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**Identity in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and  
Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013)**

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## Dedication

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the issue of identity within two selected literary works: Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). The aim of this research paper has been to explore the complexities of an individual's personal identity formation in the middle of societal expectations and impositions. Relying on Stuart Hall's theory of *Identity*, this dissertation analyzed how the novels portray their protagonists' identity development in two different contexts: post-9/11 America and postcolonial Algeria. The research, structured in two main chapters, The Self and the Other in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013), and Resurgence of Religion in the same novels. The Analysis of these two literary works together yielded three key findings. First, it confirmed the flexible and ever-shifting nature of identity, revealing that an individual's identity formation is a transformative process influenced by historical backgrounds and societal perceptions. Second, the study revealed contrasting approaches to dealing with societal "Otherness", demonstrating various ways characters navigate their sense of self in relation to external representations. Third, the research highlighted the significant impact of religious identity on self-understanding, showing how the resurgence of religion plays a crucial role in reshaping individual identities. These findings collectively proved that identity formation is a complex interplay between an individual's personal choices and societal influences, as demonstrated across both literary works.

**Key words:** Identity, Religion Self-perception, Other, Representation.

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## I. General Introduction

The issue of identity has emerged as a major theme in academic research, grasping the attention of many scholars across the world. Indeed, numerous pieces of literature have already portrayed its complicated and intriguing nature. In this case, studies have been conducted on the process of Identity formation and on the various challenges that it may face. This increased attention on identity, highlighted its multifaceted and problematic nature, revealing that its construction is a complex and intricate process, which involves many aspects of human beings. These aspects include religious affiliation, cultural heritage, race, gender...

Valuing the importance of identity in literature, this dissertation sought to gain deeper insight on the complex nature of identity and on the process of its formation. In order to achieve this, an attempt is made to investigate the issue of identity in two different, yet interconnected novels, by focusing on the analysis of the protagonists of Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) through the lens of Stuart Hall's theory of *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. Indeed, both works highlighted the complications of navigating a person's personal identity, in the middle of an oppressive environment and imposing societal norms. While situated in distinct historical and cultural contexts, both novels addressed the theme of identity and its complexity.

By examining these two selected novels in relation to Hall's essay of cultural identity and diaspora, this study provides a valuable framework for understanding the ways in which individuals construct their identities in relation to broader cultural and historical contexts. Hall's theory permits for a detailed analysis on the protagonists of each novel and their struggle with their sense of self amid societal pressures and expectations. Through this investigation, the dissertation aims to contribute to how the protagonists' identities in

Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* are fluently constructed and influenced by their surroundings environments, histories and larger societal factors.

## 1. Review of the literature

Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) have received a bulk of criticism. Waldman's fiction, in particular has been studied under multiple angles. Musadak Muslim.H, has devoted his article entitled "Islamophobia in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2018)" to the analysis of Islamophobia's impact on both Muslims and Americans, as well as to the role of media in spreading this "phenomenon" (Musadak, 2018, p.239). He explains that, the aftermath of 9/11 was characterized by strong prejudice against Muslims, citing Pope's (2016) observations "it was a period in which no Muslim could escape the strong prejudice against them...it was an 'us versus them' ideology that pervaded." (Musadak, 2018, p.240). Musadak focuses on the consequences of Islamophobia on the novel's protagonist Khan, who was unable to identify himself inside of a political conflict. As he couldn't manage to reconcile both identities, Waldman's protagonist Mohammad Khan was "at loss which identity he should live with." (Musadak, 2018, p.246)

Similarly, in Pamungkas Setyari's analysis in his article "The Representation of Muslim Women as The Other in *The Submission*" Novel (2023) examined the depiction and representation of women, through the lens of Edward Said Orientalist's theory. Setayri argues that feminine figures in the novel were portrayed as "...sensual, libidinous, devilish, subordinate, oppressed, exotic, and requisite to the west's assistance." (Setayri, 2023, p. 38). The novel's female characters are portrayed as needing Western intervention to become "civilized" or "liberated" (Setayri, 2023, p.42), exemplified by Asma's reliance on American

compensation to access education. Relying on Said's theory, the article concludes that these stereotypical portrayals, pointed out the struggles of the Muslims' minorities when facing all kinds of "discrimination, prejudice, racism, anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia."(Setayri, 2023, p.39)

In addition, Saif Raed Nafia Fakhruddin *et al*, explored in their article titled "Unearthing the Social Oppression of Muslim Identity under American Imperialism in The Submission by Amy Waldman" (2023) by focusing on the impact of cultural imperialism in post-9/11 America. They analyze Americans' discrimination against Muslims by using Iris Marion Young's framework of oppression, demonstrating the way *The Submission* (2011) illustrates the difficulties of navigating a Muslim identity in the middle of societal rejection . Fakhruddin *et al* , also point out the undeniable fact that dominant cultures often disregard Muslim identities and despise them.

By the same token, Kamel Daoud's novel *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) , has also been the subject of many studies , among them Laila Bellour in her article entitled "Postcolonialism and Religious Identity in Kamel Daoud's The Meursault Investigation "(2018) . Bellour examines Daoud's portrayal of the Algerian religious identity in his novel. She declared that, the Algerian writer failed to protect their religious identity particularly during that period of time when Islam was intensively demonized (Bellour 2018, p.379). She also questioned the efficacy of postcolonialism in correcting this misrepresentation on Islam. Furthermore, Bellour highlights the disapproval of the Algerians towards the publication of this novel. According to her , Algerians viewed this "distinguished work in postcolonial literature." as disrespectful and degrading to the Quran. (Bellour, 2018, p.379) Additionally, based on her analysis, Daoud's protagonist, resembles Meursault in his way of denying and

rejecting religion, by relying on his own beliefs and perception of things, going beyond the societal norms that deprives his liberty.

Likewise, Sami Alkyam explored the controversy surrounding Kamel Daoud and his novel. In his article entitled “Lost in reading: The predicament of postcolonial writing in Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation*”(2019), Alkyam pointed out to the international debate caused by the publication of this literary work. While western countries praised it and considered it as a canonical work, it faced fierce criticism by the Muslims’ community. Some even called for Daoud’s execution, accusing him of despising his own culture and religion. Finally, Alkyam sought to examine the causes that led Algerians to accuse Kamel Daoud of “Apostasy” and “self-hating Arab”(Alkyam,2019,p.460), by suggesting a re-reading of *the Meursault Investigation* (2013) through a postcolonial perspective .

Similarly, Mohsin Raza’s article; “The author as comprador intellectual: A postcolonial analysis of *The Meursault investigation* by Kamel Daoud “(2023) explored the novel of Daoud from a post-colonial perspective using Hamid Dabashi’s theory of the Comprador Intellectual. He argues that, while Daoud’s novel meant to answer Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* ,and rewrite it from an Algerian’s perspective , he ended up criticizing his own society. The article pointed out the way this literary work presented the Algerian society and its religion, which is Islam in a bad light. This analysis examines how he used his protagonist, Haroun to express his critical views about Islamic practices, Algerian culture, and society. It highlighted the author’s novel disrespectful and negative depictions of Algerian women, youth, emphasizing corruption and moral decadence. Furthermore, it discusses Daoud’s challenge to Islamic beliefs and practices, concluding that, his writings were meant more to support Western ideas about Algeria, rather than defending his own culture.

## **2. Issue and working hypothesis**

The above review of literature showed that many studies have already been conducted on *The Submission* (2011) and *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). Despite the importance of the previous research investigations, it is noticeable that there has not been any research interested so far in studying and investigating the issue of identity in both works together. Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore the issue of identity in both novels by examining how the protagonists struggle with self-discovery and belonging in their respective societies. This research also emphasizes the characters' journey of self-rediscovery and the formation of their personal identities. Indeed, both works portray the multifaceted and problematic nature of identity, illustrating its fluidity. The study explores how the protagonists confront questions of self-definition and cultural belonging while navigating their complex social environments.

## **3. Methodological Outline**

The following dissertation follows the IMRAD method. The current research starts with a general introduction providing an overview of the topic, including a review of literature on both Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). The second section, related to method and materials, deals with the analysis of Stuart Hall's theory of Cultural Identity, while the materials section consist of the summaries and biographies of both literary works. The results highlight the main findings reached through the analysis. The discussion section is divided into two chapters. The first chapter, entitled "The Self and the Other," emphasizes the role of Self and Other in shaping individuals' identity. The second chapter demonstrates the role of religious resurgence in the

process of identity formation. Lastly, the dissertation ends with a general conclusion summarizing the most important points of this research.

## II. Method and Materials

### 1. Method

#### *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*

This section explains the research method used to study how identity is explored in two modern novels: *The Submission* (2011) and *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). The analysis relies on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, which helps us understand how people develop their sense of self. This framework is particularly useful for examining how the main characters in these novels struggle with their identity and how they are shaped by their culture, society, and personal experiences. The following paragraphs explain Hall's key ideas about identity formation and explain how these ideas apply to the analysis of the novels. Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity has provided a solid framework for analyzing the complex and troubled nature of identity formation as depicted in Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013).

In his essay of "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Hall defined identity as a "process [and] production which is never complete...always constituted within representation" (Hall, 1990, p.222), which refers to how individuals and groups are portrayed within society. This view presented identity as a flexible process evolving through time. In other words, Hall believed that identity is not fixed; instead, it is constructed over time, through a person's experiences, choices and the way this same person is portrayed within society. To gain deeper understanding on this theory, Hall illustrated his ideas with the complex identity of the Afro-Caribbean people who lived during the period of diaspora. The Afro-Caribbean experience, according to him, exemplifies how identity is continuously negotiated and

renegotiated in response to changing historical circumstances and cultural representations. He explained that it is always in a state of production, “it is not once and for all” but rather, subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power.(Hall,1990,p.226) It means that history, culture, and power are constantly interacting with each other in ways that shape who we are.

In this regard, Hall introduced two alternatives of cultural identity. The first is the collective “imposed” identity, shared among individuals. He defines it as “A one shared culture” (Hall, 1990, p.223) ;which represents people with the same historical background, experiences ,origins, and creates their sense of unity . This type of identity is viewed by Hall as the real essence of the marginalized people living in diasporic communities. This interpretation views identity as “stable and not changing”; it is affiliated by race and history, that give people a sense of “oneness”. (Hall, 1990, p.223) However, Hall argued that this view of identity is too limited and doesn’t fully capture the complex and problematic nature of identity.

Inspired by Frantz Fanon’s ideas on post-colonial societies, Stuart Hall emphasized on the importance of accepting one’s heritage in the process of identity formation. Hall suggestes that revealing one’s true cultural identity, involves what Fanon calles “the Rediscovery of Identity” (Hall, 1990, p.224). In other words , a person needs to embrace his past in order to be able to affirm the essence of his identity. However, the second definition presented a counter view of identity of the first one by stressing its ever-changing and transformative nature. Hall argued that despite the commonality of individuals’ origins, and despite sharing the same historical experiences, there were always notable distinctions between them. It means that even among people who share similar backgrounds or experiences, there exist significant differences in how they interpret, embody, and express their identities. He declared:

This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'.(Hall,1990,p.225)

Hall explained that, even if the past held importance and “continues to speak to us” (Hall, 1990, p.225), it was not to neglect and prioritize “what we have become” (Hall, 1990, p.225). Besides, it was the interruptions and “discontinuities” with the past that make up the “uniqueness” of an individual’s identity. According to Hall, this second explanation, focusing on individuals’ growth and development, offered a more appropriate and advanced understanding of identity than the first one. It was also, according to him, the more suitable to gain a deeper understanding of the traumatic colonized people’s identity (Hall, 1990, p.225).

