

# Blackamerican Muslim Scholars and Leaders in New York City: Sidelining American Islamophobia and Misrepresentations

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## Abstract

Recent work has drawn attention to the state-led and media-driven discourse of “good” and “bad” Muslims. It is a flexible discourse, with benchmarks and shifting appraisals, that aims to mold American Muslims into “good” secular Muslims. Drawing on old Orientalist representations, this American Islamophobic framework strives to produce “good” Blackamerican Muslims through rendering them as invisible, voiceless, or under the control of allies of US secular power. Three ethnographic vignettes developed here—a masjid fundraiser, the work of two chaplains, and a political collective—demonstrate that Blackamerican Muslims scholars and leaders are not only disrupting this discursive project, but also undermining negative portrayals of Muslims and Islam more broadly. In addition, through their practice and discourse, these Blackamerican Muslim figures are formulating an emergent American Muslim religious identity.

## Introduction

Several scholars of Islam have pointed out the danger of the intensified post-9/11 project of making Muslim Americans into “good” secular Muslims

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beholden to the cultural and political framework of the sovereign rulers of the United States. Mahmood Mamdani noted that the categories of “good” and “bad” Muslims are *political* identities imposed by dominant secular powers: “There are no readily available ‘good’ Muslims split off from ‘bad’ Muslims, which would allow for the embrace of the former and the casting off of the latter, just as there are no ‘good’ Christians or Jews split off from ‘bad’ ones.”<sup>1</sup> Although there is no neat way of distinguishing these categories that corresponds with social reality, Zareena Grewal reminds us that Muslim Americans have been made to endure government and mainstream media scrutiny and interrogation of their willingness to disavow and combat terrorism. Powerful examiners pressure Muslims and identify those who shoulder responsibility for the violent acts of a few as “good” Muslims. In this post-9/11 context, some Muslim American leaders began to express discourse entailing a cultural model, or what Grewal called a “moral geography,” of an ‘American Medina’ as ‘home’ underscored with the notion of American exceptionalism projecting Muslim Americans as the exceptional and exemplary community of Muslims.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of this cultural model may be taken as an early phase in the process of making “good” secular Muslims. Sherman Jackson and Muna Ali caution us about the pitfalls of secular power projects of producing a “domesticated” Islam to showcase to the world.<sup>3</sup> In their respective works, each alludes to the risk of the Muslim American community being made into an object of empire only capable of applauding secular power.

This state-led project of producing “good” secular Muslims strives to handle Blackamerican<sup>4</sup> Muslims by rendering them invisible and voiceless or casting them as amenable role-players under the influence of Christians or assimilating “immigrant” Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Blackamerican imams in New York City informed me that news reporters habitually avoid collecting their statements in favor of immigrant Muslim leaders when events occur involving the broader Muslim community. In addition, following the white supremacist massacre of Muslims in mosques in New Zealand on March 15, 2019, I attended a public meeting in a masjid in Queens, NY, in which New York police officials came to speak to Muslim leaders about security matters. No representatives from the council of Blackamerican imams were consulted. However, if their independent and intractable presence is felt, state-led forces and agents attempt to castigate Blackamerican Muslims by labeling them racists, hatemongers, angry, unassimilable, criminal elements, and radical terrorists or violent extremist sympathizers. For instance, Imam Siraj Wahhaj, the charismatic leader of Masjid At-Taqwa in

Brooklyn, NY, has repeatedly been labeled in the media as an “unindicted co-conspirator” with “links” to the 1993 World Trade Center bombings.<sup>6</sup> After such labels are circulated in mainstream media, there is always the possibility that the state may take more aggressive action to eliminate the public presence of Blackamerican Muslim figures tagged in this manner.<sup>7</sup> The state and its agents have routinely used violent tactics to “neutralize” Blackamerican Muslim and non-Muslim activists, such as Elijah Muhammad, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X), Black Panther Party members, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who were bluntly critical of the US government and its unjust policies.

However, US secular power prefers using discursive techniques of management and control. Blackamerican Muslims are instructed to embrace dominant Whiteamerican cultural values and forms of American nationalism, while also being marginalized in constructions of American society and the Muslim American community. Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic<sup>8</sup> representations of Muslim Americans tend to emphasize Middle Easterners, North Africans, and South Asians as the ‘default’ Muslims, while Blackamerican Muslims are left out of the picture or presented in the margins as inauthentic, nominal converts. The attempt to eliminate enslaved African Muslims in the Americas through forced conversion and White Christian nationalism has a long history.<sup>9</sup> While foreign Muslim immigrants were legally banned from naturalized US citizenship from 1790 to 1944, enslaved African Muslims and their emancipated Blackamerican Muslim descendants toiled and struggled under inhumane conditions that portrayed their religiosity and Americanness as non-existent.<sup>10</sup> Samory Rashid’s research uncovered evidence of significant numbers of Blacks with Muslim backgrounds in colonial Florida and suggested that they may have continuously practiced Islam and transmitted Islamic institutions to the north during a series of twentieth-century migrations.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the dominant paradigm narrativizing Islam in America, the “waves of immigration” theory, continues to assume that Islam among Blacks died out and that successive waves of immigration in the late nineteenth and twentieth century brought Islam to the American shores anew.<sup>12</sup> This academic paradigm reproduces Blackamerican Muslim invisibility and marginality as fashioned in the hegemonic state-led project.

Immigrant Muslim-led *umma* institutions, at times, also reproduce the erasure, silencing, and disciplining of Blackamerican Muslims. As Grewal points out, the post-1965 influx of Sunni immigrant Muslims from South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa initiated a large-scale demographic

shift as well as a modification in dominant cultural models.<sup>13</sup> Immigrant Muslim professionals steered a course away from the model of Black Religion, which motivated struggles against white supremacy, social injustice, and anti-Black racism, and toward the model of the Muslim third world as diasporic homeland, embraced as the *umma*'s moral and political core. Educated Muslim immigrants, many of them influenced by overseas Islamic revival movements, deemed the Nation of Islam, a long-term champion of Black politico-religious struggle, to be deviant and un-Islamic. In addition, they reproached Blackamerican and Latinx Sunni Muslims for evoking their embattled minority racial identities, behavior these professionals-*cum*-religious authorities considered to be contrary to the notion of a color-blind *umma*.<sup>14</sup> For example, Imam Yusuf, currently a local Blackamerican Muslim leader, told me that when he used to work in a prominent immigrant-led national organization a few decades ago, he was scolded for criticizing racism in American society and told that anti-Black racism is a worldwide norm. He was warned to never bring up race again in this institution.<sup>15</sup> In addition, this erasure is often enacted through the proscription of Blackamerican modes of merging cultural traditions with Islam while imposing immigrant ethnic modes. For instance, during Ramadan 2019, ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) leaders told Blackamerican Muslim leaders that drumming at a fast-opening event in a public park in Queens, NY, would not be allowed because it was inappropriate. However, each year ICNA enacts South Asian customs, including the distribution of sweets, in their central masjid in Jamaica, New York on the night that recitation of the entire Qur'an is completed during *tarawih* prayers in the month of Ramadan.

