

Crossroads Podcast - Kam Copeland.mp3

Kristian Petersen [00:00:00] Welcome to Narrating African American Muslim Life Through Film, which aims to reveal the role of cinema in constructing ideas and assumptions about the Black Muslim experience in America and outline ways African American Muslims have used film to communicate and define the spirit of their community. This digital exhibit was supported by a Fellows Grant from the Crossroads Project, a collaborative research initiative between the Henry Luce Foundation and Princeton University. I'm especially grateful for the guidance and support of the Crossroads director Judith Weisenfeld and its media and technology consultant, Megan Goodwin. The research also makes up a portion of the forthcoming Muslim Cinema Chronicles project. This conversation is with Kam Copeland, the foremost scholar on Black Muslim representation and African-American cinema. Kam, thank you so much for joining me. I'm really grateful for you sharing your expertise and wisdom on the subject. Can you please start by just telling us a little bit about yourself?

Kam Copeland [00:01:01] My name is Kam Copeland. I am an assistant professor in the Department of African American and African Studies at Ohio State University. And my research and teaching really broadly focuses on Black studies, film history and theory, critical Muslim studies and Black radical southern studies. And my work explores how Black Muslim communities have critically engaged the moving image, contributed to theoretical discourses on Black media. And really just use the cinematic to artistically express visions for liberation. I'm presently working on a book project titled *Muhammad Gazes: Islam Blackness and Resistance Cinema in the United States*, which is really a representational history that explores how Black Muslims have used accessible forms of film technology like home video, public access TV, independent film, which we're talking about today, and public affairs television to challenge dominant representations of Black Muslim-ness in the U.S. Media.

Kristian Petersen [00:02:02] I was hoping you could begin by helping us think about where the media image of Black Muslims in America starts to take shape. There's a big absence in the first half of the 20th century and I was just hoping you could kind of walk us through what are some of the circumstances that start to make Black Muslims a feature of American popular imagination and where this media image starts to come into focus for us.

Kam Copeland [00:02:29] Yes, really, in my project, I kind of start off discussing Malcolm X and his experience in the 1959 television documentary, *The Hate That Hate Produced*. *The Hate that Hate Produced* was a television feature done by reporters Louis Lomax and Mike Wallace. Louis Lomax is known for being the first Black television reporter. And he was walking through Harlem one day and ran into a group of Black street corner preachers. Of course, Harlem really had a very thriving Black street preaching tradition wherein you had various organizations representing different political and religious programs. So he ran into members of the Nation of Islam and also Malcolm X. And he really went back to Mike Wallace, they were producing a program called *Newsbeat* and wanted to do a television documentary on what he referred to as Street Corner Nationalist. So essentially *The Hate the Hate Produced* was a series that aired over a few nights in July of 1959 that covered the growth of Black nationalism in U.S. urban areas with a primary focus on the Nation of Islam. Now this television documentary really included interviews and speeches by Malcolm X as well as Elijah Muhammad. However, it was also an earlier form of Islamophobia in the U. S. media. As I really argue, it really represented Black Muslim-ness using a combination of the tropes of the Muslim terrorist and also the

trope of the "Black brute," you know. The "Black brute," of course, we see in early cinema and we just see in U.S. society generally, but really with the emergence of the feature motion picture in D.W. Griffith's film that came out in 1915, *The Birth of a Nation*. That really empathizes with the Ku Klux Klan, and it's actually based off of a book called *The Klansmen*. And this film was actually screened at the White House and actually led to a rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. You see the image of the "Black brute" being represented as an aggressor, sub-human, inherently violent, as we see white men in Black face in this film, chasing a white woman off of a cliff attempting to rape her. So you have Blackness being represented as threatening to white civil society in this trope. So you have this trope pretty much replicated in that the Muslims in the Nation of Islam in 1959 are represented as threats to white society and you also have the caricature of the Muslim terrorist. Which is represented as a threat to Western society. So really these are how some of these ideas are solidified in the mainstream U.S. media. However, among some Black audiences, really seeing some of the images, seeing Malcolm X really strongly empathizing with the oppressed, taking the side of the oppressed Black masses. In these images you see really the Black masses beginning to see Malcolm X as really a hero, you know, almost like a third world hero in this representation. So even though *The Hate That Hate Produced* clearly ascribed to the fusion of the caricatures of the brute and the terrorist, we see Black audiences seeing some type of redemptive, the redemptive value in the message of Malcolm X. That's kind of where I start off, of course, that's 59 and I kind of segue into how these themes appear in 1960s cinema.

