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Sarah Babar

Falling Through the Cracks: Black and South Asian Muslims Survival and Solidarity

Within the fractured systems and institutions that plague the US, two groups in particular have fallen through the cracks: Black and South Asian Muslims. According to a 2015 report published by human rights organization Muslim Anti Racism Collaborative, over 3.4 million Muslims currently live in the United States.¹ Black Muslims and South Asian Muslims constitute about 20% and 60% of that population, respectively; however, both groups are disregarded and misrepresented in US discourse and media.² In 1619, Black Muslim slaves were the first to bring Islam to the US and played a foundational role in the development of Islam in the Americas; yet, they are erased from Islamic and US historical memory.³ Similarly, South Asian Muslims have resided in the US since the 1700s, but it was not until 9/11 that they entered mainstream discourse as hostile terrorists who were criminalized and subjugated to state-sanctioned harassment and surveillance.⁴ Today, both groups are targets of counter-terrorism initiatives which shape their racial formations, racialized narratives, and intra-Muslim interactions. White supremacy and Islamophobia additionally serve as opportunities for connection as both groups come to understand their specific contexts of racism, xenophobia, citizenship, state violence, and criminalization. While overcoming their individual and distinct issues regarding racism, discrimination, and injustice, both groups have found pathways towards solidarity and allyship.

¹ Hill, Margari, Daniel Kowalski, Meral Kocak, Hakeem Muhammad, Sherouk Ahmed, and Namira Islam. *Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations: Muslim American Views on Race Relations*. Report. MuslimARC, 2015.

² “Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans.” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*. May 30, 2020. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>.

³ Abdurraqib, Samaa. “Faith or Fight: Islam in the African American Community.” *Counterpoints* 346 (2010): 169-85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980517>.

⁴ Mishra, Sangay K. “Race, Religion, and Communities: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States.” In *Desis Divided: The Political Lives of South Asian Americans*, 71-104. University of Minnesota Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt19rmc89.7>.

This research paper examines the relationship between Black and South Asian Muslims, analyzes the differential impact of societal and state violence and hyper surveillance, and explores strategies for cross-racial solidarity.

Part I: Brief History of Black and South Asian Muslims in the US

Black Muslims and South Asian Muslims have historically worked to overcome racial and religious discrimination, ranging from legal hyper-vigilance and violence to multiple forms of erasure. Black Muslims were the first Muslims in the US, brought over from Africa during the slavery era; however, white slave owners imposed Christianity on them, forcing many to give up their faith and banning the establishment of religious communities.⁵ As a result, Muslim slaves were forced to part with their religious clothing, violate dietary regulations, and forgo regular Islamic prayers.⁶ Many were forced to convert to Christianity and leave their faiths behind, but some became “pseudo-converts” in order to protect themselves and their families while still maintaining their Islamic roots. Following the abolition of slavery, remaining Black Muslims persisted with their faith which continued the growth of Black Islam and contributed to the emergence of Pan-African leader Marcus Garvey who featured Islam in his famous newspaper *Negro World* which was first published in 1918.⁷

South Asian immigrants, especially from the eastern Indian subprovince of Bengal, came to the US during the 1700’s-1800’s and faced an immense amount of anti-Asian sentiment and

⁵ Hill, et. al., *Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations: Muslim American Views on Race Relations*.

⁶ Amon, Ayla. “African Muslims in Early America.” National Museum of African American History and Culture. July 05, 2019. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/african-muslims-early-america>.

⁷ Moughni, Noor. “Brief History of Black Muslim Americans.” *The Michigan Daily*. June 17, 2020. <https://www.michigandaily.com/michigan-in-color/bief-history-black-muslim-americans/>.

xenophobia.⁸ Anti-Asian racism not only took the form of mob attacks and social exclusion but also anti-immigration legislation such as the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1790 which limited US citizenship and naturalization to “free white persons” from Western Europe.⁹ Other instances included the 1854 Supreme Court case *People v. Hall* which ruled that Asian immigrants, African Americans, and American Indian people could not testify against white people in court which paved the way for white people to avoid accountability for anti-Asian and racist violence.¹⁰ The Immigration Act of 1917, or the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, expanded the barriers enacted by the 1790 Immigration and Naturalization act by creating a “barred zone” ranging from the Middle East to South Asia, restricting immigrants in these areas from entering the US and subjecting potential immigrants to English literacy tests.¹¹ The exclusionary and xenophobic efforts of the US made it increasingly difficult for South Asians to settle safely, let alone thrive, within the country.

Black and South Asian Muslims have since experienced multiple moments of overlap, allyship, and solidarity with each other while attempting to find light within the shadows of white supremacy. In the 1950’s, South Asian missionary and lecturer Mufti Muhammad Sadiq played a critical role in the growth of Black Islam. Sadiq was an Ahmaddiya Muslim who immigrated from British India to Chicago in the 1920’s where he opened the first Ahmaddiya mosque, converted a large population of people, and attracted the attention of many Black

⁸ “An Introduction to South Asian American History.” *South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)*. July 30, 2015. <https://www.saada.org/resources/introduction#:~:text=While South Asians are noted, regions of Punjab and Bengal.>

⁹ “Nationality Act of 1790.” *Immigration History*. January 31, 2020. <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1790-nationality-act/>.

