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Moving beyond (and back to) the black–white binary: a study of black and white Muslims' racial positioning in the United States

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ABSTRACT
Muslim racialization literature argues that a new racialized group emerged after 9/11, but does not examine how this group is positioned relative to US black–white binary racial logic. In fact, many argue that to understand Muslims, we must move our analysis "beyond black and white". Literature on the black–white binary, on the other hand, offers valuable theory for analysis of racial structures, but does not often examine the role religion plays in these structures. My project employs and fills gaps in these two literatures by examining how black and white Muslims are positioned relative to US black–white racial logic. Analysing ethnographic data, I find that black and white Muslims are positioned as either black/white or as Muslim. This suggests that Muslimness, and religion more generally, shapes the construction and attribution of blackness and whiteness.

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> After the [9/11] attacks, however, [Arabs and Muslims] have formally entered American discourse around race, and with a bang. But the primary question remains: To which racial category do they belong exactly? Are they white, brown, or black (all of these, actually), or are they their own novel category? … And what relationship does being Arab or Muslim in America have to blackness … In other words, have Arabs and Muslims today become less "white" and more "colored" – that is to say, have they in some sense become more "black" than blacks? (Moustafa Bayoumi 2009, 133–134)

Moustafa Bayoumi's primary question – to which racial category do Arabs and Muslims belong in the US – does not have a straightforward answer. What is clear is that Muslimness is associated with non-whiteness, sometimes brownness specifically. What is less theorized is the significance of these associations within a country whose racial order is built off a black–white binary in which blackness and whiteness are the two main racial positions.

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Rather than attempting to determine precisely where Muslims land in the US racial order, this article makes an argument for how Muslimness further shapes and disrupts that binary, specifically blackness and whiteness.

This article helps to fill gaps in two complementary literatures, one on Muslim racialization and the other on the US racial structure. The literature on Muslim racialization[1] argues that Muslims are positioned as foreign to what it means to be American (Volpp 2002; Bayoumi 2006; Love 2009; Gotanda 2011; Elver 2012; Beydoun 2013; Selod and Embrick 2013; Garner and Selod 2014; Moosavi 2014; Selod 2014). It shows that religion is a factor in race-making today and that there is an association between being Muslim and being non-white, or "brown", specifically. However, this finding is largely based on the study of Arab and South Asian Muslims. The literature on the US racial structure has argued that two fundamental positions in the racial structure are black and white. Some argue that the US has three racial positions, but all agree that black and white are two of the three (or more) positions (Kim 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2004). Blacks, whites, and others are largely positioned based on their colour, class, immigration status, and racial and political attitudes. Though historical precedent provides reason to believe that religion may also help position blacks and whites (Fredrickson 1981; Mills 1997), religion is largely absent as a factor in research on US racial positioning.

Muslim racialization literature neglects the black–white binary logic of the racial structure, while literature on the racial structure neglects the role of religion in constructing it. This article addresses the strengths and limitations of both literatures by including whites and blacks in its research design. Black and white Muslims have one foot (identity-wise) in each of the two literatures, so I use them as a case study.[2] This article addresses these literatures' complementary gaps in order to understand how Muslimness shapes and disrupts the black–white binary. Based on my ethnographic research, I ask the following question: How are black and white *Muslims* positioned relative to the black–white binary racial logic that structures race in the US?

Debating the black–white binary

The debate on the relevance of the black–white binary focuses on what the binary means for the positioning of non-black/non-white people. There are three main approaches.

The first approach is a call to move "beyond black and white". In response to scholarship that has almost solely studied blacks and whites to understand race, the call is to study "others" such as immigrants, Asians, Latina/os, and Muslims in order to include them in race literature and for their struggles to be considered racial (rather than cultural, ethnic, etc.) (Alcoff 2003; Perea 2013; Selod and Embrick 2013).[3] This is often a call for inclusion into race

literature (Perea 2013).[4] Also arguing against a binary, the next perspective argues that there is a tri-racial not a bi-racial order, but that blackness and whiteness remain major racial positions along with an intermediate group (Kim 1999; Forman, Goar, and Lewis 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2004). Factors positioning groups racially include foreignness/Americanness, colour, education, profession, income, and racial attitudes (Kim 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2004). The third perspective reviewed here is a critique of the call to move beyond black and white. Most in this perspective view the call to move beyond black and white as "unintentionally disrespecting a venerable tradition of black scholarship" (Brooks and Widner 2013, 499), arguing that "What is lost for the study of nonblack nonwhite existence is a proper analysis of the true scale and nature of its material and symbolic power *relative* to the category of blackness" (Sexton 2010, 48).[5]

All three perspectives argue that black–white binary logic is part of the racial structure but attribute different levels of significance and different temporalities to it. For some, it is part of racial history, for others it is part of the racial present. My view is that there is some usefulness in all three approaches, but they largely miss how religion has shaped the binary.

