Race and Islam: Global Histories, Contemporary Legacies

March 23-24, 2022
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
[online]
Recent events across the globe have led to a renewed focus in public discourse on the socially embedded legacies of race and racialization. These legacies, however, are byproducts of a much broader global history—one moreover in which Islam has had a consistent role and presence. Race, racism, and racialization have been problematized, defined, and redefined in changing contexts by multiple subject positions, and simultaneously articulated, confronted, and absorbed across various media, institutions and communities. The intersectionality of race with constructs of gender, justice, equality, freedom, faith, ethnicity, and identity has refocused attention on race as a defining theme of academic research, political deliberation, cultural production, and public discourse.

Islam as a faith tradition, both in its historical and contemporary manifestation, has been intricately intertwined with the question of race. While Islam has been subject to objectification and racialization, the lived experiences of Muslims reflect a mixture of indigenous, historical, and modern adaptations of racial categories. The conference, therefore, aims to explore not just how Islam—either scripturally or culturally—responds to questions of race, as has often been done, but also the ways Islam, as a faith tradition, has encountered, engaged with, and reflected particular understandings and experiences of race (not least of all through Islam’s own history with racialized slavery). Cognizant of recent processes through which Muslimness has become subject to racialization, one of the underlying questions of the conference will be how being or becoming a Muslim has been defined and constructed vis-à-vis particular racial discourses and praxes.

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https://islamicstudiescenter.gmu.edu/events/13079
Wednesday, March 23
Opening Remarks | 9:00 am - 9:15 am EDT
   Huseyin Yilmaz, Peter Mandaville

Panel 1 | 9:15 am - 10:45 am
Islamic Disciplines and History
   Chair: Mohammad Ramadan Salama

   Jonathan Brown (Georgetown University)
   Antiblackness in Islamic Marriage Law: Custom as the Problem,
   Custom as the Solution

   Bernard K. Freamon (Seton Hall University)
   Islamic Jurisprudence and Critical Race Theory

   Touria Khannous (Louisiana State University)
   In Defense of Blackness: Patterns of Argumentation in Al-Jahiz'
   Fakhr Al-Sudan-Ala-Al-Baydan

Break | 10:45 am - 11:00 am

Keynote Address 1 | 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

   Sahar Aziz (Rutgers University)
   Global Islamophobia and the Racial Muslim
   Chair: AVACGIS Research Director Hüseyin Yilmaz

Break | 12:30 pm - 12:45 pm

Panel 2 | 12:45 pm - 2:45 pm
East Africa and The Arabian Peninsula
   Chair: Sumaiya Hamdani

   Ahmed Ali Salem (Zayed University)
   Africanized Arab and Arabized African Muslims: Reflections on the
   Histography of the Sultanate of Zanzibar
Dalal Daoud (George Mason University)
The Islamist Approach to Minorities in Sudan: The South Sudanese and Darfuris

Ameen Omar (Hamad Bin Khalifa University)
After Emancipation: The Legacy of Slavery and Racism in the Gulf

**Break | 2:45 pm – 3:00 pm**

**Panel 3 | 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm**

**Africa**

**Chair: Ahmet Selim Tekelioğlu**

**Naglaa Hussein (George Mason University)**
Nubians and the disconnection of Egypt from the African continent

**Ayşe Çırçır (Erzurum Technical University)**
Biopolitics, Islam and Slavery in Najwa bin Shawtan’s The Slave Yards (2020)

**Olfa Zairi (The University of Gabes)**
Why Has it Taken so Long? Tunisia from the Abolition of Slavery to the Removal of Slave Names

**Fouad Gehad Marei (University of Birmingham)**
Shabīh-i Joon (or, Nigeria, Where Bilal meets Husayn): Blackness Redemption and Sectarianism in Shi’i Ritual Cultures
Thursday, March 24
Panel 4: 9:00 am - 11:00 am EDT

Asia

Chair: Maria Dakake

Jing Wang (University of Pennsylvania)
Can comedy be racist?: The Logics of Racial Impersonation of Uyghur Muslims in Post-Mao China

Hew Wai Weng (National University of Malaysia)
Sites of Inclusion and Exclusion: Multiple Intersections between Race and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia

Matthew Bowser (Tufts University)
Islam and Race in Myanmar: The Racialization of the Rohingya

Ruslan Yusupov (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)
Regarding the Difference of Others: Interethnic Family Life in Contemporary Xinjiang, China

Break | 11:00 am - 11:15 am

Keynote Address 2 | 11:15 am - 12:45 pm

Suad Abdul-Khabeer (University of Michigan)
Can We Really Talk About Race and Islam or Will Scholars Keep Fronting?
Chair: AVACGIS Director Peter Mandaville

Break | 12:45 pm - 1:00 pm
Panel 5 | 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Europe

Chair: Nathaniel Greenberg

Jeta Luboteni (Boston University)
Unapologetically, Imperfectly, Muslim: Race and Islam in the Music of Azet

Katarzyna Górk-Sosnowska & Ewa Górska (Warsaw School of Economics)
Problematising anti-Muslim Racism in the East-West Nexus: The Case of Poland

