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Diversity Within Islam: Its Intersections with Muslim Immigrant Identities

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the multiple identities of four Muslim immigrant students, the intersections of these identities, and the students' understandings of the systems of oppression examined in the multicultural developmental ESL writing course they attended as college freshmen. The research question is "*What are Muslim immigrant students' understandings of their own identities in terms of race, class, and gender as seen through the lens of their religious identity while taking a multicultural college writing class focusing on race, class, and gender?*" The four participants of this qualitative multiple case study were chosen on the basis of religion, race, and gender. Data sources consisted of observation fieldnotes, a mapping exercise, interviews, in-class discussions, and documents. Data were coded inductively according to arising themes. Key findings reveal that there are diversity and complex identity intersections within what the general public perceives as a homogeneous group, and that primary intersections are those of religion and race, religion and sexuality, religion and gender, and religion, race, and gender.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 50 years, as a result of the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965 that discontinued the admittance of immigrants into the United States based on country of origin (Center for Immigration Studies, 1995), there has been an increase in the population of immigrants of color. However, a concomitant increase in immigrants of color in higher education has not been observed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). A possible reason for this could be social injustice, and a solution cited by researchers is postsecondary multicultural developmental education (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005), such as that found in the setting for the present study, an all-immigrant college writing class focusing on the multicultural content of race, class, and gender. This class was situated in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program within Central Academy (pseudonym), the developmental education college of a mostly White urban Midwestern research university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before examining the postsecondary multicultural developmental education represented by the class in the present study, however, multicultural education, developmental education, identities, immigrant identities, and Muslim immigrant identities need to be examined.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education can be seen in three ways, as an idea, a reform movement, and a process:

Multicultural education is an idea stating that all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion, or exceptionality,

should experience educational equality in the schools. … Multicultural education is also a reform movement designed to bring about a transformation of the schools so that students from both genders and from diverse cultural, language, and ethnic groups will have an equal chance to experience school success. … Multicultural education is a continuing process because the idealized goals it tries to actualize—such as educational equality and the eradication of all forms of discrimination—can never be fully achieved in human society. (Banks, 2010, p. 25)

Elements of the three-part definition of multicultural education above can be further analyzed by considering the theoretical frameworks of multicultural education, which can be divided into "conservative, liberal, and critical" (Kubota, 2004, p. 31) perspectives—the critical perspective is of relevance in the present study.

Characteristics of critical multicultural education include:

- Explicit focus on racism and other kinds of injustice at the collective level
- Nonessentialist understanding of culture and problematization of difference, and
- Culture as a discursive construct (Kubota, 2004, pp. 37-38)

Elsewhere, critical multicultural education has been defined as:

(a) anti-racist; (b) a basic component for all good education; (c) important for all students, not just students of color or those in culturally-diverse settings; (d) pervasive throughout the curriculum; (e) education for social justice; (f) a process, and (g) involving critical pedagogy (Hackman, 2008, p. 30).

Finally, of the different social issues mentioned in the definition of multicultural education, it should be noted that religion is the social issue focused on in this article. The course also featured the pluralist paradigm that focused on "races, classes, genders, or intersection of race, class, and gender" (Grant, Elsbree, & Fondrie, 2004, p. 187).

Developmental Education

Developmental education, on the other hand, can be defined as

… a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum. Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners. (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009, para. 1)

Central Academy, with its mission of open access and its history of admitting freshmen who would later transfer to other colleges within the university, is an example of an institution featuring developmental education (Beach, Lundell, & Jung, 2002).

Identities

Although there is still a primary focus on race, multicultural education research has also increasingly focused on identities. A summative definition that incorporated various researchers' definitions is as follows: "Identity refers to the individual's understanding, often with an emotional dimension, of his or her own relationship through space and time with the world." (Smidt, 2007, p. 17).

