Exporting Race: Norms, Categories & "The All-American Skin Game"

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The American definitions of "race" and "racism," which often conflate academic and lay conceptions, have been exported with American social science into debates of race in the Middle East and Africa. These definitions assume that the American distinction between race, as primarily about skin color, and ethnicity, as denoting cultural difference, is universally accepted. Over the past fifty years, a semantic shift in American academia and society has redefined race from a biological term to a social construct, further confounding its use as the concept travels outside the U.S. context, imposing American understandings of difference. This confusion has both scholarly implications and political consequences.

In December 2017, a mysterious mural appeared on a street corner in West Philadelphia. Vivid and kaleidoscopic, swirls of black twist through hues of yellow, blue, and red across two walls. On the right side, written in Arabic, is the mural's name, *Soul of the Black Bottom*, a tribute to the historic African American neighborhood that was razed in the 1960s to allow for the expansion of Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania. On the left side, also in Arabic, is a quote from sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, on the equality and brotherhood of humanity – "black, brown, and white." The mural was created by French-Tunisian artist eL Seed (named after the fictional Christian knight and ruler of Muslim Spain, El Cid), who has, over the last fifteen years, painted intricate murals around the world, aiming to bring two art forms – graffiti and Arabic calligraphy – into the mainstream. In 2011, with political tumult spreading from Tunisia across the region, eL Seed painted a sardonic mural in Doha, Qatar, with a quote oft attributed to "the father of sociology," Ibn Khaldun: "Arabs agree to disagree" (or: "Arabs agree to never agree"). An enthusiast of sociology, eL Seed had read Du Bois's classic *The Philadelphia Negro*, and was inspired by the author's activism and efforts to unite African peoples. So when the local nonprofit Al-Bustaan invited him to paint a mural there, he readily accepted.[1]

eL Seed was probably unaware that Du Bois had a keen interest in Ibn Khaldun and saw Tunisia as a political beacon. In 1929, Du Bois hoped to hold the fifth Pan-African Congress in Tunis. Like Frederick Douglass before him, Du Bois was

intrigued by North Africa and the Nile Valley, moved by the anticolonial uprisings in neighboring Libya and Morocco. He saw "Ibn Kaldun" and Ibn Battuta as reliable chroniclers of African achievement, and knew that Tunisia had abolished slavery in January 1846, two years before France, and decades before the United States.[2] Holding the Pan-African Congress in Tunisia made sense because of its geographic proximity, but also because it aimed to bring North Africa into the pan-African movement, challenging the colonial partition of Africa into a northern part and sub-Saharan Africa. "Elaborate preparations were begun," he writes in *The World and Africa*. "It looked as though at last the movement was going to be geographically in Africa. But two insuperable difficulties intervened: first, the French Government very politely but firmly informed us that the Congress could take place at Marseilles or any French city, but not in Africa; and second, there came the Great Depression."[3] The fifth Congress was held in Manchester, England, in October 1945.

A century after Du Bois dreamed of Tunisia as an emancipatory space, the North African country was again in the headlines, a site of dashed dreams, not only in the derailed democratic transition, but also failed pan-African integration, as the Tunisian state launched a repressive campaign against Black Tunisians and African migrants. In 2018, in response to an activist campaign launched by Afro-Tunisians and African migrants, Tunisia's first democratically elected government promulgated the first antiracism law in the Middle East and North Africa region (and the second in Africa, after South Africa's similar law of 1999). In 2019, Tunisian president Beji Caïd Essebsi proclaimed that January 23 would mark an annual commemoration of the abolition of slavery. The new laws were a response to a campaign led by Black Tunisian activists, calling for a recognition of their history of oppression and marginality. Yet three years later, in February 2023, President Kais Saied sparked international outrage when he ordered security forces to take "urgent measures" against African migrants, who he accused of being part of a conspiracy to change Tunisia's demographic composition to that of "only an African country that has no affiliation to Arab or Muslim nations."

The antiracist mobilization in Tunisia and the subsequent crackdown opened a debate among Black Tunisians on whether to deploy race as a category and mobilizational tool. Urban middle class Black Tunisians claimed the Western/American language of "race" and "indigeneity," while the poorer, more rural Black Tunisians expressed discomfort with such language.[4] This debate echoed an older dispute among locally based intellectuals and activists across the postcolonial world about whether to use race as an analytical variable and a mobilizational tool – to "categorize back." With authoritarianism and xenophobia surging worldwide in the 2020s, the question of whether to adopt essentially American discourses and categories of race resurfaced among scholars and activists from

Brazil to Rwanda to Tunisia to Lebanon. Some argued that race would help globalize their cause while other, more locally oriented activists preferred to use homegrown (non-Western) categories. These debates arose as American academics, diplomats, and foundation officials were trying to persuade local politicians and activists from South America to the Middle East of the merits of race as a descriptor, analytical framework, and institutional category, even accusing skeptics of "race disavowal."[5] This debate about the exportability and applicability of American sociological discourses and categories was the latest chapter in a decades-long dispute; though it may have only recently reached Africa and the Middle East, it was not new.

In February 1999, French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant published "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," a scathing essay on the globalization and hegemony of American race ideas. The French scholars denounced the imposition of pernicious concepts like race on countries where the concept doesn't exist, and the broader lingua franca of race that has little interest in class and promotes a "false universalism."[6] The export of "racial doxa" by American foundations, embassies, and universities was seductive to youth worldwide because, they argued, like jazz or hip-hop, these concepts "are produced and worn by subordinate minorities."[7] In 2005, I argued that the American academic discourse on race and slavery in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) used peculiarly American categories and understandings of race (as seen in the Save Darfur movement, for example), and was shaped by domestic norm contestation, jockeying by various social groups, most notably Black and Jewish activists.[8] I suggested that Bourdieu and Wacquant's critique of American scholars imposing "false universals" might apply to the MENA region and "Islamic Africa," but there was no explicit American government effort to export race/racecraft to the region at the time, except perhaps in Mauritania.[9] Twenty years later, I revisit this debate, reviewing the burgeoning literature on race in MENA, and government efforts to export American "racecraft."[10]

At the center of this dispute between Anglo-American scholars and others about the exportability of race is semantic confusion: American social scientists tend to conflate race with racism, and to mix academic and lay definitions of race. They also tend to assume that the American distinction between race, which is understood as primarily about skin color, and ethnicity, which is concerned with cultural difference, is universally accepted. Moreover, over the past half-century, a semantic shift has occurred in American academia and society, whereby race has been by and large redefined: its original biological meaning has transmuted into a social construct, which has permitted it to be deployed as a liberating, equalizing tool for social justice. This largely American-driven semantic and normative shift has given rise to a new understanding of race that has been exported to other parts

of the world (primarily through American institutions but also international organizations). This new norm has prompted a redefinition of race in parts of Latin America, most notably in Brazil, where race has been embraced by broad swaths of civil society, and *race* and *indigenous* categories have been added to the national census. To the extent that race as a concept even exists outside the Latinate world, however, this redefinition has yet to happen everywhere. Race outside the Americas and the Anglosphere is still a byword for eugenics and scientific racism and is viewed as a divisive and dangerous political term.

