American-Muslims and the Muted Debate on Internal Pluralism

Abstract

The rainbow of Muslim diversity in the US is continuously adding new colors, and the collective identity of American Muslims is evolving as their lives unfold within varied experiences. While diversity on the ground should ideally be matched with perceptual schemes for coordinating such diversity, the discourse on pluralism among American Muslims oscillates between two utopian visions: hygienic Islamic unity and hygienic Americanism.

In the case of Muslims, the paper envisions a *virtual moral community* that rises above minority centrism and ethnic politics, a community in which universality forms its perceptual framework, Islamic ethics constitute its organizing principles, and ethnicity acts as meaning and experience placeholder. Such imagined community would concurrently embrace American life and relish in hybrid cultural heritages.

Culture, in reference to the fate of minority groups, stands for a three-pronged generative resource that functions as: (1) a meaning system that coaches group members' motivation and the perception of their lived reality, furnishing an imaginative space of peoplehood; (2) a locus of connectedness that anchors individuals to social structure and coalesces groups' efforts toward collective goals; and (3) a conduit for crucial social information that fosters economically facilitative norms.

The paper proceeds to focus on the case of American Muslims and how crucial for them to appreciate their own internal diversity. After a brief discussion of post-911 assimilation pressures, the paper develops an integration model that is more consistent with the realities of the Muslim communities in the US.

I will only provide a brief note on the incorporation realities of the newer American Muslims.

It was suggested that, historically, the bases of communalism is the cross of religion and national origin. Herbeg and others suggest that later on nationality retreats and religion remain as the important base of communalism (McKay, 719). Mckay, Jame. 1985. "Religious Diversity and Ethinc Cohesion." International Migration Review 19:2, pp. 319 333.

For example, the early Christian Arabs, largely uneducated, reported the lowest levels of delinquency[1].

Furthermore, within-group qualitative comparison shows that those who enjoyed a high level of cultural maintenance faired better than those who did not. That might be a valid evidence specifically for the success of first-generation immigrants and their children, although that necessarily means that second-generation members received some doses of the parents' culture that would allow them later to develop hybrid cultures and confident identities. The impressive success of immigrant Muslims, coming from a various cultural backgrounds, provides multiple evidences on the positive effects of cultural maintenance.

Changing the assumptions is helpful here. Let us assume that a group with meager cultural and material resources achieved zero of cultural perpetuation. Could we expect better results? Obviously that is not the case because culture organizes the life of people, and cultural vacancy would trigger extreme levels of social failure.

It is no surprise then is that deviance among immigrant youth has a positive, not negative, association with the degree of assimilation[2].

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[1] Alexia Naff.. *Becoming American: the early Arab immigrant experience*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, pg. 291.

[2] Ref

Assimilation in the American Life

A quick historical synopsis of literature regarding assimilation clearly points to a modernist framework of thinking that is squarely Eurocentric. African and Native Americans were absent in Crèvecoeur's melting pot model. Even there were no Native Americans in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "new Europe.[1]" John Dewey and Jane Addams in the early 20th century were among the early voices who spoke against assimilation. Horace Kallen shifted the melting pot metaphor into an orchestra metaphor, but racial groups in his 1924 work on culture and democracy received only a marginal reference[2].

Formal theorizing in sociology carried the spirit of the aforementioned views. The once celebrated views of Robert Park[3] theorized for an irreversible process of assimilation punctuated with stages: contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation, although final assimilation might take a very long time. Such theorizing had some validity only in reference to Park's own ethnic group, Jews and the White Ethnics of east and southern Europe. It strikes our sensibility today how a University of Chicago eminent professor can consider the experience of African Americans, Indian Natives, and early Mexicans as "competition." Ironically, later writings on the Jewish people spoke of the "unassimable Jew"; the issue is still debatable until the present[4]. It was Milton Gordon that first delineated a formal theory of assimilation that contains two crucial conclusions: full assimilation is not inevitable, and the subprocesses of assimilation may occur at different rates. In his 1964 classic, *Assimilation in American Life*, Gordon identified seven processes of group adaptation to the host society, and most importantly was his distinction between cultural and structural assimilation[5]. Yet, Gordon's theory was an assimilation theory par excellence.

What is of concern here is that regardless of their theoretical soundness, assimilation was the theme and the presumption of almost all sociological writings. On

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[1] In 1845, Waldon wrote: "so in this continent—asylum of all nations—the energy of Irish… and all the European tribes—of the Africans, and of the Polynesians, will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages, or that which earlier emerged from Pelasgic and Etruscan barbarism."