It is important to remember that the discourse of "good" and "bad" Muslims is directed at all Muslims regardless of ethnic or racial background. Moreover, it presents a fluid binary that at times depicts Blackamerican chaplains as laudable Muslims and Middle Easterners as threatening immigrants. Other times, assimilating Pakistani Muslims are depicted as praiseworthy and native-born Latinx Muslims or immigrant Somali Muslims as suspected "radicalized lone wolves."<sup>16</sup> This discourse, with shifting valences attached to various ethnic and racialized groups within the American Muslim community, aims to mold and discipline American Muslims writ large into becoming "good" secular Muslims. In addition, a variety of alternative litmus tests are applied. One persistent test, taken from old Orientalist representations of Islam as misogynistic, is whether Muslim Americans embrace dominant Western-style ideas about gender equality. A more recent

yardstick is whether Muslim Americans support the civil rights of LGBTQ people and/or accept the validity of their identities and sexual practices.

This article is based primarily on my ethnographic research conducted with Blackamerican Muslims during 2018. I engaged in participant observation in masjids (mosques), political collective meetings, and at fundraisers in banquet halls. I also interviewed and held discussions with several Blackamerican Muslim leaders. This paper focuses on three vignettes and related experiences: a masjid fundraiser, interviews with two Blackamerican Muslim chaplains, and interviews with two founders of a local political collective. Although these Blackamerican Muslim figures are not eliminating incorrect ideas and biases from circulating in the broader society, they are challenging and refuting them in their communities of practice and social networks of interaction. I argue that Blackamerican Muslim scholars and leaders in New York City are dismissing and putting aside Islamophobic notions and misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam, while also calling the entire Muslim community to focus on refining its character and engaging in political struggle for social justice.

### **Blackamerican Muslim Scholars: Custodians of the Dīn**

On January 1, 2018, I attended a fundraiser for Masjid Ta Ha at a banquet hall in Jamaica, Queens, New York. There were around fifty people in attendance, a lower number than the organizers hoped for. Most attendees were Blackamerican Muslims, but there were also a few small groups of Guyanese, Pakistani, and Arab American Muslims present. Masjid Ta Ha is a small mosque, sorely in need of repairs and renovations, located in a lower class neighborhood in Long Island. There was a long table in the back of the banquet hall with an exhibit consisting of several poster boards with newspaper clippings documenting this masjid's social activism, especially its fight in the 1980s to eliminate drugs from the neighborhood in which Blackamerican Muslims patrolled the residential projects and streets. This effort was spearheaded by its captivating leader, Imam Isa Abdul Kareem, a former member of the Dar ul-Islam movement, well-known for donning his stylistic turban. Dar ul-Islam was a Blackamerican Sunni Muslim movement that in 1962 split away from the immigrant-led Islamic Mission and its State Street mosque in Brooklyn.<sup>17</sup> Members of this movement, feeling that the Islamic Mission's leadership lacked any intention of challenging the racist and segregationist norms in American society, established its own prayer hall and later a masjid and adopted a version of black nationalist philosophies popularized by Malcolm X. Although the leader of

Dar ul-Islam, Imam Yahya Abdul-Kareem, declared that the organization ceased to exist in 1980, many of its followers maintained the movement and it continued to have an impact on Blackamerican Muslims in New York and several other cities.<sup>18</sup>

Imam Aiyub Abdul-Baqi, founder of the Tauhid Center for Islamic Development and chairman of the Social Justice Committee of the Islamic Leadership Council of New York (Majlis Ash-Shura), served as the master of ceremonies and gave the first talk following Imam Isa's opening address. Early in his talk, Imam Aiyub stated:

This is why when movements come on the American scene and...they tend to move in this whole America as if there was no Islam here. That I have a problem with. (...) So those brothers who come on the scene and begin to *takfir* leadership and go outside of masjids and say, 'oh those brothers don't know nothing or those brothers are not on the *haqq* [truth]...and those brothers are not representing Islam,' I want to say to them that Islam has always been in America. We have just not been looking for it, but it has always been here. The first Qur'an [here was] written by Ayuba ben Solomon, three copies of the Qur'an written from his own memory. He was an enslaved African in America. Do we know that? The first masjid built in America with an African imam, or African American, howsoever you want to put it, was Bilali Mohammed, studying the works of Maliki *fiqh* (...) developing his own *fiqh* book in America.

The theme of rebuking newly-arrived immigrant-led Islamic movements that undermine the established local leadership by claiming that these native-born groups are not practicing an authentic form of Islam runs throughout this talk. However, there is some ambiguity here and elsewhere, because Imam Aiyub does not name the particular movements he criticizes. He could be referring to mid-twentieth century Arab and South Asian groups that declared that the Nation of Islam was an un-Islamic movement, or he could be referring to more recent Salafi or Wahhabi groups that claim that local Muslim American leaders are infidels or deviating from proper Islamic belief and practice. The key notion that more recently arriving Muslims should form respectful and principled relationships with already present "indigenous" Muslims has long been present in Blackamerican Muslim communities.<sup>19</sup> Imam Aiyub proceeded to school these arrogant newcomers about the much earlier presence of enslaved African Muslims and their achievements. As noted above, Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic and immigrant Muslim biases toward Blackamerican Muslims

often converge in their efforts to render them invisible or insignificant. Imam Aiyub reminds these opponents that Islam has always been in the US, in the history of enslaved Africans who struggled to maintain the faith under unthinkable conditions. Job ben Solomon (or Ayuba Suleyman Diallo), an enslaved Senegalese known to hide in the woods to pray while tending to cattle of the slaveholder, later wrote three identical copies of the Qur'an from his memory.<sup>20</sup> Bilali Mohammed was an enslaved Guinean who became an imam on Sapelo Island, Georgia and wrote a manuscript containing rules about prayers and assertions of faith.<sup>21</sup> Imam Aiyub, a popular preacher often invited to give sermons at immigrant-led masjids and Islamic centers, consistently reminds the Muslim American community about the history of enslaved African Muslims.

Imam Aiyub went on to stress the significance of the Dar ul-Islam movement and the agency of Blackamerican Muslim women:

Islam during the sixties, we know all about the Dar ul-Islam movement, but today we have MAS, ICNA, ISNA, and people tend to think that this is the only Islamic reality and they have bypassed the leadership, the brothers who established dignity and self-respect for this Islam in the ghettos and on the streets of America. This is disheartening to me. (...) There was a time when no Muslim sister was walking the streets of NYC with a hijab. But those sisters that everybody laughed at, everybody mocked and ridiculed, went home and took their sheets and cut their sheets and sewed the ends and wore their headpiece out on the street for dignity and honor. And all the people in the ghetto understood that you did not put your hands on a Muslim sister. But today is not that same situation. We have the situation like recently in which a Muslim sister was accosted and attacked. The people began to cry on the news and in the media; this is just disheartening. Why? Because if that happened back in that particular time that individual would have been found and he would have been dealt with and it would have never happened again.

