

© 2016

Jeanne P. Baptiste

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

GENDER PRACTICES AND RELATIONS AT THE JAMAAT AL MUSLIMEEN IN
TRINIDAD

by

JEANNE P. BAPTISTE

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School—New Brunswick
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy Graduate Program in

Women's and Gender Studies

Written under the direction of

Abena P. Busia

And Approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

January 2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

GENDER PRACTICES AND RELATIONS AT THE JAMAAT AL MUSLIMEEN IN
TRINIDAD

by JEANNE P. BAPTISTE

Dissertation Director:

Professor Abena P. Busia

In an effort to bring into view critically—as actors rather than as spectacle—Muslim men and especially Muslim women in non-Islamic countries and to examine their constitutive individual as well as collective religious and social identities—that is their contextual realities as opposed to just the ideal of Islam—this project seeks via ethnographic research to investigate gender practices and relations among Muslims at the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa located in Trinidad and Tobago. This small community's mundane yet resilient existence amid national, global, historical, geographical, physical, and sociopolitical ambivalences and contradictions begs revisiting how we read, interpret, represent, and deploy extant categories, theories, and methodologies articulating gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and nation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Finishing this dissertation has been a long and arduous process prolonged by many life challenges but aided and brought to completion by just as many kindred souls. I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee: Abena Busia, my Chair, who taught my very first graduate course in the Women's and Gender Studies graduate program and further whetted my appetite for exploring colonial constructions of African and black bodies and sexualities; Ethel Brooks whose graduate course on Muslim women further piqued my interest in gender and Islam and who directed me to do my dissertation at the Jamaat al Muslimeen; Belinda Edmondson, a mentor from since my undergraduate days at Rutgers, Newark and whose analyses of Caribbean literature remain seminal to explorations of gender, especially, formations of black masculinities and nationalism; and Aisha Khan, whose gift of her book, *Callaloo Nation*, gave me deeper anthropological insight into the irreducible vagaries of gender, place, and religion.

I wish to thank also the staff at NALIS, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; and at Rutgers University Libraries both in Newark and New Brunswick, USA, Rowland Bennett, Newark Dana; and Kayo Denda, Mabel Douglass.

The debt of gratitude to Barbara Sirman and Alex Bachman, from the Graduate Office at Rutgers, New Brunswick, for their expertise, help, patience, and kindness is immeasurable.

From the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, I wish to thank my dear colleagues and friends Deborah McFee, Charleston Thomas, Avril Patterson-Pierre, Sommer Hunte, Jane Parpart, and Godfrey St. Bernard for their steadfast support financially and intellectually; and the brilliant graduate students from the Institute of

Gender and Development Studies, especially Shelley Santiago, Maria Jaikaransingh, and Stephanie Leitch.

For his computer expertise and recovering my documents the numerous times my computers crashed, and I had neglected to back up my latest versions, as well as, for his feedback on my many drafts over the years, and for giving me the David and Goliath metaphor, I am eternally grateful to my friend, Ronald Chandleur.

Finally, for their faith in and support of me on multiple levels, I thank my family, especially my parents, Victor and Christine; also Patrick Baptiste and our daughter Tsahai Baptiste; and my siblings who were surrogate parents to my daughter, especially my sisters, Luanne and Karlene.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
PROLOGUE	1
INTRODUCTION	
Criminalizing Muslim Man, (De)Face-ing Muslim Woman: The Global Picture	8
Criminalizing Muslimeen Men, (E)face-ing Muslimeen Women: The Local Portrait	13
Literature Review	19
Methodology	25
Access and Entry	30
Theoretical Frameworks	34
Chapter	
1. SETTING AND ACTORS: AFRICAN-TRINIDADIAN MUSLIMS IN THE MASJID AND MADRESSA	
Unsettling Actors: The Muslimeen	44
Trajectories of African Muslim Presence in the Americas: Black Muslims, Nation of Islam, Orthodox Islam, and the Muslimeen	45
Constructing African Muslim Identity in a Muslim-hostile World and a non-Muslim Nation	66

2. REALIGNMENT OF AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNESS, FEMINISM, AND POWER IN CARIBBEAN FEMINIST AND GENDER THEORIZING:	
POSTCOLONIAL ESSENTIALISM	70
Muslim Secular Feminism	71
Sketching a Map through US Sisters of Color Feminism	81
Caribbean Feminist Contours	85
Postcolonial Essentialism	93
Revisiting, Redefining, Remapping	94
Understanding Gender Practices and Relations in the Caribbean:	
The Return to African Antecedents	104
Reframing Feminist Lenses	117
Sister Narratives	123
3. POLITICS OF SEXUAL PIETY	129
Piety and Sexuality: Undoing the Dichotomy	130
Demystifying the Veil	137
Reviling Bodies, Re-veiling Faces, Revealing Choices: Aversion, Conversion, Reversion	146
In Their Voices	152
4. GENDERING SPACE AND PLACE	168
Physical Space: A Postcolonial Essentialist Collage	169
Social Space	177
Cultural space	188

5. (DE)CRIMINALIZING A COMMUNITY: THE PRODUCTION AND	
CONSUMPTION OF THE MALE MUSLIMEEN BODY	198
Third Spaces: The Black Islamic State within the	
Christian Nation State	200
Regime of Looking	206
Epistemic Violence	211
Politics of Muslimeenism through Postcolonial Essentialism	212
De-Criminalizing a Body, Normalizing the Muslimeen:	
Fuad Abu Bakr and the New National Vision	218
6. CONCLUSION AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY	225
Fiction one: The Ethnographer enters the field <i>tabula rasa</i>	226
Fiction Two: Islam is an East Indian religion and African	
Muslims are not real Muslims	230
Fiction Three: At Least One Extant Feminism and/or	
Postcolonialism Can Account for the Muslimeen	
Gender and Sexual Relations	232
Fiction Four: The Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa is a	
Criminalizing Space Only	244
AFTERWORD	248
GLOSSARY of ARABIC TERMS	250
REFERENCES	252

Prologue

In April 2011, I joined members from my research site, the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa in St. James, Port of Spain, on a bus-ride to a remote beach in Northeast Trinidad in the municipality of Matura in order to witness leather-back turtles laying eggs. April to September is generally the season for the laying and hatching of these eggs, and citizens and tourists alike are curious to witness this natural yet wondrous phenomenon of the creation of life. Local authorities try their utmost to protect this endangered species, so each observer is required to obtain a permit prior to arriving at any of the three major observation locations: Matura, Toco, and Grande Riviere.

Although I was born in and lived in Trinidad nineteen years before I migrated to New Jersey, USA, I had never gone to see the leatherback turtles lay their eggs or to see the hatchlings; so going with the Muslimeen was a maiden outing for me. The Vice-Principal of the madressa and two of the imam's wives were on the bus of about thirty passengers. We left the masjid just after nine o' clock in the night and returned at four o'clock the following morning.

We arrived at Matura Beach after eleven o'clock at night; and soon thereafter our guide led us down the dark, narrow, stony path toward the beach. I was happy that Nadia, the young Muslim woman who had helped me gain access to the Jamaat al Muslimeen, and whom I had now known for close to four years by then, had reminded me to walk with a flashlight; for there is no artificial lighting, deliberately, other than the lights of the guide and some of us interlopers.

Eventually our group reached the shore, and we made our way along the beach until the guide found a lone turtle. Leatherback turtles use moonlight to direct their

journey ashore as well as their return to the sea; and unnatural light can misdirect them, cause them to lose their way, and the results can be fatal for these creatures, already vulnerable to the caprices of the elements and the unconscionable violence of humans who continue to slaughter them despite their protected-species status. So as not to startle or confuse the turtle, the guide asked us to turn off all our flashlights and remain quiet until he told us otherwise—hence my use of the terms *interlopers* previously. It was a very long wait to see the proverbial and literal first signs of life... more than an hour. But the spectacle, when it unfolded, was an incomparable and virtually inexplicable unveiling.

Our group comprising Muslimeen and non-Muslims saw just one turtle that night. Other tour groups much further along the beach saw more turtles, evidenced by the periodic whispers emanating from the walkie-talkies of guides informing each other of the location of female leatherbacks. As there were a couple elderly members in our group, we did not venture very far along the beach; but witnessing this single female negotiating painstakingly slow the tenuous terrain to find the ideal spot to build her nest was sufficient to capture our attention and hold us in awe. After twenty minutes of digging a hole with her front flippers, this female leatherback abandoned her first nest before laying any egg. The guide informed us it was because she could not feel water close enough to her nest. The absence of moisture meant that the sand would not be of the right texture—too dry and light—and would keep caving in as she dug the nest.

She navigated painstakingly through the sand again until the leatherback decided on an alternative spot; then, she dug another pit for herself in which to settle her body for the laborious undertaking ahead. Once nestled, she alternated the use of her hind flippers

to dig another nest deep into the sand. This time she laid eggs. In the midst of the laying process, a turtle goes into a trance-like state. During this virtual catatonic period a game warden tags one of the hind flippers of each leather back turtle; so her migratory history can be traced, her use of space and time recorded and analyzed, and her life history mapped, including when and if she comes ashore again. At this time of quietude too, the sightseers are allowed to take pictures and touch the turtle gently. The turtles are called leatherback owing to the texture of their shells, neither hard nor crustaceous but leathery.

At this moment of contact with the turtle, at one of its most delicate stages of life, I wondered if my presence was an empirical excursion to an event or an intrusion into the life of an *other*. I thought critically of this imbalance in access, vulnerability, and power reflective of the relationship between researcher and subject. This leatherback-turtle/observer dynamic was a metonym for any subject-researcher engagement despite the genus of the subject; and, I mulled over, too, the cosmos's valuing of reproduction and the inescapable risks and rewards attached to motherhood and mothering.

The beach guide informed us further that these female leatherback turtles on this beach in Matura, Trinidad and Tobago, are in fact intercontinental travelers, swimming from as far as Canada and Australia. So while very slow and clumsy on land, they are extremely agile in water. Another amazing feat is that a female leatherback lays between eighty and one hundred and twenty eggs at one time, including yokeless eggs that help cushion the viable eggs and allow them to breathe.

The laying process took less than an hour. Once the laying process is done, the female leatherback returns to the sea, using moonlight to find her way back to the ocean. By this time we had turned off our flashlights again, so as not to confuse her with light

emanating from several and even opposing directions. She has no choice but to leave to nature the hatching of her eggs and survival of her young. Although eighty-five percent of the eggs may be fertile, it is unlikely that any more than one hatchling will make it to sea and/or to maturity given the number of predators, including humans, the defenseless hatchlings encounter on land and in the sea. The process seemed to mirror my PhD experience.

Indeed for some, maybe many, like me, completion of a PhD comes at great sacrifice and costs on polyvalent levels. Like the female leatherback turtles negotiating spatial and temporal parameters, in the final years of my writing, just to find the space and time to produce was perpetually challenging. It seems non-academics cannot conceptualize that working at home is not akin to time off, or slacking off, or being engaged in non-productive labor.

Grappling with writing, work, and motherhood; self-imposing social isolation and enduring emotional, mental and financial challenges; balancing personal goals with professional requirements: teaching, research, publishing, and service/outreach; and the dissolution of relationships were constitutive of my doctoral package. Yet, I continued to travel this academic route convinced increasingly that the perpetual pursuit to find new postmodern and postcolonial feminist theories and terminologies will indeed contribute to better non-neoliberal, non-modernist, secularist-only policies and programs aimed at promoting human development, sustainability, dignity and the reduction of wasted and disposable lives. Through my sacred and secular unearthing, I believed knowledge seekers and knowledge producers in the Caribbean and beyond could better understand and explain gender and sexual practices, structural and institutional hierarchies, and

social and economic inequities albeit to engender alternative and productive forms of social relations and justice. I remained committed to the belief that textbooks and theories can, should, and do result in terrestrial transformation; and there is no incommensurable chasm dividing activism, scholarship, policy, and mobilization.

Theories and methodologies precipitate and are themselves embedded in paradigmatic shifts. They effect changes on the ground, once researchers retain social, moral and ethical responsibilities to not only collecting and analyzing data and publishing findings but also to offering solutions. Beyond our personal and institutional research and publication agendas, our work must be instruments to improve livelihoods of people relegated to the fringes of human dignity.

The interdisciplinary study of women's and gender studies seeks to promote self-actualization and gender equity while analyzing and redistributing power relations between men and women as well as among men and among women. Feminist studies is about agency and overcoming. Resistance. Empowerment. Perpetual returns to the tangible, materiality, and bodies, and how they are (mis)treated. Once a male hatchling makes it to the sea, it never comes ashore again in its lifetime—at least not voluntarily or alive. My dissertation, indeed my research, must not be a male hatchling; rather, its birth must sustain and transform for the better the lives of my subjects by reflecting the value of their contributions to the development of their community, society and nation. My dissertation must come ashore from time to time to reproduce.

Among my four committee members: Abena P. Busia, Ethel Brooks, Belinda Edmondsdon, and Aisha Khan, I had overlapping expertise in discourses on gender; race and ethnicity; nation and citizenship; Islam; and Caribbean literature, history, culture,

sociology, anthropology, and politics. It was just up to me now to jump into this sea of academic and affective fertility and make my way to shore where I would finally lay down the output of my scholastic voyage. Unfortunately, I was no Rebecca Soni, six-time Olympic medalist in swimming; so my journey to shore was a lengthy one, as I found myself multiple times just treading water or being washed back out to sea by tumultuous waters. Yet... forever being thrown a lifeline by Abe, my Chair.

Another critical lifeline that gave me staying power to complete my dissertation was my increasing engagement with Islam and with my Muslim subjects who exuded not just tolerance for disillusion but patience with accepting the disappointments of life alongside the tenacity to struggle to effect change when necessary. Although I have not taken *shahada* [yet], I find myself incorporating Islamic teachings and practices into my daily life. I still attend Sister classes some Saturday afternoons and *juma* less frequently; but I continue to have a relationship with sisters and brothers from the Jamaat al Muslimeen. As an imam on the Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN) in Trinidad and Tobago explained, there are three elements of *jihad* (struggle): individual/ intellectual, economic, and collective/physical. This doctoral hijra seemed to encompass all three.

In 2011, the UN-declared Year for People of African Descent, I failed to meet my goal of completing the writing of my dissertation, *Gender Practices and Relations at the Jamaat al Muslimeen in Trinidad*. Completing in 2012, the year Trinidad and Tobago celebrated its fiftieth year of Independence from Great Britain would have made my dissertation timely and even more salient for revisiting the written and oral histories of Trinidad and Tobago and rewriting the extant versions to make visible how Muslims of

African descent contributed to the shaping of the nation that is still evolving. In 2015, however, Islam remains a poignant topic globally and academically.

Thus my dissertation is not only an intervention into gender and Islam in Trinidad but also into global constructions of Islam and especially African [and Indo] Caribbean narratives themselves. It is a restorative project of re-interlocution, reaffirming and re-signifying a community of people whose absence from Caribbean history is as telling as it is disturbing and whose uncritical media hypervisibility in the present is destructive if this portrayal is not contextualized, theorized, and understood and radically disrupted, from the perspectives of obedient servants of Allah, including submitting wives.

Inshah Allah

Introduction

Criminalizing Muslim Man, (De)Face-ing Muslim Woman: The Politics of Global Islamophobia

In popular culture as in contemporary academic discourses generated from Western¹ neoliberal and modernist configurations of globalization, political economy, international relations, and human in/security, contentious and exceedingly injurious misrepresentations of Islam and Muslim bodies prevail and work to stabilize a persistent Orientalist binarizing paradigm of a cultured and technologically progressive people from the West and uncultivated, barbaric people from the East. Ironically this East, comprising expansive and diverse regions like the African and Asian *continents*, is in fact the technological platforms for many of the West's scientific advancements. Yet, labels like *warmonger*, *terrorist*, *suicide bomber*, as well as, the Arabic words *jihad*, *intifada*, *Al-Qaeda*, and *hijab* spoken both overtly and covertly have become Western household labels attaching to Muslim bodies in the East especially, even if these terms are misnomers and misused and misinterpreted.

This Western veil of paranoia and virtual hysteria is so ubiquitous in the current global political climate that the fact Osama bin Laden—the alleged mastermind behind the September 11, 2001 attack on America and elusive to the Bush administration—was killed during President Obama's first term in office is insufficient to erase the phonetic,

¹ I use the term West and Western in the same vein as Anouar Majid to mean “ a secular ideological concept born out of Europe's multiple crusades against the other, the Westernization of non-European elites started as a deliberate policy designed to enhance the interests of colonial powers and maintain their hegemony over the their colonies” (2002, footnote 1 p.54)

psychological, and racial, even though imagined, collusion between Osama and Obama. Such indiscriminate yet particularized collapsing and reification of diverse political, cultural and religious categories of people into fixed racialized, criminalized, and dehumanized material bodies is characteristic of modernist, neoliberal, neocolonial epistemological and ontological articulations, in fact, fabrications. The signification of racialized Muslim body as terroristic transcends a so-called first world construction and reverberates in discourses on Islam in the Caribbean, especially when mapped onto African Caribbean Muslims, specifically the Muslimeen in Trinidad, the primary subjects of this study and whose extraordinary identities emerge through very quotidian Islamic practices in a predominantly Christian postcolonial nation state.

In this Islamophobic twenty-first century visually identifiable, as well as perceived-to-be Muslims, both female and male, embody a hypervisibility that facilitates Western religious, cultural, political, racial and ethnic somatic inscriptions that mark them as literal and symbolic purveyors of terror and disorder.² Consequently, these bodies are in need of surveillance, regulation, and ultimately erasure as seen in the many indiscriminate and annihilating attacks on Gaza for example. Minoo Moallem purports that “Islamic fundamentalism has become a generic signifier used constantly to single out the Muslim other, in its irrational, morally inferior, and barbaric masculinity and its passive, victimized, and submissive femininity” (322).

² *Soma* refers to body. Although Greeks like Plato and Aristotle philosophised about morality and the soul, the distinction between *soma* and *psyche*, body and mind is attributed to French philosopher Rene Descartes.

Hence, in the name of modernity: one, atrocities are committed against bodies considered disposable by neocolonial regimes-- the concept of *the enemy within*; two, the collateral damage left in the wake of industrialization's appropriation and extraction of resources outside first world nations' geographical borders are disappeared in the rhetoric of *savage other*; and three, the production of human detritus and the simultaneous elimination of this human waste (Bauman 5) are sanctioned by "'frames' of war—the ways of selectively carving up experiences as essential to the conduct of war" (Butler *Frames* 26).³

In the midst of this heightened global pandemic of irrational affect—sustained by the periodic but persistent instantiations of European and US national security codes of red, orange, yellow along with the deployment of the National Guard and US-UN troops abroad—racism, prejudice, discrimination, and ethnic cleansing (under the guise of modernity, development politics, and globalization) continue to find spaces through which to rear their ugly heads. Consequently, it remains an opportune time for imperial nations to keep broadcasting the raced and gendered body politic upon which inscription becomes easily and effectively legible and indelible. For at least three decades, from arguably the Iranian Revolution of 1979 through this current war of terror, the "Arab" Muslim woman has replaced the Biafran woman as the trope of oppression and human

³ In 2015, Islamophobia and biopolitics remain alive, evident in the grossly unequal treatment of the attacks on Paris in which twelve lives were lost, including Muslims; the viral popularization the *Je suis Charlie* slogan; the astronomical spike in the sale of the controversial Charlie Hebod newspaper, and Israel's current bombings of Palestinian hospitals and civilian homes resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians including dozens of children. The racialization and dehumanization of brown and black bodies continue.

suffering, signifier of both a racialized and gendered primitivism as well as a raced and gendered violence. Mohja Kahf reasons, “For all that Western culture retains today of its own ebullient parade of Muslim women is a supine odalisque, a shrinking violet-virgin, and a veiled victim-woman” (179). Therese Saliba recalls when the “Face of Islam” was propelled onto the American screen. Juxtaposed in a 2001 photo essay in the *NY Times* were the images of a veiled woman and the crumbling Twin Towers (Saliba 1).

Additionally, the celebration of US forces’ victory over the Taliban was coupled with “Afghani women removing their *burquas*” (Saliba 1 *Italics in original*).

Although “the face of Islam” is not monolithic and Muslims (veiled or unveiled) are not passive victims of their religion and culture (Saliba 1), two even more contemporary images of repressed Muslim woman stand out among many as signifiers and produce a simultaneous face-ing and defacing of Islam. Ironically, again through the seemingly authenticating conduit of the *NY Times* on July 29, 2010, *NY Times Magazine* published on its cover a picture of a young Afghani woman named Aisha whose face was disfigured after she reportedly fled her abusive Taliban husband and was recaptured. To discourage such recalcitrant actions, it is alleged that under the direction of a Taliban leader in the village, eighteen-year old Aisha’s husband and in-laws severed her nose and ears and left her to die. She survived and became a Western symbol of the War on Terror, at once representing victimized Muslim woman and reinforcing barbaric Muslim man. In and out of and across academic borders, the image spawned debates on the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim women and men, reigniting discourses on white civilizing and rescuing missions geared toward brown and black anatomies. Judith Butler encapsulates the construction and function of such vilifying representations when she unpacks how

Western governments, especially through the co-opting feminist discursive language and policy to which these governments had no prior investment or even interest, justify their war on terror, namely against Muslim bodies:

There are several frames at issue here: the frame of the photograph, the framing of the decision to go to war, the framing of immigration issues as a 'war at home,' and the framing of feminist and sexual politics in the service of the war effort....even as the war is framed in certain ways to control and heighten affect in relation to differential grievability of lives, so war has come to frame the ways of thinking multiculturalism and debates on sexual freedom, issues largely considered separate from 'foreign affairs.' Sexually progressive conceptions of feminist rights or sexual freedoms have been mobilized not only to rationalize wars against predominantly Muslim populations, but also to argue limits to immigration to Europe from predominantly Muslims countries. In the US this has led to illegal detentions and imprisonment of those who "appear" to belong to the suspect ethnic group. (Butler *Frames* 26)

More recently, on December 18, 2011 there was sensationalized media coverage of spontaneous yet humiliating public disrobing of an unidentified Egyptian Muslim female protester. As hypermilitarized male Egyptian authorities dragged and kicked her viciously while arresting her, this protester's upper garments became dislodged, exposing her upper body, now clad only in a blue bra, thus her being named the Blue Bra Protestor.⁴ Such public state of undress for Muslim women is sacrilegious in Islamic culture. Her face and name have not been revealed to date. This blue bra incident rekindled popularly, in Orientalist rhetorical garb of "East versus West" or "Islam and the Rest," the raging subterranean academic debate on the signification of Muslim woman, Muslim man, Islamic feminism, modernity, postmodernism and postcolonialism. These demeaning and dehumanizing representations of Aisha and Blue Bra serve as Western semiotics to negate Islam's counter-narrative of Islam as a submitting and peaceful way

⁴ <http://gunsnplanes.blogspot.com/2011/12/half-naked-girl-in-blue-bra-shows-islam.html>. Accessed March 22, 2012.

of life. Instead, Islam has become a ubiquitous synecdoche for the East—violent, atavistic, repressive, brutal, misogynistic, thereby reinstating the West as the obelisk of modernity, civilization, human security, and a universal liberated woman. So the East, in all its religious, political and cultural diversity remains simply a homogenized West's antithesis in this War on Terror/Islam.

Criminalizing Muslimeen Men, (Ef)faceing Muslimeen Women: The Local Trinidad Portrait

The contentious dichotomous paradigms of West versus East and first world versus third world become even more unstable when one factors in that Southwest of the Atlantic Ocean in the twin-island Anglophone Caribbean state of Trinidad and Tobago,⁵ July 27, 2010 marked the twentieth anniversary of an attempted coup by a community of Muslims, called Muslimeen, against the then government, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). It remains the only Muslim insurrection in this part of the world since the African slave uprisings, which are historicized as slave revolts and not Muslim resistance movements, although many slave revolts in the Americas were initiated by Muslim slaves.

The term *Muslimeen* is simply plural for Muslim, as several Muslimeen explained to me, and refers to both men and women members of the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa.⁶ In Trinidad popular culture however, the term seems to attach to male

⁵ Although Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island state, I refer to Trinidad only in many places in the text. My research site is located on the island of Trinidad, and I do not want to collapse historical and social specificities and cultural practices that may be specific to Trinidad but not to Tobago and vice versa.

⁶ I use the term as both a noun and an adjective and as simultaneously singular and plural.

Muslimeen only. Trinidad and Tobago, a mere 1864 square miles, complicates cardinal positions for academics as it is neither West nor East but invokes a North-South dialectic. Furthermore the country disturbs geographical, cultural and political configurations of Islam and constructions of Muslims, for it is neither first nor strictly third world nor its Muslim population Arab nor Middle Eastern. Its Islam is neither aggressive political Islam in the global sense nor apolitical on an international or national scale. The Muslimeen have been and continue to be involved in state politics in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa⁷ is located inside the borders of Trinidad but is also set apart from the state. The masjid stands on contested land; and for the Muslimeen, *shar'ia* law takes precedence over the law of the land. Consequently, the Muslimeen embody spatial, cultural, and socio-political contradictions and use strategically these interstices in Trinidad and Tobago created by ambiguities and ambivalences around the definitions of race and ethnicity, the polemic signification of African Muslim, and the ongoing land dispute between the state and the Muslimeen. The Muslimeen use these paradoxes to advance an identity and agenda that parade metonymically as a politics of resistance for disenchanting and marginalized groups and communities in Trinidad. I call this antagonistic Dawud and Jalut (David and Goliath)

⁷ The sign marking the entrance to the compound reads "Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa; but the site is called popularly the Jamaat al Muslimeen including by its own members or just *Jamaat*. As Ethel Brooks clarified during my proposal defense in October 2006, *jamaat* refers ideally to a body of people whereas *masjid* or mosque refers to the physical structure. With this distinction in mind, when I refer to the physical structure I capitalize *Jamaat*; and when I refer to the people, I use the lower case form, *jamaat*. I note, however, that Muslims can pray anywhere and do not need a physical structure to perform *salat*, only space.

posturing *Muslimeenism*, a strategic response to a local and specific version of Islamophobia I term *Muslimeenophobia*.

Though there is no overt state or public action against these Muslimeen,⁸ popular opinion and the media continue to constitute and characterize as terrorist and criminal any member of this *masjid* or any African Trinidadian male Muslim who “looks” like a Muslimeen. The Jamaat’s Islamic practices like incorporating and caring for the socially and economically displaced-- including the formerly incarcerated—are antithetical to national security, national development, and ultimately a unified national identity.

Even though current discourses in various fields including anthropology, sociology, and gender studies speak to identity as non-essentialist, fluid, and shifting, in this Muslimeen ethnography it is critical for me to make fundamental racial and ethnic categorizations in order to examine their shaping of gender relations and gender

⁸ To stem a vote of no-confidence against him, the incumbent Trinidad and Tobago (TT) Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, of the ruling People’s National Movement (PNM) called elections on May 24, 2010 before the scheduled time, confident that he would be re-elected into office. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, however, disgruntled with Patrick Manning’s growing dictatorial governance of the country, elected a new government into power. The People’s Partnership (PP), united specifically to avoid “splitting the vote” which would give the PNM party the upper hand, comprises the former Opposition and predominantly Indo-Trinidadian party, the United National Congress (UNC); the alleged middle to upper class, “high-colour” party, the Congress of the People (COP); the sister-isle’s traditionally Afrocentric party, the Tobago Organisation of the People (TOP); and much to the chagrin of many citizens, the black activist and black nationalist party, the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC). The People’s Partnership immediately launched the much clamoured for Commission of Enquiry into events precipitating July 27, 1990 as well as the insurrection itself and its aftermath. Additionally as predicted by many political analysts, the coalition is disintegrating with the PP now transparently UNC-dominated. The PP won twenty-nine of the forty-one seats in the House of Representatives, but UNC candidates sit in twenty-one of those twenty-nine. The PP received 59.81 percent of the votes; PNM 39.50 percent and won twelve seats. The New National Vision (NNV), the Muslimeen party, received .27% of the votes and Independents 0.02.

practices. These essentialist notions will demonstrate how Muslim bodies of African descent are marked and treated differentially in Trinidad and lead to an understanding of the reasons gendered bodies are racialized, sexualized, eroticized, and criminalized differently.

Although seductive to do otherwise, I remain conscious of using the terms *African Trinidadian Muslims* or *African Muslims* when referring ontologically to Muslims of African descent as opposed to *black Muslims*. Black Muslims are associated with the Nation of Islam in the US with whom the Muslimeen are not synonymous despite having etymologic and ideological ties. Epistemologically and theoretically, however, in my ethnography I use African and black interchangeably, both having to do with notions of phenotype derived through visibility and consciousness gleaned from subjective and collective ideological formations of identity in a postcolonial setting.

When I began my field research in 2007 however, in ignorance I intentionally collapsed the terms *Muslimeen*, *black Muslim* and *African Trinidadian Muslims* as a result of struggling to construct and navigate the very slippery concepts of race and ethnicity in Trinidad and Tobago. During my meetings however with my dissertation committee; my conversations with the Muslimeen and other Muslims; my contours through my own research; my growing knowledge of the Nation of Islam; and telephone conversations with Brother David Muhammad, the liaison between the Nation in Trinidad and in the US, it became necessary to at least attempt to tease out the distinctions, nuanced and overt, in a local context among the terms *Muslimeen*, *black Muslims*, and *African Trinidadian Muslims*. I do use the term *African Muslims* as the overarching

nomenclature, however, for there is overlap among all these groups emerging from irreducible African antecedents.

The designation of African Trinidad Muslim is based on a combination of phenotype and self-naming but especially self-declaration. Generally, Muslims do not ascribe to ethnic categorizations. Yet, given the dynamics of race and ethnicity; religion, specifically Islam; and revolution in Trinidad and Tobago, race and ethnicity map onto Muslimeen bodies in very peculiar, discriminating, and functional ways as members of the Muslimeen community emerged out of an era and even fostered an ideology of African roots, black consciousness, black pride, and black power. Thus, this palpable credo of black identity that permeates the jamaat validates and even necessitates the African nomenclature. One must bear in mind, although relatively few in number, some Indo-Muslims are also Muslimeen and were insurrectionists in 1990; but their presence does not negate, neutralize, or compromise the pervasive African identity that inheres in the Jamaat al Muslimeen.

During a March 2012 trip to Trinidad where he presented two lectures in two consecutive days, Minister Louis Farrakhan made clear that “his presence would [not] further divide a place where race and ethnicity often bring political and social fractures.”⁹ What Farrakhan alludes to is the racializing and marking African Muslim bodies as *other* and inherently disruptive. In other words, as much as Trinidad is commercialized as a multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious space, ethnic tensions persist and sizzle around the intersection of race/ethnicity and Islam especially. The perpetuating presence of the

⁹ “Farrakhan Opens Visit to Trinidad.” *The Final Call* March 23, 2012 accessed March 24, 2012.

Muslimeen is one such literal and metaphoric erupting element. Trinidad and Tobago is paradoxically both an Indian *and* an African diaspora; but despite African slavery, ethnic mixing, cultural crossover, and hybridization, in Trinidad Islam is still perceived by the majority of the population as an Indo, not African, birthright. Thus, the Muslimeen's highly visual and quotidian Muslim embodiment contests boldly the Indo-Muslim national aesthetic.

In addition to complicating racial and ethnic textures of what it means to be an African Muslim in Trinidad, the Muslimeen subscribe to a bodily and spiritual performance of piety along with an ethos of sexuality and eroticism that cohere strategically into a politics of sexual piety. This performance of sexual piety, however, cannot be comprehended through narrow, traditional or hegemonic feminisms where there are preconceived notions of female sexual agency; instead, feminists must look through a lens of standpoint theory that allows validity of subjective perspective and investment.

During my research, it became clearer that the Muslimeen were navigating the epistemological third spaces between their positive, proactive posture of Muslimeenism and the nation's negative and/or ambivalent emotion of Muslimeenophobia. Their passage in and out and through this amorphous third space between the Jamaat and the dunya, as well as, the jamaat and other citizens, is deliberate and tangibly powerful specifically at moments when the nation is at dis-ease, like July 27 annually when the Muslimeen commemorate the attempted coup. This slippage is possible through what I theorize is a postcolonial essentialism, a subverting of Barbara Metcalf's postmodern

pluralism and a merging with Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism. I tease out this theory of postcolonial essentialism in depth in Chapters Two and Three.

Literature Review

Feminist Scholarship on Muslim Women and Men

In surveying contemporary feminist scholarship on Islam, and even within Islamic feminism, it emerges that Western-based feminists too often transcend Muslims' mundane specificities, contextualities, and geographies thereby reproducing the ubiquitous notion that instates Muslim men and women in what is referred to as the Muslim or Arab world. That Muslims populate the entire globe is masked through this reductive perception of Islamic localities. In addition to this geographical stereotype, Muslim men are systemically typecast as fundamentalist and as oppressive, regressive patriarchs and female Muslims as politically, culturally and economically oppressed women who are further repressed sexually.

It stands to reason then, in the West, contemporary feminist literature on Muslim women or gender relations in Islam are discerned primarily through and against an East versus West dialectic with Western epistemologies framing theories and Western agendas shaping Muslim ontology. Dominant feminist discourses appear to converge around six major themes:

- 1) literal and symbolic representations of the veil;
- 2) gender egalitarian reinterpretations of the Quran;
- 3) Muslim women's complicity in reproducing—or their agency in resisting—
Western ideas of patriarchy and other subjugating principles allegedly
embedded in Islam;

- 4) the intra- and inter-terrorizing predispositions of Muslim men;
- 5) modernity versus tradition; and
- 6) secularism versus fundamentalism.

In dominant Western literature on Islam, Muslim women are invariably positioned against Muslim men, a dichotomy that privileges and reinforces a Western construction of Muslim women as always and already culturally and politically mired in patriarchy and subject to violence. I invoke Uma Narayan's paradigmatic "death by culture" where she critiques Western feminists' interpretation of dowry murders as embedded in Indian rituals and practices. Narayan cautions against feminism's tendency to misdiagnose causes when, what appears to these feminists as cultural pathologies, cross borders.

Also, in arguing how female suicide bombers are disempowered via Western feminism, Amal Amireh argues "Doomed to this cultural context, Palestinian women are seen as victims of an abusive patriarchal Arab culture that drives them to destroy themselves and others. Thus, their violent political act is transformed into yet another example of the ways Arab culture inevitably kills its women" (qtd in Lorber 208). In much of Western feminist literature, Muslim bodies become more symbolic than literal; and Muslims' lives are interrogated within virtual, representational, transcendental rather than quotidian or immanent realms.¹⁰

Both in academia and in the media, representations of and discourses on Muslims remain fixed in a South Asian-Middle Eastern-Arab context, a socio-spatial and psychological landscape where Islam is the dominant religious ideology. This

¹⁰ With the exception of feminist scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod (1991, 1998), Aisha Khan (1995), Leila Ahmed (1999, 1992), and Saba Mahmood (2005)

cartographical, racial, and ethnic stasis renders non-Middle Eastern/non-South Asian/non-Arab Muslims invisible and voiceless. Muslims in non-Muslim countries become virtually nonexistent or insignificant. Muslim women, especially, are seen in need of liberation since lack of visibility and/or voice are more often than not constructed by hegemonic feminism only as patriarchal impositions rather than subjective and welcoming choices of informed and “believing” women.¹¹ Too often the academy and the media define and deploy an uncritical concept of *the* tortured Muslim woman, a representation that masquerades as an essentialized and universalized diacritic. Such Western feminist proclivity to discursive and ontological prefixing of *other* women bred several epistemological challenges to hegemonic configurations, generated new theories, and engendered postures of resistance visible from the late 1950s:

- second-wave feminists’ resistance to the category *woman*, to universalism, to homogeneity, and to global sisterhood;
- both US black feminist thought that spawned intersectionality and Chicana feminists’ *mestizaje* consciousness, two schools of identity formation insisting on the recognition, celebration, and theorizing of difference;
- feminist standpoint theory and subaltern studies denouncing the illogic of objectivity in research, instead validating subjectivity, experience, and context which allow arguably better views from people considered outside the dominant and privileged perspective;

¹¹ I borrow this phrase from Asma Barlas’s book title “*Believing*” *Women in Islam*. The phrase appears in several *suras* of the Qu’ran, including the most controversial thus obviously often cited Suras 24:31; 33:35, 49; and 60:10.

- transnational and postcolonial feminists' scathing critique of hegemonic feminism's myopic, infantilizing, and disempowering view of "other" women;
- methodologies of the oppressed and oppositional consciousness; and
- Caribbean feminists' indigenous theorizing.

My observation of feminist scholarship on Muslim bodies is not as much a critique of the work of prominent and progressive Islamic feminist scholars as it is a recognition of the differential valuing of knowledge production, publication, or research subjects, academic politics in which I am simultaneously very much implicated and resisting self-consciously. As much as transnational feminist scholarship pushes against confining binaries like self/other, complicity/resistance, passivity/agency that scaffold feminist analyses of gender relations particularly in places denoted as third world nations, and as much as transnational feminist scholars invoke epistemologies and methodologies of difference and intersectionality, analyses written within hegemonic dialogic formations seem to congeal around stereotypical or eliding discourses subjugating and even disappearing the existence and quotidian realities of *other* Muslim others. So, research on Islam and gender defaults invariably into articulations of Arab Muslim women's agency and complicity and the other dialectics listed previously. Like Saba Mahmood, therefore, I wish to not only permeate but also dismantle these unproductive dichotomous boundaries.

There are exceptions to Western scholarship's focus on reproducing stereotypical images. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini is arguably a watershed moment in ushering in what came in the 1990s to be termed *Islamic feminism*.

Just like women's movements in the West sprouted during other social reformations and political upheavals, the Iranian women's movement gained currency during nationalist mobilization as the Iranian women's activism was part of the Populist movement that unseated the Iranian monarchy. Miriam Cooke argues:

As is now well-known, nationalist women, most of them recently and expediently veiled, supported clerics in their resistance against the westernized shah [lower case in original]. They had adopted the veil, which confounded political and religious symbolism, to demonstrate their anti-West nationalist convictions. They were eager to veil because they believed to wear this symbol of nationalist mobilization against the westernized shah would demonstrate their commitment to and importance to the nationalist movement and speed the advent of a new pro-women era. (xi)

Despite operating within institutional confines and though their work may be de-centered from academic canons, there are black, transnational, postcolonial, secular and Islamic feminists engaged in feminist knowledge production and scholarship to de-essentialize culturally, socially, and politically the terrorist image of the male Muslim body and the notion of the subjugated female Muslim corporeality and psyche. In *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood advances a theory of self-enacted piety by Egyptian Muslim women in a direct attempt to resist Western, primarily secular formations of agency, subjectivity, liberation. Julie Rajan has an extensive body of work, and is one of the few scholars to focus meaningfully on female suicide bombers. Gunther Dietz and Nadia El-Shohoumi write on Muslim women in Southern Spain; Shanaaz Khan treats with Muslim women in places as varied as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Canada; and Carolyn Moxley Rouse espouses upon the negotiations of African American Sunni Muslim women in Southern California. Further South, some of Aisha Khan's body of work encompasses gender, ethnicity, and race in Islam in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ultimately however, Muslims' everyday life-shaping experiences and negotiations as Muslims in non-Islamic territories are eclipsed and remain underinterrogated in these rabid economies of globalized modernity; of shifting geopolitical landscapes and territoriality; of ethno-racial, ethno-national, and ethno-religious discriminatory behavior (A Khan "Homeland" 93). Dietz and El-Shohoumi lament, "The life-worlds of Muslim women residing in predominantly non-Muslim countries...are one of the most striking unknown facets of the contemporary phenomenology of globalized modernity" (1). Thus, in an effort to bring into view critically—as actors rather than as spectacle—Muslim men and especially Muslim women in non-Islamic countries and to examine their constitutive individual as well as collective religious and social identities—that is their contextual realities as opposed to just the ideal of Islam—this project seeks via discursive and ethnographic research to investigate gender practices and relations among Muslims at the Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa in Trinidad. This small community's mundane yet resilient existence amid national, global, historical, geographical, physical, and sociopolitical ambivalences and contradictions begs revisiting how we read, interpret, represent, and deploy extant categories, theories, and methodologies articulating gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and nation.

Methodology

My primary research methods were discursive analysis and ethnography encompassing participant-observation, structured and semi-structured interviews, telephone interviews, and informal conversations in the field with present and former members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen and other masjids. Before entering the field, I surmised ethnography as a primary tool would be sufficient to observe, record, transcribe, and analyze gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen. Upon beginning my research and especially upon attempting to write my analysis, it became more and more evident that I was required to do lay more contextual groundwork through textual and discursive analysis in order to contour through the ambivalences and ambiguities of the Muslimeen community.

During my proposal defense, one of my committee members asked if I imagined myself to be a Caribbean scholar or a Muslim scholar. I didn't quite grasp the epistemological and methodological depth of that question. That I was not a Muslim scholar was made irrefutably clear very soon. I did have misconceptions gleaned from my North American schooling of Muslim women. To familiarize myself with Islam I bought a Qur'an and read suras. I also had a book of select surahs. On the brink of starting my field research, I taught a summer session at DeVry University in North Brunswick, NJ. I tried, unsuccessfully, to learn Arabic from a student there, barely making it through the alphabet. In Trinidad I spent a great deal of time watching the Muslim television channel, *International Broadcasting Network (IBN)*, absorbing as much as I could about Islam, especially locally. I read numerous books and did innumerable internet searches to learn the pillars of Islam and the names of the prayers. I wanted my subjects to take me

seriously as unlearned as I was in Islam. I soon understood that there was indeed a difference between practicing Islam and being a Muslim.

I was fortunate to have access to several libraries with comprehensive collections on Islam, including women in Islam. The Mabel Douglass, Alexander, and Dana Libraries of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey supplied me with a great deal of material for my literature review especially. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Alma Jordan Library of the University of the West Indies as well as the Diamond Vale and Port of Spain branches of the National Library and Information System of Trinidad and Tobago (NALIS) provided the local and regional historical contexts and the kernels of my research into the 1990 insurrection.

Through archival digging and online searches of the Trinidad and Tobago daily newspapers from 1990 to 2012, I gleaned incomparable information on the pathos and ethos of the coup as I was not in Trinidad when it occurred and did not have a sense of the nation's psychic, emotional, psychological and physical terror. Discursive analysis of the Commission of Enquiry (COE) spanning 2011 and 2012 revealed invaluable data on the sensibilities of the Muslimeen experiences pre- and post-1990; the hostages' memory and trauma; the role of print, electronic, and other forms of social media; the activities of the armed and defense forces; the airport authority, and the many arms of government; the alleged complicity of the government itself and some Opposition members. The COE revealed the innumerable agitators and victims involved in the coup, both visible and obscure, but left decidedly invisible Muslimeen women as social and political actors.

I spent three years in the field formally from 2007 to 2010; but for two subsequent years in decreasing frequency, I continued to attend mosque and visit the

compound after my ethnography ended officially. Once I was in the Trinidad, I tried to attend Eid ul Fitr celebrations and Eid al Adha observances, and the July 27 commemoration of the coup. On two occasions after my ethnography ended, I attended *nikahs*. One was at the invitation of Sister Fatima, one of the Imam's wives; and the other was the wedding of a friend. I did attend *nikahs* during my ethnography as well.

On my first visit to the Jamaat, I realized that the compound was not what I had expected structurally. The devastating consequences of the 1990 insurgency and the state's retaliation that included razing the compound were still visible and tangible. In fact, the compound was still under reconstruction, with the infants and primary schools' rebuilding being given priority, according to the imam.

I never obtained a list of members nor do I have a definite head count.¹² In fact, establishing an exact number or list of names was not data I pursued for two obvious reasons: one, the numbers are very variable, comprising a transient population owing to the masjid's open gate policy structurally and philosophically; and two, given the socio-political climate at the time it was not prudent for me to insist on being privy to these specific details. The masjid, traditionally a site of tension and contestation between it and the nation state, was even more hyper-vigilant while I was doing my ethnography. The imam's legal issues persisted throughout my study and beyond. Though some charges were dropped off and on, and some cases were dismissed for lack of evidence, other pending criminal matters continued to plague the imam. July 27, 2010 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the attempted coup by the Jamaat al Muslimeen. When I was writing my analysis, the six phases of the 2011-12 Commission of Enquiry into the

¹² In a sister class in July 2011, one of the imam's wives estimated about 500 members.

events of 1990 periodically propelled the Muslimeen into the national limelight. In late June 2012, the imam's trial for his 2005 Eid sermon started.¹³

My intention is not to perpetuate the image of the Jamaat as a site of criminality, or romanticize its criminalizing, or far worse, commodify its members. I, however, incorporate the insurrection, trials, and anniversaries of the attempted coup and COE to set the tone, limitations and significance of my inquiries and the emotive and political economy of the location. Furthermore, the insurrection is an irreducible component of the Muslimeen identity. They embrace and mark its occurrence annually even while the nation's collective and individual memories still seek resolution to the trauma and the treachery, and await still a simple apology from Imam Abu Bakr.¹⁴ Thus, I could not speak responsibly of gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen and not engage such a constitutive element in the making of the Muslimeen identity or in the making of a nation's history.¹⁵

¹³ At the time of my field research to the present writing of my dissertation in March 2012, Imam Yasin Abu Bakr repeatedly had court appearances to answer charges laid against him stemming from a November 4, 2005 sermon. The charges included inciting members to commit violence, breach of peace, sedition, and other state violations when he warned Muslims that there would be "bloodshed and war" if wealthy Muslims did not give *zakat* to poor Muslims, and this payment was to be made through the Jamaat al Muslimeen. The nation state and Indo-Muslims interpreted this statement to be a threat levied against Indo-Muslims who are overall socioeconomically better off than African Muslims. During 2007 to 2012, Abu Bakr also had a couple murder charges dismissed eventually. In August 2012, Imam Abu Bakr's trial for murder ended in a hung jury.

¹⁴ Up to 2013 Yasin Abu Bakr stated he was not responsible for the coup's fatalities, for he was not at the locations where the killings occurred, and he gave no orders to kill anyone. See Jada Loutoo's article "Bakr: Don't Blame Me for the Coup." <http://newsday.co.tt/news/0,176415.html>

¹⁵ Thanks again to one of my advisors, Ethel Brooks, who insisted I needed to address the coup; for it undeniably constitutive of Muslimeen identity.

Consequently, I had to tread delicately, ever conscious of the Muslimeen sensibilities regarding not only the prosecution and persecution of their respected imam but also his, as well as, African Muslims' stigmatization nationally. Permeating that loyalty to the imam and the Jamaat, however, were fringe feelings of discontent and expressions of disillusionment among the restless lower echelon regarding the attempted coup and the imam's failure to address it fully with the Muslimeen community, to recharge, and to re-strategize—even relinquish—leadership. These sentiments re-surface circa every July 27.

Initially, I had planned to interview forty-five subjects, more women than men, in a ratio of three to five. Before beginning my ethnography, I was more interested in the lives of the Muslimeen women who were physically and racially visible women given their everyday Muslim dress, and that they were women with disappeared stories. As my research progressed, however, that sex-disaggregation ratio redistributed itself necessarily to include an increased percentage of men. The intricate web of gender relations in this Muslim community became more difficult to disentangle, and there was absolutely no logic to maintaining this numeric divide. So, I sought to gather information from both men and women without regard to number but as occasions and opportunities arose.

I entered the field with a list of structured questions, approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Though research ethics dictate I stick to the prepared questions or wait until I applied for renewal in another year to rewrite them, my field notes yielded more pertinent information than structured interviews. The field notes method proved more effective and time-saving since I did not have to spend those additional onerous hours convincing subjects to be taped, poring over

taped interviews, and transcribing them. Also, subjects were much more loquacious and intimate without the recorder.