Identities can be divided into three types, namely:

- imposed identities: identities which individuals or groups are unable to contest or negotiate at a particular time and place
- negotiable identities: identities which individuals or groups have the power to contest at a particular time and place
- assumed identities: identities which individuals or groups accept and thus do not perceive a need to contest or negotiate (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

For example, after being exposed to the more egalitarian values held by many Americans, Ai (Vietnamese female) exhibited a negotiable identity by contesting the notion that household chores are the province of women (Smidt, 2007). Mustafa, the Bangladeshi male participant in the present study, demonstrated an imposed identity when he, "upon his arrival into the United States [and finding] himself … racialized as a minority, … chooses a corner seat at a restaurant to distance himself from what he perceives to be unfriendly gazes" (Smidt, 2007, p. 19). Finally, Muslim immigrants comfortable with their religious identities display assumed identities when they do not perceive a need to contest their religious identities (Smidt, 2007).

Negotiation of identities, then, refers to "an interplay between reflective positioning, i.e. self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to position or reposition particular individuals or groups" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 20).

The theory from which this discussion of identities is derived, and the one subscribed to in this study, is Bourdieu's theory of practice, which features power as a central concept (Bourdieu, 1991). Imposed identities are unable to struggle for power and thus succumb to interactive positioning, whereas negotiable identities can struggle for power and therefore are able to obtain reflective positioning.

To elaborate, individuals with negotiable identities possess agency, defined as "the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, … to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable" (Inden, 1990, p. 23). This may take the form of passing, where individuals "suppress their own style and move toward the valued styles" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 132). An example of this may be Heidi, the Somali female participant in the present study,

who chose to dress like a Westerner so that she could pass as an African American, thereby avoiding religious discrimination (Smidt, 2006). Other forms of negotiating one's identity include adopting oppositional stances—as when "immigrant Latino males … adopt the oppositional stance exhibited by their disenfranchised native born Latino male counterparts" (Smidt, 2007, p. 20)—and hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1990, 1994), which will be discussed later in the article.

Immigrant Identities

Poststructuralist theory "highlights the fact that identities are constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, … whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 16). In immigrant research, immigrant identities may take the three forms of segmented assimilation:

> One [that] replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity. (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82)

In the first form, we see an imposed position, one that is not always negative, in contrast to what the term "imposed" suggests. Here, the immigrant undertakes the positioning desired by the dominant culture, namely that of "growing acculturation" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 16). The second way features the negotiated position in the form of an oppositional stance that has negative consequences. The third way, also of negotiated positioning, represents the hybrid position or third space (Bhabha, 1990, 1994) mentioned earlier. Here, the hybrid position carves out a path other than simply accepting or rejecting the dominant culture, suggesting that the immigrant has choices—the immigrant possesses agency (Inden, 1990)—as mentioned in the previous section.

Muslim Immigrant Identities

Since this paper focuses on Muslims, an examination of Muslim Americans in general and Muslim immigrant identities in particular are in order. A survey of 1054 Muslim Americans from 68 countries by the Pew Research Center (2007) revealed that adult Muslim Americans make up 0.6% (1.5 million) of the population and that Muslim Americans are mostly middle class, mainstream, and assimilated, with income and education levels comparable to the national mean. They are also highly diverse, with 65% of Muslim Americans being foreign-born.

Ethnic backgrounds consist primarily of South Asian (30%), African-American (25%) and Arab (25%) origins (Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, & Katsiaficas, 2008). Reasons for immigration include education (26%), economic advancement (24%), family reunification (24%), and to escape persecution (20%). It should be noted that three of the four participants entered the country as refugees (the fourth immigrated for educational reasons), suggesting that this study's findings may apply to only a small proportion of the Muslim American population.

