"WE'RE JUST SEPARATE FROM EVERYBODY"

Culture, Class, and the Racialization of Muslim Newcomer Youth

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Abstract

Recent scholarly work has explored the experiences of racialization among Muslim immigrants in the United States. Such work has challenged a static view of race strictly tied to phenotype by highlighting the significance of culture and religion to racial ascription as well as the varied ways individuals respond to their own racialized position. While valuable, much of this scholarship has analyzed the racialization of Muslim immigrants as it relates to Whiteness thereby neglecting their relationship with other racialized minorities such as African Americans. Moreover, such work has focused on culture and religion without discussing the role that social class plays in the process of racialization. This article seeks to address these gaps by drawing on ethnographic data gathered among a group of Muslim newcomer youth in an urban, multiracial high school in upstate New York. The findings presented here show how these youth are racialized along cultural and religious lines yet actively respond to this process in various ways. In addition, participants articulated racializing comments towards African Americans with significant class connotations. Despite the tensions between Muslim newcomers and African Americans, moments of solidarity were evident and drew attention to the potential for establishing cross-racial alliances.

Keywords: Muslims, Racialization, Class, Immigrants, African Americans, Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Race can be viewed as a social construction that relies on the fallacious belief that individuals can be divided into biologically discrete categories on the basis of both physical and cultural traits (Golash-Boza 2016; Omi and Winant, 1994). Rather than a static category simply imposed from above, race can also be viewed as an actively negotiated process occurring at various scales through both state institutions and individual/group agency (Bashi Treitler 2013; Haney López 1996; Omi and Winant, 1994). Such views illustrate the utility and increasing use of the term "racialization" as it suggests a dynamic process of racial ascription and negotiation against changing

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political, economic, and institutional backdrops (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2015; Silverstein 2005).

Following these insights, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which religious and cultural markers of Islam are crucial contributors to the racialized status experienced by Muslim immigrants in the United States (Cainkar 2006; Kibria 2011; Rana 2007; Selod and Embrick, 2013; Zopf 2018). These studies have illustrated the importance of understanding the role of culture in the process of racialization. Moreover, in viewing race as a dynamic process involving agency, work exploring the racialization of Muslim immigrants has also shown how individuals respond to the experience of racialization using a variety of strategies (Maira 2010; Marvasti 2005; Rana 2011).

Despite explorations of their changing racial positioning and their responses to these changes, little work has examined the ways in which Muslim immigrants understand their own shifting racial status vis-à-vis other racialized minorities such as African Americans (Husain 2017; Zopf 2018). Furthermore, few scholars have attended to the factor of social class despite its significance in providing many middle- and upper middle-class Muslim immigrants and their descendants with the resources to aid in social mobility and avoid downward assimilation into the racialized underclass (Dhingra 2007; Prashad 2000)

This paper addresses these gaps by drawing on data gathered through a yearlong ethnographic project among Muslim immigrant and refugee newcomer youth at a multiracial, urban high school located in New York State. The paper first provides empirical evidence of how Muslim newcomer youth are racialized along lines of culture and religion yet actively respond to and negotiate their racialized position in varied ways (Maira 2010; Marvasti 2005). Next, the paper explores participants' racializing attitudes towards African Americans. Their comments reveal a link between racialization, culture, and social class as they articulate a form of racism that associates African Americans with poverty and deviance while associating Whiteness with upward mobility and integration (Ortner 2006; Urcuioli 1996). While some participants neglected class inequality as they criticized the behavior of African Americans, others nascently acknowledged the ways in which class contributed to a racialized status (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2015; Skeggs 2004). This paper concludes by discussing the potential for cross-racial solidarity between Muslim newcomers and African Americans.

The findings presented below provide additional evidence of the way in which culture and religion are implicated in the process of racialization while also providing an ethnographic view into the ways individuals experience racialization and respond as agents (Ortner 1984). Moreover, this paper adds to work examining the racialization of Muslim youth by situating this process vis-à-vis participants' White and African American peers while also calling attention to the intersections of racialization and social class, a nexus which has been undertheorized in much scholarship on the topic (Cainkar and Selod, 2018). Lastly, as these data were collected in a school setting, findings highlight the significance of schools as important sites for the development and contestation of youths' racialized identities (Carter 2003; O'Connor et al., 2006; Ogbu 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture, Religion, and the Racialization of Muslims

Although Islamophobia is often portrayed as religious intolerance, and not racism (Love 2017), religion and culture have been prominent elements in the racializing of Muslims as long ago as fourteenth-century Spain where Muslims and Jews were regarded as essentialized "heathens" (Rana 2007). Only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

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did the concept of race become "secularized," moving from a religious foundation to one believed to have a biological basis (Rana 2007; Selod and Embrick, 2013). As Steve Garner and Saher Selod (2014) write, "the long 19th century of body-fixated race theory is an anomaly in a longer history that evidences various combinations of culture and phenotype being combined to define racial characteristics" (p. 12).

Religion remains tied closely to race as shown in the 2003 Detroit Arab American Study where nearly three-quarters of Christian Arabs identified themselves as White compared to only about half of Muslims surveyed who responded similarly (Baker et al., 2006). Cultural and religious markers of Muslim identity have been shown to alter the racial status of those who adopt them (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007). For example, Muslim women who otherwise may be identified as White may find their racial status altered if they decide to cover their heads (Ajrouch and Kusow, 2007).