Moreover, Hall clarified that the two perspectives are important as they complement each other; together they highlighted the interplay between the past and the present. Hall claimed that “...cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all lying and changed outside history and culture” (Hall, 1990, p.226). Originating from historical roots, cultural identity is an ongoing process of evolution, subject to the continuous influences of history and culture (Hall, 1990, p.225). Identities, as he explained, are “the instable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture” (Hall, 1990, p.226). In order for a person to possess a clear sense of identity, one may assimilate the two definitions together. It is both a matter of being and becoming at the same time (Hall, 1990, p.225).

Stuart Hall stated that “identity is not transparent or unproblematic as we think” (Hall, 1990, p.222). This quote proves the complexity of identity shaped by various external and

internal factors. He further explained that the process of identity is greatly influenced by the power of Representation. In this regard, he relied on the ideas presented in Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism*, to highlight how representation can be employed as a strategy of domination. By propagating dehumanizing representations, the colonizers had the ability to make the colonized perceive and depict them as the "Other"(Hall, 1990, p.225)

To conclude, Stuart Hall's theory illustrated that identity is unstable and changeable. It can evolve depending on where we are and what's happening around us . By emphasizing on identity as a production rather than an essence, and by highlighting the roles of history, Hall offered valuable insights into how identities are constructed, negotiated, and transformed. This theoretical framework is particularly useful for analyzing the process of identity formation of both Waldman's and Daoud's protagonists.

## **2. Materials**

### **a. Amy Waldman's biography**

Amy Waldman is an American famous and Journalist at the same time. Her works are known for tackling political issues. She is born on May 21, 1969 in Los Angeles, she graduated from Yale university and joined The New York Times as reporter for 8 years and then became a co-chief of the New Delhi bureau she had many opportunities to report in Muslim communities...While excelling in her job, she also showed interests in writing. Waldman published her first successful and thought-provoking novel "The Submission" in 2011, where imagined a whole story of an Arab Muslim American confronting the oppressive American society during Post 9/11 tragedy. Her journalistic experience covering the aftermath of 9/11 for The New York Times and spending years in Afghanistan provided her with a multifaceted understanding of the event from various perspectives. Years Later in 2019,

following the path of her first novel she published another interesting work entitled “A Door in the Earth.”(Waldman,n.d)

**b.Kamel Daoud’s biography:**

Kamel Daoud is an Algerian writer and journalist who was born in Mostaganem on June 17, 1970. He began his career in journalism in 1990 and worked for several Algerian newspapers, including Le Quotidien d’Oran. As he studied French literature after his baccalaureate, he chose to write in French. Daoud became known for his provocative critiques of social and religious norms in Algeria, which led to accusations of fuelling Islamophobia. In 2013, he gained international recognition for his novel “The Meursault Investigation”, which re-examined Albert Camus’s “The Stranger” by giving voice and identity to the brother of a marginalized character from the original work. Through this narrative, Daoud’s sought to critique the dehumanization of the Arab community and the impact of colonialism on the Algerians’ lives. His other notable works include “Zabor, or The Psalms” (2017), “Le Minotaure 504”(2019), “Le Peintre Dévorant la femme” (2018), among others.(Kamel Daoud,n.d)

**c. Summary of Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011):**

In the context of post 9/11 attacks, just when America begins to recover from the ashes, a decision is made to build a memorial for those who lost their lives during the attack. To do so, an anonymous competition is organized to select the most outstanding design. A committee, including survivors’ families is tasked to choose among the submissions. The design that is chosen and approved is “The Garden,” submitted by an American Muslim, “Mohammed Khan.” However, when his religious identity is revealed, almost all members of the jury object to his victory. Initially, Khan views himself simply as an American architect, but the controversy forces him to confront his Muslim identity in ways he never had to before.

The committee considers changing the results, but Claire Burwell, a juror and widow representing the victims' families, supports Khan's design. After the situation becomes public, a controversy erupts, and Anti-Muslim sentiment intensifies. Khan's identity begins to become problematic as he struggles between his American and Muslim identity. Later on, he decides to approach a Muslim community organization that claims Muslims' rights in America. However, in the end, Mohammad Khan decides to withdraw from the competition.

#### **d. Summary of *The Meursault Investigation* (2013):**

In the context of postcolonial Algeria, Daoud's story starts with an old man in a bar, engaged in a deep reflection and shares his narratives with a graduate student. Haroun's identity is primarily defined by being the brother of Moussa, an unnamed Arab man killed in Camus' *The Stranger*. As he recounts his family life with his mother after his brother's murder, he explains how this tragic event shatters his identity forever. Growing up in a poor neighbourhood and abandoned by their father Moussa was the only fatherly figure Haroun knew. When Moussa is killed by a French man near the beach, His mother becomes obsessed with finding out what happened to her older son . Her consuming grief leads her to not only ignore her younger son but also to forcefully impose Moussa's identity on Haroun, treating him as a replacement for his dead brother rather than his own person. As a result grows indifferent towards both his mother and society, showing how his identity transforms from a beloved younger brother to an invisible, alienated figure in his own story.

### III. Results

Relying on Stuart Hall's theory of *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), this research dissertation aimed to outline the complex nature of identity as an issue within two literary works; Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). These works, though emerging from different cultural contexts post-9/11 America and postcolonial Algeria; both explore how individuals struggle to maintain their sense of self in societies that often seek to define them through restrictive cultural and religious labels. Through a detailed analysis, the study highlighted some important points to take into consideration.

The first finding confirmed the validity of Stuart Hall's suggestion on the flexibility and ever-shifting nature of identity. Through exploring the journey of the novels' protagonists, one may conclude that identity is an ongoing process of continual navigation and negotiation shaped by various factors. Indeed, both Waldman's and Daoud's main characters demonstrated the difficulties and challenges of constructing their personal identity within societal representations, expectations, stereotypes and prejudices. Hence, the way society perceived and represented them influenced their self-perception, and these self-portrayals shaped the formation of their identities. The social environments depicted in both novels pressure individuals to conform to their established societal norms. Those who refuse to align with these imposed standards, despite how restrictive and limiting they are to an individual identity, face marginalization and are categorized as outsiders.

The second finding revealed the two distinct approaches individuals may adopt when faced with ostracization. This analysis uncovered that people may navigate their identities in the context of otherness in different ways. While Waldman's protagonist perceived this situation negatively, he tried his best to avoid it; he attempted further to fit the norms set by

the American society in order to avoid societal rejection. In contrast, Haroun's protagonist embraced his otherness as his only mean to freedom and self-governing. Unlike Mohammad , he did not submit to the oppressed norms set by his community and rejected them, in order to assert freely his self-identity.

As a last result, we have highlighted the role of historical background in the process of constructing an individual's identity. Indeed, both protagonists have known a significant challenge trying to navigate their identities, after the resurgence of their religious identities. Analyzing both novels permitted to gain deeper understanding on how the characters' religious identity impacted their way of further understanding themselves, and creating a clear sense of their personhood. Undoubtedly, Mohammad Khan and Haroun faced societal rejection mainly because of their religious affiliations. However, one may say that it was also thanks to it, that they came to rediscover themselves and assert clearly who they are, their identity and aspirations. We concluded that religion played a complex and multifaceted role in shaping the protagonists formation of identities. Initially a source of exclusion and conflict, it ultimately became a catalyst for self-discovery and empowerment.

## **IV. Discussion**

### **Chapter One: The Self and the Other in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011)**

#### **and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013)**

This chapter explores the theme of self and other in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*. By closely analyzing these two novels, we examine how the main characters, Mohammad Khan and Haroun, construct their identities within their respective societal contexts. We investigate how their self-perceptions, as well as how they are perceived by others, influence their sense of belonging and shape their overall identities. This section analyzes the complex interplay between Self and Other, by exploring how societal representations, expectations, and stereotypes impact individual identity formation.

#### **1. The Importance of Self-Perception in Shaping Identity**

The way an individual perceives and depicts his self plays an important role in the formation of his identity. Self-perception is the way people identify themselves. It essentially forms a personal perspective on one's identity. According to Britannica Dictionary; it is the idea that you have about the kind of person you are. Moreover, an individual's self-perception is influenced by various factors including self-beliefs, and these beliefs are influenced by his environment, experiences, interactions with others and his status in society. Thus, this concept is not solely an internal process; it is also related to how others regard them. Charles Horton Cooley, the famous sociologist in his work "The Looking Glass Self", explained that people develop their "self-concept" by paying attention to the way society views them. (Lesley University, para.1) They take into consideration their opinions, and consequently construct their self based on that. However as clear as this concept may seem, it may become more

complex when you reflect and consider the situation and experiences of marginalized groups as portrayed in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011).

*The Submission* (2011) is a novel set during the aftermath of 9/11 tragedy. Through this novel, Waldman portrayed the complexities of the American Muslim Mohammad Khan living in an Islamophobic era. Describing his journey of navigating and struggling between his internal self and how he was perceived by a society despising Islam. Mo was a born American from Indian's origin, but he lived all his life as an American citizen. Graduated from university, he was a talented and successful architect. After the 9/11 attacks, he took part in an anonymous competition to design a memorial in the name of all those who lost their lives during that tragedy. His Garden's design(p.15) was selected , marking the start of his hardships. Initially, Mohammad didn't identify himself as a Muslim. Though aware of his Islamic heritage, he saw himself primarily as an American. His focus was on his architecture career and in being a good American citizen. At that time his Muslim roots were barely part of his identity, he has always thought of himself as an American first. However, as the circumstances progress, Khan's sense of self starts to change little by little ,forced by the events to pay attention to his origins and reconsider his personal identity. Mohammed's gradual shift from identifying himself primarily as American to reconsidering his Muslim identity demonstrates Stuart Hall's notion of the fluidity of identity.

Hall argues that identity is not fixed but rather a "production" that is always in process, never complete and constantly being transformed by social, historical, and cultural forces. He suggested that a person's sense of self is not stable, and develops through time. Additionally, he went on to elaborate that rather than prioritizing the past, an individual must embrace "what he had become."(Hall, 1990, p.225).In this regard, Khan depicted himself as American because he gave more importance to what he has evolved into. Khan emphasized his achievements over his origins. Therefore, his self-perception is profoundly linked to his

professional identity which took precedence over his religious one. It was not until the rejection of his design that he became aware of that ignored part in him. Mainly due to his Islamic heritage, this refusal to acknowledge his work forced him to re-evaluate his perception of self.

