"Common Cause":
On the Black-Immigrant Debate and Constructing the Muslim American

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"Whether cultures are inherited or consciously and deliberately created, basic problems of definition—who belongs where or with whom, who belongs and who doesn't—are unavoidable the moment we translate our dreams of diversity into social visions and agendas."

- Satya P. Mohanty[1]

"How does a religious civilization like Islam, which relies on a defined code of behavior and traditions based on a holy book, cope in an age which self-consciously puts aside the past and exults in diversity?"

- Akbar S. Ahmed[2]

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[1] Satya P. Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernisn*, ed. Michael R. Hames-Garcia (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

[2] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

On June 30, 2009, the New York City council overwhelmingly passed a resolution to add

two of the most important Muslim holy days—*Eid al-Fitr* (the Festival of Breaking the Fast) and

Eid al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice)—to the public schools' holiday calendar. The resolution

was met with little opposition, both within the council itself or the general public. As the

resolution's advocates pointed out, roughly 600,000 Muslims currently live in New York City,

while 12 percent, or more than 100,000 of the city's public school students are Muslim—

numbers, these advocates argued, that made the Muslim community well-deserved of the city's

recognition. A *New York Times* piece covering the Council's decision said that the resolution's

success "reflected the political maturation of the city's diverse Muslim population, which has at

times seen its political and political ambitions hamstrung by schisms among competing groups."[3]

Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, a leader of the predominately Black American Mosque of the Islamic

Brotherhood in Harlem and a major proponent of the resolution, attested to the increasing unity

amongst the city's Muslims, saying: "When there are issues of common concern and broad-based

impact, the people put aside their differences and unite around a common cause."[4]

What are the "common causes" of Muslim communities in the US? And what are the

"schisms among competing groups" that have left these communities "hamstrung" both in the

past, and conceivably, in the future? In this essay, I engage these questions through prisms of

race and ethnicity, exploring how histories of racial and ethnic intersection and comparative

racial formation—in particular between Black, Asian, and Arab American communities—inform

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[3] Kirk Semple, "Council Votes for Two Muslim School Holidays," *New York Times*, July 1 2009.
[4] Ibid.

the contemporary emergence and development of Muslim American identities, communities, and cultural production. Drawing upon notions of epistemological truth and identity articulation in the work of cultural theorists Satya P. Mohanty and Stuart Hall, I review and consider the debates concerning relationships between Black and immigrant American Muslim communities, then move on to engage what has arguably emerged as the most influential text addressing the topic, Sherman A. Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*. Taking into consideration Mohanty's assertion that the "recovery of an individual's sense of personal worth…partly depends on finding the right social or political theory,"[5] I argue issues of Black-immigrant difference in the Muslim American community have yet to be examined through the "right" interdisciplinary intermixture of theories of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and religion—and specifically those which have arisen from the field of ethnic studies—which I suggest can provide Muslim Americans new discursive horizons for moving beyond past schisms, and getting onto the business of articulating the "common cause[s]" of our communities.

My usage of the term "our" communities is intentional. For the purposes of advancing my argument, I believe it is important to first clarify my own subject positioning as an Asian American Muslim woman working within the fields of ethnic, gender, and critical American studies. Beyond scholarly interest, my personal investments in the topic run deep, as I was first drawn to the study and practice of Islam over a decade ago through my concerns and frustrations over issues of Black-Asian relations in the US, specifically in the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings, when dialogue between Black and Korean communities could also accurately

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[5] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," 62.

be characterized as "hamstrung" by longstanding schisms among the two groups in urban Los Angeles, then exacerbated by the explosive political context at hand. In August 2001, I entered my graduate program in Ethnic Studies to study such schisms, as well the many rich histories of Afro-Asian intersection both in the US and beyond, buoyed by my identity as an Asian American feminist strongly committed to the field's antiracist and anti-imperialist agendas. However, following the events of 9/11 which occurred a month later, I quickly became involved in flurry of activism and political mobilization efforts to support Muslim American communities, an engagement through which I myself eventually converted to Islam. In my subsequent interactions with what was now my community, I quickly came to note a number of striking similarities in the relationships and discussions between Black American and immigrant Muslims from South Asia and the Middle East and those which had taken place between Black and Asian American communities throughout the 1990s, in particular pertaining to issues of unequal distribution of resources, political representation, and general notions of mutuality and respect, all of which I will elaborate upon throughout the course of this essay.

Yet, unlike existing discourses of Black-Asian interaction in the US, issues of faith motivated, and continue to motivate, discussions of race and ethnicity in Muslim America, specifically in regards to how Islamic spiritual practices are developed in relation to what is known as *urf*—an Arabic Islamic term denoting the customs and practices of a given society, in this case, the U.S. At the same time, while the majority of Muslim Americans are extremely committed to adapting Islam to the US context, a commitment to the *ummah*, or global community of believers, is also a central component of the faith. In the most basic sense, Muslims understand that they are to put aside their individual identities and personal desires for

the sake of the *ummah*—a global collective that must work together to uphold what is right, forbid injustice, and worship Allah. In the US context, however, one's relationship to the *ummah* is directly affected by domestic differences of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Such differences have led various scholars, such as Jamillah Karim, to speak of an "American *ummah*" in order to more accurately identify the distinctive contours of Islamic identities developed in a nation fundamentally stratified by categories of race, class, and gender.[6] In this way, I suggest that Muslim American communities present a particularly fascinating set of issues for scholars interested in the formation of interracial or intraethnic political coalition, due to the community's obligatory commitment to empower the *ummah*. Indeed, part of the "political maturation" of the Muslim American communities currently taking place appears to arise out of an understanding that they will have the most success as a community in promoting the "common cause" of the American *ummah*'s shared spiritual practices, despite marked cultural, class, and political differences.

Thus, in closing, I consider the ways in which an "ethnic studies" analysis might be used to think through issues of tension and conflict between Black and immigrant Muslims, in particular the ways in which those in each group have sought to articulate their visions of Islam in the quest for Muslim American political enfranchisement and social equity. I argue that these Black-immigrant Muslim relations would be well-served to be examined through the discourse of Black-Asian intersection and comparative racial formation which has emanated mainly from ethnic and Asian American studies fields. I then propose critical race studies scholar Eric

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[6] Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Yamamoto's application of "restorative justice"—a theory of justice which seeks to repair harm through a cooperative processes between the parties involved—as a means to facilitate future discussions of racial and ethnic difference between Black and immigrant American Muslim communities, as well as a framework for how Muslim Americans can productively engage the state in ways that account for the trauma and violence their communities have experienced since 9/11. The aforementioned ethnic and critical race studies frameworks, however, cannot be applied "as is," and instead must be amended and expanded through the inclusion of faith and religion as governing analytics, categories which have been long unacknowledged and woefully undertheorized in ethnic, gender, and critical American studies fields, when at the same time, I suggest that issues of race and ethnicity must become more primary in areas of religious and Islamic studies. As such, this essay stands as both an attempt to encourage those within Muslim American communities to acknowledge the salience of race and engage with histories of comparative racial formation and intra-ethnic relations, as well as a call to scholars in ethnic, religious, gender, and American studies to do the hard, yet urgently necessary work, of building critical intersections between their fields.