A brief historical dive suggests that there is precedent for considering religion as a factor in racial positioning (Brodkin Sacks 1994; Thomas 2010) vis-à-vis the black–white binary today. Pre- and early-modern differences along the lines of religion, civilization, and geography "eventually coalesced into the *basic* opposition of white versus nonwhite" (Mills 1997, 21). The arrival of the Enlightenment and secularism shifted these ideas about religion and civilization, but did not radically change notions of superiority/inferiority that underpinned these categories (Fredrickson 1981; Mills 1997; Wade 1997; Omi and Winant 2014). Rather, "this strategic dichotomization (Christian/infidel)" was translated into race, which "gradually became the formal marker of this differentiated status, replacing the religious divide" (Mills 1997, 23). Premodern Christians in Europe developed their group identity and consolidated power, defining themselves relative to Muslims, Jews, and heathens (Native Americans, among others) on the path to constructing whiteness as the dominant position in the black–white/non-white–white binary. Whether the subordinate position in the binary is characterized as "black" or as "non-white", it remains that religion played an early role in constructing and categorizing into dominant/subordinate racial positions (Husain 2017).

Racialization of Muslims

Literature on Muslim racialization has examined how religion shapes race. Aside from research on black and white Muslims, much of this research frames itself as moving beyond black and white (Rana and Rosas 2006;

Selod and Embrick 2013). For example, Saher Selod and David Embrick argue that, for the study of Muslims, the racialization framework provides "a space where race theory can move beyond *a Black/White paradigm* in order to discuss new racial meanings and new racisms experienced in new political, cultural, and economic contexts" (2013, 648, emphasis added). Junaid Rana and Gilberto Rosas make similar arguments about new contexts:

> The post-9/11 global racial system emerges from the history of Western conquest, empire, and imperialism; the spread of capitalist accumulation and dispossession; and the exploitation of racialized and gendered labor, gesturing to a politics of race and racism beyond the hegemonic *black–white binary*. (2006, 226, emphasis added).

This research has tracked and documented the racial meanings applied to Arabs and South Asian Muslims. However, we know less about how these meanings are produced relative to blackness and whiteness. I argue that it is valuable to analyse Muslims' position relative to the black–white binary because the binary structures the context into which Muslims are racialized. The persistence of black–white racial logic means that it is significant for how Muslims are racially positioned.

Some brief background on black and white Muslims in the US[6] is necessary before moving on in order to contextualize findings and analysis. This background throws into sharp relief the call that we must move beyond black and white to understand Muslims. An estimated 15–30 per cent of slaves in the Americas were Muslim (Diouf 1998; Gomez 2005). The twentieth century brought a revival of Islam in black America. Black Muslim groups like the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Moorish Science Temple, Nation of Islam, Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, and Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi groups emerged. Through institution-building and cultural shifts, Islam became well established in African-American communities (Lincoln 1961; McCloud 1995; Jackson 2005). Black Muslim cultural production developed and spread, including food (i.e. bean pies), arts and culture (i.e. hip hop), and clothing (i.e. suit, bowtie, fez, particular hijab styles) (Alim 2006; Khabeer 2016). The flourishing of Islam in black America is heavily associated with protest against white supremacy (Jackson 2005) to the point that "The Black Muslim Scare of the 1960s was the pinnacle of pre-9/11 fears about the Muslim threat to the American nation-state" (Curtis 2013, 98).