Muslim American diversity is also demonstrated in frequency of mosque attendance and denominational differences (Pew Research Center, 2007):

> [W]ith respect to their religious denomination, there is a division between mainstreams and substreams, religious schools, mystical orders, and religio-political movements. Likewise, there is a scale of religious practices ranging from agnostic to fundamentalist. (Shadid, 2006, p. 20)

Furthermore, there is a tendency for younger (under 30) Muslims to self-identify as Muslims first (60%) rather than Americans (Pew Research Center, 2007). This is also borne out by Ali's (2008) study that divided second generation South Asian Muslims into acculturationists, partial acculturationists, and de-acculturationists. The latter consisted primarily of younger Muslims who went to school during the era of multicultural education and now "divest themselves from … certain aspects of mainstream American culture they deem to be contrary to Islamic norms" (p. 401).

With regards to Muslim immigrant identities in particular, there appears to be an integration of race and religion. Abu El-Haj (2006) reveals that Muslim immigrants are viewed as the "enemy within" (p. 15). He also discusses the "perpetual foreigners" (p. 310) syndrome, whereby Muslim immigrants are othered on the basis of both their race and their religion. Rich and Troudi (2006), on the other hand, introduce the term "new racisms" (p. 617), which argues that the religious discrimination experienced by Muslim students can be racially motivated. Their data suggest that this could be particularly true if the Muslim student is phenotypically black. This current of Islamophobia is also seen in Shadid's (2006) study that examines the decision of Middle Eastern Muslims who chose to stress their racial rather than their religious identities. Ajrouch and Kusow (2007), on the other hand, in researching Lebanese Muslims in America and Somali Muslims in Canada find that Lebanese American Muslims preferred to highlight their racial (White) rather than their religious identities, whereas Somali Canadian Muslims preferred to focus on their religious rather than their racial identities. The rationale for these decisions was the same: they chose the identity that would cause them not to be othered.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

Within a setting that seeks to implement critical multicultural education, namely to transform schools so that all students "have an equal chance to experience school success" (Banks, 2010, p. 25) in part through an "explicit focus on racism and other kinds of injustice at the collective level" (Kubota, 2004, p. 37), a study that examines the results of such implementation through the lens of religious identity is timely. As such, the research question of this study is:

> What are Muslim immigrant students' understandings of their own identities in terms of race, class, and gender as seen through the lens of their religious identity while taking a multicultural college writing class focusing on race, class, and gender?

Participants

This research study is derived from two separate data collection events: a pilot study, with Heidi (Somali female) and Mustafa (Bangladeshi male) as participants, and a dissertation study with Deedar (Afghani male) and Mubashir (Somali female) as participants. These participants were chosen for this paper because they are Muslims and provided rich data.

Heidi was born to a sickly Somali mother and a Somali-Egyptian father, both of whom were born in Somalia. They moved to Kenya when Heidi was four because of the civil war, an experience described as "not so good." Heidi and her family immigrated to the United States in 1997 when she was thirteen or fourteen. According to Heidi, "I think this life is better than the one in Kenya."

After completing high school, Mustafa immigrated to the United States in January 2001 as an immigration lottery winner. Coming from a close-knit and wealthy family in Bangladesh and having aspirations to study mechanical engineering at Berlin University, Germany, his family was not in favor of his move. Nevertheless, Mustafa decided to come to the United States knowing that he could always return home if he wanted to. He stayed in the United States for nine months, leaving for Bangladesh in October 2001 because he did not like it here. However, he returned to the United States again four months later for its educational opportunities and would have become a citizen in 2005.

Deedar was born in Afghanistan, where he spent the first eight or nine years of his life before moving to Pakistan. He and his family spent the next eight or nine years there. Thereafter, they immigrated to the United

States, and in 2006 they would have been here for six years. Deedar did not want to talk about his siblings—his war experience in Afghanistan impacted him greatly, which in turn influenced how he viewed life, namely that he preferred to think about positive things and not to think about negative things like his experience of war and the topics of race, class, and gender.