Norms, defined as "standard[s] of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity," hinge on new definitions formulated by norm entrepreneurs.[11] An astonishing array of norms shape racial discourse and practice in the United States, at the macro and micro levels – from the "one-drop rule" to writing Indigenous and Black with a capital *I* and *B* and white with a lowercase *w*. Below, I focus on six norms that are shaping the American discourse on ethnoracial politics in the Middle East and North Africa.

1. Race is defined narrowly to mean phenotype (skin color, to be precise) and, in the postcolonial world, the concept is deployed in Latin America, and more recently in the Middle East and North Africa, because a color line or racial boundary is presumed to run through this region's societies (including Sudan's).

2. The labels of *race* and *racist* are not applied below an arbitrarily drawn line across the Sahara, because it is inappropriate to categorize ("sub-Saharan") groups as races when there is no color line between said groups.

3. *Race*, however, can be used on the Swahili coast and Sahel to describe Black Arabs (for instance, Sudanese), Black Persians (such as the Shirazis of Zanzibar), and dark-skinned Tuareg in the Sahel, because they are locally viewed as having exogenous origins.[12]

4. Outside the Americas, Western pressure to "remember" slavery is applied in North Africa and the Middle East, but not below the racial boundary that is the Sahara, except in the Arab League states of Mauritania and Sudan.

5. Anti-Black and anti-Jewish racisms are deemed the most morally abominable racisms, such that the American definition of anti-Black racism is being exported alongside institutional definitions of antisemitism.[13]

6. Movement between gender categories is largely acceptable and, before January 2025, was institutionalized in contemporary America (with USAID and the State Department promoting "conversion therapy practices" overseas), but movement between racial categories is strongly disfavored and policed – in part because racial identity in the United States can confer material benefits (as through affirmative action).[14]

On January 20, 2021, on the first day of his presidency, Joe Biden issued the first ever executive order aimed at "advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government." Executive Order #13985 also promised to conduct an "Equity Assessment in Federal Agencies" to ascertain whether underserved communities faced systemic barriers. A few days after it was issued, USAID officials working on the MENA region decided to tap into the executive order, launching their own initiative to assess the socioeconomic conditions of ethnic and racial minorities in Lebanon, Yemen, and Libya. USAID commissioned local organizations to examine how ethnic and racial minorities were faring in the realms of media, academia, and politics.[15] In April 2022, defining "inequity [as] a national security challenge," the U.S. State Department appointed a Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice to support marginalized, racial, ethnic, Indigenous, and African-descent communities worldwide.[16]

American institutions – universities, foundations, and embassies – have long sponsored studies and workshops on ethnoracial minorities in Latin America and Europe.[17] In MENA, however, with the exception of American University in Cairo, which in the early 1960s produced studies on Egypt's Nubian community, most American organizations have worked on religious, not ethnoracial, minorities. Biden's executive order offered an economic and political opportunity to look at the "racial component" of ethnic and religious minorities' marginalization.[18] One of the challenges facing policymakers and foundation leaders exporting American race policy is its very definition. Like many concepts that serve both scientific and political purposes, race is notoriously difficult to define. There are arguably three types of definitions of race : legal, academic, and colloquial/"folk." What anthropologist Carola Lenz said of ethnicity can be said of race as well : it "is a dazzling, ambiguous category, at once descriptive and evaluative-normative" and "will be so important a political resource and an idiom for creating a community that today's social scientists and anthropologists have no choice but to confront it."[19] USAID and State Department officials soon realized that race not only was difficult to define but did not translate easily into Arabic, and terminologies local to Yemen and Libya differed from the then-dominant American language of intersectionality and anti-Blackness. By 2020, the Mellon Foundation, which had previously funded a project called "Race and Indigeneity in the Americas," launched the "Race and the Middle East and North Africa Project." The initiative sought to establish equivalents for race in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and other regional languages and specify ways to translate the English word *race* (as *jins* or *'unsur,* according to the website). For both USAID and Mellon, race was self-evidently a positive and emancipatory category, a public good even ; and for neither organization was race to be deployed south of the Sahara.

In the United States, the foreign and domestic politics of ethnoracial classification have long been shaped by actions taken by Congress, the Census Bureau, and the White House's Office of Management and Budget.[20] In October 1943, President Roosevelt appealed to Congress to rescind the Chinese Exclusion Act (introduced in 1882) in recognition of China's partnership in World War II. In the early years of the Cold War, foreign-policy elites saw categorizing Arabs as legally white as a way to build relations with Arab states being courted by the Soviet Union. In 1944, in a landmark case, Arabs in America were granted legal status as whites so as "to promote friendlier relations between the United States and other nations."[21] The export of American racecraft – as an alternative or counter to France's model of racial colorblindness – has long been the result of state-society relations and geostrategic interest, whether it was the Census Bureau shifting populations into new categories, or American oil companies exporting Jim Crow practices to Venezuela and Arabia.[22] The Trump administration's current push against USAID and American universities' "race policies" is similarly driven by domestic and international considerations, in particular, the situations in Haiti, Palestine, and Venezuela, though it's as yet unclear whether the Department of Education's definition of "race" is phenotype-based or includes religious difference.[23]

The debate about domestic racial categories and policies being scaled up to the international level is hardly new. In 1916, philosopher Alain Locke was considering how Western states' domestic racial categories informed imperial rule. Foreshadowing Lenin, Locke viewed "imperialism as a metastasized stage of race," with race as "the pivot of contemporary global economic and political domination."[24] Like Locke, Du Bois spent much of his academic career trying to define "the race concept," studying how the U.S. Census Bureau categorized communities, and comparing his land of birth to Europe, Latin America, Africa, and India. In *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, Du Bois details how he went from viewing race as a genetics-based biological certainty to a social construct.[25] A vast literature has since emerged showing how the American understanding of the concept has evolved from racial science to social construct, while always remaining focused first and foremost on phenotype and skin color. In this evolution, debates arose over whether to use race as a category of analysis or category of practice; if, when used by scholars, it represented a useful category or an inappropriately essentialist reification; and, insofar as it is useful at all as a category of analysis, if it can be deployed in all regions of the world.