Naveed Shahzad Sheikh (Keele University)
Race & Radicalism: The Problem of the Muslim Terrorist in British Counter-Terrorism Legislation

Break | 2:30 pm – 2:45 pm

Panel 6 | 2:45 pm - 4:15 pm

America

Chair: Yasemin İpek

Tazeen M. Ali (University in Saint Louis)
Politics, Sex, and American Islam in Hulu's Ramy: Beyond Racialized and Gendered Islamophobia in US Popular Media

Michael D. Gutzler (Northern Virginia Community College)
Uncovering Muslim Communities in the Antebellum American South

Nazita Lajaverdi (Michigan State University)
The Influence of American Identity on Anti-Muslim Policy Preferences Across Partisans

Break | 4:15 pm – 4:30 pm
Plenary Session & Concluding Remarks | 4:30 pm – 5:00 pm
Speaker Bios and Abstracts
(In alphabetical order)

Keynote Speakers:

**Sahar Aziz** is professor of law, Middle East Legal Studies Scholar, and Chancellor’s Social justice Scholar at Rutgers University Law School. Professor Aziz’s scholarship examines the intersection of national security, race, religion, and civil rights with a focus on the adverse impact of national security laws and policies on racial, religious, and ethnic minorities. She is the author of the book *The Racial Muslim: When Racism Quashes Religious Freedom* and the founding director of the Center for Security, Race and Rights. Professor Aziz was a visiting professor at Princeton University in the Department of Politics and School of Public and International Affairs. She was also a visiting scholar at Columbia University Center for Gender and Sexuality Law.

**Suad Abdul-Khabeer** is Associate Professor and Interim Director of the Program in Arab and Muslim American Studies and Undergraduate Advisor for the minor at University of Michigan. Dr. Abdul-Khabeer is a scholar-artist-activist whose work examines the intersections of race, religion and popular culture. She is the author of *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States*. She has a deep commitment to public scholarship and reaches diverse audiences through her one-woman solo performance, Sampled: Beats of Muslim Life and in her leadership of Sapelo Square: An Online Resource on Black Muslims in the United States.

Speakers:

**Ahmed Ali Salem** is Professor and Associate Dean in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zayed University, United Arab Emirates, and Senior Research Associate in the Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa. He earned his Ph.D. in political science and M.A. in African Studies at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, USA; and B.Sc. in political science at Cairo University. His research interests include mainstream, critical and non-Western theories of international relations; foreign policies of Muslim and Western states towards each other; Arab-African relations; and modern Muslim reformist and political thoughts.
**Africanized Arab and Arabized African Muslims: Reflections on the Historiography of the Sultanate of Zanzibar:**

It was in Zanzibar that the split among racialized African and Arab Muslims was aggravated, and it is in Zanzibar that their rapprochement can be consolidated. Rewriting the history of Arabs in Zanzibar from a deracialized perspective can play a significant role in this regard. After all, Arab and African Muslims of Zanzibar have been victims of the racialization of their common history. In this paper, I discuss and compare Western, African and Arab histories of the sultanate of Zanzibar between the moving of Oman’s capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1832 and the post-independence revolution that overthrew the last Omani sultan of Zanzibar in 1964. The paper uses tens of Arabic and English sources to criticize the overly colonialist and racialist English literature published before Zanzibar’s independence in 1963, and compare it to the more nuanced analysis of Western professional historians writing after Zanzibar’s independence. The works of African, Arab and Afro-Arab historians are also examined with the aim of exploring alternative approaches to the history of the Zanzibar sultanate.

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**Ameen Omar**

**After Emancipation: The Legacy of Slavery and Racism in the Gulf**

The present study is on contemporary discussions about slavery and racism in Qatar. It analyzes the Bin Jelmood House (BJH), the first museum dedicated to slavery in the region. The BJH comes when Qatar is undergoing a social transformation leaving some skeptical about the motives behind the museum’s establishment. Meanwhile, slavery and racism have recently gained more attention in the region than in days prior. The death of George Floyd has been especially consequential in provoking more thought and discussion. The exhibits at the BJH serve as a vehicle through which people debate and navigate the legacy of slavery and its aftereffects. It cuts across arenas of Islamic discourses, colonial legacies, oral histories, and international legal debates. The main questions of this study are: what are the competing narratives and representations about slavery and racism in Qatar? How do these various narratives relate to concerns about nation-building and cultural specificity? What connections do different actors draw between slavery, religion, and contemporary labor regimes in the Gulf? The research contributes to the scant literature on slavery and racism in the
Gulf. Using an anthropological method, I analyze the exhibits at the BJH and compliment them with interviews, public and social media debates, academic scholarship, fatwas, and literary fiction.

__Ayşe Çırçır__ received her PhD in English Literature in 2018 in the fiction of Ahdaf Soueif, British-Egyptian novelist. Her project was supported by Tubitak and she was offered place as a visiting DPhil at St Antony’s College, the University of Oxford in between 2015-2016. She published on Orientalism in literature and post-colonial literatures. Dr. Çırçır teaches English at Erzurum Technical University, Turkey.