Kristian Petersen [00:06:50] How did *The Hate That Hate Produced* and the new visible archetype of Malcolm X affect filmmaking in the 1960s and how does the image of the Black Muslim start to take shape in this moment in film history?

Kam Copeland [00:07:04] So, really, in terms of film, of course, *The Hate the Hate Produce* being aired, really represented, and we saw images of Malcolm X, you know, on TV, you know, in a moving image medium. And ultimately, this kind of makes its way into film and the cinematic in the 1960s. So I would say it kind of begins with independent film, right? We have an independent film released by a director named Shirley Clark called *The Cool World*. And *The Cool World* really begins with what the script refers to as a quote unquote "Black Muslim street meeting." In the very beginning of the film, we hear a Black man and see him in Harlem. you know, preaching and he's preaching that the white man is the devil. And he's also saying, you know that, you know, Black people need to unite to fight oppression. And we see this at the very beginning of that film. And additionally, we see some of these themes just kind of also play in mainstream film of the early, independent film, I'm sorry, of the early 1960s, and ultimately... kind of make its way into more mainstream productions. So really whenever it comes to Black representation in cinema, one moment that people refer to as a representational shift occurs in 1967/1968. Of course, Sidney Poitier stars in a film in 1967 called *In the Heat of the Night*, and in *In the Heat of the Night* we see him slap a racist white man who's just slapped him. And of course, this is unusual in the 1960s and so far as Black representation in film, you know, seeing a Black character slap a white character, right? So some scholars refer to this as a representational shift, right, a representational shift but I like to highlight that it's merely a representational shift in Hollywood, right? This doesn't represent empathizing with the struggles of Black people or even empathizing with the Civil Rights or Black Power movement, but it simply represents a representational shift in which there is a desire to kind of capitalize off of contemporary social movements, right? So in 1968, there's a film released called *Uptight*. *Uptight* is directed by Jules Dassin and its script is written by him as well but also co-written by Ruby Dee, and also co written by Julian Mayfield who was also involved in Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity. Of course we read in the

Autobiography of Malcolm X how he, you know, met with Julia Mayfield while in Ghana, among other things. So *Uptight* is really a film that's about an urban rebellion, actually takes place in Cleveland, Ohio. The film is shot in 68. And at the beginning of the film, it begins with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In the beginning, you don't see his assassination, but you see his funeral, right? And you see his funeral is being watched by many residents throughout the streets of Cleveland. And the film really follows the narrative of a group of Black organizers who are moving more toward the politics of Malcolm X, after Dr. King has been assassinated. So you don't necessarily have a direct representation of Muslimness in this film. However, you see aspects of this street preaching tradition. Of course, we talked about how the street preaching tradition was seen among Black Muslims and *The Hate That Hate Produced*, as well as in the independent film, *The Cool World*, specifically in *The Cool World* script was connected to a particular Muslim tradition, particular Black Muslim tradition. So we kind of see images of this in 68 in terms of the politics specifically of Malcolm X but also in so far as the street preaching tradition so you have this representational shift remember it's merely a representational shift really happening in Hollywood in the 1960s that also kind of sets the stage for what happens in the 70s.

Kristian Petersen [00:12:11] In some of your research, you look at 1970s cinema and how Black characters are being portrayed in mainstream films such as "Blaxploitation" films. Where do Black Muslims fit into a genre like this? And what do they come to mean in these types of films? And then do we see alternative characters of Black Muslims in independent films, for example, such as some of the filmmakers you look from the LA Rebellion School.

