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Chapter One: Introduction

1 Background to Area Study

This study was initially conceptualized as an exploration of the relationship between Black African American popular songs, religion of Islam and Muslim identities, before and after the fateful 9/11 as the point of departure. However, after thinking through about this focus it became apparent that many songs manifesting Islamic influences had already taken root in America before 11 of September 2001 when the American Twin Towers were brought down by the Al-Qaeda terrorists. It became clearer also that one cannot understand the stereotyping of Black African Americans who assumed Muslim identities in the period after 9/11 before coming to terms with the black musical tradition that used Islam to comment on the post-bellum politics of racial discrimination of Blacks in America. Because of this conceptual shift, the study focuses more on some selected lyrics by Black African American singers before 9/11. This refocusing of the study does not mean a total rejection or lack of considering the Islamic inspired songs that Black African American singers have composed after 9/11. Rather, the study critically re-establishes creative links, their continuities and discontinuities in the Islamic-inspired songs that African Americans composed and popularized before and after the 9/11. 2001. A further caveat is that this study is not *per se*, or in the strict sense a sociological exploration of fortunes or misfortunes of the religion of Islam. This can be pursued in appropriate departments that deal with the history of world religions.

However, before exploring approaches to songs and how they articulate Muslim identities an analysed, of a brief historical background on the presence and activities of Islam and the Moslems in America, in at least the twentieth is crucial for sequencing and bringing the relevant arguments about the general influences of musicians across the religious divide. Contrary to popular opinion that suggests that Islam has a short history in America, there is sufficient literature that points to the fact that Islam in America is as old as the establishment of the American society in its roots/routes as an immigrant society (Schumann 2007). The existence of the *Holy Qur'an* that contains the principles and values underlying the existence of Islam not only in the Arab world but in America since the establishment of the colony is testimony that Islam has a far longer history of presence in America than is normally acknowledged. For

Schumann the "complexity of Muslim life in [America] and the West has been reduced merely to its problematic aspects, such as its presumed link to the 'outside' (2007: 11). In reality, in present day America, "Muslim community is shaped and constantly transformed by its share in both Western and Islamic civilizations, and, on the other, it would highlight the contribution of American Muslims in creating a "transcultural space" between the United States and the Islamic world"(ibid 11). The transcultural space cannot simply be defined by the assumptions that link Islam to terrorism. Mamdani reminds us that the concepts of a "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim" do not speak or answer to the complex mutations of muslim identities in America since these concept have been narrowed in the recent characterisation of Moslems by dominant American discourses as the negative 'other' (2004). The *Pluralism Project Research Report on American Muslim Music* pushes the argument when it suggests that positive Moslem agency in present day America have derived from the association of Black Americans with Islamic religious institutions such as the Nation of Islam, Five Percenters, the Sunni Islam and Islamic influences from the Arab world.

This study critically explores the influence of Islamic symbols and cultural resources on some selected songs penned and performed by black African American composers in the period before and 9/11. The question of literary "influence" has been dealt with in the works of T.S Eliot (1985), and A.Quayson (1997). For Eliot, creative writers and singers do draw their thematic perspectives and literary styles from an already established literary tradition. An initial reading of Eliot's essay on literary influences, suggests that the individual singers passively copy from a tradition that is understood as static. In this sense Islamic traditions can be said to have made available the cultural resources that singers cull and superimpose on their works to become musical narrative. However, Eliot usefully modifies this assumption when he argues that every attempt by creative writers and singers to engage the tradition from which they draw their cultural resources, introduces new perspectives to that tradition so that tradition is constantly dynamised by individual acts of simultaneously drawing from it and modifying those values that are no longer compatible with present realities. Quayson (1997) describes this process by which individual artists can manipulate the cultural symbols of a tradition to their advantage as an act of cultural trans-valuation of tradition's myths so that they begin to signify new realities. In other words cultural continuities between past and present values that make a tradition are always complicated by images that creative writers and singers imaginatively introduce in the analysis

of traditions. It follows also that every moment of cultural discontinuity between the values of the past traditions and the newer traditions that are shaped during new struggles do not necessarily and totally reject all the cultural elements and symbols from the past traditions. To the extent that Islam is one of the traditions from which Black African American use in their songs, there is constant manipulation of its values and symbols by the singers. These manipulations contribute in imagining a plurality of meanings and ideals among the black African American singers.

Therefore, the main aim of this study is to demonstrate how Muslim identities are created and suggested in the musical narratives. To accomplish this task the study sets the objective to critically explore the manifold ways in which Black African Americans have been influenced by as well how the singers have consciously or unconsciously manipulated the cultural and spiritual symbols available in Islam so as to forge new identities for the black communities in America.

The historical relationship between Islam and the western world has been one of political contestation for the domination of the world. The west, particularly some sections of the American people view Islam as a fundamentalist religious ideology advanced by some Arab nations and bent on reviving some imagined hegemonic rule in world affairs. On the other hand, Islamic countries view the west with suspicion, and America with uneven degrees of hostility; the fear in most Islamic countries is that western modernism has brought the domination of the Arab world by non-Arabs in search of controlling Arab resources, especially oil and gas reserves. Kwesi Prah ((2006) characterizes the western world's relation to Islamic countries and Muslim cultural identities as driven by hostile competition. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1997) leave no doubt to the reader that - in his understanding- Islam and Muslim religion have had a historically incompatible relation with the western countries. The relations of America and the Western Europe to most Islamic countries, particularly the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan deteriorated when in 2001, a terrorist group described as Al-Qaeda coordinated the bombings of the American Twin Towers in New York. The war that ensued drew in some western countries on the side of America, while the Taliban were quietly offered help to attack American interests by some terrorist groups that sympathized with the Taliban of Afghanistan.

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1.1 Formulation of the research problem

Since 11 of September 2001 when the Al-Qaeda struck the American Twin Towers, there has been relentless struggle to propagate a particular regime of images of Islam in the main as dangerous because discriminatory laws that threaten the freedom of speech of black African Americans and Arabs in America have been enacted. The Patriotic Act gives unlimited powers to the American state security apparatus to arrest, question and detain blacks, whites and Arabs on suspicion of being linked to Al-Qaeda. The collateral damage of this law is that even creative black African American artists and some sections of the American society that have not had any links with the Al-Qaeda have been harassed by the state agents. Senator John McCain represents the retrogressive elements in American politics and in his foreword to Noam Chomsky's book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories can't Stand up to the Facts* (2006) McCain openly speaks for the America government's strategy of a pre-emptive war when he says that,

> As Americans…we liberated Afghanistan from the murderous rule of the Taliban,
> our attackers' proud hosts. We chased Al Qaeda around the globe….The terrorists
> who attacked America were clear about their intentions. Osama bin
> Laden and his ilk have perverted a peaceful religion, devoting it not to the
> salvation of the souls but to the destruction of bodies. They wish to destroy us,
> to bring the world under totalitarian rule according to some misguided
> religious fantasy. (McCain 2006: xii).

The vocabulary of the passage falsely describes Americans as liberators, and goes on to name Osama and those who practice Islam as destroyers and that these people have become the enemies of America. In these descriptions, Moslems are depicted as infidels and the America system then projects itself as composed only of peace-loving people in the western world. The vociferousness of McCain's argument and his twisting of facts such as that those who destroyed the twin towers were motivated by 'misguided religious fantasy' help construct a new mythology that justifies America's interventionist policy in world affairs. This mode of commenting, reporting and of 'covering of Islam' in the main American media proceeds from the construction of Islam as an aggressive ideology determined to destroy and change western lifestyles described as built on self-evident images of democratic institutions. These negative images of Islam and

Muslim cultures are based on 'knowledge of dominance and confrontation but also from cultural anti-pathy'....Islam is defined negatively as that which the West is radically at odds, and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam'(Said, 1997: 60).

America's main media coverage constructs Islam as a single ideology and by this act, dissolves diverse contradictions in the social strands that make up Islam. This portrayal simplifies a complex reality of the different values that inform Islam in mainland America and outside. The fact is that Islam has been practiced in America for the past four hundred years. Islam is not foreign to black African Americans. The identities that the religion of Islam has encouraged in America have also not been static; Historians and literary scholars have written about how Muslim identities contested other religious faith in Islam's search for its own spiritual rooting in the American people. African Americans, who through-out the black people's history of struggle against slavery and its subsequent forms of oppression have embraced Islam as one among several religions such as Christianity that they have used to form and re-create new identities that they chose for themselves. While there has been substantial literature on black people's struggle, little has been documented on the role of Islam in creating differentiated cultures of Muslim-ness among black people.

What is available in the writings on Islam in America is in the mainstream Islamic media of Islam and it emphasizes how Muslim identities are irrational, fundamentalist and opposed to progressive development. This distorted story of the existence and role of Islam in black communities and how they constantly re-fashion different Muslims identities needs to be challenged on different cultural sites. This negative characterization of Islam does not reveal or rather 'covers' up certain extremist tendencies within Islamic ideology. Edward Said emphasizes heterogeneity in the cultural foundations and present day articulations of Islam when he suggests that the '...Islamic world as a whole is neither completely anti-American and anti-West nor unified and predictable in its actions' (1997: 171). We need to search for alternative cultural sites where dynamic conceptions of Islam and Muslim identities can be found. Black African American popular songs composed before and after 9/11 provide just an appropriate artistic space where one can explore the 'heterogeneity in the cultural foundations' of Islam in order to critically explore the different kinds of Muslim identities that this religion allows singers to authorize.

The study, therefore, also seeks to explore the varied constructions of Islam and Muslim identities as depicted in black American popular music. It will be argued that the body of selected popular musical lyrics composed by different generations and genders among the black African American communities can provide portrayals that modify and sometimes openly reject characterizations of Islam as composed of unitary values. The discography of lyrics by Black American singers such as Paris, the band Public Enemy, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface, Kanye West, Miss Elliot, Miss Undastood, Erykah Badu, and K.R.S-One provides the primary sources for this study. These artists hail from different social backgrounds in terms of class, age, gender, and geographical cities in America, Their artistic creativities can also provide a wider range of diverse images of Islam and Muslim identities, lifestyles and politics of image-making in broad ways that go beyond a single dialectic of the West versus Islamic countries and their cultures. Furthermore, the lyrics of these selected artists are discussed as "social protest music and are contingent upon the audience's ability to invest the music with the 'appropriate' political meanings" (Peddie 2008: 1).

1.2 Formulation of the sub-problems and assumptions of the Study

A number of sub-problems arise out of the constructions and representations of the Muslim identities by Black American popular artist. These are that:

- There is a regime of symbolic signification of Muslim identities constructed in main stream American media coverage that encourages the production of images of Islam in terms of good Muslim and bad Muslim.
- There is an assumption that black singers of America have a unitary image of Muslim identities.
- There is a belief that black singers who are practicing Muslims in America can alone access the 'total' subjectivities underlying the ideologies of Islam
- There is also a pernicious belief that the medium of popular songs in America is authentic and that it cannot be infiltrated by dominant discourses represented by American commercial interests and also by ideologies of extremist Muslims.

1.3 Formulation of the research question (s) / hypothesis (es)

Against the background of these contradictory constructions and representations of the Muslim identities in Black American popular singers this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the trends of scholarship on Islam and Muslim identities in America?
- What are the forms of Muslim identities composed by Black African American people's music before and after 9/11?
- Are there any differences or continuities and discontinuities in the images of Islam that Black African American popular singers mine and popularize in their songs composed before and after 9/11?
- What are the implications to Black African American people and some Arabs, of these symbolical constructs and cultural representations of the religion of Islam and Muslim identities in American popular songs in the era of the 'War on Terror'?

To answer these questions, this study analyses lyrics from selected songs sung by black singers before 9/11 and after. Although the study concentrates on the songs sang before 9/11 it will proceed to compare, where possible, songs created before and those created after the period 9/11 to establish whether or not there have been radical departures in the ways in which Islam and Muslim identities have been narrated in the black-authored songs. The emphasis of the study therefore is the exploration of contradictory Muslim identities in circulation in the black popular music. The study argues that not all the black people have embraced Islam and Muslim identities. Furthermore, it will be demonstrated in the study that not all the Black African Americans who have embraced Islam and assumed Muslim identities imagine or have a similar understanding of the cultural urgency of Islam and the reason for assuming Muslim identities. Some black singers who are not practicing Muslims have used the religion of The religion of Islam to create new identities for blacks that complicate the notion of 'Black' in African American popular culture. Rather than standing by and uncritically defending absolute definitions of the Muslim identities within the African American communities, this study explores the changing nature of the influence of Islam and Muslim identities in African

American cultural lives. Rather than guess or speculate about the specific cultural trajectories of the African American Muslim identities this study emphasizes that there are lines of continuities and discontinuities in the ways Islam and Muslim identities are represented in the African American popular music before and after 9/11 in America. The assumption that there are continuities and discontinuities in the constructions of Muslim identities in black popular music must be investigated and proven beyond mere assertions.

1.4 Justification of the Study

There are several reasons why it is necessary to carry out this present research. Ideological contestations between the main American media and the black African American images of Islam and Muslim identities have tended to be reduced to the case of good or bad Muslims (Mamdani 2004). This binary simplifies, and needs to be transcended if we are to gain meaningful knowledge of Islam outside the context of knowledge as domination of the mind (Said 1997). It is therefore necessary to shift the search of the site of the struggle on the representations of Muslim identities away from the main media (whether American or Extremist Islamic) towards Black African American popular song lyrics. The choice of Black American popular music was dictated by the desire to explore how the media of an economically marginalized group can negotiate meanings of Islam. There was, therefore, the quest to test whether or not, the assumption that all black popular musicians who champion the cause of Islam understand the multiple identities that their lyrics suggest, can be proven with facts produced from a critical analyses of the narratives in the songs.

Whether of a novelistic form or oral literature narratives such as popular songs, are never totally subservient to the claims of truths in academic or conventional history. Popular songs have a capacity to suggest their own patterns of meanings that are validated in the process of symbolic representation as instances of interpretation. If singers are never totally in control of the meanings they authorize during singing as performance, then it is possible that critics can help clarify some of the 'surplus meanings' that is embedded in lyrics and that point to the possibilities of different aspirations even among a community such as that of the Black African American that is often depicted as essentially cohesive and whole. This is an uncritical attitude towards the black communities and the identities that they fashion. In other situations, the same

communities are described as only prone to violence. This too, is a stereotype of the Black African American identities that needs to be challenged through an analysis of their popular music. This study uses Vambe's (2004) formulation of the relation between history, facts and fiction in popular music when he argues that though a social construct, popular music as narrative discourse is very much tied to specific historical referents in the real world. Vambe goes on to assert that

> whether popular music chooses to turn history into fiction, or to transform the imaginary into history, the meanings of that music can only be accessed via its textualization in its written and oral forms. As interpretations of reality, popular music defines what is 'historical' or 'political' through its manifestation in the multiple versions of reality it authors(2004:90).

However, the significance to this study of Vambe's understanding of how popular songs work, is that the critic correctly points out that

> popular music as narrative discourse is also problematic in the sense
> that that it is not always fully aware of the meanings that it
> embodies at any given time, nor are the singers totally in control of the
> meanings refracted from the music they create. In other words,
> in its ways of giving shape and form to national dreams,
> popular msic reacts in contradictory ways. This is so because its meanings may be partial
> because they are in medias res, and history may be half made because
> it is in the process of being made;
> and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent
> because it is caught in uncertainty, in the act of
> composing its powerful image.(Vambe 2004: 90).

Such strong assertions about how popular music operates can be tested when applied to the analysis of the construction of Muslim identities in black African American popular music. To the extent that identities and images in popular songs can become 'charters' by which a group of people can be judged, there is need to interrogate how Muslim identities are produced,

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constructed and consumed in contexts both of peace and war. This can forestall the possibilities of stereotyping groups of people which in the context of America leads to political tensions, and war between America and people who have assumed Muslim Identities whether these are Americans or not.

Popular music incidentally is both 'imaginary and arbitrary' (Barthes 1972, 123). The subjective aspect in popular songs is that while a community may often express its identity through them, it is also true that individual artists may often use songs, only to find themselves locked in struggle with their community as to the meaning of such songs. (Gikandi 1987:165). Popular songs have been used to 'dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict and validate' old and new identities (Brantlinger 1985, 186). Songs are a semiological system that as Roland Barthes observes, can be confused with 'raw' or 'unmediated' reality as when,

> what allows the listener to consume [popular song]
> innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system
> but as an inductive one.
> Where there is only equivalences, he sees a kind of causal
> process: the signifier and the signified have, in his eyes,
> a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed
> otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values;
> now the [song]-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts:
> myth is read as a factual system,
> whereas it is but a semiological system (Barthes 1972: 123).

As 'semiological,' system popular music is made up not of lyrics alone; musicians make use of rhetorical devices, their voice, and tone, all whose effect is to produce surplus meaning' that listeners can have access to. This dimension to the analysis of Muslim identities in American music has not been sufficiently theorized because critics search for open and overt political themes that are 'obvious' in the song-words.

Vambe and Vambe (2006: 50) suggest that songs can be analysed as written "text (lyrics or words), rhetoric or words used in a special way, and voice or words being spoken or sung in human tones which are themselves meaningful signs of persons and personality.' This study seeks to adopt a broadened analytical approach that, hopefully can, help the researcher to access

multiple meanings and identities underpinned by the ideologies of Islam. But Vambe and Zegeye (2007: 1) also caution us and insist that in analysing lyrics, we also need to reject the notion of confining politics to organized and visible political movements and those areas 'of daily life that are not so political in the most palpable way; instead we need to emphasise' the small, heroic acts performed in what one would call 'domestic spaces', but which have far reaching political consequences' to the constructions of social identities. The present study adopts this perspective in order to step outside narrow political analyses based only on what people can see but excluding an exploration of what has been rendered 'absent' in the musical narratives by Black American singers, particularly in their conceptualizations of ideologies of Islam and Muslim identities. This analytical perspective is also useful because it enables the study to manifest the diverse levels at which different understandings of identities of Muslim-ness are individuated by singers coming from one community that can be described as Black African American.

Apart from the above specific issues relating to how narrativity operates in popular songs, this study is also motivated by the desire to use American popular music to raise epistemological issues about the status of popular songs in relation to the discipline of literature, and mainstream media. Bennett (1994) has rightfully observed that the initial impulse in the study of popular song was to prove that it was degraded from within; was an inferior 'literary' form and that it is a pliant terrain that is easily infiltrated by the dominant values and distorted to suit the interests of the elite class so that what the people read, buy, listen to, consume and enjoy is already manipulated and debased from within. The present study seeks to deconstruct these notions that simplistically project popular music as a purveyor of dominant values. On the other hand, the present study also seeks to prove that popular music is not necessarily a conveyer-belt of resistance values identified only as modes of open political revolt. Far from representing an either or situation in the political continuum of domination and liberation, this study ultimately seeks to introduce an understanding of the construction of Muslim identities that recognize that popular music is a cultural force-field where strategic alliances and interests are constantly negotiated(Hall 1995).

And, finally, for what it is worth, the present researcher is an Arab woman who practices Islam and has embraced humanistic Muslim identities of love, sharing, tolerance and mutual coexistence. And yet these are the values that are sacrificed each time Islam is misrepresented in

the American and Extremist Muslim media channels. My personal intervention is conceived as corrective and this ideological intervention can be fulfilled when new theoretical approaches are brought to the explanation and understanding of Islam and Muslim as well as the workings of narrativity in black American popular music.

1.5 Literature review of the study

There are not sufficiently known and critical books in circulation on Islam and Muslim culture in Africa. Research on Islam in America that is conducted by Africans remains fragmented because of the continent's ambivalent attitude to Islam. For example, Prah shows that an exploration of Arab-African relations in the past may show that this was not always 'complementary and may throw up painful and difficult lessons which some might not like or prefer to forget.'(2006: 127). The realities, as Islam scholar, Akbar Ahmed argues, is that there are in fact varied versions of Islams; that at least black popular singers of America have uneven levels of understanding the phenomenon of Islam, that their mastery of the values embodied in Islam is also unevenly distributed. Ahmed (1992) argues that in its interaction with Western cultures, Islam can be directly confrontational, ambiguous and even acquiescent of the values of the west.

The understanding of Islam in the after of 9/11 is contradictory. Mamdani (2004) complains that the American war on terror has reduced any understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures to 'Good' Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'. Said traces this habit of misrepresenting Islam to the phenomenon that he describes as Orientalism. In the arsenal of this ideology of western imperialism, non westerners are named, controlled and marked out as inferior people and sometimes as violent people whose rich historical and cultural traditions must be defeated, and the Arabs, its promoters, absorbed into the modernist project of Europe. Said argues that in the discourse that orientalise Islam and Muslim cultures, supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines have been developed to authorise views on Islam cultures, describing, teaching, settling and ruling over them (Said: 1979:2-3).

In *Covering Islam*, (1997) Said continues to reveal the contradictions that make the conditions of othering of Islam in European and American western discourse possible. Said writes that most of what America and the west know of Islam is through the framework of colonial domination and that

all our knowledge of so complex and elusive a phenomenon

as Islam comes about through texts, images, experiences that are

not direct embodiments of Islam but representations

or interpretations of it….The result has been the triumph not just

of a particular knowledge of Islam but rather of a particular

interpretation which, however, has neither been unchallenged nor

impervious to the kinds of questions asked by unorthodox, inquiring

minds. (Said 1997:168-169).

The language that disparages Islam and Muslim identities is roundly condemned in the Report of OSCE-ODIHR Roundtable that notes that 'negative portrayals of Muslims, disproportionate coverage on issues such as extremism and violence, and one-dimensional (and often inaccurate) reporting on the Islamic faith reinforce existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslim people and contribute to a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility towards Muslim communities' (ODIHR Roundtable 2006: 1). However, writing in a different book, but on the same theme of Islam, Said also acknowledges the instabilities defining Islam and Muslim culture; on one hand, he suggests that Islam identities are misrepresented. On the other some Arab countries such as Egypt have 'completely bought the American discourse on the world, complete with "terrorists," "extremists", and "radicals', all of whom are violent and implacably opposed to the "peace process" (Said 1995: 403). Ahmed, another scholar of Islam suggests that the post-modernity of Islam and Muslim identities are their double and often conflicting articulation; Islam is feared as the next threat after communism(Ahmed 1992: 37), and yet Muslims also massacre each other (Ahmed 1992: 45) in Sudan and Iraq and some sections of Muslims still oppress their women (ibid 43). The ambiguity at the heart of the identities described by Islam and Muslim cultures is further underscored by Nawal El Saadawi for whom Islamic identities embody the positive and the negative principles; one one hand, Islam's resistance to western imperialism is celebrated as an instance of creative dissidence, but this positive identity is often compromised by Islamic leaders in some Muslim countries who suppress freedom of expression, and present Arab women in literature as the 'she-devil' (Saadawi 2007: 520).

These contradictions that define Islam and Muslim identities are often accentuated particularly in the ways they are represented in American black popular culture. Popular music has emerged from a past described by Gilroy as that of 'dependency and antagonism' (Gilroy 1993: 48), of 'resistance and accommodation' (ibid 29) to capitalist society, and of existing 'both inside and outside the West' (ibid 30). Floyd (1990) traces Black American popular songs from the Negro spirituals and insists that during the Harlem renaissance in America, popular music by black people expressed the African-American desire for economic independence. The irony was that the production of the music was funded by white commercial interests and bosses who often had the power to insert preferred lyrics in black songs. Floyd (1995) further argues that despite patronage from white financiers, black American popular music signified or generated meanings that always undercut the 'officially' intended meanings. Although black music had its origin in African-American oral culture, the music also absorbed cultural influences from white cultures whether Caucasian or Arabic; black musical art developed powerful syncretic modes of existence.

Furthermore, although black popular music is well-known in black communities, individual skills specifically shaped the musical repertoire of African music; differentiated individual compositions from among African American musicians expand the musical canvas so that what defines the music's politics from a stylistic perspective is its closeness to community rhythms as well as its capacity to deviate, innovate and accept cultural contamination, or promiscuity as its condition of continuance(Perry 2006: 10-12). Levine (2006) also adds that black music in America should be understood as addressing all aspects of the black people's lives; to perceive this music in these ways enables the critic to stop searching for narrow signs of visible political resonances. This perspective that seeks to expand the knowledge of what is political in black popular music is adopted in this study because it opens up the possibilities of imagining alternative ways through which black African American singers reconceptualise their lives in situations of oppression. Peddie agrees with this deepened notion of the relationship of music and politics when he argues that black music should be viewed as a 'complex dialectic where musical protest is as fluid as the audiences to which it appeals and the hegemonic structures it opposes'(Peddie 2008: 1). This observation makes sense when it is remembered that gender, race, class and generational differences among black singers also determine the production styles and modes of musical reception among the black people (Aparicio 1998). The complex nature in

which black musical genres evolved, and how they have sustained themselves enables them to be adaptive to the new themes when artists elaborate on Islam and Muslim identities to which many black youths are converting in America.

This study argues that black music has traversed different challenges, economic and stylistic, and this has enabled black artists to use the same music to construct and elaborate in differentiated ways, their uneven understandings of Islam and Muslim identities. The emphasis that this present study places on the different conceptualizations of Islam by African-American musicians constitutes the overall argument of the study which is that the different levels of consciousness among the black musicians creates a picture of different 'knowledges' of Islam and Muslim identities. Instead of writing a monolithic Islam and Muslim identity, there are a plethora of versions of these identities. This understanding of Islam and Muslim allows for isolating of extremist and moderate ideologies that underpin Islam and Muslim identities. It is an understanding of Islamic human agency that rejects essentialism based on assumptions that black musicians' cultural and ideological understanding of Islam and Muslim cannot be individuated and that the sum total of these alternative constructions represent what is truly countercultural discourses in writing about Islam and Muslim identities. It demonstrates an understanding of the functioning of narrativity in popular songs that rejects theories that project popular music as merely and simply mass cultures which are so pliant that they bend to every dominant ideological wind (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944).

This study also modifies conceptions of the popular in 'popular music' that accords extraordinary power to ordinary people and to artists to fashion, and make their own identities outside the workings of historical processes within particular and given contexts. To imagine and argue that black Americans construct or make similar identities of Islam or Muslim is to adopt a position of culturalism which essentially romanticizes both the historical agency of the artists while misrepresenting by burying, the diverse values underlying Islam and Muslim identities, before and after 9/11.

Hall reminds us that the lives of popular classes are informed by a constant dialectical struggle marked out by "the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield, a battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there is always strategic positions to be won and lost" (Hall

1995: 460). This powerful argument puts paid the myth of the popular classes as passive onlookers onto the stage of history. It is equally, an argument that also criticizes the philosophical underpinnings of cultural critics who popularize the myth of the working class as a unitary voice, constantly engaged in struggle to realize similar aspirations. Gramsci, whose work significantly informs the analysis of Islam and Muslim identities in this study, believed that identities that are being constructed, and the black Americans whose musical compositions embodied these constructions, all have uneven levels of relating to the ideologies that define them. He says that "the subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified" and that are responses to political processes and to the consumption of material goods produced by elites are influenced by "their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own [and] the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character(Gramsci 1971: 52).

Therefore, in seeking to reveal the contradictory motivations of black African Americans' different depictions of different identities of Islam and Muslim that obtain in American popular music, this study subscribes to the view that the struggles for cultural representations of the Islam and Muslim identities by black artists of America take conflicting forms such ' incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation, recuperation." (Hall 1994: 463). This mode of reasoning about the popular lends itself towards reading popular culture in multiple ways. It helps demystify the popular by attributing different and sometimes conflicting human motivations to the actions of those classes. In other words, this study on the constructions of Islam and Muslim identities in black African American community which on the surface appears a cohesive social group is distinctly 'authentic' when it manifests its different perspectives of Muslim identities.

1.6 Theoretical background of the study

No single theory can account on its own the complexity of constructs of Muslim identities as imaginatively captured in Black American popular songs. The theoretical approaches adopted in this study are eclectic; isolating and harnessing the theoretical strands in appropriate theories in order to provide the best explanation of Muslim identities in American popular music from a multiplicity of perspectives. In selecting theories for popular song analysis one aims to set those theories, "one against the other, forcing them to speak to common issues, making them reveal the

basis of their thought" (Andrew 1954: v), a process that should enable the critic to explain the complex articulations that specific song texts can suggest.

1.7 Theories of "Black" Subjectivities in African American Communities of the USA.

Theoretical writings on the idea of being 'black' or 'the fact of blackness' (Fanon 1995:323) have shown that as a cultural signifier of identities, blackness is a concept whose meanings have been shifting over time. Writing in a colonial context of Algeria, Fanon noted that the fact of blackness was narrowed by the colonial powers to refer to the biological identities of having dark skin. Blackness was equated with evil; negative meanings were built around being black. As Fanon wrote, in a colonial context the belief of the colonial master was that 'The negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, The Negro is ugly, cold [and the white] is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quavering because of rage and [the white boy shouts] Mama, the nigger is going to eat me up' (324). Depictions of blacks as 'animal', 'bad', 'mean' [in] 'rage' and men-eater where used by colonialism to justify the conquest and then control of the black body, and the exploitation of its powers to reproduce itself. For Fanon, the enforced 'consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity.''(323). African identities were portrayed as fixed for all times. The refusal to think of the idea of blackness as a cultural category of the ever shifting was ironically accepted as an incontestable truth by some Black African American as well as contested by others.

In the ante bellum American context, racialised depictions of African Americans as not only blacks but also slaves added an important shift to the conceptual understanding of blackness. American blacks were not only mocked for their dark skin, they were viewed as a source of cheap slave labour. Du Bois argues in *The Souls of Black Souls* (1973) that the experience of being black in America bred a condition of cultural schizophrenia among African Americans. Blacks in America were forced to view themselves as inferior to whites; they could only express their identities through comparison to or through the white race whose racial achievements were described as the norm and standard of civilized beings. For Du Bois, the cultural alienation embedded in the idea of being black in the American context resulted among the black people in the development of a double consciousness. Blacks were aware that they were Americans; but they were also forced by the same system to think of themselves as second class citizens in the country which they had laboured as slaves to develop. This 'two-ness' that blacks were made to

feel in America, in turn, bred a variety of morbid symptoms in African Americans. Some blacks took their blackness as a sign of being an abject object, poor and came to believe that, indeed, they were not naturally endowed with the assumed positive intellectual gifts that whites were thought to have. Other blacks wallowed in self-hate and worked hard to be accommodated in the exploitative American capitalist system. The phenomenon of passing from being black into identifying with white values, white skin and white cultures is dramatized in James Weldon Johnson's autobiography called *The autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (1975).* The theme of self hate in being black is also present in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man (1994).*

Stuart Hall has theoretically revealed in his influential article, 'New Ethnicities' (1995:223-227) that the idea of blackness as a fixed identity has been contested by the blacks who in different historical contests used this cultural signifier as a rallying point for resistance to various forces oppression. Hall identifies two crucial moments that the idea of being black has been re-conceptualized. He points out that politically, the term black was 'coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization' of black experience. In the first moment, 'The Black Experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities'(Hall 1995: 223). In the American and British racialised contexts, the idea of blacks as having a single idea created 'counter position of 'positive' black imagery (ibid). It also created 'necessary fiction' which worked with and through difference so that in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject was born' (ibid: 223).

Hall further goes on to show that the symbolic and discursive space occupied by the signifier of the black experience was in fact much more diverse than the proponents of a single identity for black people ever thought of. In Hall's words, 'the end of innocence', or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' is conceptually rendered thinkable because of, or when we recognize the 'extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature.

When conceptualizing the notion of blackness, Hall moves away from the biological definition and emphasizes the cultural definition. In another article entitled, 'What is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' Hall further complicates his understanding of the notion of 'black' politics; he avers that by definition,

> Black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a sight
> of strategic contestation. But it can never be simplified or explained
> In terms of the simple binary oppositions that are still habitually used to
> Map it out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic
> versus inauthentic; experiential versus formal; opposition versus
> homogenization (Hall 1992:21-33).

Viewing the category of 'black' in African American communities as an unproblematic reality and unified whole identities contributes in creating a narrow poetics of the Black Atlantic, something that Gilroy (1993) describes as a notorious culture of ethnic absolutism. This culture is grounded in notions that take black political cultural forms as simplistically based on cultural authenticity captured in the discourse of roots. Gilroy proposes that, in seeking to explain the experiences of African Americans, we need to acknowledge the diverse sources of blackness and engage the trajectories or differentiated routes that these identities have followed in the era of high modernity represented in American capitalism. Gilroy emphasizes the fact that scholars need to bring to the surface, the 'fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange' (ibid: 15) that richly endows the experiences of black peoples in Africa. One aspect of this cultural divergences of the black experiences in America is that the African American popular culture and music itself is based on a relation of "dependency and antagonism" (Ibid: 22) to the very capitalist system that it affirms in its different musical critiques of American society.

To conceptually locate the Black African American, in the poetics of the Black Atlantic must, therefore, entail the recognition that black cultural identities and forms of music exist "both inside and outside the West"(Gilroy 1993: 30). Black popular musical culture borrow cultural resources from or sometimes made available by the capitalist system in America, even when Black popular culture has also struggled to create distinct ideas found outside the grand narrative of the American dream. In other words, Gilroy suggests that to approach black African American popular music as counterculture to American modernity must force us to acknowledge the irony

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in that relation; American capitalist system is both "lifeline and fetter" (ibid 30) to black popular music. The paradoxical relationship of the location of Black African American music in relation to the commercial ethic that underpins American capitalism is the condition of possibility of a Black African American counterculture in which there is not only resistance to Americanism, but also "growing cleavages within the black communities" (Gilroy 1993: 32) in their diverse understandings of what it means to be black and African American in the United States of America.

In short, and for Gilroy, it is sometimes the irony of black cultural experiences within the African American communities that their intellectual and cultural achievements should exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of enlightenment in America. Although Gilroy's conceptualization of the fact of black subjectivities in America have been criticized for imposing "a kind of hemispheric limit and singular "racial" context on currents of black diasporaic work that are actually much more interwoven, broad and varied (Edwards quoted in Titlestad 2004: 18), the theory of the "Black Atlantic" informs this study in so far as the theory emphasizes the multiplicity of versions of black subjectivities in African American popular music and society. One of the cultural sites upon which the versions of blackness are performed is the relationship between black popular music and Islam, itself also articulated through versions that have come to authorize inter-faiths practiced under the religious rubrics of Nation of Islam, The Five Percenters or The nation of Gods and Earths, and Sunni Islam (Knight 2008) which are the prime focus of this study.

1.8 Theories of popular culture and Black African American popular music

Although the specific genre of black African American hip hop was born in South Bronx in Harlem in the America in the 1960s, the trajectory of this music has been influenced by the theoretical developments in the analysis of popular culture internationally. For example, in *The dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer show that although the enlightenment projected itself as a force of reason, it tirelessly worked to suppress other forms of rationality that it dismissed as myths or false consciousness. For the two scholars, popular culture was amenable to the influences of dominant narratives and the people and their popular cultural productions were imagined as a terrain that was easily infiltrated by the dominant values and distorted to suit the interests of the elite class so that what the people read, bought, listened to,

consumed and enjoyed were already manipulated and debased from within. Adorno assumed that in music, once, "a musical and / or lyrical pattern has proved successful it is exploited to commercial exhaustion, culminating in 'the crystallisation of standards" (Adorno quoted in Storey 2001,91). The Frankfurt School's view that popular music could easily be commercialized has been challenged.

In "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular", Stuart Hall, argues that the popular classes are not "cultural dupes" (Hall 1994: 459) who have to bend to every political change, and who in matters of aesthetics can't tell what they are being fed on. Although Hall suggests that dominant cultural industries have the capacity to infiltrate the cultural sensibilities of the ordinary people, he maintains that the relationship of the popular classes to the dominant class is not simply one of containment or resistance. Rather, there are "lines of 'alliance' as well as lines of cleavage" (Hall 19994: 456) between the dominated and the dominators. The lives of popular classes are informed by a constant dialectical struggle "in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained, but where there is always strategic positions to be won and lost" (ibid: 460). For Hall (ibid: 455) there is no whole, authentic, autonomous 'popular culture' which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination" ibid: 460). Instead, popular culture is syncretic and hybrid and its authenticity derive from its capacity to handle diverse discourses informed by different and often contradictory motivations. In its different forms, the popular - of which popular music is one, "take many forms: incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation, recuperation." (ibid: 463). This mode of reasoning about the popular culture lends itself towards reading popular music in multiple ways.

John Storey (2001) supports Hall's formulation of popular culture as culture created by the ordinary people. However, Storey stresses that as a terrain of struggle, popular music manifests different values articulated by people from different perspectives; within popular music there are versions and sub/versions, some whose values approximate the values of dominant classes and other versions reflecting the ideas of the ordinary people. Bennett qualifies this rather binary understanding of popular culture when he suggests that popular culture "consists not simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within

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which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations (Bennett quoted in Storey 2001: 11).

Dominic Strinati (1997: 421-433) links popular culture to postmodernism and emphasizes the point that in popular culture under postmodern conditions style and not content matters. The emphasis on style or technique in popular music suggests that the language of popular music can enable singers to arrive at unexpected meanings. Strinati implies that the polyphonic nature of popular culture enables it to challenge meta-narratives, so that within musical narratives no one version monopolizes truth; instead the instabilities inherent in symbolical narratives reveal how musical tradition such as hip hop borrow from, reshape existing music in order to arrive at new forms of musical narratives. These understandings of the dynamics of popular cultures are useful to this study; one of its central claims is that black African Americans' appropriation of cultural symbols from the Islamic religious traditions in America demonstrates its hybrid nature and adaptability as a vehicle for constituting and communicating Black Muslim identities in America.

1.9 Postcolonial language theories and Black African American popular music

Since black popular music in the African American communities has developed under conditions of enforced marginality, one may ask the question related to the extent to which this marginalized culture can authorize its own values and meanings outside the dominating musical gaze of the dominant classes in America. In this regard, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has in her controversial article, 'Can the subaltern Speak?'(1995) sparked a useful theoretical debate that enriches this study. There is no single and straight-forward answer to Spivak's question. The very existence or formulation of the question points to a lingering doubt as to whether it is possible for the lower classes to fully authorize their views untrammelled by the dominant values. Gareth Griffiths notes and complicates the understanding of the agency of lower classes when he writes that when the subaltern 'speak', 'there is real concern as to whether what we are listening to is really a subaltern voice, or the subaltern being spoken by the subject position they occupy within the larger discursive economy'(Griffiths 1995:240).

For Spivak, the subaltern voice can be de-activated so that it is possible that their voice is articulated to the interests other than theirs. On the other hand, Spivak does believe that ordinary classes have historical agency and change their lives. However, when they speak to can change their lives, this is done in 'irretrievably heterogeneous '(Spivak 1995: 26) tones. The 'marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for (Spivak 1996:200) but they do so in different tones. Benita Parry (1996) complicates the notion of speaking or resisting oppression when Parry suggests that when thinking about resistance theory or the theory of resistance from the margin occupied by the subaltern classes we should remember that there is no discourse from this class that does not borrow some cultural resources from the very values of the dominant social classes that in other circumstances, the masses engage in struggles.

Titlestad (2004) uses the notion of dissonance and dissidence to describe how the marginalized weave narratives that question the assumptions of political authority. However, as the work of Wilson testifies, in music the paradox of subaltern politics is that their musical narratives are 'temporally contingent, fundamentally mobile, and uttered by acoustic entrances and exits and struggles of multiple constituents (Wilson quoted in Titlestad 2004:19). The instability in the cultural narratives of resistance authored by the subaltern is also noted by Homi Bhabha for whom, the difficulties of narrating individual as well collective subjectivities is that these not only question each other, but that the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that are used to signify resistance are themselves culturally volatile and politically unstable so that 'by exploring hybridity...we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves'(Bhabha 1995: 209). If we agree with Bhabha and Fanon that the effort at giving durable form to resistance narratives is a 'zone of occult instability'(Fanon 1963: 169) fraught with its own contradictions, we can then adopt and apply the notion of cultural improvisation as a strategy of struggle in black African American popular music.

According to Titlestad, the idea of cultural improvisation has some major strength, the most important of which relates to the role of a musical performer who produces meanings during performance and suggests signifiers that disseminate surplus meaning from the verbal and virtuality of the images embodied in the languages of resistances. The value of language based postcolonial theories to this present study is that they can help explain how style and technique is

used in lyrics in order to tease out meanings beyond those that are apparent from an analysis of the surface content of the songs.

Henry Louis Gates, one of the foremost African American theorist of how blacks use language to give form to their experiences argues in his book *The signifying Monkey (1988*) it needs someone 'educated' in the ways of African American usages of language to explore the various levels at which meanings are arrived at and simultaneously revised in black authored oral texts such as popular songs. A theory that emphasizes the constructed-ness of narrative in song, and its emphasis on the capacity of songs to signify meanings other than those intended - 'signifying monkey'- benefits this study immensely because it makes us aware that the lyrics that are being analysed are based on the selection and ordering of words, during composition, which exclude other potential narratives. This means that there could be other identities of Muslim-ness that the selected singers for this study may not necessarily reveal. These forms of Moslem identities could still be reconstructed from the literature from other disciplines such as history, sociology and religion.