¹⁰ Brockell, Gillian. “The Long, Ugly History of Anti-Asian Racism and Violence in the U.S.” *The Washington Post*. March 20, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/03/18/history-anti-asian-violence-racism/>.

¹¹ Boissoneault, Lorraine. “Literacy Tests and Asian Exclusion Were the Hallmarks of the 1917 Immigration Act.” *Smithsonian.com*. February 06, 2017. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-america-grappled-immigration-100-years-ago-180962058/>.

communities, including Somalian immigrants and African Americans.¹² India was still under British influence and building a Non Cooperation Movement to gain self-governance and independence from Britain, a movement spearheaded by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, so Sadiq was well-versed in white supremacy and colonialism.¹³ Sadiq gave public lectures on the message of Islam in Chicago, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and Detroit and was featured in several newspapers such as *The Buffalo Enquirer*, the *Ashland Daily Independent*, and *The Sunday Advertiser*.¹⁴ He reminded Black Muslims that their historical and familial connections with Islam were rooted in Africa and brought overseas to the US, and he argued that the egalitarianism of Islam could better serve the Black community than Christianity. In a letter to Black Muslims published in his newspaper *Moslem Sunrise*, Sadiq critiques Christianity and speaks directly to Black Muslims: “Christian profiteers brought you out of your native lands of Africa and in Christianizing you made you forget the religion and language of your forefathers — which were Islam and Arabic.”¹⁵ Sadiq also extended the term “Muslim American” beyond an oxymoron into a critical identity that embodied the intersectionality that many Muslims experienced as US citizens.¹⁶ Sadiq also lifted up Black Muslims by preaching to and educating Garveyites on their Islamic histories. His emphasis on the role of Islam within Black slaves’ lives inspired Black Muslim leaders like Nation of Islam (NOI) co-founders W.D. Fard and Elijah

¹² Prashad, Vijay. *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001.108-109

¹³ Sawai, Akshay. “1920 vs 2020: What’s Changed, What’s Not in the World, and India?” *The Economic Times*. January 14, 2020.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/1920-vs-2020-whats-changed-whats-not-in-the-world-and-india/articleshows/73239360.cms>.

¹⁴ Misbah, Ghulam. “Retracing Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq’s Travels in America.” *Al Hakam*. April 10, 2020. <https://www.alhakam.org/retracing-hazrat-mufti-muhammad-sadiqs-travels-in-america/>.

¹⁵ Curtis, Edward E. “Islamism and Its African American Muslim Critics: Black Muslims in the Era of the Arab Cold War.” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 683-709. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068446>.

¹⁶ Khan, A. M. “Born of a Muslim who overcame an immigration ban, a community celebrates its centennial.” *Religion News Service*. February 18, 2020. <https://religionnews.com/2020/02/15/a-centennial-celebration-for-a-muslim-who-overcame-an-immigration-ban/>.

Muhammad who extended Sadiq's ideas in their their efforts to build the NOI and pan-African Islam.¹⁷

Black and South Asian Muslims also interacted with each other in social spaces, as illustrated by the relationships between Black Muslim intellectual Malcolm X and the Bengali community in Harlem, New York. When Malcolm X moved to Harlem in 1954 on assignment from the NOI, he befriended many Bengali immigrants from eastern Pakistan in his search for halal meat. The Bengali store owners and merchants he met had fled a hostile Pakistani regime and immigrated to Harlem where they settled down and started families with their African American and Puerto Rican neighbors.¹⁸ In 1947, these Bengali immigrants had established the New York-based Pakistan League of America which served the Bengali community and their Black and Puerto Rican wives and children, reflecting a hidden multicultural enclave built upon cross-ethnic community and allyship.¹⁹ Finding solace in African American communities was helpful to Bengalis in their search for acceptance in a new white country, because the exclusionary practices and policies of the US had made it difficult for them to establish a strong sense of community on their own. This solidarity within the greater diverse *ummah* is reflected by the merchants' relationship with Malcolm X. Bengali immigrants and Malcolm's NOI constituents often engaged in debates concerning white racism, religious practices, and Islam as a whole.²⁰ One Bengali merchant expressed his view of Malcolm X: "Malcolm was 'one of us,' a Muslim, but also a person of color reviled by white supremacy."²¹ Malcolm had even been

¹⁷ Misbah, "Retracing Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq's Travels in America"; Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 109

¹⁸ Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 106

¹⁹ "Family Stories." *Bengali Harlem*. <http://bengaliharlem.com/category/family-stories/>.

²⁰ Hussain, Nadia. "Lost and Found: The Legacy of the Bangladeshi Sons of New York." *Hyphen Magazine*. September 09, 2015. <https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2013/01/lost-and-found-legacy-bangladeshi-sons-new-york>.

²¹ The Arabic word, "Ummah" translates to "nation" in English and is commonly used to describe the broad Muslim community. Stacey, Aisha. "The Concept of Ummah in Islam." *The Religion of Islam*. January 11, 2021. <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/11312/concept-of-ummah-in-islam/>; Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 106.

photographed with Bengalis such as Ibrahim Chowdry, a community organizer established in New York who was adamant about Bengali cross-ethnic relations. Through their shared oppression at the hands of the white majority and their distrust of US institutions, Black and South Asian Muslims established a connection based on relationality which highlights solidarity based on parallel but not identical relationships to hegemonic power structures. Relationality became an important foundation of allyship in Harlem in the 1950's between Black Muslims such as Malcolm X and South Asian Muslim immigrants.