In other contexts, markers of Muslim identity may be used to distinguish an individual who otherwise might be ascribed an African American racial identity. Atiya Husain (2017), for example, describes the experience of an African American Muslim participant who was followed by a police officer when walking home late at night. When the man took off his hood revealing a kufi beneath, the man's shifting racial identity caused (as he believed) the police officer to drive away. Likewise, Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal (2007) depict the ways in which Somali Muslim immigrants in Canada emphasize their religious and cultural identities in order to avoid being identified with the racialized Afro-Caribbean population.

This brief overview suggests that Muslims' racial identity is defined, in part, by culture and religion and is distinct from a binary White or Black categorization (Cainkar and Selod, 2018; Husain 2017; Zopf 2018). As Louise Cainkar and Saher Selod (2018) put it, religious and cultural markers such as turbans and veils, or even one's name, can "provoke a racial response" (p. 170). Although this work has made it clear that culture and religion play a role in the racialization of Muslims, few scholars have addressed the intersection of social class with this process. In what follows, I explore the ways in which social class has influenced the ways that Muslims have been historically incorporated into the racial hierarchy of the United States. These processes illustrate the ideological connection between race and class whereby middle-class identity is linked with Whiteness and poverty is associated with racialized Others (Moss 2003; Ortner 2006; Urcuioli 1996). For immigrant groups, therefore, the process of becoming "American" is itself racialized as integration requires not just "an embrace of American identity but specifically of White American identity" (Roediger 2005, p. 178). Although social class resources may have provided Muslim immigrants in the United States the capacity for social mobility, such advantages may be disguised by a "model minority" ideology which displaces class features onto culture.

Social Class, Racialization, and the "Model Minority"

Social class has played an integral role in the construction of a Muslim racial identity in the United States throughout the twentieth century. Under the *In re Najour* case of 1909, for example, those from Syria-Lebanon were granted a legally White status in the United States which made them eligible for citizenship (Haney López 1996). Although this claim on Whiteness was most clearly based on an association with Christianity, Sarah Gualtieri (2009) notes that Syrians later began to rely on contrasts with other racialized groups such as African Americans after recognizing the conditional nature of their civic inclusion. Such contrasts emphasized class factors such as their high levels of education, English proficiency, and position as small business owners (Gualtieri 2009). This historical legacy, combined with selective acculturation and high levels of cultural

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and economic capital, helped establish a "marginal White" status for many Middle Eastern Muslim Americans throughout the twentieth century (Cainkar 2002; Naber 2000) despite being subjected to Orientalizing discourses which blocked their full inclusion into society (Maghbouleh 2017; Said 1978).

Like other "Arabians," South Asian Muslims were barred entry to the United States under the *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* ruling of 1923 that deemed them as non-White and ineligible for citizenship (Haney López 1996). Yet, after the immigration policy shift of 1965, large numbers of highly-educated South Asian migrants arrived in the United States to help keep pace with the Soviet Union and provide medical staff for the new social programs initiated during the 1960s (Bald et al., 2010). Like many Middle Eastern Muslim Americans, South Asian Muslims leveraged their class position upon arrival to promote social mobility and build positive cultural representations of themselves as "model minorities" (Purkayastha 2005). Though this "model minority" status did not fully shield South Asians from the effects of racism, they were able to, in large part, advance their social position through educational advancement and consumption practices facilitated by class resources brought with them from their native countries (Dhingra 2007, Prashad 2000).

Far from establishing a White identity, the social mobility of these so-called "model minorities" has nonetheless been frequently invoked as a way to distinguish Muslim immigrant groups from other racialized minorities while rarely acknowledging the role of class in this process. This stereotype not only valorizes upwardly-mobile immigrants for overcoming the challenges of migration but chastises African Americans for their seeming inability to move up the social ladder in the same fashion (Prashad 2000). These narratives also lend support to the ideology of meritocracy by presenting the successful immigrant as indisputable evidence that anyone is capable of success in the United States with the right attitude and work ethic (Hochschild 1996). Previous scholarship has shown that new arrivals often view the United States in meritocratic terms and may use this ideology to both rationalize hardships and justify their success (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Leo 2019; Louie 2004).

Neglecting the impact of U.S. immigration policy that selected for highly-educated immigrants from South and East Asia and the Middle East, the "model minority" stereotype ultimately promotes attacks on Black culture and family structure while hampering the potential to establish cross-racial unity (Louie 2004; Maira 2016). In benefitting from their contrasts with other racialized minorities, many immigrant groups have willingly adopted this ideology and contributed to a colorblind ideology that denies the power of racism in society and obscures class inequalities (Chan-Malik 2011; Love 2017). In the absence of a discourse on class, racial inequalities are frequently explained as cultural or personal deficiencies rather than outcomes of a history of political, economic, and racial injustice (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2014; Skeggs, 2004).

Although class resources may have helped many Muslim immigrants and their descendants in the United States be viewed as a "model minority," this status may have been revoked under the War on Terror and the increasingly nativist climate ushered in under the Trump administration (Cainkar and Selod, 2018). Furthermore, the increasing numbers of working-class Middle Eastern and South Asian Muslim immigrants entering the United States may lack the economic and cultural capital of their predecessors, and therefore fail to attain the same social mobility that their middle- and upper-middle class counterparts had in the past (Dhingra 2007). Working-class Muslim immigrants are also more susceptible to detention and deportation and likely to be targeted for immigration policing based on visa status or petty criminal violations (Rana 2011).

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In sum, for many Muslim immigrants throughout the twentieth century, racial ascription has critically involved social class, a factor which has created cleavages between Muslims in the United States and other racialized minorities, specifically African Americans. As the pernicious history of the "model minority" demonstrates, the same class resources which helped many Muslim immigrants attain social mobility also created a fracture with other racialized minorities.

