportunity to perform good deeds in preparation for the afterlife. Human beings have only one chance to live their life in accordance with the religious tenets of Islam, and based on their good or bad deeds, they will be assigned a place in heaven or hell at the time of resurrection. Furthermore, death is a predetermined fact and part of the divine plan, though the exact time of death is only known to God (Leaman 2006). The last words of a Muslim are the *Shahadah*[55]*,* professing that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his prophet. The people surrounding the dying person encourage them to repeat these words or whisper them in their ears in preparation for the individual's transition from the *Alam al Mulk*[56] to the *Alam al Malakut*[57] (C. Turner 2011). The Quran states, "[A]nd die not except in a state of Islam" (3.102), highlighting the importance of death as a Muslim believer to cross the realms. Throughout the journey, Sakina Bano is preoccupied with her uncertain or sudden death in the airplane. "What if the plane was forced to

[55] The *Shahada* or the testimony is one of the five pillars of Islam and is also included in the *Adhan* or the call to each of the five compulsory prayers. It represents the acknowledgement of God's indivisibility or oneness (*tawhid*) as well as the acceptance of Muhammad as the messenger of God. The recitation of the *Shahada* is required for a person to become a Muslim and is regarded as a common statement of faith across all Muslim communities. It is whispered by the father into the ear of a newborn child and is also whispered into the ear of a dying person (Cornell 2007).

[56] In Islamic cosmology, *Alam al Mulk* refers to the realm of the physical or material world which can be perceived with all five senses (Cornell 2007).

[57] In Islamic cosmology, *Alam al Malakut* refers to the realm of the imaginary or spiritual inhabited by metaphysical beings and where all ideas, thoughts, and actions are manifested (Cornell 2007).

make a landing in the country they were flying over when she took her last breath, and her body was abandoned there, in a strange country?" (*DIASC* 4) If that were to happen, she hopes that it would happen in or around Cairo. "[T]he thought that Egypt might be the place where she was left for burial provided some comfort, for at least she would be among fellow Muslims" (*DIASC* 4). Her fears are put to rest momentarily. She strikes a conversation with her co-passenger Abida and confesses once again "I only pray my maker allows me to die in my own country" (*DIASC* 6). Sakina Bano is shocked when Abida mentions that in America people in their seventies sometimes get married and start new lives. For Sakina Bano believes that this is the age when people should prepare for their afterlife and not form new attachments, which only lead to pain. Sakina Bano then asks about what happens if someone were to die in America and how their body could be brought back to Pakistan. Abida replies that it would be possible to send the dead body back to her homeland, albeit at the price of four plane tickets. Abida tries to solicitously console Sakina telling her that "nowadays there are burial rights in special cemeteries that have been allotted by Muslim communities" (*DIASC* 7). This, of course is no consolation to Sakina Bano, who cannot imagine being buried among strangers in a foreign country, nor does she want her children to be buried in America without their loved ones.

At the local Salvation Army church turned mosque Sakina Bano's heart convulses as she learns of the death of a community member who passed away on a Sunday. The stores were closed, so it was impossible to buy white cotton for the shroud, and they had to make a *kaffan* or the ritual shroud from white bed sheets donated by friends and family. The period after death holds great significance in Islam, and the term *barzakh*[58] denotes the timeframe between death and the day of resurrection and sometimes refers to the grave itself. Although there are multiple interpretations between the differences in the soul and the spirit and the two terms are used interchangeably, some Muslims believe that the *nafs* or the soul ceases with the human body at the time of death, but the *ruh* or the spirit refers to its immortal metaphorical essence after death (Smith and Haddad 1981). Therefore, funeral rites are significant in ensuring the soul's safe passage to the hereafter. Muslims need to be buried as soon as possible, and cremation is strictly forbidden in Islam. The burial is preceded by the ritual bathing and shrouding of the body, followed by the funeral prayer, and finally the positioning of the deceased with their head facing in the direction of Mecca. All rituals are performed by the surviving male family members, including lowering the body into the grave. Quranic verses are recited at each stage of the rituals (Bilal 2005). What worries Sakina Bano is not the fact that she would be buried by a Turkish priest who would say her burial prayers nor that she was afraid of dying, but her greatest fear is meeting a fate as unfortunate as the recently deceased Pakistani woman in America without even the luxury of a proper shroud.

> Bedsheets! What an unfortunate woman. And what guarantee they were all cotton? Wash and wear is what they are making these days. And to be buried among strangers – such a dismal fate. Poor woman, to be so far from home and die. To be wrapped in bed sheets which said, on small tags somewhere, "Made in Amreeka." Will the angels condescend to enter a grave where a body lay draped in a shroud made by Christians? Sakina Bano shuddered at the possibility of being abandoned by God's messengers at the hour of reckoning. (*DIASC* 12)

[58] In Islamic tradition, *barzakh* refers to the place that divides the living from the hereafter or a phase between death and resurrection (Cornell 2007). It is different from the Christian concept of purgatory but in fact *barzakh* is closer to the idea of limbo in Catholic theology denoting a place that is between life and afterlife. The Islamic concept of a'rāf designating the borderland between heaven and hell is closer to the concept of purgatory (Smith and Haddad 1981).

In conclusion, *DIASC* depicts stories of South Asian Muslim Americans who demonstrate a knowledge of how to juggle between their different "selves." Zenab's children "huddle together on the carpet in front of the television while Fred Flintstone and his prehistoric family, with their anachronistic lifestyle, yabadabadoo their way into their lethargic little heads" (*DIASC* 94). At the same time, both the children and their parents discuss the applicability of Quranic verses to their everyday life in a non-Islamic setting. The children are surprised to find simple words like "chagrin" in the Quran and are quick to realize that the "Koran is full of words like this, ordinary words. And ordinary everyday stories too" (*DIASC* 99). A. Ahmed and Donnan (1994) suggest that the challenge of comprehending and coming to terms with Islam "in an age of postmodernity will demand all our powers of analysis, old and new. Neither the Orientalism that Said so passionately denounced nor indeed the anti-Orientalism that Said himself has set in motion are of much help" (16). Faced with increasing globalization, the diversity in the Muslim diaspora, the global political response to Islam, the still pervasive negative image of Muslims in the media, and the trials and tribulations of reflexive modernity, we need to look for more nuanced ways of conceptualizing Muslim American identity. Baker (2015) contends that "Islam in the world is a living, rather than mechanical, entity. As a living organism, Islam has a remarkable capacity for self-organization, even in the absence of clear leadership or even a stable hierarchy" (287). With followers from diverse national backgrounds across the world, Baker (2015) further suggests that "Islam has the capacity to take on extraordinarily variable forms. Yet, for all the variety of its colors, it remains recognizably Islam" (287). Furthermore, Baker (2015) argues that within the confines of domestic authoritarianism or international sanctions, "the imprint of these diverse circumstances never eclipses the Islamic character of what emerges. Islam reacts to but remains apart from all such environments to preserve the essentials of its own distinctive identity" (287). For the native Arabic speakers, the authentic message of the Quran is only to be understood in Arabic, but for South Asian Muslims, translations have worked just fine. On symbolism, Naqvi remarks, "one man's symbolism is another man's nightmare" (*DIASC* 96). Even within the Muslim American context, there are diverse interpretations of the scripture. The true meaning of an Islamic identity can emerge in the late modern context while adhering to the principles of the Islamic concepts of *tawhid*[59] and *taqwa*[60].

DIASC is not the only literary narrative that portrays the importance of religion in matters of life and death for the diaspora. The first-generation narrative articulated by Naqvi is also found in all authors that form a part of this research project. Writers like A. Akhtar have narrated death

[59] Tawhid, also spelled Tauhid, Arabic Tawḥīd, ("making one," "asserting oneness"), in Islam, the oneness of God, in the sense that he is one and there is no god but he, as stated in the *shahādah* ("witness") formula: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet." Tawhid further refers to the nature of that God—that he is a unity, not composed, not made up of parts, but simple and uncompounded. The doctrine of the unity of God and the issues that it raises, such as the question of the relation between the essence and the attributes of God, reappear throughout most of Islamic history. In the terminology of Muslim mystics (Sufis), however, *tawhid* has a pantheistic sense; all essences are divine, and there is no absolute existence besides that of God. To most Muslim scholars, the science of *tawhid* is the systematic theology through which a better knowledge of God may be reached, but, to the Sufis, knowledge of God can be reached only through religious experience and direct vision (Encyclopaedia Britannica "Tawhid").

[60] Taqwa is defined as "[G]od-consciousness or God-fearing piety. Also rendered as "god-fearing," "right conduct," "virtue," "wariness." Taqwa and its derivatives appear more than 250 times in the Quran; Abu al-Ala Mawdudi (d. 1979) identified taqwa as the basic Islamic principle of God-consciousness, together with brotherhood, equality, fairness, and justice, on which the true Islamic society is established. Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) systematically elaborated the significance of taqwa in his Quranic commentary, which is characterized by an emphasis on political activism. Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) identified it as "perhaps the most important single concept in the Quran," an inner vision that helps humans overcome their weaknesses (Oxford Dictionary of Islam "Taqwa").

from an intergenerational perspective. In *Homeland Elegies* (2020), A. Akhtar shows the meaning of spatial belonging through the death of the narrator's mother, who yearns for the ancestral homeland on her deathbed. The narrator's father, a strong proponent of Trump and the American Dream, goes back to Pakistan at the end of his life. In *American Dervish* (2013), A. Akhtar provides a second-generation perspective through Hayat, who memorizes the Quran to secure a place for his parents in heaven after their death. The events leading to Mina's death show the Sufi symbolism attached to the meaning of the afterlife in Islam. In *How to Be a Muslim* (2017), Haroon Moghul talks about the stigma attached to suicide in Islam, the importance of mental health in second-generation Muslim Americans, and access to therapists who can relate to Islamic values and customs to better assist their patients. Moghul stresses the importance of Muslim chaplains in American universities and the role of Islamic Student Centers to help provide religious guidance to Muslim Americans. Fatima Farheen Mirza shows how the second-generation diaspora internalizes religion in *A Place for Us* (2018). Mirza describes a devout Muslim father's instinct to protect his children after the events of 9/11 by asking his daughters not to wear the hijab anymore. She reveals the parents' lifelong efforts to pass on religious values to their children so that they can be together in the afterlife. Nafisa Haji depicts the repercussions of 9/11 on Muslim American identity in *The Writing on My Forehead* (2010) through her sister's death in a hate crime. Poets such as Dilruba Ahmed and Aga Shahid Ali have eternalized the death of their loved ones through poems containing depictions of American realities and Muslim dilemmas in the face of dying in a foreign land. In *Bright Lines* (2015), Tanwi Nandini Islam places the death narratives in the ancestral homeland with descriptions of Islamic symbolism associated with rituals after death. Finally, S. M. Masood describes the horrors of warfare in the Middle East and the increasing Islamophobia in the U.S. in *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2020). S. M. Masood portrays the impact of death caused by religious strife on the identity of Muslim Americans and their extended families. The cemetery is depicted as a living space in all these narratives. The importance of dying as a Muslim and receiving the proper burial rites is a critical concern for the Muslim American diaspora.

2.5 Return of the Repressed in the Post-9/11 Era of Late Modernity for South Asian Muslim Americans in Dilruba Ahmed's *Bring Now the Angels*

> Do you have a family history
> of grief? Please explain.
> Do tests confirm you are
> a carrier of grief? No, or Yes?
> *
> We apologize for the wait. Rest
> assured your grief is important
> to us. But if your grief
> is chronic, it cannot be addressed.
>
> Dilruba Ahmed, "Processing," *Bring Now the Angels*

Dilruba Ahmed is a second-generation Bangladeshi American poet, writer, and educator born in the U.S. who has grown up in western Pennsylvania and rural Ohio. In interviews with Karen Rigby (2011) and Justin Bigos (2012), D. Ahmed discusses her love for poetry and the primary motivation for her literary work. She has been influenced by both her formative years in a literature-loving home as well as her experience of living in midwestern American towns where she was the outsider. D. Ahmed was "othered" not only because she was a brown Muslim girl but also because her parents frequently moved in small rural towns with poor populations in the north-eastern U.S. Influenced by American poets like Dickinson, Whitman, Frost, and Plath as well as Bangla poetry by Rabindranath Tagore and Jibanananda Das translated by her mother for her, D. Ahmed wrote her first poem at the age of ten. She has published two collections of award-winning poems, *Dhaka Dust* (2011) and *Bring Now the Angels* (2020) (*BNTA*). Her work has been anthologized in several well-known poetry collections. D. Ahmed writes about her tri-cultural roots in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Bangladesh in the backdrop of increasing Islamophobia in post-9/11 America springing with a yearning to form a reflexive identity in late modernity characterized by globalization, digital transformation, and hybridity. D. Ahmed joins the rank of emerging second-generation South Asian Muslim American writers like A. Ahktar, Moghul, Mirza, and Islam in writing from a particular to the universal to portray the dilemmas of the "self" in late modernity. D. Ahmed's writing style can be summarized in her own words in a dedication she wrote to the Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali[61] quoted in the interview by Karen Rigby (2011).

> Whether one's particular Asian American identity plays prominently in one's work is less important than whether one's work strives to move us toward nuggets of truth. Because the truths of human experience are messy, complicated things that involve a necessary blurring of boundaries and divisions, the very divisions that enable us to pit one human against another. And for many Asian Americans, our lives are, by their very nature, both complex and contradictory. (D. Ahmed 2011 "Dilruba Ahmed: Interview")

[61] Agha Shahid Ali is an important literary figure responsible for the introduction of the English ghazal in American Literature. See K. Ali (2017) for a critical analysis of the poet's work and life. With works such as *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000) and *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* (2003), A.S. Ali maneuvers the performative style of the ghazal's ancient poetic form to surface themes of cultural hybridity along with an intersubjective and an intersectional experience of writing and living in the U.S. The theme of exile in his poetry not only evokes cultural and political loss but also displaces the idea of nationhood using the poetic literary form to subvert identity (Parveen 2014). For a more detailed discussion on the poet see Chapter 3.3 in the dissertation below.

Western societies have emphasized the distinction between state and religion with advances in notions of the nation-state. But "[r]eligious symbols and practices are not only residues from the past; a revival of religious or, more broadly, spiritual concerns seems fairly widespread in modern societies" (Giddens 1991:207). With the increasing number of Muslims in the U.S., estimated by the Pew Research Center report in 2017 at 3.45 million, out of which 58% are immigrants, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the discussion of religion's impact on contemporary society. All prominent thinkers of modern social theory, "Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber, believed that religion would progressively disappear with the expansion of modern institutions. Durkheim affirmed that there is 'something eternal' in religion, but this 'something' was not religion in the traditional sense" (Giddens 1991:207). The Pew Research Center's report highlights that Muslim Americans embrace both religious and national facets as part of their identity. Giddens (1991) posits that "[w]hat was due to become a social and physical universe subject to increasingly certain knowledge and control instead creates a system in which areas of relative security interlace with radical doubt and with disquieting scenarios of risk" (207). The Pew Research Center's report further highlights that about 92% of the respondents identify as American, whereas the vast majority of 97% proudly identify as Muslims, and nine in ten or 89% are proud to be both Muslim and American. Four in every ten Muslim Americans say that they are recognized by their religion based on their physical appearance and external markers of religiosity such as the hijab among women or the beard among men. Further, 65% of Muslims believe that there is no conflict between Islam and Democracy, and about 70% endorse the idea of the "American Dream," favoring hard work as a critical factor of success. Giddens (1991) contends that "[r]eligion in some part generates the conviction which adherence to the tenets of modernity must necessarily suspend" (207). At the same time, Muslim Americans, like all other U.S. citizens, must contend with ontological insecurity and anxiety caused by several external factors in the present times. Reminiscent of Woolf's landmark essay, *A Room of One's Own*, D. Ahmed succinctly describes the state of present-day America for minorities in one of the poems in *BNTA* titled "*With Affirmative Action and All."* Amidst the prevailing conservative political climate in the U.S., D. Ahmed laments the reversal of the progress made by liberals in advancing and championing the cause of discrimination based on biological markers of identity.

> […] when in any given
> American town,
>
> there is a room inside a room inside a
> room,
> where thought shapes word shapes
> action–shapes
>
> memory, shapes history–where
> synaptic gaps
> deepen, now, into fissures, into
> canyons. (*BNTA* 86-87)

The twenty-first century is considered by many sociologists (Bauman 1998, Beck 1992, Lash 1999, Giddens 1991) as a continuation of modernity rather than a move towards postmodernity. Characterized by cultural and economic globalization against the backdrop of neoliberal capitalism, technological disruptions are shrinking and redefining the notions of space and time. The stresses and strains of a post-industrial society have given rise to a network society.

We have entered a state of reflexive modernization that has a profound impact on our lives at both individual and societal levels. Such disruptive forces have led individuals to break away from traditions to create their own self-referential lifestyles armed with the unlimited availability of information and the unending possibilities of nomadic personas (Bauman 2000). In the case of diasporic individuals in the contemporary era, the "self" is constructed reflexively in a space fragmented between multiple homelands, constantly offering competing and contrasting cultural choices. Cultural ambiguity and the formation of hybrid traditions in the diasporic communities result in multiple and reflexive "selves" as individuals become more comfortable moving between various social positions in a fluid manner. The burden of guilt gradually diminishes as the individual takes responsibility for their own ontological development. "The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens 1991:5). In *Consequences of the Curvature of Space-Time*, D. Ahmed places the various reflexive "selves" side by side and evokes the difficulty of living in hybrid cultures as well as the effects of this hybridization on the mainstream identity. The American identity is no longer absolute but relative. Like the theory of relativity in physics, the various layers of the "self" shaped by globalization, digital transformation, and cosmopolitanism are no longer flat but curved by the massive presence of religion for South Asian Muslim Americans.

