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The Immigrant as Other: Racial Capitalism, Neoliberalism, and Necropolitics in Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans*

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This paper examines Laila Lalami's The Other Americans *(2019) through synthesising racial capitalism, neoliberalism, and necropolitics to illuminate how post-9/11 violence operates through economic mechanisms. Through contextual and close analysis of Driss Guerraoui's entrepreneurial journey and tragic death, the research reveals how immigrant entrepreneurship paradoxically functions as a site of inclusion and elimination within America's racialised economic landscape. The paper demonstrates how market participation intensifies rather than ameliorates immigrant vulnerability, while neoliberal multiculturalism's celebration of immigrant success actively enables racial violence while obscuring structural inequalities. Lalami's novel exposes how economic participation becomes weaponised as a surveillance and control mechanism. The analysis extends beyond individual narrative to examine how systemic violence against MENA communities is legitimised through neoliberal ideologies that obscure structural inequalities beneath administrative discourses. This analysis provides crucial methodological tools for scrutinising how immigrant economic "success" marks certain bodies for elimination within post-9/11 America's security apparatus, challenging dominant narratives of assimilation and belonging.*

Keywords
Immigration; Necropolitics; Neoliberalism; Arab-American literature; Racial Capitalism; Morocco; post-9/11

Introduction

Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) provides a powerful lens for examining how economic participation paradoxically heightens vulnerability for Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) immigrants in post-9/11

America. Through the story of Driss Guerraoui, a Moroccan immigrant whose journey from philosophy student to successful restaurant owner ends in a tragic hit-and-run, Lalami illuminates the complex ways immigrant entrepreneurship simultaneously marks bodies for both inclusion and elimination within America's socioeconomic landscape. The novel's nuanced exploration of immigrant experience shows how the promise of economic mobility exists in tension with persistent racial violence, even as neoliberal ideologies obscure these structural inequalities beneath narratives of individual responsibility and market-based success. *The Other Americans* demonstrates the intersecting forces of racial capitalism, neoliberalism, and necropolitics that shape MENA immigrant experiences in contemporary America. Drawing on Cedric Robinson's theory of *racial capitalism*, which posits that racial and economic exploitation function as mutually constitutive forces, Driss's trajectory from immigrant arrival to business owner illustrates the constrained choices available to immigrants within racialised labour markets. Though he achieves the mythologised "American Dream" of entrepreneurial success, his economic advancement paradoxically increases his exposure to xenophobic violence, uncovering the limitations of neoliberal narratives of meritocracy and self-sufficiency.

The suspicious circumstances surrounding Driss's death, including an earlier arson attack on his business following 9/11, demonstrate Achille Mbembe's *necropolitics* operating through both spectacular and slow forms of violence against racialised bodies in post-9/11 America. The novel's treatment of immigrant entrepreneurship shows economic participation, offering no *immunity* against the necropolitical dimensions of contemporary capitalism, where certain populations remain perpetually vulnerable to death despite their financial contributions. Lalami's work challenges dominant assumptions about assimilation, belonging, and justice. It exposes how racial capitalism requires certain bodies to remain precarious even as they participate in economic production systems.

Lalami's *The Other Americans* represents a significant epistemic shift in MENA-American literature through its radical reconfiguration of how economic participation intersects with racial violence in post-9/11 America. While previous MENA and African literary works primarily interrogated questions of cultural hybridity, religious identity, and generational trauma (Benharrousse 14), Lalami's novel crosses fundamental epistemological boundaries by theorizing the market itself as a primary mechanism of surveillance, control, and elimination. This constitutes not merely a thematic

expansion but a profound reconceptualization of how knowledge about MENA immigrant experience is constructed and communicated within American literary discourse. The epistemic innovation in Lalami's work operates along several critical axes that distinguish it from its literary predecessors. First, where earlier works like Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) examined cultural hybridity primarily through domestic spaces and familial relationships, Lalami relocates the site of knowledge production to economic spaces. The restaurant becomes not merely a setting but an epistemological framework through which American racial formations are rendered legible. Lalami thus breaks from the epistemological framework that positions cultural adaptation as separate from economic participation, theorizing how market spaces become sites where racial knowledge is produced and contested.

Second, Lalami's novel advances beyond works like Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) by fundamentally reframing how violence against MENA bodies is theorized. While Kahf's novel locates violence primarily within religious prejudice and cultural misunderstanding, Lalami's work reconceptualizes violence as inherent to market-based inclusion itself. By demonstrating how Driss's entrepreneurial success paradoxically increases his vulnerability to violence, Lalami's narrative destabilizes epistemological frameworks that separate economic "success" from racial vulnerability. Third, unlike predecessors such as Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), which privileged a singular narrative perspective, Lalami's polyphonic approach creates a complex epistemological matrix where competing knowledge claims about Driss's life and death are presented without hierarchical resolution. This narrative strategy does not merely diversify perspectives. Still, it fundamentally challenges the epistemological authority of any single position, including those originating from state surveillance apparatus that traditionally define "truth" about MENA subjects.