METHODS AND CONTEXT

Data for this paper are drawn from a yearlong ethnographic project conducted among current and former immigrant and refugee students in an urban, multiracial public high school located in New York State. Schools serve as a unique site for the construction, ascription, and negotiation of racial subjectivities as they offer "one of the rare social spaces in which adolescents from different social-cultural experiences and backgrounds come together on a daily basis for an extended period of time" (Moss 2003, p. 23). In addition, since race and academic performance are intimately linked, students of color often must manage their racial identities in an institutional context where Whiteness is frequently associated with school success (Fordham 1996; Lee 2005). For example, as John Ogbu (1987) and colleagues (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986) have argued, long-term experiences of oppression can lead African American youth to develop an "oppositional culture" to schooling as they view the attitudes and behaviors required for academic success as a form of conformity to White norms. While critics have demonstrated that Black students from varied backgrounds highly value education (O'Connor 1997), explanations of academic disparities continue to draw on racialized explanations of school inequality (Carter 2003). Thus, as immigrant youth navigate experiences with racialization, they often do so in a school context where racial ideologies are closely linked to educational success and failure (Perry 2002).

Parkside High School (a pseudonym, as are all names that follow) serves approximately 2500 students, of which half identify as African American, 20% as White, 14% as Latina/o, and 10% as Asian (New York State Education Department 2016). The city where the high school is located can be described as a mid-sized, urban city located in New York's Rust Belt. While the Parkside Metro area has experienced a 15% overall decline in White student enrollment, the proportion of White students in urban schools dropped from 72.8% in 1989 to 32.5% in 2010. During the same period, Black student enrollment in urban Parkside Metro area schools more than doubled from 22.5% to 45.7% and the number of English Language Learners in Parkside schools increased from approximately 300 students to over 1300 (Kuscera and Orfield, 2014; *Parkside Herald* 2017). These trends mark White flight to suburban areas as well as the increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants arriving in Parkside. As demonstrated below, the racial geography of Parkside serves as an important context for the Muslim newcomers of this study who negotiate their racial identities in schools and neighborhoods in close proximity to African Americans.

Aware that Parkside High School would be a suitable field site for this project, having received large numbers of immigrants and refugees in the last decade, I emailed several teachers six months before the study began and secured permission to volunteer as an afterschool tutor for new arrivals. With this initial entrée to the school, I eventually contacted the Superintendent of the ENL [English as a New Language] Department and obtained formal permission to begin collecting data for this study.

Eighteen students took part in this study. Of the eighteen students, eleven were male and seven were female. Four out of the eighteen students were recent graduates of

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Parkside High and currently enrolled in nearby colleges. These students were contacted for interviews through the help of student participants and teachers. All participants identified as practicing Muslims who regularly attended religious services and observed Muslim holidays, and five out of the seven female students wore headscarves to school every day. All participants had migrated to the United States within the last seven years, and some had arrived as recently as six months prior to the study. Participants were natives of the following countries, though many had relocated to neighboring countries before arriving in the United States: Iraq (seven), Afghanistan (three), Bangladesh (two), Sudan (two), Libya (one), Chad (one), Jordan (one), Yemen (one). Twelve of the eighteen students were refugees. Of the eighteen students, six came from working-class backgrounds and had parents who had not attended college and worked blue-collar jobs in their former countries. Twelve of the students were from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds and had college-educated parents who had professional, white-collar positions in their former countries. Nearly all families had experienced downward class mobility upon arrival to the United States, however, and many parents worked in service or manual labor positions. High aspirations and optimism for social mobility were evident across all class groupings as each student reported detailed plans to attend college and establish white-collar careers.

Though recognizing the diversity present among the Muslim immigrant population at Parkside High, this study refers to participants collectively as "Muslim newcomers" to emphasize their common religious identity and the role it plays in racialization as well as the significance of their first-generation status. This term does not imply homogeneity among participants and indeed national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and class differences were present among this population (Kibria 2011). As Nazli Kibria (2011) reminds us, any attempt to address the racialization of Muslims in the United States risks "flattening" the heterogeneous experiences, subjectivities, and phenotypes of such a diverse population. Moreover, while the following data provides useful insights into the racialization of Muslim immigrants, generalizations must be made with care as the sample here is not meant to represent the entire Muslim immigrant population in the United States.

This study combined forms of traditional ethnographic research with applied approaches where the researcher takes a more active role in the lives of participants (Greenman 2005). As situated participant-observers, ethnographers are particularly attuned to the ways in which immigrant youth construct their identities and negotiate racial ascription (Fordham 1996; Lee 2005; Ngo 2010; Urcuioli 1996). Ethnographers can also add to political-historical analyses which underscore the production and reproduction of racial formations (Omi and Winant, 1994; Wilson 1987) by paying close attention to the quotidian experiences of individuals over time and the ways in which they position themselves relative to the racial context in which they find themselves (Ortner 1984).

The fieldwork schedule consisted of a full day of classroom observations which sometimes combined teaching assistance and tutoring three days a week for an entire school year. The class subjects were English as a New Language (ENL), Global History, and English Language Arts. In several classes I took a more distanced position where I sat among students making observations, answering students' questions only when prompted, and chiming in when appropriate. In other classrooms, teachers asked that I work in small groups with students or walk around the room to assist students as they worked independently. Additionally, I assisted in an after-school tutoring program, attended extracurricular activities in which participating students took part, and visited community events put on by local organizations. These varied positions allowed me to better understand participants' day-to-day experiences of race and class as well as capture information about their lives which was not made clear in interviews. Semi-structured

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interviews lasting between forty and sixty minutes were conducted with all participating students. In addition, five teachers were interviewed to help provide context to student data. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded using qualitative software. Because the fieldwork for this project was conducted solely in Parkside High, all ethnographic data collected pertains to current students with the exception of a few events and after-school activities that former students attended.