> My dress made of Mylar, cinched
> at the elbows and hips. Like a
> helium
>
> balloon, I can't help fluttering
> at the ceiling for a bird's eye
> view
>
> of the party: red punch cups spilled
> on white carpet like a crime
> scene, gifts
>
> already shredded open. (*BNTA* 52)

On the one hand, mylar is a metaphor for the material used for making cheap polyester clothes in Bangladesh. On the other hand, it represents the high-quality film capable of taking long-exposure photographs planted in helium balloons for increased surveillance by the state. Punch, and not wine is served at what is a party for one and a crime scene for the other. The traditional view of culture no longer holds validity; rather, the hybrid curvature now determines the cyclical reality of the "self." The scene moves from an extravagant non-secular party venue to a mosque, and the citizens are turned into guests in their own homeland. A storm of dissent is brewing, and there is a yearning to claim one's rightful place, not in a country they have left behind but in the place where they have built a new life and have called home for many generations.

Caught in a loop,

the guests keep removing
their shoes at though approach-
ing

a mosque doorstep. The music hiccups
to make a vocalist's wail

cyclical, the needle scraping
as someone familiar and alien

tries and fails to light the silver
candles
Chattered words rise

into headwinds that hinder
my movement. […] (*BNTA* 52-53)

In the post-9/11 age, Muslims and Islam from all over the world, especially in the West, have been subjected to increased surveillance and scrutiny. Their identity has been stripped off of all other layers and has been relegated to the status of an ethnoreligious identity. It ensues that "the more open and general the reflexive project of the self, as further fragments of tradition are stripped away, the more there is likely to be a return of the repressed at the very heart of modern institutions" (Giddens 1991:202). The distortion caused by religious identity on their other identities for South Asian Muslim Americans is relatively proportional to the image of Islam in the U.S. Like their compatriots from the mainstream culture, they too want to return to the familiar world where a sense of community based on humanist values prevails. Notwithstanding, the distance between cultures has increased after 9/11 and subsequent Islamophobia in the Trump administration. D. Ahmed voices the desire of Muslim Americans:

I want to return

to where the cake will be sliced
and shared, to snuff the candles

no one can light anyway.
The closer I try to pull

toward the orbit of beloved,
the greater the distance be-
tween us. (*BNTA* 53)

As discussed previously, South Asian Muslim Americans are not an ethnoreligious community but a diverse set of individuals influenced by specific regional and geographic cultures depending on where they trace their heritage in the subcontinent. To merge the *ummah*, the Arab identity, the Islamic identity and impose it on all Muslim Americans poses a threat to the public expression of beliefs and traditions in the Western world and those South Asians upon whom this

seemingly universalized identity is imposed. In one of the poems entitled *Ghazal*[62], D. Ahmed evokes the diversity in Islam and questions the superiority of one Islamic culture over the others.

> I'll never make my way to the pearly
> gates above us
> so long as the pious are preferred
> above us.
>
> Ahmed, Ahmet, Amadi begins a long
> line of skeptics.
> Will our malnourished hearts make a
> third world above us? (*BNTA* 28)

The three major Islamic traditions of Sunnis, Shias and Sufis have a different interpretation of Islam, which has further moved away from the original Arabian thought as Islam spread globally, causing an intermingling of spiritual aspects with local cultural mores. Furthermore, in an attempt to theorize the model that can represent how Muslims construct their religious identity, A. Ahmed (2007) posits that these approaches can be categorized as acceptance, preservation, and synthesis. "Those who believe in acceptance approach the divine through universal mysticism; those who believe in preserving opt for straightforward orthodoxy or a literal interpretation of the faith; and the synthesizers seek to interact with modernism" (A. Ahmed 2007:32) the ideals valued by Western nations. In this ghazal, D. Ahmed represents a synthesizing perspective in constructing religious identity, both from an oriental and occidental perspective. Not only is the synonym for Prophet Muhammad's name "Ahmed" used, but it is also represented in the use of different spellings for the same word across the Islamic world. Additionally, Ahmed is also synonymous with the poet's own last name. The reference to the third world can be seen as asserting the validity of Islam's presence in South Asia in opposition to Saudi Arabia or the Middle East. The superiority of a specific form of Islam is denounced as well as the resort to violence and fundamentalism. The poem is deliberately written in the form of a *ghazal,* highlighting both a longing for peaceful coexistence and the romantic idea of the search for a home in the material and the spiritual world. The ghazal continues as:

[62] Ghazal, also spelled ghazel or gasal, Turkish gazel, in Islamic literatures, genre of lyric poem, generally short and graceful in form and typically dealing with themes of love. As a genre the ghazal developed in Arabia in the late 7th century from the *nasib*, which itself was the often amorous prelude to the *qaṣīdah* (ode). Two main types of *ghazal* can be identified, one native to Hejaz (now in Saudi Arabia), the other to Iraq. The *ghazals* by ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿah (d. c. 712/719) of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca are among the oldest. Umar's poems, based largely on his own life and experiences, are realistic, lively, and urbane in character. They continue to be popular with modern readers. What became a classic theme of the *ghazal* was introduced by Jamīl (died 701), a member of the ʿUdhrah tribe from Hejaz. Jamīl's lyrics tell of hopeless, idealistic lovers pining for each other unto death. These enormously popular works were imitated not only in Arabic but also in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poetry until the 18th century. The genre is also present in many other literatures of Central and South Asia. Of additional note is the work of Ḥāfeẓ (d. c. 1389/90), considered among the finest lyric poets of Persia, whose depth of imagery and multilayered metaphors revitalized the *ghazal* and perfected it as a poetic form. The *ghazal* was introduced to Western literature by German Romantics, notably Friedrich von Schlegel and J.W. von Goethe (Encyclopedia Britannica "Ghazal"). For a more detailed discussion about the literary form of the ghazal in Urdu and English see Chapter 3.3 in the dissertation below.

Do the gods exist? Will we ever know?
Not until we rise to the ghost world
above us.

In sleep, we scrape at boulders,
dreams with no end.
Will our belief in You, too, be interred
above us?

Who now points the barrel nudging
our spines
as we're ushered toward the afterlife
secured above us?

No need for weapons. Our hearts hold
munitions:
we've earned (no doubt) the rebuke
assured above us. (*BNTA* 28)

The lyrical ending "above us" is an allegorical representation of the path to justice and the repeated justifications by fundamentalists in using the Islamic concept of *jihad*[63] as a means of receiving an eternal reward in the afterlife. The call to shed weapons also points to the concept of the importance of the *jihad al-nafs* or the internal struggle of the spiritual "self" against the *jihad al-sayf* or the physical act of combat with weapons[64].

The misrepresentation of religious fundamentalism as the only truth of Islam in the dominant discourse in the media and mainstream political thought, coupled with security measures obtruded by the State, are being questioned by multicultural societies in the Global North. Counter-terrorism legislation and scrutiny of its own citizens, especially in the U.S. and the U.K., have led to an unfair institutional representation of Muslim identity leading to widespread stigmatization and suspicion (F. Khan 2016). At such fateful moments, "individuals may be forced to confront concerns which the smooth working of reflexively ordered abstract systems normally keep well away from consciousness. Fateful moments necessarily disturb routines, often in a radical way" (Giddens 1991:202). Further, Giddens (1991) has also characterized the late modern world as apocalyptic not because we are doomed in the literal sense of the word but because of the uncertainty caused by the risks and doubts that we face in the twenty-first century are somewhat

[63] Jihad, (Arabic: "struggle" or "effort") also spelled jehad, in Islam, a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning of the term *jihād* depends on context; it has often been erroneously translated in the West as "holy war." Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong. In the Qurʾān, *jihād* is a term with multiple meanings. During the Meccan period (c. 610–622 CE), when the Prophet Muhammad received revelations of the Qurʾān at Mecca, the emphasis was on the internal dimension of jihad, termed ṣabr, which refers to the practice of "patient forbearance" by Muslims in the face of life's vicissitudes and toward those who wish them harm. The Qurʾān also speaks of carrying out jihad by means of the Qurʾān against the pagan Meccans during the Meccan period (25:52), implying a verbal and discursive struggle against those who reject the message of Islam. In the Medinan period (622–632), during which Muhammad received Qurʾānic revelations at Medina, a new dimension of jihad emerged: fighting in self-defense against the aggression of the Meccan persecutors, termed *qitāl* (Encyclopedia Britannica "Jihad").

[64] In the later literature—comprising Hadith, the record of the sayings and actions of the Prophet; mystical commentaries on the Qurʾān; and more general mystical and edifying writings—these two main dimensions of jihad, *ṣabr* and *qitāl*, were renamed *jihād al-nafs* (the internal, spiritual struggle against the lower self) and *jihād al-sayf* (the physical combat with the sword), respectively. They were also respectively called *al-jihād al-akbar* (the greater jihad) and *al-jihād al-aṣghar* (the lesser jihad) (Encyclopedia Britannica "Jihad").

unique to the present generation. In discussing the tribulations of the "self" in late modernity, Giddens argues that the banal nature of the apocalypse has turned it into a collection of "statistical risk parameters to everyone's existence. In some sense, everyone has to live along with such risks, even if they make active efforts to help combat the dangers involved – such as by joining pressure groups or social movements" (1991:183). D. Ahmed highlights the reality of overcoming the apocalypse by looking for solutions in the physical world and letting the sense of the unknown prevail as far as the afterlife is concerned.

> Apocalypse upon us in one lifespan,
> we are told.
> Call it blessing. Calling it curse. All
> terms blurred above us.
>
> Leave me here on earth, our human
> inferno
> if heaven's simply earthly life mir-
> rored above us.
>
> These prayers in earnest, palms
> pressed, heads bowed –
> it seems our mutterings are misheard
> above us. (*BNTA* 28)

In the final couplets, D. Ahmed once again questions the legitimacy of one form of Islam over the other and dismisses the claim to righteousness as reserved only for a selected few. The poem ends with a proclamation of gratitude by playing on the word "Ahmed" and a mockery of those who blindly follow Muhammad's message without applying any rational arguments to the literalist statements made in the Quran and considering Quranic proclamations as the absolute truth to justify political gains.

> A smackdown among angels: who
> owns heaven by birthright?
> The righteous muscle into the ring,
> undeterred above us.
>
> Closing time. Last call for drinks.
> Their promise of rapture.
> Wasted angels give up hope for earth,
> their prayers slurred above us.
>
> Ahmed is my name, one who thanks
> God without end.
> One of many blind mice, our chatter
> unheard above us. (*BNTA* 28-29)

The question of religious identity, especially among second- and third-generation diasporic individuals, is intricately connected with the rise of audio-visual streaming platforms, smartphones, and social networking sites. "New forms of religion and spirituality represent in a most basic sense a return of the repressed since they directly address issues of the moral meaning of existence which modern institutions so thoroughly tend to dissolve" (Giddens 1991:207). Research indicates that South Asian Muslim youth are a part of a "convoluted modernity." Their identity is shaped by influences from Eastern and Western ideas drawing equally on MTV and

Peace TV. This creates a hybrid culture that merges consumerist hedonism with a globalized version of Islam. The virtual spheres provide access to a Friday sermon anywhere in the world, blurring the lines between local and global Islam, which has influenced the interpretation of religion among the youth. The binaries of progress and regression in the Middle East have spilled over to the West, shaping a new ambiguous form of late modernity (T.R. Khan 2015). "New forms of social movement mark an attempt at a collective reappropriation of institutionally repressed areas of life" (Giddens 1991:207). D. Ahmed's poem *Google Search Autocomplete* represents the intersection between personal spirituality and the pervasive world of technology. It is an artistic expression of the perceptions held by a diverse population and how these thoughts subsequently take the form of a search on the world wide web. The title itself is loaded with multiple connotations about the twenty-first century: "Google" denotes the capitalistic and neoliberal domination of contemporary society, "Search" signifies the literal and figurative quest for finding one's place in the late modern world, and "Autocomplete" alludes to the influence of the power of the collective dominant discourse on personal knowledge. The poem has multiple perspectives asserting the presence of religious, spiritual, economic, emotional, and philosophical layers in the diaspora's process of "being" and "becoming."
On the one hand, we have,

> God who sees
> who wasn't there
> who created hearts to love
> who strengthens me
> God who is rich is mercy
> who saves (*BNTA* 26)

And on the other hand, we have,

> God of carnage
> God bless america
> God bless america movie
> God gave me you
> God gave me you lyrics (*BNTA* 26)

Moghissi (2006) argues that in the case of Muslim diasporic communities, the collective identity is formed more as a reaction to repeated discrimination by members of the dominant culture rather than a result of nostalgia for the heritage culture and homeland. Being branded as Arab or Muslim irrespective of whether they are practicing members or the degree to which Islam influences their identity is a process that has resulted in radicalized cultural identities among Muslims in the West. D. Ahmed's poem *Interrogation* talks about a ubiquitous scene at airport security screenings where Muslim passengers are isolated from others either based on their name or their travel history in the passport as well as on the nature of their visit to the U.S. Depending on the airport where they land, the interrogation may last from several hours to a couple of days. The interrogating officer needs to ascertain the passenger's past, present, and future actions and run an extensive and intrusive background check before the passenger is let into the country. The interrogation applies to those on temporary visas and those who hold U.S. passports. In *Interrogation*, the "suspect" citizen is questioned about their loyalty to the U.S., and at the same time, they need to assure the immigration officer about their denouncement of fundamentalism in Islam.

Do you pledge?
Do you pledge allegiance?
Do you pledge allegiance to the flag?
Fraternities? Sororities?
Are you known to drink a beer
with the boys? Are you Muslim?
Islamic? Islamist? Fundamentalist?
Do you pledge allegiance
to ISIS? Should we feel safe
in your company? Is there anything
we need to know? Anything
you want to say now? (*BNTA* 88)

Simple actions from everyday life are juxtaposed and valorized in terms of morality and fidelity to the American mainstream. Questions of belonging are reduced to a tough choice. There is only one acceptable way to dress, eat, act, behave, which is contrasted in direct binary opposition to the diasporic individual's Islamic identity. "The expansion of internally referential systems reaches its outer limits; on a collective level and in day-to-day life, moral/existential questions thrust themselves back to center-stage" (Giddens 1991:208). Even those who are not religious are forced to think about their Muslim "self" as their primary identity. D. Ahmed continues:

Tattoo on your bicep? Cowboy hat?
Chevy pickup? Do you eat
baked beans with pork from the pot?
You like American TV?
What's wrong with your people?
Records state you once loved a boy
who called you "terrorist." His lips
were so pink. He was sweaty
after recess. Were you present
when the bottles were thrown?
Have you a habit of speaking
in passive voice? Who are your
people?
Where are you from? Where do you
belong? (*BNTA* 88-89)

These identities do not stem from mindless regurgitation of religious rituals and doctrines but are politically motivated. Being repeatedly subjected to define one's "self" based on external markers of religion, perceived as symbols of religiosity by the Western media, but which in reality are symbols of protest against the "othering" of a community based on the global perception of Islam outside the U.S., some diasporic individuals are not afraid to raise their voice against the undisguised and loud Islamophobia in mainstream U.S. society. The poem's closing line is written in the style of a text message indicating that the question is being asked now by the Muslim American passenger to the immigration officer, thereby reversing the roles.

Do you believe in Christ, our savior?
You fly a lot. Why fly so much? From
what
do you flee? What do you hide
in your burka? Why use it to hold
your phone as you speak? Who are
your people? Where are you from?
Where do you belong? You like American
music?
Anything you want to say now?
Have you completed the Hajj? Pray
five times a day? Who are your people?
Where are you from?
Where do you belong?
Hw do U fl abt rlgn? (*BNTA* 89)

There is an urgent need to define "belonging" to a global community that is "othered" and constantly ostracized by the West. This has also attracted the outward and public display of religion even by second- and third-generation members of the Muslim diaspora in the U.S. and Europe. "Focused around processes of self-actualization, although also stretching through to globalizing developments, such issues call for a restructuring of social institutions, and raise issues not just of a sociological but of a political nature" (Giddens 1991:208). Having been raised and educated in the West, millennial and postmillennial generations are much better integrated into the mainstream culture. They don't find the need to succumb to the dominant discourse. This sentiment is manifested in the outward display of Islam but is not necessarily linked with religiosity or spirituality. The identity is based on Islam as an ideology rather than Islam as a religion whose aim is to claim the rightful place of Muslim citizens in Western countries for ensuring a balance of political, economic, and cultural power. According to the three worldviews held by Muslims, A. Ahmed (2007) also posits that "Islam's response to the forces of globalization also takes at least three distinct forms: mystics reach out to other faiths, traditionalists want to preserve the purity of Islam, and modernists attempt to synthesize society with other non-Muslim systems" (32).

In conclusion, identity in South Asian Muslim Americans is reflexively constructed from physical and metaphysical components, including human and non-human elements. Further, this identity extends beyond the dimensions of physical time and space, even transcending life on earth, liberating the "self" from the boundaries of time and the limits of geographical locations. In building a reflexive identity, the "self" is confronted with various dilemmas as it navigates from literalism to modernism to humanism. Giddens (1991) has outlined four dilemmas that need to be negotiated by individuals in late modernity, which can also be extended to the formation of identity among diasporic individuals. The first dilemma is unification versus fragmentation, the second one is powerlessness versus appropriation, the third one is authority versus uncertainty, and the fourth dilemma is personalized versus commodified experience. The lives of South Asian Muslim Americans are fragmented by the multiplicity of behaviors expected from the mainstream resulting in a false performative "self" in opposition to a truly authentic "self" that unifies all layers of their identity. The feeling of powerlessness caused by the constant threat to their core identity as Muslims has resulted in the appropriation of a temporary American identity that they cannot resist or transcend. The uncertainty caused by submitting to conflicting religious authorities while simultaneously balancing the need for an outward show of religiosity and inwards feeling of faith has caused a further schism in the identarian process. The commodification of highly personal experiences of spirituality and faith in the age of neoliberalism, further fueled by 24x7 access to

an information society, has suppressed personal autonomy turning citizens into consumers, subjecting the process of individuation to the forces of the global market. The threat of meaninglessness and the fateful events spurring from Islamophobia have resulted in a return to religion in an attempt to achieve ontological security. Owing to these peculiar socio-politico-economic circumstances in late modernity, the return to the repressed can be traced to a "burgeoning preoccupation with the reconstruction of tradition to cope with the changing demands of modern and social conditions. Of course, in many sectors of modern life, traditional elements remain, although they are often fragmented and their hold over behavior partial" (Giddens 1991:206).