Since World War II, social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic have sought to redefine race away from eugenics. Among the most influential academic definitions of race was that of Michel Foucault, who in 1975 argued that state policy has been critical to the racialization of the world. For centuries, nation-states ("bio-power") created and recreated differences (what he called

"caesuras") within human populations at the national and global scale so as to be able to manage these populations.[26] Some social scientists, echoing Foucault, speak of race as any human difference that can be grounds for domination, thus making the concept a broad "mechanism of sorting," or "supermarket cart" of variables.[27] Others – particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom – define race as involving more specific phenotypes or physical characteristics.[28] Sociologist Mara Loveman has observed that in the United States, race tends to be defined as biological/phenotypical, while ethnicity is seen as cultural, but in Latin America, race is associated with both cultural and biological difference.[29] In short, understandings of ethnoracial difference tend to be highly contingent and hyperlocal, giving rise to specific discourses and institutional configurations. In terms of the origin of race, by the mid-1970s, most scholars were understanding race as the product of European modernity – dated to 1492, 1648, or 1776 – coinciding with specific moments of Western expansionism. But in the early 1990s, European scholars – usually less restrained in deploying race in the post-colonial world – began talking about racist belief systems and ideas of race outside the West and before modernity.[30] Around this time, European and American scholars interested in using race as a causal variable began asking how to translate the term into non-Latinate languages like Arabic, Hindi, or Chinese ; or what local category or "internal frontier" could be analogous to race.

These tensions in interpretations of racial inequality and racism would drive debates on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1986, sociologists Michel Omi and Howard Winant published their influential *Racial Formation in the United States* and, responding to the Marxists who saw race as secondary to class, emphasized "that in the United States, *race is a master category,*" comparable to class in its explanatory power.[31] *Racial Formation* would inspire a cottage industry of writing about American racial politics. In 1990, historian Barbara Fields published a seminal essay countering the sociologists who "invoke race as historical explanation," conflating race (an ideology created to justify racism) with racism (a social practice).[32] More recently, in *Racecraft*, Barbara Fields and sociologist Karen Fields have reiterated this materialist argument, stating that race is not "an external motor of history" that will "take on a life of its own," as the sociologists would have us believe ; "if race lives on today," it is "because we continue to create it today."[33]

By the mid-1990s, the battle lines were drawn, dividing scholars methodologically between those who saw race as a powerful independent variable and those who found the term unclear, "epistemically inchoate," and very European- and American-centric. In 1997, British sociologist Stuart Hall described race as a "floating signifier." In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack,* Paul Gilroy – Hall's student – would elaborate, defining race as "a political category that can accommodate various meanings."[34] By the 1990s, this "floating signifier" definition seems to have stabilized in the United States, with the scholarly community largely re-

jecting scientific racism and defining race as a social construct. Though a few prominent voices – so-called biological race realists like scientist Richard Dawkins, legal scholar Amy Wax, and linguist and *New York Times* columnist John McWhorter – continue to argue that race is not a fiction, but "biologically real." Relatedly, scholarly definitions have long differed from activists' usage. Soon after Bill Clinton launched his "Initiative on Race" in 1997, Michel Omi wrote, "there is an enormous gap between the scientific rejection of race as a concept, and the popular acceptance of it as an important organizing principle of individual identity and collective consciousness."[35]

The end of the Cold War saw transitions to democracy in Latin America and the emergence of AmerIndian and African-descent movements, often (re)claiming the categories of "indigenous" and "race."[36] It was in this context that political scientists Mahmood Mamdani and Anthony Marx published their studies on racemaking and state-formation in the postcolonial world, arguing that racial and ethnic identities were constructed and legally encoded by colonial states.[37] These two authors presented a materialist understanding of race as an exclusionary category and institution created by colonial states. Mamdani offered a new definition of race and ethnicity: "ethnicity" was the label that colonial rulers gave to groups deemed indigenous to Africa, while "races were presumed to be nonindigenous."[38]

The reception of these arguments in the scholarly community of the Middle East and North Africa was shaped by decades of earlier debate over the definition of Africa. In March 1957, the African Studies Association (ASA) was founded, according to a United States Information Agency news release, as a "nonpolitical" organization that would "focus upon the problems of sub-Saharan Africa."[39] State Department officials and foundation heads present at the inaugural meeting saw ASA as part of a Cold War effort to counter Soviet influence in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1958, the Bureau of African Affairs was established, and policymakers drew a clear boundary across the Sahara – leaving Sudan within the MENA region. Similarly, the first ASA conference focused entirely on "Black Africa." This emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa, as sociologists William G. Martin and Michael O. West have pointed out, "marked of course, a sharp break with the earlier generation of pan-African scholarship, which stressed ties across the boundaries of North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the wider African world."[40] Founding president Melville Herskowits, however, had little patience for the Black scholar-activists, accusing Du Bois and Carter Woodson of "engaging in polemics" and being more interested in racial uplift than dispassionate scholarship.[41]

In October 1969, at the opening session on the first day of the ASA's annual conference, a group of activists seized the microphone from the association's president. The insurrectionists were members of the Black Caucus of ASA, founded the

year before and later renamed the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA). This was an organization galvanized by the Black Power movement, which was in turn inspired by political movements on the African continent. At the podium, AHSA leaders issued their demands, which included that the study of Africa "be undertaken from a pan-Africanist perspective" that did not continue the "tribalization of African peoples by geographical demarcations on the basis of colonialist spheres of influence."[42] The AHSA also called for an activist stance against colonialism and apartheid in Africa, and protested the exclusion of Egypt from ASA's ambit. "We were simply following the OAU's definition of Africa," recalls 85-year-old Harlem-based novelist Rashidah Ismaili, referring to the Organisation of African Unity. "Our slogan back then was 'No Africa without Egypt!' 'No Africa without Madagascar!'"[43] These demands would be rebuffed by a majority vote, as ASA decided to maintain a "non-racial" approach.[44]