Fourth, where Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* (2017) positioned displacement primarily as geographic and psychological, Lalami reconceptualizes displacement as operating through economic mechanisms that penetrate deeper than cultural dislocation – this epistemic innovation positions market participation not as salvation from displacement but as its reconfiguration. Lalami accomplishes precisely this epistemological reframing by theorizing how economic "inclusion" itself becomes a form of exclusion for MENA immigrants in post-9/11 America. Most significantly, Lalami's novel constitutes an epistemic shift by revealing how neoliberal promises of economic mobility function simultaneously as mechanisms of control and elimination. This

epistemic reframing allows us to understand how immigrant "success" is constructed within racial capitalism, not as evidence of assimilation but as justification for heightened surveillance and potential elimination.

Lalami captures how individual experiences of discrimination connect to larger patterns of collective trauma facing MENA communities. Her daughter Nora's investigation into the circumstances of Driss's death uncovers intersecting forms of prejudice: the white business owner Anderson's resentment of immigrant success ("Pretty soon they're going to take over this place" (Lalami 6)), his son A.J.'s automatic labelling of Driss as a "terrorist", and the dismissal of an undocumented witness, Efrain, due to his vulnerable legal status. These layered reactions illustrate how post-9/11 policies and rhetoric institutionalised prejudice against MENA communities, subjecting them to heightened surveillance and unjustified suspicion (Alsultany 162; Joseph et al. 240; Mamdani 768). The discourse of the "War on Terror" normalised the racialisation and "othering" of MENA groups after 9/11 (Rana 63). Neoliberal multiculturalism's celebration of immigrant entrepreneurship coexists with and even enables continued forms of racial violence. By tracing how market participation fails to protect immigrants from systemic violence, Lalami's work exposes the limitations of neoliberal frameworks that emphasise individual responsibility while obscuring structural inequalities. The inadequate investigation into Driss's death grounds neoliberal state apparatuses, while claiming colour-blindness and merit-based treatment, perpetuating racial hierarchies through bureaucratic indifference and selective enforcement. This examination of *The Other Americans* extends beyond individual narrative to analyse systemic violence against MENA communities being legitimised through interconnected economic and racial logics. Drawing on scholarship in critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and economic criticism, this paper challenges readers to recognise the persistent vulnerability of immigrant communities despite formal economic inclusion. Through contextual and close analysis of the text's treatment of entrepreneurship, violence, and justice, this paper reveals how racial capitalism creates conditions where immigrant success simultaneously enables and constrains opportunities for belonging in contemporary America.

Contextualising Moroccan Immigration to America

The historical patterns of Moroccan immigration to America illuminate

economic opportunity and racial exclusion, consistently shaping immigrant experiences. While initial migration waves beginning in the early 20th century were primarily driven by economic factors, the subsequent transformation of MENA bodies into sites of suspicion structures the underlying logic of racial capitalism. As postcolonial unrest grew in Morocco, middle-class professionals sought educational and career options in the United States, embodying *flexible citizenship* and strategically adapting identity and aspirations to navigate global economic systems (Ong 117). The 1965 Immigration Act's abolition of nationality-based quotas appeared to promise greater economic inclusion, yet this legislative change paradoxically set the stage for more sophisticated forms of racial-economic exclusion.

Moroccan immigration to America occurred in several waves, beginning in the early 20th century. Initial migrants came for economic opportunities, with immigration rising after World War I and peaking after 1965. As postcolonial unrest grew in Morocco, more middle-class professionals sought educational and career options in the United States. By 2004, the Moroccan population registered in the Moroccan Consulate in the U.S. reached over 100,000 (de Haas 50). MENA communities maintained cultural roots while integrating socioeconomically through business ownership and educational achievement. Moroccan ethnic identity in the U.S. is adapted based on transnational ties to the homeland. Second-generation Moroccan Americans furthered hybrid cultural belonging, even as racialisation and discrimination increased post-9/11. Lalami captures intra-community diversity through characters like Nora, who embraces American lifestyles, versus her mother, who longs for Morocco. This heterogeneity counters damaging stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as a cultural monolith (Shaheen 174). Lalami demonstrates how hopeful aspirations about America's inclusive promise contrast with unjust barriers facing MENA immigrants. This speaks to multiple Moroccan immigrants who escaped Morocco during the Years of Lead and became antagonistic to the Moroccan regime, especially using social media to voice how Morocco is worse, regardless of prejudice and racialisation (Benharrousse 59). By humanising one fictional Moroccan family within a larger, diverse community, she effectively brings history to life while foregrounding shared dreams deferred by prejudice.

