ISLAMOPHOBIA AND PROXIMITIES TO WHITENESS: ORGANIZING OUTSIDE OF THE BROWN MUSLIM SUBJECT

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The existing Islamophobia[1] literature has come to illustrate how the Muslim subject "can at a moment's notice be erected as [an] object of supervision and discipline" (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 5–6). In the popular imagination, Muslimhood[2] has come to stand for an undifferentiated culturally alien oriental subject defined through the prism of racialized violence and irrationality. Although much of the anti-Islamophobia efforts – academic and community-based – work to combat the reductiveness of *a universalized Muslim figure*, these efforts tend to uncritically take up the brown Muslim figure as the starting point of inquiry, thereby further reifying the homogenizing racialization of dominant discourses. This article opens up the possibilities to expand thinking on the lifeworld of Islamophobia by addressing the erasure that happens with this homogenizing approach to Islamophobia. In particular, we consider the dialogical nature between the operational life of Islamophobia and the differing proximities to whiteness our intersectional subject positions make available. And in turn, how these availabilities come to shape the experience of Islamophobia is a prime focus of analysis. The authors ask: *how does the systemic demarcation of Muslim subjectivity, across racial, ethnic, class, regional, and ideological lines, interact with how Islamophobia is experienced and operationalized?* Leveraging an auto-ethnographic approach, we provide first-person narratives of Islamophobic encounters from our respective geopolitical and social locations to deconstruct and delineate an intersectional understanding of Islamophobia.

Key Words: Islamophobia, Critical Muslim Studies, Critical Race, Racism, Racialization, Autoethnography

> *The 'gaze' has always been political in my life ... There is power in looking.*
>
> (hooks 1992: 115)

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In 2016, Ontario's Special Investigations Unit found that a Toronto police offi-
cer was not at fault after the 2015 killing of Andrew Loku (CBC News 2016b).
As a result, Black Lives Matter organized a protest and encampment at the Toronto
Police Headquarters that lasted approximately two weeks, demanding they "release
the name of the officer who fatally shot Andrew Loku, a 45-year-old father of
five" (CBC News 2016a). An informal group of young, brown Muslims composed
of activists and community leaders came to support the rally held at the Toronto
Police Headquarters, holding their first iteration of a sign that read: "*Muslims in
Solidarity with Black Lives Matter*". This seemingly innocent gesture of solidarity
prompted a slew of community backlash because the slogan's use of "Muslims"
generalized Muslimhood as non-Black.[3] This was despite BLM-TO's organiz-
ing team not only including Yusra Khogali, a Black Muslim woman, among its
founders but also a wide range of Black Muslim organizers. Therefore, the sign's
positioning of "Muslim" in contrast with "Black Lives" reaffirmed the dominant
imaginary of "Muslim" both within and outside Muslim spaces as non-Black, per-
petuating the further erasure of Black Muslims (Mugabo 2019). And perhaps more
critically, it forced a reconsideration of how Muslims organize and are organized
by their differing subject positions and relative proximities to whiteness.[4]

The point of particular interest is the manner the signage revealed how
"Muslim" tends to casually be presented as an undifferentiated standalone marker.
The solidarity sign was corrected, following the outrage, to cumbersomely read
"*Non-Black Muslims in Solidarity with Black Muslims and BLM*". The revision
addressed the immediate community concern, but also demonstrated how the
"whom" of an identity marker is a construct always tied up with the broader dis-
cursive arrangements of the day. The imagined figure of the Muslim encompasses
and comes to hold substantive consequences in paving out available pathways
of subjectification, identification, and belonging. Understanding the makings of
these pathways of subjectification is salient when thinking through the operational
life of racist systems, in our case, Islamophobia. In this vein, Nazia Kazi implores
studies on Islamophobia to "think [carefully] about privilege and stratification
among Muslims themselves. Social class, race, immigration status, or educa-
tional attainment are [all] determinants in the experience of Islamophobia" (Kazi
2015: 119). Thus, in this article, we aim to disaggregate this "Muslim figure" that
has come to be commonplace in our North Atlantic Imaginary – both within and
external to Muslim communities. We aim to destabilize the manner this "common-
place" construction of "the Muslim" has come to foreground our understanding
of Islamophobia. Offering our own biographic narratives, we explore how this
largely taken-for-granted construction of a "universalized" astatic-brown Muslim
figure has come to the field and narrow our understanding of Islamophobia.
Therefore, we take seriously the manner in which the systemic demarcation of

Muslim subjectivity, across racial, ethnic, class, regional[spatial] and lines of "practice", interact with how Islamophobia comes to unfold and be experienced. As the above Black Lives Matter anecdote demonstrates, anti-racist efforts that lack an intersectional lens inadvertently reproduce exclusionary erasures, further reifying limited racializing constructions of the "whom" in question.

This article turns toward a qualitative auto-ethnographic approach for this discussion (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010; Prus 1996). We offer up testimonials of Islamophobia and Muslimhood, as three *very differently* located Muslim women. We begin by situating the stories and experiences that foreground our auto-ethnographies. There are three authors in this article, Nadiya N. Ali, Lucy El-Sherif, and Hawa Y. Mire. For Lucy, a white-passing Arab-Muslim, her experience of Islamophobia was conditioned and tempered by the white aspirational bubble she found herself living within, only feeling the weight of her racialization post-9/11. As a Somali Canadian growing up in British Columbia, Hawa's experience of anti-Black racism was continuous and intimately tied to her relationship to her Muslimhood, which shaped her experience with Islamophobia. While Nadiya's encounters with Islamophobia were foregrounded by her Black immigrant status and ethno-cultural Otherness in relation to the rigid American racial map. These uniquely complex experiences of when our Muslimness came to be problematized provide a basis for the work we aim to undertake. And so, these auto-ethnographies will be leveraged as the conceptual working ground allowing us to explore the following key conceptual questions: *How exactly does Islamophobia order and regulate the lives of Muslims, considering the vast intersectional diversity of Muslimhoods? How does taking this diversity seriously interact with and shape how we understand the experience of Islamophobia? And what does a disaggregated and intersectional approach to Muslimhood reveal about the operational life of Islamophobia?* Ultimately, we wondered how a deeply intersectional conceptualization of Muslimhood can offer a more layered and nuanced understanding of the operational life of Islamophobia and its dialogical relationship with white supremacy and the assemblage of subject positions that compose our subjectivities. It was important for us to take seriously a feminist ethos that locates lived experiences as the "places from which to start off knowledge projects" (Harding 1991: 61). Our narrative composites will work as the ground zero in saturating and texturing the theorizing this article offers. We begin with a brief review of the literature on Islamophobia and "the Muslim subject", outlining the mobilization of knowledge production and interventions. This is followed by a theoretical and methodological section. In the second half of the article, we present our testimonials in full, which will be put in dialogue with one another in order to tease out the overarching ordering logic of the operational life of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia and the "Universalized" Muslim Figure

