

## African American Muslims under Barack Obama's Post-black Politics



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### Abstract

The election of Barack Obama was an unprecedented event that triggered scholarly research and excited cultural and racial critics about the factors that contributed to the election of an African American president. "Post-blackness" is a philosophy that intends to explain the complexities of Obama's personality as well as signals the end of traditional blackness in favor of a more fluid and boundless black identity that Obama personifies. This identity relies on multilingualism that rejects black authenticity and rejects historical ties to the cultural trauma that held back the African American community. This article offers a qualitative analysis of Barack Obama's Post-black politics which were characterized by deracialization, neutrality and inclusivity but did not achieve the expected impact on the Muslim African American community. Moreover, Obama's attitude towards Islam in America did not reflect a Post-black policy of racial justice; rather, it held the position of the previous administration, both in terms of domestic and foreign affairs. Obama's Post-black aesthetic did not impact his political agenda, which led to the general deception of both Sunni and unorthodox Black American Muslims.

### Keywords

African American Islam;  
Blackness;  
Nation of Islam;  
Post-black;  
Racial Identity.

### الكلمات المفتاحية

الإسلام الإفريقي الأمريكي  
السود؛  
حركة أمة الإسلام؛  
ما بعد السود؛  
الهوية العرقية.

### المسلمون أمريكيون من أصل أفريقي في ظل سياسة ما بعد السود لباراك أوباما ملخص

كان انتخاب باراك أوباما حدثاً لم يسبق له مثيل أثار الأبحاث العلمية والناقدين الثقافيين والعرقين المتحمسين حول العوامل التي ساهمت في انتخاب رئيس أمريكي أفريقي. إن فلسفة "ما بعد السود" هي فلسفة تهدف إلى تفسير تعقيدات شخصية أوباما وكذلك تشير إلى نهاية السود التقليدي لصالح هوية سوداء أكثر سلاسة ولا حدود لها والتي تتجسد في أوباما. وتعتمد هذه الهوية على تعدد الغوي الذي يرفض الأصالة السوداء ويرفض الروابط التاريخية مع الصدمة الثقافية التي أعاق المجتمع الأمريكي الأفريقي. يقدم هذا المقال تحليلاً نوعياً لسياسة ما بعد السود التي انتهجها باراك أوباما والتي اتسمت بإزالة العنصرية والحياد والشمولية ولكنها لم تحقق الأثر المتوقع على المجتمع الأمريكي الإسلامي الأفريقي. فضلاً عن ذلك، فإن موقف أوباما من الإسلام في أميركا لم يعكس سياسة العدالة العنصرية؛ بل كان بدلاً من ذلك يحمل موقف الإدارة السابقة، من حيث الشؤون الداخلية والخارجية على حد سواء. لم يؤثر أسلوب أوباما في مرحلة ما بعد السود على أجندته السياسية، الأمر الذي أدى إلى الخداع العام للمسلمين الأمريكيين السود السنة وغير التقليديين.

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## Introduction :

Islam appeared in the 7th century, and as has been the case with Christianity, it underwent transformations throughout its worldwide spread. Several studies have focused on examining the extent to which Islam has been culturally adapted and how Islam demonstrates adaptability in several circumstances (Tsai, 2013; Stephenson, 2009). As it adapts to different cultural contexts, these various versions of Islam which are often unacknowledged by the majority of Sunni practitioners appear as is the case with Sufism and its mysticism. The cultural merging of Islam and indigenous ethnic characteristics is tackled by Van Nieuwkerk (2018) in *Moving In and Out of Islam*, in which she analyzes the cultural transformations of people who embrace Islam in various European countries. She says, "... converts interpret Islamic sources and virtues through cultural filters, so the pre-conversion cultural context is extremely important" (p.113). In other words, people who were not born Muslim and convert to Islam do not undergo a major cultural Islamic metamorphosis; rather, they must blend their native cultural values into their new spiritual life, which cannot constitute a drastic alteration in Islamic terms. African American Islam is an example of these adaptive mechanisms.

African American Islam results from complex historical, racial and ethnographic factors that contributed to its evolution and distinguishability within the Muslim world (Diamant, 2015). It is necessary to expose the historical development of Black Islam in order to highlight the differences in conceptualizing black identity through both unorthodox Islam and mainstream Sunni Islam. Slavery and Islam, for instance, have historical connections that played an important role in the rebirth of Islam among black Americans and the rise of Black Nationalism. The latter strengthened the relationship between blackness and Islam, especially through the political and religious activism of the Nation of Islam (NOI) (Jeffries, 2019).