The ways in which symbols of Islam are referenced or appropriated for use in some African American songs are not always apparent. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse the songs using some aspects of a postcolonial nationalist theory that can explain Islam as an ideology of black African American nationhood laying the ground for a possible Pan Islam or pan Muslim consciousness emerging in America. Said's orientalist theories of power and discourse are useful in explaining how dominant powers use certain vocabulary to pronounce certain forms of knowledge such as Islam as less powerful in society. Therefore postcolonial theory informs this study and particularly its theoretical strand that emphasizes that 'construction' of social texts such as songs should be understood as processes which include the responses and reactions of those who are being represented (Loomba 1998: 110). Rey Chow (1993:382-399) argues further that when approaching musical lyrics for critical scrutiny, we must 'listen otherwise'. For him 'listening otherwise means paying attention to words from the song as much as its tune, allusions, allegories, and even its visuality. These formal qualities of music can enable a critic to consciously 'dis-member and dis-remember- official history' which is a theoretical task that helps in partializing rather than totalizing official historiography. Chow believes that 'because of this 'empty', trans-linguistic status, music suits the theorizing of surplus the best because it

provides a means of suggesting what goes beyond. ...it [music] is the use of music's power as surplus that which cannot be safely contained" (ibid, 382-399) for a criticism of cultural identities normally cast in monolithic terms.

In short the theoretical framework sketched here scaffolds the analytical value of this study that seeks to interpret different lyrics black African American who share more or less similar history, values and ideals. The aim of the study is to individuate each singer's relationship to some aspect of Islamic symbols that they have sampled and referenced in their lyrics. Chow's theory of listening otherwise is best positioned to reveal the diversity of musical and lyrical voices within a single group of black African Americans. As Chow says and this study fully endorses his theoretical perspective on music;

> Listening otherwise changes the meaning of music from its
> traditional association with a plenitude that escapes concrete articulation on account of its
> infinity, to that part object whose field is always elsewhere. At the same time, this part
> object is surplus; it is not reducible or graspable on the form of an externalized image. Its
> excessive partiality requires a different kind of theorizing (Chow 1993: 396).

Popular music exists first as oral performance; as verbal, aural and visual images. As such, reception theories will be used in this study to explain how listeners experience the construction of Muslim identities in the medium of song. People have capacity to listen using their own values, assumptions, and horizons of expectations. Popular song texts are a volatile cultural space where there are no single meanings fixed forever. Music listeners have heterogeneous experiences which make their capacities for decoding meanings of songs appear uneven. When the meanings embedded in the text by singers prove to be narrowed and can no longer account for the totality of the listeners' contradictory experiences, the listeners can chose to listen differently or Otherwise, thus bringing their own expanded frames of referential meanings to the practices of listening. The result is 'negotiated meaning' in which recipients can "fit" into preferred meanings of the dominant consciousness but can still modify this ideology to ensure that their interests and meanings are also represented and acknowledged as valid sources of knowledge.

This study recognises the double-consciousness embodied in audiences' modes of listening to music as critical in shaping the kind of meanings that listeners can remain with after immersion in a musical experience. Popular songs do not merely reflect reality. They mediate reality, an active process that brings into being different kinds of being and consciousness (Rantanen 2005:8). Mediation then, can allow listeners to bring entirely different protocols or frames of references for experiencing song. Thus, it can be proven that audiences have some critical freedom and autonomy to deconstruct 'dominant meanings' in order to emerge with their own oppositional meanings that can undermine intended constructions of identities embedded in song lyrics (Morley 1992; Strelitz (2005). This is why an emphasis on those theoretical approaches that value the signifying capacity of songs which bring out 'dissonance and contingency [of]sonic possibilities'(Heble 2000: 9) in the black African American composed songs that are based on, influenced by and manipulate Islam and Muslim's cultural symbols is preferred and forms the theoretical backbone of the study.

1.10 Relevance of the study

A study of the construction of Muslim identities is of immense relevance to academics and policy makers particularly in a polarised world threatening to reduce every contradiction to a war of terror – a euphemism of America's war on Islamist extremist ideologies. The study hopes to create an awareness of the discursive struggles waged during constructions of Muslim identities in the war on terror. This awareness should encourage other scholars to do further investigations on the relationships between popular culture, identity construction and modes of listening as practices. Cultural policy makers can benefit immensely from a study that interrogates processes of myth-making as produced in international media. Ordinary people, government officials, workers in academia and popular cultural industries are sensitized to take action against wilful or unconscious distortion, non-disclosure and the banality of representation in popular songs that can popularize harmful images harmful to nations struggling to create democratic institutions. Finally, the study is relevant to young scholars who wish to transfer and test in their own different geographical and socio-historical contexts, the consistency, dependability and validity of the theoretical approaches used in this study.

1.10.1 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of Communication and English studies

Strictly speaking, popular culture as a discipline transcends the boundaries imposed by traditional disciplines such as departments of literature and Communication Science. That this study is registered in the Department of English Studies is recognition that just as novels mediates realities through images and metaphors, so does popular culture. There is a deliberate epistemological rejection of the notion of creative art or literature as superior to the study of popular songs. Both Literature departments and popular culture departments deal with communication and movement of messages from sources to receivers and back to sources. This study is rendered timely and relevant to the English Studies if it is remembered that the English Studies department's proposal of a new honours course at the University of South Africa has a module on "Popular culture and the Practices of Reception". (Department of English Studies proposal, 2008). Given this new reality and flexibility of the offerings in the English Studies department, it is hoped that a study such as this present one will, when completed not only form one of the relevant resources material, but will encourage other scholars to engage the field of popular culture from a trans-disciplinary perspective in the department of English Studies.

1.10.2 Type of study

The type of study conducted here is both descriptive and explanatory. A 'dense' or 'thick description study pays attention to what themes emerge from textual analyses of the songs and how the codes embedded in the interstices of the symbolic narratives are made to suggest a range of potential meanings. Denzin adds a list of the qualities of a descriptive study when he says that

> A 'thick description' does more than record what a person is doing.
> It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail,
> context, emotion, and the webs of social relationship that join persons
> to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings.
> It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of
> an experience or the sequence of events, for the person or persons
> in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and
> meanings of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin 1989: 83).

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Thick description studies are informative and aim to suggest new insights and understanding to the complexities of social issues of which little is known, or create historical contexts within which people (listeners) can interact with song lyrics gainfully, rethinking and reflecting differently on issues listeners have known before but may have taken for granted. This understanding of thick description studies, therefore, satisfies one of the aims of this study, which is to describe in greater detail the kinds of constructions and representations of the Muslim identities in Black American popular music.

But a thick description study alone would not be able to stand and explain the reality of the medium of popular song as verbal, visual, aural and a "technical possibility" (Williams 1975: 131), that mediates and produces its own fragmented reality. Descriptive studies deeply imply and implicate an explanatory dimension to social phenomena. For this reason, an explanatory dimension can complement and bring into the interpretation of lyrics, a questioning sensibility that seeks answers to the questions of 'how' and 'why' popular songs depict certain images of Islam and not 'authorise' others.

1.10.3 Methodology

This study is textual analysis of the lyrics of some selected black American popular musicians. The discography from the singers will provide the primary sources. Secondary reading materials will be accessed from the Library in South Africa. However, the methodology used here is qualitative approach. The appropriateness of the use of a particular method is not only a researcher's choice but is also dictated by the objective of the study, and ways of collecting, sampling and analyzing the data. Maritz and Visagie (2006: 26) suggest that good qualitative research methods focus on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used, and give a thick description of the strategies employed that include textual analysis.

Qualitative research methods help one to understand social processes taking place in the production, composition and reception of popular music rather than concentrate on outcomes or pre-determined products of research. Qualitative methods direct the researcher to be interested in the ways people make meaning and sense of their lives, experiences and their structures in the world. Using a qualitative approach on data should enable a researcher to construct abstract concepts and modify, confirm or reject the theories previously used in a field of study. Qualitative research methods also require the researcher to declare that the selected sample is

representative of the period being covered, the people whose lives are being studied, as well as being representative of the contradictions in the content under study.

In order to ensure representative-ness, the researcher can consciously select the most productive sample to answer the research questions posed in the study. However, Bradley (1992) suggests that in studying a sample, it is appropriate to explore variation, deviations and critical voices from the same sample, but with different experiences and different interpretations from 'official' perspectives. This ensures that multiple narratives, each suggesting multiple meanings can be secured in the process of analysing the data. For Guba (1981) the major test of the validity and dependability of a qualitative method is its applicability by which is meant whether or not the method satisfies the criterion of fittingness and transferability. Transferability is the ability to reproduce more or less the same findings in another situation or population. Maritz and Visagie argue that qualitative research methods satisfy this criterion of transferability when the findings fit or can be used to explain contexts "outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between two contexts (2006: 44). It is hoped that the results of the present study can be used to through a critical searchlight on the relationship of art, communication and 'communitarian' ideologies such as the Black Atlantic. It is also hoped that the present study will provide a vigorous context to debate the effects of narrow ideologies based on Afrocentricity, authenticity and populist theories of popular culture most of which have promoted narrow identity politics of localism that can manifest themselves extremist ideologies.

1.10.4 Anticipated contribution of the study to the discipline English and Communication

It is anticipated that the study will create awareness and influence people to adopt alternative ways of understanding Islam as product of diverse ideologies and evaluate the depictions of the different forms of Muslim identities in Africa. This should cultivate the much-needed trust between and among societies with difference values, particularly Americans who are Islam, and Muslims who are Americans.

1.10.5 Chapter organization.

In order to emphasise differences of perceptions on Islam and Muslim among the collective cultural identity of American blacks, this first chapter outlines the area of study, justifies it,

provides literature review and theoretical background, explains the methodology adopted, and outlines chapter placement within the study.

Chapter two critically engages secondary sources on Islam and Muslim cultures as they are depicted and elaborated in secondary sources. This chapter sets the scene by arguing for an understanding of differentiated trends in the ideologies of Islam, Muslim and popular cultures as lived in America and in the world. The idea is to deconstruct the notion pervasive both in mainstream American media and in the mainstream black African American popular musical media that projects a homogeneous ideology of Islam and Muslim.

Chapter three discusses the musical lyrics of three black and male artists who are both practitioners of Muslim. This chapter emphasizes open political descriptions of the ideologies and philosophies underlying Islam. It will be argued that the artists adopt discourses of open resistance when constructing and depicting new Muslim identities, before as well after 9/11 when the term Islam was more than ever, highly politicized. The artists whose discography will be analysed are Public Enemy, Talib Kweli and Paris.

Chapter four discusses the lyrics of Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface and Kanye West. These singers refuse to adopt a penchant and open political discourse which would have made their lyrics derivative of and in fact subordinated to the dominant images of African American political nationalism in its form of the Civil Rights Movement. The singers take a different direction, opting to explore social themes which are political not in the 'open' sense. It will be argued that the essence of these four artists' mode of constructing and representing Islam identities focuses on a conscientising programme that seeks to raise the Black Americans and all practitioners of Islam of the necessity to adopt tolerant ideologies that promote coexistence with other social groups in America and other parts of the world.

Chapter five shifts from analyzing the lyrics of male singers and embraces a critical exploration of how Miss Elliot, Miss Undastood and Erykah Badu, all black African American female singers, and practitioner of Islam insert the female artistic voice and redefines the contours of Islam in opposing it to the ways that Islam is depicted in both the white American establishment, and by the black male artists who also champion Muslim identities. This chapter provides an occasion to further deconstruct unitary notions of Islam and further reveals the multiple identities

of what Islam is, from the perspective of female artists. Chapter six argues for a need to further recognize the significance of the language of rapping through which K.R.S-ONE attempts to recreate a black African American Muslim community bound together by historically shareable but also diverse interests in America. The chapter argues that what enables the Black American popular singers to imagine a plurality of narratives and characterizations of Islam and Muslim identities are factors related to the artistic temperament, skills with language usage, rhetoric, tone, voice and the listeners' expectations of how a good song should sound. The conclusion of the study reiterates the arguments of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review on Muslim Identities in Popular Songs in America

2 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an extended literature review for this study on Muslim identities in American black popular music. Several arguments must be fore grounded to avoid the confusion that defines popular Muslim identities as constructed in the songs. First, the assumption that Muslim or Moslem or the religion (Islam) is patronized by Arabs of white skin colour is a falsehood that this review questions. Popular artists who use Islam as a source of creative inspiration are black, white, Afro-Arab and American Arabs. Among these groups further differentiation are necessary. Not all who use words from the Qur'an are practicing Moslems. Also those artists who are practicing Moslems may not necessary call up words from the Koran to validate their Muslim-ness in their songs, because, sometimes, the themes they deal with are universal. Second, the Arab people from Iraq or the Arab world are not the concern of this study. Only some lyrics of black African America people are used. Even then, those Moslems who identify with Islam may not use their native languages when rapping; therefore, this study focuses on popular songs rendered in English.

Thirdly, to deliberately escape the danger of racial essentialism in understanding the different trends in the formations of Muslim identities this study emphasizes hybridity; black Americans have a long history of the use of the oral in the constructions of their Afro-American identities. Moslems who have hailed from the Arab world and settled in America have brought their own cultural resources mined from the common but rich fund of Islam. The point of encounter or the chronotope (Bakhtin 1981) that this study emphasises the constant borrowing and trafficking of cultural resources used in the popular songs. Fourthly and lastly, this chapter brings out difference between radical, underground and militant type of music that promotes the ideology of Islam from the Moslem artists who use their art to air social themes that are political not in the sense of visible political movements, but nonetheless has political significance for the communities for which the lyrics are penned. This point is important because the present images of Muslim music are a stereotype; singers must swear, threaten to tear America apart. These are falsified depictions of Islam and as such, must be challenged by showing that in fact there trends within Muslim identities that can suffer if critics focus on songs that are manifestly political open in their image, and also when critics only highlight only, some negative aspect of Islam.

Therefore, in order to structure the argument of this chapter in a coherent way, this review focuses on the themes embedded in Muslim identities that are produced and circulated in Black communities and by Black singers of America. This task entails the recognition that popular songs and the mediation of identities, Islam/Christian religion in the American context, by male and female Muslim singers are in flux. The literature reviewed in this chapter complements and sometimes borrows from what has been previously highlighted in chapter one. While this chapter adds new dimension to the review of literature by focusing on specific aspects of the themes related to Muslim identities and how they are depicted in some new literature, the literature reviewed here is not meant to exhaust all the literature written on black American popular songs, nor the genres of popular nor exhaust the meaning of the term "black" as a signifier of the identities of American people who promote or practise Islam.

2.1 Redefining Muslim identities

Swedenburg (1996) has observed that there have not been incisive studies on the relationship between Islam and rap music in Black culture in America. The image of Islam as a senselessly violent ideology is what mainstream American media has privileged in projecting. For example H G Farmer suggests that Muhammad, the revered prophet Allah was himself a censor of music in the religion of Islam: "there can be little doubt but that Muhammad feared the poets and minstrels, and stopped at nothing to accomplish their discredit and even destruction, as we know in the case of Ka 'b ibn al-Ashraf, Ka 'b ibn Zuhair and Al-Nadr ibn al-Harith (2001: 23). Such comments point to the aspect of intolerance that critics have latched on to discredit Islam and the Muslim identities that the religion generates. And yet, Islam has been an important source of values associated with peace (Fidai 1991; Shad 1990 & Islamic educational Organisation of Southern Africa 2000). Islam has also been instrumental in promoting the politics of resistance of ordinary Americans to their own Government, of fighting oppression of women by men, and of promoting awareness of the need to challenge America's global hegemony (Cassiem 1992; Swedenburg 1996).

Undifferentiated interpretations of Islam and Muslim identities have also been promoted by politicians willing to make cheap political capital by blaming American problems to terrorism purportedly carried out by Arabs in the name of Islam. The American Senator John McCain wrote in a foreword to the book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories can't Stand*

up to the Facts (2006) that, **"**As Americans…we liberated Afghanistan from the murderous rule of the Taliban, our attackers's proud hosts. We chased Al Qaeda around the globe….The terrorists who attacked America were clear about their intentions. Osama bin Laden and his ilk have perverted a peaceful religion, devoting it not to the salvation of the souls but to the destruction of bodies. They wish to destroy us, to bring the world under totalitarian rule according to some misguided religious fantasy. (McCain 2006: xii).

The vocabulary suggests that Americans are liberators, that Osama and those who practice Islam are destroyers. It is a clear world divided into infidels – the Muslims – and peace-loving people of the western world. The vociferousness of McCain's argument and his twisting of facts such as that those who destroyed the twin towers were motivated by 'misguided religious fantasy' help construct a new mythology that justifies America's interventionist policy in world affairs. In contrast, Chomsky wrote that 'the world regards Washington as a terrorist regime.' (Chomsky 2007: 2). America did not seem to have learnt much from the events of 9/11. Or rather, America leant how to impose its will on other races with deadly force and impunity. Chomsky further notes that "the national security Strategy declared that the United States – alone – has the right to carry out "preventive war": preventive, not pre-emptive, using military force to eliminate a perceived threat, even if invented or imagined. Preventive war is very simply, the "supreme crime" condemned at Nuremburg (Chomsky 2007: 36).

After 9/11, "preventive war" is the right to provoke other nations in order to create pretexts for invasion. Weapons of mass destruction were 'invented' or 'imagined' and this alone justifies American invasion of Iraq and the subordination of Muslim identities. Literature on the constructions of Muslim identities, particularly in America remains far between, and is riddled with stereotypes. Critical research on Islam in Africa remains fragmented because of the continent's ambivalent attitude to Islam. Prah shows that an exploration of Arab-African relations in the past may show that this was not always 'complementary and may throw up painful and difficult lessons which some might not like or prefer to forget.'(2006: 127). The realities, as Islam scholar, Akbar Ahmed argues, is that there are in fact varied versions of Islam and demonstrates that at least Black Muslim popular singers of America have uneven levels of understanding the phenomenon of Islam, and their mastery of the values embodied in Islam is also unevenly distributed. Ahmed (1992) also argues that in its interaction with Western cultures,

Islam can be directly confrontational, ambiguous and even acquiescent of the values of the west. This understanding of the versions of Muslim identities is very important to this study which seeks to reveal the trends in Muslim identities created through the musical genre. There is no single Muslim identity to which all Muslims accede to. Critics who insist on a unitary identity for Muslim people before and, especially after 9/11 underestimate the kinds of political differences that inform the richness of Muslim identities in America. Rich but also contradictory cultural identities are noticeable in those American singers who claim to have embraced Islam, or who assert that they are Muslims.

Mamdani (2004) is quite right to complain that the American war on terror has reduced understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures to 'Good' Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'. Said traces this habit of misrepresenting Islam to the phenomenon that he describes as orientalism. In the arsenal of this ideology of western imperialism, non westerners are named, controlled and marked out as inferior people and sometimes as violent people whose rich historical and cultural traditions must be defeated, the Arabs, its promoters absorbed into the modernist project of Europe. Said argues that in the discourse that orientalise Islam and Muslim cultures, supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines have been developed to authorize views on Islam cultures, describing them, teaching them, settling and ruling over them(Said: 1979:2-3).

In *Covering Islam*, (1997) Said continues to reveal the contradictions that make the conditions of 'othering' or discriminating of Islam in European and American media discourse possible. Said writes that most of what the west knows of Islam is through the framework of colonial domination and that "all our knowledge of so complex and elusive a phenomenon as Islam comes about through texts, images, experiences that are not direct embodiments of Islam but representations or interpretations of it….The result has been the triumph not just of a particular knowledge of Islam but rather of a particular interpretation which, however, has neither been unchallenged nor impervious to the kinds of questions asked by unorthodox, inquiring minds" (Said, 1997: 168-169).

The language that disparages Islam and Muslim identities is also criticised in the Report of OSCE-ODIHR Roundtable (2006), notes that 'negative portrayals of Muslims, disproportionate coverage on issues such as extremism and violence, and one-dimensional (and often inaccurate) reporting on the Islamic faith reinforce existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims and

contribute to a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility towards Muslim communities (ODIHR Roundtable 2006: 1). Other Arab dominated countries such as Egypt have continued to misrepresent Muslim since their country has, according to Said, "completely bought the American discourse on the world, complete with "terrorists," "extremists", and "radicals', all of whom are violent and implacably opposed to the "peace process" (Said 1995: 403).

Ahmed, another scholar of Islam suggests that the post-modernity of Islam and Muslim identities are its double and often conflicting modes of expression. On one hand Islam is feared as the 'next threat after communism' (Ahmed 1992: 37). On the other, Arab Muslims are 'massacre each other' (Ahmed 1992: 45) and some sections of it still oppress their women (ibid 43). The ambiguity at the heart of the identities described by Islam and Muslim cultures is further underscored by Nawal El Saadawi (2007) for whom Islamic identities embody the positive and the negative principles. For her, on one hand, Islam's resistance to western imperialism is celebrated as an instance of creative dissidence. On the other hand this positive identity is often compromised by Islamic leaders in some Muslim countries who suppress freedom of expression, and portray Arab women in literature as the 'she-devil' (Saadawi 2007, 520).

These contradictions that define Islam and Muslim identities are often accentuated particularly in the ways they are represented in American black popular culture. Popular music has emerged from a past described by Gilroy as that of 'dependency and antagonism' (Gilroy 1993: 48), of 'resistance and accommodation'(ibid 29) to capitalist society, and of existence 'both inside and outside the West'(ibid 30).This fact alone suggests that critics should not expect to recover a unitary Muslim identity in America: it is not possible and has never been possible to have Muslims speak with a uniform voice although they can organize in unity to advance their material interests. A relation of "dependency" to the capitalist system might suggest that the popular music through which Muslim identities are expressed is funded by huge capitalist companies, and these companies can encourage different forms of Muslim identities for an imagined as well as real difference in American and Moslem audience. Similarly, the relation of "antagonism" to capitalism that Gilroy talks about actually enables black popular artists to survive through a critique of the American dream that is seen to preclude Muslim aspirations.

It makes sense to agree with Ali (2005: 3) who argues that when analysing American popular music in search of the sites where Muslim identities are composed, disseminated and consumed,

critics need to acknowledge the various identities that the music can express. For example, Ali suggests that "unless we rid Hip hop of all its Jahiliya (ignorance) elements, we can only expect more sharp minded but misguided youth to perish over territorialism, materialism, and the pursuit of the sensual path"(200:3). The understanding of the hip hop culture by Black Muslim youth in America suggest that it is not easy to renegotiate new identities, particularly in a politically poisoned context in which to sing against the wrongs of the American state is to invite the appellation of 'terrorist'.

This study intends to go beyond the absolute assertions in written literature by critics of Islamic popular music who have tended to explore open modes of rebellion in black communities of America. There are other new discourses of Muslim identities produced in Islamic-inspired popular Black hip hop music. These discourses focus more on the capacity of Black Muslim communities to help themselves improve their immediate communities. The themes handled in these popular musical genres emphasize social themes such as the meanings of human existence and places the notion of what is political in a different light.

2.3 Popular music and Black American culture

American popular music expresses itself in various genres, too numerous to include in a single study that focus on hip hop genre. This genre cannot be identified as a single entity without undermining an understanding of the complex mutations that have taking place in the hip hop culture either as verbal texts, or as located within a particular region in America. Therefore, one of the major theoretical hurdles in the study of American popular music is the assertion of its collective identity. While black oral cultures emerged from slavery and the protest against it, it was individuals within the black collective who originated specific songs which were then further elaborated into different directions by new artists. In other words, American popular cultures recognize the individual creativity of black musicians, innovation, and change. It is important to note here that Islam is as old as the beginning of the American dream (Farmer 2001). Although at different times, it did not have the kind of prominence that it shares today, Islamic religion and Muslim identities are not new to America. European Christianity, Islamic-based faiths and Black secular cultural believes collided to create the distinct identity of American Muslim identities that is marked by cultural appropriations and integrations. It should, therefore, be expected that that black American musicians who have embraced Islam do not all

share similar motivations when they act in real life and also that their vocabularies through which they understand what America means to them are different. As the Islam scholar, Akbar Ahmed reiterates, there are, in fact, varied versions of Islam promoted by Black Muslim popular singers of America who are marked out from each other by uneven levels of understanding the phenomenon of Islam. The singers' mastery of the values embodied in Islam is also unevenly distributed differently depend on exposure to Islamic religious and their specific life experiences. Ahmed (1992) argues that in its interaction with Western cultures, Islam can be directly confrontational, ambiguous and even acquiescent of the values of the west.

Amani Perry adds that the fragility of hip hop music based on Islam is that the workings of capital in America has, to some extent denied the music full elaboration of its 'radical' ethos since implantation of certain preferred meanings over others results in;

> The manipulations of capital, media, and record company distribution,the ruthless promotion of some acts to the disadvantage of often musically superior ones, the commodification of black female bodies, and the grotesque marketing of racist images of black male violence threaten to completely overwhelm the public face of hip hop. (Perry 2004:7).

The possible control and 'manipulation' of black musical lyrics can ironically be promoted by the music industry under the guise of a superficial discourse of resistance. Writing about the resistance in black American music, Lawrence Levine comments that Black Muslim youth are not always singing about the need to overthrow the capitalist American system. There are other aspects of life that Muslim youths sing about. Levine argues that in black American music, "protest has been too easily depicted in exclusively political and institutional terms."(2006:587). Levine warns that

> By searching too narrowly for signs of political consciousness and revolutionary activity …we have missed other manifestations of their group consciousness sense of pride, and use of their culture to define themselves and comment upon their status. (Levine 2006:587)

Not only have black American popular musicians had uneven levels of ideological consciousnesses of the values for a new society and world; the singers have different ways of handling the linguistic resources that mark out their individuality. The singers reflect different levels of borrowing from the very capitalistic system and sometimes white American cultures that the black musicians often sing about ridiculing. The singers are constantly re-inventing their own black musical tradition rooted in the Negro spirituality, but that they recreate new traditions (Maultsby, Burnim & Oehler 2006: 7). Levine reiterates the fact that instead of searching for a single Muslim musical tradition among black Americans, we should acknowledge 'songs learned in the singing, unrehearsed… [but] principles governing the birthing and execution of a song, its own parameters defining the range and use of the vocal instrument, and its own roles for singers within the group.'(Levine 599). Innuendo, hidden meanings as well as palpable political meanings are encoded in the lyrics of Lupe Fiasco, Nas and Mos Def. A further challenge in seeking to understanding black American music is that in analyzing lyrics we are dealing with dry words; the singers use extra-linguistic features such as voice, mime, rhetoric and other non-verbal signifying cultural apparatus. This study critically and closely analyses these para-linguistic features in order to establish how they have been used to create Muslim identities that challenge the hegemony of mainstream American white music such as rock' n' roll.

Singers are not only musicians; they are performers, film actors, DJs and producers. All these definitions impact on the potency of their musical meanings. Sometimes, singers declare their political allegiance in open ways. For example, Lupe Fiasco – born Asalu Muhammed Jaco in 1982- is unapologetic that he has embraced some aspects of Islam and Muslim culture; he brings the significance of Islam in his musical career when he says

> Well, I was born Muslim, so Islam plays a part in my life and everything I do, to a certain extent. I'm not like the poster boy for Islam…I still got my flaws and stuff like that, so I don't really wear that on my sleeve…I don't go to clubs, I don't smoke you know like my whole –the whole groupie is shut down" (Wikipedia 2008: 3).

Against the stereotype of Muslim youth as violent, Fiasco does not club, drink, do drugs, smoke and take heroin. Fiasco's Muslim identities are defined by images of a role model; however, this does not mean that Fiasco is incapable of subverting and offering a critique to the rabid

materialism of America. His own career spans from being a rapper, actor, and he is more credited for promoting "socially aware rap music" (Wikipedia 2008:4).

While hip hop is essentially black music with distinct characteristics such as the music's primary language which is African American vernacular English with music traditions rooted in African American orality, the music has accepted 'literary contamination' or mixing of cultural values as creating the lyrical space for creative regeneration. Thus, "Even with its hybridity: the consistent contributions from nonblack artists, and the borrowings from cultural forms of other communities, it is nevertheless black American music. (Perry 2006: 10). Perry subverts any attempt at essentializing black music in America when she argues that,

> In the midst of a consumer culture that
> glorifies violence and eschews intellectualism,
> hip hop has both spewed American vices on
> the airwaves and aggressively introduced progressive
> politics, compelling artistic expression, emotion, and
> beauty into popular culture" (Perry Ibid: 2).

Asadullah (2003:1) corroborates the above view when he notes that although black hip hop music rails against police brutality, inequalities, materialism in the black community, the rap culture of hip hop is not itself free of misogyny. Adisa Banjoko (2004) identifies this misogyny as the disrespect of women promoted through sexualized images of women and colour and the senseless killings that happen among black artists.

Gates' (1988) structuralist theory has been used to explore the constructedness of narrative in song, and its emphasis on the capacity of songs to signify meanings other than those intended - 'signifying monkey'- will be used to account for the instabilities inherent in the words-as signs used to represent Muslim identities in American popular songs. Floyd (1990) traces black American popular songs from the Negro spirituals and insisting that during the Harlem renaissance in America, popular music by black people expressed the African-American desire for economic independence. The irony was that the production of the music was funded by white commercial interests and bosses who often had the power to insert preferred lyrics in black songs. Floyd (1995) further argues that despite patronage from white financiers, black American

popular music signified or generated meanings that always undercut the 'officially' intended meanings. Although black music had its origin in African-American oral culture, the music also absorbed cultural influences from white cultures whether Caucasian or Arabic; black musical art developed powerful syncretic modes of existence.

Furthermore, although black popular music was well-known in black communities, individual skills specifically shaped the musical repertoire of African music; differentiated individual compositions from African American musicians expanded the musical canvas so that what defines the music's politics from a stylistic perspective was its closeness to community rhythms as well as its capacity to deviate, innovate and accept cultural contamination, or promiscuity as its condition of continuance(Perry 2006: 10-12). Levine (2006) also adds that black music in America should be understood as addressing all aspects of the black people's lives; to perceive this music in this ways enables the critic to stop searching for narrow signs of visible political resonances.

Peddie agrees with this deepened notion of the relationship of music and politics; for Peddie, black music should be viewed as a 'complex dialectic where musical protest is as fluid as the audiences to which it appeals and the hegemonic structures it opposes'(Peddie, 2008: 1). This observation makes sense when it is remembered that gender, race, class and generational differences among black singers also determines the production styles and modes of musical reception among the black people (Aparicio 1998). The complex nature in which black musical genres evolved, and how they have sustained themselves enables them to be adaptive to the new themes when artists elaborate on Islam and Muslim identities to which many black youths are converting in America.

2.4 The "Popular" in American Muslim Identities

Instead of writing a monolithic Islam and Muslim identity within American popular music therefore, there are a plethora of versions of these identities. This understanding of Islam and Muslim allows for isolating of extremist and moderate ideologies that underpin Islam and Muslim identities. It is an understanding of Islamic human agency that rejects essentialism based on assumptions that black musicians' cultural and ideological understanding of Islam and Muslim cannot be individuated and the sum total of these alternative constructions represented as

what is truly countercultural discourses in writing about Islam and Muslim identities. It demonstrates an understanding of the functioning of narrativity in popular songs that rejects theories that project popular music as merely and simply mass cultures which are so pliant that they bend to every ideological dominant wind (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944). This study also modifies conceptions of the popular in 'popular music' that accords extraordinary power to ordinary people and to artists to fashion, and make their own identities outside the workings of historical processes within particular and given contexts. To imagine and argue that black Americans construct or make similar identities of Islam or Muslim is to adopt a position of culturalism which essentially romanticizes both the historical agency of the artists while misrepresenting by burying, the diverse values underlying Islam and Muslim identities, particularly after 9/11.

Hall reminds us that the lives of popular classes are informed by a constant dialectical struggle marked out by "the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there is always strategic positions to be won and lost" (Hall 1994: 460). This powerful argument puts paid the myth of the popular classes as passive onlookers onto the stage of history. It is equally, an argument that also criticizes the philosophical underpinnings of cultural critics who popularize the myth of the working class as a unitary voice, constantly engaged in struggle to realize similar aspirations. Gramsci, whose work significantly informs the analysis of Islam and Muslim identities in this study, believed that identities being constructed, and the black Americans whose musical compositions embodied these constructions, all have uneven levels of relating to the ideologies that define them. He says that "the subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified" and that there are responses to political processes and to the consumption of material goods are produced by elites are influenced by "their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own [and] the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character(Gramsci 1971: 52).

Therefore, in seeking to reveal the contradictory motivations of black Americans' different depictions of different identities of Islam and Muslim that obtain in American popular music,

this study subscribes to the view that the struggles for cultural representations of the Islam and Muslim identities by black artists of America take conflicting forms such ' incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation, recuperation." (Hall 1994:463). This mode of reasoning about the popular lends itself towards reading popular culture in multiple ways. It helps demystify the popular by attributing different and sometimes conflicting human motivations to the actions of those classes. In other words, with such an argument, this study on the constructions of Islam and Muslim identities, one can reveal complex meanings that can be described as Islam and Muslim.

2.5 The Theme of Islam in American Popular Music

Since the time of slavery in America, black people evolved the musical genre that they described as Negro Spirituals. While these songs mined themes on the quest for freedom, using biblical imagery, the songs were also secular in that they offered a veiled critique of the capitalist system that had forcibly brought blacks on the shores of America. From then, black musicians have continued using songs that have a religious undertone to attempt to come to terms with their subordinated life in a racial context. Popular music by black singers has used the figures of God, Muhammad and Jesus as narrative tropes of the quest for political saviours. Religious discourse has therefore been instrumental in helping African Americans in creating a new sense of community growing out of hundreds of years of domination by the white establishment. The songs to be analysed in this article are not exhaustive of the potential usage of religion in cultural struggle for freedom but they indicate the power of narrative in providing alternative ideological options for the black people in America.

The power of black popular music in shaping the cultural frames of references for the African-Americans in the United States of America has long been acknowledged by critics. Dubois describes the Negro spirituals as the 'souls of black folks', a distinctively black cultural creation which enabled them to imagine an alternative world outside the suffocating culture of slavery. Gilroy (1993) described the black music as an instance of the Black-Atlantic, and highlights the fact that this music grew to what it is today because it borrowed cultural resources from white Christianity, and other world religions. Collins situates the issue of black religious music in the context of Black Nationalism and writes that

One reason that religious expressions of Black nationalism have garnered support is that African American have long used religion and faith-based sources of resistance to racism. Unlike the use of religion by immigrant ethnic groups where practicing the traditional religion becomes an important site of a group's success in maintaining its ethnic heritage, for African Americans religion in general, Christianity in particular evolved in response to African American suffering under American racism. (Collins 2006:84).

If Negro spirituals used a veiled language to offer a critique of the American dream, Levine warns us from limiting these songs to the religious realm. He argues that although most Negro spirituals did emerge from the Christian bible, the songs were deployed in secular situations where the songs became the tool of struggle against racism in America. Levine further cautions us from generalising about this music when we describe their resistant ethic arguing that not all songs that resist do so in open ways. This view of African American religious music is reformulated by Elan for whom although the church is about faith, it also leads in the persecution of black women through organized religion:

Religion seems to honour woman only as submissive beings with no sexual desire while men are allowed sexual freedom. Then, like gangs, women are recruited in order to spread the guilt throughout families to maintain a level of control over the lives of people. They blindly recite passages and quotes without much thought blaming devils, demons and other entities, separate from our human identities, in order to create fear and faithful following(Elan 2007:432).

While religion may be described in certain situations as the opium of the people, African American people have often used it to reconstitute their communities in ways that emphasis collective identities and shared values. Watkins quotes Louis Farrakhan the spiritual father of Nation of Islam who insisted that there is a positive link between hip hop and religion. Farrakhan spoke encouraging Black youths to sing, but sing to enhance the betterment of African American lives and not its destruction. According to Watkins, Farrakhan praised Ja and his contemporaries:

God has given you a gift, the opportunity to touch so many young people when others can't...May God bless hip hop to rise to its full potential, to take the youth of the world and instead of making them instruments of death, make them instruments of peace (Farrakhan in Watkins 2005:5).

Some critics of African American music are agreed that the Black society have created its own distinct cultural symbols through music, and that these symbols are not entirely without external spiritual influences. For example, Raquel Cepeda(2006: 272) opines that 'throughout the hip hop's still embryonic life, Yoruba religious Philosophy and aesthetics have consistently informed graffiti art, fashion, rap music, and break dancing' Brazilian and Afro-Cuban religious tunes have also found their ways particularly from the Hispanic artists. Religion then, could be described as the structuring principle of African American music, even where it is openly defying the internal politics of America.

Perry (2004) and Cepeda(2006) have observed that the distinct cultural feature and foundation of America is the fact that it was founded on migrant cultures. Migrants came from Europe, Africans (came as slaves not migrants), and from Asia. Each of these cultural groups' modes of cultural existence has been assimilated by black people; ancestor-worshipping exists side by side with the following of Christianity and Islam. It is, therefore, not surprising that the strands of Muslim identities in black American popular music sometimes are articulated through a combination of religious beliefs. This study explores this element in the music, in order to reveal the positive values of religious syncretism in moulding Black Muslim identities in America.

2.6 Women in Islamic popular discursive constructions

Critics of popular culture in general and hip hop industry in America have not exhausted the debate on the meanings produced in the representations of black women in the American music. A variety of trends exists in the critical discourse on the subject; women have either been portrayed as morally degraded in songs. For example, literature on male-produced songs shows black women as the female vixen. These sexist terms identify women with being loose and dangerous. It is also ironical that in some female-produced musical women have portrayed themselves in ways that perpetuate the images of women as objects, financially greedy and morally reprehensible (Kendalls 2008: 1). Tricia Rose (1994) writes that the representation of

black women in musical videos is complex; it shows women's capacity for complicit as well as the desire to break out of the cycle of negative stereotyping. On the other hand, Imani Perry (2004) believes that there are black female American artists such as Queen Latifah who have consciously depicted black women in positive ways, showing only, how women can retrieve new modes of existence in song, and fiction as in real lived experiences. These four trends briefly sketched above are however, not always entirely mutually exclusive of each other. Rose writes that

> Cognizant that they were being constructed in the mainstream press as a progressive response to regressive male rappers, these female felt that they were being used as a political baton to beat male rappers over the head, rather than being affirmed as women who could open up public dialogue to interrogate sexism and its effects on young black women. Furthermore, they remain acutely aware of the uneven and sometimes racist way in which sexist offenses are prosecuted, stigmatized, and reported (Rose 1994:149-150).

Black women identify themselves with their men who suffer from racial discrimination in America. The paradox is also that the same black women are oppressed by their Black men and yet the Black women continue to support the social causes of black men which in some instances do not advance female interests. Tricia Rose captures this ambiguity in the lives of Black women in America when Rose argues that in several public contexts,

> women rappers defended male rappers' freedom of speech and focused their answers on the question of censorship rather than sexism rap lyrics. This is not to say that their evasive tactics are not in so far as they may implicitly sanction verbal attacks on women in rap. My point here is that women rappers cannot be situated in total opposition to male rappers; they support and critique male rappers' sexual discourse in a number of contradictory ways (Rose 1994:149-150).

Black women can "support and critique" male rappers, the above passage also carries with it that which is problematic about the criticism of representations of women in American videos; black women are accorded extraordinary capacity to defend themselves and their men because the

women are always "acutely aware of the uneven and sometimes racist way in which sexist offences are prosecuted, stigmatized and reported." The fact is that, not all women who participate in the hip hop culture care for their black men or are aware that they, the women are actually enslaved by the images they emulate. An exploration of female images in the female produced songs does not always endorse progress black Muslim identities. Sometimes women's bodies are rudely commercialized and consequently women debase themselves when they do not question such harmful images in the literature on Muslim identities.

2.7 Negative images if Black women in Male-produced musical videos.

Jennifer Mclune (2008) makes a bold statement when she suggests that

> Hip hop owes its success to the ideology of woman-hating. It creates, perpuates and reaps the rewards of objectification. Sexism and homophobia saturate hip-hop culture, and any deviation from these forms of bigotry is made marginal to its most dominant and lucrative expressions. Few artists dare to embody equality and respect between the sexes through their music; those who do have to fight to be heard above the dominant chorus of misogyny (Mclune 2008:1-2).

The clear expressions of "woman-hating" in music narratives include, but does not exhaust, the descriptions of women as sex objects, prostitutes, and mentally inferior people who have to strip their clothes, dance naked in order to earn the commercial recognition of big business in the music industry. Objectification of the female body in the male-produced artist guarantees profits for the male artists, and recording companies. Black Athena (2008: 1) suggests that

> "the common element in most Hip-hop video besides the use of expensive cars or liquors is their dependence on the use of barely clothed females whose sole role in the video is to gyrate provocatively while mouthing the artists' lyrics. The women employed in these music videos are used due to the sexual suggestiveness of their poses and the manner in which they move. These women are reduced to props. The reduction of females to

backdrops or props transforms them into sex objects whose only value is derived from their ability to tantalize and excite their fellow men".

