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Resistance and redefinition

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9

RESISTANCE AND REDEFINITION

Theatre of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK and the US

Suhaan Mehta

The playwright Wajahat Ali opened his talk at Google by saying:

Today's [...] speech [...] has solidified my worth as a human being for my family members who in their typical South Asian bluntness see my professional career as a writer as [...] useless. Today they said, 'Try to get a job at Google!' And I told them, '[...] Google invited me to speak for them', and they said, 'Yes, yes! But after the speech get a job. Stop being useless'.

(2012: n.p.)

The dismissive attitude of Ali's Pakistani immigrant parents is central to his play *The Domestic Crusaders* (2004). The character Ghafur, who had been the apple of his parents' eye, leaves them aghast when he says that he no longer plans to become a doctor (51–52). Ghafur's parents cannot understand why he wants to pursue Middle Eastern history, Islam, and Arabic (54–55). Their angry reaction to Ghafur's revelation in Ali's post-9/11 play is reminiscent of the ending of Ayub Khan-Din's *East is East* (1996) set in 1970s Salford, England. While the authoritarian patriarch George Khan thinks that his son Saleem is studying engineering, in reality he is pursuing art; Saleem has been working on a 'model [...] of a vagina complete with pubic hair', rather than building machines (1996: 70). Ali and Khan-Din draw on their experiences growing up in immigrant Pakistani households to show how families limit the career choices of second-generation Pakistani youth.

Besides these internal restrictions, playwrights of Pakistani origin have struggled to find audiences in America and the UK. One of Ali's motives for writing *The Domestic Crusaders* was to counter the cartoonish representation of Muslim-Americans (Illumemedia 2009: n.p.). In a conversation with Al-Jazeera, Ali said:

Mainstream theatres were not ready for [*The Domestic Crusaders*]; they were afraid. They thought 'What will people say?' Here is a Muslim-American with a multi-syllabic, Arabic name showing Muslim-American characters talking freely about religion

and politics and race very honestly and bluntly. 'What will people say?' Eight years later there is a change. [...] *The Domestic Crusaders* is written, and it is on in New York. It wouldn't have happened eight years ago.

(Nichena 2009: n.p.)¹

There is a longer tradition of Pakistani-British drama, but contemporary playwrights also comment on their relative invisibility. In an online interview, the playwright Avaes Mohammad said that:

One of the major reasons I started writing was the events around summer of 2001 where in the North there were riots between young British-Asian youth and the far right which also spilled onto the police. That spread like a flame actually from Oldham to Bradford to Burnley. [...] It started going off like matchboxes, really just all over and then 9/11 happened at the end of that.

(FIPA Arts 2014: n.p.)

Mohammad was disturbed by the skewed representations of British-Asian youth in these eruptions as 'terrorists', 'rioters', and 'disaffected youth' and remarked to his flatmate at the time, 'We need to talk about us' (FIPA Arts 2014: n.p.).

In this chapter I study playwrights from the Pakistani diaspora in the UK and the United States, all of whom have at least one parent born in Pakistan (for a comprehensive account of theatre in Pakistan, see Mundrawalla 2014). Pnina Werbner writes that while Muslims in England were seen 'as a law-abiding minority', starting with the Rushdie Affair a number of them developed an 'oppositional consciousness' (2005: 480–481). While younger generations of Pakistani-British immigrants continue to feel alienated from the mainstream, they also interrogate their parents' 'culture', 'custom', and 'tradition', either through 'reformist Islam' or 'satirical artistic works' (Werbner 2005: 483). This dual alienation of individuals from their country and family is seen in several contemporary Pakistani-British plays. The creative output from the Pakistani-American diaspora is partly a response to being 'othered' after the events of September 11. In his essay 'The Pakistani Diaspora in North America', Iftikhar Dadi writes that no existing creative work provides 'insight into the dilemmas of Pakistani American identity, culture, and politics' (2006: 55). This may have little to do with the merit of the plays and more with the lack of recognition given to minority playwrights. For instance, Fawzia Afzal-Khan points to the paucity of critical commentary on the playwright Bina Sharif, who has published twenty-four plays over a career spanning three decades (Afzal-Khan, Khoury, and Bose 2016: 51). Sharif's *An Afghan Woman* (2002) is a powerful commentary on the post-9/11 world wherein the speaker, a veiled woman, is communicating to an imagined audience of American women looking at images of her on their television screens. The speaker chronicles the many acts of violence by the Taliban and by her American liberators but still reimagines a life where she can 'talk', 'laugh', and 'be free' (Sharif 2002: 251–252). It is true, however, that after 9/11 more Pakistani-American voices have emerged as Dadi predicted (2006: 56, 63). Within a decade of the publication of Dadi's article, a handful of playwrights attained national prominence: Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* premiered at the 16th Street Theatre and received wide critical acclaim; Rehana Lew-Mirza's *Barriers*, published in 2002, is taught in several American universities; Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* debuted in California in 2005 and premiered on Broadway in 2009; and Ayad Akhtar won a Pulitzer for his first play *Disgraced* (2012) in 2013. These playwrights provide rich alternatives to one-dimensional representations of Muslim-Americans.