Additionally, Muslim Americans themselves have been experiencing an identity crisis of sorts over the past few decades. As is true for all individuals, "[t]he self in high modernity is not a minimal self, but the experience of large arenas of security intersects, sometimes in subtle, sometimes in nakedly disturbing, ways with generalized sources of unease" (Giddens 1991:181). Therefore, such sentiments have partly resulted in the reemergence of religious identity in Muslims in the U.S. The prominence of outward display of religious symbols such as the *hijab* in the public sphere has questioned the legitimacy of "being" and "belonging" for Muslim Americans, especially women, in their own country. Public acts of religious practice are seen as disrespectful, incompatible with American values, and even a threat to the idea of the nation-state. Citizens who eat halal meat, women who choose to wear burkinis, or people with Arabic-sounding names are ostracized and othered from the mainstream. Muslim American women, in particular face the dual challenge of anti-Islamic hatred and sexism and have to deal with multiple layers of intersectional oppression due to their religious and gender identities (Karim 2009). "Not only has religion failed to disappear. We see all around us the creation of new forms of religious sensibility and spiritual endeavor. The reasons for this concern quite fundamental features of late modernity" (Giddens 1991:207). Furthermore, A. Ahmed (2007) argues that because of the limited understanding of Islam and Muslims in the West today, the U.S. fails to recognize the co-existence of the multiple worldviews held by Muslim Americans today, and instead these citizens are crudely reduced to the moderate versus extremist duality. For many American Muslim women, wearing the hijab is "not about coercion but about making choices, about 'choosing' an identity and expressing a religiosity through their mode of dress. Many young Muslim women are wearing the headscarf as a means of expressing identity and spirituality as well as modesty" (Haddad et al. 2006:10). D. Ahmed's collection of poems *BNTA* represents the dilemmas of the late modern "self" addressing themes of globalization, neoliberalism, race, and ethnicity. It metaphorically and allegorically highlights the multiple identities among brown Americans, including the day-to-day representation of faith and the manifestation of religion as the "forgotten remains of fabled civilizations" (*BNTA* 112) amidst growing fears of terrorism. There is hope and a wish for acceptance of "Muslim" as a part of her "American" identity transcending belief or non-belief in religion in an organized or personal fashion. In the below lines, "father" is the symbol of her heritage land, "death" signifies metamorphosis from one homeland to the other, and the closing hyphen "–" represents a transcultural identity.

My friend believes in no god but I cannot say
        what rises from mist
when a body disappears
        into the unforgiving ground

The ablutions the time wasted
        the boulder of regret
I repeat words uttered
        when others hear of the loss

of my father I'm sorry sorry sorry
        Kneeling now stranger prayer
no mosque temple church and yet
        how awkward, what comfort, to pray
– (*BNTA* 54)

In Part Two of this dissertation, the focus has been on demonstrating the shift from multiculturalism, interculturalism, and pluralism towards transculturalism and transcultural identity in the lived realities and literary imaginations of the South Asian Muslim American diaspora. Furthermore, religion plays an essential role in defining identity across all generations of Muslim Americans. It unites South Asian Muslims with the global *ummah* and separates them from other Muslims. The conditions of late modernity, the political pressures caused by ideological conflicts based on faith, the state of reflexive modernization, the effects of time-space distanciation and compression are all important considerations that make diasporic identity complex. The final Part Three of this dissertation attempts to unravel this identarian complexity, peeling each of its constituent layers and demonstrating the existence of multiple scales of identities at play in the South Asian American diaspora and their contemporary literature. How Muslim Americans today balance their multiple "selves" can be explained through the principles of fractal geometry which impacts not only identity construction but also the construction of literary narratives depicting such fractal characters and their lives.

Part Three–
Beauty and Roughness: Fractal Identity During Late Modernity in South Asian Muslim American Diaspora's Literary Imagination

3.1 Theorizing a Fractal Identity Model: A Multidisciplinary Approach Connecting the Natural and Social Sciences with the Humanities

> For a complex natural shape, dimension is relative. It varies with the observer. The same object can have more than one dimension, depending on how you measure it and what you want to do with it. And dimension need not be a whole number; it can be fractional. Now an ancient concept, dimension, becomes thoroughly modern.
>
> Benoît B. Mandelbrot, *The (Mis)Behavior of Markets*

The construct of identity in the twenty-first century is becoming so complex that we need a more sophisticated theoretical framework to describe, analyze, query, and debate the processes of "being" and "becoming" in transcultural diasporic narratives. It is essential to define the foundational aspects of such an identity based on the competencies needed to manifest it and a framework to characterize its inherent multiplicity, complexity, and cyclicity. This can be made possible by turning to multiple scientific disciplines that allow us to go beyond simplistic binary definitions of diasporic identity. This chapter attempts to develop a multidisciplinary paradigm for defining diasporic identity and discusses its application in analyzing literary representations of such diasporic identities in the contemporary era. On the one hand, a model describing transcultural competencies defined by Slimbach (2005, 2012) can be used to theorize the aspects of shifts in geographies and cultures. In contrast, on the other hand, the mathematical concept of fractal geometry conceptualized by Mandelbrot (1982) can be used to characterize the cultural and identarian complexities in the Muslim diasporas of the Western world.

> Today, who we are (by birth) and where we are (by choice) is not as relevant as it once was. More persons than ever before are pursuing lives that link the local and the global. They are becoming increasingly transcultural – physically or electronically connected with diverse peoples, and involved in decision-making that is influenced by, and in turn influences, the affairs of a global society. (Slimbach 2005:205-206)

By considering human identity to be fractalized or, in other words, fragmented such that it can be split into parts, each of which, at least approximately, is a copy of the whole, displaying "self-similarity," a parallel can be drawn between fractal geometry and the processes of "being" and "becoming" in diasporic individuals. The multiple layers of identity, like fractals, appear similar at all levels of magnification and are considered infinitely complex. The concept of fractals can make the complexity involved in multiple social roles and identities manageable, for to understand one part is to understand the whole though not with the same level of precision, and if one scale of focus is changed, then all scales of focus are affected (Haugestad and Levick 2006). The transition towards global citizenship and ethics is theorized through the knowing-living dynamic using fractality. The extension of a mathematical construct to social sciences is an interesting line of inquiry that merits further research, especially in theorizing transcultural diasporic identity. The nature and reality of the world we live in, driven by cultural and economic globalization, which has produced transcultural societies, has resulted in continuous cultural hybridity and fluidity. More than ever before, geographical borders and boundaries do not solely define our cultural identity in the twenty-first century. First, thanks to the sophisticated travel links, it is possible for some people, with the proper means and entry permissions, to cross entire continents in just a few

hours. Second, thanks to the Internet explosion, information instantly reaches the well-connected postmillennial diasporic individual through 5G networks. While considering the factors that favor the development of identity among the Generation X diaspora and their Generation Y and Z offspring, it is essential to acknowledge the complexity of the developmental phenomenon rather than restricting our conceptualization to the deculturation and acculturation dichotomy. Given the transcultural reality of our world, it is essential to identify common interests and shared values across multiple physical, virtual, social, political, and psychological borders to foster possibilities of coexistence among diverse communities. The complexity of global issues is unlike anything we have seen before, and the extent of interconnectedness between the subjects confronted with these issues is unprecedented.

> Effective personal and collective responses to complex quality-of-life issues have always depended upon some level of cultural awareness. Today, however, competence of a transcultural kind must exhibit the attitudes and abilities that facilitate open and ethical interaction with people across cultures. (Slimbach 2005:206)

Borrowing significantly from sociology, anthropology, intercultural communication, and international education, Slimbach (2005, 2012) has defined a model to characterize the transculturally competent person that can be extended to theorize transcultural personhood among diasporic individuals. This model is based on six broad categories further subdivided into ten organizational propositions with specific competencies. The whole framework forms a cognitive map for those attempting to understand transcultural personhood and those manifesting it through their lived reality or vivid imagination. Six broad categories symbolize the cognitive map of transcultural personhood. Perspective consciousness comprises the ability to place oneself in the other's shoes and always perceive things from a different perspective when faced with differences. All assumptions must be questioned, and all judgments must be evaluated by consciously othering the "self." Ethnographic skill encompasses the "self's" ability to be a perpetual cultural observer and, through critical analysis of learnings from such ethnographic encounters, to establish fruitful relationships that help to build a sense of community and shared purpose. Global awareness involves the ability to identify the transnational conditions of the world and the choices that are available to both individuals and nations to make sustainable decisions when confronted with differences. World learning constitutes direct lived experience and interaction with a culture different from one's own and full extensive immersion in the target environment. Foreign language proficiency spans mastery of a language other than one's mother tongue to be able to understand and meaningfully interact with members of the other culture. Affective development embraces the expression of emotional intelligence in situations demanding actions, thoughts, and interactions involving the heart instead of the mind when confronted with situations that hold a significantly different interpretation from one's own culture.

Slimbach (2005, 2012) has also outlined ten organizational propositions and associated specific competencies with each proposition to zoom into the cognitive map of transcultural personhood. The first proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to articulate commonalities. I argue that this pillar and its associated competencies constitute the dimension of 'cultural transcendence' within fractal identity. We need to look at cultural similarities as a medium to articulate the imaginings and meanings within the discursive and behavioral manifestation of identity amongst diasporic individuals. The second proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to identify oneself as belonging to multiple cultural sub-groups within one's own culture. Therefore, I contend that this pillar and its associated

competencies form the dimension of 'boundedness' within fractal identity. Recognizing the limits of the various layers of cultural identity within oneself is essential for achieving comfort in the existence of multiple identities and switching between them depending on the spatial and temporal context. The third proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to identify the contributions of one's own culture and those of other cultures to the world's cultural inventory. Thus, I argue that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'authenticity' within fractal identity. The process of "becoming" in transcultural diasporic individuals demands authenticity with the multiple layers of the "self." The existence of multiple versions of the truth should not destabilize ontological development. The humble overcoming of the inferiority and superiority dualism and the sincerity towards believing in an alternative version of reality give comfort to the "self" amidst the chaos created by the existence of multiple truths. The fourth proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to be aware of the partiality towards one's own belief and value system. Consequently, I suggest that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'cosmopolitanism' within fractal identity. Their trajectory is marked by eliminating their provincial tendencies and avoiding the urge to resort to group identity definitions based on the construct of nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion to combat alienation. The fifth proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to perceive the outsiderness in oneself from the point of view of the dominant culture. Thereupon, I assert that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'interrogation' within fractal identity. It is essential to develop the ability to isolate extremist behaviors in both one's own culture and the target culture based on one's past and present historical, sociopolitical, and economic conditions.

The sixth proposition translates to the transcultural individual's ability to be involved with people from underprivileged sections of society. Accordingly, I argue that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'metropolitanism' within fractal identity. There is a constant struggle for resources in large cities, and the upwardly mobile diasporic individual may not feel the pressure in terms of access to community facilities. However, when there is a backlash from the economically disadvantaged both within and outside the state, not only is the metropolis the first geographical space under attack but the privileged diasporic individual is also seen as the "other" in times of crisis; no matter how strong their voice is. The seventh proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to allow themselves to experience and be influenced by the target culture without isolating or constantly seeking approval from their own culture. Subsequently, I contend that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'egression' within fractal identity. The transcultural diasporic individual must be able to temporarily detach themselves from the layers of their identity that profoundly define them and momentarily cross the psychological border into the world of the "other" to move into the realm of mutuality. The eight proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to possess the skill to learn the target country's language and cultural norms independently. As a result, I suggest that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of dealing with 'strangeness' within fractal identity. The transcultural diasporic individual needs to come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to traverse the foreign land without a guide. To identify such a shaman, they need to leave behind their fear of the unknown, open their mind and heart to building trust and faith in their mentor, and do this in accordance with the linguistic and sociocultural mores practiced by the target culture. The ninth proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to describe the different scenarios where they have experienced discrimination in their own culture. Therefore, I posit that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension

of 'crossing' within fractal identity. While Slimbach (2005, 2012) argues that the creation of the new "self" is a process that involves complete metamorphosis, it needs to be viewed as transubstantiation in the Aristotelian metaphysical sense, where substances or the essence changes while the appearance remains unchanged (Toner 2011). Although the result is an entirely different substance, it still holds traces of the original, just like the crossing from our old to new "self" and vice-versa. The tenth and final proposition translates to the ability of the transcultural individual to try new ways of thinking and acting in the target culture. As a result, I argue that this pillar and its associated competencies form the dimension of 'relativity' within fractal identity. The ability to perceive and experience reality and imagination through the lens of relativity gives comfort to the transcultural diasporic individual as they juggle the various layers of their identity.

The six principles, the ten propositions, and their associated competencies from Slimbach's (2005, 2012) model have been summarized above. Consequently, ten fractal dimensions have been derived from the theorization of transcultural personhood that can potentially form a basis for conceptualizing fractal identity in the socio-anthropological sense. There are many similarities between transcultural identity and other forms of cultural identities discussed before, especially in their foundation in the cultural learning and competency framework. Grounding the construction of the diasporic identity in communication studies is a sensible approach, especially for literary analysis, as it provides us with the tools for analyzing linguistic narratives and discourses. As discussed earlier, the ability to wage language wars is a crucial component of Lewis' (2002) definition of culture that can be employed in the transcultural context. However, as mentioned previously, the other identity models reviewed in Part Two are founded on the constructionist approach and rely on comparing two or more cultures. It has been subsequently argued that given the complexity, multiplicity, cyclicity, fluidity, and transience of cultural identity in the twenty-first century, for diasporic individuals and naturalized citizens, a novel approach and new tools to analyze and understand the developmental and ontological aspects are needed. Transculturalism could be considered a suitable alternative to all the existing and partially successful cultural '*isms.*' The transcultural identity model described here allows us to look at culture from a global perspective without any reservations about creating the much-needed boundaries to separate the multiple layers of identity. It favors relativity as a tool to be at ease with conflicting realities and imaginations depending on the spatial and temporal context. In doing so, a landscape of a very strange geography has emerged, whose points, lines, angles, and figures form a complex geometrical space radically transgressing the three-dimensional notions of existence. To characterize this intricate entanglement of "being" and "becoming," the Mandelbrotian (1982) concepts of fractal geometry can be used to enhance and enrich the idea of transcultural personhood and subsequently form a basis for defining fractal identity. The remainder of this chapter outlines the concept of fractal geometry and its applicability in analyzing identity in transcultural diasporic individuals and literary narratives.

The theories used to describe the effects of geographical displacement on the identities of diasporic individuals fall under the category of spatial analysis or space-time analysis. Space is a fundamental concept in many disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, mathematics, physics, and biology. To describe a geometrical object in the physical world, it must be located in a space bounded by a finite number of dimensions. One of the early theorizations of space was provided by the ancient Greek Mathematician called Euclid. In classical geometry, this refers to the Euclidian space that typically has three dimensions. Any

point within this three-dimensional space can be mapped using three coordinates, usually represented by x, y, and z in mathematics (William 2016). Furthermore, a branch of mathematics called topology studies the properties of abstract geometrical objects that are preserved when subjected to continuous deformations that could arise from stretching, twisting, crumpling, and bending these objects but not tearing them apart or gluing them (Armstrong 2010). There are several types of mathematical spaces, and one among them is the topological space which can be defined as a set of points along with a set of neighborhoods (the area to which the point can move without leaving the defined space) for each point which adheres to certain postulates that define the relationship between these points and neighborhoods. Additionally, through topological space, we can define constructs such as continuity, convergence, and connectedness (Schubert and Moran 1968). A dimension characterizes every space, and this varies depending on the number of coordinates needed to situate any point within that space. For example, a line has one dimension (1D) because we only need one coordinate to specify any point on it, a square has two dimensions (2D) because any point on such objects requires its length and breadth to be specified, and finally, a cube has three dimensions (3D) because we need three coordinates in the form of length, breadth, and height to locate any given point within a cube (Weisstein "Dimension").

There are several types of dimensions depending on the kind of space. The dimension of the topological space is referred to as the Lebesgue covering dimension or simply the topological dimension. One of the main characteristics of this dimension is that it helps to identify the similarity or differences in the dimensions of various topological spaces by characterizing the dimension so that it remains unchanged at the core despite being subjected to certain deformations called homeomorphisms. In other words, the geometric object is the topological space, the object's transformation through continuous bending and stretching is the homeomorphism, and the topological dimension is the definition of space when subjected to invariance (Gamelin and Greene 2013). However, it must be noted that these spaces and dimensions are used to characterize abstract mathematical objects. Still, the artifacts and objects found in nature and the natural world are not confined to mathematical geometry's neat and orderly arrangements. "Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line" (Mandelbrot 1982:1). Hence, the topological dimension is a primary measure of space of simple smooth objects or with simple shapes or with a small number of edges that can be represented using integral values. On the other hand, we also have non-classical objects, especially those found in the natural and physical world, exhibiting the properties of scaling and self-similarity. In mathematics, scaling involves the linear transformation using a factor that either increases or decreases the size of the object to the same degree in all directions, and self-similarity refers to the property of an object where a part is either exactly or approximately similar to the whole. The Hausdorff–Besicovitch dimension is beneficial to represent the irregularity of such rough and chaotic objects. A number defines the distance between various members of a given set and draws its range from the extended real number system, which includes positive and negative infinities. The resultant number need not be an integer (Schleicher 2007). It helps us characterize spatial complexity through the properties of infiniteness and fractionality. Nonetheless, the Hausdorff–Besicovitch dimension equals the topological dimension for simple objects such as lines, squares, and cubes. It may also be the case where these two dimensions are equal for irregular objects. However, some objects called fractals that exhibit a higher dimensionality as found in nature despite having an integer value for its Hausdorff–Besicovitch dimension (Falconer 2006). Plus, these objects also exhibit recursion like a *mise en abyme* effect that is mathematically described as a phenomenon where the object being defined is applied to determine itself, creating

a loop that could theoretically go on forever but which is controlled using a small number of initial values and the application of tightly defined rules (Weisstein "Recursion").

There are innumerable patterns in nature that exhibit irregularity and fragmentation so that their complexity is not merely a bit higher than the abstract mathematical objects but at a completely different level. Additionally, the properties of scalability, self-similarity, and recursion in these patterns are infinite, and mathematicians have not sufficiently studied these formless objects or have not thoroughly investigated the morphology of these amorphous objects until very recently, as emphatically articulated by Dyson (1978).