Black Athena refuses to romanticise the identities and social experiences of Black women and instead insightfully reveals in some instances Black women are vectors in their own oppression. The Black women allow their bodies to be objectified so that even their musical voices are appropriated by capital to serve its commercial interests. It is true that some Black women have benefited financially and materially from this relationship with capitalism through which their music is funded for. As Levande (2008) also writes, the pornographic musical videos always assure the female singer big financial retains:

> The pornography industry in the United States generates annual revenues of $10 billion to $ 14 billion (Rich 2001, 1). The companies that profit from pornography, either currently or in the past, include: AT&T, Yahoo!, Marriott, Westen and Hilton Hotels, Comcast, AOL Time Warner, and Direct TV, a subsidiary of General Motors that was purchased by Rupert Mudorch's News Corporation (Levande 2008: 1-2).

While these companies realize mega-profits, the images of black women are constantly compromised. Taylor (2008:1) suggests that negative images of female Muslim identities are also created by women themselves:

> Everyone loves to blame rap for the way black women are portrayed in videos. Lets get something clear…no one in the rap industry has help these women at gunpoint and forced them to wear skimpy and revealing clothes! The black women that appear in rap videos laced in sexy and tantalizing lingerie, itty-bitty bikinis, or the latest in "prostitute-fashion", choose to do so!.

This passage is controversial because to shows that some Black women allow themselves to be abused by capitalism; at the same time, the passage also reveals that some Black Women also participate in the exploiting of other Black women who are in the music and video industry. In other words, when exploring the critical agency of Black women we need to go beyond gender

roles that women play in America and then depict the class struggles that are also waged in the community of Black women as a distinct gendered social group. Taylor actually argues further that Black women

> know, beforehand what role they will portray on have in the video! If its soothing they'll rather not to, they have the option of declining the assignment. No one forces them to dress or appear in sexually stimulating clothing, it's a conscious choice and/or decision that they make themselves. This shouldn't even be an issue! Why isn't anyone telling Hollywood movie producers, directors, and film-makers, to stop putting nudity in their movies! Why inn't anyone screaming about the way the women are portrayed in rock & roll videos!? They appear the same way, but for some reason, no one seems to have a problem with! Amazing (Ibid, 2008: 1).

Taylor hints on the complexity of the creation of female Muslim identities which are often as a result of larger forces that include the women themselves, the interests of capital in commercializing women's images. Taylor further writes

> Most of these women are either professional models or actresses, or aspiring models and actresses. Many of them use the "video-vixen" role as a mere stepping stone in launching their careers. Many former video vixens have on to become top-notch choreographers like Laurie Ann Gibson, whose best known for her work with Sean "P Diddy" Combs and the Bad Boys recording labels (Ibid: 4).

Taylor's comments suggest it would be too simplistic to argue that all Black women are driven into unequal and unethical relations with capital because all Black women lack the financial resources to live their lives without material stress. Taylor points out that other women "are bestselling authors like Karrine Steffans, largely known for her sexually controversial encounters with the "who's-who" of the music and film world, and her "tell- all" novels written elaborating on those encounters" (Ibid, 2008: 1). The complexity of Taylor's observation about how Black women participate in a music industry that threatens to undermine their economic freedoms is that the same women have appropriated for themselves the power to manipulate the glamorous

symbols of commercial hip hop to empower themselves materially. In other words, Taylor implies that rather than seeing downright oppression of Black women in the music industry in which they participate as divas, critics strive to come to terms with how women fight oppression in the same space that they ambiguously occupy as victim and victor. This point and observation is significant in the analysis of popular culture in which there are no clear and straight lines or straight jacket ways for understanding the complexity of human behaviour and what goes on in people's imaginations as the people interact different with different people in different social contexts. These points and arguments are what make popular music interesting for this present study.

That black women have been negative vectors in the denigration of the images of black women in American musical videos is also confirmed by Kendalls (2008) for whom black women artists have equally been infiltrated and in the past and, now participate in producing images that are hating and hurtful to themselves. For Kendalls, black female artists such as Trina have actively participated in legitimizing a visual discourse in which when artists are "hoes", colloquial for prostitutes; "Why continue to portray detrimental images of black women in hip hop videos when you have artists like Trina talking about how they are the baddest b* or Superhead talking about her own personal exploits and how she got rich not only dancing in rap videos, but sleeping with the artists" (Kendalls 2008: 1). The fact that one cannot generalize on the images of women in music videos is demonstrated in musical narrative video in which women are portrayed as near nude, dancing in seductive ways that slot the images of black women as 'bitches'. What is more important to note is that some women producers have been won over by capital's profit motive.

2.8 Muslim Women and the struggle for positive images

The dialectic of the black female image in music narrative is complex; while some critics argue as has been shown above that women sometimes wilfully participate in creating images that degrade them, other critics such as Tricia Rose(1994) re-interprets the female experience within male-produced videos in ways that undermine the notion that women are projected only as degraded humanity. When black women in male songs describe their "nakedness", they are accordingly trying to create a "resistance community"(Reid-Brinkley 2008:239) whose content shows people whose consciousness is made up of or pitched at different and, therefore, made up

of uneven levels of conscious resistance sensibilities: "yet even as parts of hip-hop culture draw on over-determined tropes of black gender roles, there is the possibility that those parts can be rearticulated or engaged in a subversive manner" (2008:24).

Perry also suggests the mere fact that black bodies appear on male-produced music videos is evidence enough that those women can lay claim to a physical as well as cultural space that in the past only patronized and patrolled by male authority. Furthermore, the exposure of female raw flesh on music video has been understood as a preliminary stage in the struggle by black females to reclaim their sexualities and the powers to shape new discourses associated with that process. Rose writes that "Black women rappers' public displays of physical and sexual freedom often challenge male notions of female sexuality and pleasure. Salt 'N' Pepa's rap duet "Shake Your Thang" with E.U., a prominent go-go band, is a verbal and visual display of black women's sexual resistance (Rose 1994:166).

The critic puts the black female's displays of her body in broader perspective when Rose argues that

> The black behind has an especially charged place in the history of both black sexual expression and white classification of it as a sign of sexual perversity and inferiority. It conjures a complex history of white scrutiny of black female bodies, from the repulsion and fascination with and naked exhibition of Sara Bartmann as "The Hottentot Venus" in the early 1800s to the perverse and exoticized pleasure many Europeans received from Josephine Baker's aggressively behind-centered adances. It is also a contemporary not to the substantial black folk history of performers and dances and songs that involve celebration of big behinds for men and women…In song lyrics the butt is talked about in ways that attempt to challenge racist assumptions that suggest it is an ugly sign of inferiority, even as it remains a sexualized sign (Rose 1994:166).

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Rose suggests that the vocabulary used to describe Blacks as being ugly, dirty and uncouth all belong to the dominant American Media that participates in diminishing the personhood of Black people.

However, Rose also suggests that Blacks have found a visual language to reverse the stereotypes of Blacks; instead of feeling put down by such descriptions as people with big buttocks, Blacks actually flaunt these protruding behinds as a way of reclaiming their physical identities that slavery attempted to rubbish. The question that arises when one follows this kind of argument is about the extent to which revising narrow representations of Black identities might or might not end up elaborating or confirming the very stereotypes of Blacks as made up of all flesh and no brains. On this point, Rose is flexible in her understanding of the agency of Black women and she argues that

> Because female bodies are especially scrutinized in this way, such explicit focus on the protruding behind in black popular culture counters mainstream white definitions of what constitutes a sexually attractive female body. It also serves as a rejection of the aesthetic hierarchy in American culture that marginalizes black women. American culture, in defining its female sex symbols, places a high premium on long thin legs, narrow hips, and relatively small behinds (Rose 1994:166).

Furthermore, Rose reads resistance to white forms of describing the agency of black women when she points out that the vast majority of white

> female television and film actresses, musicians, and the highest paid black models fit this description. The aesthetic hierarchy of the female body in mainstream American culture, with particular reference to the behind and hips, positions many black women somewhere near to the bottom. When viewed in this context, Salt 'N' Pepa's rap and video become an inversion of the aesthetic hierarchy that renders black women's bodies inadequate and sexually unattractive (Rose 1994: 167-8).

These passages suggest that black female bodies were constructed as the site of dirt, and the unattractive during slavery. In order to revise these dominant aesthetics created for blacks by whites, black women who appear on music video simultaneously confirm and interrogate the contradictory identities allotted to them. It is in this context that even the most pornographic and sexually 'repulsive' images of black women on music view can be viewed as staging a

subversion of what has come to be described as commonsense in black beauty. Black women can be said to have succeeded in creating the grammar of language that emphasises self-love, induces self confidence and leads to the recuperation confidence outside the male gaze, whether this is by black or white protagonists.

2.9 Literature on Muslim Women and the struggle for voice in female-produced images

The ideological movement from "video vixen" to musical trickster and subversive element and finally to reclaiming women's voice's in hip-hop is one which is not a straight-forward one. Few black producers who feature in their music videos and sometimes feature other women have insisted on the need to recuperate an intellectual space in hip-hop in which women cannot be objectified. Many critics of female participation in hip hop still show and argue that it is difficult for female rappers to be entirely freed to depict themselves in when ways that are not influenced or infiltrated by patriarchal ideology and which are not motivated by commercial interests to succeed no matter what(Moor 2008; Miller-Young 2008; Fitts 2008; and Brooks 2008). Nevertheless, critics such as Perry believe that female hip hop producers can wad off the dangers of being seduced by those discourses that objectify women in song, video and life. Commenting on Boss and Dee, Perry argue that their music video attempt to represent women in new ways that show respect for women. Perry writes that for women artists to be taken seriously they "must become subjects instead of objects" (2004:157) of their products.

2.10 Conclusion.

The aim of this chapter was to provide an extended background literature to the present study. It was argued that the most of the literature on Islam is stereotyped, showing Blacks and Arabs, and those who have acquired Muslim identities as violent. Part of the reason for this confusion was the failure to understand the differences between Islam – the religion-, and Muslim – identities of those who practice Islam. The chapter also provided literature on American popular music. It has been argued that there are many genres of black popular music through which Muslim identities can be expressed. The chapter emphasized the need to focus on hip hop genre because it is this genre more than others through which the acute differentiations of what it is to be Muslim can be

demonstrated. The chapter then discussed the themes of religion and the images around which the identities of Muslim are formed. The literature on popular music in America shows clearly that the singers themselves are aware of the different kinds of Muslim identities and that popular songs embrace themes that go beyond militant Muslim nationalism. This observation is important because another stereotype that has been exposed is that Muslim identities occur only in the political sphere. The realities are that popular singers also sing on Muslim identities that are constructed around gender inequalities in the black African American society.

In chapter three the study focuses on the lyrics of those artists who draw their artistic inspiration from the notion of Islam, and use it to construct militant and nationalistic identities for black African Americans. Primary focus will be on the lyrics of the band, Public Enemy, the lyrics of Talib Kweli and Paris.

Chapter Three: Nation of Islam and the manifestations of Militant Muslim identities in Black American Music

3 Introduction

Chapter two analysed the literature available on Muslim identities, the interface with popular American music and emphasised the constructions of Muslim identities through the themes of nationalism, religion and black women's struggle for voice. This chapter focuses on the manifestations of militant Muslim identities in the music of the band, Public Enemy, Talib Kweli and Paris. The chapter closely analyse the lyrics of these singers in order to demonstrate the diversity of views and varieties of discourses of militant nationalism in the constructions of diverse notion of political Muslim identities in the music that emerged, before and after 9/11. The latter is a time warp in the American history and it shall be demonstrated that popular music has redefined this historical moment as the music and artists were significantly impacted upon by the new politics that came out in the aftermath of 9/11 acts of terrorism in America.

On September 11, 2001 the American Twin Towers, and Pentagon were targets of what the American President, George W. Bush described as an act of terrorism on the American people. The so-called 'War on Terror' that ensued established a new world order in which America reserved the right to militarily intervene in any country in pursuit of the so-called terrorists. The Taliban of Afghanistan fell. Saddam of Iraq was hanged. Muslims all over the world became enemies and/or were perceived as potential enemies of the American State. American official media created and continues to reproduce the image of Blacks and Arabs and their Islamic religious identities as objects of attack and derision. However, in America, Black Muslim popular singers have generated a counter-narrative seeking to provide 'alternative viewpoints' on Muslim identities.

9/11 is a date in American history and recent memories that marks the intensification of the challenge of the ideology of 'war and terror' by black artists. The after math of the 9/11 also inaugurated a new morality in which artists and democratic voices were subjected to extreme control by the government probably more than before. Part of the reason is that most black popular musicians – though American by citizenship – do not feel included in the definition of being part of an American nation. There are noticeable and different tendencies in musicians

who adopt strategies of resistance to the American state that the artists view as practicing terrorism on its own people. The lyrics from the music of Public Enemy, Talib Kweli and Paris are most trenchant in their critiques of American domestic and foreign policy in the period before as well as after 9/11. A textual analysis of the music can help uncover the degrees of social resistance in the music that proclaims itself as not only a crusade against the American ideology of 'war on terror', but sometimes openly identifies its inspiration from Islam. While the lyrics of the selected artists demonstrate a quest for liberation of blacks from the perceived injustices perpetrated by America on its black people and the Arabs in general, the singers articulate their visions from contradictory ideological ground of being American, victim, and visionary artist for a better society.

3.1 Thinking through myths and music of 9/11

The quest to understand the role of Black music after 9/11 has created some myths that need to be dispelled. The first of this myth is the assumption that before 9/11 in 2001, there was no black music that offered political and incisive critique of the American society. The second myth is that all the singers composing after 9/11 are all Muslims. The third assumption in the mainstream white American media is that the singers' music is directed towards the promotion of the fundamentalist religion of Islam. In fact there have been very critical and important songs by Black musicians exposing the endemic violence in the American society. There has also been a negative and spirited repression of musical lyrics deemed to be pro-Muslim. The effect of this crack down among black singers has been varied. Peddie (2008) writes that black music has been resisting the restrictive measures imposed by the American State on black cultural creativity. This sweeping statement obscures the fact that some black artists connive with the American ideology of war on terror. However, the general feeling among black music critics is captured by *The Times Online report of November* 11, 2006 that opined that Hip hop and black artists are teaching young Muslims the ideology of radical Islamism through songs about the war in Iraq, the oppression of Muslim and the creation of an Islamic state governed by Sharia, or religious law (2008/02/26).

This oversimplification of the role of black music is contradicted by Khabeer's nuanced study in which different trends of black hip hop imagines different enemies. American Islamic hip hop is created by Black American Muslims who seek to comply with Islamic religious standards and

practices and whose current and primary audience is basically Muslims. According to Khabeer (2007; 126) the influence of some versions of Islam is visible in that, they 'restrict[s] the types of musical instruments used, generally does not employ expletives and frequently refers to issues of ideological import.' Other American black singers are integrated within the mainstream of American culture. Furthermore Khabeer differentiates the Sunni Islam artists who provide the reserve from which Muslim music emerges from 'immigrant Muslim musical traditions that is 'tainted by the political agendas and racial prejudices of immigrant Muslims and the governments of Muslim-majority countries (Ibid 2007).

In an interview with some hip hop singers, Alim observes that several of the artists testified to have been influenced by Nation of Islam. For example, for the singers "Islam served as a transformative force both in the personal lives and in the public roles of many Hip hop artists as community conscious agents" (2006: 46). For example Hi-Tek, one of the Black hip hop artist told Alim that, he, Hi-Tek " went to the Mosque…wanted to be a Muslim…Farrakhan and Malcom X, you know, that's what I was into…Knowing the realities of who I am as a Black youth."(ibid: 52). For Hi-Tek, Islam gives Black youths new identities, aspirations and positive ideals in the American society. Also, "J", another Black Hip hop artist testified that he became a member of the Nation of Islam after having read "*The Final Call* newspaper that the Brothers from the Nation of Islam got out to the communities" (Alim, Ibid: 53). Another black musician by the name JT said that Minister Farrakhan confirmed the importance of Islam in Black communities when Minister Farrakhan [said] "the rappers are the leaders" (ibid: 55). These names of the black African American singers provide some evidence of the influence of The Nation of Islam in shaping the musical sensibilities of the black singers.

However, in attempting to sample the varied responses of black music to 9/11 critics must be sensitive to the fact Black singers come from different class, social, gender, regional and generational backgrounds. These factors can enable some Black musicians to sing and compose lyrics that other Black African Americans in America may not be creating. Black musicians are also not always singing against the American state or in favour of Islam. Many singers still focus on social problems encountered in black communities that prevent them from sharing in the ideology of the American dream that ironically is promoted in some lyrics. Some black musicians are ambivalent; while their music justifies the bombing of the twin-towers, they still

recognize that they are Americans and as such, they are not always totally in agreement with the ideology of Islam in its extremist forms. And others, particularly female musicians call themselves feminist and believe that their music can expand women's awareness in a capitalist and patriarchal American society. They work within the validating hip hop male genre heavily patronized by male artists and the female artists use this genre to criticize the American system and at the same time to create space for themselves to engage the misogynistic tendencies in black communities.

3.2 Public Enemy and the black musical background to 9/11

Black music before 9/11 carries forward the black musical tradition of being a public counterculture (Levine 2006). The most specific identity of this counterculture to American racism is the paradoxical nature of the music; it is both dependent on and opposes American capitalism (Gilroy1993). It is born out of extreme forms of injustices for the black people, and yet it shares the general aspiration of individual success in the American dream. The music criticizes the very capitalist system that provides it with the technology to express itself. The musicians show uneven levels of understanding the object of their attack; American mass consumption is encouraged and yet subverted in the lyrics. For example, in Public Enemy's song, **Black Is Back**, blacks are still trapped in the ghettos, and the American government is criticized for victimizing blacks who refuse to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan in the so-called war on terror.

The artist tells off the government not to control the lives of ordinary Americans and imprison them in the ideology of a war viewed as benefiting elites. Musical Art is a tool of reprimanding and the singers chimes: 'Off my lips/Tell the scurred beware of them ghetto tricks/Tell the government/Please stay off my dick'. The authoritarian tendencies of the government are highlighted as exposed as undermining the individual freedom of expression. In the song, **Black Steel in The hour of Chaos**, the reality of the alienation of blacks is brought home through the persona who has been imprisoned for refusing to acknowledge the participation in the war on terror as a national duty. First, the singer-persona 'got a letter fro the government/The other day/I opened and read it/They wanted me for their army and, when the singer-persona refused he 'got sittin' in the state pen'. There is suggestion in the line I'm not a citizen' that America is a 'prison' in which the most basic human rights are eroded;

It occurred to me/The suckers had authority/Cold sweating as I dwell in my cell/How long has it been?/They got me sittin' in the state pen/Igotta get out – but that thought was thought of before…./I'm not a citizen/But ever when I catch a C-O/Sleepin' on the job- my plan is on go ahead/On the strength, I'm tell you the deal/I got nothing to lose 'Cause I'm goin' for the steel….

However, for the artist the condition of being 'captive' in the wider sense of being oppressed is the condition of possibility of struggle against the system that violates individual freedoms. *But I'm still a captive/I gotta rap this/Time to break as time goes intense/I got the steel in my right hand/Now I'm looking fot the fence*

While in the song, the protagonist escaped from the 'pen' or prison, music is another avenue through which marginalized voices can challenge the system. In ***Escapism***, by the group, Public Enemy there is open reference to the war on terror that the singer views as not benefiting blacks. The persona rejects the notion of participating in what he/she sees as an imperialist and senseless war in which American youths are perceived as being sacrificed for oil at the expense of their well-being in America:

Cause I want yall to know/Exactly what I said/ This so called war in Iraq/Over a thousand dead/That's about 10 a week/Even as I speak/33% of black males in jail/55% of black female will fail/85% of blacks forgot/We were slaves/Up inside this box/They don't even know that the blues is back/And when I rap is back to the roots

Capitalist America counts loss in dollars and profits. But the persona counts America's losses in human terms. The financial resources that should go into educating blacks are diverted to a war that most in the black communities to not approve of. The result is that poverty and ignorance is perpetuated in black communities. The disadvantage of the war is represented statistically; a third of blacks are in jail, more than half of the black women fail at school and ironically, due to low levels of consciousness within black communities, 85% are still enslaved mentally by the so-called ideology of the American dream, which in black communities is experienced as an American nightmare.

In *Rage against time*, the group, Public Enemy reveals that as part of executing a cultural genocide, the black people, suffer the most from HIV infection. There is even the conspiracy theory that White Americans would want to use AIDS as an instrument to wipe blacks: 'Who/ World Health Organised/Murderized/Came to aid got paid/Doctor doctor in the lab/Concocted a germ warfare to the booty/I rocked it/105million going down/In da ground/Most in da black an da brown/aw!' In these lines the war in Iraq and the germ warfare from AIDS are the nemesis of Black people's communities. The American state is thus defined as practicing terrorism on its black people. The staggering figure of 105 million black and brown people who die suggests that there is within the American society reactionary ideologies that are hell-bent to see the destruction of African-American lives.

3.3 Talib Kweli and the struggle against militarization of domestic life in America

If Public Enemy's songs can be said to reveal the cultural instabilities in black communities, Talib Kweli's music shows that political violence and acts of terrorism in America did not begin with 9/11. In *The Proud* Talib Kweli traces the roots and routes of terrorism in America by making the audience remember the unfortunate events that led to the Oklahoma bombings in which event several innocent lives were lost;

> *So everything's okay and all must be well/I remember Oklahoma when they put out the blaze/And put out Islamic terrorist, bombing on the front page/It's like saying get AIDS, propaganda/Like saying the problem is over when they locked the man up/Wrong it's just the beginning, the first inning/Battle for American soul, the devil's winning/The president is Bush, the Vice Presiden's a Dick/So a whole lot of fuckin is wha we gon' get/They don't wanna raise the babies so the election is fixed....*

Kweli removes the thin veil of hypocrisy in the discourse on democracy in America that suggests that Islamists are behind the political instability in America. The Oklahoma bombing was the work of a former white American soldier protesting against the republican policies that marginalize those who make America the mighty country that it is. The economic policies of President Bush, and his Vice –President Dick Cheney are isolated as having created the instability in the Middle East. Further, Bush and Cheney are depicted as uncaring because Americans die of AIDS on their watch. These social conditions are linked to the 9/11. Kweli is

boldly assertive that the American leadership was in the know about the possibility of the 9/11, and that the 9/11 was deliberately left to happen in order to allow Bush and Cheney to find a pretext to wage a war on Iraq so as to have unlimited access to Iraq's oil:

> *'It,s in they job description to terminate the threat/So 41 shots in the body is what he can expect…September 11, 2001/Terrorist attack the Pentagon and the World Trade Center/Kills thousands and permanently scars Americas false sense of security/As firefighters, police officers, rescue workers/And volunteers of all sorts, fight to save lives/The world will never be the same again'*

The cynicism of oil magnates is shown through the fact that Americans were sacrificed. But the events of the 9/11 also showed that America is not invincible. America is vulnerable although it insists on what the singer views as the 'false sense of security.' The bullying tactics of America is depicted as rendering the world to be an unsafe place to live. In ***Ghetto After life,*** Talib Kweli suggests that at a domestic level, the African-Americans are wrongly persecuted for crimes that emanate from the discriminatory structure of the American society. For the singer 'These niggaz aint thugs, the real thugs is the government/don't matter if you independent, democrat or republican.' The inference here is that although America champions itself as a democratic government its weakness are manifest through the way the country's leaders treat the minority black people. But Kweli also reveals that there is now in America also a new class of black elites who have joined hands with white executives to exploit the poor blacks. Kweli problematises the identities within black communities and refuses to see in it an essentialised and collective community without its own contradictions:

> *Niggaz politickin the streets, get into beef/Start blastin , now a new ca is executive chief/With a passion for heat you get, blast in your seat/Die before you crash in your jeep, never   passing in your sleep/Like an old man, you aint a fool you got a whole plan/To conquer territories like Europeans who stole land/The future of your whole fam'hang in the balance/You the king and your block is the palace/Ya'll niggaz is the parliament, untouchable spot unrushable/Keep your weight wet, call in to save a buck or two/Get mad , who the fuck are you? What you gonna do?....*

Kweli suggests that the identities of blacks are not static, and that it is simplifying to describe blacks as victims of the ideology of American liberalism. Some blacks have become part of the 'untouchable' while others have been condemned to a life of perpetual poverty. Kweli and Public Enemy therefore use their music to suggest that before 9/11 there were within the American society ingredients for potential self-destruction.

The treatment of people of colour in America reveals that the domestic public sphere is also tense with social expectations of the majority of the minority blacks not satisfied. There is an inference that 9/11 could have come from a country imploding from within. That 9/11 was carried out with some Arabs who had become citizens of America further confirms the idea that the contradictions in American social life are irreconcilable and that unfortunately they could only be resolved through drastic acts such as through acts of terrorism whether this was internally or externally induced. This language that's emanating from the black popular singers that America is largely to blame for the 9/11 has come under severe assault in the post 9/11 where state agents haunt artists whose lyrics are not agreeing with American foreign and domestic policies.

3.4 Censorship of Black Music after 9/11

Senator John McCain wrote in a foreword to the book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories can't Stand up to the Facts* (2006) that:

 As Americans…we liberated Afghanistan from the murderous rule of the Taliban, our attackers's proud hosts. We chased Al Qaeda around the globe….The terrorists who attacked America were clear about their intentions. Osama bin Laden and his ilk have perverted a peaceful religion devoting it not to the salvation of the souls but to the destruction of bodies. They wish to destroy us, to bring the world under totalitarian rule according to some misguided religious fantasy. (McCain 2006: xii).

The vocabulary describing the new world order suggests that Americans are liberators, that Osama and those who practice Islam are destroyers. It is a clear world divided into infidels – the Muslims – and peace-loving people of the western world. The vociferousness of McCain's argument and his twisting of facts such as that those who destroyed the twin towers were motivated by 'misguided religious fantasy' help construct a new mythology that justifies

America's interventionist policy in world affairs. Chomsky wrote that 'the world regards Washington as a terrorist regime.' (Chomsky 2007: 2). America did not seem to have learnt much from the events of 9/11. Or rather, America leant how to impose its will on other races with deadly force and impunity. Chomsky further notes that

The national security Strategy declared that the United States – alone – has the right to carry out "preventive war": preventive, not pre-emptive, using military force to eliminate perceived threat, even if invented or imagined. Preventive war is very simply, the "supreme crime" condemned at Nuremburg. (Chomsky 2007: 36).

In the new world order, "preventive war" is the right to provoke other nations in order to create pretexts for invasion. Weapons of mass destruction can be 'invented' or 'imagined' and this alone can justify American invasion of Iraq. In the aftermath of 9/11, censorship on free speech, creativity and the undermining of individual rights by the American state have intensified. Neal suggests that the more benign forms of censoring the black popular culture is through

> 'corporate annexation of black popular music…a process that placed significant constraints on black expressive culture [since] black popular music was no longer solely mediated by the communal masses within segregated black locales, but mediated by Corporate America's own mercurial desires for the marketplace'(1998:65).

Chang further underlines the contradictions within black hip hop that make it amenable to commercial forces when he argues that 'Hip hop began as a way for ghetto youth to refuse anonymity, to escape enforced marginalization' and yet in the present,

'The hip hop Generation could come under more surveillance because of the October passage of the USA Patriot Act. The Act authorized the federal government to install its controversial Internet monitoring program Carnivore. The program tracks and makes copies of all of an ISP's traffic, including web and email and uses filters to sort out irrelevant content…The Patriot Act now provides cover, under a sweeping definition of domestic terrorism' for federal officials to further harass hip hop activists(Chang: 2008: 3-4).

Snow writes that in post 9/11 America the twin forces of censorship and propaganda are used to divert creative artists from criticizing the failings of the government. For Snow, authoritarian values are winning over democratic values 'Censorship ends the free flow of information so essential for democracy and makes dissent less likely. Propaganda injects false, misleading, or slanted information into the media in order to influence the behaviour of populations (2005:103). The paradox is that popular music is also implicated in sustaining the status quo, especially when it colludes with the state in shutting avenues of democracy dissent. The fact that music in particular and media in general cannot be taken for granted in post 9/11 is also revealed by Miller (2002). He appeals to the American government to make sure that security management systems must not compromise the freedoms of expression and association that people share as citizens of America. Conservative American politicians such as Richard Posner argue for the infiltration of information and control of the private lives. Posner blames the 9/11 mainly on inadequate sharing of intelligence among different intelligence agencies and thought a more centralized intelligence structure is an indispensable part of the cure'(Cooper 2006:94-95).

The emphasis on intelligence, security and control of information in the post 9/11(Levi & Wall 2004; 194-220; Straetmans, Verschoor & Wolff 2008 17-42; Carroll, Wichman, &Arkin 2006: 289-290; Plant 2004: 293-305) impinges on academic freedom(Knopf-Newman 2006:101-108) and undermines discourses of democracy(Mummery & Rodan 2003:433-443), associated with new globalized identities of Muslims(Abushouk 2006:487-505). According to Mary L. Shapiro, this condition of 'new normal' (2002:5) where information is strictly monitored has encouraged cultural workers to vigorously question the values underlying the ideologies of the war on terror propagated by the American government. One such cultural worker is the American musician Paris who uses his songs as a 'lyrical sword' (Banjoko 2004) to challenge the American system.

3.5 Black music and militant cultural nationalism after 9/11

The assault on America's interests in the homeland and in Africa and the disproportionate violence in response to it by the American State has shaped American popular music in very contradictory directions. Perry (2006) for example, initially suggests that Hip hop is essentially black music with distinct characteristics. While the music's primary language is African American vernacular English, its political location is distinctly ascribed to black people, and their music traditions rooted in African American orality. Perry believes that 'even with its

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hybridity: the consistent contributions from nonblack artists, and the borrowings from cultural forms of other communities, it is nevertheless black American music. (Perry 2006: 10). The critic refuses to essentialise black music in America when she argues that, 'in the midst of a consumer culture that glorifies violence and eschews intellectualism, hip hop has both spewed American vices on the airwaves and aggressively introduced progressive politics, compelling artistic expression, emotion, and beauty into popular culture"(Perry Ibid: 2).

An important aspect of the militant nature of black hip hop music is its capacity to balance "American vices" with 'progressive politics" of identity renegotiations in black Muslim communities. Asadullah (2003:1) notes that black hip hop rails against police brutality, inequalities, and materialism in the black community. Ali (2005: 3) argues that "unless we rid Hip hop of all its Jahiliya (ignorance) elements, we can only expect more sharp minded but misguided youth to perish over territorialism, materialism, and the pursuit of the sensual path."

In many ways Paris's new CD, **Sonic Jihad** can be viewed as an attempt to deal with the contradictions of being black and Muslim in America. It can be viewed as a way to chart "alternative viewpoints" set against the characterization of Islam as a violent religion, and Arabs as people prone to 'senseless' destruction when forging new identities. Paris's lyrics can be viewed as radical in so far as he attempts to redefine the role of hip hop; to use it to confront the excesses of power entrenched in the American notion of an imperial presidency. His music also struggles against attempts at containing/controlling his voice by both politicians and the musical industry (Chang 2005).

3.6 Paris' Sonic Jihad as Black Islamic Militant counterculture

Swedenburg (1996) has observed that there have not been incisive studies on the relationship between Islam and rap music in culture. The image of Islam as a senselessly violent ideology is what mainstream American media has privileged in projecting. And yet, Islam has been an important source of values associated with peace (Fidai 1991; Shad 1990 & Islamic educational Organisation of Southern Africa 2000). Islam has also been instrumental in promoting the politics of resistance of ordinary Americans to their own Government, of fighting oppression of women by men, and promoting awareness of the need to challenge America's global hegemony (Cassiem 1992; Swedenburg 1996). The title of Paris' CD, 'Sonic Jihad' identifies as its political

provenance, the need to fight through music all that which diminishes the personhood of black people in general, and followers of Muslim in particular. Paris also engages with issues of black people's spirituality, and their lived experiences in order to "…dispense with labels like fundamentalism, extremism, ethnic absolutism, irrationalism, myth and racism."(Swedeburg 1996:13).

In the song, *Life Goes On*, Paris sings that there is a real need for blacks to consciously defy the death-promoting politics practiced by the American leaders. In the lyrics, the oppressed blacks are enjoined to keep their heads up and defeat the forces that encourage the weak to succumb to the dictates of what Paris sees as the evil values of most American leaders such as Bush and Cheney.

> *From the Atlantic to the bay, what? Life goes on/To all my people gettin' paid, huh? /Life goes on/Never fogettin' where you came from, Life Goes on fa'sho/Now keep on strivin' and survivin' don't let life get down on you/Forget these haters that betray mistakin' kindness for a fool/Keep your head up don't get fed up, keep on doing what you do…./Now that's one too many times more than three had to die 45's got to spittin/6:30 was the time , 7 years gone by, 8 of us done been deceased/9 times outta 10 somebody bleeding in the streets/Tell me whats the reason? Trial dates the 10th/These juveniles in wild life smile upon your death.*

In *Life Goes On,* Paris continues to explore the theme of police brutality on black people. However, in the song Paris also looks inward into the Black Muslim communities to expose the levels and extent to which they have been corrupted by the ideology of violence promoted by the American government under the guise of promoting peace and democracy in the world. For example, a cycle of violence is established and continues to play itself in *Life Goes On* even when the black people turn on each other, killing one another; *'Everybody chasin' dough, if them aint your folks, then here we go/If we ridin', then lets ride, do –or die, homicide/ But tell me the reason for lost lives/Could it be we all caught up in a scandalous system?"*

These moments of introspection on black lived experiences in America reveals how the American mainstream ideology has constructed blacks as murderers or perpetual children always needing the Whiteman's moral guide to prevent black people from completely sliding into bestiality. It is to the credit of Paris, to suggest as does in *Life Goes On* that there is no need to romanticize the experience of black people; they are also capable of inflicting pain on each other. This is so because blacks fight among themselves in pursuit of crass materialism to the extent that some blacks are 'takin better care of their cars then of their kids'. 'Juveniles in wild life smile upon your death/ Went from kids to killas, fun lovin' to felonies could it be /We self-destructin in this rush for the cheese.'

In *Life Goes On*, the power of Paris' lyrics is the song's capacity to offer a candid critique of lives as lived by black people. Paris' song is a distress call for the blacks to confront their weaknesses and change their identities and images for the better. Thus, when Paris sings *'No matter what they say or do, I aint never givin up on you' he attempts to suggest an alternative lifestyle free from violence for the black people. Paris also suggests that his 'spitting cynide'* should also result in a radical re-arrangment of the dialectic of life in the black communities; if white America is violent on blacks, blacks themselves must rise above violence among themselves so that the blacks do not reproduce patterns of slavery among themselves.

The desire by Paris to forge a national consciousness within the black communities is emphasized in the song, *Evil.* The song elaborates the values underlying the inspiration of Paris as an artistic. Guerrilla Funk is a fighting music. It confronts police brutality on blacks, perforates the myths of the war in Iraq as a war of necessity. Guerrilla Funk, as tonalised in *Evil*, is meant to provide the grammar of human conduct for the singer and black audience who want to emerge out of the exploitative relations that this community has endured over five hundred years. Paris further sings in *Evil***:**

> *It's a Guerrilla Funk –orchestrated counter attack/Formulate and infiltrate'em so the people react/See if I was wicked I would pick and stick to a plan /To rule the world and trick'em, this is how it began…./Control the content of the lyrics, now only the sound/Of*

se,dope andmurder in a song is allowed/Tell'em "Niggas ain't shit" every move that they
make.

For Paris the musical movement of Guerrilla Funk is akin to a political ideology and it articulates the philosophy informing his lyrics. He stated in an interview with *IslamOnline* that his jihad or struggle is against misogyny, mindless violence and drug culture within black communities. Significant to note is that Guerrilla Funk refuses to have the voice of the Blacks submerged by oppressive laws passed after 9/11. Guerrilla Funk is therefore an act of remembering not only the misdeeds meted on blacks; it is a musical counter culture attempting to fashion an alternative narrative discourse of freeing the mind from the fetters imposed by the warlike institutions of official America. Paris articulated the philosophy informing his lyrics when he stated in an interview with *IslamOnline* that his jihad or struggle is against misogyny, mindless violence and drug culture within black communities. He views his mode of musical insertion as contributing in generating a counterculture that is based on

> *Waging righteous warfare through music/and print on the oppressor….I try to offer*
> *solutions to a lot of what I discuss as opposed to just speaking on problems. I cover the*
> *War on Iraq/War on Teror, Black on Black violence, police Brutality, Money*
> *ManagementReal Estate tips, The Death Penalty,Bush, Aids…(Paris in Asadullah*
> *2003:3).*

The CD, **"Sonic Jihad"** explores the interstices of American societies through the themes of struggle against American oppression, 'war on Iraq', 'war on terror', black on black violence', 'police brutality' and death penalty, and the scourge of Aids that ravages black American communities, the most. The song, ***What Would you do*** is probably the most radical song on the CD, **Sonic Jihad**. In this song, Paris can be said to provide an alternative interpretation of the 'war on terror' Paris urges the listeners to his music to not "…close ya mind- so they shape ya." Listening otherwise (Chow 1993: 382-399) entails the capacity to go beyond the official American Government's propaganda that the 'war on terror' was forced on America. The listeners to this track are urged to fight official and self-censorship – but continue "…fightin' devil state mind control.' Here, Paris suggests that radical and committed art must struggle to

create awareness among listeners that that are various versions of truth to any statement and that truth is an ideological category as it is dependent on the singers' standpoint.

For Paris, the truth of the American nightmare is that blacks had been for centuries subjected to various forms of oppression such as slavery; the new form of subjection is the lack of concern displayed by the American government regarding the problem of AIDS that afflicts black communities. But, Paris goes further to accuse the American government for not caring about the lives of a majority of Black people and in the process reminding the black folks that their problems are manmade: "Don't forget they made us slaves, gave us AIDS and raped us." Furthermore, when blacks vent their problems , the American State choses not to listen, for listening is subversive, it will force white America to improve the lives of the lot of blacks, which is what the American government is perceived by Paris as not wanting to do, hence, "Niggas talking loud but aint nobody sayin shit."

When mainstream white American-controlled media passes the blame on war on terror on Arab youths and the Muslim religion, Paris provides a compelling argument that in fact it is the American State that is a terrorist State. For Paris, the attempt by the state agents to muzzle his voice 'warning me about Osama' constitutes the suppression of freedom of expression. More importantly, Paris suggests that the events of 9/11 were orchestrated by the American secret agents to "…Make an enemy Of Phoney evil so the government can do it's dirt." The motivation for the American government to kill its own people is given by Paris as the desire to satisfy and aggrandise more wealth, particularly to exploit Iraq reserves of oil, and Afghanistan gas, hence, "Oil blood money make these killers ride cold Suspicious suicides people dyin' never told." Here, the American ideology of an imperial presidency who has to push the imperial economy agenda to control the resources of other countries in the world is deplored. The American mainstream media is further implicated in reporting falsehoods and sometimes 'narrowcasting' outright lies in order to satisfy the profit motive; hence "while Reichstag burns see the public buy it I see the profiling see the media compliance War is good for business see the vicious make a savior."

While the mainstream media may not start the war on terror, the same media benefit by reporting on that war. In this sense, there is an unholy alliance between the American government and the mainstream media through which it attempts to channel people thinking process into a grove.

Popular music as seen by Paris can then help citizens to understand the truth because the mainstream media has been infiltrated by state agents. Another theme that comes out of **What Would you Do**, is about American state terrorism on its people. Not only does the State misinform its people (both white and black) about important issues in the American society; "Ain't nothing changed but more colored people locked in prison" Here, a state of war is declared on one section of the American population; the blacks have suffered under slavery and this has continued in new forms. The ideological power of the song comes both from the tone of the singer, attacking his own country, 'spitting cynide' as well from the recurrent question to the listeners about what they would do, if they knew that "…the one with the most gain to gain (Bush)/'Fore 9/11 motherfuckas couldn't stand his name (Bush)/ Now even niggas waiving flags like they lost they mind." Blacks are also depicted as being in complicit with state politics of preventive and not pre-emptive wars that hurt the economies of the countries in the world. In **Tear Ship Up** the evils against humanity perpetrated by the American government are enumerated and constitute a silence genocide on the Black Muslim communities. Police violence on blacks is registered through 'sticks and shots', black youths fill the prisons it seems " the more a nigga build they wanna take away' Black lives are constantly under surveillance and choked by 'police and poverty' in the land of plenty. For Paris, there is no democracy in America when blacks suffer. It seems the singer suggests that the humanity of American civilization is judged by how the State treats black people. The irony is that in a country that preaches democracy, 'nowadays radio makes it harder to bring Real shit to people.' Government ideological state apparatus such as the media have been domesticated. The media has been imprisoned just as the 'Black bodies in the pen, [when] they put the men into prison turn women to whores [and ignore cries of the people.'

The laws themselves are discriminatory, do not protect '22 generations of genocide.' In other words, Paris suggests that genocide takes place also when a whole section of the black people is denied fundamental basics, like good education, health and houses.