Sayyid asserts, in *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, that "Muslimistan" has been seemingly located on the map – spanning a conflation traversing across Western, middle, and southern Asia (Sayyid 2010: 3). This "thinking through" of Islamophobia has corresponded to a range of assessments and understandings in the literature, including debates on whether Islamophobia should be understood within a race-oriented framework (Selod and Embrick 2013; Garner and Selod 2015; Razack 2008; Sayyid 2010; Elahi and Khan 2017; Bayoumi 2006; Kazi 2015; Morsi 2017; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Karim 2006; Selod 2019; Meer 2008). In our investigation of Islamophobia, we move from an understanding of Islamophobia as incidental and irrational to taking a broader, more systemic approach. Islamophobia is better considered as a system of spotting, ordering, managing, and disciplining the Muslim Other (Tyrer 2013; Sayyid and Vakil 2010; Tyrer and Sayyid 2012; Razack 2008; Mamdani 2005; Selod 2019; El-Sherif 2019), akin to other racisms (Goldberg 1993; Omi and Winant 1994; Crenshaw et al. 1995). And so, following this point, Singh's definition of "IslamoRacism" (2016) will be used both in conjunction and interchangeably, as Islamophobia/ Islamoracism in order to signal that Islamophobia is in tight conversation with, and tied to, what Goldberg (1993) refers to as "racial knowledge", or what Smith (2012, 2016) calls "racial logics", both situating *race* as a fundamental organizing logic of the Modern (also see Bauman 1989). While this orientation toward locating Islamophobia in a critical race genealogy productively moves discussions away from an individualized framework of Islamophobia concerned with "misunderstanding" or "ignorance" of Muslims; we do want to identify that it still contributes to the further erasure of Black Muslims – already preoccupied with markers of race and religion (Mugabo 2016, 2019; Walcott 2011). Moreover, Kazi explains the massive conflation of the Muslim "whom" has developed a form of identification in which the category of the "Muslim" in the North Atlantic stands as "as an imperial term with which to locate and police Muslim" communities, while also functioning as "a form of strategic essentialism and mode of political solidarity … among an increasingly alienated population" (Kazi 2015: 18). However, as extensively outlined in the ethnicity and race studies literature, the strategic taking-up of the category of identification and belonging for matters of organized action are constructed in dialectic relation with hegemonic frames – which inevitably come with erasures, silences and reductions (Hall, Morley, and Kuan-Hsing 1996; Fanon 1952[1967]; Spivak 1988; Du Bois 1940[1991]).

Scholars like Walcott (2011) and Mugabo (2016) have problematized how popular Orientalized understandings of "Muslims" have closely shaped the manner in

which anti-Islamophobia campaigns, and Muslim talkbacks, have been organized and deployed. Mugabo (2016) and Walcott (2011) both explain that the starting point of the analysis of "the Muslim Problem" situates Islamophobia as non-applicable to Black Muslims (Mugabo 2019; Walcott 2011). Walcott argues that Black Muslims are often "non-existent" in conversations surrounding Islamophobia. Mugabo (2016) takes this point further and demonstrates how anti-Muslim organizing has worked to (often inadvertently) further entrench anti-Blackness. Mugabo more specifically asserts: "the Muslim subject is not [always] specified as Arab or South Asian but is nevertheless treated in a universalistic manner that forecloses any potential attention to the subject's racialization as Black" (Mugabo 2016: 165). In response to Sherene Razack on the politics surrounding the problematization of the Muslim subject, Mugabo explains:

> In Canada, for instance, Razack's work has analyzed how public discourses frame Muslim subjects as a risk to Western civilization ... cast[ing] them out physically and even legally from the polity. Razack focuses on an abstracted Muslim subject that one could assume applies to all Muslim subjects. Yet her analysis examines how Muslim subjects are "cast out" of the nation or placed in a "state of exception" to the usual state-based procedural ... do not account for the ways that Black people, Muslim or not, are always already cast outside the categories of the human and the citizen. (Mugabo 2019: 165)

And so, the non-Black and arguably "brown" subject is thus the universalized Muslim subject that anti-Islamophobia action, knowledge production, and intervention is mobilized around in the North Atlantic. This becomes the starting point of analysis for even the most critical Muslim studies scholars. Kazi asserts, "the representative voices combating Islamophobia [have been] upper-middle class embodiments of the 'model minority', [which] may ultimately be sheltered from the worst aspects of domestic Islamophobia" (Kazi 2015: 119). Consequently, not only does a singularized construction of "the Muslim" participate in the hegemonic work of misrepresentation and reduction, but it also adequately describes the operational workings of Islamophobia. Kazi explains, Islamophobia may better be thought of as a type of "umbrella category phenomena that include anti-black racism, xenophobia, [and]or Orientalism" instead of a standalone process (Kazi 2015: 118). And so, taking up Islamophobia as a type of *umbrella phenomena*, Kazi asks, "what [operational] processes are we actually observing when we invoke Islamophobia?" (2015: 118). Our work in the current article in many ways is attempting to not only subvert this popular figuring and singular "making" of "the Muslim" – but also to closely engage with Kazi's poignant questions. In the next section, we will outline the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of

centering our own lived experience of Islamophobia as a means of revealing the working grounds of Islamophobia.