> A great revolution of ideas separates the classical mathematics of the 19th century from the modern mathematics of the 20th. Classical mathematics had its roots in the regular geometric structures of Euclid and the continuously evolving dynamics of Newton. Modern mathematics began with Cantor's set theory and Peano's space-filling curve. Historically, the revolution was forced by the discovery of mathematical structures that did not fit the patterns of Euclid and Newton. These new structures were regarded ... as 'pathological,'... as a 'gallery of monsters,' kin to the cubist painting and atonal music that were upsetting established standards of taste in the arts at about the same time. (Mandelbrot 1982:3)

It can be observed that the complexity of fractal objects prohibited their analysis and understanding until the recent discoveries in computer science and data modeling in the late twentieth century that allow us to investigate the phenomenon of scalability, self-similarity, and recursion by immensely magnifying the finer details of such objects and reproducing the patterns to demonstrate their viability (Edgar 2004). The term 'fractal' is derived from the Latin adjective *fractus* and the corresponding Latin verb *frangere,* which signifies "to break" or "to divide into irregular fragments," thus encompassing the idea of both fractionality and irregularity within the same term. In mathematics, an object can be defined as a fractal if its Hausdorff-Besicovitch dimension strictly exceeds the topological dimension (Mandelbrot 1982). In simple terms, a fractal is an object made of parts that are like the whole in some form or the other such that when zoomed in, the same pattern appears on the inside with a sufficient level of detail to set apart a fractal object from other infinitely regressive objects (Falconer 2006).

To easily understand the concept of the fractal dimension in contrast to the integral topological dimension, we can consider the dimensionality of one of the most commonly found fractal shapes: the Koch snowflake. However, first, let us briefly discuss the topological dimensions related to simple geometric objects to put things in perspective. We know that a line is a one-dimensional object, and when it is cut into pieces that are one-third the size of the original, we get three equal parts. A square is a two-dimensional object, and if it is cut into pieces that are one-third the size of each of its dimensions, then we get a total of nine equal parts, or $3^2 = 9$. Therefore, for ordinary self-similar n-dimensional objects, scaled down by a factor of 1/r, we get r^n pieces. Moving on to the Koch snowflake, this is an object that can be constructed through sequential iterations: the first iteration starts with an equilateral triangle, and each subsequent iteration is formed by adding outward bends to each side of the initial triangle making smaller triangles, such that the resultant snowflake has a finite area but an infinite perimeter (Addison 1997). Another approach to constructing the Koch snowflake is to start with a one-dimensional line, take its middle third, break it into two, and arrange them in the middle to form a protruding spike. There are now four parts in the new structure, and each of them should be iterated in the same way as the original structure until infinity. With every iteration, the length of the object increases by 4/3. The complexity of this figure is expressed through its Hausdorff-Besicovitch dimension, or its self-similarity is mathematically defined by $d = \log n / \log s$, where n denotes the individual parts of one iteration, and s denotes the scaling factor. So, for the Koch curve, this

dimension is calculated by log 4 / log 3, approximately 1.2618. The topological dimension of each line forming the Koch snowflake is 1. Still, the Hausdorff-Besicovitch dimension of the resultant object is 1.2618, which is greater than the topological dimension, and it is not an integer, thus qualifying the object as a fractal (Vrobel 2011). This also illustrates that fractals are mathematically non-differentiable objects such that their dimension cannot be measured in traditional ways. For non-fractal objects that are curved, it may be possible to find a measuring tool that could allow us to quantify the object's dimensions by placing it end to end over the pieces of such a curve. However, for fractal objects, such as the Koch snowflake, it is not possible to find a piece that is straight enough to be measured with a traditional measuring tape because the irregular pattern constantly reappears at successively smaller scales, and the tape gets pulled in slightly every time an attempt is made to lay it over a part of the fractal object. Thus, if we are ever to measure the dimension of a snowflake, we would need an infinite tape to perfectly cover the entire fractal object (Mandelbrot 1982).

Therefore, the most used definition of a fractal is provided by Mandelbrot – an object whose self-similarity dimension is greater than its topological dimension – such that these objects have a unique relationship with the space in which they are situated. However, according to Falconer (2006), considering the complex and non-finite nature of these objects, in addition to the fractal dimension, to qualify as a fractal, the object must exhibit the following key features. The first feature is 'self-similarity,' where the object is a web of never-ending and infinitely complex self-similar patterns across different scales. The second feature is 'emergence' comprising of a fine or detailed structure at arbitrarily small scales where the whole has properties that are not exhibited by each of its parts individually. To be complete, the various dimensions must interact with each other. The third feature is 'irregularity,' where the object is non-synthetic as it cannot be described using the principles of regularity available in Euclidean geometry. And finally, the fourth feature is 'recursion,' exhibiting an infinite number of dimensions so that no loop occurs and that each dimension can be distinctly identified as a function of the core dimension. Having briefly discussed the fundamental mathematical concepts of Euclidean space, topological dimension, fractal dimension, self-similarity, emergence, irregularity, recursion, and fractal objects using a vocabulary that social scientists and literary analysts can understand, it will become easier to discuss the relevance of these concepts for theorizing complexity, chaos, and roughness in identity formation among diasporic individuals together with the idea of transcultural personhood.

As seen above, fractals are used to characterize and study objects considered complex and irregular and to define objects that were discarded as 'indescribable' by classical geometry mathematicians. "[A] few shapes they had to call grainy, hydralike, in between, pimply, pocky, ramified, seaweedy, strange, tangled, tortuous, wiggly, wispy, wrinkled, and the like, can henceforth be approached in rigorous and vigorous quantitative fashion" (Mandelbrot 1982:5). Similarly, many attempts have been made to define cultural identity among transcultural diasporic individuals and will continue to be made. As discussed throughout this dissertation, the transcultural world we live in calls for a mindset and a new approach to describing identity amongst transcultural individuals. It is possible to draw many interesting parallels between the world of fractals and the changing universe of the twenty-first century diasporic individuals in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. Analogous to the mathematical space are the new and old homelands where the "being" and "becoming" for these transcultural individuals unravels and unfolds through the curves and grooves of the turbulent changes they are faced within the process of their ontological development. Let us call this the 'transcultural space' and let its boundaries be characterized by

the six broad categories of 'transcultural personhood' posited by Slimbach (2005, 2012): perspective consciousness, ethnographic skill, global awareness, world learning, foreign language proficiency, and affective development. Like fractals, the area occupied by this transcultural space is finite. Still, its perimeter is infinite to incorporate the immeasurable idiosyncrasies associated with the identity development processes among these transcultural individuals. Furthermore, the coordinates and dimensions to locate the abstract objects in a mathematical space have been derived from Slimbach's (2005, 2012) theoretical model. The possibilities of having multiple, if not infinite number of dimensions for fractal objects have been presented. Consequently, the ten dimensions defined in the context of transcultural personhood can be attributed to this transcultural space. The fractal dimension attributed to the identity of the diasporic individuals, obtained through the unending interplay among these individual dimensions and the interminable permutations and combinations of the prominence taken by these dimensions relative to the context in which the transcultural person is situated at any given moment, is greater than its simple topological integral dimension. Additionally, it is also fractional or fragmented due to the impossibility of determining the number of dimensions invoked in response to a particular cultural situation and the possibility of a *mélange* of parts of some dimensions along with some whole dimensions being invoked to handle transcultural behavior satisfactorily. If these dimensions seem excessive, they are indeed commensurate with the complex and chaotic nature of the transcultural personhood, as is the case with fractals where "dimensions must not be multiplied beyond necessity, but a multiplicity of dimensions is absolutely unavoidable" (Mandelbrot 1982:14).

François Laruelle's (1992) concept of non-philosophy based on chaos theory and symmetrical approaches opens an interesting avenue for connecting various ideas from the natural and social sciences. For Laruelle (1992), identity determines the relationship between linguistic, historical, and temporal phenomena rather than these forces molding the course of identity. The theory is based on a constructivist approach. It is critical of the existing philosophical notions of sameness, difference, and plurality linked to so many existing cultural identity models. A renaissance in identarian thinking is proposed by frequenting ideas of deterministic behavior, fractal geometry, and artificial philosophy in stark opposition to the new materialist theorists such as Deleuze and Badiou. The concept of fractals has been used to offer an alternative to the gaps that cannot be filled by structuralism in explaining the irregularity in discourse. In turn, it provides a framework for analyzing multiplicity and inconsistency in society pertaining to those on the margins. Furthermore, it takes a non-philosophical approach to ontology as it seems unrealistic to conceive notions of existence without discussing its capitalistic means in the twenty-first century. So, it is necessary to take the middle ground to strike a balance between Marxism and Capitalism. Existence is analyzed with all its nuances, modalities, and particularities from a non-epistemological basis and without any origins in philosophy; rather it is propounded in science and the chaos exhibited by reality. Identity is treated as a saber against the conceptualization of difference in postmodern terms, built on the fundamentals of science, the notion of determination from non-philosophy, and quantum mechanics achieved through the merger of fractals with philosophy.

> [This] identity emancipates singularities that are at last radical, fractals that are no longer subject to it. It gives them their *reality* and prevents them from dissolving in philosophical possibility. It authorizes the constitution of an autonomous order of singularities in the form of chaos. We will describe this nonepistemological generalization as simultaneously scientific and not regional (geometrical, set-theoretical, catastrophic, thermodynamic, etc.), transcendental and not philosophical (Aristotelean, Kantian, Nietzschean, Lacanian, etc.). It alone "conserves" the singularities in a nonconservative way and imparts to the old, rather worn out philosophical "multiplicities" a new power, which will be the power of generalized "fractality" and "chaos." (Laruelle 2016:xix)

This new theorization lies at the intersection and conjugation of science (fractals, chaos) with philosophy rather than an act of philosophically reflecting about these scientific objects. Generalized fractality is given preference over textuality to account for the artistic fractality in the literature produced in the contemporary era, and artificial philosophy is used to create a fractal model of philosophy itself that can be used to explain the identarian irregularities and fragmentations. Furthermore, there is an attempt to use the cognitive aspects of Artificial Intelligence to derive an Artificial Philosophy such that it retains a philosophical logic yet by means of science, in this case, computer science, as the latter provides powerful tools to generate complex fractals and calculate fractal dimensions of highly irregular and fragmented objects. While it is impossible to retain the transcendental aspect of philosophy to not render it abstract and quantitative when applying the theory to analyze human identity, it is possible to take a qualitative approach and use the generic rules of Mandelbrot's fractal theory to perform a textual analysis of philosophical content thus separating it from the norms and requirements of philosophy and creating a synthetic language comparable to artificial intelligence.

Laruelle (1992) explains that in doing so, philosophy becomes non-philosophy, the framework for analysis is rooted in mathematical science, traditional thinking is replaced by artificial computer-generated knowledge. Deconstruction is restituted by non-hierarchical cooperation between philosophy and the sciences, and epistemological or philosophical thought is supplanted by a unified or scientific theory of thought. In essence, this approach based on the theory of identities sweeps us away from the dream-like world of the erstwhile philosophers. It places the conceptualization of identity in the sciences using quantum mechanics and fractal geometry. There is a hope to redefine the practicality and reach of philosophy in the face of globalization in the twenty-first century. Conclusively, this unique paradigm allows us to confer a certain legitimacy to the use of fractals in understanding and defining identity among diasporic individuals in literary works. It provides a philosophical or rather a non-philosophical backbone by paving a path to develop much-needed thinking beyond postmodernist, postcolonial, and poststructural approaches to identity analysis currently prevalent in the fields of communication studies and literary criticism. Most importantly, it allows us to justify the use of a mathematical framework in the inquiry of literary texts as paraphrased by the following consideration by Laruelle (2016):

> Taking as our guide or theoretical signpost B. Mandelbrot's works (which have been universally accepted by the scientific community and widely used in various areas of research), we generalize them in the aforementioned mode, which remains internal to science, but to a science endowed with an authentic power of relating to the real (Identity) and of thinking this relation. Generalized "non-Mandelbrotian" fractals are then no longer objects of "nature", but of knowledge or of theory, and above all they form a novel theoretical tool, adapted at last to the disciplines of language (philosophy, poetry, literature) and no longer only to geometrical and perceived forms (physical phenomena of turbulence, cartography, painting, photography, etc.). This concept is accompanied by others ("fractal a priori", "fractal intentionality", "generalized chaos", etc.) which cash out its theoretical force in a nonpositivist mode. (xx)

At the heart of fractal geometry lies chaos theory which, according to Brady (1990), has affected the pure sciences significantly since its inception in the second half of the twentieth century, challenging and disrupting age-old scientific paradigms and concepts based on order and organization. While chaos theory aims to explain and account for disorder in systems and structures, the human mind tries to attribute some sense of order even amidst disorder. However, we need to separate our perception from the degree of order or disorder to fully comprehend the problem, as it is impossible to predict the course of reality. Chaos theory helps us to look beyond the superficial order and drill through the underlying disorder and provides us with a framework to analyze that disorder. Naturally, the first applications of this theory were in the field of the pure sciences. Still, chaos theory has seen more and more utilization in the humanities, particularly in arts and literary studies. Its principles can be applied first to textual analysis to discover the order and symmetry in composition that appear beneath the chaotic surface. Secondly, it can be used to analyze non-linearity in genres such as comedy which is cyclical and does not repeat itself in the same manner as nuanced history. Thirdly, it can be beneficial to the inquiry of moral and non-deterministic availability and unpredictability of literary characters independent of fate, heredity, and motivation. Fourthly, using fractal geometry, a subset of chaos theory, we can investigate the presence of *structure en abyme* representing the properties of self-similarity and recursion in textual and non-textual elements of a literary work. Fifthly, it can be employed to study the psyche of the literary characters and its evolution in them through space and time, which at first appears to be caught in a web of phycological confusion, but they are woven by a self-referential order of the author's unifying viewpoint in presenting various narratives.

To conclude the review of the adaptation of fractals, its dimensions, and its critical defining features to the analysis of identity among diasporic individuals, it is essential to note that this triad must be conceived in its entirety with the framework of transcultural personhood based on the principles of transculturalism as the underlying space where this identarian narrative and politics unfolds. Furthermore, the transcultural turn is primordial in the *mise en scène* of the post-postmodern epoch leading to trans-postmodernism, which is one of the defining moments in the history of migration, given the calculated political, social, and economic transactionality between globalization and technology. Having provided a brief overview of the methodological framework constituting fractal identity, the following two concluding chapters in this dissertation discuss the application of such a theoretical approach in analyzing identity in prose and poetic forms of literary texts published in the new millennium by South Asian Muslim American author Syed Masood and poet Agha Shahid Ali.

3.2 Deconstructing the Fractal "Self" and Checkers in Syed M. Masood's *The Bad Muslim Discount*

> For another, leaving the country of one's birth isn't an easy thing. Not only do you have to leave everything you've ever known—family, friends, streets littered with memories of your childhood and homes that have walls imbued with memories of generations—behind, you also have to find a place willing to take you.
>
> Syed M. Masood, *The Bad Muslim Discount*

From the categories that form the cognitive map of transcultural personhood (Slimbach 2005, 2012), we can derive that they apply to a greater extent to the more established diasporic individuals and their successive generations. The multicultural and intercultural identity models discussed previously describe the personhood of people who are just beginning to enter a new country. It can be argued that transcultural personhood is an advanced stage of "being" and "becoming", and the competencies needed to achieve it can only be developed through total immersion in at least one more culture other than one's own over a sustained duration. It is not easy to break personal biases, heighten one's consciousness, demonstrate proficiency in global awareness and world learning, master a foreign language, or develop affective capacity without having a very significant stake and interest in the new homeland. This gradual transition to life in multiple homelands can take more than one generation's lifespan to achieve. However, given the cultural complexity of the subcontinent, it is evident, especially among the affluent classes, that the first-generation South Asian Muslim American diasporic individual already possesses a strong basis for transcultural personhood. They are constantly dealing with all kinds of differences in their ancestral homelands. They have formed both long-lasting and functional relationships across different communities. They have lived in environments whose cultures and languages are distinct from their own. The more well-to-do diaspora members speak fluent English in their home country even before they move to America. Many of the politically and academically engaged among them have an awareness of what impacts their minority status and have found ways to overcome the effect of unfavorable situations. Furthermore, they have deepened their understanding of the impact of caste and religion on their "being" and "becoming." Some have even formed families by breaking the social stigma attached to inter-caste marriages. The challenge for these individuals on American soil is to be able to replicate the same transcultural personhood in a completely alien environment, to develop a new way of seeing the things that are familiar back home but entirely different in the U.S., and ultimately develop the capacity to understand their new processes of "being" and "becoming." The theoretical framework for the fractal identity model has been laid out in the previous chapter. To increase the relevance of fractal identity to literary studies, the paradigm of transcultural personhood, based on Slimbach's (2005, 2012) concept of the transcultural journey, serves as a foundation. It is a necessary condition for the manifestation of fractal identity in diasporic individuals. The six broad categories– perspective consciousness, ethnographic skill, global awareness, world learning, foreign language proficiency, and affective development, constitute the space for the evolution and manifestation of fractal identity. The ten organizational propositions and the competencies associated with each of them– cultural transcendence, boundedness, authenticity, cosmopolitanism, interrogation, metropolitanism, egression, strangeness, crossing, and relativity serve as dimensions of the fractal identity. The basic

principles and tenets from the ordered world of Euclidean geometry, as well as the irregular and chaotic world of fractal geometry, can be extended to analyze hybridity, multiplicity, and irregularity in identity formation among the diaspora. The five distinct features of fractals: dimension, self-similarity, emergence, irregularity, and recursion, allow us to quantify the identarian problematics in diasporic individuals from complex cultural and religious milieus such as the South Asian Muslims inhabiting the U.S. in the present times. This chapter analyzes the fractal nature of Syed M. Masood's novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* [*TBMD*] (2021) and the fractal nature of the identity of its two characters, Anvar and Safwa.