Here, Imam Aiyub suggested that the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), and the Muslim American Society (MAS), all immigrant-led *umma* institutions reaching out to the broader Muslim community in the 1980s and 1990s, overlooked the important pioneering work of groups like Dar ul-Islam. Imam Aiyub emphasized that this group strongly implemented and promoted respect for Islam in American society. Later in the talk, he also mentioned that Dar ul-Islam and the Masjid of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB, a Blackamerican-led

mosque carrying on the work of Malcolm X in Harlem) started the first Muslim publications in New York City. He said that the material in their publications was *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a* (Sunni) and that they discussed all the things that are still relevant to Muslim Americans today. Blackamerican Muslim women are also represented here as active agents who took the initiative to fashion the resources available to them to implement their understanding of an Islamic way of life. They actively chose to embody a moral model, shaped by intersections of gender, race, and Islam, that entailed respect for their femininity. On their part, Blackamerican men forthrightly fought to secure the safety and protected the dignity of these women in the community and broader society. These men, historically racialized and emasculated, enthusiastically embodied their sense of an Islamic masculinity that called for men to fulfill this role as protectors of women.<sup>22</sup> Imam Aiyub contrasted this firmness and strength with the weakness shown by some current responses to rising Islamophobic attacks against Muslim American women. He recommended that as the diverse Muslim American community pulls together to confront acts of violent anti-Muslim hate in the post-9/11 context that it would be best for it to stand up to defend itself, just as the Blackamerican Sunni Muslim pioneers did in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the latter segment of his talk, Imam Aiyub spoke about some of his work as the chairman of the Social Justice Committee and the value of principled unity among Muslims as they face anti-Muslim foes. He stated:

Imam Al-Amin threw me out there: go to the thing. After 9/11, they tried to close the masjid, Park51...I believe in work...It is just that Allah *sub-ḥāna wa ta'ālā* inspired me with what to say...that we would take a stand on behalf of a masjid. I don't want to hear about no Sufism, 'oh those brothers are Sufis.' No, those brothers are Muslim, period. I don't want to hear about no Shiism. Those brothers are Muslim, period. If you want to have a gripe with someone, go there with Trump, and go down there to South Carolina, go down to North Carolina, go down to Mississippi. There's enough people for you to deal with, than going around hating somebody else who never caused you anything and who...believes in the same God as yourself. 'Cause one brother was trying to get me on that thing. [He said,] 'Brother, those Shiites brothers.' I told him I'm not on that thing. I am *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'a*, you know, they can be Shiite. I said, 'it is for Allah to decide who is pleasing and displeasing to Him. It is for Allah to decide who is going to *Jannah* and who is going to the

Hellfire. I said, I'm trying to make it there, and I'm sure that Shiite brother is trying to get there, and only Allah with judge between me and him. I'm not going to hate him because you hate him. I'm not going to try to define him because you defining him. I'm going to be thankful to Allah and leave it in the hands of Allah. We're in America and we have some clear enemies. And we better realize we got some clear enemies, some people who just the very word Islam upsets them to the very core of their stomach. And they are restless day and night trying to think of ways of how they can concoct things to discredit Islam. You have to graft all that history that went before you and these children have to understand that dynamic of Islam, that this is a protracted struggle, this belief in *lā ilāha illā llāh*... The key to *Janna* is *lā ilāha illā llāh*. And anyone who says that is safe from my tongue and my hand.

Here, Imam Aiyub relates the story of how his colleague Imam Al-Amin Abdul Latif, president of the Majlis Ash-Shura at the time, directed him to explore supporting the embattled Park51 Project to build a masjid and cultural center in Lower Manhattan. As Ali notes, this project became a central target of Islamophobic groups pushing the fear-mongering “Islamization of America” narrative that moved from the margins to the mainstream in 2010.<sup>23</sup> In the process of mobilizing defense for the “ground zero masjid,” Imam Aiyub had to reprimand some Muslims who were withholding support for the masjid project based on their negative evaluation of the Sufi religious orientation of Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf, one of the project partners, and others affiliated with him. Fulfilling the role of “custodian” of the religion (*dīn*), mediating and applying Islamic tradition in the contemporary American context, Imam Aiyub corrected the posture of these divisive individuals and instructed them to unify as Muslims and stand up for what is good.<sup>24</sup> He applied this position of principled unity and suspension of judgment toward Shi'a Muslims as well. Moreover, instead of attacking fellow Muslims, such as Sufis or Shi'ites, he called for these recalcitrant individuals to direct their energy toward struggling against anti-Muslim figures and groups that are spreading hate and enacting Islamophobic policies.

Indeed, Blackamerican Muslim scholars and leaders in New York City led the way for Muslims and their allies to sideline and criticize anti-Muslim ideas and policies. In 2010, Imam Aiyub wrote and circulated a small pamphlet entitled “Islam is Not Anti-Systemic,” which pushed back against the threatening “Islamization of America” narrative and its negative representations of Islam and Muslims. This pamphlet opened as follows:

There are these racist, vile and evil groups who are attempting to depict Islam as anti-American, foreign, with no place in this society, but they are grossly mistaken. Islam is not anti-systemic. It is as American as apple pie. (...) When history is rewritten and the truth is revealed, the veil of ignorance will be lifted off the eyes of the misguided masses.<sup>25</sup>

In the pamphlet that he authored, Imam Aiyub challenged the Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic representations of Islam as inherently violent, unassimilable, and irreconcilably opposed to American society. He went on to explain Islamic monotheism (*tawhīd*), the five pillars of Islam, the long history of Islam in American society, and the morally and spiritually transformative capacity of Islam. During the same time period that Imam Aiyub published his pamphlet, Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, leader of the Masjid of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB) and president of the Masjid Ash-Shura, led an action to voice disapproval of the Islamophobic policies of the New York City police department and their endorsement by Mayor Bloomberg. In 2011, Imam Talib called for a boycott of Mayor Bloomberg's annual year-end interfaith breakfast to protest the mayor's defense of the NYPD's extensive profiling and surveillance of local Muslims. Numerous Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders, groups, and individuals supported this boycott.<sup>26</sup>

Imam Al-Amin Abdul Latif spoke later in the event after dinner. Imam Al-Amin is a veteran Blackamerican Muslim *dā'ī* (missionary) and former member of Dar ul-Islam in the 1970s. He is one of the founders and former president of the Masjid Ash-Shura, and is currently the imam of Masjid Al-lahu Akbar and director of the nearly-completed multimillion-dollar project of constructing this mosque from the ground up on a large plot of land in Wyandanch, Long Island, New York. Imam Al-Amin opened his talk with an introduction underscoring the theological significance of his topic: *akhlāq* (character) and *adab* (manners).

Education is the answer in terms of success here and in the hereafter... There is a very important aspect of education that many of us marginalize and overlook. There is a very beautiful hadith of the Prophet *ṣallā llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam*, he said... "I have been sent on a mission to teach the perfection of good *akhlāq*, character"... There are number of different narrations saying the same thing: noble character, excellent character. When you reflect upon it, this was the Prophet's mission. To say it another way, the Prophet was sent to teach us how to behave, to teach human development, real development of the human being...how to treat each

other, that's education...how to develop the good character, the good manners.