"The Right Social and Political Theory"

In his essay, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," Satya P. Mohanty suggests that cultural identity, as understood from what he calls a postpositivist realist perspective, is formed in the "fusion" between personal experience and the social and theoretical experiences and knowledges with which this experience comes in contact and thus finds realization or voice. In this way, Mohanty argues, there is "an epistemic status of

cultural identity," i.e. a personal, social, and thoroughly experiential "truth" that animates the

core of group and community identities that are conceived within wider frameworks of social

relations.[7] Constructed as a response to postmodernist theories of identity pervasive amongst the

academic left in the 1990s, Mohanty's thoughts bears a great deal of resemblance to the ideas in

a brief, but remarkable essay written by Stuart Hall in 1996 entitled "Minimal Selves." Also

conceived as a reply to the seemingly endless fracturing of identities enacted by postmodernism,

Hall's piece is a meditation on the construction of identity in Great Britain during an era in

which he observes that the "centering of marginality" seems to have become "the representative

postmodern experience."[8] Like Mohanty, Hall also posits a moment of "fusion" between

personal experience and social-cultural-political theory as crucial to identity formation: "Identity

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[7] In a reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Mohanty offers a reading of the text that demonstrates how the quest for moral meaning and cultural identity for two of the book's protagonists, Sethe and Paul D, is entirely dependent upon a "revisionary historiography" of Middle Passage and African chattel slavery that fundamentally reveals "a new understanding…of the role of motherhood in slavery" (54-5). Only with such an understanding of "the historical achievement of motherhood" can one accurately grapple with the act of infanticide that lies at the heart of the text's narrative, in the way this history enables us to "come to terms with the historical community (Sethe) claims as her own, and reexamine the moral theory we bring with us (to our reading of the novel)." This is not to say that one should simply accept all forms of identity politics as justified, or that any particular versions (e.g. "progressive") should be privileged. Rather, as should be the case with all forms of scholarly inquiry, Mohanty suggests that we must "examine the details of what is being claimed" and determine if these claims are "good" depending on "the cogency of the background theories they draw on, which often necessarily have deep moral and evaluative content." Thus, as in the fields of the philosophy of science and general scientific inquiry from which Mohanty derives his analysis, a postpositivist realist persepective of identity, while certainly subject to change, asserts that an epistemic "truth" of a particular identity can generally arise out of a wide consensus of moral and theoretical inquiry.

[8] Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in *Black British Cultural Studies*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1996).

is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture."[9] Consequently, both theorists agree that some form of "truth" lies at the heart of various forms of identity—a truth that is "not forever, not totally universally true," but enables a person to claim that, "just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am,"[10] thus articulating the sense of closure necessary to form sociopolitical affiliations of race, gender, culture, etc. "Such claims and feelings," Mohanty concludes, "embody alternative and antihegemonic accounts of what is significant and in fact necessary for a more accurate understanding of the world we all share."[11]

As such, what is the core epistemic status of contemporary Muslim America, a "just now" point from which meaningful political engagement can proceed? Whereas Mohanty and Hall specifically address racial and ethnic identities, the "truth" of Muslim American subjectivities poses some added difficulties, due mainly to the dizzying racial, ethnic, class, and generational diversity of Muslim America, as well as the expansive range of Islamic belief and practice. Hailing from at least 68 countries, Muslim Americans are a multiracial, multiethnic, multigenerational, and resolutely transnational community, and reflect numerous moments of arrival and points of entry to the US. Diversity in the Muslim community also refers to various sectarian differences, e.g. Sunni, Shia, Ismaili, Ahmadi, etc., as well as the degree of religious practice each individual is engaged, e.g. praying five times a day, not praying at all, only praying on holidays, etc. Accounting for all of these differences, I suggest it is still possible to discern a

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," 63.

terrain of consistency across Muslim American identities and subjectivities, produced through

firstly, the racist and orientalist interpellations of Muslim communities following 9/11, and

secondly, the choices each Muslim engages in relation to their faith. In regards to the former,

9/11 fundamentally altered all aspects of Muslim American life, suddenly thrusting Islam and

till-then mostly invisible Muslim American communities into the national limelight. In the

decade since, Muslims in the US have struggled, to varying degrees of success, to express their

loyalty as American citizens while decrying the targeting and surveillance of their communities

and US military invasions and occupation of Muslim lands. While 9/11 powerfully reinforced

racialized and gendered archetypes of Islam as either brown-skinned Arab or South Asian male

terrorists, or brown-skinned women in *hijab*, the taint of "Islam" has also demonstrated an

amazing ability to cross racial boundaries, just as easily vilifying and criminalizing white

"American Taliban" John Walker Lindh,[12] as Black American Washington sniper suspect John

Allen Muhammad,[13] or Chinese American U.S. Army Muslim chaplain James Yee,[14] by simply

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[12] Lindh, a white convert to Islam from the Bay Area, became known as the "American Taliban" after he was captured as an enemy combatant during the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. He is currently serving 20 years in prison.

[13] Muhammad, along with accomplice Lee Boyd Malvo, carried out a series of sniper attacks in 2002, killing ten people. While there was no evidence to suggest Muhammad's actions were in any way related to terrorist ties or political ideology (a number of written diatribes by Malvo contained references to both Osama Bin Laden and the *Matrix* movies), many concluded that Muhammad and Malvo were Islamic Terrorists and that the sniper attacks were part of their efforts to wage *jihad*. Muhammad, who converted to Islam in 1987, is currently on death row in Maryland.

[14] Yee was the Muslim chaplain at the notorious Guantanamo Bay detention camp until September 10, 2003, when he was arrested on charges of sedition, aiding the enemy, spying, espionage, and failing to obey a general order. During his trial, he was kept in solitary confinement for almost three months and forced to undergo sensory deprivation treatments, which he documents in his 2005 autobiography *For*

associating them with the threat of "radical Islam." As a result, Muslim Americans of all racial

and ethnic backgrounds in the US have become painfully aware of their widespread

interpellation as terrorists and inassimilable Others and understand as part of their daily lives the

types of discrimination, prejudice, and misunderstanding directed at both their religion and

themselves.

In regards to the second point of commonality—the issue of faith—all Muslim

Americans must reckon with Islam's core beliefs, (e.g. the Oneness of God, the prophethood of

Mohmmad), which cut across sectarian differences; as Ahmed Akbar writes in this essay's

second epigraph, Islam implies a "defined code of behavior and traditions based on a holy book."

This is not to say, of course, as Islamophobes often assert, that Muslims are completely governed

by their adherence to Islam. To the contrary, what I am referring to is that each individual must

determine the extent to which they will practice, or not practice, the fundamental requirements of

the faith (praying, fasting, donating charity, pilgrimage to Mecca), to what degree they will heed

the moral, ethical, and physical parameters of Islam (e.g., no alcohol or pork, no dating or

premarital sex, modest dress, etc.), all decisions they must make in relations to the social,

cultural, and political pressures exerted by the secular-democratic principles and capitalist

cultures of contemporary American society. Thus, the "truth" of Muslim American religious

practices is not some sort of rote adherence to Islam, but the manner in which each individual

must constantly engage and make choices concerning their expressions and practices of faith in

ways that account for their multiple positionings as Muslims and Americans, and to what extent

God and Country: Faith and Patriotism Under Fire (New York: Public Affairs). All charges were later
dropped or reduced to much more minor offenses.

they will alter, adapt, or compromise Islam's fundamental tenets in order to express their national

subjectivities, which are irrevocably produced through categories of race, class, gender,

sexuality, etc. Upon the political charged landscapes of our current moment of crisis, this is an

incredibly exciting, unchartered, highly improvisational terrain of possibility. Thus, the

discriminatory effects of post-9/11 Islamophobia coupled with the desire to express Islamic

beliefs in the turbulent cultural and political climate of the contemporary US represent a

rudimentary foundation from which we might begin to understand the construction of

contemporary Muslim American identities.

