

## Article

# “The New Americans”, “the New Muslims”: African American Muslims and the Recreation of American Muslim Identities after 9/11, 2001

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**Abstract:** This study sheds light on the identity negotiation processes inside the African American Muslim communities and the post-1960s immigrant Muslim communities both before and after 9/11, and the various hurdles that have impeded the development of a pluralistic American Muslim identity. It locates the American Muslim experience within the omnibus context of religious pluralism and draws on Barbara McGraw’s “the American Sacred Ground” theoretical framework (2003) to gauge advances and setbacks in such identity negotiation processes. While gleaning insights from the works of scholars of Islam and religious pluralism in America, this study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the USA between 2002 and 2006. After 9/11, both communities came to realize that it is vital to engage in a process of self-critique and confront the challenges of reinventing themselves on the American pluralistic tapestry. While the African American Sunni communities tried to reinvent themselves as ‘new Muslims’, the immigrant communities found themselves compelled to reinvent themselves as “new Americans”. In studying some facets of such an inter- and intracommunity identity (re)negotiation process, this article argues that perennial internal factionalism and the promotion of changing US foreign policy agendas in the Muslim world still represent a major stumbling block towards developing an American Muslim identity that draws on its many streams.

**Keywords:** American Muslims; African American Muslims; identity; religious pluralism; civil rights



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## 1. Introduction

The American Muslim communities are unique in their diversity. They reflect an extraordinary ethnic, racial, cultural, and theological diversity. The Muslims in the US represent a microcosm of the Muslim world (Eck 2001; Smith 1999). This diversity was promoted by changes in the patterns of immigration since the 1960s. With the repeal of the National Origins Act of 1924 by the 1965 Immigration Act, a massive influx of Muslims from the Middle East, Asia, and other parts of the globe immigrated to the US. Even though the history of Islam in the US can be traced back to the ancestors of the African American Muslim communities, who make the US perhaps the only Western democracy with a significant proportion of its Muslim population being born on its soil and who has a unique experience with Islam in America (Diouf 1998), the post-1960s immigrants have given the American Muslim communities a distinctive pluralism and diversity that were more likely to harmoniously and creatively interact with American diversity and pluralism in a post-civil-rights era (Eck 2001; Lippy 2000). However, the 9/11 events and preceding terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam have affected the ways the indigenous and immigrant Muslim communities defined themselves. Unlike the latter, the former tried to reinvent themselves as ‘new Muslims’, abandoning parts of the creed of the 1930s and borrowing the cultural imports of transnational Islam since the 1970s. The immigrant

communities, “the new Americans”, on the other hand, found themselves compelled to reinvent themselves as Americans by distancing themselves from the extremist ideologies of the Muslim world after 9/11.

Contrary to the general claim that the 9/11 terrorist attacks represent a calamity that befell a dramatically expanding Muslim community in a religiously pluralistic America (Khan 2002; Nimer 2002; Haddad 2002; Eck 2001), this work attempts to shed light on the religious identity (re)negotiation dynamics triggered with the 9/11 events at the broader intercommunity level. It argues that the post-9/11 phase of the debate about the religious identity of America represents the Muslim moment in a protracted process heading towards the possible realization of religious pluralism as a founding constitutional ideal. As such, it contends that the 9/11 attacks helped give a sudden lurch to intracommunity identity negotiation methods and strategies that had already been gestating within two strands of an internally diverse Muslim community. The first strand is referred to in this work as the post-1965 immigrant communities. This catchy label is used heuristically to refer to a category of Muslims who reflect the diversity of the Muslim world and who settled in the US after participatory pluralism, which is a founding constitutional ideal, was inscribed into public policy by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As the Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, national origin, race, sex, or color, it made it possible for minorities to exercise cultural authority and shape the country’s agenda. The second strand is referred to as the African American Sunni communities or followers of the late W.D. Mohammed. This equally heuristic label is used to refer to a segment of the indigenous African American Muslim communities that are internally diverse and have historically played a pivotal role in advancing the course of participatory pluralism in America and in making sense of their internal pluralism as “American Muslims”. They worked together for generations toward reasoned compromises reflecting new conceptualizations of American religious identity while not compromising America’s commitment to religious freedom, which has so far been critical to the moral health of American society. In the process, they yielded an armory of contest strategies that successive religious outsiders have nurtured through centuries. These contest strategies have helped guide new outsiders, who have used them with varying degrees of success since the civil rights era, into an unfamiliar and religiously diverse territory (R. L. Moore 1986). This strand of indigenous Islam is chosen because its followers are considered “Muslim” by the immigrant Muslim community leaders I interviewed after 9/11<sup>1</sup>.

Accordingly, this work discusses some of the various hurdles that have impeded the development of a unified American Muslim identity despite the precariousness of the post-9/11 context. Without running the risk of oversimplification of what is, in reality, a very complex issue, the paper locates the American Muslim experience within the omnibus context of religious pluralism and adopts American scholar Barbara McGraw’s theory of “the American Sacred Ground” (McGraw 2003) as a framework to gauge advances and setbacks made by the African American Sunni communities and the post-1965 immigrant communities on the road towards participatory pluralism both before and after 9/11, 2001. Gleaning insights from the works of scholars of Islam and religious pluralism in America, this work breaks new ground by offering McGraw’s two-tiered framework as a yardstick that helps measure advances and setbacks made by the extraordinarily Muslim communities on the road towards participatory pluralism and analyze intracommunity identity negotiation dynamics. Having tested its applicability in cross-community comparative studies in previous research focusing on the experiences of religious outsiders of a long-standing basis such as American Jews and Catholics (Ben Hadj Salem 2010), McGraw’s framework is offered as an alternative theoretical and analytical framework to the main models of religious pluralism that have been developed in the American academia since the mid-twentieth century to (re)define the religious identity of America in light of its post-civil-rights-era ever-changing religious tapestry. These include the chronologically grounded spectrum of religious identities conferred on America ranging from “A Protestant Establishment that nurtures diversity” (Ahlstrom 1972; Albanese 1992; Lippy 2000), to

Judeo-Christian (Herberg 1955), and to “A Multi-religious America with an Abrahamic overtone” (Eck 2001; Haddad 2002; Nimer 2002). Even though these models of religious pluralism represent landmarks in recognizing the increasing religious diversity that has characterized American society since 1965, they have excluded many other religions practiced by large numbers of Americans. Quite obviously, the add-on revisionist or fit-it-all-in approach that informs them has been limiting as we cannot fit it all in, and it has never been possible, even when “all” was mostly a history of the white Protestant male experience.