Considering the recent events surrounding the memorial, his origins were brought into focus as they became spotlighted. He begins to pay attention to the fact that though he was born American, he remained a Muslim at the end. Deep down inside, Khan acknowledged the fact of not being the person he believed to be. This exposed the instability of his belonging and the undeniable truth that he was not as secure as he pretended to be. This sudden realization captured Mo's inner chaos, struggling between what he perceived and what he was in reality. Moreover, it also highlighted the re-emergence of his Muslim identity, paving the road for a long and merciless journey of balancing and reconciling his American identity with his religious one.

Furthermore, Mohammad self-perception was also influenced by his society and its perception, he was afraid of being seen as a Muslim. This proved that Mo was someone who worries about the opinions of others. He is sub-consciously guided and influenced by the fear of the stereotypes prevalent during that period of time. Khan experiences profound anxiety about his Islamic background, as evidenced by the following statement, "A Muslim drinking to cope with the stress of being a Muslim" (p.51). This quote reveals his internal conflict, where he resorts to alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam to manage the psychological burden of his Muslim identity. This aligns with Hall's theory suggesting that identity is shaped by representation; Khan was haunted by the fear of being represented and labelled as his heritage. He was not comfortable embracing his Islamic roots, to the point of wanting to "disavow his Muslim identity."(p.34) For this reason, he chooses to ignore and overlook them. The concept of "the looking glass self" introduced by the famous American sociologist

Cooley, highlights the role of interactions in self-perception (Lesley University,para.1). According to him, an individual's self is connected to others' perceptions and reactions to him. This concept applies to Khan who constructed his identity by considering other's opinions to prevent any bias or stereotype.

Mohammad forged his behavior to mirror the image of a pure American. Thomas, his friend and colleague at the same time, affirmed that he did not differ from them, he might even seem more American than the majority of them, "hardly" religious and on the top of that "decadent"(p.123). Though he was a Muslim, he did not act as such and did not adhere with Islam's rules, "he had barely been to a mosque all his life"(p.34). Going to the mosque was an obligatory act for Muslims. But Mo has already committed various acts of violation to the Islamic laws and principles , like the consumption of alcohol .In his perspectives, he believed to be American because he was born and raised as such .As narrated in the novel:

His parents, immigrants to America in the 1960s, made modernity their religion, became almost puritanical in their secularism. As a boy he had no religious education. He ate pork, although he hadn't grown up doing so. He dated Jews, not to mention Catholics and atheists. He was, if not an atheist himself, certainly agnostic, which perhaps made him not a Muslim at all.(p.34)

Even after reaching out to the Muslim' s organization in order to defend his design, he remained neutral towards the Muslim-American confrontation, and was "secular" (p.102) in regarding those kinds of issues. He proudly identifies himself to them as an "American" , "Architect, not a politician." (p.102) and his only aim is to ensure justice for his design , which some considered " an act of Islamization" (p.133)this quote reflects how Khan's architectural design was wrongly interpreted as an attempt to impose Islamic influence on American spaces, despite his strong American sentiment to honor and pay

tribute to the victims of that tragedy. This was as he claimed, the only reason which motivated him to participate in that competition, and the Muslims already noticed his disinterest in Islam. Jamila Maqboul ,a member of that Islamic party, already said it, Mo was “not interested in Islam” and never showed any care towards Muslims because he did not consider himself as one of them .(p.102) However, Charlie Huntington wrote in a journal article that “self-perception is how we see ourselves - and we don’ t see ourselves as we truly are.” (para.1) The protagonist’ s experience thus illustrates the fluid and complex multifaceted nature of self-perception; Mo presents himself as American and an Architect, emphasizing certain aspects of his identity while downplaying others. His situation places him at the intersection of multiple cultural identities; American, Muslim by heritage, and the professional identity of an architect. His navigation of these potentially conflicting identities demonstrates the internal negotiations that individuals from multicultural backgrounds often face.

This complex interplay of identities becomes even more apparent as the protagonist’s journey unfolds. Initially, he did not consider his background until he was forced by events and society to acknowledge and confront them. He had been a Muslim by origins, but he had never felt Muslim until he was made to feel Muslim. It was not until the American jury tried to erase his name from the competition that his religious background resurfaced and became a central part of his troubled identity. He became aware of the fact that the fate of his career and design relied solely on his religious background. This realization marked a turning point in his journey, driving him to face his self-perception and heritage. The once-comfortable, proud and confident person he was, turned out to be just an illusion. Khan’s psychological strategy of constructing a particular self-image (as a successful, assimilated American architect) to avoid confronting deeper identity conflicts was a sort of defence mechanism or shield he

generated to save himself the trouble of grappling with the feeling of being an outsider. Thus, his whole vision of his person-hood shattered down.

In this regard, he starts to profoundly question his sense of belonging to experience later on a disconnection from both American society and Muslims affiliations; he becomes bewildered trying to figure out how to perceive himself. He was forced to admit that this American society of which he was proud and felt honored to be included in, was a society that defined individuals only based on their religious or cultural background. Acknowledging his Muslim identity raised in him the feeling of fear and insecurity. This was the reason why he denied his religious heritage at the beginning, because he was afraid of being seen as an outsider who did not fit the American community. Thus, he refused to be represented as a Muslim “terrorist”. (p.30)

Hall asserts that if differences did not exist, representation itself also would not exist either (Hall, 1990,p.229). As for Mo, being represented and categorized differently meant to be labelled an “Other”. From this point onwards, his self -perception became blurred. The way he depicts his self was unclear and hazy, and not having a clear sense of self contributes to further identity problems. Since he acknowledged having a “dual identity”, reflecting Hall’s interpretation, society reduced him to a single one, thereby rejecting his American sense of self .He found himself wandering between the two without knowing where to position his identity. He grappled with existentialist questions on the nature of his identity, lost between what he was and what he became. He has no clue of how to balance and reconcile his American self-hood with his “imposed” religious background.

Mohammad evolving self-perception of his multifaceted identity reflects what Stuart Hall’s notion of diasporic identities being the result of hybridization. He argues that cultural identity, particularly for those in diaspora communities, is not fixed but constantly shaped by

both past and present experiences. In his essay of Cultural Identity and Diaspora, Hall emphasized on the importance of both accepting his past and current self. Accordingly Mohammad needed to embrace his past to discover the true essence of his identity; he needed to rediscover himself in order to be able to move forward. It is a process of self-rediscovery, which is necessary for the progress and formation of identity. During this journey of self-exploration, the protagonist learned how to navigate and negotiate the complexities of his “hybrid identity” in order to gain deeper understanding on his self and his belonging. This process is about accepting the fact that an individual may become a product of multiple influences.

While Khan’s narrative explores the complexities of identity formation in a post-9/11 America, Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) offers another view of identity construction by examining the challenges of self-discovery in a postcolonial context. Haroun, the novel’s protagonist, also grapples with questions of identity, within a different cultural and historical framework. Haroun as khan, embarks on a journey of rediscovery ,in order to re-evaluate his self-perception and assert his identity in his own society. *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) offers a response or a counter-narrative to Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*. Set in the aftermath of colonial Algeria, Daoud portrays the identity crisis of Haroun the brother of” Moussa, an unnamed man killed by the colonizer in Camus’ narratives. This piece of work portrays how the protagonist grapples with his sense of invisibility living under the shadow of his deceased brother, yet seeks to restore Moussa’s taken identity by the French colonizer. Daoud described Haroun’s formation of identity through his childhood experiences, cultural interactions and the legacy of the French colonizer, challenging society’s perception and expectations on him.

Similarly to Waldman’s *The Submission*(2011), self-perception in Daoud’s novel, is also a key part of the complex of Identity construction . Just like how Mohammad khan tries

to balance and navigate his self-perception with his society's expectations, Haroun finds himself navigating his identity between the complexities of his self-portrayal and his community's perception on him. The protagonist's depiction of himself has continued to change from the beginning to the end, undergoing constant evolution and shaped by various external influences. Initially, Haroun's identity was profoundly influenced by his childhood experiences, particularly the loss of his brother.

Haroun experienced a fragmented sense of self, precipitated by the sudden loss of Moussa and the sudden insistence of his mother to become his brother's replacement and take on his identity. The mother discarded his individuality; she wanted to erase his unique traits, characteristics and personal identity to replace them with Moussa's, abandoning all what makes him Haroun. His "Mma's" perception on him as another person emerges in him the feeling of invisibility. Ultimately, the human being needs to affirm his self in order to be able to live confidently and proudly. He needs to feel a minimum of space and independence so as to build himself little by little. Moreover, a man's confidence comes from his ability of self-governance; having the freedom to choose his own path and feel responsibility for his own actions. It was all what Haroun lacked during his childhood.

Haroun's mother forced him to erase his own sense of self, giving the floor to the personification of Moussa, as he admitted "Ma mère, par conséquent, m'imposa un strict devoir de réincarnation."(p.61) . This quote highlights the way Haroun's mother forced him to kill his own sense of self, giving the floor to the personification of Musa. She monopolized the way he viewed himself, annihilated his identity and obliged him to live as a dead man. It was her way of giving back life to her dead son. The young boy felt like he was invisible, or existed only to take his brother's place. Haroun's authentic selfhood was erased in the purpose of resurrecting his brother's self through him. His true self was then, held captive by the sensation of duty to revive Moussa's identity that his mother implanted in him. Rather

than focusing on developing his individual identity he was forced to perpetuate another's one. These circumstances condemned Haroun to live a life of a "secondary person".(p.53)

This traumatic childhood's experience awakened in Haoun a profound sense of marginalization and alienation. He had the sensation of being disregarded and excluded by his own mother. Forced to live in isolation; detached from society and its people, she turned him into a "coward" hiding from others by wearing "djellaba"(p.22). As a result, he cultivated strong feelings of shame. In this sense, Marina Nani, a doctor in sociology, argues in her article on self-perception that if the "early interactions were negative or damaging, then it can lead to low-self-esteem or even psychological issues later in life."(Nani,2023,para.4) Haroun's experience strongly illustrated and confirmed the validity of this quote. The nature of his mother's grief was extremely damaging for his inner self, agitating in him the feeling of being an outcast in his own home. His identity formation starts to take roots in an environment of rejection and obligation. An inappropriate ,and unfavourable atmosphere for a child's well and healthy self- growth.

In society, Haroun was seen only as a widow's son or the dead man's brother "le frère du mort"(p.51) . He was identified in relation to Moussa, not Haroun. This perception pushed him to doubt and question his existence. He grew perceiving himself as no one, just a worthless man leading a futile life. This situation has completely wearied and exhausted him that he wanted to end his life but wasn't brave enough to do it. "Je me sentais a la fois coupable d'être vivant mais aussi responsable d'une vie qui n'était pas la mienne"(p.53) The protagonist felt guilty over wanting to end a life that he was responsible for. He felt as if his life wasn't really his to live. Thus, he was consumed by the fear that ending his own life would end his brother all over again. Consequently, he developed conflicting feelings towards him. While he felt love and affection for him, he hated him and wanted to get rid of him . He

wished he could destroy Moussa's presence in his life completely, though he experienced remorse for having such sentiment.