Born in Somalia, Mubashir, together with her mother and brother, left for Ethiopia when she was three. They lived there for three to four years, then moved to Kenya where they lived an additional three to four years before immigrating to the United States at the age of 10 "because of the civil war." As of 2006, she had been in the United States for nine years. Although they spent their first two years in Buffalo, New York, they moved to this Midwestern state to be near friends and relatives. This move "made life kind of easier."

Like the participants, the students in the class were all recent immigrants and first-generation college students. Besides the students, the class also included Pam, a White female instructor with politically left tendencies, a Somali female undergraduate writing consultant in the pilot study and a White male undergraduate writing consultant in the dissertation study.

Developmental ESL College Freshmen Composition Course

Both pilot study and dissertation study data were collected in the same course, the second of a two-course developmental ESL writing course for college freshmen. The students met twice a week for 75 minutes and once a week for 50 minutes. The textbook used was Rothenberg's (2004) *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. The seven-assignment course requirements built carefully upon one another and consisted of:

(1) Definition Paper,
(2) Web Source Evaluations,
(3) Summary Writing,
(4) Reading Analysis,
(5) Annotated Bibliography,
(6) Major Research Paper, and
(7) Persuasive Writing.

Students began by (1) exploring the definitions and connotations of key terms in controversial issues such as race, class, and gender. They then moved on to (2) learn how to evaluate web sources. Then, using a teacher-chosen article, students first learned to (3) demonstrate their understanding by summarizing the article, and then (4) "critically analyze[d and] consider[ed] the unspoken assumptions and perspective" of the article. In preparation for researching their self-selected topic, students produced (5) an annotated bibliography. The knowledge and skills they

obtained from the preceding five assignments were demonstrated in their (6) Major Research Paper, where they "explore[d] one area of discrimination that [was] most interesting to [them]". The course ended with (7) a letter to a newspaper editor or to a political figure demonstrating a call to action based on knowledge they had gained on a topic they cared about.

Researcher's Role

I am a Chinese Malaysian middle-class female researcher. During data collection, my researcher role was that of a participant observer, with an intermittent role as an additional writing consultant in the class as required. Also, it should be noted that Malaysia is a Muslim country, hence my interest in the focus of this article.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection consisted of a mapping exercise (Beach et al., 2002), semi-structured student interviews and follow-up interviews, two instructor interviews, taped in-class discussions, and documents. The documents consisted of "teaching materials, assignments, small group discussion, whole class discussion, in class work, fieldnotes, and peer review" (Smidt, 2007, p. 69).

The methodology used was that of a qualitative multiple case study that focused on 'why' questions (Yin, 2003) in a setting where "the investigator [had] little control over events" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). The case study exhibited a maximal sampling strategy (Creswell, 2005).

The data was organized using NVivo 2.0 (QSR International, 2005), a qualitative research software. Data was coded inductively (Merriam, 1998) according to participant cases, document types, and arising themes. I also analyzed the data according to the codes of religion, race, class, and gender, and kept a researcher journal.

After the coding was completed, I conducted within-case and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Then quotes were chosen and trustworthiness was attained through triangulation of data sources (Sturman, 1997), member checks (Stake, 1995), use of thick description (Stake, 1995), and an audit trail (Merriam, 1998).

DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, religion is the lens through which I observed my participants' multiple identities. Therefore, I examined the intersections of religion with the other systems of oppression, of which race, sexuality, and gender are the focus of this article.

Religion and Race

The intersections of religion and race are represented by Heidi, Deedar, and Mustafa.

Heidi

Heidi's racial-religious identity was demonstrated primarily through her decision to wear Western clothing. In fact, the pseudonym *Heidi* was chosen because the participant had selected an Americanized name for herself in place of the Somali name she had. Heidi decided to wear Western clothing because, in her own words, "I was really influenced by my surroundings and you know, being young, you … just wanna be like everybody else, you just don't want to be put down." Her desire to look like the wider society around her, however, had serious consequences. It caused her to be ostracized by her family and the Somali community, who viewed the adoption of American culture as religious failure with a resultant "afterlife in hellfire" (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 24).