In *L'Afrique dans le temps du monde*, Senegalese historian Mamadou Diouf observes that African American writers were the first to counter the colonial (Hegelian) partition of Africa, and to conceive of the continent as extending from Cairo to Cape Town.[45] Frederick Douglass, who traveled to Egypt in 1887, argued that the Western insistence on the separateness of Egypt from the rest of Africa was meant to justify slavery and Negro inferiority : "to," as he put it, "divest the Negro of all honourable antecedents."[46] If colonial policy had cordoned off North Africa from the slave-supplying territories of West Africa, the descendants of these American slaves sought to break that cordon. When Douglass and Du Bois were claiming North Africa, they were challenging not only imperial cartography but a powerful Anglo-American discourse on Saharan slavery, propelled by colonial policy and the abolitionist movement. The question of "Islamic slavery" has been a domestic political issue in the United States and Britian since the Barbary Wars (1801 – 1815), with Islamic slavery portrayed as a mirror image of the transatlantic trade, except infinitely worse. Saharan slavery became an important weapon for the Abolitionist movement, with influential works like Parliament member Thomas Fowell Buxton's *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, representing the Saharan slaving practices as similar to the transatlantic trade with the desert crossing as a "middle passage," with slave traders described as "barbarous," "Arab carriers," and "cruel Moors."[47] This literature invariably depicted slavery in Islamic Africa or the Ottoman Empire as the product of theology or Islamic teachings. But it also created a simulacrum of "Islamic slavery" with its own racial taxonomy and cartography as a parallel to "real" New World slavery. The earliest institutional response to this "comparative framework" came from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which were the first to introduce African studies in the United States and to offer Arabic language instruction. Black historians and social scientists like Leo Hansberry, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Bunche, and Merz Tate sought to redefine Africa to include the Nile Valley.[48] On "Islamic slavery" or the "Arab slave trade," as

it had come to be known, Du Bois would argue that there was a difference between premodern slavery, which drove state formation and centralizing states' need for labor (whether it was for the emperor's household in imperial Rome or civil service in Byzantium) and slavery in a modern capitalist economy with a plantation system. His classification of slavery in Africa as being more "mild" than slavery in America would prove enormously influential, quoted and finessed by scholars like historian Walter Rodney and political scientists Cedric Robinson and Ali Mazrui.

The debate about Africa, Islam, race, and slavery continued throughout the Cold War and beyond. In 1971, Orientalist historian Bernard Lewis published *Race and Color in Islam*, a slim volume that aimed to show that anti-Black and skin-based racism existed in Islamic texts dating back to the pre-Islamic period. "The total identification of blackness with slavery which occurred in North and South America never took place in the Muslim world," writes Lewis. "There were always white slaves as well as black ones. Nevertheless, the identification of blackness with certain forms of slavery went very far." Providing little by way of empirical evidence, Lewis would also state that "the massive development of the slave trade in black Africa" dated "from the Arab period."[49] Lewis's book was intended as a retort to the "myth-makers" who presented Islamic society as free from racial discrimination, including Malcolm X, whose autobiography described his visit to Mecca as a racial epiphany. Rather than an "interracial utopia," Lewis argued, a quick reading of *The Arabian Nights* showed the "Alabama-like quality" and "Southern impression" of Arab life.

Lewis would counter Du Bois's classification with his own categorization, separating the "Arab East" from Africa. He claimed that, in the Arab East, white slaves rose to powerful positions, but rarely Blacks; Black slaves did rise to high office in Muslim India and in "the black zone" – but not in "the central Islamic lands" – a direct riposte to Du Bois and Malcolm X. Lewis's book would spark waves of responses and counterarguments, but it became – and remains – a touchstone for studies of racism in the Middle East, works that aimed to show that anti-Blackness existed in pre-Islamic Arabia and spread with Islam and that the Arab East was particularly racist and exploitative of African slaves. These political clashes – aggravated by the United Nations' "Zionism Is Racism" resolution of 1975 – would frame research agendas in African and Middle East studies for decades. In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said describes the mid-1970s as a time when "Islamic slavery" and the plight of minorities in Muslim lands would become central to a new academic "consensus which sets limits and applies pressures."[50]

Over the next two decades, an academic discourse on slavery in "Islamic Africa" would emerge, reviving the colonial practice of treating North Africa as not part of the continent, and depicting the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the norm. With few exceptions, most of this work adopted religious or theological explanations of "Islamic slavery" and "Islamic trade." Historian Ann McDougall sums

up this literature nicely : "'Muslims' take slaves from (an implied) non-Muslim Africa; then with a stroke of the pen 'Muslims' became 'Arabs' from 'alien' lands and are equated with Europeans as outsiders, damaging and detrimental to this creature called 'Africa.' Arabs and Europeans are not African; Muslims are Arabs (and slavers), therefore...."[51] By the late 1970s, Malcolm X and Du Bois's vision of a cosmopolitan Africa had been neutralized by state repression, white supremacy, and Zionist activism, which would oppose linkages between Black progressives and Africa, especially North Africa. In 1990, Lewis would publish *Race and Slavery in the Middle East : An Historical Enquiry*, an updated version of *Color and Prejudice in Islam*, with a special section on Ibn Khaldun's purportedly racist ideas; once a touchstone and ally of pan-African thinkers, by the 1990s, Ibn Khaldun would transmute into a North African Arthur de Gobineau, a chronicler and purveyor of Arab-Islamic racism. Herskowits's and Lewis's respective visions of Africa would slowly prevail : the Sahara would go back to being a boundary, this time a frontier between a guilty "Arab Africa" and a victim "Black zone," with distinct political labels – race, colonialism, settlerism – pinned on the former but not the latter.

