

# MUSLIM AMERICANS' TRAUMA IN SAM YOUNIS' *BROWNTOWN* AND AYAD AKHTAR'S *DISGRACED*

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DOI: 10.37648/ijrssh.v10i02.007

Received: 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2019; Accepted: 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2020; Published: 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2020

## ABSTRACT

*Cultural and identity scars have been engraved in the body of ethnic minority of Muslims in America due to the bloody attacks of 9/11. These events have created thus traumatic experiences on the party who witnessed the events at close and the people on whom the blame is conclusively directed, Muslim Americans. For Americans, the attacks resulted in a proud reassertion of the national virtue and communal integrity from which Muslim Americans were excluded. This reassertion is accompanied for Muslims by a reconstruction of a cultural identity away from their origin homeland and under pressures and prejudices that made the process of reconstruction to be severely challenging.*

*Accordingly, the challenge needed to be portrayed to overcome the difficulties Muslims are encountering publicly. Muslim playwrights started to establish a pad for truth revelation and dialogue between the two sides of the traumatic experiences.*

*Sam Younis's Browntown and Ayad Akhtar's Disgraced attempt to postulate the choices allowed to their co- Muslim Americans within the social and political aggressive manifestations formed under the umbrella of 'war-on-terror'. Both writers dramatize the unjust stereotyping of Muslims and its influence in shaping its subjects' private and professional lives, leading to their partly or wholly renouncing and degrading their cultural and religious identity.*

*Keywords: assimilation, belonging, cultural trauma, collective identity, identity, Muslim American, trauma.*

As an extension of the twentieth century, the twenty-first century is diagnosed in its traumatic events as the century of trauma attributing the experiences that are severe and disrupting, influencing profoundly the self's emotional and psychological integrity, and such traumas are affecting; thus, the individuals' view of the external world. Elaborated from Freud's deliberation on traumatic experiences in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1957) where trauma is said to signify the representation of an extreme experience as its effects upon identity and

memory are severe and profound. Therefore, the event is not traumatic by itself as its remembrance because the event is harbored in the unconscious and unconsciously develops a scar that splits or distorts the ego because it is usually accompanied by fear, terror or/ and helplessness (Ritcher, 2018, 6). Trauma can be classified to different types; it is either individual or collective to which the cultural trauma is usually linked. The cultural trauma plays an important role in the formation of the collective's identity as it appears with the African

American identity, where trauma relates to the issue of slavery engraved deep in the Afro-American collective memory (Alexander, 2004, 8). A collective trauma attempts to subdue a certain stereotyping would certainly create pressures especially when it tries to dissolve or assimilate itself within a larger social context as Afro-American or Muslim American collectives.

The new millennium awakened to the bloodshed of 9/11 attacks and two subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in addition to the shock of the Arab World of the enormous loss of property, dignity and life in Libya and Syria. However, the events of 9/11 did not only have distinctive and negative effects upon Americans, they had their positives which had been represented in the reaction towards the events, and there was a reassertion of the virtues of nation and community, a sense of gatherings, and the pride of being an American. However, this did not mean that it included all Americans, there were exceptions and Muslims were the exceptions. Since the attackers proved to be Muslims, Muslim Americans were suspected. The idea of revenge was there where Muslim Americans had to suffer (Smelser, 2004, 270). At the same time, the disturbing circumstances and wars in the Arab World pushed its people to immigrant to Europe and The United States. Immigrants and refugees and their consecutive descendants have surely reconstructed their cultural identity away from their original home attempting to adapt to the new culture. The process of reconstruction is not so far from being accompanied by an encounter with intensive perplexities and diaspora sentiments developing into a shared cultural trauma, as far as this cultural trauma is one aspect of one's adaptation to a new culture (Noman, 2019, 58). The process of transformation would never be secluded from the unfair racial and cultural prejudices of the hospital culture members recurrently articulated to form the faulty generalizations as the collective's representatives. Muktedir Khan described the dilemma of belonging and assimilation of Muslim Americans:

The demonization of Islam by the American media compels Muslims to indulge in identity politics. They concentrate on defending their faith from a perceived American assault rather than their role as American residents seeking

liberty, equality, and prosperity. The negative image of America, a consequence of its foreign policy in the Middle East, inspires a paradoxical response from Muslims. Its prosperity and freedom attacks them, but once they are here, its politics and attitudes towards Muslims and Islam alienates them. The result is the dilemma for American Muslims, they like living here but they hate love to hate America (2000, 95).