3.7 Paris' Artistic vision and the Quest for Justice

Apart from protesting the inequalities, police brutality and the assault on Black Muslim identities that followed 9/11, Paris believes in a kind of music that approximates social insurgency. Popular music is not only the military analogy of an armed guerrilla movement; it is also

implicated in shaping new identities. For Paris, Guerrilla funk can only vindicate itself as a radical statement of the need for social justice, when that music spreads social awareness among the oppressed to understand the source of their oppression and fight that source. Hence, in the song *Freedom* Paris characterizes the role of the musical artist as that of a "…soldier for life fo ' sho.' Progressive music such as Guerrilla Funk must interrogate the political assumptions of the American system that is based on the exploitation of the black people. Art, in this context becomes an ideological weapon that should be used for "…bangin on the system, ready to turn the heat up." In short, in the song, *Freedom*, Paris references as important the quest for freedom that is already cherished and immortalised in the works of Black African American heroes such as Malcom X, who was also one of the leaders of The Nation of Islam.

"Freedom"(The Last Cell Remix)

> *Freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom/This is how we ride and roll – solders to life fo'sho/Freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom/This is how we ride and roll – solders to life fo'sho x2….Still put a fist in - the system/Still kill a killa cop, we still win/Still be the one to expose the beast (when it's)/Still an American to be for peace (yeah)…./RBG,d up, yeah, ready to get freed up/Bangin' on the system, ready to turn the heat up/Malcom X cocktail, ready to burn the streets up….How I came into this revolution mentality/Comin' up in my hood, it's an everyday thang/Nigger is hungry and starvin' that's why niggers bang*

The social values informing these insurgent guerrilla funk are those that have already been espoused by revolutionary black leaders of the past. In 'Freedom' lyrics and sonics must escape the power of the censor and continue to "…rhyme under pressure.' The quest for freedom is born out of the desire to reject the impoverished lives that black Muslim communities are forced to live under, hence, 'My reality is poverty, police brutality/How I came into this revolutionary mentality/ Comin up in my hood, it's an everyday thang/ Niggas is hungry and starvin' that's why niggas bang.' It is important to explore the various options from poverty that the song *Freedom* advances. Niggas, or black people can bang, which is a ghetto *lingua franca* that means fight back or to wee. Black people can also recall the ideologies of cultural nationalism associated with the radicalism of Black panther movement that emphasized the beauty of the

black race, as well as the need to confront in an armed insurrection, the military complex of white America.

The radicalism of the CD, **Sonic Jihad** is complemented by some of Paris's songs found on the Album titled, ***The Devil Made me do it***. For example, in the song ***Escape from Babylon*** Paris raps of the emergence of 'real black leadership' who are prepared to fight (jihad) and die to realize 'true freedom, justice and equality in America'. In ***Escape from Babylon*** Paris openly identifies with the ideological solution to the American problem of racism of returning fire for fire that is promoted by the political movement of the Black Panther. For Paris, "Panther Power protects the citizen…it's a new direction/ Strength and unity, peace, protection/ One for Huey and the movement won't die/ and the strong survive, the Panther Power.'

3.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the reasons behind the radicalization of black music particularly before and after 9/11/. It was demonstrated that before 9/11, black singers such as Public Enemy and Talib Kweli composed hip hop music that criticized police brutality on blacks in America. The songs located the poverty of black people in the discriminatory politics of America. 9/11 marked the moment were the American government introduced open and sometimes hidden but draconian forms of surveilling artists, harassing them for singing against what the leaders termed American patriotism. In turn singers such as Talib Kweli and Paris upped their ante and coined songs that are most trenchant in their criticism of the so-called American 'war on terror', poverty of black people and the general neglect of Americans suffering from AIDS. More importantly, Paris's musical movement described as Guerrilla Funk took it upon itself to become a platform for conscientizing Americans against the contradictions of the domestic and foreign policies of America that work against the poor blacks and whites. Paris used his songs to suggest an alternative space on which black nationalist values can be elaborated. Paris' **Sonic Jihad** is indeed a radical collection of musical rhetoric.

 Through the medium of popular songs, Paris has challenged normative explanations that the war on terror was instigated by Islam. Paris makes a bold claim when he sings that the American government orchestrated the events of 9/11. What is radical in this claim is not so much the fact that Paris' argument cannot be verified by 'facts'. What is subversive in **Sonic Jihad** is that the

songs makes it thinkable to imagine that a government can put its people at risk for self-serving purposes such as the need to control oil in Iraq. Paris' CD, **Sonic Jihad** demands an audience that is prepared to listen differently, away from the patterns of musical consumptions channelized by the State.

Paris' songs are also bold in the ways they name police brutality as that which diminishes the humanism of the Black Muslim communities. The power of **Sonic Jihad** to renegotiate the identities of Black Muslim communities after 9/11 is that the music also forces the black communities to confront their weaknesses, such as drug abuse, and the exploitation of black women. More importantly, Paris's CD, **Sonic Jihad** occurs in the provenance of other songs found in other CDs that Paris has composed. In particular the musical struggle or 'sonic jihad' that Paris advocates is linked to the political movement of the Black Panther. The movement indicates that taking up arms against oppressors in America can be likened to a political process of internal decolonization. In short, renegotiating black identities in America through the medium of popular music means that Black Muslim communities must reject being classified as second class citizens in a country of their birth. Paris has appropriated the cultural resources based on the oral word from Black Muslim communities in order to advance political struggle that metaphorically is expressed as 'sonic jihad'. Paris also makes use of the technology made available by the very capitalist system in America that he uses to launch a critique of the system (Negus 2004: 534) In these ways; 'Sonic Jihad' is truly radical and revolutionary.

In chapter four we explore the lyrical compositions of black singers who use Islamic texts to construct diverse notions of the identities of Muslim-ness. The focus will be on the selected discography of Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface and Kanye West.

Chapter Four: American Islam, Christianity and the re-formation of Muslim identities in Black American hip hop music

4 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the study focused on some selected musical compositions by the group, Public Enemy, Talib Kweli and the music of Paris. It was demonstrated in this chapter that by and large the musicians' relationship to Islam was motivated by the desire to create narrative identities that contrast those offered in mainstream American public media. It was argued that the radical black militant sensibilities in the Islam-faith based songs can be traced to the solid foundations of nationalist politics of the Civil Rights era that the American blacks formed, and managed through such political organisations such as the Black Panther Movement and the Nation of Islam. The chapter also revealed the differentiated degrees of reliance on Islam among these artists who share more as less similar political convictions about the necessity to defend the cultural integrities of black communities in America

In this chapter, the study explores the role of the religion of Islam as a site from which black American singers have drawn cultural resources to mould enduring identities of the self and black community. The chapter discusses the influences of The Nation of Islam, the Five Percenters and American Christianity on the black singers' sensibilities. This chapter then analyses some songs by Lupe Fiasco, the self acclaimed Black Sunni Muslim, the musical lyrics of Mos Def, the controversial artist who situates his musical poetics in the tradition of the The Nation of Islam religious doctrine, presently propagated and headed by Minister Louis Farrakhan. The chapter concludes with an analysis of some songs by Scarface, the black American artist who has accepted religious hybridity as the condition of possibility for emerging personal and collective black communities' identities in a globalized cultural context. *'Jesus Walks'*, the song by Kanye Amori West is based on the Christian faith and is analysed in this chapter only as a counterpoint to Islam-inspired songs and also to reveal how African American religions supply cultural resources that singers use to affirm and critique the American Christian-based protestant ethics.

The singers in this chapter have been sampled because they all proclaim a relation with Islam, whether in practice or through their songs that they have created. Therefore, purposive sampling

has been used as the method or unit of analysis. However there is also the academic debate to be addressed in the chapter, and this relates to how religion has structured and filtered the experiences of American hip hop artists; its converse also relates to how the singers have selectively appropriated some concepts from Islam and transformed them in their composition to arrive at new levels of defining the self within the black communities using the cultural and spiritual grip provided by Islam and Christian values. The debate on the relationship between Islam and Christianity to hip hop being carried out in the Black American communities is further explored against the knowledge that individual artists possess different artistic temperaments, vocabulary and that the very nature of rapping and its forms of styling complicate any notion of single or essentialized identities for American blacks, before and in the period after 9/11.

4.1 Some manifestations of negative stereotypes of Islam in American dominant discourse

Dominant cultural discourses authorized in America have constructed the The religion of Islam as posing 'threats to American civilization' (Alim 2006:45). The distortions of what the core values of Islam are manifest in what Mamdani calls 'Culture Talk after 9/11' in which Islam is equated to the practice of 'terrorism as Islamic'(2004: 17). In the American culture talk all Moslems are described as bad, fundamentalist, pre- as well as anti-modernity (Mamdani 2004: 18). In mainstream American media the Quran, Islam's sacred text, is portrayed as containing values that promote hijacking, murder and terrorism'(Mamdani 2004:20). Rustomji (2007) discusses three negative elements that have been used to characterise Islam; its assumed sensual character, its assumed violent culture and assumed irrational character. According to Rustomji, some American critics who accuse Islam of being sensual use the figure of the *houri* or virgins explain the conduct of those who blew up the American twin towers. The assumed sensuality of Islam is used as explained as to deriving from the beautiful females who are rewarded to Moslems who commit acts of terrorism.

In this negative characterisation of Islam, the post-September 11th is framed using the excuse that the through the cultural and religious bias the figure of the *houris* provides human motivation for violent behaviour' (Rustomji 2007: 83). Discussions of the *houri* in dominant American media suggest that the use of 'houri as a reward for terrorist acts' promotes the assumed violent behaviour in Islam so that the irrationality of Islam is its assumed acceptance that it is heroic for Muslims to kill others to gain for the self (Rustomji:85). The depiction of Islam in negative

stereotypes is further underscored by Said who writes that in American and some European countries, 'for the right, Islam resents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the centre, a kind of distasteful exoticism' (Said 1997: iv). *The Jihad Watch* noted in 2006 that Islam is perceived as a 'tool for indoctrination' and promotes anti American values. Hunt's study shows that Islam is also depicted in America as anti pluralist and then referenced as possessing "core language, and traditional culture" that can no longer adequately account for modernity'(Hunt 2009: 581-582).

Furthermore in some American public spheres, the negative images of Islam as a religion are thought to be its staying power that is said to allow its symbols to be manipulated by Arabs, blacks and Latino youth to influence American blacks and the Latinos to promote 'moral declension of the United States'(Ogbar 1999:166). Mamdani summarises the potential philosophical and political implications of stereotyping of Islam when he argues that not only does this make Muslims targets by the US state: understanding of Islam is further fudged when culture is politicized: "Islamic terrorism" is thus offered as both description and explanation of the events of 9/11. It is no longer the market (capitalism), nor the state (democracy), but culture (modernity) that is said to be the dividing line between those in favour of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror'(Mamdani 2004: 18).

In the dominant American discourse on Islam, the war on terror is therefore morally justified, and Islam becomes the main casualty and Muslims have to self-justify their existence in America, a country that they lay claim to, as theirs too. The report of OSCE-ODIHR (2006) roundtable on the representations of Muslims in public discourse reveals how Islam is stereotyped as having negative influence on public policy. This religious intolerance within American culture then promotes a back lash on Americans who have assumed Muslim identities as the identities that they have chosen to live by. These converts to Islam are constantly harassed by State agents and discriminatory practices on immigration, migration, integration and multiculturalism has also intensified in America. These dangerous stereotypes of Islam that are constructed to limit the freedoms of Muslims are, however, critically and imaginatively interrogated in some critical works that link Islam to hip hop in America.

4.2 Islamic influences on black American Hip hop; a theoretical reconsideration.

 Set in opposition to images of Islam as evil that are promoted by the West, are incisive and insightful works by hip hop scholars who have noted how thematically, hip hop is heavily indebted to the moral teachings of Islam. Kirsten Grieshaber asserts that 'in post-Sept. 9/11, U.S., rap is used to express political protest and that Arab-American artists are becoming the new face of hip hop' (2008:1). Liu (2008) has also noted hip hop's link to Islamic influence and suggests that Black American artists display different degrees of consciousness about how much of their lyrics are grounded in the ideological values in Islam. The Islam-hip hop continuum of influence can be very close as in when artists loyally reproduce the poetic verses of Islam in their hip hop songs. On the other hand, critics also claim that some African American singers have consciously manipulated the cultural symbols of Quranic Islam to a point where they have inflected new meanings to its narratives of moral values when expressed in the genre of popular music For example, Clay views the dependency of Hip hop on Islam as demonstrating the capacity of a religion to provide the grammar of moral conduct for the collective black communities. Clay suggests that the values embedded in Islam the American Blacks artists – particularly after 9/11 – with the much needed cultural capital to "position people in a particular status hierarchy...and acts as a criterion for setting up boundaries and determining who is legitimate or authentic in a setting, excluding those that lack legitimacy."(Clay 2003: 1349).

Khabeer (2007:125) suggests that Black America Islam-inspired artists use Islam 'to preserve the Islamic identity of Muslim youth and to educate non-Muslims about Islam and Muslims.' Schumann (2007) observes that Black artists use Islam to interrogate other competing movements such as the dominant media discourse in America or other forms of symbolical narratives of Muslims brought into America through Immigrant or diasporic Islam of Muslims whose original homes could be Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt. For Schumann, the measure of success in the use of Islam in Black American hip hop would be when the blacks have created an 'Islamic language that articulates the distinct American experience to a global Muslim audience' ((2007:12).

The discourse of purity and authenticity in the use of Islamic ideas in American hip hop is contested as impossible to achieve at any time because musical discourses on their own draw the cultural resources from a range of cultural sources that include but are not limited to Islam. Forman (2002: 194) argues that black artists in America have used values embedded in Islam to attempt to challenge oppressive values in America and at the same time to suggest an alternative society underpinned by different values for America. He argues that the dominant discourse in America also works hard to infiltrate this Islamic hip hop mass movement and re-channel its energies in "a manner that reproduces the hegemonic structure...and reaffirms the prevailing social order of domination and subordination" (Forman 2002:194).

Ogbar samples the names of prominent black American singers such as "Jay-Z, Foxy Brown, the notorious B.I.G and other [hip hop]rappers as evidence of African American singers [who] have helped romanticize organized crime'(Ogbar 1999:167). For Ogbar these popular musical hip hop black figures have had their lyrics and indeed their ideologies domesticated by the official America discourse, despite the fact that these popular black artists are known in the Black African American communities as community leaders whose inspiration to music were in part positively influenced by the cultural movements of the Civil Right politics of the 1960s and the its cultural and religious dimension that found black community expression through the well-known Nation of Islam.

In other words, the question of Islam's influence on hip hop is not already decided or a *fait accompli*. The exploitation of the values in Islam can help define hip hop's infra-politics as "oppositional transcripts, [where] the 'unofficial truths' are developed, refined and rehearsed, *ala* James Scott's notion of the 'hidden transcripts' where 'offstage' dialogue can exists outside the scope of critique from powerful holders"(Ogbar 1999:9). But Stephens (1991) suggests that hip hop's propensity for double-voiced-ness, and its two tone-ness can result in some aspects of Islam such as the oppression of women suppressed or openly brought into question. Since Hip hop is conscious rap, it is capable of crossing racial boundaries and can begin to reconstitute some of the tenets of Islam away from the original philosophy as contained in the Quranic texts.

In short, although black artists may wish to achieve compliance of their art to Islam's moral coda, the specific nature of hip hop art is such that to 'preserve' some elements of it involves selecting some aspects of the faith, rejecting others, and then ordering them in a particular way.

The constructed-ness of the any symbolical narrative text of hip hop can be based on some aspects that have been taken from Islam and then are given prominence as the ultimate and correct interpretations of the Qur'an when in fact these selected aspects only demonstrate how much the artist is familiar with Islam. As Jhazbhay (2000) puts it, the Islam-hip hop dialectical link cannot afford to duck questions related to the fluidity in both Islamic values and the ongoing constructions of cultural identities of Muslim-ness in the popular hip hop songs.

In other words, Islam-hip hop relationship of influence are not one way; while artists use popular themes derived from the Qur'an, the artists' individual temperament can alter the meanings of found in the Qur'an. Trapp complicates the relationship between Islam and Hip hop when Trapp suggests that hip hop arts view themselves as organic intellectual, *pace* Gramsci, who should provide models and leaders in their communities: For Trapp, "Hip hop artists then are leaders of a social movement who *pull* and shape identity in their community and foment action for social change."(2005:1483). Trapp adds that Hip hop artists view themselves as exceptional men and women who pull their brethren from lack of knowledge of the workings of American racism.

Thus, by giving voice to the aspirations of the mass of Moslems, it is argued by Trapp that, hip hop artists push other black and African American communities to "see the inferiority of their position behind the veil....[and understand that] social injustice not only exists but also can be fought"(Trapp 2005:1484). Another important aspect of the ideological influence of Islam on American Black hip hop artists captured by Abdel-Alim reveals that "in a post-9/11, what we are witnessing is a massive movement of Muslim artists who are networked around the world through the power of hip hop culture, constructing the notion of a hip hop nation through nation-building practices and ideologies". (2008:1). Watkins quotes Louis Farrakhan the spiritual father of Nation of Islam who insisted that there is a positive link between hip hop and religion. Farrakhan spoke encouraging Black youths to sing, but sing to enhance the betterment of African American lives and not its destruction. According to Watkins, Farrakhan praised Ja and his contemporaries in the following words:

> God has given you a gift, the opportunity to touch so many young people when others can't...May God bless hip hop to rise to its full potential, to take the youth of the world and instead of making them instruments of death, make them instruments of peace (Farrakhan in Watkins 2005:5).

The notion of "nation-building" that hip hop can facilitate through appropriating practices and ideologies from Islam is not, and cannot be viewed as a monolithic Muslim movement. "From the beginning hip hop culture has been syncretic incorporating sounds and elements from radically divergent sources" (Wikipedia 2008: 1). Religious and cultural frames of references for African American black music has also been traced back to the negro spirituals or the "souls of black folks" Dubois(1973), a distinctively black cultural creation that enabled blacks to imagine an alternative world outside the suffocating culture of slavery. Hip hop also draws cultural resources from the Judeo-Christian mythologies in a relationship of dependency and antagonism (Gilroy 1993). Collins situates the issue of black religious music in the context of Black nationalism and writes that

> One reason why religious expressions of Black nationalism have garnered support is that African American have long used religion and faith-based sources of resistance to racism. Unlike the use of religion by immigrant ethnic groups where practicing the traditional religion becomes an important site of a group's success in maintaining its ethnic heritage, for African Americans religion in general, Christianity in particular evolved in response to African American suffering under American racism. (Collins, 2006:84).

This view about the link between African American ways of life and religious music is reformulated by Elan for whom although the church is about faith, it also leads in the persecution of black women through organized religion:

> Religion seems to honor woman only as submissive beings with no sexual desire while men are allowed sexual freedom. Then, like gangs, women are recruited in order to spread the guilt throughout families to maintain a level of control over the lives of people. They blindly recite passages and quotes without much thought blaming devils, demons and other entities, separate from our human identities, in order to create fear and faithful following (Elan 2007:432).

While religion may be described in certain situations as the opium of the people, African American people have often used it to reconstitute their communities in ways that emphasise collective identities and shared values.

For example, Islam scholar, Ahmed argues that there are in fact varied versions of Islam; that at least Black Muslim popular singers of America have uneven levels of understanding the phenomenon of Islam, that their mastery of the values embodied in Islam is also unevenly distributed. Ahmed (1992) argues that in its interaction with Western cultures, Islam can be directly confrontational, ambiguous and even acquiescent of the values of the west. Commenting on the fragility of Islam Hip hop culture in America, Perry also observes that capital has, to some extent the ability to deny the Islam-inspired music, its full elaboration of its 'radical' ethos through implantation of certain preferred meanings over others by the dominant American social values;

> The manipulations of capital, media, and record company distribution, the ruthless promotion of some acts to the disadvantage of often musically superior ones, the commodification of black female bodies, and the grotesque marketing of racist images of black male violence threaten to completely overwhelm the public face of hip hop. (Perry 2006:7).

The possible controls and 'manipulation' of black musical lyrics can ironically be promoted by the music industry under the guise of a superficial discourse of resistance.

Writing about the resistance embedded in black American music, Levine comments that Black Muslim youth are not always singing about the need to overthrow the capitalist American system. There are other aspects of life that Muslim youths sing about. Levine argues that in black American music, "protest has been too easily depicted in exclusively political and institutional terms."(2006:587). Levine warns that "by searching too narrowly for signs of political consciousness and revolutionary activity …we have missed other manifestations of their group consciousness sense of pride, and use of their culture to define themselves and comment upon their status(Levine 2006:587). Islamic hip hop makes use of complex allusions and metaphors to comment on the need for personal growth in the identities of the individual black American and their communities. Artists using Islam can originate complex vocabulary, develop an entirely

new lexicon not known or available in the linguistic repertoire of Islam or also creatively manipulate existent cultural codes in Islam so as to evade censorship of their music.

In other words, although the Qur'an has instances of poetry, this poetry is sometimes transformed by the imaginative power of the hip hop artist, so that after the composition of a hip hop song, it is possible that Islam itself is influenced, and its vocabulary expanded or split through "stripping down the melody, emphasising the rhythm, and incorporating mouth music, battling and vocal improvisation" (Wikipedia 2008: 1). As Swedenburg notes, there is simply not a relationship of 'affinity' between Islam and hip hop. Rather, there are "fractal patterns of [linguistic] cultural and political affiliation"(Gilroy 1991:3) that the "cultural critic interested in rap but who has not bothered to study the beliefs of Nation of Islam or the Nation of Gods and Earths will, of course, [will need to know too] catch the allusions.'(Swedenburg 2006: 3).

Expressed differently, Black American hip hop musicians can reveal uneven levels of understanding Islam and its moral precepts. Rapping as a form of cultural production depends on the singers has different command of the ways of handling the linguistic resources that mark out their individuality. Levine reiterates the fact that instead of searching for a single Muslim musical tradition among black Americans, we should acknowledge "songs learned in the singing, unrehearsed…[but] principles governing the birthing and execution of a song, its own parameters defining the range and use of the vocal instrument, and its own roles for singers within the group"(Levine 2006: 599).

This theoretical background to this chapter is very useful in foregrounding the ways in which innuendo, hidden meanings as well as palpable political meanings are encoded differently in the lyrics of Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface, and Kanye West. In analyzing the lyrics of Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface, and Kanye West we need to remember that these are oral and aural performances and as such are marked by different relations between the artist, Islam and Christianity. These differences could be as a result of the singers' attempt in different ways to adopt, adapt, preserve and exploit the values in Islam for the cause of enhancing personal struggles to spiritually survive the oppression inherent in the American system or community struggles for self perpetuation that are structured through and also reconfigure the values of Islam.

4.3 Lupe Fiasco: Sunni Muslim and the quest for self knowledge

By his admission, Lupe Fiasco adheres to the Islamic faith. He has confessed that the Islamic faith influences and structures some of his lyrics. In an interview recorded on Wikipedia Lupe Fiasco has confessed that he was "born Muslim, so Islam plays a part in my life and everything I do, to a certain extent. I'm not like the poster boy for Islam…I still got my flaws and stuff like that, so I don't really wear that on my sleeve…I don't go to clubs, I don't smoke you know like my whole –the whole groupie is shut down" (Wikipedia2008: 3). In contrast to the stereotype of Muslim youth as sensual, violent, and irrational, Lupe Fiasco does not club, drink, do drugs, smoke and take heroin. Fiasco's Muslim identities are defined by images of a role model. This positive image of the self is meant to uplift his personal self worth. In the religion of Islam, the concern with creating role models for the self, the duty to fight for the poor is part of the just war; to succeed in carrying out the just war demands a jihad or struggle.

Lupe Fiasco the artist, emphasizes *al-jihad al-akbar,* literally translated as the greater jihad which is "a struggle against weaknesses of self; it is about how to live and attain piety in a contaminated world. Inwardly, it is about the effort of each Muslim to become a better human being" (Mamdani 2004: 50). The manifestation of this Islamic moral teaching that strives to attain spiritual cleanliness is Fiasco's Album **Food & Liquor** which was released in 2006. In the album, Fiasco describes the ways in which American black people waste their lives on liquor resulting in violent crime. The album announces Lupe Fiasco's desire to see the African American turn a new leaf, and move out of the orbit of materialism and a consumerist culture that ends up diminishing their personhood. The Album, was

> considered a critical masterpiece by many critics. It earned an 83/100 on *Metacritic*, a
> website that calculates reviews and averages the score, an 83 represents "Universal
> Acclaim'. It received perfect scores from *The Onion* and Hip hopDX. HiphopDX
> remarked that the music was ahead of its time."When you are this far ahead of your time
> you have to remember that it will take even longer for the average listener to catch up.
> Prefix magazine called it the best hip hop album of 2006.'(Wikipedia 2008: 6).

Such accolades as in the above quote reveal that by highlighting to his fellow blacks the dangers of embracing American materialism, Lupe Fiasco views himself as an organic intellectual within the black community, tasked to teach and lead the mass so that it would understand the imperatives of the struggle against racist oppression in America. It is one of the central tenets of Islam for exceptional men and women to teach one another how to protect the body and soul from the alluring tactics of '*shaytaan*'(Satan), which in the Album is personified as **Food and & liquor**. Personal righteousness must manifest in collective good (Holy Qur'an undated: 6). Abstaining from drugs and liquor also constitutes for Lupe Fiasco the practice of the Qur'anic values embodied in *al-jihad al-asghar* which is a struggle about "self-preservation and self-defense; directed outwardly, it is the source of Islamic notions of a just war" (Mamdani 2004: 50). Moreover **Food & Liquor** explicitly references Islamic teachings in associated with the Five Perce*nters'* version of Islamic doctrine in which it is believed that

 Father Allah, as his followers came to call him, taught that the 5% are those black men with "knowledge of self". This five % knows their divinity, and uses that knowledge to release the hidden resources of black man. Once a man has tapped his hidden talents, he is a God. Most members refer to themselves as Gods rather than five Percenters, reserving the latter term for those who have only begun studying the knowledge...The 85% are those without knowledge, the mentally blind, deaf and dumb who are bent on self-destruction. The 10% are the bloodsuckers of the poor, those who have knowledge and power but who use it to mystify and abuse the 85%. The 5% are the poor righteous teachers who preach the divinity of (Black) man, the god who is manifest and who will save the 85% from destruction' (Swedenburg 2006: 4-5).

Lupe Fiasco does not claim to be a member of the Nation of Gods and Earths. He explicitly suggests that in practicing his faith, he is flexible with his faith and draws from the Islam faith only to a 'certain extent'. By suggesting that he is not 'like the poster boy for Islam…' he creates space between his faith and his art. When he states that he does not wear Islam on his 'sleeve' Lupe Fiasco further suggests a knowledge that in the "current hip hop environment, professional success is derived from content that [can] contradict Islamic mores'(Khabeer 2007: 127). Thus, unlike the group, Native Deen that closely observe the moral precepts of Islam, Lupe Fiasco makes allusions to the metaphors in Islam to pass his lyrical messages through hip hop.

For example, in his song, **American terrorist** Lupe Fiasco plays with words, and implies that America itself is *shaytaan* or the devil because it terrorises its own black people the most. In the song, he singles out America's unbridled materialism that renders blacks to be sacrificed at the altar of mammon:

> *The more money that they make/The more money that they make The better and better*
> *they live/whatever they wanna take/whatever they wanna take/whatever whatever it is/*
> *the more that you wanna learn/the more that you try to learn/the better and better it*
> *gets/American terrorist (Fiasco 2008: 1)*

Dominant and hegemonic social formations in America are lambasted for their desire for 'more money' and they care less for the ordinary black people who create the basis of the profit. For Fiasco, the nature of social conflict in America is a class war; *"now the poor klu klux man c that we're all brothers not b/c things are the same b/c we lack the same/colour that is green."* It is money that the rich classes of America use to define the humane-ness of people. For Fiasco, the materialism of America threatens to undermine and destroy the cultural lives of black people and their positive moral fabric within the black communities:

> *It's like/don't give the black man food, give red man liquor/*
> *red man fool, black man nigga/*
> *give yellow man tool, make him railroad builda/also*
> *give him pan, make him pull gold from river give black man crack,*
> *glocks to teens, give red man/craps, slot machines (*Fiasco 2008: 2*).*

Blacks are spiritually starved, unemployment is rife among them and drugs are fed into the black communities so that they should destroy themselves. On the other hand white people are given skills that make them competitive in the modern capitalist world. Fiasco also suggests that the war on terror targets Islam and Muslims in America. There is also the implied meaning that not only is America a terrorist state; the country can produce its own terrorists from blacks who are frustrated. Fiasco warns the might America that it has made a terrorist out of innocent black lives; that this black terrorist is bound to undermine the historical achievements of America; that

the black youth will join *al-Qaeda* – terrorist organization – to smash the American dream which is in fact a nightmare for most blacks. The American terrorist is thus the black man transformed from innocence to fighting for survival in a land of her/his birth: Fiasco indicates that

> *Now if a Muslim woman strapped with a bomb on a bus/*
> *with the seconds running give you the jitters?/*
> *just imagine an American-based Christian organization*
> *planning to poison water supplies to bring the /*
> *second-coming quicker/nigga they ain't living properly/*
> *break em off a little democracy/ turn their whole culture to a mockery/*
> *give em coca-cola for their property/give em gum give em guns,*
> *get em young, give em fun (*Fiasco 2008: 3*).*

The institutions of America such as the 'American based Christian' plan to destroy black people's and references to 'Muslim woman strapped with a bomb in a bus' reveals the negative responses of the exasperation that blacks feel at not being accommodated in their own country. In America 'terrorism is not a necessary effect of religious tendencies, whether fundamentalist or secular. Rather, terrorism is born of a political encounter (Mamdani 2004). For Lupe Fiasco, the conditions making possible the political encounter between blacks and the American state is a product of the bitterness of blacks. Blacks are forced by the American system to become anti America and consequently become terrorist-minded. The very critique of the American social arrangement in the song can be read as the act in which the singer has also become a terrorist who uses words as 'lyrical swords' (Banjoko 2004) to attack the American establishment.

The estrangement and alienation of blacks from America is further dramatised in Lupe Fiasco's song, **Muhammed Walks**. This song catalogues the misdeeds of America to its people and reveals how America has transformed itself into a world police starting costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The song also posits alternative ideological frames of reference through the invocation of the figure of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The singer is aware that there are fake artists who are using the name of Muhammad in order to cash in on post 9/11 dispensation. Fiasco believes that young Americans referenced as 'my brothers and sisters' are sacrificed in Iraq, Israel and Afghanistan' by the American state through the so-called war on terror. The artist

suggests that most hip hop artists are using the Islamic faith to affect counterfeit emotional sympathies and then cash in on the plight of those who are dying in America's imperialist wars. The singer dedicates his song to the memory of those who expired or lost their lives during combat in the wars they had not started:

> *This is one's for all my brothers and sisters*
> *who died in Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan and right here in America*
> *(Jesus Walks)/Abraham Talked/ Muhammad Talked/*
> *And Moses split the sea/Jesus walk with me/*
> *I ain't tryin to profit of the prophets so this one's for free (Fiasco 2008: 1).*

Lupe Fiasco expects a miracle to happen to stop the carnage on brothers and sisters who die in war, described by the Obama administration as a war of choice in Iraq rather than a war of necessity in Afghanistan where Bin Laden – the Al-Qaeda chief priest - is thought to be holed. The meddlesome nature of American foreign policy has pitted Iraq, Afghans against each other. However, in the same stanza the singer draws one's attention to the references of the religious leaders like Jesus, Abraham and Moses found in the Christian bible. These men of faith are known for their righteousness and their crusade against the evil figured in the bible as Satan.

An analogy is made that Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the foremost prophet of Allah shall lead his devotees against Shaytaan; Here Shaytaan or Satan is understood as the America state. The singer insists that he shall therefore 'walk' or follow closely along the religious and political footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). On a religious level, the metaphor of walking suggests that any association with Muhammad can bring the kind of spiritual purification and provide a moral compass by which the individual singer can live against the background of the exploitative context of America. On a political level, the association with Prophet Muhammad (SAW) seems to be invoked in order to suggest the possible in America of a theocratic political arrangement in which the binary between state and church are blurred.

Put differently, Lupe Fiasco uses the poetic language based on religious syncretism to show that his faith is based on different sources. More importantly, a message of religious tolerance is passed when Jesus is discussed in the same context with Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Islam and Christianity are then seen as compatible and through invoking these spiritual guides, Lupe Fiasco

is searching for heroes whose works he can use in order to shape the black community into a coherent community with aspirations high above the craving for crack and the celebration of a gun-culture and crime. In the Christian world of which America, to equate Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to Abraham, Jesus and Moses is to make a political statement to the effect that the singer cherishes religious tolerance. Lupe Fiasco downplays Osama and Saddam and disowns both Osama and Sadaam because they represent the worst images of Islamic culture that puts worthy on people who protect and not kill innocent people. Lupe Fiasco performs a double entente in which in his world there are good Muslims like himself, and bad Muslims like Osama and Saddam: 'Don't think Osama and Sadaam are is our leader, We pray for peace'(Fiasco, 1). But the split, 'we pray for peace' is ironical because it suggests that if Osama and Saddam can bring peace, then they can be accepted in the pantheon of African American gallery of heroes.

The metaphor of a journey motif in *Muhammed Walks* used by Lupe Fiasco is his way of inviting the Islamic religious devotees to walk new paths and into new worlds that promise new and alternative values. Lupe Fiasco rejects the myth and narrative construct create by America that there are 'good' Muslim and a 'bad' Muslim. It is a narrative constructed by America to enable her to persecute those Moslems who do not conform to American dictates since 'In post-9/11 America, Culture talk ...there are good Muslims and bad Muslims' (Mamdani 2004: 18). In other words, in by insisting that African Americans should 'walk' with Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the aftermath of 9/11, Fiasco suggests that many blacks have opted for Islam as a religion that can provide them with a vantage point from which to critique America. Through song, Lupe Fiasco seeks to promote a positive image of Muslim that identifies with America. In 'Muhammad Walks' to 'walk' with the prophet is to practise his teachings on thanking Allah (Holy Qur'an undated 1), receive blessings from Islamicate cultural traditions, seek protection from Shaytaan (Holy Qur'an: 6) to be 'members, one of another' (Holy Qur'an, 9) and achieve victory over enemies (Holy Qur'an:16). Lupe Fiasco prefers to 'walk" with Prophet Muhammad (SAW) because Fiasco sees an alternative way of organising American lives from the teachings of the prophet of Islam. The artist acknowledges the cultural significance of Muhammad to the black communities of America. To suggest that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was one for peace is to subvert dominant American discourse in which Islam is portrayed as violent and irrational.

As the high priest of Muslims, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has taught his followers the benefits of hard work, honest and love for one another. In the lines from *Muhammed Walks*, Lupe Fiasco lays bare the spiritual richness of the The religion of Islam when he sings that "During Hajj we walk, through Ramadaan we starve/Though you not eatin' there's feedin of the mind/ A defeating of the demons, a seein of the signs(Fiasco, 1). "Walking" is also and therefore used as a metaphor for spiritual journeys into the faith of Islam where the artist emerges with new identities purified by the s experience of fasting. Ramadaan is the Islamic ritual of spiritual reflection on the status of the self in the community in relation to the ideologies and practices of Islam.

As a religious ritual moment of spiritual introspection, Ramadaan brings self renewal and implies recommitting oneself to one's ideals that promote peace and a non violent society. Ramadaan is therefore invoked in this song to act as the philosophical bedrock upon which a new morality that transcends American materialism and self aggrandizement can be experienced and achieved. The philosophy underlying the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) are further explained in the song when we hear that in Islam what is emphasised is that there is (No) Sex before you marry/No grudges/You should be carry no lyin/ Not supposed to be gambling/(Fiasco, 2008: 1).The life devoid of unbridled sex, of fear lies and of gambling creates a break in the cycle impoverishment in the existence of black people. The fact that Lupe Fiasco testifies that a life of crime and imprisonment diminishes the capacity of blacks to resist the threats to their community shows that the singer desires his music to be taken as a platform for teaching against the ills of American materialism. The double consciousness' that Lupe Fiasco possess implies that he is aware of the cause of social ills that lead to negative identities among blacks; at the same, he uses the consciousness that he has gained in previous struggles to suggest that a life of depravity can be overcome.

It is in this sense that the individual experiences of Fiasco's faith can be taken as a metaphor representing the ideal values that should inform African American people in their quest for alternative identities underpinned by new values in America. Islam just as Christianity is portrayed as carrying with it potential for fostering a peace-loving culture. Fiasco even goes further to suggest that there are cultural and spiritual points of convergences in the Christian and Islamic religions. Each of these religions has borrowed from the other the best qualities and this

has tended to strengthen the religions. Fiasco ends his song by implying that there is a strong sense of cultural trafficking of spiritual resources between the values that Jesus and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stood for. A case of hybrid religious identities is opened for African Americans. Fiasco sings:

> *All praise is due to God (Amen) Tellin it how it was taught me/*
> *I ain't tryin to sell it can be brought for free/T*
> *This is how it is/Now how it ought to be*
> *Muhammad talk to me/*
> *Jesus talk with me/I hope (Fiasco 2008. 2).*

When Lupe Fiasco suggests that 'Now how it ought to be Muhammed talk to me' he suggests an intimate relationship between blacks in their newfound faith in Islam. The shift to 'Jesus talk with me' in the same song may imply that although Christianity is a useful faith that has also provide spiritual scaffolds for the blacks, there is in it a hierarchical order that may prevent the faithful to have full communion with the religion. In other words, through word play 'talk to me and 'talk with me' there is a suggested shift not only of lexicon but of values and commitment to the ideals of Islam. Fiasco seems to be suggesting that it is not possible for African Americans to live in America as if they are not Americans; blacks are Americans who happen to be suffering like other races in America even when the intensity of that suffering is magnified in black communities due to lack of competitive skills and racial discrimination practiced on blacks even when they possess requite skills for jobs reserved for whites.

However, and more importantly, Fiasco is speaking the language of cultural integration between races and implies that the roots of that possibility are in the fact that the American people share common religious backgrounds. Taken in this broad interpretive stride, religion in the song ***Muhammad Walks***, the lyrics is viewed as an agent for cementing stronger cultural ties among black Americans. The song uses religious figures such as Muhammad and Jesus in order to make a plea for spiritual, cultural and political tolerance. Above all, the song, ***Muhammed Walks*** operates in the Jamesonian frame of being a 'third world text' in which the story of an individual mirrors the collective aspirations. If Fiasco's insistence in his songs incline towards individual salvation that can be realised within the robust The religion of Islam, championed by the nation of Islam, Mos Def's songs emphasises the centrality of the black community as providing the

collective identity so needed by an individual to pull that community out of the cesspit of moral decadence imposed on it by external and internal negative social forces.

4.4 Mos Def: The Influences from Nation of Islam, and Five Percenters and the search of alternative black community values

Mos Def uses his art as 'verbal jihad' (Alim 2006: 45) in the sense that words are used in music to envision new horizons of values and social perspectives within the America black communities. Alim argues that "As verbal mujahidin, artists also engage in jihad of the hand and fight in the way of Allah (*jihad fi sabil Allah*) to help improve their local communities...Mos Def does not only rap about issues like consciousness and justice" (Alim 2006: 56) but also uses art as a "weapon of mass culture that narrate the marginalized experience of the nation" (Alim 57).

The influence of Islam is most visible on the musical work and critical statements by Mos Def, the Sunni Moslem who was first exposed to Islam at the age of 13 by his father(Wikipedia 2008:1). In an interview with Abdel-Alim, Mos Def revealed that he took his oath or '*Shahada* four years ago' and suggested that he had been advised that "when you do works that go out to the public – written works or spoken works – that you should bless them like that, [because] the spiritual level puts the seal on it. Like I'am making an effort to reach Allah with this. And *Insha*' Allah, my efforts will be accepted" (Abdel-Alim 2008: 1). The use of direct Islamic terms such as *Shahada* is conscious; it allows Mos Def to creatively conceptualise links between his faith and his art so as to create a vision of a better society in America.

Commenting on the close affinities between the poetry inherent in hip hop and the poetry that informs the text of the Qur'an, Mos def says that "hip hop and the texts of the Koran are both forms of poetry...Both possess a rhyme pattern and convey essential information in a condensed form"(Mos Def quoted in Fischer 2007:2). The capacity for the Quranic verses to be appropriated and re-deployed in hip hop to achieve broadened basis for the growth of social consciousness of the individual believer and the community of Africa American blacks is further underscored by Mos Def when he emphasises the importance of hip hop in carrying information that operates as a social critique meant to create new vistas for changed relations of social production and reproduction of oppression in America. Mos Def believes that the poetic nature

of the Islamic verses when used in hip hop allows the artist to experiment with form that can carry the freight of

> "vital information [and] get across in three minutes...[because]
> the Qur'an is like that. The reason that people are able to be *hafiz*
> [one who memorises the entire Qur'an through constant repetition and study]
> is because the entire Qur'an rhymes. And it holds fast to
> your memory. And then you start to have a deeper relationship with it
> on recitation. Like, you learn Surat Al-Ikhlas, right. You learn Al-Fatiha.
> And you learn it and you recite it. And you learn it and you recite it.
> Then one day you're reciting it, and you start to understand! You really have a
> deeper relationship with what you're reciting.
> *A'uudhu billhi min ash-shaitan al-rajim...* You be like Wow!'
> You understand what I'm saying? Hip hop has the ability to do that – on a poetic level"
> (Mos Def quoted in Abdel-Alim 2008:3).

