

**DREAMING AMERICA: MIDDLE EASTERN DIASPORA AND  
CULTURAL CONFLICTS**

*Ahmet BEŞE\**

*Nazila HEİDARZADEGAN\*\**

**Abstract:**

This article attempts to examine how Middle Eastern Americans settled in America in pursuit of happiness, a better life, and liberty, and the results of their expectations. Culture and religion play a significant role in lives of Middle Eastern Americans and actively effect people's attempts to be Americanized and forfeit their authenticity. Such cultural conflicts cause them to feel fragmented, split, or sometimes yearn for the days back in their homelands. People in diaspora, mostly fled from local communities, are culturally hybridized while attempting mimicry.

**Key words:** American Dream, Middle Eastern Americans, Culture, Migration, Diaspora.

**INTRODUCTION: A NEW WORLD, A NEW DREAM**

Wilber W. Caldwell, in *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream*, points out that the entire epic of American history is a story of expanding expectations, a saga of a dream that grew greedy. Although ambitious, the first versions of the American Dream today appear childishly simple and naïve. In the beginning, the New World was a great green wilderness of dreams: dreams of new beginnings, of liberty, and of abundance. The early American Dream was an agrarian vision open to a hardy new breed of self-reliant individuals who embraced hard work and sacrifice. It was built on the notion that with work, self-sufficiency, sobriety, thrift, initiative, moderation, and endurance the riches of a new land would be placed at the feet of the dreamer. This concept was more than a dream; it was an ethic, for it implied not only a possibility for material abundance, but also a path to a better, more moral life. Thus, the American Dream became a bifurcated dream: one side aspired to

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\* Prof. Dr., Atatürk University Faculty of Letters American Culture and Literature Department - Erzurum/Turkey ahmetbese@hotmail.com

\*\* Dr., Islamic Azad University English Language Department - Islamic Republic of Iran naziheidarzade@yahoo.com

material wealth while the other, supposedly complementary side, aspired to liberty, democracy, equality, the common good, and a new morality (Caldwell, 2006, p. 11).

But as the new nation grew, it began to lose its simple rural character. Dreamers aspired to material wealth far beyond the modest hopes of America's first generations of republican yeoman farmers. The American ideals of liberty and democracy often became manipulated in support of material plunder. For many Americans, with the burgeoning industrialization, the material side of the American Dream was more realized, and with its fulfillment, the Dream itself began to change.

The first large groups of Middle Eastern Americans coming to the United States began to reach the continent by boat in the late 1800s. These were Syrians and Lebanese in majority (Askari & Asian American Journalists Association, Detroit Chapter, 1991, p. 4), though there is still some historical confusion as to the nationality of these earliest Middle Eastern immigrants. This is mainly because all inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were considered as Ottoman Turkish citizens until after World War I. They all spoke Arabic, and most referred to themselves as 'Syrian.' However, when they came to the United States, they arrived with Ottoman Turkish passports. Thus, U.S. officials simply referred to all such immigrants as Ottoman Turkish until 1899. After this date, however, a new category was created for Syrians. It was not until the 1930s that the identification of 'Lebanese' began to be used, although it is estimated that about 85 percent of the early immigrants came from the region that is now known as Lebanon. Many Lebanese continued at that time to refer to themselves as 'Syrian,' and similarly, some people who actually came from the area known as Syria started to call themselves 'Lebanese.' Others used the term 'Syrian-Lebanese' (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 4).

### **1. THE WAVES OF MIGRATION: FIRST WAVE**

The first Middle Eastern immigrants tended to gather in groups based primarily on religion, and there was some divisiveness in the immigrant community because of religious differences between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. However, they had generally been prompted to immigrate to the US through the same motivations. Like many other groups, these first Middle Eastern Americans came to the United States pursuing the American Dream of 'life, liberty, and happiness,' in order to escape difficult lives in their home country. During the first wave of immigration, which began in 1870 and lasted until about 1914, approximately 100,000 Syrian-Lebanese came to the United States (Parillo, 2003, p. 354). These first immigrants were fleeing the harsh

treatment of the governing powers. In part due to overtaxing, large numbers of people starving and many living in poverty. The promise of religious freedom in the United States, as well as economic opportunities, were the major motivating factors in Syrian-Lebanese immigration in the early 1900s (Parillo, 2003, p. 354). These were sometimes exaggerated, or at least skewed to include only the positive aspects of living in the United States. For example, in *The Syrian Yankee*, Salom Rizk writes of the report his schoolteacher gives of America:

*“It is a country-but not like Syria. It is really a country like heaven and you cannot know what it is like until you have been there ... the land of hope ... the land of peace ... the land of contentment ... the land of liberty ... the land of brotherhood ... the land of plenty ... where God has poured out wealth ... where wheat grows waist high, shoulder high, sky high, and as thick as the hair on your head ... where men do the deeds of giants and think the thoughts of God ..... where every boy and girl can learn to be what he or she want to be ... Now it grew too big, too miraculous, too heavenly. It sounded like the fairylands. I will go to America-To Heaven”* (Rizk, 1943, pp. 70-73).

One should not overlook the impact the returning emigrant had, with tales and tangible evidence of their swift economic success, in creating a psychological disposition favorable to emigration which inspired the determination and adventurous spirit of countless numbers of people to do likewise and to seek their fortunes in the New World (Khalaf, 1987, pp. 17-35).

The majority of these early Syrian-Lebanese, one in every three, were peddlers (i.e., travelling salesman) and many subsequently became shop owners (Parillo, 2003, p. 355). The Syrian peddlers provided access to ‘exotic’ products that the white inhabitants of rural America had almost never encountered before. A less obvious function of peddling, for early Middle Eastern Americans, however, was that it helped them to assimilate to U.S. society more easily, by preventing ghettoization, spreading them throughout the country, and by bringing them directly into contact with the native population in their own homes (Parillo, 2003, p. 355). Peddling allowed them to be spread widely throughout the country, which not only helped them become accustomed to the host population, but also helped the host population become accustomed to them (Parillo, 2003, p. 356). As of 1914, most of these first Middle Eastern Americans had become stationary business owners, specifically opening grocery stores.

Middle Eastern men were attracted into the industrial labor force, especially in Detroit, where Henry Ford promised a \$5 wage for an eight-hour work a day. (Askari & Asian American Journalists Association. Detroit Chapter, 1991, p. 4) Those working low-skill jobs sent word back home, selling the Dream of Work, to encourage relatives to join them. Although early Middle Eastern American families were relatively poor, as were most immigrants, unlike many others, they were literate and Syrian parents required that their children finish primary school (Parillo, 2003, p. 355). A look at current statistical data will show that this emphasis on education is still part of the Middle Eastern American ethos. The entire family, including children after they completed school, contributed to the family's economic success, further reinforcing the Dream of Education.

Many Middle Eastern people in America were able to become economically secure within the first generation. Most had owned homes in their countries, so they immigrated in relatively stable financial circumstances. They also accumulated money quickly, and already had the knowledge of how to invest it wisely, as well as certain cultural values of motivation to succeed, industriousness, and independence, which were the common features between Middle Eastern expectations and American Dream (Hooglund, 1987, pp. 17-35).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Middle Eastern American was the term to identify the Arab immigrants, but a larger question loomed ahead for them: could these Arabic-speaking people from Asia fit into a country that favored its European roots and practiced varying degrees of prejudice against those perceived as 'non-whites'? (Hooglund, 1987, p. 23)

Those referred to as Syrians had been granted citizenship since the 1880s and seen as white (McCarus, 1994, p. 325). However, in the early 1900s, theories of 'racial inferiority' began to grow, and U.S. Government asserted that newly arrived Arabs had no right to become citizens because they were 'nonwhite' (Feagin, 2011, p. 326). A Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision (Naff, 1994, p. 325). However, the issue of citizenship was certainly not complete (Parillo, 2003, p. 355). In order to establish their 'whiteness,' members of the Syrian community sought to establish their identification as 'Arabs.' The argument was that Arabs, as the purest of the Semitic race, were even whiter than Europeans. Even while adopting this Arab identity for the purposes of citizenship, the community still referred to itself, as Syrians perhaps because of the recognition of American antagonism toward Arabs related to Islam (McCarus, 1994, p. 355).

## **2. SECOND WAVE**

A second wave of Middle Eastern immigration began after World War II. These new immigrants arrived from such countries as Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon between 1946 and 1968 (Askari & Asian American Journalists Association. Detroit Chapter, 1991, p. 355). This second wave of immigration was larger than the first, with half a million Arab immigrants entering the United States (Feagin, 2011, p. 326).

