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The Limits of Muslim Cool

After settling into my economy-class seat for the long haul flight to London in April 2014, I opened up my iPad to peruse, with a fair bit of chagrin, a recently released 104-page U.S. Department of State digital publication entitled *American Muslims*. The design quality of the color- and photo-filled report was impressive. Beyond its design, one of the first things that struck me about the report was how it represented the racial and ethnic diversity of U.S. American Muslim communities. Specifically, the booklet included U.S. Black Muslim narratives. This jumped out at me from the photos used, including one of Ibtihaj Muhammad, a member of the U.S. national fencing team, to the individuals profiled, such as magazine editor Tayyibah Taylor. Likewise, a U.S. Black American, the Harvard-trained historian Precious Muhammad, had penned one of the reflective autobiographical articles in the publication. Although she was the sole Black Muslim who had written for the booklet (and whose other publications were cited in the "Want to know more?" reference section), this remains a significant inclusion that stands in stark contrast to the many ways in which Blackness is marginalized or rendered invisible in U.S. Muslim communities and the broader U.S. discourse about Muslims.

Another remarkable characteristic of the report—and this was the source of my chagrin—was that it explicitly highlighted Chicago and indirectly appropriated Muslim Cool. While the organizations and individuals profiled in the report came from across the United States, Chicago was the only city that was specifically highlighted as a symbol of American exceptionalism. For example, echoing the celebration of the United States as a multicultural nation, the report quoted a local Chicago Muslim leader heralding the city: "There is no other place where Muslims from different parts of the world have established one community with so much diversity"(2014, 38).[1] The booklet and the four short videos that accompanied it online (U.S. Department of State 2014) also prominently feature IMAN, IMAN's Executive Director, Dr. Rami Nashashibi, and Muslim hip hop artists, citing their contributions to U.S. American society as symbols of successful Muslim integration in the multicultural fabric of the United States.[2] In this report, then, the figures, institutions, and movements that I had identified as the vanguard of Muslim Cool—because they engage Blackness to offer a counternarrative to hegemonies that produce unequal power relations—were strategically deployed to reinforce the hegemonic power of the state.

This booklet was not designed for domestic consumption but for U.S. embassies abroad, yet I first found out about it through postings on my Facebook timeline. Friends and colleagues, some of whom contributed to the publication, were celebrating the report as a symbol of inclusion and recognition by the U.S. government. The fortuitous timing of my reading of the report, on the eve of my U.K. trip, and its explicit and subtle references to my field sites and to Muslim Cool, gave fresh urgency to the questions that had led me to the United Kingdom. I was on my way to follow a multicity tour of U.S. American artists, six of whom were Muslim, which was sponsored by the U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom. I decided to follow these U.S. American Muslim artists to a different context, that of the United Kingdom, in order to explore how Muslim Cool travels beyond the United States. My interest in the circulation of Muslim Cool outside the United States was sparked by my interactions with non-U.S. Muslim artists who performed and participated in IMAN's arts and culture work while I was in the field. I found that although they were from different contexts, including the United Kingdom, they were still doing Muslim Cool; their identities as Muslims were being forged through the loop of hip hop, Islam, and Blackness.

I also met the U.S. American artists on tour in the United Kingdom through my relationship with IMAN. Each of these artists had an individual music career, but they were on tour as members of the FEW Collective, a group of artists that had expanded in membership since the 2007 ISNA convention mentioned earlier. These artists were politically conscious and had multiple motivations for participating in the tour—none of which was to endorse U.S. foreign policies. The tour was an opportunity to do a gig, to expand their international audiences, and to connect with like-minded artists and activists in the United Kingdom. These were not the first U.S. Muslims to participate in what scholars and

the state call "hip hop diplomacy." The State Department's hip hop ambassador program began in 2005 with a non-Muslim U.S. Black American female activist, Toni Blackman. But over the years these tours have taken U.S. Muslim hip hop artists, predominantly U.S. Black men, to a number of Muslim-majority locations such as Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Occupied Territories. Twenty-first-century hip hop diplomacy reenacts the jazz diplomacy of the Cold War era. At that time the U.S. State Department deployed jazz artists as part of a cultural offensive against the Soviet Union. "Jazz ambassadors," particularly U.S. Black American artists, were used to counter the perception that the United States was a racist nation, a perception the Soviets attempted to use to their advantage (Von Eschen 2004). In the post–civil rights and post–9/11 era, hip hop has similarly served as a tool of the broader agenda of cultural diplomacy. It has been deployed by the state to manage the U.S. profile abroad but also to manage young Muslims who are perceived as potential terrorists (Aidi 2014, 225). Critically, in this management of an imperial relationship with the "Muslim world," U.S. Muslims have become a strategic asset for the state's efforts to "reform" Islam outside the United States.

This chapter, through a look at IMAN and the Muslim hip hop tours, examines Muslim Cool's relationship to the state on two scales—the domestic and the global. It also looks at this relationship temporally; specifically, I question how this post–civil rights and post–9/11 moment creates the possibility for Muslim Cool to tell a counternarrative to anti-Black racial and religious hegemonies while simultaneously telling the hegemonic narrative of the state. As Stuart Hall (1998) insightfully noted, popular cultural forms are always in a tactical relationship with power. Thus, the utility in investigating the possible limits of Muslim Cool lies not in declaring Muslim Cool, IMAN, or this cadre of U.S. American Muslim artists complicit with the state—which would divert attention away from the real holders of power. Rather, it lies in charting the context that engenders the limits of Muslim Cool's alterity.

I illustrate how Muslim Cool's claim to alterity hits a stumbling block, a wall, or a tension in its encounters with the state. The state, and the power it enacts, is not contained by the various arms of the U.S. government but rather is a "complex formation" (Hall 1996, 429) that "has no institutional fixity" (Trouillot 2001, 126). Importantly, the state's lack of "fixedness" is not a weakness but the source of its power. Examining Gramsci's formulation as it relates to the modern state, Hall argues that the hegemony of the liberal democratic state is "sustained, not exclusively through the enforced instrumentality of the state [i.e., force and coercion], but rather, it is grounded in the relations and institutions of civil society" (Hall 1996, 428).

Gramsci's formulation also insists on the recognition that hegemony is "historically specific" (Hall 1996, 424). This is important, because the U.S. hegemony that Muslim Cool must contend with is post–civil rights and post–9/11. This periodization is critical because it is a marker of how regimes of surveillance and multiculturalism coexist and complement claims of U.S. exceptionalism, and these are claims made through the incorporation of dissent. Institutions of civil society, nonprofits such as IMAN, are incorporated within the state's technologies of governmentality (Kwon 2013). Likewise, the symbols and signs of marginalized groups such as U.S. Black Americans are incorporated to authenticate the "legitimacy and social completeness" of the United States (Greenhouse 2005, 359). At this historically specific moment, U.S. American Muslims are deployed as a "critical component of the late American empire's cultural repertoire" (Aidi 2014, 257). They symbolize the success of U.S. multicultural inclusion and are evidence of the fitness of the United States as the dominant global power.

In the first half of this chapter I address the limits of Muslim Cool within the United States. I look at the construction of Muslim Cool as an alternative and as resistance through the deployment of the Black radical tradition in the arts activism of IMAN. I show that because of the paradox of the post–civil rights era, IMAN's connection to the Black radical tradition is in tension with IMAN's status as a nonprofit and with its commitment to a rights-based discourse of critical engagement, which results in an alignment with state objectives of subjectification—the cultivation of citizens as subjects who reproduce the state's hegemonic power. In the second part of the chapter, I chart the contested context of U.S. American Muslim participation in cultural diplomacy. I argue that the political realities of the post–civil rights and post–9/11 United States cut a hard bargain to belong for U.S. American Muslims.

The Black Radical Genealogy of the Muslim Hip Hop Generation

On a yellow notepad I quickly jotted down some notes on Imam Talib's talk "Artists of the Hip Hop Generation and Liberation." I was still working at IMAN at this time, and Imam Talib was at the IMAN office for an "artists' brunch." The brunch had been designed by Nashashibi as an intimate conversation between Imam Talib and a select group of about fifteen young Muslims, including Man-O-Wax, Tasleem, and Tyesha. These artists had been invited to the brunch because of their long-standing relationship to IMAN's work and to the Muslim hip hop scenes in Chicago and beyond. For Nashashibi, closeness between scholars such as Imam Talib, artists such as Tasleem, and activists such as himself was the bedrock of IMAN's work. Yet he was not the only one invested in building these relationships. Imam Talib had been working since the 1990s to instruct and support musicians and performers who had converted to Islam and who, as Imam Talib explained, were seeking spiritual balance while working within an industry that was hostile to the moral code they struggled to live by. For the artists in the IMAN conference room that morning, the talk was like a port in a storm, a refuge from the kind of policing described earlier.

The central focus of Imam Talib's presentation was the hip hop generation. He drew on religious and secular texts to impress upon us that we were part of a generation—the hip hop generation—and had to be attentive to the opportunities and responsibilities that came with our generational location. Specifically, he cited the Qur'anic verse 2:141 (trans. Muhammad Asad): "Now those people who have passed away: unto them shall be accounted what they have earned; and unto you, what you have earned; and you will not be judged on the strength of what they did." He amplified the point by referencing Frantz Fanon: "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it" (Fanon [1963] 2005, 206).

During his lecture Imam Talib suggested that the hip hop generation should take its cues from earlier generations, such as the *Salaf as-Salih* and Black Power activists. The term Salaf as-Salih, "the pious predecessors," is used by Muslims to denote the first three generations of Muslims—those who were companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the two generations that followed, all of whom are widely revered in Sunni Muslim tradition. Linking the Salaf to the hip hop generation, Imam Talib highlighted the role of the arts and artists among the Salaf: "The *Rasul* [Prophet] recited poetry at [the battle of] Uhud to lift the spirits of the troops. . . . Prophet Muhammad loved the poetry of Umayyah Ibn Abi as-Salt and Ka'b Ibn Malik, and Hasan Ibn Thabit, whose skills were so sublime the Prophet had another *minbar* [pulpit] built for him." Likewise, Imam Talib linked the hip hop generation to the Black Power movement through the arts, specifically citing the poetry ensemble The Last Poets, established in the late 1960s, and the role it played as part of the Black Arts Movement.