Framing the Study: Theoretical and Methodological

As part of our theoretical considerations and methodology, we take up Islamophobia/Islamoracism through a critical race approach and shift analytical focus from "*what Islamophobia is*" to "*what Islamophobia does*". By orienting attention to the "*doing*" of Islamophobia, rather than fixating on definitional preoccupations, we aim to provide a deeper sense of the operational life of Islamophobia/Islamoracism. Looking at the "*doing*" of Islamophobia follows a critical race tradition in which the question of *what are race and racism* is foregrounded by what "race" means as a "social fact", and thus examining "racism" as the value-latent operationalization of this "social fact" makes both possible and impossible, actionable and unactionable (Goldberg 1993; Omi and Winant 1994). Here, Islamophobia/Islamoracism is understood as the end product of a process of "*doing*", a process of ordering, and thus a (re)making the world (Sayyid and Vakil 2010; Vakil 2010; Tyrer and Sayyid 2012; Morsi 2017). This "*doing*", similar to other racisms, works as a mechanism that manages and problematizes *Muslimhood* in doctrine (anti-Islam) and *Muslimness* as lived subjecthood (anti-Muslim) (Sayyid 2010). The conceptual starting point taken up in the current article thus locates Islamophobia/Islamoracism as a "*doing*" that manages Muslimhoods by problematizing Muslimness in doctrine, practice, and system of subjectification (Sayyid 2010; Morsi 2017; Mugabo 2019; Jackson 2011). Following this conceptualization of "problematization", and leveraging Sherman Jackson, Mugabo succinctly affirms, Islamophobia is about "… the production of Muslims as 'problem peoples'" (Mugabo 2019: 164). She then explains, this problematization can manifest through "misrepresentation, harassment, intimidation, physical violence, and continued suspicion from private citizens, government officials, and the many tentacles of the state apparatus" (2018: 164). Similarly, Sayyid asserts, "tak[ing] seriously Islamophobia as a concept and reflect[ing] upon its usage … [means] considering the ways in [which] the Muslim presence is problematized in various contexts" (Sayyid 2010: 2). Therefore, the framing of "problematization" within our conceptualization of Islamophobia/Islamoracism closely informs the manner we have constructed the guiding questions contextualizing the auto-ethnographic study of Islamophobia in this article.

In operationalizing this frame of "problem peoples", we turn toward a qualitative interpretive auto-ethnographic approach (Charmaz and Kathy 1983; Denzin 1989; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010) as a core method of the paper. As coauthors we offer up personal narratives (Berry 2005, 2007) of Islamophobia and

our sense of Muslimhood using a biographic "life-course approach" (Plummer 2001; Dowds 2003) as the site of analysis. We guide and ask one another to reflect on: *How has our Muslimhood been problematized across our lives? Where has this problematization taken place? And who were the central perpetrators of these problematizations?* In answering these questions, we aim to unearth the pathways through which Islamophobia/Islamoracism comes to order and regulate our identities, mobilities, and sites of belonging. In addition, through a dialogical comparative reading of our narrative composites, while keeping the framework of racial discourse in mind, we also tease out the relationship between whiteness and the operation of racialization.

We think through the points of convergence and divergence in our stories to reveal the unmarked operating logics of Islamophobia/Islamoracism. This comparative approach forces us to take up an epistemological standpoint that moves past the *self* as "inside" and *the world* as "outside", instead centering a de-individualized understanding of subjecthood (Benhabib 1992; Harding 1991; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Alcoff 2006; Hollway 1984 [2001]; Anzaldua 1994). As three *very differently* located Muslim women, we demonstrate how the experiences of xenophobia, racism, and exclusion – however private and specific – are very much intersubjectively and discursively (re)produced, always calling-in larger orders and operations (Fanon 1952[1967]; Benhabib 1992; Smith 2012; Abu-Lughod 2013). We have also given special attention to disaggregating our subject positions in relation to our Muslimness to support the objective of de-obfuscating some of the operational workings of Islamophobia. With the belief that it is within these de-individualized and intersectional understandings of racism(s) and exclusion that more transformative liberatory anti-racist pathways of action can be carved out (Crenshaw et al. 1995; hooks 1990, 1992; Anzaldua 1994; Simpson 2014).

Auto-Ethnographic Problematizations: The Stories

Our stories were narrated and picked up at different places, pinpointing a wide range of transitory points, geographies, and moments of becoming. In reading our stories dialogically, however, what came to be salient is how differently the problematization of our Muslimhoods unfolded. Our ability to live, occupy, and perform our Muslimness was in one way, or another, regularly contested. This contestation was a violence that suffocated, contoured, and shaped our relationship to our Islam, our sense of self, and the world around us. Yet, the violence we "named" Islamophobia manifested and fielded our experiences, mobilities, and self-understandings in radically differing ways. With each re-reading of our composite set, we began to ask ourselves if there was anything else tying the "how" (i.e., the operational unfolding) of our Islamophobic experiences? What slowly came to be

evident as the binding force was the overbearing weight of white supremacy in our narratives. Although not always overtly apparent, white supremacy functioned as a sort of "White Elephant" in the room – structuring and ordering the field of readability, relationality, and mobility. And so, central to the dialogical reading of our stories was this "White Elephant", coming to life as a substantive but troublesome force indexing the manner in which our Muslimhood came into view. In the next section, we will spend some time closely engaging with our individual composites, providing a more substantial analysis. Again, our narrative constructions were guided by a concern in enumerating the instances and spaces in which our Muslimhoods have been problematized, ejected, and/or erased.

Lucy: An Islamophobia Foregrounded by a Politics of Slippages and Proximity

Moving to the US from Egypt in 1998, I was surprised to feel that I, an Arab-Muslim woman, had gone home for the first time in my life. My racial ambiguity as white-passing and the buried conceptual instruments in my Westernized education such as modernity or racial capitalism aptly shaped me to smoothly slide into life in the US, as did the tokenistic diversity of representation in global youth culture. Sure, the US had a foreign policy problem when it came to the Middle East, and the emergence of an Orientalist terrorist narrative in movies around that time took me by surprise, but I read this virulence of representation as just a misrepresentation. Overall, I felt inclusivity was the goal for the Muslim community and our method needed to be changing our representation.