In contemporary times, a philosophy called "Post-black" emerged as the latest reinterpretation of black identity and an attempt at subjugating traditional blackness. Introduced at the beginning of the 21st century, "Post-blackness" addresses the need to perform a liberated blackness that would eventually heal the upcoming generations from the past collective trauma of racism. The concept of "Post-black" has been later linked to the former President Barack Obama, who is considered a "proto-African American," and the success of blackness without falling into old stereotypes. Through a qualitative analysis, this article seeks to show how Obama's "Post-black" attitude influenced his political decisions, which, in turn, impacted the complex racial and religious identity of Muslim African Americans. It will also highlight Obama's centrist and politically deracialized measures that were supposed to espouse the rehabilitation of Muslims in America but ended up being damaging for the articulation of their full potential as American citizens. This work will also expose the attitude of the Black Nationalist organization, the Nation of Islam (NOI), towards the openness of Obama's decisions, as well as the reason why the organization participated in political media propaganda for the benefit of Obama's election.

### I.1. African American Islam: Diverging Attitudes on Black Identity and Leadership

Islam entered the history of the United States as a nation very early. Thanks to the slave trade with western Africa, an unprecise number of Muslim Africans were among the early arrivals in the New World. Historical and archaeological proofs have shown that the slave population that existed throughout the north of America was both ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. In his article "Muslims in Early America," Gomez (1994) explores that point and exposes how Muslim slaves in colonial America were highly recognized by their skills, such as literacy and piety (p.692, p.703). Ayuba Sulayman and Oma Ibn Said, two notable examples of antebellum Islam in America, offer the world two perfect insights into how Muslim slaves distinguished themselves from the rest of the slave population due to their deeply rooted affiliation to Islam and Islamic traditions.

Islam remained present throughout the centuries, but it underwent an unprecedented transformation with the rise of Black Nationalism in the late nineteenth century. The link between the emergence of Black Nationalism and Islam has long been obscured, but it is necessary to note that thanks to the Pan-Africanist Edward Blyden, Islam was reintroduced to the African American consciousness, as Simmons (2006) highlights in her article "African American Islam as an Expression of Converts' Religious Faiths and Nationalist Dreams and Ambitions". Although he never converted to Islam, Blyden was highly fascinated by the assembling effect of this religion during his visits to Liberia and Sierra Leon. Simmons (2006) explains that he "...was favorably impressed by the level of learning and unity among African Muslims. He also admired the social and political organization of these communities, which he attributed to Islam." (p.176). This close connection between Black Nationalism and Islam paved the way for future Islamic black American religious movements, which flourished during the 1920s and will enroll a large number of African Americans. This time period, according to Chande's (2008) analysis, is distinguished by the prevalence of "Black Religion," which is defined as a confluence of several faith practices through which the black community sought self-improvement. (p.223). "Proto-Islam," coined by Chande, is a reference to the Islam preached by the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam (NOI), which represent not only a creolized Islam in the Afro-American context but also a politicized Islam blended with Black Nationalism as well.

### I. 2. Organized Black Islamic Nationalism

The Moorish Science Temple and the NOI were similar movements because their Islamic rhetoric aimed at empowering black people and glorifying their racial origins (Woodward, 2020; Clark, 2013). Berg (2005), in his article "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context: The Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims", states that Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad, the leaders of the two movements,

respectively, relied on mythmaking and reinterpretations of history to teach African Americans about their stripped-original identity. As an example, Noble Drew Ali believed that African Americans were "Asiatics" and Moors, with biblical origins descending from Noah's son Ham, and that the reason for their enslavement was due to their acceptance of the label "Negro", allowing the whites to put them into servitude (p.689-690). Similarly, Elijah Muhammad and his predecessor and founder of the NOI, Wallace Fard Muhammad, used their pseudo-prophecy and historical misinformation to reinforce the idea of racial division and hatred towards Caucasians. In its core, the NOI has doctrinally few Islamic elements in it because it incorporated mythical and ideological beliefs that are in complete opposition to mainstream Islamic principles, as Sahib (1995) illustrates: "They have acquired some of the aspects of Islam after they have ethnicized some of them and distorted the others to fit their mythical beliefs and ideology. Allah is Mr. W. D. Fard; Prophet Mohammed did not originate Islam because Islam was before him; it was the religion of the original man" (p.41).