Unlike the history of black Muslims in the US, there is only a handful of white American Muslim communities peppered through US history texts; "Their presence has been characterized by clannishness and quietism, not by proselytism or public postures" (Lincoln 1984, 157). Early white conversion to Islam is directly connected to the study of Eastern religions through the "occult revival" beginning in the mid-1870s, in which there was a proliferation of organizations dedicated to the practice and study of "esoteric and

non-Christian religious teachings" (Bowen 2015, 17). Research on white Muslims today argues that this group loses aspects of their whiteness, or that it becomes compromised or complicated because they are Muslim (Franks 2000; Tourage 2012; Moosavi 2014; Galonnier 2015). Physical presentation greatly facilitates this presumed loss, particularly for women, as hijab is a "particularly efficient factor of racialization" (Galonnier 2015, 15). Black and white Muslims are typically studied in isolation or each relative to Arab and South Asian Muslims (Karim 2008; Chan-Malik 2011). Few existing studies compare black and white Muslims in the West (Jackson 2005; Maslim and Bjorck 2009; Moosavi 2014; Galonnier 2017). This is notable because studies of race in the US otherwise consistently study blacks and whites, and the US racial structure is built on these groups, which would suggest that it is important to study them together as my study offers.

Methods

This study is based on in-depth interviews and participant observation in Muslim communities in a metropolitan area on the west coast over 12 months (August 2014–2015). The area has a long history of leftist politics and a growing technology industry that structures the field demographically and economically. Interviewees were recruited based on several starting points and accumulated through snowball sampling. Starting points included different mosques and individuals I knew prior to conducting research in order to maximize respondent diversity along the lines of race, class, political beliefs, gender, sexuality, and degree of religiosity. I spent time with participants at mosques, their homes, places of employment and education, and various public spaces. Interviews covered questions about participants' background and relationship to Islam vis-à-vis other areas: their childhood, education, religious life at home, social life and networks, socio-economic status, Muslim social networks, what is important to them in Islam, what it means in their everyday lives, their experiences as members of their racial group, and their experiences of discrimination based on any aspect of their identity.

Though I analytically focus on African-American and white Muslims in this article, the 67 total interviews consisted of Muslims in the following racial/ethnic groups: black ($n = 14$), white ($n = 14$), Latina/o ($n = 7$), Arab ($n = 7$), South Asian ($n = 15$), multiracial ($n = 6$), East Asian ($n = 2$), Iranian ($n = 1$), and Afghan ($n = 1$). In this article, the data on other groups serve as context for the data on African-American and white Muslims I focus on here. Of the 14 black participants, 12 are African-American, 1 is an Afro-Caribbean immigrant, and 1 is the child of African immigrants.[7] Of the 28 black and white Muslim participants, there are 14 women and 14 men, 26 who identified as heterosexual, and 2 who identified as queer or LGBT. Six of the black participants

converted as adults; eight were raised Muslim. All 14 white participants converted as adults. Respondents are largely working class, and the age range is 22–70. Many attend more than one of three Sunni-majority mosques or Muslim community organizations with a significant convert population. Most participants are Sunni Muslims. One is Shi'a and one is a Nation of Islam member. All names are pseudonyms.

As a South Asian American Muslim woman, my positionality facilitated and shaped data collection in some ways. As a self-identified Muslim and South Asian, my presence in Muslim spaces can appear natural. My race/ethnicity appeared sometimes as a barrier due to longstanding anti-black racism in Muslim communities, perpetuated by Arab and South Asian Muslims (Jackson 2005; Chan-Malik 2011).

Data analysis included a first pass of coding interviews, field notes, and memos for explicit mentions of race, followed by examining how blackness, whiteness, and being Muslim appeared in the data relative to one another.

Findings

The following findings show how the meanings of Muslimness, blackness, and whiteness emerge relative to one another. Being black or white and visibly Muslim has different sorts of meanings and significance, but both blacks and whites share a separation from Muslimness, regarded as a foreign influence.

Nadeer is a 35-year-old African-American man who was raised Muslim and works in nonprofit organizations. Like many African-American Muslim participants in this study, he describes a mismatch between his religious self-identity and others' perceptions:

> So no matter how I felt about my identity, Muslim or not, I've been treated like a black dude. And until I have this conversation of "well actually, before you say this about those people (Muslims), you should know sometimes they could be sitting around you and you wouldn't even know it." … I would say things in Arabic … [and the response would be] "Oh, how'd you learn that?" because [I'm] not always what you were looking for.