"The Black-Immigrant Debate"

With such a core status in mind, I want to turn to a discussion of the social, economic,

political, and cultural differences between Black and immigrant Muslims. The "Black-immigrant

debate," as it is sometimes called, represents in my mind the clearest example of an issue that

would be more effectively addressed in the critical juncture between the disciplines of ethnic

studies, gender studies, and religious and Islamic studies. Such Black-immigrant divisions were

the focus of a lengthy article in the *New York Times* which ran in 2007, which described "a vast

gulf" between Black American Muslims and South Asian and Arab Muslim immigrants,

"marked by race and class, culture, and history."[15] Deep and longstanding, the origins of these

differences might be said to date back almost four hundred years, when Islam's presence was

established in the Americas with the arrival of West African Muslim slaves, who at one point

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[15] Andrea Elliott, "Between Black and Immigrant Muslims, an Uneasy Alliance," *New York Times*, March 11 2007.

made up almost a third of the nation's slave population.[16] While no firm links exist between that

history and the resurgence of Islam in Black communities in the post-Reconstruction North

through groups like the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the Ahmadiyya

Movement in Islam, Islam is certainly part and parcel of a Black American spiritual and cultural

consciousness. Indeed, until the 1970s, while Muslims from the Middle East, South Asia, and

other parts of the world were certainly present in the US, the vast majority of Muslims in the US

were Black, and "Islam" connoted a politicized stance of antiracist resistance and struggle.

However, in the post-1965 era, following the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act and unstable

political circumstances in South Asia and the Arab world, the numbers of South Asians and

Arabs living and working in the U.S. rose exponentially, a demographic shift that irrevocably

changed the composition of the Muslim American community.

As a result, the Muslim American community came to embody two distinct, and in many

cases, mutually opposed visions of Islam and the nation, one which viewed the faith as a means

to counter the dehumanizing effects of white supremacy and national disenfranchisement, as was

the case for Black American Muslims; and the other which saw Islam as a religious and cultural

inheritance, while viewing America as a land of opportunity and prosperity, as could be said of

the immigrant Muslim population. In the interaction between these two worldviews, questions of

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[16] For more information on this, see Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum American: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (New York: Routledge, 1997), Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Furthermore, in regards to immigrant Muslims, it would be a worthy undertaking to consider how Blackness was configured in Asian and Arab countries under colonial rule, and how this has effected immigrant Muslim's perspectives on Blackness.

legitimacy and *authenticity* in regards to practices of Islam and the nature of citizenship have

come to represent the central sources of tension between these groups, with immigrant Muslims,

in particular native speakers of Arabic, questioning, and at times outright dismissing, the

legitimacy of certain Black American practices of Islam which they consider *haraam*, or

forbidden. Thus, more relaxed attitudes towards gender mixing, the incorporation of music and

performance into spiritual practice, interaction with non-Muslims, and political assertions of

one's racial identity, all more prevalent in the Black American Muslim community, are often

labeled by immigrant Muslims as *bid'a,* or reprehensible innovations, the introduction of which

are seen as perverting and distorting an "authentic" practice of Islam.[17] Such a view of the

"illegitimacy" of Black American Muslims has led to various mainstream Muslim American

organizations and large mosques, largely run by immigrants due to matters of economic access,

to exclude Black Americans from their leadership. Further, accusations of *bid'a* have continually

been directed through a growing number of Islamic hip hop artists and musicians who advance

explicitly Islamic themes in their music. On the other hand, Black American Muslims view

immigrant Muslims as deeply ignorant of Islam's longstanding associations with the Black

American community—"unaware of the foundations upon which they are standing," as one

Black imam put it[18]—and unwilling to see that the cultural and civic legitimacy of Islam in the

U.S. rests in the hands of the Black American Muslim community, due to their unquestionable

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[17] Muslims believe that the Quran, which they view as the indisputable word of God, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, and thus all Muslims are enjoined to learn the language and eventually read the Quran in its original form. Thus, those who speak Arabic are often viewed as also the most advanced in their spiritual practice, though this is not often the case.

[18] From Elliott, "Between Black and Immigrant Muslims, an Uneasy Alliance."

claims to citizenship and an indigenous anti-racist discourse. In addition, due to the fact that many Black Americans are converts to Islam, they feel that they are actually far more authentic in their practice than those immigrants or children of immigrants who have simply inherited a Muslim identity through custom or birth.

Furthermore, differences between Black and immigrant Muslims have affected how gender dynamics are being negotiated and constructed in Muslim American communities. The question of gender in various Muslim American communities has also remained a constant focal point both in terms of external (mis-)representations of Islam and Muslims and divisive internal debates about authentic practices of Islam. While contemporary American orientalist discourse has produced a racialized trope of the Poor Muslim Woman that Muslim American women must continually contend with in relationships external to their communities, culturally-influenced conceptions of proper" gender roles and the roles women should play within political and religious institutions are issues that constitute internal tensions that many confront on a daily basis within their familial and religious communities. While further study on the topic of gender in Muslim American communities is greatly needed,[19] for my purposes here, I want to simply comment on the way Black-immigrant difference has animated new configurations of gender

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[19] The corpus of scholarship on this subject is continually expanding. For current examples, see Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur, ed., *Living Islam out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, "Striving for Muslim Women's Rights--before and Beyond Beijing: An African American Perspective," in *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in Northe America*, ed. Gisela Webb (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), Ula Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," *Race and Society* 1, no. 2 (1998), Karen Fraser Wyche, "African American Muslim Women: An Invisible Group," *Sex Roles* 51, no. 5/6 (2004).

politics and ethnoracial-religious/gendered identities which have arisen out of the differing social

and political contexts that immigrant and Black American women view and practice Islam. In the

most basic of terms, for Black American Muslim women, as within the larger Black community,

Islam has long been viewed as source of empowerment, with its emphases on modesty, marriage,

and a "clean" lifestyle (e.g. no alcohol, drugs, pork) seen as a means of reversing the devastating

effects on Black women and the Black family enacted through the legacies of slavery; as one

Black American Muslim character in Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* says

of her *hijab*, "Imagine being made to stand naked in front of a whole bunch of people…That's

how it was for black women back in slavery times. Up on the auction block. Covering up is a

strong thing."[20] For many immigrant Muslim women, however, in particular the younger

generation who might also be the second-generation children of immigrants, wearing *hijab*,

praying in separate spaces from men, and Islam's emphasis on seemingly essentialist notions of

women as mothers and wives might feel restrictive, especially in light of liberal American

cultural values and norms.[21]

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[20] Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (New York: Carol & Graf Publishers, 2006).