**Biopolitics, Islam and Slavery in Najwa bin Shawtan’s The Slave Yards (2020):**

The Slave Yards (2020) explores slavery in Ottoman Libya in the late 19th and early 20th century with the stories of two women, Atiqa and her mother, Tawhida. Shatwan builds up a concrete image of the institution of slavery in the novel and portrays the accepted views on slavery in Islam and the interplay between slavery and race beyond and within Islam. Atiqa finds herself on shaky ground when her cousin Ali unexpectedly enters into her life and narrates the story of her mother, a black woman, whose freedom brings about more dislocation, marginalization and stigma in the Libyan society. Shatwan shows that only tragic contradictions await black female slaves and they become disposable bodies moving from slavery to concubinage system and forced abortions to prostitution. Human, in this novel, is not a neutral term and the abolition of slavery does not destroy the ghostly trace of racialism and slavery. Ironically, we are informed of Tawhida’s tragic past through the narrative voice of a white man and Atiqa also narrates her past in the notorious slave yard encampment in the outskirts of Benghazi. The contrapuntal and non-linear narratives of Ali and Atiqa unite stories and memories and turn into a historical record of race-based slavery. For my research, I will read this novel with critical race theory and establish two crucial points. I will first point out to how the practice of black magic and *zaar* (a ritual cult) among the black slaves complicates faith relations between free and slave Muslims and will focus on the connection between slavery and Islam. Following on from this, I will read the bodies of black female slaves as ‘bare life’ and explore the intersection of race and biopolitics with Foucault and Agamben’s theories.
**Bernard Freemon** is Professor of Law Emeritus at Seton Hall University School of Law, where he taught Evidence, Islamic Jurisprudence, Slavery, Human Trafficking and the Law, Professional Responsibility, Jurisprudence, and other courses. He is currently an adjunct professor at NYU School of Law, where he teaches Islamic Jurisprudence, and a visiting professor at Pace Law School, where he teaches Criminal Law and a seminar on slavery and human trafficking. In July he will join the faculty at Roger Williams Law School to direct its innovative and mandatory program on Race and the Foundations of American Law. Professor Freamon’s scholarship is focused on slavery in the Muslim world. His most recent book, *Possessed by the Right Hand: The Problem of Slavery in Islamic Law and Muslim Cultures*, was published by Brill in 2019 and is now in paperback.

**Islamic Jurisprudence and Critical Race Theory:**

This paper considers two bodies of legal thought and asks whether there might be any relation between them. It outlines how the bodies of thought are quite different from each other and yet it appears that each has traditions of critical historical inquiry that are quite similar. The paper asks whether the methods of critical race theory might supply some answers to what appears to be a continuing problem of racial hierarchy found in parts of the Muslim world. The question is whether these regimes of racial hierarchy owe at least part of their legacy to the legal histories of slavery and slave trading in Islam. The paper suggests that a similar inquiry might be made with respect to gender-based hierarchies.

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**Dalal Daoud** is a Visiting Scholar with the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University. She completed her doctoral studies at Queen’s University. Her research focuses on the intersection of political Islam and ethnic politics in Sudan and Turkey. Specifically, she examines ruling Islamists’ approaches to minorities while analyzing the roles of elite strategic calculations, institutions, and ideational commitments. Her broader research interests include ethnic politics, Islamist politics, as well as MENA and African politics.
The Islamist Approach to Minorities in Sudan: the South Sudanese and Darfuris:

In the past four decades, Islamists have emerged as important actors in the politics of the Middle East and North Africa, in some cases seizing power. And while scholars of MENA have given considerable attention to a wide range of Islamist policies, empirical research on the relationship between contemporary Islamist rulers and minorities has been sparse, despite its real-world and academic salience. This study helps to fill this gap in the literature by examining the Sudanese Islamist government’s approaches toward ethnic minorities in the country. Conventional accounts are largely ideational and suggest that Islamists are more likely to favour religious kin. But the case of Sudan suggests that ideational approaches overstate the impact of religious doctrine on minority policies. Sudanese Islamists shifted their approaches between repressive and accommodative strategies toward both Christian and Muslim ethnic groups. The study finds that the Islamist regime’s minority policies were instead shaped by elite self-interest and a desire for survival contingent on internal and regional considerations.

Fouad Gehad Marei is a Research Associate at the University of Birmingham and an Affiliate Research Fellow at the University of Erfurt. His research focuses on Islamic religiosity, piety, Shii politics, Islamic eschatology, and jihadi violence. He has research experience in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq and is interested in conflict and post-conflict dynamics. Fouad’s ongoing research examines Shii ritual practices and cultures in the Middle East and the diaspora. He has previously worked at the Free University of Berlin, Germany, and the Orient Institute in Beirut, Lebanon. Fouad holds a PhD from Durham University. E-mail: f.g.marei@bham.ac.uk.