The second wave was made up of Muslims and Christians, whereas the first-wave group was more Christian. The second-wave immigrants tended to be highly educated professionals. The 'push' factors were different. Whereas the first wave of Middle Easterners came to America mostly because of religious persecution, the new arrivals came to benefit from the educational opportunities in the United States and escape political conflicts in their home countries. Some of the crises that brought the new Middle Easterners to the United States included the 1968 Palestinian-Israeli conflict over the West Bank and Gaza Strip, poverty and civil war in Yemen, and conflict and religious oppression in Iraq. Most members of the second wave did not see themselves as temporary residents, as the first group did. Rather, they conceived of themselves as permanent members of their new society, and full participants in it (McCarus, 1994, p. 32).

Many of the second-wave immigrants, especially those who immigrated since the 1960s, were highly educated (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 12). Despite their exceptional educational achievements, Middle Eastern Americans are nonetheless vulnerable to discrimination in schools. Middle Eastern Americans, compared to other ethnic groups in the United States, are relatively economically successful. Those in the first wave were usually poor; however, they began a tradition of business ownership that has continued to the present (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 12).

Stereotypes of recent Middle Eastern immigrants are based on fundamentally racist conceptions of them as physically distinct from 'white' Americans (Feagin, 2011, p. 326). Though, Census categorizations continue to label them as 'white', average Americans are likely to view them as 'nonwhite' (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 18).

Since the 1960s, the notion of Middle Eastern Americans as dangerous outsiders has been based more on ethnic or religious grounds, which are later translated into racial differences. (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 46). In light of the political crisis in the Middle East, ethnic and religious differences of Middle

Eastern Americans have received more public attention and security. Several events, particularly the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab oil embargo, influenced the U.S. government and public to begin to respond to the Middle East, and to Middle Eastern Americans, as a monolithic religious group.

The new Middle Eastern immigrants were Muslim, they began to be seen in more religious terms than previous immigrants, and often more negatively. Thus from an external view, the Middle Eastern American identity, since the 1960s, to a large extent has been based on religious difference, and being a Muslim is a problem, though internally this identity is clearly more heterogeneous, diverse, and complex.

Conflicts in the Middle East solidified a sense of Arab American identity in the United States. For example, some cite the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as a turning point for the second-wave immigrants similar to that of World War I for first-wave immigrants. Witnessing the Arab-Israeli conflicts, and particularly what many viewed as a one-sided U.S. media response, strengthened the sense of Arab identity among many Arab Americans. New immigrants, along with third-generation descendants of the early immigrants, who had begun to think of themselves as 'Arabs' rather than 'Syrians', came together to form stronger ethnic communities. Thus, political conflict in the Middle East revitalized a sense of Arab pride for the new immigrants; it began a process of 'de-assimilation', or pulling away from mainstream America (McCarus, 1994, p. 85).

### **3. 9/11 AND MUSLIM MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICANS**

The millennium was not a lucky turn of the century for Middle Eastern Americans. Tuesday, September 11, 2001, stands as one of the darkest days in U.S. history. Americans have begun to mark time with reference to the terrorist attacks. They almost talk of 'pre-9/11' and 'post-9/11.' It will long be remembered by millions of Americans who witnessed the collapse of the Twin Towers over and over on their television screens. For Muslim Middle Eastern Americans, '9/11' likewise signifies a shocking and sad day, but it also marks the beginning of a new era in which they became the victims of backlash. For many, the tragic events ushered in a period of hate crimes, profiling, and discrimination. Though stereotypes and discriminatory actions were not new to these Middle Eastern minorities, the post-9/11 backlash was overwhelming and relentless. Immediately after the attacks, individuals who appeared Middle Eastern or had Arabic- or Islamic-sounding names became the scapegoats of Americans' anger and vengeance (Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2009, p. 1).

Hate crimes and racially or religiously biased incidents spiked immediately. As The New York Times put it most succinctly: “Since the attacks, people who look Muslim Middle Eastern, whatever their religion or nation of origin, have been singled out for harassment, threats and assaults” (Goodstein & Lewin, September 19, 2001). More seriously, a few weeks after 9/11, the U.S. government generated a series of initiatives and policies that targeted Muslim Middle Eastern immigrant populations, especially men. Ostensibly, these administrative rule changes, executive orders, and laws aimed to stop terrorism; however, they legitimized the backlash in the eyes of the Americas. It seemed as if the government was condoning stereotyping and scapegoating.