[21] Such manifestations of ethnoracial-religious and gendered difference came to a head during another key controversy in the Muslim American community: the female-led *jummah* prayers which took place in Manhattan on March 18, 2005. For the first time, at least in a public setting, a woman—Black American Islamic studies scholar Amina Wadud—led a mixed-gender Friday prayer service, an act that deliberately broke with Islamic tradition and which most Muslim jurists considered un-Islamic, and subsequently earned Wadud the ire of Muslims worldwide, many of whom viewed her as a heretic and in some cases, called for her death. However, while Wadud led the prayers, it was journalist Asra Nomani, an Indian American Muslim woman who had immigrated to the U.S. as a child, who was the prayer's central organizer and had urged Wadud's participation. Coincidentally timed to coincide with the release of Nomani's book, *Standing Alone at Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, the prayers were, according to Nomani, "a way to take back the identity of Islam from those who were trying

As stated earlier, the tensions and conflicts between Black and immigrant Muslims have been critical in determining trajectories of the Muslim American community in particular the way which they have sought political enfranchisement and social equity. For example, in recent years, the *NY Times* reported in 2007, "Black Muslims have begun advising immigrants on how to mount a civil rights campaign," while "foreign-born Muslims are giving African Americans roles of leadership in some of their mosques."[22] In addition, the discussion about what constitutes a legitimate practice of Islam in American amongst these various racial and ethnic communities has led to substantive internal discussion about the role of culture within a unified Muslim American community, specifically, whether it is *halal*, or permissible, for observant Muslims to engage in mainstream cultural practices such as entertainment production and performance (such

to pervert it." As with the topic of gender within the Muslim American community as a whole, the organization and media-representation of the female-led *jummah* services warrants much closer examination on its own terms, in large part for the manner in which it highlighted the issue of women's equity in American mosques, as well as forcing the global Islamic *ummah* to re-engage in sustained discussions around the topic of gender. However, in regards to the analysis here, I use the example of the *jummah* prayers to point out that while Wadud bore the brunt of the media scrutiny and criticisms of the immigrant Muslim community for leading the prayer services, despite being learned religious scholar who is fluent in Arabic, and long time community insider who has published a groundbreaking text on a female-centered reading of the Qur'an, Nomani was, for the large part, championed in the mainstream media as a feminist icon who was now attempting to "reform" Islam. While a number a overlapping circumstances contributed to the outcome of Wadud's demonization and Nomani's celebrity, I do think it is critical to point out the manner in which Nomani, a relative outsider to the Muslim American community, who did not speak Arabic, had no religious training whatsoever, and was largely unknown to the general public prior to the prayers, met with little to no resistance in positioning herself as a spokesperson for the community. Nomani's ability to so easily promote herself as central voice of Muslim American "reform" demonstrates the varying, and racially and ethnically-determined, levels at which authenticity and legitimacy have been conferred upon immigrant and Black American Muslims by the mainstream media and American public.
[22] Elliott, "Between Black and Immigrant Muslims, an Uneasy Alliance."

as the Islamic hip hop mentioned above) which would, in some way, require them to participate in what viewed by many in the community as a morally corrupt industry. Would developing "Muslim American-ness" as a form of consumer culture, some in the community wonder, lead Muslim Americans to view Islam as some form of secular cultural identity, as has debatably come to be the case with Jewish Americans?

Islam and the Blackamerican

In recent years, a number of essays and texts have documented or addressed the issue of Black-immigrant tensions in the American Muslim community, with most offering strong and cogent critiques of the prevalence of "immigrant hegemony."[23] However, perhaps the most prominent of these critiques, and a text that has become a rallying cry for many Black American Muslims and second- and third-generation Muslims of immigrant backgrounds is Black American Arabic and Islamic Studies scholar Sherman Abdul-Hakim Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*. The book, published in 2005, has not only made a decided impact in scholarly arenas, but is arguably reshaping the manner in which

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[23] See Abdul-Ghafur, ed., *Living Islam out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak,* Michelle D. Byng, "Mediating Discrimination: Resisting Oppression among African-American Muslim Women," *Social Problems* 45, no. 4 (1998), Jamillah Karim, "Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation: Young Muslims Inherit Global Muslims and African American Legacies," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (2005), Jamillah A. Karim, "To Be Black, Female, and Muslim: A Candid Conversation About Race in the American Ummah," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006), Karen Isaksen Leonard, "Introduction: Young American Muslim Identities," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (2005), Aminah Beverly McCloud, *Transnational Muslims in American Society* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2006), Amina Wadud, "American Muslim Identity: Race and Ethnicity in Progressive Islam," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: OneWorld, 2003), Wyche, "African American Muslim Women: An Invisible Group."

Black and immigrant Muslims, at least of the younger generation, are formulating relations with

one another as well as how they are constructing their practices of Islam as a collective American

ummah.

First and foremost, Jackson's text operates as a call-to-arms for Black American orthodox

Sunni Muslims to enact what he calls "The Third Resurrection," in which he extends a challenge

to "Blackamerican" Muslims[24] to develop "Blackamerican Muslim mastery and appropriation of

the Sunni super-tradition" of Islam.[25] By this, Jackson means that Black American Sunni

Muslims must acquire their own competence of the established scholarly and spiritual practices

of classical Sunni Islam through traditional Islamic methods such as engagement with the

Qur'an, *Sunna* (normative practices and supplemental commentary of the Prophet Muhammad),

and the Unanimous Consensus (*ijma'*) of religious jurists which constitute what is known as *usul*

al-fiqh—a "full-blown interpretive methodology" employed by Sunni Muslim scholars and

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[24] Jackson explains his use of the neologism at the close of the text's introduction, writing, "…the explicitly American context of American Islam is alos what prompted me to vex my reader with the neologism, "Blackamerica," a term I picked up from the late C. Eric Lincoln but which, to my knowledge, he never explained. My use of the term is based on the following considerations. On the one hand, to speak simply of 'black Americans" as the counterparts of "white Americans" is to strengthen the hand of those who wish to deny or hide white privilege. On the other hand, to speak of African Americans is to give short shrift to the almost half a millennium of New World history, implying that Blackamericans are African in the same way that Italian Americans or Greek Americans are Italian or Greek. I emphatically recognize, wholly embrace, and celebrate the African origins of Blackamericans. But in my view, the force of American history has essentially transformed these erstwhile Africans into a new people. This is especially so with regard to their religious orientation. Of course, I could have opted for the hyphenated convention "Black-American." But…the whole point of the hyphenated America is that the right side of the hyphen assumes the responsibility of protecting the cultural, religious, and other idiosyncrasies of the left side." (17)

[25] Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

jurists to determine Islamic law. Through mastery of these traditions, Jackson continues, "the

structural features of classical Islam will confer upon Blackamerican Muslims both the right and

the responsibility to develop their own body of concrete doctrine." In other words, Jackson urges

Blackamerican Muslims to shake off the putative stronghold of an immigrant Islam that asserts

Black American Muslim illegitimacy and inauthenticity by aggressively pursuing an engagement

with the classical foundations of Sunni Islamic theology and jurisprudence. At the same time

however, Jackson firmly views practices of Blackamerican Islam as fundamentally rooted in the

what he calls the cosmic "No" of Black Religion, which extends to Black American

engagements with Christianity and Judaism, and has historically operated as "a pragmatic, folk-

oriented, holy protest against anti-black racism."[26] Thus, the "Third Resurrection"—with the

period before the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975 constituting the "First

Resurrection" of Blackamerican Islam and the period immediately afterward in which

Blackamerican Muslims were under the divided leadership of Imam Warith Muhammad and

Louis Farrakhan as the "Second Resurrection"—enjoins Black American Muslims to embark on

a deep and meaningful engagement with the classical traditions of Sunni Islam, while remaining

firmly grounded in, and always mindful of, the racialized historical contexts out of which a

uniquely Blackamerican Islam has arisen.[27]

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[26] Ibid., 4.