Kam Copeland [00:12:41] Of course, we were talking about the 1960s representational shifts, and this kind of sets the stage for what happens in the 70s. So in the 70s, you have an independent filmmaker named Melvin Van Peebles. He directs a film called *Sweetback's Badass Song* and this is an independent film made on a budget of about \$150,000, but, you know, earning well over \$12 million at the box office, right? It really follows the story of a Black male sex worker portrayed by Van Peebles himself who witnesses the police brutalizing a Black revolutionary. So he shoots the police and is on the run throughout the entire film. So when this film comes out, clearly it's successful in the Black community. It triggers a lot of debates about the film, its storyline and his representation throughout the Black community. Most notably, Huey P. Newton actually pens an essay in an issue of the *Black Panther* in 1971, the year the film came out. And in this essay he refers to *Sweetback* as a revolutionary film, right? You know, it's obviously an independent film, and throughout the film we see various members of the, you know, various people in institutions in the Black community kind of, you know helping him as he is on the run throughout the film. And also empathizing with the cause of the revolutionaries but we also see the, you know, the transformation of what in the Black Panther Party and beyond was referred to as the "lumpenproletariat" which is the underclass devoid of consciousness. You know, we see that transformation of the "lumpen" into a really a revolutionary hero, so he praises it for that. However, you know, there is *Ebony* magazine actually publishes a critique of Newton's analysis saying *Sweetback* is not a revolutionary film, this is written by Lerone Bennett, the editor of *Ebony* magazine. And I think it's an interesting juxtaposition because, of course, *Ebony* magazine has a fairly different audience. *Ebony* magazine, largely a Black middle class publication, whereas, you know, the *Black Panther* is a publication, you know, that's kind of also handed out, like, to the masses in the Black community, right? They have a different distribution model as well, *Ebony* is subscription-based, whereas, the *Black Panther* is, you know, kind of distributed in the streets, kind among the people. So we have these two

narratives and generally when people follow the history of that film they kind of focus on you know these two debates or main debates happening in the Black community. However there was also something written in *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper. Of course, *Muhammad Speaks* was the newspaper of the Nation of Islam and also one of the largest Black newspapers really in the Black community in the 60s and early 70s. So, *Muhammad Speaks* has an editorial or an essay written by Leon Forrest. Leon Forrest was actually the managing editor, though not a member of the Nation of Islam, and he's also an author, he a novelist. And Leon Forrest strongly critiqued the film *Sweetback*, right? However, his critique is somewhat different from the critique we see in *Ebony* magazine. Lerone Bennett feels as though *Sweetback* ultimately deserts the Black community in getting away and he also argues that essentially Hollywood is probably going to appropriate this model as a result of the success of *Sweetback* in the Black communities, so that's another perspective or response really to the film *Sweetback*. So essentially, Forrest's essay really also is very similar to other writings in *Muhammad Speaks* about *Sweetback*, even by members of the Nation of Islam who write into the newspaper. So *Sweetback* itself is not a blaxploitation film, but many Hollywood studios saw really the success of *Sweetback* and desire to capitalize off of the success of the film. So from that, we have something referred to as the Blaxploitation cycle in Hollywood where, you know, just numerous films featuring Black cast would be made, usually not by Black directors, even though we have a few exceptions. For instance, the film *Superfly* was directed by Gordon Parks Jr., *Shaft* was directed Gordon Parks, the photographer, who actually also photographed the Nation of Islam in the 1960s, and Malcolm X. And that's also a very interesting point because we have a film like *Shaft* coming out in 71, really the success of *Shaft* and *Sweetback* just shaped the rise of the Blaxploitation cycle. Hollywood studios really wanting to benefit off of Black movie goers. Of course, not as many Black people seen on the screen in past decades. But the film *Shaft* itself, we also, you know, see there's actually a scene where he's walking down the street, and then in the background, we can see, we can see the sign from a Shabazz restaurant, right, in Harlem, during one of the scenes in which he's walking in Harlem. But we have direct representations of Black Muslim-ness in some Blaxploitation films. For instance, there is a scene in the film *Sweetback* where, not *Sweetback*, I'm sorry, in *Superfly* where the main character, Priest, who is a coke dealer trying to kind of phase out of the drug business. We see him walk into a restaurant and we see a group of three Black men follow him into a restaurant, and approach him at a table and say they're trying to build an independent nation for Black people, and they want him to donate something. And he essentially dismisses them and says, you know, he says, we ain't giving you shit in the scene. And, you know, he dismisses them in their program. They're kind of represented as, you know, armchair revolutionaries, but also having a sense of corruption themselves and they walk out. Two of the men actually are wearing kufis, who he dismisses, right? And, of course, just kind of knowing the history of New York, in particular, the Black Muslim community in New York City, Harlem specifically, obviously, that's where, you know, Malcolm X was minister of Temple number seven of the Nation of Islam. We also have just really a diverse array of Muslim groups in, you know, Harlem and really all throughout New York City, especially in the 60s and the 70s. Additionally, we also, these three characters are credited in the credits, listed in the credit as militants, right? Which is very interesting because there's this caricature of you know, Black revolutionaries that occurs in Blaxploitation films. And just finally on the point, we also have in New York, of course, there is the New York Black Panther Party, based in Harlem, and the Bronx as well. And many members who were Muslim in the New York Black Panther Party as well. So we kind of have some Blaxploitation films, really using a caricature of Black revolutionaries and Muslims too really, you know, a combined caricature, of both. We also see this happen in a 1976 film called *Car Wash* where there, it's a film with the ensemble cast and also a very prominent album. Many of these films