Despite the history of cross-racial community and allyship, anti-Blackness in South Asian communities and anti-Asian racism in Black communities remains so pervasive that some scholars claim that “the largest ethnic division in North American communities is between predominantly Black/African American Muslims and immigrants from Arab and South Asian countries.”²² Muslim immigrants searching for political and cultural citizenship and “honorary whiteness” often adopt and attempt to assimilate to U.S. norms which inherently fortifies US anti-Blackness.²³ This uncritical pursuit of “honorary whiteness” can be traced to toxic elements of South Asian culture, particularly colorism that celebrates whiteness as the standard of beauty.²⁴ At the same time, Black communities are disillusioned by the Asian American model minority myth which “characterizes Asian Americans as a polite, law-abiding group who have achieved a higher level of success than the general population through some combination of innate talent and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootsraps immigrant striving.”²⁵ The model minority myth acts as a racial wedge that pits both groups against each other, allowing white supremacy

²² Hill, Margari et. al, *Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations: Muslim American Views on Race Relations*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Flodin-Ali, Yasmine. “What Malcolm X Taught.” *The Black American Muslim*.

<http://www.theblackamericanmuslim.com/what-malcolm-x-taught>.

²⁵ Blackburn, Sarah Soonling. “What Is the Model Minority Myth?” *Learning for Justice*. March 21, 2019. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-the-model-minority-myth>.

and its calculated narratives to create a hostile divide between both communities.²⁶ Though there are inspiring moments of overlap and allyship between both communities, there are still obstacles that prevent full solidarity between Black and South Asian Muslims.

Part II: Black Muslims + Erasure

Islamic communities have faced various issues involving erasure, invisibility, transnational terror, and hypervisibility. One-fifth of the Muslim population in the US identify as Black; however, the Black Muslim community struggles against their erasure in US Islamic history and within Muslim American communities.²⁷ Additionally, Black Muslims have been placed in boxes regarding their specific religious practices and denominational identities. With their diminished role in US Islamic history and unacknowledged intra-community diversity, Black Muslims face erasure that prevents them from being recognized and celebrated in the U.S. and general Muslim community.

Few realize that African American Muslims were the first major Muslim community in the US with 30% of slaves from West and Central African countries practicing Islam.²⁸ This initial group of Black Muslims were enslaved and forced to abandon Islam, convert to Christianity, and choose safety over religion. Many choose to resist and maintain their Islamic practices by pseudo-converting to Christianity but secretly practicing Islam in whatever way they could. While their practices persisted, the hidden nature of their faith made it difficult to formally develop and institutionalize Islam within the US which, by extension, has rendered it challenging

²⁶ Chow, Kat. "‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks." NPR. April 19, 2017.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks>.

²⁷ I use the term "Black" to encompass both African Americans and Black immigrants, whereas the term "African American" specifically refers to those whose ancestors were slaves in the U.S.; "Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*.

²⁸ Moughni, "Brief History of Black Muslim Americans."

to recognize the central role that Black Muslims have in the history of US Islam.²⁹ In addition to historical erasure, modern Black Muslims are also hidden in the shadows of the larger numbers of other Muslim immigrants, since 91% of foreign-born U.S. Muslims are from non-Black countries.³⁰ Black Muslims and their contributions to the U.S. Islam are suppressed which amount to a form of anti-Black racism that not only echoes mainstream racism but also extends into various Islamic communities.

The minimization of African American Muslims can be found in their absence from various Islamic denominations and communities. Internationally, the two major Muslim denominations are Shia and Sunni and, within the US, it is estimated that 55% of Muslims identify as Sunni, 16% identify as Shia, and the remaining 29% identifying with the Nation of Islam and other minor denominations.³¹ Shia and Sunni Muslims share much at their Islamic core, but they significantly differ in relation to the succession of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis believe that the Prophet Muhammad's father-in-law and best friend Abu Bakr should succeed the Prophet, and Shias believe that the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin should be his successor. In addition, Sunnis rely on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad to inform their practices, whereas Shias rely on their ayatollahs who communicate signs from God to the people on Earth.³² The NOI also adopts the main characteristics of Islam, but it espouses the belief that an evil Black scientist named Yakub created the white race to hold power and oppress Black people, therefore requiring the presence of the NOI to liberate Black people and resist the "devilish" white race.³³

²⁹ Abdurraqib, "Faith or Fight: Islam in the African American Community."

³⁰ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, "Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans."

³¹ Lipka, Michael. "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and around the World." Pew Research Center. December 08, 2020.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>.

³² Tasch, Barbara. "The Differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims." *Business Insider*. October 04, 2015.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-differences-between-shia-and-sunni-muslims-2015-10>.

³³ Melton, J. Gordon. "Nation of Islam." *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nation-of-Islam>.