[27] As already stated, Jackson's polemic has had strong effects beyond the bounds of scholarly discourse. For example, in the wake of the passing of Imam Warith Deen Muhammad—the son of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad who transitioned the organization from its black nationalist ideologies to orthodox Sunni Islam—in September 2008, Indian American Muslim comedian Azhar Usman, issued a widely-circulated essay on the internet entitled "An Apology," in which Usman apologized to his "Blackamerican brothers and sisters in Islam" for the "historical wrongdoing of so-called 'immigrant

For many Muslim Americans, in particular Black Americans, Jackson's text has struck a deeply personal chord which speaks directly to their experiences of marginalization within the larger Muslim American community. In particular, the book gives voice to the sense of betrayal many Black Americans have come to feel at the hands of immigrant Muslims, due to the ways they feel they allowed the latter to dictate the parameters of the religion in a way which inauthenticated the practices and histories of Black American Islam. For example, one of the most cogent points Jackson's text makes lies in its argument against the "false universal" of an "authentic" Islam, one which prioritizes allegiance to the *ummah* above all else, and deems national affiliations of race, ethnicity, and culture antithetical to the practice of a true Islam. This false universal advances:

> ontological realities that are equally esteemed and apprehended by everyone, save the stupid, the primitive, or the morally depraved. From this vantage point, only those who subscribe to specific concretions of these ostensibly universal categories are justified in laying any claim to them. In this capacity, and precisely because it is so imperceptible, the false universal turns out to function as a powerful tool of domination.[28]

In Jackson's analysis, immigrant Muslims are the main perpetrators of such universalistic fallacies.

Muslims'—wrongdoings that have been so hurtful, and insulting, and degrading, and disrespectful, and dismissive, and marginalizing, and often downright dehumanizing," and closed with a heartfelt plea that directly referenced Jackson's text: "It is hoped that the passing of Imam WDM will also mark the end of chapter in our collective American Muslim history, and perhaps now, in earnest, *we can all look together toward the Third Resurrection*" (italics added).

[28] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, 9.

Such observations give voice to the sentiments of many in the Black American Muslim community, and in many cases, comprise long-overdue observations about the tensions and conflicts which inform intra-racial and intra-ethnic discussions within the Muslim American community. However, Jackson's text relies on a number of essentialized notions of Black-immigrant difference that further contribute to, and ultimately reify, what I view as insurmountable divisions within the community. Thus, in what follows, I seek to supplement Jackson's prescriptives with a number of analytics and theories from the field of ethnic studies, particularly in regards to his text's undertheorization of the particular racialized histories of South Asian and Arab immigrants in the US, and the complex relationships between "Third World" post-colonial émigrés to the US and the category of whiteness. Principally, I contend a more thorough treatment of the racialized histories and racialization processes South Asian and Arab immigrants have undergone would render Jackson's arguments more powerful in his desire reinstate Blackamerican Islam as "a source of inner strength, a builder of human character, and a bridge to salvation."[29]

It is necessary to first underscore a number of the *Islam and the Blackamerican*'s limitations that ultimately inhibit its ability, to return to Mohanty's words from earlier on in this essay, to engender "a more accurate understanding of the world we all share." In particular, I propose that immigrant Muslims in the U.S. have a far more complex relationship to racial categories, and in particular, the trope of whiteness, than Jackson indicates, and briefly consider how a number of contemporary theories of race, class, and ethnicity might be employed as a means to further engage and contextualize some of the assertions in the text. By identifying the

[29] Ibid.

ways in which Jackson's analysis should be supplemented by various theories of comparative

racialziation, I seek to demonstrate that "the right social and political" theory for addressing the

Black-immigrant debate would fundamentally interweave the language of spiritual and religious

common cause with a firm grasp of the racialized histories of that have led Muslim Americans to

conceive of Black-immigrant relations terms as a "problem," as opposed to a unique occasion for

a deromanticized undertaking of interracial coalition or collaboration. The distinctiveness of the

situation is grounded in faith; the Qu'ran unequivocally enjoins Muslims to build common cause

through mutual respect and understanding in the well-known and oft-cited passage: "Behold, We

have created you all out of a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that

you may come to know one another."[30]

To begin, throughout *Islam and the Blackamerican*, Jackson makes quite clear that his

censure of Immigrant Islam does not translate into a blanket condemnation of immigrant

Muslims themselves, saying:

> I should add that Immigrant Islam is not synonymous with immigrant Muslims,
> especially those of the second and third generation, many of who are actually
> opposed to its hegemony. Thus, while a successful Third Resurrection will not
> necessarily attack the false pretensions of immigrant Islam in general, this does
> not mean that it must target immigrant Muslims. The Third Resurrection is aimed
> at ideas, not at people.[31]

Consequently, in addition to clarifying that he is denouncing the ideology of Immigrant

Islam as opposed to individual immigrant Muslims themselves, he also does acknowledge the

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[30] *The Message of the Qur'ān* (English Version), Trans. Muhammad Asad. Gilbrator: Dar-Al-Andalus, 1980, 49:12.

[31] Ibid., 13.

colonial contexts out of which many South Asian and Arab Muslim immigrants have formed

their conceptions of a "true" Islam, one shaped by the violence of the colonial encounter and

directly linked to the inferior status with which they were conferred by conquerors in their native

lands. Jackson is also mindful of the omnipresence and deeply-etched historical legacies of white

supremacy, and how these legacies have been instrumental in the ways Asian and Arab

immigrant Muslims position themselves, and are positioned by, national racial hierarchies,

writing "American whiteness has always reigned as the most prized public asset a citizen could

own…[immigrant and Blackamerican Muslims'] mutually conflicting relationship to American

whiteness has contributed much to Blackamerican-immigrant Muslim relations."[32]

Yet in regards to these "relationships to American whiteness," Jackson does little to

problematize or further examine a discursive equivalence the text advances throughout:

immigrant Muslims covet whiteness, Blackamericans stand opposed to it. Further he ascertains

that immigrant Muslims have actually been conferred with the legal advantages of white

citizenship in the post-civil rights era, stating early on in a section explaining the "American

context" of the Black-immigrant question:

> By 1965, U.S. immigration law had rendered Muslim immigrants from the Middle
> East and Asia legally white. On this development, coming to America represented
> not simply a chance for a better material life but a chance to participate in
> whiteness—real whiteness, like that of the colonial masters, as opposed to the
> mere "light-skinnedness" the term connoted in the Muslim world. By this time,
> however, American whiteness had become a sanitized and undifferentiated

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[32] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, 15.

category….But Muslim immigrants all understood (or soon learned to understand) the term "nigger."

It was after 9/11, the text contends, that immigrant Muslims realized they could not longer partake in the advantages of their "legal whiteness," thus forcing them to finally confront the issue of race. It now remains to be seen, Jackson adds, if these newly-racialized subjects will, "join Blackamericans in a Third Resurrection that seeks to confront the problem of white supremacy in America without degenerating into reverse racism and without hiding behind the empty platitudes of 'Islamic' utopianism."[33]

A number of issues in Jackson's statements require attention. First of all, due to a lack of additional context in relation to its claim that "By 1965, immigration law had rendered Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and Asia legally white," I can only surmise that Jackson must be referring to the manner in which those immigrant Arabs, mostly from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan and largely Christian, who began immigrating to the U.S. at the turn of twentieth century were legally classified as "white" by the U.S. Census Bureau. As many Arab American scholars and commentators have noted however, this classification did not function to confer the legal advantages of whiteness upon Arab American immigrants; on the contrary, as scholars of Arab American racialization have argued, the "not-quite-white" status of Arab Americans actually functioned to render them the "most invisible of the invisibles," i.e. a minority without minority status.[34] Thus, in many cases, Arab Americans themselves have actually led the push for their

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[33] Ibid., 16.

