Classifying Muslims: Contextualizing Religion and Race in the United Kingdom and Germany

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Since the late 20th century, public discourse in Muslim-minority countries has centered around the question of how to classify Muslims. In this paper, we compare the state, academic, and self-classification of Muslims in two countries: the United Kingdom and Germany. We propose that the historical experience of anti-Semitism makes religion a more salient master category to understand Muslims in Germany, while the history of both anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism largely resulting from colonial domination means that religion together with race are master categories used to understand Muslims in the United Kingdom. Through this multilayered ethnographic and historical analysis, we challenge taken-for-granted assumptions in both the political and academic milieu about what it means to be Muslim, emphasizing the importance of the interplay between sociopolitical categories and self-identifications.

Keywords: Muslims, religion, race, United Kingdom, Germany.

In recent decades, pundits, politicians, and everyday people—both Muslim and non-Muslim—have asked about Muslim integration into Western, Muslim-minority countries, with these questions often being posed via deeply Islamophobic concerns about security and heritage (Braunstein 2017; Martosko 2015; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Yet, the question of Muslim integration—with all of its political problems—hinges on two deeper questions.

First, what, exactly, is a Muslim? The answer might seem obvious enough, but the question is actually quite complicated, and has occupied a tremendous amount of scholarly energy in Islamic Studies (Ahmed 2016) and anthropology (Asad 2009), although the debates have had little spillover into sociology. Yet, even these debates have often paid little attention to the meta-categories undergirding the category of Islam. So, if the first relevant question is precisely how words like "Muslim" or "Islam" are themselves defined, the second question concerns the sources of these definitions. What are the categories through which societies come to recognize and understand Muslims and Islam?

In their study of racial formation in the United States, Omi and Winant (2014:106) show how race has been a "master category," playing a "unique role in the formation and historical development of the United States." They define a master category as "a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and

culture" of a country: in their case, the United States (2014:106). Yet, Omi and Winant (2014) make clear that race is *a* master category, rather than the only possible one.

In this paper, we show how the master categories underlying the recognition of "Muslim" and "Islam" vary between Germany and the United Kingdom, especially in relation to the intersections of religion and race, adding to ongoing discussions about "complex religion" (Wilde 2018). In so doing, we demonstrate how the degree to which "Muslim" is understood as a racial or religious category has much more to do with the contexts of a country's own racial and religious history rather than anything essential about Islam or "Muslimness." In the context of the United States, which remains a touchstone case in sociological literature on boundaries to inclusion, the integration of Muslims is often described in terms of a color-coded racial schema where only whiteness guarantees full inclusion (Bonilla-Silva 2021; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015; Garner and Selod 2015; Maghbouleh 2017; Omi and Winant 2014; Selod and Embrick 2013; Yazdiha 2021). In the European context, however, the so-called "Muslim question" has come to replace the so-called "Jewish question" that preoccupied European social thought well into the mid 20th century, and in which religion became a catch-all category for the signaling and maintaining of religious/ethnic/cultural/racialized difference (Bernstein 1996; Norton 2013). Anti-Semitism in pre–World War II Germany was an ideology that emphasized Jewish religious difference while also encapsulating ideas about racial and cultural pluralism. Of course, as Fanon (1963) argued some years ago, and as we see in the case of the United Kingdom that follows, anti-Semitism and anti-Black prejudice are both distinct and interrelated.

In the case of Germany in the late 20th and early 21st century, we show that sociocultural difference has come to be largely understood through the prism of religious and/or collapsed religio-ethnic-cultural-racial difference (i.e., the Jewish experience). This does not negate the presence of racism or the racialization of Muslims in Germany (Lewicki 2018), but instead shows how the category of Islam and the *kind of difference Muslims present* can differ across contexts, with Germany tending toward a more religious categorization of Islam, because religion in the German context functions as a "master category" of difference. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, has historically been marked by both anti-Black and anti-Semitic prejudice. In the United Kingdom in the last 20 years, there has been a notable shift from a framework of ethno-racial distinction to the racialized religious distinction of Muslims, increasingly understood by leading scholars like Tariq Modood, Nasar Meer, and Anya Topolski through the lens of the Jewish experience.

Our paper proceeds in the following manner. First, we discuss why classification matters: both those classifications ascribed by others and self-classifications. Then, we discuss our research design for exploring these classification processes. We follow by showing how the master categories of state and academic classifications of Islam vary by country. Similar to recent scholarship on racial formation (Mora 2014), we are interested in how both state and nonstate actors help to determine the classification of minoritized groups. Our analysis of state classification and academic discussions of Islam in Germany and the United Kingdom reveals how the classification of Muslims engages race and/or religion to distinguish them, pointing to their potential integration (or not). This distinction is both studied by academics and, to some degree, maintained by them. Finally, we draw from the first author's ethnographic fieldwork in Germany and the United Kingdom to move from how the state classifies Muslims to how Muslims themselves understand their relationship to particular categories of difference (Brubaker 2004).

WHY CLASSIFICATION PROCESSES MATTER

Classification processes matter because they shape the opportunities for people to access resources and rights as well as protections in law (Becker 2021; Meer and Modood 2009; Mora 2014). Various forms of classification and status hierarchies have important consequences for

the life chances of those relegated to lower tier groups in a given society, thus experiencing the consequences of being seen as negatively different from the mainstream (on Germany and the United Kingdom, see Becker 2021). Meer and Modood (2009) have specifically argued for the recognition of "Muslim" as a racialized category in the United Kingdom, because in that context, minorities deemed as "racial" are provided with legal protections that exclusively religious minorities are not. That is, classification processes—whether by the state, academics, or by those in minoritized groups themselves—are both normative and highly contextual.

We emphasize context here because despite its crucial insights about the U.S. racial system, for the most part the sociological literature on race and Islam/Muslims (e.g., Breen and Meer 2019; Cole 2009; Garner and Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013) fails to account for the formative influence of anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic systems in Europe, as well as the racialized systems that resulted specifically from European colonial rule. That is, racism in Europe has entailed distinctions of both color and religion (the former dominating stratification in British Caribbean colonies and the latter dominating stratification in North African colonies where distinction animated religious—specifically Muslim/Jewish—divides) (Beaman 2017, 2021; Fanon [1959] 2004; Hall 2017). As Go (2018) has argued, it is important to bring postcolonial theory to bear on the sociology of race in order to account for its at-once highly localized and globally influenced conditions.