Shabih-i Joon (or, Nigeria, Where Bilal meets Husayn): Blackness Redemption and Sectarianism in Shi’i Ritual Cultures:

This article examines a Farsi-/Arabic-language Shi‘i ritual lamentation poem commemorating the Zaria Massacre of 2015, which saw hundreds of members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) led by Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky killed in clashes with the Nigerian army in the northern Nigerian city of Zaria, Kaduna Province. In addition to comparing the suffering of early-Muslim hagiographic figures with the persecution of modern-day Shi‘is, the poem is significant in its focus on Blackness as an essential and defining characteristic of Nigerian Shi‘is. I probe the role of Blackness and
racial identity as tropes in the construction of a collective memory and an affective bond around narratives of redemptive suffering. I posit that purveyors of this lamentation poem invoke Blackness to construct a narrative that is both global and local, universal and particular. In so doing, they expand membership in the imagined ‘Ummah of Karbala’ beyond its traditional Middle Eastern and South Asian heartlands and invite converts from Sunni to Shi’i Islam to become constitutive members of this Ummah. Finally by contextualizing the poem in relation to the socio-political history of the IMN and Shi’ism in Nigeria, I argue that this racialized narrative is not a radical pro-Black shift in Shi’i thinking but a manifestation of Sunni-Shi’i geopolitics and the hyper-politicization of sectarian identities.

Hew Wai Weng is a fellow at the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, National University of Malaysia (IKMAS, UKM). He has published on Chinese Muslim identities, Hui migration, and urban middle-class Muslim aspirations in Malaysia and Indonesia. He is the author of Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia (NIAS Press, 2018)

Sites of Inclusion and Exclusion: Multiple Intersections between Race and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia:
Malaysia and Indonesia are two Muslim-majority countries which have sizeable Chinese minorities who are mostly non-Muslims. Islam plays a significant role in shaping the ethnic interactions and cultural diversity in both countries. This article highlights multiple intersections between race and Islam in contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia, which have both potentials of being sites of inclusion and exclusion. For examples, on one hand, there are emerging trends of expressing Chinese Muslim cultural identities, exemplified by the establishment of many Chinese-style mosques – reflecting a kind of Islamic cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, there are majoritarian movements who using the rhetoric of ‘defending Islam’ to propagate hatred messages towards various ethnic, religious and sexual minorities - reflecting a rise of Islamist-minded rightwing populism. In other words, there are Muslims who articulate Islam as an emancipatory vocabulary to support anti-racism movement; and at the same time, there are also Muslims who ‘racialize’ Islam to serve their nativist agenda. Seeing Islam as identity marker or/and political ideology, there are diverse Islamic
configurations - such divergent trends coexist, compete, and sometimes, co-
constituting each other. The politics of race and Islam are simultaneously
shaping and being shaped by the politics of in/exclusion in both countries;
and such developments are informed by incidents in other parts of the
world, be in in China, in India, in the ‘West’ and in the Middle East.

Jeta Luboteni is a second-year Ph.D. student in Religious Studies at Boston
University. Jeta’s research focuses on the racialization of Islam in the U.S.
how individuals in the Albanian diaspora relate to it. They are also
interested in Quranic studies, religion and Hip-Hop, and Islam in the
Balkans more broadly. Jeta completed a M.A. in Middle East and Islamic
Studies at George Mason University and a B.A. in International Relations
with a minor in Sociology at American University in D.C.

Unapologetically, Imperfectly, Muslim: Race and Islam in the Music of
Azet:
Research on Islam and Muslims increasingly emphasizes the importance of
understanding processes of racialization, including in news media, on social
media, and in interpersonal interaction. Much less attention has been paid
to the impact of the racialization of Islam on the subjectivities employed by
Muslim musical artists. This study attempts to speak to these intersections
by analyzing the music of one of the most popular German rappers, “Azet.”
First, the study places the interaction with African-American art forms by
Muslims in Germany in historical context. Next, it conducts a lyrical analysis
of Azet’s songs and music videos to better understand how Azet’s
references to criminality and Islam constitute not only an embrace of a
racialized identity, but a criticism of German state and the delegitimization
of its authority. This study finds that Azet’s unapologetic embrace of Islam,
both as a belief system and an ascribed racial identity, becomes a source of
strength and pride for him, as well as for his fellow (racialized) people from
the “ghetto.” Though his music is closer to gangster rap than conscious rap,
it nevertheless represents a stern criticism of the German state and its
refusal to attend to the needs of its Muslim minorities. Hip-Hop, being an
originally African-American and Caribbean-American art form, connects
Azet historically and politically to these populations and their traditions of
resistance to racism at the hands of the state, police, and a careless white
society. Azet purposefully defies and destroys any hope of assimilation into
German society, as he was already abandoned and criminalized for being a poor immigrant Albanian/Muslim—no matter that he was from the continent of Europe. Yet, his music allows him to be popular and listened to by German youth of various of backgrounds, on his own terms, again mirroring Black American gangster rap and its significant white American fan base. This study finds that the implications of Azet’s instrumentalization of a strategically essentialized identity includes not only an increased visibility of a complicated Islam, but also a potentially Islamically-motivated indictment of the German state by someone who it already indicted (even before he committed any crime).