Heidi's decision to stress her racial rather than her religious identity appears complex in the context of previous research. Her decision contrasts with some research which suggest that younger Muslims tend to self-identify as Muslims first (Ali, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2007), supports other research (Shadid, 2006), and calls into discussion yet other research (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Unlike Heidi, Ajrouch and Kusow's (2007) Lebanese American Muslims focused on their racial (White) identity while their Somali Canadian Muslims highlighted their religious identity. The multiplicity of decisions demonstrated by these studies indicates that Muslim immigrants choose the identity that would cause them to be less othered. However, what this choice would be is complex, as Muslim immigrants navigate the tension between Islamophobia and racism. In Heidi's case, she perceived her less othered identity as the racial one, as she escaped the religious discrimination experienced by her Somali family and friends. She shared her experience in a bus:

> When I take the bus and I see some Somali girl who dress traditionally Muslim walk in, people would just like stare at her, give her that evil look. When the whole society goes against you, you just don't feel like you have a sense of belonging. You just want to disappear, vanish, go back to a place where you can find people who will accept you for who you are.

Deedar

Deedar, on the other hand, revealed his racial-religious identity through his narration of a pivotal job application incident. Deedar shared how he had applied for a job after the September 11th, 2001 incident. He related how he had not been hired even though he was the first person to turn in his application form, not having understood

that he had not made the first selection round. He revealed that prior to the course, he would have thought that the

reason for his rejection was a lack of qualification or experience. Having taken the course, however, he said:

> But now because I read about race and sex and this *inequality or disadvantage of color people*, now I'm
> thinking negative, negative because I'm *Muslim*, they didn't call me. This kind of thought can make a gap
> into my brain, into my heart, that gap will cause me to start hate about *Christianity* maybe, maybe *other*
> *religion*, maybe about *other race*, just because I'm *Muslim*, why they do this?

In other words, there was a conflation between religious and racial identities. Deedar began the excerpt above by

talking about "color people," which he related to his being "Muslim." He connected his religion to the dominant

religion of the United States, "Christianity" before including "other religion." He then switched back to "other race"

before ending the excerpt by mentioning the fact that he was "Muslim."

Mustafa

The excerpt by Deedar above also revealed a link between racism and Islamophobia (Ajrouch & Kusow,

2007) and introduced new racisms (Rich & Troudi, 2006), which suggest that religious discrimination may be partly

racially motivated. Mustafa, for example, evinced a reluctance to discuss his religious identity—he felt that Islam

had already suffered from a bad reputation and he did not want to add to the misinformation:

> I told that people are more stereotype … when they saw these people, this kind of face they think they're
> terrorist, because our name is like Muslim name and we're Muslim. So I don't want to talk about those …
> because already in this society … I would say my religious is totally screwed up, you know, I don't want to
> shake it more, you know.

Other researchers (Muir & Smith, 2004; Weller, Feldman, & Purdam, 2001), conversely, have discovered

that sometimes Muslim identities are asserted in the face of such Islamophobia, perhaps as an instance of negotiable

identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) or hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1990, 1994).

Religion and Sexuality

Data sources for religion and sexuality were obtained from Deedar and Mubashir.

Deedar

Deedar's views about religion and sexuality arose from a discussion about non-Muslim and Muslim

homosexuality. Although Islam prohibited homosexuality, Deedar believed that "as a human, we are not allowed to

hurt someone feeling" and that "the God only is a body to judge [the homosexual], … to bring them to the hell or to

heaven." When I asked him what the situation would be like if the homosexual was Muslim, his reaction was the

same, that he still needed to treat the Muslim homosexual well and that God was the Muslim homosexual's only judge. However, he did have an additional criterion. Just as he as a Muslim needed to treat others well, so too did the Muslim homosexual have to treat him well. Deedar did end this topic by emphasizing that this was his opinion, perhaps suggesting again the heterogeneity of Muslims, that they do not all think alike on the topic of homosexuality. This contrasts with the general public's opinion that Muslims are a homogeneous group (Dwyer, 1994; Peach, 2006).