This simple and clear description of the Prophetic mission undercuts and sidelines Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic representations of Islam as an inherently violent, misogynistic, and harsh religion. For Imam Al-Amin, education about how to treat people in a respectful and polite manner—the way we would want others to treat us—and how to cultivate excellent character, the fundamental Islamic mission, is sorely needed across human societies today. However, rather than focusing on non-Muslims, Imam Al-Amin directed our attention to the Muslim *umma*:

Look at our *umma* today... we lack *akhlāq*... There is no character, there is no manners. That's the sad state of the *umma*... But when we look at the *umma*, look at the world, look at the rulers, the torture, the oppression, the murder, the stealing, the squandering of the wealth, the extortion. Look at what's happening in Saudi Arabia right now. Some of the businesspeople are under house arrest in a hotel, and some of them are gaining their freedom by giving billions of dollars.<sup>27</sup> If that isn't extortion, I don't know what that is. Who taught these people? Who did these people learn Islam from? What do they know of *akhlāq* and *adab*? You see, this is the reality. The different sects and different groups that we see in the Muslim world, the murdering and slaughtering of people in the mosques, in the churches, in the marketplaces, all this stuff... they have lost sight of the sacredness of human life... you are killing innocent women and children, this is not what the Prophet *ṣalla llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam* taught us. That is the problem, isn't it, the heart? (...) So this is what we are dealing with. It's not so much that they don't have knowledge of the fundamentals of religion, [that] people don't know Arabic, Qur'an, [that] they don't know *fiqh*. They know this stuff... [but] they lack character... People are graduating from universities, Islamic institutions all over the world. Some of them have bad behavior... I heard one big scholar...got thousands of students and he was attacking a fellow scholar equally renowned... he said, about the other scholar, "May Allah sever his lips and his tongue." He cursed him...it's all reflective of all this ugly character.

As a custodian mediating and reflexively applying Islamic tradition, Imam Al-Amin diagnosed the condition of the global Muslim *umma*. The basic problem underlying the existence of repressive, oppressive, and corrupt states in Muslim-majority societies as well as the violent acts of terrorism of non-state groups is not political or economic woes, but rather, the

condition of the heart, a lack of good character and manners. As a Black-american scholar trained and certified in Islamic sciences in Saudi Arabia, Imam Al-Amin was appalled at the immoral and criminal behavior of the rulers of this country. Although Saudi princes and their loyal servants, including many religious scholars, and the leaders of violent terrorist organizations are knowledgeable in Arabic language, studies of the Qur'an, and Islamic jurisprudence, he felt they are grossly uneducated when it comes to *akhlāq* and *adab*. In fact, he asserted that the Muslim *umma* has placed too much emphasis on the science of *fiqh*, while overlooking the significance of education focused on cultivating good character and manners. Moreover, some of the popular scholars in Islamic institutions of higher learning who are charged with transmitting Islamic tradition sadly perform acts that exhibit a lack of good character and etiquette.

Prior to closing his talk with a brief exposition of a Tradition of the Prophet about the closeness to him of people with good *akhlāq* and the vast distance from him of those who have vulgar and filthy manners, Imam Al-Amin reflected on the good manners he learned from his first instructor in Dar ul-Islam.

I remember years ago, back in the old days, Imam Yahya, one of my first teachers, he used to tell us, when you go out and you give talks publicly, don't get personal with attacking people...don't say bad things about Elijah Muhammad, don't say bad things publicly about America. Don't do that, leave that alone. We can talk about some of the deviations in their practices and beliefs...I thought about that, the way people used to attack Warith D. Muhammad, or attack Elijah Muhammad, the way they used to do. I heard one *dā'ī* (missionary)... a very prominent *dā'ī*... and he said, "yeah, and that so-and-so and so-and-so, I would piss on his grave"... The Prophet *ṣalla llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam* never did that. Whose *akhlāq* and whose *adab* are some of the students of knowledge and people of knowledge following? What are they learning in institutions?

Although the Dar ul-Islam, a Blackamerican Sunni movement, disagreed with many of the beliefs and practices of the Nation of Islam, its leader, Imam Yahya, taught members to always be polite and not to verbally attack this group's leaders. Similarly, they were instructed to criticize the US government in a principled manner, pointing out incorrect beliefs and practices, but not to unleash vulgar verbal attacks. This cultivation of good manners in the Dar ul-Islam contrasted with the behavior of others, even

some Muslim missionaries, who expressed disrespectful and filthy utterances toward the leaders of the Nation of Islam.

Before the end of the fundraiser, there were calls for donations and a presentation of several plaques to notable figures in the Muslim American community. Dr. Jaffer, a local Pakistani American doctor, was recognized and applauded for his expression of brotherhood in earlier talks and again during the awards ceremony. He was presented with a plaque and pictures were taken. Dr. Jaffer has been a long-time moral and financial supporter of Masjid Ta Ha and on this occasion donated \$25,000 to the masjid's funds. This is an example of how the older generation of Muslims has formed significant bridges across ethnic, racial, and class borders.

Islamic studies scholar Sherman Jackson has referred to Blackamerican Muslim “mastery and appropriation of the Sunni super-tradition” as the “Third Resurrection,” which he proposed as the answer to challenges posed by negotiating “the legitimate aspects of the agenda of Black Religion” while also avoiding the pitfalls of “the ideological claims, prejudices, and false obsessions of Immigrant Islam.”<sup>28</sup> Imam Aiyub, Imam Al-Amin, and other Blackamerican scholars and leaders in New York City have demonstrated their mastery of Sunni tradition and their ability to mediate and reflexively apply it in ways that reflect Blackamerican perspectives, consciousness, and sensibilities.

### **Blackamerican Muslim Chaplains**

On August 8, 2018, I drove to the Masjid of Islamic Brotherhood in Harlem, New York to interview Chaplain Jawad Abdul-Wadud, an assistant imam of this mosque. Following afternoon prayers led by Imam Talib, Imam Jawad and I pulled two chairs from the back wall and sat in the prayer hall across from each other to discuss his experiences of studying to become a certified chaplain and providing pastoral care to people in juvenile detention facilities, hospitals, and nursing homes. Imam Jawad currently handles New York State residential centers and maximum security prisons for youth from eleven to seventeen years of age in the entire Hudson region, extending from Long Island to Albany. While learning pastoral practice, Imam Jawad worked as an intern at a hospital and a nursing home, where he honed his skills of supplying empathic encouragement and counseling to patients. Initially, he was attracted to the indigenous Islamic perspective on chaplaincy under the guidance of two other Blackamerican Muslim imams. However, when he accepted a scholarship to complete his Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy

(CPSP), Imam Jawad experienced a drastic change in perspective, which he eventually found to be unacceptable.

When they gave me that scholarship, there was no more Islam. When I went over to the Christian-dome, that's what I call it, CPE, it was all Christian. Islam was no place to be found, unless I brought it—and then they were biased. Because they are talking about John, Peter, Paul, and Psalms and Genesis, it was alright. But then when I brought up any *āyāt*, they would get uptight. And then when I try... to read it to them, they would say he is talking that nonsense... Then I would bring the translation in English... and al-Ghazali, what he says... and the hadith... They would say, "he is talking that stuff." Then one day I couldn't take it anymore and I said, "Listen, you talk about how this is supposed to be an interfaith circle here, but it's not. Anytime I bring up Islam, you all have a problem with it. I listen to John, Paul, Genesis and all that, and we respect that book, we believe all the books, all the prophets, all the angels, we believe in the hereafter, we believe in divine good, you understand. But every time I talk about this thing, you have a problem with it." And that's when Dr. Francine and Dr. Musa was in the room... We went through some stuff in those rooms in that CPE program... Dr. Francine said, "Okay, stop the whole class. We are going off the record, this is just being said among your peers and me. Jawad, I want to apologize to you because you are right. We have been a bit prejudiced toward you and you brought that out. Thank you so much. And I'm going to be the first to apologize to you and all the rest of you should apologize to Jawad. Apologize to Jawad and respect what he brings to this table."