**Jing Wang** is the Senior Research Manager at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication (CARGC) at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Wang studies the Anthropology of Islam and Muslim Societies, Mobility and Diaspora, Memory and media, Sound and Podcast Studies, Global Communications, Gender, Race and Ethnicity, Contemporary Asia, and Multimodal Ethnography. She received her Ph.D. degree in Sociocultural Anthropology from Rice University in 2019. Dr. Wang has published in Asian Anthropology, Journal of Contemporary East Asia, Terrain: Anthropologie & Sciences Humaines, Journal of Transformative Learning, and other journals and edited books.

*Can comedy be racist?: The Logics of Racial Impersonation of Uyghur Muslims in Post-Mao China:*

Since 1949, state media representations of the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs in Xinjiang have profoundly influenced the public perception of Muslims in China. During the Mao era, for instance, the image of Uncle Qurban Tulum (1883-1975) was long featured in propaganda posters, photos, and films to represent patriotism, ethnic unity, and the hardworking spirit of the Uyghur peasants. However, the post-Mao era has seen a drastic shift in the popular imagination of Uyghurs as stealthy, cunning, dishonest, and uncivilized in China’s rush into a market economy. This article mainly focuses on the genre of sketch comedy (xiju xiaopin 喜剧小品) performed in state-sponsored cultural programs such as the annual Lunar New Year Spring Galas in post-Mao China. I argue that sketch comedy has become a powerful medium in shaping the contour of racial stereotypes of Uyghur Muslims among the Han Chinese audience from the 1980s to the digital era in recent
decades. Moreover, the trajectory of sketch comedy performance in the CCTV spring galas uncannily resembles the logic of racial impersonation manifested through works such as blackface and yellowface in the United States. As such, I advocate for a context-grounded, comparative approach to studying global racisms regarding the representations of Islam and Muslims.


Antiblackness in Islamic Marriage Law: Custom as the Problem, Custom as the Solution:
This paper examines controversial opinions found in books of Mālikī law, such as that a groom can receive an annulment for his marriage if he discovers his new wife is ‘black’ and that it is acceptable for a man to look at an unrelated ‘black’ woman’s face because of an assumption that she is not attractive. This paper examines how the Shariah deference to custom (ʿurf, ʿāda) created an opening for such legal opinions and where and when they appeared. Finally, it traces how other Mālikī scholars, from both north and south of the Sahara, opposed these rulings or corrected them.

Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska is an Associate Professor and head of the Middle East and Central Asia Unit, SGH Warsaw School of Economics. She has a PhD in economics (SGH) and habilitation in the study of religions (Jagiellonian University in Cracow). Her research focuses on Muslim communities in Poland and Europe. She has published five monographs including Deconstructing Islamophobia in Poland (2014), and edited a book on Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe (2011). PI in Let’s Empower, Participate and Teach each other to Hype Empathy. Challenging discourse
about Islam and Muslims in Poland (EMPATHY) funded by the European Commission, 2022–2023).

**Ewa Górska** – Doctor of Law; earned MA in Law, and MA in Middle Eastern Cultural Studies from Jagiellonian University (Poland). Author of the book “Contemporary Dynamics of Islamic Law regarding bioethical problems”. Her research interests include formal and informal legal systems in the Arab world, contemporary Islamic law, normative pluralism, Orientalism and law.

**Problematising anti-Muslim racism in the East-West nexus. The case of Poland:**

Studying racism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is a puzzling and challenging task. CEE has received little attention in modern studies of racism, mainly concentrating on Western post-colonial societies. However, limited encounters with racialized Others, combined with the current ethnic-oriented politics of national identity, can reinforce racism and mobilize it in mainstream discourse. Our article contends that this mobilization can only be understood in relation to how Poland is positioned within Europe and how it is willing to position itself vis-à-vis Europe. While anti-Muslim racism has been latent in Poland for many years, it manifested itself strongly during the so-called ‘border crisis’ at the Polish-Belarusian border that began in the summer of 2021. In our article we propose to use the conceptual framework of Frontier Orientalism, developed by Andre Gingrich (1996, 2015), for understanding the dynamics of anti-Muslim racism in Poland and relations with the Muslim Other at European borders in terms of how anti-Muslim racism is problematized in the discourse surrounding the Polish-Belarusian border crisis.

**Matthew Bowser** is an interdisciplinary World-Historian, focusing on the intersections of race, nationalism, capitalism, and empire in twentieth century Southeast Asia. He received his PhD in Modern World History from Northeastern University in May 2020, and he is currently teaching at Northeastern University and Tufts University. His first book, *Our Land, Our Earth, Our Burmese Race: The Racialization of Burmese Politics*, is currently under review at Cornell University Press. He has also published articles on
his research in top-tier journals, including the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History and the Journal of Modern Asian Studies.