[2] Ibid., pg.

[3] Robert Ezra Parks. *Race and Culture*. Free Press, 1950.

[4] For a brief short treatment, see Calvin Goldscheider, "Are American Jews Vanishing Again?" *Contexts*; Winter 2003.

[5] Milton Gordon. *Assimilation in the American Life* , 1964.

the other hand, the discourse on pluralism and multiculturalism, which gathered steam since the 1970s, mobilized the principle of social construction[1], remained controversial and suffered from haphazard relativism. Specific sociological theories from a non-assimilationist perspective did develop, but they tended to have a narrow focus. Most of these theories were about the economic behavior of immigrant ethnicities and how the economic choices they adopt or they are forced into affect their status in the society. The middleman minority theory of Blalock 1967 (later refined and critiqued by Bonacich, 1973[2]) studied a specific case of minority position, such as the Chinese in East Asia or Jews in Europe, and how their skills and the structure of opportunity in the host society allowed them to escape the society's lower rungs and to attain a midlevel status[3]. Subsequent theories went further in considering economics as the major determinants of the fate of minority groups, such as 1967 Bonacich's split-labor theory or 1979 Berrera's split-class theory[4]. Compared to these Marxist theories, 1992 Olzak extended a human ecology/rational choice perspective, which squarely focused on economic competition as the source of ethnic conflict[5]. Noel theory of contact situation presented a more expansive view of ethnic realities and tried to identify the features that lead to ethnic inequality[6]. The colonial model furthered the discussion on conflict. Wilson wrote on the realities of ghettos[7], and Blauner's internal colonialism theory widened the discussion to include the effects of the destruction of ethnic culture with a special focus on race[8].

It is obvious that the work on ethnic minorities generally lacked accounting for culture[9], let alone considering culture as an outlook or value orientation. Instead, the focus was on the economy-driven processes of marginalization. Writings from a

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[1] See for example Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 2nd ed. NY: Routledge, 1994.

[2] Ref

[3] Ref

[4] Ref

[5] Susan Olzak, "A Competition Model of Collective Action in American Cities," in *Competitive Ethnic Relations*, ed. Susan Olzak and Joane Nagel. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1986, pp. 17-46.

[6] Donald L. Noel, "A Theory of the Origin of Ethnic Stratification," in *Majority and Minority*, ed. Norman R. Yetman and C. Hoy Steele. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971.

[7] William J Wilson 1972. "Race Relations Models and Explanations of Ghetto Behavior" in Peter I Rose (ed.), *Nation of Nations.* New York: Random House.

[8] Robert Blauner. 1969. "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt". *Social Problems* 16. and Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*. NY: Harper & Row, 1972.

[9] Neglecting culture relates to the field of sociology largely divorcing culture, and anthropology becoming the field that is interested in culture.

pluralistic perspective did continue, however, they were mainly qualitative studies that celebrated the idiosyncratic aspects of ethnic lives. While celebrating the seemingly strange aspects of cultures presumably brings respect by popularizing them, they as well could become stereotyping and essentializing as they often fail to situate them in their natural cultural habitat. Reducing a culture to its outer manifestations necessarily ends up distorting them[1], and engaging the cultures of others solely at the level of cultural manifestation is a risky endeavor. I call this methodology *reductionist holism*.

On the practical level multiculturalism could be labeled as "bourgeoisie pluralism." Ultimately it is trivializing to others in its quest to adopt imported cultural items. It was well-said that we have turned Native Indians into living museums; the use of their mascots in sports is also illustrative of the glossy-but-empty, at times offensive, claims of commercial multiculturalism[2]. From our present, consider the dignity-stripping popular use of the terms guru and Mecca, turning one into a mere powerful figure and the other to a mere center. The fashion of joining in the fasting of Ramadan could lead to a hunger-exercise view of Muslim fasting, not a purifying worship. Similarly, Muslim lifestyle imbued with the morality of Islam becomes material for reality shows.