As this work seeks to understand the overall drama of American religious development through an interpretive analysis rather than add-on revisionism and fit-it-all-in approaches to pluralism in which separate chapters are devoted to women, minorities, and other formerly neglected players including Muslims, it contends that having passed through the necessary stage of add-on revisionism, we can reframe the religious narrative in ways that will do more justice to a complicated past and offer a better understanding of the dilemmas of the present. With hindsight, it might not be too contentious to argue that McGraw’s two-tiered Sacred Ground offers a frame according to which the stories of America’s religious outsiders, including the internally diverse American Muslim communities, can be interpreted. Having tested the framework in previous research work for inter-religious community comparative reasons (Ben Hadj Salem 2010), this work claims a ground for itself by applying the framework as an operative methodological paradigm to help interpret the dynamics undergirding the identity (re)negotiation processes within an intracommunity context. While this work is indebted to the literature on Islam and religious pluralism in America, it also relies heavily on an ethnographic corpus that was collected by the author as a participant observer who conducted fieldwork across the USA between 2002 and 2006. In what follows, this work will explore the ebbs and flows of the American Muslim journey toward participatory pluralism with a special focus on exceptionally diverse African American and post-1965 immigrant communities. The logic of the argument evolves organically in a continuum of interlinked and complementary reflections on the experiences of the studied communities.

## 2. Theoretical Framework, Data, and Methodology

In her 2003 book *Rediscovering America’s Sacred Ground: Public Religion and Pursuit of the Good in a Pluralistic America*, which was born in the throes of the 2001 identity crisis experienced by Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, American scholar of religious pluralism Barbara A. McGraw invites Americans to adhere to the principles of what she called “the American Sacred Ground” to overcome the crisis. She defines America’s Sacred Ground as a two-tiered public forum: civic and conscientious. Each is governed with guiding principles. Offering a historically mined approach to these principles, she sets two primordial conditions for the diverse religious people in America to contribute to an open debate about their ever-changing identity. This identity, according to her, draws on a variety of perspectives and is shaped by an American system that embraces pluralism, the unifying principle of America’s Sacred Ground. First, they have to channel public debates on the conscientious public forum to define who they are (their identity) and what they wanted (their interests). At this stage, they engage one another and their fellow Americans in and through the distinctive moral language of their conscience. Second, once they go through this self-empowering stage, they can engage in public debates on the civic public forum. The outcome of the debates is a new definition of the religious identity of America that flows naturally out of its many streams. McGraw’s framework derives its importance from the fact that it represents a possible yardstick that helps measure advances on the road toward participatory pluralism. It also allows for cross-community comparisons. What does religious pluralism mean? Why is a study of the dynamics of identity formation within internally diverse religious communities, including the Muslim communities studied in this work, guided by a study of religious pluralism? How are these two related? And what insights can be gleaned from the contentious history of religious pluralism, as a founding ideal (Hutchinson 2003), to better understand the

Muslim experience in the US after 9/11 on the two-tiered public forums of America's Sacred Ground? This is the set of questions out of which this work arises. They certainly reflect some of the most significant issues in America's new and ever-evolving identity crises.

Notwithstanding their own conceptions of the "many" and the "one", what can be gleaned from the brief accounts of the experiences of religious outsiders, as reflected in the works of the scholars of religious pluralism quoted above, is a general trend in terms of the paradigms of the relationship between religious outsiderhood and the evolution of the culture of religious pluralism in the US. The issues underlying this trend are complex and deep. In general, seen up close, the experience of many religious "outsiders", who have made their way to the mainstream, as has been succinctly documented in the literature, has shown that pluralism can be defined as a culture (Wentz 1998). It is a dynamic state of mind whose evolution has been marked with three major stages. These are toleration of difference, inclusion, and participation. In the case of the Mormons as in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in the case of Jews, as in the case of Catholics, and many other religious outsiders, these three stages reflect the inextricable intertwining of America's religious life and her political life. Indeed, the tensions that had long operated in America's religious life were transferred into American political life through the interplay of the two forums of America's Sacred Ground, the conscientious public forum and the civic public forum. On the other hand, major socio-political changes, that marked the history of the US, including those of the Progressive era and the civil rights era, had a wide religious base (Wuthnow 2007). In both cases, religious leaders made concerted efforts to bring moral and ethical teachings to bear on public life and change the very structures of society. By the same token, the remarkable coherence between the evolution of the American civil order and the evolution of patterns of religious pluralism is considerable. The experiences of the religious outsiders referred to above clearly show that the changing face of the American people, and the threatening aspect of religious difference and demeaning stereotypes, have led Americans to engage one another, from their distinctive conscientious public forums, in and through the public language of the Constitution (Ben Hadj Salem 2010). As a result, a structure of liberty and constraint has marked both the conscientious and civic orders.

Religious toleration resulted in most cases in civic inclusion and participation and the emergence of new conceptualizations of American identity. The fact that participatory pluralism, obtaining the opportunity to exercise cultural authority and to shape the country's agenda, was inscribed into public policy by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 raises pressing questions about the state of religious pluralism with respect to the post-1965 immigrant religions and about the primordial role that African Americans, an important segment of whom chose Islam as a religion, have played in the process of reinventing themselves as Americans. R. L. Moore (1986), Jackson (2003), and Diouf (1998) demonstrate painstakingly how, in the process, African Americans offered the immigrant Muslim communities an invaluable repertoire of contest strategies and well-established indigenous and equally internally diverse communities to collaborate with. This spurs a profound search into the essential dynamics of identity negotiation processes within these communities both before and after 9/11. To ignore the pre-9/11 phase is to ignore the ongoing saga within the indigenous African American Muslim communities, which is replete with insights and possibilities for moving the public debate on American Muslim identity beyond its post-9/11 impasse toward a better understanding of the culture of religious pluralism, which frames the American identity, in general, and American Muslim identity, in particular, not as they are but as they should be.

American history has shown that it is generally those on the fringe of society who rise up and reinvigorate the principles of the nation, taking America ever closer to the ideals upon which it was founded (R. L. Moore 1986; Hutchinson 2003). Accordingly, this work attempts to study how some of the many voices of the internally diverse American Muslim communities, including the indigenous African American Muslim voices, had already played a leading role in such a process after a long history of marginalization preceding the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Indisputably, the very presence of the post-1965 immigrant



Muslim communities on America's pluralistic religious tapestry and their astounding institutional development in the post-civil-rights era were to a greater extent the outcome of legendary battles fought by African Americans, including African American Muslims. Fought on America's two-tiered Sacred Ground, these battles helped them reinvent themselves as religious outsiders of a longstanding basis and carve a space for Islam as an American religion. Therefore, this work seeks to shed light on the intracommunity identity negotiation processes and find out if the immigrant communities seized the unique opportunity that none of the post-1965 immigrant world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism had and benefited from the invaluable armory of contest strategies developed over centuries by the world's largest indigenous Muslim communities in the West in their move from the margins to the core.