In order to complete his required educational units to become certified as a chaplain, Imam Jawad was taught the Christian rather than Islamic perspective of Clinical Pastoral Education. The instructors and supervisors stressed making connections between psychology, behavioral sciences, and psychotherapy with Christian theology. Moreover, he felt that his attempts to find ties with Islamic tradition were scoffed at and rejected under this "Christian-dome," a space in which Christians beliefs and worldview were dominant, taken as the default religious perspective, and the foundation of clinical chaplaincy. Imam Jawad found this treatment of Islamic tradition unacceptable and directly challenged the supervisor's and participants' bias. Dr. Francine, the supervisor, was obliged to admit their prejudice and apologize. For his part, Imam Jawad continued to draw on Islamic texts and perspectives in his seminar work and statements. Nevertheless, the

overwhelming emphasis on Christian theology led to his utter exasperation and he contemplated leaving the program. He said he realized that “it’s Christianity: that CPE is geared for the Christians; it’s not geared for Muslim chaplains.” Imam Abdus-Salaam Musa, who was also present in this class, convinced him to complete his final units.

I interviewed Imam Abdus-Salaam Musa around a week after my discussion with Imam Jawad and again in early September. Both of these meetings with Imam Musa took place in the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) Al-Markaz Masjid in Jamaica, New York. Imam Musa is president and co-founder of the Southeast Queens Muslim Collective (SEQMC) discussed below and former director of the ICNA Relief’s United Muslim Movement Against Homelessness (UMMAH). As a diplomate of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP), he was the first Muslim chaplain to be certified by this organization, and at the time of these interviews was writing his doctoral dissertation in clinical pastoral education. Imam Musa not only made it clear, like Imam Jawad, that Clinical Pastoral Education is a Christian-dominated field of study, but also pointed out that “Bible-belt Christians” founded both of the main certifying agencies: CPSP and ACPE (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education). He informed me that the ACPE headquarters is located in Atlanta, GA and the main CPSP figures are from Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas. Although most of the Clinical Pastoral Education literature concerned with chaplaincy is Christian-oriented, Imam Musa was able to envision a convergence between Christian and Islamic concepts and between behavioral and psychological sciences and Islam.

What I was able to see was the universal message. I was able to see the correlations between the Christian concepts that were being presented and projected and Islam. Everyone couldn’t see that. Many Muslims, especially indigenous Muslims, left the programs because they said it was too Christian dominated. And this is what I would do... When I give presentations or I give didactics, I have my trainees bring me what they can find, something equivalent or [something] that correlates with the theory that’s being presented by these western theorists. I can share some examples with you. I just finished training some African chaplains in the Bronx. I gave them Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, and Abraham Maslow... What I found is that many of those theorists...have lots of Islamic concepts and you even have some books on Islam by Erikson... But I have them bring me materials, bring me an Islamic counterpart to each of

these theories... We know that Sigmund Freud is considered the grandfather of psychotherapy... Now, I'm going to show you what I asked them to do and what they brought me, and some of this is going to be going into my dissertation for the need for an Islamic presentation and not to take away from what you [clinical pastoral educators] are doing but that it should be integrated into it.

Imam Musa was able to see past the surface differences between Christian concepts or behavioral theories and Islamic concepts in order to ascertain the underlying or formal convergence or similarities between these knowledge structures. This insight facilitated Musa's ability to look beyond the "Christian-dome" to locate the universal messages that traverse multiple religious as well as behavioral science traditions. Moreover, Imam Musa has embedded this insight into a variety of teaching tools he uses to train Muslim chaplains. For instance, he asked his trainees to take Freud's concepts of id, ego, and superego and find comparable concepts in Islamic tradition. His students brought back reports of narrations about angels being sent, the breathing of spirit into humans, the recording of actions, and so forth. Imam Musa pointed out that the existence of such correlations in Islamic tradition are difficult for Muslim trainees to disregard and thereby eases the acquisition of theories integral to clinical pastoral education.

To make it easier for a Muslim to relate to a theory I tell you I'm giving you either what the Prophet said or what Allah said which is not a theory, this is a commandment. It is from the Almighty, so you can make the correlation. You can't reject what they are saying because it says this here. So when you are dealing with people, we must understand that we all have character growing edges or flaws... So we must be able to speak to a person in a language that they understand. It is necessary in chaplaincy for you not to change anybody, but to be with them where they are. So therefore you have to be able to process within you. What people don't understand, they think chaplaincy is about going into a room and praying with people... We talk about the psycho-sociological theory... for each level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the brother has brought in *āyāt* from Qur'an and hadiths.

Imam Musa has developed and institutionalized Islamic Compassionate Care as a separate project that evolved out of his collaborative efforts with some other Blackamerican chaplains to formulate indigenous Islamic pastoral education. Their efforts inspired other Blackamerican imams, like Imam Jawad, to pursue certification as clinical chaplains. Subsequently,

Imam Musa began to train imams from diverse ethnic and sectarian backgrounds, including Africans, South Asians, Iranians, and both Sunnis and Shi'is.

Blackamerican chaplains, like Imam Jawad, with his outright challenge of Christian bias, and Imam Musa, with his transformation of clinical pastoral education through a methodical search for universal messages, have sidelined Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic misrepresentations of Blackamerican Muslims as malleable figures under the management of Christians or "good" assimilating immigrant Muslims. Indeed, Imam Jawad created cracks in the CPE "Christian-dome" through which he inserted references to Islamic discursive tradition. In addition, as a certified chaplain in New York State youth detention centers, he freely draws on the Qur'an and Prophetic Traditions and his personal experience of self-transformation through the embrace of Islam in order to provide pastoral care to his troubled juvenile patients. Likewise, Musa has formulated a method of finding connections between behavioral science frameworks and Islam, and has institutionalized Islamic clinical pastoral education in which he trains not only Blackamerican imams but also immigrant imams from various backgrounds.

Imam Jawad, Imam Musa, and other Blackamerican chaplains also push aside misrepresentations of Muslim Americans and Islam as hateful, inhumane, and inherently opposed to American religious, gender, and sexual diversity. Contrary to these tropes, the stories of these chaplains relay many examples of how they provide compassionate pastoral care to patients from various religious backgrounds and of a variety of sexual identities and orientations. For instance, Imam Jawad told me a story about his experience of caring for Miss Muffin, an elderly Jewish woman, at a local hospital.

Her son is a big rabbi. But she said she did not want to see any of them. She said, "I want to see Imam Jawad. I don't want to talk to none of you all. I want to talk to him." I would go in there and she used to say, "I want to die, my bones are hurting." I told her, "Miss Muffin, I come up for you, I understand, you want us to get you some medication for your bones"... She said, "no, I just wanted to see you today."

Miss Muffin felt severely depressed after becoming bedridden. Imam Jawad cared for her for around two years, providing her with empathetic encouragement. He told me that he dealt with her with reasoning and from a spiritual perspective, informing her that, "When God is ready for you, He will come. You don't have to rush it. He got you here for a reason." Imam

Jawad also encouraged her by reminding her of the positives in her life, her sons and grandchildren, who love her. That was the last time he saw her. When he came to visit her a few days later, she had already passed away. Imam Jawad had developed a close relationship with Miss Muffin and still remembers her. Likewise, Imam Musa was asked to listen to the confession of a Catholic woman.