Accordingly, developing an Islamic identity is a challenge for Muslim Americans, particularly for second generation of Muslim Americans, those who were born and live in non-Muslim environments. The challenge creates a kind of trauma between integrity in the American society as its citizens and the presentation of the values related to their culture and religion (Kaplan, 2007, 2). Within the context of the American society, the Muslim collective's trauma has always developed into a trauma of survival, which relates, as Lewandowski Kira, to the pains of a collective due to continuous and cumulative aggression like discrimination and racial prejudice. (2014, 78&184). The collective trauma and its recovery depends to a large extent, as Jeffrey Alexander stated in his *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004) on issues as the nature of pain, the nature of the victim, the relation of the victim's trauma to the audience and the attribution of responsibility (8). Muslim Americans have the responsibility to relieve their traumatic stress, for some party, by a sincere valuation of religion and its practices to cope with the ongoing stressors, and for others, by trying to reveal truths about Muslims' misrepresentation in the American society.

The emergence of Muslim American theatre was part of all the second and third generation of hyphenate artists. However, it started to have a prominent place since 9/11 which provided the landscape of terrorism for the new generation of playwrights (Qureshi, 2018). Muslim playwrights found that it is their new obligation to voice out the misrepresented Muslims through their dramatic work with the aim to establish a ground for discussions and dialogues between the two sides of the struggle, a matter that paved the way to many talented dramatists as Betty Shamieh, Heather Raffo, Leila Buck and Youssef El-Guindi, who persistently overlapped the

international discourse of Islamophobia' and stereotypical identification with the emotional identity in his *Back of the Throat* (2005) and *Jihad Jones and Kalashnikov Babes* (2014), all endeavored to present the social identity and religious identification in their drama (Jaafar2018: 11). Youssef El-Guindi (1960-), the Arab American playwright, could surely draw the feeling of Arabs post the events of 9/11, as he states that in the aftermath of the bloody attack of 9/11 that:

as an Arab / Muslim American, one wasn't quite sure in those first few months after 9/11 as an Arab/Muslim American one wasn't quite sure where one stood. What laws were still in place to protect one from government inquisitiveness or from a government, rightly or wrongly, deciding to throw aside civil liberty concerns in the need to protect the country from an amorphous enemy whose potential for another strike was very real. In this climate [...] I personally, on a visceral level, found myself fearing a knock on the door. For no logical reason, I should add. (Ali, 2017, 87)

Two plays are selected to examine the trauma of Muslim Americans. Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* and Sam Younis' *Browntown* expose what kind of choices Muslim Americans have in order to face the hostility of the society they are living in. The two plays present the cultural trauma which Muslim Americans have to live. Roy Eyerman defines cultural trauma as "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2004, 61).

The Syrian-Lebanese descendant Muslim American actor/playwright, Sam Younis, demonstrates in his introduction to *Browntown* that cultural misunderstanding would lead to "dire political and mortal consequences". (Alqahtani, 2018, 402). He attempted to reclaim Arab self-representation with the intention of exploring the cultural stereotyping on the layers of individual and institutional manifestations. Through his *Browntown* (2004), Younis tries to relieve the traumatic burdens of Arab/ Muslim American Muslims of being the

hostages to the faulty cultural and social identifications created and intensified against Prophet Muhammad and his people and against all what Islam stands for. The play is to an extent a biographical piece based loosely on tips borrowed from the writer's acting career of which authenticity won him the "Overall Excellence in Playwriting" in 2004. Younis introduces his play through comedy to be free in voicing the ignorance and confusion created by the incongruity of stereotypes as long as the dramatization of ignorance is an important tool in the making of a comedy. Adding to this, the author tries to demolish the rigidity and uncompromising nature of the Arab stereotypes via means of the non-threatening territory of a comedy, attempting thus to clarify the disparity between the character whom he identifies as a Muslim and the culturally portrayed stereotyped identification as an Arab: "I believe that comedy is an effective tool for exposing the roots and every day's expressions of ignorance in a digestible, non-judgmental way. If we can laugh at our own ignorance, then we have already identified it. And that's a start" (Younis,2009, 233)