Obviously, there is no gainsaying the fact that wheeling out this yet-to-be-explored variable in studying the identity (re)negotiation processes within the internally diverse Muslim communities in the US has methodological implications. Indeed, it makes it counterintuitive to present a telescopic history of the internal pluralism of the indigenous African American Muslim communities and post-1965 immigrant communities. This work recognizes that these communities are more complex and still remain beyond the many labels that have so far been wheeled out to comprehend and define them. It simply presents a brief overview of the course of encounters between major expressions of Islam and the US at varying epochs, in which we may track the mutual challenges that have engaged the response and attention of each. It reinterprets the historical process to identify what it may yield in terms of operative paradigms and leitmotifs that may assist in the process of realistically grappling with some of the salient aspects of the armory of contest strategies that the African American Muslim communities, as religious outsiders of a longer standing basis than the post-1965 immigrant communities, have nurtured through centuries. These contest strategies have helped guide new outsiders, who have used them with varying degrees of success, into unfamiliar and religiously diverse territory as painstakingly demonstrated in the literature that this work explored to study the pre-9/11 phase of the identity (re)negotiation process on America's two-tiered Sacred Ground (R. L. Moore 1986; Hutchinson 2003; Jackson 2003; Haddad 2002; Curtis 2002; Dannin 2002). In the same vein, this work attempts to identify and discuss the extent to which the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities, bringing with them the religious traditions of the Muslim world, have worked together with the indigenous African American communities, who had had a unique experience with Islam and participatory pluralism in the US prior to 1965 and 9/11, toward reasoned compromises reflecting new conceptualizations of American Muslim identity as an integral part of a pluralistic America. It seizes on the possibilities opened up with the American Sacred Ground, with its civic and conscientious public forums as a legitimately contested territory (by religious outsiders since 1965), where people who do not share a single history and project different perspectives on a global religious faith, Islam, have engaged in the common tasks of civil society. It also seizes on the golden opportunity, from a social movement theory perspective, offered with the 9/11 terrorist attacks to help them make sense of their internal pluralism. By exploring a corpus of first-hand witness accounts of the micro-contestatory efforts made by these communities on the two forums of America's Sacred Ground after 9/11, in many of which the author was involved as a participant observer between 2002 and 2006, this work disputes the allegations, popularized most notoriously by the post-1965 immigrant Muslim community leaders and scholars, that 9/11 represents a calamity that befell a community that had made astounding strides towards participatory pluralism (Khan 2002; Nimer 2002). It argues that 9/11 offered the extraordinarily diverse American Muslim communities the opportunity to develop a common language by merging, in a new key, the wisdom and perspectives of their religious traditions and to reach across boundaries of difference while adamantly holding to fundamental and common principles of their world views. Through channeling both civic and religious debates to advance the course of pluralism, they were

offered the privilege to help create an environment that is safe for both inter-religious and civic conversations.

Many scholars have studied various aspects of the relationship between the indigenous African American Muslim communities and the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities (Jackson 2003; McCloud 2003; Haddad and Smith 1993; Curtis 2002; Dannin 2002) and the making of American Muslim identity. This work draws on many of these invaluable contributions and substantiates some of their findings with a corpus of primary sources, firsthand accounts, and interviews collected by the author as a Fulbright participant observer in California, Chicago, New York, Indiana, Washington, DC, and Philadelphia. However, it attempts to make a start for itself by identifying a schema of paradigms that reflect the historical variants and developments of the relationship between a growing segment of the Muslim communities, that is heuristically referred to as the post-1965 immigrant communities, and a segment of the indigenous African American Muslim communities, who have tilted towards transnational Sunni Islamism since the 1970s. It offers a hermeneutic framework—McGraw’s two-tiered framework—as an analytical tool as it critically revisits the past, and thinks through the contemporary situation and prospects for future patterns of religious pluralism. The first section of this work, which relies heavily on the literature about Islam and religious pluralism in America, explores the pre-9/11 phase of the identity negotiation processes experienced by major strands of these internally diverse communities. The second section, which relied heavily on primary sources and the ethnographic corpus collected by the author, assesses the post-9/11 phase. It sheds light on the major challenges encountered by these communities and offers insights into the prospects for overcoming such challenges.

### **3. The Pre-9/11 Phase: Negotiating the “American Muslim Identity” on the American Sacred Ground**

As we dig deep in the midst of American Muslim diversity to find out the roots of Muslim identity, i.e., what joins all Muslims in the US and the plurality of their visions, we discover that Muslim identity cannot be encompassed in one vision. The nearly twelve hundred mosques, two thousand Islamic centers, and over twelve hundred Islamic schools, which have mushroomed across the US since the immigration reforms of the 1960s as telltale signs of a Muslim presence on America’s conscientious public forum, are defined with gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, sectarian perspective, appearance, professional affiliation, or other such criteria (Haddad and Smith 1993; Eck 2001; Smith 1999; Nimer 2002). As we explore the literature on Islam and religious pluralism in America at the turn of the 20th century, what features prominently are works mapping the dramatic growth of the Muslim communities as part of academically run pluralism projects, such as the nationwide project directed by Diana Eck of Harvard University. This and similar projects were meant to study the unsettling pluralism of the turn of the 20th century, mixing political, historical, and economic analyses and approaches as well as interviews and field research. What we find out through examining their publications and the literature is that they tend to advance a cohesive and sustained set of arguments on the local, regional, and transnational dynamics as well as the long-term and short-term factors that combined to impede any serious attempts on the part of the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities to make sense of their internal pluralism. Mapped on McGraw’s undergirding ground of citizenship, the latter did not channel public debates on the conscientious public forum to define who they are (their identity) and what they wanted (their interests). Their ideologically and religiously motivated isolationism from the host society as underscored by Eck, Haddad, Smith, Findley, and many other scholars chipped away at any contestatory efforts to form an Islamic identity and develop a Muslim community of conscience as part of the conscientious public forum of America’s Sacred Ground. Little wonder that prior to 9/11 there was no such designation as an “American Islam” that flows directly out of its many contributing streams and has its own structures, definitions, and contributions to make to the complex picture of religious society in the United States following the Jewish, Catholic, African

American, and many other examples. This was the case mainly because allegiance to the Muslim world prevented Muslims from finding ways to reach across the boundaries of their internal differences and learn from the experiences of other religious outsiders, including that of their African American coreligionists, in their attempt to reinvent themselves as Americans. Perhaps no immigrant religion in the US had already found a large indigenous community on US soil as Islam did. Yet, prior to 9/11 there had scarcely been any genuine attempts on the part of the immigrant Muslim elite to formulate genuine responses to their religious and cultural diversity, nor had they creatively incorporated the unique and peculiar life experiences of African American Islam.<sup>2</sup>

Making Islam part of the intellectual heritage of the US requires strengthening the ties with African American Muslims who have contributed, along with outsiders of a longstanding basis, to advance the understanding of Americans of how America can fully realize its promise as a pluralistic society since the civil rights era. On the contrary, the intellectual elite of the late 1970s and 1980s, including (Shi'i) Sayeed Hussein Nasr, and the late (Sunni) Ismail Al-Farouqi, who played an important role in defining Muslim identity for the growing post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities in the US, essentially had one over-riding goal: to revive Islamic civilization throughout the world, including the United States. They strongly believed that the key to achieving this goal was the intellectual revival of the Ummah (Islamic community or nation). As this resonated with the Islamic revivalist fervor in the Muslim world, the cash-rich Gulf states promoted the establishment of Islamic institutions, including Islamic schools, Islamic centers, mosques, and institutes of Islamic learning all over the world and in the US. These institutions served as ideological vehicles through which these countries reproduced the cultural hegemony of the Muslim world in the West/US. In brief, the argument is that whereas the American context could have offered the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities the opportunity to overcome the extraordinary ethnic, racial, cultural, and theological diversity that drew some of them apart in their countries of origin, and develop an American Islam that is in conformity neither with Western assumptions nor, necessarily, with the dictates of Islamic traditionalism, Muslims in the US reproduced the cultural and religious differences of the Muslim world on American soil. This has made it difficult to settle the question of authority for all Muslims in the US. As Charles H. Lippy succinctly puts it, "securing a niche within American religious life has also been complicated by the nature of Muslim religious organizations in the US (. . .). None could speak for all American Islam" (p. 118).