Sociologists have well established the power of group classifications to shape symbolic boundaries of belonging and access to material resources along the lines of religion, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, class, and more (Lewis et al. 2004; Omi and Winant 2014). Sociologists have also emphasized the dynamic nature of groups: they are produced by cognitive processes, neither natural nor stagnant categories of belonging. As Brubaker (2004) argues, differences are created through a process of interchange between social imaginaries, structures, and histories. The construction of "Muslim" as a category of belonging and/or difference in Germany and the United Kingdom therefore entails dynamic and interactive processes of racial formation (Omi and Winant 2014) and also *religious formation* that complicate notions of Europe as a singular sociocultural entity. As such, we show how notions of difference developed in colonial/imperial encounters, hierarchical and racialized social structures, and national histories interact in processes of classifying Muslims today.

Omi and Winant (2014) are especially helpful here, as their concept of a racial project can be employed to explain racial inequality in Europe, and with some modifications, religious prejudice as well. They define a racial project as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (2014:125). Racial projects can be macro, meso, or micro, anything from national voting laws to an individual's decision to wear their hair in a certain way. These racial projects help to make racialized identities "common sense," with "a vast web of racial projects mediat[ing] … between the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational forms in which it is routinized and standardized on the other" (Omi and Winant 2014:127). Because race is not the only possible master category, we can use this same concept of "master project" to describe how religion and race differently serve as master categories in Germany and the United Kingdom, and are intertwined in different ways in these contexts, with consequent distinctions in the categorization of Muslims.

Finally, it is important to remember that these categories and projects are visible to everyone in a society, not only to the academics who describe them professionally. Taking shape on the micro, meso, and macro levels, those who are formed by them are further engaged in acts of self-assertion and social resistance. In his paper, "Categories of analysis and categories of practice: a note on the study of Muslims in European countries of immigration," Brubaker (2013:1) focuses on how the category of "Muslim" functions both as a category of analysis and as a "category of social, political and religious practice." He asserts that Muslims in Europe are not only classified

by the societies in which they live but also classify themselves. As such, the *self-classification* of Muslims as religious is itself an important point sometimes overshadowed by an insistence on racialization as the dominant (or only) relevant master category for Islam. Self-classification strategies are also an important means of resisting ascribed identities and marginalities, whether through reworking the category that maintains hierarchies (e.g., the political Blackness movement in the 20th-century United Kingdom that used the category of race) or by refuting an ascribed category while asserting another: for example, Stuart Hall's assertion that Black British minorities should organize through ethnicity rather than race, and recent scholarship on Latino and multiracial racial/ethnic self-understanding in the United States. (Hall 1996; Harris and Sim 2002; Hitlin, Brown, and Elder Jr. 2007; Modood 1994; Mora 2014).

Research Design

Emerging from a concern with both ascribed and self-determined classification processes, this paper combines secondary social science research with primary ethnographic and interview-based research. We describe the state classification processes via academic literature on the subject and academic classification via a wide sampling of publications. The secondary social science research component thus entailed searches for academic literature (including that specifically on the state) using the search terms of "Muslim" paired with "race/racism/racialization" and/or "religion/religious" and each country of study: "United States," "United Kingdom," or "Germany." We eventually identified approximately 100 relevant articles and books, many (though not all) of which are cited here. We are fully aware that the articles and books we identified do not exhaust academic discussions of Islam, race, and religion in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Still, as all three authors are social scientists who study Islam and know the literature well, we believe we have reached saturation with these identified texts, providing an up-to-date and accurate sense of the literature.

The ethnographic portion of the study combines ethnography and semistructured interviews, which were undertaken as part of a larger project on Muslim integration in Germany and the United Kingdom. Between 2013 and 2017, the first author spent over 2.5 years conducting ethnographic research in the East London Mosque and the Şehitlik Mosque, Berlin, including observing religious and social events and visiting homes of mosque constituents in both cities. Ethnographic research does not seek to be representative but rather aims to understand how broader social processes play out in particular contexts. As the first author was interested in understanding the positionality of Muslims and Islamic institutions in two of Europe's largest metropoles, she chose visibly representative mosques, constituted by the largest "ethnic" Muslim groups in each country's case: Turkish in Germany and South Asian in the United Kingdom. At the same time, the first author was aware of the differences in these societies' migration histories: with the majority of South Asian migration resulting from the (post)colonial social figurations of the United Kingdom and the majority of Turkish migration through guestworker programs created to fill labor shortages in post–WWII Germany. Site selection was also influenced by seeking to understand mainstream-minority interaction, as both sites are "go-to" mosques for mainstream engagement, specifically media interviews and visits from high-profile figures, such as politicians. Additionally, 40 semistructured interviews were undertaken with mosque community constituents (36 at the Şehitlik Mosque and 4 at the East London Mosque), the majority (31) of whom identified as women and nine of whom identified as men; the research was asymmetrical, focusing more extensively on the Şehitlik Mosque community. Interview subjects were identified through the author's preceding ethnographic work in the two mosques, and then through snowball sampling. Interviews focused on the life histories of interview subjects, as well as their experiences in/with mainstream German or British society, honing in on school, university, and work contexts, in order to understand minority-majority interactions.

Data analysis of the ethnographic and interview materials for this paper consisted of a close reading and coding of fieldnotes and interview transcripts, specifically looking for references to the keywords or discussions that addressed the following topics: "religion," "practice," "race," "racism," "Black," "white," "equality," "inequality," "difference," "hierarchy," "discrimination," and "otherness." The themes of religious identity interacting with state religious classification in the German context and religious identity interacting with more racialized religious state classification in the British context emerged through this inductive data analysis process (and also drew on the first author's earlier publications on these two mosque communities).

In the section that follows, we trace state and academic classifications of Muslims in the United Kingdom and Germany, and then turn to the self-classification processes of two Muslim communities in the cities of London and Berlin.

STATE CLASSIFICATIONS OF MUSLIMS

Europe: From the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question

In his monumental work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1979:27) writes of Muslims and Jews in Europe as unfortunate "secret sharer[s]" on whom, as Wilfred Graf (2006:102) laments "the shadow of western civilization" is cast. "The idea of 'Europe' was born," Glynis Cousin and Robert Fine (2012:167) argue, through the persecution of both Jews and Muslims. During the Reformation, Jews were said to be poisoning wells with support from the devil and Turks. And in German-speaking European states, eerily similar rhetoric has been utilized to render Jews and Muslims into nefarious others, with Jewish or Muslim identity posed as antimodern, overly global, and incapable of national loyalties (Hafez 2016). Farid Hafez (2016) points out that the slogan of today's Freedom Party in Australia, "Vienna should not become Istanbul," echoes the words of Karl Lueger's proclamation in 1910 that "Vienna should not become Jerusalem." The recent circumcision debate and its temporary outlawing in Germany cast Jews and Muslims together as morally inferior, unenlightened strangers in a post-Christian, secular order (Amir-Moazami 2016). Religion has been a master category across Europe, including both Germany and the United Kingdom for centuries, and while both countries are much more secular than they once were, a concern for a Christian heritage dominates even seemingly secular political agendas (Amir-Moazami 2005; Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy 2016; Morieson 2021).