Middle Eastern and North African identities became heavily racialised in America, especially after the 2001 terrorist attacks. The U.S. census classifies MENA populations as legally white. However, this obscures experiences of racism and discrimination faced by those perceived as Arab or Muslim

(Rana 177). Phenotype, culture, and religion intersect to position MENA groups as racialised "others" regardless of legal classifications on paper. Pop culture depictions have powerfully fuelled the "othering" of Arab and Muslim characters as exotic, barbaric threats (Shaheen 174). Orientalist representations reduce MENA ethnicities into essentialised caricatures and stereotypes serving Western political self-interest rather than reflecting a nuanced reality. Feelings of being perceived as perpetually "foreign" result in alienation for young MENA Americans. Every day, microaggressions complement overt forms of surveillance, detention, and violence that typically peak during politically tense moments (Alsultany 163). The collective trauma of being otherised solidifies MENA identity as existing in opposition to dominant societal norms, though lived realities are far more heterogeneous. Lalami provides a deeper human context to counter the reductive cultural mythologies that justify the ongoing oppression of minorities.

Lalami's body of fiction provides nuanced perspectives on the challenges and aspirations of MENA immigrants, before and after 9/11, which indelibly impacted American society. In her 2005 debut, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, she chronicles Moroccan characters risking their lives to reach Spain by sea, driven by dreams for a better future abroad. This poignantly humanises the struggles that migrant communities face, countering media depictions of immigrants as nameless threats. However, *The Other Americans* portrays how life has changed for Muslims in America since 9/11-era policies institutionalised prejudice. Whereas *Hope* centres on the risks immigrants take pursuing ideals of freedom and opportunity associated with the West, *The Other Americans* exposes the harsh realities lurking beneath the mythologised promise of America. Mobility does not guarantee belonging, significantly when racial otherness trumps legal citizenship status in social interactions. By showing how Arab and Muslim identities become politicised and polarised over time, Lalami captures the human impacts of cultural forces beyond individual control. While Arab and Muslim immigrants faced prejudice before 9/11, systemic backlash intensified after the terror attacks. Existing Orientalist cultural imagery of Arabs and Muslims as violent, backward, and oppressive became weaponised to justify expanded surveillance and restrictive policies (Salaita 165). Previous waves of MENA immigration centred on gradual socioeconomic integration. After 9/11, Arab/Muslim identity was suddenly politicised as an inherent national security threat. Mosques and charities faced unprecedented scrutiny as possible terror fronts.

MENA communities endured heightened profiling based not on evidence but on essentialised stereotypes linking Islam with terrorism (Rana 54–9). This overnight shift repositioned Arab and Muslim immigrants as targets of state suspicion and public aggression. "When al-Qaeda flew planes into the World Trade Center in New York, my father sat up in the easy chair and for the first time started to pay attention to the television" (Lalami 28). Driss's interest in the news stems from an understanding of the implicit increase in racial violence and discrimination. Profiling, detention, surveillance, and even violent assaults target Arab and Muslim citizens regardless of actual evidence. Lalami highlights the collective trauma and erosion of rights that enable tragedies like Driss's death to be ignored instead of adequately investigated. As Lalami's novel highlights through the trauma of Driss's death, assertions of belonging and humanity no longer shielded minorities like Moroccan immigrants from reactionary racism when security fears peaked after the attacks. The promise of equal citizenship regardless of identity evaporated for those who "looked" foreign and, especially, Arab.

Racial Capitalism and Necropolitical Violence

The intricate relationship between racial capitalism and necropolitics in Lalami's novel illuminates how economic participation becomes a double-edged sword for immigrant communities in post-9/11 America. Through the narrative of Driss Guerraoui's entrepreneurial journey and violent death, the novel excavates the complex ways in which immigrant economic success simultaneously marks bodies for both inclusion and elimination within the American socio-economic landscape. The novel's treatment of immigrant entrepreneurship exemplifies what Cedric Robinson theorises as racial capitalism, where racial and economic exploitation function as mutually constitutive forces (8). Driss's initial entry into the American economy occurs during a recession. "We landed at Los Angeles International a few months later, only to find the Golden State in the middle of a recession" (Lalami 42). The ironic juxtaposition between California's mythological status as the "Golden State" and its economic reality during the recession emphasises how neoliberal promises of prosperity are systematically denied to immigrant bodies even as they are required to participate in the economic system. The use of "landed" carries particular significance within racial capitalism. While

suggesting arrival, it simultaneously evokes the precarious nature of immigrant presence, a temporary touching down rather than a permanent settlement. The recession becomes not merely a temporal backdrop but a structural condition that shapes the immigrant experience, demonstrating how racial capitalism requires immigrant labour while simultaneously maintaining conditions of economic vulnerability.

