

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **NATIVE BELIEVER**

1. *Native Believer* is among the first novels that turns the satirical and comic gaze upon the War on Terror. The novel mercilessly satirizes the War—pornography, waterboarding addiction, and governmental monitoring of Muslim communities are just some of the myriad examples. Of the many examples, what is your favorite scene satirizing the GWOT? Does the arrival of such a scathing view of America's War place this novel in the category of war literature?
2. In the December 10, 2015, edition of the *Washington Post*, Fareed Zakaria writes about being forced to embrace another identity, of being a Muslim. He does this with great reluctance and compares himself to a certain set of Jews in Germany in the 1930s, who wanted to condemn Nazism, not as Jews, but as Germans. What similarities and differences does the protagonist of *Native Believer* share with Fareed Zakaria's unwilling or reluctant Muslim?
3. M is fully committed to his marriage even though it is fraught with problems. What are the most memorable parts about his marriage to Marie-Anne, and what optimism, if any, does their marriage represent?
4. Until the twentieth century, the world hadn't known an assertive Western Muslim identity. Ali Eteraz's debut novel, along with his first two books—a collection of short stories, and a memoir ranging from rural Pakistani madrassas to Alabama—form an intriguing trilogy about the Muslim diaspora in the West, ranging from the first-generation discovering their Muslim identity, to the second-generation recoiling and reconciling that identity during the War on Terror. If read together, what lessons do these three works tell us about the making of the Western Muslim?
5. Anguish is a recurring theme in the novel—M's anguish about children; Marie-Anne's anguish about her health; and the couple's joint anguish at the state of their marriage. What are the examples of anguish experienced by the secondary characters, particularly Ali Ansari, Richard K., Farkhunda, and Candace? How do these characters deal with their respective anguish?
6. M's exclusion from Center City sets in play his wide-ranging excursions into the parts of Philadelphia he would not otherwise go. Please track M's movement across Philadelphia and discuss which part of Philadelphia seems most appropriate for him, if any.
7. M has three significant encounters with his boss, George Gabriel, in the book. Which one is the most haunting and why?
8. M has a strange and unusual relationship with the Koran, which passes through at least three phases. With respect to the Koran, M shares a series of reflections about why he should or should not maintain a relationship with the book. What does this conflict reveal about M's state of mind?
9. M's relationship with a Muslim pornographer plays an interesting and impactful role in his development. What does M learn from the Muslim pornographer and how does he apply it in his own life?
10. In the background, the novel reports on a number of hate crimes, most of these targeting groups other than Muslims. The most severe one is the hate crime suffered by M's mentor Richard, who eventually decides to move to Israel as a result. What does M's encounter with Richard's departure tell him about his own feelings?
11. What is the connection between the title of the novel, the opening line, and the eventual ending?
12. After the San Bernardino shooting in December 2015, a horde of media exoticized the suspected shooters by invading their apartment and taking pictures of their faith-related objects such as prayer beads and prayer rugs. This gave rise to a sarcastic hashtag on Twitter called #mymuslimapartment, where average Muslims shared pictures of the mundane items at their homes in an effort to protest the media's breathless coverage. In *Native Believer*, written well before the arrival of the hashtag, the discovery of a concealed faith-related object sets the plot in motion. What similarities and connections are present between the novel and the real world?

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