Ayad Akhtar (1970-) is a Pakistani American dramatist, novelist, screenwriter, and an actor (Ayad Akhtar, Bio). When he was young, Akhtar had a conflict between two worlds; "I didn't have a place in the American culture in same way that my white friends did (Levingsten, 2014). *Disgraced*(2012), the Pulitzer prize winner 2013, presents a disturbing and negative portrait of a man who renounces his Islamic culture. Just like the playwright, Amir, the protagonist, was born in Pakistan, and he is a high-powered New York attorney who has changed his name to an Indian one and he has renounced his Muslim faith on which he was brought up. Emily, his Caucasian wife, is a painter who evaluates Islamic civilization and art as her work is influenced by it. At the core of events of the play is a dinner party in Amir's and Emily's Upper East Side apartment to celebrate Emily's joining in an exhibit at the Whitney. Issac who is a Jewish curator at Whitney is invited with his African American wife, Jory, who is working with Amir in the same company. The gathering of the four, who belong to various ethnic minorities, would reveal things related to race and religion.

The issue of ethnic minorities is also apparent in the inquiry initiating *Browntown* voicing out the perplexities roaming not only in Omar's mind but also

in most Muslim Americans: “Why am I routinely a candidate for terrorist role? Why do these terrorists gotta be named Mohammed in these movies?... it’s like these writers have never ever heard of another Muslim name Why does the Indian guy keep getting the Arab terrorist parts over me?” (Younis, 235). Jack Shaheen, the world’s foremost authority on media images of Muslims, seems to find an answer to Omar’s inquiry in the introduction to his *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001, 2009). He begins it with the proverb that “*Al tikrar biallem il hmar,*” that is “by repetition even the donkey learns” (Shaheen,2000,7), exposing how the entertainment industry of Hollywood employs the strategy of repetitive mythology of Hollywood’s images of the bad Muslims as a teaching tool to its audience, emphasizing that the recurrent stereotyping has begun long before the attacks of September 2001 with the early Hollywood’s movies in which the Arab Muslim appears ultimately the “uncivilized character, the outsider in need for a shower and a shave, starkly contrasting in behavior and appearance with the white Western protagonist.” (Shaheen,2000,22)

American audience were led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs, as Arabs confusingly take all Indians as Hindus, by the assistance of Bollywood (Younis,241). The confusion of the cultural identity makes the lenses by which Muslims are seen completely distorted and foggy, whereby Muslims are seen heartless, brutal, religious fanatics, depicted as kidnapping or raping fair maidens and demonstrating a love for wealth and power, and, above all, they are haters of the West and Jews. This orientalist tradition of stereotyping started to be severely intensified and metamorphosed post the attacks of 9/11 (Halse, 2011, 111). Edward Said demonstrates in his *Orientalism* (2003) that: “Arab\_ and Arab Americans have been subjected to an ideological process of stereotyping which conveys the Western projection of Otherness”, concluding that if the Arab is bestowed with enough attention to be talked about, then he is recollected “from a family outlined stereotype as a camel –riding nomad... seen as a disruptor of Israel’s and West’s existence”( 285-286).