What Lippy intended in his final remark, and what I, in agreement, will try to spell out in this work, is not a denial that Muslims in the US have done perhaps better than most other post-1965 immigrants in building networks and securing a public space for themselves on American soil. In my opinion, the sustenance of Islamic practices in the US was made possible with the freedom available in the US to further institutional development, the gradual transformation of America from a melting pot to a multicultural society, and the rapid rate of conversion of Americans to Islam within African American and Caucasian circles. It did not follow from an unabated zeal on the part of immigrant Muslims to establish Islam as an American religion as did American Jews, Catholics, and African American Muslims before them. It is no wonder then that engagement in the civic public forum did not feature on the immigrant Muslim agenda prior to the 1990s (Findley 2001). A community that does not seriously face the challenge of defining who it is (its identity) and what it wants (its interests) in the context of its internal sphere (community of conscience), according to McGraw, lacks self-empowerment, which is a prerequisite for civic engagement. Indeed, unlike Arab Americans, only since the early 1990s have immigrant Muslim leaders shown interest in American politics and formed PACs. For the most part, these PACs were modeled on Jewish organizations and spurred by crises in the Middle East. As they were meant essentially to promote the interests of the countries/authorities financing them, they only provided Muslims with a ceremonial space on the civic public forum (Ben Hadj Salem 2006, 2010). Internal factionalism and conflicting interests were nurtured with attempts made by wider sections of the immigrant community

leadership to promote foreign agendas. Consequently, they failed to develop a domestic agenda that reflects the shared interests of the community and a steadfast determination to exercise cultural authority and help shape the host country's domestic agenda (Findley 2001). Yet, long before the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities came to realize the need to act responsibly in accordance with the principles of the two-tiered public forum of America's Sacred Ground in order to survive as part of the intricate religious tapestry of the US, the African American Muslim communities had experienced internal debates about their identity, norms, and values. They had negotiated, according to McGraw's framework, the specific interests they wanted to pursue in the larger society without compromising the complexity of their theological and practical religious differences (Jackson 2003). The process through which they established Islam as an American religion is worth studying, as it assists in better understanding the Muslim experience in the US and attests to the fact that Islam and Muslims should not be viewed monolithically.

In tracing the history of Islam in the United States, it is important to begin with the history of Islam among African Americans<sup>3</sup>. The latter not only make the US perhaps the only Western democracy with a significant proportion of its Muslim population being born on its soil (indigenous), but also have a unique experience with Islam in America. In "Black Orientalism: Its Genesis, Aims, and significance for American Islam", Sherman A. Jackson argues that the dissemination of Islam within the Black American community deviated from the familiar patterns observed in other regions where Islam is present. It did not result from migration, conquest, or the efforts of traveling Sufis. Instead, the emergence of Islam among Black Americans can be attributed to a skillful act of adopting elements from Black Religion. Early advocates of Islam within the Black American community, such as Noble Drew Ali and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, employed Islam not only as a purely religious expression but also as a foundation for an alternative form of Black identity. This alternative form, referred to as "the Black Man's Religion", encompassed not just religious beliefs but also aspects of cultural nationalism and the shaping of Black American identity, according to E.E. Curtis IV (Jackson 2003, p. 23).

In the African American experience, Islam emerged as part of Black Religion. Yet, Islamic beliefs and practices did not generally separate African American Muslims from the larger Black community. Despite the ideological conflicts that mark the history of African American Islam from the emergence of the Moorish Science Temple to the Nation of Islam, under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, to the splits between the latter and Malcolm X in the early 1960s and then between Louis Farrakhan and Warith Deen Muhammad in 1977, contacts have been maintained with other Black religious and political leaders to promote community activities. Their common goal was to uncover and reclaim a shared past and gain knowledge of their history. However, such contacts were almost absent between them and the newly arriving immigrant communities. Indisputably, with the repeal of the National Origins law in 1965, the massive influx of Muslims from the Middle East and Asia brought a new basis of religious authority for American Islam. The primary authenticators of Islam were no longer Black Religion and Black Americans but, rather, immigrants who spoke in the name of historical Islamic jurisprudence. This shift in the basis of Islamic religious authority effected a fundamental change in the African American communities and added to an already pronounced sectarianism. According to Aminah Beverly McCloud (2003), many members of the Black Sunni communities (the followers of W.D. Muhammad) limited their interaction with other Black communities and "leveled vicious verbal and, occasionally, physical assaults against those in nationalist Islamic communities". Pursuing a more historically mined approach swerving seamlessly from the social to the political and theological, she argues that "[it] was as though the weariness resulting from prolonged oppression forced a need to be 'just Muslim', or to pass for a moment as someone else--a foreigner to the black heritage". According to her, these communities, organized around a fragile understanding of mainstream Islam, were unable to avoid or challenge their newfound reliance on the interpretations of immigrant Muslims who positioned themselves as the owners of Islam, a status that African American Muslims



could only aspire to and hope to achieve in the distant future. She believes that within many of these communities, members were ahistorical as they were unable to claim ownership of another culture's heritage and were disconnected from their own roots (McCloud 2003, pp. 87–88).

The paradox informing the intracommunity dynamics became increasingly locked within two antithetical community goals towards the turn of the 20th century. While pursuing legal claims to obtain equal rights on the civic public forum was the main goal of the African American Muslim communities, the internally diverse post-1965 immigrant communities championed the cause of converting the host society's "other", including the African American Muslims, to any of the most influential transnational Islamic doctrines. This paradox found one of its best expressions in US prisons. While the African American Muslims, who were confined in correctional facilities and prisons during the 1980s and 90s, played a pivotal role in bringing the American legal authorities to consider Islam as a religion worthy of constitutional protection through cases they brought before US courts, the immigrant Muslim communities' efforts were devoted to converting and supporting African Americans in the prison system. According to Kathleen Moore, who studied painstakingly American Muslim claims to the constitutional protection of religious liberty in US prisons, compared with any of the Muslim immigrant groups, African American Muslims were "most active in pursuing legal claims to obtain equal rights and access to the resources of the larger society" (K. Moore 1991, p. 137). Moore's work demonstrates how the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities benefited from these collaborative forms of political agency channeled by the longstanding African American Muslim communities to secure legal rights and access to societal resources. In case after case, Moore argues that African American Muslims won religious rights in prisons such as the rights to pray, to receive services of Imams, and to eat halal (Islamically slaughtered or prepared) food. These victories eventually led to an overarching public activism strategy on the civic public forum laying broader claims on American society by other Muslims in other arenas.