The linguistic command of some Islamic terms is the entry point to Mos Def's music because it "provides rules and guidelines for life" (Aidi 2008:2) for the disempowered African American blacks who are disenchanted with America's permissive consumer culture. The target of Mos Def's musical criticism is first and for most the anti-black culture that the artist sees as embedded in the American culture predominantly controlled by whites. In the song **Dollar Day**, Mos Def sings of the blacks who were the victims of the typhoon Katrina in New Orleans. The American government's noncommittal and negligent handling of the provision of relief to the affected people is in the song politicised and viewed in racial terms; in the song a lady from Louisiana rebukes the officials for their slow response to the catastrophe that led to the death of many blacks and some whites. Mos Def sees discrimination of the blacks and suggests that if it were a greater population of whites who were affected, the American government could have acted faster;

Listen, homie, it's Dollar Day in New Orleans
It's water water everywhere and the people dead in the streets
And Mr. President he bout that cash
He got a policy for handlin the niggaz and trash
And if you poor you black (Mos Def 2009:1)

In the lyrics above, the casual attitude of the government is attributed to the fact that President George W. Bush(Junior) hates blacks; the songs attempts to persuade the listener that the financial resources that were supposed to help the Katrina black victims were diverted and used to finance war in Iraq and Afghanistan: 'And they got –illions and killions to waste on the war' The split words 'illions and killions' suggest that the government enjoyed seeing the 'illness' and suffering of people from Katrina and also contributed in 'killing' some by not reacting on time. The singer singles out the vulnerable such as 'babies dead' and passes judgment that America is ruled by cruel leaders; 'Lord did not intend for the wicked to rule the world/Say God did not intend for the wicked to rule the world/ God did not intend for the wicked to rule the world' (Mos Def 2009:2) The descriptions of the rulers as 'wicked' indicates a quest for another set of values that can only be brought in by an enlightened leadership. Mos Def is flexible in his beliefs and he appeals liberally to God to intervene and stop the political rot and corruption in America. The singer appeals to God to 'save, these streets/ A dollar day for new Orleans/Quit bein cheap homie freedom aint free/God save these streets (Mos Def 2009: 2). Referencing the Christian God in this song suggests that Mos Def is syncretic in his approach to the use and appropriating of the cultural resources that are made available in the Christian religion.

However, in the song, *Fear Not of Man*, Mos Def reveals the influence of the Islamic faith on his lyrics. He begins *Fear Not of Man* with the Islamic words, '*Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem'*. This salutation situates his consciousness in the Moslem traditions and enables him to unravel the role that hip hop which is inspired by Islam should accomplish. For Mos Def, Islamicate hip hop should reflect on the daily struggles that common people engage in either to strengthen their faith in Islam or to lay the foundation of a just society. Islamicate hip hop exists to structures the believers' perceptions of their struggles and helps them to sieve the negative aspects in their community. Islamicate music cannot therefore die since for Mos Def, 'Me, you, everybody, we

are hip hop'(Mos Def : 1). *Fear Not of Man* samples Sunni Islamicate thought in which purity of body, of mind, celibacy are celebrated and there is a consciousness against taking drugs and any substances that debases the body and the spirit. For that reason, sings Mos Def, 'Hip Hop is goin where we goin/Hip hop is about people/Hip hop won't get better until the people get better/then how do people get better/Well, from understanding people get better when they start to understand that, they are valuable/And they not valuable because they got a whole lot of money' (Mos Def 2009: 1)

In *Fear Not of Man*, Mos Des takes himself as the organic intellectual of the black community who has to teach his people. This is in keeping with the central tenet of Islam that insists that one who has acquired knowledge of the Qur'an should teach those who are not yet believers. The discourse of frugality where people should emphasise self worthy, and confidence and not money is also part of the artist's desire to expose for ridicule some of the aspects of America's materialist culture that have corrupted the black people. In '*Fear Not of Man'* ordinary people are enjoined to observe the precepts of the Islamicate religion and fear Allah. According to Khabeer, 'Islamic hip hop seeks to comply with Islamic religious standards and practices and whose current and primary audience is Muslims...Islamic hip hop may restrict the types of musical instruments used, generally does not employ expletives and frequently refers to issues of doctrinal import(Khabeer 2007:126).

In *Fear Not of Man*, there is a shift from addressing Allah to addressing the Christian God and these are used interchangeably so that the song accepts religious syncretism as the condition that makes possible a strong faith in the The religion of Islam. The love for money, sex and power are ridiculed and allusions are made that suggest that the singer is criticising America for attempting to dominate and impose its will on the world: 'God makes you valuable/And whether or not you, recognize that value is one thing/You got a lot of societies and governments tryin to be God, wishin that they were God/ They wanna create satellites and cameras everywhere and make you think they got the all-seein eye' (Mos Def: 2).

The two tone-ness of the message above is both an address to the ordinary people to emulate God's plan to have man be pure so that he does not fall like Lucifer: at the same time, America

and European countries that spread their wars to other parts of the world are slapped and the singer encourages the audiences or listeners not to be intimidated by their governments. For Mos Def, hip hop music must also change its tune to align with the changes taking place or not taking place on the ground. Mos Def is ambitious in believing that art can help transform human lives. He sings 'If we smoked out, Hip Hop is gonna be smoked out/If we doin alright, Hip hop is gonna be doin alright'. It is possible that Mos Def is singing tongue in cheek because some black American artists have become rich but this does not mean that the majority of black lives have also improved. Furthermore, Mos Def sounds the possibility that it can happen that hip hop is domesticated by those with money, which would mean that it would be able to reflect on the people's lives more uncritically: 'So,.if hip hop is about people and the…Hip hop won't get better until the people get better.'. Mos Def criticizes the commercialization of hip hop, a fact that creates a false sense of identification between artists of those people whose lives they sing about.

Mos Def mines the age-old theme of the spirituals, which are argued by Levine to have been the most important cultural resource that is distinctly Black and African in America. Mos Def also borrows from the oral tradition in ways that makes the listener to his music re-live the historical moments that African Americans have passed from slavery to freedom. The artist sings, insisting on his people's spiritual resilience in the face of adversity: 'Fear not of Men because men must die/Mind over matter and soul before flesh/Angels for the pain keep record in time/ which is passing and runnin like caravan freighter.'(Mos Def 2009: 4) Here, Mos Def recalls the biblical injunction that the pain that the poor suffered would come to pass with the wear and tear of time. It is the kind of conviction for a better life that comments on both the present as well as the future: Levine argues that Negro spirituals just as Mos Def's art is 'either about this world or the next: they [are] about both simultaneously" (Levine 2006: 591). In Mos Def's song, an alternative lifestyle is proposed for those who want to live the life free of oppression of and from others; the evanescent life of the rich is hinted at while the enduring and spiritually solid experiences of the ordinary people are sung about as the source of the salvation of the American society.

Mos Def is relying on the power of spiritual songs to foretell of future positive happenings when the protagonist in the song repeats that

'The world is overrun with the wealthy and the wicked' However,
this class of people and its modes of exploitative existence are depicted as short-lived:
because 'God is sufficient in disposin of affairs'.
To inherit this future of peace and stability that both the Islam and Christian faiths
promises to believers,
people must 'Fear not of men because men must die...
The World is overrun with the wealthy and the wicked/But God is sufficient
in disposing of affairs/Gunmen and stockholders try to merit my fear/But
God is sufficient over plans they prepared/Mos Def in the flesh, where you at,
right here on this place called earth/ holdin down my square/Bout to do it for y'all,
and y'all at the fair/B-b-bounce b-bounce b-bounce-bounce/And
just..just step two three/ Just step two three and step two..two three and...
One two three and four/One two three and four...(Mos Def 2009:2).

In this stanza Allah is the Supreme Being who can undermine the plans of the evil people who have 'overrun' the world. These biblical references find resonances in the war on terror in which America and its allies have stationed their armies in Iraq to fight for oil. The stanza is also a literal invitation to the nonbelievers or as yet unconverted to follow closely in the ways of the Islamic and Christian faiths. This is the gospel of spiritual purity for which the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths are known for advocating. Conscious Hip hop lyrics as are in the song, **Thug Is a Drug** initially describe the conditions of poverty and crime that people live in on order to create the basis for rejecting that social order. The song, warns blacks to stay away from the culture of gangsterism that result in undermining the collective sensibilities among blacks. Beyond the literal meaning, the song's stanzas operate as allegorical proposals for an alternative framework of social relations between and among people in the black communities in America. The song 'Champion Requiem' has its beginning stamped with some lines from the Qur'an as a way of endorsing the viability of the Islamic faith in an American context where 'cops' are used by politicians to brutalize the ordinary blacks.

In the song, **Bin laden**, Mos Def departs from the highly metaphorical address to his people and offers open political critique to the American ideology of the so-called war on terror. The singer makes his political views on this hotly contested topic by first suggesting that the official

narrative that the world was fed on about why 9/11 happened in America was a fabrication. The American government is imaged in negative terms; the officials are 'motherfuckers' and 'professional liars'. This language that debases or carnivalizes the state delegitimizes the central authority's tendency to want to speak on behalf of everybody. The official propaganda is passed through the construction of a symbolical narrative that is given the trappings all the 'truth'. For Mos Def truth is unstable; America forces blacks and the world to affect counterfeit emotional sympathy over the victims of 9/11. The truth, or another probable version that the singer proffers to the audience to consider is that 'Bush knocked down the towers' referring to the fact that the American President used political expediency of having Americans to be killed when he could have prevented this tragic event.

The refrain 'Bush knocked down the twin-towers' is repeated four times' to render it thinkable Americans that it is possible that the American government 'killed' its own people in order to stay in power. Here, hip hop is used as the official religion of Islam and its claim is used to subvert the notion that there is one explanation to the 9/11 events. The interpretation of the 9/11 offered in the song, 'Bin laden' is meant to provoke in the audiences doubt about the veracity of state propagated truths. The perspective of war on terror that the song offers does not have to be proved to be correct; the singer wants to render it thinkable that the relationship between the state and the individuals who make up its citizenship is never always one of mutual consent. A state such as America can coerce its listeners to be comfortable with a single factor explanation about the 9/11 tragedy. In the song the listener is forced to listen differently from the 'programmed' understanding of 9/11 in official 'propaganda they spit through the speakers'. Official media is in the song by Mos Def ridiculed for being part and parcel of the state ideological state apparatus meant used to enforce conformity of thought about 9/11 among the African Americans.

The song '*Bin laden*' deliberately subverts the idea of promoting monolithic meanings of identities. The song acts as a counter narrative that offers a preliminary critique to the official version of the events of 9/11. For example, in the song the listener is told that the government 'funded Al-Qaeda, and now they blame the Muslim religion/Even though bin laden, was a CIA tactician/They gave him millions of dollars, and they funded his purpose/Fahrenheit 9/11, that's just scratching the surface'(Mos Def 2009: 1). Mamdani (2004) corroborates this view that it was America that trained and made a terrorist out of Bin laden because America funded Bin Laden to

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fight the threat of 'communism' from Russia, during the Cold war. Historical documents abound that establish a link between Bin Laden and CIA (Mamdani 2004). In other words, the song Bin laden suggests that it is a hoax for America to blame the The religion of Islam for 9/11. It is also an excuse because at 'home niggaz do not have clean water, their freedoms are curtailed by the 'Patriotic Act'ill track you to a type of your blood'. The assumption that America is a democracy is held up side down and shown that the country is 'run by fake Christians, fake politicians'. The song also goes to claim that it was America that armed Saddam to engage in a perilous war with Iran: 'And of course Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons/ We sold him that shit, after Ronald Reagan's election/ Mercenary contractors fightin a new era/ Corporate military bankin off the war on terror/This ain't no alien conspiracy theory' (Mos Def 2009: 2).

American big business sacrifices the people in America, in Iraq and Afghanistan. The corruption established between fake Christians and fake politicians suggest that the Nation of Islam can provide a healthier alternative to the religious hypocrisy offered by the Christian church and politicians in America. Mos Def's version of the song 'Bin laden' has affinities to Paris song, *What would you do* in which both artists encourage the listeners not to take state propaganda for granted. The two artists also imply that it can be proven beyond reasonable doubt that America terrorised its own population by failing to prevent the 9/11 events when the country had the means to do so.

The inter-textual nature of the political views in 'Bin laden' and how they echo in songs by other African American black singers suggest that this community is using Muslim identities and Islam to sieve information about the war on terror in order to arrive at different explanations. This contestatory narrative reveals that in America identities cannot be taken as uniform and for granted. Hip Hop is viewed as the 'official religion' (Swedenburg 1999: 1) of Islam and offers what Mos Def in another of his song, *Hip hop* calls the 'prosecution evidence/The out of court settlement/a school unaccredited' (Mos Def 2009:2). Here, Mos Def establishes links between hip hop and its origins in the oral traditions of Black musical cultures in America. Performing against official perceptions implies, according to Khabeer (2004) that Black artists have to engage the dominant American discourses on Islam; black artists also have to contest the 'dominant narrative of the immigrant Muslim' through composing hip hop narratives that are

deemed 'authentically American because [they emerge] and reflects black and Latino American Muslim experiences.'(2004: 137).

In short, Mos Def's selective use of some cultural resources from Islam and Christianity lends some credence to Floyd(1995: 28) observation that black music signifies and that 'signifying is figurative, implicative speech that makes use of the tropes of "marking, loud talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name) sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and …can be used to read and inform the formal, since the former contains the very critical principles by which the latter can be examined.' Black Muslim inspired musical popular narratives can possess the capacity to signify an alternative politics; however, this politics cannot be characterized as unitary. Black popular artists bring to the public sphere varied experiences. It is these multiple versions that make Islam popular music clearly rich in its manifestations.

4.5 Scarface: Religion as the space of cultural hybridity in America

Unlike Lupe Fiasco and Mos Def who have sampled Islamic thought, and flavoured their songs with some of the teachings from the Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam and The nation of Gods and Earths, Scarface's song, ***Someday***, functions as a spiritual scaffold for the individual who finds himself or herself in a country that he/she belongs to, but in which the black person feels unaccommodated. The theme of walking with Jesus is emphasised but given a different direction so that to read ***Someday*** is to experience an alternative kind of spiritual resurrection. Scarface sings that he real people and with God at the same time: 'I wanna walk with you, follow in your footsteps/Talk with you to find out where my good's kept/ I been gone away from home for so long (Scarface 2008: 1).

There is a belief emanating from the song in the inherent goodness of human beings which can be distorted by cruel systems. But there is also a desire to destroy the shackles that bind African Americans to a life of depravity and that process is figured as partly motivated by personal choice so that against the crude sociologism that ascribes everything bad done by blacks in America to the power of racism in America, the black people have to come to terms with the fact that they can still rebuild their lives without being forced to forget the cruelty they suffered over the four hundred years in chains of slavery. Such levels of soul searching in the song suggest that blacks are also prepared to account for their own ways of life. The message of the song is that it

is possible to redirect one's life; to reject the negative dictates of Ghetto live and embrace a new way of relating to the self, God and the society. Scarface sings that

> *But until it's time for me to bring it home/ I'll be out in these*
> *streets, hanging in the hood/Even gangsters need to pray, /cause*
> *when I pray it's understood/That I got flaws about myself, I can't*
> *make it by myself/I need the heaven's help, I want to follow in*
> *your footsteps (Scarface, 2008, 3).*

What is fore-grounded in these lines is the question of human agency; while human beings and how they behave are mostly determined by society, and their social location in it, it is also true that human beings can use the consciousness gained in previous struggles to reflect and act upon their lives. That is why gangsters should be able to renounce a life of violence in favour of a life of peace. Scarface insists that for moral redemption to work, blacks need to acknowledge the possibility of attaining higher and noble goals in life. In this respect God and Jesus in whose foot steps the singers wants to follow is a metaphor of the righteousness that the African American people wish for America. Religion then is in **Someday** viewed as possessing some viable frame of reference that can be used to change one's individual life which would in turn impact positively on the collective in society.

The punch lines of the song are those that implore the devious, the lost sheep in African American society to make amends with the self and accept God in their lives. It is as if the song is sermonising, prophesying the need for change which is introspective within black communities. There is a limit to which blacks can continue 'playing' the blame game for their degraded lives. Scarface sings that 'For all my homies tha's been trapped out there/Tha's stuck in their ways, it's different now than back in the days/ So fuck what they say, cause ain't no coming back from the grave/ So when the gun goes pop and the lights go out/Then you'll understand what l'm talking about' (Scarface 2008:3).

Images of the "trapped", those who are "stuck in their ways" point to African Americans who for one reason or another have failed to move out of their bad ways that include a gun-totting culture, rape, violent crime and doing drugs. When Scarface sings that things are "different now than in the days" not only does he alert blacks that the new African American must strive to be

better morally, spiritually, economically and politically; but that once a person roots one's beliefs in the good works of Jesus, then there is a firm basis from which the blacks can begin to rebuild their lives that have been shattered by many years of slavery and racial discrimination in America. In short then for Scarface, the Christian religion can be appropriated as it has been done by the ancestors of African Americans and be re-shaped to improve the lives of blacks. As a frame or moral compass, the Christian religion has the potential of making blacks explore alternative sites where they can elaborate their new identities in positive ways. The quest for fulfilling identities whether Muslim, Christian or both within the American black communities cannot only be realised through the agency of Islam. However, the fact that Christianity has significantly shaped the lives of Black American lives in ways that cannot be underestimated is a theme that is further given poetic and musical form in Kanye West's song, *Jesus Walks*.

4.6 Kanye West: Affirmation and critique of American Christian faith

Kanye Amori West has not claimed that his creativity has been influenced by Islam beliefs. In fact, he situates his poetics within the conventional Christian doctrine as it is practised in America by most Blacks and Whites. And yet, despite rooting his song in the Christain God, the song, *Jesus Walks* can be interpreted as both an affirmation of the staying power of white religion as well as a critique to the white Christian religion for failing to inspire American leaders to live by the ideals stated in the Christian ways of lives Besides the fact that 'Jesus Walks' inspired Lupe Fiasco to compose his own derivative song, *Muhammed Walks*, there are hidden ways in which Kanye West's songs reveals itself as partially influenced by the Islamic religion.

First, the song lists the negative ways in which America mistreats the blacks. The biased American police 'question, harass, and arrest blacks at the slightest pretext'. Second, due to racial discrimination by the white American system, blacks are forced to become 'husttlas, killers, murderers, drug dealers, even strippers.' Third, the black artists who want to sing positive themes of up-lift-ment of the black communities are barred and encouraged to celebrate through songs, the vices such as the culture of 'guns, sex, lies, video tapes.' We saw this narrative strategy of cataloguing the ills visited on blacks by the American system in the songs penned by

Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def and Scarface. Alim's interviews with some of the artists reveal that the artists create this list of the negatives in the American system so as to form the basis for rejecting the negative picture in order to emerge with positive frames of spiritual references.

As verbal *Mujahidin*, songs such as **Jesus Walks** represent a space for discursive struggles against oppression and engage in battles for the control of spiritual meaning of existence and cultural discourse of liberation among African American communities. At the beginning of 'Jesus Walks', the listener hears the echoes of the negro spirituals and their mournful tunes insisting that American blacks need spiritual soldiers because 'we at war with society, racism, terrorism, but most of all we at war with ourselves'. The cause of war is only alluded to as the 'devil trying to break me down' In the racialised context from which the singers compose their songs the American system is depicted as the number one enemy of the American people because it is portrayed as having succeeded in fracturing society along racial lines. More significantly, the black community is also at war with itself and it needs as much healing and introspection as the nation since each mirror each other in a metaphorical sense.

For example in the song, **Jesus Walks**, Kanye West chimes that in 'Mid West, 'NIGGAZ! Might snatch your necklace/And next these NIGGAZ! Might jack your lexus/.' Crimes of theft and carjacking are symptomatic of an unstable society. America is depicted as the' valley of death'. At a metaphysical level, the battle for which the singer would like to recruit 'all the soldiers/All of God's soldiers' is imaged as one between immortal evil and immortal good. Kanye West uses the conventional narrative technique of the journey motif that conjures motion across the valley of death. The triumph against the valley of death requires the spiritual guidance of Jesus just as Lupe Fiasco suggests that the spiritual fortitude to weather American vices demand the strict observance of the Islamic faith. The recurrent refrain 'Jesus walks with me' indicates the willpower needed by the black community to triumph over the temptation in the valley of death. Success is equated to spiritual purification.

The third aspect that links **Jesus Walks** to the Islamic religious traditions is that West identifies closely with the destiny of the individual who has to the righteous paths of Jesus for spiritual guidance and salvation, West is close to Islamic teachings, particularly in those moments in his song when he the doctrine of the Five Percenters in which it is believed that individual salvation comes out of strict observance of Islamic religious beliefs. However, this element is also present

in Christianity as well as African traditional religious practices so that the distinct feature of *'Jesus Walks'* is also its syncretic nature deriving from the hybrid religious sources that form its material and spiritual basis. An important and fourth that demonstrates Islamic influences on the song, 'Jesus Walks' is the self consciousness that the singer possesses about himself as one of the exceptional men who belongs to the 5% men and women who are the organic intellectuals within the black communities: Kanye West reminds the listener to his song that black artists like him should be positive role models of the black communities in America. 'We rappers is role models we rap we don't think/I'm just trying to say the way school need teachers/The way Kathie Lee needed Regis tha's the way I need Jesus(West 2009: 2).

The process of self-transformation requires that African Americans must have positive role models to emulate. If God and Jesus are positive role models but coming from the white Christian culture, Kanye West believes that in the black community, singers like himself should play that role model as he project himself and his music as moral exemplar. This point is emphasised in the magazine, *The Mujahideen Ryder* that reports that

> 'The Nation of Islam should be given all in its religious, spiritual
> and political influence over the hip hop world. Louis Farrakhan,
> [head and minister of the Nation of Islam] 'had talk at the hip hop summit in 2001
> challenging the hip hop artists to improve the future of the youth
> that follow them by rapping about positive things in their lyrics
> to eliminate racism, stereotypes and bringing peace in urban communities
> and their fans worldwide' (2008:1-2).

Role models can be negative, especially when they sing glorifying "guns, sex, lies, video tapes". If singers have to be role models who aim to produce lasting and positive impact on the people, the singers themselves need a higher moral authority from which to derive their own authority; Kanye West finds this spiritual authority in the biblical figures of God and Jesus, for whom the singer asks for spiritual fortitude: 'God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down. (Jesus walks with me)(West 2009: 2).

The song, *Jesus Walks*, by Kanye West provides a cultural template that uses images of Jesus, God and the black Americans as symbols of 'soldiers' all who are being invited to participate in

the struggle for higher forms of life for the African Americans. The song uses the archetypal image of God and Jesus representing the righteous path to life which is opposed to the wrongdoings of America represented by the racism that the blacks suffer everyday. A key feature of the lyrics from the song is the fact blacks are depicted in mainstream America media most often as objects of ridicule, of insults, and of un-accommodated being in a country described as being "at war with ourselves". West identifies the matrix that makes the self inflicted war possible being made up of social forces of racism, terrorism, and crimes committed by black people on black and white people, police brutality on blacks and the use of guns and drugs in the black community. West sings pleading for the American society to mends its ways

We at war with society, racism, terrorism,
but most of all we at war with ourselves.
where restless NIGGAZ! Might snatch your necklace/
Getting choked by the detectives
yeah yeah nowcheck the method/
They be asking us questions, harass and arrest us/
Saying "we eat pieces of shit like you for breakfast (West 2008: 6).

The contradictions in American society are laid bare; one social group perceives itself as disadvantaged. It is brutalised by the police when it commits crime. There is an inference that the treatment of NIGGAZ who commit crime is different from that which is meted out on other groups. This perception of injustice is viewed as deliberate, but presented in the song as an intractable problem which requires God's interference in the lives of Black people because although the singer's 'My Momma used to say only Jesus can save us/Well momma I know I act a fool(West 2008). The possibility of irony being in encoded in these lines are very real; on one hand Jesus and God are conflated as one, and on the other hand as separate but representing the values that have been trampled upon in America; the values of love, peace and sacrifice for another person. Both God and Jesus depicted as a part of White American culture with which the Blacks have been dominated through.

However, the refrain ***Jesus Walks*** might also be taken as a religious trope intoning that despite the fact that Blacks are constantly harassed by police detectives, the Blacks, like Jesus who was wrongly persecuted by his own people, will nevertheless triumph over social injustice. Again,

any critic of popular music will only be too weary not to realize that the genre of music can undermine the very certitudes that the songs are promoting. Considered from this angle, the refrain "Jesus walks" can be interpreted as being loaded with innuendo in which the white religion centred on the Godly nature on of Jesus can be said to be mocked for not suggesting more than enough for NIGGAZ who are persecuted when Jesus who is supposed to be the saviour of humanity, walks by, living his flock being culturally flogged.

The complexity of the song *Jesus Walks* can be realised when one argues that Kanye West is more concerned with converting black people to the winning ways of the good gospel of Jesus, the son of God who becomes God Himself, by virtue of being Him. In the song, West emphasises the redemptive power that the Christian religion can bring to those blacks who have fallen by the wayward side. He sings 'To the hustlas, killers, murderers, drug dealers even the strippers' (Jesus walks with them)/To the victims of Welfare for we living in hell here hell yeah (Jesus walks with them) (West 2008:2). There is an appeal by West for wrongdoers to repent; but more than that message, it is inferred in the songs that African American people have survived by sheer tenacity and faith; without faith in God, in the power of Jesus Christ to intercede on their behalf, and most importantly, the internal spiritual power of African Americans to weather the storms of racism testifies to their willingness to constitute themselves as a people with principles firmly rooted in the beliefs of self- upliftment. Through this inference, the song, 'Jesus Walks' partially succeeds in responding to the overbearing question in the African American communities which according to Lupe Fiasco is 'where the black at'. In the song, 'Jesus Walks' Kanye West suggests that proposes a life steeped in the practicing the Christian principles of spiritual goodness, love and work performed for the enhancement of the society.

A fifth feature that links *Jesus Walks* to the Islamic religious traditions that inspire Muslim hip hop is the capacity for self questioning. In the song, West does not romanticise the ordinary African Americans; most have been swept by the crude materialism that has made it difficult for people to survive from day to day. Consequently, they have become part of the problem and Kanye West enjoins these 'lost sheep' to seek the power of Jesus to change their live circumstances for the better. The unnamed devil can be the American society trying to break the spirit of African Americans, preventing them to enjoy the American dream as a positive attribute of American culture. Religion, in *Jesus Walks* with me is constructed as having the potential to

help the African Americans to re-group and find their positive bearings. Religious authority is also used in the song to protest against American materialist culture that is built on the concrete walls of racial discrimination. Religious authority particularly the one associated with God and Jesus is viewed as a positive influence in the lives of black people.

The controversial reading of West's *Jesus Walks* is not so much that the interpretation of the song attempt to affix it to an Islamic tradition, even when the singer used Christian leaders such as God and Jesus; in African American black music code switching, splitting and splicing are part of the verbal arsenal that an artist can use to transmit message and meaning. In 'Jesus Walks' for example, there is an implied fear and challenge of official censorship when the singers says: 'They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus/That means guns, sex, lies, video tapes/But if I talk about God my record won't get played Huh? /Well let this take away from my spins/Which will probably take away from my ends/ i hope it take away from my sins.' To sing about Jesus and God is considered acceptable when the meanings do not rock the American system. When 'Jesus' is sang about and new messages inflected with the quest for freedom are introduced, the American system becomes nervous because the singer has the power to mobilize the masses against evil, part of which is viewed as the American system.

Religion, whether associated with Jesus or Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is depicted and constructed as potentially subversive especially when the spiritual sensibilities in it reshapes the imaginative perspectives of the oppressed in society. There is potential that rebellion against oppressive systems might be fomented. West is aware that harassment of artists can be induced by the state through the imposition of economic embargo on the individual song; his 'record won't get played' and this threat can be real because it does result in the artist failing to get profit from 'my spin' or creativity, and the singer might die poor [take away my ends] and ironically, the artistic might actually be forgiven by God for not fleecing ordinary people. This reading is subversive because Christianity has in some cases been used by African Americans to re-fashion discourses of liberation from the very systems that introduced Christianity into the black communities. In his song, *Jesus Walks* Kanye West also subverts the discourse based on the Christian God and Jesus and this comes out when the singer doubts the ability of Jesus to deliver Blacks from their conditions of enforced depravity: 'My momma used to say only Jesus can save us/Well momma I know I act a fool'. In these lines the authority of the mother and of Jesus are

questioned because black people have been suffering a lot and divine intervention has not been for coming: 'I want to talk to God but I'm afraid because we ain't spoke in so long,(Jesus walks') so long,'

In these lines there is an ironic acknowledgment of distance between Jesus the saviour and the black African Americans. Consequently, it is suggested in the song that individual action is more reliable: 'The only thing that I pray is that my feet don't fail me now/And I don't think there is nothing I can do now to right my wrongs.' In other words the power to change one's life as well as that of the society in the song, is now invested in the self; the corporeal that should act in the way 'school need teachers'. Hip hop artists are new models and rabbi; the organic intellectuals in the struggle for political rights and spiritual fulfilment in America.

4.8. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the links between African American identities, Islamic religion, Christianity and hip hop music. The chapter discussed some stereotypes that have conveniently been used to distort Islam. These negative stereotypes of Islam have been challenged in the songs because singers wanted to provide positive images of black identities and communities. Some selected songs from Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface and Kanye West have been analysed and they revealed different levels of influence or affinity to Islam and the Christian religion. It has also been demonstrated that the capacity of singers to draw from and transform the cultural motifs, concepts and values available in the Islam and Christian religion depended on their creative use of language, their proclaimed relationship to the religions and their understanding of both the core values of these religions and the problems of identity re-formations that is a challenge to the African American black communities. Singers aspired to use Islam and Christianity to recreate individual and group values for their communities. Singers found themselves challenging the American dream, critiquing their communities' weaknesses and suggesting new vistas of cultural development based on some sampled thoughts from Islam and Christianity.

It was revealed that of the four singers considered in this chapter, Lupe Fiasco's selected lyrics and his political views inclined his poetics towards the use of Sunni Muslim doctrines of self help and community engagement. Fiasco made conscious effort to flavour his songs with

concepts and ideas borrowed from Islam. A song such as *Muhammed Walks* has parallels in the negro spirituals, themselves based on Afro-centric and Christian derived thematic motifs. The song was then also adapted from Kanye West's version of the song *Jesus Walks*. This intertexuality shows that singers are listening to each other and engaging each other in conversation about it means to be Christian or Moslem in the post 9/11 political dispensation that is restrictive to cultural freedoms. The singers also use counter discourses designed dialogue between themselves in order to re-shape new sensibilities for the black communities in dialogue with these communities. The twist of the song from *Jesus Walks* to *Muhammed Walks* indicates intertexual relations in the songs and imply a deliberate association with Prophet Muhammad(SAW), suggesting Lupe Fiasco's quest for alternative spiritual ancestry and alternative values. The exploitation of the journey motif in the song also is a time tested narrative strategy in Negro spirituals and reveals a community's restlessness in search of new heroes and values identities.

It was argued that Mos Def is a practising Sunni Muslim and his lyrics display this. In *Bin laden* Mos Def defends Islam from allegations that the religion is the one that fomented fundamentalist ideas possessed by the men who blew up the American twin towers in 2001. In the song, *Bin Laden* Mos Def uses Islam to provide a contestatory voice that challenges the official American narrative constructions of Muslims as either good and bad according to a narrow definition decided upon by the American State's imperative to defend itself in the war on terror. The song boldly suggests that Christian politicians killed their own people in America in order to create a pretext for war with Iraq, and in Afghanistan. In *Fear Not of Man* Mos Def makes structural and religious allusion to the Islam's dictate that men and women should fear and respect Islam because it is a faith that does not allow the violence, sexy images and crime pornographically displayed on American television. Mos Def draws his language for this song from some of the well-known words in Islam and views himself as located within Islam's intellectual and cultural values. *Fear Not of Man* challenges blacks to renew their individual and collective ideals for unfettered freedom based on practising and believing in Islam, a religion viewed by the singer as providing the grammar of spiritual values that can help rebuild the shattered black families, individuals and communities.

Scarface's lyrics, especially in *Someday* deliberately draw from both Islam and the Christian faith and demonstrated that religious syncretism enriches the minds of African Americans and fosters tolerance among believers from different faith. Scarface's song also showed that the condition of possibility for a superior faith comes from interdenominational dialogue. The singer fore-grounded the Christian religion and revealed how it could be used as a cultural resource by blacks to create new forms of relating to the self, with God and with society. There was a call – implicit though – in Scarface's song that blacks need to move out of the 'blame cycle' and then accept the historical fact that they were brutalised under slavery and that they continue to be, by white America, but also that the power is with them to fashion new models that transcend the master –slave relations so widely taken for granted in America.

Kanye West also penned *Jesus Walks*, a song that is based on the biblical allusions of Jesus Christ the Son of God who walked the breadth and length of his country preaching the gospel of Christian goodness. West itemized the woes that are experienced by blacks in America. His song is very controversial because it reveals the singers' ambivalent attitude towards the very religion he sang about. In some way, West appealed to blacks to leave their losing ways and join the Christian crusade against manmade and metaphysical evil. On the other hand, West doubts the capacity of religion to provide the much-needed vigorous strategies for uplifting blacks from their lives of crime and economic quagmire in America. Just as Lupe, Fiasco, Mos Def and Scarface, Kanye West's seems to have heeded Nation of Islam's minister, Louis Farrakhan's challenge that singers should view themselves as the black people's organic intellectuals who should use hip hop to challenge negative stereotypes of blacks.

While these songs mined themes on the quest for freedom, using biblical imagery, the songs were also secular in that they offered a veiled critique of the capitalist system that had forcibly brought blacks on the shores of America. From then, black musicians have continued using songs that have a religious undertone to attempt to come to terms with their subordinated life in a racial context. Popular music by black singers has used the figures of God, Muhammad and Jesus as narrative tropes of the quest for political survival. Religious discourse has therefore been instrumental in helping African Americans in creating a new sense of community growing out of hundreds of years of domination by the white establishment. Although the singers analysed in this chapter are at different levels of relationships with their faiths, the singers have created

distinct and yet differentiated cultural symbols through music, and that these symbols are not entirely without external spiritual influences. For example, Cepeda (2006: 272) opines that 'throughout the hip hop's still embryonic life, Yoruba religious Philosophy and aesthetics have consistently informed graffiti art, fashion, rap music, and break dancing.'

Brazilian and Afro-Cuban religious tunes have also found their ways particularly from the Hispanic artists. Religion then, could be described as the structuring principle of African American music, even where singers use it differently due to their consciousness of religion's role in moulding new identities. The songs discussed in this chapter are at their most subversive when they insist on creating their own narratives in spaces that do not easily lend themselves to political manipulation, infiltration and supervision. The irony of course is that corporate America continues to fund the production and distribution of songs based on Islam and reaps the profits (Chang 2008). The difference in the use of religion in hip hop lyrics analysed in this chapter contributes to the renewed sense of richness in the black 'music-scape' in America. Unfortunately, Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface and Kanye West can be criticised for suggesting a uniform cultural experience for blacks. Their songs emphasize male heroes from the bible and the Qur'an. Women remain in the shadow of Christianity and Islam's forms of 'othering'. This theme is tackled in chapter five that explores how female black artists have worked with Islam and Christianity in the period before and after 9/11.

Chapter 5: Gendering Islam: Black Female Muslim artists and the search for Alternative models of black Communities

5 Introduction

In the previous chapter we explored how four male, Black Muslim artists engage with questions of identity, particularly in the period before and after 9/11 in America. We demonstrated in the chapter that although some black and male singers in America use and reference Islam in their songs, this is done from a multiplicity of ideological positions. Although black male hip hop artists manipulated some cultural symbols from Islam to imagine a sense of collective home for black people, black women were made to occupy subordinate social positions in those representations. Some male and black artists imagined themselves as the organic intellectuals for African Americans – a cultural group that was in the songs imaged as single, coherent and stable. None of the male artists questioned the capitalist base of social relations responsible for diminishing the lives of the black people about whom the singers were composing their songs. Therefore, although women are present in the lyrics composed by male artists, the women's voices are severely silenced. This distortion and underrepresentation of the Muslim identities of black women by black male African American singers invites questions: Are there black women singing from within or using Islam as a cultural point of reference? What kind of images do black female Muslim artists authorize in music when they produce their own lyrics?

This chapter explores how black female singers represent Islam and Muslim in the lyrics. The chapter focuses on the lyrics by Missy Elliot, Miss Undastood, and Erykah Badu and evaluates the kinds of sensibilities and frameworks of alternative intellectual spaces that black women's voices can suggest for the social, spiritual and material up-liftment of black communities in America.

5.1 Critical perspectives on Notions of black women in the hip Hop industry

This chapter draws its theoretical resources to explain the production of artistic works by female singers, from the works of Rose (1994), Collins (2000; 2005; 2006; Pough (2004) and Banjoko (2004). These critical works describe themselves as black American Feminism steeped in African American nationalism; its authentic self is the self-conscious knowledge of the fractures that manifest themselves through the critical but differentiated versions and subversions of how

African American popular music mean, differently to the black communities. There is a general assumption in black cultural nationalism that male-produced lyrics deliberately symbolically annihilate and marginalize the voice of the black African American women (Banjoko 2004). To some extent and as we have shown in chapter four, this assumption is generally accurate. However, the assumption also essentialises male identities because as an idea, it assumes that all male artists are wilfully chauvinist in their representations of black women and that all female singers can represent themselves more authentically without revealing contradictions in their own musical narratives.

The idea that when women sing they can wreck male authority is advanced in African American black feminist scholarship authored by female critics. Pough argues that

> Bringing wreck, as the word is used here is a rhetorical act that
> has close ties to various other speech acts that are often
> linked to Black womanhood: talking back, going off, turning it out,
> having a niggerbitchfit, or being a diva. Each of these actions has
> simultaneously been embrace by some Black women as a marker of unique
> Black womanhood and renounced as the
> stereotypical Black women stance by others (Pough 2004: 78).

The 'unique' aspect of the politics of wrecking is that it implies resistance to dominant discourses that name and describe women as inferior. But this resistance is complicated because it "…combines politeness with assertiveness" (78), allows female artists to "signify" multiple meanings and then slot in the image of aggressive blacks when the women "talk shit" (79). Talking shit or "talking back is a challenging political gesture of resistance to forces that render Black women nameless, voiceless and invisible. (Pough 2004: 80). At the same time African American black feminists argue that there is no guarantee that female artists have access to and can manifest their positive agency and subjectivities at all times. Mainstream black feminism acknowledges that '…no homogeneous Black woman's standpoint exists (Collins 2000:28). Black female artists can imitate white middle class experiences, and internalize controlling images of men as superior. These insights are profound because they reveal the double consciousness in which female singers can 'support and critique male rapper's sexual discourse

in a number of contradictory ways' (Rose 1994 150). However, this chapter demonstrates that mainstream black feminism has remained informed by and subsequently subordinated to the explanations of female artistic inspiration as simply being based on male authored forms of black nationalism located within the politics of civil rights movements. Consequently less has been clarified about the inspiration that female Hip hop singers have received from The religion of Islam, and also how the female artists manipulate symbols associated with Islam to achieve female-centred meanings. The lyrics of Missy Elliot dramatize the ideological double-ness embedded in female musicians in their relation to Islamic culture.

5.2 Ms Elliot and the Female Gangsta Hip hop culture

Many of Missy Elliot's songs can easily but misleadingly be understood on a surface level to speak to and re-inform gangsta culture. For example, in the song *On and On*, Miss Elliot announces her presence in a male dominated musical tradition through mining themes related to explicit images of rabid sex; lurid expressions of sexual engagement in this song involves the sighs that the persona emits during the sexual act. Such expressions as 'Uh uh on, uh uh on, uh uh uh uh uh uh on' confirm the stereotype of women who are artists as conforming to descriptions such as 'female vixen'. In these depictions, women's sexual identities are associated with the commercialized aspect of hip hop. In the song, accompanying the sexual groans is the use of expletives, and swearing in a kind of degraded language that can only be interpreted as the expression of a degraded language depicting a degraded life. 'Fuckin levels', 'shit' 'eat your ass up' all reflect the gansta influence on her song. In her other song, **'Beep me 911** the language that connotes open sex is used to describe the tragic events of 9/11. This is used to diminish the significance linked to this historical event that reshaped world politics. In *Why you hurt women* women are depicted as sex objects; 'loose bootie' and 'hot as da nectar'. In the song *She's A Bitch* women are derisively likened to and represented as ''ass on fire'. From these songs, there are reasonable grounds to suggest that the influence of mainstream commercial hip hop on Missy Elliot reinforces the marginal role that women play in social life.