European sociopolitical development has long been framed around the so-called "Jewish question" in particular, delimiting the place of this group in the space and place of nation-states and the broader European imaginary. The marginalized status of Jews first became institutionalized in the medieval period, during the third Lateran Council of the Catholic Church, which segregated Christians from Jews in 1179. This division was soon embedded in social life through widespread segregation in ghettos and ethnic enclaves. Venetian Jews were notably forced to live in the ghetto from the late Middle Ages through early modernity, due to their perceived impurity, including the "mysterious polluting powers" of their "alien, seductive bodies" (Sennett 1994:215 and 217). From the Middle Ages forward, anti-Jewish sentiment transformed into anti-Semitism, which in effect collapsed Jewish culture, religion, ethnicity, and racialization (Norton 2013; Sennett 1994). In modernity, this translated into the second-class citizenship of Jews, who were restricted in who they married and where they lived and worked. Even when Jews were eventually legally emancipated in modern European nation-states, their perceived pollution led to enduring persecution, which culminated in the rise and rule of Hitler, whose political project was centered on the extermination of Jews (Fredrickson 2002).

Today, the so-called "Muslim question" echoes both the language and experience of Jewish marginality (Norton 2013). Muslims, even as now-citizens of postcolonial European countries, are increasingly understood as "enemies within the gates" and therefore an internal threat

to civility (Schiffauer 2006). Within this larger framework of Jewish and Muslim differentiation, alongside of the current swell of both anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment, European nation-states frame Jewish and Muslim difference in their societies in distinct ways (Meer 2013; Topolski 2018). In the following section, we focus on two cases—the United Kingdom and Germany—in order to explore contemporary Muslim classification processes at the nation-state level, where Muslims have increasingly been othered as a religious group, albeit one embedded with assumptions about culture, ethnicity, and even supposed biological differences—much like Jews vis-à-vis anti-Semitism. We are less interested in *whether* this entails a process of racialization (we would argue that racialization is most certainly part of, but not the whole story here) and more interested in how these processes in the United Kingdom and Germany differ, and how and when the "master categories" of race and/or religion are invoked, thereby revealing distinct "projects" of religious, racial, and racial-religious distinction (Omi and Winant 2014). What we find is that in the United Kingdom, religious and racialized experience (rooted in a colonial history that spanned South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean) is explicitly interrelated, whereas Germany is characterized by significant race silence in the classification of Muslims as a religious minority (a silence rooted in a history of scientific racism under Nazi rule).

U.K. State Classification of Muslims: From Race to Religion

There has been a discernable shift in the governance of Muslim otherness from ethnicity and race to faith in the United Kingdom, with the master category moving away from race toward religion. This counters the experience of governing Jewish otherness in the same context. Once dominantly understood as a faith-group, Jews have been explicitly protected by law from "racial hatred" since 1983 (Grillo 2010; UK Parliament 2002). Unlike Jews and also Sikhs, Muslims have not been recognized as an ethnic group in the United Kingdom, effectively leading to weaker protection against discrimination under British law (Egorova 2022; Modood 2016).

The majority of Muslims living in the United Kingdom today migrated from Muslim-majority countries, or they are the children and grandchildren of those who migrated during "de-colonization" in the 1950s to 1970s. Within the colonial project, for example, in British India, racial and religious differentiation intersected, and were invoked—together and apart—to maintain social and political hierarchies (Mahmud 1998). Since the late 20th century, the United Kingdom's dominant political model for managing postcolonial pluralism was multiculturalism, often used simply as a descriptive term for a diverse society, but which tends to refer to a set of policies for majority/minority relations, or "the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity" (Modood 2007:2).

Over the past two decades, more refugees in Europe and the growing instability of the European Union have eroded positive connotations with multiculturalism in British politics and the public, while nativist activists and leaders in religion, culture, and government have encouraged a fear of cultural difference and the loss of European heritage. Echoing then-Prime Minister Tony Blair's 2006 declaration that multiculturalism in Britain had failed, some have come to regard multiculturalism as a "dirty word" (Asthana 2010; Johnston 2006). Muslims have long held an uncertain place in the multicultural project, as part of what some perceive as "pathological diversity" in the postcolonial era (Lentin and Titley 2011). While some Muslim individuals and groups have been protected as ethnic or racial minorities during the late 20th century, they could not access such protections as religious minorities, given that religion does not have a similar legal status in the United Kingdom (Meer 2008).

The language of racism and racialization in the contemporary United Kingdom emerged from the postcolonial experience, rooted in 20th-century identity movements shared by migrants from South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Racial classification has long been a formidable undercurrent of British society—specifically in relation to the slave trade (15th to 19th century) and colonialism (16th to 20th century; Hall 2017). Just prior to the immigration of South Asian

postcolonial migrants, a large wave of Black Caribbean colonial migrants arrived in the United Kingdom in the 1950s (the Windrush Generation) and quickly became the subjects of residential segregation and other limitations to full participation in public life (Cantres 2020). The Race Relations Act passed in 1965, barring racial discrimination writ large, and was followed by more specific laws (of 1968 and 1976) outlawing employment, residential, and service discrimination (Goulbourne 1998).

In the 1970s, Afro-Caribbean and South Asian minorities together embraced a movement of "political blackness" in which they asserted a critical stance toward the imperial legacies of ethno-racial hierarchies and second-class citizenship (Modood 1994). They recognized that Blackness was seen as contrasting with Britishness, but animated rather than erased notions of racial difference in order to make claims on protections and rights (Gilroy 1987). Responding in particular to continued attacks against racial and ethnic minorities, members of these communities led large-scale protests across the country in the 1980s and again in the early 2000s, making demands for recognition and protection by the British state through a language of race (Bagguley and Hussain 2016).

Today, as noted above, Muslims in the United Kingdom are largely classified by the British state and state institutions as a religious or "faith" group. State engagement with Muslim collectivities focuses on religious institutions (primarily through the Muslim Council of Britain, made up of over 500 organizations, including mosques, Islamic schools, and charities). "Muslim" was added as a religious category on the British census in 2001, with creed institutionalized as a group marker for the first time (Gidley 2012). Many British Muslim organizations pushed for the inclusion of this question, arguing that it would allow resources to be granted to marginalized religious communities (i.e., not only ethnic or racial communities, as prior). Some dissented, instead arguing that it would facilitate greater surveillance of an already securitized group, paralleling similar debates over the U.S. census (Moore 2010).