Although I tried to minimize the effect my identity had on participants, my position as a middle-class, White man likely influenced reactions and responses in nuanced ways. For example, it is possible that students may not have commented so frankly about African Americans to me if I was not White. Furthermore, my male identity may have affected the ability to generate rapport between the young men and women participating in this study though I can recall no explicit moments where this seemed to be the case. Lastly, the sociopolitical context in which the study was conducted played a significant role in the responses and attitudes of participants. This project coincided with the nomination and subsequent election of Republican candidate Donald Trump whose campaign platform included consistent anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy initiatives which included the promise to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as a ban on immigrants and refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries (many of which were the homelands of students participating in this project). The anxiety and frustration expressed by students and teachers over Trump's controversial ascent to political power served as a significant backdrop to this study and often framed discussions about race and assimilation.

FINDINGS

Responding to Racialization

Racial tensions involving Muslim immigrant students were described by teachers at Parkside High as an important issue which occasionally manifested in hallway "bullying" incidents, physical altercations, and online harassment. Such events often involved features of culture and religious identity that were emphasized as a deviation from American norm, thus drawing on an ideology which suggests that Muslims are inherently antagonistic to "Western" culture and therefore unassimilable (Jaffe-Walter 2016). During one of my first days at the high school, for example, I waited after school in the library for a student participant. An Afghani girl on a computer accidentally unplugged her earphones while listening to music causing the song to be played loudly throughout the library. Before she had a chance to silence the music, a booming reproach from a male African American student was heard from across the room: "Turn that Arab shit off!" Through his comment, the young man served to police certain areas of the school, demanding that public areas such as the library exclude any features of outsider culture. Additionally, by referring to the Afghani music as "Arab," the young boy "flattened" the heterogeneity of all Muslim culture, turning it into a recognizable and essentialized Other (Omi and Winant, 1994; Said 1978). Amidst these experiences, many participants endeavored to manage racial stigma and some articulated critical views of Islamophobia (Maira 2010; Marvasti 2005).

Though integration may have historically been a potential lever for class and racial mobility (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Waters and Jiménez, 2005), many participants felt that their religious affiliation made it hard to "fit in" with other Americans. As Aziz, a seventeen year-old Iraqi refugee who had arrived in Parkside two years prior to this fieldwork, told me, "I want to do it [go to parties, drink alcohol] so badly so I can get along with them and be like, feel like someone American. And at the

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same time, I feel like that's not who I am. I'm changing into another person and that's not what I've been raised to do and what I've learned from my religion." Mehdi, an Afghani refugee, felt that his religion conflicted with what he saw as the fundamentally secular values of the United States. "If you're religious, you're not going to be in American culture because Americans are too easy about everything and in Islam especially they have their own limits [to what is considered acceptable behavior]." Mehdi spoke disparagingly about other Muslim newcomers who abandoned their identities: "I've seen a lot of people who give up everything, and they just become American and they forget about everything. It's wrong."

Such narratives demonstrate how participants often saw full integration as being in conflict with their religious and cultural identities as Muslims (Jaffe-Walter 2016). Yet even participants who felt that they were guaranteed religious freedom in the United States still felt that their identities as Muslim presented obstacles to inclusion. When asked whether she felt comfortable practicing Islam in the United States, Miriam, an Iraqi woman who arrived two years before the study was conducted replied, "It's legal for you to practice your religion here, but I think that you feel like you are strange. People look at you like, 'Why do they do that?' It makes you want to do it alone. You don't want anyone to see you." Responding to the same question, Leila, an outspoken young woman who arrived from Libya two years ago as a refugee, gave the following response:

> They start judging you about the things you do, or the things you eat, or the things you wear… so that's kind of hard. When I wear the scarf every time people ask me, 'Why are you wearing this? Are you bald or something?' At first, I was like 'No I wear this because of my religion and stuff.' But then I started joking about it. And I told these two boys, I don't even know them, but they were like 'Oh you're wearing this because you're bald' and stuff like that. I was walking and I had a blank face, then I turned around I told them 'If you really want to know the truth, I'm actually a vampire. All Muslim people are vampires. That's why they wear this stuff.'

As these comments demonstrate, participants felt that their cultural and religious identity as Muslims presented an obstruction to full integration into U.S. society. Miriam and Leila, unlike Mehdi, wore headscarves and were likely more visibly racialized than the other youth who participated in this study since, according to Islamophobic ideology, head coverings represent a clear example of Muslim women's oppression or are evidence of the unwillingness of Muslims to assimilate (Abu-Lughod 2013; Jaffe-Walter 2016). Although women report more instances of discrimination-related stress than do men (Sirin and Fine, 2008), attacks on headscarves affect Muslim men as well since they portray Muslim culture and family life as essentially patriarchal and oppressive towards women (Al-Saji 2010). Notably, all three students found consensus in the belief that their religious obligations and identities as Muslims present a barrier to full inclusion in their new country.