The conversation on multiculturalism ranges from wishful hippie-turned-yuppie talk to a sophisticated discourse rooted in relativism. The former could be labeled as hedonistic multiculturalism, driven by the quest to maximize pleasure in a poly-cultural orgy. The more serious discourse on multiculturalism espouses *absolute* relativism. At this far end of the continuum we can locate nihilistic postmodernism, creatively destructing cultures, any culture. Its aversion to holism and stable meanings drives cultures into the abyss of nothingness. Indeed, the very idea of respecting the other becomes empty if the other and its culture are mere illusions. Even if a relativism-powered multiculturalism does not go postmodern, its secular liberal presumptions make

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[1] Take the example of a well-known anthropologist who tried to understand the norm of personal space among Arabs. He characterized it in terms of the importance of smelling the breath and odder of others, ending up stigmatizing what he meant to understand. Certainly Geertz's warning is in place here: "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions for better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape." Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*. NY: Basic Books, 1973, p 20.

[2] Ref

it unfit in accounting for the cultures of others, invariably rooted in religious views. How could it genuinely respect something that it considers a mere myth, usually associated with oppression? How could secular liberalism do justice to what it once rebelled against, and is still rebelling against with no much reason? That liberal multiculturalism often ends up infantilizing or denigrating what it claims to bring respect to should not be surprising[1]. Writings that can be described as wishful multiculturalism can be contrasted to two kinds of critique. The first is a serious critique troubled with failing to consider the wider role of culture in human life[2], and the overlooking the dynamics that engulf cultural groups trying to coexist in modern societies[3]. The second kind of critique is xenophobic, understandably so among the populist, and regrettably in the establishment-connected academy[4], where the melting pot metaphor shifts to tomato soup in which Anglo-Saxon culture forms its base while the others are relegated to "spices[5]." The irony is that the idea and practice of multiculturalism are connected to industrial-democracies, societies that are increasingly becoming nervous from non-European elements in their countries. Ironically, the extreme version of liberal pluralism adopting an absolute level of relativism ends up infringing on the lived culture of the majority, leaving nobody happy[6].

In sum, we can speak of American diversity more so than American pluralism. Academicians in the fields of language call the United States as a graveyard of languages; it is also a graveyard of cultures. To the extent pluralism existed in the US, it was largely market-driven. *Capitalistic pluralism* distorts cultures, recasting them according to its fetish internal logic, fixated at appropriating cultural items and accommodating consumer

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[1] Consider here, as an example, the London based library that initiated a "Rent-a-Client" program as an antidote experience for those who are not comfortable with marginal groups. This program gave the choice of renting a Sikh, a Muslim, or a homosexual. NPR News, 2009.

[2] See Stephan Steinberg. 1991 3rd ed. *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*. Beacon Press.

[3] Neil Smelser and Jeffrey Alexander, eds. *Diversity and Its Discontents: Cultural Conflict and Common Ground in Contemporary American Society*.

[4] C.f. Samuel Huntington. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. 2005.

[5] See a very interesting radio conversation on the subject between Samuel Huntington and Alan Wolfe, NPR, 10/8/2004.

[6] Commenting on the internal contradictions in the discussion on democracy and human rights is beyond this paper. However, it should be noted here that the logic of the paper acknowledges the specificity of what may be referred to as White culture or European cultures. The logic of the paper views it natural for cultural groupings to carve a space of their own.

preferences for profit-making. Is it not an irony that Americans love Chinese food but stereotype their communities, consume Hispanic sandwiches but resist bilingual education? The voices of pluralism were always there, but liberal pluralism lacked a vision compatible with an important foundation of American society, the communal/republic foundation. Furthermore, softhearted liberalism frequently failed to comprehend the outlooks of other cultures. This, in turn, triggers a nativist reaction, only to chase populist pluralism to barricade itself. Describing American pluralism as shallow begs the question of why thick, collective pluralism is desirable, a theme that the next section discusses.

Incorporation and the Means of Consumption

The talk on the incorporation of Muslims is usually addressed to what referred to as immigrant Muslims, although the integration of African American Muslims is neither complete nor unproblematic. Public discussion about the incorporation of immigrant Muslims came to the fore after 911, and the terms of their integration became subject to negotiation in a not-so-friendly atmosphere. It can be asserted that the gradual and reflective process of integration of immigrant Muslims before 911 was slow but sure. Once we are reminded that the process of integration is not a mechanical one, it could be argued with confidence that the gradual growth of the modalities of integration is better for both the host society and the newcomers. For reluctant groups that are wrapped in their small ethnic worlds, assimilation shocks convince them for more protective insulation and can produce fissures that destabilize their communities. Forced incorporation is not integration. Speaking of integration is only meaningful when the specific characteristics of ethnic and minority groups are taken into consideration. The paper has already identified the relevant factors to the type of integration, such as cultural capital, social capital, economic potential, and political power, as well as size and concentration. Ultimately, the passage of time and the accumulation of experiences mediate all integration processes. Specifically, three types of experiences are worthy of mention in the case of immigrant groups: work success, punctuated memories (pleasant and unpleasant), and the internal negotiation between immigrant parents and their American-born children.