A first-generation Pakistani American, S.M. Masood grew up in Karachi and is a two-time immigrant to the U.S., finally settling in Sacramento, where he is also a practicing attorney. He has been a citizen of three countries and has lived in nine different cities. His debut novel *More Than Just a Pretty Face,* published in 2020, is a teen romance story told from the perspective of the second-generation diaspora and portrays how they negotiate the complexities of friendships, love, American and Islamic identities, and familial obligations in present-day America. S.M. Masood describes these dilemmas as universal, which are reflected in his writing, urging us to investigate the hidden and jagged layers of fractal identity.

> Living among different people in different countries at fascinating times in their histories has shaped both my view of the world and my writing. Ultimately, human beings are the same everywhere (despite the fact that they tell themselves, everywhere, that they are different from each other), and the theme of this fundamental human unity informs everything I write. (S.M. Masood "About")

The present novel, *TBMD*, follows two very different families with the commonality of their faith from Pakistan and Iraq: from the height of the Iraq war in the nineties to Trump's America in 2016. It narrates the universal Muslim immigrant experience in the U.S. and how each generation comes to terms with living in modern America. According to S.M. Masood, the novel was written mainly in response to the 2016 U.S. elections and the growing anti-Muslim sentiment used during the election campaign and during Trump's tenure as president.

> I wanted to figure out what it meant to be both Muslim and American when a large part of your country's populace clearly considered you, and people who believed as you did, entirely alien.
>
> What does that do to "bad" Muslims, Muslims whom other Muslims may not entirely want to claim? How do you belong to identities that just don't want you? That was the topic I wanted to explore. (S.M. Masood "Let Your Characters Surprise You")

The novel's plot is organized around different stages of the game of checkers (American English) or draughts (British English) – opening, zugzwang, crowning, trap, blitz, and endgame – lending it the mathematical precision of a strategy board game between two players. Each section starts with a strategy lesson from the male narrator's maternal grandmother representing the voice of experience and the crossover between generations acting as a bridge between multiple homelands. She advises the said narrator: "Real life is like checkers. You try to make your way to where you need to go, and to do it, you've got to jump over people while they're trying to jump over you, and everyone is in each other's way" (*TBMD* 12). The narrator contends that he has never been able to win against his grandmother and treats her strategic wisdom as a lifelong learning exercise in negotiating his cultural and religious identities in two very different countries in equally unfamiliar circumstances. The two-player theme from checkers is further extended to the story's narration. In the board game, the two players make diagonal moves using twelve uniform pieces each and are required to make mandatory captures by moving over their opponent's pieces (Hosch 2007). The

novel is divided into twenty-three chapters, each alternating between two narrative voices–Anvar and Safwa–the latter changes her nominal identity multiple times throughout the novel starting from Safwa to Azza to Zahra. There is one chapter in the novel in the blitz section, which is narrated by both Anwar and Safwa (who is Azza at that time) simultaneously, thus creating a hybrid chapter that brings the total of the novel's chapters to twenty-four. Spatially, like the n-by-n dimensional checkers board, the novel's narrative can be compared to a fractal space. The evolution of fractal identities of the novel's characters, like the computational complexity of determining the winner in a game of checkers, leads us to conclude that it is not so easy to determine victory. Some researchers argue that modern checkers is derived from the tenth-century game Alquerque (*al-Quirkat* in Arabic), popular in the Middle East (Westerveld 2009), further highlighting the universal human connections across the world and the relevance of a game appropriated by the West as a backdrop in a Muslim American novel. The game's complexity is further revealed in its impossibility to win, and an attempt at solving the game by using artificial intelligence took almost two decades, proving that the game always ends in a draw unless one of the players makes a mistake (Schaeffer et al. 2007). Throughout the novel, Anvar and Safwa struggle with forging their identity, faced with difficult choices, question the compatibility of their faith and culture with their present circumstances. For Anvar, it is about being a good Muslim in America. For Safwa, it is about maintaining her faith in her own homeland destructed by American armed forces and her eventual arrival in the U.S. The answer lies in forging a fractal identity and allowing the seemingly jagged, irregular layers of the "self" to coexist in a continual state of metamorphosis, as Anvar avows towards the end of the novel.

> It's part of growing up to realize that often, perhaps inevitably, we are left with incomplete stories about the lives of other people. It is impossible, therefore, to understand any other being as completely, or incompletely, as we understand ourselves. The best we can do is find some common ground in self-evident truths about who we are, if not the same, then at least similar. We can recognize that our experiences of the world, no matter how various and varied, how tinged with excess or want or joy or sorrow, make us all irredeemably, undeniably, irrepressibly human. (*TBMD* 353)

The multi-layered game of checkers, the schematic on which the novel is crafted, and the complex and complicated identities of the narrators exhibit properties of a fractal object in many ways. Firstly, the resemblance of the multiple "selves" and their respective identities in Anvar and Safwa can be compared to the feature of self-similarity in fractals. At the plot level, the experiences of both these characters are so similar that it becomes impossible to distinguish between their narrative voices. For example, the ritual of sacrificing the lamb during the festival of *Eid al-Adha* is present in both narratives. In both cases, it is associated with a traumatic memory. The symbol and story of the lamb are referred to in multiple locations throughout the novel. Several incidents around this Festival of Sacrifice help the characters trace their history and personal stories. From a war-torn Baghdad to the suburbs of San Francisco, the motif of Abraham's sacrifice is used as a reminder of life in the ancestral homeland and the strategies of adopting the rituals of the festival in a secular country such as the U.S. For Anvar, the story is about obedience to God's will, but Safwa thinks that it's a story about ignorance and caution. This reflection occurs when two men kill themselves and many other innocent people in Baghdad on the day of the *Eid* celebrating Abraham. She wonders if Abraham, who spoke with the divine, misunderstood God's command and was ready to slit open his child's throat, how can mere mortals claim to understand what Allah wants. On the other hand, Anvar starts his story by confessing that he killed Mikey. He says, "[i]t sounds worse than it actually was. You have to understand that I didn't kill Mikey because I wanted

to do it. I killed him because God told me to do it" (*TBMD 3*). Anvar named the goat Mikey and sacrificed it on *Eid al-Adha* when he was ten years old, yet the memory lasts well into his adult life.

As discussed before, self-similarity in fractal identity, like fractal objects, can either be exact, approximate or random depending on the dimension invoked and the context presented to the diasporic individual. The fractal identity is the accumulation of the identity formed by the interplay of various layers of the "self" from the new and old homelands. Certain aspects of the "self" are precisely similar in both homelands, such as adherence to particular values, beliefs, and traditions that need to be replicated literally and repeatedly irrespective of the geographical location of the "self." In Karachi, when Anvar's mother reprimands him for questioning a story she narrates to him about the Prophet and his companions and asks him to pray to Allah for forgiveness, it marks a turning point in his relationship with religion. Anvar reflects: "I knelt but did not pray. That was the day the hold of the sacred upon me was broken forever. It was the day that made me who I am" (*TBMD* 7). However, we see later in the novel that he never abandons his faith, partly because he creates his own interpretation of what it means to be Muslim in the U.S. and partly because the people that he loves and respects keep pulling him back into Islamic rituals in one way or the other. Anvar reminisces: "The day I was first told I was damned was the day I felt I had been blessed" (*TBMD* 7). He becomes a lawyer in the U.S. and is praised by the local community for defending Muslims against the prevalent Islamophobia in the U.S. However, he stops practicing law because he wants to distance himself from the politics of representation. When he's out of work, he finds a kind Pakistani patron who gives him a discount on the apartment rent for being a good Muslim. The novel is sarcastically titled *The Bad Muslim Discount*, which could be read in two ways: discount for Muslims with a particular character, good or bad, and the fractal and complex nature of being a Muslim in the U.S. so that one "bad" Muslim does not represent all Muslim Americans.

Furthermore, hybridity is in line with self-similarity, especially regarding approximate or random manifestation. As Safwa straddles into the "other" world, she first attempts to approximate behaviors from her old homeland to meet the needs of the new homeland. However, as time passes, these approximations are no longer needed. As Azza or Zahra, she learns to switch her behaviors, naturalized over time in both homelands, such that it is impossible to preserve complete or approximate self-similarity. Safwa, Azza, and Zahra remind us to probe deeper and identify the similarities in seemingly disparate situations. The hijab gives her safety in Baghdad and anonymity when she's in California. She has experienced violence inside and outside the house but does not characterize herself as a victim. She remarks: "That's exactly the way the world works. It isn't always an angry man hitting a helpless girl with a belt. Sometimes it happens in the open, like a drone in the sky, raining hellfire on villages" (*TBMD* 298). Her trajectory from Baghdad to Canada is full of hope. She is the one who has traveled across continents despite being from a poor country in comparison to Henry, whom she meets in Canada while working at a bakery. In his mid-thirties, Henry, a white man, has never left his town. The identarian complexity reaches such an advanced level that the pattern of behavior becomes stochastic, whereby some random aspects of the "self" are preserved, thereby retaining its authenticity vis-à-vis the original "self." As Anvar recalls in one instance about home and familiarity: "It is strange, wandering in a city you are intimately familiar with because even if don't know exactly where you are, you never feel lost. You always know, more or less, how to get back home" (*TBMD* 330). Unlike the cultural identity of individuals who have never crossed a border, it is not possible for diasporic individuals to exhibit their identity traits straightforwardly, just like it is not possible to measure the length of a coastline by using

traditional measurement tools. For example, the coastline of Britain is not constructed using neat and simple self-similar lines that traditionally constitute the Koch snowflake. There is self-similarity amongst the various patterns that form the coastline such that to the naked eye, it would appear as orderly, but when magnified to several degrees, the pattern does not follow the same order as the base object (Mandelbrot 1967). Similarly, by considering the randomly occurring self-similarity among diasporic identity presenting a fractional dimension, we can account for the trials and travails of diasporic individuals in the twenty-first century. As Anvar recounts his experience of visiting Karachi from the U.S.– "I'd gotten a chance to walk through our old neighborhood. It was like I had found a piece of myself. I was surprised at how incomplete I'd been without ever realizing it" (*TBMD* 298) – and despite being a naturalized American citizen for many years, there were other parts of his identity that only existed in Pakistan. This was not because he was nostalgic but because he could afford the possibility of having multiple simultaneous homelands.

Secondly, the different parts of the identity that form the composite identity among diasporic individuals, as illustrated by the novel's narrator, can be compared to the feature of emergence in fractals. To be considered a fractal identity, the component identities need to be fine or extremely detailed at arbitrary scales such that the whole cannot exist without the contribution of the parts. The sum of the parts is much greater than the whole, and the parts lose their identity if they are dissociated from the whole. The last condition is of prime importance because fractal identity among diasporic individuals should not be viewed as fragmented. The fragments on their own have no significance until they contribute to the formation of the complex and hybrid whole. "Identity is neither unitary nor fragmented; it is an experience of multimembership, an intersection of many relationships that you hold into the experience of being a person at once one and multiple" (Wenger 1998:135). The female narrator in the novel has multiple aspects of contradictory thoughts and actions at different stages in her life through the different personas adopted by her. Her identities as Safwa, Azza, and Zahra, seem superficial until we probe further into the depths of her arbitrary rationality and outlook on life. As Safwa, she always responds to her father and other male members, as she remarks: "all properly because I'd been brought up to say the right things at the right times, but all I wanted was to be left alone" (*TBMD* 33). Inside her house, she is not afraid to confront her father, and she strives to be the exact opposite of what is expected of women in a male dominant society in Iraq. Her mother rarely argued with her father, but when she "did speak, and was told she was wrong, she offered no defense. It kept peace in the house, and some peace, as those who remember fondly the days of Saddam will tell you, is better than war" (*TBMD* 30). But her mother is no longer alive, and her father, having returned from Afghanistan, is still the same man, only hardened more by multiple wars. When Safwa is asked to stop mourning and take responsibilities as the woman of the house she decides to speak up against her father.

> May be I should have gotten up like he wanted and just made something for him. That's what my mother would've done. She would have kept the peace.
> But I wasn't my mother.
> And I didn't want to be my mother. I wanted to be nothing like her. I definitely didn't want to live like she had lived, or die like she had died, in silent pain. I wouldn't do it.
> So I said what my mother hadn't said to Abu[65] in years, if ever.
> "No." (*TBMD* 35)

The same Safwa is then forced by her father to travel to an unnamed village between Pakistan and Afghanistan, where they seek refuge at Bibi Warda's home, who is a woman with a strong

[65] One of the words for father in Arabic and Urdu.

personality. From this woman, Safwa strengthens her courage to take her destiny into her own hands despite the rampant destruction caused by war and the prevailing local tribal conflicts. In Baghdad, she has a choice, even if she cannot exercise it, but here she feels she is commanded by strange men to restrict her movements and always required to wear the niqab[66]. However, for Safwa, these men are cowards "in a land carved up by war" (*TBMD* 113). Yet, under these circumstances, Safwa secures passage for herself and her father to the U.S. Ironically, America is the only place where she would be safe because "[n]o man sets fire to his own house" (*TBMD* 114). She travels as Azza to California, enrolls in school, plots revenge against the man who brings them to the U.S., meets Anvar, visits the houses that her mother used to keep watching on U.S. television series, and learns to navigate through a different version of Islam in the U.S. In America, she has the power to decide the fate of the man, Qais, who threatened and blackmailed her into getting married in exchange for bringing her to the U.S. She does not want to live the same life she has left behind and plans to send proof to homeland security that could get Qais deported. She weaves "truth and lies together, until they became indistinguishable" (*TBMD* 278). There are parts of her identity as Safwa that are impossible to erase.

> I felt like I was ripping the story out of my soul, in which it had become intertwined, because of how much it was a part of me, because I had tried not to even think of it, much less speak of it, for so long. (*TBMD* 279)

Finally, as Zahra, she can reconcile all parts of her identity and view the beauty in the world and start living her life created by the sum of her other lives. The novel ends with Zahra's hope for the future. "Maybe I'd been wrong too. Maybe there was still beauty in the world. Maybe you just had to know when and where to find it" (*TBMD* 358).

Unlike Safwa, Anvar does not change his name when his family moves from Pakistan to the U.S. He is brought up in a devout Muslim family by a mother who prefers morality to rationality. This has a very different effect on her two sons. Her eldest son Aamir is the obedient boy who does what he's told. He even becomes a doctor to please his family and community members. Unlike his brother, Anvar questions everything about culture and tradition, forcefully pursues a law degree but returns to art and literature as that is what liberates him from mundane existence. The game of checkers and the advice given by his grandmother about life and the choices one needs to make in this world act as his alter ego in a certain sense. Like Anvar, his grandmother defies tradition, and she is also one of the main influences in resolving his dilemma about moving to the U.S. She justifies their migration by citing the journeys of some of the prophets mentioned in the Quran: "… all your heroes were wanderers upon this earth. Moses, Jesus, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Ishmael, Muhammad" (*TBMD* 20). Throughout the novel, we see that Anvar cannot tear away from his faith even though he does not practice it anymore. His guiding light is the last piece of advice from his grandmother: "The history of the world is the history of people who went places. People who walked to the horizon. If you get the chance, you should be glad to be one of them" (*TBMD* 20). Interestingly, this perspective comes from his grandmother, who is not the one migrating to America. For Anvar's brother, their move to the U.S. is like an exile, but for Anvar, exile and migration are the same things. He will forever be a Pakistani and an American, no matter where he lives. The South Asian Muslim American's identity emerges from the combination of their national, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities within their country of origin in South Asia, their gender identity, their cultural identity in their new homeland, or in other words, the totality of their biological, societal, and spatial identities,

[66] Another word of hijab or veil.

originating from their "being" and resulting in their "becoming" or more innovatively transpired through their "being in becoming" (Parry 2003:102). The diasporic "self" is, by extension, the transcultured and fractal "self" in late modernity.

> As a working definition, the transcultured self may be described as one who... can dwell in travel, that is, who can temporarily acculturate to the other's world, but without losing hold of the self. It is not a hybrid identity, but a being in becoming, one which is brought to a fuller recognition of itself through confrontation with difference and, simultaneously, to the sense of its own limitations. (Parry 2003:102)

On the one hand, Anvar's mother tells him that in this world, one cannot do what one wants because if something goes wrong in one's world, "if you make it what you want it to be, becomes your responsibility" (*TBMD* 24). On the other hand, his grandmother advises him to just do what he's told to do when he is told to do and that if he wants everything to be easy, never to ask any questions. She counsels him: "The world is difficult sometimes for restless minds and imaginative hearts" (*TBMD* 26). Anvar's identity comprises these competing philosophies and influences his lifestyle. He is continuously evolving and never at ease with who he has become. Consequently, emergence is a distinct characteristic of complex systems. The diasporic individual is the embodiment of complexity, hybridity, and chaos in the twenty-first century due to their constant straddling between physical and virtual spaces and the intergenerational demands to maintain integral relationships across multiple cultures. When Anvar's family moves to Fremont, life is surprisingly not different for them. He does not experience any culture shock due to his familiarity with U.S. culture and the presence of and access to Pakistani culture in the Californian suburb.

> In a way I'd been in training to become an American all my life. I spoke the language, and I knew all the cultural touch points—the movies other kids spoke about, the video games they played, the sports they followed, the music they listened to—none of it was foreign to me. I belonged here as much as I belonged anywhere, even if I didn't know many people or needed to print directions off MapQuest to get anywhere. (*TBMD* 41)

From a philosophical viewpoint, this branch is studied under emergentism. Almost all proponents of this branch advocate epistemic or ontological irreducibility of the whole to the parts, thereby advocating the necessity for a strong relationship between the fragments. Religion has never made Anvar feel awe, elevation, or reverence. Instead, he finds that the divine is possible in Art. "The possibility of something good, in the universe. The possibility of something divine opens up for me. […] The human imagination is a miracle, and it is possible that this miracle is a gift from a Creator" (*TBMD* 337). Finally, for a part of a system to be emergent, it needs to be formed interactively because of a new outcome of some other parts of the system, and at the same time, it needs to be different from all these other parts (O'Connor and Wong 2002). Indeed, this has interesting applications to both the epistemological and ontological development of diasporic individuals. Anvar falls in love with a Pakistani-American girl Zuha. Still, as is the custom in South Asian cultures, he is not allowed to date, so he decides to keep his relationship secret from his family. In an attempt to forge an American identity, we see several instances in the novel where he applies the principle: "What my family didn't know, after all, couldn't hurt me" (*TBMD* 40). His relationship with Zuha is complicated, but his love for her is so strong that he decides to break up with her when she becomes overtly religious to take a political stand against the rising Islamophobia in the U.S. He never stops loving her, and their paths cross again later in life.