While interaction was kept at a minimum between the immigrant Muslim communities and the African American Muslim communities on the conscientious public forum in general, signs of interaction between the ministry of W.D. Muhammad and the immigrant Muslim leadership cannot be ignored. Indeed, having severed its doctrinal ties with the Nation of Islam in the mid-1970s, the former leaned towards Islamic orthodoxy and became more open to transnational doctrinal influences emanating from the centers of Islamic authority in the Muslim world. Highly vulnerable economically (after having left the larger African American self-help network), the African American Sunni community became of particular interest to Saudi philanthropists. Scholarships were provided to the followers of W.D. Muhammed to study in the Saudi homeland, and fares were established for African American Muslims to perform the Hajj in Mecca. However, this rapprochement was forced ahead at the expense of the movement's unity and generated continuing resentment and anger amongst the African American underclass. Indeed, despite the growing number of mosques in the US claiming to serve both immigrant Muslims and African American Muslims (followers of W.D. Muhammad), both groups are rarely integrated.

Overall, during the decades leading up to 9/11, there was minimal social contact between African American and immigrant Muslims even in worship, and sharing in holidays and celebrations. Since the African American and immigrant Muslim communities tend to live in different residential areas, they developed separate educational institutions<sup>4</sup>. As the core issue for students and schools for both African American communities and immigrant communities is identity and the concomitant key question is envisaging the role and responsibility of a Muslim in the American context at large, the absence of a unified curriculum for Islamic schools in the US further complicates the issues of identity for both communities. Indeed, the absence of a unified education policy made it difficult for both African American and immigrant Muslim communities to agree on a joint agenda based on a common vision of the roles and responsibilities of a Muslim in the American context at large. Studies focusing on modes of interaction between both communities prior to

9/11 underscored divisive rather than unitive impulses. Racism on the part of immigrant Muslims also widened the divide and fueled tensions between both communities. Even though it is not fully acknowledged by scholars, Aminah McCloud (2003) points to the resentment African Americans feel if they are not recognized by immigrants as “real” Muslims, or when they perceive immigrant community development organizations (such as the Islamic Society of North America) to be dictating to them while restricting their participation. The result is an endless crisis of identity as African Americans try to adjust to a new identity as first- or second-generation Muslims, and the Americanist segments amongst the authenticators of Islam are struggling with a new identity: what it means to be American. Thus the “new Americans” and “new Muslims” were engaged in self-definitions rather than definition.

What is evident, then, is that prior to 9/11, both the immigrant Muslim communities and the African American Muslim communities had hardly made any attempts to define a common way to build a community of conscience and an American Islam that could benefit from the American community as a whole. In light of McGraw’s framework, while there is every indication that the African American Muslim communities had formed their own communities of conscience and made important strides on the civic public forum of the American Sacred Ground by getting involved in community service, and preparing and nominating candidates for local and national public offices to help shape the country’s agenda, the immigrant Muslim communities were isolated from their neighboring communities (Eck 2001). The lack of a unifying common ground that could have helped the many streams of American Islam make sense of their internal pluralism in the process of reinventing themselves as Americans and carving a space for Islam as an American religion with clear theological and philosophical foundations, as had been the case with American Catholicism and Judaism, may be attributed to two main factors. The first factor is the immigrant communities’ ignorance of the African American experience and their attempt to impose their own understanding of Islam on them, disregarding the various cultural expressions of Islam they reflect themselves. Another reason might be the difference in the priorities set by both groups in shaping their experience in the US. While the African American experience was marked by a lack of outside interference and resistance to spiritual, economic, and intellectual dependence, outside interference and spiritual, economic, and intellectual dependence on the Muslim world affected the way “mainstream” Islam was defined and perceived in the US prior to 9/11. The ramifications of such associations have become more pronounced since 9/11.

#### **4. The Post-9/11 Phase: “The New Muslims” and the “New Americans” (Re)Negotiating the “American Muslim Identity” on the American Sacred Ground**

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the post-1965 immigrant Muslims of a Middle Eastern origin found themselves under siege. They suffered a severe wave of backlash violence from different sections of the American public in the form of hate crimes including murder, beatings, arson, shootings, vehicular assaults, defamatory speech, attacks on mosques and hijab-wearing Muslim women, institutionalized profiling, discrimination, high profile trials, and raids on Muslim charities. The foremost leader of African American Sunni Muslims, Warith Deen Muhammad, issued joint statements with mainstream Muslim organizations to condemn the attacks. But as a conservative Republican, as American Muslims affiliated with the Islamic Centre of Southern California informed me during a fieldwork visit in summer 2002 informed me, he showed no interest in engaging in critiques of American foreign and domestic policy. However, the mainstream media’s focus on the immigrant Muslim spokespeople and heavy reliance on them as direct sources of information about Islam and the Muslim world for the first time in the history of the US further marginalized the indigenous leadership. Indeed, the predominantly immigrant Muslim communities that were interviewed during the field trips I conducted between 2002 and 2006 in California, Chicago, Indiana, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC asserted that the African American Sunni Muslims of those areas lent tremendous

support to immigrant American Muslims and helped them overcome the overall state of paralysis and unpreparedness to handle both the public relations crisis and the legal repercussions of the anti-terrorism measures adopted by the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11. Indeed, having a long experience in interfaith dialogue and civil rights activism, and a much-needed fluency in the English language that most of the immigrant community leaders lacked to make themselves intelligible to their fellow Americans, the media, and decision makers, African American Muslim men and women played a crucial role in carrying the immigrant Muslim communities, the main targets of the anti-terrorism laws, through the post-9/11 disabling condition of uncertainty. The discursive moral certainty with which they addressed the non-Muslim constituencies, as American Muslims, during the interfaith and know-your-rights forums I attended across the US between 2002 and 2003, helped the immigrant Muslim communities, who still had to reinvent themselves as “American Muslims”, mutate from inarticulate and isolated communities (Eck 2001) into active participants in the two grassroots forums of America’s Sacred Ground. They shined with their articulate voices and knowledge of the US legal arsenal addressing minority rights in all the community and academic panels I attended as a participant observer. They managed to translate the concerns and grievances of the immigrant Muslim communities to their English-speaking mainstream Americans. This was not the case with the mainstream media panels where only immigrant Muslim leaders were invited to represent that part of the world, the hotbed of terrorism. A case in point was the panel discussion hosted by CNN’s Larry King on one of his most famous shows ‘Larry King Live’ on 20 April 2003. Aired at 9 p.m., the panel, which discussed the role of religion in wartime, featured the late Dr. Maher Hathout (a scholar of Islam and senior advisor at the Muslim Public Affairs Council), Deepak Chopra (spiritual adviser and author of bestsellers like *How to Know God*), John MacArthur (pastor of the Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and a syndicated host), Rabbi Harold Kushner (author of the bestseller *Living a Life that Matters*), and Father Michael Manning (Roman Catholic priest, and host of the international TV show “The Word in the World”). Unlike the indigenous representatives of the other world religions on the panel, who managed to develop articulate and sound arguments about their religions’ perspectives on peace and war, Dr. Hathout, despite his academic credentials as an Egyptian cardiologist who immigrated to the US as a political refugee, failed a golden opportunity to make the wider American audience understand Islam’s perspective on peace. Obviously, there is no gainsaying the fact that the linguistic variable impeded the communication process.