In this regard, Haroun's self-perception went through a negative transformation, transitioning from "self-doubted" to "self-hatred". The constant pressure of his mother to suppress his individuality left him doubtful about the worth of his existence. Besides, leaving his hometown to land on a distinct foreign society boosted his feeling of loss. Without the familiarity of his surroundings, he finds it more difficult to express his personal identity. As people were not familiar with him, they only perceive him as "le fils de la veuve"(p.56) He realized that people continue to define him through the lens of his family, which further complicates his attempts to establish a clear and balanced selfhood.

Haroun's struggle with identity is mainly intensified by his mother's and society's projected image upon him. People tried to impose him a perception of self, that was not his own. The image of self that he wanted to show them was overlooked and changed with another. In his new community, as well as in his ancient hometown, Haroun constantly faced challenges trying to balance or reconcile his personal self with the roles imposed by his mother and society. He had his own aspirations, but finds it hard to become himself in a middle of an oppressive environment. He longed for his mother to understand him and accept him as he was, but no one did. This situation pervaded until he completely felt himself as an invisible, unworthy and unfortunate person. This new developed perception of his was preventing him to assert his individuality, as he came to despise the person he had become.

Accordingly, he felt a kind of longing for his homeland, yet couldn't take a single step towards returning, as his memories portrayed it as a symbolic cage that deprived him of life and freedom. He missed his home, but couldn't return because he remembered it as a place that had trapped him and stolen his freedom to be himself. He knew the moment he left that

there was no going back, regardless of what he might face in his new life. In their new town, Haroun encountered what he could term as new curse ; the difficulties and isolation inherent to the outsider experience. Though life was hard at first, and fitting in with the people was difficult, he never wanted to return home. To cope with his new life, he learned the French language, which he customized later on in his own way. However, Haroun did not expect it to be a sort of liberation for him. After leaving his hometown with his mother, he entered a French school and felt a kind of alleviation; finally, he got the opportunity to detach himself from his mother, declaring that being away from her was a relief, confessing the following:

J'ai fini par être admis dans une école où se trouvaient quelque petit indigènes comme moi .Cela me faisait un peu oublier M'ma et sa façon inquiétante de me regarder grandir et manger, comme si elle me destinait à un sacrifice. Ce furent des années étranges. J'avais l'impression de vivre quand j'étais dans la rue , dans l'école ou dans les fermes où je travaillais mais de regagner une tombe quand je rentrais à la maison.  
(p.56)

Additionally, learning the French language permitted him to investigate his brother's death who suffered from a great dehumanization in the novel of Albert Camus' *The stranger*. Moussa was represented as a nameless, unimportant Arab man, deprived from voice and identity, whose death got normalized. He was killed by a French man named "Meursault", and the novel does not focus on his death though he was the most important character, but on the absurdity of the protagonist who killed him. Indeed, Camus's novel paradoxically focuses not on the murder victim but on the killer's existential crisis and his emotional detachment, treating the Arab's death as merely a unimportant element in the story.

Just as his mother spent years obsessively seeking answers about Moussa's murder, investigating the truth about his brother's death becomes Haroun's own obsession. However,

for Haroun, this investigation serves a dual purpose: while seeking justice for Moussa, it also becomes his path toward self-discovery and independence. By reclaiming his brother's story and giving him back his identity, Haroun paradoxically frees himself from being merely “le frère du mort” (p.51). Through this investigation, he transforms from being just the dead man’s brother ; an identity his mother had imposed on him , into his own person. The act of uncovering the truth about Moussa’s death becomes Haroun’s way of both honoring his brother’s memory and breaking free from living in his shadow, while simultaneously liberating himself from his mother’s oppressive fixation on the past.

Actually, through the investigation, Haroun explored deeply the narratives of Camus’s works that offered him the opportunity to develop his thinking on a lot of matters . It had a deep influence on his self-perception, and opened his eyes on a lot of diversities and perspectives of life. He admits: “Les livres et la langue de ton héros[sic] me donnèrent progressivement la possibilité de nommer autrement les choses et d’ordonner le monde avec mes propres mot.”(p.56) It permitted him to self -examine his way of perceiving his existence, people ,their norms and even moralities; forcing him to confront the harsh realities of life. His literary exploration of absurdity, life, existentialism, alienation and humans’ conditions impacted and enhanced the evolution of his self-perception. In an ironic twist of fate, Meursault , his brother’s murderer, became an unlikely source of Haroun’s liberation by leading him to explore Camus’s philosophical works. Thus, inspired by his thought-provoking philosophical works, the protagonist gradually started to mold his own perception of self. His uncertainties and doubts begin to become clearer, and it paved the way for the construction of his own personal identity.

In this regard, his perception’s evolution marks the beginning of his break with traditions and origins. He developed feelings of indifference toward his mother, and detached himself from her as he was unable to forgive her. Ultimately he becomes also disconnected

from the rest of society. Disappointed by their rules and values, he refused to reconcile with the imposed identities and cultural inheritances of his origins. Haroun comes to the conclusion that he was not made to fit their principles, his indifference towards his mother's living or dying is his act of rebelling towards their oppressive norms. He harboured feelings of hatred towards society, which in his view supports prejudices and injustices. Love and passion was an absurd feeling doomed to disappear; his relationship with women was a proof of that.

The protagonist becomes increasingly detached and indifferent, embracing his role as an outsider. He takes pride in his alienation from society, viewing it as a symbol of his unique identity and freedom. Viewing himself different was a source of comfort for him and finds solace in that. Through this process of self-alienation and rebellion, Haroun managed to construct his own self-perception as an authentic, free and unique man. Accordingly, Haroun's process of identity formation aligns with Hall's theoretical perception of identity as a flexible and never finished or completed process which keeps evolving over time. Hence Daoud's protagonist's identity is constantly being reshaped by his experiences and society's perception; from self-doubted to self-hatred to finally self-acceptance. However, it is worth mentioning that self-perception is not the only factor influencing the construction of an individual's identity. Beyond this concept, there are also other external factors which contribute to the shaping and formation of identity, and representation is one of them.

## **2. Identity Formation and its Representation**

Identity formation is impacted by multiple factors like personal experiences, cultural exchanges, societal norms, self-perception, and Representation. According to the Cambridge dictionary, Representation is the way that someone or something is shown or described. Based on Hall's definition, "it is a system which language works by using 'signs' and 'symbols' to stand for or represents ideas ,thoughts, feelings, expressions and emotions." (Hutasuhut,

para.3) In other words, it is how a group of individuals portray and describe another group in a specific and unique way. Definitely, Hall suggested that identity is “a process within representation.” (1990,p.222) This representation promotes stereotypes and prejudices .Hence it creates a category of marginalized people, and these marginalized individuals might develop later on troubles with their identities because of the unequal treatment that could exist within a society. While exploring and navigating identity, a person gives a lot of importance to how others represent it. A negative representation and portrayal can have a chaotic impact on individuals who hold marginalized identities; which is the case in Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011) and Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation*(2013) .

Initially in Waldman’s novel, there was already an existing negative and unfavourable portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the societal environment. Numerous events have taken place during the late 1980c that had a negative impact on the perception of Muslims. Preceding incidents during the early medieval and modern Europe, led the Americans to view Islam as a problematic and troublesome religion. The middle age was a period of great cultural exchanges from the east and the west. People of all kind interacted and travelled between the two regions , including important “ Diplomats, merchants, theologians, artists, poets, women and children, people from every class, pilgrims, slaves, criminals, camp followers—all had East-West connections ” These individuals shared and narrated stories of horror and disgust about the East, expressing fear and repulsion towards its people and culture. (Frassetto, M. & Blanks, D.R, 1999, p.2) “Islam has always represented a particular menace to the West” (Said , E , p.12) moreover the situation worsened after the 9/11 attacks with Islam becoming regarded “as hateful as nausea”(p.136)

After the 9/11 tragedy, the minority of Muslims living in America were unbearable for the Americans. They were portrayed through the lens of criminality and associated with the image of violence, terrorism and primitive people. Through the novel, Muslims were

vilified and demonized; categorized as a potential threat for the American society. As such, the spread of these stereotypical ideas created a larger atmosphere of hostility and tensions and otherization in America. “Everything relating to Islam” wrote Pamungkas in his article “is sensitive issues after the attack.” (Panmungkas, S, 2023, p. 39) Muslims in America were regarded as “Other” in society, suffered from marginalization and stigmatization.

In this regard, the selection of Mohammad Khan, an American Muslim’s design for the memorial, Americans expressed a strong “backlash” (p.249) and dissatisfaction towards it. After that they became even more hostile regarding the presence of Muslims in their country. Muslims were excluded from society, living in constant fear and anxiety of being sent back to their home countries. Subject to discrimination and prejudice, they were in constant surveillance and observation, in the slightest mistake, they were arrested. Mohammad was a living proof of their chaotic situation, the harassing questions directed to him at the airport about his “thoughts on Jihad ”(p.31)or whether he was a“ practising Muslim”(p.31) were only the beginning of his sorrows.

The rejection of Mo’s design was also a way of marginalization; Muslims were systematically excluded from all good professional work opportunities and resources, forbidden from getting a fair chance. Despite the fact that Khan’s design was chosen through an ethical and legitimate process, he faced accusations that he was trying to build an“Islamic Garden” or “Martyr’s paradise”(p.149)rather than recognizing the beauty of his majestic work. He becomes, unwillingly, the symbol of Islamic community and its formal representative, while being at the same time the receptacle of American’s anger. “People need someone to blame at times like this.”(p.132) this quotes shows how Khan is being scapegoated and directed to the American’s anger. His personal and inner identity as an American Muslim architect is ignored; instead he is reduced to a specific category.

Mo faced discrimination because of his religious affiliations. Called the “decadent Muslim” (p.123) his “Garden” was not viewed on its merits, but as an “Assault on America’s Judeo Christian heritage” and an “attempt to Islamization” (p.149). Americans couldn’t bring themselves to trust him because he had “religious sanction to lie...”(p.160) Portrayed as an untrustworthy Muslim, “Manhattansites” who usually were open minded and “always prided themselves on their Liberalism ”(p.161) were so displeased and uncomfortable with him that they confessed consulting “therapists” because of his design(p.160). Khan was “analyzed and judged” (p.161) without knowing anything about him. He directly was associated with terrorism because of his name first, and because his father “ran a shady Islamic charity” (p.161)

Because of his intersecting identities, Americans argued that a Muslim should not be involved in an American memorial. Though he is born in America, his ethnic identity with his religious one becomes his primary issue with which he was outcasted. As a matter of fact, Mohammad was judged because of his roots and not because of his qualification as an architect. Despite being raised as a pure American citizen, he was rejected and slandered by Americans. His insistence on the fact that he is not practicante and that the garden was “just a design”, there was “nothing Islamic about it”(p.122), he couldn’t convince them. Pamungkas (2023) stated that a “man perpetuates the orientalism stereotypes by representing Muslim characters as the Other and danger.”(p.38) and Khan’s professional qualifications were overlooked and replaced by dangerous prejudices and stereotypes.