Mubashir

On the other hand, in contrast to articles she read which argued that people are born with either homosexual or heterosexual tendencies, Mubashir stressed the notion that people are born heterosexuals, and that homosexuals choose their sexual orientation. In particular, she differentiated between open societies where, as she termed it, the "normal" heterosexuality and the "not the normal" homosexuality were accepted and closed societies, where homosexuality was not accepted. According to Mubashir, homosexuality was not accepted because it was "not something people are born with." Instead, "it's a choice." A reason this distinction was important to Mubashir, who revealed, "I feel like my religion is huge, huge part of my life," could be because it would be difficult to reconcile a God who would prohibit homosexuality if homosexuality was innate and not a choice. Like Deedar, Mubashir too believed that "nobody has the right to judge them by it or put them down by what they choose to be whether it's hetero or homo."

In both examples above, Deedar and Mubashir were able to craft a hybrid identity or third space (Bhabha, 1990, 1994) that included both the Islamic mandate against homosexuality and the American norm of tolerance.

Religion and Gender
Deedar

Religion and gender was represented by Deedar, whose ideas were complex, ranging from an argument against sexism in the media to arguing against the practice of women wearing sexually explicit clothing. He was also in favor of "separat[ing] girl from boy," a practice he probably witnessed during his sojourn in Afghanistan and Pakistan prior to immigrating to the United States. Again, his range of ideas about gender demonstrated the heterogeneity of Muslims—"Arab American families, similar to other American families, represent a full range from highly patriarchal to equitable gender relations" (Abu El-Haj, 2006, p. 23)—not just among different

individuals, but perhaps within the same individual as well, as demonstrated by Deedar. This difference also demonstrates the hybrid identity or third space mentioned earlier (Bhabha, 1990, 1994).

Religion, Race, and Gender

Mubashir

Besides the intersections of two systems of oppression that have been discussed thus far, there is also an instance of intersections of three systems of oppression, as demonstrated by data from Mubashir, who discussed her experience of sexism in Somali culture. However, in contrast to the prevailing idea that Islam oppressed women, Mubashir took care to rectify this misconception. As suggested by Farid and McMahan (2004), Mubashir reiterated that what was misinterpreted as Islamic practice was actually a Somali cultural norm:

> … this way of being sexism towards the women was not from the religion in that it had nothing to do with the religion and that it was coming from the culture. Since Muslim people mostly our culture is based on our religion, so people might mix those two things up.

Mubashir again crafted a negotiable identity that protected her religious identity while acknowledging the reality of the gender discrimination she experienced in her culture.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL

The goal of any ESL teacher or teacher educator is obviously improved ESL teaching and learning. This study lends itself to this goal primarily through its consideration of the "emotional dimension" (Smidt, 2007, p. 17) of Muslim immigrant identities, as found in identity's definition. Considering the emotional dimension includes cultivating the "affective growth" (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009, para. 1) and promoting "sensitiv[ity] and responsive[ness] to individual differences" (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009, para. 1) in Muslim immigrant students, as suggested in the definition for developmental education.

A theme that arose from the discussion of the intersections of Muslim immigrant identities is that of the tension between Islamophobia and racism (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). For example, how much of Heidi's decision to wear Western clothing and select an Americanized name is that of peer pressure as opposed to religious discrimination? As mentioned previously, Heidi chose to stress her racial identity rather than her religious one, suggesting that Heidi perceived her racial identity as less othered than her religious identity. Conversely, to further problematize our understanding of Heidi's decision, 'new racisms' research suggests that religious discrimination

may be partly racially motivated (Rich & Troudi, 2006), and Rich and Troudi's (2006) data suggests that this may tend to be so with phenotypically black Muslim immigrants.