Thirdly, the jaggedness in the transcultural personhood resulting from traits and behaviors that cannot be classified in a singular cultural system is analogous to the feature of irregularity in fractals. Safwa's transformation to Azza and ultimately to Zahra results from her multiple cultural

experiences and varied interpretations of Islam as she moves between Baghdad, Afghanistan, Fremont, and Canada. She remarks: "The choices we make are ultimately always about ourselves, about who we are, instead of other people, […]. I did what I had to do to be who I am" (*TBMD* 322). The irregularity is deepened by the forces of globalization, hyperconnectivity, and cultural hybridity in a highly fragmented geographical space that is itself irregular and fluid irrespective of its fixed and limiting borders. Neither Anvar nor Safwa are afraid of voicing this dissatisfaction with the perception of Islam and Muslims globally. Safwa's is a Middle Eastern perspective shaped by war resulting in the weaponization of Islam to suit the allied forces. Anvar's is a South Asian perspective that fringes on the export of misguided fundamentalist ideologies into the subcontinent. The calls from the so-called preachers to make Islam great again are not different from the republican rhetoric to make America great again. Both versions of greatness rely on tossing all the progress made over the centuries and receding into the past.

Fourthly and lastly, the *mise en abyme* or the Matryoshka doll effect employed by artists to create an illusion by using a picture within a picture within a picture where all pictures are either a copy of the original picture or somehow related to the original picture is comparable to the feature of recursion in fractals. The concept of fractal identity comprises this layered effect. The core identity is enclosed within several layers of other identities that a diasporic individual acquires or develops when moving between multiple homelands. Recursion in Anvar's fractal identity refers to the reappearance of religion and its different meanings throughout his life. As a child, he prays because he does not understand the meaning of prayer. In his third year of university in Boston, he learns to believe in God ("an intellectual decision not a spiritual one" (*TBMD* 117)); in Fremont he comes to "admire the friendly, practical religion that is Californian Islam" (*TBMD* 188), and in moments of distress, he probes the depth of his religion and religiosity. "In the deepest part of the night, desperately exhausted, I did something that I hadn't done for many years. I stood up to pray in my own home of my own volition" (*TBMD* 294). There are differences in the various layers of his approach to and understanding Islam, yet there are similarities with the core layer of his identity. Even when prayer doesn't help him, he accepts the complexity of his identity and is constantly discovering new hidden layers. "Always perhaps, in the court of the King, the Fool is destined to remain unsatisfied" (*TBMD* 294). The more Anvar strays away from the surface, the more distinct the connectedness between the various layers becomes. The projection of a specific identity layer from the repertoire emerges depending on his contextual and cultural needs. Anvar's fractal identity is in many ways like a checker's piece: "limited yet full of potential. If it could brave perils before it and survive, it would be coupled with another just like it, and become royal. It would make a real difference in the world it inhabited" (*TBMD* 295).

In conclusion, we need to consider that the theories and thought processes used traditionally in analyzing identities in diasporic individuals in the twenty-first century do not do sufficient justice to their fractal nature. Král (2014) argues that the very nature of contemporary society, the indubitable alternation of the trajectory of urban life, the fractalization of the city where the bourgeoisie and proletariat interact and intermingle in new ways calls for the undoubted re-segmentation of the diasporic subject and an urgent unearthing of the urban fractus. While Bhabha's theories on belonging, hybridity, and location are a good starting point, the original ideas were aimed to respond to the dominant discourse of Western hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and the treatment of the voiceless and deprivileged subaltern. Although the basic premise of postcolonial ideas such as hybridity and postmodern ideas such as multiplicity lies in the intersecting of the various identities deemed irregular vis-à-vis the dominant narratives, the circumstances have changed dramatically in the last twenty years. In the context of fractal identity,

on the one hand, we have the discourse of the underprivileged that continues to represent the struggles of the vast majority of the immigrant populations in the U.S. On the other hand, we also have the discourse of the privileged transnational elite that is pushing for the formation of a new social order by those diasporic individuals who are no longer immigrants but have become naturalized citizens with enough power to change the location of the dominant culture. Just as fractal geometry gives a voice to the heretofore irregular objects, fractal identity can vocalize a discursive change from a position of a well-organized and structured theoretical framework. Finally, it is also important to point out that, like mathematicians, historians too have chosen to ignore irregularity. On the surface both irregular objects and irregular identities appear to be normal when viewed from a convenient distance. Only when one subjects them to the gaze of the magnifying glass, the irregularity becomes apparent, and the infinitely granular structure emerges the closer we examine the object and, by extension, the identity. While this irregularity has been declared an "art museum" where until now, these outliers were relegated to the "gallery of monsters," it is opportune that this gallery has become a "museum of science" (Mandelbrot 1982). It is time to walk out of our purebred daydream of cultural simplicity into the half-blood reality of cultural complexity, acknowledge the existence of deep granular irregularities in ourselves and others, and define a much-needed new normal. S.M. Masood's key message for the readers is to acknowledge the fractal nature of human existence and comprehend the inability to universalize identity based on one person's or one group's behavior. He recounts that "it'd be nice if people walked away with an understanding of how complex, diverse, and varied the Muslim experience is. I hope they realize that no one person can ever do it justice" (S.M. Masood "Let Your Characters Surprise You"). Every diasporic individual is, in effect an artist and a magician who is adept at hiding what is not needed and revealing it slowly at the right time in the right place. This skill increases as time spent in multiple homelands increases. Every transcultural journey, be it physical, spiritual, psychological, or virtual, into the real or imagined homeland enriches the voyager's personhood markedly. This ephemeral theatrical show or the skating across several identities is necessary as none of the individual parameters fully define today's diasporic person, "each parameter is likely to come to the forefront when triggered by contextual changes in the politics of the nation, or I may choose to foreground some specificities or play down some others as part of a larger strategy of fitting in or sticking out" (Riley 1988:16). It also ensues that recursion is closely tied with the self-similarity feature of fractals due to the perceivable sameness among the layers of multiple identities. Due to this self-similarity, the conflicts between the multiple layers do not render the fractal "self" into a split personality. Fragmentation here does not delve into schizophrenia; rather it is the ability of the "self" to partition the various layers of personality and identity from its past, present, and future and to prioritize the *mise en relief* of the appropriate identarian expression as demanded by the situation.

> The individual's self-relationship becomes a pseudo-interpersonal one, and the self treats the false selves as though they were other people whom it depersonalizes. [...] From within, the self now looks out at the false things being said and done and detests the speaker and doer as though he were someone else. In all this there is an attempt to create relationships to persons and things within the individual without recourse to the outer world of persons and things at all. The individual is developing a microcosmos within himself [...]. (Laing 1960:74)

Contrary to the above analysis by Laing, the fractal "self" does not replace its relationship with the external world through its inter-psychic relationships. It does not cause one to have split relationships with others. The split between the various fractal "selves" is not a chasm between the mind and body. In no way is the diasporic individual deprived of maintaining actual relationships

with others in the real world. In this sense, *TBMD* is a fractal narrative comprising multiple textual layers and varied characters leading fractal lives in late modern America, battling with what it means to be American and Muslim in the twenty-first century.

3.3 Fractality in Late Modern Times: Form follows Function in Agha Shahid Ali's *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*

> For a moment you were silent, and then,
> "Shahid, I'm dying." I kept speaking to you
> after I hung up, my voice the quickest
> mail, a cracked disc with many endings,
> each false: One: "I live in Evanescene
> (I had to build it, for America
> was without one). All is safe here with me.
> Come to my street, disguised in the climate
> of Southern California. Surprise
> me when I open the door. Unload skies
> of rain from your distance-drenched arms." Or this:
> "Here in Evanescence (which I found–though
> not in Pennsylvania–after I last
> wrote), the eavesdropping willows write brief notes
> on grass, then hide them in shadows of trunks.
> I'd love to see you. Come as you are."
>
> Agha Shahid Ali, *A Nostalgist's Map of America*

Agha Shahid Ali, a first-generation Kashmiri Muslim American poet responsible for popularizing the sixth-century Arabian poetic form of ghazal in American literature, lived a tri-cultural life with influences from Muslim, Hindu, and Western cultures. Born in India, A.S. Ali moved to the U.S. in 1976 and eventually became an American citizen in 2001, the same year which he passed away (D. Hall 2008). While in India, A.S. Ali was raised in a secular Shia Muslim family, surrounded by Persian and Urdu poetry, immersed in Hindu culture. These multiple linguistic and cultural influences found their way into his poems, which blend the personal with the political. "Shahid was completely South Asian and completely cosmopolitan at the same time, and in his poems, I could sense the presence of both Ghalib and Eliot, of the West as well as the subcontinent" (Kapoor 2021:10). However, there are more layers than what is overtly visible in A.S. Ali's works, not only from his choice of poetic style, which gradually changed from free verse to the ghazal's strict compositional rules but also from his deep affinity to being regarded as Kashmiri-American. His poems present complex imagery, complicated references unfamiliar to the American audience, juxtaposing themes and languages across multiple spatialities and temporalities. Fragmenting lived and imagined realities in multiple homelands, A.S. Ali has created a transcultural and fractal English to mimic the nature of complex societies in the twenty-first century.

> Shahid's multiplicity of subject matter and reference poses a by now familiar problem, one that has been with us since high modernism, and particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, which saw a flourishing of—or, rather, a recognition of—hyphenated Englishes around the world. (D. Hall 2008:16)

Winner of multiple awards and fellowships, A.S. Ali, taught in several American universities. His attachment to Kashmir reveals his insistence on multiplicities within the Indian subcontinent. His adoption of the ghazal within the American literary landscape alludes to the cultural complexity inside the U.S. His choice of themes asserts the voice of Muslim Americans of South Asian origin.

Not only did A.S. Ali possess a fractal identity, but it is also forcefully visible in his poems, particularly in his English ghazals.

> In the 21st century, when identity politics, and provocations to wear those on our sleeves, is the buzz, it may seem odd not to link literary production to autobiographical minutiae— after all, we create and carry over (in image, music, and text) traces of who we are. But turning the hypothesis around—that we are the very things we create—isn't necessarily an act of erasure; rather, it can be an empowering gesture, opening up possibilities, refusing to be circumscribed by autobiography. Ali's sense of the person he was, the poet he became, and the ideas he believed in are far too interconnected to be explained away by one facet of his personality. (Ghoshal 2021 "Agha Shahid Ali")

The remainder of this chapter provides a brief overview of the ghazal's origin, its compositional rules and describes the similarities between its poetic form and the properties of fractals. Consequently, some of A.S. Ali's ghazals from his posthumous collection *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* [*CMIT*] (2003) are analyzed from a South Asian Muslim American perspective highlighting the fractal nature of their identity in late modern times.

The ghazal is the most popular poetic form in the Indo-Muslim literary tradition of the subcontinent. Although predominantly written in Urdu, this poetic form can be found in other languages like Bengali, Punjabi, and Gujarati, widely spoken in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Originating in the Arabian Peninsula, perfected by the Persian mystics, the ghazal found its way to South Asia in the twelfth century and has evolved linguistically and thematically. Today the ghazal is omnipresent in South Asian culture: from Bollywood movies to political protests invoking the past and planting it in the present representing the robust nature of this form factor in conveying elaborate messages with an eloquent linguistic sparsity. The ghazal has also found its way into Western poetry in nineteenth-century Europe. There have been attempts at composing free verse ghazals in American literature in the twentieth century. Although the closest Western poetic form to the ghazal is a sonnet, the ghazal starkly departs from formal unity toward formal disunity. A.S. Ali (2000) has provided a detailed description of the ghazal's compositional rules to a Western audience with a dual attempt of clarifying the form and necessitating the need to adhere to the form.

> The ghazal is made up of couplets, each autonomous, thematically and emotionally complete in itself: One couplet may be comic, another tragic, another religious, another political. (There is, underlying a ghazal, a profound and complex cultural unity, built on association and memory and expectation, as well as an implicit recognition of the human personality and its infinite variety.) A couplet may be quoted by itself without in any way violating a context–there is no context, as such. One should at any time be able to pluck a couplet like a stone from a necklace, and it should continue in that vivid isolation, though it would have a different luster among and with the other stones. In less exotic terms, the poet must have no enjambments between couplets. (A.S. Ali 2000:2-3)

The fractal nature of the ghazal's poetic form and message from the above definition becomes evident. Consequently, the ghazal also becomes a symbol for the poet's fractal identity, which is composed of seemingly dissimilar layers, whether manifested in isolation or in a combination, still constituting a complex whole. Just like the couplets of the ghazal that can be plucked apart and yet can represent the entirety of the poem, A.S. Ali fragments multiple meanings, symbols, and messages in a single thematic disunity which appears to be incoherent to those unfamiliar with the poetic form and by extension its cultural background. By popularizing the ghazal in the U.S., A.S. Ali first introduces diversity in American literature, makes sure that the ghazal is accessible in English, and finally establishes the strict compositional rules as a canonical requirement. At the same time, A.S. Ali acknowledges the difficulty of transferring the quantitative meters of

languages like Persian and Urdu into English. However, while it is impossible to render the meter in an English ghazal perfectly, the rhyme, refrain, and prosody is what dispels its perceived arbitrariness to the unaccustomed reader. A.S. Ali asserts the cultural difference through the difficulty of achieving metrical consistency, which can be obtained by following "an inner ear rather than any clearly established rules, as in English" (2000:3). At the same time, there are some rules which are clear and followed by all classical poets from the Eastern literary traditions.

> The opening couplet (called *matla*) sets up a scheme (of rhyme–called *qafia*; and refrain–called *radif*) by having it occur in both lines–the rhyme IMMEDIATELY preceding the refrain–and then this scheme occurs only in the second line of each succeeding couplet. That is, once a poet establishes the scheme–with total freedom, I might add–she or he becomes its slave. What results in the rest of the poem is the alluring tension of a slave trying to master the master. A ghazal has five couplets at least; there is no maximum limit. Theoretically, a ghazal could go on forever (in practice poets have usually not gone beyond twelve couplets). (A.S. Ali 2000:3)

In setting the tone of the ghazal and its patterns of rhyme and refrain, the *matla* is comparable to the diasporic poet's core identity and the poem's topmost layer of meaning that can be used to infer its interior layers. Outwardly, the opening couplet, therefore, is the fractal object as viewed from a macro level, waiting to be dissected further. The refrain word or phrase signified by the *radif* can be equated with the property of self-similarity in fractals, which repeats in every second line of each couplet following the *matla*, reminding the reader to look for coherence in the seemingly apparent disunity of the ghazal. Like the *radif,* the diasporic poet's core identity is composed of self-similar layers of multiple identities when probed at a micro-level. When viewed in isolation, each couplet, like the diasporic poet's fractal identity, can be considered a standalone unit. However, like a fractal object, the coherence lies in reading all couplets together while recognizing the similarity in each couplet to fully comprehend the entirety of the poet's message conveyed by the ghazal. The *qafiya* or the rhyming pattern indicated by a few recurring words immediately preceding the *radif* is like the trait of recursion in fractals. At the poetic level, the rhyme lends a sonorous quality to the ghazal (a key feature of ghazals is that they are to be recited in front of a live audience in an event called *mushaira*). In contrast, at the level of meaning, the rhyme reinforces the diasporic poet's assertive voice to ensure that the message is conveyed unequivocally to the mainstream audience.

In addition to the above structural requirements, two additional compositional rules constitute a ghazal. *Beher* or meter is a specific pattern in Persian or Urdu prosody that defines the length of the couplet. There are more than thirty types of meters, and depending on the length of the couplet or the ghazal, the meters are classified as short, medium, or long. Essentially, all couplets in the ghazal need to be in the same meter, and so to determine the meter of the ghazal, it is sufficient to identify the meter of its *matla*. Therefore, *beher* is one of the compositional requirements used to offset the irregularity or disunity amongst the couplets (Pritchett and Khaliq 1987). Traditionally the strength of a metered poem is the sum total of its parts. However, due to its compositional form, the ghazal contains disjunctive shifts that "are akin to nonlinear interactions in which the value of the whole cannot be predicted by summing the strength of its parts" (Fulton 1999:136). Like fractal objects, a ghazal displays the property of irregularity at the external level, but it is the meter that ensures the internal link between the seemingly disparate verses. Further, the compositional rules in Urdu ghazals allow the poet to shorten or prolong a vowel to suit the metrical requirements. In other words, the outward irregularity is controlled by the diasporic poet and altered depending on their need to surface a specific layer of their identity to respond to the contextual needs prevalent in the dominant discourse. *Makta* denotes the ghazal's

last couplet, which features the poet's pen name known as *takhallus*. The last couplet has two primary functions: one is to deliver a personal message by the poet, and the other is to creatively engage with the *takhallus* to incorporate homonymous meanings to add multiple layers to the poetic message (Kanda 1998). The *matla* and the *makta* constitute the property of emergence in a ghazal. Not only are these essential parts of the ghazal with strict compositional rules like the rest of the ghazal itself, but these are also indicators of the composite nature of the fragments bound together to form the complex and hybrid unity. The first and the last couplets rely on the thematic similarity provided by the meter, rhyme, and refrain. Yet, they are set apart from the remaining couplets in terms of their function of constituting the ghazal. Furthermore, the ghazal does not have a title, but it can be indexed or referred to by its refrain for convenience. This can be considered another indicator of the diasporic poet's attempt to use the refrain as a repeated reminder of the message they want to send out to the mainstream readers, further amplified by the cleverly articulated wordplay in the *makta* around the poet's *nom de plume*. At the level of dimensionality, based on the above discussion, it is apparent that a ghazal's dimension of self-similarity, like that of a fractal object, is greater than its topological dimension. There are many factors and compositional restrictions that constitute the fractal dimension of the ghazal. Therefore, a ghazal is perfectly comparable to a fractal object due to the sheer mathematical precision needed in its creation. Together with its non-linear dimension, its irregularity offset by its *beher*, its *radif* constituting self-similarity, its *qafiya* lending it recursiveness, and the combination of its *matla* and *makta* revealing its emergent nature, a ghazal satisfies all geometric properties of a fractal object.