His lecture was emphatic in its claim that artists play a critical role in the struggle against injustice. This role, Imam Talib argued, is described in the Qur'an (22:78, trans. Muhammad Asad): "And strive hard in God's cause with all the striving that is due to Him: It is He who has elected you [to carry his message], and has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion, [and made you follow] the creed of your forefather Abraham." Drawing on this verse and the model provided by the earlier generations of artist-activists, Imam Talib contended that the hip hop generation had a specific and momentous role to fulfill. He maintained that Muslim hip hop artists are a part of a historical "continuum . . . back through African American history, back to West Africa, back to the Prophet. There is no reason whatsoever why the young Muslim artists of this day and time, like their ancestors, the Last Poets, and like their ancestors, the Griots of Muslim West Africa, there is no reason why they should not be doing the same exact thing."

Imam Talib asserted that Muslim hip hop practice is genealogically linked to Muslim tradition because it participates in a history of Muslim artistic production as the work of liberation—*art as activism*. This genealogy of art as activism locates the Muslim hip hop generation within multiple lines of descent: as descendants of the transnational and transhistorical Islamic tradition by way of the Salaf but also as descendants of the African diaspora by way of the West African Griots and as inheritors of the Black radical tradition by way of the Last Poets. Imam Talib claimed this genealogy for Muslim hip hop artists irrespective of their contemporary racialized position. However, beyond the multiethnic Salaf, his genealogical narrative privileges Muslim arts rooted in Africa and the African diaspora.

Imam Talib's genealogy was designed with the Muslim hip hop artist in mind, yet he was not the first to identify a "hip hop generation." In his critical study of hip hop's relationship to politics and culture, Bakari Kitwana defines the hip hop generation as "young African Americans born between 1965 and 1984 who came of age in the eighties and nineties and who share a specific set of values and attitudes" (Kitwana 2002, 4). This definition is useful but, as Jeff Chang (2005) notes, also contested because of who might be excluded from its purview, such as hip hop legends who are Puerto Rican or born before 1965 and those born after 1984, like my younger cohort of teachers who are multiethnic millennials who came of age after hip hop made the commercial mainstream (Clay 2012). Therefore, Chang uses the term "hip hop generation" less in terms of a specific timeline and more in relation to a set of social shifts, "the turn from politics to culture [and] the process of entropy and reconstruction" that define the United States in the post–civil rights era (Chang 2005, 2).

These divergent definitions reflect diversity within the hip hop generation. This diversity is tied to hip hop's ascendance as a popular culture form, encompassing an older hip hop generation that came of age when hip hop was at the periphery of the White U.S. American mainstream and a younger cohort for whom hip hop *is* the mainstream. My teachers came from both groups, and accordingly I use the term the "hip hop generation" in acknowledgment of the similarities and differences that define the hip hop generation across race, class, gender, and age as well as the dialogic relationship between different hip hop generations, especially as I experienced this in the field. Whatever the timeline, like Imam Talib's genealogy, these parallel definitions juxtapose the hip hop generation with the generation that immediately precedes it—namely, the activists of the civil rights era. Scholarly analysis frames hip hop and hip hop activism in relation to these previous generations and the paradox that defines our current moment—the post–civil rights era (Chang 2005; Kitwana 2002; Rose 1994; Neal 2001).

The paradox of the post–civil rights era is rooted primarily in the era's concurrent gains and losses in racial equality. As Kitwana argues, the hip hop generation is the beneficiary of the legal successes of the civil rights movement: "voting rights, affirmative action, rise of black elected officials," and the limited expansion of economic opportunity that has led to the growth of a small Black economic elite (2002, 147–48). This is an elite that comprises, among others, Black American entertainers and athletes whose success is a hallmark of what Cornel West has termed the "AfroAmericanization of White youth": a process through which styles originated by Black American youth "have become disproportionately influential in shaping popular culture" (West 1994, 10). I understand this AfroAmericanization as the instrumentalization of Blackness, described earlier, which extends the historic love and theft of Blackness (Lott 2013) into the twenty-first century so that Blackness becomes, once again, a globally traded commodity as a piece of Americana. Yet these signs of "progress" parallel, and often obscure, continued racial discrimination in the form of disparities in health, housing, education, and employment, punitive laws and policing practices that target Black and Latin@ youth, astronomical rates of Black and Latin@ incarceration (despite a general downward trend in crime rates), and the broader criminalization of Black youth in the popular imagination of the United States.

This paradox shapes hip hop activism in two specific ways. As a post–civil rights generation, the hip hop generation is unable to accept fully the easy binary of resistance and cooptation that defined the civil rights era (Kitwana 2002).[3] At the same time, hip hop activism is evaluated on the basis of the success—material, imagined, and commodified—of the civil rights and Black Power era activists (Clay 2012).[4] Hip hop activism, then, is located amid the tensions between the desire for a deeply equitable world, different levels of entanglement with the current political, economic, and social world orders, and nostalgia for a populist radicalism. This holds true for IMAN as it does for the broader hip hop generation; for them, the civil rights-Black Power era, particularly Black Power activism, is central to the engagement of art as activism.

Muslim Arts Activism and the Black Arts Movement

I see the role of the arts at IMAN and in the work of the Muslim hip hop artists I met in the field as a partial extension of the Black Arts Movement, the cultural arm of the Black Power Movement. The Black Power Movement is the late twentieth-century articulation of the Black radical tradition. The Black radical tradition reconfigures the boundaries and institutions of the nation-state through Black consciousness and a

political agenda that is transnational and diasporic in scope. My understanding of the Black Radical tradition encompasses the ever-palpable undercurrent of resistance and revolt that informs the Black experience across the Black Atlantic. Thus, the Black radical tradition includes resistance to white supremacy forged by enslaved African Muslims in forms that encompass both the extraordinary and the everyday—from armed revolt in Bahia to the maintenance of *zakat* (almsgiving) traditions in Sapelo Island to the Black Power Movement and related movements today (Robinson 2000; Gomez 2005; Diouf 2013).

The Black Power Movement denotes the activists and organizations that emerged after the assassination of Malcolm X and whose "collective thrust . . . toward racial pride, strength and self-definition" positioned them as his heirs (Van Deburg 1993, 2). The Black Power Movement is often presented as the counterpoint to the civil rights movement. Whereas the civil rights leadership advocated nonviolence, Black Power activists trained for self-defense; whereas civil rights tactics were often mired in respectability politics, Black Power activists took pride in vernacular and Afrocentric aesthetics; and while the civil rights movement demanded rights as citizens, Black Power activists organized for worldwide revolution (Van Deburg 1993).

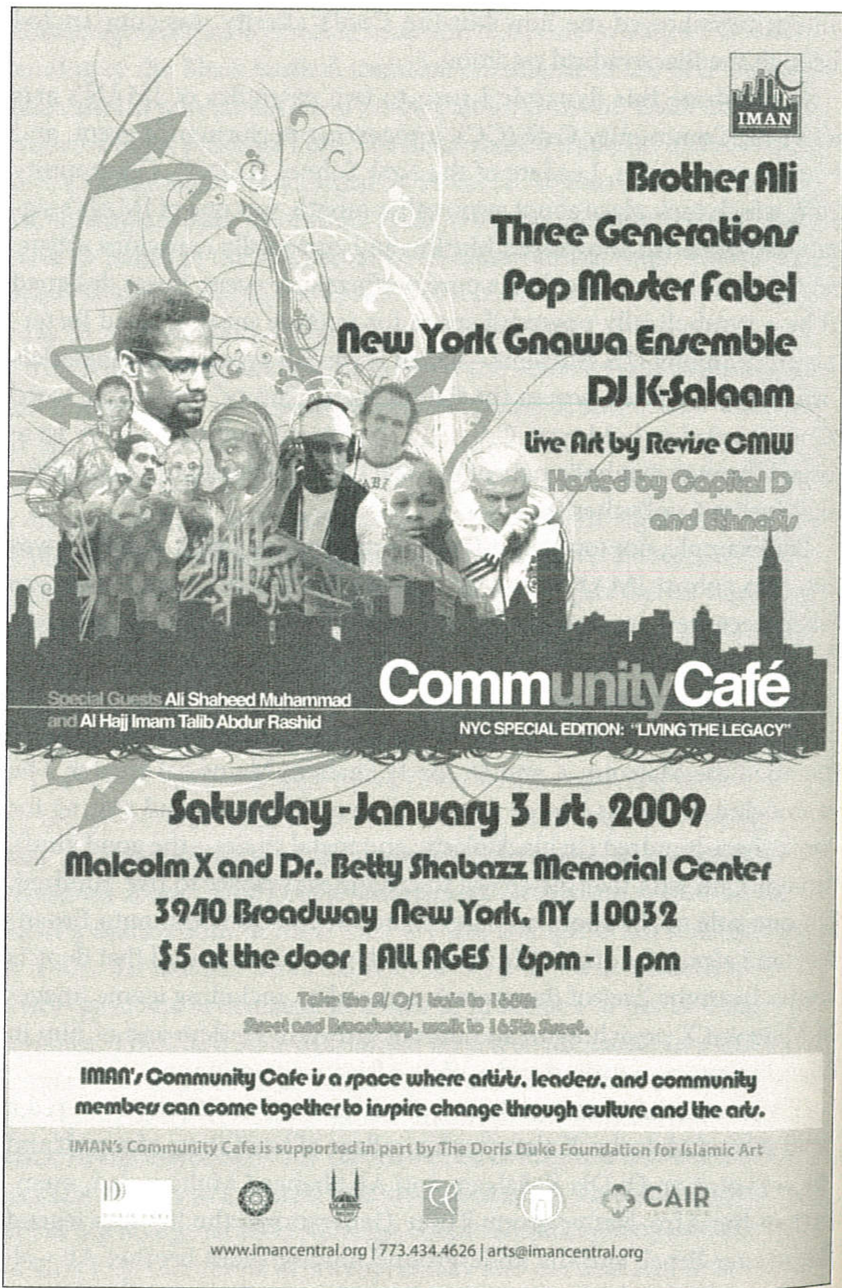
The art of the Black Arts Movement, whether poetry, music, or literature, was oppositional at its core because it was explicitly designed to raise the consciousness of the masses by disrupting white supremacist narratives about Black people—narratives circulating within as well as outside Black communities. This art was also generative: artists such as Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez created new interpretations of the poetic form and articulated an aesthetic grounded in the U.S. Black experience. The Black Arts Movement targeted "the cultural arena as the primary site of political action" and advocated "a cultural revolution in art and ideas" (Larry Neal, quoted in Ongiri 2009, 90–117). Like their Black Arts predecessors, my U.S. American Muslim arts activist teachers also saw the arts as a critical field of contestation. The arts became a site where hip hop generation Muslims could mount challenges to the interlocking hegemonies of white supremacy and of Arab and South Asian U.S. American Muslims. Likewise, Man-O-Wax's Turntable *dhikr*, described earlier, and the Arabized graffiti that adorns the wall of IMAN's office are just two examples of how their art is also generative. These