Approximately 45% of Black Muslims identify as Sunni, and only 3% of Black Muslims identify with the NOI, but many incorrectly assume that most Black Muslims follow the NOI.³⁴

Reflecting on her own experiences as an African American Sunni Muslim, poet and scholar Samaa Abdurraqib notes that the presence and role of Black Sunni Muslims is sometimes undermined by the popular history of the NOI.³⁵ With figures like Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X leading major Black Islamic movements in the US, mainstream discourse associates Black Muslim communities with the NOI without realizing that the majority of them are Sunni. Mainstream media outlets, popular culture, and civil rights discourse have publicized the NOI in ways that obscure the diversity of Black participation in other denominations. Though Malcolm X eventually converted from the NOI to Sunni Islam, his time with the NOI often defines his relationship with Islam. Abdurraqib continues, “What I find problematic is the way in which these two aspects of his life are presented as fragmentary — as if his politics didn’t inform his faith and vice versa.”³⁶ Despite Malcolm’s conversion to and identity as a Sunni Muslim, his political and religious identities are notoriously associated with the NOI. Black Sunni Muslims continue to struggle to reflect their own religious beliefs, trying to emerge from the shadows that the NOI has cast on society’s views of Black Muslims.³⁷

In addition to the erasure of Black Muslims in Islam and the invisibility of Black Sunnis in Muslim denominations, Black Muslims face anti-Blackness within Islam as well as in the U.S. society at large. Anti-Blackness is rampant within Islamic communities, and its impact is compounded by the Islamophobia experienced by Black Muslims. Black Americans are criminalized and stigmatized within society and by law enforcement, the justice system, and

³⁴ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, “Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans.”

³⁵ Abdurraqib, 174.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁷ Lee, Victoria J. “The Mosque and Black Islam: Towards an Ethnographic Study of Islam in the Inner City.” *Ethnography* 11, no. 1 (2010): 145-63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24047902>.

even governmental rhetoric as seen through mass incarceration, disparaging media representation, police brutality, and political debates. Their intersectional identities as Muslim make it even harder for Black Americans to thrive as white supremacy criminalizes and scrutinizes multiple aspects of their lives. After the 2020 police shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black Muslim in Kenosha, Wisconsin, his father recited an Islamic prayer which sparked dialogue among Black Muslims such as Chicago resident Iesa Lewis. A practicing Muslim, Lewis noted, “I don’t think people walk around and can identify me as Muslim. The first thing that comes to mind is that this is a Black man. So I’m constantly profiled [for being Black] but then as a Muslim.”³⁸ He and other Muslims noted that their religious identities were seen as secondary to their Blackness, but the intersection of Islamophobia and anti-Blackness required them to be even more wary of and vulnerable to state violence. This intersection even shapes grassroots organizing strategies, as articulated by community organizer Sahar Pirzada. Pirzada is a member of Los Angeles-based Vigilant Love, an Asian-American and Muslim centered organization that works to promote cross-ethnic relationality and dialogue while educating communities on state violence, anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, and community health. She explains that the multiple oppressions of anti-Blackness and Islamophobia require various strategies and responses that require so much energy, time, and resources that it can feel overwhelming.³⁹ The erasure that Black Muslims have faced and continue to face forces them to fall through the cracks of invisibility and ignorance, robbing them of their rightful presence in Islamic discourse and society.

³⁸ On August 23, 2020, 29-year-old Jacob Blake was shot by a white police officer seven times in the back in Kenosha, Wisconsin in front of his three children, leaving him partially paralyzed. The shooting sparked a societal uproar and several protests and demonstrations in Kenosha and nationally. Morales, Christina. “What We Know About the Shooting of Jacob Blake.” *The New York Times*. September 10, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/jacob-blake-shooting-kenosha.html>.

³⁹ Pirzada, Sahar. “Bridging the Gap Between Black Muslims and South Asian Muslims: A Call for Intra-Muslim Solidarity and Allyship.” Interview by Sarah Babar. June 29, 2021.

Part III: South Asian Muslims + U.S. Empire

Like Black Muslims, South Asian Muslim have fallen through the cracks of justice, assimilation, and acceptance as they strive to navigate terrorist narratives and racist stigmatizations and make the U.S. their home. As more recent immigrants to the U.S. South Asian Muslims have found themselves stuck within the overlapping ridges of anti-Asian erasure, Islamophobia, and U.S. militarism in Asia. There are currently over 5.4 million South Asians that reside in the US, and it is projected that by 2065, “Asian Americans will be the largest immigrant population” in the U.S.⁴⁰ With their exponential population growth, the issues they face at the hands of the state continue to increase as well.

South Asian Muslims have struggled to find safety in this country U.S., even while under the shadows of U.S. empire. After 9/11, South Asian Muslim communities endured state-sponsored hyper-surveillance, militarized overpolicing, and racial profiling. The passage of the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (U.S.A. PATRIOT Act) just 45 days after the 9/11 attacks enabled law enforcement to utilize surveillance methods, such as wire taps and pen/trap orders which grant investigators access to the phone numbers called from one’s device.⁴¹ It also removed judicial approval which cleared the way for the FBI to obtain private civilian records such as phone records, computer records, bank statements, and credit history.⁴² Muslim Americans were placed

⁴⁰ *Demographic Snapshot of South Asians in the United States: April 2019*. South Asian Americans Leading Together, April 2019. <https://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SAALT-Demographic-Snapshot-2019.pdf>. 1

⁴¹ “Pen Trap.” Electronic Frontier Foundation. Accessed August 04, 2021. <https://www.eff.org/issues/pen-trap#:~:text=Investigators%20can%20typically%20get%20%22pen,of%20the%20phone%20call%20itself>.