Nadeer enjoys the shock and discomfort on the faces of non-Muslims who come to find out that he is a Muslim after assuming that he is not. He says that it is his race that leads to the assumption that he is not a Muslim, along with the fact that he does not have other visual cues that signal being Muslim like prayer beads or certain types of caps and clothes. Though Nadeer does not have those markers, he does have a beard. Arab, South Asian, and Latino men who otherwise look like Nadeer – no "Muslim garb", no prayer beads, no caps, but have a beard – have been racially profiled as Muslim, whether they are Muslim or not ((SAALT) 2014; Silva 2016). When asked if he thinks that his beard signals to people that he is Muslim, Nadeer responds:

> I don't know that anybody looks at me and sees "Muslim," which I think is just an advantage. The profiling, et cetera, I just don't get. I'm just a black dude with a beard. Until they learn more and they say, "Oh that's why, I knew there was something," but no.

Nadeer suggests that people view him as "different" in some kind of way but do not attribute it to being Muslim. The assumption that he is not Muslim and that he is *instead* black is a consistent theme in other black Muslims' accounts, even those who "look Muslim" like Aleem.

Aleem is a 40-year-old African-American man. Sent to prison as a youth, he returned a Muslim two decades later after trying to change his life while in prison. Aleem's account about walking home from the mosque after *fajr*, the pre-dawn prayer, in a majority white neighbourhood is revealing. He was wearing a black hoodie with the hood on. He noticed a police officer looking right at him from his car. Aleem says,

> I snatched my hood off, and I had my kufi on [under it], and he pulled off. [The officer] just went on his own way. And I said phew, wow, I did not want that at four in the morning.

I asked if he thought his kufi made a difference. "I do. I wear my kufi everywhere … When I don't wear it, I feel uncomfortable, because in that way I do feel I will be identified as something else other than Muslim." For Aleem, his kufi signifies his new identity:

> This is my identity, this is who I am, and this kufi is a part of that identity … I just wear it everywhere I go, because … we recognize each other when we see people in certain garb and we say, ok, spiritual person, religious person, or whatever.

He feels that "looking Muslim" by wearing a kufi shifts meanings in how he is perceived, away from the meanings of blackness and towards being Muslim. This time, he was spared what is otherwise a common and defining experience for black people – being stopped by the police. While Aleem often "looks Muslim" and Nadeer does not, both experience a shift in what blackness means in their lives due to Muslimness.

Muslim women across racial groups who wear a headscarf are perhaps the most visibly Muslim. Their experiences and accounts illuminate the specific meanings attributed to whiteness, blackness, and being Muslim. Soon after Allison, a 30-year-old white Muslim researcher, started wearing a hijab, she began to face assumptions from others that she is not from the US. Once in a public restroom as Allison was washing her hands, a white woman standing at another sink turned to her and said, "You have to wash everything, you know?" Allison was puzzled and wondered briefly if the woman was also Muslim and instructing Allison how to do *wudu* (ritual washing before prayer) before realizing that was not the case:

> And then it slowly unfolds that she's giving me instructions on proper hand hygiene and telling me that I need to wash basically up to my elbows … this experience is just baffling to me … I'm doing a very good job of washing my hands (laughs) … and then eventually in the conversation, she says, "Where are you from?" Suddenly all of the sort of slow, deliberate language she was using starts to make sense. She thinks I'm from some foreign place where people don't wash their hands properly. I was like, "Wow, that's fascinating! There it is."

Allison did not face assumptions of foreignness prior to wearing hijab, which she wears pinned under her chin, covering her hair and neck. She says that if she did not wear hijab, "You would never dream in a million years that [she] was Muslim." With her hijab comes an assumption of foreignness that does *not* match her racial identity. She was not perceived as a white American *because* she was perceived as a Muslim, which suggests a separation – if not opposition – between whiteness and being Muslim. Paula, a 40-year-old white Muslim, explicitly addresses race and hijab:

> I was actually just talking to [a friend] about this … since she's black and she wears hijab, I feel like non-Muslims will not see that as strange … cause being black and wearing hijab, it's more normal, or being brown, but then if you're white and you're wearing hijab you must be really weird, you know? … It doesn't run in those cultural lines at all, you know?