A significant strand of British engagement with Islam today is through a security paradigm, in the form of the so-called Prevent Strategy, which emerged as part of the larger government CONTEST program as a means to prevent violent extremism. Within this strategy, the British government has funded Islamic institutions seen as moderate or progressive, including the Radical Middle Way project and the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (O'Toole et al. 2016). Part of the security paradigm has, as in Germany, focused on anti-Semitism in Muslim communities (Feldman and Gidley 2018). That is, a paradigm of the increased insecurity of Jews has been tied to a security paradigm targeting Muslims (Gidley 2012). Under such securitization, signs of religious practice such as donning a headscarf as well as physical appearance and national origin are used to identify and surveil Muslims. Thus, in the United Kingdom, state classification has moved toward a more religious definition of Islam, albeit one that intertwines racialized and religious difference.

German State Classification of Muslims: From Immigrant to Muslim Citizen

Germany's relationship with both Muslims and the concept of race can only be understood in the post–World War II context. During the 1960s and 1970s, Germany addressed postwar labor shortages by recruiting guestworkers from poorer countries, including those in the Middle East and North Africa. This program stipulated the explicit mandate that the workers were *not* migrants and thus would eventually return to their countries of origin. The "rotation principle" upheld during the initial decades of Germany's guestworker program required these migrants to leave the country after only 2 years of working (Koopmans 1999). Yet, the economic precarity of sending countries coincided with the reticent relaxation of these regulations at the end of the 20th century. While most guestworkers returned to their countries of origin, tens of thousands—most hailing from Turkey, followed by Morocco, Algeria, and the former Yugoslavia—remained in Germany long term (Banac 1988; Ellermann 2013).

German policy encouraged return to countries of origin into the 1980s, legalizing the status of migrants while not allowing for their naturalization (Becker 2021; Rosenow-Williams 2012). It was only in 1992 that Germany passed its first law allowing a restricted group to access citizenship, replacing the longstanding blood-based citizenship law with one based on birth (Fennel 1997; Rosenow-Williams 2012). And it was only in the early 2000s, under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, that German politicians came to identify Germany as a country of immigration (Constant and Tien 2011). At the same time, the state began to offer citizenship to German-born children of Turkish immigrants. Yet, continued contention over what it means to be a country of immigration has revealed ongoing resistance to demographic change in Germany. And as the largest minority population in the country, ethnic Turks have been targeted in this struggle since their first wave of migration in the 1960s, today most pointedly via political questioning of whether Muslims/Islam belong in Germany (Ewing 2008; Mandel 2008).

While ethnicity became a classification scheme employed by the state and its policies regarding Germany's largest minority populace, race notably did not. The danger perceived in employing the language of race is a legacy of World War II, specifically the doctrine of the Third Reich, which cast Jews through a biological/scientific lens as a lesser race, leading to brutal persecution and millions of deaths. In the second half of the 20th century, race thus became not only avoided in German political discourse but also perceived as a form of linguistic violence, capable of transforming into deadly force (Yurdakul 2016). This is not to deny the ongoing existence of racial projects in Germany, only to emphasize that religion here gained power as a "master category" and efforts to understand and differentiate Islam have often taken the shape of religious projects (Evans 2010; Omi and Winant 2014). Accepted terminology to explain the marginality of Islam and Muslims in the mainstream has included Islamophobia and *Islamfeindlichkeit* (Islam-based xenophobia).

"Muslim" is thus a religious category in Germany, albeit one in which ethnicity and religion are collapsed. "The Turk" is equated with "the Muslim," and increasingly "the Arab" with "the Turk" (Özyürek 2023). Germany's efforts to "domesticate" Islam in a digestible, officially recognized form (Becker 2021; Davidson 2012) have included the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz*, a selection of Europe-friendly Muslim representatives who together were recognized as an official Islamic interlocutor. Germany's Federal Ministry for Education and Research also initiated and financed centers of Islamic Theology at six major universities—Münster, Osnabrück, Frankfurt, Giessen, Tübingen, and Erlangen—all in hopes of training "moderate" Muslim leadership, including European imams.

ACADEMIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF MUSLIMS

The academic literature has largely reflected the classification of Muslims vis-à-vis the state, with a shift toward understanding religion as a master category in both the United Kingdom and Germany, albeit in distinct ways: with Muslims classified as a racialized religious minority in the United Kingdom, in relation to both a "politics of Blackness" and Jewish minorities, and as a religious minority (with notable race silence) in Germany (on race silence in Europe, see Lentin 2008).

Academic Classification in the United Kingdom: From Immigrant to (Racialized) Religious Minority

The British academic field has increasingly used religion as the master category through which to understand Muslims since the 1980s, reflecting both the state classification, and the increasing self-identification of second- and third-generation Muslims as "Muslim first." As Gilliat-Ray (2014:73) writes: "if there is a distinctive change of emphasis in the academic research about Muslims in Britain since 1945, it is most evident in the shift from a predominant concern with the

ethnic and racial identity of 'immigrants', to a more concentrated focus on the religious dynamics of settled Muslim communities." In the 1990s, Islamic Studies emerged as an academic field in the United Kingdom, receiving funding as a priority area within a state security agenda.

To a lesser extent, one strand of 21st-century scholarship on Islam in the United Kingdom has instead turned toward the racial classification of Islam. Adopting some language from U.S. theorists (e.g., Foner 2015), these scholars emphasize the perception of Islam as an ascriptive state of difference, accomplished by stigmatizing visible markers of the Muslim body (whether phenotype, dress, or worn symbols). Garner and Selod (2015:9), for example, draw from both the U.S. and U.K. contexts to argue that Islamophobia is "racial in its nature," institutionalized through ideology, historical power relationships, and forms of discrimination. Similarly, Moosavi (2013) argues that the position of White converts in the United Kingdom, downgraded in the social hierarchy upon embracing Islam, shows how "Muslim" itself emerges as a discrete racial category juxtaposed to whiteness.