Even those who were less "visibly Muslim" reported experiences of discrimination and racialization. Fatima, a fair-skinned Iraqi refugee who described herself as "not that religious," spoke fluent English, and did not wear a hijab, was still attuned to the effects of Islamophobia. She described a racist attack suffered by her parents' friends who were taking English classes at a local church:

> I feel like just in the last couple years it [Islamophobia] became a lot more common. For example, I know my mom's friends who go to a church just for English classes. They told us that when this whole Donald Trump thing came and he said to ban Muslims and all that, they put our Holy Book, the Koran, and they put a jar of pee on top of it

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> next to the door where they go to. And they were very sad to see that. And the church didn't want to do anything, so they told the students not to say anything either.

When I asked Fatima if that made her angry, she replied, "I'm not one to complain, so I don't really care if someone is racist against me or if they say something that's not nice. I tend to just walk away and pretend like it never happened."

Like Fatima, several students expressed anxiety over rising levels of Islamophobia which coincided with Donald Trump's ascent to the presidency. During the first ten days after Trump was elected, there were 900 reported incidents of hate crimes, and in 40% of those cases Trump's name was used when victims were attacked (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017). While some students I spoke with shrugged off the rise in Islamophobia coinciding with Trump's rise, others reported elevated levels of visibility and exclusion. In a classroom conversation the day after Trump's election, for example, one student said jokingly that he was thinking of returning home to West Africa. Another student sarcastically quipped, "Hurry close the door before Trump comes in!" Leila responded to the election scoffing, "White people are more scared of Trump than we are!" Despite these jokes, one teacher told me that a few students asked her pointedly why Trump "hated them." "They're afraid," she said.

The accounts above demonstrate the ways in which Muslim newcomers are racialized along cultural and religious lines as well as the complex ways in which Muslim youth respond to their racialization through various techniques and strategies to manage stigma (Marvasti 2005). Several students like Leila utilized a blend of humorous and defiant strategies to deflect and refute mischaracterization of Muslims. Other youth utilized an "educational" strategy of stigma management such as Sharif, who encouraged me to visit his mosque as Ramadan approached (Marvasti 2005). After he told me that "many people come to speak with the Imam there—news crews came one time," I responded, "Wow, that is a lot of attention." Nodding, he replied, "It's important to teach people about Islam so that they aren't learning about it from the wrong people… like Trump." Unlike other youth, the comments made by Sharif suggest that Islamophobia can be "corrected" through teaching others about Islam.

Several students went beyond managing stigma, however, and incorporated what Sunaina Maira (2010) calls "dissenting citizenship," a penetrating critique of power imbalances which often conflict with the official state politics. For example, when Leila remarked that "White people are more scared of Trump than we are," she takes aim at the notion that marginalized groups cannot stand up for themselves without the help of the White majority (Spivak 1988). Likewise, Miriam picked up on the contradiction between the "legal" protection to practice Islam in the United States, and the feeling that she wanted "to do it alone." Such "racial loopholes" demonstrate the limits to multiculturalism and participants' critical awareness of inequality in the United States (Jackson 2010; Maghbouleh 2017).

My interactions with these students demonstrate the ways in which Muslim newcomers experience racialization along cultural and religious lines and respond to their racialization through varied techniques that manage racial stigma and develop critiques of U.S. society. Such findings further highlight the ways in which racial identity is not simply ascribed in a top-down fashion but actively contested and negotiated by individuals (Bashi Treitler 2013; Omi and Winant, 1994).

The following section furthers this discussion by situating participants' views of their own racialization vis-à-vis African Americans. Their comments evince a racial ideology which links African Americans to poverty and deviance and Whiteness to affluence and social mobility (Ortner 2006; Urcuioli 1996). Although social class factors underlie many of their experiences, most participants displaced class inequalities onto

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cultural features, while several newcomers more explicitly associated social class with racialization. These findings point to the need to consider class in the process of racialization and the ways in which racialized minorities relate their own experiences to other racial groupings.

Class, Culture, and Racializing Discourse

In discussing relations between African Americans and Muslim immigrant youth, several teachers mentioned incidents in which African American students called Muslim immigrant students "terrorists" as well as a brawl in a Parkside neighborhood which involved weapons and police intervention. As an administrator thoughtfully explained, "What happens with an oppressed group is, another oppressed group that's been around longer might actually have conflict with them." In referring to numerous negative comments about African Americans made by her Muslim students, one teacher said that "they [Muslim immigrant youth] don't come here with a very high view of African Americans to begin with."

In the comments made by several participants, class differences were displaced onto race and culture and often interpreted as cultural deficits rather than social inequalities. Although nearly all participants' experiences with African Americans were in low-income, segregated neighborhoods, such disparities were rarely emphasized when participants discussed their interactions with African Americans whom they frequently depicted as frightening and aggressive Others. For example, several students described the negative perceptions of African Americans they had after being resettled in neighborhoods on Parkside's North end, an area inhabited largely by low-income African Americans. Sadiq, an Iraqi refugee and graduate of Parkside High, compared his first neighborhood unfavorably with the rest of the city due to its racial makeup. "It's okay. But it's a lot of Black people so… it's not a good example." Sara, Miriam's sister and graduate of Parkside High, described her first neighborhood in the following way:

> My home was on Main Street, and the place there is a little bit… it's not comfortable. I heard a lot of things about Black people and what they do to immigrant people, and so it was scary for me to go there… Friends told us that.

Other participants commented on the difficulties that they had "getting along" with African Americans in their neighborhoods and in school. Tariq, a nineteen year-old Iraqi refugee who spent most of his childhood in Egypt before being resettled in Parkside in 2014, told me bluntly, "I'm not trying to be racist, but the Black people are bad. I mean, not all of them… but most of them, they don't like to communicate with Arabs. I don't know why." He added that his opinions came "from experience" living on the North end of Parkside. Sharif, too, commented that he couldn't make friends with his African American neighbors because "they were always yelling and fighting."