similarities showed me how Muslim Cool's alterity was constructed through the Black radical tradition.

To illustrate this dynamic I turn to two examples of IMAN's arts activism: Community Café (CC), a recurring performance event, and a summer program, Leaders of the New School (LONS). Community Café, which took place about every other month, was one of IMAN's signature events that showcased Muslim and/or socially conscious artists. Yet CC was always more than a pure performance event; it was designed to be a symbolically powerful space for making meaning and fostering unity among U.S. Muslims—which is why all promotional materials for the event while I was in the field featured "unity" within the word "Community" in bold type. Crucially, this meaning and this unity were forged through symbolic uses of the Black Radical tradition, exemplifying Muslim Cool's alterity.

For example, not too long after I left my first long stint in field, I was asked to cohost IMAN's first CC in New York City.[5] I am sure I was asked because I am a native New Yorker with fairly extensive connections to NYC Muslims thanks to my activist mother. The NYC CC was themed "Living the Legacy," and it was held in 2009 at the site of Malcolm X's assassination, the Audubon Ballroom, newly remodeled and renamed the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial Center. The remodeled theater is a large room with wood flooring and seating for about three hundred (in black plastic and metal chairs—the good kind), though I am sure that the crowd that night was closer to five hundred. On one side of the room are large windows that look out onto Broadway, and along the other side is a 63-inch panoramic mural that depicts scenes from the lives of the center's namesakes, including iconic images of Malcolm X preaching to an outdoor crowd in Harlem and of him in Nigeria wearing a turban and a West African caftan in 1964.

The promotional materials and program for this CC also featured a head shot of Malcolm X along with a collage of head shots of myself and my cohost, Cap D; DJs K-Salaam and Ali Shaheed Muhammad; members of the Afro-Native group Three Generationz; the hip hop legend Popmaster Fabel; and the underground hip hop giant Brother Ali—all of whom, like Malcolm X, are Muslim. Malcolm X's image was above the others, which made it appear as if he was looking down, perhaps pleased, upon the next generation, the hip hop generation. I was not



Flier for 2009 Community Café in New York. Courtesy of IMAN.

Community Café, New York, January 2009. Courtesy of Author.

involved in the planning for this event, but I know that the choice of location was very deliberate. As the site of IMAN's first CC in NYC, which itself was part of a larger effort to bring IMAN's model to New York, this venue introduced IMAN by locating it within Malcolm X's legacy of Black Radical resistance.

Similarly, the Black radical tradition was the centerpiece of a CC in celebration of Black history month. This CC was held in coordination with DePaul University at the university's Reskin Theater. The program for the CC featured a black-and-white collage of iconic images: a laughing Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. at their first and only face-to-face meeting; Coretta Scott King speaking at an antiwar rally just weeks after her husband's assassination; a pensive Angela Davis in 1969; the classic H. Rap Brown donning black shades in 1967; an afroed Arthur Ashe holding his 1975 Wimbledon trophy; Chuck Berry posing for his 1959 single, "Johnny B. Goode"; an early photo of Afrika Bambaataa throwing up the P-Funk sign; and MC Lyte in the early 1990s. Deploying Black U.S. American icons for Black history month has become so com-

Flier for February 2008 Community Café. Courtesy of IMAN.

mon that images like these are used in all corners from big business to the political right in the United States. But whereas some corporations, pundits, and politicians use Black U.S. American figures to reproduce their own economic and political power, I read the aim of this collage as one of alterity—evoking the Black Radical tradition as resistance.

The collage linked the radical Black politics of figures such as Davis, Brown, and Malcolm X to Berry's musical genius, which stands as a counterpoint to histories that write Blackness out of rock and roll. The collage also featured Bambaataa and Lyte, who are hip hop pioneers—a status derived both from their musical consciousness raising and from their activist contributions to hip hop. The inclusion of Bambaataa *and* Lyte departed from the tendency to represent hip hop as a male enterprise. It was also a visual representation of the hip hop generation's genealogical connection to the civil rights and Black Power activists through arts activism, which is key to the construction of Muslim Cool's alterity.

This construction of Muslim Cool as an alternative and as resistance also took place though the deployment of the Black Radical tradition in the work of the artists who performed at CC. These artists were often

hip hop emcees and poets, known within Muslim circuits but also in underground and conscious hip hop circles. Over the years of my field research and beyond, the roster for Community Café included Amir Sulaiman, The Reminders, members of Jurassic 5, Cap D, MTeam, Brother Ali, Pop Master Fabel, and others. The lineups also included song and storytelling ensembles such as Three Generationz, who performed at the NYC CC, and the theater troupe Progress Theater, who performed at the Black History Month CC and also a year later at a CC honoring "Mothers of the Movement." These U.S. American Muslim artists used their art as a form of activism. Their work is "consciousness raising" because they push their audiences to reconsider the dominant narratives of power. They challenge hegemonies in the footsteps of the Black Arts Movement.

For example, Amir Sulaiman, a spoken-word poet who came to prominence by appearing on Def Poetry Jam and performs frequently at CC and other IMAN events, always delivers work that is hard hitting and boundary-challenging—in both content and cadence. In verses that challenge the contemporary discourse that links acts of terrorism to Islam and Muslims, Sulaiman proclaims:

> From South Street to Central Road, we are shook in a trauma
> Of terrorism that precedes Al Qaeda and Osama
> Forget Bin Laden; Ben Franklin
> Enslaved my great-great-grandmamma, comma
> Great-great-grandfather, comma
> Indigenous nations of reservations, comma (Sulaiman 2007)

Likewise, Maimouna Youssef, who has performed at CC as part of Three Generationz and as a solo artist, offers a stinging critique of culture-of-poverty narratives in her cover of Lorde's Grammy Award-nominated song "Royals." Renaming the track "*We're Already* Royals," Youssef, who has also been nominated for a Grammy, flips Lorde's song on its head. The original song offered a now common critique of commercial hip hop music's preoccupation with money and consumer goods—a critique that is an extension of an older castigation of the Black poor. Youssef gives a withering rejoinder by reminding her listeners who has the "real paper":

We don't know that old true blue blood slave money
war heroes take it to their grave money
cotton money/cane money
Diamond blood stain money
. . . .
what about that tax money
oil money
Africa's rich soil money
so thick you can't fold money
British East Indian company old money
Gold money
Lime stone
Coal money (Youssef 2014)

The use of the Black Arts Movement's consciousness-raising strategies was also central to IMAN's youth development work while I was in the field. Participating in a national trend (Clay 2012) that uses hip hop and spoken-word poetry to empower and organize young people, this programming linked the arts and community organizing as a means of developing youth as leaders in their communities. At IMAN and some of its partner organizations on the Southwest Side, young people would discover and/or refine their writing and performance skills through free writing workshops, paid writing internships, regularly scheduled open mic events, and special events such as community forums in local schools. Most of these events took place in the neighborhood, but there were also times when my teachers were invited to suburban Muslim communities to perform at small youth-centered activities as well as large formal banquets.

Toward the end of my fieldwork I attended a few of the early group meetings of IMAN's then newly formed Leaders of the New School (LONS). LONS was a summer artist apprenticeship program that was designed to raise the consciousness of participants through a range of arts-based activities that "teach youth how ideology shapes" their lives and their neighborhoods (Clay 2012, 52). LONS was part of revamped youth development programming at IMAN that focused on distinct levels of engagement, from drop-ins to the appointment of a youth member to IMAN's board of directors. These levels of progressive engagement were designed to keep youth involved in IMAN's work over a long trajectory.[6] LONS brought together a group of mentors and young people who were interested in various artistic forms that aligned with the elements of hip hop: movement, vocal performance, music, and visual art. As an artist apprenticeship program, it connected youth with particular mentors based on their interests; thus a young woman who was a poet and singer was mentored by two vocal performance instructors, a poet and an emcee, both of whom had had formal theater training.

While giving youth the opportunity to explore their interests in the arts was a central organizing aspect of the program, LONS was about more than "just art." In line with the positive youth development trend among nonprofits, LONS activities did promote youth self-expression, yet these activities were also geared toward getting young people to think collectively. Unity was repeatedly emphasized in the LONS sessions I attended, reflecting the implicit understanding of arts activism at IMAN as being in line with the Black radical tradition: consciousness raising for collective action. In this model, as in that of the Last Poets ensemble, it is not the singular artist who changes the world but rather the collective—which is not uniform but united like the fingers in a fist.