Moving from the macro-perspective of the nationwide media, book marketing, and government policy to the micro-perspective of the grassroots responses, there was much to inspire a new birth of pluralism within the internally diverse Muslim communities and the society at large and a return of the culture of civic engagement of the civil rights era on both forums of America’s Sacred Ground. Reviving the traditional role of religion as the moral voice in public dialogue in times of crises in America, the Jewish, Christian, and to a larger extent African American Muslim communities rushed to their traumatized neighboring Muslim communities of Middle Eastern origins. According to the immigrant communities I visited across the US after 9/11, they helped catapult the willing amongst them from their ethnoreligious cocoon to the wider American Sacred Ground. What is more important by far is that they empowered them by helping them build bridges of understanding with their American neighbors. Indeed, on the interfaith forum, they gradually helped spur their traumatized immigrant male coreligionists to assert in a new and complex period of national insecurity the principles of America’s Sacred Ground by facing the challenge of ongoing educational engagement. With the help of experienced neighboring community leaders (moderating the interfaith forums in almost all the interfaith meetings I attended), they managed to make themselves comprehensible in the American milieu, to demystify and decode Islam, and to challenge its negative characterization in the media. As a result, the interfaith open house became a regular affair after 9/11. Mosques and Islamic centers across the US engaged in more exchange and dialogue with neighboring

faith communities than over all preceding decades. More crucially, the interfaith forum gave American Muslims the opportunity to make their partners in dialogue aware of their painful experiences after 9/11 (Ben Hadj Salem 2006).

However, the realities of the post-9/11 context made it imperative, as was the case in the African American experience in the past decades, that dialogue be transferred outside houses of worship through racial and ethnic blind communal social work. As a result, dialogue in action rather than conversation placed American Muslims, especially American Muslim youth who were born and raised in the American context and do not carry with them the cultural burdens of their parents' countries of origin, at the leading edge of an interfaith revolution that is global in reach. They revived the traditional role of religion as the moral voice in public dialogue. In fact, the growth of young adult organizations, whose interfaith initiatives and projects, which are gender, racial, and ethnic blind, and global in scope, was remarkable after 9/11. Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur's edited volume *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action* (Patel and Brodeur 2006) captured this generational change and pluralistic mindset on the conscientious public forum of America's Sacred Ground. Not surprisingly, the preface of the volume was written by Diana Eck, the Director of the pluralism project at Harvard University, who considered this new generation of Muslims as the leading edge of an interfaith revolution taking place across the US. The African American interfaith experience and contribution in clarifying the philosophical foundations of religious pluralism in the US as a microcosm for global diversity were certainly inspiring as the book's introductory paragraphs included the following quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

This is the Great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, we must somehow learn to live with each other in peace. (p. 1)

The discriminatory aspect of the measures taken by the government against Arab and Muslim nationals made many immigrant American Muslim community leaders lose any hope that they might seek relief for their grievances at the national level by addressing the government. They turned, instead, to the grassroots, seeking support from the liberal voices of society. The crack in the civil religion shell ensuing from the PATRIOT Act and concomitant post-9/11 measures opened past wounds in many ethnic and religious groups that rallied in solidarity with Muslim public advocacy organizations. Alliances included Japanese Americans, African Americans, even local law enforcement and political officials, and human rights activists. What brought them together was their concern about the erosion of their constitutional rights as Americans.

Following the mass incarceration of nearly 1200 individuals in the post-9/11 anti-terrorist campaign, more than 250 of whom were Pakistanis (Ben Hadj Salem 2010), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapters, mainly ACLU-New York, where most of these detentions occurred, rushed to the families of the detained Muslims to document their cases and to help them understand their rights and write petitions to find where their relatives were incarcerated. According to Asli Bali, a lawyer and civil rights activist in New York City, the immigrant Muslim communities did not receive ACLU outreach to them favorably. They did not cooperate with it because most of them had not heard about the ACLU before despite its century-long history defending the constitutional rights of Americans, including African American Muslims, and had no prior experience with civil rights organizations. Yet this resistance gradually gave way to increased cooperation and collaborative nationwide campaigns including immigrant and African American Muslim organizations, the ACLU, and other civil rights organizations.

Perhaps the coalition that the California-based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) built around civil liberties on 14 January 2002 was one of the earliest expressions of alterna-



tive politics. The conference was held on the occasion at the Islamic Center of Southern California to share with civil liberty advocacy organizations, and representatives of various ethnic minorities, the rising concerns over the status of American Muslim civil liberties. It was attended by M. Hathout (MPAC), A. Abdullah (The *Minaret* magazine), Steven Rohde (ACLU, Southern CA), Mark Masaoka (the Japanese American Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress (NCRR)), and Hussam Ayloush (the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)). Lack of disclosure of the information regarding the detainees arrested after 9/11, lack of due legal process, the singling out of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans, and the contemplation of an effective counter-terrorism policy to target suspects while preserving the democratic traditions of American society were the main subjects discussed in the meeting.

MPAC's press conference provided a malleable model that was to a large extent replicated in subsequent Muslim organizations' conferences and gatherings. Yet such conferences were not the reserve of the elite, as was the case in the 1990s, but were directed, maybe as never before, to the common American, including the internally diverse American Muslim communities. Nowhere could this shift in interlocutors be perceived more readily than it was at the Annual Conference of ISNA "Islam: a call for Peace and Justice" (30th August–2nd September 2002), the largest gathering of Muslims of different ethnic, ideological, and sectarian backgrounds in North America after 9/11. It was held a few days after the first wave of immigrants from countries in the Middle East were required under the new anti-terrorism law to register with the INS in California. Maybe for the first time in the history of the institution, which is a conservative community development organization that had not been involved in politics and Muslim public affairs in the US prior to 9/11, its annual conference reflected in some of its newly introduced panels almost the same themes that one would expect a public affairs organization to treat. Not only this but representatives from the January coalition, in spite of the ideological conflicts that had prevented many of them from attending previous ISNA annual conferences, featured most prominently as speakers in panels on civil rights, including "9/11 Beyond the Blame Game: Between Flawed US Foreign Policy and Distortions in Muslim Societies", along with the panel that looked at the road map to the 2004 elections.