Islam and Race in Myanmar: The Racialization of the Rohingya:
In light of the present-day Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, scholars have begun to examine the history of Burmese Islamophobia and to study the relationship between race, ethnicity, and religion. As a microcosm of my larger scholarly work on the subject, this paper takes the Rohingya as a case study in discerning how race, as a scavenger ideology, can combine ideas of ethnicity, nationality, and religion to fulfill specific political goals. In the late 1930s, Burmese fascists politicized ethnic and religious cleavages –creating a racialized scapegoat, the Indo-and Islamophobic Other –in order to respond to political and economic crisis. The vast contract labor system of the British Indian Ocean had brought millions of low-wage Indian migrants to Burma, causing a glut in the labor market and damaging negotiation power for Burmese workers. This nascent Burmese fascist movement appealed to the rising sense of Burmese nationalism to scapegoat Indians and the religion of Islam as exploiters, colonizers, and invaders. Burmese fascists racialized Indians and Muslims into the same category –kala–thus dissolving the boundaries between Indian-Muslims, Indian-Hindus, and Burmese-Muslims, such as the indigenous Rohingya minority. I will briefly trace how the Rohingya first came to be included in this categorization of “Indian invaders” in the late 1930s, how World War II and the Japanese occupation intensified these associations, and how the post-war military junta repeatedly doubled down on the Rohingya’s racialized identity in order to maintain its power. This racialized Islamophobia has led the Rohingya to become one of the world’s largest stateless populations since the Burmese Citizenship Law of 1982 stripped them of their legal status in Burma. I will conclude by examining the contemporary legacies of this racialization in the 2012 pogroms and 2016 genocide.

Michael D. Gutzler is Associate Professor of Religion at Northern Virginia Community College. Michael’s areas of research include the history of Sub-Saharan Africa, history of Antebellum America, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Religious Ritual.
Uncovering Muslim Communities in the Antebellum American South:
The field concerning religious practice of the earliest African slaves continues to develop as scholars take a more careful reading of the primary documents. While many scholars look to the known evidence of recognized and stated early Muslims in America, this paper reevaluates the nature of what is assumed to be religious practice of “converted slaves.” A careful reading of one Lutheran pastor’s firsthand observations of African slaves gathered in his congregation for worship reveals authentic Muslim religious practice under the restrictions of enslavement. With documentation as early as 1733, the Detailed Reports of the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America, offer an untouched treasure for Islam’s historical experience with slavery.

Naglaa Hussein completed her Ph.D. in African Studies at Howard University. She is currently Assistant Professor of Arabic language and literature at George Mason University. Her research interests include the literature of black minorities in the Middle East, Gender and Islam in Africa, and media representations of darker skins. Her current research focus is on rural Nubian women economic empowerment.

Nubians and the disconnection of Egypt from the African continent:
For centuries, Nubians have been featured prominently in both western scholarship on ancient civilization and Afrocentric historiography. For the Afrocentrists, Nubian history came to represent the power to challenge Eurocentric narratives about civilization and knowledge. Despite the enlightening scholarship on Nubians produced by Afrocentrists, this historiographical trajectory sometimes romanticizes Nubians as frozen in history instead of recognizing their mobility and contemporary identities. The division between black African and white northern Egyptians continued to persist through modern politics. The British colonial and post-independent Egypt produced a number of discourses that centralized Egypt around Cairo and pushed Upper Egypt, Nubia, and Khartoum to the periphery. In this paper, I will provide evidence of how representation of Nubians as the “African other” has resulted in the disconnection of Egypt from the African continent and perpetuated images of Egypt as distinctively different from other African countries.
Race & Radicalism: The Problem of the Muslim Terrorist in British Counter-Terrorism Legislation:

In the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7, British anti-terrorism legislation proliferated, simultaneously constituting a situational narrative of ‘threat’ and a construction of the potential assailant. Constructed in a situation of global securitization of identity, the ‘Prevent paradigm’, which was parcel of Westminster’s legislative output, identified suspect communities in terms that were unmistakably racial and imperial. The present paper interrogates the entailments of the Prevent legislation, seeking to unpack its underlying racial and orientalist assumptions. It investigates not only the entailments of the legislation by means of a critical discourse analysis, but re-reads the ideas, identities, and civil obligations that were constituted by the legislation. It ties these together with historical perspectives of the hegemonic discourses of the colonial British elite on their subjects (particularly, his excessive brutishness and racially-conditioned violence), showing a continuous narrative of objectification and securitization of race, religion, and alien belonging. Overall, the paper shows how terrorism was, in the formal articulation of the state, simultaneously depoliticized and racialized.
Nazita Lajevardi is a Political Scientist at Michigan State University. She broadly studies issues related to political discrimination and the exclusion of marginalized groups. Her scholarship has largely examined American public opinion and political behavior through the lens of religious and racial identity, using an array of methodologies. She is the author of Outsiders at Home: The Politics of American Islamophobia from Cambridge University Press, and her work has been featured in the popular media, including The Atlantic, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Vox Magazine, Religion News Service, and The Huffington Post.