This complexity needs to be teased apart in the context of the ESL classroom, even beyond an "explicit focus on racism and other kinds of injustice at the collective level" (Kubota, 2004, p. 37) as suggested by critical multicultural education. Instead, the nuances of both Islamophobia and racism, and new racisms, need to be unpacked in the classroom, particularly for phenotypically black Muslims like Heidi and Mubashir. A way to do so in the ESL classroom is to encourage Muslim immigrants to reflect on their multiplicity and contextuality of identities—how their different identities influence one another, and how context influences identities as well. This can be achieved through a carefully scaffolded series of assignments, as the participants were able to do in this study. During the course of completing her assignments, Heidi reflected on the content of the course—race, class, and gender—as it impacted her identities:

> It changed me. It changed the way that I look at the world, the way I look at things, because I would always say like "Yeah, this person is racist" but I would never look at it as in the system. I would always blame the individuals who were racist. I would have a completely different point of view about racism than I do today.

Discovering the existence of racism allowed Heidi to blame the system that privileges certain groups and disadvantages other groups rather than blame the individuals who made up the system. Doing so allowed her to place the blame where it rightly belonged, on the system, enabling her to differentiate between the system and its individuals.

Another theme that arose is the need for a safe space to discuss controversial topics, particularly if a participant holds seemingly unpopular opinions. Examples of such topics include Islam and homosexuality, such as Mubashir's belief that homosexuality is a choice, and gender relationships like Deedar's opinion that women should not wear sexually explicit clothing and that boys and girls should not be allowed to freely associate. Related to the opportunity to discuss controversial topics is providing Muslim immigrant students a safe space to make sense of conflicting demands upon their identities. Examples included how Deedar and Mubashir reconciled the supposed incongruity between the Islamic prohibition of homosexuality and the American societal mandate of tolerance.

Finally, ESL instruction consists of more than the mastery of a language. It also includes personal development or "affective growth" (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009, para. 1). In contrast to Deedar's complaint earlier in the semester that studying the content of race, class, and gender caused him to "hate about Christianity," he acknowledged at the end of the semester that there were advantages to such study:

> This kind of activity bring more love, more respect, understand, and more, I mean, create a good environment to live. If I go against you, you definitely go against me. If I go with you and respect your thought, your religion, your culture, anything about you, you I'm sure you know there's more possibility you accept me because this is human nature. … And most of the time, it's kind of you're not saying like a word and you will say it and you're from your heart because your heart has been happy by the word I use.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the context of ESL teaching and learning, investigating how the *course content* of race, class, and gender and the *teaching* of such content influence immigrant students' attitudes about systems of oppression, both during the semester the course is being offered, and longitudinally would be an appropriate avenue for future research.

Researchers have also suggested that further studies should be conducted on identities other than race, class, and gender. One such avenue includes investigation into Muslim immigrant identities, particularly the increasing Americanization of Muslims as demonstrated by Heidi and the characteristics and consequences of such Americanization. Another option is the examination of the connection between race or ethnicity or culture and Islam as illustrated by Mustafa and Deedar. Still another option is the investigation into homosexuality and Islam.

The study supported previous research in its discovery that participants conflated racial and religious identities. A question that arises is whether racial and religious identities should be conflated. Are there circumstances within which such conflation would play into racial-religious stereotypes? How does new racism influence this conflation?

Besides investigating Muslim immigrant identities through the field of multicultural developmental education, Muslim immigrant identities can also be examined in conjunction with identity threat and resilience. The latter in particular would be a fruitful avenue with immigrants who have experienced war like Deedar or lived in refugee camps.

Finally, as the suggestions for future research demonstrate, there is still much to research in the fields of ESL and immigrant identities even though the present study has produced findings that supported previous research, e.g. the conflation of racial and religious identities, and raised some new questions, e.g. whether such conflation would result in racial-religious stereotypes.

AUTHOR

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