Paula's perspective was confirmed by every other white participant: to be visibly Muslim as a white person comes across as odd at best and dangerous at worst, while for black Muslims, to be black is already far outside of whiteness and already comes with grave consequences due to the history of racism in the US. This means that black and white Muslims experience their religion differently from one another socially. At the same time, blackness and whiteness are *both* positioned as separate from Muslimness, which is seen as a foreign influence.

Hijab styles carry different racial implications. Saleemah, an African-American Muslim woman, is often asked "Where are you from?" She says she is assumed to be African as a result of her hijab when she wears it pinned under her chin. In this question, there is an assumption that she may not be native-born. It is a question that she otherwise did not face. Along similar lines, I once witnessed a group of white men call Saleemah a "towelhead" while she was wearing this particular hijab style. Again, not among the racial epithets typically directed at African-Americans. Non-Muslim black women often wrap a scarf around their heads with a bun-like twist at the nape of the neck, the top of the head, or at an angle on the top or side. Black Muslim women also often wrap their hair this way but with the intention of observing hijab. Khabeer (2016) calls it the "hoodjab" in a compound term of "hood and hijab". It is for political reasons that Karimah, a 30-year-old black Muslim artist, intentionally wears her hijab as a scarf in this style. She says that

she would "rather be associated with the baggage" of being black American than "the baggage" that comes with wearing a hijab pinned under her chin, which is associated with Middle Eastern Muslims. Karimah is proud to be a Muslim and does not attempt to hide it. Rather, by wrapping her scarf as non-Muslim fellow black women do, Karimah uses her agency to signal her connection to blackness. In contrast, when Paula (white) wears her hijab that way, she jokingly says that people might think the style suggests she has cancer due to her pale skin. The same hijab style, worn by a black and a white woman, is associated with meanings that differ based on race but share one thing: they are meanings *other* than being Muslim. When whiteness and American blackness are signalled, being Muslim is not the immediate assumption.

In the context of these meanings, where whiteness, blackness, and being Muslim are positioned as separate from one another, black and white Muslim participants have different desires around being visibly Muslim that further point to this positioning. Being visibly Muslim was important to 11 out of the 14 total white Muslim participants of all genders. Of the 11, all wanted to be visibly Muslim in Muslim spaces. All but one wanted to be visibly Muslim in public spaces. Four out of seven white Muslim women participants and all of the black Muslim women participants wore hijab in their everyday lives. Participants cite several different reasons for desiring visibility. One reason is to be taken seriously by fellow Muslims as authentic and legitimate. Another reason is for participants' presentation to reflect their transformation. Allison says, "As much as I would like to say that I have purely Godly motives, I think at some level [looking Muslim is] also part of my choice to wear hijab." "Looking Muslim" requires effort on Allison's part due to her whiteness.

The data presented here on moments that blacks and whites are positioned as Muslim resemble the accounts and stories that the literature on the racialization of Muslims is also trying to explain (Tehranian 2008; Elver 2012; Moosavi 2014; Selod 2014). These accounts include Muslims being called racial epithets like "towelhead", Muslims being assumed to be foreign, to not know English, and more. Participants' experiences show that when blacks and whites are perceived as Muslim, it influences the race that is attributed to them and vice versa. The literature on the racialization of Muslims may argue that these are examples in which black and white Muslims are racialized as Muslim and that they are having the same experiences as any other Muslims, like Arabs and South Asians. But that literature cannot explain the dissonance between black, white, and Muslim. I argue that the dissonance for black and white Muslims is explained by the implicit racial/religious meaning contained in all three of these categories, and not only that the category of Muslimness is racialized. These meanings are made explicit in moments like the examples I describe. The implicit racial

meaning in Muslimness is non-whiteness/non-blackness, and the implicit religious meaning in American whiteness and blackness is non-Muslim – perhaps specifically Christianity/secularism, as existing research may suggest in other ways (Anidjar 2014; Davenport 2016). Sometimes we can see what is implicit when things do not go as expected.

Participants' use of the term "Muslim" reflects these implicit meanings. Malik is a 35-year-old African-American Muslim man who converted as an adult. We once had the following conversation:

Malik: Muslims don't understand black folks.
Author: But doesn't "Muslims" include "black folks?"
Malik: You know what I mean. It's the same for me.