Crime, violence, poverty, unemployment and lack of sustainable employment and other vulnerabilities not only plague but also define African Trinidadian urban youth; and the Muslimeen's hypervisible hypermasculinity impact powerfully upon these demoralized young men's and women's identity construction. By the end of my ethnography, officially, I had interviewed as well as had informal discussions with more than fifty Muslims ranging in age from four years to an octogenarian. I have not included formally the voices of girls and boys younger than eighteen years; but I remain cognizant of their spirited dialogues, knowledge, and sensibilities; and I am sure those interactions have raised my consciousness of the Muslimeen community and infused my text.

Access and Entry

Gaining access to the Jamaat was not as difficult as I anticipated. I came to know Nadia before I actually met her in person.¹⁶ A childhood and close family friend recommended her as my contact person for the masjid. She remains the only Muslim in her family. Nadia did not live far from where I had grown up, but we had never met each other before I started my research. I was still living in New Jersey at the time; and Nadia and I played phone tag for several weeks in August 2007 before we connected. Whenever I called her, I got her voicemail. At the time she was in a transitional phase of moving out of her family home to her own. She was married and pregnant with her first child. She did not have a computer at home at that time, so it took a few attempts before we spoke.

¹⁶ Nadia is her real name; and she did not want me to conceal her identity, finding it unnecessary. At times though, I use a pseudonym when the details of her narrative are personal and intimate.

Self-reflexively I made a note to be conscious of differential technological access between some of my subjects and me that could hamper our communication; but ethnicity and class, while in effect in terms of personal choice in elaborateness of Islamic clothing and wearing of ornate and conspicuous jewelry, were never obstacles for me at the Jamaat al Muslimeen. Sex and gender too were not barriers in the way there were at other masjids where there was strict division of men and women, for example, a popular mosque on Queen Street, Port of Spain.

My initial visit to the Jamaat al Muslimeen was at the beginning of Ramadan on September 12, 2007. I flew to Trinidad for the weekend to establish contact at my research site and met with the imam to ask permission to do my case study at his mosque. It was a long wait for me to see the imam as he is very much in demand, and the month of Ramadan was even busier as those in economic need came to the mosque in great numbers. During Ramadan, Muslims pay *zakat* (charity) the fifth pillar of Islam; so the destitute flock to the mosque for Muslim's excessive generosity during this most holy period for Muslims. Their blessings increase seventy times for giving charity during Ramadan. It is common that during Ramadan, the Muslimeen go to a very popular location in the capital city to distribute food, clothing, and money. The venue is named officially Woodford Square but is called locally The People's Square; for it is often the site of protest movements, town meetings, union gatherings, cultural events, election campaign platforms as well as serving as a home to whom citizens call vagrants, homogenizing a range of marginalized people from mentally unstable, to homeless, to economically depressed.

My youngest biological brother—being on the compound for the first time in his then forty-one years—waited in his car for me for more than the hour it took to meet the

imam. My brother, the only one still living in Trinidad at the time, was concerned about my wellbeing given the negative reputation of the Muslimeen. I presented the imam with my proposal, and he redirected me to his first wife. I could tell immediately he was not impressed with my research, and I would find out later from a Muslimeen brother that he saw it as a “woman thing”; so I knew I had my work cut out for me to convince him my ethnography was important to the Jamaat.

His skepticism was understandable given the extant tensions between the state and the Muslimeen; but when I visited the Jamaat for Eid ul Fitr on Sunday 19, August, 2012 with my daughter and one of her friends, the imam greeted us warmly, expressing to my daughter that her mother is a very “intelligent woman.” He then called for us to be treated like royalty. Over the years the imam had come to realize that I was invested in the Jamaat as more than a research site, and my participation-observation was more than a research methodology.

My first encounter with Sister Annisa nullified my discomfort upon my initial meeting with the imam, and she restored my enthusiasm with my “project” which metamorphosed from just an ethnographic study into a way of becoming for me. I would come to the brink of *shahada* and remain poised there even at the submission of my dissertation.

On October 10, 2007, I met with Annisa to discuss logistics of my study. We talked for two hours; and she shared with me David Muhammad’s¹⁷ *The Black Anthology*, a comprehensive analysis and bibliography of black studies from black history, to black

¹⁷ David Muhammad is the Trinidad and Tobago liaison to the Nation of Islam in the US. I would meet David Muhammad a couple years later.

psychology, to black religious scholarship. It includes references to well-known as well as not-so-famous men and women involved in black education and activism. I bought a copy immediately more as a symbolic gesture than an academic one, a serious testimony to Sister Annisa of my commitment to my research.

The staff and students of the Jamaat were off for the week of Ramadan, so the compound was deserted at this time. When she went for *dhuhur salat*, I accompanied the Imam's first wife to the masjid. The only other Muslim women there at that noon hour were the cook, Sister Jamilah; and an assistant. Afterwards, Sister Annisa and I sat in the masjid and talked. She was my first somatic introduction to Islam; and it was an intensely personal and emotional introduction: a co-wife; a teacher; a grandmother; but more heartbreaking, a mother still in mourning for a murdered son almost two decades after the *idaat* was over. Annisa's story will emerge in Chapter Two.

Theoretical Frameworks

Indeed, studying gender practices (the roles Muslimeen men and woman perform specific to their sex) and relations (how they delegate, regulate, and negotiate what they do using Islam as their organizing template) among the Muslimeen involves charting several trajectories and negotiations emanating from familial, religious, social, and political engagements and tensions between and among

- the male and female members inside the Jamaat's compound,
- the masjid and the nation,
- African- and Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, and
- the *masjid* and global Islam.

Within the last two decades scholars from disciplines as varied as history, sociology, African

American Studies and religion have published volumes on Islam and race; and there are over two dozen books published on Islam in the Americas. Michael Gomez and Sylviane A. Diouf are just two notable scholars historicizing and analyzing African Muslims in the Americas. Clifton Marsh, Edward E. Curtis, Zain Adbullah, and Yvonne Hadad look critically at African and black Muslims in the United States of America. Mansoor Ibrahim, Brinsley Samaroo, Ramesh Deosaran and Darius Figuera are among at least ten Trinidad and Tobagonian authors and scholars who have written on Muslims in Trinidad, paying particular attention to the 1990 Muslimeen insurrection. Invariably though, the majority of texts on African Muslims, black Muslims, and the Muslimeen are decidedly masculinist in their analysis; for as Belinda Edmonson captures in *Making Men*,

Caribbean revolutionary discourses tend to resolve around constructions of black masculinity.

The problem remains that very few of these male writers are concerned with a rigorous examination of gender in Islam. Other than marginal references to the presence of women and sporadic notations on the absence of Muslim women from analyses on African Muslims in the Americas, the roles of Muslim women remain under-interrogated. Edwards notes that even though African American women were always involved in the Nation of Islam, their contributions often go undocumented although their presence and involvement are evident from photographs historicizing the movement. Within Trinidad and Tobago not one of the texts on the 1990 insurrection is written from women's standpoints, uses gender lenses, or engages feminist methods and methodologies. Thus, I employ feminist geography along with its theories on body, space, and place in my ethnography on gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen.

At the Jamaat, Islamic doctrine and religious affiliation transcend allegiance to local, state, or national centers of government and destabilize national, racial, ethnic, religious, political, and social imaginaries of "all ah we is one family."¹⁸ For instance, the Muslimeen practice polygyny in a monogamous country although my informal quantitative analysis reveals that fewer than five percent of African-Trinidadian Muslim men of the Jamaat are married to more than one wife at a time. Most of the men say they

¹⁸ This phrase, "all ah we is one family," is part of the chorus of one of Trinidad and Tobago's most famous calypsos, "One Family." It is sung by popular calypsonian, Lord Nelson. Although the song refers specifically to social relations in Trinidad's twin-isle of Tobago, the calypso has become almost a national anthem and a rallying cry in times of racial and ethnic fractures in Trinidad.

would opt to divorce their current wife before remarrying, finding it difficult to treat all wives or families equally as Islam prescribes.

I intend to make sense of the life-worlds of Muslimeen women and men in a predominantly Christian society that harbors ambivalent sentiments towards the presence of African Trinidadian Muslims.¹⁹ While not always hostile overtly, Trinidadians are not necessarily embracing either. In fact, similar to mainstream America's sentiments toward the Nation of Islam, the middle to upper classes maintain suspicion and tempered hatred while among the working class hope and admiration seem to be the primary emotions mediating the relationship between society's detritus and this apparently dissenting community. Not merely class but also ethnicity shape these emotive responses. These seemingly primal reactions are governed, sustained, and intensified by how public gestures and discourses—born out of neoliberal and modernist metanarratives of the juxtaposition of black bodies and terror—define and mark [male] African Trinidadian Muslim bodies as dangerous and criminal.²⁰ Interestingly, Muslimeen women are not

¹⁹ As is repeated throughout the text, the state and the Muslimeen have an ongoing conflict regarding ownership of the land on which the *masjid* stands as well as the legality of the constructions on the compound. The state claims in addition to them not having the legal right to the land, the Muslimeen also never obtained the necessary permits to build on the property either. On one occasion, Imam Abu Bakr spent twenty-one days in prison for starting to erect illegally a school on the compound.

²⁰ I do not intend to perpetuate the erasure of Indo-Trinidadian presence in state instabilities as with the 1990 attempted Muslimeen coup, but it is unquestionably people of African descent who predominate in the civil unrests in Trinidad and Tobago, from the Labor Movements through the 1970 Black Power Uprising to the 1990 attempted *coup d'état*. African Trinidadian Muslims were implicated in or engineered directly the 1970 and 1990 insurrections respectively; so there is some cause for their presence stirring national anxieties. Additionally, media depiction of police arresting black Muslims, televised excavation of the Jamaat al Muslimeen's grounds in the alleged search for weapons, and other public gestures of black Muslim transgressions and the spectacle of crime and punishment intensify an irrational fear around whom the nation sees as black Muslims.

stigmatized as threatening, evident in their absolute and uncontested deletion by the state, the public, and the Jamaat from the enquiries into the 1990 insurrection.

In an effort to erase notions of African Trinidadian Muslims as the “other” Muslims, as being inauthentic, converts, separatists, simply militant in converting/reverting to Islam, or as acting only upon “wounded attachments” to an imagined past, an attachment re-enacted in a Christian society through violent acts and other modes of resistance,²¹ my research hopes to shed new light on the historical, geographical and sociopolitical connections between African Trinidadian Muslims and Islam.

Thus, this case study at the Jamaat entails interdisciplinary fora and the exploration of multiple axes of oppression coordinating the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and the concept of national identity. Paying close attention to Nikol Alexander-Floyd’s distinction between the ideational and ideographic in the deploying of intersectionality, I will argue the indivisibility of what hegemonic feminism terms matrices of oppression, ever vigilant of categorical irreducibility when theorizing African or black bodies. The choices of Muslimeen women and men must be understood in the context of the ideational:

As an ideograph, intersectionality serves as a catch-all word that stands in for the broad body of scholarship that has sought to examine and redress the oppressive forces that have constrained the lives of black women in particular and women of color more generally. As an idea or as an analytically distinct concept, intersectionality is a moniker, identified with Crenshaw (1989), meant to describe the ‘intersecting’ or co-determinative forces of racism, sexism, and classism in the lives of black women (4).

²¹ I integrate Wendy Brown’s idea, drawn from Nietzsche, of identity construction predicated upon past injury.

That gender is at times a primary analytic in my text is not a contradiction but a necessary theoretical approach in looking at social behaviors and practices among the Muslimeen as well as those of the host nation.²²

The prioritizing of a gender lens necessarily and immediately invokes the critique of US black, Chicana, and transnational feminist theorizing since, logically, a primary analytic undermines the concept of multiplicity and intersectionality. Like Caribbean feminist and gender scholar and activist, Eudine Barriteau, however, I am vigilant about erasing women as subjects, especially women of color; so privileging and essentializing gender becomes innately strategic at times. I find myself positioned theoretically between Barriteau's caution that "theoretical skirmishes" (*Confronting* 5) often elide the female subject and Islamic feminist scholar Valentine Moghadam's argument that Qur'anic exegesis is inherently destructive to Muslim women's advancement since it replaces women with theology. Moghadam places Islamic feminism in a sticky place, for many Islamic feminists see Qur'anic exegesis as promoting not only gender egalitarianism but also arguing sexual autonomy and justice for Muslim women.

Nevertheless, through a particularized gender lens I hope to explore the relationship among modernity, the biopolitics of the racializing of specific religio-politico bodies and spaces, and processes of social and individual identity construction in Trinidad.²³ Seminal to my dissertation is Saba Mahmood's revolutionary politics of piety

²² Although the majority of Muslimeen are not immigrants to but citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by birth, I borrow the term *host nation* from the literature on Muslims in the diaspora, playing upon the Muslimeen's ambiguous position as simultaneously a part of and apart from the nation, inside and outside the state.

²³ While Joan Scott's *Gender as an Analytical Tool* and Mary Hawkesworth's "Confounding Gender" are foundational to women's and gender studies, I want to make African and Caribbean voices decidedly audible in my text. I will be relying on the works

that looks at what she terms a pious revival among Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt. This politics of piety, however, is but a subset of a larger discourse called *Islamic feminism*. Tied to theories employing contextual and conceptual renegotiations, Islamic feminism looks critically at the tensions among secular feminism, Islam, and fundamentalism. Harnessed to the interrelatedness among context, concept, and religion, Aisha Khan's ethnographic experiences with the Jamaat al Muslimeen as well as with predominantly Indo-Trinidadian Muslims offer insights into unpacking gender practices at the Jamaat.

At the same time, I must clarify that my project is neither to declare these Muslim women or men *feminists*, imposing a nomenclature that is very much a Western-derived linguistic privileging; nor is it my intention to position Muslimeen gender practices and relations between the dichotomy of agency and complicity. Cooke claims that Muslim women in the Arab world are resisting conservative constructions of Muslim women that stress the importance of virtue. That these women are consciously resisting this prescriptive behavior, Cooke argues, is *feminist* whether they name themselves as such or even resist such labeling (viii-ix). I make no such intervention, in fact invasion, into these Muslimeen lives at the Jamaat. Instead, I allow to emerge from the ethnographic process, terminologies and vocabularies more relevant to the actions, negotiations, preferences and compromises of submitting and obedient subjects.

My resistance to the term *non/feminist* being attached to my subjects, especially the female social actors, is not based on the fact that they are not "of the Arab world," therefore their bodies and identities are not threatened in the same way as Afghani Muslim women

of Abena Busia, Eudine Barriteau, Aisha Khan, Linden Lewis, Rhoda Reddock, Verene Shepherd, Patricia Mohammed, Belinda Edmondson, Merle Hodge, and Paget Henry to name a few.

for instance; consequently there is no need for feminist intervention. My reservation is that the very nomenclature *non/feminist* in this project seems to be a hegemonic, ethnocentric, liberal naming rather than an informing theoretical framework. Imposing a linguistic preconception in analyzing Muslimeen spiritual and material engagements is applying an epistemological frame that bears no relevance to their quotidian lives, religious beliefs, and social practices. Instead I take the position of bell hooks iterating “the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being; concurrently one may practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term, just as we can live and act in feminist resistance without ever using the word “feminism” (29). So I choose consciously not to inscribe either *apriori* or *posteriori* upon these corporealities and to enter *tabula rasa* the compound of the Jamaat al Muslimeen and allow self-inscriptions to unfurl during my ethnography.

While white European and US feminist scholars are seminal to women’s and gender studies syllabi globally, and necessarily so for their complicating of over-determined approaches to gender theorizing, I use self-consciously Caribbean theorists in my definition of gender, primarily Barribeau’s concept of the material and the ideological in the formation of gender identity. Barribeau’s work galvanizes how power shapes gender relations in the Caribbean. Throughout my text however, other Caribbean, African, and African American theorists undergird my analyses of the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and resistance in a postcolonial context. I rely on the works, including literary, of Caribbean feminists and activists namely Rhoda Reddock, Belinda Edmondson, and Verene Shepherd. Black US thinkers like Alexander-Floyd, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberle Crenshaw inform my ideas of difference and factor into my consciousness of what being a black woman or black man means conceptually

and contextually. Notions of Caribbean familial formations, including ideas of motherhood and co-mothering, are shaped by Caribbean activist and scholar Merle Hodge. Ghanaian poet and scholar Abena P. Busia and African American theorist Stanlie James bolster my argument that latent African antecedents still influence gender notions, practices, and relations in the Caribbean and infuse Muslimeen beliefs and practices.

The materiality of race can only survive within an economy of affect that perpetuates the differential treatment of racialized bodies simultaneously determining and commodifying differences. The dominant group is privileged while subordinate groups are devalued as *other* – disposable and lose-able. As Cornell West argues in his innumerable explorations of race and racializing, whiteness as a frame of reference is so ubiquitous it becomes invisible; so the hegemonic body is not subjected to abjectness as is the injurable body. Sara Ahmed's politics of emotion helps us understand even further why specific [negative] emotions attach and stick to particular bodies. These affective theories help me explain Muslimeenism and Muslimeenophobia. For Muslimeenism and Muslimeenophobia to thrive, however, the politics of recognition must first be engaged.

Visual cues mark and gender the post/colonial body sexually and racially. Additionally, popular culture as well as academic interpretations of visual markers and their centrality in the gendered, religious, cultural, political discourses codify Muslims arguably more so than other corporealities in an Islam-versus-the West dialectic. Kalpana Sheshadri-Crooks's regime of looking speaks profoundly to how the visual is fundamental in constructing and perpetuating the illusions and delusions of raced bodies. There are psychic, economic and political investments in actively "looking for race" despite widely

held academic beliefs in social constructivism. Both the racializing gazer and the gazed upon engage in materializing the belief in race because for both, although differentially, power, privilege and access to resources are at stake.

Paget Henry's, Lewis Gordon's, and Frantz Fanon's African and Caribbean philosophical interrogations frame the colonial mentality of both oppressor and oppressed. I am deliberate in privileging Henry, Gordon, and Fanon over Michel Foucault and Butler, though both Foucault's and Butler's works with power, discourse, subjectivity and abjectness to inform my analyses. In resisting being relegated to the heap of what Bauman calls wasted lives, Paulo Freire's theory of a pedagogy of the oppressed, Chela Sandoval's idea of oppositional consciousness, and Edmondson's critical look at African Caribbean masculinities are crucial to my interrogation of Muslimeen longevity and perpetuation. Since not one of Trinidad and Tobago's governments recognizes or validates the Muslimeen as a national group, evident in consecutive ruling parties' refusal to legalize the land on which the masjid and schools are located or to grant them state aid, legally the Muslimeen do not exist; so logically they should not. But they do abide; they continue to thrive; and in its staying power, the Jamaat continues to antagonize the state.²⁴

²⁴ Since the Commission of Enquiry began in 2011, Imam Abu-Bakr has refused to appear before the Commission. He said the only way he will testify is if he is paid at least the same as the Chair of the Committee, Sir David Simmons, and if the state also pays his legal fees. As Joel Julien reports Abu Bakr saying, "People exchange time for money. If they are not willing to pay me for my time, they are saying my time is worth nothing. That is slavery and I am a free man," he [Abu Bakr] said. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Pay-me-to-testify-213922161.html>. Accessed online August 6, 2013 Another Trinidad journalist, Julien Neaves quotes Abu Bakr, "As a matter of fact my time is more valuable than his [Sir David Simmons's] time," he said, noting that he has to look after an entire community that is being discriminated against." <http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,179474.html>. Accessed online August 6, 2013.

As much as I believe, like Aisha Khan, in the fluidity of categories of identity, I too am a strong advocate of Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism. Threading strategic essentialism through the fabrics of postcolonialism and postmodernism, seemingly disparate theories like the regime of looking, African Caribbean philosophy, affect, and oppositional consciousness congeal into a semiotics of *Muslimeenophobia* and a politics of *Muslimeenism* unpacked through what I term *postcolonial essentialism*, a theoretical intervention that locates the postcolonial body in the interstice between strategic essentialism and postcolonialism.²⁵

²⁵ This "regime of looking" is decidedly ironic since some Muslim women told me they traditionally tend to cover eyes in photographs and in toys since they believe that evil enters through the eyes. Other Muslims, however, do not adhere to this philosophy of covering the eyes, claiming they do not see the logic, for they watch television and go to the movies and allow their children to play with dolls and action figures.

Chapter One

Setting and Actors: African-Trinidadian Muslims in the Masjid and Madressa al Muslimeen in St. James, Trinidad

Unsettling Actors: The Muslimeen

Hopkins, Kwan and Aitchison argue:

Just as global migration and mobility are important to the geographies of Muslim identities, so too are local and regional experiences. Local experiences of negotiating Muslim identities, creating Muslim space and managing other identities alongside this, are significant in helping to understand the experience of being Muslim in various places. (3)

From its inception, the Jamaat has been disruptive to a cohesive Trinidad and Tobago national identity, literally and symbolically embodying the contradictions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and nation; so even going to the compound whether as a Muslim or non-Muslim is immediately construed as an act of transgression against family and against the state.

Popular culture including media coverage—print and electronic, local and international—of this group of Muslims from the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa in North West, Trinidad, and by extension all affiliates actual and perceived of this mosque, marshal around the lack of retributive justice for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and the lack of state retaliation against this particular Muslimeen community. The alleged lack of retribution was part of the insurrectionists' hostage-release negotiations procured through an amnesty agreement and parcel of state's latent accountability and corruption in dealing with state affairs. "The High Court in Trinidad upheld the amnesty...thus the insurrectionists remain free to this day and continue to be a thorn in the side of the government and the ruling establishment" (Deosaran 7).

Trajectories of African Muslim Presence in the Americas: African Muslims, Black Muslims, Nation of Islam, Orthodox Islam, and the Muslimeen

For addressing historical erasures, as well as, tracing African cultural lacunae in the Diaspora, Sheila Walker proposes a methodology of recovery:

Afrogenic perspectives offer both correctives and opportunities to become hip to jive scholarly and popular traditions that have propagated a story of the Pan-American African Diaspora that does not either conform to empirical reality or do justice to the much more complex story of the Americas. (39)

Employing these measures, it becomes evident that transnationalism has shaped the development of Islam in the Americas; for “[e]xperiences of migration and mobility are important to the construction, negotiation and contestation of various identities, including religious identities” (Aitchison, Hopkins, and Kwan 2). The majority of African slaves brought to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade were Muslims from West African nations (White 5). Yet, like in many countries comprising the Americas, this Muslim presence has been ignored or systematically eradicated from the annals of these regions’ histories. The tenets of Islam like defending the faith, solidarity, and self-affirmation made African slaves appear rebellious and difficult to control; so the slave owners made every attempt to suppress not just the practices of Islam but also the essence of rebellion in these recalcitrant [Muslim] slaves.

West African Islam itself was a syncretism of Orthodox Islam—brought by the invading Almoravids, orthodox “Muslim militants” led by Abu Bakr who organized the Sanhaja Berbers in a holy war against non-Muslims in the western Sudan (Turner 17) — and indigenous African law and governance. In the Sudan where Islam first emerged on the Africa continent, as in Ghana and Mali later, inherent in West African Islam were aspects of universalism, particularism, and separatism as “rich and powerful black rulers

... attempted to reconcile their new religion with African traditional religious and cultural praxis” (Turner 17). West African Islam gave birth to a new signification, *black Muslim*; and this racial and cultural signification, syncretism, and separatism carried over and played out in telling ways in the US and other parts of the African Muslim diaspora, including the Caribbean.

Originally from North Carolina, Noble Drew Ali, born Timothy Drew in 1886, migrated to Newark, New Jersey and founded the Caananite Temple sometime around 1913. In 1925, (coincidentally the year in which Malcolm X was born), Drew Ali changed its name to the Moorish American Science Temple (Curtis *Muslims in America* 34). In keeping with the concepts of naming and signification in West African Islam that Turner analyzes, Drew Ali was uncompromising in teaching African Americans to repudiate the terms *black*, *colored*, and *Negro* and instead adopt the identity of *Asiatic* since African Americans were originally Moors, whose ‘original religion’ was Islam (Curtis *Muslims in America* 34-35; Marsh *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection*).

From the 1800s, African Americans and African Caribbean figures made interventions into returning people of African descent to the continent. Some of the most prominent people and movements to attempt to reunite African people and reaffirm their African identity were Paul Cuffee in the early nineteenth century; the American Colonization Society and Edward W. Blyden in the early to mid-nineteenth century; the merging of Henry Highland Garnet’s African Civilization Society and Martin R. Delaney’s National Emigration Conference in the latter half of the nineteenth century; and Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the early

twentieth century. Drew Ali was committed to returning people of African descent to their homeland and their true religion. These themes of deracination and resignification continue to permeate and shape African Islam in the diaspora to the present day, especially in the US as well as Latin America²⁶ and the Caribbean where there is a Nation of Islam revival and other forms of African Islamic communities, like the Muslimeen in Trinidad.

Between the late 1920s and early 1930s W.D. Fard Muhammad, an itinerant self-identified Arab immigrant from Mecca, realized a social, economic and political void felt by black Americans and introduced a new religious ideology, a black Islamic concept (White 3).²⁷ This new Islam took root easily in a milieu of unbridled racist, discriminatory, demoralizing, and exclusionary policies and practices by white Americans against African Americans (White 21) and an already existing African Islam in America. As a young boy in Georgia, Elijah Poole had witnessed the lynching of a deacon of his father's church. Fleeing racism as an adult, Elijah left Georgia for Michigan; and it was there he met Fard Muhammad. Angry, frustrated and disillusioned by the brutality of white racism, Elijah found a calling in the teachings of Professor Fard Muhammad; and Elijah Muhammad emerged as the new messiah to lead African Americans out of the throes of white America's institutionalized racism and the ignoble bondage of the "white devils" as Muhammad called Caucasians.

²⁶ Telephone interview with David Muhammad on Farrakhan's visit to the Caribbean and Latin America. February 15, 2012, Trinidad.

²⁷ W.D. Fard Muhammad has a very controversial history starting from his declared point of origin in Mecca to having multiple identities including being the reincarnation of Nobel Drew Ali. NOI followers claim such an unflattering history is a white conspiracy to discredit Professor Muhammad. I defer from such a discussion, for it is irrelevant to believers as to my analysis.

Elijah believed that W.D. Fard Muhammad was God. This belief led to persistent and even vitriolic critiques from Orthodox Muslims globally and created tensions within the Nation of Islam. Islam is a monotheistic religion; and its first pillar, *shahada*, is the declaration of faith, *Lâ ilâha illallâh; -Muhammad-ur-Rasûl-Allâh*. “There is no other God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.” To do otherwise is to commit *shirk*. Elijah Muhammad’s belief that Fard Muhammad was God was the most egregious sin a Muslim could commit; and shirk, polytheism, was unforgiveable. This was the main reason the NOI was not sanctioned internationally as an Islamic order.

Furthermore, owing to his steadfast separatist and particularist politics and ideologies and his unwillingness to bring the NOI in line with Orthodox Islam, Elijah Muhammad would come to be at odds with one of his most revered students and leaders, Malcolm X, who later in his religio-politico life supported the NOI’s realignment to Sunni Islam. Elijah also ran afoul of who would become his successor, his fifth child, Warith Deen Muhammad, whom Elijah excommunicated from the Nation several times. After his father’s death, W.D. Muhammad shifted Elijah Muhammad’s anti-Orthodox ideologies from its particularist, separatist form of Islam to a more universal Orthodox Islam in the form of Sunni Islam.

Between February and April 2012, the current leader of the Nation, Minister Louis Farrakhan, who has roots in the Caribbean as his mother was Jamaican, spent a few months speaking in parts of the Spanish and English-speaking Caribbean calling for a black/African Caribbean economic coalition to help lift blacks out of poverty, crime-ridden environments, and a self-annihilating disposition in which the majority of African Caribbean people are embedded. Brother David Muhammad, the Trinidad and Tobago

liaison to the NOI accompanied Minister Farrakhan on his tour to parts of the Caribbean and Latin America.

Thus, even though the Nation has aligned its religious ideology with a more universal and less particularist Islam, it maintains its commitment to a progressive black consciousness and politics. The African antecedent of black signification remains indelible and even necessary especially when the authenticity of African Muslim identity in the African-Indian diaspora is called into question repeatedly, especially in Trinidad where Islam is seen as an Indo Muslim site.

Under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in the United States, the influence of the Nation of Islam's (later The World Community of al-Islam's) focus on civil rights and black empowerment in the 1960s and 1970s extended globally including to Trinidad and Tobago (Ibrahim 64). A group formed in a heavily Africacentric, Northwest region of Trinidad called Laventille, as notable for its diverse and outstanding cultural products like drumming, dance, plays, and art as it is for its high crime rate including gang violence and murder. This criminal element is still allegedly not a fringe but a constitutive component of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, an attribution that fosters the negative affect towards the Muslimeen community.

Since at the time of this group formation black consciousness raising and black power were at their peak, racial solidarity rather than religion engendered the group; black freedom fighters joined; power struggles ensued; and this seminal group splintered into The Islamic Party, The Jamaat al Muslimeen, and the Jamaat al Muminoon. Although almost all members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen were African, there was never total ethnic and racial foreclosure (Ibrahim 64).

Ironically, although now irrefutable in contemporary academic discourses that there was African Muslim presence in the Americas even before Columbus and that the commander of the Santa Maria was Muslim, these facts remain unknown and untaught to the general Caribbean populace. Consequently, it is no mystery why, in Trinidad, Islam is not also perceived as an African religion. Imperialism, apparently, was efficient in colonizing indigenous minds. Colonialism, seemingly, was effective in privileging the master's discourses over colonists' narratives, the allochthonous over the autochthonous, a discursive tug of war that persists to the present day as Henry unpacks in Chapters Five and Six.

Thus, perusing the table of contents as well as the indices of history and sociology books on the Caribbean curricula, one is hard-pressed to find the words *Islam* and/or *Muslim*; and where the terms appear indexed or in-text, their history is marginal at best.²⁸ Additionally, there is virtually no reference to the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion other than perhaps in terms of ethnic and gender ratios or stereotypes in discussions of sexual behavior within and across racial and ethnic lines during slavery and indentureship, since in the early waves of indentureship very few Indian women accompanied their male counterparts. Not only do history texts in the Caribbean not pay necessary attention to the connection among race, ethnicity, and religion but also, by erasing early African Muslim presence in the region, may even perpetuate the miseducation that East Indians/South Asians were the first, thus true, Muslims in the Caribbean.

²⁸ With the obvious exceptions of the sources cited in my dissertation, produced primarily by Caribbean feminist and gender scholars. These texts however are not used in primary and secondary schools and are used only by tertiary and postdoctoral researchers.

The unpalatable fact remains though that the movement of Muslims into the Caribbean and into Trinidad was through force primarily, for enslaved Africans were the first Muslims in the islands (Ibrahim 1). Scholarly texts, however, while attesting to the early presence of African Muslims in the region, diverge in the degree of successful eradication of Islam from the hearts of the enslaved Africans. Unarguable is that the colonizers did try systematically to uproot Islam from among the African slaves. Indisputable is that East Indian Muslims were able to practice their religion and not stripped of their religion as were the African slaves (Ibrahim 7); and “Indian Muslims in Trinidad were more fortunate than Muslims in other parts of the Caribbean because of their strength in numbers” (Ibrahim 7). Yet, many experts still maintain that despite rigorous imperial efforts to militate against the Islamic practices of their captives, Muslim slaves refused to divorce Islam from their heads and hearts, using it instead to rally against the dehumanizing effects of human bondage (Samaroo 1; Warner-Lewis 118, 119, 125; Reis 306-09; White 4; Diouf 1-3).

Colonial context

According to Caribbean scholars, the Caribbean region is particularly unique because it is constituted upon mass movements of people—voluntary, coerced, and forced—across diverse linguistic, geographical, and cultural boundaries. Conversely, Trinidad and Tobago’s colonial history underwrites a complex racial and ethnic demography that mediates social, economic, cultural, religious, political, and gender relations to the present day. The complexity, instability, and salience of the intersection of racial/ethnic and religious identities intensify when a religion like Islam, originally brought to the Caribbean by West African slaves but believed erroneously but popularly

in Trinidad and Tobago to be originally an Indo-derived religion, is mapped onto African Trinidadian Muslim bodies; for issues of conversion, reversion, essentialism, authenticity and identity are perpetually negotiated and contested on these bodies that fall outside of the Muslim somatic norm.

Colonized by the Spanish and the English with French settlers coming through the Treaty of Cedula, and with African slaves and East Indian Indentured laborers, Trinidad is a multiracial multiethnic society. As a direct result of its colonial history however, to the present day Trinidad remains a predominantly Christian, specifically Catholic, society where religion is also drawn along racial and ethnic lines. Islam and Hinduism are perceived as Indian religions, Spiritual and Shouter Baptists as African, and Catholicism and Anglicanism as European. Obviously then, Christianity is the dominant religion although all religions are tolerated. All major public religious holidays: Eid ul Fitr (Muslim); Divali (Hindu); Spiritual Baptist/ Shouter Liberation (Baptist); and Corpus Christi, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday (Christian) are also national holidays.

Paget Henry offers reasons for this delegitimization of African cultural formations: colonization and marginalization, internal polarization, and racialization. This analysis is expounded upon in Chapters Five and Six.

Islam in Trinidad: The 150-year Gap between Yunus Mohammed Bath and Yusuf Mitchell

The mapping of the history of Islam in Trinidad facilitates the amputation of African from Islam. Yunus Mohammad Bath, also recorded as Jonas Mohammed Bath and John Mohammad Bath, is one of the most notable and revered names to African Muslims in Trinidad; but to this day, his name as well as the African Muslim presence in the Caribbean remain absent from most Caribbean history books written even by Caribbean historians.²⁹ In the 1800s, Bath who claimed to be a sultan in Gambia, became the imam of a Port of Spain (the capital of Trinidad now) commune of Mandingo Muslims captured from Senegal, and he concentrated on purchasing the freedom of Muslim slaves and returning them to Africa. This group of Muslims seemed “uncrushed psychologically and bore no traces of dehumanization” (Ibrahim 3).

The history of African Muslims in Trinidad is not picked up again for one hundred and fifty years. Ibrahim also documents one of the first African Trinidadian reverts to Islam. A disenchanted twenty-three year old Yusuf Mitchell reverted to Islam in 1950. “By chance” he was passing the Jama Masjid in Port of Spain, Trinidad, when he heard the words of a Pakistani missionary Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui (Ibrahim 63). After following the missionary around for months, Yusuf took *shahadah*, describing his reversion as “the most beautiful turning point in his life” (Ibrahim 63).

Yusuf’s conversion story mirrors Elijah Muhammad’s and as we will see later on, several of the Muslimeen’s. The fact that his conversion was “by chance,” however,

²⁹ Brinsley Samaroo’s and Ibrahim’s texts are housed under Religion according to the Library of Congress classification system.

perpetuates the portrayal of African Trinidadians reversion to Islam as happenstance and thus capricious or faddish. The disappearing of an African Muslim presence from Trinidad for a century and a half lays bare a systemic and epistemic erasure that opened the discursive space for a counter-narrative, not even a chronological or parallel one but an oppositional account, of an Indian Islam in Trinidad to be inscribed upon the spatial and psychic landscape of the nation. Thus, given the colonial attempt to stamp out African slaves' own religion and its permissiveness with the indentured laborers, though Islam was given only a *rebirth* in the Caribbean by Indo-Muslims, the *recreation* story now relates the actual birth of Islam in Trinidad from an Indian origin.

The Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa

Founded on land given by the then PNM government to the Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG) to build a cultural center but later rescinded when the IMG sought a different location, the masjid was formed in the late 1970s on the abandoned land “through the merging of Dar Al Islam Al Muwahiddin (a splinter group from the Islamic Party of North America), followers of Ansar Laah” (Ibrahim 65), and black militants from a criminalized and Afrocentric city in Northwest Trinidad, Laventille. Ansar Laah is a black Muslim group that emerged out of New York in the 1970s under Malachi (Dwight) York. Construction on the land began as early as 1972:

After returning from Canada around 1978, Bakr with the Muslimeen group built a mosque, offices, housing quarters, a medical clinic, a primary school, grocery and garment factory on the Mucurapo lands – all at an estimated cost of TT\$3 million dollars. No approval was received for these structures from the Town and Country Planning Division. The Mucurapo conflict began. (Deosaran 80, 100).

Mansoor Ibrahim states the membership began with about 200 people but by 1995 comprised 2,000.

Bishnu Ragoonath estimates that African-Trinidadian Muslims whose presence was “negligible or even non-existent” before the 1960s and 1970s black power uprisings (414) saw their membership increase so that by the 1990 Muslimeen coup, African Trinidadian Muslims comprised five percent of all Muslims in Trinidad (414). Immediately after the coup, however, Ibrahim purports that membership diminished as members “went ‘in hiding’ basically for security reasons” (66, 115); but numbers soon climbed again. One of the imam’s wives number the membership at about 500 now in 2011 although there are many transients.

The state’s biopolitical agenda to guarantee wasted,³⁰ lose-able, and injurable³¹ lives and the capitalist enterprise to justify neocolonial and liberal projects are evident in the series of Trinidad and Tobago’s governments’ attempts to perpetually define the Jamaat al Muslimeen as only a site for vagabonds and criminals, therefore a corpus upon which to focus its assaults. Yet, the Muslimeen are not at all disempowered; for, ironically, political parties woo this very Muslimeen community during national election time. Although scholars like Ramesh Deosaran dispute the Muslimeen’s overrated involvement in National Elections, many scholars still concede the Muslimeen’s political and social capital to influence a certain demographic of citizens’ votes since elections in Trinidad are contested to a great extent along racial, ethnic, and class lines; and the Muslimeen can manipulate the votes of an African underclass. There is also documented

³⁰ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004.

³¹ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*. London: Verso, 2009

evidence of dealings between the Muslimeen and every single government that has been in power since the Jamaat opened officially in 1985, discussed in Chapter Five.

Paradoxically, after three decades however, the Jamaat al Muslimeen is still invalidated by the state through the state's refusal to regularize the land upon which the masjid and madressa were built by the Muslimeen, razed by the government in 1990, rebuilt by the Muslimeen, and still under reconstruction and subject to structural and epistemic violence.

Thus, even going to the compound whether as a Muslim or non-Muslim is immediately construed as an act of transgression both to outsiders and the Muslimeen themselves. My youngest brother had taken me on my initial visit to the compound in September 2007 to obtain the imam's consent to do my ethnography. Thereafter, I had to use public transportation to get to the compound since I did not own a car until nine months later.

For me to get to the Jamaat, I would just say to the taxi driver as I entered or was about to alight from the four to twenty-five seat taxi,³² "Jamaat please?" Immediately, that phrase would elicit some kind of reaction from the other passengers, either tacit or vocal, "You a Muslimeen?" The question was invariably less of a probe into my religious affiliation than into my socio-politico positioning. Furthermore, I knew the inquiry would

³² Regular taxis in Trinidad are not like cabs in America although this type of US car service is available upon request. Generally though, particular cars called taxis and color-coded mini buses called maxi-taxis, ply specific routes in designated zones: East, West, Central and South Trinidad. These vehicles hold from four to over twenty-five passengers depending on if the vehicle is a taxi or a maxi, the abridged name for the mini-buses. Since there are no designated stops along the route, passengers wait anywhere along the routes for vehicles that have space and alight wherever they want, before or at the end point called City Gate in the nation's capital city Port of Spain.

be merely for confirmation; for in Trinidad, many African Muslims are marked stereotypically as Muslimeen and negative emotions attach almost automatically both to black/African Trinidadian Muslim bodies generally and the Muslimeen specifically. As a black woman wearing what could be seen as Islamic clothing, going to the Jamaat could signal only one identity to others. In the early phases of my ethnography, in order to distance myself even further from any alliance with this stigmatized community, I would answer unequivocally in the negative.

“No,” Then I would offer the disclaimer, “[I’m] just doing research there.”

“You brave,” one passenger would retort.

“Be careful,” another would offer.

“Next thing you one of them,” yet another would interject. These conversations were not localized to just taxi talk but in essence were indicative of the standard discourses around Jamaat membership or attendance. The traditional affective responses are a curious mix of fear, caution, and intrigue.

The Imam

Lennox Phillip was born into a Catholic family in 1941 and attended Catholic elementary school. He joined the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 1959, and in 1969 left Trinidad to pursue his college education at Ryerson Technical Institute in Canada. After receiving his tertiary education in Canada, where he converted to Islam, Lennox Phillip returned to Trinidad in 1973 as Yasin Abu-Bakr. Abu means father; and Bakr means Shepherd. By 1979 he became involved with the factions of African Trinidadian Muslims who remained on the Mucurapo lands after the IMG declined the government’s offer.

Tall, charismatic, and generally soft-spoken, by 1979 Yasin Abu Bakr was readily selected by the sects of predominantly African Muslim men to be their leader of the Jamaat al Muslimeen. This African Muslim triangulation among Canada, the US and Trinidad congealed into an Islamic identity that bears resemblance to but is still different from even its closest allies, the Nation of Islam, and manifests itself in a politics of Muslimeenism specific to the Jammat. The imam has four wives, Annisa, Fatima, Atiya, and Indrani; and fifteen children including a step-daughter, his first wife's daughter. His step-son, Jissani, his first wife's son who was on vacation in Trinidad and scheduled to return to Howard University, was killed in a police raid on a house during the 1990 insurrection.

The Insurrectionists

On July 27, 1990 the jamaat marshaled its defiant stance against the nation state; and, with a negligible number of insurrectionists reportedly 114,³³ like a collective Dawud sought to bring down the Jalut of what they perceived to be religious persecution, sociopolitical inequalities, and economic inequities. The attempted *coup d'état* was against the ruling party, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), a conglomeration of the then extant National Action Congress, the United Labour Front (ULF), and Organization of National Reconstruction (ONR). Darius Figuera defines the insurrection as *a jihad* since the Muslimeen found it was time for armed resistance both

³³ Although all media and academic reports number the insurgents at 114, during the June 21, 2011 session of the Commission of Enquiry into the 1990 coup, Jamal Shabazz, one of the insurrectionists, called this total into question saying that the number was fabricated by the state, that there were more. According to Shabazz, however, this reconstructed figure “proves the will of Allah as there are 114 suras in the Holy Qu’ran.”

to defend the Islamic faith as the *masjid* was under occupation by state machinery (army and police) as well as to protect the disenfranchised people of Trinidad, a vulnerable population, primarily of African descent, frustrated by dire economic and social conditions. Hence the receptive climate for a politics of Muslimeenism.

During some of the 2011-12 sittings of the Commission of Enquiry, some Muslimeen who denied having any knowledge of the impending coup testified that on Friday 27, July 1990 there were “rumours that the Prince was coming.” At the time, they had no idea what the phrase meant and/or brushed off the idle talk. These insurrectionists figured, in hindsight, the then incomprehensible phrase was a code for the attempted coup. Later that day in downtown Port of Spain, loud explosions and gunfire shattered the Friday evening hustle and bustle. The coup had begun.

The insurrectionists blew up Police Headquarters in the capital city, Port of Spain, killing a still undisclosed number of police officers. According to Jada Loutoo, a journalist for one of the three local daily newspapers, *Newsday*, “documented evidence” presented by the Port of Spain General Hospital to the Commission of Enquiry, twenty-four persons died during the insurgency:

[Fifteen] 15 persons died of gunshot related injuries at the hospital; two police officers, one Jamaat al Muslimeen insurgent and four others died in the capital city and at the Red House; another insurgent died at Trinidad and Tobago Television studios at Maraval Road, and the sentry at the Police Headquarters when it was bombed on July 27, 1990. (“24 persons died”)

While the attack on Police Headquarters was being effected, other major state institutions were falling under Muslimeen control. Another faction stormed Parliament as it was in session, taking as hostages the Prime Minister, government ministers and Cabinet members. Although postmortem analyses of the coup almost ubiquitously point

to the lack of planning and thinking through, Abu Bakr had devised it was strategic to take over the media. So a group, led by Abu Bakr himself, commandeered the one television station at the time, Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT); and one of the two radio stations, *Radio 610*, capturing twenty-four employees of television station but releasing all the women.

By seven o'clock in the evening, instead of the regularly scheduled evening news program *Panorama*, Imam Abu Bakr flanked by heavily armed and visually militarized Muslimeen, one of the portraits that has become an enduring characterization of the Muslimeen and of the coup, appeared on TTT announcing the overthrow of the Trinidad and Tobago government, calling for calm, and appealing for citizens not to loot.³⁴ His appeal was not heeded as looting and civil disorder erupted in pockets of the country, primarily in Port of Spain and its environs. Some of the coup's casualties include looters. The insurgents surrendered on August 1, 1990 after sealing an amnesty agreement that the state contested afterwards but was upheld by the highest court of appeal, the Privy Council in London. Another blow to Goliath.

Traditionally then, given the colonial shaping of race, ethnic and gender relations in Trinidad; vestiges of racial and ethnic tensions; and Muslimeen hypervisibility, in Trinidad and Tobago discourses on the Muslimeen are mired not only in the production and consumption of male Muslimeen bodies but the production of them as already criminalized, more so disposable and lose-able, and antithetical to the commercialized unitary, paradisiac Trinidad identity. Among the Muslimeen, Islamic doctrine and

³⁴ The other perpetually deployed image is of the imam's surrender on Aug 1. The imam is shown exiting gates in full white Muslim clothing, with his hands held above his head, then setting down his high powered rifle before lying face down in the street.

religious affiliation transcend allegiance to local and national centers of government and destabilize national, racial, ethnic, religious, political, and social imaginaries of one-family nation. Yet the very presence of the Muslimeen designates the Jamaat a unique Muslim space at times apart from the nation as well as a part of the global umma. In Trinidad itself too, over thirty years after their formation and twenty-two years post-*coup d'état*, the Muslimeen continue to shape actively the history of Trinidad and Tobago as they persist in the preservation and hypervisibility of their Muslimeenism including commemorating annually the July 27 uprising. Deosaran, a leading scholar on the coup encapsulates the enduring threat the Muslimeen poses to the state claiming, “The Islamic and religious nature of the Jamaat al Muslimeen would tend to mask fundamentally the African nature of this entire event. But for the Jamaat, race was as, and even more important than religion. Bakr sought to create a Black Islamic State” (qtd in (Deosaran 1993, 52).

The state and Jamaat have a long and perpetuating history of conflict, contention, and antagonism. Decades before the insurrection, Ibrahim had claimed the “Jamaat al Muslimeen was victimized consistently” (66). During the 2011-2012 Commission of Enquiry into the events of 1990, several of the Muslimeen gave testimony echoing this historical fact of not only individual members being harassed by police but also the Jamaat itself being under occupation by state apparatus although a court ruled the combined force of police and army was illegal and had to vacate the premises. Members testified that even the diapers of babies were searched when families were leaving the compound.

According to Deosaran, “between 1988 and 1990 ... Abu Bakr faced several unsettling confrontations with the police (105). On “Nov 16, 1988 more than 160 police officers made a raid on the Muslimeen quarters, arrested 34 persons and reportedly seized three rifles and 247 rounds of ammunition (181). Ten weeks later on “Jan 30 1989 police again raided the mosque seizing a revolver and arresting two persons allegedly wanted in connection with murder and armed robberies. At the same time a combined team of police and army demolished in East Port of Spain buildings occupied by some Muslimeen members (Deosaran 181-82). Laventille, the virtual host city for a great number of Muslimeen, is in East Port of Spain. The straw, however, that seemed to finally break the camel’s back was the illegal military occupation of the Jamaat al Muslimeen on April 21, 1990 and the state’s recalcitrant refusal to obey court order to remove itself from the premises.

The state’s targeted treatment of the Muslimeen was neither new nor isolated as there was a history of African Trinidadian Muslims being categorized as troublesome and/or other. The state’s actions, however, at this time in 1990 far exceeded other forms of harassment or exclusion by other Islamic organizations and communities and the public. Scholars agree that Indian Muslims’ marginalization of African Muslims resulted in the Africans forming a separate group and building a separate masjid (Ibrahim 65-55). “Prior to their ‘Jamaat al Muslimeen’ African Muslims were not encouraged to participate in the mosques they frequented and their voice was largely quelled since their questions to those in authority were almost always regarded as threatening” (Ibrahim 66). From the Muslimeen perspective, these infractions by the state were certainly

prerequisites for the third jihad, taking up arms to defend the faith, since Islam was being threatened by the Jamaat being under assault or threatened by an enemy.