One would comfortably argue that careerism was and still is the crucial factor in shaping the integration patterns of immigrant Muslims. It is through work-related activities that immigrants get wider exposure to the society and adjust their behavior. In particular, financial success is a potent force that encourages assimilation. Furthermore, professional identities in the US occupy a central place in its culture[1], and for immigrants it appears to be a neutral identity that leaves enough degrees of freedom for ethnic and local identification. That is especially true since modern work operates in a space totally detached from the private sphere. Extensive participation in civic activities, especially

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Muslim public affairs institutions, is another potent force that encourages assimilation, but among immigrant groups, only few members usually afford to participate at such level.

We can add to above a crucial factor, pervasive but forgotten—owning the means of consumption[1]. Indeed, what is missing of most discussions about immigrant Muslims is that they operate under the forces of capitalism in which control shifted from the means of production to the means of consumption. The success in work brings with it higher capacity to consume, and consumption is a tacit force that compels conformity. To the extent the allegation that immigrant Muslims harbor a disdaining attitude toward others is true, in such a behavior they are just being too good Americans responding to the sirens of commodification, and capitalist commodification has a race, not simply class, implications. Among immigrants, the lack of race consciousness and of the recognition of historical racial oppression is a reflection of the success of capitalist America in convincing newcomers about its democratic fairness. I suggest that there is evidence that the issue of race has started to carve a cognitive space in the minds of first-generation immigrant Muslims, probably as a reaction to international affairs associated with post-911 local experiences. In contrast, second-generation immigrants experience the implications of race at a more local level[2].

It should be made clear here that the use of the term ghetto, or its derivations, in describing the immigrant part of the American-Muslim experience is erroneous. Many immigrant Muslim communities did even not develop demarcated enclaves. The Yemenites of Dearborn might be the only exception, and they are slowly moving out of this mode. Albanians in Saint Louis formed a loose and open enclave, so did the Palestinians of Orange County, California. Somalis in Minnesota, though, might be going though a process of enclave forming. The enclave arrangement does not point to a fix type of integration and could be a positive or a negative arrangement. In fact, several ethnic groups made it through an enclave strategy. The point is that the use of the term

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[1] Ritzer coined the term "means of consumption," modifying Marx. George Ritzer. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Pine Forge, 2005.

[2] It is interesting to note that although black immigrant Muslims face the consequences of their color, their racial attitudes align less with black Americans and more immigrant Muslims. That lends further evidence on the relevance of the dynamics that this paper identified.

"ghetto" in the vocabulary of critics could be only be valid as a metaphor, not a as sociological characterization of reality.

The experiences that a minority group faces in its relationship with the majority society highly condition their attitude toward incorporation. It is pleasant experiences that encourage healthy integration, a common-sense often forgotten notion. While the pressures associated with 911 have led some immigrant Muslims to reassess their place in the wider society, there is no evidence that 911 was an integration threshold for the overwhelming majority of immigrants. Empirical studies could shed more light on the point, and the late surveys that highlighted the middle-classness of American Muslims do not have comparative data to speak on this matter. Common observation suggests that, except for some rhetoric, there was no major change in the behavior or activities of most mosques. That should be of no surprise since mosques are community centers totally occupied with mundane communal concerns, whether they are religious matters, educating the young, or socialization activities. The only observable change that could be considered positive was the cessation of alienated messages within the mosques. The atmosphere after 911 legitimizes discrediting isolationist tendencies among some immigrants, and paved the way for an assimilationist discourse to rise, championed by "America first" individuals. The background of those individuals includes all the ethnic variation of American Muslims: white American Muslims, African American Muslims, and second-generation as well as first-generation immigrant Muslims. Newspaper and blogs suggest that such individuals are driven by two strong feelings: immigrants are unfit for managing the post-911 environment, and being bored with immigrants' idolization of their ethnic culture. Depending on how the post-911 pressures are internalized, they might help or hinder the incorporation of immigrant Muslims, and for some such pressures might not amount to more than challenges of the *external* environment that do not distract them much from day-to-day communal concerns.