Nevertheless, the cultural identity of African American Muslims during the leadership of Elijah Muhammad underwent many changes with the adoption of the Islamic lifestyle regulated by prayers, reading the Qur'an, and the avoidance of forbidden activities such as eating pork or gambling (Ohm, 2003). The NOI nurtured a Black Muslim identity that empowered individuals at expressing an unprecedented positivity over the articulation of their "true selves" under the guidance of Islam. In the 1950s, the NOI issued a booklet entitled *Muslim Daily Prayer* that encouraged its followers to have not only an Islamic identity through learning Arabic and performing Islamic rituals, but also to maintain and develop a Western education (Rashad, 1995). In other words, as Barnett (2006) argues, the Millenarian beliefs of the NOI gave Black Muslim identity the necessary strength to get away from the inferiority complex it suffered from for centuries, thus putting an end to "the vicious cycle of false identity and self-hatred" (p.874).

Following World War II, these proto-Islamic movements did not continue to be the sole source of Islam, and as a result of the decolonization era, African American Muslims gained a better understanding of the true Islamic faith that resulted from the connections they made with many people from countries where Islam was the dominant religion. Moreover, as Curtis (2007) explains: "More and more persons in the African American diaspora identified Islam and Muslims as potential allies in the struggle against European neocolonialism and white supremacy" ("Islamism and Its African American Muslim..." (p.686). Soon after, the Civil Rights era saw the rise of the NOI's most prominent figure and spokesman. Relying on the eschatology of the NOI, Malcolm X was able to attract an unprecedented number of adherents to the NOI because the practicality of the Black Nationalism he was promoting was appealing for its empowering effect (Taylor, 2005). But in 1964, Malcolm X converted to Sunnism after discovering mainstream Islam during his visit to the city of Mecca. Consequently, his supporters followed his path, and thanks to the arrival of many Muslim immigrants due to the immigration reform laws in 1965, the number of mainstream "orthodox" Muslims grew rapidly (Turner, 1999). Furthermore, with the death of Elijah Muhammad, the NOI underwent an internal crisis as it gradually transitioned towards orthodox Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad's son, Warithuddin.

The coming of Warithuddin Muhammad as a leading figure for African American Muslims deeply impacted the foundations of the NOI and the African American Muslim identity itself. He replaced the NOI's eschatology with mainstream Islam sources without neglecting the racial reference by using Islamic historical references on Bilal ibn Rabah, a slave and companion of the Prophet Muhammad. By distancing the organization from his father's vision of "Black Islam," Warithuddin Muhammad put himself in a position to seek legitimacy from orthodox Muslims. As an attempt at appropriation and protection of the uniqueness of the African American Muslim identity, Warithuddin Muhammad insisted that African Americans do not need Muslim chaperons to interpret Islamic sources (Galyon, 2017). But with the continuous overflow of Muslim immigrants in the country, African American Muslims are now facing a new form of fight over religious authenticity.

### **1.3. Black Islam in the Aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement**

After 1975, Sunnism became the dominant doctrine, followed by the majority of African American Muslims, and in a 2002 census, African Americans represented 42% of the whole Muslim population in the United States (Kahera, 2002). African American Muslims, who are part of the Sunni Muslim "Ummah" (Muslim community), have become a minority within a minority. Contrary to the Black Muslim identity expressed under Elijah Muhammad's NOI, mainstream Sunni African American Muslims seem to have melted among the whole Muslim American community. According to McCloud (2007), African American Muslim intellectual thought has become invisible. Among other reasons, it is due to the fact that they are not perceived as being Muslim because "...that "real" Islam is practiced only by Muslim immigrants in Western societies and by Muslims in the Muslim world itself" (McCloud, 2007, p.173) but this "in-between" status has also affected scholarly studies on African American Islam. On one side, African American Muslims are treated in literature as fully part of the Muslim community, as if their racial identity has been overshadowed by their religious one. On the other side, as Karim (2006) argues in her article "To Be Black, Female, and Muslim: A Candid Conversation about Race in the American Ummah," African American Muslims tend to isolate themselves from Muslim immigrants, creating a division among the Ummah. Feeling marginalized, they become unwillingly a part of a threesome pattern of racism in which "colored" Muslims from South Asian and Arab countries express an anti-black feeling to please the white majority

(p.226). This self-exclusion is an expression of the deep racialization that exists within the Muslim community in the United States, although Islam is deemed to be a universalistic religion.