were, you know, known for their soundtracks, of course, Isaac Hayes did the soundtrack for *Shaft*, for *Superfly*, we had Curtis Mayfield, we had a film called *Black Caesar* and James Brown did the soundtrack, of course. So in the film *Car Wash*, there is a character named Abdullah, and Abdullah is represented as someone who is misguided, essentially. In the end, he actually tries to rob the car wash, right, and he's just represented as someone who's lost, misguided, and misdirected, so there's that trope as well. And we also see the same "Abdullah" trope appear in a 70s film called *Claudine*, actually starring Diahann Carroll. So we have those representations when it comes to Blaxploitation films. Of course, I don't believe I mentioned this earlier, Blaxploitation is a combination of the words "Black" and "exploitation," right? Interestingly, the term was coined by the director of the Hollywood NAACP, Junius Griffin, to kind of refer to how Black cast members were not paid very much and also how Hollywood studios were specifically seeking to benefit off of Black audiences. Additionally, there are many, as these films come out, there are many editorials in *Muhammad Speaks* that are written by members of the Nation of Islam. One particular member is, I believe, Wayne 3X, formerly known as Wayne Grice, who actually starred in a 1960s buddy cop television program called *Hawk*. Actually, he starred alongside Burt Reynolds in that particular television program. However, he kind of phased out of television and also penned film criticism as these films were coming out now in the 70s. But also in the late 70s, you know, you have what film theorist Ed Guerrero calls "cinema of recuperation," where in Hollywood is kind of trying to, you know, push the ideology of U.S. empire. You have, you know, these films representing like the "great white hope," militarism, and you know really a return to a patriarchy as well in the late seventies with films like the *Dirty Harry* franchise starring Clint Eastwood. Interestingly in the third installment called *The Enforcer*, there is a character named Big Ed Mustafa. And this character is, represented initially as a revolutionary, but revealed to be unprincipled and actually cooperating with the feds, right? So we have this trope of unprincipled revolutionaries in this like "recuperative" cinematic artifact of the 1970s. So, you know, really, this is what's happening with, you know, in during the era of Blaxploitation, just in terms of representing Black Muslims as unprincipled in their politic. That's kind of happening in the 70s. Of course, 1973, there's another film that comes out called *Willie Dynamite*, where you have like a Black Muslim cop. So you have the combination of these "recuperative" and Blaxploitation narratives in Hollywood films of the 70's, representing Black Muslims. However, as you mentioned, I know in part of your question, you mentioned the L.A. Rebellion. L.A. Rebellion film movement was a movement that consisted of Black student filmmakers who attended UCLA film school, really from the late 60s into the early 90s or late 80s, who specifically sought to resist the Hollywood studio system and also largely represent the Black working class in their films. So in the L.A. Rebellion film movement, separate from Hollywood independent films, we see them looking toward Malcolm X for inspiration. And we do see, you know, some representations of Islam and the Islamic, but Islam and the Islamic is specifically connected to, you know, in many of these films, our principled revolutionary thought, not a desire to present caricatures of revolutionaries or, you know, reduce their politic to uplift the U.S. nation state. We don't see that in L.A. rebellion movement. We see them specifically being inspired by the Black Power movement, Third World movements against colonialism and Third Cinema. And their, you know, empathetic representation of Islam is kind of rooted in the Black radical tradition.