*Disgraced* begins with Amir who is “40, of South Asian origin, in an Italian suit jacket and a crisp, collared shirt,

but only boxers underneath. He speaks with a perfect American accent” (Akhtar, 2015,8). Amir is being painted by his wife Emily who is “early 30s, white, lithe and lovely” (Akhtar, 2015,7). Emily’s painting of Amir is an attempt to reproduce Velazquez’s *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*. Emily was inspired by incident happened to Amir in a restaurant last evening when a waiter behaved in a racial way towards Amir by expressing that Emily has chosen him as a slave. Velazquez’s 1650 *Portrait of Juan de Pareja* is a portrait of the painter’s slave who was freed a few months after the painting. Juan de Parejo was a Moor who preferred to stay with the painter, his master previous, until his death. (Neel, 2014, 55) However, Emily chooses Amir to stand for de Pareja although Pakistani-American Amir has no connection to the Moors. The play’s opening scene embodies the essence of the play in reflecting the trauma which Muslim Americans live. Amir, a man of color, is being painted by his Caucasian wife to reproduce the historic portrait in which the painted one is a slave. The whole painting is inspired by a racist event upon Amir.

Opposite to Younis who displays the dilemma of facing stereotyping, Akhtar does not create a stereotype Muslim American character. Rather, he presents the impact of society stereotyping in the dilemma which Amir lives. This does not mean that Amir stands for all Muslim-Americans. (McKinley, 2012, 13). *Disgraced* presents one of the significant political issues which is Islam and identity. The play depicts the daily activities of Muslim American who hates his identity as a Muslim (Martinez-Vazquez, 2016). Amir has changed his Pakistani family name, 'Abdullah' to 'Kapoor' which sounds more Indian, he has changed his social security number and he has even lied about the place where his parents were born. What he has done shows Amir’s fear to reveal his Islamic heritage. Also, his nephew, has changed his name from Hussein Malik to Abe Jensen. He tells his uncle: “You know how much easier things for me since I changed my name?” (Akhtar, 2015,11). Abe tries to justify his action of changing his name from a religious point of view; “It’s in the Quran. It says you can hide your religion if you have to.” (Akhtar, 2015, 11). At the same time, Abe confesses that “It’s gotta be one thing or the other. I can’t be all mixed up.” (Akhtar, 2015, 11). Abe enters “as American gets, Vibrant and endearing. He’s wearing a kidrobot t-shirt under a hoodie, skinny jeans and high tops” (Akhtar,2015, 11). Amir has radical views

concerning Islam, while Emily claims to understand true Islam. Her aim is to push Amir to have a reconciliation with his heritage. Emily has an appreciation of Islam and its role in a history of culture, scientific and spiritual contributions and innovations. Yet, her evaluation is refused by her Muslim husband who insists that Islam is outdated religion. Akhtar comments on the condition of Muslims after 9/11: "Life changed. I and a lot of people like me felt differently after that. Like Amir, the fact of being Muslim, whether religious or cultural, became a significant fact that could not be avoided" ('Disgraced: theatre Guide' 2016,3).

Abe comes to ask his uncle to defend an imam who has been unjustly accused of giving money to terrorists. The arrival of his nephew flashbacks Amir's background and the way he was raised. He states that his mother would "roll over her grave" (Akhtar, 2015, 11) to know that his name is amid the Jewish last names of the partners at Amir's firm. He remembers how his mother spit in his face because of his interest in a Jewish girl classmate. Amir's remembrance of his mother's past blames reveals the pressures put upon him and the disparity between his family integrity and his attempts to be integrated in the American society.

Similarly, originated from his full understanding of the pressures and perplexities of Muslims' surviving the stereotypical depictions poured into the American society, Younis's demand is that for anyone reading his play *Browntown*, to reconsider on whom the responsibility and blame are to be laid, as the experiences of the play's characters will lead them to some type of identity-shifting or denial, that does not very much reserves the cultural identity of the collective of Muslims in America. Like Amir and other Muslim Americans in the aftermath of 9/11, the actors in *Browntown* are entrapped in the social and individual stereotyping. Unless they sanction, enact and internalize the very negative stereotypical image of a Muslim, which they entirely reject, they would be considered a refused entry into the entertainment industry and consequently are denied their economic survival. Actors of *Browntown* know that the prejudiced misrepresentation and marginalization of their Muslim entity are ridiculous but they try to adjust themselves by surrendering to it, a surrender that is surely accompanied with an inner

struggle relieved precisely by the thought that 'otherwise there is no survival.'