Another example of a racializing narrative directed at African Americans came from Salim, a Bangladeshi immigrant whose family came to Parkside in 2012 looking for "better opportunities." He commented on what he felt were the differences between "groups of Black people" such as African Americans and immigrants with dark complexions whom he also saw as Black (though himself not a member of either group):

> I don't want to be mean, but in Parkside you have a lot of groups of Black people: The one is the biggest, basically like American Black people. And the other Black groups are from Sudan or other countries, like immigrant Black people. Immigrant Black people are really nice usually, friendly, whatever… it's like we can speak a little bit even though we speak different language. But American Black people are just like

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> that they don't want to talk, so we don't have a lot of American Black friends. But I can communicate with other Blacks from other countries, not from America.

In these cases, participants neglected class factors and instead couched their negative experiences with African Americans in cultural terms (Silverstein 2005). In contrast to the youth above, comments made by other respondents reflected a nascent recognition of class inequality as they explicitly linked class disparities and racialization.

For example, one day during class I asked Mahmoud, whose comments about Donald Trump were mentioned in the preceding section, about his job working as a short-order cook. He complained exasperatedly, "I do everything. Nobody helps me," he said. "Do you get paid well at least?" I asked. Mahmoud replied, "I get some tips, but only White people give me tips. Black people never tip me. And sometimes Black men come in and start asking for money. I tell them that I'm just working, but they start yelling and cursing." Karim, an Iraqi refugee who spent six years in Syria before arriving in New York State, offered similar comments which linked economic deprivation to racial inequality. When asked whether Muslim immigrants get along with African Americans, he said:

> What I've learned is that there are two types of African Americans: there is the bad side, like where the Black people have their own community—and then, like I don't want to say 'educated Black people'—but there are the ones who live with White people, or they act like White people. They are easier to get along with, when they feel like they are accepted or that they're equal.

Ibrahim, an Iraqi refugee who arrived in the United States eighteen months prior to our meeting after fleeing to Jordan for three years, also drew an association between class inequality and racialization. Like Karim and Mahmoud, Ibrahim related issues of class inequality to negatively perceived cultural characteristics among African Americans. One day at the end of class, we began to chat about the different places in Parkside. I asked him about his neighborhood and he excitedly told me that he had just moved to a new neighborhood. Like many newcomers, he had shared a small apartment with his family on the North side of Parkside. "We had problems there… the Blacks didn't like us; they were always fighting. I didn't like it," he said about his former neighborhood. With more secure income coming in from the small restaurant owned and operated by his father, his family sought to move to a more diverse working- and middle-class area in Southern Parkside. I asked him how he liked it and he responded with a smile, "Oh my new neighborhood is better. The Black people there have more money, and they get along with immigrants."

In many ways, the comments made by participants echo a long history of racialized immigrants adopting anti-Black attitudes (Bashi Treitler 2013; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 2005). As Toni Morrison (1993) writes, "the move into mainstream America always means buying into the notion of American blacks as the real aliens. Whatever the ethnicity or nationality of the immigrant, his nemesis is understood to be African Americans" (p. 57). However, these narratives also illustrate the relationship between social class and the process of racialization. For example, while class resources have frequently been used as a means to mitigate racialization for immigrants in the U.S. (Brodkin 1998; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 2005), many participants failed to account for class in their criticisms of African Americans despite the fact that their experiences with African Americans were in largely low-income, segregated neighborhoods. In the absence of a class discourse, participants instead criticized African Americans through

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the lens of culture. The tendency to implement individual or cultural explanations at the expense of a class discourse is unsurprising given previous scholarship which has demonstrated that new arrivals often view the opportunity structure of the United States as open and meritocratic (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Leo 2019; Louie 2004). Such ideologies neglect class inequality and may draw on the "model minority" stereotype discussed above which suggests that social mobility and integration is possible for those who put forth effort and diligence (Dhingra 2007; Prashad 2000). From this view, the failure to achieve social mobility can only be seen as a result of individual or cultural deficiency.

In contrast, Karim, Ibrahim, and Mahmoud more clearly associate racialization and class inequality. Through this lens, poverty and segregation are envisioned as features of the racialized underclass, yet class mobility is envisioned as one way in which racial position is mitigated (Ortner 2006; Urcuioli 1996). Thus, according to these youth, African Americans were less threatening to participants when they had more wealth, education, and were more integrated with the White population of Parkside. These comments illustrate the close relationship between race and class. Or as Sherry Ortner (2006) puts it, "racial and ethnic categories are already class categories" (p. 73). Despite this nascent recognition of class, the comments made by these three youth can still be seen as perpetuating a form of racism insofar as assimilating to Whiteness— "living with" or "act[ing] like White people" as Karim put it—is viewed as a prerequisite to social mobility (Moss 2003).

In spite of the racializing attitudes towards African Americans expressed above, comments made by several participants pointed to the potential for establishing cross-racial solidarity between Muslim newcomers and African Americans. It is this topic which is explored in the following section.

Cross-racial Solidarity in a Colorblind Era

In contrast to the racializing narratives discussed above, several Muslim newcomer participants expressed moments of solidarity with African Americans, thus calling attention to shared experiences of racism and exclusion as well as the complicated relationship between African American Muslims and Muslim immigrants (Jackson 2005). These comments further illustrate the ways in which Muslim newcomers both recognize their non-White status and highlight the potential to establish cross-racial alliances despite significant barriers (Maira 2016).