Who are "Muslims" such that they do not already include "black folks" to Malik? Malik is an activist who participates in Twitter conversations like #BeingBlackandMuslim. Like many black Muslims, one of his political goals is for his identity as both black and Muslim to be recognized by non- and fellow Muslims in part to challenge the power that Arab and South Asian Muslims have over defining what it means to be Muslim. Given Malik's political goals to synonymize "black" and "Muslim", he works from and also critiques an assumption that black and Muslim cannot be synonymous. Even as being black and Muslim is "the same" for Malik, his words show that it is possible to speak of the two separately.

I met Malik at an event at a majority-black masjid a few weeks after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri that became a turning point for the budding Black Lives Matter movement. The masjid invited American Muslim activists and local scholars to speak on the connections between American intervention in the Middle East and the uprising in Ferguson. The first speaker, an Arab American activist, said that "immigrant Muslims" (which always refers to Arab and South Asian Muslims, and sometimes other groups as well) can no longer attempt to "assimilate into whiteness". She addressed them in absentia, putting the microphone in front of Malik sitting next to her, who said for her, "Y'all niggas, too." The audience clapped and whistled, responding affirmatively. To say that immigrant Muslims are "niggas, too" suggests that they did not begin as such. The "too" suggests that they are not the defining, essential "nigga", suggesting a distinction between blackness and being Muslim. It may also suggest that immigrant Muslims are closer to being "niggas" than they realize. In participants' own use of language and in most research on Muslims, there is frequent use of the word "Muslim" to refer specifically to Arab and South Asian Muslims without specifying the race/ethnicity of "Muslims". These are the same unspecified Muslims who Malik says "don't understand black folks". Black Muslim resistance to Arab and South Asian Muslim hegemony highlights dominant meanings of Muslimness that operate in both Muslim

and non-Muslim discourse. These meanings are revealed in moments like "Y'all niggas, too" and "Muslims don't understand black folks." Both these statements suggest that "Muslims" refers to non-black/non-white people, which is a common perspective in society and scholarly literature. It might be read as supporting the idea that Muslimness is "beyond black and white", but that frame may lead us away from an integrated analysis of black, white, and "beyond" all relative to one another. Data here suggest that blackness, whiteness, and Muslimness all influence and co-construct one another, even within an individual person.

One way that white Muslims respond to the arrangement of these constructs is by playing up their Muslimness, which means distancing themselves from their whiteness, as the next few accounts show. With a slightly wavering voice, an African-American Muslim professor spoke into the microphone on stage at an event honouring Malcolm X at a local Muslim organization: "What is the role of white converts in fighting racism?" By chance, the professor read my question from one of the index cards on which the roughly 80 audience members had been asked to anonymously write their questions. The panel consisted mostly of African-American men – two Muslims and a Christian pastor – as well as a white Muslim man, who is a well-respected community member. My question was directed at the latter. There was a long pause after the question was read aloud. The professor rephrased the question, an attempt to fill the silence. The white Muslim man responded, "Yeah, you know, I just feel like these adjectives don't define me personally. I've never felt white." A group of black women in the rows in front of me started whispering to one another. Moments later, they and others were booing as he continued:

> I was raised with a consciousness about oppression … since I became Muslim, I was given my name and I thought okay, this is just what you have to do … since then, I haven't been white. I've been Muslim … so this idea of white privilege – if you're Muslim, there's no white privilege. You know, I've been pulled out of those lines at the airport many, many times.

He also discussed the anti-racist books and figures he had been raised around, and how his wife and children are non-white to demonstrate that he "[doesn't] think personally in those terms but [he's] very aware of that". The otherwise quiet, attentive audience was now buzzing. There was another long silence on stage after he finished responding. The pastor placed a hand on the white Muslim man's shoulder and with a wry smile and a chuckle said, "Well, that sounds like a real white man's burden." The white Muslim man sat silently. For the white Muslim man, his whiteness is cancelled out by being Muslim, while the pastor's response draws attention to that whiteness. The white Muslim man redirected the question to talk about how he also experiences discrimination as a Muslim, which he also put

forth as an effort to downplay his whiteness since he does not see himself "that way". In this way, the white Muslim man posits "Muslim" and "white" as separate, which he also says so explicitly: "Since then, I haven't been white. I've been Muslim."