Then there was one lady, an Ecuadorian lady, a Catholic. I went and sat with her. I think she had hepatitis and was jaundiced, she was yellow. Her mother was there and it really did not look good for her. And she wanted communion and wanted to confess. I said, okay, "I'm at Beth Israel Hospital. When I go to the office I will call to make sure this happens"... I get a page and call the nurse's station and she says the same lady wants the chaplain to come see her. I said, "yes, I spoke to her, let her know that I did notify the priest and he will be there in around an hour and a half." She said, "No, she wants you to come back to her room." Her mother stepped out of the room and told me, "My daughter wants to confess to you and just wants to talk to you." So, I go in the room and say, "I'm not a priest, I'm a Muslim." She said, "I don't care. I want to confess to you." Then she told me. I said, "Oh Allah, why did You do this to me"... what she said to me I have never told anyone... she confessed. I don't know whether the lady died or not, but she confessed. She needed to cleanse her mind, her soul... I will say this, Allah *subhāna wa ta'ālā* has given me something. He's given me some sort of gift that I connect to people, that I connect to them in a way that they want to tell me stuff that troubles me.

Although listening to confessions is certainly not a customary role for an imam, Imam Musa agreed to hear this sick Catholic patient's confession. While divulging the nature of her sins to a religious specialist apparently relieved some of her spiritual burdens, this knowledge, whatever it was, weighed heavily on this Muslim chaplain's mind. For Imam Musa, this was a memorable but not an isolated experience. In fact, as he provided compassionate care to patients, many of them felt such a deep connection to him that they disclosed personal matters that troubled his soul. Imam Musa viewed this ability as a gift from Allah and part of his service to humanity that entails personal sacrifice.

These Blackamerican chaplains also told me some stories and their perspectives about providing compassionate care to LGBTQ patients. Imam Jawad related an experience he had with a white gay patient he advocated for while working at a nursing home.

It was this gay patient in the hallway, and I saw him. He looked disturbed, so I went over to him and said, “How are you doing? What’s wrong?” He said, “I’ve been trying to go to the store. I wanted to go to the store for a week, but that social worker wouldn’t let me. She’s talking about how she was going to go.” I told him, “I got it.” He said, “Don’t cause any problems.” He was intimidated by her. I said, “Look, don’t worry about it. I won’t mention you said anything about it. I got this. You know who I am, I am your chaplain, I’m your advocate.”

Imam Jawad spoke to the social worker, threatening to write her up if she did not take care of this patient’s needs right away. She did and later the patient came to thank Jawad for helping him. Jawad told him to thank Allah. Similarly, Imam Musa told me that he counseled a Muslim bisexual woman who was married to a man but felt unfulfilled in the marriage. He provided compassionate counseling and pastoral care for her, trying to serve her psychosocial needs. In addition, another gay patient Musa was counseling asked him if he could perform his *shahāda* and embrace the Islamic faith. Imam Musa was prepared to have him perform the declaration of faith as a Muslim, until he realized that this man lacked a proper understanding of Islamic monotheism. He still held the belief that Jesus is the son of God. Neither of these chaplains expressed any sense of homophobia or discrimination toward LGBTQ patients. During my second interview with Imam Musa, I told him that some notable Muslim American religious figures support LGBTQ people in political terms in the broader society, while still considering their sexual practices to be sinful. I asked him for his perspective.

That’s not my understanding at all... I had experiences here when I was doing counseling... I meet people where they are. They are human beings. Allah *subhāna wa ta’ālā* created them... Allah *subhāna wa ta’ālā* is the final Judge. Will I assist them? Of course, I will in any way that I can... I don’t see how anyone can neglect providing them with service. If they have needs, they need to be addressed, needs for food, shelter, clothing, or counseling, it should be given in a non-judgmental way. We believe as it is written, so shall it be. For whatever reason, He has allowed it to be whatever it is. That is Allah... He allows them to exist... I can’t condone any illegal sexual activity, but in all other aspects of life you have to service them. That is where I come from.

Imam Musa stressed that when he administers pastoral care and counseling to LGBTQ non-Muslim or Muslim patients in hospitals, nursing homes, or

Islamic institutions, he strives to address their needs in a non-judgmental way. Like Imam Jawad, he approaches them as human beings in need of service. Moreover, he suggests the fact that Allah has created LGBTQ people and allows them to exist means that we should embrace their humanity and assist them in every domain of life, short of condoning “illegal sexual activity.” Imam Musa has arguably proposed a middle path (*wasatiyya*) situated between the “progressive” affirmation of homosexual practices and the anti-LGBTQ condemnation of queer identities, orientations, and persons. Blackamerican chaplains, with their consistent provisions of empathic pastoral care without regard to religious and sexual difference, sideline negative depictions of Muslims and Islam.

### **Southeast Queens Muslim Collective**

On August 24, 2018, I drove to downtown Jamaica, New York, a bustling urban area, to interview Khayriyyah H. Ali in her office on the second floor of a building that houses the Queens Educational Opportunity Center (EOC). She is the executive director of the SUNY (State University of New York)-Queens EOC, a position she filled after working for around thirty-five years as an educator. In her characteristically judicious fashion, she informed me that she plays a role of serving an “underserved,” so-called “disenfranchised” or, as she would rather put it, an “underprepared” population of students. During the late 1990s, she worked with Imam Musa to organize and formulate the projects of ICNA’s United Muslim Movement Against Homelessness (UMMAH). In our discussion, she stressed that they helped to support women who were homeless due to a variety of social conditions, including as a result of domestic violence.

During December 2015, Khayriyyah co-founded the Southeast Queens Muslim Collection (SEQMC) with Isaac Parsee and Imam Abdus-Salaam Musa. She currently serves as Secretary on its board of directors. These activists aimed to change the political situation in New York City in which they perceived political officials and politicians to be catering to immigrant Muslims while leaving Blackamerican Muslims with little input into political processes. As a 501c3 tax-exempt organization, they don’t officially endorse any political candidates, but they actively disseminate information and educate people about political issues and the policies candidates promote. Khayriyyah stressed the significance of self-examination and active involvement of Muslims in the American political system:

I've never had anyone ever ask me, "So how are you doing? Is everything okay with you as it relates to being a Muslim, which everyone knows [about me]?" And... if I had any instances that 9/11 has impacted my life directly, because it has, and it has affected all of our lives... No one can say that the world has not changed since then. In terms of what this may mean for Muslims per se, I've always been one that scrutinized myself... As a community I think we have all become more circumspect, which I think is warranted. But I think at the same time, if you know the history of this country, and if you know who you are, which I have tried to do... I do believe in being part of the political process, which I have always have, and I try to understand the lay of the land to understand the environment in which you are operating. I believe in trying to make good decisions.

Similarly, Imam Musa, the president of the Southeast Queens Muslim Collective, emphasized the importance of their organization working to empower the youth, and Blackamericans in general, to better navigate the American political system. He aims to train the youth in not only becoming politically astute, but also in economics, critical thought, ethics, and spirituality. Imam Musa said, "We hope to be the catalyst to let our people know what they need to do in order to be successful. And all we can do is to deliver the message... And if we do that and we have one, two, three, or four people that do vote to make a difference, than that is *ṣadaqa jāriya* for us." Here, Musa asserts that their political activism, as a form of charitable giving (*ṣadaqa*), can be a lasting spiritual benefit, earning them continuous rewards in this world and in the hereafter.