Furthermore, by associating Waldman’s protagonist with the Prophet Mohammad who “revealed Islam’s true, harsh nature”(p.168) they concluded the following, “Islam is not a religion ”but “a political ideology, a totalitarian one”.(p.193) This negative representation of Islam and Muslims enhanced in Khan a feeling of self-doubt and self-esteem, which led him to unconsciously limit and restrict his inner ability to express freely and fully his true self. As

a result, Mo's identity was seriously affected by these representations; he developed a sensation of displacement that fostered another sentiment, that one of being "the other". Though Khan was convinced at first of his American identity and proud of it, he is now lost between the two; American and Muslim. He has the impression that his belonging was ambiguous and became aware of the fact that he did not fit neither sides. This sudden realisation awakened in him the sensation of alienation and insecurity, rejected from everyone refusing to acknowledge his self-perception. The protagonist experienced all forms of oppression, not only from Americans because of his hateful origins and suspicious design, but also from Muslims. Expecting him to act like a pure one and defend their stand against Americans. As a matter of fact, Khan's difficulties of managing both identities and dealing with representation at the same time, resembles Haroun's situation in *The Meursault Investigation*.

Likewise, the theme of Representation was strongly depicted in Daoud's novel. Among the strategies' employed by the dominants; in this case the colonizer, to erase the colonized dominated people's identity was the strategy of Representation. This representation is constructed and reinforced with the power of discourse .The oppressed category was dehumanized , deprived from humanity and represented like primitives , savage animals , ... As Fanon stated , the colonized people lived "...in a state of depersonalization." (Fanon,1961,p.53) under this imposed representation. In this regard, Daoud tackles the issue of Representation on two levels. Firstly on Haroun's, and secondly on the nameless Algerians' level portrayed in Camus' *The Stranger*, reclaiming their erased identity.

To begin with Haroun, he was depicted as the brother of Moussa or the son of his mother, always represented through his relationships with others. People considered him as a victim of an unfortunate accident of life; the tragic death of his brother Moussa. He felt like he was always related to that tragic event , referred to as the poor boy who lost everything ; a

pitiable boy trapped in a circle of misfortune and misery . Known as his mother's son or "Ould Alassas" ( p.22) no one identified him under the name of Haroun. His mother forced him to live under the shadow of a dead man, causing him to wonder if he is merely the ghost of his brother.

Forbidden to desire something on his own, something to Haroun only; he has no right for autonomy. Outlawed from reclaiming his own personal identity, he was always associated with his brother, there was no talking about Haroun without mentioning Moussa. Daoud's character was represented as an unfortunate and miserable child. He was not even the protagonist of his own story, everything turned around his brother. His identity is being restricted by the overpowering and influencing perception of others. It is noticeable that Haroun's identity was suppressed by the power of dominant representations. The image he has of his selfhood was erased and replaced by his mother and society's projected image.

To reclaim his identity and liberate himself from the haunting ghost of his brother, and fully prove his existence as Haroun ,he needed to break free from three oppressive forces constricting his selfhood . His journey to his self-assertion begins by going against the expectations his mother set on him. He had to demonstrate that he was not merely a replacement for his brother, but a unique individual with his own identity. An individual ,that has the right for self-governance and self-definition. He wanted wanted to define by himself his values and identity. Second, he had to defy the law and labels imposed on him by society that tried to confine his being inside their boundaries of representation. The final chain and obstacle for the development of his identity is the unjust death suffered by his brother in Camus's narratives.

Haroun's mother consumed by grief over the loss of her son was the first major obstacle in the formation of his identity. His desires, aspirations and even his being was

overlooked in order to regain her lost Moussa's self and identity. Haroun had to break away from her imposed life and forge his own path to get rid of this burdensome situation. Therefore he puts an end to her hopes and dreams and allowed his inner self to resurge. He becomes indifferent towards his mother and distanced himself emotionally from her. He could not bring himself to forgive her for burying him alive instead of Moussa. Living as another person was hellish life for him. He resented his mother's inability to acknowledge him as a separate unique person from his brother. Seeing that his inner identity continue to sink further into oblivion, he had to take action and save his soul from deeper drowning, and the only solution was to escape his mother's shadow.

Secondly, he defied societal expectations to establish his own identity, breaking free from imposed norms. This process of liberation is not just about rejecting his mother's portrayals but also about challenging the broader societal representations and labels that confine him. Haroun feels marginalized and stigmatized in his own country and society, by his own mother and fellow Algerians. "Je suis suffisamment marginal dans cette cité..." (p.93) he declared, however conforming and aligning with them was limiting and suffocating his real identity, so he chooses, himself to become the other. By rejecting societal expectations and constructing his own identity, he asserted his individuality and authenticity. Since he was unable to be the son of either (p.88) he couldn't conform neither to his mother nor to society. Societal norms were absurd and baseless for him, as he confessed mocking Algerians exaggerated grotesque sense of honor(p.33) considered a profanation in Islam, a disrespectful act towards what Algerians considered sacred. Haroun grew detesting his country's formal religion and its exaggerated principles, as a result he was discarded by society. He detached himself from them by constructing his own identity, morals, and beliefs.

Consequently, Daoud's protagonist is being outcasted by his Algerian community due to his chosen identity and its clash with the norms and expectations of society. This rejection

comes first, from the fact that Haroun becomes a person who rejects and despises religion , and second, from the kind of absurd, indifferent and lawless person he chooses to grow into . Influenced by Camus' narration, he becomes the person he detested the most, his brother's murderer; The Meursault of Daoud's story. These facets of his identity pushed his own Algerian community to classify him as a stranger. However, it's worth mentioning that this situation of otherness did not displease the protagonist, rather it was more like a matter of choice.

The final barrier to overcome in order to assert his personal identity, lay within the second level of representation, which is on the level of the colonized Algerian society and Haroun's brother, "Moussa" in Camus' novel. As they were depicted and represented as invisible, they were not even recognized as individuals, erased from existence and denied from humanity. Haroun was haunted by the monstrous death of his brother that he wanted to investigate it ,and restore his dignity as a human being. Moussa was an important character in Meursault's story but no one considered him as such. He was referred to as an Arab man only, sometimes as "Zoudj" associated with the time of his death.(p.15) As Haroun says:

Mon frère Zoudj est comme un sous verre: même mort assassin, on ne cesse de le désigner avec le prénom d'un courant d'air et deux aiguilles d'orloge, encore et encore, pour qu'il rejoue son propre décès par balle tirée par un Français ne sachant quoi faire de sa journée et du reste du monde qu'il portait sur son dos.(p.15)

In this quote, Haroun expresses his frustration with how his brother Moussa's death has been reduced to a unimportant accident, highlighting his dehumanization and erasure from history.

Furthermore, Meursault artistic narration devalued Moussa and reduced him to a mere unimportant incident. Rather than a fully realized human being, completely indifferent to him. He was barely mentioned in the story, represented as a faceless, nameless and voiceless Arab

man that lost everything along with his life in a single day. In Haroun's perspective, the fact that Moussa was deprived from a name or characterization was a form of marginalization and stigmatization. Even Meursault was arrested and condemned not because of killing a person but because of refusing to align with societal norms. Ignorance was the greater act of marginalization, and alienation. Moussa was depersonalized and dehumanized, depicted as an insignificant person. A poor man whose only purpose in life was to take a bullet and disappear anonymously, without having the time to be given a name. (p.13)

### **3. Identity and Otherness**

Through exploring the themes of self-perception and representation in both works *The Submission* (2011) and *The Meursault Investigation*(2013) , another relevant and powerful theme emerges from associating the two concepts together; Otherness. Indeed after analyzing the role of representation in Waldman's novel, it is clear that an individual, when subjected to negative representations always ends up becoming an Other. This Otherness is often perpetuated by societal and cultural preconceptions, leading to marginalization and discrimination. Both novels underscore the negative consequences of such representations on individuals and communities. In *The Submission*, the protagonist confronts the prejudices surrounding his identity as a Muslim in a post-9/11 context, while in *The Meursault Investigation*, Haroun's narrative reveals the complexities of being defined through others.

Khan, Waldman's protagonist became an outcast. He was repulsed and denied by the American society where he grew because of his origins, and rejected by his fellow Muslims as he didn't live up and conform to their expectations, illustrating the concept of otherness. In this sense, Jean-François Staszak ,a French geographer and professor at the University of Geneva whose research focuses on cultural geography, particularly on the concepts of the exotic and the other pointed out that "all societies ...create the self and the other with their

own set of categories” (Stanzak, 2008, p.3) and Mo turned into an Outsider among them because he didn’t fit their categories. Waldman’s protagonist considered himself to be more American than Muslim ,but after the events of september 11 memorial , he was forced to accept his dual identity that both Muslims and Americans refused.

The Muslims rejected him because of his lack of implication into political associations to defend Islam’s rights ,and judged his indifference towards their religion and hypocrisy about daring to believe that he was barely Muslim. Concerning the Americans, they only viewed him through the lens of his heritage and associated him with the terrorist attack held by Muslims on that tragic day. Moreover, they refused to allow someone like him to design their American memorial. Khan felt wronged and judged according to prejudices and stereotypes. His professional reputation got damaged and he was confronted to media representation as “the decadent Muslim” (p.123) Reinforcing negative perception on him, as a result he faced all sorts of “Islamophobic” attitudes.

In this regard, the whole Islamic community faced hostility and persecution and experienced otherness as well. Stanzak(2008) argued that othering ,“consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups : them and us.” Here “them” consisted of Muslims and “US” were the Americans. The term “Islam” is frequently viewedwith suspicion and fear in Western societies today.(Said,1997,p.10)Western people had always regarded Islam as a dangerous and devilish act and people who followed that religion were demonized ,dehumanized and viewed with hostility. They needed to get rid of them especially after the 9/11attacks, their hate toward them intensified. Waldman exemplified this situation with Khan’s experiences after the tragedy.

Besides Khan, Waldman described the situation of many other Arab Muslims living in America during that period of time , and their struggle with a society that marginalized ,

discriminated and reduced them to “the Other”. Deprived from many work opportunities , which was the case of Khan wondering if “his name had ever cost him a job(p.120) His fears turned out to be correct , as soon as the jury of the competition learned his name and his relation with Muslims , they put a lot of pressure on him . On one side, the Americans trying to force him to either withdraw his candidature , associate his name with an American one, or worse erase it completely. “Picking a name that hides your roots, your origins and ethnicity...”they said (p.83) On the other side , the Muslim community constraining him to choose between his heritage . As he refused to conform to both; Americans and Muslims he became the other of both parts.

Just as Khan was positioned to the status of Other in his society, Daoud’s character Haroun experienced the same process of othering . Jean- François Stazak defines othering as “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in a group ('US', the self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('them', Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined –presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (2008, p.2).This concept of Otherness is a strategy used to create a gap between the dominant and the dominated by making them seem different and inferior, to realize that they did not fit and belong. *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) did not only highlight the perception of the colonized Algerian population as the Other through Camus’ *The Stranger*, but also shed lights on how Haroun became an Other within his own Algerian community. It was said that what a person becomes reflect what she went through childhood, and the reason why Haroun was set apart from society goes back to his childhood experiences.