The Muslimeen Women

As I stated in the methodology section, when I conceptualized my ethnography, the Muslimeen women were to dominate my text. That they appear “as bodies” only at this moment is not to further subsume them or render them marginal to my research; but this seemingly delayed emergence speaks to the complexities of disentangling a web of historical, political, cultural, social and personal complexities that enwrap the extraordinary existence of the Muslimeen women and men. Here too, I give readers but an introductory view, devoting Chapters Two to Four to seeing their Muslimeenism performance and hearing their narratives.

Many Muslimeen women are well versed in the Qur’an and are progressive women. Some are educated formally, even holding multiple college degrees. Some own homes, land, and businesses; play musical instruments; learn foreign languages including Arabic and Spanish; have the latest technological gadgets like iPads and iPhones; and negotiate tenets of Islam like polygamy and obedience differently and strategically, especially across generations and educational levels.

Some have lived through the state’s decades of harassment and the 1990 occupation then demolition of their sacred mosque and compound. They and their children have been searched while entering and leaving the Jamaat. Some mothers have lost sons as a result of the 1990 insurrection and other instances of police brutality.³⁵ Yet again for some younger

³⁵ In 1985, one of Abu Bakr’s chief lieutenants, Abdul Kareem, was murdered in St. James, Port of Spain, Trinidad while in police custody. To this day details of the stabbing

Muslimeen women it is a daily personal *jihad* to reconcile their personal emotions, preferences, and ambivalences with Islamic decree. These physical, intellectual, and emotive negotiations, though expressed infrequently, can be as simple as from wearing make-up or nail polish or plucking one's eyebrows to wearing body-hugging clothing to extending the hijab to cover one's breasts to managing polygyny.

Some women, including Indo Trinidadian Muslim women, have been ostracized by their families for joining the Muslimeen; but acts of violence are not perpetrated by relatives against these women like it is in some patriarchal Islamic countries. There are incidences of domestic violence in Indo Trinidadian Muslim households, but those incidents are attributed more to the seeds of patriarchal Indian culture than to religion. Since Islam does not stand out as a marker on Indo Trinidadians, religion rightly or unfairly does not factor in these cases of violence.

Conversion or reversion to Islam by African Trinidadians is seen as a radical act. For Indo Trinidadian Muslims, becoming members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen is akin to a fall from grace. Although the Muslimeen are Sunni Muslims, the major Islamic associations in Trinidad like the Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJA); the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (TIA); and the Trinidad Muslim League (TML) comprising primarily Indo Trinidadians do not recognize the Muslimeen as an Islamic community and may even find them a source agitation, akin to the sentiments Orthodox Muslims felt for the early Nation, especially before the Nation's conversion to Islamic

remain sketchy and no one was ever arrested. In December 1990, however, the Appeals Court ruled the police responsible for Kareem's death; and his wife and two children were granted compensation. Additionally, Abu-Bakr's step-son, on vacation from Howard University, was killed in a house during a police raid in the days following the coup attempt.

orthodoxy. For all these women, then, their choice to stay Muslimeen or revert to Islam at the Jamaat is loaded with social, cultural, familial, and personal considerations.

Muslimeen women are by no means a homogenous group; for differences in class, ethnicity, age, mothering, preferences in television shows, and even in the definition of “good Muslim” exist among them. The unifying thread, nevertheless, is that they all appear to use Islam and the site of the Jamaat al Muslimeen physically and psychologically to order and make sense of their quotidian lives. The term *Islamic feminism*, explained in detail in Chapters Two and Three is not part of their consciousness or vocabulary, although many cite the Qur’an when making decisions or defending a position they hold. They are neither Afghani Aisha nor the infamous Blue-Bra protester, ubiquitous symbols of oppressed Muslim woman. These kinds of patriarchal violences and repressed Muslim woman are not part of the Muslimeen culture, even behind closed doors, given the formal and informal discussions to which I have been privy for almost five years.

Yet, in the midst of personal ambivalences and religious apartheid, there is no contradiction for Muslimeen women between holding multiple academic degrees; being self-assured, opinionated, ambitious, industrious individuals; and at the same time being submitting Muslims, obedient and pious wives, devoted mothers, and community-oriented sisters. During my ethnography, I had to re-imagine constantly many traditional and emerging stereotypes of *the* abject Muslim woman from the Muslim world as well as of the Muslimeen themselves from local portrayals.

Constructing African Muslim Identity in a Muslim-hostile World and a non-Muslim Nation

How then, in an age of seeming irrepressible and irascible global Islamophobia and local Mulimeenphobia-- intense anti-Muslim sentiment --and the hegemonic reproductive site of Muslims as only Arab/Middle Easter/South Asian, do Muslim women and men especially of African descent construct, negotiate, and contest their identities in a non-Muslim, multicultural society, namely Trinidad, where Muslims comprise about six percent of the total population?

Here, it is necessary to show a more detailed demography of Trinidad and Tobago, unique for the fact that the two major ethnic groups, Indo-Trinidadians and African Trinidadians are almost equal statistically and comprise about four-fifths of the national population. Guyana (geographically and culturally problematic in its own way) is the only other Caribbean country that comes close in population composition with 50 percent East Indians and 36 percent Africans.³⁶ The 2006 *World Fact Book* shows the following racial and ethnic statistics from the 2000 Trinidad census, although socially the distinction between race and ethnicity remains as liminal textually as contextually: Indian (South Asian) 40%; African 37.5%; mixed 20.5%; other 1.2%; unspecified 0.8%. In terms of religious denomination Roman Catholics comprise 26%; Hindus 22.5%; Anglicans 7.8%; Baptists 7.2%; Pentecostals 6.8%; Muslims 5.8%; Seventh Day

³⁶ Although located geographically in South America, Guyana is considered part of the English-speaking Caribbean owing to its colonial history.

Adventists 4%; other Christian 5.8%; other 10.8%; unspecified 1.4%; none 1.9% (2000 census).³⁷

Indo-Trinidadians dominate the Muslim population; so Indo-Trinidadian Muslims tend to get what little critical attention is paid to the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and Islam in Trinidad.³⁸ Although written decades ago, still relevant today is the fact that

continued projection of an 'Indian' Islam has naturally led to a feeling of alienation amongst African Muslims. National radio programmes hosted by Muslims who are viewed more as Indians than Muslims in the eyes of the community have been dynamic in projecting Indian culture to the extent that the portrayal of anything Islamic, is Indian. (Ibrahim 66)

Although David Muhammad, the liaison in Trinidad to the Nation of Islam, had his own radio program four nights a week for several years and now speaks every Sundays from 10am to noon at the Trinidad and Tobago National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS), Muslim programming remains ostensibly Indian. Indeed, African Trinidad Muslims at times do receive media attention; but it is invariably negative, focused primarily on Imam Abu Bakr's many trials and court appearances and other Muslimeen as will be discussed in Chapter Five. Almost every mention of an African Trinidadian Muslim in the local newspapers is of a member of the *jamaat* as perpetrator or victim of a violent crime, a representation that has itself become the canvas on which the portraits of all African Trinidadian Muslims are painted.³⁹ The

³⁷ The Trinidad and Tobago government completed a census in May 2011, but to date the data have not been collated and analysed far less published.

³⁸ See Peter van der Veer's *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*. From the very title, it is obvious that African Trinidadians are on the margins of this discourse.

³⁹ For example, RoboCop is a notorious repeat offender whose criminal activities are documented in the newspapers. The media always notes he is a member of the Jamaat al

section “Criminalizing the Muslimeen Body” in Chapter Five will interrogate this epistemic and discursive violence in the media and other sources.⁴⁰

Given the contentious history of the Jamaat al Muslimeen I chose this site for several salient reasons:

1. to define Muslimeen in the jamaat’s own terms;
2. to examine its gender relations and practices as informing to national and regional gender dynamics;
3. to instate its female members as irreducible components of the jamaat;
4. to legitimize its Islamism since its members are predominantly of African descent; and, in the Caribbean, Islam is seen as an East Indian religion;
5. to reconcile Indo-Muslim presence to *Muslimeenism*;
6. to interrogate and de/legitimize the stigma of criminality;
7. to trace the roots of *Muslimeenophobia* by unpacking its political history, primarily its ambivalent and ambiguous relationship with the state; to unearth the reasons for the negative politics of emotions attached to Muslimeen bodies;
8. to humanize, not necessarily normalize, these social actors;

Muslimeen, although in my five years at the Jamaat I never once met RoboCop. In contrast, articles of Indo-Muslims center on cultural and religious practices. Recently, a couple featured on the front page of one of the Trinidad dailies, *the Express*, was accused of murder; however, only the woman’s *hijab* belied their religion. The article never made mention of their ethnicity which visually appeared Indo or of their religion which was obviously Islam.

⁴⁰ During the third phase of the Commission of Enquiry into the events of 1990, Brother Kala Akii Bua stated that under the State of Emergency effected August 21, 2011 in certain hot spots of Trinidad, not a single member of the Jamaat al Muslimeen has been arrested, not even for breach of curfew. He said if it were otherwise, it would be plastered across the newspapers.

9. and finally to revisit policy issues around regularizing ownership of the land.

Like the semiotic and affective capital of Aisha and Blue Bra, for the Trinidadian mainstream the Muslimeen are unarguably the most stigmatized and maligned Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago and are a metonym for all African Muslims. For this reason, the Jamaat is the site of my intervention if indeed displeasing and invalid sentiments surrounding the bodies of African Trinidadian Muslims are to change. In essence, then, I went into the belly of the beast to fight the leviathan of ignorance and irrationalism fueling a politics of adverse emotions attached to Muslims globally; and locally to African Trinidadian and black Muslims generally, African Trinidadian male Muslims specifically, and the men and women of Jamaat al Muslimeen particularly.

Chapter Two

Realignment of African Consciousness, Feminism, and Power in Caribbean

Feminist and Gender Theorizing: Postcolonial Essentialism

African slavery in the Americas, in its erasure of cultural connections and lifelines and its disruption of historical memory, created a group of diasporic Africans desperate to reach back across the Atlantic and history to reconnect to an ancestral 'homeland' and articulate a coherent cultural identity that could offer meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. Yet this endeavour is fraught with difficulty. (Davis 276)

My aim is to prevent women's subjectivity from disappearing from the discourses on gender. (Barriteau *Theorizing* 14)

An inquiry into the constitution of the self does not take the personal preferences and proclivities of the individual to be the object of study, but instead analyzes the historically *contingent* arrangements of power through which the normative subject is produced. (Mahmood 33. *My Italics*)

The epigraphs at the start of this chapter are intended to congeal into a methodology of self-affirmation for postcolonial male and female Muslim bodies as they seek to negotiate their Muslim identities in a predominantly Christian country. Although at first glance the quotes appear to derive from distinct disciplines and discourses, they will all come to reveal overt and covert dynamics of history and power in the complex and dialectical processes of subjugation and subject formation in which culture, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender play inalienable roles. Through an in-depth, but by no means exhaustive, spatial and temporal journey through various feminist discourses—primarily Islamic, Black US, and Caribbean—this chapter attempts to arrive at a nascent theory that begins to illuminate the implications on local and global scales of gender practices and gender relations among the members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen in Trinidad. Against a complex and dynamic ethnic, cultural, geographical, and political

landscape as well as on literal and metaphoric planes, the Muslimeen in Trinidad complicate and ultimately destabilize neoliberal and binarizing ideologies that have secured globally a Western racialized, anti-Islamic rhetoric.

To iterate, Trinidad is neither first nor third world. It is not situated in the East-West dialectic or nestled neatly in the North-South dichotomy. Its Muslims are neither Middle Eastern nor Arab; but most Indo Muslims in Trinidad claim an Eastern ancestry from the Asian continent, and African Trinidadian Muslims identify primarily with the African continent. Additionally, given Trinidad's colonial history, ideologies of race and ethnicity are intricately complex; for identities of black and brown, Indian and African, and even Islamic take on different meanings both globally and locally on Trinidad Muslim bodies. It stands to reason, then, that none of the extant feminist and gender discourses address the Muslimeen particularly, conceptually, or contextually. How for example do African Muslim men and women, namely the Muslimeen who live in a postcolonial non-Muslim country, negotiate their quotidian existence in a nation that refuses to validate them constitutionally yet categorically racializes and criminalizes them?

Feminist Contours

Muslim Secular Feminism and Islamic Feminism: The linguistic jihad from repressive representations to empowering epistemologies on Muslim women

Privileging and drawing heavily upon Foucault's theories on subjectivity, sovereignty and discourse, Western feminisms isolated systems of power as the primary instruments through which social and structural inequality and inequities are not only

created but also perpetuated, normalized, and internalized by communities of people as well as by individuals. So power impacts directly upon racial, sexual, and gender relations. Western feminists and those enmeshed in hegemonic feminism perpetually identify patriarchy as the predominant system of power facilitating women's oppression and men's domination. Yet as Chandra Talpade Mohanty throughout her oeuvre argues, systems of power are not isomorphic or isotropic. They manifest themselves and operate differently to oppress women differently, hence the myriad of feminisms seeking to rectify the imbalance in status between the world's men and women. Feminists from what is considered the developing world and global South look more to imperialism and colonialism and their accompanying conspirators—capitalism and racism—as primary operatives in women's subjugation; and those theorizing about sex, sexuality and gender relations in the Middle East hold fundamentalism under a microscope.

Of course, systems of power are not discrete and neatly categorical; rather they tend to be cleistogamous, the state of a flower bearing simultaneously both large and small flowers, but where the small flowers do not open; rather they self-pollinate, for example a pansy. Owing to cliché, turning to anthography, the description of flowers, may not seem an appropriate field from which to harvest analogies for debilitating structures that oppress women and other vulnerable groups of people. Yet, I am not drawing upon the traditional and literary use of flora as natural symbols of beauty, captivating aromas, or tragic ephemerality but sketching the interdependent constitution of the organism itself as well as the intercorrelation between the organism and its environment, between, as Asma Barlas argues later in this chapter, texts and contexts (*"Believing Women"* 21).

So, this particular schemata of a pansy portrays the complexity of the relationship among large and small systems of power and to self-propagating internal components. Subsequently, what emerges from this metaphor and remains particularly salient to feminist discourse is despite political, cultural, and geographic positioning, power is diffusive and inheres in great and few degrees in external and internal organs. Where there is divergence between the Animalia and Plantae kingdoms, however, is in homo sapiens' seeming capacity for transcending nature in its strictest meaning thereby exercising agency.

Feminists, especially from more marginalized groups, are ever vigilant of autochthonous methodologies of appropriating power; and discourse is one of those strategic tools of subversion—as is silence. Thus, any local or global ideological shift, whether in hegemonic or in subaltern paradigms, impels feminist and gender theorists to “examine the discourses on feminism and human rights... and explore indigenous modes of emancipation for the masses in general and women in particular” (Majid qtd. in Saliba 53). The emancipatory conduits to which Anouar Majid alludes may be physical, rhetorical, or irreducible discursively and materially.

Muslim feminist discourses tend to be categorized into two discrete theoretical camps: secular and religious/fundamentalist; but those classifications are reductive. Islamic feminism

by contrast burst on the global scene as a new discourse or interpretation of Islam and gender grounded in *ijtihad*, or independent intellectual investigation of the Qur'an and other religious texts. The Islamic, or religious, framing of this new feminism did not mean that 'the secular' in the sense of worldliness was absent. This new critical thinking was understood by its shapers from the outset as linked, of necessity, to paving the way for gender liberation and social change in particular context. Its concern has not been simply a religious and societal reform

but a fundamental transformation reflecting the practice of an egalitarian Islam.
(Badran 3)

Moghadam predicates her etymology of the term *Islamic feminism* from a debate on a 1994 talk Afsaneh Najmabadi, Iranian expatriate and Islamic feminist scholar, gave at the School of Oriental and African Studies, in London. Najmabadi characterized Islamic feminism as “a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists” (paraphrased from Moghadam 1143). Nayereh Tohindi characterizes Islamic feminism as “a movement of women ‘who have maintained their religious beliefs while trying to promote egalitarian ethics of Islam by using the female-supported verses of the Qur’an in the fight for women’s rights, especially for women’s access to education’” (Tohindi qtd. in Moghadam 1147).

Necessarily, in adhering to the feminist methodology of self-reflexivity, with the coinage of *Islamic feminism* came the accompanying and sustaining debate on the legitimacy of the term itself as Islamic feminism appeared to be a syntactical as well as ideological juxtaposition some feminists themselves felt and continue to feel is oxymoronic and incommensurable in its very nomenclature. Critics of Islamic feminism see reliance on theology rather than the lived realities of Muslims’ lives as reinforcing patriarchy (Moghadam 1165). “Religious doctrine should not be the basis of laws, policies, or institutions” (Moghadam in Saliba 43); for even though “religious reform is salutary and necessary” exegesis is inherently limiting for it “could reinforce the legitimacy of the Islamic system, help to reproduce it, and undermine secular alternatives (Moghadam in Saliba 38). Furthermore, Moghadam argues

Women’s rights and human rights are best promoted and protected in an environment of secular thought and secular institutions, including a state that defends the rights of all its citizens irrespective of religious affiliation,

and a civil society with strong organizations that can constitute a check on the state (Moghadam in Saliba 40).

Conversely, Majid sees exegesis as a mode of empowerment for Muslim women and recommends progressive clerical reinterpretations of the Qur'an in advancing women's social and political causes. Majid's grounds his argument in the knowledge that the Prophet's wives themselves like "'Aisha, Umm Salama, and Umm Habiba were renowned for their 'intellectual qualities,' and 'Aisha is said to have been one of the principal sources of 2,210 *hadiths*'" (Majid qtd. in Saliba 86. Italics in original). Theology is not necessarily synonymous to fundamentalism; for, in articulating progressive exegesis, Majid calls for the simultaneous rejecting of global capitalism and religious fundamentalism.

Similarly, in her Preface to "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, Barlas claims that the objective of her text is "not only to challenge oppressive readings of the Qur'an but also to offer a reading that confirms that Muslim women can struggle for equality from *within* the framework of the Quran's teachings, contrary to what both conservative and progressive Muslims believe" (xi. My Italics). So Barlas "concentrate[s] on recovering the liberating and egalitarian voice of Islam" ("*Believing Women*" 4). Muslim women's right to *Tafsir*, Qur'anic hermeneutics, then, is as Islamic as their right to perform *taqwa*, piety. I would be remiss, however, if I do not emphasize that Barlas also acknowledges that women do not have a monopoly on feminist readings or that feminist interpretations are inherently female:

I do not ... valorize communities of women readers as the sine non qua of liberatory readings, as feminists do. To me the fact that both men and women can produce patriarchal readings or liberatory ones is an acknowledgement of the relationship between texts and the contexts of their readings (or between

discourses and materiality) and an argument against biological essentialism. (*“Believing Women”* 21)

Although the enactment of an Islamic feminism may be attributed arguably to the Prophet’s wives themselves and the coinage of the term may be credited to Najmabadi in the 1990s, as an academic feminist discourse Islamic feminism emerged debatably at least two decades prior to the 1990s during moments of nationalist thrusts in the East. Most particularly, the Iranian women’s political agendas and activities during the Iranian Revolution appear to be a watershed moment in the shaping of Islamic feminism. It can be argued that in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the ensuing reformist movements through the 1990s precipitated what came to be termed *Islamic feminism*.⁴¹ I vacillate between the terms Islamic feminism and Islamic feminisms for Islamic feminism as an ideology has not remained static and intransient but is very fluid travelling across space and time. Like one is apt to chronicle Western feminism(s) in waves, there appear to be at least two significant phases of Muslim feminist literature important to this study:

- one, Muslim secular feminism from the 1970s to 1990s fueled by postcolonialism, revolutionary ideologies, global nationalist anti-colonial struggle and the subsequent passing, rather failure, of these promising mass movements and proletariat upheavals; processes of modernization, dynastic decline, and independent state building (Badran 3);

⁴¹ For a provocative discussion of Islamic feminism, including definitions, see Moghadam, Valentine. “Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate.” *Signs* 27.4 (2002): 1135-71.

- two, Islamic feminism, post-1990s, predicated upon a less secular-liberal more clerical-progressive reclaiming of Islam as integral to Muslim female identity.

The earlier period of Muslim feminist writing embodies the disillusion felt by Muslim women with the betrayal of the ideologies of populist revolution that unseated the Iranian monarchy in 1979. With the clerical implementation of Islamic doctrine after the revolution, Islamic feminism focused primarily on repression of Muslim women, with a veiled Muslim woman emerging to the present day as one of the most poignant and enduring icons of women's oppression. Although veils and other head coverings are worn by Christian women, the veil has become a metonym for a disembodied Muslim woman. Islamic nationalist disenchantment was almost ubiquitous. In her Preface Mahmood claims that

[b]y the time my generation of Pakistanis came to political consciousness during the 1970s and 1980s, the high moment of postcolonial nationalism had passed and there was considerable disillusionment with what the 'not-so-new nation' could provide for its citizens. (ix)

Still, the hunger for social and gender equality and the toppling of dictatorial regimes gnawed at feminist political consciousness, especially in the East and global South where postcolonial appetites were whetted and yet to be satiated. So necessarily, a kernel of transformational politics remained rooted and continued to sprout. Mahmood asserts further that this sense of mixed emotion was

not so different from our counterparts in Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia, where the postcolonial condition had generated similar sense of disappointment but also a continued sense of nourishment, borne out of the promises that the twin ideologies of critical Marxism and feminism held out for us" (ix).

That periodic deflation of the postcolonial bubble—coupled with the liminality among the past, present and future where Islamic traditions were concerned—led Mernissi to discern in her Introduction to her 1987 edition of *Beyond the Veil*:

I did not know in 1975 that women's claims were disturbing to Muslim societies not because they threatened the past but because they augured and symbolized what the future and its conflicts are about: the inescapability of renegotiating new sexual, political, economic, and cultural boundaries, thresholds, and limits. (xvii)

This inescapability—of renegotiating what, in essence, are unavoidably reconfigurations and reconstitutions of self and others—ushered in a different Islamic feminist rhetoric in tone and temperament. Within this discourse of the 1990s after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the rebirth of leftist progressive sensibilities that included women's rights and women's equality, the discursive paradigm shifted to more positive expressions of Muslim women's empowerment, ownership of Muslim woman identity including piety, and on embodiment than on Muslim women's oppression, sexual and other repression, and complicity in their subordination.

In the international media and in academia, Muslim men and women are subjected to more negatively sexed, gendered and racialized portrayals than any other religious body. To simultaneously facilitate, validate, and perpetuate these adverse codifications, hegemonic representations fix these servants of Allah⁴² in a third world context; and injurious, modernist language on war on terror mark them as other, even subhuman. As Aisha Khan notes, place informs identity. Homi Bhabha argues the third world is racialized. Ahmed argues terror is racialized. Reddock and Bauman and a host of

⁴² Taken from the title of Sylvianne A. Diouf's book, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*. New York: New York University, 1998.

theorists from many disciplines argue the *other* is racialized. Sheshadri-Crooks and Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis argue race and ethnicity are racialized. Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander argue women's oppressions and subjugation are racialized. Henry and Gordon argue philosophy is racialized. Alexander- Floyd, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen, Gloria Anzaldúa argue even feminism is racialized. So Muslim women and men are misrepresented, dislocated, and disquieted on multiple planes; for they embody all of these frames of reference in the fundamentalist, male, Middle Eastern/Arab, Islamic terrorist and the iconic oppressed and subservient Muslim woman, even if she too is a suicide bomber.

Thus, given this currency of stereotypical, racialized images of Muslim men and women to advancing neocolonial incursions into what the West continues to construct as third world nations, at present it appears the debate on secular and Islamic feminism continues to predominate in hegemonic feminist scholarship. On one hand, secular Muslim feminists appear to distance themselves from theology which they see as restricting and regulating; and Western scholarship tends to privilege any discourse that purports to liberate Muslim women from the yoke of Islamic fundamentalism and bring women from behind the veil. On the other hand, Islamic feminists embrace the Qur'an as a liberating mechanism, purporting that the suras validate and reinforce the value of women.

Yet, despite the academic schism between secular and religious feminisms, in essence the objectives of Muslim feminists are more coterminous than dichotomous especially with Western feminists' appropriation of the rhetoric on Muslim men and women and in the face of Islamophobia. Margot Badran suggests

Several elements catalyzed the rise of Islamic feminism. Women, both secularists and the religiously oriented, grew increasingly concerned at the imposition and spread of a conservative reading of Islam by Islamist movements, and found the need to respond in a progressive Islamic voice. (303)

Consequently, Muslim women who are both activists and theorists are hunkering down in discursive trenches to defend against the physical and epistemic violences meted upon Muslim bodies. What appears to remain priority for Islamic feminist scholars, whether categorized as secular or clerical, is strategizing about developing indigenous feminisms that speak to their cultural, political, historical, and geographical specificities and contextualities, an ongoing project that reflects the position of other sisters in the South. Meanwhile, Muslim women in these very bunkers are continuing to navigate gender relations and practices on quotidian planes.

So, while feminisms have always included and are engaged in the social, economic and political concerns of men and children (female and male), with ideological shifts feminists must be mindful to maintain a self-reflexive *en garde* posture; for given the biopolitical tendency of globalizing, neoliberal, modernist agendas, women, especially *other* women, are perpetually at risk of being marginalized in women-centered discourses; and more disturbing, as Alexander-Floyd argues, is that women of color and racialized women are in an even more precarious position of being disappeared completely from the very platforms they invented for their voices and visibility. The appropriation of their very own rhetoric, especially by neoliberal feminists, erases women of color from their own discourses by neoliberals appearing to speak of equality and equity but inserting *post* as a suffix with identity and race and even black.

Sketching a Map through US Sisters of Color Feminisms

We in the global North, South, and East live in an affective economy rife with seemingly self-perpetuating racism and prejudice; so although some theorists are partial to the *post* in postmodern and postcolonial—nevertheless ever vigilant of neocolonialism—they are not yet ready to insert the *post* in post-race, post-black, or post-identity. The politics of crafting and reaffirming one's identity is still necessary for communities of people who are subjected to effacing hegemonic ideologies, structures, and practices.

It is a well-established fact in US feminism that white feminists have often accused their black counterparts of not producing theory. Such a negation of black women's scholarship is still evident. Collins iterates:

Assuming that only a few exceptional Black women have been able to do theory homogenizes African-American women and silences the majority. In contrast, I maintain that theory and intellectual creativity are not the province of a select few but instead emanate from a range of people. (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* viii)

For second-wave feminists, a major point of departure from liberal feminist theorizing was critical attention to women's bodies. Fearing that women's oppression lay in their biological make-up, especially their reproductive capacity, first-wave liberal feminists sought to avoid the organism inherent in encasing women's social and civic issues in women's anatomy. Second-wave feminists, among them women of color, rejected this immateriality which subsumed corporeality.

Through the late 1960s to the 1990s and even in the twenty-first century, black, Chicana, and transnational feminists argued theoretically the indivisibility of women's social, political and economic conditions from women's anatomies, especially women of color. These discourses, all searching for paths through structural and ideological

effacement and exclusion, were often parallel and interlocutory; therefore, it is not my intention to map a chronology here or engage in a literature review. Instead I look at the tensions within identity politics and the concept of difference, and the importance of using these tensions strategically and productively.

In an attempt to complicate the concept of a hyphenated or hybrid Mexican-American, Chicana feminist theorists Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga pioneered a politics of Mexican-American marginalization and self-affirmation. Anzaldúa coined the term *mestizaje* consciousness, which appeared in circulation in the 1980s. As far as difference thinkers were concerned, dualities were sterile; and *mestizaje* consciousness sought to transcend binaries that did not explain the complexities of straddling geographical borders or embodying racial, sexual, and cultural multiplicities.

I segue now to Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, for it is to preserving its integrity and particularity to the oppressions of black women that Alexander-Floyd is committed in her unpacking of the ideational and the ideological. The concept of intersectionality evolves out of, encompasses, and is buttressed by a range of US black women's epistemologies and methodologies including oral histories and written narratives documenting lived experiences that spoke to multiple and simultaneous oppressions and multiple consciousness. As Deborah K. King makes abundantly clear, "The necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of black feminist thought" (King 43).

Black feminist theorists from the US have made immeasurable contributions to feminist as well as to women's and gender studies; and Caribbean scholars' understanding of the legacy of slavery upon black bodies and sexualities, male and

female, are informed by black feminist thought. Evelyn Hammonds' 'Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality'; King's, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology"; and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* are just some seminal works theorizing the lives of black women in America given the history of slavery, the exploitation and dehumanization of black women's bodies and the ways in which interlocking matrices of oppressions like race, sex, and class impact upon black women experientially and epistemologically.

The concepts of double jeopardy (racism and sexism) and triple jeopardy (racism and sexism and classism) became characteristic of black womanhood. US black feminist theorists, however, rejected the mathematical equation of oppressions as additive (race plus sex plus class) or singularly incremental, for instance, focusing on economics if classism is seen to be the major oppression in a black women's life (King 47). King argues that "such assertions ignore the fact that racism, sexism, and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems" (King 47). King builds upon the double and triple jeopardy models that could be misapplied, proposing instead, "an interactive model . . . multiple jeopardy" (King 47), a multiplicative process that "better captured those [interlocking] processes" (King 47).

King defines the four salient components of a black feminist ideology. Black feminist theory "declares the visibility of black women"; "asserts self-determination as essential"; "challenges the interstructure of the oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism both in the dominant society and within movements for liberation"; and "presumes an image of black women as powerful, independent subjects" (King 72).

The liberal critique of identity politics is that it is essentialist; and as Crenshaw explains, liberal sensibilities are “in tension with dominant conceptions of social justice” which see categories of race and gender locked within power structures of domination and bias that exclude people who are different; so these categories should be “empt[ied] of any social significance” (Crenshaw 1242). Crenshaw argues however that “[t]he problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw 1242). Although identity politics is predicated upon privileging sameness and mobilizing around similar agendas, identity politics is not necessarily at odds with the recognition of difference(s) strategically. What Crenshaw highlights about *identity politics* is the danger inherent in homogenizing all women for example, obscuring ways that other intersecting categories of identification, like race and class, may also shape the types of violence to which a woman is subjected. Intersectionality then, considers the ways in which interlocking or cleistogamous categories impact upon how a body is treated as well as how that body reacts to its physical and social environment. Intersectionality speaks to the specificities of identities at the same time it espouses difference.

The discourse then returns to the salience of the materiality of a body, the biological characteristics that race it, and sex it, then gender it and class it. Yet, materiality and essentialism in and of themselves are insufficient to do the work of liberating the body. There must be an emancipating paradigm. That is, not only do intersectionality and multiple jeopardy require the materiality of a soma, an organic entity, but also they necessitate a politics of concretizing deliberately, even if not

homogenizing, this organism. Hence the paradoxes of postmodernism and strategic essentialism taken up later on this chapter and in Chapter Three.

Caribbean Feminist Contours

Similar to Islamic feminist agendas and black feminist thought, Caribbean feminists and gender scholars have for decades been dissatisfied with what Barriteau calls “imported theoretical constructs that did not stimulate critiques of epistemologies, methodologies and practices, and therefore [sic] reinforced and maintained exclusions and invisibility around key dimensions of women’s lives” (*Confronting* 3). So Caribbean scholars have called for and have themselves crafted indigenous Caribbean feminist and gender theories. Reddock defines feminism as the “awareness of the oppression, exploitation and or subordination of women within the society, and the conscious action to change and transform this situation” (“Feminism” 53). Barriteau defines gender “to mean complex systems of personal and social relations through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated, status, power and material resources within society” (Barriteau qtd. in Lewis 27).

Yet the reality remains that issues affecting women of color are becoming subjugated knowledges more and more as hegemonic feminisms coupled with masculinities studies push women of color to the margins again in a theoretical backlash. As Tejumola Olaniyan posits, “The entrance of denied knowledges [into dominant discourses] alone, without articulation to specific ends, is not a guarantee of subversion, since hegemony conserves itself precisely by admitting and taming querulous denied

knowledges” (qtd. in Edmondson *Caribbean Romances* 205). And as Alexander-Floyd demonstrates, the ideological propensity of hegemony seeks to neutralize and disappear the ideational ends of subaltern discourses; so metaphorically, the Caliban-Prospero interchange seems to perpetually re-invent itself.

Barriteau admits that just over a decade before the publication of her seminal edited text, *Confronting Power: Theorizing Power: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, “the conjecture of power that inheres in dominating relations of gender and its influence over the emergence of an embryonic Caribbean feminist epistemology appeared as a subtext in my work on constructing a post-modernist theory to guide social science research” (3). Thus, by making explicit “*the relations of power* within relations of gender” (5. Her Italics) Barriteau attempts to plug this lacuna in Caribbean feminist theorizing.

For Barriteau, then, the importance of [patriarchal] power masking unequal gender relations and its shaping of a postmodern Caribbean epistemology should be the axis on which contemporary Caribbean scholarship revolves; so Barriteau through *Confronting Power*(2003) “offers a rigorous, incisive and very compelling examination of the epistemological, theoretical, conceptual and practical issues and implications that emerge when the study of the multiple dimensions of the social relations of gender intersects with history, law, political economy, politics and policy in the Commonwealth Caribbean” (*Confronting* 7).

Like the global discourse, concepts of power and social capital in their polyvalent dimensions rose to and continue to maintain epistemological prominence in the Caribbean, and Barriteau is one of the leading theorists looking at power in gender

systems. Although a cadre of inter- and multidisciplinary Caribbean scholars are working within and through frameworks of power congealing into salient and persistent epistemological and methodological enquiries, for me, Barriteau's work begs engagements for three major reasons:

- one, owing to her pronouncement that her edited volume *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean* (2003) “departs from the earlier literature by becoming the *first* work in Caribbean feminist theorizing that explicitly and deliberately confronts gender relations as regimes of power that produce significantly different material and ideological outcomes for women and for men” (9);
- two, for her postmodernist approach and critique of the modernist project in the Caribbean, a paradigm to which I subscribe;
- and three, her challenge to not only “recognize the competing realities and alignments against which our [Caribbean] theorizing operates” but also to advance “*strategic* interventions...into paradigms and practice.” (24. My Italics)

Following the 1978 implementation of the Women and Development Studies Unit (WAND) at the University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Education, in 1982 Caribbean women's activism and feminist scholarship became even more integrated and formalized when foremothers like Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Lucille Mathurin Mair, and Jocelyn Massiah met and mobilized around institutionalizing women's studies. Thus in the 1980s, drawing upon the work of US black and white feminist scholars as well as their own

colleagues', Caribbean feminist academics focused their writing on validating and developing women's studies programs at The University of the West Indies.⁴³

In the mid- to late 1980s, Caribbean feminist and gender scholars began to write gender into Caribbean development, revisiting the Western ethnocentric construction of Caribbean families. This period also cultivated "a new literature on masculinity in the Anglophone Caribbean region" (Reddock *Interrogating*, xvii) different from the 1960 and 1970 publications of transplanted scholars who located African Caribbean bodies, especially male, in dysfunctional gendered household roles (Reddock *Interrogating*, xvii). It is important to unpack these adverse representations of African Caribbean men; for in Chapter Five, we will see ways in which Muslimeen men disrupt these portrayals of black absentee fathers yet reinforce how young men drawn to the Jamaat feel the disempowerment in the larger society, the emasculation to which Errol Miller, Barry Chevannes, Gordon Rohlehr, and Linden Lewis refer.

Miller tussled with a male marginalization theory that argued the majority of African Caribbean men were structurally and institutionally disempowered; so they remained at risk socially, economically and politically while the ensuing gap allowed socio-economic seepages into the middle class by African Caribbean women. Feminist Caribbean scholars like Christine Barrow responded immediately, rejecting this divisive dispensation. Still, Chevannes, Rohlehr, and Lewis theorized on gender socialization, the constructions of hyper/masculinities, and male stereotypical roles in the Caribbean.

⁴³ See for a detailed history of the development of women's studies at the University of the West Indies Elsa Leo-Rhynie's "Women and Development Studies: Moving from the Periphery." Introduction." In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Thought*. Mona, Jamaica: the University of the West Indies, 2002: 147-163.

Chevannes's *Learning to be a Man* (2001), Linden Lewis's *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (2003) and Reddock's *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities* (2004) mapped primarily men's social, economic, and sexual negotiations onto an increasingly complex Caribbean gender landscape amid local, regional, and international reverberations in gender and internal relations.

The 1990s saw a transformation in the discourse from locating women's studies in academia to employing and reshaping theoretical frameworks to fit Caribbean women's lives. This shift in focus—from galvanizing institutional legitimacy to producing and owning the scholarship that dissected Caribbean women's lives—mirrors the ideological shift in Islamic feminism to reclaim ownership of understanding Muslim women's lives and to speak more of empowerment than of oppression as inherited epistemologies do traditionally. I must make it clear here that I am in no way arguing for an authentic or authoritative voice or cultural relativism; instead there is a need to be unapologetic about prioritizing and even privileging indigenous knowledges.

Barriteau, Reddock, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen, and Amrita Chachi, for example, interfaced with the concept of *difference* borrowed from black US feminists, re-theorizing it in a complex Caribbean context given the diversity of region, culture, ethnicity, and colonial intrusions. Somatically and discursively, difference matters in the Caribbean. Similarly, schools of thought like postmodernism, deconstruction, postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and the growing number of feminisms, as well as, artificial temporal markers like post-feminism and postcoloniality informed and continue to contribute to Caribbean theorizing in immeasurable ways. Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd's *Gender in Caribbean Development* (1999), and Mohammed's *Gendered Realities* (2002)

made critical inroads into navigating historically and sociologically Caribbean women's contributions to the development of the English-speaking region especially, as well as theorizing Caribbean women's and men's lives.

Consequently, the 1990s to the present day arguably find Caribbean theorizing fraught with discursive tension as the fear of women being de-centered from gender studies remains an unsettling reality and produces periodic epistemological ebbs to resituate women in feminist and gender studies. Thus the concept of power in its multiple dimensions—from fashioning the texture and tone of Caribbean scholarship, to shaping gender relations in the Caribbean from past to present, to facilitating the hegemonic and subaltern paradigmatic shifts and upheavals of discursive and emancipatory trends—needs further interrogation. If, then, Caribbean theorists are to trace the epistemological and methodological contours and shape new directions—the transformations, frustrations and uncertainties—of Caribbean feminist and gender studies, the project of confronting power, more often than not patriarchal power, seems to be not only an obvious but also a necessary epistemological location from which to launch such an inquiry and critique.

First however, Caribbean feminists must ask whether the ambit of this power, patriarchy specifically, fits adequately or perpetually a Caribbean landscape and whether an ironically fixed implementation of postmodernism is the best theoretical frame for gender exploration in the region. Notisha Massaquoi argues that '[d]iscussions of the nation state within feminist theory have a tendency to focus on resistance to nationally sanctioned patriarchy. This universal model of resistance with its idealized politics of identity obscure rather than illuminate the terrain of globally-diverse gendered subjectivities in a postmodern world' (6). So is it not time to substitute the power within

patriarchy with the power embedded within the metanarratives of colonialism and imperialism in order to expose the tangled roots of gender relations in the Anglophone Caribbean? Must we not be self-reflexively vigilant that the subject, history, and metaphysical conditions of colonization—embodying many “‘local narratives,’ ‘*les petits recites*’” (Benhabib in Benhabib et al 11)—remain at the heart of all Caribbean discourses? To dislodge completely the maligned *grand recites* or metanarrative, history, as well as the subject as postmodernism prescribes is to rupture the umbilical cord from the embryo of Caribbean gender relations, leaving at best a fetus perpetually at risk of expiration.

In speaking of Muslim immigrants negotiating their identities in host countries, Metcalf writes, “This new space, one might suggest, is largely created by humble ‘post-modernists’ creating their own cartographies and living the new globalization implicitly as they travel and interact with one another” (3-4). Metcalf’s thematic harnessing of the essays in her text on “experiences of cultural displacement [and] Muslims’ negotiations of hybridity and authenticity” coheres into what she terms *postmodern pluralism* (Metcalf 22). When the subject melds into plurality however, vestiges of assimilation, acculturation and interculturalization re-emerge; and the strategic essence of the agent is excised in the same way Alexander-Floyd laments black women are being obliterated from intersectionality theorizing. Instead of a postmodern plurality then, the postcolonial subject needs to deploy an essentialist system that pushes not only against a visible,

definable, tangible patriarchal power but also an amorphous, ubiquitous, seemingly innocuous but insidious ghost hegemony of cultural and somatic imperialism.⁴⁴

Rethinking Postmodernism and Strategic Essentialism

Proposing that feminists are lured by the seduction of postmodernism's rejection of Western Enlightenment and modernity, Seyla Benhabib et al caution feminists against an assumed natural or easy alliance between postmodernism and feminism. Indeed Benhabib et al see the characteristics of postmodernism as disloyal to feminist principles of agency, subjectivity, context, and utopic imaginaries. Benhabib et al assert that feminists have just cause to distrust "the Enlightenment fiction of philosophical reflection, *epistme* juxtaposed to the noncritical practice of everyday, doxa, [for it] is precisely that, a fiction of legitimation which ignores that everyday practices and traditions also have their own criteria of legitimation and criticism" (11). Still, however, they do not conceptualize postmodernism as a conduit for this quotidian and subaltern legitimation.

Justifiably, Alexander-Floyd in highlighting and protesting the erasure of black women from intersectionality discourses is wary of postmodernism; for "it problematizes identity by suggesting that we all are said to have ruptured identities and fragmented bodies... [which] de-legitimize the study of racism, sexism, and the structural bases of inequality and activism and further threatens black women's scholarly authority on black women's subjectivity" (2).

⁴⁴ I borrow term *ghost hegemonies* from Brackette Williams. *Stains on My Name War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle*. Chapel Hill: Duke University, 1991.

Yet, dismissing the strategic value of postmodernism to feminism is akin to the metaphor of the baby and the bathwater. Postmodernism can serve to legitimize women's and men's quotidian existentialism and is a very strategic piece of apparatus for subjects in the South in a postcolonial context; for the character of paradox, fragmentation, and essentialism offers a channel through which *le petit recites* can become necessary and empowering narratives of pan-subaltern resistance, transformation, and re-affirmation.

Thus, amidst the feminist tension between the fallacy and failure of global sisterhood and the alleged divisiveness of a politics of difference, Spivak called for *strategic essentialism* as a location from which to fight women's oppressions collectively. In highlighting the debate around cultural nationalism in Western as well as Third World countries, Steven Robins offers that some proponents of nationalism use "strategic Third world nationalism to challenge Western domination and cultural hegemony" (18). It seems a logical evolution then that a *postcolonial essentialism* answers the challenge to find a politics of legitimation that provides a collective site of mobilization at the same time it offers a politics of quotidian, legitimizing particularities to bodies fragmented and dislocated historically, geographically, and socially.

Postcolonial Essentialism

Can postcolonialism, then, aligned with this very postmodernist strategic impulse engender Caribbean feminist theorizing? The post/colonial subject though varied in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and region must not be decentered and displaced in totality but fragmented and repositioned mindfully in that critical juncture—like "watching [oneself] dance in a cracked or dimly polished mirror" (Busia 204 "Performance") — where postcolonialism and postmodernism intersect, overlap, and

rupture to produce what Sandoval calls an oppositional consciousness, manifesting in a methodology of the oppressed: an enactment of self-affirmation, agency and empowerment of subjugated bodies. Speaking to an aesthetics of mixing in Trinidad, Aisha Khan illuminates the paradox of groups fighting to preserve origins, even if imagined, in the midst of an almost natural phenomenon of interculturalization. “Identities,” she iterates, “are not stable, secure, pure, or essential, and yet in diverse places and periods people have found meaning in ideas of cultural or racial purity, religious orthodoxy, and related traditions” (*Callaloo* 3). It is this particularity of identity (*Callaloo* 3) that gives validity to my theory of postcolonial essentialism.

Postcolonial essentialism powers a differential consciousness that emerges from a place of subjugation to one of a collective subject, what Bhabha, Sandoval and Shahnaz Khan refer to as third space, a place of possibilities, a place of becoming, a place where contradiction and unification, universalism and particularism, paradox and meaning are not antithetical but commensurable.

Revisiting, Redefining, Remapping

Insofar as issues of gender, sexuality and culture are not disemboweled concepts but have important material consequences for how we live our lives, under what conditions we produce our means of existence and how we relate to each other as social beings, the intersections of these concepts are of crucial importance. Still we must guard against the danger of fetishizing the intersections to the point that this derails our analysis of the real social phenomenon and conjecture that gives rise to particular manifestations of it. (Lewis 3)

Is there a patriarchal cathexis in the Caribbean with the concept of indigenous Caribbean theorizing which has imploded into veiled and neotraditional, universalizing

feminist codifications of oppression? For example, the fervor with which masculinities studies is sweeping the feminist and gender landscapes globally and regionally illuminates a kind of liberal patriarchal configuration of power as the primary theoretical framework regulating the multiple dimensions of women's lives. So it seems to be the eternal return to the quagmire that the pre-gendered subject is constituted and simultaneously trapped within the very discourses that seek to liberate it. So, the feminist subject's deconstruction occurs at the very moment of its emancipatory engendering.

I am not dismissing the work of Caribbean theorists and activists across disciplinary and geographic divides, academic and social actors who for decades, since the 1970s at least, have used an intersectional approach in analyzing Caribbean gender dynamics. Yet, I fear that as Caribbean feminist scholarship stands now and despite the call by M. Jacqui Alexander to return to spiritual and ancestral roots in our theorizing, we may be reverting to secular, neoliberal, or radical feminist positions that eradicating from society a specific kind of gendered oppression or particular gendered violence—read, particular gendered power—will automatically create a society free of all discriminating, demoralizing, and dehumanizing practices. Patricia Mohammed denotes this fatigue calling for the repudiation of old, tired, categories when exploring Caribbean peoples' experiences (*Imaging* 16). Mohammed does not mean the emptying of categories similar to how liberal feminists suggested the abandoning of identity politics; but she proposes replenishing the categories with new images that predate the colonial intrusions, looking back to indigenous histories where the present can be imagined differently and not keep defaulting to a colonialist litmus test.

While I argue here that confronting power textually and epistemologically in the Caribbean needs revisiting, I am not suggesting that the theories power houses and espouses are outdated and/or invalid. In fact, the concept of confronting power remains a feeding tube for the continued development of Caribbean scholarship; thus, I hope to resuscitate Barriteau's theoretical project and respond a decade later to the challenge she presents in *Confronting Power* "to recognize the competing realities and alignments of power within and against which our theorizing operates" (24). Along that line, I propose a three-step analysis of how Caribbean theorists may un/do gender in the Caribbean. Consequently, embryonic Caribbean theories may mature into salient, provocative and meaningful epistemologies within and outside the region. This combined epistemological-empirical exploration comprises three methodologies:

- one, finding new vocabularies to frame Caribbean gender relations;
- two, remapping landscapes of women's and men's subjectivities; and
- three, revisiting African antecedents to formulate theories for analyzing and understanding gender relations and sexual negotiations in the Caribbean.

This project of retheorizing the Caribbean lends directly to understanding the quotidian negotiations of the Muslimeen in Trinidad.