As the twenty-first century dawned, the September 11 attacks, the second intifada in Palestine, and the Iraq War would throw American racial politics into flux, leading to political and racial shifts and bringing a renewed interest in "region-making" and on the boundary between Africa and the Arab world. The rise of diverse pro-Palestine coalitions on American campuses would draw police surveillance of students and faculty, prompt federal scrutiny of Middle East studies, and trouble Black-Jewish relations in academia. With the Save Darfur movement, "Arab slavery" would again emerge as a wedge issue in response to the pro-Palestinian coalitions forming on campuses between Black, Arab, Jewish, and Muslim groups.[52] This movement would emerge just as political theorists like Suzanne Rudolph were cautioning that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq could lead scholars to attempt their own "imperialism of categories," imposing concepts of a dominant culture on a less powerful one.[53] On the question of race, Paul Gilroy would observe how, alongside the War on Terror, American scholars and diplomats were spreading singularly American racial norms (including the belief that minorities cannot be racist because of some "biologically-grounded innocence"), adding that exporting American "racial commonsense" at a time when DNA-testing was rising in popularity risked aligning science with the racial classifications of the eighteenth century.[54]

In 2005, legal scholar Sherman Jackson published *Islam and the Blackamerican*, examining how 9/11 had changed academic discourse on race and Islam – and relations between what he termed "indigenous" and "immigrant" Muslims.[55] Younger Muslim leaders had become politically active seeing race not just as a

category on the American census but a political tool for empowerment and a site for struggle, believing that activism around inequality and injustice in the ghetto could bring some kind of political belonging or protection for Muslims. A number of grassroots coalitions had emerged between the children of African American converts to Islam and the progeny of immigrant Muslims, as lawyers and academics lobbied the Census Bureau to stop categorizing Middle Eastern and North African Americans as white. "Legal whiteness," they argued, not only meant that hate crimes were not being counted at a time when such attacks were surging against Muslim communities, but also that being categorized as white made coalition-building difficult. Surveying this new political activism, Jackson highlighted a peculiar American norm. He noted that African American Muslims were not rounded up *en masse* like "immigrant" Muslims after 9/11, and while he did not know where the African American Muslims' "added insulation" came from – their "indigeneity" or loyalty to the constitutional order – he warned that the fates of African Americans like Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Paul Robeson, who took the Black struggle to the international arena, did not bode well for young Muslim American internationalists who hoped that Black politics might provide protective norms or "added insulation."

Islam and the Blackamerican was in part a response to historian Eve Troutt Powell's seminal book *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, a study of Egyptian-Sudanese relations from 1881 to 1925, when Egypt was colonized by Britain, and Egyptian intellectuals were developing a national identity and debating control of Sudan. Troutt Powell traced anti-Black prejudice in Egyptian literature, theater, and political writing that reflected the rise of an Egyptian racial consciousness in relation to Sudan and Nubians. Arguing that Egypt is a "colonized-colonizer," she suggests that the country may have been a victim of British racism, but Egyptian society absorbed European "categories of race" that were layered atop precolonial local notions of race, fueling nationalist policy toward Sudan. *A Different Shade* subtly shifted the terms of debate, speaking of an "African slave trade" instead of the more old-fashioned "Arab slave trade." Aware of the difficulty of identifying who is a descendant of slaves, Troutt Powell says she is not looking for "the biological imprint of black slaves in Egypt" but rather their discursive or cultural imprint. She distinguishes between slavery in the United States and Egypt, noting that in the latter, miscegenation was not a taboo, and that "it is clear that African slaves in Egypt did not suffer the brutality that so characterized the treatment of blacks in the American South. There was no similar plantation culture in which nuclear families were torn apart or in which slaves were subjected to horrifying physical abuse."[56]

Yet the American experience hangs over Troutt Powell's account. She deploys an American definition of race to mean difference based on skin color or color consciousness, before adding that by speaking of race, she does not mean "that

they [Egyptians] were themselves racist, or even that they held the power to discriminate racially." This too is a peculiar American idea, that minorities or colonized people cannot be racist: "Labeling 19th century Egyptians with such a term clouds the discussion and attributes power that simply did not exist."[57] Subjugated groups or minorities may lack the collective power to implement racist policies, but at the individual level, they are certainly capable of racist acts and speech. Troutt Powell is less reserved about using the term *colonial* to describe Egyptian depredations in Sudan. It is not clear if the author was intimating that all state expansionism on the African continent – whether Ethiopian or Rwandan – constituted "internal colonialism," or only the allegedly color-based domination that Egypt practiced against Sudan. But *A Different Shade* reflected a political moment and a discursive shift, mixing older tropes comparing the Atlantic with the Sahara, for example, and the depiction of Arabs as colonial intruders in North Africa, with more contemporary arguments that racism is premodern, precolonial, universal, and can have multiple origins as well as the growing tendency to extend the concept of race and colonialism beyond the West's borders.

A Different Shade of Colonialism would generate much discussion. Historians would note that Egypt during that period was under Ottoman rule, and it is not clear if expansionism into Sudan reflected Egyptian agency or if said expansionism was driven by material interests or racial reveries.[58] The notion of "race without racists" would draw criticism from both sides: from those who asked why introduce the slippery concept of race when there is no clear definition, no local equivalent or translation, and those who asked why the author was reluctant to call Egyptians racist when they were clearly dominating, stigmatizing, and enslaving Africans.[59] By the mid-2000s, a new consensus held that the identity of modern North African states was forged both against an "external" white European adversary and an internal Black African other – which aligns with contemporary white American national identity as formed against an internal African other and an external Islamic world – and the idea of Arab conquests of North Africa as a parallel to European colonization of the Americas gained renewed currency.[60]

In 2011, historian Bruce Hall published *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600 – 1960*, an influential study of "racial arguments" in the Sahel and an attempt at a transnational, transhistorical theory of race. With his focus on "racial thought," Hall's book consolidated the cultural turn and posed an emphatic response to the materialist, race-is-modern argument, presented most prominently in Mamdani's recent interpretations of the conflicts in Darfur and Rwanda.[61] The book held that race existed in Africa and Asia long before European imperialism: "there are African histories of race that do not obey colonial logics."[62] As Islam began to spread in the seventeenth century, Arab genealogy became more valued: "Local intellectuals insisted that patrilineal relationships to Arab ancestors, regardless of their current skin color, rendered them white," and "the ab-

sence of genealogical connections to Arab Muslim ancestors was what rendered one black."[63] When French colonialists arrived, they adopted these discourses and categories.