Drama from the South Asian diaspora in the UK and America has been receiving increasing critical scrutiny, but the output by playwrights of Pakistani origin has not yet been studied as an independent body of work. Neilesh Bose's *Beyond Bollywood and Broadway* (2009) is the first critical anthology of plays from the diaspora based in three continents. In a summative comment, Bose writes that the 'theater of the South Asian Diaspora reflects a highly diverse set of sociopolitical and aesthetic concerns, such as the engagement with classics of various forms as well as explorations of questions of the "homeland"' (2009: n.p.). The British and American diasporas have been studied independently, too. Sarah Dadswell and Graham Ley write that the emerging scholarship on British South Asian theatre has documented this new body of work, presented 'theoretical and critical assessments', provided 'historical' readings of the plays, and paid 'attention to [elements of] performance and production' (2012: 2–3).² Despite being in its infancy, South Asian American drama has also started to attract academic interest. Ashis Sengupta argues that contemporary South Asian American plays combine 'Western performance aesthetics with innovative South Asian dramaturgies and popular performance culture' (2012: 838, 853). Rohini Chaki's doctoral dissertation *Desis in the House* is the first full-length study of South Asian American theatre. Chaki examines how the possibilities and limitations of 'belonging [are] embodied differently [in South Asian American plays] across structures of class, gender and sexuality, and religion' (2016: 41). The journal *Performing Islam* devoted an entire issue to critically reflect on the success of Akhtar's *Disgraced* and its position in Muslim-American theatre (Afzal-Khan et al. 2016: 5). This chapter is the first study wholly devoted to the theatre of the Pakistani diaspora in America and the UK. It presents an overview without attempting to be comprehensive, and unlike many of the scholars referenced here, offers textual analyses of the plays. My argument is that Pakistani-American and Pakistani-British playwrights create characters that are constrained by forces within and outside their communities. These fictional characters cope with constraints and deal with prejudices by refashioning their identities to creative or destructive ends.

A recurring theme in this body of work is how familial and community expectations restrict the individual's professional options. In Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*, the parents, Salman and Khulsoom, have dreams for their children, and every one has disappointed them in one way or another. Salman is especially horrified that his youngest son, Ghafur, who had such a promising future, 'is going to become some third-rate, penniless professor teaching little kids grammar and sentence-vocabulary structure' (Ali 2004: 53). Khusloom is worried about what Ghafur's decision will do to their status among the Muslim-American community: 'Our nose is cut. I brag and brag about you gaining admission to the top university, scholarships [...] They will be rich in ten years, and you'll be getting apples from two-year olds' (2004: 53–54). Not unlike Saleem in Ayub Khan-Din's *East is East*, Ghafur's defiance of his father earns him a loud slap (Ali 2004: 57). Though more than three decades and an ocean separate George Khan and Salman, their tunnel vision is linked to their desire for upward mobility and social respectability in their adopted homelands. The psychological stress on Ghafur and Saleem shows how those who opt out of 'respected' career paths risk being ostracised.