The family's complete liquidation of assets, "we had sold my car, her jewelry, and all our belongings" (Ibid.), represents that everything must be converted into capital for economic participation and, consequently, to escape the status of the living dead. The immigrant, being already a "resident alien", must then change their previous occupation to fit within the neoliberal American economy. The itemised list of sold possessions ("car", "jewelry", "all our belongings") represents how the immigrant family must voluntarily participate in their own dispossession to enter the American economic system. The personal pronouns ("my", "her") emphasise their dispossession operating at an intimate level, stripping away not just material possessions but markers of personal and cultural identity. The progression from specific items ("car", "jewelry") to the encompassing "all our belongings" reveals the totalising nature of this economic transformation. Each item carries a different symbolic weight: the car represents mobility and independence, the jewelry suggests both economic and cultural capital, while "all our belongings" encompasses the entirety of their previous life. This complete liquidation demonstrates Orlando Patterson's "social death" (79-80), where immigrants must sacrifice their previous social and economic identities to participate in the American economy. The use of the past perfect tense ("had sold") positions this dispossession as a necessary precondition for immigration, revealing how racial capitalism requires immigrant bodies to arrive already transformed into liquid capital. The family's voluntary liquidation of assets thus becomes a form of self-imposed "primitive accumulation' (Marx 873), necessary for entry into the global circuits of capital that structure migration and labour.

The transformation from philosophy graduate student to donut shop owner represents not a simple abandonment of ethical principles, but rather a complex renegotiation of Lévinasian ethics within the constraints of racial capitalism. When Driss states, "I was a graduate student in philosophy; all I knew was how to pontificate about Sartre or Lévinas" (Lalami 42), his reference to Lévinas is particularly significant. Lévinas's philosophy centers on the ethical obligation toward "the face of the Other" (Drichel 21), emphasizing infinite responsibility to others that precedes ontology. However, Lalami's

narrative complicates this ethical framework through Driss's entrepreneurial journey. Rather than portraying Driss as abandoning his ethical obligations to others, the novel presents a more nuanced negotiation between philosophical ideals and economic survival. When Maryam questions Driss's apparent contradiction – "She couldn't believe that the graduate student who spoke so fervently about the plight of workers laboring under the boot of capitalists suddenly wanted to start a business" (Lalami 46) – the moment reveals not ethical abandonment but ethical complexity. Driss attempts to reconcile his philosophical understanding of exploitation with his family's immediate need for economic survival. Driss's continuous attempts to maintain dignity in his entrepreneurial endeavors illustrate this ethical complexity. He "repainted the walls, fixed rickety chairs, and replaced the light fixtures" (Lalami 47), taking pride in his work. He "experimented with the dough until it became as soft as the one [he] had grown up with" (47), preserving cultural authenticity rather than simply maximizing profit.

Most significantly, after achieving financial stability, Driss continues supporting his daughter's unconventional career choice, demonstrating ongoing ethical concern for others despite his participation in capitalism. What Lalami portrays, therefore, is not a rejection of Lévinasian ethics but their transformation within the constraints of racial capitalism. Driss must navigate a system where economic and historical power relations always mediate the ethical encounter with otherness. His entrepreneurial journey illustrates how immigrants must negotiate ethical frameworks within systems that constrain the very possibility of pure ethical ties. The novel thus offers a critique not of Driss's ethical compromises but of a racial capitalist system that forces such compromises upon immigrants while simultaneously judging them for making precisely these accommodations.

This generalisation eases the process of labelling the *other* through orientalist and barbaric imagery and discourse to legitimise the American imagined community's attacks and xenophobia against Arab immigrants. The post-9/11 arson attack on Driss's business represents the necropolitical dimension of contemporary capitalism. "You remember his business was arsoned after September 11th? They never found out who did it" (Lalami 26). This act of violence demonstrates how economic success paradoxically increases vulnerability to racist violence. The subsequent display of the American flag, "he put up a huge flag outside his restaurant, like he had to prove he was one of the good ones" (Lalami 26), illustrates performances of patriotic belonging becoming necessary survival strategies within racial capitalism. This

performative patriotism negotiates the complex discourses immigrants must undertake in periods of national crisis, where their economic participation in capitalism offers no shield against xenophobic aggression; they must be perceived as part of the imagined community.

The arson attack functions as necropower, where the right to expose specific populations to death becomes enacted through both state and vigilante violence (Mbembe 27). The restaurant space transforms from a site of economic production to a landscape of terror, marking how racial capitalism requires certain bodies to remain perpetually vulnerable despite their financial contribution. The flag's presence serves a dual function: it operates both as a shield against future violence and as a visible marker of the coerced performances of national loyalty required of racialised subjects. This duality exposes the fundamental contradiction within racial capitalism, where economic participation never fully translates into social belonging or physical security, although the notion of the American dream equals social inclusion. Hence, active entrepreneurs are forever othered precisely because of their "different" origin, legitimising the continuous need for permission to enter the "free" market. Permission takes different shapes and forms. The flag and other forms of banal nationalism, the everyday representations of the nation highlighting the signs, discourses, and things that build national identity (Billig 6), could be viewed as physical permission, but precarity is discursive permission.