Indeed, the primary cause that led Haroun to the position of Otherness, is the triggering factor that started everything, his mother’s attitudes towards him after the death of her son Moussa . She became strict and severe with him, not out of love for him as her younger son, but because she considered him a replacement for her deceased firstborn, a mere

tool through which she continued to see Moussa . Refusing to recognize his autonomous selfhood, the mother confined him to herself and prohibited him from drifting away even to play. Shutting down his personality and desires as well, he was allowed to move and breath only within the perimeters established by her. Haroun had to stick to her all the time and act according to what she orders him to do ,forced to adhere to all her horrible demands. This behaviour made Haroun question the purpose of his life .She enhanced in him the feeling of uselessness leading a meaningless existence. She alienated him from society, made him grew into what we call “un lâche ”(p.165). Moreover, it eventually led him to commit a monstrous murder of a French man, which the Algerians reproached him for.

This toxic relationship with his mother deeply affected his worldview on a lot of matters. It fostered a hatred and distrust of women, developing a sort of trauma towards them; unable to find peace and solace with them. Moreover, his mother’s insistence on mosque attendance against his will made him hate Fridays, while the absence of a father figure led to distrust in religion and concepts of God, as he associated his father’s absence with God’s. He even advised his neighbours to stop pursuing a God who had been running away from earth (p.98) these childhood experiences cultivated in him, an alienated and isolated attitude. Hence, the protagonist grew into an indifferent person, even towards his mother, Unconcerned with her suffering, and disgusted by society and her people with their excessive principles. Revolted by God and the “conservative” religion of Islam and considered love, friends and family as absurd and meaningless, while showing lack of concerns regarding death.

As a result, Haroun becomes the outsider of his own community, willingly rejecting to conform to its rules. They alienated him, seeing in his soul a fallen person, and a tainted impure monster. Children go silent when he passed by, adults run away to avoid any kind of conversation with him , but insulted him behind his back .(p.99) He was an abomination and a sort of “plague ”to avoid , otherwise they would be tainted by his impurity. However to

Haroun being an “Other” was not as catastrophic as it might appear, because he accepted and embraced his status as a stranger . Being an Outcast opened for him the doors to freedom; he is no longer concerned with societal rules and obligations. Haroun managed to transform otherness into a sense of uniqueness. The absurd for him, would be to submit to his society’s rules and norms . Through their hattered and ostracization, Haroun felt liberated from all forms of imposed restrictions and prohibitions ,and even believed that beneath people’s animosity , they were secretly jealous of him and envied his “Independence”(p.98)

It is worth mentioning that, Daoud’s novel highlighted a dual othering process: Haroun’s personal experience of otherness, and the treatment of Musa as the Other in Camus’ narrative, in addition to Haroun’s otherness. Moussa’s death represented an erasure of his identity and existence. Even his corpse was not found. They deprived him from a name and a family . Musa was reduced to a mere anonymous incident, an Arab killed on a beach .“ In the hierarchical language of the West, what is alien represents otherness.”(Rutherford ,1990,p.10) Moussa’s portrayal as an “other” in Camus’ writing , arose only from his Arab identity. Categorized as the dominated class, he had only the right of silence. If a French person had been killed that day, the victim would have been treated differently, and the narrative would have progressed differently. Despite Haroun’s complex feelings towards his brother and mother, he sought to uncover “la vérité nue” behind that murder in Camus’ novel and restore Moussa’s humanity and identity. (p.75)

To conclude, despite sharing number of similarities and thematic affinities, one may say that Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011) and Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) shared also numerous differences. Each one of them gives a unique perspective and a different way to convey his message.Indeed, Both novels’ protagonists, Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011) and Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) struggle with identity issues. Hence during their journey of self-discovery and identity formation, Mohammad Khan and Haroun

were both influenced by their self-perception. How they perceived themselves become a significant aspect of their identities, shaping their understanding of who they were. Similarly their perception of self was constantly shaped by their society, which made it flexible and changing. However, the way they face both societal perception upon them is totally different. While Khan tried to live up to his society's expectations, and align with the norms in order to fit their community and affirm his identity. Haroun chooses to rebel against them, rejecting their norms and following only his own principles.

Furthermore, due to their intersecting identities, both characters were positioned as the Other by their respective societies. They rejected their multifaceted identity and tried to reduce them to a single one. Both characters were lost trying to navigate and negotiate their self-hood under such conditions. However, Unlike Haroun who embraced his differences and uniqueness by rejecting solely his origins and only focusing on what he wanted to become. Khan managed to overcome his identity crisis, by reconciling with his religious background and assimilated it with what he became. According to Hall, the negotiation of identity involves both the retention of cultural heritage and the adaptation to the new environment. As he believed about cultural identity, it "belonged to both the past and the future." (Yang, Zhao, Lieu, 2021, p.180)

Being represented as an Other was never Khan's choice. Every hardship he endured was part of his attempt to escape being labelled and represented as an outsider in American society. He even went on to neglect and ignores his heritage just to fit their specific American category. In contrast, becoming an outcast was a matter of choice for Haroun. He believed that the only way for him to be totally free to assert his identity, was to disconnect himself from society and what he considered as absurd and irrelevant laws. Their norms were limiting and restricting the manifestation of his true inner self; this is why he opted to get rid of them

before sinking even deeper into oblivion, and loose himself to another strange and imposed person.

## **Chapter Two: Resurgence of Religion in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013)**

Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) demonstrate a significant focus on religion. Both present a strong return to religion. Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* have seen a strong return to religion. Indeed, it becomes a significant theme in the novels and a central part of the two protagonists' identity, though religious issues were not visible at the very beginning. The storyline in both books did not emphasize religion, but as the events unfold, what is highlighted through the characters' self-development and the society around them. Accordingly, both works demonstrated a shift from being disregarded to distinctly promoted, illustrating the advancing importance of religion within the narratives. In this regard, the following chapter will analyze the depiction of religion in both works and discuss the way this resurgence of religion affected both Haroun's and Mohammad Khan's identity construction, their understanding of themselves and their place in society.

### **Section 1: Religion in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011)**

In Waldman's text, the depiction of religion played a crucial role in the course of events. By going deeper into the analysis of the novel, we noticed that religion was in fact almost the main reason of the troublesome occurrence within the narratives. Notably, it thrusts the identity issues of the protagonist Mohammad Khan, taking into account that Islam has always been a topic of controversy in America. According to Blanks & Frassetto (1999), Islam was "a danger all too real" and "Europe's greatest problem." (p.3) Since covering Islam, the Islamic world represented Barbarism and a kind of distasteful exoticism, not much to be approved of. (Said, 1997, p.XV) According to Edward Said, none of the Islamic figures were represented by their names, but were told ominously as "these men" (Said, 1997, p.3)

western people judged it unimportant to acknowledge eastern people by their names. By doing so, they condemned them to the status of Other, depersonalized and deprived from an identity.

Waldman's novel reveals that, Islam has been subject to negative stereotyping and misrepresentation in Western discourse. This portrayal, as Blankes and Frassetto suggested, "only served to kindle hostility and fear." (1999, p. 3) Islam was depicted as follows: it is a deceitful religion that despised women, forcing them "to wear headscarves to submit" (p.217), and deprived them of their rights and freedom. It also restricted men from following their desires and chained to their ethnic principles and norms. Some extremists even perceived Muslims as the evil sent to them by "the great Satan" (Gentile, 2008, p. 33). They believed that "[they] invited the enemy to [their] home to decorate" (p.149)

*The Submission* (2011) portrays the intensification of Islamophobia in the American society following the September 11 terrorist attacks, resulting in a harsh divide between Muslims and Americans. This societal division was illustrated through various incidents and atmospheric descriptions, Waldman created a perceptible sense of anxiety and uneasiness, such as the way people stare at Khan when he enters public spaces, the nervous glances Muslim characters receive on public transportation.... It was a period characterized by a raise of religious tensions between them. In light of this, associations and organizations have been created from both parts in order to defend what they believe to be their rights. The situation was described by the head of the Islamic association, at that specific period of time as follows:

People—we—are on edge, Malik said. The mood is very tense right now. There's violence in the air, and you bear some responsibility for that. We don't know you from Adam. You organized a rally where people were making death threats. You yanked a woman's headscarf. How are we to know what else you're capable of? (p.230)

This quote illustrates the heightened tensions in post-9/11 America, where Malik, the head of the Islamic association, confronts anti-Muslim protesters by highlighting how their hostile actions like pulling off a Muslim women's headscarf have created an atmosphere of fear, demonstrating how Islamophobia has transformed from prejudiced thoughts into dangerous physical actions against the Muslim community.

In this tense environment, discrimination and hostility targeted Muslim Americans in their daily lives. They were not allowed near American neighbourhoods and risked being attacked if they did. The anti-Islamist party "Save America from Islam" view Muslims as enemies and a threat to their American identity. This led people to be suspicious of Muslims and made it hard for them to feel welcomed. Some "clergymen" even blamed America's politics and held them responsible "for fostering or even creating conditions for evil to exist in the world." (Gentile, 2008, p.33) Due to these prejudices Muslim Americans, faced rejection based solely on their religion and not their qualifications. Which was the case of Mohammed Khan, the Muslim American architect whose design got rejected not because of his talent and abilities as an artist, but because of his Islamic background. Waldman's narrative thus, highlighted how Islamophobia creates a climate of suspicion and exclusion, impacting the lives of innocent citizens.

The aftermath of 9/11 also witnessed a rise of Christian Nationalism. Associated with Terrorism, the presence of Muslims in America "awakened their sense of patriotism and developed an excessive attachment to their Christianity unexpected ferment in Religious and patriotic feeling." (Gentile, 2008, Introduction). Religion was a sensitive matter that became central in their life, they became firmer in rejecting other cultures and everything turned around it, even their American "Democracy" explained Gentile "has a religious matrix and is constantly inspired by religion..." (2008, introduction). The anti-Islamist party were afraid that

by picking Khan's memorial, Muslims would interpret it as an act of friendship, and may dare to believe that there was no offense between them, and nothing against Islam. (p.110)

Americans described Islam as a "violent religion" (p.112) synonymous with hatred. It seemed like all their grief and frustration contained over those two years were redirected towards Khan, and his memorial. It was regarded as "an assault to America's Judeo Christian heritage", (p.149) and to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant model (WASP). Khan did not suit this ideal model of them, so his design was considered as "an attempt to change [America's] cultural landscape", and an act of "Islamization" as well (p.149). Hence a Muslim would always be a wicked Muslim in their eyes, no exception for those who grew up and were raised with them; their historical backgrounds justified everything, no need to go any further in trying to understand. A Muslim would always remain untrustworthy, as they are terrorists with the aim of imposing "sharia law" (p.170) assuming that Khan was just "mocking" (p.148) and "humiliating" (p.152) them by designing an Islamic Garden for an American memorial.