While the NOI's shift toward Sunnism was welcomed by many of its members, some chose to break away from Warithuddin Muhammad's leadership and align themselves with Louis Farrakhan, who has become the new embodiment of Elijah Muhammad's rhetoric. During the Million Men March towards Washington in 1995, the NOI was resurrected, and it demonstrated its viability as well as its political commitment once more. In 1996, Farrakhan visited a number of Muslim countries, such as Iran, Iraq, and Libya, an action that was regarded by the American government as a threat to national security, as stated during the 104th Congress (United States). Furthermore, Farrakhan adopted the new NOI's fluctuating attitude about its doctrinal vision, which switches between separatism and assimilation. For example, in 2000, he reconciled with Warithuddin Muhammad and exhorted his community to seek knowledge from mainstream Islamic sources, but, unexpectedly, he marked a turnabout by referencing the old NOI's discourse. Consequently, Farrakhan's followers adopted a fluid attitude with a relative freedom of interpretation of Islam (Gibson, 2016, p. 21). This fluidity might also be seen as a form of struggle to find a balanced Muslim identity amidst their racial and ethnic affiliations. Still, it is regarded as politically versatile and suspicious by public opinion, especially after Farrakhan's political demeanor was associated with terrorism (Haddad & Esposito, 2000, p.38).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, both the NOI and mainstream African American Muslims became engaged in a non-consensual struggle about their Americanness, along with all Muslim Americans. Muslims and Islam became the focal point of criticism, in which the media and public opinion engaged in a long, hustling debate over the compatibility of Islam's presence in American culture. The 9/11 attacks have obviously stimulated the spring of Islamophobia but surprisingly brought attention to the Islamic faith and its practices in America. It represented an opportunity to describe and study Islam under a new light, far from the NOI parallel. Apart from the rejectionist stance on Islam that considers it a problem for national security, many voices admitted that Islam, through its long-lasting presence in America and its expanding adherents, has become a part of the American scenery. Smith (2009, p.30–31, p.40.) believes that "American Islam" should theoretically be regarded as the American expression of Islam, and its heterogeneity is proof of its racial inclusiveness (although there is a Sunni/Shi'a opposition). Nonetheless, American Muslims have an overall sense of rejection and exclusion, especially since Islam and terrorism have become nonchalantly used as synonyms.

## II.1. Barack Obama's Post-blackness

The 2008 presidential election was a historic triumph for Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States and the first African American to have ever accessed this function. Obama's election has been greeted by national and international public opinion as an omen for hope and change for the better. The African American community in particular considered him the ultimate signal that America was once and for all reconciled with its bitter past and that Obama would be the panacea for several centuries of trauma (Wickham, 2019, p. 394). Many elements played a role in Barack Obama's succession to George W. Bush, among them the racial inequality that was demonstrated in the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina crisis (Brooks, 2012, p.42). Obama became the new example for millions of African Americans, and even beyond, as his career and charismatic character came under scrutiny in an effort to march in his path. As a success story, Barack Obama became the icon of a movement defined as "Post-black" (Touré, 2011, p.12), which emerged in the early 2000s, under the direction of black artists and curators.

Defining "Post-black" is a tough endeavor because its originators conceptualized it as being non-aligned with traditional blackness, which was rooted in collective trauma and the longstanding struggle to counter racism. In 2001, Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York City, introduced the term "Post-black" in the exhibition catalog of "Freestyle" without providing a clear explanation, but her overall philosophy tends to deconstruct black artistic expression. She insists that the new millennial black expression cannot be restricted by any traditional racial ideology, and that what is "post-black" cannot be qualified as "black" (Golden & Walker, 2001, p.14). Later on, in his book *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness*, Touré (2011), a writer, journalist, and cultural critic, amplified the content of Golden's Post-Black vision of twenty-first century blackness. Touré's text comes in the form of contributions from various African American commentators, such as the sociologist Michael Eric Dyson and the visual artist Kara Walker, whose unanimous message consists in liberating blackness from former and archaic representations as well as from any dogmas that nurtured the limitedness of blackness.