Within this framework of racial capitalism, I conceptualize immigrant precarity as *discursive permission* – a complex mechanism through which immigrant bodies are simultaneously granted conditional access to economic participation while being marked for surveillance, control, and disposability. This concept extends beyond understanding precarity merely as economic vulnerability (Standing 11) to recognize it as an active discursive mechanism that regulates immigrant participation within neoliberal systems. Driss's economic vulnerability upon arrival – "we had nothing to lose but the futon we'd been sleeping on since we landed" (Lalami 46) – functions not simply as a circumstance to be overcome but as an implicit form of permission to enter the marketplace, albeit under highly regulated terms. As Lalami's narrative reveals, the immigrant entrepreneur must continuously negotiate this permission through multiple performances of worthiness. The family's complete liquidation of assets ("we had sold my car, her jewelry, and all our belongings") represents not merely economic necessity but a ritual of dispossession that signals acceptance of precarious status as a condition of

market participation. This liquidation process is identified as racial capitalism's requirement that racialized subjects convert themselves into forms of capital that conform to market logics (Melamed 77). The post-9/11 arson attack on Driss's business and his subsequent response illustrate how precarity functions as discursive permission. When "he put up a huge flag outside his restaurant, like he had to prove he was one of the good ones" (Lalami 26), this act represents the compulsory enactment of national belonging that racialized subjects must undertake to maintain their tenuous permission to participate economically. The flag becomes both a shield against future violence and a visible marker of the conditional terms under which immigrant entrepreneurship is permitted. The implication is clear: economic participation requires continuous demonstration of exceptional loyalty precisely because the immigrant body remains perpetually suspect.

This discursive permission operates spatially as well. The ongoing disputes over parking spaces between Driss and Baker reveal how even physical territory becomes a site where immigrant economic rights must be continuously negotiated and justified. Baker's handwritten note – "PARK IN YOUR SPACES ONLY!" with "only" underlined twice (Lalami 108) – exemplifies how seemingly neutral market disputes mask deeper contestations over which bodies are permitted to occupy space within the economic landscape. The spatial restriction mirrors the broader constraints on immigrant economic participation. Significantly, discursive permission through precarity creates Povinelli's *economies of abandonment*, where certain populations must remain perpetually vulnerable to maintain the broader system of racial capitalism (3). The very success that neoliberal multiculturalism celebrates – Driss's transformation from refugee to business owner – paradoxically increases his exposure to violence by marking him as a threat to established racial hierarchies. Anderson Baker's resentment of Driss's success ("Pretty soon they're going to take over this place" [Lalami 6]) demonstrates how immigrant entrepreneurship, particularly when successful, intensifies rather than ameliorates vulnerability. This analysis illuminates how market mechanisms themselves constitute a form of necropower. The immigrant entrepreneur's economic participation does not liberate them from vulnerability to death; instead, it reconfigures the terms of their exposure. Precarity functions precisely as discursive permission because it marks certain bodies as disposable, even granting them conditional access to economic systems. Driss's trajectory reveals how neoliberal multiculturalism's celebration of immigrant success actively enables racial violence while obscuring structural inequalities

beneath narratives of market-based meritocracy. This framework allows us to understand Driss's death not as an isolated incident but as the logical conclusion of a system that requires immigrant vulnerability as a condition of economic participation. In this system, permission to participate never translates into freedom from disposability.

The novel's treatment of labour relations uncovers the layered nature of economic precarity. The urgency was to reopen the restaurant after Driss's death because "the staff had bills to pay and families to support" (Lalami 117). This economic vulnerability creates a chain of dependence where the precarity of immigrant business owners extends to their employees, creating what David Harvey terms "accumulation by dispossession" at multiple levels (34). The $250,000 life insurance policy serves as a grotesque manifestation where even death becomes a site of capital accumulation. "What none of us had expected was a life insurance policy worth $250,000" (Lalami 67). This posthumous conversion of life into capital exemplifies how violence becomes inextricably linked to economic value. The interconnected nature of this precarity stipulates how racial capitalism creates cascading systems of vulnerability, where the death of one business owner threatens the economic survival of an entire network of dependent workers. The life insurance policy ensures that even death can be monetised to ensure economic continuity. This transformation of human life into a financial instrument demonstrates capitalism's capacity to extract value from tragedy; the gradual wearing away of human dignity through economic necessity becomes definite. The workers' urgent need to resume operations despite their employer's violent death illustrates how racial capitalism normalises trauma through the immediate demands of economic survival, creating a perverse system where even mourning becomes a luxury that precarious workers cannot afford. The novel narrates precarity through labour exploitation, debt, and commodity.