Subjectivity represents our stories that function as our truths, and those stories were working well for me. I read the US as white, and I was able to work, go to school, and lead a happy, successful life. I read the Black community in Philadelphia's concerns with racism as irrelevant to me. After all, I was someone who had come to the US recently and had done well. I made sense of the systematically pernicious tropes, projects, and discourses as misrepresentations – aberrations that would be overcome by more community work. These stories that functioned as my truths worked to create the aspirational white world I was living in.

All that ended on 9/11, when the president of the US at the time laid out political options very clearly: "You are either with us or against us". Any historical, political, or social links between terrorism and US foreign policy were unspeakable. I vented my frustration and anger at this simplistic binary to my boss at the time and he cautioned me not to share my frustrations with other people, because they did not know me as well as he did and therefore might take it the "wrong way".

The shift to directly explicit racism against Arab and South-Asian Muslims shifted how I read the US and how it read me, shattering my aspirational

whiteness. For the first time, I understood something of how racialization works: for racialized groups, والسيئة تعم الحسنة تخص, *as we say in Arabic, which means that one's good acts are ascribed to the person, while one's evil acts are ascribed to one's community at large; whereas for white people, the opposite is true,* الحسنة تعم والسيئة تخص, *one's good acts are ascribed to their community at large, whereas one's evil acts are ascribed to only the person that committed it. The injustice of that stung particularly hard because I had been guilty of it myself in judging the Philadelphia Black community. I now read the US as unjust and imperialist and it read me as threatening, suspicious, in need of surveillance.*

I moved to Canada. I read Canada as white and it read me as white, where, for a variety of personal, theological, and political reasons, I decided to wear a hijab. Initially, nothing changed. The world offered me no showdown, no explicit challenge to indicate the world was not seeing me as white anymore, but I was being read in new, lesser ways. People often assumed I was a "foreigner", surprised by the fact that I did not have an "accent", and on good days, I was assumed to be too good for what I wore, for my car, to be my kids' mother and not their nanny. People looked right through me for the first time I could ever remember, and I was rarely given the benefit of any doubt. I was stunned by these changes and their subtle insidiousness, and when I expressed it to those around me I seemed paranoid. This Otherization was not at the level of representation anymore; this Othered subjectivity was on my body. I realize that not everyone experiences or narrates their story of the hijab the same way I do, but for me the shift brought about by microchanges in how the world was reading me was seismic and after a while, I read the world differently too. I read it as only seeing people who fit their expectations.

After a while, and also for a variety of personal, theological, and political reasons, I stopped wearing the hijab. In one of my first drives out sans hijab, I scratched a woman's car while parking. As she stood there ranting at me, I could only feel elation. She was mad at me, only me and not "all you people". In that moment, I felt the weight of being a symbol lifting off my shoulders. I was visible as an individual, albeit one she was currently yelling at. I do not have to spend as much energy proving myself anymore. That is privilege, pure and simple.

Lucy's story brings us to the hegemonic narrative of Islamophobia, focusing on her embodied and subjective experiences, the often repeated and described encounters of anti-Muslim racism. These experiences arise directly from white majoritarian spaces, levied at both the individual and structural levels to socially mobile, racialized, often non-Black, Muslims. Such a problematization of Muslimhood taps into civilizational anti-Islam discourses, discourses that run all the way back to the Crusades in Europe, as well as back to the earliest Black slaves bringing Muslimness to North America. These discourses, however, were frequently ignored by Muslim Arabs and South-Asians who immigrated in large

numbers after changes in the Immigration Act in the 1960s. Sherman Jackson characterizes immigrant communities' stance on Islam as "immigrant Islam", a political stance that opposed American policy only insofar as it pertains to their foreign policy in the Middle East, purposely excluding American ideological, cultural, and systemic racism toward its own Black and Indigenous population from immigrant Islam's concerns (Jackson 2011; Jamal and Naber 2008). Aspirational whiteness was the goal, insofar as the understanding that racial mobility was a viable route that rested and rests on the disavowal of Black Islam. A myth that became much harder to hold onto post-9/11, as demonstrated by Lucy's story.

Her story also demonstrates the varying proximities to whiteness and corresponding "slippage" both racially and epistemically. Lucy's story aligns with what Tyrer and Sayyid (2012) refer to as the "haunting presences" of "the Muslim Phantom" hiding behind diverse bodies, particularly white-passing bodies eluding crude racializing logics. Tyrer and Sayyid further explain the possibility of this "mobility" through *slippage*, which serves to leverage the incomplete racialization of Muslimhood in the Western imaginary. This allows for the possibility (and underlying threat) of "the Muslim" accessing spaces of power "undetected". Lucy's story speaks directly to this access pre-9/11; her mobility works to leverage racial ambiguity in the Black/white racial ordering present in the American landscape. Lucy's settlement experience – unlike the usual associations with disorientation and perplexity, akin to Nadiya's experiences – came to unfold in a manner she describes as a type of "homecoming". This homecoming is grounded in an epistemic comfort and familiarity developed through her colonial-oriented educational background in Egypt, and her socio-economic security upon migration.