Whites often take on the cultural trappings of the particular Muslim communities they join. Karen, for example, is a 32-year-old white Muslim nurse who peppered her speech with advanced Urdu words in her interview. When I asked if she knew Urdu, she shook her head to say no. When asked how she identifies racially, she responded that she identifies as a *gori*, or "white female", in Urdu. Racially identifying using an Urdu word would likely not be understood in most contexts. Her word choice is indicative of where she is situated (in a South Asian Muslim community) and her ways of negotiating belonging within it. White belonging is not assumed in many Muslim religious spaces. Allison – the same blue-eyed, hijab-wearing, white Muslim woman assumed to be foreign in a public bathroom – was also assumed to be non-Muslim in a mosque. While speaking with Allison at a South Asian-majority mosque, I witnessed a South Asian Muslim woman ask Allison how long ago she converted or if she was considering converting to Islam. With an edge in her voice, Allison responded that she *is* Muslim. Participants receive questions about their conversions in various ways, frequently negatively. Some hear it as suggesting that they do not belong, or that they are inauthentic or not fully Muslim. Taking on the cultural trappings of a non-white Muslim community is therefore one strategy for negotiating belonging, or negotiating whiteness.

Unlike Karen, Andrew, a 25-year-old white Muslim, is concerned about making sure he is not seen as appropriating culture. He said that when he was young, he was very interested in "other cultures" and "envious" of people who are "really solid in their cultural identity". Like "many white people", he "struggled with [his] identity" and "felt disconnected".

> I was really searching. This is why it took me so long to convert to Islam, because I wanted to make sure I wasn't going for the identity, like the beards, the hats, and these things – external identities … I didn't want to jump into something just to be part of something.

Andrew felt the need to say that he was not converting for the externalities that appear to come with it. Though not by name, Andrew is making a reference to converts who present like Karen. Karen may be described as making a racial conversion along with her religious one, and although Andrew is interested in "other identities", he emphasizes how he is not like those who just want to "be part of something". White Muslims always contend with the idea of racial conversion, whether their contending is how Karen does it in which she explicitly takes on the behaviours of a non-white Muslim group,

or whether it is how Andrew does it, in which he tries to distance himself from the idea that his conversion may have racial meaning. Either way, this positions whiteness and Muslimness as dissonant.

Nadeer (African-American) joked about white racial conversion when I asked him to suggest white Muslims I may interview. "What kind do you want? … I know black white people, *desi* (South Asian) white people, Arab white people." He said he wished a white Muslim friend of his was still in town to refer me to because his friend "converted to black" when he became Muslim.

Fatima, a 65-year-old white Muslim retired from administrative assistant work, is also not comfortable thinking of herself as white. She expressed indignation when I got to the portion of the interview with questions on race. "You keep talking about race, but it's about gender!" At the end of the interview, when I asked her to fill out a sheet with her demographic information, she said that she needed to call her mother to find out her race/ethnicity. She had called herself white earlier in the interview but with all my questions about race, she seemed to feel differently. She dialled her mother and asked about her heritage, and as her mother spoke, she transcribed a list of European ethnicities along with the name of a Native American tribe. Her list took up the entire blank line of the question and some blank space in the margins of the page. Fatima did not want to be associated with whatever it would have meant to write "white" on the line.

For black Muslims, who would otherwise fit neatly into the black category in the black–white binary, their racial position is complicated by being Muslim. It is more common for black people to be Muslim and black Muslims have created institutions and arts/culture that have normalized being Muslim for African-Americans, even in the eyes of mainstream Americans. Islam is part of black culture for non-Muslim black people as well through hip hop, for example (Aidi 2005; Jackson 2005; Daulatzai 2012; Khabeer 2016). As a black Muslim leader in the field site put it, "Islam is part of black consciousness." The embeddedness of Islam in black culture frames and inspires black conversion to Islam. A queer black Muslim participant said that "Some of the warriors against white supremacy with the biggest guns" – which he defined as having the most knowledge – "were Muslim", and that inspired him to convert. Racism and black Muslim resistance to it has therefore led to a higher sense of normalcy surrounding black Muslims than white Muslims. It remains notable that black Muslim participants still experience a separation between being black and Muslim given that the local context has a celebrated history of black radical politics that is soaked in Muslim symbols and practices. That all African-American and white participants feel the need to negotiate belonging in some way further suggests a positioning of their blackness and whiteness as separate from Muslimness.