"Save America from Islam" (p.166), associated with the "SAFIs" was an anti-Islamist organization described as the following:

The SAFIs, as they called themselves, like some lost Judaic tribe were mostly from Staten Island, Queens, and Long Island, and they were mostly women. As far as Sean knew, most of them hadn't lost anyone in the attack. Radical Islam was their freelance obsession. (p.167)

Their leader Debbie Dowson, promoted fear and suspicion with her accusations. She claims Muslims are inherently deceitful, allowed by their religion to lie in order to convert others (p.149). This distrust extends to Khan's memorial design. Dowson sees the "Garden" as a "sneaky" way for Muslims to spread their faith (p. 149). Unable to build a mosque, Muslims,

according to her, disguised their true intentions with this “code” (p.149). She even reached the point of suggesting that the design is a message for “Jihadists,”(p.149) a “Martyrs” paradise encouraging death and sacrifice. (p. 149). The spread of this stereotypical reputation transformed the memorial, meant to honor victims, into a graveyard for potential future attackers. Some Americans, particularly those from Manhattan deeply affected by 9/11, even seek therapy due to the perceived threat. Dowson further intensified these anxieties by portraying the memorial as a potential “Dar al-Islam”.(p.168)

In addition, Debbie challenges the peaceful image of Islam, arguing that it weakens and destroys societies. She criticizes Muslims as follows:

They’re trying to colonize this hallowed ground,” she said. “This is what they’ve done all over the world, all through history: they destroy something, then build an Islamic symbol of conquest in the same place. Babur tore down Ram’s temple in India and put up a mosque. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople and made the Hagia Sophia—what else?—a mosque. Here, one set of Muslims destroys the buildings and now another comes along to put paradise there for his dead brothers. For all we know this was part of the plan all along potential “Dar al-Islam.(p.167)

This quote highlights Debbie Dowson’s Islamophobic view. She sees Khan’s memorial as a Muslim attempt to conquer the American land in the same way as the past Islamic conquests. She argues that the Prophet “Mohammad” was just pretending to give “the illusion of tolerance” in Mecca (p.168) when he actually shed lights on the true essence of Islam in Medina by killing anyone who was not submissive to their religion in Medina. In her interpretation, “Islam means submission—it makes slaves of its followers, and demands that people of other religions submit to it, too.”(p.168). She further affirms that Muslims are all liars ,though it was written in their Holly book that Islam “sanctions lying ”(p.170),they continued to resort to it in order to defend themselves.

In this regard, like Debbie Dowson, Americans developed a solid perception of Muslims based on stereotypes and prejudices. These misconceptions have evolved from initial fears into a deep-hatred and animosity over time. Waldman's text presents Mohammad Khan as an example of this stereotype, portraying him as someone who superficially adapts to their American society while hiding deceitful intentions. In this perspective, as cited in Papova's article (2015) "... a man may skin himself seventy times seven times without being able to say 'now that is truly you, that is no longer your outside'" (para.5) Khan became then, a target for anti-Muslim sentiments, serving as a receptacle for people's frustrations and prejudices. Consequently, this hostile environment appears to have led Khan to experience internal conflicts regarding his identity.

Mohammed Khan's self-identification as an American was central to his sense of self, guiding his actions and decisions. However, the recent events surrounding the memorial brought his religious background into light and forced him to confront complex issues of personal identity. This sudden resurgence of religion challenged his self-concept and necessitated a re-evaluation of his identity. Hence, one may conclude that the primary source of Mohammad's difficulties mostly resulted from his religious affiliations. Upon the public revelation of his Muslim identity, he faced significant discrimination. Additionally he was confronted to the public's hostility, including threats of violence from extremists and constant harassment through various communication channels.

Khan experienced a deep internal struggle as he attempted to balance his American identity with his Muslim heritage, finding himself torn between these two fundamental aspects of who he was. Society's refusal to acknowledge his multifaceted identity reduced him to a singular Muslim one, disregarding his American affiliations. Consequently, Mohammed was obliged to confront their biases, prejudices, and assumptions about himself. Despite his attempts to distance himself from religious practice and assert his non-concern

with Islam, the harassment persisted. It even expanded further to target his entire neighbourhood and all the Muslims living in America. This situation grew so worse that it created divisions within the Muslim community itself. Some Muslims even blamed Mohammad for putting them into that disastrous situation. According to them, Mo's participation in the memorial's competition intensified American's hatred and hostility towards them. His own father accused him, stating:

You are drawing attention to yourself, to us—all of us, all Muslims in America—in a way that could be dangerous, Salman said. He was pacing with his hands behind his back. “My mosque has hired a security guard because of the threats it has been getting, and I almost feel like I should pay for it. Think of the community.”(p.247)

This quote shows how Khan's role in the memorial controversy spreads fear among Muslim Americans, as Salman points out that when one Muslim becomes too visible in public life, it can put the entire Muslim community at risk in an already hostile environment. Consequently, Khan becomes isolated from his own religious community, who blame him for attracting attention and potential danger to American Muslims.

Waldman's protagonist experienced a deep identity crisis. Khan found himself caught between his Islamic origins and his identity as a born-and-raised American who had worked hard to become an accomplished citizen. He struggled with his sense of belonging and did not know where to fit anymore. As he was lost between the American and Islamic community, he isolated himself from both. He even regretted seeking help from Islamic organizations, considering their support as inauthentic due to their focus on his Muslim identity; an aspect he had previously attempted to ignore. His statement, “I shouldn't be identified as one” (p.223), reveals his discomfort with being primarily categorized as Muslim.

Mohammad Khan resented being solely defined by his religion. The image of self that people interpreted was not the image that he wanted to show them. Despite his unwillingness to be in the public eye, Khan becomes a central figure for Muslim support organizations that seek to “humanize” (p.220) him. This increased attention paradoxically, further alienates him and leads him to experience a sense of dehumanization. It made him feel that he lost all sense of being human, to become “a new product being rolled out to market, a product he suspected had significant fund-raising potential for the council.”(p.220). He hated living under that kind of tensions and isolated himself in order to find some peace of mind.

Khan’s alienation served as a psychological defence mechanism to protect himself from further identity confusion. His only way was to deny and erase his heritage, a solution that Laila; Khan’s former lawyer and girlfriend at the same time, strongly opposed. She constantly tries to raise his awareness and advises him to confront reality. Laila attempts to challenge his denial with the historical example of “the Nazi Germany”, claiming: “Look at the history of Nazi Germany. The Jews thought they were German, until they weren’t.”(p.223). This quote suggests that even if people from minority groups feel fully part of a society, reality shows that they are not. External forces, like the dominating society decide whether those groups belong or not, based on their ethnicity, religion, or background.

Moreover, Mohammad tries to assimilate the American society by mainly erasing his religious background. He had to become invisible, like a chameleon adapting to its surroundings. This situation reflects what Stuart Hall says about diaspora identities that are always changing depending on the cultural context. They are shaped by both a person’s background and the new culture they live in. Unfortunately his efforts to fit in were not a success. Despite his achievements, his Muslim identity always remained, and people still judged him for it. He finds himself constantly labelled by his Islamic origins, illustrating

Hall's argument that cultural identity is as much about 'becoming' as it is about 'being' (p.225)

Paradoxically, the resurgence of religion, while initially problematic, ultimately proved beneficial to the development of Mohammad's identity. It allowed him to re-evaluate his self-perception; how he saw himself belonging. It forced him to confront his heritage, which ultimately led to a deeper understanding of himself. Finally, and through this process, he manages to accept himself, where he came from, his origins and religious background. The resurgence of religion was in a way a catalyst for self-discovery. It permitted the protagonist to build a more complete and integrated sense of identity. Khan came to the conclusion that one must accept his past in order to fully engage with the present moment.

Overall, it may be said that embracing one's complete identity, including religious and cultural heritage, may be necessary for his personal development, even in a society marked by religious tension and discrimination. The resurgence of religion in Waldman's *The Submission* significantly shaped Mohammad Khan's journey of identity formation. While initially attempting to overlook his Islamic heritage, Khan's involvement in the memorial controversy forced him to confront both his religious identity. What he perceived at the beginning as a source of alienation ultimately led to personal growth and self-acceptance at the end.

## **Section 2: Religion in Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013)**

While Waldman's protagonist's journey of self-discovery led him to embrace both what he has become and his religious heritage, Daoud's protagonist Haroun takes a noticeably different path in his quest for identity and progress. For a long time, religion represented a source of constraint and suffocation for him. He perceives it as a restrictive force that limits his personal growth and autonomy; it is a kind of confining cage that condemns him to live only within its boundaries. In his perspective, religion deprives him from exploring, and experiencing genuine freedom. This perception made his life oppressive, stifling and overbearing, thus, he could not bloom as the complete person he wanted to be. Haroun disagrees with Islamic teachings and their strict rules. As an atheist, he firmly rejects religious beliefs and practices. He does not believe in God, claiming that if there was one, it does not care about its followers.

Haroun's stance reflects his deep sense of disappointment with religion. To illustrate this, he cites the example of a man who in response to God's order raised his hand toward the sky for eighty eight years. He states : "On y raconte l'histoire d'un certain Sadhu Amar Bharati... C'est un Indien qui affirme avoir gardé bras droit levé en l'air pendant trente-huit ans. Résultat, son bras n'est plus qu'un os recouvert de peau."(p.126) This extreme act of devotion to God resulted in physical harm, specifically causing injuries to the man's hand. Despite hardly surviving this unpleasant experience, people only celebrated this man's honourable devotion to God. They ignored that part of situation where Amar Bharati was in a state of near-death, and the fact that that poor man's act yielded no response from God. This societal reaction to that situation angered Haroun. He hated and criticized the grotesque and exaggerated way such actions were glorified. In his view, no rational person with a logic mind, would endure such suffering willingly.

Haroun's animosity towards religion dates back to two pivotal childhood incidents. The first occurred when he was a little boy, reluctant to attend Friday prayers at the mosque, forced by his mother. When an Imam asks him about his sadness, Haroun fabricates a story about being bullied by another boy. This initial childhood lie marked a turning point in his relationship with religion. It opened the door to the unforbidden, to a world beyond religious constraints. "C'était je crois mon premier mensonge. He says "Mon expériences à moi du fruit volé au paradis." (p.84) This suggests that Haroun views this moment as his first major transgression against religious teachings. It can be compared to the biblical narrative of Adam's and Eve's first sin. This act also marks his first decision to deviate from religion.

The second significant event in Haroun's religious deviation was the act of killing a French man. This incident marks his decisive break with religion. He confesses that the only Quranic verse resonating within him after committing that crime is, "Si vous tuez une seule ame, c'est comme si vous avez tué l'humanité entière." (p.125) This quote highlights the protagonist's recognition of his transgression. Haroun recognizes himself as a sinner who violated a fundamental moral principle of Islam. Consequently, he feels he no longer fits the expectations and norms of his Islamic community. Furthermore, he perceives a lack of understanding from his society. He feels that they didn't care to understand his acts and the reason behind them; they only seek to understand what they want to.

Accordingly, Haroun developed a distinctive and critical perspective on religion. He believes that it existed only to perpetuate a reign of oppression and control over its adherents. The protagonist perceives religion as an internal force of constraint, limiting personal autonomy and freedom. According to him, Islam served to restrict an individual's liberty, by imposing limitations on personal expression and self-determination. Therefore he distanced and alienated himself from both religion and society, as he knew that there is no way for him to taste real freedom if he chooses to conform to their rules. Haroun believes that, adhering to

any religion or specific community employs sacrificing one's individuality and personality. He views it as a form of self-confinement, where individuals are molded against their will to conform to the established norms, which is a complete absurdity.