LONS brought together the older and younger segments of the hip hop generation, and the first LONS meeting I attended took place in the same IMAN conference room in which Imam Talib had lectured. The first exercise, guided by Man-O-Wax, was a mix between charades and Pictionary: the young people used their bodies and the large paper notepad on the easel to get the others to guess their nicknames or stage names. For example, one b-girl apprentice went by the stage name Steady Rock. It was challenging to give clues for her name pictorially, but ultimately (and with much hilarity) the group guessed her name. This activity had all the elements of a standard youth development exercise: it broke the ice, created a shared experience, and pushed folks to be creative in performing or visually representing their names (or in creating names for those who had yet to do so).

We then moved outside to the parking lot to do another exercise, led by one of the vocal performance teachers. I joined Rabia, Latifah, Naeemah, and the other youth participants, who were a mix of male and female, Black, Latin@ and South Asian (i.e. Rabia), and Muslim and non-Muslim. We were instructed to cross our arms and hold hands, take

a deep breath, close our eyes, and count, going around the circle one by one. The youth laughed a lot. We all laughed a lot. We barely got to twenty, and the instructor lightly reprimanded us, saying that a group our size should have gotten to fifty. We did not, he surmised, because we felt insecure and vulnerable holding hands with people we had just met. This exercise also had the hallmarks of positive youth development and consciousness raising in that it pushed participants outside their comfort zones *and* raised the issue of how to build unity—implicitly introducing the challenge of working collectively. Since LONS was an apprenticeship program, many LONS sessions included mentors and mentees only, but at the group sessions that I attended the strategy of promoting collective work was maintained. From free writes to yoga, to a discussion on gender prompted by Steady Rock who wanted to know, "Where are the b-girls?" while the group watched a movie about hip hop dance, LONS was a program to develop artist activists.

Although LONS began toward the end of my time in Chicago, it stands as the culmination of IMAN's youth-focused programming that was being developed while I was in the field. The centrality of consciousness-raising art as a mobilizing precursor to collective action at IMAN is a marker of the imprint of the Black Arts Movement and illustrates how IMAN's arts activism—from its venues and publicity to its programs and performers—evoked the Black radical tradition. The claims made on the Black radical tradition by the Muslim hip hop generation, as exemplified by IMAN, do important discursive work—work that constitutes Muslim Cool as a counterpoint. However, IMAN's arts activism is only a partial extension of the Black Arts Movement and the Black radical tradition more broadly. Its partiality is rooted in a critical shift that defines the post–civil rights era: the domestication of racial politics in the United States.

Limiting Muslim Cool at Home

Looking back at my initial response to the State Department report I described at the beginning of this chapter, I should not have been too surprised to find IMAN featured in such a document. Its inclusion matches the narrative that has already been constructed around IMAN in mainstream media and some academic work—including, to a certain

extent, this monograph. This storyline often centers on Rami Nashashibi's biography (much to his chagrin) and focuses primarily on IMAN's work with the arts, youth, and interfaith engagement in a way that positions the organization as a signpost of the coming of a "uniquely diverse, inclusive *American* Islam" (Warren 2010; emphasis mine). Critically, in this telling the conditions of racial inequality that IMAN seeks to impact become just the backdrop to a triumphant American (Muslim) narrative.

Of course, for IMAN the conditions of racial inequality are not a backdrop but the organization's raison d'être. Yet to be fair, this narrative of "the triumph to come" aligns in some ways with the story IMAN tells about itself. Nashashibi, who wrote an article on IMAN for the State Department publication, guides IMAN's work through the prism of what he calls "critical engagement" for U.S. American Muslims (Nashashibi 2005). This theory of engagement is undergirded by the ever-present and urgent reality that Muslim claims to U.S. belonging are contested. Nashashibi argues that in order to solidify their position as U.S. Americans, U.S. Muslims must engage the political process and the institutions of civil society, much as other historically marginalized groups have done and continue to do: "From 19th-century anti-slavery activists to 20th-century social reformers like Dorothy Day, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., people of different faith communities have been at the center of such social activism. Today American Muslims are a growing part of this tradition" (U.S. Department of State 2014).

Two of the three references in Nashashibi's genealogy of faith-based activism are iconic leaders of the Black liberation struggle in the United States. This is reflective of his own thinking and the way IMAN's work and Muslim Cool more broadly are inspired by and seek to connect to Black freedom struggles. Nashashibi is, of course, a hip hop head, and so his nod to Malcolm X also reflects the esteemed position of Malcolm X and the Black radical tradition in hip hop and hip hop activism—an esteem that shapes Muslim Cool's alterity. During my time at IMAN it was clear that Martin Luther King Jr. was also a radical Black figure—IMAN's King marched through Chicago's Marquette Park to protest residential segregation and opposed the Vietnam War. Yet Nashashibi also includes the White female founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day. This inclusion contests claims that U.S. American Muslims do not

belong to the nation by locating these Muslims within a multiracial and multifaith U.S. American tradition of social activism. This is a move of conscious U.S. American Muslim self-making that reflects not only the pressures of the exclusion of the post–9/11 context but the post–civil rights domestication of racial politics in the United States as well.

By the domestication of racial politics I am referring to the way the dominance of the rights-based discourse of the civil rights movement narrows the set of concerns of Blacks and other communities of color in the United States to the demand for full citizenship as *Americans*—a term that implies both the extension of the legal rights of citizenship but also affective modes of belonging as citizens. I consider this a narrowed set of concerns because claims to full citizenship by people of color in the United States require moving away from internationalist and transnational frameworks of belonging. This does not mean that communities of color give up their transnational attachments, but being legitimate citizens in the eyes of the state requires that move. In the specific case of the U.S. Black American political imagination, domestication came by way of the explicit delinking of the domestic Black struggle from the anticolonial movements of the period by the civil rights establishment. This move, which Richard Iton calls "black realpolitik," meant that the civil rights establishment would fall into step with a vision of American exceptionalism as a concession for racial equality at home (Iton 2012).

The domestication of racial politics does not mean that marginalized racial communities no longer engage in forms of dissent. The concept of "cultural citizenship" as articulated by Renato Rosaldo (1994) is grounded in dissent—objecting to the institutionalized exclusion of Latin@ communities from the nation. Likewise, in her work on South Asian immigrant teenagers, Sunaina Maira defines "dissenting citizenship" as a form of cultural citizenship the basis of whose engagement with the state is "a critique of its [the state's] politics" (Maira 2009, 201). Yet as Maira illustrates, dissenting citizens are still seeking belonging *as citizens*. Thus, because citizenship is a site of subject making by citizens as well as by the state (Ong 1996), the post–civil rights era is defined by the ways in which this desire for belonging is taken up by the state, which coopts dissent through its administration of dissent.

In her recent monograph *Uncivil Youth* (2013), Soo Ah Kwon traces how the expansion of the nonprofit sector in the late twentieth century has worked to limit the forms of political resistance available to racialized communities in the United States. Building on Hall's (1996) Gramscian analysis that state power is "grounded in the relations and institutions of civil society," Kwon argues that limits on political mobilization are not the result of violent state repression but of the incorporation of marginalized communities as a category of administration. Nonprofit organizations serve the state's administration through youth development programming that "empowers" young people to self-actualize as individuals and future leaders of their communities, in the process becoming "ideal democratic subjects" (Kwon 2013, 58). Kwon notes that the growth of 501(c)(3)s is a consequence of civil rights-era mobilization and the concurrent rise of neoliberal governance as the dominant form of state power in the late twentieth-century United States. The nonprofitization of activism is a state objective under neoliberalism, enacting what Kwon terms an "affirmative governmentality that stresses neoliberal principles of self-responsibility and community governance" (Kwon 2013, 46). I do not call on Iton, Maira, and Kwon to make the point that the desire for citizenship, the work of nonprofits, and youth engagement are categorically "negative," but rather to critically consider what kinds of political possibilities are foreclosed to Muslim Cool by the post–civil rights commitment to a rights-based discourse and the cultivation of engaged citizens.

On the one hand, like most activist nonprofits whose work and perspective are explicitly concerned with the suffering of racialized communities, IMAN is at odds with the state, which upholds racial suffering. Yet on the other hand, in a departure from the activist models of the Black radical tradition, IMAN is not in direct confrontation with the state. As a post–civil rights era nonprofit organization IMAN has a much more complicated relationship to state power and governance. IMAN uses the critique of the Black radical tradition to shape the contours of the rhetoric of its dissent: how to levy a critique at the state, the importance of levying a critique at the state, and the necessity for U.S. American Muslims to be critical. Yet the organization's theory of "critical engagement," which guides its work on the ground, turns more on the rights-based rhetoric of the civil rights movement.

Nashashibi articulates IMAN's work as critical engagement to set it apart from U.S. American Muslims who engage with the broader U.S.

American society primarily through education and the marketplace but do not "analyze the intimate relationships they have with a broad set of political arrangements," on the one hand, and from U.S. American Muslims who withdraw from broader U.S. American society "as an articulation of deep Islamic principles or an expression of heightened piety . . . often couched in terms of renouncing or rejecting *dunya* [worldly affairs]," on the other hand (Nashashibi 2005, 2–4). By contrast, Nashashibi proposes for U.S. American Muslims an engagement with the political process and with institutions of civil society that is critical of state power. For Nashashibi, this engagement is also attentive to the ways in which race and class position U.S. American Muslims differently in relation to state power. Critical engagement is a form of dissenting cultural citizenship because at stake in Nashashibi's definition of engagement is the recognition of U.S. American Muslims as *Americans*—which again implies both the extension of the legal rights of citizenship and affective modes of belonging as citizens.