The novel's treatment of labour exploitation within immigrant-owned businesses represents the discursive and immediate conditions of precarity. The wage negotiations and delayed raises, "Your father promised me a raise last year, but we had to replace the freezer" (Lalami 187), demonstrate how economic precarity forces immigrant business owners to participate in the systems of exploitation they experience. The constant deferral of worker compensation structures financial instability at the ownership level and cascades down to employees, creating a microcosm of capitalist exploitation within ethnic enclaves. The broken promise of a raise, justified by infrastructural necessities, illustrates how immigrant business owners must constantly negotiate between

maintaining business viability and fulfilling obligations to their workers. This tension exposes the paradoxical position of immigrant entrepreneurs who, in their struggle for economic survival, often reproduce the labour practices they sought to escape through business ownership. The freezer repair becomes a metaphor for how material constraints force immigrant business owners to prioritise business continuity over worker welfare, perpetuating cycles of exploitation even as they attempt to create spaces of economic opportunity within their communities. Racial capitalism creates conditions where survival often requires complicity in systems of exploitation, transforming former labourers into reluctant exploiters of labour within their own communities.

The novel's treatment of debt and credit reveals the predatory nature of financial institutions within racial capitalism. The repeated references to borrowing money from family members, business ventures, and education illustrate how immigrant economic participation necessarily involves entering into cycles of indebtedness. This is particularly evident in the failed doggie daycare business; "He didn't listen to me, though, at least not when it mattered… he got his mom to pressure me into giving it to him. He lost it all, of course" (Lalami 267). The reliance on family networks for capital constitutes how traditional banking systems remain largely inaccessible to immigrant entrepreneurs, creating shadow economies of obligation and informal lending that sustain and constrain immigrant businesses. These familial lending practices, while offering alternatives to discriminatory banking systems, often entrench immigrants in complex webs of financial and emotional debt. The failed business venture demonstrates how the pressure to achieve economic mobility can rupture family relationships, transforming intimate bonds into financial liabilities. This commodification of family ties represents a distinctive feature of immigrant entrepreneurship within racial capitalism, where personal relationships become instrumentalised as economic resources. The cycle of borrowing and loss and the promise of entrepreneurial success often leads to cascading financial failures that ripple through immigrant networks, creating intergenerational patterns of debt and obligation.

The role of consumption and commodity culture emerges as a critical site where immigrant identity formation intersects with racial capitalism. Driss's transformation of his restaurant menu to include "American classics" alongside North African dishes represents an economic survival strategy and how immigrant businesses must perform palatability for white consumers while maintaining enough "authenticity" to remain marketable. The strategic adaptation of the menu becomes the complex negotiations immigrant

entrepreneurs must undertake within the constraints of racial capitalism, where cultural identity becomes simultaneously a resource and a burden. The presence of American dishes serves as a form of cultural insurance, a gesture toward assimilation that makes the unfamiliar aspects of the restaurant less threatening to mainstream customers. This is another token of permission to enter the "free" market and evade racial violence through the inclusion of American cuisine. Yet, this adaptation cannot go too far; the North African dishes must remain prominently featured to justify the restaurant's ethnic market niche, creating a carefully choreographed performance of difference. This balancing act exemplifies the paradoxical demands placed on immigrant businesses: they must be different enough to be interesting but familiar enough to be comfortable, exotic enough to be desirable but not so exotic as to be alienating. Thus, the menu becomes a material manifestation of broader patterns within racial capitalism, where immigrant success depends on the ability to modify strategically and market cultural identity. This commodification of cultural differences through food presents how immigrant entrepreneurship often requires a kind of cultural translation, where traditional practices must be repackaged and repurposed for American consumption. The menu has already become a discursive space where boundaries are (re)defined for socio-economic agency. The resulting hybrid menu serves as both a survival strategy and a text that can be read to understand how immigrant businesses navigate the demands of cultural authenticity and market viability within the constraints of racial capitalism.

While racial capitalism undeniably constrains immigrant economic participation, Lalami's narrative also reveals moments of meaningful resistance and strategic agency that merit critical attention. A more dialectical understanding of this relationship strengthens rather than undermines the critique of racial capitalism by illuminating the complexity of immigrant subjectivity within oppressive structures. Marginalized subjects are both the products and the producers of social formations, simultaneously shaped by and reshaping the systems that constrain them. Lalami's novel offers powerful illustrations of this dialectic through Driss's entrepreneurial journey and his family's choices within racial capitalist constraints. Driss's business navigates the contradictions of racial capitalism through calculated adaptations that preserve spaces of autonomy. When Driss "experimented with the dough until it became as soft as the one I had grown up with" (Lalami 47), he transforms economic necessity into cultural preservation, refusing complete assimilation even as he participates in the market. Similarly, his decision to transform

"his restaurant menu to include 'American classics' alongside North African dishes" (Lalami 86) represents not merely capitulation to market demands but a strategic hybridity that carves out economic space for cultural difference. The family's resistance to economic determinism becomes particularly evident in their educational and career choices. Despite the pressures of racial capitalism to channel immigrant labor into specific economic niches, Driss supports Nora's decision to pursue music rather than medicine, an act claiming rights to non-utilitarian pursuits traditionally reserved for the dominant culture. When Nora reflects that her father "never wished me to be a different person" (Lalami 110), she acknowledges his refusal to internalize racial capitalism's logics of immigrant value based solely on economic productivity. This represents the imagination of possibilities beyond capitalism's constraints that constitutes a form of resistance.