It is theoretically indisputable then that the project of confronting power is now endemic to Caribbean feminist and gender theory. Reconceptualizing power in Caribbean scholarship however should not be confined to re-examining gender relations among the men and women who inhabit this geographical space but also should direct attention to the very production and consumption of this knowledge. Confronting power also begs interrogation of extant North-South discursive exchanges. That ideologies and

ideas cross borders much more prolifically than ideologues themselves and that most boundaries are much more permeable to bodies of knowledge than to bodies of people call for attention to the hegemony that resides in North-South epistemological migrations. Of even greater concern to scholars in the Caribbean is that the theoretical osmotic process is unequal, so the flow of North rhetorical particles through the South membranes is significantly greater than South-North ebbs. In essence, the South becomes saturated with what Barriteau indicts as “received knowledges” (Barriteau *Confronting* 3); so the challenge of Caribbean scholars is to stem these theoretical seepages. The even greater difficulty though is the primacy and perpetuity of this venous clamping process; for the minute we in the Caribbean slow our theoretical pulse, epistemological atrophy ensues allowing for the influx of hegemonic discourses that frame, explain, and shape our thinking, our doing, our being, and our very *becoming*, in a very Nietzsche-Henry sense.

Friedrich Nietzsche’s genealogy of *the* [destructive] *will to power* juxtaposed with Paget Henry’s genealogy of *Ashe*, [productive] power of the Creator in Yoruba cosmology, opens new ways for Caribbean scholars to theorize how power impacts contingently on the psyche as well as on the body. So, I couple this West philosophical pull with an East and South philosophical push to show I do not dismiss the exchange of knowledge as innately counterproductive. In fact, as we know, such interchanges can be very productive once the power that inheres is transparent to and balanced by both donor and recipient. My concern centers on the fact that in the Caribbean Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s names continue to be more cited than Henry’s or Lewis Gordon’s validating my anxiety over the imbalance in North-South exchanges and the eliding of

epistemologies and methodologies and even subjects from discourses developed to theorize their own dis/embodied experiences and identities.

So I submit that after almost a decade of confronting a specific kind of power and theorizing gender within this particular paternalistic framework in the Caribbean, we within feminist studies reproduce inadvertently an increased monolithic power rhetoric by privileging a very North American/Eurocentric importation of patriarchal theories deployed primarily as male domination and female subjugation, subordinating complex differentials like history and culture in the English-speaking Caribbean at the same time we are claiming an indigenous concept of *difference* in the very region. The irony lies in the fact that while West Indian foremothers and forefathers charted a course for developing indigenous gender theories in the Caribbean, the penchant for imported knowledges predominate even when the North context is inappropriate; and research projects beg South analytical lenses and conceptual tools.

As a prime example, unless supervised by that particular Caribbean theorist, too few graduate students of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago ground their research in Caribbean scholarship, failing to recognize, far less invest in, the social and political economy of their own indigenous scholarship, as if Caribbean epistemologies, theories, concepts, and methodologies are always and already inferior, analogous to the enduring cacao bean imperial-colonial transaction.

On November 24, 2011 I attended a Second Postgraduate Student Seminar hosted by the Inter-Developmental Unit (IDU) in Daaga Lecture Room 1 at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine from 1:30-4:30p.m. The first of the nine presentations was titled, “An Investigation of the Effect of Cacao (*Theobroma cacao* L.) Pulp on the Final

Flavour and the Optimization of Small-scale Fermentation.” The young, enthusiastic researcher, Naailah Ali, explained the differences among cacao, cocoa and chocolate. Cacao is the raw product, cocoa when it is harvested and prepared for shipping, and chocolate the end-product. Trinidad and Tobago has premium cacao and cocoa beans which we export; then import the chocolate at much higher prices. We continue to reproduce the colonial mentality that foreign is superior and local is inferior, thus undesirable.

In terms of finding new epistemologies, Barriteau stresses:
Our collective reluctance or reservation about naming and examining how oppressive power is inscribed in the rituals and practices of gendered relations have increasingly forced a shift from feminist engagements with patriarchal practices to theoretical skirmishes on the borders of women’s subjectivity.
(*Confronting* 5)

Caribbean theorists still center patriarchy in our feminist analyses; so in keeping with finding new categorical and linguistic approaches, first, I propose we reconsider that these theoretical skirmishes, which on one occasion can delete a subject from her own narrative, are not inherently unproductive interchanges that detract from the real work of Caribbean scholarship; for in another instance they can be the ruptures that create gaps for new growth.

So, theoretical skirmishes can be, to draw upon Richard Turner, discursive jihads attempting to do exactly what Barriteau and other Caribbean feminists prescribe: craft indigenous Caribbean epistemologies. These theoretical skirmishes are academics, often emerging scholars, trying to find creative ways to privilege, articulate, and validate subaltern voices and perspectives. These theoretical skirmishes are politics of discursive engagements seeking meaningful terminologies, vocabularies and self-definitions that make inscriptions upon subjects’ ontologies and transcriptions of subjects’ enactments

legible not only to an academic audience but more so comprehensible to the social actors themselves.

Second, these “borders of women’s [and men’s] subjectivity” are precisely the sites upon which we in the Caribbean need to mount our defenses against the “imported theoretical constructs that did not stimulate critiques of epistemologies, methodologies and practices, and therefore [sic] reinforced and maintained exclusions and invisibility around key dimensions of women’s lives” (Barriteau *Confronting* 3). Indeed, these marginalized borders, these displaced subjectivities, these disappeared landscapes are the third spaces in which subalterns are confronting, negotiating, defusing and refusing the main organizing and regulating mechanisms of their lives.

Unlike Positivist postures, the theories around which feminisms oscillate have long advocated that knowledge, truth, power and identities are subjective, fluid, and diffusive, thus unstable. On one hand, poststructuralism fragments the text; postmodernism decenters the subject; deconstruction decodes language; and postcolonialism destabilizes history. On the other hand, essentialism re-establishes and entrenches the subject. Emanating from this third space between fluidity and stability is what I term postcolonial essentialism, a methodology that can be productive in replacing the traditional hegemonic metanarratives with postcolonial multiple histories and fluid subjectivities. It stands to reason, then, that racialized and ethnic post/colonial subjects embody very particular yet inchoate histories; and through these embodied cultural pluralities, they navigate geographies of gender, religion, and space.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This phrase taken from the sub-title of Ghazali-Walid Falah and Caroline Nagel’s *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*. New York: Guilford, 2005.

Thus, the margins of colonized subjectivities should be treated as neither fixed nor negligible; and the peripheries should be given as much temporal and spatial foci at any given time as what is at the center at any given point. Simultaneously, in postcolonial essentialism, the center must work in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, the periphery. With the Muslimeen for example, extra/ordinariness, invoked through indigenous narratives and antecedents, must conspire to elide and deny metatext and metatheory, demeaning and racist colonial representations of blacks, of African, and of African [Muslim] slaves; for “it is in the cultural interstices of negotiating blood and belonging, location and identity, that consideration of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean must be located” (Gordon 2). I must make clear though that autochthony, searching for meaning in the indigenous, is not synonymous here with a quest for authenticity or a single truth. It is a search for explanation, for the persistent extraordinariness of the Muslimeen in the midst of quotidian ordinariness.

Postcolonial essentialism is not the nexus, per se, between essentialism (blood and belonging) and constructivism (location and identity) but, in essence, the very lacuna. Consequently, it is in this amorphous space that the modernist stratagem of biopolitics to guarantee wasted, lose-able and injurable lives as well as the capitalist enterprise to justify neocolonial and liberal projects wither and atrophy. These injurable lives in the postcolonial context are racialized as predominantly black, African, and/or Muslim, and/or terrorist. Arguably, the most ubiquitous yet deceptively innocuous tool of the modernist project is its discursive technology of writing the third world body as abject or disposable; so “one of the dilemmas postcolonial subjects face is that in the language of the colonial, we must negotiate visions of self in tongues which inscribe our own

invisibilities. Yet not quite” (Busia “Performance” 206). Postcolonial essentialism dons the postcolonial body with the material for its own transcription, translation, transformation. Postcolonial essentialism enrobes the postcolonial body for its dance into the *not quite* (Busia 204).

Third, after a review of the extant literature on and in the Anglophone Caribbean from the 1970s through 2000 Barriteau asserts, “[a]t this juncture in the genesis of Caribbean feminist thought, we need to probe deeper into examining the power relations surrounding the generation of knowledge about women and the asymmetrical practices of power that shape everyday life” (*Confronting* 7). Philosophically, from René Descartes to the present and despite postmodernism, scholars tend to default to dichotomous and dialectical analyses, the Cartesian pitfall. Bilateral rhetoric is especially, sometimes even necessarily, characteristic of feminist and gender scholarship when theorizing men’s and women’s lives.

Such an epistemological prefixing of a/symmetries and hierarchies however, may very well have feminist and gender studies mired now in unproductive binaries race theorists like Anthias and Yuval-Davis seek to deconstruct. Such bilateralisms often neglect or subordinate the demoralizing and dehumanizing effects of neo/colonialism and its accompanying sub-narrative of paternalistic dispositions and infantilizing and hypersexualizing treatment of men and women in the Caribbean, especially pertaining to African bodies in the diaspora.

Theories steeped in patriarchy and Westernized ethnocentric assumptions produce bilateralisms, “sterile binaries” (qtd. in Robins 18), and hierarchies which in turn sprout linear frameworks that foreclose the use of lenses of multiplicities, specificities, and/or

contextualities and prevent the birth and maturation of new ways of seeing key strategies women use to organize their quotidian transactions.

The Caribbean gender project then remains to disentangle the epistemologically and ontologically constructed colonized subject from the imperial discourses that shaped and continue to regulate it. That is, Caribbean scholars need to unfurl the subject from its traditional metanarrative; and each metanarrative—whether patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, globalization, or in the case of Muslim women in and out of the Muslim world, fundamentalism—is particular and contextual historically, socially, culturally, geographically. For example, in fleshing out the complications of collapsing the ideal role expectations and the contextual role performances of Muslim women in the Muslim world, Freda Hussain argues, “Until the feudal system is dismantled the patriarchal order will persist and will continue to use Islam to exploit women” (Hussain 4).

It stands to reason then, in Islamic feminist theorizing the feudal system including its accessories of sexism and classism are analogous to the colonial system, the metanarrative of which patriarchy, to use Barribeau’s logic, is but a subtext; so stymieing patriarchy will not necessarily level other demoralizing and dehumanizing hierarchies for different/other women. Caribbean scholars need to reject imperial claims to authorizing and canonical texts on the Caribbean and foster greater legitimacy of local discourses (Henry 10). Caribbean scholars need to declare as valid indigenous retelling and remapping of postcolonial subjects’ histories and geographies, active re-locating of selves, and renaming of engagements within strategic postcolonial frames. We in the Caribbean are still to emerge beyond the not quite.

Understanding Gender Practices and Relations in the Caribbean: The Return to African Antecedents

Using a postcolonial essentialist paradigm to understand gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen, a predominantly African Trinidadian community, necessitates a return to African history to frame the discourse. Noting that Africa is immeasurably influential to the Caribbean, scholars of Africa offer epistemologies and methodologies for mapping the connections between Africa and African Diaspora. Paul Lovejoy in advancing a methodology of “focusing on the African” (3) rather than invoking the *fait accompli* Eurocentric perspective explains that “[t]his shift in focus renders evidence confirming complex links across and around the Atlantic that are surprising, mostly because of the degrees to which they have been ignored or denied. It becomes clear that Western Africa was not isolated from the Atlantic world” (2-3). Most of the slaves captured and brought to the West Indies were from West Africa.

Lovejoy is not alone in highlighting the importance of tracing the Africa-Americas-Caribbean trajectory. The necessity and desire to return to African antecedents to explain present inequalities and inequities in the Americas has infused a generation of scholars. Andrea Davis in reviewing a first-year undergraduate course she teaches on black experiences in America informs us that

discussions of ‘race’ invariably return to an examination of African slavery in the ‘New World.’ It was this historical trauma that for the first time forced Africans to reach across disparate geographic, ethnic, linguistic and political borders to not only express a sense of shared suffering and share historical consciousness, but to begin to conceptualize some sense of a singular, unified Africanness (276).

Similarly, Michael Gomez philosophizes, “The desire to be made whole is one of the most powerful mechanisms of motivation known to human kind” (“The Anguished Igbo”

103). Across the Diaspora, there seems to be a hunger for a politics of a pan-African postcolonial essentialism where an historic African consciousness merges with a diasporic existentialism. One significant landscape on which to begin mapping the influence of African traditional practices on gender systems in the Caribbean is the contentious discursive construction of the Anglophone Caribbean family.

Merle Hodge disassembles three imaginaries of Caribbean families:

1) that women's employment outside the home is relatively recent, hence the increase in juvenile delinquency. Hodge reminds that other than upper class women perhaps, Caribbean women always worked outside the family home;

2) the transplanted idea of nuclear family upon which Caribbean familial relations are too often predicated, erroneously. Hodge argues instead for reflecting upon the more ubiquitous and commonsensical family network model; and

3) the premise of man/husband/father as sole or primary breadwinner.

Thus, in an effort to improve family life and gender relations in the Caribbean, Hodge proposes that we in the Caribbean especially must “work with what *is* [family], rather than what some of us think it should be” (Hodge qtd. in Mohammed 476. Italics in original). The first two myths render it irrelevant to demystify the third fallacy.

Hodge's call for a different perspective—that is, for using more regional, historical and cultural frames of references for constructing Caribbean familial formations rather than employing inherited and neocolonial views—remains relevant today. As is almost inescapable in paradigmatic shifts, however, there is categorical exclusion. Hodge herself falls short of envisioning a more polyvalent and representative definition of Caribbean families. When she lists sexual unions, households, and networks

alternative to heteronormative and nuclear constructions, she still seems to stay within prescribed, socially legible, disruptive family structures: extended families and othermothering for example. Traditional West African Islamic marital arrangements, such as polygyny and co-mothering, practiced in the Caribbean and in Trinidad, are not represented. In essence then we are still not dealing with what family *is* but what we think it *should be* as well as with what it should *not* be. Thus Richard Goodridge's argument of returning to African antecedents to understand contemporary African diasporic gender relations is fundamental since

it seems unlikely that mere experience in the Caribbean or theorizing about that experience can be sufficient if it lacks a clear reference to developments in the area of male-female relations in Africa, particularly during the period of Caribbean slavery from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, particularly the way in which colonialism and neocolonialism affected the lives of women in Africa and the Caribbean. (129)

I do not mean to perpetuate one of the major critiques, especially by Indo Caribbean feminists, that Caribbean feminist theorizing marginalizes or erases the contributions of Indo-Caribbean people, especially East Indian women. Since, however, African slaves were brought to the Caribbean first, and my research investigates an African Trinidadian Muslim legacy, it is essential— and I use *essential* deliberately—to locate my subjects in an African cosmos in order to trace the African trajectory upon local social and personal configurations. Furthermore, the colonialists defined and regulated, specifically, African sexuality and gender relations; and the colonizer orchestrated sexuality between colonizer and colonized, as well as, among other ethnicities that arrived later through indentureship and other capitalist ventures. So it is unarguably imperative that African originaries, even

if considered imaginaries, be privileged here in unpacking the formation of Caribbean familial relations.

Also directly related to engineering different frames of reference for understanding gender and sexual relations in the Caribbean is Carolyn Bledsoe's lens of contingency which she uses to theorize how her female and male Gambian subjects negotiate their physical bodies and social relations, organizing their lives around non-Western notions of birth, aging, death, and time itself. Therefore, these West African bodies are communal beings, part of a continuum, rather than independent, discrete entities, a philosophical positioning that is immediately at odds with Western feminisms' preoccupation with and privileging of the autonomous feminist subject. Bledsoe explains:

the word *contingency* connotes a sense of social ties that underlie all aspects of life, including physical growth development, and decline of the body. Relations with kin, marriage partner, and in-laws, whether these relations are good or bad, all have significant impacts on reproductive career. The sense that the social and physical facets of life are inextricably intertwined thus applies not only in the individual's life but in ways that link the physical lives of different individuals.... [I]n Gambian view, the course of physical life itself is a product of social relations. (Bledsoe 25)

Natural phenomena then, like birth, fertility, aging and death along with strategic ones like child spacing and contraceptive use are neither chronological nor synchronic but contiguous and diachronic in Gambian way of life. Bledsoe, like Henry, sees African cosmologies transcending linearity and hierarchies; so she does not weigh the choices and decisions her female and male West African subjects make against or interpret them within Western hegemonic micro- and macrocosmic temporal and spatial beliefs, practices, measures, and cultural formations.

Like some African traditions, Anglophone Caribbean and African American communities also model their social and familial relationships along the lines of

collective caring of the vulnerable especially children and the elderly. Stanlie James argues that the evidence of these practices as indigenous to an “African world view ... can be traced through the institution of slavery” (45). These traditions of interdependence between and among men and women: communal living, sharing of responsibilities, collective identity formations, and cooperative intimate gender articulations unravel the threads stitching together the fabric of Western philosophical constructions of society comprising autonomous subjects with the rights and privileges to hoard or dispense at will personal resources. This differential reference point also destabilizes a hegemonic, Western feminist agenda of a homogenous, universal liberated feminist subject. It is not an easy or natural shift then for feminists to re-envision unconditional autonomy as deconstructive, even injurious to female quotidian engagements and agency.

In their analysis of the “intersection between interdependence and autonomy”(4), Willard Gaylin and Bruce Jennings argue that there is a destructive side to what they call “the culture of autonomy”(4) resulting in a decaying of society:

The individualistic philosophy that has been the backbone of political liberalism and that protects the person from the power of the state has become hyperextended into a kind of libertarian liberalism that sees power, and nothing but power, everywhere, and that casts the same acids of suspicion and mistrust on the family and civil associations that political liberals have traditionally reserved for the government. (6)

Adherence to dominant analyses of power, patriarchy and a/symmetries perpetuates constricting binaries like men/women; agency/passivity; dominance/complicity; resistance/ conformity; voice/silence; East/West, autonomous/subjugated, secular/fundamental, secular/Islamic in an infinitesimal and annihilating loop. Shahnaz Khan argues that the rhetoric emerging out of and perpetuating beyond both the Gulf War

and the events of 2001 produces a monolithic, fundamentalist Islam that erupts into open rhetoric of the “‘clash of civilization’ thesis, which draws upon and reinforces binary thinking”(Aversion xii). So

[a]lthough the laws of the Iraqi regime did not require women to cover up, conventional ideas of the plight of shrouded muslim women victimized by muslim men surfaced frequently. These images and accompanying text suggested yet again Spivak’s famous phrase about westerners’ need to save brown women from brown [and black] men” (Aversion, ix. Lower case in original).

Given the composite matrices of race, ethnicity, color, class, geography, and religion in the Caribbean, rather than a/symmetries which are inadequate to account for the material and ideological ghost hegemonies of colonialism, Bledsoe’s and Goodridge’s approaches seem better epistemological platforms from which to launch new modes of gathering, analyzing and disseminating knowledge of the intricate dimensions of Caribbean women’s lives.

Thus, in my current research project for comprehending the gendered articulations in the quotidian lives of African Trinidadian Muslim subjects at the Jamaat al Muslimeen, whose African histories have been erased or re/constructed in Trinidad in very specific ways reminiscent of the colonialist project of civilizing African barbarity, I use reframed feminist lenses to understand gender relations among the Muslimeen but also to use gender relations among the Muslimeen to unpack gender and sexual relations in Trinidad. To iterate, some Muslimeen practices and beliefs like polygyny, wealth in children, co-wifery and othermothering are derived from African traditions and continue to be contributing factors in decisions of Muslim men to marry multiple wives. These traditions also inform the tendency for co-wives and other women including mothers and

non-mothers (women who have not given birth) to coalesce around the demands of childcare and community nurturing.

For the Muslimeen men who choose multiple wives, it is a great emotional and psychological responsibility, adjustment, and commitment for the men, wives, and the children of the previous marriage(s). Like the site of the Muslimeen body upon which the visuality of African-ness predominates, the Nation of Islam in the US under Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam in Trinidad under David Muhammad draw upon African antecedents and are committed to raising African consciousness and re-cultivating a black aesthetic. The Muslimeen, African Trinidad Muslims and members of the Nation of Islam, however, must not be collapsed into the category black Muslim. African Muslims are by no means a monogamous group, having overlapping as well as clearly distinct practices among African Trinidadian Muslims, black Muslims/Nation of Islam and Muslimeen; but it is still essential to siphon from these diverse communities' religious, political, and social renditions in recovering an African world-view that shaped gender relations in the Americas and the Caribbean specifically.

In a postcolonial essentialist project, it is imperative to recuperate and reshape the literature on African cultural and religious transliterations. African Caribbean bodies, like the Muslimeen especially, can only default into five types of soma if we continue to use Western metanarratives on African people as naturalized and normalized:

1. hypersexualized and hypermasculinized. Muslim men's right to have up to four wives is read as a narrative of male privilege, male prowess, male power rather than male responsibility. Black female bodies via the tropes of jezebel

and breeder are also constructed as promiscuous and inherently accessible to white men especially;

2. infantilized and de-intellectualized. Both male and female African bodies are treated as devoid of intellect and reason, so colonial portrayals have them as imbeciles in need of regulating and instructing;
3. disappeared. African women are often erased from revolutionary narratives, for resistance movements default primarily or solely into masculinist narratives. For example, in the majority of the literature, it appears only black men were involved in the 1970 Black Power Movement in Trinidad and only Muslimeen men were involved in planning and staging the 1990 coup. In both insurrections, the absence of women implies African Trinidadian women played no roles whatsoever;
4. and criminalized. Colonial representations of Africans depict Africans as barbaric and uncivilized. Even in present times, and with a return to African antecedents, black bodies continue to be racialized, stigmatized, delegitimized, and constructed as threatening and terror-inducing.

In Trinidad, the general sentiment is that real Muslims are of Indo descent not African.⁴⁶

Thus, there is a virtual obliteration of an historical, transnational narrative of West African slaves bringing Islam to the Americas. Sheik Tariq, an elder of the Jamaat,

⁴⁶ I use Indo for people of South Asian descent but not Afro for people of African descent owing to the sometimes negative connotations of the term *Afro*. Although almost globally an Afro hairstyle signifies pride in one's African roots, resistance to status quo, and self-affirmation, for me, the term *Afro* as a hyphenated appellation embodies an always and already radicalized placement of African people I find unproductive and limiting epistemologically.

expressed his distress over the inaccuracies on government-issued history texts which continued to characterize Islam as an Indian religion, omitting completely any connection between African slaves and Islam.

Hence, in mainstream psychic infrastructure in the Americas, African Muslims in the diaspora are generally painted with the broad brush of black Muslims, namely Nation of Islam. In the US for example, popular culture does not distinguish between the Nation of Islam and Sunni Muslims; and many Americans do not even understand or appreciate the tension within the Nation with Malcolm X's or Warith Deen Muhammad's historic move from a separatist to a more orthodox Islam. In Trinidad, African Trinidadian Muslims are referred to popularly but erroneously as black Muslims, alluding to the fact that they are not Indo Trinidadian Muslims but synonymous to the Muslimeen and Nation of Islam.

It may appear contradictory to argue for essentialism on one hand but be very methodical in distinguishing among African Muslim identities on the other. The imperative though is to understand that postcolonial essentialism is not intended to obliterate difference but to use commonality strategically. First however, overt and nuanced distinctions need to be made transparent among the groups of Muslims so that, in their collapsing, differential identities are not deleted completely; and the integrity of uniqueness and particularity of Islamic communities is preserved, as Alexander-Floyd insists for groups of women.

Then, it is for this very reason of disaggregating African Muslim identities as they inform generally and specifically social and political relations on national and regional scales that

we must make greater use of comparative analysis between Africa and the Caribbean [and in the Americas at large] in order to tackle those areas in Caribbean historical development that have been systematically understudied, such as gender relations among Muslims in the Caribbean. (Goodridge 140)

Goodridge feels that such a systematic approach will go even further in “minimiz[ing] the many misconceptions about the (black) male” (140) and necessarily the black/African female and the terms of their engagements.

So repositioning African Trinidadian Muslims squarely within Islam is not a contradiction or a divisive move partitioning African and Indo Muslims. Furthermore, isolating African antecedents is not analogous to mirroring the early ideological, separatist stance of the Nation of Islam’s leaders like Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad (and Malcolm X initially), who referred to Caucasians as the white devil, not to be integrated into the Nation. Some African Americans—Muslim and nonMuslim, but mostly Muslim—wanted to return to Africa; other black Muslims sought a separate state within or outside America. The Muslimeen, while inhabiting a separate space within the nation and while Abu Bakr is accused of wanting to create a black Islamic state, are still part of the nation state, ambiguous and ambivalent as that relationship may be.

I am cognizant of the ongoing debate among African scholars on African nativism/ essentialism versus postmodernism/social constructivism (Robins 2004). Yet I hold the position that to comprehend and transform more fully gender relations in the Caribbean, including a rigorous analysis of masculinities, scholars need to adhere to and expand the thesis of deeper comparative analysis between Africa and the Americas. We must also hold steadfast to Barribeau’s suspicion of the modernist project and the political economy of modernity in the region. Gomez articulates the profundity of tracing these Afrogenic contours and remaining suspicions of civilizing missions when he purports

[h]uman beings move in streams of relation, wherein persons continuously negotiate agencies, dimensions, and qualities of connection to other persons and entities inhabiting lands seen and unseen. The capture of Africans in Africa and their subsequent shipment to the Americas amounted to a quintessential disruption of such negotiations, resulting in the redirection of the tributaries of life, now flowing through bitter waters of dismemberment and disease, emptying into seas of indigo, cane, coffee, and cotton. (Gomez in Brown and Lovejoy 103-04)

Although in her introduction to *Confronting Power* Barriteau cites Mohammed and Kempadoo as “conducting exploratory studies on women’s sexualities” (8), other than Goodridge, polygamy in monogamous Caribbean states have not been interrogated far less sanctioned as an option in women’s sexualities even though Islam and polygyny have been part of Caribbean history for almost as long as the interlopers.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, some Caribbean history books still give more attention to Columbus than to African Muslims in the Caribbean, even though an African Muslim was the Commander of the Santa Maria, and African Muslims were in the Caribbean 100 years before Columbus.⁴⁸

Hegemonic constructions define what are normative sexualities at the same time they ascribe what are transgressions. Ironically, some feminisms, liberal and radical especially, have codified normative sexuality as heterosexual and monogamous. Furthermore, radical feminism by pushing against this imaginary of heteronormative sexuality reinforces normative sexuality as heterosexual. Thus, the phallus; the symbol of the phallus; and what the phallus fears, that which renders the phallus undesirable—the

⁴⁷ See Ibrahim, Mansoor. *Islam in Trinidad and Tobago*. Researched and Coordinated by Amina Ibrahim Ali, 1995; and Dannin, Robert. *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2002.

⁴⁸ As alluded to previously, on September 19, 2007 in an interview with Sheik Tariq, probably the oldest member of the Jamaat al Muslimeen who carries within him the institutional memory, he lamented both the errors of commission as well as omission with regards to Islam in the Caribbean Examination Council history textbooks. The narratives perpetuate Islam as an Indo religion.

power of *the other*—are entangled and irreducible. Consequently alternative sexualities are typically read in relation to, especially in opposition to, this default heteronormative paradigm. Sexual agency, sexual autonomy, ownership of sexual identity and all their subtexts are generally most easily legible when read within feminisms' established or canonized normative-transgressive texts: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transpersons, queer, intersexed, asexual (LGBTQIA) and/or sex work and transactional sex.

The concept of educated, ambitious, informed African-descended woman entering consciously, copiously, and conspicuously (wearing a *hijab* for example) into spaces that could eventually bind her into a polygamous marriage falls automatically outside the purview of agency, particularly sexual autonomy; outside resistance; outside conscious, proactive, and meaningful choice; and obviously outside sexual desire and sexual pleasure. Polygyny is thus always and already incommensurable with the principles of both liberal and radical feminisms and with modernity. Yet Muslimeen women demonstrate clearly their autonomy and self-determination even in what Western feminists may consider the throes of subjugation, polygyny.

Caribbean scholars and other activists committed to the promotion of human dignity and sustainable economies are justified then in their apprehension of the modernist turn; and the power of the state to use the ideologies, the ideologues, and technologies of modernity to manufacture human detritus. Herein lies the political economy of modernity, that “the disposal of human waste produced in the ‘modernized’ and still ‘modernizing’ parts of the globe was the deepest meaning of colonization and imperialist conquests” (Bauman 6).

The decadence spawned by modernity along with the epidemic of wasted lives are catalysts for young men and women of African descent in Trinidad converting to Islam and joining the Muslimeen community where they are indoctrinated into an *ummah* of self-affirmation. In essence, the turn to Islam by disenfranchised and displaced members of society offers the reimagining of oppressed communities into charitable entities committed to social justice and equality. The simple tenets of Islam where “the true believer must therefore liberate himself or herself from human dependencies” (Dannin 238) affords the individual a simultaneous release from the need for economic prosperity as well as the opportunity for self-empowerment both achieved through modesty and piety and self-validation achieved through poverty (Dannin 238).

Similarly, Ibrahim says of African Trinidadians, “African nationals who embrace Islam today believe they are returning to Islam. For some of them, ‘returning’ means going back to the religion of their ancestors, to others, ‘returning’ to the religion to which they were born”(62). A mild-mannered twenty-three year old whom I met at the Jamaat al Muslimeen one Saturday evening after Sister classes told me he became a member at fifteen years old and stressed repeatedly the principles of self-respect, dignity, humility, and personal accountability but never once spoke of personal liberty, autonomy, or individualism. Yet, many Muslimeen women do. Several young men articulated this sentiment. Sadiq and other young Muslimeen like him believe strongly in belonging to a community. Even though Miranda Joseph argues that both the rhetorical articulation as well as social relationships constituting community are based on capitalist modes of production and consumption and promote modernity, for young men and women converting to Islam community represents survival not confinement, and bonding not

bondage. Individualism and freedom in the liberal diction are neither desires nor prerequisites for their membership and allegiance. Self-affirmation is.

Reframing Feminist Lenses

“We need to negotiate our way, not around, but through the long shadows of our histories.” (Busia “In Search” 263)

‘Feminist readings could only see their “‘purely’ feminist sensibilities, and did not consider questions of geographic *space*, or *race*, questions which are crucial to the understanding of ...specificity...” (Edmonson *Making Men* 4)

The preponderance of feminist discourses on speaking out, talking from, and ta(l)king back as well as on visibility, invisibility, hypervisibility combined with the global rhetoric of veiled Muslim woman as the epitome of oppressed woman make it increasingly difficult to dislodge voice, visibility, and sexuality, including monogamy, from the celebration of women’s empowerment.⁴⁹ The prevailing sentiment of women’s agency is embedded in the fact that “The Decade [for Women] focused on the many forms of injustices that women endure, but it also celebrated the fact that women have become increasingly *powerful* and *visible* as they intervene in global politics” (Cooke vii. *My Italics*). Feminisms’ infusions with the discourses on the vocal, the visual, and the individual make it exceedingly difficult for feminists themselves to discern African Muslim men in the region as other than oppressive and promiscuous and African Muslim women as other than victimized and misguided despite the reality these men and women view

⁴⁹ In her introduction to her revised version of *Behind the Veil*, Fatima Mernissi argues that there are two dimensions to studying the dynamics of the Muslim world: what they do (reality), and the discourses they develop about their engagements (self-presentation and identity building) [Mernissi 1987].

themselves performing the role of good Muslims according to Islamic doctrine.⁵⁰ And it is primarily this performance of good Muslim, nonetheless differentially iterated within the community itself, which informs their identity as Muslimeen.

Owing to the ubiquitous liberal concept of self-sovereignty and individualism and the persistent and privileged liberal feminist concepts of subjectivity and autonomy inherited from imperial discourses, wives sharing the same husband in a sanctioned, religious marriage is not even on the feminist radar even though such arrangements have proliferated successfully for centuries and continue to exist. Barriteau herself argues elsewhere that a central theme in her work is that the “inherited philosophical contradictions of liberal ideologies have continually contributed to states’ unjust gender systems” (“Theorizing” 27). Furthermore, in defining gender as an intricate interplay of “personal and social relations... regulating the allocation of status, power and material resources within society,” Barriteau endorses Nancy Chodorow by reinforcing that in addition to the cultural and political components there is a salience to the “contributions of personal meanings to gender subjectivity” (“Theorizing” 27). Barriteau stresses her

⁵⁰ The fact that Muslim men are allowed multiple wives simultaneously is one of the most defining yet misconstrued characteristics of Islam in Trinidad and Tobago. Very few Trinidadians even know that Muslim men are allowed only up to four wives simultaneously and that there are rules of engagement that regulate this responsibility. In a personal conversation at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Biennial Graduate Research Symposium at the UWI, Cavehill, Barbados from March 24 to March 26, 2011, Shahnaz Khan informed me that in some countries Muslim women negotiate marriage contracts in which their husbands agree not to take another wife during their marriage or for her to be consulted. I do not know this practice to exist among the Muslimeen since wives, according to teachings gleaned during sister classes, see their husband’s marriages as preordained from his birth.

intention in this article is to highlight the “political, cultural and economic dimensions of gender in the public domain” (“Theorizing” 27).

Yet for all the feminist rhetoric of taking to task the state for inequalities and inequities inhering in its allocation of resources and assigning social status, a great number of feminist and gender scholars encased within highly emotive configurations of liberated woman cannot conceptualize as empowering Muslimeen women’s nuanced and overt articulations of their personal choice to be part of a marital and familial collective. Additionally hegemonic feminism will not confess to Muslimeen women’s life choices as calling to crisis contradictions within feminists’ epistemological and methodological enquiries into hegemonic and marginalizing formations of gendered subjectivity.

Unless we disentangle Caribbean gender theorizing from neoliberal persuasions we cannot begin to comprehend and unpack polygyny as an informed and even desirable option and admit that such a position is not necessarily romanticizing rhetoric of an overzealous embryonic feminist caught in a web of cultural relativism.⁵¹ Muslimeen wives, like Muslim women locally and globally, negotiate their quotidian lives including their sexuality within frames of not just bounded autonomy but also *bonded* autonomy. Within the space of the Jamaat and unlike the acts of infidelity in the dunya, the terms of

⁵¹ On February 25, 2011 I presented a draft of this chapter at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Graduate Research Seminar at The University of the West Indies, Cavehill Campus, Barbados. I appreciate Eudine Barriteau’s caution to me to think though the “romanticising” of Muslimeen women’s position in Islam. She found the concept of choice or agency difficult to accept since a wife in a polygamous marriage does not have a say as to when her husband comes to her or leaves. I am not concerned however with the irresolvable argument about whether the institution of polygyny is agentic to women. What is informing to me as an outsider is how wives manage the time and space when their husband is present or absent, and the individual decisions and practices in which they engage at those times. As the contingencies of these marriages arise in the text, I grapple with their significations.

social and sexual engagement are clear, agreed upon, and entered into consciously even if not always wholeheartedly at first. Eventually, in most cases at various stages and to differing degrees, camaraderie takes place among wives sharing the same husband. These gender and sexual negotiations do not only make sense within the confines of the Muslimeen community but are especially meaningful writ against the larger society's gender relations and practices that can be exceedingly degrading to women whose intimate partners are openly promiscuous and unfaithful.

In Trinidad sexual infidelity, or the colloquial term *horning*, is practically accepted as customary of hyper/masculinity and even promoted and revered in many calypsos and soca music, Trinidad and Tobago's national and arguably still dominant lyrical genres.⁵² Although both men and women can be either the perpetrator—the *hornerman* or *hornerwoman*—or the victim, the one *getting horned*, men are reputed to be the primary actors. So when the Muslimeen practice polygyny, the larger society constructs erroneously this marital institution as alpha male posturing and sexual privilege rather than the converse. The colonial stereotype of black male as hypersexual carries over into the contemporary as Trinidadian men, especially, view the concept of multiple wives as a mark of sexual prowess. Non-Muslim women misconstrue it as much as they dread it.

This kind of discourse is precisely what erupted out of the Barbadian debate to introduce African history into schools, and the topic which prompted Goodridge's essay,

⁵² For example, The Mighty Sparrow's "Lying Excuses"; Penguin's "A Deputy Essential." Both men and men participate in these oxymoronic discrete indiscretions, and it goes without saying that men tend to horn women more than women horn men. Yet, when men *get horn*, it is more much more emasculating and unpalatable.

“‘How Our Lives Would Be Affected by the Custom of Having Several Wives’: The Intersection between African History and Gender Studies in the Caribbean.” A female Barbadian citizen fearing the consequences of the mandating of African history wrote a letter to a local Barbadian newspaper articulating the apprehension of “those possessed of the misconceived notion that mere teaching about the African past would lead to ‘harmful’ socio-economic practices from the continent” (127).

What is telling is that the social and martial engagements are communal and transparent not the secret, tacit or explosively demoralizing and sometimes publicly embarrassing situations of “getting horn,” or being an “outside (the other) woman” with “children on the outside,” a reality for many of our Caribbean grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. Feminists’ persistent marrying of subjectivity and autonomy to sexual agency—read monogamous relationship or non-marital encounters—keeps women’s sexuality, to use Busia’s theorizing, positioned between the virgin and the whore. This perpetual binary of women’s sexuality precludes other possibilities for women’s sexual expressions or definitions of women’s sexuality, for example sexual piety which simultaneously invokes both tropes of virgin and whore but complicates them rather than stabilize the dichotomy as I will explore in the following chapters. Yet, sexual piety as meaningful sexuality calls for thinking beyond hegemonic constructions of sexuality itself, empowerment, and agency. Ironically, the distending of autonomy at the expense of collectivity and the elimination of spaces for difference may cause autonomy itself to implode as well as erode the

very social and psychic infrastructure upon which social order, and hence the conditions for autonomy itself, rests. This social infrastructure consists primarily of the family and various civic institutions through which individuals live as parents, friends, and neighbors; as church, synagogue

or mosque members....The psychic infrastructure endangered by the culture of autonomy is the processes of childbearing, socialization, and moral development that create the motivational basis for responsible conduct in the social emotions of shame, guilt, pride, and conscience. (Gaylin and Jennings 7)

Thus, if we continue to view a Caribbean feminist subject with inherited lenses of agency and empowerment instead of, say, the African antecedent of bonded autonomy of shared responsibility, communal living, and collectivity, Caribbean gender theorizing will never be indigenously Caribbean and will remain inherited instead of inherent.

Mahmood asks, “How should issues of historical and cultural specificity inform both the analytics and the politics of any feminist project?” (1) Even while we in the Caribbean are self-reflexive of reproducing hegemony, the tendency remains to privilege imported gender and racial constructions and relations along a/symmetries and bilateralisms rather than contingencies; and this transplanting disables us from engaging multiply nuanced and complex identities like those of submitting men and obedient wives within Islam, personal and moral positions which in hegemonic feminism are always and already antithetical to agency, empowerment, and subjectivity and synonymous with complicity, disempowerment, loss of identity.

My contribution to Caribbean scholarship then is to navigate the space left bare for the growth of a revealing epistemology to analyze the quotidian negotiations of the Muslimeen where the discourse does not become mired in colonial discursive intrusions and continue to produce Caribbean subjectivities removed from and alien to the polyphonic historical, social, cultural, religious, and gender narratives, audible as well as tacit, which govern the quotidian lives of Caribbean women and men. My ethnography at the Jamaat positioned me where the politics of Muslimeenism and the production and

repudiation of Muslimeenophobia play out on a daily basis, a space in which postcolonial essentialism counters neoliberal and modernist inclinations through a transformative, appellative dance from the no longer into simultaneous self- and collective actualization.

Sister Narratives

Annisa

My first sustained conversation with a Muslimeen was with Sister Annisa. It was during Ramadan 2007, and the compound was deserted as school was closed for the last week of Ramadan for the community to prepare for Eid ul Fitr. After dhuhr, we remained on the upper level of the mosque where the women prayed, Sister Annisa on a chair as was her custom to pray and I seated on the floor. It would be the first time I would get, first hand, a snippet of the personal casualties of the coup. After contouring through what I hoped to achieve through my ethnography, we arrived at the story of the death of her son.

Sister Annisa spoke briefly but painfully about the sacrifice she paid for the insurrection, the life of her only son. On day six of the siege, the day of surrender, Abu Bakr's stepson was killed by the police during a raid on a house six miles from Port of Spain (Deosaran 26)).

"He was supposed to leave [Trinidad] to return to US," she recounted. "But the airport was closed." The airport was closed due to the insurrection. "He was originally supposed to leave the day before he was killed." Sister Annisa raised her eye glasses to her forehead and wiped her tears.

That the idaat for mourning was long over did not matter at that moment. The attempted coup was seventeen years ago; yet, the passage of time did little to ease her pain. I looked down, unable to meet her gaze. I scribbled in my notebook, then looked up. It was at that moment too, as I looked up into her eyes, and she looked down into mine and wiped the tears away again that I saw Sister Annisa, not as research subject, not as Muslimeen, not even as Abu Bakr's wife, but as mother, grieving mother. I thought of my mother. Not having anything else to offer, I broke the silence:

“One of my brothers was murdered in New York in 1983. He too was shot... in his head. He was on a weekend pass from the US army to see one of my sisters who was visiting from Trinidad. My mother still cries every time she visits his grave.” I paused.

“How old was he?”

“Twenty-three,” I replied.

“Around the same age as my son. He was going to Howard University.”

“My nephew went to Howard. A lot of Trinis go Howard,” I continued. “What happened?” I asked. I noticed Annisa never mentioned her son's name. Some time later as I became more comfortable at the Jamaat, I asked Nadia his name. She did not know either, and she would have been a child in 1990. Other than preparing to observe July 27, the coup was never talked about publicly on the compound. One day in sister class I found out Annisa's son's name, Jissani.

On one of the anniversaries of the coup, one of the local newspapers highlighted the story of the first casualty of the insurrection. A young police officer standing guard outside police headquarters on St. Vincent Street in the middle of the capital city, Port of Spain, was blown to pieces when the car bearing explosives approached the building. The

young police officer approached the vehicle that was slowing down in front of headquarters, apparently in an attempt to investigate. The journalist interviewed his mother, who recounted her pain at losing her innocent son. She was constructed as a mother of the nation, and her son a hero. Annisa and her son are allowed no such sympathy or accolades. Her son was deserving of an untimely death owing to the actions of his stepfather, Imam Abu Bakr. Sister Annisa too, is allowed no empathy and no metaphor as mother of the nation. Yet the pain and tears in her eyes which exceeded the mourning iddat by close to twenty years speak to the need for a different narrative of loss, grief, and healing around the coup.

Fatima and Nadia

During my ethnography, I observed no greater bond of friendship at the Jamaat, or beyond its walls, than between Nadia, my first personal contact with a Muslimeen and who had introduced me to the members of the jamat; and Fatima, the imam's wife who taught Sister classes. They were virtually inseparable once they were away from their families. Fatima picked up Nadia for Sister classes and took her home. She took her to doctor visits when Nadia was pregnant. When Umah was born, Fatima continued to be a constant in Nadia's life and was very active in caring for Umah.

Fatima has no biological children but is always helping in the care of the children in the mosque. She is the epitome of favorite Aunty. She holds them, hugs them, teaches them, guides them. She buys the children toys and is sure to have healthy snacks for them while they are in the mosque. Sometimes after sister classes Fatima, Nadia and I went out on errands as I narrate in Chapter Four. Fatima always drives and Fatima never takes

them home without buying Umah a small gift whether a toy or fruit. Sometimes when we went out after sister classes, Umah would talk to Fatima from his car seat in the back, and somehow Fatima seemed to be the only one who could understand what he was saying.

Nadia's husband Umah was very active in his son's life and hers, but he worked long hours; so Fatima and Nadia who were also always together engaged in their own personal self-development. Muslimeen women are probably the most productive community of women I have ever met, hence the sense in community childrearing. Time never seems to be wasted.

Sometimes, we would all be in the parking lot of the compound: Fatima, Nadia, the two Umahs as I called them, and me. I saw Umah grow from a babe in arms to a toddler running around and talking. One day as the two Umahs were playing, I asked Nadia if she wanted any more children. She replied no promptly.

"I told Umah I 'm done. I want to finish my studies." Nadia was pursuing a BSc in Business at the University of the West Indies.

"Nah, I want children back to back." Umah interrupted his playing to tease. Nadia paid him no mind. So not all Muslim women are or feel obligated to bear children just because their husbands would like more offspring. Like any other couple, Muslimeen couples compromise and negotiate their desires and their wishes, usually with the wife getting her way. In 2014 I saw Fatima at a gas station, and she told me Nadia had had a baby girl. My schedule had become so hectic I had lost touch with Nadia although I saw Fatima sporadically, and we communicated by email on occasion. Nadia had finished her studies.

Saleem and Rita

When I first met Saleem and Rita, both in their early thirties, they had three young children; and Rita was pregnant. Rita's fourth pregnancy was very difficult, and she had to be hospitalized eventually. Her doctor prescribed complete bed rest since she was suffering placenta previa. Saleem made every attempt to be at his wife's side through this trying time. His commitment to his wife and family, however, led to conflicts with his boss who became less understanding about allowing Saleem time off to stay with his three other young children or visit his wife. Although other family members rallied to his side, especially as he lived with his parents, Saleem did not want to be apart from his wife and children. It was becoming more stressful and confrontational for him at work; so, as a couple, they decided he would quit his job to be with the family, and they would live on Sister Rita's kindergarten teacher salary until he found another job. She continued to receive her salary although she was on sick leave.

While we cannot neglect the obvious reality that this valuing of wives and children is tied, whether directly or subconsciously, to women's reproductive capacity, the meaningful organization of the community around Islamic principles is informing in alternative and disruptive ways to notions of normativity.

The examples provided above reveal very productive alternative gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen. Women and men within this Muslimeen community consistently negotiate their roles and places as other/wife, other/mother, also/husband, and also/father with Muslimeen women's and wives' congenial, endearing and reciprocating relationships speaking compellingly to constructive ways in which they

navigate their regulated lives. As Margot Badran argues, women's spaces can still be productive even within restrictive patriarchal praxis.

Chapter Three

Politics of Sexual Piety

Fundamentalists and unveiled women are the two groups that have emerged with the definite disturbing claims and aspirations in the postcolonial era. (Mernissi *Beyond the Veil* xi, 1987)

An inquiry into the constitution of the self does not take the personal preferences and proclivities of the individual to be the object of study, but instead analyzes the historically *contingent* arrangements of power through which the normative subject is produced. (Mahmood 33. *My Italics*)

“Let me begin with the premise that the politics of being positioned and/or being responded to as a Muslim place women in a dilemma” (Shanaz Khan *Aversion and Desire* 2002, xix)

In a 2011, the Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN) in Trinidad and Tobago ran a series promoting women’s health. What was particularly informing about the episodes was the focus on sex. Hosted by a local Indo Muslim woman, male guests were also featured and interviewed; for they were some of the facilitators offering public workshops that discussed improving sexual intercourse between husband and wife.

The particularly revolutionary aspects of the series for me, a non-Muslim observing gender practices and relations among a group of Muslim men and women, was that Muslim women’s deliberate and informed adherence to gendered tenets of conduct, including wearing traditional Islamic dress codes, being pious, and being obedient was not antithetical to or incommensurable with desiring intimacy, being sensual, and having an active sexual appetite. Ironically, there appeared to be a sexual power embedded within willful and mindful piety, a piece of the puzzle missing from Mahmood’s piety

discourse. Thus, like I extended, then reshaped, Spivak's and Metcalf's concepts of *strategic essentialism* and *postmodern pluralism* respectively, I began to imagine how a postcolonial essentialist politics would allow a Muslimeen body, especially a female one, to perform piety and sexuality simultaneously. Since the Muslimeen were already occupying so many third spaces physically, politically, culturally, and socially, a politics of sexual piety seemed an irreducible seepage.

Piety and Sexuality: Undoing the Dichotomy

As evidenced in the secular versus Islamic feminism debate, hegemonic feminism privileges the secular over the spiritual. Seemingly then, there is the erroneous perception that sexuality and spirituality and or/religion are incommensurable. With the unparalleled global attention to Islamic fundamentalism, the belief in and practice of piety and spirituality have become attached to Muslim women's and men's bodies more so than to the soma of women and men of other denominations since Muslim men are typecast as being fundamentalist and Muslim women as complicit in their own stereotyped abject situations.