IMAN's arts activism is an important part of a larger agenda for social change. Other projects include participation in rallies for immigration reform; Muslim legislative days at the Illinois state capitol and *iftar*s (Ramadan dinners) at the White House; reentry programs that provide jobs for formerly incarcerated Black Muslim men; a free health clinic for the underinsured; and working with Arab grocers to provide fresh food options at local corner stores on the city's Southwest Side. All these projects come out of IMAN's commitment to critical engagement, which relies on a rights-based framework—IMAN dissents from the exclusion or the neglect of the rights of people of color as citizens—and accordingly responds through a series of programs that reflect the constraints of the post–civil rights era prioritization of one's status as a U.S. citizen. This does not mean that IMAN as an organization or the individuals who participate in its work do not have visions of belonging beyond the state; but it means that the articulation of those linkages is often rendered secondary, if engaged in at all.

IMAN's relationship to state power and governance, which illustrates one of the limits of Muslim Cool, is not merely or even primarily about "where the funding comes from" but about how a commitment to social change through the expansion of the rights of a dissenting racialized citizenry can align with state objectives of subjectification. IMAN's arts activism, like all hip hop activism, is located within tensions between nostalgia for a populist radicalism, desires for a deeply equitable world, and uneasy alignments with the dominant political, economic, and social world orders. Again, I do not consider this a reflection of a desired compatibility with all forms of state power; IMAN consistently dissents from the state's practices of racialized inequality. But it does reflect the paradox of the post–civil rights era, a paradox that enables a neoliberal state hegemony—one that is itself flexible—to set limits on Muslim Cool both domestically and abroad.

Imperial Muslim Cool?

As stated earlier, the limits of Muslim Cool are born out of a context that is post–civil rights and post–9/11. The post–civil rights administration of dissent through the institutions of civil society is a technology of a broader, state-generated discourse of U.S. multiculturalism. The narrative of U.S. multiculturalism upholds the racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population as the nation's most valuable asset. This asset is an achievement: the discourse configures the U.S. Black American struggle to overcome slavery and Jim/Jane Crow as a testament to U.S. American ideals and culture. Accordingly, multiculturalism, when deployed by the state, is a triumphant narrative of American exceptionalism.

However, in the lived experience of racial minorities, the state administration of dissent through the incorporation Black freedom movements as quintessentially "American" is not a challenge to structural inequality. While the rhetoric of U.S. multiculturalism allows for affective recognition as citizens, it does not displace the racial hierarchies that privilege the White Christian citizen but rather "remains appropriately hierarchal" (McAlister 2005, 259).

Parallel to the post–civil rights multicultural state is the post–9/11 surveillance state. Replicating the COINTELPRO regime of the mid-twentieth century, the current domestic surveillance state legitimizes increased overt and covert monitoring of U.S. citizens with reference to national security. Post–9/11 practices of the surveillance state, conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and local law enforcement, include unexpected home visits by "friendly"

local FBI agents, more intensive questioning and searches of persons and property at borders, selective detention and deportation, covert monitoring of personal communications and movements without prior evidence of criminal activity, and the use of paid informants to "thwart" homegrown terror plots (Khera 2010; Aaronson 2011; Akbar 2013).

In a partial inversion of state multiculturalism in the United States, race is also central to the logic of the surveillance state. Racialization under regimes of surveillance determines who does not belong. As Junaid Rana has shown, the surveillance state "deploys the Muslim body as a concrete objective entity to control and regulate" (Rana 2011, 155). This marks the contemporary "racialization of Muslims," which scholars have noted in a post–9/11 shift of the designation "Muslim" from a religious to a racial category (Rana 2011; Razack 2008; Volpp 2002; Naber 2008). As a racial category, the "Muslim" is known through bodily and behavioral markers, such as "Middle Eastern looks," beards, and headscarves—markers that are signs of suspicion.

U.S. American Muslims disproportionately feel the gaze of the surveillance state in their homes, prayer spaces, charities, schools, and even intimate lives. Importantly, however, the state enforces these policies of detention, deportation, and surveillance that single out Muslim citizens and immigrants while simultaneously holding to its multiculturalist narrative—declaring that the "war on terror" is not a war on Muslims (Maira 2009). Accordingly, surveillance meets multiculturalism in what scholars refer to as the U.S. government's support for "moderate Islam."

In her article "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," Saba Mahmood analyzes U.S. government efforts to "foster what is now broadly called 'moderate Islam' as an antidote and prophylactic to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam" (Mahmood 2006, 331). Drawing on a broader intellectual critique of secularism's "unmarkedness" (Asad 2003), Mahmood argues that these efforts advance U.S. hegemony through "secular normativity," which does not reject but rather reshapes religious subjectivity to fit U.S. imperial aims (Mahmood 2006, 328).[7] This religious subjectivity is that of the "autonomous individual believer [who] is a necessary protagonist in the plot of secular political rationality, one who owes his allegiance to the sovereign rule of the state rather than the structures of traditional authority" (Mahmood 2006, 340). Importantly, Mahmood notes that some

Muslims too seek the goals of this strategy as part of a "secular liberal Muslim agenda" (Mahmood 2006: 329).

Likewise, in his book *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*, political scientist Hisham Aidi (2014) traces the ways in which race, music, and diplomacy bring Muslims directly within Euro-American imperial agendas. He argues that music is "a key component of the Sufi counteroffensive" against the "Salafi" or "Islamist" articulations of Islam that, according to U.S. and European policy makers, fuel so-called Islamic extremism (Aidi 2014, 75). Looking at the specific case of the United Kingdom after the London bombings in 2005, Aidi echoes Mahmood's analysis of Euro-American strategy's ideological bent in seeking to win an alleged "battle of ideas" within the global Muslim community (Aidi 2014, 74). In Great Britain, this has led to the establishment of the Preventing Violent Extremism program (Prevent), whose policy directives have channeled millions of pounds in funding to British Muslim organizations that are expected to expound this counternarrative among British Muslims. According to Aidi, this Sufi counteroffensive in the United Kingdom was openly backed by the United States and a host of prominent U.S. scholars such as Hamza Yusuf, who, while not acting at the behest of the U.S. government, preached messages of political and social integration that aligned with U.S. interests. Music, including hip hop, also emerged as a part of the Prevent strategy.[8]

Around the same time that Prevent was taking shape in the United Kingdom, the U.S. government launched its own efforts at the intersection of the arts and counterterrorism. In a Brookings Institution report, "Mightier Than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship," former ambassador Cynthia Schneider, one of the architects of the resurgence of arts diplomacy geared specifically toward Muslims outside the United States, cites

> the tremendous potential of hip-hop for building connections between the United States and the Muslim world. Like jazz, hip-hop has resonated throughout the world. . . . From the suburbs of Paris to Palestine and to Kyrgyzstan in central Asia, hip-hop music reflects the struggle against authority. Hip-hop originated in African American communities in the inner city; some of its early pioneers were American Muslims. They carry on an African American Muslim tradition of protest

against authority, most powerfully represented by Malcolm X. (Schneider and Nelson 2008, 15)

Critically, U.S. foreign policy is here explicitly drawing on the very link between hip hop and Islam that I argue motivates Muslim Cool. I recall first reading this report while in Doha in 2009. The film *New Muslim Cool* had been nominated for (and ended up winning) an award at the Al-Jazeera Film Festival in Doha, and I had come along with the film's director to network and drum up buzz about the film, which was set to be released the following year in the United States. I mention this connection because the film was also cited by Schneider as a kind of exemplar of the kind of cultural production that could help to illuminate the history of hip hop and Islam in America and thus build bridges in U.S.-Muslim relationships (Schneider and Nelson 2008).

Schneider's reading of the film (and of hip hop more broadly) stands in stark contrast to the way the film's directors saw the relationship between Islam and Black protest—as an indictment of the state. As on the home front, the administration of dissent is at play here. In refiguring hip hop as a bridge builder, the United States also refigures itself as a champion of freedom, in this particular case of free speech. Accordingly, the dissent of racialized and marginalized communities becomes a marker not of where the state has failed but of where it is succeeding. Like the power inequities between the United States and Muslim-majority nations, the power inequities within the United States voiced by hip hop cannot be heard over the roar of the celebration of U.S. American triumph.

The U.S. embassy's interest in the tour that I followed in 2014 came out of the architecture of this kind of thinking. This was a tour that did not travel to a Muslim-majority territory but to the United Kingdom, which, not inconsequentially, has a significant Muslim minority population. It was a multicity tour that began in London and made stops in Nottingham, Birmingham, and Manchester. A concert was held in each city, and in London, Nottingham, and Birmingham the artists also ran youth-oriented workshops. I attended all these events except for the workshop in London and the concert and workshop in Nottingham. These concerts and workshops, while funded by the U.S. embassy in London, were organized by the tour leader, Man-O-Wax, in coordination with local arts organizations. Sometimes the local organization merely provided a host space for the concert or workshop; at other times it was more deeply involved.

At the final concert of the tour at the Z-Arts Center in Manchester, the center staff had very little involvement with the show besides providing directions to the bathrooms and auditoriums, distributing tickets, and controlling the sound. By contrast, the first concert of the tour had been held in a small auditorium at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) as a part of the "Salaam Café," a series of events put on by the Rabbani Project, a relatively new (at the time) Sufi-oriented collective that hosts a range of activities from lectures on tea cultures and Islamic music to drumming workshops and outings to learn archery as a "sacred art."[9] This particular Salaam Café was also cosponsored by a SOAS student organization, the Spiritual Dialogue Society,[10] by Rumi's Cave, and by the U.S. embassy in London. Excluding the embassy, all the sponsoring organizations were "third spaces"—ecumenical or Muslim intrafaith gatherings. The idea of the third space is gaining prominence in U.S. American Muslim discourse to describe spaces that are neither mosques, which assert a normative spirituality, nor completely secular spaces, which can be devoid of or hostile to religion. Rumi's Cave is an example of such a third space: it is a standing physical location, a small storefront in a London neighborhood, run by multiethnic young British Muslims under the tutelage of a learned and popular Sufi religious leader, Shaykh Babikar.