Conclusion

This analysis of white and black Muslims offers three key contributions. (1) It shows how the meanings of Muslimness, blackness, and whiteness emerge through interaction with one another, specifically in the interaction of different identities (race and religion) within the same person. (2) The findings in this article support the argument of Muslim racialization research that Muslims are racialized as foreign and brown, and further expands our knowledge of how Muslimness is produced through the black–white binary. My findings show that black and white Muslims are also racialized as foreign and brown in the moments when they are perceived as Muslim. In the moments that they are not perceived as Muslim, they are viewed as non-Muslim white and black Americans. What does it mean to be black or white American, such that the assumption is that they are something other than Muslim? I argue it means that blackness and whiteness are both religious and racial concepts. The implicit religious meaning in blackness and whiteness is Christianity/secularism, and the implicit racial meaning in Muslimness is brownness. That Muslimness signifies foreignness in this arrangement suggests that American blackness and whiteness both are domestic and associated with citizenship in a way that Muslimness is not. This has implications for theory on the black–white binary: religion is a key factor in producing blackness and whiteness in everyday interaction. (3) To the extent that Muslim identity complicates experiences of blackness and whiteness, this piece accomplishes what scholars and activists who wish to move beyond the black–white binary seek: to theorize non-black/non-white experiences through race theory. Whether bi-racial or tri-racial, we cannot understand the racial positioning of Muslims without understanding their relationship to black–white binary racial logic. And still further, this study illustrates a larger theoretical point: religion buttresses the black–white racial structure. Amid calls to move beyond black and white to understand or include other groups in our analysis, this study of religion in race-making shows that we still have much to learn about the black–white binary.

Notes

1. Literature in this area typically uses Michael Omi and Howard Winant's definition of racialization, so it is used in this paper as well: "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (2014, 13).
2. Intersectionality research has highlighted the value of studying groups who have particular identities to understand the meanings each identity carries (Crenshaw 1991).
3. The approach builds on the perspective in the second edition of Omi and Winant's book on racial formation in which they argue that "The US has confronted each racially defined minority with a unique form of despotism and degradation … Native Americans faced genocide, blacks were subjected to

racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion" (1994, 1). This quote highlights how racialization occurs through state level shifts primarily, and each group has a particular "moment". The strength of this perspective is that it allows for analysis of the most salient issues; a weakness is that it gives less attention to relationality. Each group is racialized by major events but also relative to one another since race is relational, meaning that groups who are not directly impacted by a major event are also racialized by it (Molina 2014).

4. The main strength is that it tracks the experiences of these groups. The main limitation stems from questions of who is recognizing whom, and to what end. A focus on inclusion can lead to seeing the black–white binary as a way to study blacks and whites, and other frames for "others", rather than seeking an integrated framework for racial positioning.
5. This critique rightly ensures that the material power of black–white binary logic does not fall far from consideration in analysis of non-black/non-white groups. The limitation of this critique is that in suggesting that comparisons to blackness are not quite possible due to the uniqueness of blackness, the terms of relational analysis are unclear.
6. Recent estimates of Muslims in the US hold that there are 3.3 million total, or 1 per cent of the US population, of which roughly one-third are black (Pew Research Group 2007; Gallup Center for Muslim Studies 2009; Mohamed 2011). Estimates of the number of white American Muslims today, however, are undermined due to the challenges of defining whiteness and collecting data on religion, which are not on the US Census. Since the vast majority of white American Muslims today are converts, estimates of converts can be a possible way to estimate the relative size of the white Muslim population. According to Pew Research Center, 23 per cent of Muslims in the US are converts. Of US converts, 60 per cent are African-American, and 77 per cent were previously Christian (Pew Research Group 2007). Given these numbers, we can roughly estimate that white Muslims are less than 40 per cent of the total non-African-American convert population, which would make them less than 9 per cent (303,600) of Muslims in the US, which is still a very high estimate. One estimate holds that whites were 22 per cent of mosque-going converts in 2011, and 1 per cent of all mosque attendees (Bagby 2012).
7. In the rest of the article, I use "black" and "African-American" interchangeably to refer to the latter.

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