*The Color of Terror*, the title of the movie to be auditioned by the actors of *Browntown*, seems as Omar says, just "like another scary-brown-guy movie" (Younis, 2009, 235). It is about a 'Mohammed' who compiles with Al-Qaeda to launch a terrorist attack in America; he is essentially used as an exemplifier of the stereotypical image accorded by the audience's mentality to any Muslim. The choice of the dark-skinned actors of ethnic descendants of Asia and Middle East is preferred by the racist casting director, Ann, to achieve the goal to appropriately portray the terrorist in American movies. The characters in the play are denied complaining or correcting the confusing ideas and identities embedded in their roles. Omar, who is supposed to play Chemical Ali at first, and is later chosen to play Mohammed, tries to correct Ann's information about the Iraqi personage who has been in reality imprisoned and executed by the Iraqi Government and not as shown to be compiling with Al-Qaeda to help in performing its aggressive attacks using Mohammed. Omar is interrupted by Ann that it is the writer's choice and "I can't speak for the writer, but it's clear.... She's trying to show us what's really going on in those countries. Like it or not" (Younis, 2009, 245).

Confusing reality with fantasy is deliberate to engrave the faulty picture of Muslims and Arabs in general. Yet, on the other side of the lenses, it shows Ann's ignorance of the real identities of Arabs as she also thinks that all Muslims are Arabs and even India is an Arab country on the basis that it has Muslims. Vijay, the Indian actor, is taken for his brown skin and Indian descent as a Muslim, although he is an atheist. He says that he almost always "Ever since I filmed '*Hijacked at Home*' it's been one Ahmed after another for me." (Younis, 2009, 237), a matter that pinpoints Omar's complaint that those non-Arab actors are helping in distorting the real cultural layer of Islam and Arab identity. Though Omar refuses, as a Muslim, enacting only the terrorist's roles as these roles link Islam to terrorism by borrowing the names of 'Mohammed' and 'Ahmed' the Islamic ideological and cultural signifiers to be represented as terrorists in film industry, yet he insists that "Why don't they just let us represent ourselves for a change? We don't need some Indian guy speaking for the Arab community." (Younis, 2009, 237) Omar is fully aware that the West's inability to change their attitude towards the

Islamic world is symbolized by the choice of the pure name of the Prophet of Islam “Mohammed”, not even for a reference to any other name that is related to ‘Mohammed’ as this name digs deep into the cultural layer of any Muslim’s self: “That’s the thing man. Why is his name Mohammed? Why do all terrorists gotta be named Mohammed in these movies.... It’s like these writers have never had even heard of another Muslim name... I’d love to play an Islami militant named Tareq or Fadi for a change. Hell, I’d even settle for Mustafa.” (Younis, 2009,235)<sup>1</sup>

Omar’s feeling is traumatic about this misrepresentation of the Muslim identity, and it later creeps to the other Arab-descent actor, Malek, who is completely unsatisfied after auditioning Mohammed, with Ann’s directions asking him to magnify the dark side of a Muslim, because he was not “acting Muslim enough.” (Younis, 2009,240) He could not adapt himself to the anti-Muslim roles. Malek, at the very beginning of the play tries to be a well-assimilated Muslim American, unresponsive to Omar’s traumatic outbursts about playing the role of a terrorist, accusing Omar of snobbery when the latter asserts the positivity of Islam and of the name of Mohammed (Younis, 2009,235). He previously tried to justify the moderate view of the movie’s author reclaiming that, “But at least this writer is trying to justify Mohammed’s reasons for doing what he does.... She isn’t exactly justifying his actions but at least making him more human... they even called him a ‘freedom fighter’ in the breakdowns .... That’s some progress right there” (Younis, 2009, 235). But, later the accumulative feeling of shame for his passive acceptance to the West’s degrading depiction of Islam through Muslims like him, only because they are in a deadly need for a job, let alone the social approval, bursts into him a decision to cut off his relation to such movies. Therefore, he starts now reconsider Omar’s righteous ideas about his collective desire for change: “Omar is right, this all degenerating... We should all have major qualms with

this one. The Color of Terror? It’s, it’s, it’s .... Brownspolitanism. That’s what it is! .... Why do I go to audition and pray that some asshole will give me the opportunity to slander my own culture on network television? .... It doesn’t help. I just get frustrated” (Younis, 2009,242-243).