The novel's multi-vocal structure challenges deterministic readings of immigrant experience under racial capitalism. By presenting differing perspectives on Driss's entrepreneurial journey – from Maryam's pragmatism to Nora's idealism to Jeremy's admiration – Lalami resists reductive frameworks that would position immigrants as either complete victims or model minorities. Each character negotiates racial capitalism differently, illustrating the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity of immigrant formations that resist totalizing categorization. This acknowledgment of immigrant agency does not diminish the critique of racial capitalism's structural violence. Rather, it strengthens the analysis by avoiding the erosion of agency that can inadvertently reinforce narratives of immigrant passivity. Recognising moments of resistance illuminates more clearly how racial capitalism works to contain and neutralize challenges to its hegemony. As exemplified when Driss's business success paradoxically increases his vulnerability to violence, racial capitalism frequently incorporates and redirects immigrant agency rather than simply suppressing it outright. By adopting this more dialectical approach to immigrant agency within racial capitalism, we can better understand how Driss's entrepreneurial journey represents both accommodation and resistance, both constraint and possibility. This nuanced reading reveals contradictions of racialized inclusion without diminishing the critique of systemic violence that remains central to Lalami's narrative. The immigrant entrepreneur emerges not as a passive victim but as a complex subject navigating impossible choices within systems designed to exploit their vulnerability – a subject whose moments of resistance, however constrained, remain vital to understanding the whole operation of racial capitalism in the post-9/11 American landscape.

Neoliberal, Racial Violence in the U.S.

The intersection of racial capitalism with neoliberal governance produces a complex matrix where immigrant vulnerability manifests through both economic and corporeal dimensions. Driss's case exemplifies how the neoliberal promise of market-based inclusion paradoxically heightens exposure to violence. This dynamic is evidenced in real-world parallels like the 2016 killing of Khalid Jabara by his neighbour, similar to various other cases like the 2018 murder of Shaima Alawadi and the 2016 killing of Imam Maulana Akonjee and Thara Uddin (Reuters; Baker), who had previously called the family "dirty Arabs" and "Mooslems. Despite repeated harassment and threats, law enforcement failed to provide adequate protection before the fatal shooting (CNN). Economic success and neighbourhood integration failed to protect against lethal xenophobic violence. The Jabara case demonstrates how neoliberal frameworks of inclusion, home ownership, business success, and community participation provide no shield against necropolitical violence when certain bodies are marked as perpetually foreign. This systematic vulnerability is powerfully illustrated through systemic institutional violence, particularly in its treatment of law enforcement procedures:

> One last thing. There's been a lot of chatter on social media about the Bowden incident. People see ten seconds of cell-phone footage and they think they know what happened. Don't pay attention to that. We're not here to be distracted by what people say online. We're here to do our job. Stay focused. (Lalami 11)

Institutional power structures maintain hierarchies of racial violence through carefully constructed narratives of neutrality and professionalism. The speaker's dismissal of "social media chatter" about the "Bowden incident" reveals how law enforcement institutions actively work to delegitimise public discourse around police violence, particularly when such discourse threatens to expose the racial underpinnings of institutional power. The reference to "ten seconds of cell-phone footage" is especially significant, as it demonstrates how neoliberal governance systems attempt to fragment and compartmentalise instances of violence, removing them from their broader structural context.

The command to "stay focused" and the assertion that officers are "here to do our job" exemplify Sara Ahmed's reflections on "institutional speech acts"

as performative utterances that work to maintain racialised, institutional power through appeals to professionalism and duty (106–7). The command to "stay focused" takes on additional significance when considered within the broader context of neoliberal governance. It reveals how institutional power maintains itself not just through spectacular acts of violence but through the daily practices of institutional actors trained to view public accountability as external to their professional duties. This rhetorical move positions public concern about police violence as a "distraction" from legitimate police work, effectively naturalising law enforcement's role in maintaining racial hierarchies while simultaneously denying its participation in systemic violence. The speaker's use of "we're" and "our" creates an institutional collective that positions itself in opposition to public oversight, particularly from marginalised communities most affected by police violence.