Characters also face ostracism owing to prejudice towards non-normative sexualities. Alia Bano's *Shades* (2009) highlights the challenges facing queer Pakistani-British Muslim men. *Shades* opens with a speed dating event for Muslims and introduces two lead characters, Sabrina (Sab for short) and her queer friend and roommate Zain. While Sab does not find a date she subsequently falls in love with a religious scholar's son named Reza, whom she meets at a fundraising event for the Palestinian cause. In her analysis, Ariane De Waal argues that Bano's play challenges several assumptions regarding British Muslims, but ultimately rehashes dichotomies such as 'fundamentalism versus secularism, self-determination versus oppression, homosexuality versus

heterosexuality' (2017: 77, 80). De Waal offers a particularly trenchant analysis of the character of Reza, who is both a devout Muslim and a British citizen (2017: 79). She also critiques the play for its uncritical 'bourgeois', 'heteronormative', and 'cosmopolitan' world view and suggests that the homosexual characters, Zain and Mark, do not subvert it in a meaningful way (2017: 80–83). I would argue, however, that Zain is not just an enabler of heteronormativity. Through Zain's character, Bano exposes the homophobia among sections of Pakistani-British society. When Zain informs Reza and Reza's friend Ali that he is gay, Ali makes some virulent homophobic comments: 'B-b-but, b-b-but you're Muslim [...] This is worse than we thought [...] You're so much better without her. [Reza, look] at who [Sab] would have brought into your home. You were spared' (Bano 2009: 77). Zain challenges Ali by presenting a more humane and profound understanding of Islam: 'God does not judge according to your bodies and appearance, but He scans your hearts and looks into your deeds [...] Maybe if we listened to [the Prophet Muhammad] we wouldn't be so quick to try and judge each other' (2009: 79). Zain plays an important role in reconciling queer, British, and Muslim identities. While Ghafur and Zain do not conform to normative ideas of masculinity, playwrights of Pakistani origin also examine the distinctive struggles of young women.

Shades represents the hurdles before single young British Muslim women looking for meaningful relationships.³ De Waal reads the opening speed dating scene as highlighting Sab's freedom of choice in the face of patriarchal misgivings regarding 'Muslim women's (in)appropriate behavior' (2017: 78). De Waal's claim is borne out through the words of a potential date, Ali. Once Ali learns about Sab's profession as an events manager, he starts making unfounded assumptions about her personal life (Bano 2009: 5–6). He turns out to be sanctimonious, making public noises about piety on the one hand and trying to have a fling with Sab on the other. De Waal argues that Reza is wrongly typecast as a fundamentalist by Zain; Reza actually has a sophisticated take on Islamic traditions (2017: 78). De Waal, however, does not explore how Zain's mischaracterisation of Reza exposes the limitations of his liberalism. Without really knowing Reza, Zain believes that he is a bad suitor for Sab and will subject her 'to the whims of the community auntie' (Bano 2009: 47). While, as a queer Muslim, Zain is mostly terrified of losing Sab to homophobic men; he does not trust her to make decisions. In this instance, Bano presents a feminist critique of the queer, liberal Muslim male.

Pakistani-American playwrights also reveal how Muslim women cope with familial pressures. In Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*, Khulsoom is upset with Fatima for 'still [being] single' (2004: 7). Fatima is dating a devout African-American Muslim named Aziz, but she knows that her parents will never accept him. As Fatima says to her brother Ghafur, 'They'd rather I married a Hindu, as long as he's relatively brown', pointing to the anti-black racism of South Asian Americans (2004: 69; for a detailed treatment of this subject see Prashad 2000). The intrusiveness in women's personal lives takes a comical turn in Akhtar's play *The Who & the What* (2014). The protagonist Zarina's father, Afzal, creates a profile for her on an online dating site and meets young men on her behalf. When Zarina is flabbergasted, Afzal rationalises his actions saying, 'All I care about is the two of you [Zarina and her sister]. Your happiness' (2014: 25). Unlike Zarina's non-Muslim boyfriend Ryan, Afzal approves of Eli, a convert to Islam who 'runs a soup kitchen and a masjid on the Northside [...] [making] people's lives better' (2014: 24). Much against her initial judgement, Zarina ends up marrying Eli, whose company she enjoys, thereby striking a compromise. The situations discussed above illustrate the internal pressures on young Muslims who also have to deal with religious and racial discrimination outside their homes.