In his attempt to be relieved from his traumatic encounter with the degradation of his cultural identity as a Muslim, Malek gets into more frustration because he knows, as all other Muslim actors in America know, that he will never be given the chance to draw his own line to present the real image of his cultural identity in performance and will recurrently be obliged to make this identity shadowed darkly for the sake of their belonging and approval in the current of the American society. Though following the tide, not all attempts for coping and belonging are a success. Malek’s frustration foreshadows the frustrating experience that most Muslim American actors would encounter in their auditioning, including Omar.

Omar who is supposed to audition Mohammed, “the terrorist”, is fully rejecting the policies used by the movie’s producers in attempting the bad-Muslim image in all of the auditions he has already gone through. In this precise audition, he is telling Malek of his sincere wish to make his own line in writing his own script on ordinary Muslims, not the bad Muslims, as an attempt to make some change in the current of film-making, but his friend Malek does not show his enthusiasm for this idea as a matter of adjustment to the prevailing attitude in the movie-industry. Even the Indian actor, Vijay, is not very hopeful about making a new trend the Easterners’ performance, he seems more compromising to the vogue than the Arab characters postulating disappointingly “That will do what? Reverse centuries of negative depictions of the brown man?” (Younis, 2009,236). Vijay is more aware of how things are happening in the field of movie making that he never objects to audition any culture he is asked to present. This cultural switching plays an important role in the confusion and faulty depiction of Muslims, if not all the ethnic minorities’ misrepresentation; that’s why Omar has always been against Vijay’s auditioning Arab roles.

Just like Omar and Malek, Amir lives in an environment which makes any Muslim a victim of prejudice even if he has a weak association to Islam just like him who has denounced his faith (McKinley, 2012, 13). Unfortunately, Muslims’ identity has been defined

<sup>1</sup> Jack G. Shaheen portrays the traumatic feeling of all Arab actors, which is articulated by Omar in the mentioned lines of the play, in his *Reel Bad Arabs*, stating that, “I am not saying an Arab should never be portrayed as the villain. What I am saying is that almost all Hollywood’s depictions of Arabs are bad ones. This is a grave injustice. Repetitions and negative images of the reel Arab literally sustain adverse portraits across generations.” Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs*, p. 176

either by those who use violence in Islam's name or by those who have blamed Muslims for 9/11. (Arida, 2007, 1). For his disappointment, Amir knows at the dinner party that his employers have not promoted him and have given it to Jory instead. The owners of the firm have dismissed him because they have known about his lies in changing his family name and security number. Moreover, one of the newspapers has misrepresented the news of Amir's attending imam's listening sitting by regarding him as the supporter of imam and his falsely terrorist ties even though he has attended because of Emily's plea to help the imam. Media plays a role in fabricating the news. However, Amir tells Jory when he knows that she has been chosen as a partner at the law firm despite his dedication and seniority: "Were you ever at work before anyone else in the morning? Were you ever the last one to leave? Cause if you were, I didn't see it. I still leave the office after you do! You think you're the nigger here? I'm the nigger!! Me!!" (Akhtar, 2015, 44). Amir lives the trauma of identity and belonging, being Muslim and American. The question of religion and nationalism represents the struggle which Amir must face and decide the priority for which one of them. The play depicts the contradictions of identity (Issa, 2016). Jeffrey C. Alexander states in "Toward a Teary of Cultural Trauma" (2004):

Identity involves a cultural reference. Only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves. Whether or not the structures of meaning are destabilized and shocked is not the result of an event but the effect of sociocultural process. It is the result of an exercise of human agency, of the successful imposition of the new system of cultural classification. This cultural process is deeply affected by power structures and by the contingent skills of reflexive social agents. (10)

In this respect, the cultural reference is tried by Omar who, mainly driven to the audition by his need for a job, enters the auditioning room with the intention to throw it by using a cynical Indian accent. He is already

unconvinced of the script joining Chemical Ali, the Iraqi, with Mohammed in the same terrorist training camp. His refusal for the faulty statement of the writer is hushed by Ann, a matter that infuriates him. He will respond with a fearful yell in his performance that scares her, but at the same time postulating himself as having the "edgy and dangerous" personality, a matter that pursued by the movie producers as a quite identical to the image of a Muslim, a person who is moved by his hatred and anger, demolishing the real reasons behind his anger. Omar's anger is merely an outburst to the pressures ongoing inside him against the prejudiced manifestations of a Muslim. But it seems that it was the pavement to his cultural identity switching.