How then can we explain the image of self-denial or self abnegation in Missy Elliot's those lyrics in which she imitates the dictates of commercial hip hop's processes of objectifying women? Rose (1994) notes that in the context of black American hip hop some women's artistic

works "affirms patriarchal family norms and courtship rituals.'(148). The critic complicates this interpretation of women's agency by further noting that black women also are in "dialogue with one another, black men, women, and dominant American culture as they struggle to define themselves against a confining and treacherous social environment"(ibid 148-149). This act of performing within established patriarchal patterns of cultural definitions of black womanhood is also acknowledged by Jennifer Mclune(2008) who claims that female hip hop artists can, unintentionally, promote the ideology of woman-hating. Kendalls (2008) notes that women have been implicated in creating a discourse that confirms them as bootie, and bitches, while Kenneth Taylor(2008:1) believes that "no one in the rap industry has held these women at gunpoint and forced them to wear skimpy and revealing clothes! The black women that appear in rap videos laced in sexy and tantalizing lingerie, itty-bitty bikinis, or the latest in "prostitute-fashion", choose to do so!" It can be argued that the vixen model is a mere stepping stone in launching female artists' careers to give them competitive advantage in a competitive musical environment. This interpretation can be a complementary acknowledge to women's creativity; their capacity to compose negative images of themselves to enhance their social and financial status testifies to a subterranean power that can be turned to positive agency.

However, what is clear is that female artists can affect shifts in their lyrics from imaging themselves as "video vixen" to musical trickster introducing culturally subversive elements in their songs that can help them reclaim different levels of voicing their lives. Double consciousness that is manifested in the lyrics by female artists can open up a wide range identities that they can access and use in contradictory ways some of which involves working within and against dominant culture. The musical lyrics by Missy Elliot show this basic ambiguity in which there is recognizable influence from commercialized gangsta rap and also studied inclinations towards referencing the cultural symbols of the Islamic faith.

5.3 Missy Elliot, Hip Hop and the subculture of Islamic Faith

Swedenburg has convincingly argued that with the genre hip hop one is on slippery ground because no one can ever fully bring out all the meanings in the coded language that links what does appear as gangsta rap to sacrosanct religious influence such as that of Islam. Islamic worship is oral and aural and one needs to have or command sufficient linguistic vocabulary of the cultural symbols used in the religious faiths of Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam or the Five

Percenters or the Islamic version of the Nations Gods and Earth to appreciate the influence of doctrinal Islam on secular singers. Certain themes that recur in the three faiths emphasize different aspects of community lives in black experiences. A reinterpretation and re-reading of the song *On & On* can pre-dispose the listener to imagine that the language of the gangsta culture is emphasized as the first step that makes possible the rejection of this world of rough sex and human degradation possible. The lyrics of *On & On* operate through contrasting and juxtaposing Islam's religious symbols. For example, in the Islamic religious doctrine of the Nation of Islam, Five Percenters and Sunni Islam, black women are recognized as an essential but subordinated part of the black community. When Missy Elliot sings that "I've been around long and Scarface so cold" one is encouraged view the song as dialogue between Miss Elliot and Scarface, a male African American singer. The line seems to suggest that male singers have been slow in acknowledging the cultural significance of the black female voice in African American popular culture. Patriarchy is chided for silencing the voice of women in as much as it is celebrated for making possible women's resistance to that silencing. Thus in the song Scarface' [male rapper] is acknowledged as a member of the black hip hop community, and a catalyst in Missy Elliot's growth in consciousness. To this extent, black male singers are both celebrated and praised for enabling as well as disabling the voice of the black female singer in the process of shaping the discourse of liberation.

The female persona in *On & On* does not culturally wait to be liberated by men; Miss Elliot grabs the "microphone… away" from men and uses it 'throw blows' in ways that narrate alternative meanings. Missy Elliot ends her song *On & On* on assertive note, insisting on the need de-silencing her voice and announcing her musical presence in African American popular culture. She reminds the listener that "Missy be the name and yall should already know, Miss, Missy, Miss, Miss-miss/Missy be the name yall shoulda shoulda should already –all-all already know". The influence of the Islamic religion on the song, *On & On,* are manifest in Miss Elliot's search for a broader black community that should be defined in broad terms that include the cultural role of females singers in giving shape to new ideals in the black communities. As suggested above, reference to Scarface does conjure the overbearing image of black men in hip hop music. This referencing of male artists shows how female singers question male artists. The influence of the Five Percenters Islamic faith in Miss Elliot's lyrics can be identified when her

music calls black men to be responsible for the welfare of the black community imagined in individual and collective terms.

In **Beep Me 911'** Missy Elliot refuses to be forced to affect counterfeit emotional sympathies for a white audience and the capitalist economic system that was challenged by the Al-Qaeda. The song minimizes the tragic nature of 9/11 in order to over emphasise the fact that for four hundred years African Americans went through horrible experiences that white officials in America would want both the black community and white communities to forget rather than engage so that both races feel being part of the American dream. In this song a political narrative that has re-defined identities between America and its Islamic population is equated to a voyeuristic sexual narrative, casualised and mocked. Instead of participating in national rituals of mourning those who died on 9/11 the song mourns the daily betrayal of black girls by both the American capitalist system and black men; the persona in the song asks: "Why you cheatin on me? Can you tell me what I've done/ I thought you was the one/But you just a hit and run/Gave up clubs and parties/I put them aside'. On one hand these musical utterances are a critique of African American men who abandon their responsible roles as providers to their families. On the other hand, Miss Elliot acknowledges that she has regained self respect from the debasing life that she used to live when she frequented the clubs.

The general importance of the song is that it echoes the Nations of Islam and Sunni Islam religious faiths' emphasis on the need to respect to women and their creation of meaningful cultural relationships among African Americans communities. Although Missy Elliot has not publicly declared her allegiance to Islam, her lyrics draw from the moral laws of Islam. For example the Sunni version of Islam faith insist on abstinence from alcohol and partying which are viewed as encouraging promiscuity, crime and the fragmentation of the African American's ideal of an alternative society free from the cultural corrupting influences of commercialized relations of affect. Further evidence of Sunni Islam influence in Missy Elliot's lyrics are found in her song, **Why you hurt me**. In it, the voice discourages multiple sexual partners outside wedlock because this results in fatalities from HIV/AIDS. We hear the singer describe the sexual escapades of Cutie Tootie who 'humped' or had sex with Ralph, Bobby, Ricky and Mike. Tight, is the way she wore her dresses/Has she learned her lesson/From all the dick testing/Now I' m guessing/She's laying in a casket/In a yellow basket/For a Gucci jacket/ Daggit. I wish she didn't

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do those nasty things.'(2). Tootie died of 'dick testing', a euphemism of unbridled sexual licence. Further influences in the song of the values promoted in the Sunny Islamic doctrine of sexual abstinence in the above quoted lines are the discouragements from having multiple sexual partners.

However, an observed contradiction here is that some Sunni Islamic faiths believe in polygamy which can also expose women to the danger of contracting HIV/AIDS. One important conviction coming out of the lyrics in the earlier song, **Why you hurt me,** is the musician' insistence that the singer is a teacher; she is conscious of the dangers that afflict black communities. Missy Elliot believes like the Five Percenters Islamic faiths do that among the black communities 85% do not know how to deal with their problems in a positive way; 10% have given their lives to the god of mammon and that only 5% are gifted with knowing and therefore should teach others. The singer confirms this in the song when she becomes preachy, describing her new role as the one of organic intellectual within the black community. She concludes her song with a sermon like message to wayward sisters; "So you know what? This should be a lesson for anybody/who's hanging with someone who's dirty, nasty, stank/Once again going around humping everybody/Everybody and anybody and anything/That's why you make the ugly bitch sing". The moralizing in these likes recalls the religious injunctions of the Sunni Islamic faith that encourage black men and women to find sexual consummation in married relationships.

In the song, **All N My Grill**, Missy Elliot sings in a way that is meant to bring men to account for the social and be responsible in the home; men or husbands should not only proclaim to be the head of the families; these come with financial responsibilities, hence the persona in the song directs rhetorical questions to patriarchy, interrogating its assumption that it is superior in the home: 'Can you pay my bills/Cu a chick gotta live'/If you want me, where's my dough?/Give me money, buy me clothes". Not only does the song force men to be responsible in the family; the song suggests that sometimes black women allow themselves to assume subordinate positions in the family in order to force men to do their part in the raising of children. This doctrine of submission to men and yet expecting them to act responsibly and do more in the family comes straight from the tenets of Sunni Islam faiths. Karim argues that 'The rhetoric of patriarchy," i.e., men are the maintainers of women, may be deployed [by Sunni African- American] not to make women submissive but to instil in men a sense of responsibility' (2006: 23).

In the song, ***Hot Boyz*** Missy Elliot sings in the black female tradition of attacking as well as supporting black men. In the song she wants to him to treat her well, with respect, and the persona objects to men who 'trick' women and lure them with 'Lexus jeeps/Benz jeeps, and the Lincoln jeeps'. The persona in the song refuses to have her body viewed as sex object. At the same time she feels that materialist men are vulnerable; they attracted to bling or material things that last; they are easily lured by the soulless materialism made available by American capitalism. The female voice sings in a manner that seeks to protect both black men and female from superficial forms of freedom. Miss Elliot's most important question to the black community is 'Where you at? This question recurs in male songs as well. It summarizes the desire of female and male black singers to take stock of how much progress they have made since the abolition of slavery. This concern with upholding the unity in diversity of the talents and voices within the American community partly defines feminist consciousness in Sunni Islam in which there is the belief that 'Mutual responsibility would mitigate the burdens African-American women who too often live in poverty and raise children alone and at the same time uplift the entire race (Karim 2006:27).

In short, an analysis of some of Missy Elliot's songs suggest that the relationship of the 'black atlantic' oral and musical tradition to the Islamic faith is contradictory; female singers show influence of gangsta traits in their music and yet those same songs are closely linked to or influenced by the different beliefs in the Islamic faiths which the songs manifest consciously and sometimes entirely by coincidence as in the case of Missy Elliot who has not openly declared that she is Muslim. Aidi suggests that the other unanticipated effect of the 9/11 is that more African-Americans are joining Islam. Those who do not join still have their cultural creativity influenced by Islam despite not being members of NOI, Five Percenters or Sunni. This is so because of the subconscious understanding of the 'primary effects of being anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant backlash and infringements upon civil liberties'(Aidi 2008: 2) occasioned by America's war on terror on the African American communities.

5.4 The 'conscious turn' towards Islam in Black American female Singers

The above interpretations of Missy Elliot's songs as being linked to or influenced by the Islamic faiths are largely inferential and determined by how much I know of the cultural tenets of Islam identities. These readings of the songs are also aided by my ideological location as an Arab

woman. However, these reasons, alone, cannot explain why more and more African-American female singers are openly identifying with and declaring through their songs loyalty and allegiances to the different versions of Islam. One other important reason suggested by African American as to why black singers have turned to Islam for religious inspiration is that mainstream female hip hop culture in America has tended to concentrate on and explain racism as the reason why female singers deploy their lyrics to wreck the dominant narrative of Americanism and male black patriarchy (Pough 2004; Gilroy 1993, Rose1994).

Collins' argues that black cultural feminism should not simplistically be viewed as a "heterogenous collectivity"(2000: 29) of identities. Rose suggests that 'female rappers cannot be situated in total opposition to male rappers; the female rappers support and critique male rapper's sexual discourse in a number of contradictory ways' (Rose 1994:150). A further aspect that defines the instability within the 'heterogenous collectivity' of female rappers is that their works build on and critique cultural creations by previous generations of female rappers. Karim notes that some black female singers have openly embraced and engaged Islam in order to create intellectual space to critique racism, challenge black patriarchal attitudes that silence women, question political ideologies based on the Civil rights movement, contest the universalizing claims of some versions of black feminism in America.

Islam is viewed as offering emancipatory identities when it is blended with 'urban – mostly African American, but also Latino – cultural forms that encourage healthy notions of spiritual hybridity' (Aidi 2002:109). Islam inspired lyrics also provide spaces to revise and reverse – and sometime but ironically - to reaffirm the subordinate roles of women in the family (Ralph 2006; Rustomji 2007).

Khabeer points out that the ideological turn to Islam among female black artists of America is aimed to preserve the Islamic identity of Muslim youth and to educate non-Muslims about Islam and Muslims. It is important to remark that any attempt at preserving Islam is a complicated process because it involves selecting some aspects of Islam and not others, and then projecting the selected ones as constituting an 'authentic' Islamic culture.

The turn towards Islam has simultaneously been an affirmation and a critique of some forms of Christianity and also from other versions of Islam manifest through the Nation of Islam, Five

Percenters, Sunni Islam, and also from Immigrant Islam from outside America (Khabeer 2007). The creative transvaluation of doctrine Islamic values in the process of becoming an Islam convert involves recovering what McMurray describes as 'improvisation zones' where Islam moves in and through cultures as a "boundary object"(2008:75). There is no single version of Islam to which black African American female singers can completely defer to without making use of some aspects of other versions of Islam. All versions of Islam borrow cultural resources from each other, critique one another and emphasize certain moral aspects that are not found in other versions.

5.5 Miss Undastood and the celebration of Sunni Islam

Tavasha Shannon, popularly known on stage as Miss Undastood is one of the few American female rappers to have openly declared her links with the values associated with the version of Islam called Sunni. She generously reference in her songs, the Quranic verses and names of spiritual martyrs from the Islamic culture. She also rhymes about the struggles of faith, local politics, incites self love, encourages women to have self-confidence, protect women from male aggression and implores the women to work together. In an interview with Khabeer, Miss Understood says that

> It's harder to be a female Muslim emcee because
> people don't think that I should be so vocal…
> I had one brother tell me it is not becoming of a Muslimah (Muslim woman) to do this.
> And I was just like 'What?'
> Even though I am the voice of Muslimas?! (Khabeer 2007:132).

The notion Miss Undastood has of her role as teacher cuts across her songs. In the song 'Here Miss Undastood to you' she describes how she was "born muslim, baptized Catholic". This seeming tension was between being born Muslim and being baptized Christian was eventually resolved in favour of Islam. Miss Undastood says she now worships Allah, insists on the Sunni conservative doctrine of and "one world, One God, One family". Miss Understood deplores wearing sexy clothes that leave parts of the body exposed, discourages clubbing and drinking alcohol. She believes Sunni Islam can provide answers to social problems such as the disintegration of the black families in America. She urges her friends and the black people to

recommit themselves to Allah through whose Islamic religion is depicted as providing moral regeneration to a world fallen to the material greed. In the song ***Best Names*** Miss Undastood samples the names of important people and values underpinned by words found in the Quran. She weaves Islamic sounds into the melody of her songs in order to reach out to Muslims. In the process the invocation of Muslim names introduces new meanings to prayer and dedication to a life of celibacy and freedom from substances that damages the souls and spiritual lives of black American youths. In ***Best Names*** she chants to 'AL Rahim', 'Al Rakman', 'Al Maliqi', 'Al salaam', Al Razzaaq and Al latif'. Each of these names creates a connection with a spiritual world whose values celebrated are in the Sunni Islam community of religious beliefs. For example, the persona in the song urges people to "make their 'salaah'" or prayers to Allah who is depicted as having power to bring Jesus back to life. In this line of thought, Jesus - and by extension, Christianity - has been subordinated to the Islamic chain of hierarchical command.

In the song, ***Best Names*** the superiority of the values of generosity in Islam are sanctioned by the 'ever providing' Ar-Razzaq' (Wikipedia 2010: 3). The name 'Al-Maliqi' suggests that Allah is the Owner, The Sovereign, the True and Ultimate King; Ar-Rahman means the all beneficent and most merciful and compassionate, while Al latif is the gentle and kind Allah. By invoking these names in the song, Miss Undastood effects a revision as well as a reversal of the stereotypes in the western imagination in which Islam is equated with evil. Her voice is a plea for religious tolerance in a world in which everything associated with Islam is linked to terrorism (Mamdani 2005). Miss Undastood recreates a bibliography containing a corpus of positive words that Sunni Muslim devotees use every day. The use of Islamic terms in the songs makes recitation easy and introduces non-believers to an oral and aural linguistic world that has barely understood by many hence her stage name is meant to suggest that the values of Islam are either genuinely or deliberately misunderstood.

Furthermore, in a cultural context in which the black family is severely dislocated by the capitalist forces of America, Miss Undastood uses the idiom of Sunni Islam to fashion new identities; the recollection of Islamic concepts as manifested through the 99 ways in which Allah is described is an attempt to recover a cultural memory that the dominant Christian narratives in America uses to suppress other religious sensibilities. Miss Undastood attempts to impose coherence to the discrete forms of consciousness within the black communities through invoking an alternative but grand narrative of Islamic culture. Needless to suggest that the very concern in

creating a pan American Islamic consciousness in the song **Best Names** is first, an acknowledgement of the fractures inflicted on the psychology of the black family. And secondly, Miss Undastood seems to deliberately insist on practicing religious tolerance that America preaches but does not wish to credit when the same religious tolerance is practiced by African Americans who have assumed Muslim identities. In other words, it seems also that Miss Undastood deliberately seeks to undermine the coercive ideology insipiently percolated into the American society by the philosophy on which the war on terror is based. According to Miss Understood, what America defines as 'terror' is in fact other people's religion in which those people find peace and not war, create new humane values and not rejection of the knowledge embedded in Islam. In the song **Stylin in Khimars**, Miss Undastood not only preaches the doctrine of pride and self-referential love for Muslim women; there is a conscious desire to test the limits of religious tolerance in the American society. She does not see herself as an outcast just because she has adopted a religion that is different from Christianity, and also just because she decides to wear clothes that are different from what is expected in a Christian home. In fact, costume is ideological; it tells of our different values and announces the possibility of an alternative life 'stylin' outside the framework of what is considered commonsensical. She rhymes in a defiant tone and insists on holding onto her faith no matter what:

> *[It's] Obligatory we use styles in our khimars(beadscarves)*
> *And we Walk with pride our long jean skirts*
> *Obligatory*
> *We stays in our hijab (headscarves) With a nice jilhab (long dress)*
> *and a matching bag'(quoted in Khabeer 2007: 132)*

The use of Islamic words such as 'khimars', 'hijab' and 'jilhab' is calculated to bring out a sense of belonging to the Islamic sect of Sunni Muslim culture. Over and above, language is the memory bank of a people and its successful acquisition is a prelude to acquiring or having access to the philosophy of the religion of Islam. While this song celebrates being a Muslimah, it also challenges official American ideology that associates Islamic attire with terrorism. Thus wearing khimars, is in fact performing against a perception; it is an assertion of a different and alternative identity. As Khabeer puts it, Miss Undastood struggles against a perception that 'while women play a pivotal role in the growth [of] the American Muslim community, for may Muslim men

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and women, the ideal Muslim woman is much more reserved and conservative than her real-world counterpart'(2007: 132). Sunni devotees cover their hair, chest legs and arms. To the extent that this covering of the body is a choice rather than forced, this is evidence of feminist agency and power that is transferred to Black Muslim women and therefore the act is not necessarily oppressive:

> In contrast, however, the headscarf functions as a symbol of piety
> and Muslim identity when it reflects women's choice.
> For [Sunni] Muslim women, dress highlights "the role the body plays
> in making of the self, one in which the outward beviour of the body constitutes
> both the potentiality and the means through which one cultivates her spirituality
> and/or projects religious and cultural loyalties (Karim 2006:22)

Miss Undastood therefore tries to live by her convictions, and one of it is that she is the organic intellectual and voice of Muslimahs. However, while the song *Stylin in khimars* invests sartorial attire with values that contest, resist and help her to assert the agency of female Sunni Islam, Miss Undastood is aware that there is a danger of essentialising Sunni identities in a way that can make those who are not Sunni Muslim begin to question her poetics. In the song *Hijab is the One* she adopts a pre-emptive stance and argues through her lyrics that 'just because I cover don't mean I'm more righteous. Just because she doesn't, don't mean she's less pious' (Muslimah Media Watch: 2010: 1). At stake here is how Miss Undastood attempts to reformulate the meaning of faith and belief. She suggests through her lyrics that it is possible that some Muslimah who belong to the Sunni Islam faith can also be hypocritical; affecting faith through attire and yet they also participate in practices that undermine Islam.

The analogy that she draws makes one remember the ways in which some black Americans have shifted allegiance from NOI, to Sunni or from NOI to the Nation of Gods and Earths. Michael Muhammad Knight's authoritative book, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip Hop and The Gods of New York* (2007) trace the tensions within Nation of Islam which resulted in some blacks switching to Sunni Muslim culture. Knight shows in his book that the Nation of Islam is distinctly male authored and controlled since it is associated with black militant forms of visible acts of resistance to racial discrimination in the African society characteristic of the Civil Rights

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politics. On the other hand, those black singers such as Miss Undastood who chose to follow the doctrines of Sunni Islam decided to expand the cultural and spiritual space in which women could work without necessarily being considered as political minors. Aidi writes in a manner that seems to support Miss Undastood, when he, Aidi opinionates that 'Orthodox Sunni Muslim sees Five Percenters as blasphemous heretics who call themselves Gods'(2004:111). Karim adds that Sunni African-American Muslim women recognize their version of Islam as the 'first feminist monotheistic religion that is, they see it as the first religion to bring systematic social reform and rights to women in a patriarchal society' (2006: 19-20). It is important to emphasise that some Sunni women still have some favourable memories that they share of the Nation usually [indicating] Nation practices or ideas that are compatible with Sunni Islam such as the desire to promote the status of women in the black communities. In other words, Miss Undastood is bold enough through her lyrics to point to the contradictions within the versions of Islam that African American people reference as religious frames in their lives.

5.6 Critique of Miss Undastood's Sunni Islam Pop music

Miss Undastood is an awesome female and Sunni artist. She has sung about the racism inherent in America, particularly in songs such as 'Best Names' where she makes critical references to the historical injustice done to blacks. In that song she mentions that at the time of the abolition of slavery in America, blacks were promised 40 acres a mule. That these have not been delivered to blacks who continue to suffer in the present day American society reveals the hypocrisy of American dream and is an indictment to the American system of democracy. When Miss Undastood's is evaluated after 9/11, the political significance of her contribution to black female and Muslim is to have challenged the emerging mainstream but black male dominated Islamic popular musical culture. Miss Undastood sings in order to create an ideal and alternative black community informed by the spiritual values of the Sunni version of Islam. Although in her lyrics she is aware of the struggles of beliefs within the versions of faiths articulated through Nation of Islam, The Five percenters or the Nation of Gods and Earths, and Sunni Islam, she has drawn criticism for implying that Sunni Muslim values are better than those values in the other versions of Islam.

One of the critics of Miss Undastood is Faith who argues in Muslimah Media watch that she finds Miss Undastood to have considerable talent that she has used to sing about issues usually

considered taboo in Islam. However, Faith argues that she sometimes finds Miss Undastood's understanding of Islam quite coercive. Faith points to the fact that Miss Undastood wrongly believes in 'one idea of what Muslims are' (Muslimah Media Watch 2009: 2) particularly when it comes to what kind of attire Muslimah should put on. Furthermore Faith points out the basic ambiguity in Miss Undastood's view of polygamy. While the artist deplores women who have multiple partners, she does not see anything wrong in the Sunni Islam that encourages polygamy. Faith suggests that Miss Undastood sometimes displays 'no sense of complexity and nuance'. The critic argues that despite announcing that she is a Muslimah, Miss Undastood has not rapped significantly on issues of social justice. This would have implied a critique of the unequal relations of power between blacks and whites, among whites, between black women and men. It is assumed by Faith that if Miss Undastood had taken this route in her lyrics she could have come face to face with system of American capitalism that justifies subordination of one social group to another, one individual over another. In short, although Faith's critique of Miss Undastood version of Muslim faith is sometimes justified, the critic has inadvertently confirmed Miss Undastood's point which is that both within the community of black people in general and among the blacks who have joined Islam, there are contradictions which still need to be worked through. This task is approached by another female Muslimah, Eryah Badu whose faith is grounded in the teachings of the Islamic version of faith called Five Percenters or Nation of Gods and Earths.

5.7 Erykah Badu and the teachings of the Five Percenter or Nation of Gods and Earths

Above, we argued that Miss Undastood inscribes ambiguities of meanings into her musical poetics. She is 'misunderstood' by male and black rappers who expect her to sing in tunes that slot easily into patterns of social behaviour associated with submissive women. She is 'misunderstood' in her Sunni community because she is appears 'too' loyal to the Islam faith; she wears clothes that identity her with her faith but which also demands the audience to recognize the Pan Islam consciousness that she wants to spread; she sings about an ideal of happy, and united black families in America yet she approves of polygamous relations that have potential of fractious politics of jealousy. In contrast to Miss Understood's Sunni faith, Erykah Badu derives her musical inspiration from the teachings of the version of Islam called The Five Percenters or The nation of Gods and Earths. In its philosophy, 'Gods' are real men and 'Earths'

are the women. The Five Percenters believe that in the world 85 percent of people do not understand their experiences, 10 percent of the people have joined capitalism and enjoy exploitation others. In this version of the Islamic faith, it is believed that only five percent of men and women can become organic intellectuals who understand the imperatives to spread the wisdom in the Quran.

The five Percenters re appropriates for themselves, the spiritual dimension of Islam which then vests the power for individual and collective regeneration in actual men and women personified as 'Gods' and 'Earths'. The Five Percenters emphasize the provability of social, political and religious facts and are therefore more materialist in their understanding of social contradictions. They are also idealist and romantic because they believe in reproducing the traditional social roles in which men are superior to women. Their ambition is to create a model of Islamic communities in which men and women share responsibilities in the family, even when these are defined in ways that guarantee the superior position of patriarchy and maintain the subordination of women or 'Earths'(Knight 2007).

The Five Percenters' religious faith emerged out of the Nation of Islam in the late 1960s when its 'Allah, Clarence 13 X defected from NOI and created the Nation of Gods and Earths. Knight also suggests that the Islamic version of the The Nation of God and Earths also emerged as a reaction to the portrayals of Islam in mainstream America media as 'irrational' and composed of violent black males(Knight 2007). The post September 11th 2001 American mainstream media assumes that 'Earths' or women in Islamic faiths are the *hur*, or *houri*, who though, imagined as beautiful are the temptresses and encourage black men and Arabs to commit violence in the name of Islam. This view of the power of 'Earths is acknowledged by Rustomji who writes that in mainstream American media, the hur is a beautiful, attractive virgin waiting to be a reward to any Muslim who commit violence in the name of Islam. For example, according to Rustomji, the connection between the *hur* and political violence is demonstrated by the alleged letter found in Muhammad Atta who masterminded the bombing of the American twin towers on the 11 September 2001. Atta's letter is said to have urged the hijackers to carry out their deadly mission because in the afterlife they would be rewarded with *houri*. Rustomji writes that another letter found in a house used by al-Qaida in Kabul contains verses in which the promise of 'Earths' or virgin angels to Muslim men is described as motivation for political violence:

For whom are the gardens, their gates wide open

Its houris standing at the entrance,

Joyfully welcoming the valorous princes

How fairs are the houris, well-fashioned by their creator/

Take pride, O gardens of delight

[in him who has earned] Enjoyment;

the companions are here for their wedding feast (Rustomji 2007:85)

In above passage *hurs* are attractive but also repulsive; beautiful but they also induce political violence in the men who follow the Islamic faiths; the *houris* are virgins and sensual but are viewed as reward for terrorists.

In the language of Five Percenters, the 'Earths' are the centre of a successful family but they are depended on 'Gods' material provisions for sustenance; 'Earths' are considered lifelong companions to 'Gods' but they are to remain subservient. There is a paradox in that Five Percenters aim at revising the image of Muslim women put across in mainstream black popular culture, The Five Percenters also yarn a philosophy that ends up reproducing some of the most pernicious stereotypes of black men (Gods) and black women (Earths).

Erykah Badu's lyrics enter this space of the religious faiths of the nation of 'Gods' and 'Earths'; her lyrics confirms the social relations sanctioned by the Five Percent faith; at the same times it offers an oblique critique to some of the excesses indulged by the devotees of the Five Percenters. For example, in Badu song *One* co-produced with Busta Rhymes, 'God', family relations are imaginatively reconfigured in ways that simultaneously transgress the fragmented reality of average American experience of black community socialization and at the same time maintain the time honoured separate roles of men 'Gods' are depicted as providers of livelihood while women '(Earths) play the 'secondary role of child bearing;

Busta Rhymes (BR) What I'm gonna do with Erykah Badu/

I'm gonna have some fun/What do you consider fun?/

Fun, natural fun

Erykah Badu(EB) I said what I'm gonna do with my man Buster Rhymes/

I'm gonna have some fun/

What do you consider fun/

Fun, natural fun (Badu and Rhymes 1997).

In the lines above, the audience cannot miss the call-and response structure of the verse, that is a tradition inherited directly from the musical tradition created by the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) in America. However, in the actual lyrics there is emphasis on 'fun' defined as 'natural fun'. In the grammar of values of the nation of Gods and Earths "natural fun" 'can be seen as a proclamation that Islam is the natural way of life, which is one of the nine principles that Five Percenters live by (McMurray 2008:78). "Natural Fun" is also associated with unrestricted sex acts between Gods and Earths. Knight argues that Allah Elijah Muhammad banned birth control among the flock of the nation of Gods and Earths and instead urged Gods and Earths to have sex and multiply at an early age, but within the family unit: sex is a duty but it is "natural fun' that is supposed to be enjoyed as well. Knight highlights the fundamental nature of this teaching of Five Percenters when Knight writes in the sexual relations between Earths and Gods:

> Proper intercourse was achieved by man and woman both
> lying on their sides, the man's legs between those of the woman.
> It was also required that a woman have sex at least once in twenty- eight days.
> Otherwise, she'd become "high-strung" because
> she could not "release" like a man. The [Born] lesson also blames this
> inability to release as the cause of female homosexuality. (Knight 2007: 208-9).

Apart from the passage's anti-pluralistic sexual attitudes in society, there is a male [God] concerned with controlling the sexuality of the woman [Earth]. However, in the lines from the song, *One* there is mutual convergence of ideas of what "natural fun" means to Busta Rhymes and Erykah Badu: consensual sex that should gratify both man and woman promoted as the ideal. Furthermore, in the song, Rhymes and Badu insist on the viability of a cohesive and united family unit for black people in America. This point is made powerfully in the song to act as a counterpoint to the fragmented realities of 'failed' or aborted families in black community. There is a desire expressed in the song, to create a model of a black family, community and nation that

is coherent and mutually based on a give and take relationship between Gods (men) and Earths (women):

> *BR…I self Lord am/So divine when me and my woman coincide as one mind*
> *Bear witness to one mind/*
> *Bear witness, one respect, one culture, one way of thinking, one vision,*
> *making the one decision, the one way of living/*
> *Common destiny amongst all/*
> *One understanding amongst me and my woman so that we can't fall/*
> *And keep moving forward based on actual fact/*
> *Yes yall my beautiful Mother Earth respect to the max (Rhymes and Badu 1997).*

In their conception of life, Five Percenters believe that they can attain a level of spiritual development in which there is ultimate unity and uniformity in the thinking of men (Gods) and women (Earths) about their social experience and spiritual social life. The insistence on oneness in "thinking", "vision", "decision", "way of life," "destiny" should initially be understood positively and literally as a conscious desire by Five percenters to create out of the chaos of social fragmentation, a community of consciousness in which the black people should redefine their lives so as to attain higher goals in life beyond the prison, prostitution, a life of crime and 'bling'. In the song lines quoted above, Rhymes and Badu consciously emphasis words like "lord", "divine", and "Mother Earth". In the belief system of Five Percenters, mortals can appropriate the spiritual values underscored by Islam and personify these values in the form of deities or Gods to refer to men and 'Mother Earth' to refer to women. There are allusions to the Christian Bible here in which it is believed that God made woman out of clay/earthed, breathed into this clay and the woman was created. This allusion suggests that Gods (men are Creators and they vested with authority over women. Busta Rhyme can describe Badu as "my woman" and "my beautiful Mother Earth" as both a sign of affection that lays claim that Gods own and have authority of women. Gender inequalities are thus reproduced because the movement forward between Gods(men) and Mother Earth(women) is premised on the understanding that men is lord and divine from where women can receive "respect".

Although the lines quoted from *One* posit a lifestyle that is ideal, Five Percenters already believe that human beings only have to will this life in order for it to come into existence. The consequence of this belief and faith is that unequal social relation between Gods (Men) and earths (women) can be taken for granted as a natural and "actual fact" of life. MCMurray notes that in the way of thinking of the members of The Nation of Gods and Earths, 'God is not a mystery and that everything in the universe can be explained mathematically (2008:78). However, it is arguable that the 'actual fact' of life is that Gods and Earth's can achieve unity but not uniformity of social consciousness among its members at any point in time; the identity of individuals in society are influenced by a collective culture, but how individuals react to that culture, to questions of their individuality can never always coincide point for point between men and women.

In other words, for the Five Percenters, group or family achievement is measured and viewed as the consummation of a project of collective upward mobility. The irony is that the language of oneness glosses over social contradictions existing at the level of individual, family and gender social strata in the black community. In other words, the ideological underpinning of the philosophy of Five Percenters sometimes comes across to the audience as at worst, coercive, and, at best as romantic idealism.

For example, in the song, *One* Busta Rhyme and Erykah Badu introduce a further idea that within the faith of the members of the Five Percenters, the group can struggle for a "common cause"/Just one" so that all must "uplift". The question of up-lift-ment among black communities has been debated by various scholars, the prominent of which is W. E du Bois who even suggested the notion that there is a group of black people who are/should be the "talented tenth"; that this group of people is composed of the elites or educated African Americans and that because of their level of culture and education, they should help in the uplifting of the black race. The Five Percenters' Islamic faiths are re-inventing this idea, narrowing it to the Five Percenters of the African American population. The difference between Du Bois's idea of the talented tenth and the Five percent is that The Nation of Gods and Earth is made up of mostly uneducated youth who have used the spiritual grid of Islam to empower themselves so that they become several Allahs. The achievements of the talented tenth and the Five Percenters who see themselves as the natural leaders and organic intellectuals of the black communities in America

has also been written about with the most critical position conceding that although the two social classes can foster some consciousness of self-worthy among the black communities, both the talented tenth and the Five Percenters have become trapped in their own rhetoric of being the self-appointed saviors of the black people(Knight 2007).

In other words, although the critic, Felicia M Miyakawa takes it as a positive aspect that "Five Percenters take pride in their ability to "show and prove" the naturalness of their way of life, instead of allowing useless rules to determine their daily practices" (Quoted in Mcmurray 2008:78), one is easily reminded of the simplifications of the ideology of Negritude as espoused by Leopold Sedar Senghor in which blacks depicted as natural, sensuous and unthinking beings while whites portrayed as mechanical, and rationalist. The insistence on living a life based on everything defining everything through the restrictive ideology of oneness is itself a way of imposing authoritarian structures on the daily practices of the lives of the Five Percenters' membership. Listening to some more lines from the song *One* by Busta Rhymes and Erykah Badu reveals more of the contradictions in the version of Islam informed by the philosophy of sameness that the Five Percenters maintain and promote: Rhymes and Badu sing:

> *We're on the highest form of emotion, holy sacred and pure*
> *And what's mine is yours, specially if we move in the same direction/*
> *Just for the one common cause/Just one, opportunity to handle our biz*
> *Just one mind, state so we can equally live/*
> *Just one, you know we only Have one life to live/Let's come together as one*
> *(EB)As one/One family as one/*
> *One little kiss now/As one/One entirety/As one/*
> *And let us all uplift now (Badu and Rhymes 1997).*

Much as the theme of group upliftment is important for the black people, in the lines above, the insistence on invoking the discourse of "emotion", "holy sacred" and "pure" suggests the biological and spiritual superiority ascribed to African American in America. Such verbal markers invoke the myth of racial and religious authenticity in an American context where blacks as social groups do not share similar values, are culturally hybrid and religiously tolerant of other faiths such as Christian from which they liberally and select spiritual values to frame

their different experiences. Knight argues that the notion of "just one, mind state" between Gods (men) and Earths (women) is even confirmed by some members in the rank and file of the Five Percenters followers who believe that it is true that men (Gods) have the mind and the brains while women (Earths) have to be told what to think by the Gods. The critic writes that

> In 1975, Infinite Al'Jaa'Maar-U-Allah was holding a
> Civilization class at 1629 Park Place in Brooklyn and built on the question,
> Does woman have a mind?"
> When Infinite taught that she did, a handful of Gods rose to challenge him,
> asserting that woman
> "didn't have a mind, but she had access to the mind" (Knight 2007: 209).

Certainly, realities have been changing among the attitudes of some Gods (men) but some Earths (Women) feel that they have not written their own histories and life experiences of the Five Percenters. Some Earths acknowledge that "knowing our history [as Five Percenters] is of the utmost importance" but go on to ask: Sisters, what about us" (Knight 2007:209). To further underscore the oppression of black women within the faith pronounced by Five Percenters, Mccloud writes that within the ranks and file of The Nation of Gods and Earths

> Women, referred to as earths, learn who they are and
> their proper place from the men.
> In general, the woman's role is to "learn to keep children,
> home and be there for the man."
> She is taught proper behavior for home and abroad.
> Women can have a profession and a career;
> this is an avenue for spreading understanding.
> Women are to be fully covered, wearing face veils with unadorned skin
> no cosmetics are used (McCloud 1995: 61).

The content of what the "proper place" and "proper behavior for home and abroad" is dictated by Gods (men). Women live double lives with one set of behaviour learnt and studied for home and

another set of behavioural values performed amidst foreigners. Rose argues though, that women rappers and operating from theological platforms such as the Five Percenters do not always see themselves as sexual servants or accessories to men. Instead, women (Earths) can endure polygamous relations if always it guarantees that the men (Gods) become responsible for the upkeep of the family. Rose argues that "the capacity of a woman to use her sexuality to manipulate his [God] desire for her [Earth] purposes is an important facet of the sexual politics of male raps about women (2004:299). Although this is a profound insight in so far as it reveals how women 'resist' coercive religious discourses, McMurray (2008) notes that Erykah Badu has inflected resistive new meanings into her musical responses to Busta Rhymes' initial call to enforce ideological uniformity as well as differences between Gods and Earths.

5.8 Rethinking Black womenhood, and respectability in the context of the theology of The Nation of Gods and Earths

According to McMurray, Badu's non-traditional thoughts about the place of the individual in the family and black community are represented in the following lyrics from the song, *One*:

> *(EB)...As my sunlight, I bear witness to you/Being the fountain you can come home and watch the babies too*
> *(BR) The one family we agree on how to follow tradition*
> *(EB)This one family coming first/Play your position/You make the sacrifices, I make the same too*
> *(BR) From all the struggle*
> *(EB)That I see, that's why mu love is for you*
> *(BR) You always hold it down for me, so l'm a hold it for you/And watch the babies while you secure the food that come through*
> *(EB)Now don't let my ambition make you feel like competition/We should both play a role in our whole living condition*
> *(BR) True Indeed*
> *(EB) I know you symbolize the strength inside the family/Then show me you can handle womanly responsibilities*

(BR)Not a problem I know you hold me down when I fall on the ground/But make sure
when you bring the food home there's enough to go round
(EB)And because you are my everything what's mine is yours/
*Moving in the same direction, just for one common cause (*Badu and Rhymes 1997
quoted in Mcmurray 2008: 79).

These are touching lines that reveal female artists as "verbal Mujahidin"(Alim 2006:45) who use language to subvert the certitudes of male authority. The lines show how negotiating multiple social boundaries and identities by black women rappers requires to enter into critical dialogue with female singers, male rappers and other popular musicians whether these are of Islamic faiths or not. For example, Busta Rhymes insists on observing "tradition" that defines women's roles as that of being at home, bearing and rearing children. Erykah Badu undercuts this cliché by first reassuring Rhymes that he is still the head of family, the strength of the home, and the "sunlight" of the family. Reference to Gods as "sunlight" and "fountain" are in keeping with the nine principles of Five Percenters who believe that Gods (men) are the originators of knowledge which then must be spread by men to women. Women are then viewed as the custodians of African American cultures so this matrix of the song the women must spread their knowledge to the children and the black communities as a whole.

However, in this verbal battle Badu then goes further to claim equal treatment in the home suggesting that the Gods must also perform the function of looking after the "baby too". The Gods are verbally forced to concede that it is manly that part of playing one's "position" implies that men's responsibilities are to bring food and "watch" the babies. In these lines, Erykah transgresses the normative lines that divide Gods (men) from Earths (women) when Erykah further demands from Busta Rhymes that he should play "a role in our whole living condition". "Whole" is another euphemist expression that both use to in the world of the song, Rhymes and Badu are equal partners who must bring food and serve that food to the family. The punch line is the one in which the women insists on equality of roles in the home is; "You make your sacrifices, I make the same too." Through this line, Erykah (Earth) has enacted the movement from traditional roles that bind women to the home with children. Gods (men) are encouraged not to become jealous of the new found freedom that has been acquired through the skilful use of

language to undermine the notion of separating spaces that women (Earths) and men Gods (men) occupy in the philosophy of the Five Percenters.