Other scholars have instead looked at the more European pattern of the racialization of Muslims in the United Kingdom, relating the racialized experience of the Muslim to that of the Jew vis-à-vis the concept of cultural racism. Scholarship on the United Kingdom by Meer and Modood (Meer 2013; Meer and Modood 2009) explores parallels between the Jewish and Muslim experiences of othering, with initial perceptions of ethnic otherness (e.g., the use of the slur "Paki" in the 1980s), followed by a racialized status inscribed onto the body. In the case of Muslims, ethnic otherness followed the so-called "Rivers of Blood" speech given by parliamentarian Enoch Powell in 1968. The speech criticized immigration, drawing on a classical metaphor of foreboding, prophesizing the River Tiber would be "foaming with blood." It led to violent attacks—so-called "Paki-bashing"—against minorities in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The "Asian" ethnicity subsequently became a shared identifier and locus of identity for the largest Muslim groups in the United Kingdom, as well as a means for fostering resistance to marginality (Modood 2007; Modood and Ahmad 2007). This understanding of racism is deeply historical, rooted in the post-*Reconquista* era where a single drop of Jewish or Muslim blood led to the designation of a body as non-Christian, regardless of conversion (Meer and Modood 2009). Meer and Modood (2009:344), however, suggest that biological notions of racism are too narrow, and instead suggest "cultural racism" ascribed to Islam in the United Kingdom, including but not limited to embodied markers of difference; therefore, they argue terms like "'anti-Muslim sentiment' or 'Islamophobia' should nest" within broader concepts like "racism" or "racialization."

There is also a growing strand of research beyond the cultural racism literature on the intersections of Jewish and Muslim positionality in the United Kingdom. Scholars have looked, in particular, to the shift from the 20th-century designation of Jews in the United Kingdom as a religious group to their designation as an ethnic/racial group in antidiscrimination law (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010; Modood 2016). Gidley and Everett (2022) and Egorova (2022) have pointed toward the similarities and differences in the racialization processes faced by Jews and Muslims in the British context (and beyond), and the role of both state and society in this process. Egorova (2022), for instance, argues that Muslims experience less protection against discrimination vis-à-vis the law because they have not been recognized as a racial or ethnic group. She connects this difference to the longer historical trajectory of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom, and their integration into British collective memory, as well as the specificity of how anti-Semitism has been coded and addressed since World War II.

While most South Asians in the United Kingdom today reject "blackness" as a form of identity, and those within the Muslim community increasingly self-identify as "Muslim first," scholars across the social sciences and humanities have increasingly pointed to the fact that the recognition of a group as ethnic or racial affords a protected minority status not afforded to religious minorities within the British state. This has led scholars like Meer (2008), Modood, and Noorani (Meer and Modood 2009; Meer and Noorani 2008) to merge academic inquiry with advocacy,

explicitly calling for state recognition of the racialization of Muslims and ensuing cultural racism against Muslims in order to strengthen protections against discrimination.

Academic Classification in Germany: Race Silence

To a far lesser extent than the United States or the United Kingdom, again owing to a historical-cultural atmosphere in which the term "race" carries great stigma, some academics have come to perceive Islam in terms of racism/racialization in Germany. In her work on converts to Islam, Özyürek (2014) articulates racism against Muslims in Germany as interconnected with ideas of individual choice inherent to both neoliberalism and secularization, with the Muslim castigated for not choosing out of his/her identity as such. Özyürek (2014) finds that whiteness magnifies suspicion of the Muslim. El-Tayeb (2011:7) perceives many "silenced" racializations throughout European history, rooted in claims of color-blindness that negate the racialized experience of those, like Muslims, who are othered. Muslim experiences, according to El-Tayeb (2011), are part of a deep European tradition of transforming religious difference into racialized distinction, their very presence threatening the imagined homogeneity of Europe.

Yet, most research on Muslims in Germany today continues to emphasize religion as a master category rather than race, centering on the ways in which religious identities and practices are negotiated within secular publics. That is, issues of religious visibility and representation dominate the academic terrain and its classification of Muslims in Germany (Becker 2017; Spielhaus 2012). The support of the Islamic Theology graduate school, and the foundation of Islamic Theology departments across the country undergird this focus on institutionalization and representation, not only by but within the academy. Engelhardt (2016:746) writes of the shift "from epistemic community to autonomous discipline," supporting new forms of knowledge formation by Muslims in Germany (what he terms "insiderism") employed in academia.

In their work on Muslims in Germany (and France), Jouili (2008, 2016) and Amir-Moazami (2006) describe how Muslim women navigate the public secular sphere through their stigmatized religious practices and dress. Jouili (2008, 2016), in particular, takes seriously the ethical entanglements and subjectivities of Muslim women in Germany, as they (re)negotiate identities through revivalism. Yurdakul (2016) traces the transformation of discourse and politics in Germany, whereby the worker became an immigrant, later an ethnic group (Turkish), and today a Muslim who cannot fully belong as an organized religious minority. Similarly, Rosenow-Williams (2012) argues that Muslims cannot be fully incorporated in Germany because of the way that the state organizes religious identity and practice.

As in both the United States and the United Kingdom, academics recognize the power of the state and media to define Islam in Germany, yet they also show how Muslims are able to contest these definitions. Spielhaus (2012) traces the self-representation of Muslims in the German media, Jouili (2016) highlights the agency endowed by pious practices, and Becker (2017) examines the power of religious leaders to produce mosque building projects accepted by the German mainstream. This power is very much limited by the security state, one preoccupied, as Schiffauer (2006) describes, with both the moral panic of deradicalization and the ongoing shift of Muslims from legal outsiderness (foreigners) to cultural outsiderness (domestic Muslims) within the German nation-state. Yet, for the purposes of this paper, what is most striking about all of these portrayals of agency is their tendency to center Muslims and Islam as *religious and cultural categories* rather than as racial or racialized ones. As we show in the next section, these processes of categorization in the United Kingdom and Germany both influence and are sometimes at odds with how Muslims classify themselves.

Self-Classification of Muslims

To illustrate how state and academic categorizations intersect with Muslim lives, we now turn to the first author's empirical research on how Muslims define their own identities. Drawing from this ethnographic and interview-based research with two Muslim communities in London and Berlin, we move from the classification processes of British and German state actors and academic fields in each country to the self-classification processes of British and German Muslims. In so doing, we demonstrate how the complex and contextual processes of state, academic, and self-classification diverge and intersect, and how they are imbued with at-times-contrasting meanings regarding religion and race. In the German context, this leads to Islam becoming essentialized and homogenized as a religion, erasing the diverse experiences of Muslims, yet also providing grounds for collective identity and solidarity with the other relevant religious minority, Jews. In the British context, state/academic classifications frame Muslims more as a religious group but with overtones of racialization, leading to a similar religious othering and essentializing as in Germany, but also shaping tensions over race within the Muslim community. As such, religion appears to be the dominant master category in Germany, while both religion and race function as master categories in the United Kingdom.