Yet, feminist literature reveals Christian women are engaged in feminist religious politics as well.⁵³ For example, Yvonne Bobb-Smith looks at the way in which "Caribbean Canadian women's spirituality is a connection between the self and the political which expresses itself in their agency, activism, and survival" (67) in the host

⁵³ The practice of piety including submission to husband is not specific to Islam. Christian women too are engaged in a politics of piety. For examples see Doyle, Laura. *The Surrendered Wife: A Practical Guide to Finding Intimacy, Passion, and Peace with a Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001; and Wilson, P.B. *Liberated through Submission: The Essence of Power*. Pasadena: New Dawn, 1988.

society. As a result of hegemonic feminism's contrived dichotomy between spirituality and subjectivity, Bob-Smith concludes "critical investigations of spirituality as a tool for agency and resistance are largely ignored in feminist thought, even though feminist theory has included experience as a valid category of analysis" (57). My focus, nevertheless, is Islam, however culturally and politically varied its articulations.

It should be obvious by now—from the comprehensive discursive and theoretical analyses in the previous chapters—that any mapping of Muslimeen gender practices and relations require in-depth, maybe even repetitive excavations. Such recoveries though are necessary to providing context and concept of a people who seem to embody and deploy their Muslimeen identity and perpetuate their ambiguous existence through disrupting paradigms and congealing paradoxes. Necessary to comprehending sexual piety is a partial revisiting of the fluid and muddy meanings of the veil. Just as it is inescapable to talk about the Muslimeen men and omit the 1990 attempted coup, it is irreducible to talk about Muslimeen women and not revisit the veil.

Among the volumes on Muslim women and nestled between the debates on the veil and Islamic feminism, two texts stand out in Western feminist literature as seminal to framing and changing the tone and texture of the discourse on Muslim women in the Muslim world. On one hand, Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* (1975,1987) comes from the tradition of writing dichotomously Muslim men and women's lives from the standpoint of oppression and repression respectively. She looks squarely at the concomitant relationship between space—which Muslim men command and in which women are regulated—and Muslim women's assumed powerful sexuality, which patriarchal society

and Muslim fundamentalists believe is the seat of *fitna*; so Muslim women's sexuality must be repressed to keep Islamic society pure.

On the other hand, Mahood's *Politics of Piety* is located in the epistemological framework of exploring contingencies of power through which subjects are produced and through which they re/create themselves. Her approach is productive rather than repressive. The women she studied in the mosque movements in Cairo, Egypt are taking possession of their right to piousness by being proactive and highly visible in their performance of piety. So too in the Jamaat's case, where Muslimeen women's choice to be pious is an informed and empowering one performed through an intersecting politics of Muslimeenism and Muslimeenophobia.

Both Mernissi and Mahmood have been revolutionary theoretically to feminist studies of Muslim women in the Muslim world, although, arguably, they have contributed to different theoretical camps. Though decades apart, both Mernissi's and Mahmood's respective texts disrupt hegemonic scholarship on male-female power dynamics among Muslims by revisiting and re-envisioning several traditional concepts:

- the semiotics of un/veiling,
- Muslims bodies navigating space and place,
- the de/valuing of particular types of subjectivity unfamiliar to Western feminists
- the uncritical hegemonic feminist privileging of secularism, and *a priori* incommensurability of adherence to religious doctrine and personal empowerment.

In essence Mernissi and Mahmood call into question the concept of teleological Muslim

woman. I extend these disruptions of a teleological feminist female sexuality and a teleological Muslim woman by exploring this empirical convergence of sexuality and piety.

Until Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) based on adherence to Islamic practices by educated Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt, Western feminist scholars too often theorized piety of Muslim women as autochthonous, thus always and already conservative gestures through which Muslim women were not only complicit but also disturbingly content in their subordination. Mahmood revolutionized how piety could be read as a conscious act of positive subject formation. Muslim women's proactive decisions to submit to a feminist Islam, cover, and reject Westernization are not akin to disempowerment, complicity, or loss of identity. Indeed, the ascription, inscription, and performance of piety or public modesty can be read very differently on different corporealities against different cultural and national landscapes.

In reviewing the gendered nature of nationalism in anti-colonial literature, Rick Wilford discovers that in the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism (or revivalism), the wearing of *hijab* "may be constructed not as an act of induced submission but as a pragmatic, if not entirely, voluntaristic, response among women" or "the adoption of propriety as a badge of commitment...expression of [national] identity" (4). Furthermore, *hijab* can represent "a form of negotiation with patriarchy enabling women to move freely in public spaces, hidden from the view of the 'male gaze,'" or "[signify] a 'patriarchal bargain' indicating to their menfolk that they continue to be 'worthy of protection'" (4). Three of the most compelling reasons for young women of African descent taking *shahada*, specifically at the Jamaat al Muslimeen, are for the sense of security, regeneration of self-

determination, and restoration of respectability Muslimeen hypervisibility promises especially to unwed mothers. Acts of violence against women are astronomically high in Trinidad; yet, up to the writing of this ethnography, there was not a single reported incident of violence against a veiled African Muslim woman by a known or unknown perpetrator.

Given racial, ethnic, cultural, and historical differences, as well as personal proclivities and beliefs locally and globally, understanding gender relations among the Muslimeen calls for more than dichotomous thinking of men versus women, empowerment versus oppression, and sexual agency versus piety. Additionally, appreciating Islamic practices among the Muslimeen also necessitates dismantling hegemonic gendered reifications of the body that *a priori* trap Muslim men in hypersexualized masculinities and imprison Muslim women in the opposite—*hypo*sexualized femininities.

I do not intend to romanticize the Muslimeen; but I declare at this point that I make every attempt to steer clear of entrapping Muslimeen's physical, sexual, religious, and spiritual articulations in modernist, secular-liberal quagmires of agency, autonomy, and subjectivity. Instead, I navigate an epistemological continuum charted from Mernissi's beyond the veil discourse to Mahmood's politics of piety rhetoric. It is inescapable, however, that Western feminist legitimizations and iterations of emancipated subject seep into explorations of gender performance. Even as emerging Islamic feminist scholarship continues to contest the relevance of applying liberally and uncritically the label *feminist* to Islamic practices, I too attempt to rescue the Muslim subject from the perpetuity of being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed within the stereotypical perceptions of Islamic normativity: terrorist, patriarchal male; and oppressed,

disempowered female. Carolyn Martin Shaw in exploring colonial inscription of Kikuyu women in Kenya illuminates that these bodies are “symbols used in battle against real and imagined enemies” (3). Indeed, Muslim women and men must be treated as more than allegory.

As necessary as the practices of veiling and unveiling are to Islamic feminism, salient analyses of covering unfortunately shroud relations between and among Muslim men and women in binaries, a persistent limitation of feminist and gender theorizing. In her introduction to her seminal text, *Beyond the Veil*, Mernissi’s linguistic choices invoke dichotomous thinking, writing of discriminating between “structural dissymmetry (ix); two distinct dimensions of the dynamics of the Muslim world (viii); repressed Muslim women and oppressive Muslim man; fundamentalists and unveiled women and so on as evidenced in the epigraph to this section. Similarly, even as I rely upon Mahmood’s politics of piety, a revolutionary theory of submission as an act of informed subjectivity that inspired my approach to studying the Muslimeen, I push against encasing Muslimeen women in piety only, instead exploring the intersection of their desire to express their sexuality and sensuality as part of their performance of *taqwa*.

In order to flesh out this methodology of sexual piety, my theoretical proposal of postcolonial essentialism in the previous chapter becomes seminal. To recap briefly, I draw simultaneously upon and reverse Metcalf’s concept of postmodern pluralism, then integrate Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism when looking for common ground upon which women can mobilize. In employing this idea of postcolonial essentialism with regard to the Muslimeen, I draw attention to another epigraph at the start of this chapter of the “historically *contingent* arrangements of power through which the

normative subject is produced” (Mahmood 33. *My Italics*) and bring the Muslimeen into their geographical context, the Anglophone Caribbean. When unpacking the dynamics producing gendered relations in the English-speaking Caribbean, Caribbean theorists need to employ lenses of contingencies that refract indigenous negotiations rather than employ solely or primarily ethnocentric lenses that merely reflect ethnographers’ subject positions. Mahmood argues strongly that gender analyses of Muslim women, especially, necessitate lenses of contingencies rather than binaries, communal or collective sensibilities rather than “individual proclivities” (Mahmood 33).

Similarly, Amireh challenges hegemonic feminism’s representation of Arab women in general and Muslim women in particular, for not all Arabs are Muslim as the literature is apt to imply. She defines representation as encompassing the political and the aesthetic. In political representation there is a tendency to speak for the other, while the aesthetic involves “the production of images of other women” (185). Critiquing that researchers sometimes “fail to confront their own positionality as investigating subjects,” resulting in the reproduction of unbalanced power differentials between First and Third World women (203), Amireh calls for ethnographers to engage in a “radical examination of the ways in which their site of enunciation...conditions their constitution of Arab women as objects of knowledge” (203).

In abiding by this consciousness of ethnographer positionality, I use an epistemological and methodological integrationist approach. Within the theoretical interstices produced by one, the collisions, tensions, and ambivalences among Mernissi’s dichotomous and repression-oppressive rhetoric; two, Mahmood’s conceptual frameworks of contingencies and affirmation; and three, Caribbean feminist theorizing

and philosophizing, I try to represent the embodied as well as disembodied performances of the Muslimeen community as I explore their sexuality.

While my gendered lens requires working with as well as *within* categories of men and categories of women, both Muslimeen men and Muslimeen women negotiate their quotidian, tenuous and highly visible identities within and outside the epistemological borders of how hegemonic feminism and gender theories understand sex, gender, and sexuality in outlying communities. As Barlas points out, however, “treating men and women differently does not always amount to treating them unequally, nor does treating them identically necessarily mean treating them equally” (*“Believing Women”* 5). Muslimeen biological comprehension and sexual appreciation of the body and the social negotiations around this enunciation are predicated upon the Islamic notions of sexuality and piety, two concepts that immediately engender cognitive dissonance among Western feminisms but are not, and have seemingly never been, incommensurable for Muslim women and men.

Demystifying the Veil

Given the currency on Muslim bodies, there is no dearth of literature on women *in Islam*, women *and Islam*, or women *in the Muslim world*. From the inception of these discourses in Arab women’s movements, most recently born out of the Arab-Muslim nationalism in the late nineteenth century, the prescriptive roles as well as the dehumanizing treatment of Muslim women in Islamic societies have predominated in literature on Islam in the West. To reinforce the latest neocolonial image of oppressed third world woman, purdah or the seclusion of women in Islamic societies took root and continues to proliferate in feminist and Islamic scholarship especially in terms of how

space is regulated in Islamic societies to control Muslim women's sexuality and prevent sexual transgression. Wearing a hijab or veiling—literal and symbolic, imposed and chosen—has become a Western symbol for piety and oppression, as if only Muslim women are pious.

In Trinidad, however, in looking at distinctions between African and Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, Aisha Khan reveals that Afro-Trinidadian Muslim women wear a hijab and “loose ankle-length shifts” (121) routinely while Indo-Muslims “confine these clothes to special or religiously marked occasions, such as personal celebrations, weddings, or festivals” (“Homeland” 121). The return to Muslim women's attire, especially the choice to don hijab or *niqab* and leave only the eyes uncovered continues to perpetuate in Islamic and secular feminisms; and in Trinidad covering reveals a strategy by women of African descent to remake their identities by restoring their respectability, especially as unwed mothers. Even as Hammonds reminds that the trans-Atlantic slavery experience positioned African American women as hypersexualized, so too in the Caribbean, African Caribbean women's bodies have been constructed by the colonial legacy as sites of licentiousness and readily accessible to white men; for “[w]hether European women were available or not African women were subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse that influenced both cultural and demographic development (Lovejoy 7).

Although this chapter is divided into subsections, there are overlaps as Muslimeen women's and men's decisions to convert/revert to Islam, to remain Muslimeen and to practice piety are not discrete performances but coalesce into a politics of sexual piety.

Additionally their politics stand in opposition to the prevailing re-veiling and revealing rhetoric:

the nascent ‘liberation’ of Muslim women has indeed borrowed many characteristics of Western women’s way of life. The first gesture of ‘liberated’ Arab women was to discard the veil for Western dress, which in the thirties, forties, and fifties was that of the wife of the colonizer. (Mernissi *Beyond* 1987, 167)

The seclusion of Muslim women from public life and public view continues to be prevalent and contentious in patriarchal Islamic societies, and a great deal of feminist scholarship pivots on these forms of somatic and spatial control. Veiling has and continues to preoccupy Western imaginations; but for at least a century Muslim women have been engaged in their own discourses on veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling:

A very hot topic at the time was the question of the veil and its divine ordination. In 1923, Huda Shaarawi, the founder and president of the Egyptian Feminist Union, had staged a public demonstration in the Cairo Railway station by taking off her veil in front of a crowd. Much ink had been spilled on the topic of unveiling, but after this momentous event, the issue gained reality and substance as committed Muslim women added their voices to the debate. (Cooke xiv)

Like any performance, veiling and piety are contextual and must not be subjected to homogenizing, hegemonic interpretations. In Muslim countries, it is not unusual for Muslim women to wear Islamic clothing daily, either by prescription or choice:

“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free) respectable women so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Surat 33:59 al-Hilali and Khan)

Mernissi herself does a *tafsir* of the “descent of the veil” sura contextualizing it linguistically, socially, historically, and religiously (Mernissi *The Veil and the Male Elite* 101). Working through the reception of the surat, Mernissi reasons it came “at a moment

when the Prophet felt intruded upon by obnoxious guests who were preventing him from spending time with his new wife” (101). Mernissi believes it was literally a veil between the Prophet and Anas, his servant, the only person left after some obtrusive guests left finally (*The Veil and the Male Elite*, 85-101; *Women and Islam*, 85-101) and was not intended to be attached to the bodies of women specifically. Additionally, the revelation occurred in the AD627, the fifth year of the Hegira, the beginning of the Muslim calendar. It was a trying time for the prophet politically and militarily having been defeated at the battle of Uhud. Mernissi’s etymology of the word *hijab* helps to clarify the perpetual debates on the veil:

The concept of the word *hijab* is three-dimensional, and the three dimensions often blend into one. The first dimension is a visual one: to hide something from sight. The root of the verb *hajaba* means ‘to hide.’ The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden. So we have not just tangible categories that exist in the reality of the senses – the visual, the spatial – but also an abstract reality in the realm of ideas. A space hidden by a *hijab* is a forbidden space” (Mernissi *The Veil and the Male Elite* 93; *Women and Islam* 93 Italics in text.)

Mernissi’s explanation is critical for laying bare the linguistic and cultural complications involved in the various interpretations of the sura and of veiling; but her unpacking also speaks to multiple jeopardies, to invoke King, a Muslim woman negotiates on a quotidian basis: the visual, spatial, and ethical. These dimensions of contact between her internal and external worlds appear to delimit or regulate what could otherwise become a sexually charged and erotic space. Ironically, however, is that even though the *hijab* veils and hides, it does not erase automatically the possibility of a sexual or sensual body beneath the covering.

The function of the veil also shifts across space and time, and its meanings is decidedly situational; hence the need to contextualize Muslim women's actions. In one context the veil can symbolize conformity and in another resistance. It is noteworthy that conformity—playing a role strategically, and complicity—participating in one's own subjugation, are not necessarily synonymous, so I am not setting up a dichotomy here between conformity and resistance; for both conformity and resistance can be acts of agency and subversion conceptually and contextually. According to Moxley Rouse, for Sunni Muslim women at one of her research sites, the Masji-al-Mustaqim in Los Angeles, “wearing of *hijab* denotes one's commitment to faith, thereby situating those who wear *hijab* as core members of the community” (39). Moxely Rouse notes however that “seven years after... *hijab* had lost its significance as a membership diacritic within the community (Moxley Rouse 39). This reversal in practice and sentiment is not the case with the Muslimeen whose veiling remains a very strategic postmodern gesture; thus, the metaphor of the veil for the Muslimeen extends beyond its immediate community's diacritical significance to a wider national and global signification of an at once submitting yet resisting community of believers.

Once they are in public, and especially when attending mosque, Muslimeen women are required to ensure their veils cover their heads, ears, neck, and breasts fully. Even though the torso is clothed, the *hijab* must also further cloak the breasts. During a sister class one Saturday, Fatima iterated the correct wearing of the *hijab*.

“Jerniece, I notice you don't wrap your *hijab* around your breasts. You're supposed to ensure that you cover your breasts as well,” Fatima said in a maternal voice as she instructed us in the proper way to wrap a veil. She reminded the teenage sister she

is not to leave the veil to drape cowl style from her neck leaving the shape of her breasts visible.

A few weeks later Sister Fatima brought several white veils to class and gave one to each of the new converts. She also gave me an intricately embroidered one. Arms and legs should also be clothed to at least the wrists and ankles. While preference is that all female attendees, even non-Muslims, cover at least the head and upper torso when entering the mosque, exceptions are made for non-Muslims as I will explain soon. The instructions for appropriate Islamic attire comes from several sura, but the following is one of the most cited:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron), and to draw their veils all over *Juyûbihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks, and bosoms) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husband's sons, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment" (Surat 24.31 al Hilali and Khan)

Still, Muslimeen women dress in differing degrees of modesty and conspicuity showing cultural, ethnic, and generational conformity as well as fissures. The subjectivity intimated in the nuanced personal choices made within Islamic codes of dress is postmodern and postcolonial; for as Barlas states, "Veiling...inscribes the body literally, by covering it and figuratively, by serving as a marker of identity. That is not to say that veiling has only one form or that veiling means the same thing to all women." ("Islam and Body Politics" 1) Some mothers cover the heads of their young girls when the children are as young as two years old; others leave it up to their girl children to choose

before puberty; but most girls with whom I chatted choose to wear a *hijab* well before puberty. Although in all elementary and in the majority of secondary schools, public and private, in Trinidad, school children are required to wear uniforms, in their own madressas on the compound, many Muslimeen girls veil and wear their school skirts ankle length and their school blouse sleeves to their wrists.

Non-Muslim children also attend the madressa; but they wear their uniforms at the standard skirt length –just above or below the knees, and short-sleeved blouses. No head covering is worn. The school uniform comprises dark green pleated skirts, pale yellow blouses, and green *hijabs* for Muslim girls who wear them. For Muslims green represents hope, unlike Western traditional signification where white symbolizes all things positive, including hope.

Muslimeen attire vary among women given age, ethnicity and personal taste. The middle-aged to older women, primarily of African descent are less ostentatious in their colors and fabric than the younger Muslimeen women or girls who are visually more expressive of their individuality via their clothing. There are no elderly Indo-Muslimeen women. Some Muslimeen cover completely with the burqa, chador, or abaya as one would see in pictures of Saudi Arabian and Afghani women for example. Two of the older women, generally more than fifty years of age, wear all-black covering from head to toe, including black gloves and black stockings, with only their eyes visible. Despite covering completely, a Muslim's perceived ethnicity still seems perceptible. For me, the wearing of the burquas is an indicator of an African Trinidadian Muslim because Indo women in Trinidad rarely, if at all, wear burquas as Aisha Khan can attest.

On the other hand, there is also personal preference. Although there is significant age difference among the African Trinidadians Ammina, Nadia, Zara, and Rita,⁵⁴ they seem to prefer abayas which are conservative, made from monotone, plain, heavy cotton fabric. Nneka, however, who lives in the US, is much less conservative, even unapologetically flamboyant. While her story was on the inside of a local newspaper, she was pictured on the cover, all decked out in a fiery red shalwar kameez and matching red hijab. It was obvious she was wearing makeup. Nneka was born a Muslimeen, but migrated to the US and holds an executive post at a major gas company.

The majority of younger Muslim women both of African and Indian descent, however, seem to prefer to dress in what was traditionally considered the Indo fashions, shalwar kameez, kurtis and tunics: very elaborate, light almost diaphanous sari material, brightly colored, beaded, sequined shalwars with ostentatious yet color coordinated headscarves. While many Muslim women reserve their most elaborate and conspicuous wear for Eid-ul-Fitr, many young women dress very elaborately every Friday for juma. A group of six young women, two already married and one of them a mother, ranging from seventeen to twenty-one years, come to mosque every Friday very ornately attired, including wearing excessive amounts of gold jewelry, sporting several piercings in each ear and multiple rings on each finger, so many that some fingers are invisible for all the jewelry adorning them.

Now, that is not to say that Muslim women who cover do not pay attention to their bodies, to sexuality, or to sensuality; for, surprisingly, some of the paraphernalia displayed on the notice board on the compound are for weight loss and new Islamic

⁵⁴ These are all pseudonyms.

fashions. Some Muslimeen women also go to gyms; and as mentioned in Chapter One, before the state raided and razed the compound in July 1990, there was a beauty parlor on site. Covering does not result necessarily in disinterest with physical appearance or even sexuality. Indeed, religiosity does not negate sensuality and sexuality; sexual expression is just reserved for particular gazes.

The dress requirements for non-Muslims though are more situational. On one occasion I left the university where I was teaching much later than I had anticipated; so I did not have time to go home after work for a head scarf. I subsequently learned to leave a scarf in my car. So I arrived to *juma* bareheaded, exposing my long rasta locks pulled up into a ponytail. Sister Fatima insisted that I accompany her upstairs into the mosque even without a head covering since I am not Muslim and was not going to pray. It was more important to her that I observe *juma* than be excluded for not wearing a headscarf.

Whatever the personal clothing, these choices—Islam, being Muslimeen, and covering their bodies from public view, particularly the male gaze—are conscious and empowering decisions by Muslimeen women in a nation given to high incidences of violence against women as well as to over-exposure and hypersexualization of women's bodies especially during the Carnival season.⁵⁵ Mernissi argues, 'While Muslim exploitation of the female is cloaked under veils and hidden behind walls, Western exploitation has the bad taste of being bare and over-exposed' (Mernissi *Women and Islam* 1987, 167).

⁵⁵ The juxtaposition between covering with mud, paint, and pieces of fabric during *j'ouveurt* and covering as part of piety is explored in the final chapter, "Ethnography and Autobiography."

**Reviling Bodies, Re-veiling Faces, Revealing Choices: Aversion, Conversion,
Reversion**

The ritual of conversion effectively sets new pedagogical goals as the necessary elements for the process of self-rediscovery and social reconstruction. (Dannin 239)

Trinidadians are destructively misinformed about the Muslimeen. One popular and injurious rumor has it that there is a huge notice board in the middle of the compound with all the Muslim women's names. Every day, the men would sign their names next to the names of the women with whom they wanted to have sex. This rumor demonstrates not only the level of ignorance concerning Muslim practices, polygamy, and the Muslimeen but also the discursive violence levied against Muslimeen women's and men's bodies. The sexually violent rhetoric reflects the colonialist construction of the native other in the trope of African bestial sexuality, arrived at via "cultural forms of sentiments, attitudes and perceptions ... expressed and codified in myths, memories, values, and symbols" (qtd in Wilford 10). Ironically though, just as Muslim women are to comport themselves in certain ways so too are Muslim men are to adhere to bodily etiquette as well:

Oh ye who believe!
Let those whom your right hands
Possess, and the (children) among you
Who have not come of age [attained puberty
Ask your permission (before
They come to your presence),
On three occasions: before
Morning prayer; then while
Ye doff your clothes for the noonday heat;
And after the late-night prayer:
These are your three times
Of undress: outside those times
It is not wrong for you
Or for them to move about

Attending to each other. (Qu'ran 24:58 qtd in Barlas "*Believing Women*" 159)

Muslims comprise about six to eight percent of the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago; and during my ethnography Muslimeen women numbered arguably no more than one hundred. Muslimeen women are among very few women in Trinidad who live in openly polygamous marriages. They are also among the minority of Muslim women who cover daily in public, including wearing hijab, an indicator Mahmood sees as part of the "religious ethos and sensibility" (3) of the Islamic revival, giving birth to the piety movement in Cairo, Egypt. The combination of these two factors places them in an extremely esoteric group. Muslimeen women are also members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, considered to be a predominantly Africancentric space. The intersection of these three identifiers: place, ethnicity, and religion results in a visibility of Muslimeen women unlike other Muslim women, militated through the hypervisibility of Muslimeen men. Their covered visibility is made even more apparent up against "indecent dress of young women" in Trinidad society.⁵⁶

Muslimeen women use this mediated visibility to perform a politics of Muslimeenism of their own. Owing to the strained and ambivalent relationship between the Jamaat and the state and the attempted coup d'état, female Muslimeen occupy a very contentious position on the social and cultural landscape; but they traverse this space strategically. Young women, escaping the challenges of the *dunya*, come to the Jamaat seeking refuge, protection, and self-renewal. One young sister whom I met in 2009 on an early walk to a breathtaking historical site in Trinidad, a place called Fort George, told

⁵⁶ Personal conversation with a Muslimeen man, June 3, 2009 at the Jamaat.

me of her several entries in and out of Islam as she tried to find a space in which she felt “comfortable and not judged as a single mother.” She joined, then she left a mosque in Port of Spain. Next she attempted membership at a mosque in East Trinidad but soon got “fed-up with the [nonsense] and macho man mentality” She felt that women were not being treated respectfully. She finally found her way to the Jamaat al Muslimeen and she found her space to renew herself. Through her affiliation with the Jamaat, she was even able to secure the job at the site at which I met her.

This penchant for self-regeneration and productivity is not specific to outsiders coming in but is self-propagating, for children born into the Muslimeen community retain their connections whether abroad or at home as seen with Nneka. Also, at present, a group of young Muslimeen who were mere toddlers during the 1990 attempted coup is engaged in a book project called *Children of the Islamic Renaissance*. Not only are young women engaged in the process of sculpting their identities but also older women who continue to negotiate their Muslimeen identity. Some otherwives co-mother without hesitation; some are less sociable. Additionally, wives manage daily a marital arrangement of polygyny that falls outside of the nation’s norm and which is spurned by non-Muslims and Muslims alike for its apparent privileging of male sexual prowess over female sexual desires, in fact, catering to male sexual appetite while not only regulating but also stymieing female sexuality.

Such an analysis of privileging male desire is not without validity. Muslim men can marry non-Muslim women and have up to four wives, once the wives are people of the Book: Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Muslim women, however, can marry only a Muslim man. During my ethnography, nonetheless, I did not encounter any men who

converted to Islam just to marry a Muslim woman, but the practice of conversion for marriage does occur in other Islamic circles.⁵⁷ So, indeed, if the issue of polygamy is privileged over all other Muslim gender relations and practice then, according to hegemonic feminism, female Muslims can only be sexually repressed and socially oppressed women. Such a reading, however, is incommensurable with the gender performances of the Muslimeen.

Choosing to be a submitting Muslim is both an implicit repudiation of a particular formation of Trinidadian womanhood and somatic norm as well as an explicit rejection of a particularly superficial formation of sexual autonomy and sexual performance created

⁵⁷ Like other faith followers, an Indo Trinidadian friend who was born into the Islamic faith chooses to which tenets she adheres. Both of her parents are Muslims; and along with them, she observes Ramadan being very disciplined about fasting. Every Friday however, outside of Ramadan, a group comprising extended family members and friends (all Muslims) leave to spend the weekend at a beach house where they, including my friend, consume large quantities of alcohol. It is not unusual the group would consume, her her telling, at least five bottles of champagne among other alcoholic beverages in a weekend. She also used to smoke. Divorced, five years ago she returned to Trinidad from abroad; for as a single parent it was very difficult managing her life in a foreign country away from her immediate family. She needed her family's help. She was thus very committed to finding a "rich, preferably white husband." For two years she dated men of all ethnicities, but mostly white, she found on Facebook, sometimes scheduling to meet them when she travelled; or they travelled to Trinidad to meet her. Late last year, she met an European man who worked in a service industry. He came to Trinidad for ten days to meet her. He returned a month later for four days, and they were engaged. He returned three months later, converted to Islam, and soon thereafter they were married. She is now pregnant and returning to live in Europe. She informs me that many Indo Muslim women like her use social media to meet people. When I asked her about Muslim couples not being allowed to date to avoid fornication, she scuffed citing the fact the Muslim men including the Prophet (PBH) did not only have sex with their wives but engaged in extramarital intercourse with concubines and slave women. To the contrary of this scenario, for Muslimeen women, piety is extremely important to being a good Muslim. Even though there are single mothers who take shahada, once they convert they try to live pious lives according to Islamic strictures. Here is the distinction between being Islamic and being a Muslim some Islamic scholars make. One is born into Islam; it is a passive act. Being a Muslim, however, means submitting consciously to the will of Allah.

within dynamics of Trinidad Carnival culture of pre-Lent moral abandonment and Lenten asceticism immediately proceeding las' lap.⁵⁸ The Muslimeen women are not only subverting and outright negating the destructive definitions and expectations of hegemonic feminist constructions of agency, empowerment, sexuality, and ownership of one's body but also refiguring sexuality and piety into a politics of sexual piety at odds with extant hegemonic feminist conventions and ideologies of autonomous subjects. Sexual agency, in the Muslimeen context, is as much about saying no to feminist inventions and interventions as it is saying yes to what may be considered traditional, conforming, and disempowering by some North American feminists. Affirming obedience to husband is a repudiation of hegemonic feminism's construction of agency and subjectivity but not necessarily a denial of personhood; for as Rey Chow advocates, "'othering' cannot simply be a process of earnest excavations of the forgotten. It means, more importantly, making a way for 'others' to come forth not as spectacles but in their contradictions" (161).

It is not enough then in analyzing how gender and sexuality are powered to stay mired in patriarchy; for then in the Caribbean context, the salience of the colonial legacy in shaping gender relations collapses; and productive alliances between and among colonized men and women are subordinated and/or erased. Deleting history and context deliberately colors readings of colonial narratives, for both the discursive and corporeal texts are corrupted in the process. What happens here in the myopic and imported focus on patriarchy is the reinforcing of the binarized system of gender relations like the

⁵⁸ Las' lap (last lap) is the final hours of Carnival Tuesday when revellers try desperately to enjoy as much debauchery as possible before midnight when Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Christians' most pious and abstemious season, Lent

bilateral structures of racial discourses Yuval Davis and Anthias find so constricting. Muslimeen women negotiate a gendered identity among their Muslimeen brothers as well as among non-Muslim women. Barlas argues, “mislabelling Muslim women in this way [as passive and downtrodden] not only denies the specificity, autonomy, and creativity of their thought, but it also suggests, falsely, that there is no room from within Islam to contest inequality and patriarchy” (Barlas “*Believing Women*” xii).

In other parts of the world and especially in what is referred to as the Muslim world by academics and non-academics alike, women who are accused of transgressing Islamic rules of conduct experience emotional, psychological, financial and even physical repercussions. Weekly, news of atrocities committed against or in the process of being enacted upon Muslim women appear in my email inbox from the online newsletter *Women Living under Muslim Laws (WMUML)*. Often, these flagrant human rights violations are committed by agents of the Muslim state in which the women reside and in which institutionalized patriarchal doctrines disguised as Islamic principles abide. Thus, for these Muslim women, especially according to dominant narratives, voice and visibility signal liberation:

At the threshold of the third millennium, religious groups everywhere are becoming more vocal and visible, and they are placing women at the symbolic centre of their concerns and debates. ... While conservative religious authorities in the Arab world are publishing tomes about women's importance to the virtuous Muslim community, [sic] they are also dictating constricting rules for women's appropriate behavior. As more and more Muslim women realize that this official preoccupation with women's bodies threatens their ability to make their own decisions, they are doing something about it. (Hussain viii)

Given the multidimensionality of Trinidad with reference to culture, religion and ethnicity, immediately realizable is that choice is part of Trinidadian Muslim women's

lives in ways that are not available to or feasible for women in Islamic nations. Yet, that these local women are not subjected to the physical and psychosocial patriarchal violence like that meted out against Muslim women in certain parts of the Muslim world does not mean that Muslimeen negotiations or choices as Trinidadian Muslims and especially Muslimeen women in a predominantly and oxymoronic Christian-bacchanalia state are negligible.⁵⁹ Such an at-least-here-better-than there configuration would be romanticizing even infantilizing these enlightened women.

In fact, that Muslimeen women, rather than opting to be *other than* Muslim women, elect to remain or become Muslimeen is a powerful declaration. Negotiating daily the metaphysical and mundane realities of being Muslim women members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen in the wake of national and international surveillance of their masjid and in spite of a local form of Islamophobia, Muslimeenophobia, speaks to a tacit but profound rejection of the local *dunya*.

In Their Voices

Undeniably, the Muslimeen *are* an esoteric group of Muslims; and, indeed, there is spiritual, social, and personal capital attached to Muslimeen bodies despite stigmatization. In this section, by contouring through some of the Muslimeen women's

⁵⁹ I am not denying that social and cultural performances at Carnival time can be read as embodied acts of subversion whether against heteronormativity (see Jasbir Puar's "Global Circuits" for example); or against class and color hierarchies (see Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*); race and ethnicity (see Rhoda Reddock's "Jahaji Bhai"); or colonial formations. In arguing, however, a politics of sexual piety, I am turning to an alternative site, the bodies of Muslimeen women, upon which even feminism has pre-inscribed and fixed a subordinated identity owing to feminism's privileging of specific sexualities and a particular kind of sexual agency.

narratives I hope to elucidate their religious and sexual negotiations in an effort to demystify their Muslimeenism and unveil their very mundane lives as ordinary women, wives, mothers, and friends.

Sister Ammina

In her seventies, Sister Ammina is a retired teacher and now a school administrator. She holds two Master's degrees. As an elder at the Jammah, she is a conservative dresser, who responded in the following way to my question of public perception of Muslimeen women's quotidian practice of covering their bodies according to Islamic dress code:

I have no idea why they [non-Muslims] feel wearing a hijab and covering yourself [one's head, face, torso including breasts, arms, and legs] is oppressive. This is very liberating to me. I am happy to cover. I do not have to think about my body, and if I look sexy or if I am too fat. My mind is free to think about important things like reading the Qur'an and teaching my students, not foolishness like if I am looking good.

Although as a non-Muslim I am not required to cover, whenever I visited the compound I was sure to wear loose fitting, wrist and ankle-length clothing., I would cover my head most of the times even if I did not extend my headwear as an additional covering over my loose fitting blouses and over my breasts. The majority of the time, I covered my locks and wrapped the head scarf in the upsweep style of African women and men.

Transferring between clothing that shielded my body from the male gaze especially and attire that attracted the attention of both men and women, I readily identified with Sister Ammina's assessment. I did feel less self-conscious when I too wore a shalwar kameez or a kurta and tunic or my Bob Marley wraps. Covering or dressing like a Muslim also affected my comportment. I recall one Friday when I was heading to juma, another driver

cut me off. I was poised to engage in an exchange of obscenities when I caught a glimpse of myself, wearing a hijab, in my rearview mirror. Immediately my attitude and demeanor changed. I wasn't just dressing like a Muslim. I felt, at that moment of literal self-reflection, that I *was* indeed a servant of Allah and needed to reflect that relationship accordingly.

Ammina's declaration however, really speaks to and opens up a discourse of not just Muslim women shielding their bodies but also the possibility and potential for the female Muslim body itself to be an erogenous zone. It begs the question what are a/sexual as well de/eroticized bodies, and if sexual and erotic are antonymous to female Muslim sexuality. As Barlas underscores, "While the Qur'an thus closes off the body to scopic activity, it does not mean it de-eroticizes or de-sexualizes the body" (159).

Early in my ethnography, the issue of sexuality and sensuality arose without me even posing the question directly. After admitting that she had no idea why wearing Islamic clothing was considered oppressive, Ammina explained that Muslim women are actually quite liberated. Liberated in this context did not signify a feminist consciousness but a comfort with adhering to Islamic doctrine as her subsequent declaration reveals:

"When my husband comes back [either from business trips or other wives], I wear negligees and seduce him. There is nothing in the Qur'an that says a wife is not supposed to be sexy."

Similarly, in an Eid ul Fitr sermon, the imam reminded that Muslim women are not required "to look dowdy" and can "put on a lil eye thing" (meaning mascara, eye liner, eye shadow) "to look pretty." He suggested they put on a "nice dan dan (outfit) and instead of coming to mosque "with their aprons as part of their dress" to "walk with the

apron in bag.”⁶⁰ The mundane attention to physical appearance does not necessarily signal vanity but reflects the purpose of the Sunnah which teaches how Muslims should live their social lives. At one point, one of the sisters was very concerned about white patches that were appearing on her face. These discolorations, barely visible to anyone else unless she drew one’s attention to her face, were a constant worry to her. The imam was not sexist as he also encouraged men to pay similar attention to their deportment.

Ironically, by invoking the Qur’an in validating her right to be a sexual and sensual being, one can argue Sister Ammina is engaging Islamic feminism, relying upon theology to validate her point. Drawing upon Mahmood’s politics of piety too, Sister Ammina performs sexual piety by not only admitting her enjoyment of her desirability but also by claiming her right to her sexuality, even into her seventies, and grounding it in Qur’anic exegesis. Consequently, her sexuality is not divorced from her piety; there is no dichotomy between the material and spiritual body. Immediately, hegemonic feminists are apt to position between the binaries of complicity and empowerment, virgin and whore, the sentiments expressed above by my Muslim subjects; but Muslimeen women do not see their behavior and practices on bilateral or gender hierarchal planes. They do not conceptualize piety as oppressive; but they understand and affirm that ordering their lives along Islamic strictures, *taharah* and *taqwa*, is not akin to compromising personal goals and desires. Coming from what can be considered at times to be a licentious society, African Trinidadian women find covering to be an operationalizing of respectability; for in the Caribbean as in the US, black women’s bodies are often considered sites of hypersexuality. Thus, when African Trinidadian women veil, they

⁶⁰ Eid ul Fitr khutba at the Jamaat, October 13, 2007.

claim a no-tolerance zone around their bodies a privilege less readily available to uncovered women in a sexist and patriarchal society with rising incidences of violence against women. Muslimeen gender relations and practices when examined through spatial navigation becomes a salient heuristic for a nation stricken by reprehensible statistics of crime and violence especially against women. On the 2014 anniversary of the attempted coup, Imam Abu Bakr declared,

“I do have a message and warning to all those men who seem to have lost their minds and brutalizing women.... The Qur’an teaches that a man must love God, then the Prophet, then his mother three times before loving his father. Women are revered and must be protected and I hearing men setting women on fire, killing women...nah, that isn’t right....I just want the men to know that we are coming for them... within the legal guidelines of course.”

This disclaimer at the end of his warning was undoubtedly a reference to a 2005 Eid khutba that resulted in the state levying five charges against the iman. Over a period of several years and countless continuances, all the charges were eventually dismissed. His ongoing legal entanglement with the state was one reason he gave for declining to appear at any sitting of the Commission of Enquiry into the events of 1990.

Sister Nneka

The issue of being a good Muslim arises perpetually as one of the very first conversations to which I was privy was between a Muslim elder mother and a young professional woman on vacation from her Chief Executive Officer position in the US. The elder was admonishing the young sister for not attending mosque regularly while she was abroad. Nneka defended,

“Not because I am not attending mosque does it mean I am not a good Muslim. When other people were building their lives I was in the masjid praying for them. You have your degrees and you did what was necessary. This is my time now.... I

still pray.... I was born in this masjid, and every time I return to Trinidad I come here. I am still a good Muslim.”

The following Sunday, clothed in red hijab and shalwar, Nneka appeared on the front page of *Express Woman*, a Sunday supplement to one of Trinidad’s daily newspapers, *The Trinidad Express*. The story highlighted her exceptional professional success, managing to head a top Washington, DC energy corporation while being a black Muslim woman from Trinidad, and the Jamaat specifically. In this instance, in her hypervisibility as a typical Muslim woman, African Trinidad woman, and Muslimeen woman, Nneka herself becomes a microcosm of the categorical disruptive nature of the macrocosmic Jamaat. Even in asserting her right to be independent, Nneka reinforces her commitment to community, by returning to her place of origin every opportunity she gets, by remaining part of the umma, and by iterating, “I am still a good Muslim” even though her work may at times obligate her to spend more time in the *dunya* and less in the masjid.

Sister Nadra

I had known Nadra for about six months before we ever talked about her “reversion to Islam” as she terms it. By then I had had both formal and informal interviews, but I was still very awkward when asking questions and still felt intrusive. Since Nadra was one of the sisters who had been instrumental in helping me get acquainted with members of the Jamaat and learn the culture of the mosque, I felt uncomfortable treating her like a subject and prying into her life. Her narrative, however, unfolded naturally one day when we were talking about the progress on my study and my learning about Islam.

“I didn’t become a good Muslim all in one shot. I did it in degrees. Even after I had taken shahada I used to lime [hang out] on the corner with my brothers and friends. I also used to hide the fact I was a Muslim from my family. I would leave the house in regular clothes and put on my hijab in the taxi.”

She had continued to wear her “normal clothes” like her jeans and tops; so the only marker that she was a Muslim was the hijab. Nadra would not don her hijab until she boarded a taxi, so she would be exposed to non-mahrams. A mahram at once defines and regulates permissible and impermissible behaviour and boundaries in a Muslim woman’s life. Except for her husband, who becomes her primary mahram upon marriage, a mahram is a man whom a Muslim man can never marry like her father, brother, son. She can also be unveiled in the presence of a mahram; and in places where Muslim women are not permitted to go out in public alone, she must be accompanied by a mahram.

This movement in and out of veiling was Nadra’s way of negotiating the ambivalences between her way of life and her family’s. What made Nadra’s conversion even more problematic was that she was a Muslimeen, so she had to fight against that stigma as well. For months Nadra kept up her charade until one day she forgot to unveil before she entered the house, and her brother saw her and confronted her. Once her veiling secret was revealed, she was able to complete her reversion to Islam; and relieved, she no longer needed to straddle the dunya and the Jamaat.

Moxley Rouse’s ethnographic study of African America Sunni Muslim women at two mosques in southern California revealed that conversion entails social, political, economic, and personal contingencies. For two converts

Islam ... was understood to be a blue-print for a moral social order that begins at the level of body consciousness and emanates outwards. Both feel that disciplining their desires does not lead to disempowerment. Rather, they accept that it is the desire for discipline that is empowering,

and the intentionality that comes with God-consciousness that is the first step toward community empowerment. (Moxley Rouse 35)

Race and racialization increase the stakes even further for some Muslim women.

On a practical very material level, African Trinidadian Muslim women especially the younger ones, use sex, gender and race to engender their piety. Although both men's and women's submission are required and undifferentiated on a spiritual plane, in an immanent and material patriarchal world women's piety carries more social capital than men's piety; for globally, women are sexualized more than men. So piety is one way via which female Muslimeen mask their sexual being from outsiders, especially given the astronomically high and still rising incidences of violence against women. In the privacy of their homes however, Muslimeen women can be very sensual.⁶¹

Considering the colonial history and the differential treatment and portrayal of Indo and African women, tracing the contours of race, religion, sex, and sexuality provide nuanced political and social possibilities for these Muslim women. These Muslimeen women's bodies, most of them of African descent, necessarily bring to crisis the idea of a national female somatic norm, a female African Trinidadian somatic norm, a Muslim woman somatic norm and call for new epistemologies, new vocabularies and new terminologies for analyzing not only how power is gendered but how gender is powered. Power not only creates and acts upon the gendered body, but this now gendered

⁶¹ As I was revising this chapter, Trinidad was under a State of Emergency in 2011, and certain areas of Trinidad have been designated "hot spots" and were under a 9pm to 5am curfew. The curfew was particularly disruptive to Muslims for Ramadan began August 1; and by the time Muslims broke fast and observed *isa*, it was close to 9pm. The state had said it would have made certain provisions for Muslims, but there was no clarity or specifics. Trinidad and Tobago's 49th independence occurred while the country was still under the SOE, so special events like fireworks and cultural events were cancelled.

body can itself become a conduit for power, a power that then works through the body to reposition, privilege, and empower its material, psychic and social codifications. The time has come then for reconfiguring the relations between gender and power. African Muslim women's choice to cover empowers their gender and race through a performance sexual piety; so they become almost an untouchable, not in the sense of pariah, but in the sense of a revered, beyond the sight of non-mahram eyes and the contaminating touch of secular hands, the patriarchal bargain Deniz Kandiyoti defines. Their politics of piety allows being Muslim, being female, being a woman, and being African to be personal and political simultaneously, a politics of self and collective empowerment reflected by their US Muslimah sisters⁶²:

Many women may have been attracted to these groups for some of the same reasons that the men were. The Nation of Islam appealed to African Americans on many levels simultaneously. It was, at once, a political, a social, and a religious organization. Like some other religious groups of its era, it encouraged the practice of a socially conservative morality, condemning sports, sexual promiscuity, obesity, tobacco, and other vices. Good Muslims, the Nation of Islam taught, should be clean living—pure, hard-working, punctual, disciplined, and modestly dressed. Children were taught these values in the nation of Islam's primary and secondary schools. Women in the organization joined the Muslim Girls Training-General Civilization class to learn home economics, etiquette, and later, self-defense. Men joined the Fruit of Islam and practiced military drills and various religious catechisms. Men wore bow ties and dark suits; women wore robes and often a head scarf. Both men and women in the movement later testified that these activities made them feel dignified and proud. (Curtis *Muslims in America* 38-39)

Under Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam initially sought a complete separation from the nation state, but the Muslimeen maintain strategic connections to their nation state.

⁶² Although the term muslimah refers to a Muslim woman, I use the plural noun Muslimeen as a gender neutral noun both in the Singular and Plural forms and as an adjective when referring to my research community.

For example, as noted previously, the Muslimeen are very much involved in national cultural and social events, and even the iman's sons are at times were members of the national soccer team, the Soca Warriors.

The point remains thought that women of African descent in Trinidad seek to reclaim self-sovereignty through Islam. It is not a unique strategy; for according to Palestinian activist Lily Fieldy, quoted in a 1996 British *Guardian* article, one motive for veiling is “the adoption of propriety as a badge of commitment: ‘There were no veiled Palestinian women before the Intifada: it became an expression of identity’” (qtd in Wilford 4). For Muslim women, there is no contradiction between subject formation and the performance of piety. In fact, piety is a necessary and irreducible characteristic of these Muslim women's subjectivity. Thus, although not to the degree as in the Muslim world, the ubiquitous image of repressed Muslim women cloaks Trinidad as well especially Muslimeen women because they are well versed in the Qur'an, quote passages frequently in validating actions and beliefs, and submit unquestionably to the will of Allah. Yet, they make a clear distinction that adhering to Qur'anic tenets like obedience to one's husband is submitting to the will of Allah and *not* to the will of man, and they mean *man* literally. As Aamron Shager iterated during the television program, Understanding Islam, on the Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN) in Trinidad, “Our actions are for no other reason but to please Allah, with sincerity; otherwise, pride sets in.”⁶³

⁶³ Shager, Aamron. *Understanding Islam*. Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. Nov. 23, 2010.

Sister Zara

Sister Zara, almost forty years younger than Sister Ammina and also of African descent, co-owns a business with her husband. She too expressed a similar sentiment about covering, choosing to, as she emphasizes, “invest my mental energy in running my own food business than in worrying about physical appearance.” Sister Zara took *shahada* when she was seventeen years old. Islam is a monotheistic religion, so *shahada*, the declaration of faith, is the most basic and essential prayer in Islam. For some Muslims, the first words that are whispered to a Muslim baby, and the last words a Muslim hears on his or her deathbed are “*Lâ ilâha illallâh; -Muhammad-ur-Rasûl-Allâh.*” More often than not this Arabic phrase, and among the Muslimeen, is translated as “There is no god but God [Allah]; and Mohammed is the Prophet”; however, Muhammad Mushin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali translate it as ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’ (*The Noble Qu’ran*, al-Hilali and Khan 939). The belief remains that Allah is the only God, and Islam is a monotheistic religion.