The first dogma is black authenticity, which was created out of the insecurities of the black identity, and, in order to respond to blatant racism, it imposed strict ways of being black as a coping mechanism (McIlwain and Caliendo, 2004, p.7) and as a cement that created group cohesion and security (Touré, 2011, p.148). The other dogma was the dismissal of cultural trauma, as Touré considers that the new generation of African Americans does not need to inherit the trauma that held back their parents and those who preceded them because it hinders the blossoming of the plurality of forms of blackness (2011, p.21). Touré asserts that the former limiting boundaries of blackness are now obsolete, and that there are forty million ways for blackness to expand (2011, p.12). He offers a "Post-black" guideline, uses famous African Americans as cons to illustrate the Post-black spirit, and mainly elaborates on Barack Obama's persona. Referred to as a

success story, Barack Obama has become the icon of Post-blackness because he combines all the features that Touré has listed in his book.

Obama's Post-black personality is described by Wachter-Grene (2012) as "bichromatically multiracial" which denotes an ethnic and racial hybridity (p.2). Because Obama is a "non-indigenous African American," his African American identity is not pre-determined by cultural trauma (Williams, 2007, p.57). The expression of his Post-blackness is illustrated through Michael Eric Dyson's dimensions of blackness by which Obama articulates a fluid identity that vacillates between "accidental, incidental and intentional" blackness (Touré, 2011, p.9). As a result, he demonstrates a multilingual blackness which can be witnessed in his political discourse (Isaksen, 2011, pp. 458-459).

Obama's political career expresses "Post-black politics", a precursing term for Thelma Golden's artistic aesthetic of Post-blackness. In *Beyond Black and White*, Marable (1995) exposes the Post-black stance of some African American politicians, whose strategies consisted in distancing themselves from "black social and political formations and institutions, and consciously minimize their identity as 'minority' or 'black'" in order to gain all possible electorates, regardless of their racial, social, or religious background (p.203). Because the question of race and historical trauma that surrounds African American history was the first obstacle for Obama, he decided to adopt a "race-neutral rhetoric" to comfort the American electorate to elect him regardless of his race (Marable, 2009, p.11). Therefore he distanced himself from articulating his blackness in regards to any trauma as he was born as the son of an immigrant African rather than the descendant of a slave ancestor. His rhetoric of distancing from cultural trauma, which Touré acclaimed, is seen as a rhetoric of consilience, which aims at reconciling different people with their various respective traumas. As Frank and McPhail (2005) put it: "...it acknowledges that many members of his composite audience have and are suffering from shared and unique traumas that can be worked through with multiracial and class coalitions appealing to the ideal of justice." (p.572).

Deracialization characterizes Obama's Post-black politics as he intentionally refrained from advocating for any specific racial cause in order to avoid being racially categorized (Veroni-Paccher, 2012). Hamilton (1990) argues that politicians rely on deracialization as a means to deal with the "dual-agenda" that aims at countering the socio-economic problems of black Americans without facing the obstacles of racism (as cited in Perry, 1991, pp. 186-187). Similarly, Obama's adoption of deracialized politics aimed at enhancing marginalized minorities's social conditions which could be seen through his two policies: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Yet, his deracialized stance was also read as an attempt at securing Neoliberal policies such privatization and deregulation (George, 2013).

## **II.2. Barack Obama: The Savior of Islam in America?**

The overall Post-black attitude of Barack Obama is governed by political conciliation, adaptability, and historical concessions. Yet, there must be questions concerning Obama's views on Islam, especially after he inherited the "War on Terror" policy of the previous administration. During his 2007 candidacy, he adopted an inclusive attitude towards Islam, projecting an opposite view of the Bush administration. Obama's tolerant discourse aimed at breaking up the amalgam that was made between terrorism and Islam and emphasized that "Islam is a part of America" and "America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles - principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." (Holdenried & Adesnik, 2016, p.2). This speech was welcomed inside and outside the United States as it provided hope for the end of years of disinformation and Islamophobia against the Muslim communities of the world. However, Obama's opponents did not miss the opportunity to dig up any improper proximity between Obama and Islam. Not only did his middle name, Hussein, reflect an Islamic root, but the fact that his stepfather was Muslim added to the fury of his Conservative critics. In his autobiographies, Obama asserts that he received a Koranic instruction back in the 1970s when he was living in Jakarta, Indonesia, and simultaneously dismisses the centrality of Islam in the life of his stepfather's household (Corsi, 2008, p.58). During the 2008 Presidential Election, any association between him and Islam would have jeopardized his accession to the White House, and Obama worked on distancing himself from any misconception (Corsi, 2008, p.51).