[34] See Suad Joseph, "Against the Grain of the Nation--the Arab," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity: Locations, Coaltions, and Cultural Negotiations," in *Arabs in America:*

communities to acquire "minority" status in the eyes of the state, so they might receive the types

of state services and resources allotted for communities of color. Additionally, determination of

the racial status, and thus, the citizenship claims of those of South Asian descent have been

equally tortuous. An examination of the history of racial classification on the U.S. Census

between 1890-1990 reveals that immigrants from the South Asian subcontinent were named

"Hindus" in the 1930 and 1940 censuses, "Whites" on the 1950 census, "Other" in 1960 and

1970, "Asian Indian" in 1980, and "Asian and Pacific Islander" in 1990. Yen Le Espiritu

documents the many transformations of census classification for South Asian Americans in her

essay, "Census Classification: The Politics of Ethnic Enumeration," explaining that in the 1970s

census, "Asian Indians" were first counted as "Other," and then reclassified as "Whites" to return

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Building a New Future, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), Nadine Naber, "Muslim First, Arab Second: A Strategic Politics of Race and Gender," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (2005), Steven Salaita, "Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia: 9/11, Anti-Arab Racism, and the Mythos of National Pride," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 2 (2006), Helen Hatab Samhan, "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab-American Experience," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999). Joseph cites the citizenship case of Syrian immigrant George Dow in 1914 to highlight the complexities of Arab American claims to the nation; citing the Naturalization Act of 1790, the court first denied Dow's appeal of citizenship due to the fact that he was a "Syrian of Asiatic birth. However, the decision was later reversed on appeal, noting "The appellant, George Dow, a Syrian, was denied naturalization on the sole ground that a Syrian of Asiatic birth is not a free white person within the meaning of the naturalization statute. After the first decision of the matter a rehearing was granted at the instance of other Syrians interested. In his two opinions the District Judge reached the conclusion, which he supported with remarkable force and learning, that the 'free white persons' made eligible to naturalization by the statute included aliens of European nativity or descent, and not others." However, the George Dow appeal was eventually granted "on the basis of the argument that Syrians were of mixed Syrian, Arabian, and even Jewish blood, belonging to the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race and were to be considered white persons."

them to the 1950 definition. However, in 1974, the Indian American community began lobbying

for South Asians to be characterized as "Asian American" so that they could "claim economic

benefits as minorities."[35] Furthermore, while the 1965 Hart-Cellar immigration law under the

auspices of which so many immigrants from the professional classes of the regions of South Asia

and the Middle East came to the U.S. abolished national-origins quotas that had been in place

since the Immigration Act of 1924, nothing in its statutes rendered these newcomers "white" in

any legal sense whatsoever.

Thus, Jackson's description of the "legal whiteness " of Muslim immigrants from Asia

and the Middle East obfuscates the far more complicated legal status of the groups in question.

While it is certainly true that indoctrination into discourses of antiblackness is, as many have

argued, a seemingly fundamental prerequisite of American ideological and cultural citizenship,

and a viewpoint that many of the immigrant Muslims Jackson discusses might have bought into

wholesale, his assertion that these immigrant Muslims arrived in the U.S. with the expectation of

adopting "real whiteness, like that of the colonial masters" does not correspond with the material

realities of immigration policy concerning Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants entering the

U.S. in the post-1965 era. Indeed, while immigrant Muslims might have, and continue to, desire

the advantages of "whiteness as property," as Cheryl Harris has called it, within the domestic

context of the U.S., at the expense of Black American Muslims with whom they are to comprise

an American *ummah*, to generalize their constituencies as unproblematic beneficiaries of

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[35] Cited in Lavina Dhingra Shankar, "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American," in *A Part, yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, ed. Lavina Shankar and Rajini Srikanth (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1998).

whiteness ignores the vast corpus of scholarship exploring the complexities of theorizing and

historicizing the racialization of Asians and Arabs in the U.S., as well as work in whiteness

studies that meticulously lays bare the "set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that

accompany the status of being white…[as] affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law"[36]—a

status Asian and Arab Muslims immigrants, in spite of their putative privilege in relation to

Black Americans, have never attained.

Another key assertion that Jackson makes about the epistemological status of Immigrant

Islam is the manner in which its ideology is steeped in the vision and sentiments of what Jackson

calls "Post-Colonial Religion." "Like Black Religion," Jackson writes, "Post-Colonial Religion

is not revealed but a product of history," a creation that arose out of the desire of colonized

peoples to "reverse the sociocultural and psychological influences of the West."[37] Jackson writes

that South Asian and Arab immigrants of higher classes attempted to enact this reversal in the

U.S. context by asserting that:

> (1) *as Easterners* their understanding of Islam was superior because it was less
> contaminated (and ideally uncontaminated) by the germ of Western civilization;
> and (2) the interpretive perspectives and presuppositions engendered by the
> history of the Muslim world were more legitimate than those generated by the
> history of Blackamericans. In other words, the history of the modern Muslim
> world was assumed to be more important, to be more Islamically probative, and to
> have a greater claim to be the proper object of Muslim religious thought and
> effort.[38]

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[36] Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993).

[37] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, 77.

[38] Ibid., 78.

In this way, upper-class immigrant Muslims, espousing the Post-Colonial Religion of a culturally-based ideology of Immigrant Islam attempted to eschew their colonial pasts by delegitimizing the non-"Eastern" practices of Islam in Blackamerican communities. Jackson points to the class particularities of immigrant Muslim American communities, who specifically, unlike the immigrant Muslim populations in parts of Europe and Australia, are comprised by a professional class of wealthy, educated elites.

Much like the native bourgeoisie in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, the immigrant Muslims described in Jackson's text seem to seek "to transfer into native hands (i.e. those of immigrant Muslim) those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period."[39] Thus, like Fanon, Jackson delves into the psychological consciousness of immigrant Muslims, asserting that those in this group:

> …labor under a relentless urge to identify with the conqueror rather than with the conquered. He is unable to see any positive meaning or value in a consciousness of the oppressed. Rather to his mind, such a move could only endorse the superiority of the oppressor and his right to oppress. Thus his greatest ambition remains not in toppling or even challenging white supremacy but in joining or replacing it. For only then can he quit the company of the dominated and join—or rejoin—the ranks of the dominant.[40]

The passage above comes at a moment in the text when Jackson is lamenting the inability of immigrant Muslims to understand the dangers of subscribing to white supremacist ideologies, and that it is this failure on their parts that prevents immigrant and Black American Muslims

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[39] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 152.