Over the last few years, this Muslim political collective has engaged in a number of activities, including partnering with Release Aging People from Prison (RAPP),<sup>29</sup> providing voter education and registration resources and events, and organizing forums about housing, immigration, and financial empowerment centers. In the midst of the late-2018 shutdown of the federal government, which impacted the economic well-being of many local people, SEQMC shared announcements and information about food pantries, soup kitchens, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). They were also actively educating citizens about the significance of participating in the electoral system and registering people to vote prior to the 2018 midterm elections. In fact, after one of our interviews, Imam Musa stood in front of the ICNA masjid distributing information and voter registration forms to people, mostly immigrant Muslim men, motivating them to cast their ballots. These sort of activities, generally ignored by

the media, serve to sideline the Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic depiction of Muslims and Islam as “irreconcilably opposed” to American values and democracy.

The important leadership role that Khayriyyah plays in this organization and in the community undermines the anti-Muslim portrayal of Islam as inherently misogynistic and patriarchal and of Muslim women as silent and restricted from public life. Khayriyyah, a long-time educator and activist, embraced Islam in 1979 after reading the Qur’an over the course of a few days. Initially, she became a member of the Warith D. Mohammed (WDM) Sunni Muslim community and was active in its social activities. Gibson and Karim point out that women in the WDM community were active in a wide range of activities, including running schools, organizing workshops on domestic violence, establishing shelters, planning conventions, and feeding the homeless.<sup>30</sup> Khayriyyah carried on this pattern of Muslim women being involved in public activities and leadership roles over the decades of her work as an educator and Muslim social justice advocate. Near the beginning of our interview, she told me that she doesn’t like to talk about herself much and many of the things she has done in the Islamic community over the years have been done anonymously. Khayriyyah writes many of the SEQMC materials anonymously. She said, “It shouldn’t matter if a woman says that... I’ve written many things and do them anonymously because I thought it more important what I was trying to achieve or communicate than if a sister said it.” Khayriyyah often leads from behind in her organizing and writing activities. She said she occasionally experiences issues related to gender in her relations with other Muslims. In these cases, Khayriyyah told me that she reminds them that “except for a degree, men and women are equal.” This expresses a judicious reading of Q. 4:34 that cedes a small measure of male control within a broader field of gender equality. In anthropological terms, this can be considered an expression of a gender-egalitarian ethos. Although Khayriyyah often leads from behind, I recall her giving a speech at the SEQMC *iftār* (fast-opening) event at ICNA Al-Markaz Masjid in 2017. Several of the immigrant Muslim men appeared uncomfortable with her giving a speech from the podium in the front of the main male prayer hall, a place from which the imam gives Friday sermons (*khutba*). Nevertheless, the South Asian men leading the masjid approved of her giving a speech in the hall and all present seemed impressed with the information she shared about SEQMC’s activities.

Musa and Khayriyyah have positive assessments and projections for the work that SEQMC is doing. Musa told me that politicians and political

officials have begun to recognize and reach out to the group. It has been “making some waves” on the local political plane and some politicians are coming to listen to these Blackamerican Muslim voices from the community. Khayriyyah offered feedback to some local Muslim groups and the organizers of a “sisters’ revert conference,” recommending that they move away from terms such as “reverts” and rather just speak of themselves as Muslims. She explained that the usage of terms like “reverts” or “born Muslims” “has something to do with how we sometimes distinguish ourselves, and I don’t even know why that is necessarily so important since we are to be one *umma*.” Khayriyyah expressed the view that Muslims from various backgrounds have improved the way they collaborate. Furthermore, she feels that as more opportunities present themselves for diverse American Muslims to work together and their interactions increase, so will inter-group understandings of each other’s perspectives. Khayriyyah closed our discussion about inter-group relations within the American Muslim community by telling me that “we need to try to work in greater collaboration and see where we really don’t do enough (...) in the cause of Allah by letting the disparities separate us.”

## Conclusion

Blackamerican Muslim scholars and leaders, through their discourse and practice, are destabilizing misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam and replacing these negative depictions with inspiring images that point toward an emerging American Muslim identity. Erroneous accounts of Muslims as absent in early American history are being replaced with images of enslaved Africans upholding the five pillars of Islam and possibly transmitting some form of Islam to their Blackamerican descendants. Misrepresentations of Blackamerican Muslims as invisible, voiceless, and nominal converts under the authority of Christians or “good” assimilating immigrant Muslims are being replaced with images of Blackamerican scholars and chaplains as custodians of *din*, creatively mediating and applying Islamic tradition in the American context. Negative depictions of Islam as harsh, violent, and irreconcilably opposed to diversity and democracy are being supplanted with images of Islam as centered on cultivating good character and manners, providing compassionate care to all regardless of religious and sexual difference, and promoting participation in the American system of electoral politics. In addition, negative depictions of Islam as misogynistic and patriarchal are being supplanted with images of Muslim women as leaders and active agents implementing Islam and interpreting religious texts.

What does this destabilization of Orientalist-*cum*-American Islamophobic misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam mean for the project of producing “good” secular Muslims? The fact that these negative depictions continue to circulate in the discourse of powerful politicians and mainstream media means that these outsider *political* identities of “good” and “bad” Muslims maintain hegemony in the broader society. However, within Blackamerican Muslim communities of practice and their networks of interaction with other Muslims and non-Muslims, there is an emergent *religious* identity of “good” American Muslims. This budding religious identity does not entail the naïve and unproblematic embrace of all facets of American Muslim identities.<sup>31</sup> It is a religious identity that prioritizes Muslim identity as the core of the self that inflects other identities, such as ethnic, racial, and national identities. Furthermore, this emergent *American* Muslim identity rejects certain forms of American national identity and related senses of nationalism, especially types that promote imperialism, war, and exceptionalism.<sup>32</sup>

Although these Blackamerican custodians of *din* remain critical of immigrant Muslims for their failure to practice the anti-racist values of Islamic tradition, they persistently embrace a cultural model of a united *umma* that traverses racial, ethnic, sectarian, class, and other divisions. Each vignette discussed involved Blackamerican Muslims reaching out to, and promoting bridges with, American Muslims of all backgrounds. However, this cultural model of the *umma* entails an expansion of the long-term goals of Black Religion—dismantling the culture and institutions of anti-Black racism and white supremacy—to incorporate a broader struggle for social justice in the US and around the world.

## Endnotes

1. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 15-16.
2. Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), section “Muslim Reformers and the American Media: The Exceptional Umma and Its Emergent Moral Geography,” 292-345.
3. See Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19. See also

Muna Ali, *Young Muslim America: Faith, Community, and Belonging* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 296.