In a skilful use of reassuring words, Erykah implores Busta Rhymes to not view her as in "competition" with him. The voice of the female persona cajoles, flatters the Gods (men) who is described as symbolizing the "strength inside the family". The content of that strength is reformulated by Earths(woman) when Erykah sings that man(God's) sense of responsibility is judged by the extent to which he is able to handle the woman's(Earth) new "ambition" of "womanly responsibility" that in the songs now means that the woman can also bring food to the family. Erykah's voice closes the lines of the song, *One* through dramatic irony in which the man (God) agrees that even when the woman fails to bring enough food, still, the man should be available to do so because in the new relationship created through the song "what's mine is yours".

Implied is that women's challenges should also be shared by men because the 'Earth' (woman) and the God (man) are now bound together by new ethos of respect of the self and of the other. Erykah Badu and Busta Rhymes song's *One* dramatizes the cultural transmutations and ideological permutations that are taking place with the religious faith of The Nation of Gods and Earth. As Mcmurray argues, "hip hop culture, and by extension hip hop music, has been a space for alternative expression[and] a space of resistance…this hip hop song that details the ideal family unit, according to Five Percenters beliefs, challenges the notions of division and competition between the sexes, opting instead for the celebration of unification"(2008:80). In other words, if in real life men and women within the Five Percenters faith are still struggling to resolve their contradictions relating to their social roles, at least in the song, those tensions have been resolved in favour of uplifting of women and men at the level of recognizing the significance of each other. This theme of respecting black women is part of the overall gender struggles that men and women have to fight within the new framework provided by religion of Islam.

5.9 General Remarks on the chapter: the influence of *NOI, Five Percenters* and *Sunni* Islam on female artists

This chapter argued that little has been written on the influence of Islam on female artists in African American black communities. Since influence is not a one way road, this chapter has also revealed that some female African American singers have appropriated the cultural symbols in Islam, recontextualized these symbols as female singers manipulated them to speak to or elaborate on the women's new found Muslim identities. In general terms, mainstream black feminist scholarship has been able to demonstrate that the African American women have forced their ways in the predominantly male industry of popular culture. There is a widely-held perception that male-produced videos accord women low status and that stereotyped women are often described as 'bitch' video vixen'. There is some truth that male artists and producers have tended to slot the image of women into the frame in which women are 'othered' as inferior and morally degraded. However, what has not been sufficiently explored is how women portray themselves in the videos that they produce. When women flaunt their sexualities and bodies in either male or women-produced lyrics or videos there is a possibility of subversion of both male and female attitudes that are rooted in patriarchal conception of women. The chapter proceeded to question how women who either participate in the male-dominated business of music or those women who sing from the ideological location of Islam are conscious of the need to transcend these stereotypes that are imposed on their imagination through the use of cultural values derived from a male-authored The religion of Islam.

Rose (1994) writes that the representations of black women in musical lyrics are complex; it shows women's capacity for complicit as well as the desire to break out of the cycle of negative stereotyping. Rose notes that "cognizant that they were being constructed in the mainstream press as a progressive response to regressive male rappers, these female felt that they were being used as a political baton to beat male rappers over the head, rather than being affirmed as women who could open up public dialogue to interrogate sexism and its effects on young black women." Rose: 1994: 149-150). The critic further notes that female singers remain acutely aware of the "uneven and sometimes racist way in which sexist offenses are prosecuted, stigmatized, and reported. And so, in several public contexts, women rappers defended male rappers' freedom of speech and focused their answers on the question of censorship rather than sexism rap lyrics.

This is not to say that their evasive tactics are not in so far as they may implicitly sanction verbal attacks on women in rap. ….women rappers cannot be situated in total opposition to male rappers; they support and critique male rappers' sexual discourse in a number of contradictory ways (Rose 1994:149-150). Though insightful, particularly when explaining why black women "support and critique" male rappers, this above passage also carries with it a sense in which black women in American music are accorded extraordinary capacity to defend themselves and their men. The analysis of the lyrics by Miss Elliot, Miss Undastood and Erykah Badu in this chapter qualifies the above assertions and revealed the fact that not all women who participate in the hip hop musical culture care for their black men or are aware that the women are actually enslaved by some the images they emulate.

Another African American critic, Mclune (2008) makes a bold statement when she suggests that hip hop owes its success to the ideology of woman-hating. It creates, perpetuates and reaps the rewards of objectification. "Sexism and homophobia saturate hip-hop culture, and any deviation from these forms of bigotry is made marginal to its most dominant and lucrative expressions. Few artists dare to embody equality and respect between the sexes through their music; those who do have to fight to be heard above the dominant chorus of misogyny" (Mclune 2008; 1-2). As revealed in this chapter sometimes black female singers themselves put their images in the firing line of criticism when they have to accept stripping their dignity when they engage in lurid dances with thin clothes barely covering their private parts. Experienced as well as inexperienced some black female singers deliberately sign up with male-artists and agree to expose their bodies. This is one way in which black women participate in downgrading themselves, although those women can re-interpret the lurid and graphic sexual dances, and see in these dances a pathway to imagined success. Sometimes the women succeed to manipulate the system that commercialises their negative images. In other cases women come out worse off with very little to show for the stints of self-immolation that they engage in. Meredith Levande (2008) writes that pornographic lyrical music does not women but big business the most:

> The pornography industry in the United States generates annual revenues of $10 billion
> to $ 14 billion (Rich 2001, 1). The companies that profit from pornography, either
> currently or in the past, include: AT&T, Yahoo!, Marriott, Western and Hilton Hotels,

Comcast, AOL Time Warner, and Direct TV, a subsidiary of General Motors that was purchased by Rupert Mudorch's News Corporation (Levande 2008 1-2).

While these companies realize mega-profits, the images of black women are constantly compromised. While recognizing that male white or black producers have undermined the images of black women, or have promoted a promiscuous image of black women, Kenneth Taylor (2008:1) objects, pointing to how the black women also take part in acts that degrade them. Taylor points out that although "everyone loves to blame rap for the way black women are portrayed in videos….no one in the rap industry has forced these women at gunpoint to wear skimpy and revealing clothes! The black women that appear in rap videos laced in sexy and tantalizing lingerie, itty-bitty bikinis, or the latest in "prostitute-fashion", choose to do so!. These women know beforehand what role they will portray. No one forces them to dress or appear in sexually stimulating clothing, it's a conscious choice and/or decision that they make themselves. (Taylor: 2008).

Taylor's tirade against black women suggests how it is easy to blame the black American women who are already victims of larger forces such as black patriarchy that converges with white capital to undermine the black female image in music and in popular videos. However, Taylor does not show that other women have decided to portray themselves in positive terms. Some of these women are Miss Elliot, Miss Undastood and Eryka Badu who have put their musical lyrics at the service black Americans for the social good.

In other words, Taylor does not understand that the dialectic of the depiction of the black female image in music is complex. Rose (1994) re-interprets the female experience within male-produced music in ways that undermine the notion that women are projected only as degraded humanity. Reid-Brinkley argues that sometimes, when black women appearing in male lyrics emphasize their "nakedness" they are trying to create a "resistance community" (Reid-Brinkley 2008:239). In this community made up of female black people with uneven levels of conscious resistance sensibilities there is the paradox that " even as parts of hip-hop culture draw on over-determined tropes of black gender roles, there is the possibility that those parts can be rearticulated or engaged in a subversive manner" (2008:24).

In other words, the ideological movement from musical or "video vixen" to musical trickster and subversive singer and finally to reclaiming women's voices in hip-hop is one which is not a straight-forward one. Few black producers who feature in their musical videos and sometimes feature other women have insisted on the need to recuperate an intellectual space in hip-hop in which women cannot be objectified. Many critics of female participation in hip hop still show and argue that it is difficult for female rappers to be entirely freed in order to depict themselves in when ways that are not influenced or infiltrated by patriarchal ideologies which are motivated by commercial interests to succeed no matter what(Moor 2008; Miller-Young 2008; Fitts 2008; and Brooks 2008). Nevertheless, critics such as Perry (2004) believe that female hip hop producers can wad off the dangers of being seduced by those discourses that objectify women in song, video and life. However, the chapter has also suggested an alternative way of listening to black women music. It was suggested that the mere presence of women in these highly sexualized spaces is in itself an achievement because it registers women's forceful entrée into a cultural arena that was at some point in the history of the origin and development of hip hop closed to women.

By turning critical appreciation to black women's artistic creativity steeped in Islam as it is practiced in America, this chapter demonstrated that some women deliberately shifted from negative self portrayals towards embracing the theological aspects of Islam that enables them to assume positive Muslim identities.

The aim of this chapter was, therefore, to deliberately sample those black female singers with Islam inspired songs and critically explore the intersections between their version of Islamic faiths and African American women's musical creativity in America. The chapter then sought to redress this scholarly gap by analysing the lyrics of three black female artists; namely Missy Elliot, Miss Undastood and Erykah Badu. It was demonstrated in the chapter that the three main versions of Islam that have had a direct and sometimes indirect influence on the female artists are The Nation of Islam (NOI), Five Percenters or The nation of Gods and Earth and Sunni Islam. The manifestations of the cultural values of Islamic influences in the black musicians of Africa were demonstrated as uneven; there are different thematic areas of emphasis in the three versions of Islam that have been discussed.

5.10 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter showed that of the three female artists whose work has been reviewed, Missy Elliot is the only one who did not openly declare her allegiance or attribute her artistic inspiration to any of the three versions of Islam. Her work was considered in this chapter because of two main reasons. The first reason is that some of Missy Elliot's songs bear a close resemblance to the influences of the earlier generation of pop musicians who were part and parcel of the black gangsta cultural movement in hip hop. The themes that define the content of this genre of hip hop celebrate commercialized sex, critique of crime and police brutality on the black communities. Missy Elliot's songs of this genre were underlined by a yearning for individual success in America; the songs did not critically reflect on the unequal relations that made the question of social justice very pressing in the black communities. The second reason why Missy Elliot's songs were included in this analysis is that some of them consciously revealed the singer's efforts to create a respectful model of human existence for the black community. The chapter noted that Missy Elliot was indirectly influenced by the nationalist themes of the Nation of Islam. She made mention of 9/11 in one of her song in order to bring to attention the fact that although the event was a tragic one, debates on it should not be allowed to cloud the debates on the historical injustices that the black people suffered during slavery and after it. This theme is very common in the discourse of The Nation of Islam. Missy Elliot's songs also displayed a desire to call black people to order, so that within their families, communities and imagined nation, they should assume responsibility that entails re-evaluation of their sexual and social relations build around black men and women. This too is an important theme that the Nation of Islam uses to mobilize African Americans so that the goals of socio-economic and political upliftment are realized at both the individual and collective levels within the black communities.

 The chapter also revealed that it needs a critic with a close understanding of the principles of Islam as they are enunciated through the three versions of faiths for one to identify traces of Islamic influence on the works of artists such as Missy Elliot. Here, the chapter argued that Missy Elliot's recurring question in her song which is "Where my people at?" forced her to sing and thereby assume the role of a teacher or organic intellectual for the black communities in America. The Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam and Five Percenters or The nation of Gods and

Earths all ideologically converge in their belief that the black singers are cultural producers and therefore have the potential of assuming leadership roles among the black race in America.

Unlike Missy Elliot, Miss Undastood openly proclaimed her close relationship with and cites Sunni Islam names, religious credo that she manipulates as a fertile source of her artistic imagination. Miss Undastood is very loyal to Sunni Islam, openly wears Muslim clothes to show her pride in her religion. The chapter argued that to the extent that attire can denote social identities, Miss Undastood's deliberate choice of clothes closely associated with believers in the The religion of Islam functions as marker and signifier of her faith in the religion. It also shows her desire to create an African American consciousness about the virtues of being Muslim. She raps on the struggles that women face in the hip hop industry, uses her music to encourage black women to have self pride hopes that her songs can help black communities create cultural networks that promote social up-liftment of black women in the black ghettoes in America.

The chapter ended with an analysis of Erykah Badu's composition called *"One"*. This song decidedly situated its ideological and linguistic discourse within the philosophical provenance of the Five Percenters faith. In analyzing this song it was demonstrated that Five Percenters have appropriated the spiritual and cultural resources made available in Islam which they have vested with and personified in the nature of actual people. In this faith, Men are described as Allahs or Gods and women are called Earths. It was argued that initial analysis of Erykah's song revealed some dangerously embedded ideas on gender inequalities because women are given subordinate roles. The analysis of the song then revealed the ways in which Five Percenters yearn for a society of equality. The analysis of the song also demonstrated through the musical voice of Erykah that women can use language to subvert the certitude embedded in the male centred philosophy of the Five Percenters. Badu's skilful use of the language enabled her to use music as lyrical sword (Banjoko 2004) to revise male values and perceptions about the roles that men and women can play in African American social lives. When she used language to persuade the man (Rhymes) to concede that both men and women have equal responsibilities in the family, Badu draws on and demonstrates Henry Louis Gates' (1998) conviction that oppressed sections of the African American people use language that rewrites the dominant narratives whether these are from the black patriarchy or are manifested in racialised discourses promoted by the white

controlled American society. Badu signifies, and in the process introduces new meanings to old songs and problems.

Of the three female artists considered in this chapter Erykah Badu's song demonstrated that not all Black Muslim women or female singers accept the ascribed position of subordination. Women like Erykah Badu have used the discourse of Muslim as a frame of referencing Islam in their works to enable them to sift the patriarchal attitudes, contest them so that the songs become the spaces for cultural resistance to oppression emanating from American racism, black male chauvinism, and also the oppression that is perpetuated when some women internalize their oppression as natural and God-given. The most important aspect that the chapter emphasized is that black female and Muslim artists use the cultural resource of language to enact stage, perform, reverse, revise and offer sustained critique of gender stereotypes in their social experiences. The centrality of language of rapping in black American popular culture cannot be overemphasized. Henry Louis Gates' book, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988) argues that African American hip hop artists use language in non-canonical ways; the artists fracture the linguistic codes in order to manifest multiple identities that African Americans can assume at any moment as cultural identities are a shifting concept. It is this important aspect of the use of language in the black artists whose cultural productions and lyrics are influenced by Islam that chapter six focus on. Therefore in the next chapter six, we analyse the formal composition of songs, the use of diction in special ways of rapping which are inspired by the ideological location occupied by black artists' who work from and across the three theological versions Islam.

Chapter six: Use of rhetorical devices in the constructions of Muslim Identities in African American songs: The Case of KRS-One.

6 Introduction

In the previous chapters, three, four and five the study deliberately focused on the content, the message and construction of Muslim values embedded in the songs. The aims were to reveal how singers referenced and made use of ideas from Islam to create cultural identities that represented some African Americans as distinctly shifting and embracing the views contained in and expressing Muslim identities. In this chapter we shift our focus and analyse the language techniques, styles and musical rhetorical devices that KRS-One uses when he manipulate Islamic cultural symbols in his songs. The question of musical style and the uses to which literary language is deployed in songs distinguishes the African American traditions from many other world cultures. Coming from slavery, black people leant too early that it was possible to compose the features of their language and manipulate their cultural symbols in such ways that one linguistic voice seemed to placate the plantation owners, while another subversive register was embedded in specific language usages that the dominant power could not always detect and then police.

An analysis of the rhetorical devices in the music of blacks cannot be exhausted in a single chapter. The language of this music is broad and its range encompasses the deployment of strategies of call and response, battling, alliteration, assonance, dissonance, exhortation/Proclamation, allegory, narrative, referencing time, space, historical dates and signifying. Each of these techniques or musical styles creates its own meanings that questions master narratives whether these are the racialised discourses of white America, the self-destructive politics of crime within African American communities or the quest for alternative values in embracing Muslim identities.

A number of critics have commented insightfully on how style is used in African American songs. In *The Souls of Black Folk (1973)* Du Bois encouraged an analysis of form in black popular songs when he observed that the lived consciousness of the black African American people is characterized by a politically double-voicedness. Double consciousness, far from reflecting paralysis and problems of identity in the blacks could be viewed as an empowering

linguistic prism because it allows African Americans to sift their cultural experiences and construct cultural communities and identities using more than one cultural grid of reference. This view of the significance of double consciousness in the rhetorical devices used in folk songs is creative and endorsed by Gilroy for whom modernity necessarily embraces two-ness, or multiple identities as the condition of possibility of recreating the ever shifting identities of black singers at any given moment. Gilroy tells us that as an ideology emanating from the lived experience the phenomenon of double consciousness eschews cultural absolutism, a perception that assumes that identities can ever be fixed as static for all times. He argues that 'the syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity'(Gilroy 1993: 101).

Stephens also makes us aware of the content of form when Stephens suggests that words, visuals and images in the songs can also force the song to incubate meanings that the singer might not have had in mind when composing the song. The "'double-voiced' or 'two-tone'" (Stephens 1991) nature of the musical rhetoric through collage enables singers to sample black cultural heroes such as Malcom X, and Martin Luther King. Form in African American music has also been used to encourage "cultural bifocality, a hybrid identity which reinforces and yet at the same time transcends its vernacular ethnicity" (Stephens 1991:83).

Gates (1988) further suggests that linguistic innovation in African American is a form of signifying in which when the sign itself appears to be doubled…and redoubled upon ever closer examination meanings in the songs can be interpreted from the surface level, towards the tertiary level where the songs assumes allegorical identities characterized by instabilities inherent in any process of representing the self. "Styling", argues Chang is sometimes as a result of artists who seek to evade direct and indirect censorship of cultural productions in America, especially after the passing of The Patriot Act that provides sweeping definitions of "domestic terrorism", for federal officials to further harass hip hop activists"(Chang 2002:4). "Fractal patterns"(Gilroy 1991:14) embodied in the rhetorical devices in African American songs also subvert the certainties in the "cultural and political" narratives that the blacks author in their own songs; a self-questioning sensibility is installed at the heart of many songs commenting on the politics within black communities.

Gwendolyn D. Pough suggests that in African American songs the rhetoric of wreck does not allow the constructed identities to settle and solidify as cultural absolutes. For Pough, linguistic wreck is disruptive and is a 'rhetorical act that can be written, spoken, or acted out in a way that shows resistance' (2004:78). As a formal device in the songs, the language of philosophy in bringing wreck combines politeness with assertiveness; when used by female artists, it engenders 'talking back, going off, turning it out having a niggerbitchfit, or being a diva'(ibid: 78). Each of these techniques effects a counter public discourse that turns on dominant discourses and exposes them for their inherent powerlessness. Sam Floyd argues that the technique of signifying

is a way of saying one thing and meaning another;

it is a reinterpretation, a metaphor for the revision of previous texts and figures;

it is tropological thought, repetition with difference,

the obscuring of meaning – all to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations,

and to achieve pleasing results for the signifier (Floyd 1995:95).

Snapper adds that one of the rhetorical ways in which blacks American singers reverse the power of dominant discourses is achieved through the phenomenon of scratching the surface and turntablism. For Snapper the deconstructive principle of turntablism resides in 'composing through techniques that rhythmically expand the timbral spectrum of a record (scratching) and combing two or more recordings (mixing, beta-juggling), [so that] turntablists toy with memory and play against [dominant] narratives."(Snapper 2004: 10). The technical formats of hip hop compositions also includes 'battling', understood and explained as the 'use of style to reconcile opposing forces, a skill that is at the heart of hip hop'(ibid: 27).

Commenting further on the art of battling in hip hop lyrics, Perry says that 'battling' highlights the weaknesses of the imagined opponent who is being 'dissed' or opposed while exhorting the qualities and proclaiming a higher moral compass of the self. Battling, or dissing revises certitudes embedded in dominant identities and reveals the capacity of musical narratives to constitute new meanings for the self or communities whose virtues are being exhorted. According to Perry the formal technique of narrative that can manifest itself in the form of exhortation, proclamation, description and battle enables the singer to

Tell outrageous stories that stretch and shatter credibility,

overblown accounts about characters expressed in superlatives:

the greatest liar is the hero of the yarn, or the strongest woodman,

or the most cunning gambler.

We listen incredulously, not believing a single word,

our delight based on skepticism and wondering

whether the storyteller can top the last,

preposterous episode he's spun (Perry 2004:77).

Elements of the 'outrageous' styles within hip hop contained attitudes of aggressiveness and defiance to conventional values. The contradictions inherent in styling or authorizing techniques that defamiliarize the world in hip hop is suggested by Chang for whom the furious styles of hip hop were also motivated by the desire of the artist to show and prove his or her talent by

distinguishing yourself and your originality above the crowd.

It put you on a relentless quest to prove to them that you

were bigger, wilder, and bolder than circumstances dictated you should ever be,

to try to generate something from nothing,

something no one else had, until everyone around you had to admit that

you had something they might never have, something

that might even make other people – big, important people –

stand up and take notice themselves, offer you money, give you power,

or try to crush your very soul (2005: 60).

The tension, conflict and strain that linguistic techniques reveal arise from the fact that while new style could be subversive of the dominant order, its popularization was sometimes enabled by relations of production against which a certain technique was brought into being to question. The specific internal rhymes of hip hop have been captured by Alim. Alim's study is useful to this chapter because it brings closer, an example of how technique manifests in hip hop and the various uses to which it is put in the songs. Alim argues that African American hip hop artists deliberately apply "multirhyming, the poetic equivalent to multitasking' (2003: 62). His study

uses linguistic theory to draw attention to "new rhyme strategies that require new categories of knowledge, such as compound internal rhymes, primary and secondary internal rhymes, chain rhymes, back-t-back chain rhymes, bridge rhymes."(ibid 61). Wordplay, simile, metaphor, narrativity, flashback, role-play, suspense, irony and imagery and also used in hip hop lyrics. However, Tricia Rose argues that rhetorical devices in African American songs are further enhanced in the video, which introduces an element of visuality, colour, sound and mis en scene. In the medium of the video, even the often taken for granted artists can recreate identities that pit individuals with communities.

In Rose's words, the video allows as well as disrupts simulacra between the artist and the message. For example the video technology can allow female rappers to raise incisive questions that seriously challenge the current distribution of power between men and women. Video "works by black women rappers that place black women's bodies in the spotlight …[can]affirm black female beauty and yet often preserve the logic of female sexual objectification…[even though] power relationships are acted out, resisted, and affirmed in popular practices, and each understands that popular practices enter into and revise dialogues already in progress'(Rose 1994: 147-148).

6. 1 KRS-One and Historical referencing of Slavery as subversive techniques of Hip hop

One of the most outstanding rhetorical devices that black African American use to comment on their present circumstances is to reference the historical realities imagined through the theme of slavery and its psychological effects on lives of black people. On the surface, KRS-One's song **Black Cop** narrates the problems that present generations of black African American suffer in the hands of the black police that the American system has employed in order to police the Black ghettoes. The singer reveals that there is no difference between the slave-driver who was used by the American system to force the black people to till the plantations of the slave owners with the modern day American black policeman:

> *Recently police trained black cop/*
> *To stand on the corner, and take gunshot/*
> *This type of warfare isn't new or a shock/*
> *It's black on black crime nonstop/*
> *Black Cop!!/*

Black Cop Black cop/

Black cop black cop

Black cop/

Don't be a sucker.

What is shocking for the singer is that the relations of violence against black people that obtained during slavery have now being reproduced and that it is the black policeman who is now carrying out acts of violence against other blacks. The narrator thus introduces a complication in those conceptualizations of the black African American that emphasizes unity, uniformity and collective aspiration. In the post bellum period the black community is no longer stable. Even those singers who sing about Muslim, insisting on how it automatically creates a collective identity for black people are ridiculed by the existence of the black cop who applies the very same laws that were used to keep black people down during slavery. KRS-One sings reminding the black cop of his treacherous behaviour:

Whassup black cop, yo whassup?

Your authorization says shoot your nation

You wanna uphold the law, what could you do to me?

The same law dissed the whole black community

Black Cop black cop black cop black cop

Stop shooting black people we all gonna drop

This angry appeal to the black policeman to stop being used by the American system to abuse the black people is further accentuated by the singer's disappointment that the black cop is 'shootin' black people for very little in terms of the salary that he receives. There is embedded knowledge that the singer brings out which he does not see manifested by the black cop. This is expressed through the word 'dissed' which implies that black lives, their values are disregarded and dismissed as not important in America. To continue the culture of 'dissing' black communities is to in complicit with the American system. It is important to underline the significance of the use of the language of contempt that the singer employs in order to reveal and depict how depraved the black cop has become. The first line of the song begins with the imitations of the bucking of

a dog which in the estimation of the singer, the black cop has been reduced to: "Buck buck buck buck buck buck buck buck" and the black community is alerted of the presence of one of their own people who unfortunately has been domesticated into a dog that can be instructed to bite black people. The final stanza of the song rhymes in the singer's attempt to persuade the black cop from being used by the American system to unleash violence and systematic pain on the black people:

> *Black Cop black cop black cop black cop*
> *Don't be the sucker/Don't be the sucker*
> *Don't be the sucker comin to my face*
> *Don't, don't be the sucker coming to my face*
> *Don't be the sucker comin to my face with that yang-yang*

The desire to reclaim the black cop so that he becomes of the black community is dashed in the song **Sound of da Police**. In this song, the former black plantation overseer during slavery in America is reborn as the black Officer who enforces the laws that are discriminatory to blacks several centuries after the formal abolition of slavery in America. KRS-One asks the listener to

> *Take the word overseer like a sample/*
> *Repeat it very quickly in a crew for example*
> *Overseer Overseer Overseer Overseer*
> *Officer, Officer, Officer Officer!*
> *Yeah, officer from overseer You need clarity?*
> *The overseer rode around the plantation*
> *The Officer is off patrolling all the nation*
> *The overseer could stop you what you're doing*
> *The officer will pull you over just when he's pursuing*
> *The overseer had the right to get ill*
> *And if you fought back the overseer had the right to kill*
> *The Officer has the right to arrest*
> *And if you fight back they put a hole in your chest*

This stanza operates at various levels. First, there is the rhythmical shift from 'overseer' to 'officer' showing how the overflow of meaning is captured through the interchanging of the words. The Slave driver of the era of slavery has been transformed into the police officer who today patrols the black community here, described as the 'nation' Second, the singer uses the words overseer and 'officer' as homonyms, thereby establishing a linguistic parallelism whose semantic resonance can be found in the contexts of slavery and modern American capitalism. Third, in order to depict the fact that the experiences of the black people have not changed significantly for the better, the parallelism established between 'overseer' and 'officer' reflects how the capitalist system has managed to establish an apparatus that constantly supervises and undermine attempts by blacks to rebel against 'the nation' a word which at the secondary level of meaning symbolizes the American society. Fourth, mentioning or referencing a known historical past allows the singers to compare it with an unchanged, and as such this rhetorical device enables KRS-One to depict the extent to which the Black African American communities have been 'dissed' or disregarded. The alliteration that is created by the rhetorical device of repetition of 'overseer' and 'officer' gives the stanza its musical assonance and unity. But this unity is in actual fact undermined because the subject or theme of the stanza is reflecting on the fracturing and destruction of the black American communities.

In *Sneak Attack* there is unapologetic mentioning that the black communities have been divided along class lines; the singer KRS-One asks: Yo, where's my people at? In his formulation the 'people' are the very ordinary folks who have not significantly benefited from the so-called American dream. On the other hand, KRS-One says 'we be where the elite be at'. The use of the contrasting words 'people' and 'elite' suggests that the black African American people are pursuing different politics. This is further confirmed in the song *Sound of da Police* in which the irony of the stanza is that the modern day 'officer' is not just an Uncle Tom waiting to take directives from his superior. He is too eager to release a volley of bullets on his kind.

KRS-One also creates an irony at the expense of the black community because the 'officer' that patrols the black ghettoes is in fact fighting a real crime that is endemic in the black communities and which also threatens any assumed stability of those black communities. The new black police officer is fighting the crime associated with drug peddling and substance abuse in the black communities. The singer tells the listener that the officer claims blacks are selling 'crack'. In the song the persona requests that the black police change his ways 'show a little respect,

change you behavior/Change your attitude, change your plan.' The moment of self-ironizing is that the blacks in the black communities must also change their ruinous behaviour because the presence of the black police officer in the ghettoes is justified by the black communities that sell the crack. ***Sound of da Police*** uses the technique of memory to recall the instabilities within the black communities and the attendant excesses of those black people who had been bought over by the system. The persona in the song goes on to re-establish a historical link of a genealogy of sell-outs within the experiences of black people in America when the songs end with

> *Black people still slaves up til today*
> *But the black police officer nah see it that way*
> *Him want a salary*
> *Him want it So he put on a badge and kill people for it*
> *My grandfather had to deal with the cops*
> *My great-grandfather dealt dealt with cops*
> *My GREAT grandfather had to deal with the cops*
> *And then my great, great great great,...when it's gonna stop?!*

First, in this stanza the conceptualization of the black nation is made to stretch right back to the period of slavery; this historical era is referenced as the point which in the geography of black African American memories is the starting point of the historical misfortunes associated with the poverty, violence and racial discrimination that present day black African Americans suffer. Memory is in this stanza strategically used to sift and then reconstruct the burnt portions of the black African American history that is distorted in official books on slavery. What is happening in the song is how the singer stages a rebellion from dominant narratives that are constructed for and on behalf of blacks by the historians paid to by the American system, Song is thus viewed as a cultural site on which different versions of being black and African American are retrieved. The use of linguistic rhetorical devices of 'referencing' such as referencing that black African Americans are conversant with and use in their daily lives functions to make sense of the chaos which they see as being introduced by the violence of the police officer. However, the same song also reveals that within the black communities there is confirmation that black communities have always had their historical sell outs.

How then can we associate this song with the politics that is advanced with Islam? It is not always clear when Islam enters every song composed by blacks. However, the deploring of drug abuse and violence within black communities echo at various levels with Minister Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam who constantly enjoins black African American singers to use their music to communicate nobler goals that transcend the base lives of crack and drugs. In the song, the concern with constituting the black communities as a 'nation' with its cultural and viable spiritual infrastructure is also an aspect of what is popularized in the Nation of Islam. Even the description of the black community as the 'nation' echoes with the nation of Islam, and the nation of Gods and Earths, both which are religious and institutional versions or entities that define Islam in present day America.

6.2 KRS-One. Parable and the recreation of hybrid Identities

In the song *False Pride*, KRS-One borrows liberally from the Christian bible. In the song there is a woman who is waiting to be graced by a religious teacher. The teacher promises the woman that he will visit her home the next day at 7-am. This occasion provides the humorous dimension to the song because the woman gets into a frantic mood, reorganizing her furniture, cleaning the house and preparing delicious food for the teacher. When the next arrives day the woman waits anxiously because the time that the teacher had promised that he would be at the woman's place comes and passes. However, as she was waiting for the teacher to arrive, a 'burn' arrives and politely asks for food since he was hungry, upon which the woman refuses and argues that the food was meant for a special guest. Because the teacher did not appear in his person, the woman took the trouble to go to the river where the teacher was preaching to remind him that he had not fulfilled his promise. The teacher responded that he had come but in the form of the 'burn who cried' for bread. The woman feels deflated and the song ends.

This song recreates a parable or story directly taken from the Christian bible. In its original context, the teacher who is alluded to is Jesus. This song-parable also borrows from the African American Negro spiritual tradition in which secular and spiritual songs were created out of the cultural remix provided by various religions such as the African oral tradition, Christian theology and Islam. Writing about the importance of songs that are produced as remixes, in black African American musical tradition, George Ciccariello Maher suggests that the religious and political mixed tape brings out the inter textual dimension of the songs revealing that the cultural

resources informing the language and content of the sources have been borrowed from diverse sources. Hybrid identities are valorised in African American popular culture. Mix tapes and songs that intertext,

> Represent the other music industry, the one where labels don't exist...
> Today a mix tape [or song] has come to mean a combination
> of "unreleased 'exclusive tracks...Freestyles...DJ's special mixes of songs or
> the blending of two different tracks...[and]
> Turntablists and artists speaking out on current topics(Maher 2005:138).

Apart from revealing the capacity of the singers to appropriate cultural symbols from diverse sources, the song *False Pride* also uses the rhetorical device of didacticism. To the extent that *False Pride* tests the meaning of what faith is, the song reveals the hypocrisy of many who say they believe in God and as the conduct of the woman in the parable-song shows, fails to accomplish a simple task of feeding a hungry old burn. The moral economy of this song derives from its desire to comment on the experiences of African American communities in which many of the blacks fail to heed the inner voice from God bidding them to love other people as they would want to be loved themselves, to save other people from hunger as the black communities would like to be saved from racial, political and economic discrimination in America. Using the technique of the parable, - which is a story extracted from the bible - to comment on the politics within the black African American communities, enables KRS-One to assume some creative distance with the object of his admiration and criticism which is the black communities. Once the singer has established this fundamental distance he can use his voice to enjoin black African American to first solve their internal problems before crying out that they are being exploited by the American system. Put differently, the song-parable suggests that it is the fractures within the African American communities that to a large extent allow the divisive politics of the system more possible to undermine black lives. In other words the didacticism embedded in the song-parable has other meanings that go beyond moralizing, such as 'the creation of activist and collectivist value structure [that] would help emancipate the lower classes'(Lunn quoted in Maher 2005: 140). Roundly appreciated, *False Pride* is a song that emphasizes that KRS-One favours cultural hybridity of African American identities against the narrow politics of cultural

particularism or cultural absolutism that sometimes threatens to narrow black politics anytime that black African American communities are imagined as distinctly black, coherent and stable. In the struggle for faiths in America, KRS-One remains an African, American black but these identities do not limit his choices; by using the symbolical narrative of the parable and its rhetorical device of moralizing about faiths in black communities KRS-One seems to have deployed a linguistic arsenal that has rendered it possible for him to imagine black African American faiths based on diverse sources of their faiths. As Gates argues, in the black African American tradition

> Writers Signify on each other's texts by rewriting the received textual tradition.
> This sort of Signifyin(g) revision serves, if successful,
> to create a space for the revising text.
> It also alters fundamentally the way we read the tradition,
> by defining the relation of the text at hand to the tradition(Gates 1988 124).

In the case of *False Pride*, KRS-One taps from and revises an authoritative biblical text and appropriates its parable that is then being used as an allegory of the politics of good, hypocrisy and badness in the black African American communities. Gates further points out that in the language of hip hop,

> The Signifying Monkey, he who dwells at the margins of discourse,
> ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language,
> is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed our trope of chiasmus,
> repeating and reversing simultaneously as he does
> in one deft discursive act (Gates 1988:52).

Because of the frugal nature of the woman in *False Pride*, knowledge remains possessed by the teacher; the margin occupied by the woman is parodied, mocked and carnivalized. Applied to the black African American communities, this parable confirms that only Five Percent of the masses will ever possess knowledge about their lives. The woman in the parable fails to decipher that God's knowledge manifests itself in different forms. She limits her comprehension of the forces defining her conduct to the surface meanings; she does not go to the deeper or tertiary levels of

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how her present predicament signifies a much larger cultural anomy in the black African America communities. There is therefore an indirect reference to the theology characteristic of the principles of the Nation of Gods and Earths in which self-knowledge is revealed through the ways in which Gods and Earths engage with life and each other. When the woman calls the teacher, "liar" she uses it insisting on reading the teacher's story through a literal sense; however, when the teacher replies that he manifested himself in different guise, the most express was the 'burn' the teacher becomes metaphorical. These rhetorical modes of signifying contrast with each other and have appropriately been designated as parody and pastiche. "Pastiche is an act of literary "Naming"; parody is an act of "Calling out of one's name'" (Gates 1988:124). Each implies a formal revision of a given tradition.

6.3 KRS-One and Critique of Black African American Culture of Materialism

The song *Krush Them* openly establishes theological links between KRS-One's spiritual convictions and the theocratic values shared and popularized in the Islamic version of the Five Percenters or the Nation of Gods and earths. Apart from the Five Percenters' believe in science, and in the fact that human beings are God's ministers on earth, the Five Percenters also deplore the crude materialism that they view as destroying the spiritual fibre of the black African American social lives. In the song, KRS-One counters the language of materialism symbolised by some black African American people's rush for 'ching-ching and all the rings'. The desire to acquire platinum as indication of success in the music industry is viewed by the singer as a descent into a degraded life in which people are even prepared to kill for mammon. In this song, materialism is being criticized because many African Americans such as Tupac Shakur and notorious B.I.G lost their lives in the wars to become champion with rings that glitter. Although in the song Tupak Shakur and Notorious B.I.G are not mentioned in name, KRS-One uses the linguistic device of allusion to remind black African Americans of the consequences of embracing crude materialism that impoverishes the soul.

Instead, KRS –One believes that black African American what or should strive to have is 'free and intelligent' and 'Not platinum plague that's irrelevant'. KRS-One actually means 'Knowledge Reigns Supreme on every One' and for the singer, "only a few like the sound of it". This secular understanding of Islam is directly influenced by the teachings of the Five Percenters

who believe that 5% of the black African Americans have knowledge of their identities and know what they want in live; 10% actively participate in the American capitalist system and also benefit in the exploiting of black labour, and 85% are those black African Americans who are confused, indulge in dangerous lifestyles such as crime, drug abuse and murder. The Five Percenters also believe in the superiority of science in solving human problems. In **Krush Them** there are direct references to the Nation of Gods and earth's conception of the world. KRS-One sings it:

> *So why did I have to come off my sabbatical?*
> *Battle you?*
> *My metachromatical will splatter you*
> *I got another track to do, I can't mack witchu*
> *Your rhymes are fictional, mine are factual*
> *I'll embarrass you.*

The notion of 'battle' in black African American popular music is a rhetorical device that relates to the ways in which different artists compete with each other using words in verbal duets. Battling emphasizes the weaknesses of the imagined enemy and further glorifies the verbal dexterity of the singer who is doing battle. But KRS-One introduces an important aspect of battling when he suggests that some singers do battles on themes that have a slight hold on African American people's realities. Because KRS-One believes in the efficacy of science – what he calls is 'metachromatical', his song is operating within the theological ambiance of the Five Percenters who believe that the social identities that they construct for themselves are based on facts, or factual, as opposed to the fictions, romance or idealistic narratives that are authored by other singers. In "*Krush Them*" KRS-One goes further to confirm one of the fundamental principles of the Five Percenters which is that his gospel of social good is mandated by God. There is a conflation of identities in which through linguistic skill, KRS-One is one and God at the same time. He sings that his are 'God's lyrics, I'm just sayin' 'em out'. The Five Percenters's Islamic version does not see it as heresy to pronounce or take over the role of God. Another name for The Five Percenters Islamic faith is The Nation of Gods and Earths. KRS-One alludes that he is a God and appeals using the fashion of the idiom of his faith that women are Earths; however, women have to earn this name by their deeds one of which is self respect. According to

KRS-One respect of the woman comes above when she observes the sartorial expectations of the Five Percenters.

KRS One is referencing the Five Percenters' faith when he sings that "You supposed to be buttoned up right to your neck/ If you are a woman, you'll get respect'. The wordplay in the song that emphasizes that The Nation of Gods and Earths must be free and intelligent echoes or rather is another rhetorical device used by KRS-One to conjure the images of the followers of this faith as the natural leaders of among the black African American communities. In conformity to this role, the singer tells the listener that the role of being the organic intellectuals of the black African American races comes with responsibilities and one of these duties is to spread the gospel of human goodness using the musical genre of conscious rap. About his own type of music, KRS-One says

> *We krush them and they lie*
> *This conscious rap, WE not hypnotized*
> *Anywhere the action's at*
> *Takin it home and unpackin*
> *that, that, that*

These lines from **Krush Them** turn KRS-One's song into an allegorical battle between knowledge and ignorance, good and evil in the African American communities. The sign that KRS-One's faith is succeeding is his use of the diction associated with the defeat of Satan and evil. **Krush Them** is also a wordplay used in popular music when singers crush each other's point of view using powerful and evocative words.

> "Rappers will often reference places or objects in their
> immediate setting, or specific (usually demeaning)characteristics of opponents,
> to prove their authenticity and originality"…
> [furthermore in battle rapping]…
> The strongest battle rappers will generally perform their rap fully freestyled.
> This is the most effective form in a battle as
> the rapper can comment on the other person;
> whether it be what they look like,

or how they talk, or what they wear.

It allows the rapper to reverse a line used to "diss" him or her

if they are the second rapper or battle (htt://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapper: accessed 2008/04/14, p. 9).

The KRS-One considers himself the bearer of truths; his musical narratives represent 'conscious' hip hop intended to teach the young black African American about social good. KRS-One contrasts his music to those of his opponents whose narratives are embellished with language that "lie". Accordingly, the leader of the Nation of Islam Louis Farrakhan stated in 2001 at the Hip hop Summit in New York of the significance of hip hop in black African American music in moulding good characters among blacks when he said that conscious

Rap has brought the youth of the world to you…

What are you going to do with your leadership roles?

The churches, mosques, and schools have all failed,

and now the kids were being brought up

by hip hop on the street (Farrakhan quoted in http://www.

qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-587/_nr-28/i.html: accessed 2008/03/17.p 3).