[40] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, 95.

from coming together to constitute "the corrective conscience of the West," that might ultimately

buck the "false universals of white supremacy."[41] However, in pathologizing the behavior of

immigrant Muslims in such a fashion, Jackson inadvertently replicates the very type of

homogenizing orientalist discourse his text seeks to reverse in regards to Islam. This

pathologization takes place, in part, through the text's under-acknowledgment of the class

diversity of immigrant Muslim communities. As with every immigrant group, there is a wide-

range of income and educational disparities amongst the immigrant Muslim American

population; a 2007 Pew Research study found that immigrant Muslims indeed seem happier with

their finances than native-born Muslims (47% of immigrants said their finances were

"excellent/good" compared to 37% among native-born), though there was a wide disparity

between Muslims of Pakistani and Arab descent, with 68% of Pakistani Muslims rating their

situation as "excellent or good," compared to only 42% of Arabs. In recent years, influxes of

immigrant Muslims have arrived from a myriad of locales such as Indonesia, Somalia, and Fiji,

as well as a steady number of refugees from the war-torn nations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus,

one wonders how to register the cultural and ideological heterogeneity of these immigrant

Muslims in the homogenizing discourse of Jackson's portrayals. Furthermore, despite the text's

acknowledgment that the hegemonic practices of Immigrant Islam are directly linked to the

colonial violence that has produced the desire among formerly colonized people to renounce

Western influences in their faith practices, one also wonders how the transnational dimensions of

this ideological renunciation accrue meaning upon the shifting racial terrains of post-9/11 U.S.

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[41] Ibid.

To put it another way, how have immigrant Muslim Americans re-narrated their own positions as both post-colonial subjects and now racialized subjects in post-9/11 America?

"Race Praxis": Morphing Race into Racialized Religion

To work towards a response to this query, I want to close my discussion of Jackson's text by considering the value of contextualizing the proposals contained in *Islam and the Blackamerican*, as well as the whole of the Black-immigrant debate itself, through the lens of a number of theories of comparative racialization addressing Black-Asian relations within the U.S. In particular, I want to suggest that Claire Jean Kim's notion of "racial triangulation" and Susan Koshy's theorization of Asian American agency as formed through both its complicity and resistance to whiteness provide a means for us to view Black-immigrant relations within the Muslim American community as clearly influenced by historically-situated systems of racial meanings that have long prompted antagonistic relationships between non-white, and in this case, Black, Asian, and Arab communities.

I view Kim's and Koshy's works as scholarly endeavors which arose out of their authors' desire to formulate theoretical bases for what critical race scholar Eric Yamamoto calls "race praxis"—the work of "infusing antiracism practice with aspects of critical inquiry and pragmatism and then recasting theory in light of practical experience."[42] Both composed in the decade following the 1992 urban uprisings in Los Angeles, these inquiries reflect the level of frustration felt by many throughout the 1990s as the national debate on race continually reverted

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[42] Eric K. Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice: Conflict and Reconciliation in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 129.

to an obsolete paradigm of Black-White race relations which was fundamentally unable to account for the diverse realities of a multicultural nation. Tensions between Black and Asian communities in various urban centers across the nation constituted a prime example of conflict between non-white minority communities, conflicts necessitating theoretical paradigms which could account for the "intermediary" racial status of Asian Americans,[43] while also, as Koshy writes, "foreground the need for developing conceptions of agency that account for complicity *and* resistance" in regards to Asian American communities.[44]

For political scientist Kim, this meant constructing a dynamic approach to Asian American racialization that demonstrated how Asian Americans had historically endured both "civic ostracism" and "relative valorization" in terms of their involvement with the American polity. Advancing the notion of a "field of racial positions" in which "Asian Americans specifically have been 'racially triangulated' vis-à-vis Whites and Blacks" over the course of the last century and a half, Kim's findings tracked how Asian immigrants since the 1850s had been simultaneously or alternately racialized through White valorization processes that posited the superiority of Asians over Blacks as a means to ultimately subordinate both groups, or through

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[43] See Jeff Chang, "Sitting on the Fence: Asian American Cultural Politics in a Black Nationalist Moment" (paper presented at the Public Displays of Asian-ness, New York University, 1998), Pawan H. Dhingra, "Being American between Black and White: Second-Generation Asian American Professionals' Racial Identities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003), Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Elaine Kim, "'at Least You're Not Black': Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations," *Social Justice* 25, no. 3 (1998), George Yancey, *Who Is White: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide* (Boulder, CO: L Rienner, 2003).

[44] Susan Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness," *boundary 2* 28, no. 1 (2001): 155.

processes of civic ostracism that rendered Asians "immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites on cultural an/or racial grounds."[45] As Colleen Lye has observed, Kim's theory has become perhaps "the most justifiably influential example of a comparative thesis of Asian American racialization to date,"[46] and advances a number of claims that would surely be useful in approaching the topic of Black-immigrant relations in the Muslim American community. In particular, Kim's theory is helpful in the discussion at hand for the manner in which it forces us to see how Asian Americans—or as the case might be, immigrant Muslims in the U.S.—as partly deriving their identities in a dynamic field of racial positions in which they can, either all at once or in turn, be enfolded within or placed beyond the pale of normative citizenship. An understanding of this fluctuating racial status is critical to achieving a more accurate conception of an immigrant Muslim American community that, premised upon the particular sociopolitical discursive contours of the imagined nation at a given historical moment, will always be subject to racialized civic ostracism—a fact that preceded 9/11 but, of course, became stunningly clear after that day.

A similar set of concerns animates Koshy's 2001 essay, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness," in which the literary and cultural studies scholar considers how "Asian American produced, and were in turn produced by, whiteness frameworks of the U.S. legal system," in many cases, at the expense of the Black Americans.[47] Looking at early Asian American claims to citizenship, the case of Chinese living

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[45] Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999).

[46] Colleen Lye, "The Afro-Asian Analogy," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008).

[47] Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness."

in the Mississippi Delta in the early 20th century, and the push amongst the South Asian American community for minority status during the 1970s, Koshy demonstrates how Asian American "agency" must be theorized in a complex matrix of meaning which "can register the complicity of various Asian American groups in associating themselves with the forms and claims of whiteness, while stressing that these affiliations were produced by a dominant group with the power to frame life conditions and chances in terms of racial choices."[48] However, while this might seem analogous to Kim's theorization of relative valorization/civic ostracism within a field of racial positions, Koshy problematizes Kim's assertions that Asian American have merely desired to be "considered White (and to be granted the myriad privileges bundled with Whiteness)."[49] Instead, Koshy argues that while whiteness certainly continues to be "a dynamic constitutive category of national belonging," white privilege itself "has been under attack, forcing a renegotiation of its forms in order to buttress its hegemony."[50] In other words, the assault on white privilege by the "multiculturalists" during the culture wars of the 1980s and 90s led to a shift in how white privilege might be maintained. In this reconfigured paradigm, the language of race became subsumed by that of ethnicity—e.g. "morphing race into ethnicity"—a discursive reconfiguration in which the language of ethnic, as opposed to racial, group identification formed in a transnational context worked to "obscure the operations of race and class."[51]

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[48] Ibid.: 156.

[49] Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," 112.

[50] Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness."

[51] Ibid.