We can characterize Lucy's proximity to whiteness through coloniality carried as an inheritance into the American context, wherein there was an apparent disjunction between her felt sense of home (i.e., "epistemic home") and geographical "home". Until 9/11, Lucy describes being able to lead a normal life in the United States, her white-passing privilege buffering her conditions of possibility, mobility, and livability. Post-9/11, however, when Muslimhood – often interchangeably used with Arabness in the US context – came to take up renewed geopolitical attention. The allowances for racial "slippage" for white-passing Muslims quickly came to a halt, fundamentally troubling Lucy's orientation to "aspirational whiteness". The unrelenting manner "the Muslim" came to be vilified further revitalized deep-seated civilizational moral panic. And the growing scrutiny and surveillance challenged the grounds of mobility and security. The post-9/11 terrain shifted the rules of proximity for anyone that identifies as "Muslim" in fact merely passing no longer granted the same level of security. Tyrer and Sayyid (2012) argue that the architecture of scrutiny and surveillance that followed 9/11 very much builds on a presupposition that *the Muslim*

is indeed "slippery", waiting in hiding, to suddenly appear and explosively end white futures. They go on to explain that the work of managing the "Muslim threat" becomes centered around the work of "spotting the Muslim", writing, "the apparent incorporeality and incomplete raciality of Muslims [became] central to the expression of racialized governmentality" (Tyrer and Sayyid 2012: 357). And so, spotting the clean shaved white-passing Muslim calls for an ordering system that moves past the standard logics of biopolitics that privileges the ocular and the body. The system of management required for spotting "the Muslim" requires techniques that can see, read, and manage the subjective dimension with the same efficiencies as it reads, orders and manages bodies. For Lucy, this loss was further compounded by the taking up of hijab. Hijab simultaneously signified her as a hypervisible symbol yet invisible as a person and marked for the first time her experience of immediate "Otherization" that reduced the white privilege her pale skin and wavy hair granted her. The hijab signified an automatic "foreignness", remaking her corporeal readability. The hijab, in this case, operated as an overwhelming and immediate signifier of an ineligible *Other*, irrespective of any previously held proximity (epistemic or otherwise) to whiteness (Zine 2006; Taylor, Lisa, and Zine 2014).

Hawa: An Islamophobia Foregrounded by a Barrier to Proximity and Slippage

My family fled Somalia at the beginning of the civil war in the late 1980s, bringing to Canada three toddler refugee children. We settled first in Toronto. Some years, and three more toddlers later, we moved to Canada's west coast. We settled in Surrey, BC – a small rural community that grew into a large city during my childhood. We lived in social housing for most of this time. The Haitian family who lived just down the street were close to mine; we called each other cousins, and our parents were all known in a variety of languages as Hooyoo, Aabo, Auntie, and Uncle. My experience growing up in this way centered the narrative of my Blackness. There was only one Black family that lived in my neighborhood, and my family members were the only visibly Black faces in our community.

I did not often have the opportunity to be Muslim – it existed primarily as private practice. The few times I engaged with Muslim communities, particularly racialized Muslim communities the anti-Black racism that occurred was so stark it removed a desire to participate. When we first arrived in Surrey, my father went first to the mosque to orient himself. The mosque-goers did not welcome him. We went next to the Faith Lutheran Church. These experiences continued into my childhood. My mother enrolled us in dugsi or madrassa, an Islamic teaching school for children. After enduring months of scolding and physical abuse from

the teachers, directed primarily at the few Black students, she removed us, and our Islamic education continued at home.

Because I was not visibly Muslim through the wearing of the hijab, I was only Muslim during intimate disclosure, even though the principles of my home were deeply entrenched in Somali/Muslim cultural and religious practices. The reading of my body as Black presupposed a relationship with Christianity in many cases, and even in these moments of intimate disclosure, individuals and systems were unable to hear my identification as truthful. The ways in which people engaged with me centered my Blackness and removed and erased my Muslimhood. I had to fight to be Muslim because the gaze of Blackness overpowered any other identity markers. At some point, I decided not to visibly engage Muslimhood as an identity because the difficulty of being Black in Vancouver was damaging enough – I could not carry both.

The erasure of my Muslimhood based on the visibility of my Blackness significantly impacts the way in which I experience Islamophobia. Because the way that I am read changes over space and context, I must always be prepared to anticipate and mitigate the reactions of others. I cannot afford to talk about Islamophobia without speaking about anti-Black racism because the separation of both makes it impossible to understand the complexity of my own experiences. Spaces change radically depending on what the gaze interprets.

At fourteen, in 2002, my parents separated, and I moved to Toronto with my father and brother. The large concentration of Somalis in Toronto immediately meant I became read as Somali before I was read as Black, and my relationship with Muslimhood became reconfigured. I can practice in public again, amongst others who are Somali. I am read as Muslim immediately, reconfigured as Somali.

I stand in line to purchase lunch; I order the jerk chicken special. The Jamaican woman preparing the food tells me not to worry; the extra oxtail sauce I've asked for is halal. In Toronto, though my body is still policed as Black, and Black and Muslim by the state, other Black communities police me as "Somali", which has specific representative and media-based imagery associations. Somali means Muslim. It is my Blackness that becomes contested here – the understanding of the Horn as "not Black" or not aspiring to claim Blackness meant that many times other Black communities ejected or removed me from spaces. The identity marker I had learned to be read has shifted and moved. Toronto has not yet articulated how anti-Blackness can account for the Somali community experience, because the Muslim here is Other. In both places, and during distinctly different political moments (pre- and post-9/11), "the gaze" has interpreted me differently, but none have accounted for my experiences as Black, Muslim and Somali.

In Hawa's composite, we have Islamophobic encounters that become devoid of the usual anti-Islamic civilizational baggage that is often associated with

Islamophobia, making it even more difficult to lay bare. In contrast to Lucy's narrative, the problematization of Hawa's Muslimhood becomes intimately linked to her Blackness. Furthermore, the perpetrators of the anti-Muslimness that she experienced all shared the marker of "Muslim". Her Muslimhood was questioned, surveilled, and ejected not in white majoritarian spaces, but rather in sacred spaces, in Muslim-run spaces by non-Black Muslim community leaders. The above story speaks to the differential experiences of anti-Muslimness tied to broader white supremacist logics. And a central logic of white supremacy, as Black studies scholars tell us, operates to perpetually outcast Blackness – as the furthest alternity, always out of place and in need of immediate and violent removal (Walcott 2011; Weheliye 2014; Walcott, 2011; Hartman and Wilderson 2013). As Sharpe explains, in the current post-transatlantic period – in "the wake" – the "ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging" is rooted in an "abjection from the realm of the human … [and] an insistent [of] Black exclusion" (Sharpe 2016: 14).