⁴² “Surveillance Under the Patriot Act.” ACLU. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/surveillance-under-patriot-act>.

under so much scrutiny that many began to internalize their criminalization. In fact, one report cited that “American Muslims are responsible for providing initial unsolicited tips to law enforcement in nearly 1 out of every 3 Al-Qaeda related ‘homegrown’ plots since 9/11.”⁴³ The attacks and the racist and Islamophobic policies that followed fostered a mutual distrust between the U.S. and South Asian Muslims and within the South Asian Muslim population itself.

Anti-Asian and Islamophobic violence and the hypervisibility and weaponization of damaging stereotypes sharply increased after 9/11. In 2019 alone, the leading two motivators for hate crimes were race/ethnicity and religion which constituted 54% and 21% of hate crimes, respectively.⁴⁴ After 9/11, hate crimes motivated by Islamophobia or religious biases ranked as the second most common type of hate crime in the U.S.. such crimes had previously been ranked as the second least common.⁴⁵ Additionally, societal hatred towards South Asian Muslims not only came from non-South Asian communities but also South Asian communities themselves. Because South Asian non-Muslims were victimized by Islamophobic violence, they resisted not by allying themselves with Muslims but by disidentifying from them. Hindu Indians were particularly resentful about being mistaken as Pakistani or Muslim. One Hindu Indian man stated, “There have been some incidents... Because they mistake us... as if we could be terrorists. This happens ... even sometimes they mistake us as Pakistanis.”⁴⁶ Political Science and International Relations scholar Sangay Mishra expands on these sentiments:

The implicit understanding articulated is that being a Hindu Indian should be an adequate guard from racial attacks and discrimination, and from this perspective the most worrying

⁴³ *Data on Post - 9/11 Terrorism in the United States*. Report. Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2012.

⁴⁴ “Topic: Hate Crime in the United States.” *Statista*. February 19, 2021.

https://www.statista.com/topics/4178/hate-crimes-in-the-united-states/#topicHeader__wrapper.

⁴⁵ This data was in comparison to anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-Protestant, anti-Other religions, and anti-Multiple religion hate crimes; Ser, Kuang Keng Kuek. “Data: Hate Crimes against Muslims Increased after 9/11.” *The World from PRX*. September 12, 2016.

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-09-12/data-hate-crimes-against-muslims-increased-after-911>.

⁴⁶ Mishra, “Race, Religion, and Communities: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States.”

aspect of the post 9/11 situation is that Hindu Indians are mistaken for Muslims/Pakistanis. The quote points to the reality of the racialization of South Asians in the United States and also to the ways in which this racialization mediates the deeper identity distinctions within the group.⁴⁷

This animosity painfully exacerbated long standing religious animosities among Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities in the U.S., sparking yet another divide between South Asian Muslims and other U.S. communities.⁴⁸ With policies and public officials outrightly stigmatizing and criminalizing South Asian Muslim communities, the U.S. public has followed suit. Xenophobic immigration and racist law enforcement policies worked in tandem with the violent hate crimes that existed against this community, therefore “aiding and abetting hate violence.”⁴⁹

South Asian Muslims were forced to struggle with the contradictions of building their American and pan-Asian identities. Asian American Studies professor Sunaina Maira analyzes the intersection between the “war on terrorism” that the U.S. claimed internationally and the war on terror that took place domestically after 9/11. As these immigrants have been desperate to assimilate and call the U.S. their new home, their previous homes have been targeted by U.S. imperialism and capitalism. Maira states, “The fissure between the two fronts of empire effectively prevents marginalized groups in the United States from understanding how their subjugation within the nation is connected to dominance overseas,” both fronts representing the domestic and international senses of empire, more specifically the idea of a community’s new home and their previous home.⁵⁰ This poses the question of how a group can work to call a new

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ahmad, Muneer I. “A Rage Shared by Law: Post-September 11 Racial Violence as Crimes of Passion.” *California Law Review* 92, no. 5 (2004): 1259-330. 1262

⁵⁰ Maira, Sunaina. “Flexible Citizenship/Flexible Empire: South Asian Muslim Youth in Post-9/11 America.” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 697-720. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068521>. 701

place their home when it is their new place that is destroying their old home. Addressing the critical intersection between the war on terror in the U.S. and abroad is “generally missing in much of the research literature on immigration and transnationalism has been an analysis of U.S. imperialism as a larger framework that shapes processes of migration, racialization, and marginality.”⁵¹ This lack of research contributes to the vicious cycle of U.S. political and economic hegemony which destabilizes South Asian Muslims immigrant communities. After 9/11, South Asian Muslims were questioned in their loyalty towards the U.S., especially within the context of U.S. military, economic, and political imperialism in the the Middle East and South Asia which profiled, desecrated, and destroyed Muslim communities. In order to assimilate and survive within the U.S., many Muslim Americans accepted the fate of their motherlands which were subjected to U.S. capitalism and hegemony under the guise of fighting terrorism and U.S. national security, but instead of experiencing more safety and inclusion, South Asian Muslim communities struggled with issues of “displacement, belonging, and exclusion.”⁵² Meanwhile, entire South Asian and Muslim populations were displaced from their home countries. The reported number of people displaced due to post-9/11 U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria is estimated to be at least 37 million and as high as 48-59 million.⁵³ In 2001, the U.S. enacted a military campaign called “Enduring Freedom” that targeted the Taliban but resulted in a high number of non-insurgent, civilian casualties. Meanwhile, President George W. Bush provided an additional \$20 billion to the Department of Homeland Security and created a program called “Friendship Through

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 700.