Lastly, it is the children of immigrants who are the big integration teachers. As parents are keen to have their children succeed in a new environment that they might not completely comprehend, they go into a process of child-led socialization of parents. Such informal education mechanism is effective because it is gradual, because it takes place in

natural settings, because it is voluntary, and because it is has emotive quality in longing for their children's success.

The discussion here necessarily focused on the immigrant wing of American Muslims since most talk is raised about their incorporation. Reflecting on the experience of African American Muslims is highly constructive since the problematic of integration was a staple in their lives. However, such experience does not point to one answer. As a social movement, the integration strategy of African-American Muslims was that of a degree of separatism and then tilted toward differentiated coexistence. Until now, African American Muslims gravitate to different ways of interfacing with the larger society, and some of these ways may have degrees of specificity related to the very experience of blacks in the US.

The discussion so far established that the well-being of ethnic groups is associated with the type of their cultural perpetuation, and that cultural perpetuation could be advantageous not only for them but for the host society itself. Then the paper noted that regardless of the outcome of post-911 assimilation pressures, the more potent factors in immigrant Muslim incorporation are the success of their careers and engagement with the realities of their growing children. It is now appropriate to discuss two models of pluralism, the one that is dominant in American thinking but which did not deliver, and an alternative to it. I would argue that the alternative model is specifically a better fit with Muslim experience and aspirations.

Models of Pluralism: Individual vs. Communal

The discussion so far argued (1) that ethnicity is part of human existence, continuous but malleable; (2) that meaningful pluralism should speak of the upper ends of culture, not simply folkways; (3) that the wellbeing of minority groups is often associated with cultural resilience; and (4) that positive experiences, career success, and children are subtle and natural agents of integration. It is appropriate now to discuss the formal characteristics of the prevailing model of pluralism in contrast to an alternative model that minority and ethnic groups' incorporation in our contemporary late-modernity societies.

First, we can speak of a process of global *pre-assimilation* factors. Ethnic studies have largely discredited assimilationist arguments; however, some argue that, in reality, assimilation is taking place. What is missing here is that American cultural patterns have become familiar for large segments of people around the world. It is very hard to find somebody who immigrate to the US and has no idea whatsoever about its culture. We can here speak of two processes, a process of pre-assimilation and of anticipatory assimilation. That is, some immigrants have already adopted some aspects of American culture, and in anticipation of living in the US some immigrants have an image of what they will do when living in the US. That does not mean that such immigrants will not face a measure of cultural shock when they commence immigration and firsthand experience "America," but it means that some immigrants have already decided on what to assimilate into and what to reject. Pre-immigration cultural class is a highly relevant factor here[1]. For a good segment of recent immigrants, they already understand and speak English, are very familiar with American pop culture, and are also familiar with the daily rhythm of modern life. In the language of the average person, many immigrants have decided on the "good things" in America that they would embrace and the "bad things" that they are determined to reject. That does not mean that the actual behavior of such people once they reach the US would perfectly match their imaginations. What it means is that the negotiation with the American culture has already begun[2].

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[1] See Reader. Muslim anecdotes tell about the pre-immigration imagination of young people toward marriage choices, what to do with *hijab*, socialization with "Americans," etc.

[2] See Healey 411-412 or Survey Pew about value

Second, literature speaks of *segmented assimilation*. Ethnic groups are internally fragmented along the lines of generation, social class, ancestry, and identity. For example, there is no one kind of Latinos in the US. There are the pre-1900 original residents, and the newer immigrants; there are those who are general labor and those who are skilled; you have whole families that immigrate, wife comes first, husband come first, single male, and single female immigrants. The patterns of integration of those people differ[1]. The theory of segmented assimilation is well established in sociological literature, and empirical studies show that there is no one single path or stage when it comes to incorporating different ethnics. In the US, some are pushed into the middle class based on their human capital and entrepreneurial skills, but others become "redundant labor" and form alternative subculture at the margins, yet others mutate into transcontinental migrants. Furthermore, pre-immigration family resources and ethnic community resources in the US are crucial factors affecting the position of ethnic members.

Third, the American context in which the members of an ethnic group entered is crucial. Literature shows that ethnic groups are affected by the type of government's receipt they face: neutral, such as some economic migrants; not neutral, such as low-skilled labor or refugees. The receipt by the society is also crucial, which goes along race perception as well as the perception of legal/illegal status. Lastly, the receipt immigrants experience from the co-ethnic community in the host society is crucial as it functions as shock cushion and cite for interpretable incorporation[2].