The outcasting of Blackness as a requirement of the Modern has been theorized by numerous Black studies scholars (e.g., Hartman 1997, 2007; Hartman and Wilderson 2013; McKittrick 2006). And so, Mugabo asserts, although non-Black Muslims undergo a "'cast[ing] out' of the nation or placed in a 'state of exception' to the usual state-based procedural … Black people, Muslim or not, are always already cast outside the categories of the human and the citizen" (Mugabo 2019: 165). Consequently, for the Asiatic/brown Muslim a pathway of graduation from the category of the *not-quite-human to full-human* is seemingly available (Weheliye 2014), what Morsi (2017), Mamdani (2005), and others have referred to as the "Moderate Muslim/Good Muslim" category. The *Moderate*, *Good-Savable* Muslim is the Muslim that comes to be marked as *Modern-secular-and-rational*, requiring a distancing from all that is deemed "backwards" and "nonhuman" (Mugabo 2019). And in the Modern, Mugabo tells us, "to be human is thus to be anything but Black" (Mugabo 2019: 163). Consequently, the *Moderate*, *Good-Savable* Muslim is a *Modern-secular-rational-and-non-Black* Muslim.

Thus, we have in Hawa's composite an illustration of a very specific anti-Muslimhood rooted in an anti-Blackness perpetuated by other Muslims – what Mugabo (2019) refers to as "*Anti-Black Islamophobia*". The problematization of Hawa's Muslimhood from within speaks to the same aspirational force that initially granted Lucy's "success". It is a politics that centers an order of proximity to whiteness as a means of arriving at the domain of the "human" or "full humanity" (Weheliye 2014). This possibility of arrival is what Black Muslimhoods complicate and threaten. And thus, situating the Black Muslim in a field made through a *double casting out*: an outcasting from citizenhood and from "beingness"

(Mugabo 2019; Walcott 2011). In short, the Black subject disturbs and threatens any relative proximity of Muslim brownness or Muslim Arabness to whiteness – blocking possibilities of incorporation into aspirational white futures of relative "becoming". A future where, as Tariq Modood explains, the assimilative "three-generation-promise" of Muslim migration to the metropole could be lived out (1992: 264). If the Black subject sits as the unassimilable by design in the Modern imaginary and structural order, Hawa's composite essentially illustrates the manner this assimilative fantasy meets a hard boundary with the Black Muslim.

And so, if the operation of Islamophobia is taken up as the "problematization of Muslimhood", as we do in the current article, it is important to keep in mind that it is a problematization that carries productive boundary making consequences. In this vein, Morsi writes, "Islamophobia is not simply [an] intense hostility … it is [also] a productive discourse that defines the Muslim … works to determine what position we can jump [in]to … it sets a range of squares" (Morsi 2017: 39). Within the arena of Islamophobia then anti-Blackness functions as a tool to safeguard from a further loss of "grounds", a loss of proximity carrying very real ramifications when the subject in question already holds a rather precarious footing. A further loss of proximity to whiteness could mean a further loss of access, loss of mobility, and loss of security – losses that the model brown immigrant cannot absorb. In this vein, Morsi writes, "social acceptance is fundamentally related to moving away from the stigmatized brown Muslim and towards a recognized culturally whiten Muslim" (2017: 48). And outside of this spectrum of brown–white, Morsi speaks of, Blackness lies as that which is not even mentioned in the range of movements. And so, the "productive" work of Islamophobia of problematizing and outcasting the bad Muslim from the polity and the making of the "good-savable" Muslim is fundamentally based on a first-order ejection, an ejection of Blackness from humanity. This first-order ejection is what allows the conversation of the "Muslim" to begin with a drama centering and circulating around brown-Arab Muslimhoods. The problematization of Black Muslimhood is then a violence Islamophobia (re)produces that opens up allowance for non-Black Muslims to engage in the politics of racial proximity. As the Asiatic Muslim is "the Muslim" that whiteness readily sees, reads, and is interested in centering in its civilizational drama.

And so, the universalized brown-Asiatic frame is a construction of Muslimhood that centers the desires and the stabilizing needs of whiteness. Hawa's Muslimhood sits as a barrier to the politics of slippage, proximity, and aspirational becoming. Non-Black racialization is underlined by a politics of proximity in which the interlocking calculus of racialization within a settler-colonial context stands on both "… the [continual] dispossession of Indigenous people, [and] … on the [on-going] denigration of Blackness" (El-Sherif 2019).

Nadiya: An Islamophobia Foregrounded by the Politics of Nonrecognition

In the summer of 2001, I felt especially anxious about the start of the new year. Being a cultural other while trying to navigate the world of American teenhood was not particularly "fun". By the time my family immigrated to the States, I was middle-school-aged and had a lot to learn. But moving into high school, I was much better acculturated, knew the teenage talking points, acquainted with all the music hits, and of course armed with the flyest Jordans to jump-start the school year. However, the tsunami of 9/11 that followed – a week into my freshman year – went far beyond the arithmetic of my adolescent calculus. Even the Jordans I spent nearly my entire summer saving for could not equip me with the social capital needed to navigate the world that unfolded.

I was a hijab-wearing East-African girl in a predominantly Black American school. In the pre-9/11 years, the East Africanness of my Blackness stood out like a sore thumb. Locating my difference in phenotype and cultural embodiment meant that the first question of engagement was often "what are you?". When I replied that I was African, my peers were often perplexed, and I was often perplexed by their perplexity. In these pre-9/11 years, my hijab was simply a "strange" exten-sion of this perplexity, this otherness. In fact, after I first started wearing the hijab, I would be asked if I was covering my head because I was ill or cold or something. A statement made by a peer in one of my classes typified my experience during this period. In reference to a class discussion on diversity, she adds, in a very matter-of-fact tone, "for instance, N*** is colored but not Black". Although the remark was made in passing, it stuck.