The Influence of American Identity on Anti-Muslim Policy Preferences Across Partisans:
Does American identity shape support for anti-democratic policies that aim to marginalize Muslim Americans? Previous work finds that national identity is associated with anti-immigrant attitudes, though recent research suggests that inclusive elements of American identity could be primed to engender opposition towards policies that harm Muslims. Absent significant priming of inclusive elements of American identity, we hypothesize that high American identifiers will endorse a range of anti-Muslim policies in opposition to cherished American values of religious liberty and equality. Drawing on three public opinion surveys spanning from 2018 to 2020, we find that American identity is positively linked to support for curbing Muslims’ civil liberties. Especially striking is the finding that the effect of American identity spans the partisan divide; it even explains the endorsement of anti-democratic policies among self-identified Democrats, who typically are more progressive than Republicans. Overall, our study underscores the importance of studying national identities empirically to further understand the factors that shape hostility towards out-groups, particularly Muslims.

Olfa Zairi is currently Assistant Professor of cultural studies at the University of Gabes, Tunisia with extensive teaching experience. She holds a Ph.D. with a thesis entitled “Where to Belong? Arab-American Women at the Crossroads of Identities.” Her Master's degree, obtained from the University of Montreal, Canada, presents a comparative study of Arab and Western feminisms. Her research and writing are grounded in cultural
studies and cross the fields of feminist writings, gender issues, minority studies and postcolonial studies.

Why Has It Taken So Long? Tunisia from the Abolition of Slavery to the Removal of Slave Names:

Tunisia, one of the smallest countries in North Africa, has always been known as the land of tolerance where people from different religious and racial origins live peacefully together. Throughout history, it has been a crossroads for a wide range of cultures and civilizations that have built its identity and made of it a nation of openness and hospitality. However, like many other countries in the world, it had a history of slavery whose legacy is still apparent today. Tunisia had been for a long time a society with slaves, and under Ottoman rule it became a major slave-trading center linking sub-Saharan Africa to countries across the Mediterranean through a traffic that flourished especially from the late 18th century to the 1840s and represented a significant source of revenue to the government. This fact did not stop Ahmed Bey, Tunisian sovereign (1837-1855), from issuing a decree in 1846 to outlaw slave holding and trafficking, making Tunisia the first Arab and Muslim country to do so, 19 years ahead of the United States; an achievement that has ever since been a source of pride for the country and its people. Nonetheless, the legacy of slavery has persisted, and racism, though not as flagrant as it is in many other countries, is still a reality in Tunisia. Today, 175 years after the abolition of slavery, many black Tunisians still have slave family names and still suffer from different kinds of segregation that have never been openly and widely discussed. This article, therefore, examines racism against the black minority in Tunisia trying to better understand this legacy of slavery that has been swept under the carpet for a long time and attempting to know why it has persisted for so long in this Muslim country known for its spirit of acceptance and friendliness.

Ruslan Yusupov is a scholar of Islam and Muslim communities in China who earned his PhD in sociocultural anthropology from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His current book project examines how Chinese Muslims, most of whom are former drug addicts, engage in social outreach and volunteering activities in the larger society as a way to imagine a place for themselves and for Islam in an authoritarian state. Starting August this year, he will be a postdoctoral scholar at the Harvard Academy of International and Area Studies.
Regarding the Difference of Others: Interethnic Family Life in Contemporary Xinjiang, China:

Following decades of political unrest in the predominantly Turkic Muslim region of Xinjiang, the Chinese leadership has, since 2014, initiated the so-called “People’s War on Terror” that aims to safeguard “ethnic unity,” but which is marked by mass surveillance and incarceration. While much of the world’s attention has been directed to internment camps and the regime of forced labor, my ongoing research examines the state initiative called “pairing up” according to which Chinese Han majority cadres are required to become “family” (live together) within Turkic Muslim households to surveil them and, if necessary, send them for “re-education” to the camps. What does it mean to consider someone as kin and yet suspect him/her as an enemy? How does each party make sense of these relations? What new experiences of kinship do these intimacies across radical cultural differences generate? Consequently, what forms of violence do such homestays inflict on Turkic Muslims’ notions of self, home, and belonging? Drawing on online diaries in which Han cadres visually and textually detail how they spend time, study, cook, eat, have fun, and share beds in homes of Uyghur families, this paper examines how participants of this campaign understand forms of difference and seek to secure “ethnic unity” that does not exist. In so doing, it places life inside the “interethnic family” engineered from above at the intersection of race, kinship, and surveillance to critically examine the emergence of a security regime that does not so much rely on the police and technology but on human-to-human relations.

Tazeen M. Ali is an Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research and teaching focus on Islam, gender, and race in America. Her forthcoming book with NYU Press, The Women’s Mosque of America: Authority and Community in US Islam explores these themes.