Accordingly, the Muslim or, more specifically, Sufi orientation of these sponsoring organizations was very much in the foreground. In addition to opening the event with a recitation from the Qur'an, the evening's host, herself part of the Sufi Muslim music ensemble Pearls of Islam, reiterated the Sufi emphasis on (divine) love by explaining that the objective of the Salaam Café was "to occupy space with love." I am referring to these organizations as event sponsors not because they provided funding for the concert but because they sponsored the event in other ways, such as by publicizing it through their networks, providing local legitimacy, and so on. The event flyer, which prominently featured photos of the FEW Collective artists, also contained small images of the logos of each sponsor, including the U.S. embassy in London.

The embassy logo was a small American flag, and its placement put the embassy on par with the other, nonprofit sponsor organizations, belying the unique financial contribution it had made. Moreover, besides a brief thank you, there was no real mention of the embassy's involvement at the event. This would change at other venues, where the embassy official who traveled with the tour actually introduced the concert or was on hand to film the workshop, as one Foreign Service officer did during the workshop in Manchester. I was able to speak with an embassy employee who attended one of the shows and was adamant about not wanting to be identified. I obliged, but at the conclusion of our brief chat I found that he had said little that I could not have easily found in official statements, such as Schneider's report quoted above. I had asked him why the embassy was supporting this tour. He responded quite enthusiastically that the tour was about "showing American diversity" and demonstrating to U.K. audiences "This is what America is!" I then asked whether the embassy ever got pushback for these events:

THOMAS:[11] What do you mean by pushback?
SU'AD: I mean, whether people say to you: "You [the embassy] say this is American but that is not what America really is."
THOMAS: That does not happen at events like the FEW show; you wouldn't even know we were a part of it, necessarily, which is sometimes something we also do [more intentionally], like in Pakistan, because it [publicizing the U.S. embassy's involvement] could endanger people [the traveling artists].

The FEW tour was one of many embassy-sponsored events and thus part of a broader strategy of cultural diplomacy by the U.S. embassy in London. The London programming is not solely Muslim-oriented; in addition to the FEW tour, according to one source, the U.S. embassy had helped to fund a tour of the United Kingdom by critical race studies professor Kimberlé Crenshaw as part of International Women's Day, a visit by Chicago violence interrupter Aminah Matthews, and a performance by the differently abled hip hop dance crew Ill-Abilities. According to the staffer I spoke with, these events were meant to promote "American values," which included "freedom of speech and American diversity." Diversity seemed to be the main emphasis, as he explained:

THOMAS: Once you are an American, you are an American; you belong and feel a sense of belonging, as a kind of patriotism—but not a blind patriotism, I am not for that, but a sense of belonging, a nationhood you don't see here in the U.K.
SU'AD: So how do you know if the event was successful?
THOMAS: That's something we are still working on, we don't have any formal evaluation system, but we need something—also to tell Congress why they should keep funding this type of programming!

Toward the end of our conversation, Thomas waxed a little reflective and wondered whether maybe he needed to go back home to make sure that was still the case—that once you are an American, you are an American—since he had been in the Foreign Service for quite some time. He also noted, insightfully, that "reverts in the U.K. say they feel marginalized and undervalued by the 'Asian' Muslim, yet the Asian Muslims *love* reverts from the States and put them on a pedestal."[12]

In an interview with a local British Muslim leader, A. R. Malik, I was introduced to another aspect of the U.S. cultural diplomacy strategy, which some call "direct engagement." Malik explained:

> The Americans learned [from] the failures of Prevent. [The Americans decided,] "We are going to engage with a broad group of actors." This is [part of the] paradoxes within American policy. . . . There are protagonists that are trying to do the right thing, within a CT [counterterrorism] perspective. The American embassy in London did something amazing during this period [right after the bombings in 2005]. I went to the former ambassador's Eid party at his house, and in that room there was Ikhwan [members of the Muslim Brotherhood], Salafis, those people the U.K. government would not talk to, they would not be invited to an Eid party at Downing Street or the Home Office. . . . [So] the American embassy has more engagement and buy-in from British Muslims.

Malik and others also noted that direct engagement was not only Eid parties but also "off the record" conversations, where embassy staff went off talking points.

For the United States, this multipronged approach seemed to be effective. While the U.S. embassy's presence was fairly discreet in the plan-

ning and presentation of the FEW concert, I noted a familiarity and a friendliness between some of the embassy staff on hand in London and the local British Muslims, which seemed to indicate relationships that preceded the tour and were reinforced by it. Therefore, related to the ways in which nonprofits work for racial equality in the United States, civil society is also central to U.S. cultural diplomacy in the United Kingdom and to the articulation and reproduction of U.S. hegemony. And like for U.S. American Muslims, for the British Muslim community too familiarity and friendliness with the state, be it the American or the British one, represent a complicated entanglement.

I met up with Malik right before the SOAS concert at a bookshop not too far from campus. Malik is one of the main organizers of the Radical Middle Way (RMW), and despite being a Canadian transplant he is a well-known figure in the British Muslim community. This is because of the work of RMW, which began in the shadow of the 7/7 bombings. RMW put on a number of multicity concert tours around the United Kingdom that featured Muslim artists such as Amir Sulaiman and Islamic scholars such as Hamza Yusuf. Similar to the work of IMAN in the United States, RMW's tours made arts and music culture central to its overall mission to open "a safe place" for young Muslims "to ask difficult questions and explore challenging issues" (RMW 2014).

The ideological foundation of RMW came from the work of the British Muslim intellectual Fouad Nahdi and the periodical *QNews*, and as such the questions and issues that RMW focused on were those that challenged the broader Muslim status quo in the United Kingdom as well as the specific "Salafi" narrative. This secondary challenge was where the vision of the RMW and the counterterrorism objectives of the U.K. government were in agreement: both wanted to counter the growth of Muslim fundamentalism in the United Kingdom. As a result, Malik explained, "the Radical Middle Way, as a project, was one of those sixty-three recommendations [that came out of the post–7/7 consultation between the U.K. government and British Muslim leaders], and we were one of the first to be funded and supported." While RMW's vision is much older, the fact that RMW as a working organization came about directly through Prevent has been a source of tension and critique:

> MALIK: People said, "Oh, they're funded by the government." Our argument was the funding could be funded from Mickey Mouse, Kermit, your father. For us, [the key was to] look at the content. [After the 7/7 bombings] we made a decision of critical engagement. Either we at this point stand by what we have always been saying [at *QNews*] that there is a pernicious element in Islamic ideology that's supporting violence and that although it doesn't occur in a vacuum, *it is* part of the matrix of the problem. For us, our sense of integrity was [posing the question], "If we did this event without HMG [Her Majesty's Government] funding, would we do this event differently?" *No*. And what happened on that [Breaking Light] tour? Amir [Sulaiman] comes up and performs "Danger" or "Dead Man Walking" and these are incendiary, difficult, some would say violent, poems. Did we censor him? No. Were our [government] funders concerned? Yes. But for us it was clear. Dissent needed to be a part of talking about empire. The stage became a place where you could speak honestly with safety about these issues; at the same time, there was a [Islamic] morality behind it and ethics behind it.

As further proof that Prevent funding "didn't change the way we [RMW] did things," Malik explained that RMW would ultimately decline future Prevent funding. In 2010 the new Conservative government had revamped the Prevent program. An official report issued by the new government claimed, "The Prevent programme we inherited from the last Government was flawed. It confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism" (Prevent Strategy 2011). In this new political climate, for RMW "there were too many [new] conditions to meet," Malik explained, "like a values clarification: [a list of] questions where we would have to clarify our British values." According to Malik, the early version of Prevent had been more porous, thus giving RMW more latitude; however, as it became more ideological and "drilled down to de-rad[icalization]," RMW got out of the Prevent game.

Malik and RMW were not the only British Muslims facing this entanglement. I met Rafeek for a conversation near a shopping square in Manchester—or rather, I met and then waited for Rafeek as he concluded what turned out to be a fairly long cell phone conversation with

another Afro-Caribbean Muslim man about ways to organize and rebuild solidarity among Afro-British Muslims. Rafeek, like most of the folks I met in the United Kingdom, was both an artist (an emcee) and a youth activist. He was fairly gregarious, with a deep knowledge of Muslim and Black British arts and life. He also had strong opinions about Prevent and the U.S. embassy and a strongly pragmatic relationship with both. Echoing complaints of anti-Black racism among Muslims that I had heard repeatedly in the United States and that the embassy staffer also alluded to above, Rafeek was dismissive of the critics: "Yeah, people have gotten criticized for taking Prevent [funding], but all these Muslim organizations that have millions do nothing for Black [British] people." Describing a kind of counterterrorism nonprofit industrial complex, he said that folks, including himself, used the "CT lingo to get the CT money."

Rafeek explained that he had received U.S. embassy funding to bring an international Muslim leader to speak to working-class youth in the United Kingdom. Like many nonprofit workers, he had an idea and the passion to make it happen but no funding until "one brother who had a connect to the embassy told me to pitch the idea" to the embassy. Rafeek called it a "bargain": he needed the money, and in return the embassy asked that its logo be placed on publicity material and that some of its people be able to attend the lectures. Rafeek obliged, but claimed that his embassy contact later complained that the embassy did not get enough exposure. Again, Rafeek was not moved: he had held up his end of the bargain. Yet even with all his aggressive pragmatism, for Rafeek there was an ethical line in the sand. He explained, pointing to the market square where we were sitting, "Say there was a bunch of Muslim kids rioting in the square; they [a specific local organization] would say, 'Yes, we came and put down the riot [so fund us],' even though they wasn't even there." In contrast, Rafeek said he neither lied nor played the role of informant. The organization Rafeek mentioned was held in suspicion by a number of Muslim leaders I spoke with, who believed that this group not only lied about the efficacy of its CT work but would even make money by reporting innocent Muslim youth to the U.K. government as potential terrorists based on conversations the organization itself had incited. Even those who disagreed with Rafeek about how U.K. Muslims should relate to Prevent, agreed that this particular organization was "dodgy." This particular group also had the reputation of being a favorite partner of the U.S. embassy in London.