Hall's intervention would inspire a lively debate. He would be critiqued for not looking at how the content of these labels changed over time, and how colonialism institutionalized preexisting categories like Arab and Berber, Hutu and Tutsi, imbuing them with new meanings, genealogies, rights, and specific roles in the colonial administration. In their review of the state of the field, ethnographer Karen Weitzberg and political scientist Alden Young doubt that the rise of "Arab chauvinism" in the twentieth-century Sahel is a result of an "unbroken history" of anti-Blackness in Muslim West Africa, noting that anti-Black racism waxes and wanes over different eras.[64] Critics would ask: Why conflate all difference in the Sahel – lineage, language, skin color, *qabila*, clan, caste, ethnic and class difference – into *race*? To imply racism? Hall explains that he uses the concept of race – interchangeably with racism – because it "fulfills a heuristic value for readers and it makes historical comparison more feasible."[65] In subsequent responses, Hall elaborated that he finds the term *race* more effective in securing resources, recalling that when he was studying in Cairo, helping refugees from South Sudan fill out paperwork to get UNRWA refugee status, he noticed that if he wrote *race* as a reason for persecution, his applicants would have more success in being processed than if he wrote *nationality* as a reason for persecution. Activists across Africa are debating whether to use terms like *race* and *indigeneity* to press their demands with local and international institutions, choices that can have dire material consequences.[66] But should a scholar be making this call? Hall's methodological choices recall sociologist Rogers Brubaker and historian Frederick Cooper's warning to scholars about adopting "categories of practice," like race or nation, as categories of analysis.[67] (In other words, just because Tutsis, in the First Republic of Rwanda, were considered a race, that does not make them a "race.") Hall deploys race as a category of analysis *and* practice, raising the question: Is it really the place for an American historian to tell Africans to deploy race so as to be part of a global Black struggle, as if they're suffering from false consciousness? The impulse to deploy race can lead to awkwardness. In *War of Stones, War of Words*, a compelling account of the Zanzibari Revolution, historian Jonathan Glassman does something similar: he understands race as categorizing humans around "metaphors of descent," recalling colonial definitions of race as involving exogenous roots. He then extends this definition into the precolonial era, only to conclude on the book's final page that scholars should "strive to abandon race altogether as a category of analysis."[68]

The debate continues. In his essay "Race in Africa," the late Nigerian poet and literary scholar Harry Garuma points to an explicit distinction between precolonial and postcolonial ideas of difference:

These premodern, precolonial instances of group self-identification and prejudice were not racial distinctions in the modern sense, for three basic reasons that define race as a category of modernity. First, they were more fluid and flexible than what race connotes today. Second, they were not concerned with constructing a homogeneous self against which a different other could be placed as binary opposite. Third, they were not embedded in a machinery of knowledge production that defined ways of knowing, ways of seeing and apprehending social reality and the world.[69]

The conversation about boundary-making and Islamic exceptionalism also continues. Anthropologist Jemima Pierre questions the persistence of the divide between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa that still shapes African studies, pointing to the proliferation of studies that trace race in Africa to the arrival of Islam while, in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, use other terminology, like "tribe" and "kinship," outside Islamic Africa. This bifurcation plays out in policy as well. When U.S. Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice Desirée Cormier-Smith delivered her statement on racial equity in American foreign policy at the United Nations offices in Geneva in August 2022, she surveyed her office's work with marginalized communities in MENA and the Sahel – specifically "in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger" – where "the United States supports improved social integration and economic empowerment for former hereditary slaves."[70] The glaring omission of non-Islamic Africa from Cormier-Smith's report prompted journalists to ask what her office was doing to address exclusionary practices in Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

On September 22, 1964, while in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Malcolm X sat for an interview with the newspaper *Al-Bilad*. Midway through a wide-ranging conversation on the purchasing power of African Americans and the importance of Arabic, Saudi journalist Mohammed El-Ghazzouli asks his American interlocutor : "Would you forgive me if I asked you a rather personal question ? … I notice that you are not colored [*mulawan*] in the sense that colored people understand the term. I mean in terms of your skin color you look like any Oriental person [*sharqui*]."[71] Malcolm X responds laughing [*dahikan*], "In the United States of America, they consider any individual Colored if his ancestry [*asluhu*] goes back, closely or remotely, to the African continent. This means that the majority of people in the Arab world would be considered Colored in eyes of Americans." Malcolm X's attraction to Sudan, Egypt, and the Nile Valley is well-known, as is his racial epiphany in Mecca, where he sees blond, blue-eyed pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba, and observes, "It was the first time in my life that I didn't see them as 'white' men … [they] didn't regard themselves as white."[72] Malcolm X's travel diary shows that during his time overseas, he spent much time explaining American racial mores, in particular the one-drop rule – and realizing that America's

color code did not translate well abroad.[73] He would also insist until his last days that North Africans and Middle Easterners were not white, and the MENA region should not be considered white – decades before Arab and Iranian Americans began mobilizing against the Census Bureau's "compulsory whiteness." A *New York Times* headline would promptly counter the African American leader's call: "Malcolm X Pleased by Whites' Attitude on Trip to Mecca."[74]

The centuries-old Western view of Islam as coterminous with slavery and the partition of Africa was briefly challenged by Black movements in the United States and by postcolonial figures like Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to bring their countries into the African fold. For the past fifty years, the countermovement against these postcolonial figures has sought to show that Islamic slavery was akin to transatlantic slavery – and portray MENA as an exceptionally racist region. This depiction was achieved in part by defining MENA and its people as "white," the only non-European white community in America, and the only region of the postcolonial world categorized as white by the Census Bureau.[75] This categorization allowed for the export of a range of American racial norms, some fashionable, some discredited and unacceptable at home. The ongoing campaign by MENA activists for minority status understands that ethnoracial categorization at home is linked to "region-making" overseas, and the hope is that gaining nonwhite status in the United States will not only offer some protection, but will also change how the MENA/SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region is talked about and represented. American racial interventionism in other countries understandably draws resistance. The same authors offering a culturalist/textualist explanation for Omani rule over Zanzibar, or the Egyptian presence in Sudan, would be loath to explain the presence of tens of thousands of Black and Latino/a troops in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of Latino/a Christian writing or Afro-pessimist ideology. Or imagine if the Japanese or Chinese government began funding research initiatives at American universities and in urban centers to show that hate crimes against Asians in American cities were the result of Latino supremacy or Afrocentrism, instead of structural processes.