Obama's attitude towards religion in its broader scope might help understand his attitude towards Islam. Throughout his candidacy and even after his election, his discourse on his religious beliefs seemed to lack clarity, leaving commentators at bay for an actual affiliation. Copeland (2008) points to his complexity towards the question of his faith, and mentions that Obama lacked a response about his personal religious beliefs during a meeting with religious leaders in Chicago. This correlates with his mentions of religion throughout his autobiographies, where his "religious expression was presented merely as a form of cultural expression" (Copeland, 2008, p.685). Adversely, Obama adopted a religion-oriented strategy for both domestic and foreign matters, as a continuity of Bush's projects, and he broadened his decisions concerning faith-based issues such as abortion and interreligious dialogue (Marsden, 2011, p.338). This equivocal attitude reflects the Post-black personality of "rooted but not restricted" (Touré, 2011, p.12), by which Obama was able to pursue his candidacy, win the presidential election, and dodge attempts at imprisoning his character with limited religious and racial labels.

The pragmatism and centrism of Obama were the reasons behind the strong appeal inside the Muslim American electorate, as demonstrated through the 2008 and 2012 elections, where, respectively, 89 percent and 85 percent of American Muslims voted for him (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2018). These electoral results indicated the amount of hope the Muslim community was holding for Barack Obama's election, as he clearly stated his intentions in the Ankara and Cairo speeches to the Muslim world and the American Muslim community. He initiated efforts to reconcile the American public with Islam, such as eliminating all references to Islam from the materials used for law enforcement and national security communities (Timmerman, 2013). Obama attempted to maintain some of his promises to the American Muslim community through two main actions: the creation of an office of special representation for Muslim communities under the Department of State and the immigration policy that allowed entry to an unprecedented number of Muslim refugees on American soil. Simultaneously, Obama failed to put an end to the Patriot Act that was initiated as part of the War on Terror policy (Alshrari, 2019, p.20).

Obama's policy of openness towards Islam in America fostered an unparalleled exposure to the complexity that lurks inside the American Muslim community. In 2015, Obama met with fifteen Muslim leaders as part of his attempts at engaging in dialogue over topics such as extremism and social liberty, and for the occasion, it became obvious that Muslim Americans benefited from an overall ethnic and gender heterogeneity. Several Muslim American organizations attended the gathering, but without exhibiting coordinated action. Furthermore, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), an initiative that was announced by Obama in August 2011 as "the national strategy for preventing homegrown extremism" (Shanzer & Eyerman, 2019, p.i), was not welcomed unanimously. Representatives of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) as well as the Muslim Wellness Foundation expressed their mistrust regarding the CVE program and how it might negatively affect the stability of the Muslim American community. Hill (2015, para.4) puts: "While CVE programs may not be nefarious in and of themselves, they represent many converging forces in the Muslim American community. The framing asks Muslim Americans to adopt the Islamophobic rhetoric where the good Muslims need to confront the bad Muslims." The CVE was implemented due to the failure of the War on Terror, and that is why it concentrated on the roots of terrorism, as extremism might be its starting point (Viana & Silva, 2021, p.24). Nevertheless, this initiative was commented on as being comparable to COINTELPRO, a counterintelligence program that was used during the Communist threat and later on for the surveillance of Black activist leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (Vidino & Hughes, 2015, p.10).