In the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7, Muslims of South Asian and Middle Eastern background have seen an alarming rise in hate crimes; however, anti-Muslim sentiment is not new in the UK or America. The spike in Islamophobia in the UK after 9/11 was an aggravation 'of existing

[...] everyday racism, both before [the first Gulf war] in 1991 and in the intervening period' (Mason and Poynting 2007: 81).⁴ In the United States too, Islamophobia is not a twenty-first-century phenomenon; Khambiz Ghanea Bassiri writes that Muslims are only the most recent group to have experienced discrimination (2006: 70).⁵ Anti-Muslim sentiment in both North America and the UK is linked to fear of the outsider. British-Pakistani drama has not shied away from the topic of race relations. The 1979 Southall riots, for instance, serve as the backdrop to Hanif Kureishi's play *Borderline* (1992). Bart Moore-Gilbert writes that *Borderline* shows British-Asian characters resisting racism in different ways (2001: 45). Anwar and Yasmin are passionate members of the anti-racist Asian Youth Movement, and have little faith in the Labour Party to speak on their behalf (Moore-Gilbert 2001: 45). On the other hand, their friend Haroon believes that the way to be 'properly influential' is to '[join] parties, sit on committees, work for papers' (Kureishi 1992: 150). Furthermore, Moore-Gilbert notes that 'Kureishi's attempt to rebut the host culture's misconceptions about Asian Britain does not entail the production of a series of naively celebratory and compensatory counter-images of "his" community' (2001: 45). As a case in point, Anwar and Yasmin are critical of Haroon's father for his exploitation of British-Asian workers, making him 'the first of many ruthless British-Asian bosses in Kureishi's work' (Moore-Gilbert 2001: 46). Aavae Mohammad's play *Hurling Rubble at the Moon*, published along with *Hurling Rubble at the Sun* in 2015, takes a similarly nuanced perspective.

Set over a four-year period from June 2001 to July 2005, *Hurling Rubble at the Moon* examines racism against British-Asians without dehumanising racists. The actions of the white working-class British characters Skef and Dean reveal the deep resentment that some locals feel towards South Asian immigrants. The play opens with Skef being laid off by his employer and feeling that he was singled out for being white. He says, 'D'you know what I feel like? Do yer? [...] Token fuckin' white guy in my own 'ome-town. D'you lot even realize this is fuckin' England?!' (Mohammad 2015: 48). A disaffected youth, Skef is particularly susceptible to white nationalist politics espoused by his father, Dean (Mohammad 2015: 58–61). At the same time, Skef is also critical of white nationalism and courageously stands up to Dean – 'This is where [British-Asian minorities] come from. This is their fuckin' home' (2015: 75). However, before questioning the aims of white nationalists Skef participates in a march and intimidates a British Muslim character named Taufeeq. Taufeeq is more central to *Hurling Rubble at the Sun*, which is set in July 2005. He is deeply embittered by injustices suffered by Muslims in the UK and overseas. He sees the anti-Muslim violence in Britain and the 'war on terror' on a continuum: 'Here they break two, three, four mosque windows so shards carpet our prayer hall, but Amma in Iraq they're bombing whole buildings, right now, one after the other so the entire city is carpeted to dust' (2015: 21). He exacts revenge on his adopted country by blowing himself up on a London bus on 7/7. Taufeeq's alienation is also felt by characters in Rehana Lew Mirza's aptly titled *Barriers*.