4. Similar to Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 17 and Muna Ali, *Young Muslim America*, 27, I use the term “Blackamerican” to locate Blacks as a transformed new people in America and to challenge the normativity of whiteness and “White” American identity as the standard.
5. Here, I am referencing the dominant racist tendency to label Muslims from non-European Muslim-majority societies, even when they were born in the US, as “immigrants.” In other places, I also reference the Blackamerican Muslim distinction between “immigrant” and “indigenous” or “native-born” Muslims that indexes the different historical backgrounds and politico-religious orientations of these groups.
6. See Nick Fugallo and Max Jaeger, “Sickos Busted for Abusing Kids at Compound Linked to Controversial Imam,” *New York Post*, August 6, 2018, <https://nypost.com/2018/08/06/sickos-busted-for-abusing-kids-at-compound-linked-to-controversial-imam/>.
7. See Murtaza Hussain, “Killing of Detroit Imam in 2009 Described as ‘Nothing Less Than a Cover-Up,’” *The Intercept*, August 9, 2015, <https://theintercept.com/2015/08/09/family-detroit-imam-killed-police-files-lawsuit-supreme-court/>. Hussain reports that on October 28, 2009, dozens of FBI agents descended on a warehouse in Dearborn, Michigan to execute an arrest warrant against Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah. The fifty-three-year-old imam was accused of fencing stolen merchandise. He was shot more than twenty times and died at the scene. FBI agents labeled Imam Luqman as a “leader of a ‘radical, fundamentalist’ African-American Muslim group” and a “leader of a domestic terrorist group,” but no terrorist charges were ever brought against him. Near the end of *Islam is a Foreign Country*, Zareena Grewal writes, “Imam Luqman was my Sunday-school teacher as a kid. I remember him as soft-spoken and smart. I remember how he read verses of the Quran in a melodic voice; I remember how he criticized the American government with quiet anger. He was a radical, but he was not a terrorist” (356). A local imam in New York City, Imam Salim (pseudonym), told me that FBI agents set a trap by asking Imam Luqman to go to the warehouse to look at some goods and then they killed him and claimed he was re-selling stolen goods. Imam Salim went on to relay that he and another prominent imam received similar calls asking them to travel to a warehouse to look at some goods. They never went.
8. See Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018). Beydoun notes that American Orientalism “is the root system that gave rise to and drives Islamophobia” and that it is “a phenomenon that lives on today

- and steers how politicians, journalists, and everyday citizens think about Muslims and frame Islam” (55).
9. Sylvianne A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). Diouf demonstrates that enslaved African Muslims performed pseudo-conversions to Christianity under duress and continued to practice the five pillars of Islam as much as possible even under the severe constraints of the institution of racialized chattel slavery.
  10. In *American Islamophobia*, Beydoun reports that under this first Muslim ban, immigrants were required to be found as “free white persons” by a civil court and that this whiteness was defined by Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity (47-48).
  11. Samory Rashid, *Black Muslims in the US: History, Politics and the Struggle of a Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). He also argued that African-born Muslims present in loosely controlled areas like Louisiana and early Florida may have kept Islam alive among Blackamericans, and that West Indian, Central American, and South American Muslims may have influenced Blackamerican Muslims (29).
  12. See Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, “Muslim Communities in North America: Introduction,” in *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Haddad and Smith (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), xvii-xxx. See also Edward E. Curtis IV, “Introduction,” in *The Practice of Islam in America: An Introduction*, edited by Curtis IV (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 1-12, which states that although enslaved West Africans continued to practice Islam in the US as individuals throughout the 1800s, “there is (as yet) no evidence that they established self-sustaining multigenerational Muslim American communities” (4). While conceding that there may be some convincing evidence to the contrary in the future, he proceeds to assume the dominant paradigm.
  13. Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 125-173.
  14. See Harold D. Morales, *Latino & Muslim in America: Race, Religion, and the Making of a New Minority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Morales reported that PIEDAD, originally a Latina women’s *da’wa* organization, was criticized for focusing on the needs of women of their ethnic group and admonished for creating unnecessary divisions in the *umma*. PIEDAD, under pressure, expanded its focus to all new Muslim “reverts” regardless of their ethnicity or race (50-51). In *Islam is a Foreign Country*, Grewal describes how Ismail Al-Faruqi, an influential post-1965 immigrant figure, “railed against Malaysian and Arab coeds who organized student groups that were both ethnic and Islamic” (140).
  15. Interview with Imam Yusuf (pseudonym), September 2018, Queens, New York.

16. In *Islam is a Foreign Country*, Grewal notes that although sympathetic media representations of Blackamerican Muslims are rare, there have been some favorable depictions of Blackamerican chaplains (328-329). On the other hand, depictions of Latinx Muslims occasionally disrupt the “racial logic of collective guilt” for terrorist acts committed by others (329-330). See Morales, *Latino & Muslim in America*, 134-164, for a discussion of media representations of Latinx Muslims.
17. See R.M. Mukhtar Curtis, “Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ul-Islam Movement,” in *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Haddad and Smith (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 51-73.
18. *Ibid.*, 65.
19. In “Urban Muslims,” Curtis notes Dar ul-Islam movement articles accused the Moroccan-born director of the Islamic Mission, Daoud Faisal, and State Street mosque leadership of being “either unaware of or unresponsive to the needs of the indigenous people in whose midst they had settled” (54). Some current Blackamerican Muslim leaders in New York City use the metaphor of the *Anṣār* (local residents of Medina) and *Muhājirūn* (Muslims performing *hijra* from Mecca) to understand what should be the proper relationship between local Blackamerican and immigrant Muslims. In his keynote speech at the Masjlis Ash-Shura annual banquet in 2015, Sherman Jackson evoked the metaphor of Prophet Muhammad’s clan of Banu Hashim to express the protective role “indigenous” Muslims could play in relation to immigrant Muslims in the US.
20. See Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 50 and 117.
21. See Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 85-91.
22. Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim Gibson, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 27-28, describes how the Nation of Islam’s gender ideology invoked the history of White men’s violent acts of injustice toward Black women as it defined the role of Black men as protectors of their honor. Imam Aiyub and the men about whom he spoke drew upon their understandings of Qur’an and Prophetic Tradition in the context of persistent intersections of racial and gender inequality in US society.
23. See Ali, *Young Muslim America*, 159-164.
24. In *Islam is a Foreign Country* (253-291), Grewal contends that most American student-travelers in search of Islamic tradition overseas fail to develop a reflexive orientation and an ability to mediate the tradition as “custodians” back in the United States.
25. Imam Aiyub Abdul-Baqi, “Islam is Not Anti-Systemic” (2010).

26. Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, Letter to Mayor Bloomberg, December 29, 2011. <https://nobreakfastwithbloomberg.wordpress.com/>. Accessed December 17, 2018.
27. He is referring to several reports that the Saudi crown prince was holding numerous business people as prisoners in a hotel and forcing them to pay large sums of money for their freedom. See Martin Chulov, "Saudi Purge Sees 159 Business Leaders Held in Riyadh Hotel," December 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/05/saudi-purge-sees-159-business-leaders-held-in-riyadh-hotel>. Around a year later, Saudi officials were implicated in the murder of well-known journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018.
28. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 5-6.
29. Mujahid Farid, an elder Blackamerican Muslim released from prison in 2011, founded RAPP and educated the public about issues of incarcerating aged prisoners and social justice. When Mujahid Farid passed away on November 20, 2018, SEQMC president Abdus-Salaam Musa shared his recollections of him in a blog on the organization's website. See <https://seqmc1.wixsite.com/home/single-post/2018/11/28/The-Loss-of-A-Giant>.
30. Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 205-206.
31. In *Young Muslim America*, some of Ali's interlocutors supported the idea of "claiming all the parts" of themselves, including their religious, ethnic, and national identities (63-65). All these parts appeared to be claimed in a manner that did not prioritize any identities or situate others as secondary or tertiary.
32. Robert P. Jones, *Progressive & Religious* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008) relates the ideas of Rev. Wallis and other "progressive" Christian leaders that considered "nationalism to be a lethal disease for Christians" and argued for prioritizing Christian identity over American nationalism (76-78).