This institutional discourse directly connects to the broader framework of neoliberal governance. Just as economic success failed to protect Khalid Jabara from lethal xenophobic violence, the appearance of professional neutrality in law enforcement procedures masks how institutional power systematically exposes certain bodies to violence. The speaker's attempt to delegitimise cell phone footage, a democratised form of surveillance that has historically exposed police violence against marginalised communities, demonstrates that institutional power maintains control over narratives of violence while presenting itself as neutral and professional. This paradox is powerfully illustrated in the 2015 Chapel Hill murders of Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha, three young Muslim students whose academic and professional achievements aligned perfectly with neoliberal success narratives yet failed to protect them from violent elimination (Neff & Shaila). The police department's initial framing of their execution-style murders as a "parking dispute" exemplifies the same policing and systems obscuring structural violence beneath supposedly neutral administrative categories. Reducing murder to a "dispute" is similar to reducing what is presumably an instance of police violence to a "Bowden incident"; the institutional discourse performs a process that transforms specific acts of racial violence into neutral administrative categories. Institutional power maintains its authority through *epistemic violence* as the systematic delegitimisation and othering of knowledge and experiences from marginalised communities (Spivak 63; Fricker 3; Derrida 273; Bhabha 122). The contrast between "ten seconds of cell-phone footage" and doing "our job" creates a false binary between public accountability

and professional duty, obscuring the footage and the institutional response's embeddedness in broader power and racial control systems. This discursive dimension of institutional power connects directly to the "complex matrix" of immigrant vulnerability, showing how economic and corporeal dimensions of violence are maintained through carefully constructed institutional narratives that present themselves as objective while systematically devaluing certain lives.

This pattern extends beyond individual acts of violence to encompass systematic exposure to death through policy and neglect. The deaths of detained immigrants in ICE custody, including the 2019 death of Nebane Abienwi (Grenoble), demonstrate how neoliberal frameworks normalise violence against racialised others through necropolitical rationality. Within this system, even documented economic success provides no protection against state institutions' systematic withdrawal of protection from certain populations while maintaining the fiction of universal market access and opportunity. The transformation of immigrant business spaces into potential sites of violence operates through the everyday mechanics of market participation. Anderson's resentment of Driss's business success stipulates immigrant economic advancement as a threat to established hierarchies of whiteness. The investigation's inadequacy mirrors broader patterns where violence against successful immigrants is minimised or ignored, structuring how neoliberal frameworks simultaneously encourage economic participation while enabling lethal violence against participants marked as other. Neoliberal governance creates conditions where immigrant success paradoxically increases vulnerability to violence through heightened visibility and a perceived threat to established hierarchies. The systematic devaluation of certain lives, even when those lives exemplify neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurial success, reveals the fundamental contradiction within contemporary capitalism's promise of market-based inclusion. Economic integration provides no shield against necropolitical violence when certain bodies are marked for elimination within the existing racial capitalist framework.

Conclusion

This paper's examination of Lalami's *The Other Americans* scrutinises the fundamental contradictions embedded within contemporary racial capitalism's

promise of immigrant inclusion through economic participation. Through contextual and close analysis of Driss Guerraoui's trajectory from philosophy student to restaurant owner, the paper represents immigrant entrepreneurship as a complex site where promises of belonging collide with necropolitical violence. First, the analysis extends Robinson's conceptualisation of racial capitalism; that is, market participation paradoxically intensifies rather than ameliorates immigrant vulnerability. The transformation of Driss's restaurant from a site of economic production to a landscape of terror demonstrates how racial capitalism requires certain bodies to remain perpetually vulnerable despite, and indeed because of, their financial contributions. Second, by engaging Mbembe's necropolitics, immigrant economic "success" functions as a marker for elimination within contemporary systems of racial violence. The inadequate investigation of Driss's death exemplifies how neoliberal state apparatuses perpetuate racial hierarchies through bureaucratic indifference while maintaining the fiction of colourblind meritocracy. Then, labour relations, debt structures, commodity culture within immigrant businesses, and racial capitalism are cascading systems of vulnerability where even success must be carefully choreographed through performances of palatability and patriotism. Contemporary mechanisms of racial control operate not through explicit exclusion but through the promises of inclusion that mark certain bodies for elimination.

This research carries profound implications for understanding how economic participation becomes weaponised as a mechanism of surveillance and control in post-9/11 America. By illuminating the complex intersections between racial capitalism, necropolitics, and neoliberal governance, the paper provides crucial methodological tools for examining systemic violence against marginalised communities. Future research might productively extend this framework to analyse how other forms of market participation function as double-edged swords across various racial and economic exploitation contexts. Hence, contemporary Arab-American literature challenges dominant narratives of assimilation and belonging by exposing the fundamental contradictions within neoliberal multiculturalism's celebration of immigrant entrepreneurship. Through Lalami's work, we witness the promise of economic mobility in perpetual tension with persistent racial violence, revealing the limitations of market-based solutions to systemic inequality. This understanding is essential for developing more nuanced approaches to dismantling interconnected economic and racial oppression systems.

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