Empirical Case: Germany

The Şehitlik Mosque in Berlin is a beautiful neo-Ottoman architectural form in the long ethnically Turkish Neukölln neighborhood. It was built by Turkish guestworkers and their children at the turn of the 21st century and today is largely led by Berlin-born Muslims. Cem (36), a mosque leader, described in an interview how the categorization of his community has changed since his parents migrated to Germany as guestworkers in the late-20th century: "Thirty years ago we spoke about Turks in Germany and now we speak about the Muslims but that's interesting because the aims are the same people in society, the same group." Similarly, Yusuf, a tour guide at the Şehitlik Mosque, sees a consolidation of various "foreign" identities into "Muslim." As he put it, "in Germany you don't have this borderline, there is no difference between Turkish and Muslim. There is no difference between, I don't know Arabic and Muslim. There is no difference between turban and Muslim. There is no difference between headscarf and Muslim." This conflation of race, ethnicity, and religion happens in the United States and the United Kingdom as well, but it is noteworthy that the dominant master category here is not racialization or race but rather religion, specifically Islam.

Less than two miles away, in his office in Kreuzberg, another historically Turkish neighborhood in the city, Arkan (45), an activist and youth worker, echoed this shift. As he tipped a coffee cup to his lips, he shook his head, recounting the changes he has witnessed, and also experienced firsthand, since moving to Berlin in the early 1990s. "It's soil and blood … Back in the day, people were yelling, 'Turks get outta here!' Now they are yelling, 'Muslims get outta here!' So, the segregation mechanisms have been altered, whereas in the past the segregation was based on ethnic refusal, now it's based on religious identity." He went on: "So the negative connotation lies with the religion, more precisely, Islam."

The first author's interlocutors make sense of their fraught positionality in contemporary Germany through the particular experience of Jews, an experience that colors the sociocultural imaginary and landscape alike. Zafer Şenocak, a celebrated writer who migrated from Ankara to Germany in 1970, famously described Turks as "treading in the footsteps of the erstwhile Jews" in his popular novel *Gefährliche Verwandschaft* ("Dangerous Relatives"; as cited in Cheesman 2007:41). The Jewish precedent of marginality often colored the first author's conversations with young Muslims in Berlin, who at times described themselves as the "new Jews" or "like the Jews before," echoing the historical position held by the ultimate "Other" in German history. Saba (26), a young Muslim poet, told the first author that "Germans don't want to hear that, but in

my opinion, you can really compare it [the Muslim positionality] to the pre-second world war situation with the Jews. Some happenings in recent times are definitely comparable in terms of how people are marginalized." Such perceptions are echoed in anthropologist Özyürek's (2018a) work on Muslim encounters with Holocaust memorials in Germany, in which young Muslims forge empathy through a shared marginality with German Jews, casting Germany's past in light of their lived present.

Not only historical parallels but also current experiences inform German Muslims' self-classification. For instance, the Salaam-Schalom Initiative, an alliance of Berliner Muslims and Jews, emerged in 2013 amidst rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. Many of the first author's interlocutors participated in this initiative, and they invited the first author, in turn, to participate in its events across the city. A Salaam-Schalom art installation held in Jewish and Muslim homes in the Neukölln neighborhood in Winter 2015 entailed inviting visitors to a household marked with both Jewish and Muslim symbols. In its ambiguity, this home entwined the stories of both groups in the city. In 2015, the initiative also led the "My Head, My Choice" campaign at Neukölln's City Hall, after Betül Ulusoy, both a Şehitlik Mosque leader and member of Salaam-Schalom, was denied a position in local government on account of her headscarf. Those who had interviewed her for the position—on the phone—did not realize that she wore a headscarf. At the protest that followed, children carried signs with the images of women donning headscarves and the words "My head, my choice," "It matters what is in a woman's head, not what's on it," and "I am a Berliner," as they marched beside their mothers.

Soon after this protest, the first author met Harun, a young Muslim tour guide at the Jewish Museum Berlin. There he articulated the ongoing sense of strangerhood shared by Muslims and Jews in Germany, which motivated him, like other Muslim Berliners, to become a tour guide in this museum. Harun noted a specific moment that had evidenced this shared positionality between Muslims and Jews: the banning of circumcision in 2012 (later reversed). Haroun explains, "the anti-Semites, they were kinda happy actually, and also the anti-Muslims, you know, they were like 'these are the two strangers in our society and now we have one case where we have the two strangers in our society together.' For them, it was the perfect chance." This perception of social-positional overlap as "strangers," as well as the religious undertones of the distinction emerged as Harun described lines drawn between Muslims alongside of Jews and mainstream German/Christian society vis-à-vis religious practice.

As Harun put it, "what was very significant is that this practice was portrayed as a barbaric practice and 'Ok, now we teach you what to do, we Christian society, we German society, we have overcome certain barbaric traditions, we have modernized with the Enlightenment and everything. We have left things behind, you know, we have overcome this. So now it's time for you guys to, you know, arrive here.'" Note that this process could have been translated as one of "whiteness" as well in terms of such a "civilizing mission" and appropriate moral transformation. Yet, the language used to describe the process is not one of White supremacy but rather Christian supremacy, invoked in contrast to both Muslims and Jews.

Many of the first author's interlocutors emphasized the centrality of school in the demarcation of Muslim bodies, describing experiences in state schools that reinforce this increasing perception of religious difference. When invited to her daughter's kindergarten class in spring 2015 to speak about her profession, Ekrem (32), a Şehitlik Mosque constituent suggested that she discuss her work teaching in the mosque. The teacher, immediately taken aback, sanctioned her: "We don't educate children in religion. Religion has no place here." Similarly, Selim (35), a public school teacher, was decried for requesting time off to attend the weekly Friday prayer. In this case, his school principal discursively set him apart from the Judeo-Christian, civil mainstream. "This is not a religious school and you cannot indoctrinate students. You don't see Jewish and Christian people asking for this," she said.

During her research, the first author interviewed Berat and Ateş, two police officers in the Neukölln district, a precinct known for pioneering intercultural work. Berat was raised in what

he described to the first author as a "modern" Muslim family, whereas his colleague Ateş belongs to the Alevi religious minority. Throughout the first author's conversation with these two police officers, Ateş described Berat as living an ideal form of Islam, in that he was not practicing. Both officers found the signaling of Muslimness less a source a pride than a source of concern. In fact, Berat bragged about convincing a 16-year-old student to stop wearing a head covering at his school. "One needs to trick him," Berat told the first author. "He might say, 'You aren't believers, you play with [Islam] … Where is it in the school rules that I have to take off my hat? There is no school rule that I have to take off my hat.'" They reflected on how they had convinced him that taking off the hat is akin to taking off shoes to enter a mosque. "That was a good idea of ours and he accepted it," Berat said. Berat took pride in "trick[ing]" a student to remove clothing that marked him as Muslim, and both officers claimed that outward Muslim appearances raised suspicion.