Mirza's *Barriers* reminds audiences of the deep sense of mistrust between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. A Pakistani-Chinese-American family is haunted by the memory of their oldest son, Nabhil, who was last seen at the World Trade Center on 9/11. In one of the most poignant moments of the play, Nabhil's father Khalil laments that holes had been burned into the eyes and mouth of his son's photograph on a flier circulated after he went missing. In her analysis, Rohini Chaki writes that the image of the burnt holes 'indicates the double victimization – angry racists may have burnt holes into Nabhil's picture, but it is the fanatic Muslim terrorists who have burnt holes into his actual body' (2016: 168). Khalil observes that when some Americans 'read a Muslim name, they don't want to see kind eyes staring back at them' (Mirza 2002: n.p.). As Chaki notes, Khalil's family members are 'perceived as perpetrators and not victims by the outside world' (2016: 168). This episode in *Barriers* is somewhat reminiscent of Mira Nair's untitled short film in the collection

11'09"01. Nair's film is based on the true story of a Pakistani-American named Mohammad Salman Hamdani. Hamdani died after he tried to save victims of 9/11, but for a certain time was suspected of being a terrorist. At his funeral, Hamdani's mother says that her son sacrificed his life for fellow Americans because he was a devout Muslim (Nair 2004: n.p.). *Barriers* also offers a critique of liberal America (Sengupta 2012: 849). Khalil's daughter, Sunima, is engaged to a white art history professor named Roger. Roger's initial sympathy for an Indian guy who is nervous around him paves the way for feelings of animosity towards that 'fucking brown piece of shit' (Mirza 2002: n.p.). As Sengupta writes, despite Roger's ostensibly liberal outlook, 'prejudice lies hidden deep down in the human psyche and can surface at the smallest of excuses' (2012: 849). Post-9/11 Islamophobia directly affects Sunima's brother, Shehry, whose Muslim classmate, Shafiq, is brutally attacked and called 'Bin Laden Cousin' (Mirza 2002: n.p.). Shehry initially resents Roger for being white, illustrating that his 'fear [transforms] into paranoia' (Sengupta 2012: 849). There is a suggestion that some of these divides can be bridged as the white art history professor, his Pakistani-Chinese-American fiancée, and her brother share a quiet moment at the end of the play.

Muslim characters like Sunima, Shehry, Nabhil, and Tafueeq are constrained by multiple forces; however, in most cases, they do not allow these constraints to overdetermine their lives. Rather characters defy restrictive norms and prejudices by making bold choices, interrogating traditions, and standing up to injustice. In Aisha Zia's *No Guts No Heart No Glory* (2014), women opt for an 'unsafe' career option. The play, with Muslim female boxers in the lead, gives greater interpretive latitude by imposing few stage directions (2014: 22). *No Guts No Heart No Glory* also departs from conventional choices by being set in a boxing facility and permitting free movement of attendees (2014: 22). The collective manifesto of the boxers is to '[get] out a bit; see the world ask some questions' (2014: 43). Zia's play opens with characters' accounts of overcoming shyness, of having the courage of their convictions, and of being open about their passion for boxing (2014: 23–25). Over the duration of the play, as the young women practise their routines, they recount struggling with body image issues, avoiding nosy members of the community, and even being optimistic about marriage (2014: 26, 31, 38–42). At times, the characters address the audience as if they are members of their extended families: 'Am I embarrassing you? Are you embarrassed? [...] My mum doesn't mind, my dad doesn't care, they're cool with it. So why can't you be?' (2014: 37). Just like the women in Zia's play, who choose an 'unconventional' career, the protagonist of Akhtar's *The Who & the What* attempts to break new ground in her debut novel. Zarina is writing a work of fiction about the Prophet in which she revisits a contentious event in his life – his marriage to Zaynab bint Jash (2014: 36). Afzal-Khan analyses Zarina's attempt to undermine the interpretive consensus around this episode, as it relates to the Prophet's desires and the question of veiling. Drawing on Fatima Mernissi's study *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), Afzal-Khan argues that Zarina offers a feminist take on Quranic verse 33:53 by reading the veil as a metaphorical 'barrier' separating 'two men' rather than 'a man and a woman' (2014: n.p.; Mernissi 1991: 85). Zarina believes that 'contradictions only make [the Prophet] more human' and refuses to jettison her book project, despite her father Afzal's angry protests (Akhtar 2014: 36). Zarina's metaphorical reading of the scriptures is at odds with her sister Mahwish's uncritical acceptance. Mahwish refuses to leave a young man named Haroon, with whom she is no longer in love, because she sees herself as a contemporary incarnation of Aisha, the Prophet's youngest wife: 'I got it in my head that when I was nine, I was going to become the Prophet's favorite wife, too [...] if it wasn't meant to be then everything in between has just been wasted time' (Akhtar 2014: 64–65). Mahwish finds herself in an unhappy situation because she reads the religious texts too literally and is unable to draw relevant moral lessons from them.