At the first *shahada* I witnessed, Sister Fatima, the imam’s wife who conducts Sister classes, said to me slyly, “It should be you taking *shahada* Jeanne.” She had not yet changed my name to Jihanne. “After all you have been here a year already. But *inshallah.*” All the *shahadas* I witnessed were of African Trinidadians. Sister Fatima is Indo Trinidadian, and this ethnic difference makes no difference. My observation is intended to reinforce African Trinidadian women’s attempt to re/adopt the badge of propriety.

All Muslimeen, male and female must perform certain rites before prayer and particularly before entering the mosque to pray. The mantra “cleanliness is next to Godliness” is not just a Christian tenet but is also an integral part of a Muslim’s life; and Muslims are at great pains to ensure that the body—the somatic conduit—is always as clean as possible. In modern times, Muslims use toilet paper after urinating and defecating; but whenever possible, water is also used to wash away any traces of faeces of urine to ensure there is no filth upon the body. Such stringent measures to sanitize the body is taken because a Muslim must be as clean as possible when entering a mosque and it is not always possible or practical to perform *ghusl* (full shower) before prayer and traces of bodily excrement would prevent proper *taharah*.

Sister Fatima explained to the seventeen-year old African Trinidadian pre-convert that cleanliness was paramount to being a good Muslim. Muslims therefore should at least perform *wudu* (a cleansing ritual) before each of the five daily *salats*, immediately after sexual intercourse, and after using the bathroom. Ideally, *ghusl*, (the full cleansing ritual, in essence a shower), should be performed; but *wudu* is a more practical and quotidian form of cleansing. Sister Fatima explained that on a practical level, Muslim women fold toilet paper into a wad, wet it, and leave it on the tank of a toilet. After urinating or defecating, the wet toilet paper is used to clean either the vagina, the anus, or both as necessary each area being cleaned with separately. The woman must be careful to use the side that did not touch the surface of the toilet tank. I asked Fatima if it is permissible to use disposable wipes, and she replied,

“A woman can also use disposable wipes to cleanse once the solution does not contain oil. You see, oil traps dirt. And as a Muslim, you have to be very conscious of cleanliness. Dirt, any form of uncleanness, block your *salats* and *suras*.”

One day during instructions for a shahada, one older sister joked that one would have to be “a really good Muslim to perform ghusl after sex after 2am” since ghusl involves washing one’s hair also. Everyone laughed; and I didn’t show it, but I was a bit shocked a Muslim woman could be so frank about sex. At that shahada, Fatima also instructed us in other personal practices. Women are not to pull their hair on top of their heads, “like a camel’s hump.” They are not to shave their eyebrows unless it was a unibrow. Wearing nail polish is prohibited. I asked Fatima if clear polish is permissible; and she replied in the negative because “any nail polish blocks water from reaching the nail, so one’s hands will not be clean for performing salat.” Some young Muslimeen women wear nail polish.

At eighteen, the legal age for Muslims to be married without permission from their parents, Zara married a man twice her age. Sister Zara and her husband have three children. After more than three decades of marriage Brother Hassan has never taken another wife; and according to Brother Hassan, but mostly Sister Zara, “and he does not intend to do so.”

Sister Rita

Sister Rita, in her late thirties, also of African descent, co-owns a printing business with her Indo-Trinidadian husband. She too expressed the liberating feeling of “covering the body.” They were married four years before Rita decided to take shahada. They are a young couple in their early thirties with four children, two boys and two girls, ranging from ten years to ten months in 2009. Rita told me that although girls are not required to wear hijab until puberty, her daughter decided at eight years old that she wanted to cover all the time. Sister Rita recounted:

“We would take them [the children] to the Savannah⁶⁴ to play; and although I tell Risah she does not need to wear long sleeve tops and long skirts or pants, she does not want to go out in shorts or t-shirts. She also insists on wearing hijab all the time too. She does not feel comfortable wearing armholes (sleeveless vests) with her hijab, so she just covers completely.

Her husband, Saleem, interjected that because they live in a communal compound with his family, his wife chooses to cover at home too. Rita’s choices seems to have subconsciously influenced her daughter’s choices, even at eight years old. Saleem explained,

“So, from a very young age, Risah chose to cover. Although she is allowed to, Risah does not wear short skirts, lip gloss, earrings, chains or armbands. I have no say. I leave it up to her mother.”

After a very brief, reflective pause Rita continued,

“She also covers the eyes in all her dolls or [toy] animals people give her, for you know, you are not supposed to have pictures with eyes or portraits in your house because evil comes through the eyes.”

At that point, Brother Saleem countered,

“Which doh [does not] make no sense at all because Muslims go cinema and watch tv. So it doh have eyes on tv?” Saleem reasoned. “People have to think sometimes. Look at the times, and see if it making sense. Look at me. Only my father is Muslim. My mother is Christian. My parents marry in a Catholic Church, and I was baptized in a Catholic church. But since I have eleven years I know it had to have something more. And when I married, my wife was a Negro and my whole family Indian. But they know I different. And look at my wife even. She wasn’t Muslim, and I never pressure she to change. Once you are a good Muslim, *insha allah*.”

These Muslimeen narratives, primarily in sister’s voices, indicate the heterogeneity, contingencies, and subjectivities of their lives. The decision to convert,

⁶⁴ The Savannah is a large circular grassy area in Port of Spain, the capital city. An important cultural and social space, it is a very popular spot for “liming” (hanging out), playing sports, drinking coconut water, walking and jogging. It is reputed to be the largest round-a-bout in the world.

revert, remain a Muslimeen is an informed one. Foucault has given us the notion that power is diffusive; yet given the reality of the far and deep reach of patriarchy, traditionally and maybe even necessarily the ways in which gender scholars have constructed power and gender relations default into a more empowered man and more disempowered woman even where there are power differentials between as well as among communities of men and women where relations are contingent rather than bilateral. Yuval Davis and Anthias argue against bilateralisms as they foreclose other differentials. Further foreclosures take place in Caribbean gender and feminist scholarship where patriarchy and the colonial legacy converge and though not exclusive are not synonymous, so Caribbean gender theory has to wrangle with the boundedness of patriarchy at the same time as it tussles with the barnacles of colonialism and imperialism and their polyvalent demoralizing legacies.

An uncritical adoption of hegemonic feminist theory leads to the re/production of somatic norms for African Trinidad woman, Indo Trinidadian woman, Trinidad man. African Trinidadian Muslim women at the Jamaat al Muslimeen call for the critical deconstruction of these somatic norms in Caribbean research on gender and feminism in order for us to understand the meanings of their contingent lives as obedient wives, sacrificing mothers, and submitting daughters of Allah.

Still, Cooke admits her insistence on naming subjects' actions as feminist arguing, "Some [women] reject the term 'feminist' to describe what they are doing. Some act as feminist even if they do not use the term. A few are happy to call themselves feminists" (Cooke viii). According to Reddock, feminism is "the awareness of the oppression, exploitation and/or subordination of women within the society, and the conscious action

to change and transform this situation” (53). Unlike Cooke, however, I do not impose the label upon my subjects preferring like Bledsoe and Goodridge to look beyond the Western notions and vocabularies to describe and understand how men and women order their quotidian lives.

So whether they are born Muslimeen, revert to Islam, learn Arabic, aspire to recite the Qur'an by heart, practice polygamy, mother/co-mother/othermother, divorce, remarry, or study abroad, Muslimeen women navigate the space between the *dunya* and *shahada* through a politics of sexual piety, where piety and sexuality are not diametrically opposed but coterminous and extend beyond the borders of the bedroom in how they use space and time. Not to reproduce overdetermined and tired rhetoric, but sexual piety complicates the public/private dyad. While the validating gaze for heterosexual women is generally that of a male partner, the concept of an imagined ideal female body is reinforced by both male and female public and private gazes. Muslimeen women reserve the physical expression of their sexuality for their husbands, and this reservation emanates from and is shaped by the empowering Islamic doctrines of sanctioned sexuality and of piety: submission to the will of Allah including obedience to husband, gender practices and formations completely antithetical to liberal feminist notions of agency and subjectivity. Shahnaz Khan argues that at “intersection[s],” women find themselves thrust into predetermined discourses and practices that help shape their agency and determine their strategies of resistance often to the extent that progressive politics do not appear possible within the category Muslim (*Aversion and Desire* xix). Not so for Muslimeen women.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDERING SPACE AND PLACE

The places where Muslim identities are negotiated, celebrated or resisted matter to how these identities are experienced by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The geographies of Muslim identities, be they based around neighbourhood connections, national affiliations or regional associations, are important to the ways in these identities are experienced in everyday lives....[A]longside the influence of place and locality on Muslim identities are other identities that influence people's opportunities, life course trajectories and everyday experiences. (Aitchison, Hopkins, and Kwan 2)

In a global economy in which borders and boundaries are contested, redefined, surveilled, and traversed, on a daily basis and in which the rights of citizens are validated or invalidated through the differential access to and allocation of resources, the concept of space as a geographic entity as well as a topography of cultural and psychic inscription has become increasingly salient to social actors and scholars. Possessors of disproportional economic, social, and political power are typically the purveyors of who occupies what space on the geographical and social and cultural landscape. Race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion and the intersection of these markers constitute a somatic norm that symbolizes national identity and factor into allocation of and access to national resources and issues of entitlement.

Metcalf identifies three kinds of spaces: physical—consisting of residences, construction of community structures; social—comprising networks and interactions with individuals in new contexts; and cultural— composed of intra -and inter group

interaction; (Metcalf 2-3). For the Muslimeen, these categories are not discrete as there is overlap in how they navigate space physically, socially, and culturally. With respect to the use of physical and social space, I will revisit the Jamaat as a site of identity re-formation and focus on the how the Jamaat receives visitors. For cultural space, I will focus on Muslimeen women since I spent more time not only observing and interviewing them but also actually “liming” [hanging out] with a couple as they ventured off to shop, go to the beach, attend classes, and visit friends.

Physical Space: A Postcolonial Essentialist Collage

In Chapter Two I touched on the history of the construction of the Jamaat al Muslimeen. Here I paint a picture from the time one approaches this site of national and international anxiety, a masjid that continues to exist despite repeated state attempts to destroy it, a place in and thorough which an identity of resistance continues to be enunciated through a postcolonial essentialist posturing.

The Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa

An acre of land. Contested territory. No deed of ownership by the occupants. A people simultaneously set apart from and a part of a greater whole called a nation. On the outside of the territory, west of the main structure: a large grassy field, a manual car wash. Framing the front, white walls with green trim and an open gate.

On the inside and just beyond: a crescent moon atop the masjid, geometric shapes and symbols reflective of Arabic culture. Remember, allegations of no deed of ownership, no permits to build; so therein, according to the nation state, lie illegal

structures. First, a relatively new guard booth, usually unoccupied, except for special occasions; a large paved area for parking, and for erecting tents when observing Islam's most religious observances: Eid ul Fitr and Eid al Adha. Brother Tambu, African descent,⁶⁵ usually the first face one meets on the compound. A special cemented area with an outdoor tap, used to supply water during animal sacrifices. One is certain to see Sheikh Tariq, African, eight score plus, perform the sacrificial rituals annually.

Schools: infant through secondary toward the back of the compound. Offices upstairs for the Principal; Vice Principal; and one of the imam's wives, Sister Annisa, African, very well educated, who oversees the academic operations. The schools are relatively new constructions, for they too were razed by the government during the 1990 insurrection.

Other than the car wash, there are other commercial spaces on the compound. A printery, operated by a couple—the husband, Indo;⁶⁶ the wife, African. A tiny shop, selling snacks and sandwiches, tucked away at the back of the compound but still easily accessible to the school children and others patrons. This snackette or snack bar is owned and operated by an African couple. A large kitchen: the cook, Sister Saida, African. It took Sister Saida four years to actually speak to me intimately, and her first confession was that, like Sister Sara, she liked to watch the popular American television show, *Dancing with the Stars*.

⁶⁵ In this chapter, African refers to people of African descent predominantly as opposed to people of South Asian descent, called East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. Although many people in Trinidad are actually mixed with African and East Indian, individuals often choose or are subscribed to one or the other ethnic group. I qualify African and East Indian with “predominantly,” determined primarily by how one looks although self-identification is also important in this categorical process.

⁶⁶ By Indo I mean Indo-Trinidadian or Trinidadians of South Asian descent primarily.

A large covered common area and at the entrance usually stands Brother Abdul, African, always dressed in elaborate Arabic style clothing and wearing a smile, with a ready “Asalaam alaikum.” A green wall on which is painted in black Italics various affirmations of the power of Islam: “Islam/ Working for me and/ it could work for you”; “Over 1 billion and growing”; “Islam/Let’s all try to understand it/You cannot imprison it/You cannot shoot it/You cannot extradite it/ It will not go away; and the five pillars of Islam: shahada (declaration of faith); salah (prayer); sawm (fasting); zakat (10% of one’s annual income); and hajj (pilgrimage). Metcalf draws a connection between words and sacred space to mark Muslim space: *Bi’smi’llah* (In the name of Allah) *Al-hamdu’llah* (Praise to Allah) *Insha’llah* (If Allah wills) are all very specific to Islam and are repeated multiple times during the most mundane of conversations. Even though a non –Muslim may not know the pronunciation or the English translation, phonetically a Trinidadian recognizes Arabic words. Furthermore, “The Muslimeen wrote under the TTT studio control panel: “*In the name of Allah the merciful, I live to work and to die for Allah.*” The words ‘a state under Islam’ were also written in the Visitor’s Book at the Red House” (Deosaran 21). Italics in original.

Two offices are located toward the eastern side: the imam’s, African. Surname: Abu Bakr. A name known nationally and internationally and not only as the first Caliph in 632CE. Yasin Abu Bakr—insurrectionist, put his nation in the international news in 1990, and subsequently on the North American no-fly list. The office with maps of the Prophet Muhammad’s hijra from Madinah⁶⁷ to Mecca. Fuad Abu Bakr, *dougla*,⁶⁸ used

⁶⁷ This variation of the spelling of Medina is taken directly from the map on the wall.

⁶⁸ A *dougla* is a mixed person of African and Indian descent.

this space for the headquarters of his New National Vision (NNV) party to contest the nation's 2010 General Elections.

To the north, separate wash areas for men and for women to perform *wudu* (cleansing ritual) before salat. The mosque, facing east, with its white walls and green dome and crescent moon and star. Reconstructed on two levels after its demolition in 1990 as a result of the insurrection. The upper level, for women and girls—"to be protected in case of another incursion by the state," a Muslimeen brother once informed me. The protective railings are high, so it is difficult to see the imam from that vantage point. Another of the imam's wives, Fatima, Indo Trinidadian, holds Sister classes on this upper level on Saturdays from four or five o'clock in the afternoon until after dark sometimes. Very young boys are usually upstairs with their mothers/other-mothers, but the men never come upstairs leaving it a totally homosocial space for women.

The men pray on the much more spacious lower level; but outside of *salat*, it is a homogenous space. Nikhas are performed on the lower level, so women occupy this space too. Also on the lower level during juma especially, the imam's security detail dressed in black, military-style clothes and boots; small, round, and on this occasion red, head covering called *taqiyah* or simply *topee*, and dark sun glasses. It was Brother Saleem, Rita's husband who taught me the official names. At the entrance to the compound, a sign: Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa. Translation: a complex Dawud (David) and Jalut (Goliath) enactment woven together with historical, geographical, economic and sociopolitical subtexts and counternarratives. But not only.

Today, August 1, 2012, is a public holiday, Emancipation Day. In 1985, the Trinidad and Tobago government ceased celebrating Discovery Day and replaced

Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of Trinidad with the marking of the emancipation of the African slaves in the British colonies. This year, both July 27 and August 1 fall in one of the holiest periods for Muslims, Ramadan. The year 2012 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of Trinidad and Tobago as a nation. Thus, the internal and external walls of the Jamaat tell an even more profound and complex story coalescing in an alternative religious, social, and national history. The eastern interior wall displays traditional African outfits—primarily from Nigeria and Ghana, Trinidad's closest allies from the continent—in African fabrics and colors. On the western and southern walls, below the affirmations of Islam inscribed on them, hang laminated newspapers clippings of every article written on the 1990 attempted coup and the immediate aftermath. There is no wall to the north as that space is the entrance to the masjid. On the outside, a large banner remaining from the July 27 commemoration of the insurrection drapes the wall framing the compound: "To the Men and Women Who Struggled Inside and Outside the Prison Walls" it reminds.

Preparation for salat/prayer

I learned through an indirect question to Nadia that the Muslimeen are Sunni Muslims. As Hosay 2008 was approaching, I asked Nadia if she was attending the festivities in the town of St. James, Port of Spain, one of the major sites where Muharram is reenacted. Hosay is celebrated in St. James and in southwest Trinidad in the city of Cedros. The Jamaat is located on the cusp of St. James. The word *Hosay*, taken from Hussain, is the commemoration of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandsons, Hussain and his brother Hassan at the battle of Karbala over Muhammad's succession line. Sunnis

believe that succession should pass to the most knowledgeable or elite Caliph and all Muslims should agree; and Shiites believe in a direct descendant. The parade involves elaborate floats in the form of mausoleums which are eventually thrown into the sea.

Nadia practically recoiled when I asked the question, then emphasized, “We are Sunni Muslims.” I had no choice but to betray my ignorance of the distinction. I knew from international media coverage on the massacres between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims that there were irreconcilable differences between these two sects, but I did not know why or realize these differences existed in Trinidad. While Christians are not a homogeneous body, during religious instruction in primary and secondary school, I do not recall being taught the differences among Muslims in Trinidad. When we did Scripture, as it was called, Muslims were treated as a homogenous group. Despite the anxieties the Muslimeen excite among other Muslim groups and in the nation state, Trinidad is a very multireligious society; and there no issues with religious intolerance, especially to the point of violence. So my perception was that Hosay was a Muslim festival, not a Shiite Muslim celebration.

Sunni Muslims must pray five times daily. Each formal prayer session is made up of a specific series of seven postures or movements— each accompanied by an appropriate set of recitations—collectively known as *rak’a* or *rakats* (bowing). During my ethnography Sisters Annisa, Fatima, and Nadia explained the differences in prayers for various occasions, not only daily salats but also for special occasions like Ramadan and Eid al Adha. The five daily salats are

- 1) *fajr*, performed at dawn or one hour before sunrise, often as early as 4:30am comprising two rakahs;

2) *dhuhr* at mid-day, comprising four rakahs. Dhuhr was the first prayer I witnessed with Sister Annisa and performed the motions without a clue as to the significance of any word or movement.

3) *asr* generally between 2:00pm and 4:00pm entailing four rakahs;

4) *maghrib* at sunset requiring three rakahs;

5) and finally at a nightfall, *isa*, with four rakahs.

At the appointed prayer time, Muslims the world over receive the *adan* or call to prayer, usually issued by a *muezzin* and in accordance with sura 62:9-10: “O you who believe. When the call is heard for prayer on the day of the congregation, hurry to remembrance of God and leave your trading. That is better for you if only you knew. And when the prayer is ended, then disperse in the land and seek God’s bounty, and remember God much so that you be successful.” The phrase *Allahu Akbar* is called *takbīr* and constitutes the *adan*.

In preparation for prayer, Muslims must wash. Although they back each other for obvious plumbing logistics, at the Jamaat al Muslimeen the women’s wash area is separated from the men’s by a high concrete wall. The women’s area is enclosed completely while the men’s is open with a long trough with taps and small concrete seats to rest upon to wash their face and feet. The men’s wash area is located immediately outside the lower internal entrance to the masjid.

Before going upstairs, women remove their shoes; wash their hands, face, mouth, and feet carefully. Most of the younger women do not wash their feet as they keep on their leggings and socks. The older women tend to be the one who are barefooted. The upper level, balcony-style is covered with green carpet with horizontal lines. The women

and girls arrange themselves along these lines as they stand shoulder to shoulder to perform salat. Often, women sit against the back wall until it is time to move forward for prayer. On my first visit, believing sitting against the back wall before standing for dhuhur was an Islamic custom, I followed suit but remained seated against the back wall when the other women and girls moved forward, stood shoulder to shoulder, feet to feet and held hands while forming several rows against the horizontal lines along the carpet. Of course the number of rows depended on the number of women present. There was no particular number per row. On special occasions when the floor is packed, the rows extend the length and breadth of the entire balcony and women who are not praying usually have to leave the upstairs to make space for those who are performing salat. No matter how crowded the upper level becomes, the women are not allowed to pray on the lower level where the men pray. I did not understand this specific separation since the women and men used to pray on the same level prior to 1990. Now that the spaces for men and women were more carefully delineated, men and women kept to their designated spaces during each salat at least.

On a subsequent visit for juma, I asked Nadia the reason for the women sitting against the wall, thinking it was an issue of gendering space and place; but Nadia told me it was just the most comfortable position since she could support her back against the wall, especially as she was pregnant. I found this reason personally amusing as I reflected on how “other” I was perceiving these women, trying to theorize every movement as particular rather than general human behavior or religious rather than mundane. Some of the older women sit for the prayers. Women who are menstruating are not allowed to

prayer but stay seated along the back wall, sometimes caring for the younger children while these children's mothers pray.

To begin the rakahs, a Muslim must face East, toward, Mecca, oriented toward the *kabal*.

Social Space

While the tension between the Jamaat and the nation state is easily a metonym for the Dawud and Jalut narrative, to continue however to juxtapose the Jamaat al Muslimeen between positive symbols of resistance—thus a place of possibilities for the disempowered and dispossessed—and negative signifiers of criminality and terror is to elide their in-betweenness, their negotiation of third space completely. Although seemingly antithetical to how non-Muslims are used to constructing our own lives, by persisting in the ordinariness of their lives the Muslimeen tell extraordinary stories of engaged submission as Muslimeen women and men are “enlisted...in the creation of [an alternative] social and moral space” (Moxley Rouse 6) including symbiotic gender relations and practices in a nation with staggering crimes rates, increasing statistics of violence against women, and hypervisible sexuality and immorality around Carnival time especially.

Staying Put: More than a Tale of Dawud and Jalut

The benefit of me being a Trinbagonian but not being *in* Trinidad during the coup to experience the trauma or harbor a subjective memory of the insurrection is that I have the critical, emotional, and psychological distance of an outsider yet the cultural, social, political and personal sensibilities of an insider, both fluid identities that allow me to *look*

at the Muslimeen from multiple angles. Similarly, to the Muslimeen visitors can be either antithetical to their politics or potential converts. I was at different times viewed both with suspicion and with curiosity, perspectives congealing after a year or so into one of me as a potential convert, especially as I continued to attend Sister classes after my field research ended officially.

As stated in Chapter Two, the Jamaat al Muslimeen was constructed on land abandoned by the Islamic Missionary Guild. Furthermore, the Muslimeen were never granted building permits; so from its very inception the construction of the mosque became a metaphor for a politics of Muslimeenism. Amid repeated governments' attempts to stop the illegal construction, the continued erection of buildings at No. 1 Mucurapo Road became emblematic of a community of radicals defining what in another context Aisha Khan defines as "livable spaces for themselves, where differing ideologies of 'nation,' 'people,' and 'community' both challenge and accommodate the hierarchal structures that shape them" (*Calaloo* 2). The Muslimeen's tenacious occupation of the land became a signifier of both resistance and possibilities, specifically to the people who felt marginalized and displaced. Metclaf classifies the masjid as a "charged spatial metaphor" since the very formation of a Muslim community is a hijra (Metcalf 8). The Jamaat al Muslimeen is located inside the borders of Trinidad but also set apart from the state as the masjid stands on contested land and *sharia* law takes precedence over the law of the land.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Sharia law is Muslim law as directed by the doctrines of the Qu'ran and the haditha. In his sermons during *juma*, Imam Yasin Abu Bakr often re-emphasizes that Muslims are accountable to Allah first, then to the law of man. .

Every year on July 27 the Muslimeen commemorate the attempted coup. The core membership tries to conduct the required five daily prayers on the compound itself, and there is a dinner. During the sixth session of the Commission of Enquiry, on November 1, 2011 one of the commissioners, Dr. H Ali Mohammed questioned one of the insurgents, Lorris Ballack about this commemoration, challenging that the annual observation and especially the raising of a banner across the street outside the Jamaat did not speak to the Muslimeen's claim of their quest for reconciliation to the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Ballack saw otherwise stating that the event was a part of the nation's history and must never be forgotten. The Jamaat, though an entity unto itself, still maintains relationships with the larger society, and these relationships stabilize and visualize its Muslimeen identity.

This Muslimeen hypervisibility, hypermasculinity, and hypermilitarization are further reinforced by the Muslimeen presence as protectors of state ventures. They provide security at government funded cultural events, like Carnival, an indelible marker of Trinidad and Tobago identity. In 2012 at the finals of the largest and most prominent national steelband competition called Panorama, a mob threatened to thrash one of the fences erected to keep certain patrons in particular sections of the Savannah depending on how much and for what specific events the patrons had paid. It was a combined team of police (in other words, the state) and Muslimeen security that restored order. Just before the chaos, Brother Jomo, the same brother whom I had seen at the Farrakhan event, had approached me and advised me to move my chair to another location since he was certain the fence was about to be stormed.

Education

Formal education and employability are two major concerns of the Muslimeen, and the Muslimeen seek premier education both at home and abroad for themselves and their children. Thus, Muslimeen parents are just as vigilant as the rest of the society, maybe even more so, with their children's education and with good, effective disciplining pedagogy inside and outside the madressa

One place that was popular among the Muslimeen for higher education especially because it immersed students in the Arabic language was Libya; and for decades, the Jamaat al Muslimeen maintained a very productive relationship with Muammar Gaddafi. Although Gaddafi was accused of providing both the military training and weapons to the Muslimeen for the attempted coup d'etat, the Commission of Enquiry into the events of 1990 failed to expose any visible and invisible machinations of such a nefarious relationship, and to date no military link between the Muslimeen and Gaddafi has been established. Yet, what remains evident is that several of its members were educated in Libya and learned Arabic there. There was even a youth program to this end, and Nadia is a graduate of this education program. The death of Gaddafi was the loss of a significant Muslimeen ally. I have not been able to ask the imam how and if he intends to negotiate rebuilding his Libyan connection, but I will at some point in time. He has been ill recently, suffering debilitating leg pain; and he is also on trial at present.

In its initial stages of the madressa, in order to preserve the integrity of its Islamicism and not be subjected to "un-Islamic influence" as Ibrahim termed it, the Muslimeen did not seek government aid or adhere to the state curriculum. From the 1980s however, the Jamaat began to align its curricula along national lines as its students

needed to be integrated into national secondary schools. The Mucurapo Islamic Educational Complex (MIEC) now comprises a pre-school, a primary school, and an Islamic College; and the schools do abide by the government curricula, use government-issued texts, and prepare their students for the primary and secondary schools national standardized tests.⁷⁰ Ninety-five percent of the MIEC primary school students go to the secondary school of their choice, and 30 percent of these children go to their first choice. All children of the MIEC who enter Spelling Bee competitions reach the semi-finals.

Despite the stigma of it being a haven for vagabonds, the Muslimeen see education as a direct avenue to productivity. The imam preaches frequently about Muslims being pillars of the ideal life in their communities.. He demonstrates no patience for idleness as Deosaran quotes Abu Bakr from a *Trinidadian Guardian* article in 1985:

We have here an operation in which we cut out ‘dependecitis.’ We have a school here for years which we run without any help from the government. We have built a mosque here by ourselves without getting a nail from anybody. We have an organisation here that operates independent of any other organisation and these things are not the norm for African people. Such independence threatens those people who are used to having us depend on them” (qtd in Deosaran 104)

Notably angered by the ubiquitous image of African Trinidadian Muslims as unproductive vagabonds, he admonished in one khutba, “Does a bee wake up and say, ‘I don’t feel like working this morning? Does a bee say I can’t find work? Does a bee say I have nothing to do?’” He then called for the young men in the community to work assiduously and to help the elderly especially with food shopping and getting around to

⁷⁰ Posted on the walls of the common area from July 27, 2012. Accessed during Eid ul Fitr, August 19, 2012.

do their daily affairs. He reinforced that Muslims should be seen as solutions to the nation's problems, not be the problem itself.

In 2007, the Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa was awarded the trophy for the Most Disciplined School in the National School Sports. Some of the Muslimeen boys play soccer on their secondary school teams as well as on the national team. Two of the imam's sons hold prominent positions in national sports: Radanfah Abu-Bakr played with the Trinidad and Tobago National Soccer team; and his brother, Ayinde, is a professional soccer coach. Jamal Shabazz, now the Guyanese national soccer coach, was also part of the Trinidad and Tobago national coaching team. Additionally, the Principal of the secondary school and the Vice Principal of the primary school are non-Muslims as are one of the teachers and a few students, none of whom are required to wear Islamic clothing.

Rita and Saleem are extremely invested in the education of their children, especially as Rita is a Kindergarten teacher and even though the father is not formally himself. Nevertheless they are a very industrious couple. They actually "kept back their daughter a year" from taking the national Secondary Education Assessment (SEA) to "ensure she did better and passed for a good secondary school." Risah ended up attending the same secondary school as my daughter, who was in a higher grade. Saleem and Rita did not want Risah to attend the secondary school on the compound, for they thought it would be better for her to start getting out in the "real world." Traditionally however, the Jamaat's secondary school has a relatively high success rate at the national standardized tests, and it is the only Islamic school in Northwest Trinidad.

Extremely frustrating for the community is that although registered with the state since 1982, the madressa has not been regularized by any of the governments of Trinidad and Tobago; so it does not receive state funding, a major grouse of the Muslimeen who at times want to be considered a part of the nation, an issue that arose repeatedly during my ethnography and publicly during the Commission of Enquiry into the events of July 1990. Although it is clear there is a mutual hostility between the state and the Jamaat, the ambivalent relationship persists with the Muslimeen's role in national politics, cultural events, and sports.

In 2012, the MIEC was in a financial crisis with the Jamaat unable to pay the teachers, for the Trinidad and Tobago government would still not fund the madressas. To add insult to injury, the People's Partnership in that same year gave the Trinidad Muslim League (TML), comprising primarily Indian Muslims, \$350,000 for Eid ul Fitr celebrations but refuses to fund the Jamaat al Muslimeen on any level. The TML often receives very generous funds from the Trinidad and Tobago government, much more so than any other Islamic group, including other Indo-dominant groups. In an effort to highlight nationally the dire financial straits and the state's neglect of the Jamaat's madressa, in February 2012, Lorris Ballack, one of the insurgents and a former senator, led on the Ministry of Education a protest comprising students and teachers and other citizens.

Many of the African Trinidadian Muslim men women at this mosque are themselves holders of first and second degrees, the equivalent of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and some have two second degrees. The women and girls receive their tertiary education either locally or abroad, but there is a tendency to encourage the girls to

migrate. One of the original members of the Jamaat, Khalid admits he had no reservations about sending his daughters abroad for tertiary education, especially for their first degrees. With his sons however, he expressed more reservation, keeping his sons in the region “where [he] could keep an eye on them.” As they “matured” he was more amenable to them pursuing their Master’s degrees further away from home. This philosophy contradicts the concept of purdah in the Muslim world where women are confined spatially and men have more freedom. In fact, it was Brother Khalid who told me in a conversation one day that Saudi Arabia was the most oppressive place he ever visited, referring specifically to how women are mistreated there.

“It is not Islam to oppress women. Women are to be respected and protected. Oppressive, oppressive, oppressive... They are not even allowed to drive. And so many are killed by being knocked down [hit by a car] because they cannot see through these heavy black veils... And there is violence against women too. How can that be Islam? That is culture.”

Shaking his head in disbelief at the memory, he continued,

“That has to be cultural. You think any Muslim woman in Trinidad putting up with that?” Brother Khalid is also a very well educated and charismatic man, as are practically all of the leaders in the Jamaat.

Local Reconfigurations of Traditional Islamic Purdah

In a khutba during juma the imam reminded women that they are not to receive into the home men who are not related to them especially when their husbands are away. Speaking in both Arabic and English, the imam recited,

“O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet’s houses, unless permission is given to you for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation. But when you are invited, enter, and when you have taken your meal, disperse without sitting for a talk. Verily, such (behaviour) annoys the Prophet.” (Surat 33.)

He also reminded the men that they are not to visit homes of women when the husbands are away, not even to borrow tools. “O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and greeted those in them; that is better for you, in order that you may remember” (Surat 24: 27). The imam iterated it is highly inappropriate for a man to even approach another man’s wife especially in his home to ask to borrow anything of her husband’s. “And if you find no one therein, still, enter not until permission has been given. And if you are asked to go back, go back, for it is purer for you. And Allah is All-Knower of what you do.” (Surat 24: 28). He stressed further that it was not the woman’s place to lend out her husband’s belongings anyway, and she should avoid contact with other men when her husband is away, “And when you ask (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen: that is purer for your hearts and their hearts” (Surat 33:53).

Although it is clear that these passages speak to regulating *both* men and women’s behavior and their gendered interactions, hegemonic feminism will tend to read these sura as regulating women’s space and immediately foreclosing any possibility of unsanctioned sexuality, putting the burden upon women. The Muslimeen on the other hand, both men and women, understand these sura as tenets for protecting and respecting women at all times. In fact, they see these sura as as controlling men more so than regulating women.

Janice recounted when she and her husband were visiting another couple and as they entered the living room, the wife who was folding clothes scrambled up a sheet and threw it over her head as she was not wearing a hijab. Muslim women are permitted to be uncovered in the presence of maryham men: “It is no sin on them (the Prophet’s

wives, if they appear unveiled) before their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or the sons of their sisters, or their own (believing) women, or their (female) slaves. And (O ladies), keep your duty to Allah." (Surat 33:55). Sister Janice thought this diving below the sheet particularly amusing in its excess. While they veil and hide themselves from unrelated male relatives, the women of the Jamaat al Muslimeen possess as much or as little spatial autonomy as any other woman in Trinidad. If there are constraints on the woman's mobility, it is more gender than religiosity, more of a safety issue nationally than a Muslimeen practice.

Many Muslim wives attest to the fact that their husbands do not try to control them sexually, physically, or socially. But the husband need not exercise these forms of social control for very often the wife has elected to live a more pious life. Choosing to live piously, Muslimeen women see themselves submitting to the will of Allah and not just to the will of their husband.

The first mosque I ever visited in Trinidad was in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago. I was escorted by one of my brothers' friends, Sam. The two men shook hands, then Sam introduced me to the gatekeeper. I automatically extended my hand in greeting, but the middle-aged African Trinidadian man folded his hands tightly across his torso and turned his head away from me. He addressed only Sam. I was very embarrassed and apologized for not knowing the appropriate gender behavior around Muslims. At the Jamaat al Muslimeen, however, although there were special occasions when there was the separation of sexes, on a quotidian basis there was no such slighting of women. Immediately significant was that Brothers Bilaal Abdullah and Tambu, the gatekeepers, were always welcoming and respectful to visitors, male and female.

Even after I was in the field for years, I had still not internalized or figured out what was appropriate Islamic gender behavior, for it seemed so unstable from mosque to mosque, occasion to occasion, culture to culture. Sixteen years after his previous visit, Minister Louis Farrakhan returned to Trinidad between March 21 and 26, 2012, where he delivered two lectures. Men and women had to stand in separate lines while waiting to enter the auditoriums of both Cipriani Labour College and the National Association for Performing Arts (NAPA). While the Muslimeen practice separation of the sexes in their mosque and at certain occasions like during *salat* or waiting in line for food after the breaking of fast during Ramadan, this rigid spatial division of men and women is not part of Muslimeen cultural or religious practice as they sit together to eat, greet one another affectionately and respectfully and certainly men shake hands with women.

On Sunday 25, March 2012 I saw an elder Muslimeen brother, one of the 114 insurrectionists, approaching me while I was in the females-only line outside the NAPA. Although I was covered fully, from *hijab* to black socks and low-cut boots, I automatically extended my hand to greet him. The moment he hesitated, I remembered men and women were divided into separate lines; we were in a public space; and we were not relatives. Thus we were not to touch each other. I withdrew my hand; but Brother Jomo leaned in toward me, and gently but firmly cupped my hand between both of his palms, saying, “*Asaalam Aliakum sister.*” And I responded gratefully, “*Wasalaam aliakum brother.*” We spoke for a few minutes; then, he joined some other Muslim brothers walking by and headed to the line for men. Brother Jomo and I are Facebook friends, and he initiated the friend request. His posts are unequivocally pro-Islamic and are never anything but related to the state of Islam globally.

Cultural space

On one hand Margot Badran (2009) sees “‘women’s worlds [as] both enabling and restricting” noting further that “women inhabiting a ‘women’s world’ have bonded in special ways and enjoyed certain freedoms from male interference in their lives” (58-59).

Cowifery, Mothering, Othermothering

Three of the most salient homosocial Muslimeen practices are co-wifery, mothering and othermothering arrived at primarily through the practice of polygyny. Community among the Muslimeen and cooperation among women even co-wives is very quotidian. It is not unusual to see this extended ethic of care on special occasions like *juma*, Eid al Adha, Eid ul Fitr as well as under ordinary circumstances.

For Muslimeen women and men, polygyny is less about sexuality than it is about family, community, and the care of women and children with special attention being given to the wellbeing of widows and orphans. During a *juma khutba* before a *janazah*, the imam reminded the men of their responsibility to marry widows to ensure that widows and children are cared for and not left to fend for themselves. During a sermon one Friday for *juma*, imam Abu Bakr ordered,

“Give women their respect and honour. Marry the women you are having children with....If you are financially able, marry the widows.”⁷¹

By the same token, although polygamy is permissible in Islam, monogamy is encouraged (Jawad 44). Additionally “[P]olygamy in Islam is permissible if it leads to

⁷¹ Imam Abu Bakr, Sermon during *juma*, April 18, 2008 at the Jamaat.

justice and it is unlawful or forbidden if it results in grievances and injustices. So, dealing justly with one's wives is a religious obligation" (Jawad 47) not a personal option.

After juma, the mourners moved to the compound's common meeting area, just outside the mosque, to pay final respects to the dead. Fatima explained that the corpse is never brought into the mosque. Cleansing rituals are endemic to an Islamic way of life, so in preparation for janazah, the body is washed according the same criteria observed for *salat*,⁷² wrapped in a simple white fabric called a *kafan*, and placed in a simple wooden coffin. The *salat-l-janazah* delivered by the *imam* was simple and dignified, symbolic of the ideal Islamic lifestyle. His brother and other men eulogized the deceased, but the widow and the other women remained silent, a silence and composure unlike any I had witnessed at Christian funerals. While women are allowed to go to the cemetery for the *al-dafin* (*burial*), they are not allowed at the graveside. Even at the burial site, weeping was barely audible.

Ideally, Muslims are to be buried before sundown of their passing; and while they recognize there will be the need to mourn, there is no excessive emotive performance like wailing and gnashing of teeth characteristic of some Christian funerals, or prolonged grieving periods. Like during a divorce, the widow is to observe a waiting period, or *idaat*, during which she has no sexual intercourse. The *idaat* is three months for a divorce and four months for the death of a husband to ensure the wife is not pregnant. Establishing paternity is critical since it is the father's responsibility to care for his child for the first seven years at least. With polygyny there is a responsibility on the husband's

⁷² The cleansing rituals of *ghusl* and *wudu* will be explained in detail in the section on conversion or *shahada*, the first pillar of Islam, the declaration of one's monotheist belief in Allah.

part to ensuring fairness, justice, equality among his wives and children; for “The Qur’an not only restricted polygyny, but it made the practice contingent on ensuring justice for women” (Barlas “*Believing Women*” 157 Italics in Original). Although not attributing the origins of androcentrism, misogyny, and sexism to Arab culture (ibid 169), Barlas theorizes that these characteristics of Arab culture perverted polygyny through acquisition of harems and other sexual unions (ibid 157).

When a Muslimeen woman marries, polygamy is only one of her considerations. Extended family relations, bearing children, parenting, being able to pursue her education if she so desires, and being good Muslims are deciding factors. By the same token, however, wives sharing the same husband are very deliberate in how they use their time in the absence or presence of their husband. Some wives are able to appreciate polygyny using the time and space for self-care. Ammina declared,

“I am so at peace when [my husband] is not with me. I can stay in bed much later, and do not have to get up for husband care. For you know that sometimes these men are like babies, and you have to take care of them like children. I like to read so I read. Well, I laze around and get up only when I have to.”

The younger couples tend to be monogamous. None of the couples younger than thirty years old with whom I interacted directly were in polygamous marriages. In fact, it seems that after multiple years of marriage, an aging husband may marry a younger woman with whom to have children. Brother Abdul admitted that he was perfectly happy with his wife who bore him six children; but he wanted more children so he married Sister Laila who was significantly younger than both Abdul and Janice. Yet, I see Abdul and Janice at many cultural events, and I happenstance upon them in the city and other places; but I have never managed to see him with Laila in public. During the Commission of Enquiry though, it was Laila who attended the proceedings when her husband was testifying.

Sister Ammina confessed when I first met her in 2007,

“Of course after so many years of marriage I was hurt when my husband told me he wanted to marry another wife. But I accepted it as the will of Allah, *al-hamduallah*; and now as I get older and older I appreciate the help of the other women and children.”

Sister Fatima explained during one Sister class,

“By the fortieth day in the womb your destiny is sealed. So if the imam is to have four wives, it is no more his choice than the wives’; for it is Allah’s. *Al-hamduallah*.”⁷³

Although some co-wives get along better than others, wives who have the same husband understand the ideology of polygyny not as promoting or perpetuating male prowess and privileging male sexuality but as Allah’s will for their husband to take the wives he has.

On an April 2011 bus excursion to Matura Beach to observe leatherback turtles laying eggs, the first and second wives of the imam sat next to each other almost the entire trip, conversing and laughing, with Sister Fatima moving around periodically to check on the other passengers. Fatima who has no children biologically, was busy caring for Annisa’s grandchildren. She was also making sure that the elder Annisa, in her seventies, who was sitting toward the front of the bus had everything she needed.

But co-wives caring for children is only one form of mothering in which the Muslimeen engage. Young single mothers of African descent come to the Jamaat and are readily absorbed into the community and encouraged to attend Sister classes, which one of the imam’s wives conducts on Saturday evenings. Sister classes are intended to help new reverts/converts, or anyone considering taking or preparing to take shahada, or even older sisters read and understand the teachings of the Qur’an and become familiar with

⁷³ Informal discussion among sisters at the Jamaat, June 3, 2009.

Islamic practices from the very religious like the proper way to pray and the meaning of submission to Allah and to husband to spiritual strictures like cleansing and covering, to the very mundane like which parts of the body a woman is supposed to shave or how to wear a one's hair in bun under the headscarf.

Muslimeen women of all ages and educational levels are managing their lives as working mothers just like their nonMuslim sisters. Given the practice of polygyny, childrearing is a community responsibility and co-wives with and without children participate in this ethic of care.

Nikahs

During my second year in the field I witnessed four weddings, nikah, taking place simultaneously at the Jamaat on Eid ul Fitr. This was another occasion to witness a bit of humor and see Muslim women as ordinary women. An Indo Muslim visitor who was eating at the same table with me after the Eid service was ended, leaned over and whispered,

“You can always tell the cheap ones, or them who feel they smart. They get married on Eid, so they don't have to pay for their own wedding. Everything done prepared for Eid, so they don't have to do nothing themselves.”

One bride was the daughter of another imam who had left the Jamaat and formed his own masjid in Laventille; and she is also involved in the *Children of the Islamic Renaissance* project. She was also one of the group of young African girls who came elaborately adorned every juma. Her father though, and members of his masjid, had undertaken the task of doing all the cooking and serving. They had also contributed to setting up the tents, tables, and chairs. He was by no means being frugal or “cheap”; and owing to the wedding ceremonies the compound looked even more elegant and festive than it had

done the previous Eid. I smiled, thinking to myself, people are people regardless of religion. As Bob Marley sang in “Who the Cap Fits,” “Some will eat and drink with you/Then behind them su-su upon you (gossip). I did not take the comment as malicious though, but lighthearted.

The service for Eid 2008 was to begin at 8 o’clock in the morning, but it did not get underway until 8:30am. As the service progressed, the upper balcony which houses the women became more and more crowded until it was beyond capacity. At that point I opted to leave to make room for Muslim women, so I went downstairs and to the back of the compound where there were tables and chairs set up under tents for the wedding reception and in the event of rain. There were a number of people there, Muslims and non-Muslims, sitting listening to the imam over the speakers. Children were running and playing on the grass field which had been freshly mowed for what many consider the most important celebration in the life of a Muslim.

After the service and having lunch, the wedding ceremony took place. We moved to the lower level of the mosque, usually reserved for men, for the women occupied the upper level generally. We sat on the green carpet in the shape of a crescent moon, Fatima and I to the front so I could see and hear, and so Fatima could explain the ceremony to me.

To begin the nikah, Imam Abu Bakr asked each couple the same four questions, directing the first three queries to the bride first, then to the groom. The final question was in two parts, this time first to the groom, then to the bride.

- 1) “Are you eighteen?” the imam asked each man and each woman. He explained that if either the groom or the bride is younger than eighteen years, then he would have to ask for the parents’ consent. They all replied yes.
- 2) “Are you a Muslim?” the imam continued after the round of the initial question. Each person answered in the affirmative. The imam then iterated that a Muslim woman can only marry a Muslim woman, but a Muslim man can marry any woman of the book, meaning Christian, Jew, Muslim.
- 3) The third question caught me off guard. “Are you sane?” Some of the younger people giggled, and the imam continued to explain the significance of each question. Consent is very important for a nikah; so if the person is not of sound mind then he or she is not permitted to give consent on his or her own behalf.
- 4) Finally, the imam asked each groom, “Do you have the dowry?” and each wife, “Do you accept the dowry?” For three couples the dowry was the bride’s wedding ring. For the fourth, it was a gold wrist band. Each bride accepted her dowry.

When the imam declared each couple married, we all returned to the compound and the combined Eid-wedding celebrations continued.

Liming and Shopping with Sister Fatima

Purdah in the strictest Islamic context of exclusion from public view and only being able to appear in public with a sanctioned man is not a part of Muslimeen women’s lives. A number of Muslimeen women are taking evening courses in various parts of the

country, and one of the imam's wives is taking Arabic classes in the South of the island, traveling alone more than forty miles from her home to get there. Almost routinely, after sister classes on a Saturday, despite the fact that it was well after sundown and dark, Fatima, Nadia, and I would venture into St. James to shop amid the bars and debauchery: three women in Muslim attire in and out and among drunks, vagrants, other non-Muslim shoppers. St. James is adjacent to Mucurapo, where the masjid is located; and it is the same town in which Hosay is commemorated. On one occasion Sisters Fatima, Nadia and I went look for an electric fan for Sister Fatima. By this time Umah was born and would be in his car seat in the back with me, talking to Fatima in his infant language intelligible only to her. I stayed in the car with Umah while Fatima and Nadia wandered in and out of the stores. Stores in St. James stay open much later than anywhere else in Northwest Trinidad, hence the reason St. James is referred to as the city that never sleeps. On another occasion we shopped for fruits.

Christmas Eve 2009 Sister Fatima called me to accompany Nadia and her shopping in the East of Trinidad. Fatima was searching for lobster to prepare the imam's dinner as it was her night for him to come home. During one sister class, Fatima had explained to me that the imam spends one night with each wife. If a husband stays with one wife on Monday, then he must spend Tuesday night with another wife, then Wednesday with the third and Thursday with the fourth depending on how many wives he has. No more than four wives at a time is permitted. If he has four wives, then by Friday will be with the wife with whom he spent Monday. There is no switching of nights and the schedule must be adhered to strictly. Even if the husband leaves the country, when he returns he must stay the night with the wife who is scheduled. "He cannot say I

will spend the night with this wife because she lives closer to the airport,” Fatima clarified. “It is not a choice; it is an obligation, al-Hamdullah.”