⁵³ Vine, David, Cala Coffman, Katalina Khoury, Madison Lovasz, Helen Bush, Rachael Leduc, and Jennifer Walkup. “Creating Refugees: Displacement Caused by the United States' Post 9/11 Wars.” *Costs of War*, September 21, 2020. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Displacement_Vine et al_Costs of War 2020 09 08.pdf.

Education” which sought “to bring American and Muslim children closer together.”⁵⁴ U.S. enacted militarism and empire within and beyond their national borders, creating a national and international crisis where Muslim populations struggled to exist safely and establish themselves as citizens in their nation homes.

Maira notes the perpendicularity of cultural citizenship and legal citizenship and argues that the war on terror and its increased national security budget produced more barriers for Muslim immigrants to enter the U.S. and attain legal citizenship. In addition to these legal obstacles, Muslim Americans also have been prevented from achieving full cultural citizenship and inclusion into the U.S. nation state.⁵⁵ After 9/11, the U.S. bolstered its Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) programs which socially crucified, criminalized, stereotyped, and stigmatized South Asian and Muslim communities, making it increasingly difficult for them to achieve legal and cultural citizenship.⁵⁶ This dual sense of isolation and alienation terrorized the South Asian Muslim community and restricted them from fully establishing themselves within the U.S.

Part IV: Survival and Solidarity through Terrorism

Despite the fact that most terrorist attacks within the U.S. are completed by far-right white supremacists, Black and South Asian Muslims are criminalized as domestic terrorists and targeted as the leading threats to U.S. national security.⁵⁷ A 2019 joint report by the FBI and

⁵⁴ “The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days.” U.S. Department of State. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.htm>.

⁵⁵ Maira, “Flexible Citizenship/Flexible Empire,” 703.

⁵⁶ “Post-9/11.” USCIS. December 04, 2019. <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/post-911>.

⁵⁷ Goitein, Elizabeth, Harsha Panduranga, Faiza Patel, and Lauren-Brooke Eisen. “Why Countering Violent Extremism Programs Are Bad Policy.” Brennan Center for Justice. June 28, 2021.

Department of Homeland Security states that “RMVEs (Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists), primarily those advocating for the superiority of the white race, likely would continue to be the most lethal DVE threat to the Homeland.”⁵⁸ In 2019, right-wing terrorists committed two-thirds of all extremist attacks in the U.S. with 90% of those attacks occurring within the first five months of 2020; yet, law enforcement targeted and criminalized Black, South Asian, Muslim, and other marginalized communities as the most lethal threats to U.S. national security.⁵⁹ As a result, Black and South Asian Muslims have been unjustifiably subjected to and continue to struggle against state-sanctioned exclusion, alienation, and stigmatization.

Present-day state surveillance of racialized and religious communities can be traced to the 1956 founding of the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) which aimed to infiltrate and undermine predominantly Black Power organizations and civil rights leaders through the 1970’s.⁶⁰ COINTELPRO was designed to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder.”⁶¹ The program deliberately worked to infiltrate Black organizations deemed “hate-type” groups and destroy them from the inside out.

Inspired by COINTELPRO, the Obama Administration established the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program in 2014 as a method of “soft counterterrorism initiative” to

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/why-countering-violent-extremism-programs-are-bad-policy>.

⁵⁸ Wild, Whitney, and Geneva Sands. “US Deaths Due to Racially Motivated Extremists Are on the Rise, FBI and DHS Report Finds.” WESH 2 News. July 01, 2021.

<https://www.wesh.com/article/us-deaths-caused-by-extremists-rising-report-says/36454474#>.

⁵⁹ Jones, Seth G., Katrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington. *The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States*. Report. June 17, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>.

⁶⁰ Mansoor, Sanya. “How Muslims Are Grappling With Anti-Blackness and Policing.” *Time*. September 15, 2020. <https://time.com/5884176/islam-black-lives-matter-policing-muslims/>.

⁶¹ “Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts - Subject: (COINTELPRO) Black Extremist.” Hoover, J. Edgar. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Section 1: August 25, 1967.

fight extremism and strengthen communities.⁶² The ACLU of Massachusetts describes the CVE program as “a law enforcement model premised on the discredited idea that harboring certain political or religious views is an indicator of future violence.”⁶³ The CVE program actively recruited teachers, religious leaders, parents, and other community members to monitor and report community members who they suspect are vulnerable to extremist recruitment, a model that the ACLU alleges violates citizens’ constitutional rights and undermines civil liberties and public safety. For example, CVE’s strategy of using teachers as a form of “soft surveillance” has caught the eye of numerous organizations critical of the program. By using teachers, they argue, Muslim youth are being religiously profiled and socially stigmatized.⁶⁴ This program has effectively targeted both South Asian and Black Muslims, a continuation of hyper surveillance and profiling. In April 2017, the Trump administration allocated CVE resources to focus on Islamic extremism despite the fact that far-right extremism and white supremacy attacks have been increasing exponentially compared to Islamic extremist attacks.⁶⁵ One 2016 study stated, “While U.S counterterrorism efforts remain focused on violent extremist acts linked to self-identified Muslims, the data shows this threat makes up 26% of ideologically motivated murders, compared to 71% of murders being carried out by violent right-wing extremists,” which reflects the failure of CVE to address actual terrorism threats in the U.S.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the Trump administration allocated 85% of CVE grants to specifically monitor Muslims, Black Lives Matter activists, and immigrants, weaponizing local citizens, schools, and community