Given the enormity of the 9/11 backlash, Muslim Middle Eastern Americans urged their constituents to claim their rights as Americans, to raise their voices, and to fight back against hate crimes, biased incidents, prejudice, and discrimination. They responded in typical American fashion—through political activism and legal challenges. Their ultimate goal was civic engagement and political integration into the mainstream of American society. Several Muslim American organizations tried to make Islam one of the core religions in America, to change the characterization of America’s religious heritage from ‘Judeo-Christian’ to ‘Abrahamic faith’ (Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2009, p. 2).

Immediately following the terrorist attacks, the government initiated a component of the ‘War on Terror’. These policies have been criticized for disregarding civil rights. Some scholars have gone so far as to call them “state-sponsored terrorism” (Minnite, 2007, p. 182). The Migration Policy Institute’s report concurs: “The U.S. government’s harsh measures against immigrants since September 11 have failed to make us safer, have violated our fundamental civil liberties, and have undermined national unity” (Chishti, 2003, p. 7). Visiting a mosque in Washington, D.C., on September 17, George W. Bush proclaimed, “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don’t represent peace. They represent evil and war” (Gentile, 2008, p. 78). Although Arab and Muslim Americans communities appreciated the initial outreach by the government, they felt that not enough had been done. Many observed that after the initial mosque visit the White House was almost silent.

Yuting Wang believes that searching for commonality should be more important than debating the differences within the American Muslim community in post-9/11 American society (Wang, 2014, p. 137). For Muslims in the United States, establishing a common ground is extremely appealing. The terrorist

attacks put Muslim Americans in a tough spot where they had to defend their identity as Muslims. The conflict between Islam and the West may be hard to reconcile; and a common ground among Muslims themselves is as difficult to come by.

Reconciling the American self and the Muslim self is a task every Muslim youth is engaged in, no matter how 'Muslim' or how 'American' they are, by their own or others' standards. Some believe that in order to be a good Muslim, one must distinguish that which is American from that which is Islamic. The 'American Muslim' identity often sugar coats the stark differences between being a Muslim and being an American (Wang, 2014, p. 123). However, the gap between being Muslim and being American seems too wide to be bridged. Impeccable English is usually an ignorable factor when a person has a Muslim name and a 'Muslim' face. Thus, the radicalized image of Islam to a certain degree prevents American-born generations from fully integrating into American society (Joshi, 1998, p. 65).

The 9/11 events turned a page in the history of Muslim Americans. After 9/11, Muslims have been trying to rectify their damaged images and demonstrate that Islam is compatible with modernity. It is within this context that the majority of Muslims seek to maintain the unity of their community. Their success in maintaining a diverse membership in their mosque, despite some setbacks, shows that Islam is comparable with a number of important values that uphold American society. The future of the Muslim community will be shaped by the outcome of the ongoing debate on 'American Islam' vs. 'Islam in the United States.'

In his famous book *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote:

*"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness-an African, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder"* (Du Bois, 2007, p. 8).

This 'double-consciousness' is not only applicable to African Americans, as Du Bois, but also suitable for other groups in a society. Race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion are among the many reasons why people have to struggle to cope with the state of double-consciousness and their multiple identities.



American Catholics and American Muslims share similar experiences on their ways to ‘Americanization’. In the United States, religion is “the culturally favored way for people to be both indisputably American and legitimately loyal to some pre- or supra-American identity” (Wang, 2014, p. 132). This characteristic of American society provides a fertile soil for the growth of Islam and Muslim communities. ‘Americanization’ has been a long and painful process throughout American history. Given the growing awareness of their ‘American identity’ among ordinary American Muslims and a thriving generation of pro-American Muslim scholars and leaders, there are plenty of reasons to picture a future of assimilation similar to that of the Catholics and Jews. Nonetheless, Islam was and is still regarded as a foreign religion transplanted to American soil, thus ‘othering’ Muslims in American society. Foreign religions have become ‘racialized’ in contrast to the ‘whiteness’ of Judeo-Christianity (Joshi, 1998, p. 83). Muslims are set apart from mainstream Americans and there is a sense of alienation among Muslims, solidifying their marginal position in American society.