A.S. Ali's poetic style has been characterized as *ghazalesque* (Singh 2004) since, although he composed ghazals, he wrote them in English and not Urdu. The influence of the Urdu language, the inspiration of classical Persian and Urdu poets, the prevalence of Indo-Islamic themes are undeniably present in all his literary works produced in the American tradition blending Emily Dickinson's prosody with Begum Akhtar's[67] musicality with equal ease.

> Most of his poems are not abstract considerations of love and longing, but rather concrete accounts of events of personal importance (and sometimes political importance). He was also intensely interested in geography, and often blended the landscapes of America (especially the southwest) with those of his native Kashmir. (Singh 2004 "Ghazalesque")

A.S. Ali took it upon himself to correct American poets writing ghazals in English that he saw in monthly and quarterly publications in the U.S., because they seem to have "got it quite wrong, far from the letter and farther from the spirit" (2000:1). Right from the correct pronunciation of the word "ghazal" to enforcing formally tight disunities by moving away from arbitrary composition in free verse passing as ghazals. He edited a collection of English ghazals and called the collection *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000), where he provided a brilliant introduction to the form and function of the ghazal with an underlying tone of postcolonial literary criticism. He dispelled myths about similarities between ghazals and sonnets and discussed the ghazal's origin and propagation across multiple continents. While A.S. Ali does not want to be perceived "as some kind of rheumatic formalist" (2000:12), he wittingly points out the flaws in departing

[67] Begum Akhtar was an Indian singer and actress from the twentieth century known as the Queen of Ghazals and regarded as one of the greatest singers of classical Hindustani Music (S. Mukherjee 2005). She was a lasting influence in Ali's life and his work and Begum Akhtar's rendition of wit, wordplay, and affectation are present in all of Ali's ghazals (Kapoor 2019).

from the ghazal's formal constraints to suit the requirements of the English language and Western cultures.

> Perhaps the business of rhyme and refrain just did not suit the aesthetic politics–and the political complexion–of various contexts in the late sixties and early seventies? The ghazal, as many of those poets practiced it, gave them the authority of a foreign and rich culture; it allowed them formally to question the authority of their own culture's often rigid proscriptions, and perhaps they saw in the thematic freedom of the couplets a chance for all kinds of liberation. What would have been paradoxical to many Westerners–the ghazal's blend of "unity and autonomy"–would have attracted them. (A.S. Ali 2000:11-12)

At the same time, A.S. Ali has demonstrated that it is possible to compose ghazals in English for Anglophone readers who are unaware of the ghazal's tropes to navigate the intentional ambiguity and simultaneity of meaning (S. Ahmed 2012) afforded by these very formal constraints.

> So while I admire the effects of various "ghazals", it really is time the actual form found its way into American poetry. It really is. […] If one writes in free verse–and one should–to subvert Western civilization, surely one should write in forms to save oneself *from* Western civilization? (A.S. Ali 2000:13)

Call Me Ishmael Tonight contains thirty-four ghazals of varying lengths. Some of these ghazals have been dedicated to other American poets who also wrote ghazals or who have had a lasting impact on A.S. Ali. As mentioned earlier, for easy identification, the ghazals have been indexed by their refrain. Those titles will also be used to refer to specific ghazals in the below analysis. The name of the collection is an indelible reference to the story of Ishmael from the Quran as well as to Melville's monumental novel *Moby Dick* (1851). It can also be seen as an attempt to distinguish between the Islamic version of the story from its other Abrahamic counterparts while also asserting the commonalities among the three major monotheistic faiths practiced in the U.S. "Differing from the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, the sacrifice is demanded not only of Abraham but also of Ishmael. Ishmael's willingness to be sacrificed […] heightens the beauty of God's redemption where He says: 'This is indeed a manifest trial'" (Ali and Ahmad 2003:42). Coupled with the fact that ghazals traditionally do not have any titles, the collection explicitly has an Islamic title, and it urges explicitly the reader to call the poet Ishmael. A.S. Ali did not select the title as this is a posthumous volume, but it exemplifies his spirit and lends an emotional coherence to all ghazals in the collection. However, some ghazals have direct and indirect references to the title, particularly in one called "Tonight." The ghazal portrays the aftermath caused by communal tension and religious conflict in India, but the situation is universally applicable. India has inherited multiple religions from its various invaders and colonizers. When one group fights against another in the name of religion for reward in the afterlife, the poet pleads, "I beg for haven: Prisons, let open your gates– / A refugee from Belief seeks a cell tonight" (*CMIT* 2003:38). This ghazal is dedicated to the British poet Adela Florence Cory who wrote under the penname of Laurence Hope. "Hope's formal verse, steeped in the Indian landscape and Sufi symbolism, often assumes the voices of Indian dancers and slaves to engage themes of passionate love and loss" (Poetry Foundation "Laurence Hope"). Hope also wrote a poem called "Kashmiri Song," and this reference is a reminder of the colonial legacy and the indecisive fate of Kashmir at the time of India's independence. There is a reference to the destruction of idols by both Abraham and Muhammad– "*Lord*, cried out the idols, *Don't let us be broken*; / *Only we can convert the infidel tonight*" (*CMIT* 2003:38) narrated from the viewpoint of the oppressed. The poet then moves to sight a reference to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and elsewhere in India– "In the heart's veined temple, all statues have been smashed. / No priest in

saffron's left to toll its knell tonight" (*CMIT* 2003:38), narrated again from the "other" perspective. These similarities are then placed in the Judeo-Christian context: "Executioners near the woman at the window. / Damn you, Elijah, I'll bless Jezebel tonight" (*CMIT* 2003:38), further highlighting the universality of the strife caused by religious and cultural differences. In the last three couplets of the ghazal, the poet narrates God's state of mind, in whose name the same conflict has occurred since the beginning of humanity.

> The hunt is over, and I hear the Call to Prayer
> fade into that of the wounded gazelle tonight.
>
> My rivals for your love–you've invited them all?
> This is mere insult, this is no farewell tonight.
>
> And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee–
> God sobs in my arms. Call me Ismael tonight. (*CMIT* 2003:38)

A.S. Ali uses "Shahid" as his *takhallus* and in the ghazal titled "Arabic" at the beginning of the collection, where he states to the reader the reason for choosing his penname. "They ask me tell them what Shahid means– / Listen: it means 'The Beloved' in Persian, 'witness' in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). This also highlights the complexity of South Asian Muslim names derived from the two languages that have influenced the local cultures of the subcontinent. As a diasporic poet and ghazal writer, A.S. Ali is also in a position to witness the world from a unique vantage point of multiple homelands and recursive cultural realities. The cultural complexity, the growing challenges for Muslims in a post 9/11 U.S., as well as forgotten and erased histories are highlighted in three ghazals: "Arabic," "Beyond English," and "In Arabic."

In the first ghazal titled "Arabic," the poet mourns the political realities of the Middle East, a region separated by multiple cultural traditions but united by the Arabic language. "The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic– / These words were said to me in a language, not Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). The couplet's second line alludes to the outside Western political commentators of the multiple conflicts in the Islamic belt in Asia. The poet further laments the usefulness of resorting to Arabic when it seems to bring pain and sorrow. "Ancestors, you've left me a plot in the family graveyard– / Why must I look, in your eyes, for prayers in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). And then, like the other ghazals, "Arabic" also transitions from particular references to more universal themes. Starting with the story of Laila and Majnoon, the Persian equivalent of Romeo and Juliet, placed in a desert, moving to Ishmael beseeching Abraham to throw away his knives and instead recite a psalm in Arabic. The ghazal then alludes to the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's famous resistance poem "Identity Card," that was later turned into a protest song across the Arab world (Nassar and Rahman 2008). "From exile Mahmoud Darwish writes to the world: / You'll all pass between the fleeting words of Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). The war on terrorism is immortalized by the couplet "The Koran prophesied a fire of men and stones. / Well, it's all now come true, as it was said in the Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7) as if using the Quran itself to justify the actions of the Western-allied forces. This is followed by a couplet on Lorca and references to his long poems written in the style of *qasidas*[68]. "When Lorca died, they left the

[68] A panegyric, or a poem written in praise of a king or a nobleman, or a benefactor. As in a *ghazal* the opening couplet of a *qasida*, is a rhyming couplet, and its rhyme is repeated in the second line of each succeeding verse. The opening part of the *qasida*, where the poet may talk in general about love or beauty, man or nature, life or death, is called *tashbib* or *tamheed* (Kanda 1998:330). The part of the *qasida* called *tashbib* got detached and developed in due course

balcony open and saw: / his *qasidas* braided, on the horizon, into knots of Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). This couplet suggests the influence of the ghazal's poetic form across multiple continents and alludes to the historical accounts of Muslims by and in the West.

> Lorca also wrote ghazals–*gacelas*–taking cues from the Arabic form and thus citing in his catholic (that is universal) way the history of Muslim Andalusia. And, as Raymond Scheindlin has written, "The typical medieval Hebrew love poem belongs to a genre known in the Arabic literary tradition as *ghazal,*" which "flourished primarily in Andalusia from the 11th to 13th centuries" – that is Muslim Spain. (A.S. Ali 2000:1-2)

The poet then reminds us that "Memory is no longer confused, it has a homeland– / Says Shammas: Territorialize each confusion in a graceful Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). Unlike Darwish, Anton Shammas is a Palestinian poet who predominantly writes in Hebrew (Mozarati 1988) and is considered an Arab voice in Israel. In this couplet, the poet ironically hints at the Israeli occupation. Whether the voice of protest is in Arabic or Hebrew, the reader is reminded of the rightful homeland, lest we forget the manipulation of history. "Where there were homes in Deir Yassein, you'll see dense forests– / That village was razed. There's no sign of Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). The Deir Yassin massacre is the precursor to the Arab–Israeli conflict and took place a few months after the UN proposed the division of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state (Khalidi 1992). The consequences of the conflict have a global outreach and continue to have repercussions until now. Finally, the poet appeals to the Israeli poet and author Yehuda Amichai, again highlighting the universality of love and life irrespective of country and language. "I too, O Amichai, saw the dresses of beautiful women. / And everything else, just like you, in Death, Hebrew, and Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:7). This couplet alludes to Amichai's 1977 poem "Memorial Day for the War Dead," referring to the Israeli Memorial Day and not the American one.

> A flag loses contact with reality and flies off.
> A shopwindow is decorated with
> Dresses of beautiful women, in blue and white.
> And everything in three languages:
> Hebrew, Arabic, and Death. (Amichai 1977:25)

In the spirit of his pen name, the poet bears witness to present the "other" side's viewpoint and reminds the reader of multiple realities. "Fractal poetics is composed of the disenfranchised details, the dark matter of Tradition: its blind spots, recondite spaces, and recursive fields" (Fulton 1999:129). Using the ghazal's fractal properties, we are confronted with the numerous layers of histories and their implications for the present. This ghazal is as relevant in Palestine or Kashmir as in the contemporary U.S. The stories of migration, love, and loss are the same irrespective of where the diaspora resides and who constitutes the diaspora. Furthermore, this ghazal can be seen as a fractal reimagining of Amichai's "Memorial Day for the War Dead," where the narrative in each couplet changes scale, is enlarged and exploded, and the voiceless are given words. "If fractal poetics means to honor the margins and illuminate the fringes […] [w]hatever is complex and underinvestigated must become the starring subject" (Fulton 1999:131).

The second ghazal, "In Arabic," can be regarded as a double fractal because it is a revised version of the original ghazal "Arabic" and because it disrupts and reverses the propositions laid out each couplet. There are some new couplets like "This much fuss about a language I don't

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of time into the *ghazal*. Whereas the *qasida* sometimes ran into as many as 100 couplets or more in monorhyme, the *ghazal* seldom exceeded twelve, and settled down to an average of seven (Kanda 1998:2).

know? So one day / perfume from a dress may let you digress in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37) or "A 'Guide for the Perplexed' was written–believe me– / by Cordoba's Jew–Maimonides–in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37). The first couplet alludes to A.S. Ali's inability to speak Arabic as the primary lingua franca of Muslims in the subcontinent is predominantly Urdu. Yet, there is a deep connection to the Arabic language both in the religious and secular spheres. The second couplet is a reminder of the interconnectedness among the three Abrahamic faiths and examples of rationalizing religion and situating it in the contemporary era continuously by various philosophers, from Maimonides' *A Guide for the Perplexed* to Borges' *The Aleph*. "In the Veiled One's harem, an adulteress hanged by eunuchs– / So the rank mirrors revealed to Borges in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37). The juxtapositions created by contrasting discrete references render the ghazal both unpredictable and inevitable. Complex systems reigned by chaos are known to reuse their components to sustain and enrich themselves. Such recursion is not limited to the repetition of the rhyme and refrain in a fractal poem such as the ghazal.

> Unlike the villanelle or sestina's recycling, fractal repetition does not appear at a predetermined place within a set scheme. The poem is more dynamic and turbulent because its repetitions have an element of ambush. Readers experience the consolation of pattern without being able to anticipate the moment of return. Such recycling, at once surprising and reassuring, can occur throughout a poem, book, or body of work. (Dickinson's recurring vocabulary comes to mind). (Fulton 1999:137)

Three examples of this fractal reuse can be found in the couplets of "In Arabic." "Writes Shammas: Memory, no longer confused, now is a homeland– / his two languages a Hebrew caress in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37). In the previous ghazal, memory has a homeland, whereas here, memory itself is a homeland. And there, the poet wants to ground each confusion using the Arabic language; here the poet adopts both languages as his own. The shift also signifies the ground reality of a multicultural world in general and the U.S. in particular. "When Lorca died, they left the balconies open and saw: / On the sea his *qasidas* stitched seamless in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37). In the previous version, the *qasidas* were braided into knots, whereas here, they form a seamless whole, albeit in Arabic. Having acknowledged the origins, as the poet begins to accept the realities of his new homeland, he creates a hybrid thirdspace by retaining the symbolic connection to the Arabic language. "Just as fractal science analyzed the ground between chaos and Euclidean order, fractal poetics could explore the field between gibberish and traditional forms. It could describe and make visible a third space: the nonbinary *in-between*" (Fulton 1999:125). "I too, O Amichai, saw everything, just like you did– / In Death. In Hebrew. And (please let me stress) in Arabic" (*CMIT* 2003:37). While change and adaption in the new homeland is a continuous process, the complex nature of the present geopolitical situation, its interconnectedness, and impact on Muslims worldwide and on Muslim Americans is a reality hard to ignore. Like many other literary works analyzed here, A.S. Ali is not hesitant to hide his political motivations, nor is he afraid to make his voice heard. "Fractal poetics is interested in that point of metamorphosis when structure is incipient, all threshold, a neither-nor" (Fulton 1999:125).

The third ghazal, "Beyond English," exposes the linguistic superiority of English and its ubiquity. Yet the diasporic poet is in search of a common language beyond English. Despite the superiority of the word "war" on the global stage, the poet advocates for the use of its Urdu equivalent, "*jung.*" Alluding to the U.S. war in Iraq, the poet implies that the phrase coined by Saddam Hussein to describe the war was only surprising to the Americans. "When the phrase, 'The Mother of all Battles,' caught on, / the surprise was indeed not sprung beyond English" (*CMIT* 2003:30). Contrasting the Western democracies with the Orient, the poet offers three couplets that

extract the cultural differences and uncover the atrocities of the misunderstandings caused by the clash of civilizations.

> If you wish to know of a king who loved his slave,
> you must learn legends, often-sung, beyond English.
>
> Baghdad is sacked and its citizens much watch
> prisoners (now in miniatures) hung beyond English.
>
> Go all the way through *jungle* from *aleph* to *zenith*
> to see English, like monkeys, swung beyond English. (*CMIT* 2003:30)

As a diasporic poet and a Kashmiri-American, A.S. Ali looks at his war-torn and troubled imaginary homeland Kashmir from a local South Asian perspective and from a global perspective seeking to identify similarities with such conflicts in other parts of the world with Muslim populations. This way, he highlights the humanist nature of the crisis and resurfaces the sufferings of Muslims in the post-World War II era (Brah 1996). "All kinds of geographical and cultural nodes thus merge in Ali's poetry to fabricate visions of selfhood that refuse to be bound by any of those limits that identities based on singular affiliations insist on" (Chakraborty 2017:66). A.S. Ali's ghazals indefatigably depict plural identities that go beyond the markers of race and religion and gravitate towards a fractal identity that can encompass multiplicities within the diasporic "self." These pluralities emerge from A.S. Ali's upbringing in the subcontinent, which has always been a confluence of conflicting albeit fluid spatio-temporalities. Even though historical religious tolerance has given way to more stringent right-wing fundamentalism both in India and the U.S., it is the diasporic poet that provides a voice of reason.

To conclude, the fractal form of the ghazal, as well as the convergence of multiple themes, coupled with past and present references to Muslim identity, accords a significant place to A.S. Ali's work in the field of diaspora literature in the U.S. While other more contemporary authors like Ayad Akhtar, Haroon Moghul, and Dilruba Ahmed portray the reality of the post 9/11 U.S. for Muslim Americans, A.S. Ali's work is a precursor to our understanding of what lies behind the present political climate. Two aspects summarize the fractal nature of A.S. Ali's work– one is the definition of what constitutes a fractal poem:

> Before declaring a poem "fractal," I suggest that you ask whether comic, bawdy, banal, or vulgar lines are spliced to lyrical, elegiac, or gorgeous passages. Ask whether resistant (dense) surfaces are juxtaposed with transparent (lucid areas). Those features seem fundamental. They offer an obvious place to begin. (Fulton 1999:125)

The form of the ghazal itself and the themes evoked in them range from comic to satirical to political, highlighting the global interconnectedness of events and reconciling the cultural differences. A.S. Ali has created a lyrical dialogue across cultures by exposing the fault lines of injustice. And the second is the use of English to create an Arabic poetic style to discuss diasporic identity inside and beyond America.

> What a noise the sentences make writing themselves–
> Here's every word that we used as a flame for you.
>
> The birthplace of written language is bombed to nothing.
> How neat, dear America, is this game for you?