The equivocality of Obama's CVE for Muslim Americans is an expression of one of his Post-black facets of expressing his own identity. According to Isaksen (2011), Obama based his rhetoric on Frank Rudy Cooper's theory of bipolar black masculinity as part of his strategy to ease white anxiety over his black personality. It consists in endorsing a "good black" attitude that deserves acceptance among the white majority, while deeming the "bad black" attitude as unacceptable (Isaksen, 2011, p.459). It appears that the CVE initiative pressures Muslim Americans to promote an identity that fosters American acceptance. That identity should express the "good Muslim" characteristic, which puts to the forefront an integrated Muslim identity that surrenders to American acculturation. As an illustration, the 2010 project of building an Islamic organization near Ground Zero in New York, which was highly supported by Barack Obama, created an overall national debate. To defend the honor of Muslim victims of the 9/11 attacks, Talat Hamdani, mother of a paramedic and an NYPD cadet who sacrificed his life to save others during the World Trade Center attack, justified herself as being "a good Muslim" by eluding any Islamic cultural reference and addressing "the nation" as a tolerant citizen (Earle, 2015, p.132). The good/bad Muslim dichotomy originated from Bush's denomination of Muslims in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and for justifying the incoming treatment of Muslim Americans. Yet, as Mamdani (2005) explains: "President Bush moved to distinguish between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims." From this point of view, "bad Muslims" were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that "good Muslims" were anxious to clear their names and consciences..." (p.15). Adamantly, the situation did not change under Obama's attempts to free Islam and Muslims from stereotypes and Islamophobic hysteria.

### III. Muslim African Americans in Obama's Post-black America

Obama's Post-black policies for a new America, characterized by neutrality and centrism, promised to allow the complexity of the Muslim African American identity to flourish. Yet, it appears that Obama's "Post-black" ambiguous philosophy about race and ethnicity has complicated the well-being of the Muslim community on the whole and Muslim African Americans in particular. Muslim African Americans have had to endure a complex socio-political context since 9/11. While the pressure of racism and Islamophobia has increased, Obama's policies, which were previously presented as progressive and inclusive, end up being detrimental because African American Muslims have engaged in proving their rightfulness and trustworthiness as American citizens. The CVE programs that Obama implemented infringed on Muslim communities on the whole, as they have "...intensified racialized surveillance, policing, and confinement" (Nguyen, 2019). Muslim African American numbers, which represent only 20% of the Muslim American community, have drastically changed thanks to the significant arrival of African Muslim immigrants (Prickett, 2018, p.99). Originally complex and diverse, the mainstream Muslim African American community is composed of born Muslims, converts, and newly settled immigrants. The composition of the Muslim American community has undergone a considerable change, and as a 2016 census of refugee arrivals shows, Muslims represented 46% of the total refugees who entered the United

States, mainly from Syria and Somalia (Connor, 2016). This new composition has entangled the Muslim American community's making, which was already highly heterogeneous and lacking unity. Although recent surveys show that Muslim African Americans perform in a better way compared to their non-Muslim counterparts (McCloud, 2010, p.538), they still suffer from social injustice and religious-oriented discrimination.

Moreover, Obama's foreign policies in fighting terrorism exasperated some Black Muslim communities, namely Somali Americans, especially since the Obama Administration has decided to support the Somali government and engaged in drone attacks against the Somali terrorist group, Al Shabaab. These decisions impacted the Somali American community, as a significant number of Somali Americans have joined terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab, attracting public and government attention. Consequently, the whole American Somali community became highly regarded as a breeding ground for Islamic extremism and the perfect field to apply surveillance to American Somali citizens through CVE programs. In many ethnographic studies of the largest Somali communities in America, such as in Minnesota, these programs exasperated the sensitivity of the citizens, leading to a division within the community itself. According to Michel (2015), those who waited for federal funding for the CVE programs received mass media coverage at the expense of those who expressed their rejection of these programs. Michel goes beyond that by stating that the CVE programs nurtured destabilization and fear among the community (p.132–134).

#### **IV. The Nation of Islam's Attitude towards Obama's Post-blackness**

Barack Obama's election has raised the attention of Louis Farrakhan and his organization, the Nation of Islam (NOI). He rejoiced at the idea of having a black man as President of the United States, yet, Farrakhan offers a sober and realistic attitude towards Obama's candidacy in a 2007 interview:

These candidates and their rise in popularity among the people do indicate a change in the attitude of many Americans concerning females and Blacks. . . . However, the hope of a potential female or African American president I don't think is enough to change the reality of the Black, Native American, poor and oppressed people of this land. . . . The forces of racism in this country are still very strong. (Gibson, 2012, p.170).