Kristian Petersen [00:26:53] One well-known film from the L.A. Rebellion tradition is 1991's *Daughters of the Dust*, and this of course has a significant Muslim character and one that falls outside of many of the tropes you've been discussing so far. Can you tell us a little bit about how Muslims are represented in this film? And then why do you think this somewhat innovative representation for the time period is coming through in this film.

Kam Copeland [00:27:21] Yes, so *Daughters of the Dust*, of course, is directed by Julie Dash. I frequently teach a lot of her films in my classes. But Julie Dash is originally from Brooklyn. She would ultimately go and, I believe, get a master's degree from UCLA. Initially, she started off her career, you know, her career in art as a filmmaker, really seeking to adapt the literature of Black women, Black women's literature into film. Some of her earliest films are *Four Women*, that is actually based on the song of the name written and performed by Nina Simone, and also in 1977, she directed a short film called *Diary of an African Nun* written by Alice Walker. So ultimately she directs the film *Daughters of the Dust*. So *Daughters of the Dust* really comes out in 1991 and we see representations of Islam in that film. So *Daughters of the Dust* really focuses on the narrative of a Black family who resides on St. Helena Island, the Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands, right, where they're able to maintain an authentic African culture, largely free from some outside influences. So it follows the narrative of part of the family wanting to move inland and assimilate into mainstream U.S. culture, and then another part of family desires to stay and maintain their cultural traditions and practices. So on St. Helena Island, which is where *Daughters of the Dust* is based and also where it was filmed, we see a Muslim presence, a character by the name of Bilal. And really Bilal is based off of the historical person Bilali Mohammed, who actually was based on Sapelo Island, Georgia, right, and was enslaved on Sapelo Island. So Julie Dash, when she made this film, she was really doing research on Gullah Geechee traditions and largely on, I believe, her father's side of the family. So this involves some oral histories, of course, but also she went to the Schomburg Center for Black Culture and Research in Harlem and really looked through a lot of archives and also consulted with experts, historians, etc. And one person she came across was Bilali Mohammed. And of course, *Daughters of the Dust*, if we look at the title cards, it takes place in 1906. So she really experience the strong connection to Bilali Mohammed, to the extent that she wanted to represent him in the film, and she actually placed him in, the early 1900s, of course, he was around in the early 1800s, right? And he is a Muslim character in the film, just kind of showing how the Georgian and South Carolina Sea Islands once really had a thriving Muslim presence, just kind of showing that in the film. In fact, in the beginning of the film, we can hear the *adhan* being called, to perform *fajr* prayer. Additionally, there is a handwritten Qur'an in the film that we see very prominently seen, and there are actually shots of Bilali Mohammed making *salah* throughout the film. And we see him actually teaching a group of children how to make *salah* throughout the film. So we see the representation of Islam in this film being specifically, you know, connected to one's African culture, right? You know, really, the group, the family who wants to move inland, they largely identify, you know, as Christians. And they really represent practices on the island, other spiritual practices, like Islam specifically, as well as, you know, Hoodoo on the Island, they represent it as, you know a quote-unquote "heathen practice." This is, they represent it as a heathen's practice because they're trying to kind of assimilate into mainstream, you know U.S. culture through moving inland, right? Whereas people like Bilal are people who are particularly preserving their cultural traditions in line with their heritage, but also in line with resistance. Of course, throughout the island, there is the story of Igbo landing. They discuss about a group of enslaved Africans who jumped off of the ship. Some people believe they drowned, others believe they flew back to Africa. So there's this notion of history, but also the notions of maintaining a communal sense of identity as well as myth. So we see Islam particularly connected to this notion of resistance in terms of preserving one's culture through the harsh realities of slavery, among other things represented throughout the film. We see Julie Dash, of course, being part of the L.A. Rebellion film movement, but also some of her classmates as well were influenced by, you know, Third Cinema, but also the Black Power movement, and also influenced by Islam as well as Muslims, you know, of, course, like