Moments of solidarity between participants in this study and African Americans often rested on the belief that both groups were victimized by racism at the hands of Whites. For example, when asked whether African Americans and Muslim newcomers get along, Muhammed, a newly-settled Iraqi refugee, responded hesitantly "sometimes," but added that the experiences African Americans are similar to immigrants because they both experienced racism from "White people." Amir, a Sudanese refugee, expressed a similar sentiment after attending an event in the library in honor of Black History Month. "It is good for them [African Americans] to have the history month," he said. When I asked him if immigrants have similarities with African Americans he paused and then said, "I don't know. I don't feel like it's my country. Maybe that is similar to what they feel." Even Salim, who had criticized African Americans for their unwillingness to talk to immigrants, later told me that he had tried to make more of an effort to be friendly with Blacks in his neighborhood. "Over time," he said, "my mind has changed a little." Such comments highlight the recognition by participants that racialized minorities share the common burden of discrimination and exclusion.

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A poignant example of solidarity between Muslim youth and African Americans was displayed during a school play put on by students several months into my fieldwork. During the play, immigrants, refugees, and African American youth recounted powerful narratives involving bullying, racial profiling, and discrimination. One skit depicted a Puerto Rican girl shown to be pregnant in a hospital. As nurses surrounded her asking questions, the girl exasperatedly tried to answer in Spanish. One nurse turned to the other and remarked, "She's been here five years and still doesn't know English?" Later in the play, a young Sudanese woman came on stage speaking rhetorically to the crowd: "Mom, why did daddy shave his beard? Is it okay to be religious here? Why do they call me a terrorist?" In a final scene, an African American girl described an incident in which her family was pulled over by Parkside police, taken out of their vehicle, and angrily told to show their hands. Her younger brother, suffering from a physical disability, did not want to take his deformed hand out of his pocket. The cops became increasingly angry and pointed their weapons at him before he finally showed his hands.

The interwoven narratives in the play created spaces of solidarity between Muslim youth and African Americans by calling attention to the practices of exclusion and Othering to which both groups are subjected. As Maira (2016) notes, the adoption of civil rights language by Muslim American activists has provided a space for cross-racial dialogue which understands the experiences of Muslims and African Americans as part of a larger history of race-based exclusion in the United States. The narratives of the play directly allude to such practices by suggesting that racialized minorities may not feel, as Amir put it, like the United States is "my country." These sentiments further illustrate the long-standing association between integration, belonging, and Whiteness in the United States (Jackson 2010).

Several students also seemed to find moments of solidarity with African American Muslims through their common religious affiliation. For example, Ali, a newly-arrived student from Chad, described his surprise when he found American Muslims at the mosque near his home. "People used to say to me, 'In the United States, people don't like Muslims'… but when I came here there's like American Muslims and immigrant Muslims. Everyone is going on their way and doing what they want to do." During one history period where students were given the opportunity to read a book of their choice, I noticed that Jamal, a Yemeni student who had been living in the United States for two years, was reading *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. He caught me looking at him and I asked, "How do you like that book?" Jamal, who I had discovered over the course of my fieldwork to be highly interested in U.S. history—even going so far as to criticize the War in Iraq to an unsympathetic teacher—replied with a hint of surprise and excitement, "Did you know about the 'Nation of Islam'? There are lots of Black people who are Muslim!" Given what I knew about Jamal's interest in history and politics, his response suggested sincere enthusiasm to learn about the role of Islam in the United States, especially regarding a group actively involved in social justice movements throughout the twentieth century.

Although the above comments suggest that Islam may provide a link between African Americans and Muslim immigrants, cross-racial unity based on a common religious identity may be difficult to build. While Islam in the African American community played a liberatory role in the twentieth century and continues to be a source of anti-racist activist movements (Aidi and Marable, 2006), schisms began to emerge as post-1965 well-educated groups of Muslim immigrants began to wrest power from the Black Muslim elite (Jackson 2005). Political divisions remain difficult to bridge as Muslim immigrant activists often direct their focus on issues of U.S. imperialism abroad, while African American activists emphasize domestic issues such as police brutality and incarceration (Maira 2016, Turner 1997). Additionally, as Erik Love

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(2017) notes, many Muslim advocacy groups have reframed their positions in terms of religious, not racial, discrimination since 9/11. Such an approach reduces complex issues of racism and exclusion to religious intolerance that can be combatted through interfaith dialogue (Maira 2016). This "faithwashing" coincides with the growth of a universalist version of Islamic which is decidedly postracial as well as the spread of "colorblind ideology" which denies the salience of race and existence of racism in society (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Maira 2016; Omi and Winant, 1994). These factors have caused what Sherman Jackson (2010) refers to as "racial agnosia" among Muslim immigrants. And as Vijay Prashad (2000) notes, contemporary Muslim populations in the United States are even less likely to participate in social movements involving racial activism due to their precarious social position.

These factors pose significant challenges for building cross-racial coalitions while also exposing the continuing durability of a racial hierarchy which traps African Americans at the bottom. As demonstrated above, the ongoing tendency for immigrant groups seeking to distance themselves from African Americans may further erode any potential for racial solidarity (Bashi Treitler 2013; Haney López 1996; Roediger 2005). Muslim immigrants have a vested interest in maintaining the racial hierarchy as their ascendance may depend on keeping African Americans at the bottom (Tehranian 2008). As Vilna Bashi Treitler (2013) writes, "A ladder with no bottom rung cannot be climbed" (p. 169). Furthermore, the allure of the "model minority" narrative may continue to provide a means for Muslim immigrants and their descendants to potentially heighten their social standing without acknowledging the class resources which have played a role in their success (Dhingra 2007). Ultimately, the absence of a discourse on class inequality and support for meritocratic ideology both advance a view of success and failure which result solely from individual and cultural characteristics. As discussed above, the promotion of these narratives has often come at a cost to African Americans who are seen as the "real foreigners" who have failed to assimilate to the norms of the White middle-class (Dhingra 2007, p. 122).