Politics, Sex, and American Islam in Hulu’s Ramy: Beyond Racialized and Gendered Islamophobia in US Popular Media:

This paper investigates how recent American Muslim-produced entertainment media disrupt dominant representations of Muslims as racial and religious outsiders in the U.S, focusing on Egyptian-American comedian
Ramy Youssef’s comedy-drama series Ramy. Ramy, set in New Jersey and Cairo, explores the first-generation experiences of its titular character, navigating his relationships to faith, community, and sexuality. I argue that Ramy disrupts Muslims’ construction as religious and political outsiders in U.S. media, even as it conforms to the gendered and racial hierarchies that privilege Arab male perspectives as representative of diverse American Muslim experiences. I further contend it rejects Muslims’ status as political others who can only be viewed through a national security lens, that is, as terrorists or assets to counterterrorism. My analysis sheds light on the racialization of Islam in the U.S., which underpins the dynamics of Islamophobia in the American public sphere. Since the early twentieth century, Hollywood films have consistently deployed the trope of the Arab Muslim enemy, conflating Islamic and Middle Eastern identities in the process. Muslim film and television characters have served as dehumanized perpetrators of violence and antithetical to U.S. values and interests (Said 1980, Sheehan 2006). While post 9/11 depictions of Muslims have highlighted diversity across race and ethnicity, they have continued to link Muslim identity with terrorism. “Good” Muslim characters are committed pro-U.S. military patriots who condemn the violence of “bad” Muslims by aiding in counterterrorism. Moreover, post 9/11 films and dramas that deal with Muslim characters and the U.S. national security framework, serve as a powerful medium through which American citizens debate War on Terror policies (Alsultany2012). This paper suggests that with new Muslim-produced entertainment media, online debates about shows with Muslim characters have shifted to reflect nuanced conversations about American Muslim identity. Using a Religious Studies approach, I analyze the pilot episode of Ramy in conversation with scholarship on Islamophobia in the U.S. as a form of anti-Muslim racism. Ultimately, I show how these series depict American Muslims as three-dimensional religious actors who operate outside of the framework of terrorism and explicitly undermine the dichotomy of good versus bad Muslims.
Touria Khannous is an Associate Professor at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA.

In Defense of Blackness: Patterns of Argumentation in Al-Jahiz’ Fakhr Al-Sudan-Ala-Al-Baydan:
This paper examines Al-Jahiz’ (776-868) famous treatise Fakhr As-Sudan Ala-Al Baydan (868) [The Book of the Glory of the Blacks] (1981). Al Jahiz lived in what is today Iraq during the Abbasid period (750-1258), which was marked by increasing ethnic divisions, and witnessed a historical uprising, known as the Zanj revolt (869-883). The paper examines the multiple ways Al Jahiz’ text resonates with the work of modern theorists of race such as Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Stuart Hall and Cornel West who all argue that blackness has no essence, and that race is a social construct that is tied to concrete material conditions. Al-Jahiz refuted the idea that race was a group of human beings of common biological descent. He strongly rejected the Hamitic theory of race which postulates that the different human races descended from the three sons of Noah. Al Jahiz’ text also resonates with Bell hooks’ concept of loving blackness and its pledge to undermine racism and promote the idea of blackness as beautiful. The paper examines Al Jahiz’ racial naturalism which postulates that climate and geography shape the characteristics of whiteness and blackness, and which makes him a forerunner of Ibn Al Jawzi’s racial naturalism in his treatise “Illuminating the Darkness: The Virtues of Blacks and Abyssinians.”
About the Center

The Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies (AVACGIS), founded in 2009, is a multidisciplinary research center devoted to public scholarship. The center is situated at the heart of the dynamic and innovative campus of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, outside of the nation’s capital, Washington, D.C.

Its strategic location allows the center to draw on unparalleled resources to advance its mission in the areas of research, public education, and building professional opportunities for current and future scholars of Islamic studies. Through conferences, workshops, lectures, and outreach activities, the center engages one of the most diverse campus and community populations in the nation.

Mission

The mission of AVACGIS is to advance a sound and nuanced understanding of Muslim societies and the Islamic faith, its role in world history, and its current trajectory as a diverse, global, and constantly evolving religious tradition.

AVACGIS supports research, interdisciplinary academic programs, and community outreach. By providing educational and research opportunities for students, faculty, and visiting scholars, it is helping to develop 21st-century leaders with a sophisticated understanding of the complex dynamics that shape Muslim communities worldwide.
About the Maydan

Maydan is an online publication of the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University, offering expert analysis on a wide variety of issues in the field of Islamic Studies for academic and public audiences alike, and serving as a resource hub and a platform for informed conversation, featuring original articles and visual media from diverse perspectives.

Maydan complements and benefits from the flourishing academic blogosphere and the rise in digital scholarship, amplified by social media and the diversification of academic production venues. It aims to contribute to the developments in digital scholarship by bringing peer-reviewed academic research to the attention of the broader public and providing original resources and databases for scholars, students and the public to facilitate research, discussion, and pedagogy in Islamic Studies across all disciplines. In response to a growing need for a broadly-focused online resource for academic scholarship and critique, Maydan offers its readers multidisciplinary perspectives on the historical, intellectual, and global patterns and developments influencing the Muslim world.

While drawing on the expertise of the scholars and faculty associated with the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies, Maydan aims to widen academic and public discourse, stimulate intra and inter-disciplinary debate and inspire researchers from all levels to undertake new projects and engage with new issues. It features original pieces and compiles academic resources for the advancement of a sound and nuanced understanding of Muslim societies and the Islamic faith, its role in world history, and its current patterns of globalization.
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