Fourth, globalism has allowed for a new kind of immigrants—transnationals. Many new arrivals, armed with their modern skills, are connected to well-established employment and educational networks that span the sending and the receiving countries. Transnational migrants are typically highly familiar with US culture and have already shopped from the cultural hypermarket of modernity and customized a comfortable outfit for themselves. Their eagerness to contribute back to the home country could have altruistic as well as self-interest motives. The phenomenon of transnational migrants is

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[1] Perrete

[2] Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530, Interminority Affairs in the U. S.: Pluralism at the Crossroads, November, 1993:74-96.

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specifically well observed among whose sending country has a serious national project playing on the international theater, such those from India and China. Some communities may develop ultra-nationalist tendencies, as it has been reported about some Hindu Indians[1]; that is a far cry from the classical assimilation talk. Transnational migrants are typically conscious of two social ladders that they climb, one at home and one in the new country, and their status may fluctuate in each of those two cites. Such dynamics are not simply driven by personal cultural preferences and economic interests. Rather, some nations became significantly dependent on the remittances that transnational immigrants send to their home country, and therefore, such countries became supportive of "long-distance citizenship" and eager to interfere on behalf of their citizens. The Paraguay serves as one example; the example of Mexico is specifically interesting as it issued a special consular ID cards for Mexican emigrants to the US[2]. It might be argued that the majority of ethnic community members are not transnational migrants. Nevertheless, multiple belonging in late-modernity has become more sustainable, and non-transnational immigrants might exhibit some of the same qualities of transnational migrants[3]. They belong to both societies at the same time exhibiting a nuanced pattern of integration.

If pure assimilationist arguments are now out-of-touch and shortsighted, and if historical assimilation patterns are not structurally supportable anymore, what should be the alternative? What model of pluralism would be preferable to Muslims, and which one corresponds to their cultural Islamic ideals?

Myrdal's classical "American dilemma" is still with us to day. One only needs to be reminded that no ethnic group is contended with the US type of pluralism, neither the majority nor the four nonwhite historical minorities; more recent immigrant groups too are not that happy on this issue. Wisdom as well as common sense dictates that we should move beyond ceremonial pluralism that feels good but leaves no one satisfied. Ethnic and

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[1] "Class, Race, and Success: Two Generations of Indian Americans Confront the American Dream." Lessinger.

[2] "Salsa and Ketchup: Transnational Migrants Straddle Two Worlds. Class, Race, and Success: Two Generations of Indian Americans Confront the American Dream," Lessinger.

[3] It was hoped that the book *Transnational Muslims in American Society*, by Amina Beverly McCloud, shed more light on the experience of Muslim experience. However, the book used the term "transnational" but did not engage in what such term entails. Sociologically, the discussion of the book stayed close to an old assimilationist view.

race tensions in the US are in the air awaiting a friction point to flare. Indeed they erupt on daily basis although recently no conditions have coalesced for a society-wide eruption. What constitutes an adequate answer to the American diversity dilemma? The writings of academics and intellectuals point to a wide variety of exits: the recovery of the increasingly disappearing social capital, the rejuvenation of civic consciousness, the return to Western classical sources, and the awakening of the Christian ethics of this country. Obviously, the reconciliation of those various visions, some of which are diametrically oppositional, is impossible. The paper will not venture in those grand visions; rather, it will briefly point to an alternative model of pluralism suggested by an old authority in the field.

Milton Gordon who authored the most robust theory about assimilation in 1964 came back in 1981 to speak of a "second American dilemma" the dilemma between what he called "liberal pluralism" and "corporate pluralism.[1]" According to Gordon, these two models of pluralism differ on six dimensions. First, legal recognition and the approval of differential treatment of different groups are not formally recognized in the liberal model, while minority and ethnic entities are part of the corporate model. Second, individual meritocracy and equality of opportunity is the working schemes for equality in the former model, while group rewards and equality of condition is on the mind of the latter. Third, structural separation in liberal pluralism model is dictated by the free market, while the logic of rewards in the corporate model is conducive to within-group aggregation of power and interest. Fourth, cultural heritages are ignored in one while celebrated in the other. Fifth, area exclusivism is legally forbidden in one and possible in the other. Sixth, institutional monolingulism is practically pursued by the liberal model of pluralism while multilingualism is embraced by corporate pluralism.