⁶² Patel, Faiza, and Michael German. *Countering Violent Extremism: Myths and Fact*. School of Law, New York University. New York: Brennan Center for Justice. Date Accessed August 10, 2021.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/102915%20Final%20CVE%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

⁶³ “‘Countering Violent Extremism,’ a Flawed Approach to Law Enforcement.” ACLU Massachusetts. August 03, 2018. <https://www.aclum.org/en/countering-violent-extremism-flawed-approach-law-enforcement>.

⁶⁴ Erwin, Shannon. “FBI Uses Teachers as ‘Soft Surveillance’.” Fair Observer. November 10, 2015. https://www.fairobserver.com/region/north_america/fbi-uses-teachers-as-soft-surveillance-13005/.

⁶⁵ “What Is ‘Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)’.” Muslim Justice League. <https://muslimjusticeleague.org/cve/>.

⁶⁶ Barbari, Nabeela. *Reconsidering CVE: The Unintended Consequences of Countering Violent Extremism Efforts in America*. Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018. Monterey: Naval Post Graduate School, 2018.

centers to do so.⁶⁷ Despite its multi-million dollar budget, there is no evidence proving that the CVE has reduced domestic terrorism.⁶⁸

With their joint struggles of fighting white supremacy and profiling from law enforcement, Black and South Asian Muslims in the U.S. and abroad have found ways to build solidarity and allyship. Community organizations such as Equality Labs and Vigilant Love work to use dialogue, activism, and education in order to build bridges between and within marginalized communities in ways that foster growth and promote healing. With relationality and passion being at the forefront of their efforts, groups are able to come together and bond over their shared experiences of oppression. With their various threads of discrimination weaving together, they are able to build upon their communities in a stronger, healthier, and more collaborative way.

Equality Labs is an international civil rights organization that places overseas South Asian activists in conversation with Black activists and educators in the U.S. to discuss advocacy and allyship. Learning from and growing with each other, both groups participate in decolonization workshops that deconstruct issues ranging from racial discrimination to caste systems, political education sessions on digital security protection, and international dialogue webinars. Their mission statement states, “We believe that all progressive South Asians must work towards the goals of ending white supremacy and anti-Blackness, but crucially, also our internal hegemonies of caste, language, geography, gender, sexuality and religion.”⁶⁹ The goal of this organization is not only to achieve solidarity and fight various power dynamics, but also fosters an environment of growth and influence, building relationships that encourage

⁶⁷ Goitein, et. al., “Why Countering Violent Extremism Programs Are Bad Policy.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Our Mission: A Political Home for South Asian Progressives.” Equality Labs.
<https://www.equalitylabs.org/mission>.

conversation across racial justice movements. Chandrashekar Azad, an Indian social activist who spoke at an Equality Labs event, explained, “We’ve been trying to campaign on similar lines over here back home in India. We’ve learned so much. We’ve started to have moments like Dalit Lives Matter, Muslim Lives Matter. So, we’re learning a lot, and we’re together in this struggle.”⁷⁰ The push for fighting for marginalized populations, with the help of organizations such as Equality Labs, exceeds domestic borders and achieves influence from other movements. These moments of cooperation and dialogue strengthen international community bonds and increase the odds of harmony among marginalized groups.

Another organization working against state-sanctioned violence, particularly policies such as CVE, is Vigilant Love. Rooted in Los Angeles, Vigilant Love emerged after the San Bernardino shooting and in response to rising Islamophobia in Southern California.⁷¹ Its membership consists of Muslim Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and Japanese Americans who unite to fight anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia and to protect their communities from state violence. Guided by the principles of solidarity, allyship, activism, and healing, members strive to support grassroots movements in their push towards liberation, justice, and peace by engaging in cross-cultural conversation and investing in the mental health of community members, especially in regard to liberation movements. Their programs dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health struggle, offer resources, and assist mental health practitioners as they resist government pressure to participate in state surveillance.⁷² Pirzada explains,

⁷⁰ Shenoy, Rupa. “Black and South Asian Communities Find Solidarity in Fight Against Racism.” *The World*. July 07, 2020.

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-07/black-and-south-asian-communities-find-solidarity-fight-against-racism>.

⁷¹ “Who We Are.” #VigilantLOVE. <https://www.vigilantlove.org/who-we-are>.

⁷² Pirzada, “Bridging the Gap Between Black Muslims and South Asian Muslims: A Call for Intra-Muslim Solidarity and Allyship.”

We've pivoted to kind of hone in on specifically mental health and so we've been trying to reach out to mental health professionals, providers, folks that are in these service-oriented positions to get educated about CVE, so that they don't fall into the trap of applying for the grants or receiving funding or engaging in any kind of programming that would put a target on our communities' backs.⁷³

Vigilant Love's programming includes a webinar series, including an episode titled "The Mental Health Industry and State Surveillance," which examines how mental health institutions have historically been used as vehicles of state surveillance and tracking.⁷⁴ With a focus on supporting grassroots movements and using a community engagement and education approach, Vigilant Love has become a valuable organization for fighting for community healing and working to also bridge the gap between South Asian and Black communities.