In 2008, Farrakhan explicitly endorsed Obama's candidacy (Parks and Rachlinski, 2009, p.673) and even defended him against his opponents' criticism of his lack of racial authenticity (Gibson, 2012, p.169). Moreover, Farrakhan acknowledged Obama's flexible blackness by comparing him to the NOI's founder, Fard Muhammad, as they were both born out of a black father and white mother, and Farrakhan states: "A Black man with a White mother became a saviour to us. A Black man with a White mother could turn out to be one who can lift America from her fall" (Muhammad, 2008, para.9). Furthermore, between 2008 and 2009, motivated by the aspiring accession of Barack Obama to the Presidency, Farrakhan initiated the "New Beginning," a redirection of his organization's national center at Mosque Maryam in Chicago for a more inclusive cooperation with Sunni Islam as well as with the Christian and Jewish communities. However, under the pressure of his followers, Farrakhan soon returned to the NOI's original rhetoric, restating Black Nationalism, unorthodox Islamic beliefs, and anti-Semitism (Gibson & Karim, 2014, p.21).

Farrakhan and the NOI's support were a burden for Obama, who sought to "reject" and "denounce" Farrakhan's support to halt the pro-Israel force from uttering speculations that would jeopardize his candidacy (Lusane, 2008, p.38). The NOI maintained its anti-Semitic stance, which was even renewed in 2010 with the publication of *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews, Volume 2*, by its Historical Research Department. Obama chose not to publicly associate with the NOI and avoided responding to Farrakhan's calls and praises. The NOI itself avoided undermining Obama's election by hiding a 2005 picture of Barack Obama posing with Louis Farrakhan (Geraghty, 2018). Nevertheless, Obama stayed faithful to his politically adaptable "Post-black" attitude by maintaining the NOI's federal funding to provide "religious services" in order to teach federal prison inmates about spirituality. Although the funding may have started in 2007, the highest amounts were paid under Obama's presidency, a decision that was regarded with astonishment by counterterrorism and intelligence officials who knew the menacing connection between Islamic extremism and prisoner radicalization (Goodman, 2018). It appears that Obama's undefined political "Post-black" stance seemed to be convenient for the NOI's leader, who persisted in having an excusing attitude towards Obama's political positions. Farrakhan blamed Obama's positions as being either controlled by his Neo-Conservative advisors or "the Zionist controlled media » (A. Muhammad, 2013).

Louis Farrakhan imitated a turnabout on Obama after the U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the call for assassinating Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Farrakhan even called Obama an "assassin" and a "murderer" at the American Clergy Leadership Conference ("Louis Farrakhan"), marking the beginning of a hostile and critical attitude that

was expressed through the NOI's newspaper Final Call. The NOI also targeted Obama's foreign policy towards Africa, expressing its discontent towards Obama and calling him "Black face in the highest place" and insinuating that Obama was just the forefront of American colonialism (J. Muhammad, 2013). Isolating his organization from mainstream Islam and assuming a neo-Black Nationalist rhetoric, the NOI and Louis Farrakhan have adopted a more radical position fueled by conspiracy theories (Pertwee et al., 2022, p.457).

## Conclusion

Obama's Post-blackness has been detrimental to Islam and the African American community. It consisted of adopting a Neo-liberal centrist stance in order to gain public support without exasperating communities' sensitivities. Obama's presidency was expected to be the healing era for Muslim African Americans because they are a minority within a minority, the result of the transectionality of national, racial, and religious identities that endure both racially motivated discrimination and Islamophobia. Obama's recursive and contradictory attitude translated into his deceptive mission of promoting racial and ethnic neutrality for political gain. False hopes began to unravel with the Patriot Act's persistence and the implementation of CVE programs that maintained the status quo for Muslim Americans. Furthermore, it engaged Muslim African Americans in a process of proving their citizenship and their worth as members of the American nation. The Post-black era demands Muslim African Americans adopt a blended identity that comforts the white majority in its anxiety over Islam and the multicultural threats, just as Obama used a "bipolar black masculinity" to gain support from all minorities. This demand was clearly detrimental to their religious identity because some Islamic values do not coincide with politically correct stances that tend to homogenize identities for the benefit of the public and at the expense of secondary minorities, such as African American Muslims. Ethnographic and social studies on the well-being of black Islam in America signal more complexity and hardship ahead, and the Post-black era is not bringing the awaited change for Muslim American minorities.

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