Sociologist Zakia Salime recently asked why the topic of race and racism in North Africa and the Middle East has recently become such an active "zone of theory."[76] The new literature on "Islamic slavery" and "Arab colonialism" appears to accomplish two things: First, as civil wars blazed across the region, a focus on Arab wrongdoing provides Western scholars with a safe passage into a fascinating but reviled region. A researcher is less likely to be censured or attacked for studying Amazigh marginalization in MENA than for researching Arab disenfranchisement or anti-Arab racism. Second, in shifting the discourse from Du Bois's claim that transatlantic slavery was vastly different from its Saharan and Indian Ocean counterparts to the contemporary claim that they are analogous, this new

literature also purports to demonstrate that the real difference with regard to slavery is that America is the only country to have addressed and "worked through" its racial past. The discourse thus shifts from a negative American exceptionalism to a positive exceptionalism. One recurring theme in this new literature is "Arab supremacy," and the widespread practice in Islamic Africa of "genealogical improvement" to achieve a noble Arab lineage, in particular a *sharifian* or *syed* status. The institution of sharifian status – professed descent from the Prophet Muhammad – remains widespread in the Islamic world, and is often juxtaposed against slave descent, shaping ethnoracial hierarchies, caste systems, and a range of exclusionary practices. This observation, though accurate, suffers from an institutional void. In the ideational approach, for instance, there is little attempt to understand how states institutionalize and privilege Arab lineage through tax or educational policy, or which regimes have tried to break the sharifian system to address ethnoracial hierarchy.[77] Arab (Muslim) identity is often taken as a transhistorical given and carrier of a "color-coded religious racism."[78]

Norms and boundaries about who in America can call out racism, which social group can or can't be racist, and by extension which regions of the world can be categorized racially or called racist are constantly shifting, largely the result of Black and Jewish contestation. In the American political landscape, Black and Jewish nationalist movements have not only greater institutional reach, but also the capacity to define norms around race and deploy the label of race/racist in a way that American public opinion would consider inappropriate if used against them. In contemporary America, Black and Jewish identities are seen as having a moral status, a sort of *sharifian* rank, that provides group members freedom to speak, deference, and – to quote Sherman Jackson – an added layer of protection. This leads others to try to forge alliances with Black and Jewish groups, hoping the *baraka* will rub off. If Jewish groups shape norms about how Americans can talk about Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East more broadly, Black movements are shaping norms about how to talk about race in the United States and Africa. How the interzone of "Islamic Africa" is depicted is a result of Black-Jewish politicking, with definitions of race and antisemitism mirroring one another. The killing fields of Gaza would sharpen these issues : Who should be deferred to in conversations about Gaza ?

The view of race as immutable and of an African continent split between Arab and Black zones seems to have crested. Black scholarly opinion is shifting again. In 2022, at the height of the "woke movement," Alden Morris, whose book *The Scholar Denied : W. E. B Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* had revived interest in the African American sociologist, wrote a letter to young sociologists saying that the most effective way to decolonize sociology was by introducing students to "producers of knowledge from the past or present who were Black. To mention a few, Ibn Khaldun, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W. E. B. Du Bois."[79] Ta-Nehisi Coates, traveling the country promoting his book *The Message*, would say : "I live

for the day when I am no longer racially Black.…I don't live for the day when Black ethnicity or Black culture is extinguished, but the notion that we belong to races – is a lie." And "How do you write against your oppressor, your slaver, your segregator…without using their language – which has re-ordered reality?"[80]

In the United States and abroad, a counter-discourse began to emerge in the 2020s, calling into question the methodological nationalism and culturalist turn of the past two decades, with younger scholars producing work on ethnoracial inequality that, despite myriad obstacles, is grounded in fieldwork, and uses local variables and concepts (deploying subaltern tools, and not just the master's tools, to quote Morris). Some of these scholars are circumventing American concepts and theoretical frameworks altogether. Historian Rudolph T. Ware III's well-regarded book *The Walking Quran* is lauded (and criticized) for not using any Western social theory to understand the legacies of slavery in West Africa, relying instead on local analytical frameworks.[81] A. George Bajalia's ethnography of West African migrants in Morocco does not mention the concept of race, but rather uses "difference," just as recent research on African migrants in Oman uses the local marker of *nisba*.[82] Recent scholarship is raising new questions: Can we talk about racism without evoking race? Can we talk about race where people are not formally or informally categorized into races? In America, racial slavery occurred in a context of a free white majority and an enslaved black minority. How can we talk about race and legacies of slavery in societies where everyone was and still is unfree?

A generational shift is occurring in which scholars of African, Middle Eastern, and Muslim descent are emerging as producers of knowledge and "owning the issues," such that Darfur couldn't be used as a wedge issue in 2024 to counter Palestine activism as it had in 2004. Whether it is anthropologist Summaya Kassamali's work on the *kafala* system in Lebanon and the racial formation of the *Sri Lankiyya*, or Mayada Madbouly on Nubian activism and the role of international organizations and American universities in the region in promoting the latest conceptions of race, the new research is also going beyond the standard State Department, area studies silos and East-West comparison in favor of comparisons across the Sahara and the Red Sea.[83] These scholars note the irony that the United States is introducing programs to counter Arab racism against Nubians and Berbers, and initiatives to "remember" slavery, while arming and funding brutal regimes, bankrolling wars in Palestine, Iraq, and Libya, and exporting a range of anti-Arab discourses in the media and beyond. These scholars are also grappling with how to address ethnoracial inequality among stigmatized populations. As anthropologist Nisrine El Amin, who researches Emirati land-grabbing in Sudan, recently asked: "How to discuss all of this without feeding anti-Arab racism?"[84] One way of decolonizing the study of ethnoracial domination in MENA is to begin by addressing the overarching problem of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism: its origins and globalization, given that a racial calculus informs a range of Western policies. Likewise,

any research project or policy aimed at improving the lot of a minority community should highlight the work of locally based researchers and antiracist activists, and make clear that other communities will also be served. Decolonizing the discourse on race and slavery in MENA (and Africa more broadly) will not be easy, given the autocratic context and the fact that the demand for such a discourse and a "racial reckoning" is coming largely from the United States, and not within the MENA region. Yet in academia, popular culture, and the art world, a counter-discourse is germinating, if within tight political constraints.

With its thatched ceilings and arched doorways, Bin Jelmood House cuts an unassuming presence amidst the cluster of high-rises in downtown Doha. This small building has a ponderous history. Until Qatar banned slavery in 1952, the house's courtyard was teeming with East African slaves, corralled to be sold. In 2015, in response to American and international pressure, Bin Jelmood House became the first museum in the Arab world to memorialize slavery. The gallery – a mix of archive, photos, sound, and video installations – offers an unflinching look at the history of slavery in Qatar, but also reads like a rebuttal to the reigning discourse in the United States. At the entrance, a quote by Abraham Lincoln ("If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong") is beamed onto a wall, just above a portrait of Sheikha Muza Bint Nasser, and her statement that freedom is a "driving force" of human history. The exhibit opens with an exposition of the history of slavery around the world, with maps, photographs, and narratives of manumission and integration. A section on DNA-testing examines the mixed ancestry of Qataris, underscoring that race is a construct and repudiating race science. Video and sound installations include testimonies from descendants of slaves brought to meet the demands of the pearl-diving economy and female slaves brought as concubines. Interviews with American-based academics like Sudanese historian Ahmed Sakainga point to the differences between the trans-Indian Ocean and transatlantic slavery, a clear attempt to counter the Western penchant for equating the two. Another plaque notes that because there were no large labor latifundia in the Gulf on scale with American plantations, there is a "lack of group consciousness" and "diasporic consciousness" in the Gulf. But there are East African "cultural survivals" as in *zar* and *tamboura*.