My hijab in the pre-911 years was simply a backdrop to this preoccupation with location. However, 9/11 changed all this in a dramatic way. The nearly 24-hour news coverage provided new geographies of location. Now my hijab became the point of preoccupation, the point of departure for locating my "otherness". From this point on my Africanness, my "strange" Blackness, drifted to the background. The alarming saliency of my hijab provided the rubric through which to interpret any points of difference or divergence from the American, non-migrant standard. Any delays in naming R&B hits, cluelessness about American cultural icons, or the simple inability to engage in a Tupac vs. Biggie discussion seemed to be linked to the strangeness of my hijab, my Muslimhood.

Put simply, my hijab was no longer about "being cold". The weeks follow-ing 9/11, I received notes with "Aaarab, Go Back Home", "Don't blow up our school", "Terrorist". Notes I simply placed in my locker, and applied the dictum of "out of sight, out of mind". "Nonrecognition" was no longer the starting point of engagement in this post-9/11 world. Now I permanently became the "Aaarab

girl", the "Moslum girl", hurled at me interchangeably. My deep melanined skin, inability to speak Arabic beyond the Qur'anic basics, and insistence that I was African did not matter much. I was scripted anew. My unreadability found a mechanism of translation, its accuracy being irrelevant. My encounters now began not with "what are you?" but with "You Islamic right?", "You from Iraq?".

This is not to say that Muslimhood was held to be completely foreign. Black Muslims were part of, albeit marginally, my secondary school experience. In the post-9/11 years, non-visibly identifiable Muslim peers would go out of their way to come up and share their Muslimhood with me. This sharing also extended to peers that were connected to close relatives who were Muslim. There was, however, one other Black hijabi. Although we were separated by years, and hallways of instruction, we made sure to exchange words and warmth whenever we crossed paths. But our similarities seemed to begin and end with our hijabs. I, in fact, was captivated by her. She seemed to move with relative ease – gliding in and out of groups/stoups of kids I would go through corridors to avoid. Her movements, embodiments, vernacular, and intonations were one of "home". Home oozed out of her, and her hijab simply sat on top, whereas my movements, embodiments, vernacular, and intonations made "ooze" colored with perplexity and otherness.

For Nadiya, Islamophobia largely operated as a discursive mechanism of marking and mitigating the generalized anxiety surrounding a subaltern subject seemingly slipping racial mapping (Tyrer 2013). These encounters also highlight the significance of recognition politics in the subjectification and domestication of racialized Others. Additionally, even when ocularly unavailable, Nadiya's experience also reveals the discursive force of white supremacy in charting the grounds of relationality and aligning regimes of violence (Goldberg 1993; Omi and Wiant 1994). However, the play of proximity marking Nadiya's Islamophobic encounters was not fielded by a measure of corporeal-racial adjacency. Rather, the metric of proximity was one that centered the dimension of worldsense/epistemology (Oyěwùmí 1997; Alcoff 1997), echoing Oyěwùmí's claim regarding the necessity of grounding any analysis of *difference* within the contemporary postcolonial global epistemological landscape (Oyěwùmí 1997). This speaks to a landscape wherein Western worldsense, and ways of being, hold an overwhelming presence and consuming authority (Oyěwùmí 1997; see also Alcoff 2006; Mignolo 2000b). Thus, as a Black immigrant from the opposite side of the transatlantic, Nadiya's Blackness was foregrounded by an inheritance dislocated and ill-equipped for the drama of American racial hierarchy. Speaking to this point, Ibrahim writes, "when the Black body encounters the syntax of (im)migration and displacement, a complicated conversation seems to come into existence" (Ibrahim 2020: 512; see also Pierre 2002, 2004). This further demonstrates the necessity of taking up a deeply intersectional lens in our understanding of Islamophobia.

It is vital to keep in mind that *coloniality* has not only produced global white supremacy, but also the metrics through which relevance is measured and pathways of relationality are ordered (Mignolo 2000b; Alcoff 2007). Moreover, global epistemic horizons of white supremacy have come to leave an imprint on both the pathways by which we come to know ourselves and one another (Mignolo 2000b; Alcoff 2007; Sayyid 2014). And so, the subaltern racialized subject is interpellated into the work of white supremacy to various degrees – invested in protecting the liminal relative grounds of security allocated through the measure of proximity (Morsi 2017; Coulthard 2014; Thobin 2007; Alcoff 2007). In effect, the readability, legibility, and recognizability of a subaltern subject in the Euro-Atlantic tethers on the degree of relevance (friend or foe) held to the Western story/gaze (Said 1979; Hall 1992; Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014). Thus, as a subject thinly conditioned by historical and epistemic relevance to whiteness, Nadiya's entry into Turtle Island was accompanied by the uneven grounds of "nonrecognition" as the ground zero of Nadiya's racialization. Put differently, the problematization of Nadiya's Muslimhood in the post-9/11 years cannot be understood without an appreciation of her location as a Black "postcolonial arrivant" (Byrd 2011), wherein her Blackness (her East-African inheritance) was rendered *illegible* and *irrelevant* to the pre-9/11 gaze. Moreover, this illegibility also points to the reductive constructions of Blackhood that persist in the Western imaginary, with relevance measured only in the existence of Blackness as the "nonhuman" cipher for white humanity (Weheliye 2014; Wilderson 2010; Sharpe 2016).

In a world principally made legible by whiteness, "nonrecognition" as the starting point of engagement/entry comes to be married with a particular level of *mobility* in addition to *precarity* (Simpson 2014). Simpson asserts that to be a subject of nonrecognition is "to be free from recognition … operating as a free-floating signifier" (Simpson 2014: 23). Speaking to the uneven grounds of nonrecognition and borrowing from Simpson, Ali (2018) explains "nonrecognition" comes to "leav[e] [the] subjects unintelligible" by "blurring the optics of power" (Ali 2018: 22). Simpson also points to the duality underlining the fielding consequences of "nonrecognition". At one level, Simpson explains, the blurred/unevenness allows for possibilities of becoming that are foreclosed to tightly marked subjects; at the same time, the protection and security (however limited and liminal) that comes with existing within the grounds of recognition are "not extended" to the nonrecognized subject (Simpson 2014).