One can easily observe that the corporate model is more compatible with Muslim vision and aspirations. But does that matter? What really matters is if that model is compatible with US realities, one would note. However, the US system is also known for its flexibility, and the American culture is highly adaptable; and the sooner a system responds and accommodates change, the better off it is. Anyway ethnic and cultural

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[1] Milton M. Gordon. "Models of Plura1ism." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 454:178-188, l981.

groups are already moving (a little) in the direction of a corporate model. Yet, Gordon's corporate model, in its entirety, is too much Canadian-like and might not be supportable in the US. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the US can customize its own corporate model in a way compatible with its system, if it wants to seriously deal with the increased polarization of ethnic and racial groups.

Conclusion

So long as the issues of minority and ethnic group incorporation are considered zero-sum situations, one would not expect to reach a realistic understanding of those issues and the end result benefits neither party. The paper is not unaware of maladaption or social decadence observed among some minority groups, including immigrant Muslims. Such cases serve as a vindication of the article's argument: US assimilation pressures are likely to corrupt ethnic communities, and searching for alternative integration visions are necessary. It is no coincidence that the relative success of new American communities is coupled by a reflective integration attitude. Deliberative integration is not simply a Muslim quest, but a general trend among most recent ethnic groups that receive new members, though there are significant exceptions. More interestingly, some older ethnicities whose members have almost been completely assimilated are trying to pickup the pieces and recover some of their ethnic past. The classical ideology of assimilation as something good for America did not work well in the past, and has weaker basis to work well in the future.

A type of communal pluralism has to be acknowledged in the US, and the currently system is lagging behind the realities of many ethnic groups, including some Caucasian groups. It is one thing to be allowed to form own communities with own subcultures, and to understand the other—those two aims are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, it could be argued that once comfortable in the safety of own community, people would have the courage of bridging. That would be an alternative to the competitive racial and ethnic model within which the US society operates.

The implication of such an understanding is that American Muslims need to accept their own internal diversity. If cultural resilience is highly crucial for the well-being of ethnic groups, as the ample evidence shows, the current American Muslim

discourse on the matter is neither enlightening nor realistic. Devaluing ethnic experiences and cultures is not helpful and does not lead to one imagined single Muslim group of an ideal *true* American culture. The subcultures immigrant Muslim communities developing *are* genuinely American. American Muslims are diverse, and the challenge is to appreciate such diversity. Simply, human beings cannot assimilate into circumstances that they did not experience.

Saying that, immigrant Muslims do lack deep understanding of the societal context in which their African American Muslim brethrens experience. To the extent that the plight of African Americans and their contributions are fuzzy in the consciousness of immigrant Muslims, it is because the American culture and its system are effective in concealing such aspects. Immigrant Muslims share the conditions of other successful ethnics—they became too good Americans, and there are systematic factors that prevent immigrants (and non-immigrants) from comprehending the problematic of race in the US. Unfortunate as it is, the issue goes beyond simple prejudice or disdain. Barriers to understanding is systematically produced and has relationship to the structure of opportunity in the US, neighborhood segregation, the media, and even the educational system that does not much enlighten students about race and ethnic realities. These factors operate above and beyond individuals. Therefore, the language of blame is not helpful here. One should be reminded that even middle-class blacks find themselves in a peculiar situation in terms of their relationship with the larger black community, and sociology, the assumed bastion of understanding, is still to formally incorporate the contributions of the Black noted scholar, Du Bios.

Moreover, immigrant Muslims are correctly cognizant of their lack of necessary skills for helping African American Muslims. To the extent that they harbor a disdaining attitude, it is a class-based attitude—the well-off immigrant Islamic centers do not help much the poorer ones, although they have much more tacit knowledge that qualifies them to help. This is not to absolve from responsibility but to account for relevant explanatory factors.

Again, urban planning that created class insulated neighborhood is one culprit that should be accounted for. The phenomenon of isolated urban centers in which blacks in

particular pay a high price is well established in academic research[1], and what Robert Riche coined "the secession of the successful" is related to the capitalist structuring of opportunities, which although has racial consequences it cannot be reduced to racism since it is expected from all race and ethnic groups members. Another important sociological factor that should not be overlooked in explaining American Muslim behavior is the patterns of association. As Milton Gordon has longtime observed, contacts in modern societies, especially capitalist democracies, usually take place along what he called *ethclass*. Most contacts occur within one's ethnic group and social class.