Malcolm X throughout that time. So we see this happening in the 90s. The film comes out in 1991. Of course, the 1990s is also known for, you know, things going on in Hollywood in terms of the hood film cycle. 1991 is the year in which *Boyz n the Hood*, directed by John Singleton, is released, as well as *New Jack City*, directed Mario Van Peebles, as well. So this is like a major era for really Black cinema, of course, Black independent cinema with *Daughters of the Dust*. This is the first, *Daughters of the Dust* is also the first film to receive general theatrical release feature film directed by an African-American woman, right. So we have this representation of Islam in that film but we also have representations of Islam in the hood film cycle. I know earlier we were talking about Blaxploitation cycle, really in the 1980s we see kind of like a decrease in the amount of films being released, really kind of centering, you know, Black characters, and we see this decrease kind of happening in the 80s. Of course, many films were made, especially throughout the first half of the 1970s, particularly Blaxploitation films with that cycle when it came to Hollywood specifically. But the 1990s kind of represents you know, a pickup in the amount of films being made in Hollywood specifically from the 1980s, right? Of course, "recuperative" cinema was a more aggressive attack against, you know, Black liberation movements in the 1980's, but in the 90's, we kind of see the emergence of Black directors directing particularly Hollywood productions. Of course we see Spike Lee coming along, actually coming along in the late 1980's. Of course, we see the film *Malcolm X* coming out in 1992. We also see John Singleton, who directed *Boyz n the Hood*, of course we talked about Mario Van Peebles, as well as Albert and Alan Hughes, who direct *Menace II Society*, that also has Muslim representation in the hood film cycle. Largely film, the hood film was largely films directed by Black men featuring Black male protagonists undergoing rites of passage into manhood. So we see films like, you know, *Daughters of the Dust* kind of disrupting some of the narratives happening in mainstream Hollywood cinema of the 1990s as well, as it pertains to Islam, as well as, you know, other facets.

Kristian Petersen [00:36:38] This is really an excellent history you're giving us here and I know there are some holes to be covered, but there's only so much we can discuss in a short period of time. In the post 9/11 moment, there does seem to be a significant change in both the role of Black Muslim filmmakers as screenwriters and directors. But also a shift in the change in in terms of the types of stories that get told and how they center Black Muslim subjectivity much more than some of these earlier representations you've discussed. Can you walk us through the representational shifts that happen around 9/11 and then give us a portrait of the 21st century Muslim filmmaking in terms of what are the circumstances that make it possible for Black Muslim filmmakers to tell their own stories at this moment, have them produced and circulated, and find audiences?