Where the feisty characters in *No Guts No Heart No Glory* and *The Who & the What* largely respond to pressures from within the domestic sphere, several others stand up to anti-Muslim bigotry outside their homes. In Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*, Fatima misses school to participate in activism; in Bano's *Shades*, Zain, Mark, and Sab organise an event to create awareness of the situation in the West Bank; in Kureishi's *Borderline*, Anwar and Yasmin join the Asian Youth Movement to combat white nationalists. While characters in *Borderline* refrain from violent resistance, there are plays where the quest for justice takes a destructive turn. The protagonists of Akhtar's *Disgraced* and Mohammad's *Hurling Rubble at the Sun* respond to the collective humiliation of Muslims through violence.⁶ The reinvention of the protagonist's identity in *Disgraced* has been analysed in detail (Basu 2016: 92; Chaki 2016: 173–176).⁷ Consequently, in the following paragraphs I focus on the central character of *Hurling Rubble at the Sun*.

In *Hurling Rubble at the Sun*, the principal character Taufeeq refashions himself after the hip-hop star Tupac Shakur and, in keeping with Shakur's public persona, invites ambivalent responses (Quinn 2005). The play traces the footsteps of the 22-year-old Taufeeq from the time he starts assembling a bomb in his apartment to the moment he blows himself up on a London bus. Mohammad's play opens with lines from Shakur's song 'Ambitionz az a Rider' playing in the background. Shakur was a practitioner of gangsta rap which, according to Eithne Quinn, obtains its 'cultural and political force' through a 'double vision' whereby 'artists spout [and critique] angry and exploitative views' (2005: n.p.).⁸ As Quinn writes, however, 'Ambitionz az a Rider' emerges from the latter phase of Shakur's career, when he had moved 'from a stance of political and communal engagement to one of nihilistic disengagement' (2005: n.p.). Taufeeq, much like Shakur, sees his death coming and wants to script his ending: 'When it's time to die to be a man you pick the way you leave' (Shakur qtd. in Mohammad 2015: 11). Taufeeq, though, struggles with the idea of going through with the suicide mission when he sees people from various backgrounds on the train (2015: 36). After his bomb does not go off the first time, he gets on a bus and a 51-year-old lady named Mary – tellingly Taufeeq's girlfriend is also named Mary – sits next to him. While Mary opens up to him about her family, Taufeeq struggles to convince himself that she and the other passengers are no different from the media pundits who demonise Muslims. Despite his inner turmoil, he has gone too far down the road to change course and ultimately detonates the bomb. Although Taufeeq's actions are political, like the end of Tupac's career, rather than resuscitating the self, his story ends on a nihilistic note. At the same time, Mohammad humanises Taufeeq by devoting Act 1 Scene ii entirely to his meeting with his mother, Noor 'Amma' Sultan. When Taufeeq visits Noor the night before his mission she is visibly disappointed in him for not assuming the role of a community leader. What follows is a moving encounter between mother and son as they have dinner, make plans for his future, and pray together. Importantly, their conversation also foregrounds how South Asian British Muslims are consistently targeted by racist groups. Taufeeq's attempt to reach out to his mother has a parallel in Shakur's 'Ambitionz' as the speaker implores his mother 'to come rescue [him]' (1996: n.p.).

Taufeeq's identification with a gangsta rap artist while lashing out against the dominant group is comparable to how hip-hop assumes an anti-establishment dimension in Pakistani author H.M. Naqvi's novel *Home Boy*. Protagonists Chuck, A.C., and Jimbo frequently belt out the rap group NWA's song 'Straight Outta Compton', but without grasping its political message. NWA's single assumes true significance for them after they are racially profiled in post-9/11 New York. Once Chuck has been tortured, the 'anthem's resonance was no longer mere novelty or a boyish sense of affinity with the hood; no, it put things in perspective' (Naqvi 2009: 138). Naqvi and Mohammad repurpose gangsta rap to point out how young

South Asian Muslim men are radicalised partly as they face individual and collective acts of humiliation.