This cryptic linking of KRS-One to the theology of the Nation of Islam (NOI) is not a contradiction in terms, since earlier, it was suggested that KRS-One's music seems to be steeped more in the teachings of the Five Percenters. Alim argues that the use of Islam in black African American popular music is dependent on and characterised by the constant borrowing and trafficking of cultural resources between and among the different versions of Islam. For Alim the use of the term Islam is therefore,

Broadly conceived, encompassing a spectrum of ideologies and schools of thought…

the three most dominant forms of Islam in the HHN in the U.S [are]

The Nation of Islam, the Nation of Gods and Earths,

or the Five Percent Nation of Islam, and the Sunni Muslim community…

While there are theological and terminological differences between these communities,

all view Islam as a transformative force in the lives of its practitioners,

and the data reveal similarities among the views of their adherents.(Alim 2006: 46)

While in **Krush Them**, KRS-One predominantly uses the rhetorical figure of allusion and referencing some aspects of Islam's theological values, in the song **My life**, the singer largely employs the autobiographical form to map out his narrative journey from being 'a young black man' washing cars to being a respected hip hop master. Autobiography attempts to form personal identities and in the process the life of an individual is taken as an allegory of and a commentary on the lives of a collective group. The autobiographical form is self-referential and claims that the singer is in control of his/her life's that is being depicted. Autobiographical songs also insist on producing truth that is created from a stabilized narrative perspective. The form forces the listener of the song to acknowledge the capacity of the individual to authorize certain meanings that can be at once personal as well as reflecting on the growth and developing personality of a social group.

In **My Life**, KRS-One attempts the mode of a conventional narrative which describes the life journey of an individual in recognizably linear terms. For example, in the song the singer announces his presence through a series of rhetorical questions which are stylistically located at the beginning of the song so as to clear the ground for the narrative that follows:

> *Whattya think makes up a KRS?*
> *Whattya think makes up a KRS?*
> *Whattya think makes up a KRS?*

The street lingo, 'whattya', is a short cut to 'What do you think makes up a KRS?' and is strategically inserted with the assumed knowledge that those who belong to the black African American community will understand what it means. As Henry Louis Gates argues in is structuralist inspired critical work, *The Signififying Monkey*(1998), the capacity to mean, to signify different things at once depends on the recognition of shareable speech acts among the group that more or less shares similar cultural attributes.

Apart from the linguistic use of the form of autobiographical narrative in **My Life**, KRS-One also deploys exhortation/Proclamation as a linguistic and structuring device of the song. According to Perry(2004: 80) the features of exhortation or proclamation reside in the ability of the singer to

use language in ways that highlight the heroic side, and at the same time in ways that makes the song teach but not necessarily preachy. Here is an instance of how KRS-One uses exhortation, beginning with the narrating his life when it was at its lowest ebb until he arrives at the zenith of a musical composer: "1981 before the crack attack/I used to let the Old English 800 suds bubble/In the last car of the Franklin Avenue shuttle." As a car valet, he conventionally takes the listener down his memory lane where he remembers those 'homeless' days when in the New York city in 1984 corruption was hot/Cats sellin 'Uzi's out the Jacob Javits Center'. This is a period in the history of black African American experience when violence of black youth on black youths intensified.

In the late 1980s, KRS-One confronts the challenges brought into communities by the introduction of "marijuana with the cocaine mix", where the singer took "flix" with bad company. The musical refrain 'the type of shit a young black man/gotta go through every day of his life/hard times to live in, wake up in the morning," shows that KRS-One was not spared by the social discontent within black communities. His story of suffering is theirs too. Referencing of the actual dates are mnemonic tools that allow KRS-One to remember the life that he has gone through. Conventional autobiography enables one to reconstitute the self and in the process mirroring the ways in which the community's disparate histories can be brought to speak to each other. But in *My life*, the singers exhorts and proclaims that despite the life of vagabondage that threatened to spiritually tear him apart, he stayed "focused" and people begun to notice and they said "Kris rise above". The climax of personal up-lift-ment which is an aspect of theology of the three versions of Islam comes out in the singer when he chimes that

> *Everybody knew my style, Kris was no coward*
> *I wanted to get in the game but my peeps wouldn't allow it*
> *The'd say, Read them Books and write the hooks*
> *Save our children, give 'em a whole new outlook"*
> *So I did, I lived like any street kid*
> *But I was handed 20 books, others were handed 20 year bids.*

While the wordplay on 'coward' has meaning from 'battling duets' in song, KRS-One also suggests that from a life of depravity he was able the weather the storms, and emerged heroic. He

goes further to distinguish, exhort and proclaim the nature of his heroism when he sings that he found himself drawn closer to those who seek knowledge in life and "books". Here, there is a recurrent motif in KRS-One's life as that of a philosopher convinced that book knowledge is equally important and generates knowledge that can benefit black communities. This referencing creates links with the Five Percenter's notion of a select few who have knowledge that they can use to uplift the black community. Even as KRS-One turns to "books," he continues to produce the best lyrics here, described as "hooks".

This simile, is in fact part of the language of boxing in which the singer sees himself as bringing his opponent down. In the fashion of the conventional autobiography, that *My Life* suggests, life is a foe that must suffer "hooks"; but also, the spiritual battle to rise above the social miasma that defines the lives of less than average black African Americans requires sustained spiritual and mental battles with the forces of habituated behavior such as cracking and crime. In *My Life*, KRS-One sees himself as a seer, a bringer of knowledge; where he was handed 20 books as a metaphor of receiving philosophical knowledge. Other artists received material accolades in the form of 20 bids. As a rabbi, and seer, KRS-One cannot elect to live in the posh suburbs; instead he chooses to live 'like any of the street kids'. The metaphor-cum simile, 'like' is a rhetorical device that according to Perry operates in black authored music to accomplish three things;

> First, they fulfill the obvious task of explication.
> The Mc tells the listener about him- or herself,
> or whatever other subject is up for discussion,
> through comparison with or use of the characteristics of other objects, creatures, or
> entities. Second, they serve as great tools for exhortation and proclamation
> because through the metaphoric naming of great things,
> the MC proclaims his or her own greatness…
> But perhaps most important, metaphor and simile engage the imagination
> and expand or transform the universe in which the MC dwells.
> With them, the author creates a space of possibility (Perry 2004:65).

KRS-One continues to exhort about his career in *My Life*, singing that "1987my career blowin' up now". He sings with Scott LaRock, showing that the intellectual growth of individual consciousness is aided by extending on one's social networks. The expansion of social networks

creates a complex web in which a community is born. KRS-One- sings that singing into this community meant that he had to make a choice about who he needed to rhyme for. "I chose the underground to rhyme where it's grimm, wow…do a lot of work just not in the mainstream" The underground in this lines could be the space occupied by the marginalized black people; the streets, in the ghettoes.

But the underground could also be a social and political movement borne out of the efforts of artists such as KRS-One to create an alternative code of values and conduct not necessarily influenced by the "mainstream" commercialized Hip hop that is patronized by big capitalist business concerns. The wordplay on "mainstream" initially conjures up an opposition between Black African American values that the individual artist re-incarnates but is set against the social forces in mainstream American media. KRS-One is also punning with the word 'mainstream' because within the black communities there are creative cross currents of different genres of hip hop that do not only always speak against the system in favour of a single, coherent and imagined black community. Equally, within the black African American religious affiliations to Islam, the Nation of Islam is both viewed as hegemonic as well as rendering visible the aspirations of the singer. The notion of "underground" Hip hop and it's assumed opposite in "mainstream" hip hop is also dramatized through the rhetorical device of call-and response that is deployed in the last stanza of the song, *My Life*.

For Perry, call and response happens when the audience respond to or participate in the song that has been initiated by the singer. Call and response happens between artists when they apportion each other sections within a song, to utter in the presence of an audience that participates verbally or using bodily movements.Call and response also happens when the singer engages past traditions of rapping between what is known as the Old school and the new school of hip hop rappers. Call and response is

> Rooted in the tradition of functional art in that it stresses community and heterogeneity of individuals in the composition.
> It also stands as an important democratic gesture because it identifies hip hop as a collective every person's music.
> Black American music existed under the threat of co-optation throughout the twentieth century.

The black community's presence within the music composition offers protection
against co-optation and hierarchical commodification:
any one might emerge from the crowd and grab the mic if he or she is smart and skilled
enough. (Perry 2004: 74-75).

But in KRS-One's *My Life*, threats to the black musical tradition also come from inside; the blacks who have accepted the commodification of their products and from the blacks who are stuck with old ways of rhyming. KRS-One uses the call and response rhetorical device to appeal to the heterogeneity among blacks when he sings:

> *Know what you need to learn*
> *Old school artists don't always burn*
> *Know what you need*
> *KRS-One, don't always burn*

The quest for intellectual knowledge remains a perpetual yearning in the lyrics above. This is in-keeping with the faith of the Nation of Gods and Earths in which knowledge is revered and God is thought to manifest Himself clearly, through those Five Percent who 'know' what they 'need' to do in order to move the African American communities in positive directions

6.4 KRS-ONE and the language of imagining post 9/11.

The song, *Tears* is probably one powerful song among some that KRS-One uses to discuss the politics that led to the fateful tragedy of 9/11 as well as to the need for spiritual recovery for black African American communities in the period after 9/11. In the song the terrorist attack of the American twin towers is creatively referenced. KRS-One sings about it casually as if the event was anticipated, as if it was one of life's happenstance that should not be overblown out of proposition in terms of its coverage in the various media:

> *At midday, some Americans attended memorial services*
> *For victims of Tuesday's acts of terrorism*
> *Thousands gathered at Chicago's daily Plaza*

> *Hundreds more looked on from the windows*
> *Of surrounding buildings.*

These lines partialize the memory of victims from 'acts' of terrorism; only 'some' and 'hundreds more' remember the bombings and participate in memorializing the event through officiated and officialised and authorized gatherings. The moods of the next lines are sombre as they introduce an awkward element through suggesting that those who perished from the attack have gone to a "place we believe is better". The nature of their death is caught in controversy as they were forced to depart from this world. And yet, for the singer 'Aint no need in all the tears…No need for tears, no need to cry/No matter what we face, we shall get by". These are the most nationalistic lines, identifying the singer with the 'thousands' and 'hundreds' who perished in the attack. But does the singer really mean it or he is simply affecting counterfeit emotional sympathies and composing the features of his face/voice so that he appears to be like the people whose relatives were killed?

An important deconstructive ironic device is introduced in the sixth stanza in which there are suggestions that those who are sad are suffering from having misplaced their pity, sadness and sympathy: "Sadness comes from a lack of knowin'/Not knowin' where the one that you love is goin'. The singer lays exclusive claim of knowledge about an alternative space where freedom can be experienced without the fetters to the spirit. There is an implicit reference to the mournful and yet hopeful tone of the Negro spiritual through which throughout the period of slavery blacks were able to balance delight and dole in the same pot or hand. And yet if the lines above are interpreted from another angle, they introduce a very worrying ambiguity; Do blacks have to participate in the mourning of the dead most of whom where whites? This is a hard interpretation to take but it is rendered thinkable because there are suggestions further in the next stanza that America was vulnerable to attack because, as a country, it has not resolved its own internal contradictions. The possibilities of the repeatability of other acts of terrorism are for KRS-One not beyond imagination.

Using the diction largely culled from or informed by the biblical parabolic texts, KRS-One poses the following troubling questions:

But is your house, upon the rock
Or is it on sand and about to drop
Here is the question that you got to ask
Do I live for today or do I live for the past?

The American society is depicted as not being built on hard rock: there are cryptic religious messages here that amount to almost saying that the 9/11 debacle was partly self inflicted pain on the body politic of America. 'House' is also a metaphor of African American communities; they too are unstable because they "ignore God's law". People have now been turned to look like "pimps, and "whores". There is no spiritual regeneration in the mainstream American society and in the margin that the black people occupy. On one hand there is a call to the winning ways of Jesus who is mentioned in name as the spiritual commander of those who follow his theology:

Pray in the day and the night
Be prepared for the fight, not scared of the fight
He is the way, the truth and the light/
J to the E to the S to the U to the S.

Religious syncretism as a formal strategy used in black popular music in not a new thing. The ability of the singer to move with ease between Islam and Christianity demonstrates the appropriative powers that the black authored theology is able to generate. In the lines above, metaphysical evil and guilt in the American society is pitted against a referenced biblical figure who is Jesus. The method of signifying that is embedded in religious narratives creates meanings that gesture towards different directions. In *Tears*, KRS-One generously quotes from the Christian bible in ways that confirms him as a champion of cultural hybridity and syncretism as the condition of possibility of a firmer religious faith. Allegory is the main rhetorical figuration of the contest between good and bad in the spirit-scape that KRS-One constructs for America. Allegory is ambiguous because of its paradoxical desire to represent its reality as stable and unstable at the same time. As listeners to KRS-One we hear him exhort us that

At Matthew 5:44,

"But I say, unto you

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you

Be good to them that hate you

And pray for them which despitefully

Use you and persecute you

Taken straight from the Christian bible these lines seems like they are pleading for religious tolerance. in America – a country in which people are characterized as good or bad, infidels or righteous, terrorists or democrats, is it possible to love one's enemies? In America where black people have been oppressed for more than four hundred years, can the blacks really "endure" the Christian gospel bidding them to forgive and forget the misdeeds of the past and present tormenters? The above lives are central to the song ***Tears*** because the lines are strategically placed just before the stanza that vilifies the American republicans for their warmongering behaviour. But as KRS-One sings,

This goes for them terrorists too

But them publicans, done put themselves up above

Lookin' for blood again, hate no love again

Got them soldiers runnin' in, with a gun again?

With a ton of sin, in a holy war, how we gonna win?

I think it's time for KRS-one again

What the song depicted as a metaphysical battle between evil and good, elsewhere is in the above lines given human qualities. Terrorists reflect an extreme form of nationalism that is bound to destroy America; similarly, the unrestrained hand of the 'publicans' and their meddling in international affairs also represents a radical and conservative nationalism that, too, can only bring disaster for Americans. Both forms of nationalism are discarded and in place KRS-One suggests that we need true love. But KRS-One complicates the nature of this true love when he suggests republicans need to love those that torment them. There is dramatic irony here, for it is impossible to cohort with terrorists, so the administration of George W. Bush Junior, insisted.

The world that seems irreconcilable between the terrorists and the publicans can be bridged if the publicans who worship the Christian God and the terrorists who revere Allah can begin to tolerate each other's religious beliefs. Otherwise, both terrorists and the publicans are depicted as similar; both are violent. While the publicans go for blood seeking, the Islamic extremist terrorists will continue to pose a threat to America and world peace. *Tears* is therefore, a remarkable song in so far as it summons both the Islam devotees and the Christian devotees to account for their actions. The song ends with a plea for religious tolerance and enjoins both Muslims, and Christians to respect the sanctity of life which are both viewed as sacrosanct in some versions of Islam and Christianity:

> *And if ye salute your bredden only*
> *What do ye more than others?*
> *Do not even the publicans so?*
> *Be ye therefore perfect*
> *Even as your father which is in heaven, is perfect?*

Referencing the Christian bible suggests that the song attempts to provide a moral compass that both Muslims and Christians can live by. Although it seems that KRS-One favours Christian symbols more that Islamic ones, it can be arguable that at a deeper level, he has constructed and then depicted Muslim identities via an idiom of Christianity that is known to him. There is no contradiction in making this statement because in black African American communities, there are Christian Moslems who use the cultural symbols from the two religions in order to create a new community. Religious hybridity and cultural mixing of values is what KRS-One seems to offer as a viable solution because through these spiritual grids, black African Americans can borrow cultural resources from the best aspects of the values of Islam and Christianity which they can then reshape to become relevant in their own communities.

6.5 The Language of Philosophy, and philosophy of language in African American

Conscious hip hop

One of the most distinguishable aspects of KRS-One's discography is the didacticism that evinces from his songs. When a singer embraces the techniques of being preachy and teachy, it can be averred that the singer (1) wants the message to get to the audience in its simple and clear form (2) the singer might be suggesting that he or she is unsure as to whether or not his previous efforts have yielded the desired expectations. Jocson (2006) suggests that the use of rhetorical technique of didacticism in black youth poetry communities encourages the poetry embedded in hop hop to reach "larger audiences" since even averagely schooled youth can access the diction of the hip hop poetry. KRS-One's song, ***Health, Wealth, Self*** returns to the theme of the role that an artist must accomplish in the black community in which popular music is considered the "CNN of the black People". Singing and composition must serve social purposes. The Goddess who inspires KRS-One has made a contract with him and it is to sing and use that "gift to uplift". This social responsibility is to create awareness of the problems in black communities and then suggest viable solutions to these problems and this is further elaborated in the song in the following lines when KRS-One sings that

> *In the beginning was the word, the word was made flesh*
> *Knowledge K Reigns R Supreme S*
> *Some of us guess while others of us are blessed*
> *Take heed to the word that I manifest*
> *I manifest the future, the present, followed by the past*

Needless to mention that the philosophy embedded in this piece derives from the Five Percenters' conviction that only five % of the black African American people know what they want their lives to be. 85 % are confused and are struggling to interpret life in ways that expand their knowledge in order to move out of the confined space of the margin of social reality that they occupy. 10% have become sell outs and participate eagerly in exploiting the masses of black people. KRS-One does not believe that the black people' relation to knowledge should remain skewed in favour of a few like him. There is a suggestion that knowledge is gained when people engage with "everything in nature" and in the struggles between human beings.

KRS-One's understanding of the role of language in transmitting knowledge is that language is not simply a medium of communication. To use words is to mark, to mark is to control, to control is dominate and to dominate nature produces new forms of how to relate to that nature. Knowledge then is manifested in language in action. Hip hop is that medium through which social teachings are delivered to other people. Language is also the medium through which lessons of life are leant; language is knowledge. Language carries cultural values. In KRS-One's songs the philosophy behind the use of language is ambiguous; he intends to educate and communicate with his Black people.

But the language that he uses is implicated in promoting multivocality of expressions and this complicates talk about a single language within the black communities in America. In his conceptual use of language, KRS-One insists that language is a carrier of prior knowledge but language's protocols or modes of representing cultural identities also help in authorizing new epistemologies of knowledge. In, KRS-One's songs language is the vehicle that the singer uses to fracture unitary or monological ways of depicting the theological values informing Islam and Christianity that black African American communities use to fashion new Christian, Muslim identities inspired by adherence to African derived ancestor-worship. In KRS-One's songs language or rhetorical devices are used in ways that encourage "dialogue leakage" (Pechey 1989: 55) so that the very Muslim and Christian identities that are created are constantly revised and refused to settle as cultural absolutes. In short, and as Gates explains in his theory of the language usage within the framework of black African American popular culture in general and music in popular,

> Writers Signify upon each other's texts by rewriting the received textual tradition.
> This sort of Signifyin(g) revision serves,
> to create a space for the revising text.
> It also alters fundamentally the way we read the tradition,
> by defining the relation of the text at hand to the tradition.
> The revising text is written in the language of the tradition, employing
> its tropes, its rhetorical strategies, and its ostensible subject matter,
> the so-called Black Experience (Gates 1988: 124).

For KRS-One there is no single tradition to which a singer of his stature can defer. There are traditions that contest each other, and lend cultural symbols to each other. This paradoxical relation of religious traditions is visible in KRS-One's use of the rhetorical device of didacticism to drive his points to his audience. For example, in the song ***Health Wealth and Self***, KRS-One becomes didactic as he tells others what they need to do in order to acquire knowledge of the self and that of the community; community is here understood in its broadest terms. For example, in the song the first lesson that the community of singers need to embrace and embody singers must appreciate the role that they have taken up. While music should be entertaining, it must carry huge doses of educating the masses to reach the highest levels of intellectual development. The second lesson from ***Health, Wealth and Self*** is that the process of rapping is a collective one in which meaning-making is guaranteed. KRS-0ne says that each one of the collective singers must form what KRS-One calls a 'mad crew, that's of some benefit to you". Beyond the concern with individual images in the hip hop culture, singers must strive to popularize conscious lyrics. As KRS-One sings

> *What separates the pro from the amateur is stamina*
> *Not how long you can rhyme, but how long you've been rhyming*
> *Change with the times, and findin yourself*
> *Still CLIIIIIIIIMbin for wealth Me nah gon' need nuttin else*
> *But health, wealth and knowledge of myself*
> *Me nah gon' need nuttin else*
> *But health, wealth, and knowledge of myself*

The need for new knowledge within the black has been a pervasive theme in KRS-One's musical *oeuvre* but the singer does not apologize or minimize the need for maintaining a healthy relation between being wealthy and healthy; a singer needs both to continue singing new visions of self and the collective.

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight an important aspect of black African American politics of composing hip hop songs. It was demonstrated that the particular attention that KRS-One gives to his use of language is meant to serve ideological functions. Style in the music of KRS-One is not used for the sake of simply showing his mastery of the rhetorical strategies available in the popular culture within black American communities. The chapter also analysed different songs revealing that different techniques have been used. Allegory was used to imagine a black community that aspires to be stable. However, because of the nature of the metaphorical allegory embedded in the form of the parable that KRS-One used, the black African American Muslim and Christian identities have been depicted as represented as fractured. KRS-One extensively used the technique of didacticism in his songs. His aim was to attempt to reach a wide listenership audience as far possible as the clarity in some of his songs could allow. In some other songs, KRS emphasized the rhetorical device of exhortation and in these songs he proclaimed his heroic spiritual journey from a life of depravity to one of a musical star. This narrative of individual success was used as paradigmatic of what KRS-One expects from the black African American communities. The chapter argued that KRS One frequently referenced the values contained in the theology of version of Islam that is promoted by the Five Percenters who believe that African Americans should have in-depth knowledge of themselves. This knowledge is supposed to enable them to become critical of their own conduct. The chapter also suggested that KRS-One used rhetorical tools to complicate his narratives so that within the cultural interstices of a single song there was found Islam and Christian sensibilities. In other words, careful deployment of words enabled KRS-One to emphasize cultural hybridity in black identities instead of ethnic absolutism. This heteroglossic approach in the language enabled KRs-One to imagine a plurality of listeners.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion:

7 Whither Islam and Muslim identities in black African American popular songs?

The aim of this study was to explore the constructions of Muslim identities in the songs composed by black African Americans before and after 9/11 in America. The study emphasized the analysis of the songs composed before 9/11 because there are more black singers singing about Muslim identities during this period, and deriving the artistic inspiration from the Nation of Islam, The Five Percenters or the Nation of Gods and Earths as well as from the Sunni Islamic faith. In the period before 9/11, black African Americas also used the cultural and symbolical grids provided by Islam to imagine plural identities. In the post-9/11, there are continuities with the depiction of Muslim identities with pre- 911 period when the singers suggested the quest for collective identities is urgent. This search for viable models of community organizations are deemed useful against the background of the continued poverty that define the black ghettoes, the racial discriminatory policies that have continued to disadvantage black people and the persecution of blacks who have joined the Islamic faith by the American state under the guise of the 'war on terror'.

The study argued that some black African American singers deliberately used the cultural symbols of the three versions of Islam in their songs. These versions that have been identified as having openly and sometimes covertly influenced the lyrics of the black African American singers are the Nation of Islam, The nation of Gods and Earths or the Five Percenters and the Sunni religious faiths. The study further argued that the question of influence was a two way process because although the singers referenced Islamic symbols, they then manipulated these symbols so that the kind of Muslim identities that emerged in the songs were not always those that are guaranteed in the Qur'an. The capacity to manipulate the cultural resources made available in the Islamic faiths was dependant on the creative temperament of the artists, their knowledge and command of the vocabulary of Islam. Because the modes of insertion of the black singers into the Islamic faiths differed from one singer to the other, there was no single Muslim identity that has been constructed and justified as the only authentic one. The gender, class, generational as well as the political consciousness of the individual singers also determined the goals to which the Islamic cultural symbols have been used. Generally, it was also observed

throughout the study that black singers used Islamic religious symbols to achieve positive political, cultural and spiritual ends.

Some black singers adopted Islamic narratives within the internal structures of their songs in order to confirm the superiority of Islam over Christianity. Other singers used cultural symbols from both Islam and Christian eschatological values. And yet other black singers demonstrated how Christian values can be articulated to Islamic values so that the model of cultural coexistence and tolerance was preferred against a narrow embrace of the politics of cultural absolutism that would have implied that an acceptance of any one of the faiths without the other would have forced a narrowed social vision of the reconstruction of the black communities in America. It was demonstrated that some blacks deliberately joined the Islamic faiths in order to experiment with alternative models of ordering their individual and collective existence. Despite the use of different diction, thematic concerns and styles, it was revealed that the majority of singers preferred cultural hybrid Muslim identities that sample the best values and practices from Islam and Christianity. This reality to a large extent, reflects the diverse and unity that characterize the popular imaginations of the masses of people within the black African American communities in America.

Chapter one formed the introduction to this study. It described the area of study, justified why it was necessary to study the construction of Black Muslim identities in the periods before and after 9/11 in America. The chapter elaborated on the theories of black subjectivities, appropriated some progressive aspects in the theories of popular culture and re-interpreted these using postcolonial theoretical frameworks that emphasized the fractured nature of cultural identities, be they, Muslim, Christian or both. Chapter two provided an extended literature review to the study, sampling the different kinds of versions of Islam and the literature written on them. The chapter also highlighted the difficulties of arriving at something distinctively called Muslim identities. In America, there are Muslims who follow Islam; some Moslems practice both Christianity and Islamic values. The literature relating to these seeming contradictory cultural identities was also reviewed. Chapter three explored the lyrics of the band, Public Enemy, and the lyrics from Talib Kweli and Paris. It was demonstrated that the three artists are by and large influenced by the nationalist politics dating back to the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. which movements coalesced into the Nation of Islam guided by Minister Farrakhan. Kweli and Public Enemy's lyrics focused

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used the teachings of and believes in NOI to critique the racism of the American society, the black on black violence encouraged by conditions of enforced poverty. However, the singers also used Islamic values as a useful cultural grid to sift and construct imaginative models of viable black communities before 9/11. In this chapter it was also demonstrated that Paris' lyrics are more militant, and that he self-produces his lyrics because they are prevented from circulating in mainstream American media.

Paris' lyrics are largely composed in response to and as a commentary of the politics of 'othering' of blacks that emerged after 9/11. Paris's musical movement described as Guerrilla Funk took it upon itself to become a platform for conscientising Americans against the contradictions of the domestic and foreign policies of America that work against the poor blacks and whites. Paris used his songs to suggest an alternative space on which black nationalistic values can be elaborated. Paris' **Sonic Jihad** is indeed a radical collection of musical rhetoric. Through the medium of popular songs, Paris has challenged normative explanations that the war on terror was instigated by Islam. Paris makes a bold claim when he sings that the American government orchestrated the events of 9/11. What is radical in this claim is not so much the fact that Paris' argument can be verified by 'facts'. What is subversive in **Sonic Jihad** is that the songs render it thinkable to imagine that a government can put its people at risk for self-serving purposes such as the need to control oil in Iraq. Paris' CD, **Sonic Jihad** demands an audience that is prepared to listen differently, away, from the patterns of musical consumptions usually channelized by the State.

Paris' songs are also bold in the ways they name police brutality as that which diminishes the humanism of the Black Muslim communities. The power of **Sonic Jihad** to renegotiate the identities of Black Muslim communities after 9/11 is that the music also forces the black communities to confront their weaknesses, such as drug abuse, and the exploitation of black women. More importantly, Paris's CD, **Sonic Jihad** circulates in the provenance of other songs found in other CDs that Paris has composed. In particular the musical struggle or 'sonic jihad 'that Paris advocates is linked to the political movement of the Black Panther. The movement advocates that taking up arms against oppressors in America, a process that can be likened to internal decolonization. In short, renegotiating black identities in America through the medium of popular music means that Black Muslim communities must reject being classified as second

class citizens in a country of their birth. Paris has appropriated the cultural resources based on the oral word from black communities in order to advance political struggle that metaphorically is expressed as 'sonic jihad'. Paris also makes use of the technology made available by the very capitalist system in America that he uses to launch a critique of the system (Negus 2004: 534). In these ways, **Sonic Jihad** is truly radical and revolutionary.

Chapter four begun by arguing that most of the singers depicted open Muslim identities in their lyrics which are influenced by Islamic ideologies and the visible and organized political movements. Chapter five effected a shift and explored how Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Scarface have embedded Islamic values in their songs. It was demonstrated that the capacity of singers to draw from and transform the cultural motifs, concepts and values available in the Islam and Christian religion depended on their creative use of language, their proclaimed relationship to the religions and their understanding of both the core values of these religions and the problems of identity re-formations that is a challenge to the African American black communities. Singers aspired to use Islam and Christianity to recreate individual and group values for their communities. Singers found themselves challenging the American dream, critiquing their communities' weaknesses and suggesting new vistas of cultural development based on some sampled thoughts from Islam and Christianity.

It was revealed that of the four singers considered in this chapter, Lupe Fiasco's selected lyrics and his political views inclined his poetics towards the use of Sunni Muslim doctrines of self help and community engagement. Fiasco made conscious effort to flavour his songs with concepts and ideas borrowed from Islam. A song such as *Muhammed Walks* has parallels in the negro spirituals, themselves based on Afro-centric and Christian derived thematic motifs. The song is also adapted from Kanye West's version of the song *Jesus Walks.* This inter-texuality shows that singers are listening to each other and engaging each other in conversation about what it means to be Christian or Moslem in the post 9/11 political dispensation that is restrictive to cultural freedoms. The singers also use counter discourses designed to dialogue between them in order to re-shape new sensibilities for the black communities in dialogue with themselves. The twist of the song from 'Jesus Walks' to *Muhammed Walks* indicates intertextual relations in the songs and imply a deliberate association with Prophet Muhammad(SAW), suggesting Lupe Fiasco's quest for alternative spiritual ancestry and alternative values. The exploitation of the

journey motif in the song also is a time tested narrative strategy in Negro spirituals and reveals a community's restlessness in search of new heroes and values.

It was argued that Mos Def is a practising Sunni Muslim and his lyrics display this. In the song, *Bin laden* Mos Def defends Islam from allegations that the religion is the one that fomented fundamentalist ideas possessed by the men who blew the American twin towers in 2001. In the song, *Bin Laden* Mos Def uses Islam to provide a contestatory voice that challenges the official American narrative constructions of Moslem as reducible to either being good and bad according to a narrow definition decided upon by the American State's imperative to defend itself in the war on terror. The song boldly suggests that Christian politicians killed their own people in America in order to create a pretext for war with Iraq, and in Afghanistan. In *Fear Not of Man* Mos Def makes structural and religious allusion to Islam's dictate that men and women should fear and respect Islam because it is a faith that does not allow violence, sexy images and pornography displayed on American television. Mos Def draws his language for this song from some of the well-known words in Islam and views himself as located within Islam's intellectual and cultural values. *Fear Not of Man* challenges blacks to renew their individual and collective ideals for unfettered freedom based on practising and believing in Islam, a religion viewed by the singer as providing the grammar of spiritual values that can help rebuild the shattered black families, individuals and communities.

Scarface's lyrics, especially in *Someday* deliberately draw from both Islam and the Christian faith and demonstrated that religious syncretism enriches the minds of African Americans and fosters tolerance among believers from different faith. Scarface's song also showed that the condition of possibility for a superior faith comes from interdenominational dialogue. The singer fore-grounded the Christian religion and revealed how it could be used as a cultural resource by blacks to create new forms of relating to the self, with God and with society. There was a call – implicit though – in Scarface's song that blacks need to move out of the 'blame cycle' and then accept the historical fact that they were brutalised under slavery and that they continue to be, by white America, but also that the power is within them to fashion new models that transcend the master –slave relations so widely taken for granted in America.

Kanye West also penned *Jesus Walks*, a song that is based on the biblical allusions of Jesus Christ the Son of God who walked the breadth and length of his country preaching the gospel of

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Christian goodness. West itemized the woes that are experienced by blacks in America. His song is very controversial because it reveals the singers' ambivalent attitude towards the very religion he sang about. In some way, West appealed to blacks to leave their losing ways and join the Christian crusade against manmade and metaphysical badness. On the other hand, West doubts the capacity of Christian religion to provide the much-needed vigorous strategies for uplifting blacks from their lives of crime and economic quagmire in America. Just as Lupe, Fiasco, Mos Def and Scarface, Kanye West's seems to have heeded Nation of Islam's minister, Louis Farrakhan's challenge that singers should view themselves as the black people's organic intellectuals who should use hip hop to challenge negative stereotypes of blacks.

Chapter five argues that in many cases well-intentioned male singers tend to stereotype women in the male-authored lyrics. The chapter then focused on female composers and explored the different sources of their artistic inspiration. The analysis in this chapter showed that of the three female artists whose work has been reviewed, Missy Elliot is the only one who did not openly declare her allegiance or attribute her artistic inspiration to any of the three versions of Islam. Her work was considered in this chapter because of two main reasons. The first reason is that some of Missy Elliot's songs bear a close resemblance to the influences of the earlier generation of pop musicians who were part and parcel of the black gangsta cultural movement in hip hop. The themes that define the content of this genre of hip hop celebrate commercialized sex, critique of crime and police brutality on the black communities. Missy Elliot's songs of this genre were underlined by a yearning for individual success in America; the songs did not critically reflect on the unequal relations that made the question of social justice very pressing in the black communities.

The second reason why Missy Elliot's songs were included in this analysis is that some of them consciously revealed the singer's efforts to create a respectful model of human existence for the black community. The chapter noted that Missy Elliot was indirectly influenced by the nationalist themes of the Nation of Islam. She made mention of 9/11 in one of her song in order to bring to attention the fact that although the event was a tragic one, debates on it should not be allowed to cloud the debates on the historical injustices that the black people suffered during slavery and after it. This theme is very common in the discourse of The Nation of Islam. Missy Elliot's songs also displayed a desire to call black people to order, so that within their families,

communities and imagined nation, they should assume responsibility that entails re-evaluation of their sexual and social relations build around black men and women. This too is an important theme that the Nation of Islam uses to mobilize African Americans so that the goals of socio-economic and political up-lift-ment are realized at both the individual and collective levels within the black communities.

The chapter also revealed that it needs a critic with a close understanding of the principles of Islam as they are enunciated through the three versions of faiths for one to identify traces of Islamic influence on the works of artists such as Missy Elliot. Here, the chapter argued that Missy Elliot's recurring question in her song which is "Where my people at?" forced her to sing and thereby assume the role of a teacher or organic intellectual for the black communities in America. The Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam and Five Percenters or The nation of Gods and Earths all ideologically converge in their belief that the black singers are cultural producers and therefore have the potential of assuming leadership roles among the black race in America.

Unlike Missy Elliot, Miss Undastood openly proclaimed her close relationship with and cites Sunni Islam names, religious credo that she manipulates as a fertile source for her artistic imagination. Miss Undastood is very loyal to Sunni Islam, openly wears Muslim clothes to show her pride in her religion. The chapter argued that to the extent that attire can denote social identities, Miss Undastood's deliberate choice of clothes closely associated with believers in the The religion of Islam functions as marker and signifier of her faith in the religion. It also shows her desire to create an African American consciousness about the virtues of being Muslim. She raps on the struggles that women face in the hip hop industry, uses her music to encourage black women to have self pride and hopes that her songs can help black communities create cultural networks that promote social up-liftment of black women in the black ghettoes in America.

The chapter ended with an analysis of Erykah Badu's composition called *One*. This song decidedly situated its ideological and linguistic discourse within the philosophical provenance of the Five Percenters faith. In analyzing this song it was demonstrated that Five Percenters have appropriated the spiritual and cultural resources made available in Islam which they have vested with and personified in the nature of actual people. In this faith, Men are described as Allah or Gods and women are called Earths. It was argued that initial analysis of Erykah's song revealed some dangerously embedded ideas on gender inequalities because women are given subordinate

roles. The analysis of the song then revealed the ways in which Five Percenters yearn for a society of equality. The analysis of the song also demonstrated through the musical voice of Erykah that women can use language to subvert the certitude embedded in the male centred philosophy of the Five Percenters. Badu's skilful use of the language enabled her to use music as lyrical sword (Banjoko 2004) to revise male values and perceptions about the roles that men and women can play in African American social lives. When she used language to persuade the man (Rhymes) to concede that both men and women have equal responsibilities in the family, Badu draws on and demonstrates Henry Louis Gates' (1998) conviction that oppressed sections of the African American people use language that rewrites the dominant narratives whether these are from the black patriarchy or are manifested in racialised discourses promoted by the white controlled American society. Badu signifies, and in the process introduces new meanings to old songs and problems.

Of the three female artists considered in this chapter Erykah Badu's song demonstrated that not all Black Muslim women or female singers accept the ascribed position of subordination. Women like Erykah Badu have used the discourse of Muslim as a frame of referencing Islam in their works to enable them to sift the patriarchal attitudes, contest them so that the songs become the spaces for cultural resistance to oppression emanating from American racism, black male chauvinism, and also the oppression that is perpetuated when some women internalize their oppression as natural and God-given. The most important aspect that the chapter emphasized is that black female and Muslim artists use the cultural resource of language to enact stage, perform, reverse, revise and offer sustained critique of gender stereotypes in their social experiences. The centrality of language of rapping in black American popular reveals that black African American hip hop artists use language in non-canonical ways; the artists fracture the linguistic codes in order to manifest multiple identities that African Americans can assume at any moment as cultural identities are a shifting concept.

It is this important aspect of the use of language in the black artists whose cultural productions and lyrics are influenced by Islam that chapter six focused on. The singers whose lyrics were analyzed in chapters three, four and five all strove to reveal the content of Islamic values which for most of the times are suppressed in America. Chapter six of this study focused on the lyrics of KRS-One. The emphasis of this chapter was a deliberate exploration of the linguistic arsenal

and rhetorical devices that the black African American artist used in order to manifest the grammar of values that are informed by Islam in their songs. This chapter deliberately focused on styling in rapping because it is through the deft usage of language as a cultural and spiritual resource that some values that are not so obvious to a casual listener could be unearthed.

It was shown that KRS-One's understanding of the role of language in transmitting knowledge is that language is not simply a medium of communication. To use words is to mark, to mark is to control, to control is dominate and to dominate nature produces new forms of how to relate to that nature. Knowledge then is manifested as language in action. Hip hop is that medium through which social teachings are delivered to other people. Language is also the medium through which lessons of life are leant; language is knowledge. Language carries cultural values. In KRS-One's songs the philosophy behind the use of language is ambiguous; he intends to educate and communicate. But the language that he uses is implicated in promoting "multivocality of expressions" (Alston1964:84) and this complicates talk about a single language within the black communities in America. In his conceptual use of language, KRS-One insists that language is a carrier of prior knowledge but language's protocols or modes of representing cultural identities also help in authorizing new epistemologies of knowledge. In, KRS-One's songs language is the vehicle that the singer uses to fracture unitary or monological ways of depicting the theological values informing Islam and Christianity, that black African American communities use to fashion new Christian and Muslim identities other values inspired by adherence to African derived ancestor-worship. In KRS-One's songs language is used in ways that encourage "dialogue leakage" (Pechey 1989: 55) so that the very Muslim and Christian identities that are created are constantly revised and refused to settle as cultural absolutes.

In short, chapter six demonstrated that the particular attention that KRS-One gives to his use of language is meant to serve ideological functions. Style in the music of KRS-One is not used for the sake of simply showing his mastery of the rhetorical strategies available in the popular culture within black American communities. The chapter also analysed different songs revealing that different techniques have been used. Allegory was used to imagine a black community that aspires to be stable. However, because of the nature of the metaphorical allegory embedded in the form of the parable that KRS-One used, the black African American Muslim and Christian identities have been depicted and represented as fractured. KRS-One extensively used the

technique of didacticism in his songs. His aim was to attempt to reach a wide audience as far possible as the clarity in some of his songs could allow. In some other songs, KRS emphasized the rhetorical device of exhortation and in these songs he proclaimed his heroic spiritual journey from a life of depravity to one of a musical star. This narrative of individual success was used as paradigmatic allegory of what KRS-One expects from the black African American communities. The chapter argued that KRS-One frequently referenced the values contained in the version of Islam that promoted by the Five Percenters who believe that African Americans should have in-depth knowledge of themselves. This knowledge is supposed to enable them to become critical of their own conduct. The chapter also suggested that KRS-One used rhetorical tools to complicate his narratives so that within the cultural interstices of a single song there was found Islam and Christian sensibilities. In other words, careful deployment of words enabled KRS-One to emphasize cultural hybridity in black identities instead of ethnic absolutism. This heteroglossic approach in the language enabled KRs-One to imagine a plurality of listeners. By and large this conclusion reveals that the questions at the beginning of the study were thoroughly researched and satisfactorily answered.

7.1 Recommendations for future study in the construction of Muslim identities in black African American popular music

This study, therefore, recommends that future studies can research on questions relating to

- In-depth and critical exploration of the influence of individual versions of Islam to the black African American authored music. This can reveal the versions of Islam that are most favoured by artists and this will force critics to explain why.
- Future studies can be localized in such a way that they can focus on how a single group, eg, women have manipulated Islam's cultural symbols in their works. This can avoid paying critical lip-service to the lyrics authorized by women.
- More research work needs to be directed to exploring how and with what impact constrictions of Muslim identities before the 9/11 tragedy has impacted on musical traditions other than hip hop music.

- How lyrics by black African American singers have transformed the initial messages encoded in the Qur'an.

- How cultural hybridity and religious tolerance in the lyrics can broaden the democratic space in America.

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