A third crucial factor is customarily overlooked—the very realty of immigration. What is referred to as voluntary immigration is largely driven by economic factors. There is here a process of self-selection where immigrants are expected to be entrepreneurially seasoned. Focusing on financial successes in America is just natural. It is natural not only because it is something very American, but also because going back to the country of origin with signs of financial failure is utterly humiliating. It should be pointed here that the financial success of immigrant Muslims is often exaggerated. Surveys show that immigrant Muslims are more represented in the upper income brackets than native born, but they are also heavily represented in the lowest bracket[2].

Moreover, discussions tend to forget that uprooting oneself from homeland is not a touristic experience, even if done with enthusiasm by a middle-class person. The immigration experience is mortifying as it throws the person to a zero point on the social landscape, in terms of emotional support, connections, status, and many other social stuff of normal life that people take for granted. For those who do not know English well, they feel that they regressed to a child-like babbling stage.

The case of Inner-city Action Network (IMAN) in Chicago serves a good illustration. In race-ethnic demarcated Chicago, the neighborhood womb of the Sixty-Third Street that nurtured the sensibilities of African American, Latino, and Arab young people formed the structural basis for the phenomenon of IMAN. Every social action has a hero, but the hero of this story could not have become the protagonist of IMAN should

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[1] See Wilson's classic argument. See also the response of…
[2] Ref Pew

he has not been situated in such neighborhood, mentored by African American professors, and experienced prejudice because of his ethnic identification. His own biography as a young Palestinian is not irrelevant to his present awareness of injustice, even if he repulsed Palestinian nationalist activism in the US[1]. The donations this IMAN project received from well-off immigrant Muslims also speaks to the point mentioned above—immigrant Muslims generally lack the social skills to support African Americans, and they would help, at least partially, when trusting a project. The story of the *ummah* clinic in Los Angles speaks to the same issue.

As the Muslim community in the US is experiencing multitude of changes—because of generational shift, global economic factors, and governmental actions—some enthusiastic-frustrated voices slipped into assimilationist logic. This is unhelpful, at odds with global realities, and only aggravates what such voices are frustrated from. Similarly, grievance projection is not constructive, and immigrants can claim a long list of grievances that were behind their "voluntary" migration. Ironically, immigrant Muslims are subjected to similar tactics used against the organized left and Blacks, whether it is in the construction of oppressed Muslim women suffering under Arab and South Asian patriarchic control, or in the construction of the dangerous immigrant Muslim male. After successfully disciplining the left and the token celebration of African Americans, the last thing America would like to hear is a new generation of American (Muslims) raising moral post-colonial claims.

Reminding ourselves that human beings are cultural beings, the question on immigrants' quest to maintain own culture should come under a different light. The simplistic, strange, and artificial attitude is that which gets puzzled by the tendency toward cultural perpetuation, and it is certainly a boastful modernist attitude. Furthermore, if cultures are humanity's heritage, who has the right to trash part of it? It goes without saying, that immigrant Muslims lack knowledge of the struggle of African American Muslims, and that teaching their history should enter the curricula of all masjids and Islamic schools. Blacks should have pride in their heritage, and that what they fought and still fighting for too. Minding that there is fundamental difference

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[1] See Geneive Abdo. "Taking it to the Street."

between nationalistic pride and pride in heritage, what wisdom dictates robbing immigrant Muslims from their pride in their heritage.

The challenge of American Muslims is to recognize and accept their internal diversity as we are witnessing the formation of four Muslim cultures: African American Muslim culture, White American Muslim culture, the children of immigrants American Muslim culture, and fresh-off-the plane American Muslim culture. The beauty of this rich cultural formation lies in that Muslim cultures do not stand for closed categories; rather they fissure, overlap, and coalesce along other social and religious dimensions. I claim that vision of this paper is compatible with the Muslim historical experience as well as the Quranic vision of pluralism—a topic that discussed in a separate paper.

If biography is part what an author or researcher produces, let me conclude with a word on my biography. I have been accused of being Americanized from my first year in the US. In a sense, this paper disciplines my own potential of prejudice—I have weak contacts with my co-ethnics, and I wish they change a lot of things in their lives. But I am an academician who follows evidence. Immigrant Muslims exhibits properties similar to other immigrant groups, although not without pointed Muslim exceptionalism. It is the comparative sociological methods that drove the paper's conclusions, against my own intellectual elitism.