In each of these examples, we find a German classification system in which society is marked as either secular or Christian and potential pollutants to that society are marked as religious, at one time Jewish, and more recently, Muslim. A significant consequence of this categorization of Muslim as religious category is that it erases the experiences and identities of Muslims from very different class, regional/national, and ethnic circumstances (including those for whom Muslim may not be a primary identity), as well as homogenizing a religion, much as anti-Semitism did historically with Jews. Yet, such categorizations also help to shape collective identities and solidarities. Along these lines, the point of reference in self-classification processes by young Muslims has become the Jewish experience in Germany, present and past. Many Muslims seem to feel that their primary identity is a religious one, yet because of the "race silence" in Germany it may also be difficult for them to articulate how they are racialized. For both Muslims and non-Muslims then, Muslim identities in Germany draw from religion as a master category, even when "religion" is racially and ethnically infused.

Empirical Case: The United Kingdom

At the New Muslim Circle at the East London Mosque, cradle Muslims and converts both navigate the classification of Muslims in the British capital, sorting out the religion-based difference between Muslims and the mainstream public as well as the ethno-racial differences between and within London's many Muslim communities. In the first author's fieldwork at this mosque, the idea of Muslimness as a form of piety was an ongoing collective commitment, at once transcending and overriding cultural, ethnic, and racial distinctions. Rooting themselves in the universality of Islam, converts at the East London Mosque dislocate themselves from any particular place, ethnicity, or race. This Muslim cosmopolitanism is a key distinction from what Rogozen-Soltar (2017) found in her study of converts in Granada who root themselves through Islam's local history and what Özyürek (2018) observed about how German converts "giv[e] … Islam a German face," through, for instance, locating Islam in the Enlightenment.

For the first author's London interlocutors, being "just Muslim" or "only Muslim" allowed these converts to release themselves from the constraints of the liberal, globalizing nation-state, focusing inward on redemptive possibilities rather than outward on the old socioeconomic grind. The individual and collective Muslim self becomes powerfully reframed through piety.

Of course, this commitment to Islam as the primary identity does not negate the salience of racial and ethnic categories in these Muslims' everyday lives. Yet, these experiences of racial and ethnic difference become framed as intra-Muslim differences rather than a way that people are separated from the outside. Many of the first author's White convert interlocutors recognized that their "non-normative whiteness" made them particularly suspect to secular or Christian White Britons, as they have willfully left a privileged position in society's ethno-racial hierarchy and entered a position of social marginality.

On the other hand, Black British converts in the learning circle explained that they confront racialization and racism within the mosque community as well. "Muslims are equal in the eyes of God," "but not in the eyes of mother-in-laws," said Nala (40), who had spent her childhood in a housing estate directly across the street from the mosque. She explained that she hopes to get married but has not been able to find a husband in the Bangladeshi community because of her race. "I want to get married. There I see the divisions. They won't marry me because of who I am, my background … one man even said that he would have a secret marriage with me, he doesn't mind, but his parents wouldn't accept it. I said, 'No, that wouldn't be fair to the child that I have nor to children if we had any together.' There I saw the divisions in our *ummah*."

Race here emerged as a decisive dividing line inside of a community that remains overwhelmingly ethnically Bangladeshi even if a small but growing Somali populace shares the mosque, albeit generally in separate spaces within. For example, classes on Islam for children and adults can be alternatively taken in Bengali or Somali (as well as English). The classification of Muslims by state authorities in the United Kingdom largely reflects that in Germany—with Muslims perceived as a potentially dangerous religious minority. Mark, a police captain in the East London Mosque neighborhood, is aware of the shifting societal gaze that has come to focus on understanding Muslimness as a religious marker. "We didn't think about faith before. We were aware of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, but they kept to themselves. We thought of them as shopkeepers and restaurateurs," he explained, noting the increasing shift toward seeing South Asians as "Muslims" since the turn of the 21st century.

In Summer 2016, Mark introduced the first author to Hasan, a youth worker employed in the Tower Hamlets neighborhood government and responsible for managing local community relations. Hasan described the classification of Muslims vis-à-vis the potential threat of Islamic ideology. "Three words," he says, "Operation Trojan Horse." In 2014, Operation Trojan Horse became seen as an example of "muscular liberalism," and its targeting of Muslims in the United Kingdom. This scandal entailed a letter sent anonymously to the British government about schools in Birmingham, accusing them of attempting to further an "Islamist ideology" by replacing non-Muslim teachers with Islamist teachers. As a result, 21 schools in the city were investigated by the state. The language employed in the report suggested linkages between conservative Islam in the United Kingdom and global terrorism, echoing a common trope about religious zealotry, even though no such agenda existed at all.

Both the self-classification processes of the first author's Muslim interlocutors and the classification processes engaged by state actors in London center on religion. Race is not entirely absent in these conversations but is notably marginal, when compared to religion, in articulations of Muslimness and Muslim distinction in British society. And yet race does matter for many British Muslims, particularly those from South Asia, the largest ethnic Muslim group in the United Kingdom, who experience differential treatment from both outside and inside of the Muslim community on the basis of not just religion, but also skin color, culture, and ethnic background. The meanings attached to this primacy of religion, however, contrast with each other fairly intensely. On the one hand, religion provides a positive identity able to transcend cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers between our interlocutors in the learning circle. On the other hand, Muslimness is seen as a problematic, even dangerous, category of belonging that might threaten British civic life. Many young British Muslims emphasize the primacy of their religious identity, perhaps partly as a challenge to their racialized marginalization.

Interestingly, comparisons with Jewish positionality or experiences of anti-Semitism did not come up in the ethnographic fieldwork or in interviews in London, as they did in Berlin. Although the East London Mosque stands in a historically Jewish neighborhood, close by once-Jewish bagel shops on Brick Lane and largely empty Jewish institutional spaces (the women's building of the mosque adjacent to the Fieldgate Street Great Synagogue, which ELM later acquired), none of the first author's interlocutors described their experiences as related to those of Jews. The only

rare reference to Jews was made vis-à-vis Judaism as a religion, specifically its intersections with Islam, such as shared Prophets and Biblical/Quranic narratives.

What do the differences between these cases mean? In both Germany and the United Kingdom, people classify themselves and others in a relational process that builds on cultural grammars and historical legacies. Self-classification processes can reflect racial and religious "projects" undertaken by state and societal institutions and/or can emerge as contestations of these larger processes. Formation hinges on society's self-perception and dominant master categories: in Germany, religion; in the United Kingdom, a combination of religion and race. These differences are important because they shape the experiences of Muslims, and the ways in which Muslims situate themselves. Just as race has become the master category for shaping difference and hierarchy in American society, so too has the essentialized Jewish experience become the framework for managing difference and hierarchy in Germany, making religion the master category. In the United Kingdom, the intersection of race and religion influences self-understandings of social positionalities, with race animated in state and academic classification processes in relation to both external Black and Jewish experiences, albeit in lived experiences largely through internal Muslim racial distinctions. And yet the question also remains as to what extent the logics of external classification, and thereby forms of distinction, are rooted in structures and processes of differentiation that stretch across national and also regional boundaries.