I have deliberately refrained from naming the organization in question because my intent is not to write an exposé about CT work in the United Kingdom based on hearsay that I am unable to confirm. Rather, I point out the overall controversy surrounding Prevent and the overlapping relationships between the U.S. embassy and a series of British Muslim groups, dodgy and otherwise, in order to highlight the fact that the complicated entanglement faced by U.K. Muslims also confronts American Muslim hip hop artists who travel within the context of U.S. (and British) empire. Yet like Rafeek, these Muslim artists are also making a kind of bargain, a bargain with empire. The question remains as to what it means to make a bargain like this: how do artists manage it, and does Muslim Cool then become a technique of the state's imperial agenda to not only "reform Islam" but extend its own global domination?

Bargaining with Empire, Bargaining to Belong

My interview with Rafeek ended shortly before one of the FEW tour's shows at a local community arts center. Since he too was a hip hop head, I encouraged Rafeek to come to the show with me, but he was highly skeptical. His skepticism was inspired by his past working relationship with government funders. Often artists sponsored by official outfits such as governments or large foundations are unknown and/or not very talented. Rafeek had never heard of any of the artists on the tour and thus assumed that they were amateurs and not really worth seeing. After much prodding I was ultimately able to convince him to attend. About two minutes into the concert, he turned to me and said, "One word: amazing!"

Rafeek's estimation of the FEW tour was not unfounded. Despite never having performed together as group and having had only limited time to practice, the group's performance was very cohesive. This was due to the individual artists' talent and professionalism and to Man-O-Wax's skills as the band leader. It was also due to the fact that their individual genres—hip hop, Nubian pop, and Gnawa—shared the same sonic home: Africa. One of the songs that impressed me was the group's cover of the Police track "Walking on the Moon." I saw them perform

the song on several occasions, and each time I was struck by their skilled and moving ensemble.

Their rendition of the song began with a syncopated break beat dropped by Man-O-Wax, and then Brahim, the Gnawa artist, added on an additional percussive layer with his oud (a lutelike instrument). In bluesy raspy tones, Aja Black of The Reminders sang the verses of the song, and Alsarah harmonized at selected movements. Their two voices came together in the chorus, which was a reggae-style yodel-shout that gave the song an almost haunting quality. And in an embodied accompaniment, the group's b-boy, Brave Monk, moonwalked and popped in slow motion across the stage.

As with the performance attended by Rafeek, the quality and intensity of every performance were high, yet they performed to what I found to be unexpectedly small audiences. When I arrived at the MAC Birmingham Art Center for the group's preconcert workshop it was clear that the FEW Collective workshop and show were just one of many events held at the bustling location. The venue was described to me as "the [official] arts center of the Midlands region." The workshop was scheduled for a three-hour block of time and was designed to start with ice-breaking activities, after which the attendees would be split up, much like the format of LONS, to have a more direct learning experience with one of the artists (vocal, dance, DJ, and emcee). The workshop was attended only by a small group of local preteen girls of color. Although they were initially shy, they eventually warmed up to the event and were full of giggles. The teachers who brought the group together seemed really appreciative of the activity and wished they could have stayed longer, but they had to leave after the icebreaker. Their departure left behind one British Asian teenaged Muslim woman, a thirty-something White Canadian transplant called Kathy, and myself. While the teenager went off to work on her singing with the two vocalists on the tour, Kathy and I stayed to work with the b-boy, Brave Monk. During our session, Kathy commented ironically, "They came all this way to teach hip hop to a Canadian and an American!"

The concert was also poorly attended, with an audience of only a small group of about fifteen Black and Asian British teens from a local organization that the U.S. embassy often partners with—but not the "dodgy" one mentioned above. To be fair, what they lacked in numbers

the teens definitely made up for in audience participation. Initially they were seated toward the back in the small stadium-style auditorium, but when asked to move closer to the stage they eagerly came forward to the second row of seats. Likewise, once encouraged to clap, they clapped throughout, and one young man even got popped, locked, and tutted on stage.

Despite this enthusiasm, I was disappointed by the small audience turnout, and I was joined in my disappointment by a local Muslim artist and organizer who described the center as "smack dab" in the middle between two communities: "On one side everyone is White and middle class, and on the other everyone is brown." He complained that typical MAC programming is aimed at that "posh, White elite" and that in the summer the park in which the center is located is full of people of color who come inside the center itself only to use its bathroom. A year earlier he himself had put on a program at the center that had attracted many people, primarily non-White Birmingham residents—so many, in fact, that the center had had to turn people away. This, he argued, was due to the aggressive street marketing he and his partners had used to get the word out. He believed that the same should have been done for the FEW show but had not been because the center's leadership did not "really engage with the community despite all the [state] resources they have been given."

I attended all but one of the tour's concerts, and the issue of small audiences plagued the entire tour. In neither London, nor Birmingham, nor Manchester was the hall where the tour performed filled to even 75 percent capacity; rather, each was full of empty seats. I was disappointed for the artists because of all the time and effort they had spent in preparation. But I was also perplexed. The U.S. embassy's stated goal in promoting a tour such as this was to showcase U.S. American diversity; it would seem reasonable, then, that the embassy would do its best to make sure that the venues were packed. Why would they spend money only to have the invited artists perform to very small audiences? The issue of audience size could be chalked up to the typical inconsistencies inherent in running a bureaucracy: the embassy had big ideas but a small staff and limited time. From my limited exposure to the embassy's work through this tour, I believe this was part of the story. However, it seemed to me that the apparent negligence also formed part of a strategy of soft power:

MALIK: What the American Embassy does is they promote American culture and American soft power, and FEW is here because the embassy sees the value of FEW as a representation of American Muslims within a broader culture space. FEW is coming here, they are going to *represent*. What's the impact going to be? On one level it's patronage, plain and simple. I think it's kind of low impact. Bring them over and people [the audience] enjoy a musical experience, they [the embassy] do it all the time. So why Muslims? Because the American embassy wants to engage with Muslim communities. It is important for them. Why? Because London is the Muslim capital of Europe. Here you exert a lot of soft power. The right inputs here will carry to the Muslim world.

Malik's reflection implies that the U.S. embassy's engagement is somewhat run of the mill and low impact by design. Unlike drone attacks or torture, the instrument of state hegemony in this case is not a high-impact spectacle of violence but minute gestures of relationship building through culture and civil society—gaining hearts and minds. Yet the goal is the same as that of drone attacks and torture: extending the power of the state. Muslim populations are geopolitically significant. Power over these populations enables access to significant natural resources and consumer markets, and control over these resources and markets is thus a key state objective for the United States. However, Muslims have their own objectives that may or may not align with those of the state—hence the need for the right input here and the right input there to reach the aggregate impact of U.S. hegemony. This suggests that, as an effect of power, the low-impact cultural diplomacy strategy must be seen in the aggregate. Multiple low-impact events, small inputs, and each tidbit of information are pooled to spin a particular narrative of American exceptionalism in order to justify U.S. empire.

Importantly, this is not the first time the arts and racialized minorities have been central to U.S. global pursuits. In the Cold War face-off between the United States and the Soviet Union, jazz became a critical weapon of U.S. soft power as officials strove to manage the international perception of U.S. racism (Von Eschen 2004). Jazz became critical to the government's strategy "to build cordial relations with new African and Asian states" as a means to shift the global balance of power in favor of the United States (Von Eschen 2004, 3). Officials hoped that endorsing jazz, a form of Black expressive culture, as quintessentially American would undercut beliefs that the U.S. government discriminated against its Black citizens (Von Eschen 2004, 3). Rehearsing earlier U.S. diplomatic history, then, the present, post–9/11 U.S. policy initiative attempts to fashion U.S. American Muslims as cultural ambassadors in a different war—the war on terror (Aidi 2014; Von Eschen 2004).

Like their jazz predecessors, Muslim hip hop artists are presented as examples of the triumph of U.S. multiculturalism and democracy. Yet unlike their jazz predecessors, who, according to Iton (2010), would tactically avoid discussing U.S. foreign policy while on tour, Muslim hip hop artists are not similarly censored (Iton 2010). As Malik noted, "The brothers and sisters in the FEW Collective have [not] been told what to say, what to sing, their scripts haven't been written for them, if they were to criticize drones or not closing Guantanamo or Obama's negligence about Burma or his very strange relationship with American Muslims, I don't think anyone in the State Department would bat an eye."

Based on my observations on the tour and my limited experience as a cultural ambassador, Malik's argument rings true. According to my conversations with Man-O-Wax in the lead-up to the tour, the embassy staff he worked with were much more concerned with budgets than with political statements. Moreover, I had the chance to see the FEW Collective perform the very same set at Community Café in Chicago, one step removed from the cultural diplomacy quagmire of the United Kingdom, and the content of the set as well as quality and energy of the touring artists were the same.

It should also be noted that although no one in the group made any overtly political statements, this did not mean that their music was void of political comment. In London, they chose to cover songs by veteran artists such as Sting and Nina Simone who have well-known political commitments and who have expressed these commitments "on wax," that is, in their recordings. Relatedly, The Reminders performed their original song, "If You Didn't Know," which includes lyrics such as "I'm like Garvey, Ghazali, Gandhi / you scared of Illuminati, I'm drumming with Bobo Shantis, saluting Haile Selassie," and "I'm trying to do the right thing like Radio Rahim / Steal the key from the oppressor, set the caged bird free / and I'm passing to the cadence of Coretta Scott King,

Betty Shabazz, Assata [Shakur], Angela [Davis] and Kathleen [Cleaver]." These musical citations of anti-imperialist heroes, including an activist who is currently at the top of the FBI's most wanted list, demonstrates that the counterpolitics and consciousness raising of Muslim Cool were not reined in by state sponsorship.