It is worth noting that *Muslimhood*, understood as a discursive orientation to an Islamicate orbit (Sayyid 2014), was not necessarily what was at issue in Nadiya's encounter with Islamophobia – as illustrated by the story of the legible Black Hijabi in Nadiya's composite. Rather, it was Nadiya's illegibility as a Black immigrant within the American racial order that directed the problematization of her

Muslimhood. Once the broader geopolitical climate shifted in a direction that located *Muslimhood* as an amplified national threat, her unintelligibility found a grammar of legibility. Ironically, the rejuvenation of long-held Eurocentric orientalist discourses that followed 9/11 provided the robust grammar by which the *disruption* of "nonrecognition" to racial subjectification could be rectified. Hence, we have here an Islamophobia that was neither anti-Islamic – in the doctrinal sense – nor anti-Muslim – as practice and subjectification. Instead, Islamophobia operated as a means of filling in legibility gaps in Nadiya's readability. Islamophobic frames operated as a readily available *language* mitigating the slippage aroused by an unfixed and slippery subaltern subject in relation to the rigid racial order of the American landscape.

Discussion

The incredibly diverse intersectional arrangement of our Muslimhoods across varying affinities, privileges, and dis-privileges came to produce a range of possibilities in relation to the manner Islamophobia came into view. And this variability opened up diverse trajectories of action and inaction persistently linked to an ever-present *whiteness*, fielding our experience of Islamophobia by order of proximity. Proximity to whiteness speaks to the operational field of race wherein whiteness is situated as a diffused organizer through which worth and humanness are measured (Goldberg 1993; Weheliye 2014). For Lucy, the corporeal and epistemic matching with whiteness afforded her the illusion of a lack of engagement with race, one that disengaged her from any racial solidarity with Black people, Muslim or otherwise, and granted her grounds of social mobility and security within the altar of whiteness. By sharp contrast, Nadiya's ethno-racial ambiguity in relation to the American racial map, together with her immigrant status, placed her so far removed from whiteness as to make illegibility and nonrecognition as the driving impetus for her Islamophobic encounters. And so, Nadiya's location in the field of nonrecognition and Lucy's white passibility afforded levels of mobility and access; however, Hawa's tight racialization as "Black" foreclosed access to both hegemonic and internal community resources. Therefore, for Hawa, the singular legibility of her Blackness meant anti-blackness was an undeniable weight shaping the problematization of her Muslimhood. Our composites affirm that engaging with investigations of Islamophobia in any substantive manner requires laying bare the "White Elephant" in the room. The order of white proximity not only arranges subjects in corporeal terms but also includes a fielding of sensibilities and practices, holding constant the referential pole of whiteness as the ontic backdrop. And thus, our Islamophobic encounters were indexed by measures of white proximity wherein the range of subject positions our Muslimhoods were interpellated through shaped the manner in which Islamophobic violence manifested.

Conclusion

In this article, we attempted to lay bare, through our own first-person testimonials, some of the operational unfolding of Islamophobia – understood as the end point of a process that is concerned with managing the Muslim through a process of problematizing and ejecting the "bad Muslim" from "civility" and "polity" (Razack 2004; Mugabo 2019). We showcase that our conceptualizations must take a close intersectional lens when engaging with racializing and exclusionary architectures that are pulled into making the "Muslim" a problem to be managed, remade, and/or ejected. Our composites further illustrate that proximity to whiteness – both in the corporeal and epistemic sense – functions as a vital ordering mechanism, by which the management of the "bad Muslim" and the making of the "good/savable Muslim" unfolds (Mamdani 2005). Even though the manner Islamophobic violence manifested across our stories dramatically differed; everything from the actors that took up the work of Islamophobia to the socio-material consequences was all varied – nonetheless, whiteness continued to function as the consistent "elephant in the room" (Pagis 2010: 312). Moreover, the variance present in our stories further supports the notion in critical race theorizing that racisms are always ontologically empty; rather, "race" and its "ism" is about a "doing" (Goldberg 1993; Omi and Winant 1994). A *doing* that is concerned with an epistemic order primed to affirm and secure white futures. Islamophobia is made to do this work of securing whiteness by functioning as a tool within an arsenal of "isms" available to a white supremacist order. Understanding the logic that underpins these tools in relation to one another requires taking seriously the proximity to whiteness among racialized and subalternized actors and the various subject positions that we all hold. And thus, understanding the operation of Islamophobia requires taking seriously the assemblage of subject positions and inheritances that make up Muslimhoods, however messy and cumbersome a process. Implementing effective intervention efforts that do not replicate the norms of white supremacy necessitates moving past a sense of a static universalized Muslim figure as the starting point for analysis and anti-racist action.

Notes

1   Though our article focuses on the use of Islamophobia/Islamoracism to address our concerns around the complex processes of anti-Muslim violence and racialization, as co-authors we too have complications with the terms we've put forward. We are aware that Islamophobia/Islamoracism as a coinage is not sufficient for the very basis of our argument. We know this, we problematize this, and yet we cannot in this paper offer another way forward. In theory we borrow from Lucy El-Sherif's use of the term "those racialized as 'Muslims' … to describe those who face the racializing logics of dominance regardless of people's actual religion, through readings that are often

situational" to help us better contextualize the complexity of Muslim experience, identity and the racial politics that follow without universalizing. However, the fluidity and conflation of being racialized as "*Muslims*", living one's Muslimhoods and the feeling of Muslimness are frame of subjectification that cannot easily be teased apart.

2   For the purposes of this article when we are describing Muslim identity – we use *Muslimhood* to denote the practices of Islam, an orientation towards an Islamicate epistemic order, while *Muslimness* speaks to how this orientation comes to be experienced.

3   We capitalize the "B" in Black.

4   "Proximity to whiteness" speaks to the operational field of race in which whiteness is situated as a diffused organizer through which worth and humanness is measured (Goldberg 1993; Weheliye 2014).

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