A corridor running through Bin Jelmood House features a wall-to-wall gallery on the plight of migrant workers in Qatar, victims of the much-criticized kafala system and "contractual enslavement." Exhibit texts describe Doha's on-going efforts to combat trafficking and "modern day slavery." The last portraits show Mexican agricultural workers in the United States – modern-day *braceros* – explaining that migrant workers in the United States and the United Kingdom are illegally bound into "enslaving contracts." This final section – a clear riposte to the Western discourse of Arab exceptionalism – has irked more than one Western

reviewer, who have pooh-poohed the "blame-sharing."[85] It's no surprise that the Arab world's first slavery museum – half an hour away from Al Udeid American airbase – would praise freedom and Abraham Lincoln, while taking a jab at ongoing "enslaving" practices in the metropole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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⁶¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶² Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

⁶³ Ibid., 41, 68.

⁶⁴ Alden Young and Keren Weitzberg, "Globalizing Racism and De-Provincializing Muslim Africa," *Modern Intellectual History* 19 (3) (2022): 924.

⁶⁵ Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960*, 13.

⁶⁶ For instance, in the 1980s, Afro-Mauritanians began identifying as a "race" in part to reach American audiences. E. Ann McDougall, "The Politics of Slavery in Mauritania: Rhetoric, Reality and Democratic Discourse," *The Maghreb Review* 35 (3) (2010): 259–286.

⁶⁷ Brubaker and Cooper wrote: "Reification is a social process, not only an intellectual practice. As such, it is central to the politics of 'ethnicity,' 'race,' 'nation' and other putative 'identities.' Analysts of this kind of politics should seek to *account* for this process of reification. We should seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the 'political fiction' of the 'nation'–or of the 'ethnic group,' 'race,' or other putative 'identity'–can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality. But we should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* such reification by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis." Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (1) (2000): 5.

⁶⁸ Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Indiana University Press, 2011), 302. On colonial rule associating race with exogenous descent, Mamdani writes: "What did it mean to be constructed as a race as opposed to an ethnicity? In the African colonies, only 'natives' were said to belong to ethnic groups. Nonnatives were identified as races. While ethnicities were said to be indigenous, races were presumed to be nonindigenous." Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 27.

⁶⁹ Harry Garuba, "Race in Africa: Four Epigraphs and a Commentary," *PMLA* 123 (5) (2008): 1640–1648.

⁷⁰ "The Critical Role of Racial Equity and Justice in U.S. Foreign Policy," U.S. Department of State, August 31, 2022, https://2021-2025.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/critical-role-of-racial-equity-and-justice.

⁷¹ "Malcolm, aw Malik Al-Shabazz, Muslim Amriki Mutahamis" [Malcolm, or Malik Shabazz, an Impassioned American Muslim], *Al-Bilad*, September 22, 1964.

⁷² M. S. Handler, "Malcolm X Pleased by Whites' Attitude on Trip to Mecca," *The New York Times*, May 8, 1964, 38.

⁷³ Herb Boyd and Ilyasah Al-Shabazz, eds., *The Diary of Malcolm X: El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, 1964* (Third World Press, 2014).

74 For a contemporaneous work that views "Northern Africa" as white, as "the great border zone where white ends meeting the area where black begins," see Leon Carl Brown, "Color in Northern Africa," *Dædalus* 96 (2) (Spring 1967): 464–482.

75 For decades, Helen Samhan of the Arab American Institute has led the campaign for a MENA box on the Census: "What I resist is the fact that virtually all immigrant populations outside Europe except us are considered minorities–Asians, Africans, Latin Americans are considered nonwhite, and can compete for set-asides intended for African-Americans. The South Asians, the Pakistanis–whose experience is so close to that of Arabs economically–geographically have minority status." Interview with Helen Samhan, Arab American Institute, May 2011.

76 Zakia Salime, "Decolonizing the Race Debate about North Africa," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 407–412.

77 In Yemen, for instance, after the revolution of 1962, the officers tried to abolish the lineage caste system that existed in northern Yemen since the ninth century. This was an ethnoracial hierarchy topped by *sada*, who claimed to be Hashemites descended from the Prophet, with *qada* as their intermediaries, and the East African–descent *akhdam* at the bottom rung doing the menial work (like street-sweeping). Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

78 Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104.

79 Aldon Morris, "Reflections for Young Sociologists to Consider," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, June 29, 2022, https://berkeleyjournal.org/2022/06/29/reflections-for-young -sociologists-to-consider.

80 Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Notes on James Baldwin's Words," interview by Razia Iqbal, WNYC, September 21, 2024, https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/anxiety/articles/notes-on -james-baldwins-words-from-tanehisi-coates.

81 Rudolph T. Ware III, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

82 A. George Bajalia, "Doing *Barzakh*, Making *Boza*: Betwixt and Between Migration and Immigration in Tangier," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 41 (1) (2023): 17–33. See also Nathaniel Mathews, *Zanzibar Was a Country: Exile and Citizenship between East Africa and the Gulf* (University of California Press, 2024).

83 Sumayya Kassamali, "Understanding Race and Migrant Domestic Labor in Lebanon," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 299 (2021); Mayada Madbouly, "Au Delà de la Complainte: Sociologie des Constructions Mémorielles Nubiennes en Égypte" [Beyond the Lament: Sociology of Nubian Memorial Constructions in Egypt] (PhD diss., Université Paris Nanterre, 2022); and Mérième Ihsan, "Des identités (dé)politisées? Les enjeux de catégorisation des Nubiennes en Égypte," *L'Année du Maghreb* 27 (2022): 41–56.

84 Nisrin Elamin, "Sudan's Counterrevolutionary War," lecture presented at the Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora, New York University, October 9, 2024.

85 Michael Foley, "Doha Letter: Museum of Slavery Casts Light on Plight of Migrant Workers Everywhere," *The Irish Times*, January 16, 2024, https://www.irishtimes.com /world/middle-east/2024/01/16/doha-letter-museum-of-slavery-casts-light-on-plight-of -migrant-workers-everywhere.