Along the way, Fatima who was driving her red Nissan Tida, pulled the car to the side of the road, parked partially on the sidewalk and on the roadway; and she and Nadia began the asr prayer in the car. Afterwards, she stopped again to buy Nadia’s son a toy since it was Christmas time and other children were receiving gifts.

“I feel bad that other children are getting gifts, and Umah is a child. I’m buying him a toy.” Nadia never protested to anything Fatima said or did, not that she was powerless to so do, but Fatima never did anything that was disrespectful or harmful to anyone.

One day Fatima invited me to the beach. It was a group of only women and children. The Muslimeen women often went out unaccompanied by men. In fact, many prefer to leave the men behind because they enjoy themselves more with women only on most occasions. They complain about men the same as other non-Muslim complain about men.

Mobility is not an issue for Muslim women. In fact some Muslim women participate in other cultural events like Emancipation Day activities when Muslim women are seen marching in the streets in traditional African barb unaccompanied by men. Brother Khalid and his first wife Janice usually attend these Emancipation Day celebrations; and some Muslim children play the steel pan during school Panorama. At an informal talk one Eid uf Fitr, Annisa, the imama’s first wife declared, “I take advantage of an old African custom where once a year for a month a wife would go back to her

family. Well, I take a month to myself every year; but I do not go back to my family. I travel ... all over the world. I enjoy this time to myself.”

So, in practice however, the imam’s strictures about segregated interactions between the sexes appears applicable in the Islamic home primarily but does not seem as binding in all public spheres where Muslimeen women conduct the affairs of their quotidian live in a non-Muslim country. The sociocultural milieu of the masjid itself permits, facilitates and even promotes a humanhood, verbal and physical interaction between men and women, where men and women talk freely and greet each other cheerfully. Other than in the mosque itself where men occupy the lower tier and women the upper, men and women are rarely separated; and Muslimeen brothers and sisters talk informally in the parking lot, converse in earnest in the school yard, and laugh together in the common eating area, sharing the space on the compound. During a wedding ceremony, men, women and children all sit on the lower tier to witness the ceremony. Women tend to sit to the front, but this is more of the homosocial culture of women being more interested in witnessing these festivities than men and is not specific to Islam.

Chapter Five

(De)Criminalizing a Community: The Production and Consumption of the Male

Muslimeen Body

[T]he *writing* of the Caribbean is paramount on the *production* of the nation”

(Edmondson *Making Men* 2)

“We live in a xeroxed society. We lack the ability to think.... My people—what position we occupy in society? Hypermasculinity? Brother Usman⁷⁴

This penultimate chapter seeks to unfurl the factors and affective economies that account for the propagating perception of the Jamaat al Muslimeen as a site of criminality and the image of Muslimeen men as “scary black men?”⁷⁵ Is it, historically, as a result of what Henry calls the discursive output of the colonialists and the coterminous relationship between writing and the production of a nation Edmondson underscores in the epigraph? Is it the social and ethnic threat the Jamaat posed from its inception as a group of listless African Trinidadian male Muslims? Is it the class marker that these particular Muslim men were primarily from East Port of Spain, a particularly economically depressed part of the country? Is the political thorn the Jamaat was and

⁷⁴ Interview with Brother Usman Dan Folio known formerly as Beethoven Forbes, September 23, 2008 at the Jamaat. Brother Usman has an MSc in Sociology and was a teacher. Disillusioned by the materiality of society, its lack of spirituality, and the internalized powerlessness of the poor, the criminalising of black men, he has turned his talent to shaping inanimate objects. A skilled carpenter, he considers himself now “the architect of the Muslimeen.”

⁷⁵ I import this phrase from Aisha Khan. Personal conversation, August 2011.

remains in the side of the state in their ambivalent Dawud and Jalut relationship? Is it the psychological trauma meted upon the nation during the six-day attempted coup d'état begun on July 27, 1990? Is it the recurring epistemic violence perpetrated by the print and electronic media: perpetuation of stereotypes of Muslimeen as lawless vagabonds; the televised image seared into the nation's consciousness of black men, with big guns, lurking around the television studio during the insurrection; racialized newspaper photographs and captions of black Muslims especially the Muslimeen? What conditions allow for certain emotions to stick to some bodies and not to others; so African Muslim bodies, especially Muslimeen, are generally read differently from Indo Muslimeen bodies?

Yet, when Indo Trinidadian Muslim bodies are juxtaposed to African Trinidadian Muslims bodies, the negative affective response to blackness is transferred. A Muslimeen brother recalled his interview process:

“He asked me if I was a Muslim. I said yes. He asked me where. I said the Jamaat. Then he asked me if Abu Bakr puts a gun in your hand and asks you to kill a family would you? I said I can't answer that. Abu Bakr would not ask that. Plus Abu Bakr is the imam, my leader, not my Lord. I have a mind of my own.”
 Brother Saleem⁷⁶

Despite the large body of interdisciplinary publications and debates debunking racial determinism, the production of racialized bodies remains not only resilient to annihilating academic discourses but also salient and even strategic in social, political, and nationalist paradigms. This racialized body becomes even more problematic when race and religion map differentially onto a particular body politic that problematizes

⁷⁶ Interview with Brother Saleem June 3, 2009 at the Jamaat as he recounts his experience at a recent job interview.

constructions of religiosity and national identity. It is beyond the scope of this project to interrogate all factors that give the belief in race its longevity, but I integrate three theories of subjugated people that scaffold the perpetuity of “race” in order to show how Muslimeen men use a racial fear factor along with the political, ethnic and racial ambivalence in Trinidad to advance a politics of resistance that serves their community’s religious, social, cultural, and political agendas. The theories—one, third spaces signified by the nation Trinidad as well as by the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa; two, the regime of looking, effected through Muslimeenphobia; and three, epistemic violence—coalesce to give “race” its staying power, facilitate affective attachments to raced bodies and racialized spaces, and engender a politics of postcolonial essentialism.

Third Spaces: The Black Islamic State within the Christian Nation State

National identities, like nation themselves, have complex and troubled histories. Forged in war or revolution, their restless dreams haunted by cries of ancestral bloodshed...small wonder if they reach compulsively for assurances of coherence and continuity, moments of symbolic definition and semiotic closure. (Davies and Goh xiii).

In Trinidad, as in any former colony, notions of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and somatic norms are predicated heavily upon colonialist engineering and are reshaped, reformulated, and reinforced by vacillating global and local notions of national and diasporic identities. In attempting to understand why ethnic and racial identity is “thick in one context and thin in another (77) Cornell and Hartmann look at “circumstantialism” since “part of the meaning of ‘construction’ is that ethnic and racial identities are not rooted in nature but are situational precipitates, products of particular

events, relationships, and processes that are themselves subject to change” (Cornell and Hartmann 77).

Paget Henry argues that in the case of the Caribbean it should be clear that

peripheral dynamics profoundly shaped the internal organization of cultural systems, their hierarchical patterns, the nature of the discursive output, and the standards and criteria by which this output was recognized and made a valuable part of the heritage. Both individually and collectively, these dynamics pushed cultural systems in the direction of producing and reproducing black invisibility, anti-African, and anti-Indian biases. (Henry 11)

The invention and enactment of race and ethnicity do not occur in a vacuum. Both ascription and self-identification are predicated upon more than just common ancestry or common history. Virginia Dominguez and Joanne Nagel lay transparent more invisible mechanisms and operational powers behind identification practices, for example, resource competition, political mobilization, social and legal preferential treatment. Owing to differential treatment of colonized people, “differential racialization” ensued (Kim 106). In Trinidad, indentured laborers were given preferential treatment over African slaves. Slave families in the New World were systematically broken up. Often African slaves were not allowed to marry, and they were forbidden from practicing their religion. On the other hand, while conditions for the indentured laborers were also deplorable, under an agreement by the British and Indian governments, the newly-arrived indentured workers were permitted to practice their religion and had the option of returning to their homeland after seven years. No such conditions existed for the African slaves.

So historically in Trinidad, Indians were mobilized to buffer and to blur the white-black dyad. Also, Indians served to keep each group in its place. During colonial times,

Indians rarely had sexual relations with Creoles (Wood 154) even though “only one third of the adults who came to Trinidad from India were women” (Wood 154).⁷⁷ That there was no wide-spread mixing of the races does not mean that there were no clandestine sexual encounters between African man and Indian women.

In formulating a feminist theory of difference in the Caribbean, Reddock makes important distinctions among the meanings of black in the United States, in Britain, and in the Caribbean where at one time “the term ‘black’ served as a useful unifying mechanism through which South Asian and African Caribbean activists were able to make successful demands upon the British state” (Reddock 200).

At one time it was politically and socially beneficial for Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians to band together to effect change in their social and economic conditions. But it was not long before the use of the term *black* to identify Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians came under heavy critique by the then newly formed Hindu Women’s Organization that argued “‘black’ had a meaning and relevance to people of African descent that it did not have for Indians and so was a hegemonic concept that denied the specificity of the Indian Caribbean region” (Reddock 200 qtd in Meeks and Lindahl). The Caribbean activists first called for the use of the signifier “brown” then settled on Indian Caribbean to reflect “the cultural and historical specificities of that group” (Reddock 200 qtd in Meeks and Lindahl).

From the late 1950s through the 1970s, postcolonialism produced an ideological shift in African identity that persists in the English-speaking Caribbean to the present day. While resistance has always been a part of the dominator-dominated dialectic,

⁷⁷ In this context, Creoles is synonymous to black or African.

postcolonial currents effected through racial consciousness, black power movements, liberation struggles, and nationalism powered by the Pan-African impulse of the mid nineteenth century mobilized the African continent and its diaspora in a way it has never since. The currents were powerful, global, and though impermanent, persistent. Under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in the United States, the Nation of Islam's (now The World Community of al-Islam's) focus on civil rights and black empowerment in the 1960s and 1970s influenced Trinidad's African communities to organize collectivities.

The Muslimeen felt that the government was corrupt and responsible for the dire socioeconomic state of the country. Figueira defines the insurrection as *a jihad* since the Muslimeen found it was time for armed resistance both to defend the Islamic faith as the *masjid* was under occupation by state machinery, a combined army and police force, and to protect the disenfranchised people of Trinidad, a vulnerable population, primarily of African descent, frustrated by dire economic and social conditions. The movement appealed to a large section of African Trinidadian youth who saw Abu-Bakr as both a father figure and a hero. *Abu* means *father*, and *Bakr* means *shepherd*. Turner argues that three principles were central to African Muslims and remained incontrovertible even during slavery: resistance, self-determination, and education (45).

As a number of multidisciplinary discourses elucidate, power differentials shape the identities of the dominant as well as the dominated and the subjugated are not merely complicit but also proactive in creating their own differential consciousness, even, in fact necessarily, from subaltern positions. As Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann argue, "Ethnicity and race are not simply labels forced upon people; they are also identities that

people accept, resist, choose specify, invent, redefine, reject, actively defend, and so forth” (77). While scholars agree race is a social construct, it is important to note here that there are still various disciplinary definitions of race and ethnicity in circulation. My project, however, is not to engage in a literature review or critical analysis of race and/or ethnicity discourses or to argue the distinctions between these two analytics. I aim to argue the strategic use of affect within a particular field of racial and ethnic relations by illuminating how race and ethnicity are differentially ascribed to, inscribed upon, and performed by a specific corporeality against a very particular national landscape. This site of contestation and enactment is the Muslimeen body in Trinidad.

Several older members, men and women, of the Jamaat emerged out of a black nationalist consciousness and have retained that African sensibility. Although a Muslimeen brother iterated to me during a conversation that “Islam does not ascribe to ethnic and racial difference,”⁷⁸ the sometimes epistemically violent impact of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and class upon a Muslimeen body especially in a non-Muslim country is undeniable and even inescapable. In the context of Trinidad, and as recorded in several testimonies during the Commission of Enquiry into the events of the 1990 attempted coup, Brothers Kala Akii Bua, Jamal Shabazz, Lorris Ballack attested to black consciousness as an irreducible component of Muslimeen identity, and identified race as a primary factor for the state’s persistent attacks against the Jamaat.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Informal conversation with Usman Dan Fodio. Jamaat al Muslimeen, St. James, Trinidad. 23 September, 2008.

⁷⁹ The 2014 Commission of Enquiry Report into the attempted coup on July 27, 1990 is available at <http://www.1990coe.org/>. My references however came from the live sessions as they aired on the local networks.

Unarguably race is a social construct, and history itself undergirds the construction of race. So it is to history, both as metanarrative and as *petit recits*, we must turn in order to understand why race matters and how what Brackette Williams terms “ghost hegemonies” perpetuate and inform Caribbean sensibilities and identities; for “to arrest the analysis of race at the point where one discerns and marks its historical effects is to reproduce those very relations of power that one intends to oppose” (Seshadri-Crooks 9). Tracing the ubiquity of racializing ghost hegemonies will necessarily reveal how blackness and Africaness become signifiers of barbarity, terror, and criminality virtually globally. What postcolonial essentialism offers though as an act of social revolution is how these negative codifications can in turn be subverted to become conduits of resistance and affirmations.

In the reconstruction though, one must be careful though not to reproduce the stereotype that African antecedents and identities are inherently fraught with negativities; for according to Lewis, the problem remains that studies of blacks too often collapse into essentializing them as the problem itself rather than studying them as people experiencing the problematics of institutional inequalities and structural inequities, as people who are black negotiating the circumstances and conditions of their quotidian lives, as subjects experiencing negation, othering, erasure (Gordon 48). This “epistemic closure” where contextualization of black experiences is foreclosed or negated defaults into an anonymity akin to universality; but therein lies a contradiction: the simultaneous erasure of historicity results in a blackness that “exists neither as the universal nor the particular” (Gordon 48). Again, it is in this caesura of what Bhaba calls *the not quite* that a politics of postcolonial essentialism emerges.

The Muslimeen community is seen not only as a religious denomination but also excites the anxieties of the state and the population for the very potential of its political activism and national upheavals:

The Islamic and religious nature of the Jamaat al Muslimeen would tend to mask fundamentally the African nature of this entire event. But for the Jamaat, race was as, and even more important than religion. Bakr sought to create a Black Islamic State. (qtd in Deosaran 52).

Thus, Islam for the Muslimeen serves as the most effective organizing principle in their quotidian lives and offers for young men, and for young women especially, hope and a self-affirming identity they feel not otherwise available to them unless part of the Muslimeen community. Muslimeenism as a collective is a formidable strategic politics. Negotiating Muslimeenism as an individual, however, is not without its practical, psychological, and emotional challenges as seen throughout this text.

Regime of Looking

Arguably, one of the most salient and enduring factors in “race’s” resilience comes from affective economies, primarily perception, and the emotions visual cues elicit to inform racial differentiation, racial hierarchies, and more pertinently, racisms, creating social inclusions and exclusions allowing for greater political power and the dispensation of privileges. Fanon recounts a dehumanizing experience based on visual cues. Aboard a train, a child traveling with its mother cries out, “Look, a Negro!” Fanon recalls, “It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile” (Fanon qtd in Goldberg 109). Soon after, the child reiterates, “Mama, see the Negro? I’m frightened!” (Fanon qtd in Goldberg 110). Fanon discovers after that interpellation of

being ascribed black and threatening-as-black, he is ascribed an otherness in an othering space:

In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one, but two, three places.... I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other...and the evanescent others, hostile but opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea....” (Fanon qtd in Goldberg 110).

No scholar will argue that race is purely phenotypical, but from the passage above the only criterion for the child identifying Fanon as Negro therefore threatening is his blackness. The importance of “the look” and the significance popular culture plays in interpreting what the look sees is intensified on the Muslimeen body. After analyzing research on how children identify and respond to visual markers of race and gender, Mervyn Alleyne discovers that

Some cues are more discernible than others. Among the most discernible are gender and racial physiognomic features (skin colour being perhaps at the top of the list). Gender and race are learned early, perhaps already from age three or four. The social significance of these characteristics is learned sometime later. (Alleyne 30)

It is not unreasonable then that Alleyne finds

there is a strong association in the human mind between the way people look and the way they behave. In fact, assumptions about behaviours and behavioural stereotypes are constructed on the way people look. There is a strong link, therefore, between race (the way people look...) and ethnicity (the way people behave), the former being a very salient component of the latter. (Alleyne ix)

Michael J. C. Echeruo argues “in matters of identity, you cannot not belong” (qtd in Okpewho, Boyce Davies, Mazrui 9). He reasons, “In simple terms, even if we were not to claim any particular identity, we would be assigned one, by the simple logic of either appearances or essences” (Echeruo 10 qtd in Okpewho, Boyce Davies, Mazrui). The

regime of looking inscribes bodies with racial makers that produce social capital or social stigmatization, and in the case of the Muslimeen both.

Across racial categories, across national boundaries, and across historical divides, the regime of looking predominates in racializing bodies. As a result of the colonial experience, race and ethnicity persist and continue to engineer national, cultural, religious and ethnic relations. Sheshadri-Crooks illuminates:

I am not valorizing caste....I only want to stress that in a wholly racialized society such as the US, Europe, or the Caribbean, appearance or physical attributes have come to be more starkly vested, more consequential than anything else such as family, wealth, culture, education or personal achievement. (Sheshadri-Crooks 1-2)

Indeed in the Caribbean as the examples of African-Trinidadian Muslims, particularly Muslimeen indicate, anatomical features, even under hijab, predominate as racial markers. Sheshadri-Crooks theorizes that “race is fundamentally a regime of looking,” although race is irreducible to the look (2). Yet, “the investment we make in appearance is beyond simple historical and material explanation” (2). Moving race from the realms of abstraction and ideological discursive realm, she moves into ontological dimensions positing that “‘Race,’ in other words is a system of categorization that since it has been organized shapes human difference in certain seemingly predetermined ways” (4). Sheshadri-Crooks then makes the connection between this “symbolic structuration” (4) and the visibility. (4) premising that “the regime of visibility secures the investment we make in ‘race,’ and there are good reasons...such an investment cannot be easily surrendered” (2). She concludes “Racial visibility should be understood as that which secures the much deeper investment we have made in the racial categorization of human beings” (Sheshadri- Crooks 8).

Yet, even as race fluidity, mutability, and contingency allow for the osmotic process of particular groups out of categorical blackness, this categorical apartheid is countered by the movement of people of African descent into an essentialist Africaness through which they reclaim an identity. Muslimeenism is an African antecedent, a counternarrative to dehumanizing colonialist portrayals. African-Trinidadian Muslims seek to re-empower a subjugated subjectivity even though Indo Muslims are members of the Jamaat and an Indo Trinidadian Muslim brother is one of Abu Bakr's most trusted body guards.

Michael Gomez in *Black Crescent* points out that the African Muslims "distinguished themselves by dress and adornment. In addition to the women's veils, Mande and Hausa men sometimes wore their hair in plaits....The Hausa males wore kaftans, humorously referred to as 'nightgowns' by Trinidadian-born blacks and coloreds" (Gomez 77).

In his essay, "The Fact of Blackness" Frantz Fanon argues, "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 108). The Muslimeen use this racial differentiation strategically. During his appearance on national television during the coup, the Imam was very strategic in deploying a politics of Muslimeenism, effected through semiotics, where, visually, the collective hypermilitarization of his followers, "scary black men," donned in military clothing and carrying menacing weapons were tempered with his personal conservatism conveyed through his dress, voice, and performance. He juxtaposed the symbols of the father/shepherd:

He wore no revolutionary-type beard nor exhibited any frenzied outburst on television on the evening of July 27, 1990. On that evening, he was cool and

garbed in Muslim wear. From such appearances he appeared an enigma. He sounded like a Moses promising a new deliverance as he articulated his nation's sufferings. He tried to dress up the illegality of his armed insurrection in self-righteous indignation." (Deosaran 35)

and the warrior/savior:

On his brief television appearance he insisted that "his action was not only on behalf of the suffering masses but an instrument of 'a higher authority, Allah.' He said, 'We have only temporary authority because we all die and our ideas with us but our noble actions don't die... We have made a noble act on your behalf'" (qtd in Deosaran 38)

The feminist Eurocentric paradoxical desire to quell the return to the body, to refuse to revisit how physical characteristics scaffold the meaning of race, is evidence of neoliberal, neo-Enlightenment postures where discourses on colorblindness, plural societies, and global villages justify academic blindness to the very real material conditions birthed out of the social construction of race and suffered under racist ideologies. Discussing raced bodies or racial histories does not in any way suggest that race is in any way natural, fixed, or immutable. Yet, as Jennifer L Hochschild makes abundantly clear, "race may be a social construction, but no one can deny that it matters" (350). It is with this idea of matter that I am concerned, matter as materiality. Why and how does matter (ontology) matter epistemologically? To delve into the significance and signification of matter, scholars cannot occlude public sentiment and interpretations. Seshadri-Crooks argues that "this rather myopic perspective [that race does not exist] refuses to address the peculiar resiliency of 'race,' the subjective investment in racial difference, and the hypervalorization of appearance" (9). So despite the cautionary remark that scholars must not contaminate their scholarship with folk interpretations, Michael Banton makes a valid argument that it is impossible "to keep the academic and popular uses of words completely separate" (128); for as Loïc J.D. Wacquant asks

logically, “How could the concept of ‘race’ not be porous when it contains and conveys all of the ambiguities, instabilities, and contradictions of folk taxonomies and of the manifold (and oft untold) histories of classification struggles?” (223).

Hardly anywhere else are these ambiguities and apparent incommensurabilities made more manifest in Trinidad than in the deployment of male Muslimeen bodies and their periodic and strategic staging of a highly visible, hypermilitarized masculinity.

Epistemic Violence

I use two methodologies, those of patterns of discursive competition and racializing of identities, to trace the reason the Muslimeen appear as scary black men. In critiquing the writing of male West Indian writers’ reliance on 19th century British intellectual discourse for constructions of Caribbean manhood, Edmondson argues that these constructions “are founded on interpellated meanings of manhood and cultural authority that have been passed on to them from British intellectual discourse of the nineteenth century” (Edmonson *Making Men* 5). Similarly, Henry states that “Caribbean tradition of thought can be viewed as a series of extended dialogues that arose out of European projects of building societies around plantation economies that were based on African slave labor” (68). The imperial incursion had to be justified through colonizing rhetoric which legitimated the state’s agenda (68). “[This] mythmaking ...inflated European identities while deflating African identities” (69).

The tendency to construct black masculinity in the Caribbean as problematic in its seeming inherent propensity to violence is not only a literary trope but infuses popular culture as well the nation’s psyche. It is not unusual to hear the expression, “so he black, so he ugly, so he bad.” African visual markers are automatically degraded, dehumanized

and criminalized, and these racializing discourses are inherited from colonial narrative, and have become so ubiquitous and naturalized that their deep-seated racism has become invisible. Deosaran pronounces that

The insurrection itself was surrounded by several social, political, legal and psychological currents. For example.... the role of mass media in a national crisis, the role of rumour in a society under stress, the politics of ethnic diversity, the psychology of relative deprivation, the vagaries of collective behaviour and the politics and psychology of law. (Deosaran 19)

I agree theoretically with Henry, but the cultural systems as Henry himself will argue pushed a black *intellectual* invisibility at the same time it constructed a biological or anatomical hypervisibility, and the perpetuation of this combination acts publicly upon Muslimeen to produce it as other, outcast, and threatening to national security and ultimately to personal safety. It is not hard to subject Muslimeen bodies to surveillance because the epistemic structures of violation and violence according to Henry and to Edmondson resulted in a “radical dehumanization that reduced [Afro- Caribbeans] to the biological level” (Henry 11). Yet many Muslimeen men and women hold multiple college degrees, including Fuad Abu Bakr who will speak in his own voice later in this chapter.

Politics of Muslimeenism through Postcolonial Essentialism

Adjustment to the conditions of the slave plantation did not mean acceptance of servitude by the African. His struggle for freedom began on the day of his enslavement. (Sherlock qtd. in Parry, Sherlock and Maingot 200)

Although Shahnaz Khan, in exploring the lives of Arab Muslim women in and out of the Arab world, suggests moving away from “notions of originary and cultural relativism”(S Khan *Aversion* 11) and towards “notions of hybridity and of third space, I

hold steadfast to moments for essentialism and identity politics (Aversion 11). The nomenclatures Afro- or African Trinidadian, black Muslim, African Muslim imply a return, however imaginary, to origins, to African roots, and more specifically to a more authentic Islam.

Thus, African-Trinidadian Muslims occupy interstitial spaces that seem at once to confirm and disrupt the ideas of commonalities and of difference. They, and the Muslimeen in particular, give notions of race and ethnicity validity as much as it they attest to its instability and can very well be read as counter/narratives to a nationalist discourse. Consequently, the Muslimeen embody these spatial, cultural, and political contradictions and use strategically these interstices created by ambiguities and ambivalences around the definitions of race and ethnicity in Trinidad, the polemic signification of African Muslim, and the ongoing land dispute between the state and the Muslimeen to advance a Muslimeen identity and agenda.

This semiotic parades metonymically as a politics of resistance for disenfranchised and marginalized groups and communities in Trinidad, *Muslimeenism*, against a local and specific version of Islamaphobia, Muslimeenphobia, where the politics of emotion is not directed against Islam in general but against African Muslims specifically. Navigating these cultural, political, and religious spaces between Muslimeenism and Muslimeenphobia, between affirmation and negation is what I term *postmodern essentialism*. A postmodern essentialist condition delegitimizes the notion of hegemonic binaries in methodologies of the oppressed and allows the Muslimeen to inhabit and represent simultaneously originaries *and* third spaces.

Scholars argue while power differentials empower some actors and disempower others, no subject is powerless completely; for power can be exerted from the bottom as it is from the top. Ruth Frankenberg in *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* argues that “any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses” (447). This ideology brings us to fact that constitution of selves is always and already within the operations of power; but still oppressed people can and do recreate and navigate their subject positions even, and necessarily, from subjugated social and economic locations. Oppressed people relegated as other in turn form an oppositional consciousness, what Sandoval calls a differential consciousness; what Anzaldúa terms a “*mestiza consciousness*... a consciousness of the Borderland” (99), an identity formed at the junctures of North and Central American cultures; what Paulo Freire calls *conscientização* (1981, 112), a critical consciousness that “empowers [humans] to alter their relations with nature and social forces” (Goulet xiv); what Henry terms ego-centric processes, identity formation.

So, in the face of dehumanizing discrimination, social marginalization and stigmatization, economic deprivation, and cultural exclusion subaltern people have chosen proudly to self-identify as the abject race and become empowered in abject embodiment. It is this commitment to a self-conscious, proactive, re-fashioning of the subject that gives race an enduring ability among subjugated people and a site through which to perform critical dances into a becoming. Even though he argues against the concept of race, Paul Gilroy concedes, “For many racialized populations, ‘race’ and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up” (Gilroy 12)

The crystallizing of a racial identity is not only in opposition to one imposed by the oppressor but also in opposition to the subject's own abject positionality, a psychic repositioning between the realms of dominated and dominator, a conscious repudiation of one's abjectness. In line with Foucauldian thought on the diffusive characteristic of power, Obika Gray reminds us that in the Caribbean, "The dialectic of oppressive state power, and opposition to it, remains a compelling subject for political analysis. Recent studies of this phenomenon have emphasized the ability of socially marginalized and disadvantaged groups to constrain power holders in ways they find hard to suppress" (qtd in Meeks and Lindahl 210). In her analysis, Gray argues that though politically, socially, economically and culturally disenfranchised, the urban poor in Jamaica engage in the process of "cultural self-formation" and take up defiant postures "often opposed to the authority of the parasitic state" and set the pace "establishing the political and moral foundations for an oppositional political culture among the urban poor" (qtd in Meeks and Lindahl 228).

Deosaran offers this similar insight locally, noting "[s]ub-cultures become havens for the marginalised and dispossessed" (159) and that "[o]ver the years a culture of resistance to established norms has developed especially in the urban areas of Trinidad" (Deosaran 157).

One affirmation of this oppositional abject positionality is that almost two decades later, the 1990 Muslimeen attempted coup remains imprinted upon the canvas of political, cultural, and religious consciousness not only in Trinidad but regionally, and I will argue globally as well.

Unarguably then, a defining characteristic of Caribbean identity is Black Power. From the Haitian Revolution beginning in 1791 to the Trinidadian Muslimeen coup in 1990, the most notorious political agitators in the English-speaking region have been and continue to be people of African descent. In 1969, on the eve of the 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad, black nationalist Stokely Carmichael, known in the African diaspora as Kwame Ture, was banned from returning to Trinidad. His absence did not deter a group of the local university affiliates from agitating. Directed by an Afro-conscious, black nationalist Geddes Granger, leader of the self-identified black political party National Joint Action Committee (N.J.A.C) the black power movement began as a long March into the Sugar Belt:

Now Granger announced his master strike of the entire campaign: The Long March, by mainly black youth and unemployed, into the sugar cane areas chiefly populated by Trinidad's large majority of East Indian workers. Given the plural social traditions of Trinidad, and the undercurrent of rivalry and feud between Negroes and East Indians—which had been exploited by politicians from both groups—this was a manoeuvre which required both clarity of purpose and tact. (Oxaal 33)

Black Power is an irreducible characteristic of national and personal identity in the Caribbean and according to Edmondson an irreducible component of African Caribbean masculinity. Admittedly, in invoking the salience of race in historical contexts, in talking of Black Power and of black bodies, male and female, there remains the risk of being called essentialist at every stage of this chapter. Critiquing the debilitating assault on essentialism, Spivak formulates a theory of “strategic essentialism” where at times universalisms can be productive rather than reductive, and it is in this vein of productive essentialism that race matters. Furthermore, in critiquing the commitment of Eurocentric theories of multiculturalism and colorblindness to foreclose discussions of the subjective

investment by subjugated people in racial identity, Echeruo laments, “We imagine that the historical conditions which have shaped our experiences in these various locations [America, Britain, everywhere] negate this [African] identity; that, because we are so various, we are not, therefore, also, identical and African. We call any notion that we might have remained African through these experiences a form of ‘essentialism’ and are only too glad to choose to be nothing” (Echeruo 16).

As the return to history and to African antecedents converge, it becomes clearer that in Trinidad black power movements’ generator lies in an African Muslim legacy. Wood suggests that all slaves taken from the coasts of Senegal and Gambia were misnamed Mandingos; but some were actually Wolofs and Fulanis who came later from Senegal to the Cameroons as liberated Africans to Trinidad, “men with Muslim names and a knowledge of Arabic” (Wood 40) and who maintained “their cohesion and corporate sense”(Wood 40). After the 1970 coup, many Trinidadians named their children what were on the surface African-sounding names but were in essence African Muslim names.

Dannin concludes that the turn to Islam by disenfranchised and displaced members of society offers the reimagining of oppressed communities into charitable entities committed to social justice and equality. The simple tenets of Islam where “the true believer must therefore liberate himself or herself from human dependencies” (Dannin 238) affords the individual a simultaneous release from the need for economic prosperity as well as the opportunity for self empowerment through modesty and self-validation through poverty. “The ritual of conversion effectively sets new pedagogical

goals as the necessary elements for the process of self-rediscovery and social reconstruction” (Dannin 239).

Liberation theology seeks to re-emphasize the central concern of Islam with social justice and its fundamental emphasis on liberating the weaker sections and the oppressed masses and radically restructuring society to eliminate all the vested interests, which would ultimately lead to the creation of a classless society which is the real purpose of *tawhidi*⁸⁰ [unity God and unity of humankind] society” (Engineer 204).

De-Criminalizing a Body, Normalizing the Muslimeen: Fuad Abu Bakr and the New National Vision

the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. ...the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (Michel Foucault “The Political Investment of the Body” from 1979 *Discipline and Punish* qtd in Fraser and Greco 100-104).

When I began my field research in September 2007, Trinidad and Tobago was preparing for general elections. In 2010, the ruling party, the People’s National Movement (PNM), called General Elections two years early on Monday May 24, 2010. Contesting the 2010 national elections was a new party, the New National Vision (the NNV) whose leader is 24-year old Fuad Abu Bakr, one of Imam Abu Bakr’s sons.

I met Brother Fuad for the first time on Saturday 22, May, 2010 when I interviewed him at the Jamaat al Muslimeen. The first thing he mentioned, an issue about which he seemed most disturbed, was that a few days prior on a platform for the new political candidates (there were no incumbents in this constituency) Fuad Abu Bakr was

asked a question posed to no other candidate, “What role would your religion play in your politics if you were to be Prime Minister?” Although Abu Bakr claims that he was prepared for the question since he was being asked it repeatedly, he was still perturbed, lamenting, “It is unfortunate that as Trinidadians, as Trinbagonians, we practice discrimination against other religions.” He pointed out that “throughout the nation’s history, Muslims have made sterling contributions, for example the former President Noor Hassanali and other sitting Cabinet members.”

Ibrahim notes Muslims “hold meaningful positions in the local government, the university and the judiciary” (23) and goes on to name a very comprehensive list of Muslims who served in government positions in Trinidad and Tobago. “Muslim presence in these areas [government, judiciary, university] manifests the sacred place Muslims have made for themselves, where they have a voice in running the affairs of the country” (26). These figures, however, are primarily East Indian Muslims and not Muslims of African descent. Thus, in this case of political space in the nation, they inhabit no third space. In fact they embody the somatic norm of Muslim bodies, and as such, their Muslim identity is enveloped in their East Indian identity and their religion made apolitical and irrelevant in a way that African Trinidadian Muslim identity can never be dismissed in political spaces. African Muslims are already politicized by the combination of their ethnicity and their religion.

That the present Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Kamla Persad-Bissessar, is a Hindu woman has not been a major factor in the way that religion impacts perpetually upon Abu Bakr. Not even gender trumped race in this instance of National Elections. Other political corporealities seem to embody religion seamlessly; it is organic

and rendered invisible and thus inconsequential in the political arena. But for Brother Fuad, his religion is differently embodied and simultaneously disembodied taking on a life of its own. Even though he doesn't look Muslim, Trinidadians still *see* him as Muslim because they know he is Muslim, and even more telling, he *is* one of Abu Bakr's son.

On Fuad's body, religion is given a hypervisibility, an inorganicism. What factors then could account for Fuad's public reception and representation? And here I too commit a kind of discursive violence by using Fuad as a metonymy for my research questions exploring the reasons behind the criminalizing of the Muslimeen body. Is the discrimination Fuad experiences and names merely as a result of the notoriety of his father-- Yasin Abu Bakr, iman of Jamaat al Muslimeen-- on the national and international landscape? That these Muslimeen are responsible for the 1990 coup or what Mark Figuera calls *jihad* (holy war) is undeniable. Is negative public perception as a result of the stigma attached to the name Abu Bakr? Or are there more complex intersecting factors that shape public perception of Fuad Abu Bakr? Is it something innocuous and innominate or something far more calculating, pervasive and perpetuating that determines the semiotic relationship between Fuad and Muslimeen and Islam and terror and politics and religion? To be more specific, why is the intersection of religion and politics not an issue for Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, Catholics, Anglicans, Hindus but specifically brought to bear on Brother Fuad? Why do Trinbagonians not only see but also *feel* /emote a particular way about Fuads? What factors fuel these emotions?

Indeed the slide of metonymy can function as an implicit argument about the causal relations between terms (such as Islam and terrorism), but in such a way that it does not require an explicit statement. The work done by metonymy means that it can remake links—it can stick words like 'terrorist' and 'Islam' together—

even when arguments are made that seem to unmake those links....The sliding between signs also involves ‘sticking signs to bodies: the bodies who ‘could be terrorists’ are the ones who might ‘look Muslim’. Such associations stick precisely insofar as they resist literalisation. (Ahmed 76)

During the 2010 National General Elections campaign, the on-going discussion at a hairdressing salon in Diego Martin, Trinidad was that the women hoped the Muslimeen party, the New National Vision (NNV) would not win; otherwise all women would have to revert to wearing *hijab*, covering their bodies, and sharing a husband. These fears were unfounded and hypocritical for several reasons: one, Muslims have from the inception of independence held prominent positions in the Trinidad and Tobago government, albeit Indo Muslims primarily; two, conversion and/or proselytizing was never part of the NNV’s campaign—they ran a progressive campaign built around economics and youth development; three, prior to National General Elections, often the discussion among some of these very women at the salon was the infidelity of their own past or present male partners.

As Puwar argues, not all racialized minorities enter contained spaces at the same rate and to the same degree, but those that most easily fit the somatic norm are allowed in. As Spivak would argue, Fuad brings to crisis the idea of the alibi, what Puwar terms the somatic norm. Fuad is both an insider as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago but an outsider as a Muslimeen and his

arrival brings into relief what has been able to pass as the invisible, unmarked somatic norm. These new bodies highlight the constitutive boundaries of who can pass as the universal human, and hence who can be the ideal figure of leadership. What has been constructed out in the historical and conceptual imagination is brought to the fore. (8)

So Kamla Persad-Bissessar can be a more successful space invader since the embodied terms of her engagement with the public realm is still a universalized somatic norm—

sex. Fuad on the other hand is not an ascribed or prescribed, that is legible, form. Kamla is like her predecessor Basdeo Panday in terms of ethnicity but not-Panday in terms of sex but still these are even if contested and unstable nevertheless legible codes of somatic legibility/designation. Although she speaks of the socio-spatial impact of space invasion on white bodies by women and racialised minorities stating that it results in “two fundamental processes...disorientation and amplification” (Puwar 11) the “muted sense and terror [that] underlies the reception of women and racialised minorities in predominantly white and masculine domains. ‘Known’ through a limited set of framings, these bodies jar and destabilise an exclusive sense of place. They “represent the “potentially monstrous” because they “defy conventions and boundaries” and whose “somatic arrival invades the social and psychic” (Puwar 11). So it is not so much the political invasion and transgressing of the nation’s laws, but the psychic invasion is what has the nation reeling to reconcile. The psychic horror is amplified by the hypervisibility of these bodies out of place. The Muslimeen body in a political space creates a socio-spatial assault.

In spite of their virtually insignificant numbers writ against national statistics and their categorical elision from the census, African Trinidadian Muslims in general and the Muslimeen in particular have been and continue to be not only highly visible but also a persistent source of national, cultural, and political anxiety. African Muslims’ cultural and historical connections to African origins, their attachment to the history of the African slave trade, their affirmation and celebration of African identity, their involvement in the 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad, their leadership in the 1990 coup, their alleged ties to terrorist nations like Libya, and their traditional Muslim dress

are ideological and ontological cues that mark their bodies as other and “race” it as black, thereby embodying terror and criminality.

Thus it appears that the very staying power of the Muslimeen as a religious, social, cultural, ethnic, and political discrete entity within a nation state derives from the very ambiguities and imaginaries of race, ethnicity, nationalism that allow for the caesura from which a postmodern essentialist strategy can emerge. Muslimeen bodies represent sites of construction for conflicting, competing, and cognate subjectivities; of integration and negotiation of collectivities; and of resistance and reaffirmation of identities. Trinidad’s Muslimeen population creates contradictions around race and ethnicity—blackness and Indianness specifically since both African- and Indo-Trinidadian Muslims can be considered “black.” African-Trinidadian Muslims create disruptions around religion and politics: are black Muslims a political or religious group primarily or are they irreducible to one or the other?

Muslimeenism interrogates the concept of authentic Islam. It calls into question the meaning of homeland and motherland, nation and diaspora. Given the foregoing context, Muslimeen bodies call into question what it means to be national/Trinidadian at the same time it calls into question what it means to be African Trinidadian and Muslim simultaneously. Thus the very nomenclature black Muslim is fraught with contradictions that for too long have gone untheorized even though it underwrites, or rather undermines, the official discourse of the nation’s history where “all o’ we is one family” (Calypsonian Nelson).⁸¹

⁸¹ Even my use of black Muslim presupposes a homogeneity of black Muslimness. In fact, there are several black Muslim Mosques and sects and many are in opposition to the radical and militant politics of Abu Bakr.

Notwithstanding the interdisciplinary fictional and nonfictional corpus on race and ethnicity, creolization and hybridity, plurality and multiplicity, border and diaspora, colony and empire, in Trinidad *blackness* invariably coalesces into an Africancentric subject linked to an African history, in essence, an African imaginary; but with unabated racial mixing in the country predicated upon a national ideology with an inscription of “Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve on the coat of arms, blackness metonymically becomes increasingly more difficult to define and to fix at the same time that race materially, ideologically, and discursively becomes more difficult to dissolve. Nowhere are these intersections, tensions, contradictions, and eruptions of race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality brought more to crisis than in the presence of African Trinidadian Muslims who posture toward the salience of race and testify to the fictiveness of race. Nowhere is the liminality of race and gender more salient than in these Trinidadian Muslimeen bodies.

Media and academic discourses around the insurrection are indicative of all discourses concerning the Jamaat and for that matter the bodies of African Trinidadian Muslims--- gendered and racialised. The affective response to these racialising and hypermaculinizing projections is the promotion and perpetuation of a politics of fear and disgust. What is especially problematic about this epistemological and discursive violence enacted upon these soma is either the total erasure of other social actors caught in the web of Muslimeenphobia or their reduction to victimhood. For example in the popular imagination Indo-Trinidadians, male and female are real or true Muslims while all African Trinidadian Muslims are converts, even if they are born Muslim.

Conclusion

Ethnography and Autobiography

My coming to know my subjects and to comprehend their life practices was an epistemological, theoretical and ontological coming of age for me. Such paradigmatic shifts are not specific to my research or even to my experience as ethnographer as Kamala Visweswaran attests. My attempts to observe, record, and analyze gender practices among the Muslimeen became a hegira to finding revolutionary language, terminologies, and methodologies to describe and understand an extraordinary community of Muslims within a Christian state. This odyssey brought me to yet another crossroads of what Sandoval terms academic apartheid. Within the first months of my ethnography then, the fiction of me as ideologically *tabula rasa* was soon exposed where the Muslimeen were concerned. I had arrived at the Jamaat al Muslimeen with latent notions of whom and what I was likely to encounter. Within moments I began shifting epistemologically as much as my methodological and theoretical approaches continued to be destabilized. Necessarily, as my research progressed I discovered that I was contending with at least four fictions:

Fiction one: The Ethnographer is capable of entering the field *tabula rasa*.

Fiction two: Islam is an East Indian religion and African Muslims are not “real” Muslims.

Fiction three: At least one extant feminist theory and/or postcolonialism can explain sexual and gender relations among the Muslimeen.

Fiction four: The Jamaat al Muslimeen is always and already a criminalized space.

Fiction one: The Ethnographer enters the field *tabula rasa*

For seven years my father had driven my siblings and me past the Jamaat al Muslimeen almost every weekday on our commute to secondary school.⁸² I had never before 2007 ventured through the gate although it always seemed to be open. It seemed in those days, especially to a child, driving past the Jamaat was akin to passing a cemetery; for I felt I would lose a digit if I motioned to it. “Your finger would fall off,” elders would always remind us if we pointed to a graveyard. The masjid’s compound as an emblem of danger was almost tangible. There was something at once ominous (and for me, alluring) about the compound, implanted and reinforced through years of societal regulating; enduring vestiges of colonial narratives on ontology, epistemology, history; and parental conditioning. This seemingly inherent fear was based more on fiction than on fact, and predicated solidly upon inherited and internalized stereotypes of race, ethnicity and religion. Some of this trepidation accompanied me on my initial visit to the masjid in September 2007.

It was just not a mysticism but a cloak of terror that shrouded this mosque, a cloak woven by unrelenting hands of prejudice and binding threads of ignorance and irrationality. I do not even remember specifically when or where or by whose telling my

⁸² The education system in Trinidad was modelled after the British system. After five years in secondary school (high school) students used to sit a national standardised test called General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (GCE O’level) that was set and corrected in England by British teachers. Based on a student’s performance in GCE O’level, the pupil could opt to go on to do two years of Advanced Level (GCE A’Level). These two examinations have since been replaced with Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) and Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) respectively, set and corrected in the Caribbean by Caribbean teachers.

prejudices began; but the teaching, overt and covert, was effective. It is obvious this negative psychological engineering predated the 1990 insurrection.

As an adolescent I emoted both fear and fascination for usually those whom I thought of at the time as black Muslims and militants; for even then I knew the term *militant* and knew it attached to black bodies, men of African descent dressed in long white robes and wearing what we called then a skull cap (kofi). I remember reading through their publication. I do not recall the name of it or if it were titled the *Final Call*, the newspaper of the Nation of Islam. I recall even now going through the list of Arabic names and choosing Jamila for myself. My parents thought it was a phase I would outgrow. I didn't seem to fit their ideal of a girl child, especially the last girl child; and they were bedside themselves trying to understand why, for me, it was "normal" to "run" with the boys, try to follow them on my little bike as they rode off to go on their adventures into the Diego Martin hills called the Northern Range. So, masculinity adhered to black Muslim bodies even then. "If only you could stay inside and read like your sisters," my mother scolded me perpetually. I was being taught how girls were to use, in fact not use, space. I *am reading* now though, but reading differently; and I am able to put a vocabulary to my childhood anxieties about my identity: regulation of bodies and gendering of space.

At that time of my pre-teen, budding, black consciousness, I was Confirmed in an Anglican church, St. Michael and All Angels; and I became one of the first six girls in Trinidad and Tobago to become an acolyte and serve on the altar. Our priest had to request permission from Canterbury, England; for as I recall, at that point in 1975, women, in whatever capacity, were not allowed on the altar during mass in any religion.

They would clean and decorate it with flowers but had nothing to do with celebrating mass.

At ten years old, there was no inter-religious ambivalence for me. I did not recognize my Anglicanism was incommensurable with my Islamic stirrings or black consciousness. There was no paradox. I did not know my choosing to be an acolyte in the Anglican Church was both complicity to colonial religiosity and subversion and agency by some feminist analyses. Unlike my older brothers and sisters who left the Church immediately after Confirmation, I wanted to stay and be an active Anglican. The only options for membership in existing female church groups were the Mother's Union, the Evergreen Club, and the choir. I wasn't a mother. I was not over sixty, so that eliminated me from the Evergreen Club. I could not sing although that factor did not seem to deter the majority of the elderly choir members. Anyway, the same old women who sang in high-pitched voices, dragged the hymns, were unsynchronized, and bungled the lyrics were the same members in all three groups. I decided I wanted to serve on the altar, and being a girl was not going to stop me.

By the time I left Trinidad to start college in the US, I had made my way to Head Server and sat on the right hand of the priest during mass. At the time I was Head Server, I wrote a poem called "Cry of a Slave" that was published in my secondary school year book, the *Hilarian*. It was my catharsis for the West Indian history course I was taking and learned about slavery, the inhumanity of slave traders, the indignity of capitalism, and the loss of African and black identity. Intuitively it seems, vestiges of that indomitable Muslim slave spirit were taking root in me.

Eventually, as a doctoral student in women's and gender studies, a member of my proposal defense committee, Ethel Brooks, suggested I do my ethnography on gender practices at the Jamaat. Finally, I had the opportunity to examine and to try to de/legitimize the reasons for the stigmatization of the Jamaat al Muslimeen and the male and female bodies peopling the compound; and in the process reflect on why thirty years later I seemed destined to enter the gates of the Jamaat. *Al-hamdullah*.

My Bachelor's and Master's are in English Literature, so research with human subjects was virgin territory for me. I was intimidated, to say the least, entering the field as an inexperienced researcher, especially into such uncharted territory. Before my Ph.D. program, I had dealt with inanimate texts only; and my encounters with bodies had been post-structuralist really, contained within the pages of the course required and recommended readings and primary and secondary sources, even if the heuristic or analytical tools lay outside the specific text. During the development of my research however, I realized my ethnography was indeed activist work; and I wanted my research to have an impact on state policy to resolve at least the ambivalence with dealing with the Jamaat al Muslimeen. I did take methodology and epistemology courses in my Women's and Gender Studies graduate program at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; but epistemological acumen does not translate necessarily into field savvy or skillful ontological relations. Generally, the Muslimeen did not obstruct my access physically, intellectually, structurally. From our first encounter, Sister Annisa and later on Sister

Fatima were very accommodating and remained concerned about my academic progress throughout the dissertation process.⁸³

Fiction Two: Islam is an East Indian religion and African Muslims are not real Muslims

From informal conversations with my eleven-year old nephew's primary school mates; my sixteen-year old daughter's secondary school mates and their friends; my discussions with my own friends, and debates from schoolyards to bars to hairdressing salons with subjects across gender, racial, ethnic, class and educational divides, it is disheartening that though indisputable that African slaves brought Islam from the African continent, very few Trinidadians know, think about, or even care to challenge or reconsider the origin of Islam, comfortable at best and unconcerned at worst with the belief Indo Trinidadians are the real Muslims and African Muslims are radical converts.