Kam Copeland [00:37:42] As we shift into the 21st century, I just kind of want to go back a little bit, so the end of the 1990s. So really in the 1990's, one thing I do want to highlight, and really the seeds of this were planted in the 1980s. Of course we have, I know you're referring to Black Muslim representation in the 21 century, but you know I do think this is kind of a pick up of some of the stuff from the 90s as well, and even before that. But something very interesting is that the last half of the 1990s, we kind of see also representations of Black Muslims, you know, on television. And I'm particularly thinking of the last half of the 90s, particularly in like 95 to 97. Of course, in October 1995, there's the Million Man March. So what's very interesting is in these police procedural dramas on television, like *New York Undercover*, like *Homicide: Life on the Streets*, we see representations of Black Muslims in those. And we kind of see representations almost of Black Muslims, kind of building upon the paradigm solidified in 1959 with *The Hate That Hate Produced*, to be perfectly honest. Like, for instance, there's an episode of *New York Undercover* and in the beginning of the episode, the episode is called "The Reckoning," it

was released in either 95 or 96. But in the beginning of the episode we see shots from the Million Man March, not necessarily from the speeches, but shots from you know, members of the Nation of Islam who are waving the Nation Of Islam's flag with the star and crescent, kind of juxtaposed against the U.S. flag, interestingly. And, you know, we see this particular episode, you know that really kind of operates using caricatures, you know the caricature I discussed, but kind of applying it to the representation of a Black Muslim woman as well. So we kind of see a return to that in 1990s representations of Black Muslim-ness in the police procedural drama happening in the late 90s. So kind of using these caricatures, of course, the image of the Muslim terrorist as well as like the image of the "Black brute," kind of being strengthened, right, in the late 1990s, which is an interesting juxtaposition, you know, against, you know, films, particularly films by Black directors that, you know empathize with, you, know, Muslims as a natural part of the Black community. So it's a kind of juxtaposition against that, like a opposite, like opposing type of representation in the late 90s. Additionally, we have, you know, television programs that come out like *Oz*. *Oz* airs from 1997 to 2003, and we see a representation of Muslims in prison in, you know, *Oz* that kind of leads us to the 21st century. Interestingly, 9/11 happens, and *Oz* is still on air. However, the creator of *Oz*, Tom Fontana says that 9/11 didn't happen in *Oz* and how you know, he kind of was, you know, against representing the impact of 9/11 on Muslims in *Oz*. To me, I think that's also very revealing in many ways, of course, HBO is where *Oz* aired, and HBO is actually, you know, premium cable television, of course. When HBO first came out, you know, there's this, you know, they are some notions of elitism. HBO specifically thought to, sought to, kind of advertise itself to liberal middle class audiences, right? And of course, we have, you know, liberal Islamophobia being represented on HBO with programs like, you know, Bill Maher's program for instance, right. However, you know, he said, Tom Fontana said, 9/11, you know, did not really happen in *Oz*, right? So we also see, you know in terms of representational shifts, as I was talking about, you know representational shifts, I think this is another example, you know going from the 1960s to the early 2000s, that it's merely a representational shift, you know, nothing else. And I think, you know especially at this moment in time is, you now important to kind of call out, you know some of the issues with our representational politics as well. Of course in the early 2000s, you have a program that aired I believe from 2005 to 2006, two seasons called *Sleeper Cell*. And of course, *Sleeper Cell*, you know just a classic form, essentially of Islamophobic television. I think one of the ads actually listed friends, neighbors, terrorists in terms of representing Muslims. But one of those characters was a Black Muslim FBI agent portrayed by Michael Ealy, so we have this notion of Muslim respectability politics being represented in which in order for a Muslim to be respectable, they have to essentially be an agent of the state in these films, right? So, you know, we have really in these television programs kind of even building off of the "recuperative" cinema of the 1980s, just a representation of Muslims as a means of really uplifting the U.S. empire, right? I think that, you know, in Evelyn Alsultany's book, she really talks a lot about the issue with the positive, negative, representational dichotomy, to the extent that, sometimes calling representations positive also seeks to usher in this notion of a post-racial society, which of course we know is an impossibility. So we have that happening in the early 2000s, the first decade of the 2000s and representations of Black Muslims in that decade. And of course we see this kind of building off of old tropes. We also have the emergence of, you know, really Black Muslim independent filmmakers in the 2010s, right? I mean, of course, Black Muslim independent filmmakers have always existed working across various mediums of film technology, right. However, we see films coming out of course like the film, *Jinn* by Nijla Mu'min, and we also, which came out in 2018, I believe, as well as *Muslimah's Guide to Marriage*, right, which came out in 2018 as well, as well as *Mooz-lum* and also, you know, films like *Bilal's Stand* by Sultan Sharrief, which those two films came out around 2010 and 2011, right. So we have Black Muslim