Indeed, despite the potential for solidarity discussed in this section, moments of racial solidarity at Parkside High were rare as Muslim newcomer youth hardly seemed to intermingle with African Americans in school. Throughout the entire school year, I rarely saw African Americans and Muslim students talking with each other or with White students. Mahmoud summed up the liminal, racialized position which he and other Muslim newcomers seemed to occupy: "Black and White people stay apart mostly [in school]—and we're just separate from everybody."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Scholarship on racialization has shown the need to move race from a static category assigned through biology to a dynamic process involving physical appearance, culture, and class (Kibria 2011; Silverstein 2005). In addition, as an actively constructed category, race involves both ascription by state power as well as the negotiation by racialized individuals and groups (Golash-Boza, 2016; Haney López 1996; Omi and Winant, 1994). This study has added to existing research by showing how Muslim newcomer youth are subjected to racialization along religious and cultural lines, yet actively negotiate this process in varied ways. For example, while many participants felt that their identities as Muslims obstructed their full integration into U.S. society—a sentiment which only deepened during Donald Trump's political ascent—they nonetheless responded to their racialization through stigma management techniques and the

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development of critical views of multiculturalism in the United States (Cainkar 2006; Kibria 2011; Maira 2010).

Further evidence demonstrated how participants racialized African Americans in ways which related to social class. While some participants misrecognized underlying class inequalities as cultural or individual deficiencies, several participants articulated a nascent acknowledgment of the role of social class. Overall, participants' responses invoked a racist ideology which linked African Americans to poverty and deviance and Whiteness to class mobility and integration (Moss 2003; Ortner 2006; Urcuioli 1996). The tendency to view the behavior of African Americans as a result of cultural or individual behavior may be further reinforced by acceptance of the "model minority" stereotype and a strong belief in meritocracy among newcomer populations in the United States evidenced in previous scholarship (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Leo 2019; Louie 2004). These findings point to the need to include discussions of social class as it relates to the racialization of both Muslim immigrants and Muslim Americans in future research (Cainkar and Selod, 2018).

The analysis of the way Muslim newcomers negotiate their racial identities vis-à-vis other racialized minorities presented here can provide insight into the contemporary racial structure of the United States (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Husain 2017). For example, the racializing attitudes held by participants towards African Americans echo a long history in which immigrants have sought to distance themselves from African Americans (Bashi Trietler 2013; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 2005). This process takes on additional meanings in school settings where academic performance is strongly linked to racial disparities, and explanations of these inequalities often draw on racialized ideologies which associate oppositional behaviors with Black student performance (Fordham 1996, Ogbu 1987).

Rates of intermarriage and geographic integration, for example, indicate that immigrant groups may not be breaking down the color line between Black and White but simply crossing it (Iceland 2017; Lee and Bean, 2004). However, these processes must also be situated in the contemporary sociopolitical landscape of the United States which targets Islam as a fundamental threat to democracy. Even Muslim immigrants who have sought to identify as "model minority" may be firmly entrenched as a racialized minority under the "War on Terror." As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) notes, even for those who have relied on a model minority or "honorary White" status, social inclusion has always remained contingent on those at the top of the hierarchy. Lastly, the changing class composition of the Muslim immigrant population writ large may mean a larger working-class population with lowered capacity to utilize economic and cultural capital to mitigate racial identity or lay claim to "model minority" status (Prashad 2000; Rana 2011). Thus, class mobility may not continue to provide Muslims with a platform to mitigate their experiences of racialization or distance themselves from other racialized minorities (Cainkar 2006; Love 2017).

Despite the racializing attitudes directed towards African Americans by participants in this study, the moments of solidarity discussed in the final section of this paper suggest the potential for cross-racial solidarities among racialized minorities in the United States. These forms of solidarity often rested on the shared experiences of exclusion and discrimination at the hands of Whites and the common link of Islam with African American Muslims. While promising, scholars have noted that the reduction of Islamophobia to religious discrimination and the promotion of a colorblind version of Islam pose obstacles to a racially unifying project (Jackson 2010, Maira 2016).

Multiracial schools like Parkside High offer rich opportunities for researchers as they bring together youth from widely varying backgrounds. Such domains also provide valuable occasions for youth to critically examine the way racial categories are constructed and maintained (Perry 2002). Because this study focused solely on newly-

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arrived Muslim immigrant youth, future research can further explore the ways in which such attitudes may change or harden over time spent in the United States as well as the perceptions held by later generations of Muslim immigrants and those from different ethnonational backgrounds (Kibria 2011). Moreover, the limited sample size of this study means that these findings must be generalized to other groups with caution. This article has sought to add the feature of social class to research examining the racialization of Muslim immigrants, however, additional scholarship can further this agenda by including additional factors such as gender and age at migration. Such work would be best aimed at the intersections of these categories rather than considering such features in isolation. In a purportedly "postracial" landscape and with nativism on the rise, the need to understand how racialization is experienced by individuals and the potential for solidarity among racialized minorities could not be more pressing (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

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