The conference reflected an attempt on the part of ISNA to tap the power of the Muslim communities and their capacities to build coalitions with their coreligionists who were not subsumed under it (ISNA). It also was a golden opportunity for these organizations and their allies to bring their coreligionists, including those among them who still held participation in American politics as a form of Americanization (abandoning one's religion), to an awareness of their constitutional rights as American citizens and of the need to fight for these rights. These included mainly the right to vote, to build coalitions, to write letters to their representatives, and to report to CAIR and civil rights organizations hate crime incidents. The presence of prominent figures from the Department of Justice, the ACLU, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) gave their calls more credibility and translated the seriousness of the situation the Muslim communities were facing.

The renewed crack in the civil religion shell (Bellah 1975) incurred with the 9/11 attacks and the way the war on terrorism was handled by the government in the lead-up to the unjustified invasion of Iraq strengthened the peace movement that became more vocal in criticizing its policies as civil liberties organizations opened a nationwide dialogue on the PATRIOT Act and forced courts and Congress to discuss cases and bills to guard Americans against its abuses (Ben Hadj Salem 2005; Chang 2002; Cole and Dempsey 2002). These civic-minded debates were not fleeting responses to a crisis but reactions rooted in well-established community networks, including the intricate American Muslim political action committees, such as the California-based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and watchdog organizations, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). However, despite their numerical growth, immigrant American Muslim political action and watchdog organizations were not instrumental in shaping the post-9/11 public debate

on the civil liberties of Americans and influencing its outcome. The modest victories they achieved in challenging law enforcement agencies were reached through cases filed for the most part by the ACLU and other mainstream American civil rights organizations, at the request of immigrant Muslim organizations, after the former had reached out to the Muslim communities and conducted “know your rights” presentations in mosques. This shows clearly that mainstream Muslim organizations, mainly the blossoming immigrant American Muslim PACs, despite their numerical growth, still do not include an organization that represents the national interests of an “American Islam” on America’s civic public forum. By implication, they lack the required independent voice that could bring a genuine American Muslim perspective to the civic public forum and unlock the stalled public debate on the promises of the American founding documents for its minorities.

The absence of genuine cooperation between immigrant Muslim organizations and the African American Sunni communities (the followers of W.D. Muhammad with their long history in civil rights activism) made it hard, at least for the post-911 immigrant Muslim leadership, to provide an authentic American Muslim voice that can make its incisive entry into the civic public forum. As they lacked this joint authentic voice, they were not able to converse with mainstream Americans about their shared national concerns nor take part in formulating the country’s agenda without being accused by right-wing groups of having ties with, or even morally supporting, one of the militant Islamic groups in the Middle East. This has been the case, for example, with CAIR, the largest (immigrant) American Muslim watchdog organization that has been very active since the mid-1990s in providing legal guidance for Muslim victims of discrimination. Some of the leaders of this organization made irresponsible public statements in which they expressed their support for militant Islamic groups, deemed terrorist organizations in the US. These statements were used by pro-Zionist groups to channel an anti-CAIR campaign and were made accessible to the American public through the <[anti-cair-net.org](http://anti-cair-net.org)> website (accessed on 15 June 2004). Meant to question the loyalty of the public voices of Islam to the US, these groups accused CAIR and other Muslim organizations of receiving money from corrupt sources and regimes in the Muslim world to serve the cause of Islamic extremism in the US. These accusations, which were widely diffused in the print media whenever American Muslim organizations tried to support a candidate for public office or receiving an award from a public organization, or whenever a Muslim was nominated for public office, proved powerful in crippling Muslim advances on the road to participatory pluralism.

This defamation campaign, which was launched against Muslim public figures and organizations, widened the gap between the indigenous Sunni African American communities (the new Muslims) and the mainstream immigrant Muslim communities (the new Americans). The latter’s commitments to promoting the causes of their financing Islamic authorities in the Middle East have impeded the promotion of a common domestic American Muslim agenda on the civic public forum. This could have been a stumbling block towards Keith Ellison’s election to Congress in 2006 and could have deprived the Muslim communities of the opportunity to have the first Muslim to be elected to the United States Congress. Ellison won the open seat for Minnesota’s fifth congressional district. He is also the first African American to be elected to the House from Minnesota. He was vilified for taking a ceremonial oath of office on the Qur’an. CAIR was a steadfast supporter of Ellison’s campaign, which caused some controversy. Ellison accepted donations from Nihad Awad (they were acquaintances as they both attended the University of Minnesota) and another leader of CAIR. The donations were listed on Ellison’s campaign finance reports. Yet facing criticism from his Republican opponent in the race, Alan Fine, for accepting these contributions from an organization that has deep ties to terrorism,<sup>5</sup> Ellison stressed he was supported by individuals within CAIR but had not been endorsed by the organization itself. A few weeks after the elections, Ellison did not attend CAIR’s annual banquet in Virginia even though CAIR had announced he would be a keynote speaker in it. Instead, he sent a videotaped address.

Keith Ellison's case may be added, as CAIR and other Muslim organizations claimed, to thousands of cases of guilt by association that have become common in the US since 9/11. These cases should act as a warning for American Muslim organizations, that saw Ellison's election as inspirational to American Muslims, as an asset towards American Muslim participation in the political process, and as a victory for the American Muslim organizations in the post-9/11 era, that foregrounding one's religious identity was not what helped Ellison enter the American Congress. Downplaying the role of religion in the electoral campaign and gaining the trust of the American electorate by promoting an identity as an American who works for the legal rights of all Americans, who is regularly involved in community service, and who cares for the future of his country and his constituency was what helped Ellison, State Del. Saqib Ali (D-MD), State Senator Larry Shaw (D-NC), State Rep. Saghir "Saggy" Tahir (R-NH), and other American Muslims win public offices in the US. As such, charges of championing non-national causes are detrimental to the future of Islam in America if Muslims really want to constructively engage with American society and make inroads toward participatory pluralism.

## 5. Conclusions

This work studied some of the manifestations of the inter- and intracommunity identity (re)negotiation processes the African American Sunni communities and the post-1960s immigrant Muslim communities went through both before and after 9/11. It also touches on some of the various factors that have prevented the development of an American Muslim identity that flows naturally out of its many internal streams. Mixing political, historical, and economic analyses and approaches as well as interviews and field research conducted after 9/11, this work advances a cohesive and sustained set of arguments on the historical, local, and transnational dynamics as well as the long-term and short-term factors that, combined, stymied possibilities to set in motion serious contributions emanating from the American Muslims, who are extraordinarily diverse, to redefine the terms of the discourse from "within". There is no gainsaying the fact that the 9/11 events ended years of Muslim isolationism. They singled out Muslims, mainly the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities of Middle Eastern origins, to play a key role in facing such a challenge with their fellow Americans, including the indigenous African American Sunni communities. It gave them a golden opportunity to spur one another on to assert in a new and complex period of national insecurity the principles of religious freedom that have so far shaped the nation for centuries and helped religious outsiders advance the course of religious pluralism. At the intracommunity level, this far-reaching goal requires renegotiating the power balance between the leadership of the immigrant Muslim communities and the leadership of the indigenous Muslim communities, including the African American Sunni Muslims (considered "Muslim" by the former) who had already reinvented themselves as Americans on the American religious kaleidoscope as part of their battle against racism on the American Sacred Ground. It is one of the ironies of the American Muslim experience in the US that Islam is perhaps the only immigrant religion to have had already well-established indigenous African American Muslim communities, who represent a quarter of the Muslim population in the US and have fought long struggles for their rights as African American Muslims on both forums of America's Sacred Ground, yet immigrant Muslims have failed to incorporate the African American experience and learn from their lessons in identity building and self-empowerment. On the contrary, they adopted for the most part a racist attitude towards them by appointing themselves as authorities on transnational Islam in America.