By accepting him to enact Mohammed's character, Omar becomes enthusiastic now about being part of the Westerners' scandalizing propaganda against Muslims. Omar goes out of the auditioning room filled with hope because he is now promised to have future auditions in LA for the role of Mohammed and supposed other roles for his *excellence* in acting. When Malek reminds him of his views and intentions to draw a fair line in auditioning the Muslim character, Omar immediately changes sides. He is no more against the defective images of Islam and Muslims. For Malek, it seems that *The Color of Terror* has now grown on you a little," (Younis, 2009, 246) suggesting that hopes have deluded him and the shades of producers are now overwhelming his mind. Omar thinks that the promises will put all the auditioning roads at hand before him. He gets out of the auditioning room holding the material given to him which has no slight difference from the first script, on which he showed his full rejection.

Omar, in his second auditioning, uses the Indian accent he used in the first time, but with greater earnestness, because now he wants the role for himself rather than throwing it away. He is encouraged by Ann's remark that Mohammed is "torn between his family and his desire to blow people," (Younis, 2009, 255) thinking that the writer wants to show Mohammed as more humanistic and he is driven by some threat of death against his family if he does not execute the bombing. While, when reviewing Ann's note to Omar when he first auditioned Mohammed, one would realize the perspective by which any Westerner would understand Ann's remark the other way round; that is Mohammed as a Muslim, has the

desire to purposeless bombing but he is worried about the future of his family after he bombs himself:"Ann: The thing I would say... Mohammed has two choices. He can either abandon the Jihad and do good deeds or choose evil to feed his own hatred. We have to see that Mohammed chooses to hate. And Ali lures him into hatred by promising him riches and virgins and all that BS. Know what I 'm saying?" (Younis, 2009,245). This remark shows that the audience's realization of a Muslim character as an innately a terrorist could make of life as a traumatic experience for Muslim Americans in the post 9/11 society. Omar starts to accept this type of cultural switching which he refuses at the beginning of the play because he is now driven by dreams of approval, money and fame, all related to the minority's yearning to belong. It seems that as Mohammed in *The Color of Terroris* deluded by threats, Omar is driven towards the process of identity switching because he is deluded by promises and hope.

Ann, searching for an authentic performance, chooses Omar as the most suitable actor auditioning Mohammed, but then her choice is refused by, Hamilton, the Senior Vice President of Casting for the studio. Omar has been decided in advance to be replaced, without Ann's knowledge, by a black-skinned American character of an Irish descent, Colin Farrel. The character of Hamilton has been added after the close of the New York International Fringe Festival Production (2004) with the aim to show the audience the perspective of those producers who are controlling the public opinion by their thoughts. On adding the character of Hamilton, Sam Younis demonstrates that: "I still wonder if this was a good decision or not.... the casting director does not seem too crazy... really, the casting director is just trying to find a way to cast the best actor while also doing the bidding of the producer... I felt that having Hamilton in the play would help to paint a more thorough picture of the challenges that the casting director faces... so that [Ann] doesn't does not just look like an ignorant, insensitive or one dimensional person."('Younis' Reply to An Inquiry').