Koshy's essay enacts a successful *de*-reification of whiteness as the unquestioned object of desire for Asian immigrants that I want to pose as a critical intervention to Jackson's constant equivalences between immigrant Muslims and their putative aspirations for whiteness. Without wavering from its indictment of white supremacy nor excusing Asian Americans for their complicity in practices of anti-blackness, Koshy presents a dialectical analysis of the role of Asian Americans that forces us to confront a "transformed field of political struggles in the post-civil rights era"—a field that is conspicuously absent throughout *Islam and the Blackamerican*, as well as in the larger public conversation around Black-immigrant relations that has arisen in recent years in response to the controversies over *halal* and *haram* cultural practices, Muslim-owned liquor stores, the female-led jummah prayers, etc. To view immigrant Muslims as "nouveau whites…ardently promoting and defending the false universals of white supremacy" fails to account for the reconfigured terrains of the post-civil rights era,[52] upon which white privilege operates not as the *object* of desire, but as mediating force that encourages ethnic particularism among immigrant groups towards the ultimate ends of maintaining racial hegemony. As Koshy explains:

> …while many middle-class immigrants may disidentify with whiteness as culture and adopt an ethnic particularist position, they might simultaneously identify with whiteness as power through their class aspirations. However, whereas assimilationism has frequently been lambasted for its obvious identification with whiteness, ethnic particularism often escapes scrutiny, since it displaces identification with whiteness from the level of culture to the level of power. Thus what has now emerged is a seemingly more congenial dispensation that allows for

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[52] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*, 81.

cultural difference even as it facilitates *political affiliations* between whites and nonwhites on certain critical issues…(author's italics)[53]

Indeed, the majority of immigrant Muslims in the contemporary era are not interested in "passing" as whites nor assimilating wholesale into Western American cultural norms; it is precisely their desire to maintain close ties with their particular ethno-religious community (not whites), and their belief in the legitimacy of their own cultural-religious norms (not those of whites) that has led to those communities to, in many cases so callously, shun Black American participation in mosques and other religious endeavors. Thus, it is not *assimilationism*, but *ethnic particularism* that should be the object of Jackson's critique in regards to Immigrant Islam, a discursive shift that would then require a more precise historical contextualization of the "Black-immigrant" debate that accounts for the material realities of class and positions the discussion in relation to considerations of how whiteness and white privilege have also evolved in the decade following the culture wars, and the shifting patterns of transnational migration which in many cases have engendered new diasporic identities that supersede the nation.[54] Focusing on ethnic particularism would not absolve immigrant Muslim communities from complicity from whiteness. Rather, it would instigate far more effective discussions in terms of building "common cause" amongst the larger Muslim American community. Such discussions might, for example, replace statements charging immigrant Muslims of imitating "colonial masters" with conversations highlighting how practices of ethnic and racial differentiation inadvertently

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[53] Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness," 186.

[54] See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

buttress the racial power structures that have so demonized Islam and Muslims in the contemporary age, leaving the entirety of the Muslim American community—and particularly immigrant communities—more vulnerable to civic ostracism and racist attacks.

Al-Rahman Al-Rahim: "Restorative Justice"

In order to instigate conversations such as the one named above, it will also be critical that Black American Muslims continue to air their grievances against the insensitive, and oftentimes racist behaviors of immigrant Muslims with whom they share the American *ummah* in order to instigate a process of what "restorative justice," defined by critical race studies scholar Eric Yamamoto as:

> the kind of recognition and redress of deep grievances that sparks a joint transformation in consciousness, diminishes enmities, and forges new relational bonds. Restorative justice. Because interracial justice is about reestablishing relationships, about reconstituting a type of community, it requires something special from racial group members—their commitment both to act in their group's self-interest and to transcend it.[55]

The grievances of Black American Muslims are indeed deep, and for many the "hegemony" of Immigrant Islam has severely tested their ability to draw upon Islam as a source of strength and safety from the daily ravages of antiblack racism. Thus, the responsibility of acknowledging and respecting these grievances appears to lie squarely on the shoulders of the immigrant Muslim community. Yet, as Yamamoto points out, the tenor of this discussion must accurately reflect the sociopolitical landscape upon which it takes place in order to reestablish

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[55] Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice: Conflict and Reconciliation in Post-Civil Rights America*, 11-12.

and reconstruct the community in a transformative fashion which "forges new relational bonds."

For Black American Muslims, this entails seeing immigrant Muslims as part of racialized

communities whose identity formation has also been profoundly shaped by the state governing

practices of race and citizenship, who are not merely "proxy whites," but who themselves engage

in complex and contradictory relationships with whiteness. In addition, with such a process of

restorative justice in place, Black and immigrant Muslim communities might then move on to

think through how their shared experiences as racialized religious minority in the US can be

more fully acknowledged in the continuing discursive contexts of the War on Terror and the

rampant Islamophobia of our contemporary moment. In all of these processes, I argue the

incorporation of comparative racialization theory and historical discourses of racial formation are

vital to the conversations taking place both within and without Muslim American communities,

so that those in the community and the nation the might more fully engage the "narratives of

history, of a culture" that give voice to the once-"unspeakable" stories of Muslims in America.

It is my hope that discussions such of these might constitute the beginnings of a

conversation in the Muslim American community that focuses not primarily on difference, but

the type of praxis Yamamoto gestures towards above. The first step towards praxis, I suggest,

lies in the acknowledgement—to return to the ideas of Mohanty and Hall discussed earlier—of

both Black and immigrant Muslims of how their "just now" status as Muslim American

communities is marked by a profound sense of post-9/11 anxiety coupled with an equally

profound desire to express and practice one's religious and spiritual identities in a way that does

not stifle or silence the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities that so acutely inform their practices

of Islam. In understanding this "common cause," Muslim Americans of varying races and

ethnicities can then work towards "their commitment both to act in their group's self-interest and to transcend it"—a process which must be undertaken with patience, compassion, and a deep respect that does not reduce either party to essentialized or stereotypical archetypes, e.g. the "Black Muslim" or "immigrant hegemony."

In closing, it bears mentioning that the New York City Council's resolution to institute Eid Prayers in the city's public schools was ultimately rejected by conservative mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who had the final say to designate the days off. Thus, no clear-cut "victory" emerged out of the "common cause" of the racially and ethnically-diverse coalition of Muslim Americans who came together to lobby for the addition of Muslim holy days to the school calendar. Nevertheless, the coalition did come together, though it remains to be seen whether they will remain unified or return to being, to return to the words of the initial article "hamstrung by schisms of competing groups." The former outcome is, of course, preferable. In looking towards this end, I want to emphasize how important it is once more that the development of a Muslim American community presents a unique situation for the consideration of interracial and interethnic conflict and resolution. This is due not only to this community's shared awareness of a responsibility towards the larger *ummah*, but also how concepts of forgiveness and mercy comprise central tenets of the faith. In the clearest example of this, one need only note that the most oft-repeated of the 99 Divine Names of Allah in the Qur'an are that of "Al-Rahman and Al-Rahim"—The Most Merciful and Compassionate.[56] Muslims are enjoined to emulate the attributes of God and the Prophet Muhammad in their everyday lives as a means of striving

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[56] The 99 Names of Allah indicate the attributes through which Muslims regard God. There is a *hadith* (saying of the Prophet Muhammad) that asserts there are no more and no less than 99 names.

towards the divine, and are reminded throughout the Qur'an and the *hadith* to show mercy and

compassion. Indeed, the notion of "restorative justice" is continually reiterated throughout

Islam's holy book, as in this passage from the forty-second *sūrah* of the Qu'ran, *Ash-Shūrā*, a

chapter which places a particular emphasis on the notion of unity: "If one is patient in adversity

and forgives—this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!"[57]

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[57] *The Message of the Qu'rān*, 42:43.