Samaroo documents that of the 19, 709 African slaves in Trinidad and Tobago in 1802, the majority if not all were Muslims. Of course, it is difficult to get precise numbers on African Muslims—even as it is today—as part of the colonizing process was the changing of the slaves' names and religions and cultures.⁸⁴

Consequently, there perpetuates in Trinidad however, as in the rest of the Caribbean region, the belief that it was the East Indians who brought Islam to the Caribbean; and despite documented evidence to the contrary there do not seem to be any

⁸³ Sisters Annisa and Fatima did not see the need to hide their identities, so I use their real names here. In other parts of the text where details are personal or intimate, I use pseudonyms for them.

⁸⁴ Ibrahim Ali 3

concerted institutional efforts to subvert the myth. Even more injurious is that Islam is frequently attached to black bodies negatively only, and the ubiquitous conflation of Muslim and terrorist locally as it is globally is both racialized and gendered.

Since it is difficult to dislodge the origin of Islam from an Indo Muslim default—so mired is the Caribbean region in this belief—African Trinidadian Muslims are always and already constructed as “other” and as troubling. Sheikh Tariq, 83,⁸⁵ probably the oldest living member of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, laments that even the most current social studies books preparing primary school students for the Secondary Schools Assessment Exam (SEA) contain erroneous information about Islam and Muslims, negating the presence of Muslims of African descent. Henry offers reasons for this delegitimization of African cultural formations:

1) peripheral cultural systems, where external imperial forces influence indigenous, internal configurations, namely ego-genetic processes like identity formation (10);

2) polarized internal competition between imperial and indigenous reproductive sites to determine whose narratives of the colonized is privileged, the colonizer [Prospero] or the colonized, [Caliban] (11) and

3) racializing of group cultural identities which produce categories of people along a hierarchal color spectrum, a perpetuating colonial instrument that continues to facilitate the color coding of criminal acts generally with white as the most innocuous and black as the most insidious.

⁸⁵ Age in 2007. Or as Sheikh Tariq put it, “four score and three.”

It is almost logical then that an African *Muslim* revolutionary spirit remains disconnected from national consciousness and nationalism discourses, from liberation struggles, and from black power movements in the Caribbean basin. Consequently in resistance discourses, race/ethnicity defaults into blackness/African-ness; and gender defaults into masculinity. So black/African men are the overriding signifiers of black power in the Caribbean, while other categories of analysis like religion and even class tend to be obscured or severed from Caribbean resistance literature.

Despite the colonial effacing strategies, however, and though scholars argue the Islam of today is not the Islam of the slaves, for African Trinidadian Muslims, and especially the Muslimeen, Islam remains an indispensable organizing principle of their quotidian lives. Additionally for them Allah's law supersedes the law of the land so that belonging to the *umma* is more important than belonging to the nation state.⁸⁶ "You do not need a constitution to legislate what Allah has legislated already," the imam reinforced during a sermon.⁸⁷

Fiction Three: At least one extant feminism and/or postcolonialism can account for the Muslimeen gender and sexual relations

Feminist readings could only see their "purely" feminist sensibilities, and did not consider questions of geographic *space*, or *race*, questions which are crucial to the understanding of ...specificity.... (Edmonson 4 *Making Men*)

The essentializing of feminist resistance is in essence advocating for a western identity politic that focuses on a western definition of defiance as opposed to a diverse global fight for human rights and freedoms. (Massaquoi 7)

⁸⁶ Brinsley Samaroo 1995.77

⁸⁷ Sermon by Imam Abu Bakr, October 13, 2007 at the Masjid al Muslimeen and Madressa, 1 Mucurapo Rd, St. James, Trinidad.

So positioned along a continuum stretching from the production of oppressed-Muslim-woman-trope to the liberating and egalitarian theology scaffolding Islamic feminism, Muslimeen women are enacting their Muslimeenism, including performing a politics of sexual piety, manipulating spatial navigation, and engaging in other/mothering. Muslimeen women not only subvert the stereotype of Muslim women as asexual; but through their gender negotiations, they proclaim their Islamic right as Muslim women to be more than the hegemonic binaries of desirous, sensual, sexual versus modest, submitting and obedient bodies. Although I use gendered and feminist lenses myself in my analysis, I do not adorn the subjects in feminist garb or impose its accompanying hegemonic accessories like agency, empowerment, and oppression. Instead, I prefer to understand, interpret, and re-present their quotidian engagements in frames of references more particular to their worldviews as ordinary women negotiating extraordinary circumstances. Conditions and the state of Muslim women globally—stereotyped or actual—do not map epistemologically or ontologically onto the lives of these local Muslim women some of whom converted to Islam and some of whom who were born into Islam, their parents being Jamaat members. Some Muslimeen women were also born initially into other Muslim communities including into wealthy Indo-Muslim Trinidadian families before joining the Jamaat al Muslimeen.

Theorizing Muslimeen women's lives demand radical shifts in extant epistemologies along with the creation of new theories and vocabularies to understand these subjects' life situations and choices inside and outside the nation. Though often homogenized by mainstream culture, there are differences among Muslimeen women.

They are also different culturally and ideologically from their closest geographical counterpart outside the Caribbean region, the women from the Nation of Islam, or the new *Muslimah* as Donna Gehrke-White refers to them.⁸⁸ Thus, it is important to underscore that even though shar'ia law prevails among them, Muslimeen women negotiate their subjective and collective identities within four intersecting borders: between and among Muslimeen men and women within the compound itself; between the compound and that of the larger Trinidad society; between the nation of Trinidad and the Nation of Islam; and between the jamaat and the global *umma*.

It would be remiss of me, however, to note and challenge epistemic foreclosures in the history of Islam in Trinidad; eliding ethnic contra-narratives; African bodies dislocated geographically, historically, religiously; and disappeared histories but not call attention to the omission of women as characteristic of all these discourses. In Trinidad and Tobago, women as well as religion for the most part are disemboweled from revolutionary literature; and their elision is persistent.⁸⁹ Brian Meeeks argues poignantly, “among its many flaws, Caribbean Black Power was a male-centered

⁸⁸ During Minister Louis Farrakhan's visit to Trinidad from March 21 to March 26, 2012, the Muslim women who comprised the entourage wore all-white clothing, including their veils. Muslimeen women do not wear all-white routinely. If they do, it is more of a fashion choice than a requirement. While I was outside the National Academy for Performing Arts (NAPA) on Sunday 25, March, 2012, a few non-Muslim women (obvious by their less than modest clothing) commented that the Muslimahs looked like nuns (although nuns in Trinidad also wear other colours like blue and black). It is interesting the Muslimahs were not compared to Baptist women in Trinidad who wear all-white also. It was obvious, though, that the style of the *hijab* was the informing semiotic; for indeed, the head coverings were flat and rectangular like those of nuns rather than the elaborate African style headwraps worn by Baptists.

⁸⁹ See for a counter-narrative, Reddock, Rhoda. *Elma Francois: The NWCSA and the Worker's Struggle for Change in the Caribbean*. London: New Beacon Books, 1988. Shepherd, Verene. *Women in Caribbean History*. James Currey, 1999.

movement... Women were everywhere present in the ‘struggle,’ but they were almost everywhere subordinate to male leadership” (*Critical Interventions* np). Attempting to stop some of these lacunae are Victoria Pasley and Reddock. Pasley analyzes the absence of, as well as, restores women’s participation in the narratives of the 1970 black power movement in Trinidad. Reddock makes her intervention into gender and religion by highlighting Muslim women’s reclaiming of masjid space. Both Pasley and Reddock, however, and necessarily so for their projects, privilege the gender lens; but with the Muslimeen, there needs to be a more profound intersectional approach of race/ethnicity, gender, religion and class since the Muslimeen embody and muddy all these categories of analysis.

Thus, in rewriting the history of Islam in Trinidad, scholars need to adopt a more panoramic, trans-Atlantic, and intersectional approach. As significant as it is to the nation’s history—and barring humanist, liberal overtures to truth and reconciliation—not a single Muslimeen woman testified at a single session of the 2011-12 Commission of Enquiry into the Events of 1990. Not a single mention was made *of* their participation by the Muslimeen men. Not a single question was asked *of* their involvement, even engagement through complicity, by the Commissioners or the counsels although the question of complicity arose repeatedly in connection with government Ministers. And from my observation, only two sisters ever attended the hearings.

Retelling the history of Africans and Islam in Trinidad should not continue to be a discursive space for the occurrence of what Sandoval calls academic apartheid, where postcolonial, poststructuralist, queer, hegemonic and other theories do not come into conversation with one another, and voices of women of color may even be elided. Such a

restorative project of transforming the consciousness of the entire nation of Trinidad and Tobago and of the Caribbean region calls for a concerted effort across disciplinary, ideological, and epistemic boundaries to reinforce that

- the seeds of nationalism are rooted in an African *Muslim* legacy,
- black consciousness is inherently powered by religion as much as by race and ethnicity,
- a productive relationship among categories needs to be transparent.

Indeed, Muslim actors themselves have to retell a more cartographical history of gender, space, place and sexuality. Through my ethnography, then, Muslimeen women speak and act. As Walker prescribes, in order for African subjectivities to materialize:

An important goal is to see ourselves, and to allow others to see us, through our own eyes, through the reflection of our own self-consciousness, rather than through either borrowed or imposed eyes. We endeavour to see ourselves in our own terms so as to allow ourselves and others to understand us from multiple endogenic perspectives, rather than as filtered through perspectives of inapplicable exogenic premises that distort our realities. (39)

In working through the relationship between autobiography and ethnography Visweswaran notes that the mode of essay conveys what she terms “practices of ‘conjuncturalism’” (11) that she claims births from feminist theory and ethnographic conjuncturalism. “This conjuncturalist approach to identity, in emphasizing the conditional or contingent, mirrors the insights of recent feminist theory as well” (11) and calls for “an understanding of the relationship between subjects and their histories as complex and shifting, yet not ‘free.’” Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani argue that this concept must be carefully specified, used to describe moments, social formations, subject positions and practices which arise out of an unfolding axis of

colonization/decolonization, interwoven with the unfolding of other axes, in uneven , unequal relations with one another” (Visweswaran *Fictions* Intro 11-12).

Tahirah, in her sixties and a new convert to Islam since her recent return to Trinidad from Canada, is enthusiastic about her reversion.

“Taking *shahada* is the best choice I have ever made. Once I did it I knew it was the right thing. And once you do it, you will see. It will be the right thing. You will just know it. You will feel it.”⁹⁰

The discussion was around my indecision about taking *shahada*. It was not the first time the issue of my conversion arose. In 2008 while I was listening to Sister Atiya complain about the “laziness and irresponsibility of young men nowadays” as she scraped up cigarette butts from around the mosque and uprooted grass growing between the cracks in the paved walkway circling the structure noting “back in the day this would never happen,” a female transient wandered onto the compound as the gates are not closed until after sundown. She greeted Sister Atiya, and it became obvious to me they were familiar with each other. They spoke casually as Sister Atiya continued her chores, then the woman turned to me and asked if I were a Muslim. When I said no, she began her da’wa, proselytizing immediately. I was taken aback as the woman, somewhat disheveled and scantily clad, appeared to be not just destitute but a prostitute. Sister Atiya without breaking stride intervened immediately and gently, “Oh. Leave her alone. She is fine. We can’t force people to do things. There isn’t just one way.” I was surprised at Sister Atiya’s open-mindedness, but this understanding is characteristic of people who are comfortable in their Muslimness. Saleem, Rita’s husband, had displayed this ease

⁹⁰ Informal discussion before the start of Sister classes Aug 2011.

with his wife too, never forcing her conversion. The conversation turned to other things and eventually I had to leave.

Since I started my ethnography at the *Jamaat* in September 2007, I was increasingly drawn to Islam but had reservations still about certain tenets like obedience to one's husband which I expressed reservedly during one Sister class. As Ni'jah, Tahirah's daughter, summarized presciently of me, I "could not reconcile my feminism with complete and unquestioning submission to husband." Ni'jah assured me compassionately and confidently that I would know when the time was right. The tension and discomfort with naming as feminist that which seemed to transcend gender discourses re-emerged in my consciousness, even though I did not express it aloud. I neither confirmed nor denied the analysis of the cause of my apprehension, for even then I did not know if indeed it was a feminist consciousness or a black consciousness or both that engendered my desire to resist whatever I saw as disturbingly regulating and even infantilizing. In this case it happened to be the Islamic belief in obedience to husband that unsettled me, but that agitation did not necessarily arise from a feminist consciousness solely.

Sister Fatima explained patiently:

The Qur'an states that the man is the provider and the supplanter. *al-hamdulillah*.⁹¹ He is responsible for the woman. And when it says woman it's not just his wife or wives, but other women-- his mother, his sisters, his daughters. So if the woman is to be taken care of by the man then she has to be obedient to him since it is Allah's will they are obeying. But she is to be obedient to him only as it is Allah's will and in keeping with being a good Muslim, *al-hamdulillah*. If your husband does not want you to be

⁹¹ A- or el- Hamdullah means Praise be to Allah. Sister Fatima uses it very frequently. *Inshallah* is another one of her favourite Arabic phrases.

friends with Jihanne then you don't question him.⁹² You don't talk to her. Or if your daughter wants to go out and you think it's okay for her but your husband says no, then she is not supposed to go out."

At that point it became transparent which matrix of oppression would take precedence. I had to suppress every feminist impulse to start citing to Fatima Muslim feminist scholars like Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Saba Mahmood and other Muslim feminists advocating a feminist Islam or a feminist consciousness distinct from hegemonic feminisms that looked myopically at male-female relations within scripted paradigms. Still, I could deploy my feminist politics strategically in self-analysis but not as readily in making sense of my subjects' life worlds. I reminded myself consciously that my project was to find new ways of understanding the negotiations of these Muslimeen women and not to impose my notion or a hegemonic characterization of feminist Islam or even feminism on them, especially when I was uncomfortable with using the label feminist from the moment of my access to the Jamaat.

Cooke suffers no such ethnocentric reservations, declaring unequivocally, "I use 'feminist' to refer to women who think and do something about changing expectations for women's social roles and responsibilities" (Cooke viii-ix). In her introduction, Cooke is at pains to clarify her use of the term *feminist* claiming "[f]eminism is more than an ideology driving organized political movements" (Cooke ix), explaining further that "[f]eminism

⁹² Jihanne is the name Sister Fatima gave me during one Sister class, and I used this name in all my electronic communication with her. Ironically, Jeanne, the actual spelling of my name was also Sister Fatima's home name, the name with which she grew up; but she started using Fatima when she became a "good Muslim."

seeks justice...[and] involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination

(Cooke x) arguing that activism may be self-conscious or not but ultimately that

this definition of feminism describes changing states of consciousness, each reflecting women's understanding of themselves and their situations as related to their biological condition. Thus defined, feminism is not bound to one culture. It is no more Arab than it is American, no more Mediterranean than it is North European. It is this definition of feminism that I am using in this book (x).

I am not so liberal in affixing the label feminist to my subjects. The term *Muslimeen* and these women's choice to be Muslimeen speak to a politics and ideology that far exceeds that of any feminist rhetoric as we have seen earlier in the text. Sister Fatima continued the explanation of the Islamic logic of obedience to husband:

"But if he tells you to do something that is against the will of Allah, then you don't obey him. There is a brother who wants his wife to take off her *kima* and go partying. Like he looking for a more exciting life. So he telling his wife to take off her *kima* and go party. But she tells him no. And she is right," Sister Fatima stressed even further; "for that is not being a good Muslim."

The notion of being a good Muslim is a recurring theme among the Muslimeen and hardly does the imam preach a *khutba* without speaking of the ideal Muslim.

"But a man could do that?" Gail, one of the young sisters, asked in obvious shock. "You could tell your wife to take off her *niqab* and go and fete?" This question was another opening for me to introduce the concept of feminist Islam, but I still could not do any proselytizing in good conscience. The academic literature on Muslim women was so heavily predicated on veiling that I had not until then encountered this Islamic doctrine of obedience to one's husband in any of the texts. Additionally, in none of my interviews and informal discussions did the issue arise before this point.

Seeking an ally I asked Nadia whom I had known for two years by then if she believed in obedience to her husband. Nadia was pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Business and in no way seemed to be acquiescent to her husband. She had a son in 2008, and though she named him after his father, she made it clear to her husband on several occasions she did not want any more children until she finished her degree. Nadia responded immediately and unequivocally, "But of course." I was taken aback, expecting her who was soft-spoken but self-affirming to say, "No." From her convicted response, I knew I needed more critical distance from my non-Muslim position to understand how Muslimeen women made sense of obedience to husband in a way my feminist consciousness was obstructing my view and ability to think about obedience as a non-gendered, non-sexist, non-hierarchal, non-effacing prescription.

Not to be derailed from her proselytizing, Tahirah quipped at me again, "Oh, you still want to be out there in the dunya!" To a certain degree Tahirah was correct. In preparation for shahada if I so chose, I had stopped drinking alcohol at that time. Good Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol or smoke although one of the imam's wives often complained about having to clean up litter around the mosque, and cigarette butts were among the litter. I was prepared to give up Carnival parties, and I never played in the large masquerade bands anyway. I was not, however, anywhere near ready to give up *j'ouvert*.

The term *j'ouvert*, a contraction of the French *jour ouvert* meaning day opens or day break, usually takes place between five and nine o'clock in the morning. It is an integral part of the Carnival celebrations setting off the two-day street parade culminating the Carnival season. Revellers dress in different degrees of tattered or minimal clothing

and don oil, paint and mud all over their bodies and parade through the streets to dee jay, steelband, and tassa music. There are organized j'ouvert bands for which members pay a fee and offers a greater sense of security for women especially, but there are also hundreds to thousands of people who just wander the street at will. The event began as derivative of a colonial French masquerade that slaves corrupted to caricature their colonial masters and madams. What was once a potent form of African slave subversion has become a very lucrative business for several band owners; j'ouvert is now a multi-million dollar industry, and few if any African Trinidadians are not among the beneficiaries.

Conversely, an integral part of Islamic way of life is cleanliness. Yet, the mud, the paint and the whole j'ouvert performance around masking and masquerading still delighted me to no end and illuminated the irony of how covering in one context (with niqua, kima, hijab, chador, burqua) was pious, while covering in another sense (with mud, oil, and paint) licentious. Yet covering brought hypervisibility rather than invisibility to both Muslim women and to j'ouvert revelers. I pondered that for the past three years I wore surgical overalls and a headscarf to protect my body and dreadlocks from being soiled by the mud and paint; but not long into the early morning parade through the streets of sections of Port of Spain, I would shed both overall and headscarf and douse myself with paint and mud from head to toe, literally, through the four to five-hour bacchanalia. Yet, though I was not required to, I covered whenever I went to my research site, whether I entered the mosque or stayed on other parts of the compound. In the masjid however, I always felt I was at the intersection of dunya and shahada.

During j'ouvert, the band's designated route would always take us, Mudders International,⁹³ past the Jammatt al Muslimeen where young boys dressed in black and holding sticks would frame the compound's perimeter to ensure no one violated the sacred space by urinating on the lawn and walls or splashing mud and paint on the walls. This responsibility for these young African Trinidad boys was another way in which disenfranchised youth was given a sense of purpose and ownership. As I became aware of the economic factor behind j'ouvert, and the exclusion of African Trinidadians as profiteers, however, I started losing my taste for it.

Sister Fatima continued her intervention. "Jihanne will have to make the decision for herself. Only she will know when the time is right. We are not to force her. *Insha allah*." I was glad that the attention was off me, fully self-conscious of blurring the line between subject and researcher too much. Was this egocentrism on my part, to keep positioning myself in the narrative, self-consciously or unintentionally?

This exchange positioned me as subject of analysis rather than as the researcher. The dialogic exchange was indicative of how unstable one's social position can be at any time and how susceptible to discursive shifts. It became apparent too that finding a

⁹³ The j'ouvert band, *Mudders International*, called popularly Mudders and mistaken phonetically for Mothers, is the brainchild of several men formerly from the popular secondary school, St. Mary's College, in Port of Spain, Trinidad. It was first launched in the Cayman Islands in 1989, then imported to Trinidad in 1994. One of the founding fathers is Charles (Charlo) Maynard, a Harvard Law graduate, who broke away from Mudders and formed his own Trinidad j'ouvert band, Silver Mudders, in 2003. Shortened to Silver, the band was conceived in the memory of Charlo's sister Lindy who died at a young age. For several years I alternated between playing with Mudders and with Silver, although in 2012 I did not participate in any Carnival activity. The creation and naming of as well as the embodied performances in these bands are interesting topics for gender analysis.

feminist or postcolonial theory to frame the discussion was like, to use Jewel Amoah's essay title, "building sandcastles in the snow."

Fiction Four: The Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa is a Criminalizing Space Only

For Muslimeen women and men there is always the stigma, and power, of being a member of the Jamaat, or for just looking like a Muslimeen. Metcalf states, "[s]implest to identify are visual clues to the presence of Muslims: people with beards or head coverings"(3).

In Trinidad and Tobago, the local media stigmatizes African Muslims similar to the ways in which Middle Eastern Muslims are stereotyped in the West. When the local newspapers mention African Muslims they are almost invariably cast in a negative light. Those criminalizing moments for African Muslims generally, and the Muslimeen specifically, have become normalized since the media tend to paint with the broad brush of Muslimeenophobia all Muslims of African descent in Trinidad. Conversely, media coverage especially around Islamic celebrations and observances like Ramadan, Eid ul Fitr, and Eid al Adha privilege Indo-Trinidadian Muslims as the norm, unlike African Muslims who are cast as apart from the nation although they are involved in national politics and cultural activities.

This conflating of Muslim and terror, however, operates in a unique and paradoxical way in Trinidad. The conflation of Muslim and terrorist is mapped onto African Trinidadian Muslim [black] bodies but not onto Indo Muslim [brown] bodies. In tracing the contours of the concept of difference through postcolonial and postmodernist epistemologies as well as through geographical, historical, political and social locations,

Reddock maps how a then “nascent” group of Indo Trinidadian women called the Hindu Women’s Organization (HWO) was significant in in making clear how collapsing Indo Caribbean people under the category black resulted in making Indian social and historical particularities invisible. Indo Trinidadians adopted the *brown* label as a means of self-affirmation to disaggregate their differential experiences and keep their identities from being erased or eclipsed by the dominant African/black narrative:

They too [members of the Hindu Women’s Organization] argued that black had a meaning and a relevance to people of African descent that it did not have for Indians and so was a hegemonic concept that denied the specificity of the Indian Caribbean experience. (“Conceptualizing Difference” 200)

This enunciation of a black narrative specific African Trinidadian, primarily male, bodies reemerged among women when several women’s groups in the country, while condemning the coup itself, offered an understanding of the ethnic, economic, and sociopolitical currents that may have triggered it. Merle Hodge who has devoted her life to education, studying the dynamics of Caribbean families, and working among the economically disadvantaged especially, voiced the sentiments of the *Working Women for Social Progress*, ‘There was social and economic distress in the country. These were the conditions that make this kind of thing possible’” (qtd in Deosaran 57). Ruby Atwell-Ferguson, President of the League of Women Voters iterated, “The people were really suffering. There’s a lot of poverty in the country and the NAR Government made a lot of promises it did not keep. And as the say ‘a hungry man is an angry man’” (qtd in Deosaran 57). Additionally, Tina Johnson of the one of the oldest activist and feminist organizations in the Caribbean, Caribbean Association for Feminine Research and Action (CAFRA) iterated the lure Abu Bakr held:

“What’s surprising is how much support the recent events have with the man in the street. There seems to be a deep resentment for the high-handed manner in which the Government ran the country. There is a feeling that the violence against the NAR Government was deserved.” (qtd in Deosaran 57-58)

Ironically, in the global practice of Islamophobia, and especially post-9/11, Muslims from the Asian continent [brown] invoke arguably more terror and hatred than say the Nation of Islam [black]. In Trinidad the black-brown fear factor is reversed. Within Muslimeenophobia, Muslimeen equals African. African-ness is equated with blackness and blackness signifies criminality. So in Trinidad, the semiotics of blackness excites more fear than that of brown-ness [East/South Asian/ Indian-ness]. Thus, the global fear of Muslims manifests itself differently in an apparent inversion of the brown-black Islamic terror-color dynamic. Of course, the degree of power that appears to inhere in a Muslim body determines the degree of fear it elicits; and this power is racialized, gendered, political, and fluid.

The Jamaat was reputed to promote a culture of criminality and lawlessness and within the “‘semiotics of colonialism’ (Hintzen 54) in Trinidad, the mutually constitutive relationship between culture and race has helped to reify these into terms that seem objective and self-evident, based in nature rather than society” (A Khan *Callaloo* 11). As a result of this naturalizing of the relationship between race and culture the Jamaat’s intentional deployment of a hypermilitarized and almost threatening masculinity cohering in a politics of Muslimeenism that militates state sovereignty is a constitutive element in Muslimeenophobia. Owing to this seeming perpetual oppositional position of the Muslimeen to the state and its law-abiding citizens, any action on the part of the Muslimeen, positive or negative, defaults an act of criminality. Deosaran captures this

conundrum when he elucidates, “The ‘good work’ being done by the Muslimeen at Mucurapo became at times both a palliative and other times an incendiary device. Different criteria were used at the same time to judge the same Mucurapo dispute” (150).

The economically and socially marginalized, primarily of African descent, living on the margins of livable conditions see the Jamaat as a beacon of hope, Abu Bakr as their shepherd. Yet, to understand and destabilize the stereotyping of African Trinidadian Muslims as inherently criminal, a radical re-education and revisioning of Islam in Caribbean history is critical. Using Patricia Mohammed’s and Aisha Khan’s methodologies of re-imaging a community through alternative diacritics and mixed metaphors, Trinidadian sensibilities toward the Muslimeen can be redesigned through re-imaging the Muslimeen.

AFTERWORD

I have not taken shahada, but I am uncertain that I will never revert to Islam. I am still lured by the postcolonial essentialist politics of the Muslimeen. I am not averse to negotiations of sexual piety, including polygyny, where the terms of engagement are clear and promise justice and protection for women and children. While Indo Trinidadian Muslims are also Muslimeen and have been an initial and consistent presence in the jamaat, the predominant African sensibilities and antecedents of community and collectivity, the legacy of recalcitrant and courageous African slaves who refused to bow to the indignity of the dehumanizing fancies of imperialists while continuing to submit to the will of Allah attaches to personal emotions of self-affirmations and identity re-formation that are hard to suppress.

What is it the ethnographer really seeks to uncover in her ethnography? Is she trying to comprehend and explain the culture and practices of her subjects, their negotiations, their embodied engagements? Or is she really on a hegira of her own, staging metaphorically her own jihad? Are these two objectives incommensurable? In her book, Visweswaran reveals that ‘The essays ... are focused on the notion that ethnographic accounts are constructed and tell particular stories—if not always the stories we have come to expect as anthropologists’ (15). What spontaneous narratives have my subjects constructed for themselves and about me? How did our academic and intuitive readings of language, emotions, and bodies not only gel into a mutual understanding of the other but also converge into how we feel about different bodies inhabiting our fields of social relations.

My prologue used the metaphor of the leatherback back turtle's resilience in the laborious digging of her nests to represent my doctoral experience, but that innate drive has come to represent the Muslimeen's staying power in the Dawud and Jalut dialectical relationship between them and the state. It is clear now, I was not quite beyond the ethnographer's own boundedness at the beginning of the writing of this dissertation.

Like the Freudian subject still in its egocentric phase, as I sat on the train I saw the trees passing by rather than realizing it was I who was transient. At the end of this dissertation phase now, on reflection it is not me, the ethnographer, at the center or with the privileged position of all knowing and all seeing. Even this final anecdote is not my story but the Muslimeen's. And in keeping with the Yoruba power of *Ashe*, I did not witness a spectacle with the leatherback turtle, but a creation. And I did not explore gender practices and relations among the Muslimeen as much as they created and continue to create alternative discourses, spaces, social configurations, familial formations that call to question heteronormativity in very productive and mundane ways.

The observation of the turtles being tagged, the attempt by a researcher to capture her migration story, to map her geographical and historical navigations, the physical construction of her home on shifting sands, her being a part of the land and apart from the land, her negotiations with global, local, and natural forces challenging her existence daily, motherhood, her fragile and paradoxical social location among homo sapiens who are at once her predators and her protectors comprise the narrative of the Muslimeen and the construction of Jamaat. The story is still fragmented and may not always seem logical to how others are used to constructing their own lives, especially in an oxymoronic predominantly Christian country with an irreducible Carnival spirit that

explodes on the eve of Christianity's holiest seasons; yet, by simply persisting in the ordinariness of their lives, the Muslimeen women tell an extraordinary story of engaged submission, determination, and overcoming.

GLOSSARY of ARABIC TERMS

al-dafin burial

alhamdulillah Praise to God; all praises belong to God

asr afternoon prayer

da'wa preaching of Islam; proselytizing

dhuhr noon prayer

dunya world

Eid al Adha begins on the tenth day of Dhul-Hijja, which is the last month the Islamic lunar calendar and the month in which Muslims from around the world gather in Saudi Arabia to perform the annual pilgrimage known as hajj

Eid ul Fitr is celebrated on the first day of Shawaal, the tenth month in the Muslim calendar, to mark the end of Ramadan, a month-long fast. Ul Fitr means breaking of fast.

fajr dawn prayer

fatwa a decree of legal judgment based on Islamic texts

hadith narratives or reports of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his contemporaries collected in written form from memory in the three or four centuries following his death

hajj pilgrimage to Mecca during Eid al Adha. Muslims, once they are able, are required to make hajj at least once during their lifetime. Third pillar of Islam.

hijab veil

idaat waiting period for a wife during a divorce or death, in case of pregnancy to determine paternity

ijtihad religious interpretation

imam religious leader; head of the masjid

inshah allah God willing

intifada shaking off, literally, but has come to be translated as resistance or uprising.

isa nightfall prayer

janazah funeral

jihad struggle

juma Friday noon prayers are the one time when Muslim are expected to gather together and listen to a short sermon, *khutba*.

Kaaba the covenant

kafan burial cloth enshrouding the dead

khutba sermon

maghrib sunset prayer

nikha wedding

niqab full veil with only the eyes showing

mahram any close male kin; men in front of whom a woman can unveil owing to blood ties, father, brother, uncle, son

majales religious rituals

masjid mosque

rakah a single series of repetitious movements and recitations that comprise a salat

salat/salah prayer, second pillar of Islam

salat-l-janazah funeral prayer

sawm fasting, primarily done during the month of Ramadan except for the frail, elderly,

sick, and women who are menstruating or breastfeeding. Fourth pillar of Islam.
shahada first pillar of Islam. Declaration of faith "*Lâ ilâha illallâh; -Muhammad-ur-Rasûl-Allâh.*"

shirk the greatest sin a Muslim can commit, for it is unforgiveable to equate anyone or anything with Allah or practice polytheism

Shyitan Satan

Sunnah unlike the hadith which are written records of Prophet Muhammad, the *Sunnah* are verbal recounts of the saying, teachings and practices of the Prophet. *Sunnah* appear to deal more with social and quotidian life

sura chapter

tafsir Qur'anic exegesis

Taharah ritual purity

taqwa piety

Tawhid God's unity

zakat literally meaning purification, *zakat* is interpreted as charity. It is a Muslim's obligation to share his/her wealth, but the percentage is debatable.

REFERENCES

- Adbullah, Zain *Black Mecca: African Muslims of Harlem*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2010.
- Ahmed, Leila. *A Border Passage. From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
- Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven; Yale University Press, 1992
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Aitchison, Cara, Hopkins, Peter, and Kwan, Mei-Po. Eds. *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2007.
- Alexander. M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke University, 2006.
- Al-Hilali, Muhammad Taqi-Ud-din, and Khan, Mushin. *Interpretation and Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language: A Summarized Version of At-Tabari*
- Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. "Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era." *Feminist Formations*. 24.1 (Spring 2012): 1-25.
- Alleyne, Mervyn. *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2002.
- Amireh, Amal. "Palestinian Women's Disappearing Act: The Suicide Bomber Through Western Feminist Eyes." *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (Spring) 230-31, 240.
- "Writing the Difference: Feminists' Invention of the 'Arab Woman.'" In Ghosh and Bose. 1996:185-203.
- Amoah, Jewel. "Building Sandcastles in the Snow: Meanings and Misconceptions of the Development of Black Feminist Theory in Canada." In Massaquoia and Wane, 2007:95-108.
- Anthias, Floya, and Yuval-Davis, Niral. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Gender, Nation, Colour, and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Badran, Margot. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.
- Baksh-Soodeen, Rawwida, "Issues of Difference in Contemporary Caribbean Feminism Theorizing." *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer 1998): 74-85.
- Banton, Michael. *Racial and Ethnic Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983.
- Barlas, Asma. "Islam and Body Politics: Inscribing (Im)morality" Conference on Religion and Politics of the Body Nordic Society for Philosophy of Religion, University of Iceland Reykjavik, June 26-28. 2009.
- "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas, 2002.
- Barriteau, Eudine. Ed. Introduction. *Confronting Power Theorizing Gender*.

- Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2003: 3-24.
- "Theorizing Ruptures Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean." In Lewis, 2003: 25-52.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004.
- Benhabib, Seyla. "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance." In Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, and Fraser, 1995: 1-16.
- Benhabib, Seyla, Butler, Judith, Cornell, Drucilla and Fraser, Nancy. In *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Benjamin, Andrew, Davies, Tony, and Goh, Robbbie, B.H. *Postcolonial Cultures and Literatures: Modernity and the (un)Commonwealth*. P. Lang, 2002.
- Bledsoe, Carolyn. *Contingent Lives: Fertility, Time, and Aging in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999.
- Bobb-Smith, Yvonne. "'We Get Troo...': Caribbean Women's Spirituality as a Strategy of Resistance. In *Theorizing Empowerment: Canadian Perspectives on Black Feminist Thought*. Ed. Notisha Massaquoi and Njoki Nathani Wane. Toronto: Inanna, 2007: 55-71.
- Brereton, Bridget. *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979.
- Brown, Carolyn, and Lovejoy Paul E. eds. *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Interior of the Bight of Biafra and the African Diaspora*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005.
- Busia, Abena. P.A. "Performance, Transcription, and the Languages of the Self: Interrogating Identity as a 'Post-Colonial' Poet." In James and Busia, 1993: 203-213.
- "In Search of Chains Without Iron: On Sisterhood, History, and the Politics of Location." In *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*. Ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003: 257-67.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Life is Grievable*. London: Verso, 2009.
- Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Chevannes, Barry. *Learning to be a Man: Culture, Socialization, and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*. Barbados: The University of the West Indies, 2001.
- Chow, Rey. "'It's you, and not me': Domination and 'Othering' in Theorizing the 'Third World.'" *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*. Elizabeth Weed, ed. New York: Routledge, 1989:152-61.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Cooke, Miriam. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Introduction. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2001: vii-xxiv.
- Cornell, Stephen, and Hartmann, Douglas. *Ethnicity and Race. Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2007.

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (July 1991): 1241-99.
- Curtis, Edward E. IV *Muslims in America: A Short History*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2009.
- . *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006.
- . *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought*. Albany: State University of New York, 2002.
- Dannin, Robert. *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2002.
- Davis, Andrea. "Rearticulations, Reconnections and Reconfigurations: Writing Africa through the Americas" in *Africa and Trans-Atlantic Memories: Literary and Aesthetic Manifestations of Diaspora and History*. Ed. Naana Opoku-Agyemang, Paul E Lovejoy, and David V. Trotman. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008: 275-289.
- Deosaran, Ramesh. *A Society Under Siege: A Study of Political Confusion and Legal Mysticism*. St. Augustine, the University of the West Indies: McAl Psychological Research Centre, 1993.
- Dietz, Gunther, and El-Shohoumi, Nadia. *Muslim Women in Southern Spain: Stepdaughters of el- Andalus*. San Diego: Centre for Comparative Immigration, 2005.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*. New York: New York University, 1998.
- Echeruo, Michael J. "An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project." In *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*. Eds. Isidore Okpewho, Carol Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2001: 3-18.
- Edmondson, Belinda. Ed. *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1999;
- . *Making Men. Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative*. Durham: Duke University, 1999.
- . "Race, Gender, and the Caribbean Narrative of Revolution." In *Interventions. Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*. Eds. Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997:63-78.
- Engineer, Asghar Ali. *Islam and Liberation Theology: essays on liberative elements in Islam*. New York: Sterling, 1990.
- Essien-Udom, E. U. *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962.
- Falah, Ghazali-Walid, and Nagel, Caroline. *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*. New York: Guilford, 2005.
- Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness." In *Anatomy of Racism*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990: 183-209.
- Figuera, Darius. *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*: July 27, 1990. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Political Investment of the Body." In Fraser and Greco 2005:

100-04.

- Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Routledge: New York, 1993.
- Frankenberg, Ruth, and Mani, Lata. Cross Crosstalk: Race, "Postcoloniality," and the Politics of Location. In *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*. Eds. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenberg. Durham: Duke University, 1996: 273-294.
- Fraser, Mariam, and Greco, Monica. Eds. *The Body: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Friere, Paolo. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Continuum, 1993.
- Education: the Practice of Freedom*. Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. 1976.
- Gaylin, Wilard and Jennings, Bruce. *The Perversion of Autonomy: Coercion and Constraints in a Liberal Society*. Washington: Georgetown University, 2003.
- Gehrke-White, Donna. *The Face Behind The Veil: The Extraordinary Lives of Muslim Women in America*. New York: Citadel, 2006.
- Ghosh, Bishnupriya, and Bose, Brinda. *Intervention: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*. Eds. New York: Garland, 1997.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Belknap, 2000.
- Gomez, Michael. A. "The Anguished Igbo Response to Enslavement in the Americas." in Brown and Lovejoy 205: 103-118.
- Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005.
- Goodridge, Richard A. "'How Our Lives Would Be Affected by the Custom of Having Several Wives': The Intersection between African History and Gender Studies in the Caribbean" *Barriteau* 2003: 126-141.
- Gordon, Lewis R. "The Problem of Biography in the Study of the Thought of Black Intellectuals." *Small Axe* 4(Sep 1998): 47-63.
- Goulet, Denis. "Introduction." In Freire 2005:v11-ix.
- Gray, Obika. *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica 1960-1972*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991.
- Hadad, Yvonne. *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*. Oxford: University, 2006.
- Henry, Paget. *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Hochschild, Jennifer L. "Multiple Racial Identifiers in the 2000 Census, and then What?" In *The New Race Question: How the Census Counts Multiracial Individuals*. Eds. Joel Perlmann and Mary C. Waters. New York: Russell Sage Foundations, 2002: 340-353.
- Hodge, Merle. "We Kind of Family." In Patricia Mohammed. Ed. *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Barbados: The University of the West Indies, 2002. 474-85.
- Hooks, bell. "Theory as Liberatory Practice." In *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Wendy

- Kolmar K. and Frances Bartkowski. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing, 2000: 28-33.
- Hopkins, Peter E., Kwan, Mei-Po, and Aitchison, Cara Carmichael. Introduction: *Geographies of Muslim Identities*. In Aitchison, Hopkins, and Kwan, 2007: 1-9.
- Hussain, Freda. Ed. Introduction. *Muslim Women*. New York: St. Martin, 1984: 1-7. *Muslim Women*. New York: St. Martin, 1984.
- Ibrahim, Mansoor. *Islam in Trinidad and Tobago*. Researched and Coordinated by Amina Ibrahim Ali, 1995.
- James, Stanlie M. "Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?" In James and Busia, 1993: 44-54.
- James, Stanlie M., and Busia, Abena. P.A. *Theorizing Black Feminisms: the Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Jawad, Haifaa. A. *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*. Houndsmills: MacMillan, 1998.
- Joseph, Miranda. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002.
- Julien, Joel. "Pay Me to Testify: Abu Bakr Wants Million-dollar Fee." *Trinidad Express* 2 July, 2013. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Pay-me-to-testify-213922161.html>. Accessed August 6, 2013.
- Kahf, Mohja. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. Austin: University of Texas, 1999.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society*. 2.3 (Sep 1988): 274-90
- Khan, Aisha. *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad*. Durham: Duke University, 2004.
- "Homeland, Motherland: Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Ideologies of Place among Muslims in Trinidad. In *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*. Ed Peter van de Veer. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1995: 93-131.
- Khan, Shahnaz. *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2002.
- King, Deborah K. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs* 14.1 (Autumn,1988): 42-72.
- Leal, Gilberto. R.N. "Fárigál/Ífaradà: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil." In Walker 2001: 291-300.
- Leo-Rhynie, Elsa. "Women and Development Studies: Moving from the Periphery." In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Thought*. Mona, Jamaica: the University of the West Indies, 2002: 147-163.
- Lewis, Linden. Introduction, *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003. 1-24.
- Lovejoy, Paul. "Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora." In *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*. Ed Paul Lovejoy. London: Continuum, 2000: 1-29.
- Loutoo, Jada. "24 persons died in 1990 attempted coup." *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. May 22, 2013. Accessed online August 3, 2013. http://www.newsday.co.tt/crime_and_court/0,178036.html

- “Khan: Bakr Scared Me.” *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* Section A. June 29, 2012: 7.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University, 2005.
- Majid, Anouar. “The Politics of Feminism.” In Saliba, Allen and Howard, 2002: 53-93.
- Marsh, Clifton. E. *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, 1930-1995*. 2nd ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1996.
- _____. *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*. Lanham: Scarecrow, 1984.
- Martin, Cedriann J. “Children of the Islamic Renaissance.” *Sunday Express Mix*. 22 May 2011: 5
- Massaquoi, Notisha. “Introduction: Future Imaginings of Black Feminist Thought.” In Massaquoi and Wane, 2007: 5-24.
- Massaquoi, Notisha, and Wane, Njoki Nathani. Eds. *Theorizing Empowerment: Canadian Perspectives on Black Feminist Thought*. Toronto: Inanna, 2007
- Massiah, Joycelin. “Women in the Caribbean Project: an Overview.” *Social and Economic Studies*. 35.2: (1998): 1-29.
- Meeks, Brian. *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014
- _____. https://books.google.tt/books?id=HgMbBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT111&dq=oxaal+and+caribbean&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi42Z6o-qbKAhUD_R4KHS8OBXIQ6AEIHzAB#v=onepage&q=oxaal%20and%20caribbean&f=false
- Meeks, Brian, and Lindahl. *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2001.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1991.
- _____. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*. Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1987, 1993.
- _____. *Beyond the Veil*.
- Metcalf, Barbara. Ed. *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*. Berkeley: University of California, 1996.
- Metcalf, Barbara. Introduction “Sanctioned Practice, New Communities” in Metcalf 1996: 1 – 27.
- Mintz, Sidney W, and Price, Sally. *Caribbean Contours*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1985.
- Moallem, Minoo. “Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism.” In *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms Transnational Feminisms and the State*. Eds. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem. Durham: Duke University, 1999. 320-348.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. “Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate.” *Signs* 27.4 (2002): 1135-71.
- _____. “Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate. In Saliba, Allen, and Howard, 2002: 15-51.
- Mohammed, Patricia. *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*. New

- York: Palgrave, 2011.
- Mohammed, Patricia, and Shepherd, Catherine. *Gender in Caribbean Development*. Jamaica: Canoe Press University of the West Indies, 1988.
- Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Neaves, Julien. "Bakr: Pay Me as Much as Sir David." *Newsday* 13 June, 2013:1 <http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,179474.html>. Accessed online August 6, 2013.
- Neptune, Harvey. *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007.
- NY Times*. Cover. July, 29, 2010.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Derek Walcott: Liminal Spaces/Substantive Histories." In Edmondson 1999 (*Caribbean Romances*): 199-216.
- Oxaal, Ivar. *Race and Revolutionary Consciousness: A Documentary Interpretation for the Black Power Revolt in Trinidad*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University, 1971.
- Parry, J. H., Sherlock, P. M., and Maingot, A.P. *A Short History of the West Indies*, fourth Edn. London: MacMillan, 1987.
- Pasley, Victoria. "The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness." *Journal of International Women's Studies*. 3.1 (Nov 2001): 24-40. Accessed 17 August 2013. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1594&context=jiws>
- Puwar, Nirmal. *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place*. Oxford: Berg, 2004.
- Ragoonath, Bishnu, "Religion and Insurrection: Abu Bakr and the Muslimeen Failure in the 1990 Attempted Coup in Trinidad and Tobago" In *Identity, Ethnicity and Culture in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ralph R. Premdas. St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: The University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Studies, 1998: 409-446.
- Reddock, Rhoda. Ed. *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities. Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2003.
- "Up against a Wall: Muslim Women's Struggle to Reclaim Masjid Space in Trinidad and Tobago. Paper presented at the Global South Asian Diaspora in the 21st Century: Antecedents and Prospects Conference. The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, June 1-4, 2011.
- "Conceptualizing 'Difference' in Caribbean Feminist Theory." *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*. Ed. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindhal. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2001: 196-209.
- "Contestations over Culture, Class, Gender and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago: 'The Little Tradition.'" *Caribbean Quarterly* 44.1/2 (1998): 62-80.
- Elma Francois: The NWCSA and the Worker's Struggle for Change in the Caribbean*. London: New Beacon Books, 1988.
- "Feminism and Feminist: An Historical Overview." In Mohammed and Shepherd 1988: 53-73.
- Reis, Joao Jose. "Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil." In Walker 2001: 301-313.
- Robins, Steve. "The (Third) World is a Ghetto?": Looking for a Third Space between

- 'Postmodern Coosmopolitanism and Cultural Nationalism. *CODESRIA Bulletin* 1 and 2. 2004:18-26.
- Rouse, Carolyn Moxley. *Engaged Surrender: African-American Women and Islam*. Berkeley: University of California, 2004.
- Saliba, Therese. Introduction. In Saliba, Allen and Howard, 2002: 1-13.
- Saliba, Therese, Allen, Carolyn, and Howard, Judith A. eds. *Gender, Politics, and Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002.
- Samaroo, Brinsley. *Early African and East Indian Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago*. Conference on Indo-Caribbean History and Culture. Centre for Caribbean Studies University of Warwick, 9-11 May, 1988.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed: Theory out of Bounds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000.
- Shager, Aamron. *Understanding Islam*. Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. Nov. 23, 2010.
- Shaw, Carolyn Martin. *Colonial Inscriptions: Race, Sex, and Class in Kenya*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995.
- Shepherd, Verene. Women in Caribbean *Americas*. Ed. Sheila S. Walker. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001: 1-44.
- Sheshadri-Crooks's, Kalpana *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Spivak, Gayatri. *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Turner, Richard Brent. *Islam in the African-American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994.
- Walker, Sheila S. "Are You Hip to the Jive? (Re)Writing/Righting the Pan-American Discourse" In *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*. Ed. Sheila S. Walker. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001: 1-44.
- Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "Ethnic and Religious Pluralism among Yoruba Immigrants in Trinidad in the Nineteenth Century." In *Lovejoy 2000*: 113-125.
- White, Vibert L. *Inside the Nation of Islam: A Historical and Personal Testimony by a Black Muslim*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
- Wilford, Rick. "Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: Surveying the Ground." In *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*. Ed. Rick Wilford and Robert Miller. London: Routledge, 1998: 1-10.
- Williams, Brackette. *Stains on My Name War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle*. Chapel Hill: Duke University, 1991.
- Wood, Donald. *Trinidad in Transition: The Years after Slavery*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1968.