On a visitor's card words are arranged in a row–
Who was I? Who am I? I've brought my claim. For you. (*CMIT* "For You" 2003:8)

The diasporic poet in A.S. Ali wages a language war to criticize shortcomings in the U.S. foreign policy and assert his claim of a fractal diasporic identity forged based on multiple homelands. *CMIT* is, therefore a manifestation of the transcultural and fractal nature of a poetics where form follows function. The English ghazal does not follow the exact rules of its oriental counterpart, and life for the diaspora cannot be mirrored fully in the ancestral homeland. The past can no longer be solely sufficient to build a fractal identity in late modernity; the break from tradition is necessary to function in the contemporary U.S. But it is the juxtaposition of modernity and tradition in the ghazal that makes it a forceful voice in converging the global, local, and transcultural themes of today's diasporic individual possessor and inheritor of a fractal identity.

Conclusion

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

Rumi, "A Great Wagon"

This verse from Rumi's poem symbolizes the journey of the diasporic individual who is torn between multiple worlds, who is pulled between many cultures, who has a relative version of right and wrong, who is divided between conflicting discourses, who is constantly balancing opposing thoughts and ideas. If this diasporic individual struggles to make sense of the "self" and the "other" dichotomy and has perhaps lost hope, there is a silver lining. The diasporic individual transformed by transculturalism is now a transcultural diasporic individual. They no longer need to live in a secret world and can genuinely awaken from the dream and make the demand for justice, equality, and representation heard. They can finally accept simultaneous coexistence in multiple worlds, constantly moving back and forth across the doorsill at the intersection of a circular and cyclical reality where a new world can exist in both the imagination and reality. Today's diasporic individuals are indeed living in the times of the transcultural turn, where they need new skills, behaviors, and attitudes, not just to survive but to thrive comfortably. This research project has presented several alternatives to existing theories and paradigms, considering the need to justify new approaches to solving complex identarian problems in the twenty-first century. As suggested in this dissertation, there is a need to move away from the cultural turn (Alexander 1988) and focus on the transcultural turn (Bond and Rapson 2014), which reflects the lived and imagined experiences of South Asian Muslim Americans. To mirror the ontological pluralism (J. Turner 2010) in the contemporary world, we need epistemological pluralism (Miller et al. 2008) to research identarian issues involving and impacting diasporic individuals. By using a multidisciplinary approach, based on Mandelbrot's (1982) fractal theory combining it with Laruelle's (1992, 2016) non-philosophy theory, it is equally appropriate to move away from the linguistic turn (Wittgenstein 1953) in our analysis of transcultural and fractal literary texts. We need to do this because the characters and the milieus found in South Asian American Muslim fiction produced in the twenty-first century are situated in a post-poststructuralist world (Schechner 2000). The choices of theoretical frameworks made in the analysis of various literary works in this project lean toward new materialism (Coole and Frost 2010), where language does not merely constitute our reality; rather, we are materially embedded in the social hierarchies of power. No doubt, language is a powerful tool for mediating our social and cultural materiality, but we are much more than that; in fact, we are a sum total of the ever-evolving exchanges between the organic and inorganic reality of which the material world is an integral part. By liberating

philosophy from its reliance on age-old Western constructs of logic and semiology and adapting mathematics to develop a form of cultural theory, we can question the prevailing ideas on social realism. Consequently, we can create a system that relies on arbitrary rules that are indifferent to content, which when combined with other cross-disciplinary aspects, offers us rich possibilities to formulate a procedure to analyze the complexity of the material world beyond the capabilities of linguistic expression.

The concept of fractals is relatively new but has already found applications in many other fields apart from mathematics, such as biological and physical sciences, art and art history, spatial and temporal analysis, organizational behavior, and above all, fractals are essential to a deeper understanding of chaos and systems theory. The concept was conceived and developed to give an alternative to researchers to understand models that do not conform to the generally accepted norm. The irregular and fragmented patterns in these non-conforming models can be supported by full-fledged theories using the notion of fractals. Although chance or probability plays an essential role in fractals, the regularities and irregularities are highly statistical and scaling (Mandelbrot 1982). Extending the theory and use of fractals beyond the pure sciences to social sciences helps us deal with the multiplicities, irregularities, hybridity, and fragmentations occurring in the ontological development of diasporic individuals. Further, fractals explain the un-manageability of seemingly opposing philosophies and lifestyles such as those of South Asian Muslim Americans in an overdeveloped country such as the U.S. during late modernity by making sense of the chaotic nature of "being" and "becoming." "'Chaos' is, first, complexity, turbulence, discontinuous process; second, it is disunity, fragmentation, and non-linearity; third, chaos is constrained randomness, or relative uncertainty, and centrally engages the parameters of predictability and unpredictability" (Brady, 1990:69-70). Therefore, the use of fractal aesthetics in analyzing identity among literary characters in works depicting diasporic narratives can be derived from the link established between chaos theory and literary studies demonstrated by Brady. Firstly, through the carpet effect, where chaos produces order; secondly, the fractal effect, where irregular patterns in text and characters repeat at varying scales; thirdly, the butterfly effect, where small actions have an exponential effect; and finally, the strange attractors effect to explain the presence of random behavior within literary narratives. Similarly, a transcultural identity that appears chaotic on the surface has an underlying unity in multiplicity. The irregular behavioral, personality and cultural traits that do not conform to the dominant culture are repeatedly present in multiple identarian layers, which are manifested asymmetrically albeit possessing a profound underlying logic with various degrees of cultural intelligence. With time, the transcultural "self" accumulates tiny self-similar patterns representative of its complex and unitarian identity and develops the ability to intricately catalog its personhood to be simultaneously local and universal. Throughout this research project, I have demonstrated that it is possible and required to use an epistemologically plural theory in the analysis and critique of literature produced in the twenty-first century under the backdrop of globalization of politics and economics, virtualization of communication and social relationships, and ubiquity of travel shattering the existing notions of space and time. The non-philosophical foundation of such a theoretical framework that is more in line with our time's complex and hybrid realities, where our identity defines and determines our relationship with culture, has been demonstrated. The concept of fractal geometry has been offered to expound on the normality of identarian manifestations and its myriad dimensions that do not fit perfectly within the planes of a dominant culture built upon the foundation of transcultural personhood. The sheer complexity of the interplay between so many novel factors that cannot be viewed through the old lens of the cultural turn of the eighties requires us to set sail into unchartered waters. We need to

master the ebb and flow of connections, voices, and narratives to be well prepared to navigate on the other side of the tsunami of multiple and conflicting dilemmas confronting our humanity. It would be possible to do this armed with the lifejacket of fractal identity without descending into uncontrolled uncertainties of mind, body, and spirit. "It is crucial, therefore, that the potential points of conflict are identified if continued confrontation is to be avoided. This is not only necessary but also possible. Into the predicament that postmodernism plunges us there is also promise" (A. Ahmed 1992:265). This is particularly true in the case of Islam and its relationship with the West and Muslim Americans and their struggle to maintain fractal identities in global metropolises and rural America alike. However, as we have seen in various literary works analyzed here, South Asian Muslim Americans are constantly finding ways and negotiating the meaning of "belonging" in a post-9/11 U.S. Furthermore, there is work to be done on both sides.

Firstly, "this will only be possible if there is a universal tolerance of others among Muslims and non-Muslims alike, an appreciation of their uniqueness and a willingness to understand them" (A. Ahmed 1992:265). Whether it is Ayad Akhtar's novels *American Dervish* (2013) and *Homeland Elegies* (2020) or his plays *Disgraced* (2012) and *The Who and The What* (2014), there is an emerging narrative of dialog between the two sides as well as retrospection within the Muslim community. The first-generation characters are drawn to the U.S. in pursuit of the American Dream, and the second-generation characters identify themselves as American. The latter do not hesitate to question the relevance of the sacrifices needed to achieve the American Dream. If the parents have held on tightly to the cultural traditions and customs of the subcontinent in matters of food, language, and dress, then the children are questioning what it means to be Muslim in the sense of religiosity. Asserting their Islamic identity instead of their Muslim American identity helps them ascertain the legitimacy of freedom and liberty granted to all American citizens irrespective of race, color, and creed. We also have Haroon Moghul, who describes his experiences of what it means to be an American Muslim in his memoir *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story* (2017). He digs deep into the golden Islamic age by situating and locating Islam as a progressive philosophy practiced in centers of learning and thought outside Arabia. Instead of returning to tribal Islam, he advocates returning to the avant-garde thinking that made Islam great during its golden age. If Fatima Farheen Mirza's *A Place for Us* (2018) is an inquiry into the second-generation's struggle to define home and family in contemporary American society, then Tahira Naqvi's *Dying in a Strange Country* (2001) highlights the root causes of those struggles by contextualizing the first-generation's diasporic journey. The material and spiritual aspects of Islam are discussed in both works. It helps us establish intergenerational continuity and explain in many ways the need to bear witness to the past and the return of the repressed in second-generation narratives.

Secondly, "[i]t will only be possible if this sentiment becomes both personal philosophy and national foreign policy if it is placed on top of the agenda in preparation for the next millennium" (A. Ahmed 1992:265). Poets like Dilruba Ahmed and Agha Shahid Ali give a political voice to combat Islamophobia while lamenting the situation in the U.S. for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. If Dilruba Ahmed's poetry collection *Bring Now the Angels* (2020) exposes the unconscious bias and hidden prejudices in the information economy, then Agha Shahid Ali's collection of English ghazals *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* (2003) uses a compact compositional poetic form to highlight the historical issues in American foreign policy that are responsible for the present Muslim response. Nafisa Haji's *The Writing on My Forehead* (2010) is a critique of the Western media in their portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Through a Muslim American journalist character, Nafisa Haji questions the legitimacy of the choices imposed on South Asian American

women by their American peers and their own families in postmodern America. Syed M. Masood's *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2020) investigates the similarities and differences in the South Asian Muslim and Middle Eastern Muslim experiences. The lines between personal and political are blurred, and questions of morality and faith are raised in the American context. The novel also exposes the fault lines in U.S. immigration laws and addresses the causes and reactions of Islamophobia post 9/11 and in the Trump presidency era. Despite these juxtapositions, there is an emerging dialog between cultures and civilizations, especially as demonstrated by second-generation literary narratives. Postmodernism and late modernity, with their "emphasis on globalization and plurality, equality and tolerance, will perhaps encourage such friendships. Perhaps the present technology will provide more and better information which will dispel prejudice based on ignorance. Perhaps it will nourish the new breed of scholars" (A. Ahmed 1992:191). If the traditionalists, rationalists, and mystics in the (South Asian) Muslim American community need to find a way to coexist, then the mainstream American media and U.S. foreign policy must adapt to the needs of its Muslim citizens as they are no longer the "foreigners" but a part and parcel of the very fabric of American society (Esposito 1991). Many scholars still see the customary opposition between the Orient and the Occident through the work of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). As Ayad Akhtar argues in *Homeland Elegies* (2020), Said's work creates confusion instead of self-knowledge when Muslims try to constantly define themselves in opposition to what the West thinks about them. Along similar lines, A. Ahmed (1992) suggests that we need to look beyond Said if we are to make sense of Muslim identity and American identity for the second-generation citizens and the third-and-beyond-generations.

> The heat and fury Edward Said generated by arguing that the West can know Islam only in a demeaning and exploitative manner has obscured a central question raised by him: can the West ever hope to understand, objectively and sympathetically, the other, that is, foreign cultures, alien peoples? Clearly, these scholars indicate that this is possible, *pace* Said. Here is scholarship in the highest tradition, and in its humanity it reflects the understanding which academics at their best are capable of achieving.
>
> It is time, then, to move beyond Said's arguments. In an important sense he has led us into an intellectual cul-de-sac. In attempting to transcend the idea of the orientalist system we end up by replacing one system with another. There remains the real danger of simplifying the complex problem of studying the other or the foreign. Said has left us at the end of the trail with what he set out to denounce: stereotypes, images devoid of substance. Orientalism is now an empty cliché, the orient a geographical location only in our imagination. (185)

In light of the above declaration, it can be argued that an epistemologically plural methodology to explain ontological plurality is afforded by the use of fractals. Combining multiple philosophical traditions, a modernistic eastern paradigm proposed by Culliney and Jones (2017) is yet another example of the applicability of fractals to explain complex social and human phenomena involved in the identarian development process. In this manner, fractals help us trace the relationship between science, philosophy, and the progression of cooperation between human beings throughout our existence on this planet based on insights from cosmology, Daoism, and Buddhism. Scientific knowledge reveals that the universe originated as a straightforward system and eventually progressed towards complexity. Life began with atoms and was perpetuated through a series of transformations with similar and dissimilar entities, ultimately leading to the fusion of the "self" and the "other," resulting in the birth of dynamic and complex human life. Interactions between humans have existed for many millennia, but the cultural diversity and the contact and clashes between different value systems and thought processes in the last few centuries are unlike anything historians and archaeologists have found. Generally, eastern philosophy has always focused on the cooperation and competition between yin and yang, leading to a doctrine of

sagely harmony and coexistence considered by many as the apex of our evolutionary journey. In Islam, the prophet Muhammad has stressed on balancing the religious or spiritual (*deen)* and the secular or material (*dunya*) aspects of life in this world. The Quran also addresses the believers to not forget their role in the physical world despite their quest for the hereafter[69]. Furthermore, Muslims are encouraged to seek and draw benefits from the temporal and ethereal creations[70]. It can be argued that for the Muslim American diaspora, the ideal "fractal self" balances the needs of its spiritual and material "being" and "becoming" and strives to operate at a higher level of integrity, keeping in mind the interests and benefits of all fellow human beings and other life forms through principles of compassion, conservation, and universal prosperity. Such a person leads from within and achieves satisfaction in the success of all people and entities they are involved with. Despite the oligarchy, self-aggrandizement, and terrorism rampant today, there is hope for humanity to expand its horizons through mutual cooperation and dialog and ultimately evolve into a "fractal self." In the face of existential danger, we are faced with immense promise to participate with others, increase our acceptance of other cultures and the natural world, and become catalysts of emergence. This can be materialized by amplifying the many cores of the "self's" complex personalities and propagating mutually favorable changes within the web of systems that it touches and operates in. The central premise of such an approach to identity is the cooperative aspect of the universe which is first examined from a biological perspective by throwing new light into the evolutionary process. This is followed by positing that cooperation is the constant and natural choice even among opposites, as propounded by eastern philosophy. And finally, the need and role of a sage-like personhood are put forward to achieve cooperation amidst the tumultuous differences in every aspect of human existence in the twenty-first century. Fractals describe the various layers of personality or identity that need to be balanced to achieve harmony with all living and non-living beings. This is akin to transcultural personhood, especially to the competencies associated with each dimension of the fractal identity model explored in this dissertation. It also allows us to find a basis and relationship between biology, metaphysics, and religion through the various propositions leading to the formation of the "fractal self" in the contemporary era.

Lastly, as illustrated throughout this dissertation, the lived and imagined realities of South Asian American Muslims have changed tremendously in the past fifty years. The concepts of multiplicity and hybridity in the postcolonial sense should be replaced by transculturality and fractality in the late modern sense. The intergenerational conflicts and dialogs today are very different from the last millennium, and there is an ongoing conversation in the works of the writers, novelists, playwrights, and poets selected for analysis in this project. The chosen literary narratives represent a cross-section of the South Asian Muslim American experience from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Whether it is a poem, play, short story, novel, or memoir, the personal is entwined with the political, questions of the collective societal well-being are juxtaposed against the American individualistic approaches, the nature and form of the American dream are reevaluated, the narrative forms merge eastern and western writing styles, and the body of work poses questions that are increasingly relevant in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, this research project has only begun to scratch the surface of cultural complexity and fractality in South Asian Muslim American identity narratives. It would be worth developing the concept of fractal identity by

[69] In the Quran 28:77: Rather, with all that God has given you seek the glory of the abode of the Hereafter. Do not forget your portion of the good life in this world but do good to God's servants as God has been good to you. Yet do not seek to sow corruption in the land. For, indeed, God does not love the sowers of corruption (Hammad 2014:653-654).

[70] In the Quran 2:201: Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter (Hammad 2014:52).

connecting the various properties in fractal objects in a mathematical sense to equivalent concepts more rooted in the humanities and literary studies. For example, the fractal property of emergence can be grounded in the Rudi Keller's (1994) philosophical idea of emergentism; recursion can be developed through the concepts of self-referentiality in philosophy and Noam Chomsky's conceptualization of recursive grammar in linguistics; parallels can be drawn between the irregularity of fractal objects and the theorization of chaos theory and Otto Jespersen's conceptualization of interlinguistics (Schubert and Maxwell 1989); and self-similarity can be related to structuration theory from the social sciences and Douglas Hofstadter's (2007) theorization of self-reference. The fractal dimension can be conceptualized through ontological plurality, and the entire framework can be founded on the principles of epistemological pluralism. The idea of a fractal novel and fractal poetics can be developed to identify and critically analyze the presence of fractality in literary form and function. A more unusual avenue would be to use Muhammad Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi* (*The Secrets of the Self*) (1915) to formulate a fractal Muslim American identity based on Islamic perspectives of the "self" and the tribulations and transformations that the "self" needs to undergo to achieve self-realization and self-knowledge. There is a multitude of possibilities, and this research project is by no means complete. Still, it provides a starting point and a foundation for elaborating new avenues in literary criticism. Every theory has its pitfalls, and reality does not always fit perfectly in the models we produce. Rather than fitting reality to theory, we should attempt to find out how we can adapt the theory to describe reality better. I hope this dissertation can spark curiosity and interest among literary scholars to explore the fascinating world of mathematics and draw from it to make sense of the chaotic and culturally complex lives that we lead and the literary narratives that we produce in the twenty-first century.

There are still other worlds beyond the stars,

Love has still more tests to pass.

These vast spaces are not inane,

A hundred other caravans are here astir.

Ghazal[71]
by Muhammad Iqbal

ستاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں
ابھی عشق کے امتحاں اور بھی ہیں
تہی، زندگی سے نہیں یہ فضائیں
یہاں سینکڑوں کارواں اور بھی ہیں
اقبال[72]

[71] Translated from the Urdu by K. C. Kanda, a former reader in the English Department at Delhi University and a prolific translator of Urdu poetry from the sixteenth to twenty-first centuries.
[72] The Urdu text has been reproduced from www.rekhta.org.

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