Race in American society is a vague concept. As a social construct, different standards have been employed to define the racial boundaries in history. Solely based on skin color, many Arabs and West Asians may well qualify to be considered ‘white’. However, the image of Muslims as ‘non-white’ in contrast to the ‘white’ Christians and Jews became prominent in the post-9/11 era (Wang, 2014, p. 132). There is a complex relationship between people’s Muslim identity and the American Dream that brought them to this land, so they developed a sort of solution by both growing as a unified community and becoming genuinely integrated in American society. As Muslim identity becomes more salient in post-9/11 America, the “American Muslim” identity will continue to be contested (Wang, 2014, p. 134).

#### **4. CULTURAL CONFLICTS AND THE RENEWAL OF DREAMS**

Immigrant Muslims, for the most part latecomers to the American scene, have actively sought recognition, some even calling for a definition of America as Judeo-Christian-Muslim. Muslims were on the true path of creating a space for themselves in America, but, the 9/11 attacks challenged such routes. It caused a significant backlash against the Muslim community. After the attacks, Muslims were not only exposed to racial profiling, but Islam, their religion, was demonized. Some Americans ascribed violence to all of Islam and all Muslims. Muslims started to think that after 9/11, the war was waged on Islam instead of terror, by media, press, and public officials.

Studies have revealed a number of problems faced by newcomers to the American religious context, which was historically Judeo-Christian, not including Islam as the third of the 'Abrahamic faith'. According to Haddad et al. the problems can be classified as the following: first, newcomers, who represent new religions and new cultures, can face discrimination from the part of those who are already American citizens. Second, former colonized peoples who have been influenced by Western exercises of power chose to migrate to America including Hispanics, African Americans, and Muslims. Third, the tension over the superiority of one group's ethnicity, culture, or religious expression challenges moral values of equivalency. And finally, immigrants are supposed to be assimilated culturally, ideologically and above all personally, otherwise they are blamed if the expectation is not realized (Haddad, Smith, & Esposito, 2003, p. 3).

Another difficulty is the importance of individualism in Western and certainly American society, which contrasts with the communal nature of many immigrants origins. Therefore, it is difficult for the immigrant communities in America "to demonstrate balance between the needs of the individual and expectations of the community" (Haddad et al., 2003, p. 4). David J. O'Brien notes that individualism is probably the single most important aspect of American religious culture. On the other hand, the quest for community is evident among virtually all immigrant groups as people look for others who share their experiences and/or convictions and with whom they can find a sense of belonging based on a common faith (O'Brien, 1992, p. 32).

Another major challenge facing most religious groups has been balancing the diversity of believers within the uniformity of faith: who is a believer, who is a non-believer, who practices his/her religion and who does not. Still, another issue of concern to religious communities today is the balance between the public and the private. It is commonly noted that Americans tend to restrict religion to private life, leaving a barren public square without religious meaning or moral guidance. But Muslims maintain a public collective identity through their religion (Haddad et al., 2003, p. 5).

Muslims who want permanent residence are often assimilated by adopting Anglicized names and marrying non-Muslims. Many have felt torn by trying to hold on to their Islamic culture at the same time that they want the 'American Dream' of educational and financial opportunities. But, it seems that they have to pay the price of Americanization, and a primary and prominent price of assimilation is the apparent loss of identity (Haddad et al., 2003, p. 6). Second-generation Muslims, schooled in America and acculturated to a significant

degree, generally accept American values, though they are keenly aware of their Islamic heritage and often experience extreme tensions when they feel that aspects of American culture or policy are at odds with that heritage.

Muqtadar Khan in *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom* classifies American Muslims into two main communities: immigrants, who tend to see themselves as ‘Muslims in America’, and the indigenous, whom he says can usually be described as Americans who are Muslim without prejudice toward either American or Muslim identity. Khan argues these classifications are being challenged by a rapidly emerging third identity, that of American Muslim per se. The interplay between American values and Islamic values and the mutual reconstitution of each are leading to a liberal understanding of Islam more in tune with dominant American values, such as religious tolerance, pluralism, multiculturalism, and multi-religious coexistence (Khan, 2002, p. 194).