This work locates the American Muslim experience within the omnibus context of religious pluralism and gauges advances and setbacks in such identity negotiation processes by placing these dynamics on what American scholar Barbara McGraw defines as the "American Sacred Ground", the undergirding crucible of citizenship. With the experiences of the religious outsiders of a longstanding basis in the background, this work sought to develop a holistic and integrative analytical approach to religious pluralism

in America from a number of diverse but cohesive angles of inquiry by focusing on the intercommunity identity negotiation processes experienced by the post-1965 immigrant Muslim communities and the indigenous African American Sunni communities. This study has shown that prior to 9/11, the immigrant Muslim communities, unlike the African Muslim communities, did not understand the principles of the American Sacred Ground and that their astounding institutional development was made possible with the post-Civil Rights Act (1964) freedoms, the transformation of the US into a multicultural society, the rapid growth of conversion, and the flow of the Gulf petro-dollar. However, after 9/11, both communities came to realize that it is vital to engage in a process of self-critique and confront the challenges of reinventing themselves on the American pluralistic tapestry. While the African American Sunni communities tried to reinvent themselves as 'new Muslims', the immigrant communities found themselves compelled to reinvent themselves as "new Americans". In studying some facets of such an inter- and intracommunity identity (re)negotiation process, this work argues that perennial internal factionalism, the Muslim communities' sheer failure to hunt down enduring stereotypes associating them with terrorism, and their desperate attempts to make their incisive entry to the civic public forum by courting successive administrations, offering to play a pivotal role in helping promote changing US foreign policy agendas in the Muslim world, still represent major stumbling blocks towards developing an American Muslim identity that draws on its many streams.

The preliminary conclusions reached in this work incite deeper research about three sets of issues that are significant for further research and theory building. First is the set of issues related to the study of pluralism within Muslim communities. There are empirical questions about various sects. Theorizing about how to anchor them in their American context and global Islamic context may help generate a comprehensive strategy that may assist in advancing the course of participatory pluralism within Muslim communities and the society at large. Second is the set of issues related to the study of Islam and generations. A study of generational conflicts within Muslim communities will certainly affect the process of identity formation and authority. The third is the set of issues related to the question of the wider public debate on America's religious self-identification in the aftermath of 9/11. A study of the experiences of individuals belonging to other post-1965 immigrant religions such as Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs on the road towards participatory pluralism on both forums of America's Sacred Ground will assist in better understanding the contentious nature of religious pluralism and help Americans make sense of their wider diversity.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** As I mentioned in the Methodology section of this chapter, I conducted the fieldwork for this work, including the interviews, as a Fulbright visiting scholar under the auspices of the Department of Religious Studies at UCSB (USA) in 2002–2003 and 2006. No ethical approval was required. As the Fulbright scholarship for Tunisian nationals is a non-degree (research) scholarship, the project I worked on did not have a number, but I gave presentations at conferences (at UCSB and the AAR), where I shared my research findings about other aspects of American-Muslim responses to 9/11 with the community of scholars and also contributed a paper to an edited volume published in the US.

**Informed Consent Statement:** The names of the lawyers and community leaders I mentioned in my study participated in public events that I attended as a UCSB Fulbright visiting scholar in 2002–2003 and 2006. They answered my questions during those events, which were attended by scores of Journalists and scholars. I mentioned all the events in the text, the dates, and the places where they were held. A record of the events can be retrieved from the websites of these organizations. Some of the data was also collected through group field visits to Islamic organizations with UCSB researchers and my academic supervisor (Professor Wade Clark Roof), and the interviewees knew that we were interviewing them for research purposes and they did not object to this. The interviewees knew that what they said would be published in the media and in the field of Academia. This was a general trend in the USA after 9/11 as scholars, journalists, and average Americans attended many events organized by the Muslim communities. Actually, the Muslim communities organized these events



to attract scholars and transmit their messages through them and the media to the decision makers and globally.

**Data Availability Statement:** Most of the data supporting my results can be found in the sources that are stated in the reference list. Some of the data were collected during my fieldwork trips as a UCSB Fulbright visiting scholar. The statements attributed to community leaders and lawyers were recorded at public events held by Muslim organizations. I mentioned all the events in the work, specifying the place and the date. A record of these events can be retrieved from the online and/or printed archives of these organizations.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The followers of the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenters, who broke away from the Nation of Islam in 1964, under the leadership of Clarence “Pudding” 13X, and the Self-identified Sunni, Darul Islam Movement, which emerged in Brooklyn in the early 1960s, for example, were not considered “Muslim” by the immigrant Muslim community leadership and immigrant Muslims. One of the most offensive themes to them is the claim of the Five Percenters, for example, that a Black man is God. Both the Darul Islam Movement and the Nation of Islam continue to preach a race-based Islam.
- <sup>2</sup> The immigrant Muslim leaders and scholars who identify with Sunni Islam have been sensitive to the matter of division within the community. Their efforts to demonstrate to their host country that Muslims are a community united under the teaching of Islam betray a latent preoccupation with and concern about the survival of the Muslim population, which they perceive to be threatened by the non-Muslim majority in a Western context. Perhaps in part as a result of these efforts, the complexity of theological and practical religious differences within the immigrant Muslim communities have been compromised. This justifies, in part, why Islam and Muslims in the US tend to be viewed quite monolithically.
- <sup>3</sup> The history of Islam in the American continent can be traced to the days of slavery when Muslims were among the slaves brought from Africa. Historical accounts suggest that many slaves resisted the religious persecution of their masters and were able to practice their faith privately.
- <sup>4</sup> The first Islamic schools in the United States were established by African American Muslims. Clara Muhammad Schools constitute the oldest and largest association of Islamic schools in the United States. There were around twenty-seven schools across the US according to a school admin I interviewed on the occasion of the Muslim Day Parade held in New York in 2003.
- <sup>5</sup> Many conservatives and Jewish groups claim CAIR is rooted in the Hamas movement and that its leaders also secretly support Hezbollah in Lebanon. Fine went so far as to say that CAIR is to Muslims as the Ku Klux Klan is to Christians.

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