In the preceding pages, I have argued how playwrights from the Pakistani diaspora in the UK and North America create characters that reconfigure their identities in the wake of internal pressures and external prejudices. The theme of reinventing the self is hardly unique to these plays, but its rendition by playwrights of Pakistani origin takes on urgency in today's climate. I hope that this study will be followed by detailed analyses of individual plays and further investigations into connections with other media. Additionally, my textual focus would be enriched by studies that consider the performative aspects of the theatre of the Pakistani diaspora.

Notes

- 1 Ali's comment has been echoed by more established figures in other media. In a television interview, the film-maker Mira Nair remarked that it was 'enormously challenging' to secure financial support for her adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The protagonist of Hamid's novel, Changez, is a Pakistani who graduates from Princeton and works at a firm called Underwood Samson before growing disillusioned with the United States. Nair was told by a financier that 'if you have a Muslim hero' you are worth only about two million dollars (NDTV 2012).
- 2 Dadswell and Ley (2012) refer to the following studies in their excellent summary: Godiwala, *Alternatives within the Mainstream* (2006); Hingorani, *British Asian Theatre: Dramaturgy, Process and Performance* (2010); Davis and Fuchs (eds.), *Staging New Britain: Aspects of Black and South Asian British Theater Practice* (2006); Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (2003); Chambers *Black and Asian Theatre in Britain* (2011).
- 3 Rukhsana Ahmad's seminal play on domestic violence, *Song for a Sanctuary*, reveals how the attempt to legislate a Muslim (and non-Muslim) woman's choices persists even after marriage. Ahmad's play has received significant critical commentary. See especially Scholte (2015: 66–78); Griffin (2003: 138–169); and Bose (2009).
- 4 See Abbas (2005) for a historical perspective on Islamophobia in the UK. Abbas writes that while citizens of formerly colonised countries filled England's labour shortage after the Second World War, the latter was offset by a recession in 'the late 1950s'. These migrant workers were grudgingly tolerated on the assumption that they would leave; they 'were placed at the bottom of the labor market, disdained by the host society, and systematically ethnicized and racialized in the sphere of capitalist accumulation' (Abbas 2005: 9).
- 5 See Bassiri (2006) for the historical reasons behind anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. Bassiri argues that the rise of nativist sentiment in America has always been preceded by an erosion of trust in the ability of 'national institutions to mediate ethnic and religious conflicts', and that Protestant Christianity shapes the collective American political sense of self and other (2006: 60). As a result, 'religious minorities [are seen] not only [as] theologically but also politically suspect as doubts are raised about their national loyalties and adherence to democratic principles' (2006: 61).
- 6 *Disgraced* was the subject of an illuminating conversation between Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Neilesh Bose, and Jamil Khoury that was published in a special issue of *Performing Islam*. They talk about their collective disquiet with the themes and reception of Akhtar's play (2016: 9). They are critical of Akhtar's trivialisation of 'Palestinian suffering', his misrepresentation of anti-Semitism, the problematic pursuit of 'whiteness' by Akhtar's male protagonist and his fuelling of his audience's 'Islamophobic anxieties' (2016: 12–14).
- 7 Lopamudra Basu presents a rich study of *Othello*'s influence on *Disgraced*. Basu argues that, like *Othello*, the protagonist Amir Kapoor '[strives] very hard to assimilate into the dominant white culture and consciously [effaces] ethnic and religious markers of his identity' (2016: 92). In her analysis, Rohini Chaki applies Mahmood Mamdani's categories of 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims' to demonstrate Kapoor's failed attempt at becoming a model neoliberal citizen by denying his Pakistani-Muslim background (2016: 173–175).
- 8 Eithne Quinn (2005) writes that the term 'gangsta rap' originated in 1989 with the success of NWA's single 'Gangsta Gangsta', which 'deals with gang conflict, the pursuit of young women, male group bonding, and a strong sense of place'.

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