filmmakers, who particularly during this era are representing narratives centered around you know the Black Muslim community and Black Muslim experience. The seeds of this were planted in the past of course you know building off of really the legacies of Black Muslim filmmakers as well as you know just really Black Muslim media makers. In the 80s and in the 1990s, we really had, you know, a lot of Muslims participating in public access television, right? You know, really going in and producing their own programs, discussing community issues, right, and as well as, you know, Black Muslims participating in theater, you know, directing different productions that traveled even throughout the country and performed for Muslim communities throughout the country. And, you know, if we think of a film like *Muslimah's Guide to Marriage*, it was directed by Aminah Bakeer. And really, Aminah Bakeer, you, know, her father, Donald Bakeer actually wrote a book that was ultimately made into a movie in the 1990s, I believe in 1992, you know, called *South Central*, and ultimately he also produced the documentary called *Bilalian*, which really covers the history, you know, of the Nation of Islam and community of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, right? So we have all of these, you, know, Black Muslim filmmakers and media makers, you know, who really inspire this future generation that comes along in the 2010s with, you know, some of the films, you know, I just listed. So this has always existed and one thing I do want to highlight is that my project primarily focuses on how Muslims resisted some of these mainstream narratives we're discussing today, you know, through public access TV, but also independent film like we, you know, are discussing in the 21st century and even through, you know, home video, for instance.

Kristian Petersen [00:48:16] Yes, you are doing some really exciting work capturing these gaps that most scholars have missed in the archive. But also you're being very innovative in expanding the mediascape that we can explore Black Muslim identity on screen through. So I'm really excited to see your future publications. I was hoping in a little bit of forward thinking you could tell us your thoughts on what you see as the challenges and opportunities that Black Muslim filmmakers have moving forward in our contemporary moment? What is the form or narratives in storytelling you'd like to see emerge at this moment? What do you think is the value of Black Muslim filmmaking in our time? And what do you think is going to be necessary for Black Muslim film makers to get their stories out there and seen by audiences?

Kam Copeland [00:49:11] So far as this contemporary moment, I'm very interested in really across various forms of moving image media. How Black Muslims are going to effectively use these technologies to resist dominant narratives. Even beyond what most people would consider to be a film, I'm particularly thinking of, like, you know, the use of moving image technology via like video sharing platforms and social media, of course, as I mentioned. You know we really had kind of a thriving use of like public access TV, which is a form of participatory media, you know, to very directly resist and like respond to you know, like the "cinema of recuperation," for instance, right, you know respond to particular films, but also create a sense of community, you know, among the viewers of, you know, some of these programs, right? So I'm very interested to see, you know, how Muslims are, Black Muslims in particular, are going to pick up with this tradition because, you know this tradition is just kind of rooted in the Black radical tradition as well. So in the twenty first century, you know, with the various issues that are more or less the same, you know, that we're facing as a community and even you know as an ummah, I would be interested to see you know how over time, yes film, but also film technology as, you know, manifested, you know, in different mediums regardless of whether its social media or video sharing platforms, you know, what role will this serve for our communities are the questions I'm asking, what role is this serving for our community? And also what role is this really serving in the fight for liberation? Because when we think about home video or even public

access TV, the role that played as participatory media and participatory medium in terms of media that the viewers had access to and could actively participate in its discourses, you know, what role will that play, you know, in the fight for freedom, justice and equality, as well as, you know, how specifically, will these themes from the past, in what ways will they experience an afterlife in these mediums, really across generations, into Millennials and Gen Z. So this is what I would like to see and this is, you know, what I'm eager to see in my community.

Kristian Petersen [00:52:11] Thank you so much Kam for sharing your wisdom with us and spending some time to talk about African American Muslim life through film.

Kam Copeland [00:52:20] Yes, thank you very much.