Khan feels that to participate in American life, Muslims develop two clear images of America: ‘America the democracy’ and ‘America the colonial power’ (Khan, 2002, p. 196) which are called ‘paradigms of embrace’ and ‘paradigms of resistance’, respectively by Ingrid Mattson (Mattson, 2003, pp. 208-212). That is, some see America primarily as liberal, democratic, tolerant, and multiculturalism, while others perceive it as an evil force, using its power to dominate foreign nations, stealing resources, and depriving other countries of their right to self-determination. Muslims who wish to make America their home are prominent among the American Muslim leadership and have been successful in establishing the ‘paradigm of embrace’ as the prevailing norm. Consequently, those in the United States who take the ‘America as colonial power’ viewpoint have become marginalized.

Prejudice against Islam in the American mainstream and resistance to adjustment within the community itself would pose a major barrier to engagement with the American mainstream. In regards to discrimination, pressure to assimilate remains high. David J. O’Brien, who believes Americans restrict religion to private life while Muslims practice it both in their public and private lives, concludes that the two major questions facing religions in America today are the balance between deep commitment to one’s faith and one’s relationship to others in a pluralistic society and how to reconcile differing religious beliefs with the need for serious commitment to one another and our earth (O’Brien, 2003, pp. 30-31).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The value placed on education, and the tradition of pursuing higher education continues today in Middle Eastern American families and communities. America has been and still is promoted as a haven for men and women from every part of the world escaping religious and political persecution or seeking economic opportunities and a better life. Yet, for many Muslims, the hope of achieving the American Dream has become gloomier, especially after a series of important events, such as 9/11 and the backlash against Islam. Muslims have begun to rethink settling in the U.S. and consider going back to their homelands. Nostalgia appears to be a solution mechanism in such a time of religious upheavals. Here “nostalgia is less about the past than it is about the present and the future” (Arargüç, 2011, p. 2), a kind of nostalgia related more with ideological discourse than that of religious. Some of the Middle Eastern Americans decide to go back to the Middle East as they, despite holding an American passport, do not identify themselves as American. The time spent in America has been but a process to return home. A Muslim family sought to return home, has a broader meaning than their homeland. Other Middle Eastern lands like Dubai, is home, too. ‘Home,’ to them, as Wang writes is:

*“Where they can live with Islam in their everyday life; ‘home’ is where all the restaurants offer halal foods; ‘home’ is where the children can learn about Islam and the Qur’an in schools; ‘home’ is where one can hear adhan (call to prayers) in the shopping malls; ‘home’ is where Friday is a holiday and no one has to struggle to take time off from work to celebrate the Eids” (Wang, 2014, p. 133).*

The differentiations American Muslims consciously make between Islamic states and Muslim states is important in their decision of either staying in the United States, returning to the Muslim world, or maintaining transnational ties in both worlds. Diversity is a unique characteristic and strength of American Muslim communities growing in the shadow of 9/11. We cannot help agreeing with Haideh Moghissi who believes that, still, despite their relatively high level of education, Muslims face a high unemployment rate and lower levels of income, the tendency among a growing number of Muslims towards stronger religious affiliation and, in some cases, towards Islamism, is a vicious circle: faced by racism and marginalization, stronger identification with Islam and its symbols and practices creates a sense of belonging and entry into a shared space based on common values or on a common perception of grievances, but this

tendency also invites hostility and strengthens Islamophobia, contributing, in turn, to marginalization (Moghissi, 2006, p. xix).

Well-paying jobs in a Muslim society, such as the United Arab Emirates, are inviting to some American Muslim families. Lots of Muslim expats from the United States chose to move back to the Middle East to establish a respectable place for their families. For these returnees being Muslim is too challenging in America. As the economic conditions improve in the Middle East and the political reforms deepen, the West is no longer the only destination for immigrants who are seeking better lives. The trend of return migration may start playing a role in reshaping American Muslim communities. A dream of home is replacing the American Dream for some, at least.

In the twenty-first century, the American Dream remains a major phenomenon of Americans. Over the course of human history, people have used number of means to identify themselves: blood, religion, language, geography, a shared history, or some combination of these. In *Television Myth and the American Mind*, Hal Himmelstein insists that many of the myths that sustain American society today are “embedded into our collective subconscious” by television (Himmelstein, 1994, p. 56). Foremost among these media-reinforced myths is the myth of eternal progress, characterized by the economic expansion of society and the growth of personal material compensations. Television promotes ‘unbridled consumption’ and through its advanced state of acquisitiveness, it is “stultifying and controlling” (Himmelstein, 1994, pp. 58-59). All these factors have and continue to provoke immigration to the United States to share the promised Dreams.

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