In fact, it was this kind of latitude that had encouraged DJ Man-O-Wax to coordinate this tour and others. In 2010 Man-O-Wax traveled to Morocco and Algeria with other U.S. American Muslim hip hop artists on his first trip sponsored by a U.S. embassy. When I asked Man-O-Wax about his trip, he explained that he had initially had reservations about the State Department funding but found that his U.S. American sponsors did not monitor him during his visit. Most important to him were the person-to-person and community-to-community connections that could be made during this kind of exchange. That same year, another hip hop collective, Remarkable Current, toured Indonesia as part of the Performing Arts Initiative of the Department of State. On the Remarkable Current (RC) website, the trip was described in the following way: "RC is honored to travel to Indonesia, at this special time, to promote positivity through music as well as set an example to the world that Islam and Muslims are a part of the fabric and foundation of The United States of America" (Remarkable Current 2010).

Man-O-Wax's account and the RC statement point to the many different motivations that lead artists to participate in this kind of work. There is the pragmatic reason—everybody's got to eat—and the fact that these trips offer an opportunity to expand an artist's audience internationally. These tours also offer an opportunity to build interpersonal connections beyond the state, and it was this opportunity that Man-O-Wax and other artists on the FEW tour were most interested in. This, Penny Von Eschen argues, was also the motivation of their jazz tour predecessors, for whom "the promotion of American culture abroad led just as often to the fostering of collaboration and solidarity throughout the African diaspora" (Von Eschen 2004, 255–57). Muslim hip hop artists' motivation is often tied to commitments to building hip hop community, as artists use the tours to establish mentoring and collaborative relationships with hip hop artists in the countries they visit.

I find compelling Von Eschen's defense of jazz ambassadors against reductive claims of complicity and extend the same defense to my U.S. American Muslim interlocutors. These individuals were neither walking around with their heads in the sand nor do they bleed red, white, and blue. Yet the specter and the power of the state never disappears. In her study Von Eschen depicts the jazz tours as a victory for the civil rights movement, recording how Louis Armstrong refused to play the role of a jazz ambassador until the Eisenhower administration had enforced desegregation in Little Rock (Von Eschen 2004, 58). Thus, while the jazz ambassadors were not pawns of an omnipotent state, their participation was also influenced by their interest in a civil rights framework—full citizenship as U.S. Americans. In an important way, then, the jazz ambassadors' relationship to the civil rights movement is a marker of the domestication of racial politics that shapes the context of hip hop diplomacy today. In a post–civil rights and post–9/11 era in which Muslim citizenship is contested in the United States, as was the citizenship of Blacks at the time of the jazz tours of the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. American Muslims' participation in hip hop diplomacy abroad has the potential to reap rewards at home. As described by the statement of the RC collective, for U.S. American Muslim hip hop, the bargain made with the state is a bargain to belong.

A Luta Continua

U.S. Muslim hip hop artists are not the only U.S. Muslims dispatched on embassy-sponsored cultural diplomacy tours. About five years before this music tour I traveled to London on a book tour for *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* (*LIOL*). *LIOL* is an anthology of first-person narratives by U.S. American Muslim women, and my contribution to it was a series of poems.[13] The tour's audience consisted of London Muslims, except for our first lunch meeting upon arrival. This was a meeting with a U.S. embassy representative, during which I learned that the U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom had funded the trip.[14] For the women on this tour, myself included, the trip represented an opportunity to learn about and network with Muslim communities in the United Kingdom and also to share the U.S. American Muslim experience with U.K. Muslims. It was also particularly important to our group that the U.S. Black American narrative was shared with audiences abroad. Yet after that welcoming lunch a question kept nagging

me: Why was this trip important to the U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom in particular and to the U.S. state more broadly?[15]

When I decided to return to London, this time on my university-funded research dime, it was because I continued to be plagued by that question and its implications for my theorization of Muslim Cool. If Muslim Cool, as I have proposed, is a way of thinking about and being a U.S. American Muslim that operates through Blackness as a counterpoint to dominant narratives, how might (or can) that alterity operate in relation to the state?

The geography of this chapter, charted in my movements and in those of my teachers and interlocutors—Chicago, New York City, Doha, London, Morocco—suggests that this relationship to the state is one of limitation; but it is a limitation caused by the circulation of Muslim Cool and of the U.S. American Muslim. The music, artists, and ideas travel, but this circulation does not only or necessarily lead to the proliferation of transgressive practices, as one might hope. Rather, because of the constraints of the post–civil rights and post–9/11 context, as Muslim Cool circulates, its alterity is also constrained by and entangled with the state.

The mentions on my Facebook feed of the State Department report upon its release were celebratory. The U.S. American Muslims who had helped produce the report and the group of consumers I had access to all read the report as a signal of U.S. American Muslim belonging—as a sign that U.S. American Muslims had made the right bargain. Yet this bargain to belong does not come without its costs. In the lead-up to my trip to the United Kingdom, Hisham Aidi's book was released. Although the book dedicates only one out of twelve chapters to the topic of hip hop and cultural diplomacy, a lot of the initial media coverage of the book focused solely on this topic. Aidi is a colleague and a friend of mine, and the selective media attention had an immediate impact on my work. Some participants on the U.K. tour, who are also friends of mine, were no longer comfortable with my following them in the manner I had initially planned. I had hoped to engage in the kind of deep participant observation that would have included not only attending official public events, which I did, but also spending qualitative time with the artists during off-stage periods, which I was not in the end able to do. The tour's artists saw their participation neither as an endorsement of the state nor even as a pragmatic bargain, but rather as an exploratory venture to see whether a tour like this, as Man-O-Wax might put it, could indeed be redeemed. Whereas some U.S. American Muslims might see their participation not just as a bargain but as an extension of their rights and thus of their belonging as U.S. Americans, these politically conscious artists had a more critical view of the United States as a world power. Consequently, they were conflicted about their participation in the tour and concerned about their movements being recorded in ways that might imply a willingness to be complicit with U.S. empire.

Yet alignments with state power, willing or otherwise, are what define the post–civil rights and post–9/11 era, in which claims to rights and belonging are embedded in the state's governing power. Accordingly, as Maira notes, "multicultural belonging becomes laced with questions of complicity and complicates notions of dissent" (Maira 2009, 251). The work of the U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom that I witnessed does appear to fall into step with the "Sufi offensive" that Aidi identifies. The embassy engages Muslim hip hop artists to deploy the symbols of Blackness, cool, and Islam to offer an alternative to the various forms of "immoderate" Islam that are seen as a threat to secular liberal democracy. This is also how I read the State Department report, with its references to "the first Muslim to . . ." engage in a particular activity or reach a particular achievement, the identification of certain prominent hip hop artists as Muslims, and its panegyric for Chicago as the epitome of U.S. American Muslim diversity. Each piece of information was selective and selected, like brush strokes on a canvas, to paint a narrative that promotes U.S. empire. This is a narrative of the United States as embracing diversity and therefore having no actual need to try and censor political perspectives; rather, it administers dissent through nonprofit activism at home and Muslim hip hop abroad.

My focus on the state's administration of dissent is not meant to suggest that Muslim Cool consequently becomes devoid of all potential to resist state hegemony. Rather, I seek to elucidate the very real constraints on the forms of resistance used by a critical racial and religious minority. These constraints accommodate only a narrowed political vision and very particular political options, and divergence from these options is subject to the violence of the surveillance state. In a post–9/11 United States in which the term "radical" has become synonymous with "Muslim terrorist" and where even those U.S. American Muslims who have

chosen to cooperate with counterterrorism work are surveilled, what are the alternate choices for resistance and political vision? Indeed, while the hip hop generation is distinct from its civil rights and Black Power predecessors, the intensity of the state's repressive violence directed at Black Power activists—from the surveillance regime of COINTELPRO and its relationship to the assassination of Malcolm X to the police murders of youth activists such as Fred Hampton and of groups such as MOVE and to the ascendance of Assata Shakur to the top of the FBI's most wanted list—seems to stand as a warning that should administration by civil society fail, state repressive violence will follow. This does not mean that Muslim Cool cannot find a way around the state, but it does mean that for it to do so, U.S. American Muslim hip hop activists will continue to have to reconsider what it means to belong. Pa' lante!

Conclusion

#BlackLivesMatter

It is fairly common wisdom that death punctuates life. It causes the living to reevaluate and reconsider just about everything, particularly that deep existential question: *what the hell am I doing with my life?* This question became quite palpable for me in the years since 2012 as the movement for Black lives, popularized by the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, grew in response to a highly televised spate of state-sanctioned and extrajudicial violence against Black men and women. While in Black communities the problem of state violence is so well known it is almost banal, the broadcast of Black deaths through cell phone-captured video, dash cams, and surveillance tapes gave Black activists the evidence they needed to bring these concerns to the national stage. As young Black activists and their allies took to the streets, faced the police, and suffered the consequences, I had to ask myself how my story of young Muslims and Muslim Cool related to this movement. How did the project, and I myself, respond to the fierce urgency of *now*? The answer to that question is simple: fundamentally, the story of Muslim Cool confirms that yes, Black Lives Matter.

Existence at the Intersection of Power and Inequality

The broad Black Lives Matter movement (now represented, inter alia, by an organization of the same name as well as by events such as the Movement for Black Lives in July 2015) has shaken a mainstream U.S. American assumption about race to its core. Black Lives Matter has undermined the belief that race and racism are things of the past in the United States. This belief became increasingly trenchant after the inauguration of the first Black president of the United States, whose election was interpreted as proof of a postracial America. This utopia is defined