CONCLUSION

In *On the Muslim Question*, Norton (2013) posits that the "Jewish question" was the "axis" of political and ethical questions leading up to and during the European Enlightenment. She argues that the "Muslim question" has similarly become the "axis" of political and ethical questions in the West today. Nestled within the classification of Muslims in Europe are questions about national identities, inclusions, and exclusions. Norton (2013:228) argues that such stratification is a long-standing feature of Europe, producing a "knot" of difference where religion, race (and ethnicity, culture etc.) become intertwined. She writes, "I see the Muslim question as the Jewish question of our time: standing at the site where politics and ethics, philosophy and theology meet. This is the knot where the politics of class, sex, and sexuality, of culture, race, and ethnicity are entangled; the site where structures of hierarchy and subordination are anchored." If Germany is more focused on religion as its central master category of difference and the United States, as we know from the literature (e.g., Emirbayer and Desmond 2015; Omi and Winant 2014), is more focused on race, then the United Kingdom is somewhere between the two. This is not to deny that racism matters in Germany and affects Muslims in that context: It most certainly does. Our point is one of master categories, not total causation, and we argue that as master categories change, so too do how certain countries frame the nature of both Islam and Islamophobia.

As a counterpoint to our discussion of Germany and the United Kingdom, the United States is often understood paradigmatically through White supremacy and anti-Black racism, with race the master category that shapes the hierarchized society as a whole (Omi and Winant 2014). Muslims in the United States must make their way through America's colliding racial projects (Cainkar 2009; Cainkar and Selod 2018; Maghbouleh 2017), with special difficulty for Black Muslims (Guhin 2018; Husain 2019; Jackson 2005). Meanwhile, in Germany, Islam is understood via the historical experience of Jews, and in the United Kingdom—shaped both by Europe's history of anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism largely developed through colonial encounters—the story is somewhere in between these dominant paradigms of distinction (Beaman 2017; Gilroy 1987). Yet, as we hope to have shown, stepping outside of the U.S. context can show how race makes sense as the "master category" of the United States but, in some other contexts, religion serves as a similar kind of master category (Omi and Winant 2014:106).

These appeals to (master) categories of religion and race have been how the state, media, and Muslims themselves differently understand the category of Islam in two different countries. Yet, we also argue that our analysis is important beyond these two cases, and can help to illuminate the consequences of such classification processes in other European contexts, as well as the United States.[1] Like Beaman and Petts (2020), we propose that bringing Europe- and U.S.-based scholarship into conversation with one another can illuminate how race, religion, and other categories function in similar and/or differing ways across contexts. This includes scholarship that traces transnational linkages in how difference is experienced or imagined (for instance, Beaman 2017 and Go 2018).

Yet, there is another complication in any study of Islam that emphasizes race as a master category rather than religion, which is that it can overlook the *meaningfulness* of Islam to Muslims. Again, this is not to deny that Islam is racialized, especially in places likes the United States where race is a master category, and including in places like Germany, where racism and racialization have important effects. Yet as sociologists, we argue that academics should also take seriously Muslims' own religious self-classification, which "implies that it simply does not matter what Muslims believe or do or what kind of human beings they are" (Dagli 2020, np). As Dagli argues, that Islam is in fact *a religion* is often not taken seriously. For instance, we are struck by how sociologists of Muslims/Islam in Western societies tend to conceptualize religion in terms of religious markers like dress or names that have become imbued with racialized meanings, while paying less attention to other kinds of religious practices such as prayer and beliefs. This is in spite of research, for example, that of Karam (2020), which shows how for many (U.S.) Muslims, beliefs, and moral values define the content of being Muslim, rather than visual markers that many Muslims see as culturally bound (such as styles of dress or names).

Moreover, we suggest that it is telling that in addition to their obsession with the headscarf, Islamophobic actors and some state institutions across Europe and the United States also focus on beliefs and practices such as Shariah law, adherence to the idea of the caliphate, or supposed hostility to science and rationalism (Jones et al. 2018) as allegedly distinguishing Muslims (see Bowen 2016). Therefore, we would argue that while an awareness and critique of racialization is essential, scholars also need to consider religious identities, beliefs, and practices as constitutive of the category of "Muslim," both by Muslims themselves as well as those classifying Muslims from the outside. We are not making ontological arguments here about whether Islam is or is not best seen as racialized or religious across time and location. Instead, we are focusing on the problem of legibility and the way that salient categories of difference make it easier to see and recognize Islam in certain kinds of ways, for states and publics, for academic and journalists, and for Muslims themselves. That is, *religious formation*, in addition to racial formation (Omi and Winant 2014), has serious implications for creating and contesting boundaries to belonging in both Europe and the United States. Such religious formation is not exclusive to the Muslim case but could also be explored in sociological scholarship on other (racialized) religious groups in Europe, such as Sikh and Hindu minorities, facilitating a better understanding of the relationship between racialization and religion across contexts and groups.

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[1]In the United States, despite Islam's official categorization as a "religion" and not a "race," the category is increasingly *racialized*, which is to say it takes on characteristics of racial identity. Since 9/11, state agencies have targeted Muslims, particularly of Middle Eastern and Asian origin, for increased scrutiny. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the history of the United States as a racialized society (Bonilla-Silva 2021) in which people are divided into categories vis-à-vis assumed racial characteristics linked to skin color and other real or alleged phenotypical differences. Indeed, it could be argued that, in contrast to Europe, racial differences have often taken priority over religious differences in the United States, as many marginalized racial and ethnic communities are themselves Christian, the dominant religious group in the United States. More importantly, in their landmark study of racial formation, Omi and Winant (2014) famously argue that race and ethnicity are not interchangeable, and that racial formation in the United States is necessarily linked to anti-Black racism.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that for many of the first author's Muslim interlocuters, neither the master categories of religion nor race are central to their identity, but rather a practice that is itself a statement of belief: the *shahada*, that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is his prophet. This pillar, these Muslims would argue, is the cornerstone from which all else follows. Of course, it might not be sociologically relevant that many Muslims consider Islam more than simply a religion or the product of racialization. And indeed, our categories in this paper are the secular concepts of "religion" and "racialization." Yet, future work might follow in the direction of sociologist Mucahit Bilici (2012) to use Muslims' own theology as a means of understanding their categorization and meta-categorization, both by powerful external entities and by themselves.

<h1 style="text-align:center">References</h1>

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