Part V: Conclusion

The destructive and pernicious nature of structural discrimination in the U.S. has generated a multitude of cracks that have engulfed Black and South Asian Muslims. Both groups have faced multiple forms of state-sanctioned violence including, but not limited to, exclusionary legislation, hyper-surveillance, societal stigmatization, hate crimes, and false terrorist narratives. However, unlawful state surveillance and Islamophobia which directly affect both groups have created avenues for intra-national solidarity, allyship, and healing.⁷⁵ According to Critical Diversity Studies professor Iman Attia, the study of anti-Muslim racism requires the deconstruction of power structures and is about a "hegemonic-critical revision of dominant

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "#StopCVE." #VigilantLOVE. <https://www.vigilantlove.org/stopcve>.

⁷⁵ Shenoy, "Black and South Asian Communities Find Solidarity in Fight Against Racism."

images and discourses... which serve the stabiliztion of power.”⁷⁶ Research surrounding the racialization of and within Islamophobia has become imperative for the fight against white supremacy and systems that stem from U.S. empire. Cross-ethnic organizations such as Equality Labs and Vigilant Love dismantle these discriminatory systems by naming racism, xenophobia, and criminalization in open dialogues, deconstructing potential avenues of solidarity, and bonding over the fight against white supremacy. By analyzing the history of discrimination that each group has experienced and developing a sense of community through a relational lens, pathways towards healing have become increasingly visible. Current movements such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, #StopCVE, and the fight against anti-Asian violence have informed the greater Muslim population of the importance of solidarity and allyship as they continue to heal and bond over their conflicts at the hands of the U.S.

⁷⁶ Hafez, Farid. “Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice, Racism, and Decoloniality.” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2018): 210-25.

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https://www.fairobserver.com/region/north_america/fbi-uses-teachers-as-soft-surveillance-13005/.

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Copley Library Research Award Paper

My research paper examined the relationship between Black and South Asian Muslims as well analyzed their respective relationships with state violence and hypersurveillance. I discussed their historical relationship with each other, their historical relationship with governmental policy and law enforcement, their modern relationship with each other, and their current relationship with the state. This project was created with an immense amount of bibliographic research, interviews, and media collection and interpretation.

The biggest element of my project pertaining to getting information was the bibliographic research. I utilized search engines such as Google Scholar, the Copley Library search engine, and the JSTOR database in order to find resources for my paper. By utilizing these three engines, I was able to narrow down the resources I found to be more exclusive, peer-reviewed, and published works that were relevant to my topics. The pieces I found through this search strategy presented me with the works of scholars, professors, anthropologists, historians, and renowned authors who do research in similar fields. The themes including in my paper were Ethnic Studies, cultural studies, Muslim studies, Asian studies, Black studies, interdisciplinary studies, and history; most if not all of these authors have published multiple works that exude these themes. These search engines retrieved their most publicized and peer-reviewed works and brought a high level of credibility to my research. Had I not used these resources, the strength of my sources would not have been the same.

In regards to data, I tried to find credible sites and organizations that consistently publish accurate and relevant data and information. Some of the organizations used for data collection were the Pew Research Center, the Brennan Center for Justice, and Statista to name a few. These sites and organizations have offered me data on demographics, statistical effects of policies, and

financial implications of the implementation of various policies and surveillance tactics. The use of credible statistics and data adds another level of depth to my research and supports my various analyses. I also used government websites to inform my research about government and law enforcement policies. Particularly, I used reports from the FBI, CIA, and the White House in regards to the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), Obama's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program, and Biden's National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism program. The details of these programs informed my analyses of the way the state was involved in the lives of Muslim Americans of color and how surveillance was used to observe and monitor them. With the racialized context that I supply in the paper accompanied with the exact details of the program exposed the impact of state violence and hypersurveillance on Muslim communities of color.

Another element of research I used was through the interview process. Because I highlighted the narratives of groups of people and different organizations that have contributed to social justice efforts in conjunction with these groups, it was imperative that I set up at least one interview with a community member and someone experienced with the topics I discussed. I was able to connect with Sahar Pirzada, an employee at an advocacy organization named Vigilant Love and I included her interview into my research paper. After drafting a list of questions, I scheduled a virtual consultation where we discussed topics such as state-sanctioned hypersurveillance, mental health, anti-Blackness, and Islamophobia. Being able to incorporate her own words and experiences into my paper provided an extra lens into my research beyond bibliographic information and statistics. This element of research personified my topic and helped bring it to life.

Throughout the research experience, my search process evolved in terms of the process by which I found credible resources. As opposed to simply searching up the topics I included in the various search engines, I used the footnotes and bibliographies from other sources that I had found to introduce me to other notable works and authors. By tracing back ideas from certain peer-reviewed journals and books, I was able to find a lot more information on the topics that I focused on and I was able to follow different scholars back their research and networks. One of the biggest lessons I learned by doing this search process was that these fields of research and the scholars that invest in them are all hyper connected with each other. It has also inspired me to further this research and hopefully enter the scholar community that I came across by conducting my research.