By including Hamilton into the play as the decision maker, Ann is shown as representative of the moderate American who is deluded by the political opinion. When faced by Ann's objection, Hamilton threatens her of dismissing her from casting for the movie. He justifies

choosing Farrel for the role for being dark-skinned and approved by the audience, so he will be convincing for an Arab role with "a wardrobe and makeup". Where Hamilton is after making his film profitable by having a 'name power, Ann is after the authentic representation of a Muslim by having a Muslim actor. Ann is deeply moved by this delusion and tries to correct the situation by articulating apologizing and encouraging remarks to both Omar and Malek who were both happy with Omar's achievement and hopes: "Ann (Pained, deeply sincere): Omar, I hope you realize that I have almost no influence on how things will unfold from this point on. I just want you to know that you did excellent work today\_ no matter how the cards fall." (Younis, 2009, 261). Omar is anxious about the meaning of Ann's words and understands that she might be doubtful about choosing him for the role. He is disappointed, but Malek tries to make things easy for his friend by giving interpretations for Ann's words; yet, the sense of doubt was still roaming in their minds.

Amir's uncured disappointment at the dinner party is followed by another which comes when he knows about his wife infidelity. He starts beating her despite his views against Islam's rules that allow a husband to beat his wife if she disobeys her husband. Again, this shows the trauma which Amir lives between his rejection of an act, yet he consequently comes to do it. The domestic violence at the end of the play is intended by Akhtar to show those who have extremist views of Islam, as Amir has explained his sense of pride and sympathy on 9/11 attacks, are the ones who use violence to communicate their message (Issa, 2016, 13). About the character of Amir, Akhtar explains: "I wanted to write a tragedy, which required a reversal of Amir's fortune dues to some human flow. In Amir's case it would be denial. Denial of his Muslim heritage, which a post 9/11 America will not let him forger" (Akhtar, 2012). Amir's denial of his Islamic heritage causes his loss at the end of the play. He tells Emily when she returns shortly to officially leave him: "I just want you to be proud of me.... I want you to be proud you were with me" (Akhtar2015, 51). *Disgraced* is an example of the impossibility of transcending cultural identity and racism. Amir does not succeed at self-acceptance, of being able to reconcile his Pakistani-Muslim self with American one, he becomes a victim of racism that costs him his livelihood and his wife (Neel,2014, 68).



However, at the end of *Disgraced*, Abe realizes that one cannot deny his heritage and ethnical identity for the quest of assimilation. He earns to his Muslim name, Hussein. He continues to wear an American style, but he appears with a 'Kufi' hat on his head to distinguish his faith and roots. Omar and Malik at the end of the play also find a recovery for their anxiety, they try to restore their cultural identity to feel assured. Malek suggests that they go to an Arab Muslim restaurant, Mamlouk, to eat *kafta*, an Egyptian traditional dish. This reference to the Arab food and dishes is very important to Arabs in the diaspora. It signifies a comfortable regain of their sense of cultural integrity and a reminder of the shared collective unity. Malek's invitation is welcomed for it relieves Omar from the tensions he has gone through in the exhausting auditioning rooms.

The title of *Browntown*, as well as the title of the film to be auditioned by the three brown-skinned characters in the play, *The Color of Terror*, signify how the film industry professionals are interested in creating a negative and discriminative single-dimensional perspective in their American audience, where Muslim American are probed as terrorists, not only on the social layer but even in their personal marital lives. In his review to the play, Martin Denton maintains that the play is intended to show its American audience how the current state of the nation tries to lead the post 9/11 public opinion towards only "one image of the Arab... the suicide bomber, ready to blow himself up to destroy the infidels." (Denton, 2004). Similarly, Abe's concluding words to Amir at the end of the play shows the significance of the title of *Disgraced*: "For three hundred years they've been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want to be like them. Look like them. Marry their women. They disgraced us. And they don't understand the rage we've got?" (Akhtar, 2015, 50). The playwright portrayed the trauma of Muslim Americans, how they are disgraced not by the United States only but by themselves. Thus trauma is a defined by Kai Erikson (1976): "a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared..." "We" no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body." (153-54).

Younis and Akhtar try to prove that culture and race enslave people. Omar and Amir are examples of what means to be Muslims in the United States. Each one of them fails because of the trauma of belonging and assimilation. While Amir has lost because of renouncing his faith and Islamic roots, Omar has lost because he is unable to resist the stereotyping. The two plays display Muslim Americans' responsibility as well as the culture they are in for having the trauma of identity and home. The blame cannot be on one part, each one has his share of the blame.

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