For Daoud's protagonist, religion is synonymous with injustice. He perceives a complete absence of God's intervention in his life. His argument is that, if God truly exists, he wouldn't have endured so much suffering in solitude. Haroun rejects and questions the Quranic portrayal of God's love for humanity. He affirms that, if that love was true, God would never allow him to go through all kinds of hardships, spending half of his limited life to compensate for something he was not responsible for the murder of his brother. Moreover, the injustice and insults suffered by Moussa further reinforced Haroun's disillusionment with religious concepts of divine protection and fairness. Islam is supposed to punish all forms of injustice; however, his brother's murderer escaped punishment for his crime. Besides, he is truly troubled with the fact that society normalized that act of murder.

Furthermore, Haroun's rejection of religion extends beyond critics of divine justice and God's presence. It is related to more personal and psychological childhood experiences. The first one is the paternal absence. Haroun seems to draw similarities between his father and God; his experience of paternal absence may have created a profound psychological parallel with his perception of divine absence. This association leads him to view them both as abandoning figures to resent, contributing to his sense of alienation and isolation. Haroun's experience of paternal absence appears to have significantly affected his trust in God. Consequently, Haroun draws a parallel between the absence of his father's support and protection, and God's perceived lack of intervention in his life.

Moreover, Haroun's despise towards religion stems from his hate of "submissions" (p.93). As Islam is synonymous to submission, he refused to conform to it. This hate may

come from his mother's controlling nature, particularly regarding his personal and intimate life. It likely fostered a strong sense of independence in Haroun. She suffocated his way of living and forced him to submit to her orders. Thus, he grows up resenting any kind of external authority, and religion is for him just another form of controlling authority. This situation leads Haroun to prioritize personal autonomy and freedom, and rejects any form of submission to higher authority, whether human or divine.

Besides, Haroun deepened his critics on religion by questioning its restrictions and particularly focusing on the Quranic prohibition of alcohol. He questions and challenges this restriction by inviting others to consume it. He confesses the fact of always asking "pourquoi ce rapport compliqué avec le vin ? pourquoi diabolise-t-on ce breuvage quand il est censé couler à profusion au paradis ? pourquoi est-il interdit ici-bas et promis là-haut ?(p.75)Haroun He specifically questions God's prohibition of wine in life while simultaneously promising it as a heavenly reward in paradise.

He argues that the wine promised by God in the Islamic concept of paradise differed from earthly wine. Consequently, he uses this contradiction to justify his consumption of wine in the present life. therefore justifying its consumption in this life. Islam's expectations and its imposed rules, did not fit Haroun's personality, there was a kind of incompatibility between them. Its conservative and strict laws make it too narrow for him to live freely as the kind person he wants to be. He feels constantly pressured by these constraints, perceiving them as an invasion of his personal space, and a limitation for the manifestation of his true inner self. Even the act of thinking about these imposed constraints and the resulting feeling of hesitation and loss are seen by Haroun as restrictions to his liberty.

Haroun regards religion as a source of constraint; an oppressive force which chains him and obliges him to obey. In his view, religion is an enemy of personal freedom. He even

perceives those who believed in and worshipped God as misguided, living in a state of delusion and engaging in what he considered a wasteful pursuit. He treated religious adherents as ignorant. This is why Leila Bellour's analysis (2018) of "*The Meursault Investigation*" characterizes it as an "atheist novel" (p386). Bellour draws parallels between Haroun and "Meursault", Camus' protagonist, in their rejection and denial of religion. Both relied on their own beliefs and perceptions of things, going beyond the societal norms that deprived their liberty.

Stuart Hall (1990) suggested that cultural identity had two types of definitions. (p.223) The first one positioned it as, a fixed, innate essence shared by people with a common history and ancestry.(p.223) In Haroun's case, this can be referred to his Islamic and Arab identity, which is inherited and rooted in shared cultural and historical heritage. This was defined by Hall as the "imposed" identity. (p.223) The second definition considered cultural identity, as fluid and subject to transformation. It emphasized the fact that, identity is not fixed but continually evolves through individual experiences, social interactions, and historical processes. Haroun's Muslim Arab identity is a shared heritage of his community. However, it is important to note that Haroun's personal experiences align more with Hall's second perspective on identity. As he grapples with societal expectations, his identity undergoes constant transformation. Thus, Haroun focuses only on what he has constructed and developed, rejecting his inherited religious identity.

Hall's second perspective on cultural identity emphasized on, the constructed identity, which develops throughout life, through experiences and individual choices. Unlike many Algerians who sought to reinforce and reclaim their identity through religious ties, Haroun chooses to distance himself from them. According to him, aligning with his community's morals and values is going against his personal convictions. Instead, the protagonist asserts his identity by following his own principles and values. While Hall highlights the interplay

between historical continuity and ongoing transformation, Haroun prioritizes only his personal development and change, over maintaining connections to his inherited cultural and religious heritage.

Although Haroun firmly rejects religion, it paradoxically plays a crucial role in shaping his identity. His constant questioning and criticism of religious beliefs and practices significantly influence how he understands himself and views the world around him. His experiences with society's religious constraints may have in a way contributed to his desire for individual freedom. He realizes that his personal values do not fit with the morals of Islam. Consequently, the protagonist consciously decides to position himself as the "Other" within his own community, in order to be able to live freely without any restrictions. This self-imposed otherness is his way of asserting his own autonomy. By rejecting the identity of a submitted, dominated and oppressed individual his society and religion imposed, Haroun aims to construct an independent selfhood.

However, it is worth mentioning that, while Haroun rejects all forms of submission and only wishes for total freedom, ironically, he becomes captive to the very idea of freedom itself. His obsession with it influenced the major choices of his life, it may be similar to the way religious devotion or commitment serves as a motivating factor that inspires many people. Just like people's religious devotion, Haroun's devotion to freedom becomes the primary factor influencing his major life choices. No matter what one may say, people need a kind of obsession in their life to be able to overcome challenges and move forward, they are all slave to someone or something. In Haroun's case, he is neither, more nor less, but a slave to his personal freedom. While rejecting all forms of submission, Haroun becomes enslaved to his ideal of freedom ,so his choices are not truly free as he implies, because they are dictated by this singular obsession. He did everything in order to obtain this freedom; he even gives up his religion and community to become the outcast of his surroundings.

Ultimately, one can say that the resurgence of religion in Daoud's novel *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) had a multifaceted role in the characters' identity formation. In colonial and post-colonial Algeria, an Islamic country, religion became a crucial element in defining national identity, it serves as a tool that differentiates them from the colonizer. For many Algerians, shared religious beliefs created a sense of unity and resistance. Those who did not conform to religious norms, like the protagonist, were rejected and outcasted. Haroun's lack of religiosity made him an outcast, who faced rejection and alienation. Thus, religion had its part in shaping societal norms and perceptions of people. It acted as a powerful double-edged sword, having the ability to welcome and create space of safety, belonging and authenticity to some, misery and disregard to others. Daoud's novel, thus, highlighted the power of religion in forming societal norms and perceptions, demonstrating its ability to both welcome and outcast individuals based on their adherence to shared beliefs and practices.

To conclude this chapter, The resurgence of religion played an important role in the two protagonists; Mohammad Khan and Haroun's formation of identity, significantly influencing the narratives and the characters' development in both novels. It served as a profound force that challenged their understanding of themselves and their place in society. However, while both novels acknowledged the power of religion to shape an individual's self, the consequences of this religious revival differ significantly between the two literary works. Both protagonists face external pressures to conform to religious expectations, but their responses diverge. Khan navigates a path that allows him to maintain his individuality while accepting his cultural and religious heritage. Haroun, on the other hand, chooses a path of resistance, viewing the rise of religion as a threat to his personal freedom and self-perception.

Furthermore, the novels differ in their portrayal of the role of religion shaping national identity. In *The Submission*, Islam becomes a major point of debate when discussing what it

means to be American and what values America holds. During the period of post 9/11 tragedy, America had experienced a rise in Islamophobia, with some Americans seeking to exclude Muslims. Religion became a topic of controversy for every American citizen, and people's identities were often defined by their religious affiliations. For *The Meursault Investigation*, religion is related to postcolonial Algerian nationalism. While it offered a sense of community, belonging, and unity to the colonized Algerian people, it is portrayed by Haroun as a powerful tool for perpetuating a system of domination and social control.

Ultimately, both works illustrate the complex interplay between personal identity, societal expectations, and religious resurgence. They demonstrate how individuals can be profoundly affected by the power of religion, even when they initially stand apart from it. These novels highlight the way personal identities are shaped by the religious and cultural contexts in which one lives. Through Khan and Haroun, we see two distinct responses: one of gradual acceptance and integration, and another of rejection and alienation. Furthermore, the exploration of religion's resurgence in these two novels offered a deeper understanding of the protagonists' journeys of identity formation. In this way, *The Submission* and *The Meursault Investigation* served as mirrors reflecting the multifaceted nature of religion in shaping individual and collective identities.

## **V. General Conclusion**

The aim of this dissertation has been the analysis of ‘Identity’ as an issue within two distinct literary works; Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011) and Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). This issue has inspired many writers, as it has been the case of Amy Waldman and Kamel Daoud, where they both portrayed protagonists struggling with the formation of their identities. In order to gain deeper understanding on this issue, we applied Stuart Hall’s theory of Identity .

The first chapter explored the complex relationship between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ in both novels. It examined how the characters’ journeys of self-rediscovery were profoundly influenced by their self-perception, and other external factors , such as societal representations. It demonstrated how societal portrayals impact an individual’s sense of ‘Self’, and vice versa. Furthermore, the chapter analyzed the characters’ self-concepts and how these were molded by their interactions and experiences within their respective societies. Finally, this chapter focused on the characters’ experience of Otherness, and on the struggles and challenges they faced with this position.

The second chapter examined the resurgence of religion and its profound impact on the formation and development of the characters’ identities. It explored how historical and religious backgrounds contributed to a clearer sense of self for the protagonists. The research showed how the main characters in both novels confronted the reawakening of their religious heritage, by responding in distinct ways to this. Furthermore, the chapter explored the society’s evolving stance on religion and the resulting tensions that arose from this. It highlighted the challenges faced by the characters as they struggled to balance their religious identity with their personal sense of ‘Self’.

By undertaking this research on identity issues, the flexibility of identity may arise as one of the most important conclusion .Stuart Hall’s theory brought to light the fact that Identity is a never completed process that lies within societal representation ; since it is easily influenced by external factors. This theoretical framework provided a deeper understanding on the multifaceted, complex nature of ‘identity’, and further insights on its construction. Furthermore, it demonstrated the way individuals navigate and negotiate their identities.

To conclude, the analysis of the issue of identity in both novels; *The Submission* (2011) and *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) have provided a rich area of study for further explorations. There are several other interesting topics for dissertation research to be compared in these works together. Other studies, may focus on exploring the theme of belonging in both literary works, or it may emphasize on examining the protagonists’ perception of “Otherness” and how distinctly, it affects them. Another interesting and pertinent topic would be the analysis of the role of history and memory in shaping the lives of people and their understanding of themselves.

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